

Chapter 29. Part One. Inside.

“Fucking cunt, if I sit here for another couple of months half a year will have passed. Can you imagine, Vasya? Six months of my life! The judge added another two months to my sentence today. When will that damn expert analysis come?”

“Are you sure that the expert analysis will show Novocain, not coke?” I try to wind up Viktor, who has just returned agitated from the court.

“Well, if the expert analysis shows cocaine, after serving my term I’ll get out and shoot those assholes. They should be killed for this outrage.”

“Hmmm, and isn’t it a outrage to come onto their turf and start destroying their business, at the same time spoiling their reputation with your cheap imitation of cocaine?” I laugh, pacing around our walking area, “It would be better if you told me what’s new in cell six.”

“They are all in a coma. They gorge themselves on sleeping pills and sleep for days. And when they wake up, they begin raving. The Greek dreams of escaping all the time, although he wouldn’t even be able to run fifty meters with his belly. The Italian is constantly whining that he is running out of money. The Scot is upset that he won’t be able to support his football team, Celtic, during the European Cup. All Ashpak talks about is food. The Japanese guy says nothing. He just makes models of the prison furniture by gluing together empty matchboxes.”

“Say, Vitya; what did you do after Afghanistan?”

“What did I do... What can young people do after a war in our country? I was a gangster. I was part of a racketeering gang that cheated businessmen out of their money.”

“Don’t you miss those days?”

“You know, Vasya, it was only fun at first. And when they began shooting our brothers, I went into business myself. My karma probably caught up with me in India; you can’t escape from it. I don’t believe that I’m here for pharmacy store Novocain. I feel it in my heart that it’s for something else. There is some sin that I am apparently working off now.”

“Did you kill someone, Vitya?”

“No, I didn’t kill anyone, but five years ago I grassed on someone and he got a year in jail. In that sense, I feel my guilt. He owed me money. The amount was silly – just a thousand dollars – and I got him locked up for a year. It looks like I’ll sit here for at least a year...”

“You’re a strange man, Vitya. The fact that you extorted money from businessmen: isn’t that a sin? Don’t you feel guilty for that?”

“But they didn’t give me their last money, and I provided a service, protecting them from other mobsters, risking my life.”

“As for me, Vitya, I never wanted to be a gangster. Maybe I was raised differently. Tell me how does it feel to be a gangster? The sense of impunity must be intoxicating.”

“Vasya, there was nothing good in that life, and I was intoxicated by vodka. I was boozing incessantly. I understood in my soul that something was wrong, but I couldn’t do anything about it. And my heart ached from it constantly when I was sober. So I drowned the pain with drink, until I started smoking marijuana. When I started smoking I began to think, and realized in the end that I was wasting my life on unnecessary nonsense, on showing off. All my life I tried to impress people by being someone that I wasn’t.”

“You’re not the only one, Vitya. I know many former criminals. All of them also boozed and caused havoc at first, but when they tried psychedelics they quit their criminal ‘business’, stopped drinking, and now they live a normal life, smoking quietly.”

“That’s right, but the state prohibits smoking marijuana, and advertises alcohol the whole time. Even here, in India, where hashish is considered to be part of a religious rite, the alcohol corporations lobbied for laws so that now it’s not permitted to smoke charas anywhere. And a large bottle of rum costs only two dollars. You can be locked up for ten years for a kilogram of hashish. When I drank, I was like an animal. If I didn’t have a hair of the dog the next morning, I felt so bad and so depressed that I thought I would die. And once you take a drop, your eyes fill with aggression and you’re ready to grab someone by the throat over any little thing. Every day, like before an attack: a shot of booze and into battle. And when I went from being a gangster to a businessman, nothing changed. I drank in order to have enough anger to fight teeth and nail for every dollar. And so it went on, until one of my friends gave me LSD to try. I will never forget my first acid trip. I felt like I was reborn. The whole broken mosaic of my life came together in my head in a beautiful pattern. I quit the business, packed my things and went to Goa. It’s good that I managed to buy a campsite on the shore of the Black Sea before Putin became president. More precisely, I bought a piece of land, for only six thousand dollars, and invested another fifty. I built huts with my own hands, and now it brings me in return fifteen thousand dollars per year. Why would I need more? I have friends in Moscow who still work their asses off. They buy one Mercedes after another, each of them has already built two villas, and it’s still not enough for them. Their wives and mistresses each have several mink coats in their wardrobes, but they are still not happy. It became clear to me when I expanded my consciousness. You will never be happy in the endless race for money; there will never be enough. And life is short; it passes quickly. How many friends lie in the grave, having not caught up with the Golden Calf? But big money is not given easily, you must sink your teeth into it, protect it, showing the whole world your muscles, claws and teeth. It’s just that in our heart we all are human beings, not animals. So we have to soak all of this world’s unfairness in drink. When I realized all this, it was as though I was suddenly cut off from alcohol.”

“Vitya, then why did you chase the Golden Calf again? Who forced you to sell fake cocaine?”

“Vasya, I don’t even know how I got into this shit again. I guess I wanted to show off. Here in Goa, I had everything: a big house on the beach, a jeep, and enough dough. I wanted to become even cooler, so that my woman would love me more. So I decided to play drug dealer. I thought I would sell only to Russians. After all, here in Goa everyone has an expanded consciousness, we are all brothers. I couldn’t even imagine that here, among our own people, there might be a grass.”

Chapter 29. Part Two. Outside.

“Finally, we made it to the house. I’m so tired,” flopping into a plastic chair, Lena puts her feet up on a suitcase. “Four days on the road, six stops, five months in Nepal – what kind of a gypsy life are we living? When will it end?”

“What’s wrong with the gypsy life? Many people dream about traveling. And we have traveled across the whole of India and Nepal. Vasilina, tell me, do you like traveling?” I ask my daughter, who has already taken her Barbies out of her little pink suitcase.

“Of course, Daddy. When will our next new journey be?”

“You see: we like it,” I say, rolling the last suitcase into the house.

“I don’t mind traveling, but I need comfort, not trains and buses. Only airplanes and taxis. And in such a hot country as India, I need air-conditioned taxis.”

“I’m surprised, Lena. Where did you get so much royal blood from? Your parents work as boilermakers in the Russian Far North. Five years ago, you not only didn’t have a place to call your own, you had no money even to take care of your teeth. After Vasilinka’s birth you worked for a year to repay your debts, and now you want airplanes and taxis.”

“You know, my dear, that when I was fifteen I came alone from a damn provincial town to conquer the big city. All my life I dreamed of having my own house. And as soon as I got it, I am again forced to move from one rented lodging to another, and it’s always either India or Nepal. That’s not what I have been dreaming about all my life. And anyway, I miss Russia.”

“Honey, you’re just tired from the journey,” I say, sitting down nearby on our little balcony. “Look around: there are palms, the Sun and the sea. See how happy Francis is because of our arrival. And what is there in Rashka now? Cold, mud, slush, plastic-tasting food. I promise you that when I have the money, we will travel by planes and cars. In a year or two, I will handle this situation with being wanted in Russia, and by then all the dust with Dymkov will probably have settled. Then we’ll go to Rashka. So for now, enjoy India, especially since we’ve got no choice. A new season is ahead, we will meet new interesting people and have new adventures.”

“Well, I am ready to suffer for a few years. Just tell me, when will we stop selling drugs? We carried two kilograms of hashish across the border, and I want to be able to sleep at night.”

“Honey, I’ll do my best for it to be the last time. We’ll rent two houses this season. I’ll expand our restaurant. Just be patient, soon we will do only legal business. And when we have the money, I will register a company here. Den will sell drugs this season. We’ll send Vasilinka to school so that she knows Hindi, English and Russian from childhood. Ilka will help you with the housework, and in five years we’ll sell our apartment in Russia and buy a house on the beach with the money. We’ll live in it happily till we die. So take Vasilinka now and go for a swim in the sea. You will have planes and cars. We’ll do it.”

A few weeks later, having rested and swum enough, Lena stopped complaining about our gypsy life and I got down to my daily Goan duties.

After breakfast, I roll a morning joint and watch as the fishermen’s dogs bark at a stray cow right in front of my restaurant, driving it into a huge puddle left when the tide went out.

“I’m coming to you for breakfast!” Hanuman shouts from a distance, throwing a stone at the dogs. “Hello, Vasya, I haven’t seen you for a long time. Where did you spend the monsoon?”

“I’m glad to see you too, Hanuman. We went to Nepal, to Pokhara, for five months, and we have already been here for about a month. I finished building my restaurant yesterday and today you are my first customer. I see you are in your orange ‘Legalize’ shorts, as usual.”

“These shorts are my style. When they wear out I buy another pair from the Nepalese. I love escaping from the police on my sports bike. The only thing the cops can see is my ass with the inscription ‘Legalize’.

“Come into the restaurant, why are you standing near the entrance? I’ve just rolled a joint. How long have you been in Goa?”

“I have been here for about a month. I’ve wanted to visit you for a while, but I’ve had no time. Until all the drug dealers arrive, I am like hot cakes

here. I'm making cocaine deliveries every day.”

“I think it's a good sign that you're my first customer this season.”

“Krishna!” I shout to one of my waiters, who is yawning at the morning sun, “Make breakfast number three for our customer, on the house.”

“Hanuman, have you heard that they are going to throw a good party in Kerim today? Tamir himself is organizing it.”

“I've heard. Everybody knows about it. He's the reason I won't go there.”

“What wrong has Tamir done to you?”

“Nothing so far, only it seems to me that he grassed me to police.”

“It can't be! I know Tamir pretty well. My Vasilinka goes to kindergarten with his daughter; I've talked to him many times. He can't grass or people will stop coming to his parties.”

“Vasya, what does it have to do with your kids? You and your psychedelics bring in a maximum of a thousand bucks a month. Who would be interested in you? Whereas you can easily earn five thousand with coke; parties are becoming rare, so I have become a competitor for him.”

“But Tamir doesn't sell; he is a DJ.”

“He doesn't sell, but his pushers do all right. They sell and grass on competitors. You probably haven't heard that he pays the cops for protection every month. Yesterday, he came to me and said, ‘Someone posted your picture on an Indian website, it says that now you are the main Russian drug dealer in Goa’. He also said that the police came to him and asked about me. They want me to come to them myself, and start paying them money. And if I don't come, they'll arrest me and throw me into jail. My whole life, I've never paid anyone for protection. I have always been my own protection. And if it was only about paying; I know these cops. They are eager to earn more stripes. They would force me to rat someone out; I have never been a rat, and I am not going to become one now. I need to get out of here, and the sooner the better. Especially since I know that there will be no parties in Goa any more. Perhaps they will allow two or three per season, but even those will be supervised by the police. And I decided to give up the coke long ago. Coke is like a swamp. You start with one line and it is impossible to stop. I'd rather go to Thailand; parties are thrown there four times a month and drug trafficking is punishable by the death penalty. So I won't be tempted to dabble in this dirty business. I would rather teach yoga there. Goa is dead and coke killed it. Be careful, Vasya, they aren't touching you now, but when all of the parties are shut down and competition between dealers is tough, you will be ratted out by your own people. Or you will be forced to rat on others.”

“I think you're exaggerating, Hanuman. You probably have paranoia from the coke. If you don't want to go tonight, don't; but I'll be glad to go and have a dance.”

The plateau on the top of the hill resembles a Martian landscape. The red volcanic surface extends almost to the horizon, in front stretches the endless sea, melting into the starry sky. It feels as if we are on another planet. A thousand elegant, colorful people dance to loud, beautiful trance music. It's good that I didn't listen to Hanuman this morning. I wouldn't have forgiven myself if I had missed tonight's party. Once upon a time in Goa parties were held on the beach. The local people and the freaks lived in harmony then, and no one got in anyone's way. The freaks bought seafood from the fishermen and fruit and vegetables from the peasants. Everyone was happy. Hippies and freaks sunbathed naked on deserted beaches, danced at the parties, smoked, and spent the money they earned by selling charas on the locals. Thriving quickly, the local population pulled down their primitive huts and built beautiful

two- and three-story houses in their place. The strange, hairy white people were pleased to pay a lot of money to rent these houses, making it possible not to fish or grow rice. No one other than hippies wanted to visit wild and undeveloped Goa. All of progressive humanity preferred comfortable hotels and beaches with no cows or pigs on them. In Goan villages, there were neither cars, nor paved roads. There was nothing. The hippies helped the locals to open small restaurants, explaining why you need spoons and forks. They showed them how to cook European dishes and taught them minimum sanitary requirements. And the local people happily joined in dancing to the drums played by the white people at night. And just like thousands of years ago, the Indians danced happily in the Full Moon, thanking the Indian gods for the good harvest and the happy life that the foreigners brought them. And so it would have gone on if the Catholic Church hadn't come out against the satanic dancing. Since the time of the Portuguese, Catholic churches have been built throughout Goa. Even before the arrival of the first hippies, the locals started forgetting their Indian traditions and gods due to the influence of the Portuguese. Priests from Catholic churches preached the right way of life: a decent Indian had to work tirelessly all his life, producing more meat and fish, collecting more rice and bananas, building new homes, and acquiring all of the modern benefits of civilization. While all the time, of course, paying a tithe to the church in order to go to heaven after death. However, the philosophy of the hairy, happy visitors went against the philosophy of the Catholics. The younger generation of Indians preferred to be content with what nature and the white men gave them, and not to spend their spare time slaving away for a new refrigerator or an iron, which they didn't need in the first place, but enjoying life. Then Catholicism started a crusade against the evil influence of the happy, satisfied hippies. In the mid 90s, a political party supported by the Catholics came to power and the Minister of Tourism announced that Goa didn't need hippies and freaks any longer. "We need money for Goa, we need wealthy tourists who come for two weeks, not have-nots who cannot even buy a cup of tea," he declared on television and in the newspapers. From that time began a crackdown on parties. First, they banned them on the beach, claiming that the loud music disturbed the sleep of workers. Soon after, parties were also banned in the jungle and remote locations. From the beginning of the twenty-first century all parties are illegal in Goa. The organizers pay the police huge bribes, which can only be compensated through the sale of cocaine. And so coke started to be sold almost everywhere. Tonight's party is organized in the farthest northern point of Goa, away from beaches, populated areas and the sea. Despite the party taking place on a deserted stone plateau, nothing has prevented a thousand people who love freedom from coming from all over Goa in order to feel the vibration of love and harmony. This is the last place, the last bastion of freedom. There is nowhere else to run.

"Hello Tamir!"

"Hello, Vasiliy, have you been back in Goa long?"

"No, I arrived from Nepal just a month ago."

A genuine psychedelic shaman stands in front of me. More precisely: the leader of all of the Russian Goa trancers. Proudly strutting around the party, he greets every psychedelic warrior, every reputable freak. This is his fiefdom. A fashionable mohawk haircut, big earrings, 'X-Budu' written in large glowing letters on his back. In the past I couldn't have imagined that one day I would shake hands with the founder of the Russian trance movement. He has lived in Goa for eight years and there are rumors that he has been wanted in Russia the whole time, which makes him even more legendary.

"Well, Vasya, will you make your kvass this year? You make excellent kvass."

"Of course I will. I sold four tons last year."

“How’s your daughter doing?”

“Well, we’ve started to prepare her for school, and now she will go to kindergarten together with your daughter. Tamir, look at the black gold I brought from Nepal,” I say, pulling a piece of charas and a small magnifying glass with a built-in light from my pocket.

“Actually, I don’t smoke Nepali charas. The Nepalese do not know how to make good charas. I prefer charas from Manali in India.”

“Tamir, take a look through the magnifying glass; you won’t find such a quality in India. Europeans made it in Nepal.”

Contemptuously taking my charas, Tamir breaks the tola in half and starts examining it through the magnifying glass.

“Yes, you’re right; it’s the first time I have seen such pure charas. Apparently, the Europeans are working hard. Vasya, it has never occurred to me to examine charas through a magnifying glass,” Tamir says, pulling a tola from his pocket. “Let’s take a look at mine.”

Examining his piece for a long time, he grins and puts it back in his pocket.

“No, it won’t work to scrutinize charas through a magnifying glass, it is necessary to try it. Let’s have a smoke. Although it is not as pure as yours, mine gets you stoned better than any Nepalese charas. But first, I will play, and then we will try it,” he says, heading towards the DJ console.

I dance together with everyone else and my dance is like the final battle, into which I pour all of my love of freedom and hatred of the globalization that has come here. Around me are the same kind of soldiers, who believe in the victory of good and love over the evil of the modern world. Tamir stands before us. Watching him, I want to believe that we will win. We cannot lose our last fight. Because to lose is to surrender; to accept the rules of society, which sold itself to the corporations long ago. It seems as if we are dancing for the last time. I want to laugh and cry simultaneously. The joy of unity and a premonition of defeat. Several hours fly by in a flash. An Israeli DJ replaces Tamir at the decks. After a few minutes, a police car appears in the distance on the plateau. The music is turned off. With bamboo sticks in their hands, the police rush the dance floor, seize the sound equipment and generator, and arrest the DJ. “Perhaps they will accept a bribe? Perhaps the music will be turned on in the morning?” the same phrases are heard everywhere.

No one is leaving. The Indian grandmothers continue to make tea on their kerosene lamps. Sitting down on a mat, I order a sweet tea with milk and spices.

“Hi, Vasya,” I hear a pleasant, familiar voice.

“Hi, Masha!”

Next to me on the mat sits a tall, slim Goan beauty with funny ponytails, like a squirrel. We don’t know each another well. Our daughters go to the same kindergarten, so when we meet we usually talk about our children.

“How are you, Vasya? Where’s your Lena?”

“Lena and Vasilina stayed at home. It gets cold at night now, and Vasilina needs be taken to kindergarten tomorrow.”

“It’s a sad party today. Vasya, for some reason it feels like it’s the last one. By the way, this is my husband,” Masha says, smiling and pointing at the guy sitting next to her.

Peering in the dim light, my jaw drops in surprise.

“And... Uh... You said that your husband is a musician, but I never would have imagined that he was one of the lead singers of Na-Na!”

“Alexey,” the guy covered with stylish tattoos greets me and extends his hand.

Next to him, sit three other musicians from the super popular Russian pop group.

“I’m surprised to see you here, in the heart of the psychedelic movement.”

“Aren’t we people, or what? Do you think we relax to our music?” laughing, Alexey says, evidently imagining a party where he is dancing to his own music.

“Pop music is for making dough. It’s too simple for a creative person to get pleasure from it.”

“I thought that creative people only create because it brings them pleasure.”

“Sometimes it’s for pleasure, and sometimes you get pleasure because you are paid well.”

“You’re just some kind of cyberpunks! You sing stupid songs on stage, but in real life you enjoy trance music, and even come to Goa.”

“Actually, there are only two of us in the band who understand trance music, the rest came with us for the trip. If you watch closely how we dance on stage, it becomes crystal clear who loves trance and who loves pop music. It is a pity that they are banning trance in Goa.”

“Lyosha, it’s a worldwide trend. House music is getting the green light everywhere, because no one needs freethinking, independent people. And the freaks that promote trance culture take psychedelics, expand their consciousness and therefore show a bad example. From the social perspective, there is only harm from them. The drugs they take are not the most commercial. You can’t take a lot of MDMA and LSD, the brain won’t take it and you’ll go mad. Glamorous House music is another thing entirely. You need to snort coke and drink booze while listening to it. And coke only works for fifteen minutes, and then you want it again. And it is impossible to stop, so you need to drink in order to lessen the desire. Meanwhile, in order to buy cocaine and alcohol, you need to earn a lot of money. It is beneficial for society to support those drugs that encourage people to earn more and more. Therefore, trance is being banned everywhere. Psychedelics and trance make people freer and less socially adapted. Trance is not commercial music, and its cultural tail is not commercial at all.”

“That’s how dough triumphs over good,” Lyosha says, laughing and hugging his wife. “In all ancient civilizations where natural psychedelics were used, it was always the prerogative of the elite. Shamans, chiefs and spiritual leaders had access to magical substances. In India, charas was previously only smoked by babas. In Mexico, the shamans ate mescaline cactuses. And in our pre-Christian Russia, the shamans of the north drank a brew made out of toadstools. Ordinary people can’t be allowed to expand their consciousness. Who would work if they did?”

“Yes, Lyosha, and you can go crazy if you try to expand an unprepared mind.”

“That’s right,” Lyosha agrees, looking at his watch, “it’s getting very cold nearer to morning, we’ll probably head home. Apparently, there will be no more music today.”

Saying goodbye to the departing pop musicians, I move closer to the kerosene lamp to warm my hands. The day dawns. There are about a hundred of the most persistent freaks near the dance floor. Some are asleep, some smoke chillums, and some are simply unable to get up to go home. The first rays of the Sun break the horizon, giving the small, round clouds a pink color. It seems like there are thousands of pink balls in the sky. Have we really lost

our last fight, is the party really over? An Israeli DJ with waist-length dreadlocks drives up to the dance floor on a motorcycle. Having detached a little generator from the bike, he quickly runs to the DJ console. It takes him several minutes to connect the wires, and the first rays of the Sun are met by a perfect trance track. As if by the wave of a magic wand, all of a sudden all of the remaining people at the party leap to their feet and begin to dance passionately. It feels as if it is the last dance in their lives. It seems like they are not dancing, but rather hovering above the ground. They jump high, trying to see the first sunrays over the hills on the horizon. I float above the ground too, and tears of joy stream down my cheeks. We have not lost our last battle. No one can take away our freedom.