



Nari Toe

## *Chapter 30. Part One. Inside.*

“Hi, Masha. I didn’t expect to see you here. I really thought that everyone had forgotten about me. I am very glad to see you.”

The guards stare curiously at the tall beauty with squirrel-like pigtailed.

“I’m glad to see you in good spirits, too. How did you manage to end up in here?”

“Masha, I have no idea. It’s probably because I didn’t believe that I could get locked up. I knew that the police were looking for me; I could have left everything behind and ran away, but for some reason I didn’t. I didn’t suspect that the cops wouldn’t play by the rules. Right up until the end, I didn’t believe that this could happen to me. While Tamir was in Rashka, one of his pushers set me up. Not even for the money, but just to curry favor with the cops.”

“Yeah, I know everything. Lena told me. How are you doing in here?”

“To be honest, jail is good for me. I am reassessing my values in life, exercising, playing chess, and I’m thinking of writing a book. I’ve also gotten rid of unwanted people from my life. Here in jail, you quickly see who is your friend, who needs you, who wants you to get out as soon as possible. To some extent, I am even grateful to the guy who put me in here. How are you doing, outside? What’s new?”

“I’ve recently returned from Bali, all the guys are there now. Do you remember Romashka who served a term in a Nepalese jail? He sends you his regards. He organizes all the trance parties there now.”

“But Indonesia is a Muslim country, they have the death penalty for drug offenses, don’t they?”

“You won’t believe me, Vasya, but they sell legal stimulants in grocery stores. Just like ecstasy, but they are made of natural plant materials. Under their influence, you can dance all night long. Of course, marijuana is illegal, but the authorities turn a blind eye to smoking tourists. If you don’t sell and don’t smoke in public places, no one will touch you. And it’s so beautiful there! Goa doesn’t come close to it. I’ve been coming to Goa for ten years, and I can say that nothing has remained of the Goa it was before. I don’t know why I came here again. Maybe because of my daughter, she loves going to school here, or maybe because of my friends. Many of my friends live here in Goa. But each year there are less and less of them. Many of them have gone to other countries. Recently, the police raided the Tereshkov place. They turned everything upside down and found nothing, but they talked about you. I don’t know whether to tell you this or not...”

“Why not? You have already started, so go on.”

“The police said that you will be released in a year and a half, not earlier.”

“Oh, Masha, that’s good news,” I say, sighing, “because I could be given ten years. In Aguada<sup>1</sup>, there are fifty people in for what I’m here for, and two of them are Europeans. And in a year and a half here, my spirit and my body will only become healthier. As my friend Viktor says, ‘Me and Vasya don’t get bored here. They fuck us and we grow stronger.’”

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1 *Aguada* – a village where a jail for dangerous criminals is located.

## *Chapter 30. Part Two. Outside.*

“Hey Arik, you look like a ghost. What happened?”

“My Natasha died.”

“What do you mean, died?”

“Just like that, the bitch just died. Yesterday in the hospital, without regaining consciousness, she croaked.”

I look at my friend and can't believe my eyes. Having known Arik for three years, I have never seen him like this. An educated, intelligent man, this season he fell madly in love with a petite, weird girl. She was nothing out of the ordinary, with short hair, and almost half the height of the handsome, two-meter tall Arik. I had never seen him so happy before. It was as if he was flying on wings when he was around her, completely absorbed in this love. It seemed that he had been waiting for her his whole life and then he finally found her. And now, after such a tragedy, he stands in front of me and calls her a bitch. “Evidently, Arik has gone out of his mind,” is the first thing I think on hearing his words.

“I opened my soul to her. I thought I had finally found my soul mate, and that bitch just croaked. She found a healthy, handsome guy like me, and croaked”

“Arik, what's up with your arms? Since you came into my restaurant, you haven't stopped scratching your arms and legs. You have already scratched them to sores. What's going on?”

“Vasya, because of this slut, I got neurodermatitis. I itch all day and night from nerves.”

“Arik, I don't understand, you loved her so dearly, and now you say all these things. Have you lost your mind?”

“I haven't lost my mind, it was her who lost it. It turned out she was a fucking addict. She pretended to be normal. But she had problems with her head. That's why she died. She had AIDS, and came specifically to Goa to die. She knew that this season she would die, and didn't tell anyone.”

“How can it be, AIDS?”

“So it is, she was a heroin addict. A year ago, her husband died of AIDS. And I believed her so much that I stopped using condoms. Then in the hospital I was told she had died of AIDS; I didn't believe it at first, I thought it was some sort of mistake.”

“And what are you going to do now?”

“What can I do, Vasya? I've just had tests and I am waiting for the results. It's the third day that I haven't slept and I just keep itching. I hate that bitch. She laughed at me before she died, or maybe she just didn't know what she was doing, but she looked normal. Three days ago, she suddenly fell into a coma, she lay there for three days, and then she died. Just like that.”

“Don't lose hope, Arik, maybe everything will be ok. It happens, I've read about such cases.”

“Vasya, what else do I have left to do? This is my only hope now. The doctors said that I need to undergo tests three times. Now, in three months time, and again in six months. So for half a year this nervous itching is guaranteed, but then we'll see. I'll go to the beach, meditate, do gymnastics. While I am practicing qigong I manage to forget myself. Although not for a long time, but I don't itch when I do it.”

“I don’t know what to say, Arik. I am stunned by this news. I will keep my fingers crossed for you.”

Going down the stairs, Arik smiles at me, but judging by the incessantly moving muscles in his jaw, it’s clear that it’s hard for him to do so. “That man has a strange fate,” I think to myself, watching him till he reaches his motorbike. Once, five years ago, he came to India as a convinced devotee of Krishna. And even earlier, long before India, while living in his native Chelyabinsk, he accidentally met those weird people who always seem to be happy. They were dressed in unusual clothes for Russians, more like Hindu outfits. Everything about them was unusual. The men shaved their heads, leaving a small braid on the nape, and drew a colored spot on the bridge of their noses. Many of them wore garlands of flowers around their necks. But most of all Arik was attracted by their unusual cheerfulness. They were always smiling and always seemed happy. That was what he needed most of all. Having been left at that time without his father and mother and with only one younger sister, he had quickly realized that the surrounding world was not as cozy and comfortable as it seemed in childhood. In this world, you have to fight to survive. Finally he met people who radiated cheerfulness and happiness. You don’t need to fight for this happiness; you just have to believe these people. And he believed them. They proposed that he sell his apartment and go traveling with them to India, to seek a path of spiritual development. For three years he lived in ashrams, leading a monastic way of life. He practiced meditation every day, studied the scriptures and chanted mantras. But the happiness that radiated from his new friends started to seem ostentatious and simulated. Somewhere deep inside, he began to feel that there was something wrong, that withdrawal from society did not give him a state of inner peace. Gradually he became disappointed in this method of knowing oneself and the world. He left the Krishna Consciousness movement and settled in North Goa, in Arambol. After meeting European freaks, he started reading psychedelic literature, where our contemporaries proposed new, interesting, and at the same time rational ways of knowing oneself. For some time, he even became interested in psychedelic drugs, conducting experiments on himself in altered states. For a while, he regained peace of mind. But eventually he also became disillusioned with this method of self-development, preferring to change his mind through meditation, rather than using chemicals. We often argued, discussing books by Timothy Leary and Terence McKenna. He called them mad professors who overrated LSD, because they preached about the psychedelic revolution to the masses in an attempt to change the world for the better. I could not understand why Arik thought that the psychedelic path of self-development was only the destiny of the select few. In our debates, he tried to prove to me that in order to make a quantum leap in perception, it was necessary to have the required predisposition of the brain. Otherwise, unable to cope with the task, the brain may easily be damaged. He believed that at this stage in our evolutionary development, the majority of mankind was not ready for any leaps. I was an advocate of the ideas proposed by the psychedelic professors who believed that everyone could make a quantum leap in perception. I agreed with Timothy Leary, who claimed that if ten percent of progressive humankind would make their first quantum leap, setting an example for others, then all the rest of the population on the planet would wake up and start transforming, changing their attitude towards the world. In recent years, Arik did not go to parties at all, calling freaks ‘jerks’. He preferred meditation, yoga, qigong and different martial arts. When he finally met his love in Goa, we, his friends, were immensely happy for him. It seemed that he had finally found the peace of mind that he had been seeking all this time. Today’s news was a great shock to me. It was frightening to even imagine what kind of emotions were raging in his head after such a tragedy.

“Hey, Roma, I am so glad to see you! Have you come back to Goa? It is difficult to be without Goa for long, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I have come for the whole season, returned to the Promised Land again,” hugging me, says my friend whom I have not seen for six months.

“How is Moscow? By the white-blue color of your skin I can see that there is no sun at all at home.”

“This time everything was much more interesting. I rented a piece of land on the Rublevskiy beach for the entire summer season, held trance parties, swung my fire pole, met lots of interesting people. This summer was very creative in Russia. In its death throes, glamorous Moscow gave birth to interest-

ing creative projects the whole time. The Krishna Mira<sup>2</sup> club opened in Moscow, and all the glamorous Goans and their fans now hang out there. Many of them promised that we'll catch up here in the near future. Soon we will lure all the most interesting people to Goa and there will be only schmucks and cops left in Rashka.”

“Good for you, Roma, only positive energy emanates from you, no matter what. Have you heard about Arik and his girlfriend?”

“Yes, such a terrible story. I have stopped talking to Arik for a while; he gives off only negative energy. I'll wait until he gains peace of mind again. His energy makes me want to hang myself. Vasya, I see that there are also interesting changes in your restaurant, I can't even recognize it. You bought expensive furniture and new mattresses.”

“Yes, Roma, I had to stop selling hemp clothes. I have to adapt to the waves of globalization that are rolling even this far. I am putting the whole focus of my business on the restaurant now. There are lots of competitors, so I have to meet the demands of tourists. The whole idea of Russian Hemp collapsed without me in Rashka. I quarreled with my partner. As soon as I left Russia, I was immediately accused of stealing money and escaping to India. And now I have no desire to go back there to prove my innocence. And you have probably heard that I am wanted there now; I can't go to Russia.”

“I know about you and about Max, who got five years in jail in Moscow for a package from Nepal. I see you have started betraying your principles,” Roma looks at me reproachfully, pointing at the menu lying near the table. “Have you started selling booze in your restaurant? You used to be a tough opponent of alcohol culture.”

“Everything flows, everything changes,” I repeat the Indian proverb with a sigh. “I had to buy a license for beer. But strong spirits are banned in my restaurant. Right now I believe that low-proof alcohol is not so bad. The owner of the land raised the rent and I need to earn money legally somehow. I can't sell drugs all my life. After all, my daughter is growing up, next year I'll have to pay for school.”

“Yeah, well, don't make excuses,” smiling again, Roman says and pats me on the shoulder, “everyone needs dough, and beer is not coke.”

“By the way, have you seen the banner I hung in front of Hemp?” I point at a huge, man-sized photo of a hemp flower.

“Yes, I noticed that beauty a few meters away. Only in India you can advertise a restaurant with a hemp photo on the wall. Vasya, are you not afraid to attract the police through such advertising?” Roman says, smiling as he gets up from the table.

“I hung a ‘No Drugs’ sign for the police, and the most important thing is that it's true. No drugs in my restaurant, only psychedelics.”

“By the way, my friends should be coming soon; they want to talk to you. And there they are, walking along the beach. I should wave to them so that they notice us. They have their own website dedicated to Goa, it's quite popular here, and they want to meet you.”

“Vasya, this is Dima and Sveta. They want to put information about your place on their website. The fame of your kvass and wonderful hash cakes has spread all around Russian Goa. Now, Vasya, you will also be known on the Internet.”

Smiling, a pretty, fair girl extends her hand to me, and then a tough-looking guy with small darting rat-like eyes holds out his hand.

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2 *Krishna Mira* ('Roof of Peace'/'Roof of the World') – a legendary Moscow club, run and frequented by a relatively progressive and bohemian section of Moscow society.