



Mari Tel

Chapter 31. Part One. Inside.

“Open Mapusa Beach,” I hear Viktor’s familiar voice.

The doors of my cell open again. One hour walk again. And once again I have to walk in circles and talk about whatever, because we’ve already discussed everything many times. I know almost everything about his life and he knows everything about mine. Sometimes we argue ourselves hoarse about some nonsense like ‘the duality of everything in this world’ and part almost hating each other. But the next day we are again incredibly happy to meet for an hour to discuss the completely opposite opinion that was born during the night. We have only one hour to speak in our mother tongue, to exchange books or jail news. Today’s top news is Yelisei’s return from the psychiatric clinic.

“Vitya, have you heard the news? They say he escaped from the mental hospital and was caught again,” I say, examining a huge dead rat killed by the guards during the night shift.

“Why guess? He is about to come out of his cell and we’ll find out everything from him.”

To the applause of the European inmates, Yelisei is the last to come out from cell number three, smiling and looking slightly overfed. He still has the same tattered old clothes on and the same long, unwashed greasy hair. The only thing that has changed is his hands: this time they are generously smeared with green disinfectant.

“Well, hello, tramp. Tell us, how did you find the Goan nuthouse?” Viktor asks first.

“Hello, boys.”

Yelisei tries to rub wrists again instead of shaking hands.

“No, Yelisei. Apparently, you are not fully cured. Can’t you give a human hand shake?”

“But I have Christ’s power in the ribbon on my wrists, it is transferred to you, too.”

“Never mind. Let’s not argue about that. Tell us, what are these rumors about your escape?”

“I needed to get home. So I ran away from there. I said it here in the jail, that I had to pick up my stuff. But no one wanted to listen to me. While I was in the nuthouse, I demanded that they escort me home to pick up my things. I rent a room in Chapora and now it’s rainy season, so if the things are not packed, everything will be lost. Moreover, I had my daughter there waiting for me in this stuff.”

Accustomed to not being surprised by anything, Viktor and I silently exchange glances and continue listening to the flow of nonsense, amongst which sense may only be heard occasionally.

“The doctors didn’t listen to me, they locked me up in a ward along with two local lunatics. One night, I broke off a piece of iron from the bed, used it to unscrew the four screws that fastened the bars on the window, and ran away. I had to wade through thorn bushes for a long time. They tore all my clothes and scratched my body. I came home, packed my things, put my daughter in my pocket, and made a joint. So I was sitting there drinking tea, when suddenly the police burst in and started shouting at me. They put me in the car and now I’m here again. Now I can sit here quietly for a long time, as my daughter is with me.”

“And who is this daughter, for whom you were so eager to escape?” Viktor asks, his mouth open in amazement.

“Here she is,” Yelisei takes a funny little doll from his pocket. “This is my daughter. Like all children, she was born as a result of a great love.”

“Vasya, look what people do for love. And you and Antonio harp on about ‘escape, escape.’ If you want to escape, do it like this guy did. That’s how people show their love, by risking their life. He may get an additional six months for the escape. You and Antonio love yourselves more. And if you love someone like that, no bars or walls will be an obstacle.”

“Perhaps you’re right, Viktor. Maybe I don’t want to escape from here.”

“Thank you, Yelisei. Thanks to you, today I realized the meaning of the phrase ‘Fools are always lucky’,” I say, holding out my wrist to him.

Chapter 31. Part Two. Outside.

“Hey, bro, tell me, who is Vasya here?” a tough-looking fellow with a shaven head asks me.

“I’m Vasya. What’s the matter?”

“Well, finally, we’ve found you, we have to have a word with you. Where can we talk?”

“What’s wrong with this place? Come up into the restaurant, sit down and we’ll talk.”

I interrupt my long observation of the capoeira dancers on the beach and prepare myself to once again communicate with ‘messengers from the mainland’.

“I am not alone, I am with two chicks and my bro,” the tough guy points at the two girls standing at the entrance in heeled sandals and a guy who looks like a typical train station conman.

“Why do you hesitate there at the entrance? Come in, make yourself at home, order juice while I talk to your friend.”

“So, you are THE Vasya? We drove almost a hundred kilometers from South Goa to see you. We’ve heard a lot about you in Moscow. All the boys who come back from Goa talk about you.”

“And what do the boys say?” I ask, smiling as I try to parody the style of ‘gangster’ communication.

“They say you have some kind of strong hash that you show under a microscope. And also, the boys told me that you make cakes with this hash. They say if you eat one such a cake it can get you so high that you don’t need to smoke all day.”

“Yes, your boys don’t lie. I have excellent hash. The local boys call it ‘from grandpa’s cellar’. Fifty bucks for a tola.”

“A tola – what’s that? A local matchbox or what?” the second conman-looking guy says, looking through the menu.

“A tola is an India measure of weight equal to twelve grams, while the Goan tola is ten grams.”

“We don’t care, ten or twelve. We are satisfied with the price. Sell us a hundred grams to last us for two weeks, and about twenty cakes. How much do they cost?”

“One hundred,” I answer with a smile, watching as their face-painted girlfriends in uncomfortably tight miniskirts sit on a mattress and look around

slightly startled, covering their plump thighs with their expensive handbags.

“Isn’t that expensive, one hundred bucks for a cake?” the conman asks, taking out a wad of money.

“One hundred rupees,” I say, laughing, “they’re three dollars a piece.”

“Well... three bucks – that’s damn cheap. Then we’ll take fifty pieces; we have some more boys at our hotel. Today we’ll feed everyone, let them enjoy it, as they can’t afford such a thing in Rashka. And, most importantly, I almost forgot to ask. Do you have any Number One¹ by any chance? They told us in Moscow that you don’t sell Number One, but we need it badly.”

“That’s right, I don’t sell coke, but I have Dymich.”

“What’s Dymich? We haven’t tried it before.”

“Dymich is MDMA, that’s what we call it here. It is the basic element of ecstasy pills.”

“No, we don’t need pills, there are no parties here anywhere, where would dance on that? We want to snort some coke on the beach with vodka.”

“Sorry, guys, then I can’t help you, don’t even ask. I don’t go near coke, that is my basic principle.”

“Listen, Vasya, what if we give you half of the money now, in the evening we try your hash, and if we like it, tomorrow we will bring the rest of the money and buy the same amount,” the conman proposes, holding out the money.

“No, guys. I am not a bank and it’s not my first day selling drugs. To give the goods and then wait for the money, that’s not my style.”

“Well, Vasya, don’t be offended, he’s kidding. Kolyan, give him all the money, don’t you see he is one of us,” says the tough guy, rising from the table. “Thank you, Vasya. We’ll go because we’ve got a taxi waiting for us, and we have an hour’s drive back.”

Having packed everything for them in a package, I see how Arik, who has just come in with two guys, is watching us from the next table and smiling.

“Hi, Arik. How is it going? What’s new?”

“So far, so good,” the six-foot blonde says, smiling and fixing his long hair. “The first tests showed that I don’t have AIDS, which is good news. But I need to give blood again after three months.”

“You surprise me, Arik. Beautiful models must run after such a handsome guy like you, and you found a girlfriend half your height, a junkie, and with AIDS.”

“Vasya, that’s life. I must have such karma. I see that the boys are appearing in your place more and more frequently.”

“Yes, Arik, normal people go to other countries, as there are no parties. Russian thugs have started coming here more often, and all they want is cocaine. But these are not the worst characters: the number of bard-nerds is constantly increasing. They need nothing but vodka. They get trashed and sing ‘It’s great that we are all together here today’.”

“By the way, Vasya, these are some guys from my home, from Chelyabinsk. They are respected devotees of Shiva.”

“Well, maybe not so respected, but we believe in Shiva,” extending his hand to me, says a skinny, long-haired guy of about thirty-five to forty.

“My name is Zhenyok.”

1 *Number One* – a slang term for cocaine in Russia.

“Nice to meet you, Zhenya.”

“And my name is Ivan,” getting up, a bald guy with a simple Russian face extends his hand to me. “I’m still not sure what I believe in. In Chelyabinsk, all the guys believe in Shiva, while I am just observing for now.”

“Nice to meet you, Vanya. Arkasha told me that you have a respected criminal kingpin who got all the lads hooked on Shaivism²,” I say, sitting down at their table. “I also heard that all the lads in Chelyabinsk wear Shiva tridents on their gold chains instead of crosses, and they greet everyone by saying ‘Hare, Hare, Mahadev’.”

“Well, not everyone, of course, but most are like that,” smiling, Zhenya points at the Rudraksha³ hanging on his chest. “In Chelyabinsk we like smoking hash and sometimes we take psilocybin mushrooms. Vasya, do you have anything for sale?”

“Well, I would like some cocaine, I love coke,” Vanya interrupts us, acting out the snorting of an invisible line of cocaine.

“I don’t sell cocaine, Vanya. And I don’t want to know anything about it, that is my basic principle.”

“Why so?” Vanya asks in surprise, pulling a pack of Belomor Kanal from his pocket.”

“Because it is a dangerous drug. Old man Freud wrote about it a hundred years ago. Besides, I’m not a drug dealer, and I don’t want to spoil my karma with bad deeds.”

“Well I, on the contrary, have always thought that cocaine is not a drug, and that there is no harm from it.”

“I’m not going to argue with you. Your knowledge is based on personal experience, and I read a bunch of books before I first tried it. As for mushrooms, unfortunately, I don’t have them. The yield is weak here in India and you need to collect them yourself. You never know what an Indian could put in the basket, he doesn’t care. However, there is LSD, which is no worse and perhaps even better – it brings you brighter hallucinations. In terms of smoke, I’ve got two kinds of charas: Indian from Manali, it costs the same everywhere, a thousand rupees per tola; or two thousand for Nepali. Nepali charas is made by Europeans, you won’t find anything purer than that.”

“What? Do the Europeans collect it themselves?” Zhenya asks in surprise, pulling out a cigarette holder.

“No, of course not, the Nepalese collect the ganja, but the process of making charas is overseen by white people. Vanya, I would advise you to try Dymich instead of cocaine. It’s more useful and more fun.”

“What is it?” the bald Chelyabinsk guy asks in surprise.

“Vanya, have you ever tried ecstasy?”

“Of course I have, I love ecstasy. In Chelyabinsk if I can’t get coke at a club, I buy four pills of ecstasy for the whole night.”

“Well, Vanya, ecstasy is made of MDMA, but they also add amphetamine to make it cheaper, and then sell it. Whereas Dymich is pure crystals without impurities.”

2 *Shaivism* – One of the four most widely followed sects of Hinduism, which reveres the God Shiva as the Supreme Being.

3 *Rudraksha* – the seed of a sacred plant, from the Sanskrit ‘Rudra’ (Shiva) and ‘aksha’ (‘teardrops’) frequently used as prayer beads. Depending on the number of segments in the seed, they may cost from \$0.1 to \$10,000 apiece.

“Then we need a bottle⁴ of LSD, one hundred grams of charas and ten grams of Dymich – to try it.”

“That’s how we do things in Goa!” I say, laughing and reaching for the camera that I use to hide drugs in. “The thing is that I don’t have that much on me now. Here you are, a little bit of everything, to sample. And write down my partner’s number, his name is Dan. Call him and order as much as you need, he’ll bring you everything. He will be in charge of the drugs now, as I’ve been too exposed.”

“I’m a disco dancer, Jimmy, Jimmy, acha, acha...” the once popular in Russia Indian song starts playing on my phone.

“Here in India, everything is very often in sync,” I say, pointing at the name on the display of my phone. “I just thought of Dan and here he is.”

“Hello, Dan. What’s up? I’ve just given your number to some guys from Chelyabinsk. Can you help them out?”

“Of course I can help. How much and what do they want?”

“They’ll call you, they are Arik’s friends.”

“Vasya, have you heard that Seryoga was killed in a crash on his bike today?” I hear the agitation in Dan’s voice over the phone.

“Which Seryoga?”

“The one who has lived on the first floor of your house for a month. Seryoga, his wife is Lena and their little son is Fedya.”

“When has he managed to crash, if I saw him on the road an hour ago? He even nearly crashed into me, he was drunk as a skunk.”

“Well, he didn’t have time to drive far away.”

Putting my phone away in my pocket, I sit for some time, staring at one spot and trying to remember Seryoga’s face.

“What is it, Vasya?” Arik breaks the silence. “Has someone crashed on a bike again?”

“Yeah, a resident of my guest house has just died. I saw him alive an hour ago and now he’s gone. Every year a lot of people crash and people still drive drunk.”

Seryoga was a friend Andryukha Pineapple, the first tourist who stayed in my house during the first season. They were both heroin addicts, and for many years they had tried to get off this terrible addiction. Andryukha managed to do it first. When he visited a year ago, he easily switched to lighter drugs, started attending parties, and led a more or less healthy lifestyle. Having grown some dreadlocks, he successfully became part of the freak community and got the nickname ‘Mr. Pineapple’ for his love of bundling his dreadlocks on the very top of his head, making it look like a large pineapple. On Mr. Pineapple’s advice, Seryoga also came to Goa with his wife Lena, both of them addicted to heroin. Having successfully gone through cold turkey they faced a new challenge – the emptiness, accompanied by the terrible boredom that formed in their heads. They usually filled this void with heroin, enjoying an illusory happiness. But they didn’t want this drug any longer. And then they started to drink. They hit the bottle every day and heavily. An hour before Seryoga’s death, I saw his eyes. Barely hanging onto his motorbike, he was driving in the middle of the road, his eyes as dull as those of a dead man. The reality of the world just did not exist for him. He was in his own illusory world. The surrounding real world simply didn’t satisfy him.

I didn't go to Seryoga's cremation. I was not sorry for him, and I even felt some resentment or anger towards this person who was absolutely indifferent to the world around him. He didn't care that he could crash into someone, or kill himself. He didn't care about his wife Lena and his young son Fedya, who couldn't understand what happened to his dear daddy for a long time after the crash.