

CHAPTER SIX: THE WHITE GOD FACTOR



here are a lot of reasons why Kara tried sabotaging the *eXile* only nine months after she and I first drafted those business plans. Moscow is a lousy town for a young, married couple from Seattle. Her husband, Marcus, never learned more than a few words of Russian, and he couldn't figure out simple business tricks.

Marcus was a failure among failures, in a town where failures didn't fail. Most fell into wads of quick cash, climbed the corporate ladder, or, like us, started up newspapers that would never have made it off the pot-smoke-clouded drawing boards back home. When he was our "promotions manager" he was fixated on making *eXile* lighters and key chains. They were never made. So he was promoted to sales manager at Kara's insistence. He didn't sell more than two ads the whole time, while Kara ran around gathering clients and handing them to Marcus as a way of propping him up.

We even had to replace Marcus as our cartoonist. I created a kitsch '50s-like cartoon door character called "Knock-Knock" to accompany our childishly cruel practical jokes. I handed the annoying door character over to Marcus, since he drew better than me. He clung to that Knock-Knock like a Down's syndrome adult clinging to a cat's scratching post. He plastered his Knock-Knocks all over our press and sales kits. He ordered a huge vinyl banner for the *eXile*, and made Knock-Knock the centerpiece. Once, when I was in their apartment, I saw his entire oeuvre of "Knock-Knock" drawings, signed and dated, carefully stacked in a glass cabinet, in the sincere belief that some future Christie's auction would be interested.

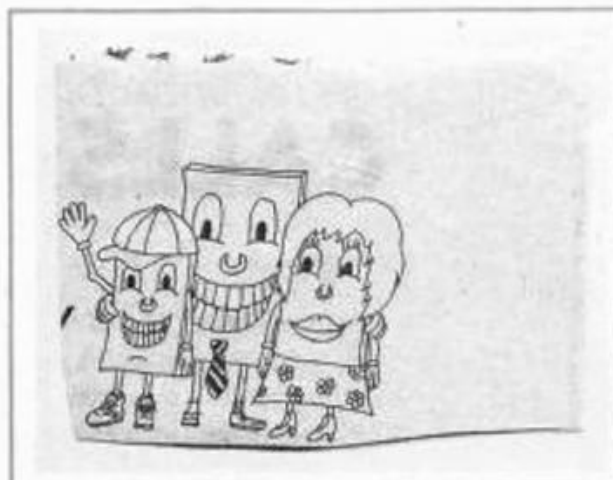
When Roman Papsuev, a freak-talented cartoonist geek with mind-reading powers, showed up in our offices with a pen and some drawings, we fired Marcus as our artist—actually, he got the hint and, in his Zen way, offered to

resign. And that was it. That was all he had to show after a year in Moscow—and if that's all you have, you're bound to start conjuring fond memories of Seattle, about how you'd left behind a paradise of aromatic-coffee-scented opportunity.

We got it into our heads that Marcus needed to be put to use, so we suggested dressing him in a 1950s Disneyland-style Knock-Knock door outfit and having him stand in Pushkin Square, handing out copies of the *eXile* and taking pictures with children. The giant foam Knock-Knock would beam its cheesy smile at passersby. Marcus would keep one hand over the mesh-grill for his eyes and mouth, waving with the other hand. He'd force copies of the *eXile* on lovers, babushki, businessmen, flatheads. He'd probably get stomped every once in a while, or rolled by Gypsies, but that'd be the price he'd have to pay to promote our newspaper.

Once, Taibbi aired our private joke to Marcus, just to test

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LOOK OUT SOTHEY'S! Marcus's Knock-Knock door character started off as a way of annoying our readers, but quickly evolved into a disturbing window into his subconscious mind.

his reaction. Marcus seemed to like it. He added that he should wear a pair of white tights with the foam Knock-Knock. We let it drop.

We often wondered how he could stay loyal to Kara, who, physically speaking, was a gnu among gazelles.

It's not as though there weren't options, even for Marcus. Moscow is packed with more female beauty per square mile than any place on earth. And not haughty, cold types, but inviting, curious beauty, always looking to try something new, trade up, succumb to pressure, fall into some wild and unexpected adventure. . . . You catch their eyes on the streets, something that doesn't happen in America. Femme fatales on every sidewalk! Vixens riding down the metro escalators! Sly seductresses pouring into the streets! Somehow Marcus managed to block that part of Moscow out. We'd often ask ourselves how long he could deny the yawning beauty gap between his wife and, well, just about every single girl in Moscow. . . .

If most expat women begin at a massive disadvantage against their Russian counterparts, then Kara was disqualified from the competition. While Marcus had the face of a 15-year-old, Kara resembled a pirate. She tried to assert her qualities—her strength of character—by being aggressively un-beautiful. That kind of shtick might work in progressive Seattle, but it died on contact in Moscow.

Taibbi and I often joked, in private, that Marcus spent the better part of his time with his pug nose wedged deep inside Kara's gorilla ass, gnawing away for hours while she surfed the Internet or ran Excel or prepared aromatic coffee or designer pasta. To this day we're not sure exactly what the fuck went on between them. Strange things, that's for sure. Everyone who knew them thought there was something creepy going on. Once, during a long night of work, Kara called Marcus into the design room and told him, "Marcus, if you want to, you are free to leave." Right in front of us. He thanked her quietly, and left.

A few months after we started the *eXile*, Kara invited an

acquaintance of theirs from the Midwest, Paul Barker, to come to Moscow and take over as sales manager. Kara didn't want to be known as a salesperson—rather, she wanted to be known as the General Manager. In the aspiring corporate world, salespeople are ranked, in status, at the bottom of the heap. Marketing people and general managers are like quarterbacks and running backs, the glory folk.

So Kara wanted to hire a sales manager to work beneath her.

Paul Barker had a ridiculously innocent, puppetoon face: bright red lips, twinkling eye, greased back hair—'80s Wall Street hair. . . . His trademark was his goofy chortle. If he wasn't chortling, he was nervously bullshitting you about one thing or another.

Paul was a monstrous failure as sales manager, but not bad at trying to fuck the entire Russian female staff at the *eXile*. His first target was our sexy receptionist Yulia, a half-Estonian 20-year-old with honey-colored hair and big green eyes, and a sexy laugh that drove Paul nuts. He started off by trying to charm her, and she led him on with her inviting laugh, one hand on her chin, big green eyes looking up. From down the hallway, you could hear Paul chortling, like a barking seal during mating season. Within a month, he was literally chasing Yulia down the hallway to try to get her to kiss him. He didn't mind that Yulia's husband is a karate champion.

"What's he going to do? I'm American!" Paul would say, chortling again. He demanded her phone number. Once, Yulia screamed for me to help her. I had to pull Paul off and lock her in our publisher's office. I blocked the door and told Paul to calm the fuck down.

"I love Moscow, man!" he'd wheeze with that hand-in-the-cookie-jar expression of his. "Man, you can do anything here!"

Kara and Marcus had to watch this every day: *eXile* guys chasing women in the office up the walls, into stalls. . . . Paul fucked the first sales girl he hired, Lyuba, a silicon-lipped 19-year-old blonde. She quit a few weeks later. He fucked our production manager, Tanya. He fucked a married card dealer from one of the casinos that he'd landed as our client. He fucked a neighbor of Kara's. He fucked everyone, that is,

SHE'S ASKING FOR IT! What sane American male wouldn't mistake our receptionist Yulia's warm expression, pictured here, as an invitation to rape and pillage her?



but his ex, Kara. With her, you just asked for money.

Paul was such a failure at sales that even Kara couldn't hide it. Marcus, when he heard us grumbling, waited patiently. When it was safe, he began to openly lobby for Paul to be fired. "I could do a better job than him," Marcus complained ominously.

Paul was finally given the boot. He headed back home to America, but first, he pocketed a thousand *eXile* dollars from an overdue client, and spent them on cards and whores and coke.

Kara installed her husband in Paul's place. In her clichéd approach to business, she thought she needed that leverage to counterbalance the Ames-Taibbi Axis.

Right up to the last, Kara tried to play the game and never show that she was bothered by our blatant sexism. She wasn't PC—she wanted us to be clear on that. I think that's a late '90s progressive *grrrl* thing, to be, at least on the surface level, anti-PC.

Kara wanted to show that she could run with the boys. She laughed at our overt sexist take on Moscow. She even encouraged it at times. She told us once that she liked to wear tight halter tops to important meetings, to show off her tits. She was proud of her little contribution to the sexist plot. It made her tougher than the other girls.

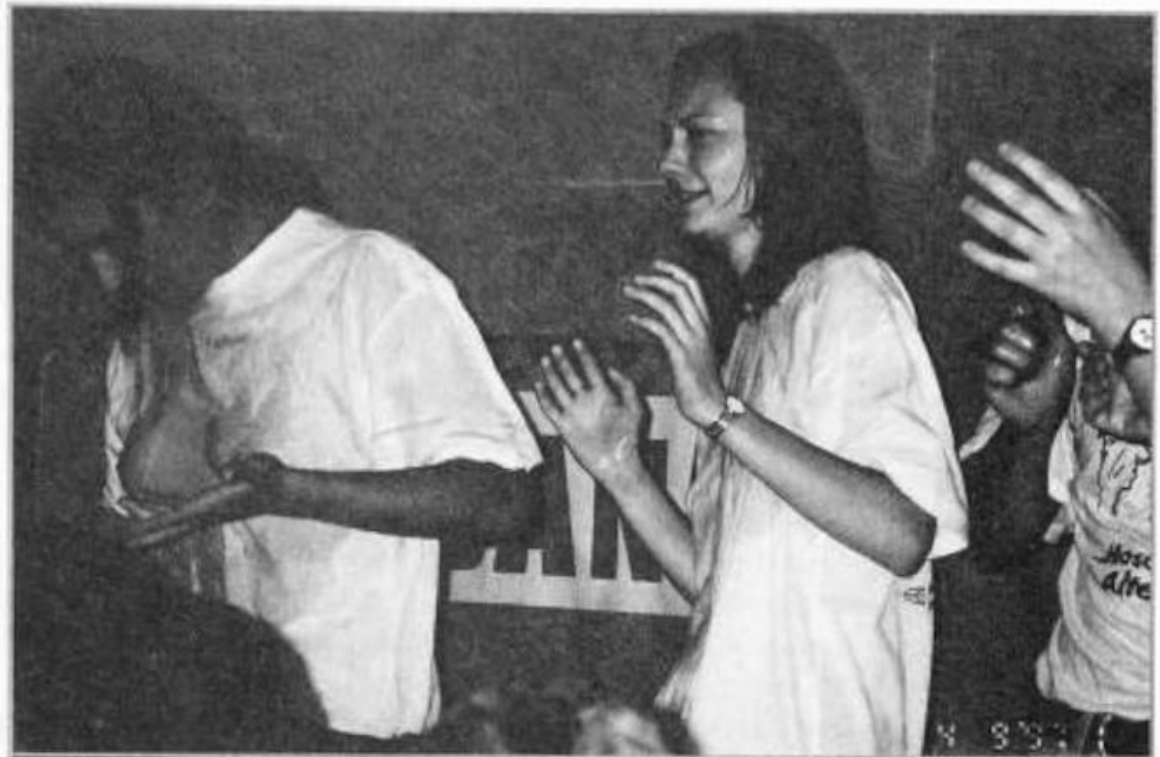
I'd look at her apple-sized breasts, then pan up to her Blackbeard face, and think... *Ee-gads!*

Then Kara abruptly quit, telling us that her life plans had changed, that she was frustrated, and she couldn't continue working with Matt and me. She particularly resented Matt.

The two of them had never hit it off. The night that Matt joined after our epic summit meeting at the *Ar-lite* Diner, we met over at Andy's apartment for what I assumed would be an amicable shaking-hands agreement, followed by celebration. Kara came about twenty minutes late, with Marcus behind. They took another twenty minutes to de-Gore-TeXize their bodies. Velcro ripped and tore in Andy's front hallway. Matt stared at me in disbelief, but for the most part, we ignored it.

When they walked into Andy's TV room, we were already drinking champagne. Andy proposed a toast, but Kara stopped.

"I think we need to get things straight first before we start drinking champagne," she said, adopting a cold, officious tone. She went on the offensive, immediately trying to drive a wedge between the two of us. It was strange, especially coming after her warnings to me that if we didn't hire Matt away, we were



Marcus arranged a wet T-shirt contest, with Kara's approval, for the September '97 *eXile* party. Marcus, in the shadows on the far right, led the ceremonies.



MD: what are you wearing? ;)... my wife and I are into plating and golden showers lol... right now I have the laptop on my throbbing member [mmmm] ;)

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fucked. She saw Matt and me sitting together laughing, and she felt threatened.

A couple of months later, while I was on vacation, she tried giving Matt a back rub while he was typing an article on the computer—some kind of hippie Seattle bonding thing, I guess. But Matt's not too good at hiding his emotions; he told me he broke out in one of those shivers that sends the whole body into an epileptic convulsion, then he turned around and, with a sour, bug-eyed look, asked her what the hell she was doing. A few days later, I got a call in California from Kara that the newspaper was about to collapse. Later, she told me that "it's either Matt or me."

It was only a week or so before she actually left town that we discovered the depths of her bitterness toward us. We were in our office, near the end of the workday, when she delivered to us some ominous threats about our publisher Kostya, and her demands that we reduce our salaries (which were already about half of Kara's) and allow her to keep her stake in the newspaper even after leaving. We were in shock. We pressed her. She kept up her attack. We pressed her more. How could she threaten us like that?!

Then she broke down and told us what she really thought.

We'd never given her any respect or credit. We were glory hogs and obnoxious jerks. Worst of all was our sexism. Our sexism and sexual harassment of the Russian female staff, as well as the sexism in our newspaper, was too much for her. Watching us harass the young female staff had to be the most painful part—because we'd never, in a million years, have thought of harassing her.

"You know I'm not PC. But there's a limit. You go too far. You're always trying to force Masha and Sveta under the table to give you blow jobs. It's not funny. They don't think it's funny," Kara complained.

"But . . . it *is* funny," Matt said.

We have been pretty rough on our girls. We'd ask our Russian staff to flash their asses or breasts for us. We'd tell them that if they wanted to keep their jobs, they'd have to perform unprotected anal sex with us. Nearly every day, we asked our female staff if they approved of anal sex. That was a fixation of ours. "Can I fuck you in the ass? Huh? I mean, without a rubber? Is that okay?" It was all part of the fun. Fun that Kara was no part of.

In the end, that's the real reason why Kara quit and left this town a bitter wreck. Moscow is a hellish Twilight Zone that completely turns Seattle on its nose-pierced head. Kara, like so many expat women, wanted to see the whole thing go up in flames. She didn't just quit the job. She tried leaving a

few fuse-delayed time bombs to sink the paper. She let three months' worth of clients' bills go unpaid without telling us, leaving our bank account in deep arrears. She ran our last few issues well into the red. Before she left, she assured me, Matt, and Nicole that all finances were in order and we had no outstanding debtors.

A few weeks after Kara disappeared, we needed money to wire to our printers. They told us that it was the last paper they would print, since we hadn't paid for printing for four issues. I was in shock. I went to our accountant Tanya, and she produced for me a sheet of paper showing \$30,000 in outstanding debts.

"What?! Tanya, I had no idea. Why didn't you warn us? Kara told us that we had no debts!" I cried.

Tanya smiled in that pithed way of hers. Tanya's not a bad person. She's just slow. Which is why she's our accountant. Anyone clever in her position could make off with our money and have us all sitting in jail for life. . . . Better to have a doe-eyed idiot who can, on a good day, add up the figures in the left and right columns.

Luckily, we untangled the mess, leaned hard on our clients, and for the first time turned the *eXile* into a profitable operation . . . until Nicole came along, made an even worse mess, took key financial records (leaving many questions unanswered), and split for Rotterdam.

The first time I met Danielle Downing was at a let's-pretend-we're-middle-aged expat party she threw at her apartment, which meant Gypsy Kings soundtrack, chinless Americans and Brits . . . and beer. She was a big deal in the banking community. My Pakistani boss took me to meet her. Like him, Downing was a fellow Wharton grad—an elite carpetbagger.

Every American expat party in Moscow is the same. Particularly if they're thrown by American women. First, the functional interior, the middle-class "low key" prints on the wall, and simple decorations, an intentional way to distinguish yourself from the allegedly vulgar, gaudy Russians. Worse, not a drug in sight, not a single drunken Russian or even a whiff of sexual tension. It was odd, this barricaded safe house of human ugliness in a city teeming with hungry beauty. Most American expat parties in Moscow are like that: a kind of inverse *Night of the Living Dead*, where the boring, homely expat creatures lock themselves indoors to protect themselves from the pulsing, beautiful miniskirted humans on the outside.

Downing had short black hair, and was dressed in a simple gray sweater, jeans, and topsiders, with no makeup. Her harsh, mannish features weren't softened by the clothes, but then

267-4159

755-8296

To: Mark and Matt
From: Nicole Mollo

Knowing that Nicole the Libra suffered from childhood-trauma-induced paranoia, we stuck messages about her into our Gore-O-Scopes—the one section she'd always quote—after she absconded. We were convinced she'd secretly read them, triggering a lifelong Xanax habit.

LIBRA This is a tricky one, Lib. See, you've absconded with money and financial records from people close to, and you've started to get the idea that maybe they've forgotten all about it and you're off scott-free. And you know what? You're darn-tootin' right! So don't worry about them knowing where you are, Lib, and worry about Number One. That's right: U! Take a little chunk of that dough and head over to American Express and treat yourself to a trip abroad, will ya?)

I have already spoken with Kostiya today about your outrageous lies. I do not appreciate you calling people and telling them the load of crap you have invented. I will return from vacation to settle this with Kostiya, as we discussed today. I purposefully left the way I did because I expected your behavior to be extremely irrational and unfair. You have exceeded my expectations. I prefer not to speak with either of you again. Since the finance question will be dealt with by Kostiya, there is no longer any need for you to attempt to contact me, or any of my acquaintances. When I have further time, I will fax you a list of the accounts which owe money. I collected money from the Duck, which was equal to the amount which was owed to me, and the balance is due to the exile, which can be collected at a later date. I hold no money which belongs to the exile. You must realize that if you persist in harassing me, or my acquaintances, there are measures I can take to protect myself.

hlm

After we realized that Nicole had disappeared with our cash-in/cash-out records and a lot of unanswered questions, we called all of her friends around town, trying to track her down. When that failed, we called several airline companies asking them not to allow her onboard. We told them that she might be carrying a highly contagious disease, and that it was vital we contact her. Only Aeroflot refused to cooperate. We also spread veiled hints that our publisher had plans for her. She barricaded herself in the American Embassy with a friend, and sent off this threatening fax.

again, she dressed pretty much the way everyone else at her party dressed. She didn't even *try* to appear sexually appealing. That's because within the frame of her party, she didn't need to. Instead, she did what all expat women do when they throw parties in Moscow: she barred all the competition—there wasn't a single Russian woman under the age of 35. This is a strategy imitated by female expat managers at restaurants, bars, and companies: They invariably hire bland support staff, weeding out all elements of potentially arousing beauty. The Starlite Diner, Video Express, McDonald's . . . everywhere it's the same. It's kind of an unstated joke in the expat world, but everyone knows it's true. The threat is real. Downing, in spite of her money and her position, was not immune to the brutal sexual humiliation that all expat American women endure in Russia.

The expat men at Downing's party were careful not to offend. It's an implicit rule in Moscow that bringing your young, leggy Russian *dyevushka* to a female expat's party is bad taste, rubbing salt in the wound, like showing up at a Vietnam vet's reunion with a slope girlfriend in a peaked straw peasant's hat, Mao outfit, and gag water gun. . . .

All American women, and practically all the European women, are socially and sexually devastated by Russia. They're at a massive disadvantage for the first time in their lives. They didn't expect it at all. None of us did. We all came here expecting to skim the top, showing the poor savages how to work, eat, dress. . . . But things started to happen to us. We—the expat men and women—veered off in wildly different directions, on to nonintersecting planes.

Eventually, all the expat women abandon this city bitter and frustrated, deeply Russophobic and devoted to the Brzezinskian doctrine of containment and dismemberment of the Russian beast . . . because the sexual strategies that they have been used to employing cannot compete against the Russian *dyevushki*. It's swords against SS-21s. American women have been raised to believe that traditional qualities of femininity—appearing as though you are trying to please the man by caking on makeup, wearing tight short skirts that show off your legs, speaking in a high voice, giggling, and deferring to his desires—as well as characteristics usually used to describe sluts—high heels, heavy perfume, sleeping

The eXile's infamous expat vagi-bashing issue We became the focus of a lot of estrogen-boiling rage after publication. It was one thing that expat women had to suffer loneliness in silence; but another that a pair of hairy-assed jerks made a huge, public joke of it all.

Moscow's Only Alternative

the eXile

ISSUE #9 [009] JUNE 5, 1997 • FREE

- Pleats eXile personals
- Eager to listen
- Draw a mustache just for you
- Prison/Army Tattoo
- Hairless chest
- Cares about what you have to say
- Chooses imitation Dockers shirt
- Keeps pocket empty of condoms to avoid that impersonal atmosphere
- Phone taken for letting wife know where he is
- Keys to Moon's house, where he lives
- Shed suit squeaky clean, just in case

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"What's Happening?" on Independence Day— Bar-Dak Calendar

Anatoly Chubais contributes a special guest prank to the eXile 20

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SPECIAL MOSTLY FUNNY ISSUE

with a man on the first night without demanding he use a condom—are not only atavistic and repugnant but, ultimately, unsuccessful tactics in the competition for Mr. Right.

Most American men are also culturally programmed to believe that what they really want is not a "bimbo" but an "equal": someone who can stand on her own two feet, earn her own coin, make her own decisions, hang with the boys, think like a man, speak in a low, monotone, ironic tone of voice—while at the same time radiate some kind of eroticism vaguely reminiscent of traditional femininity, though without implying that era's oppressive power hierarchy. . . . Just writing this down reminds me how strange and schizophrenic our expectations are. American women aren't aware that they've been handed just about the most crazed, impossible script on Planet Earth. They don't know how bad it is because America's influence is winning, the historical trend is running straight out of San Francisco and New York and Boston, and, therefore, however horrible and painful it all may be, arguing against any part of the American Way would be like arguing against history itself.

Out in Russia, you gain a little perspective, which can be dangerous. Deep down, as it turns out, even the most emasculated, wire-rimmed glasses, cigar-smoking and martini-drinking American guy fantasizes about living in world full of . . . well, I'll let you guess:

- a) self-reliant women who are also your friends
- b) sluts

Okay, still stuck? I'll amend it. All men—that's right, all sane men—fantasize about a world populated with:

- a) self-reliant androgynous women who are also your friends
- b) young, beautiful sluts

Envelope please. . . . Whoah! This is a shocker, folks! Hold on to your seats! Turns out, when you scrape away the surface implants, every single sane man wants . . . drum roll, maestro . . . young, beautiful sluts!

CUT TO: Young, beautiful sluts seated in third row, hands cupped over mouths in shocked surprise. . . . They stand, crying-laughing, hugging each other, then slowly make their way toward the podium, kissed by vigorously applauding men on their way there . . .

Young, beautiful sluts. It's a censored fantasy, and best kept that way: After all, in coastal America, reality couldn't be further away from that fantasy. It exists only in chat rooms, and even there, most of the alleged F18's are gay 50-year-old men with spiked five-inch butt-plugs wedged up their asses.

When I look back at America now, I shudder. All those millions of poor sad fucks who spend their lives on the Internet "meeting" people—they scare me the most. I remember my life those last six months in California. Had I stayed, I might

have wound up in chat room number 12 myself, jerking off with one hand, desperately wooing some socially terrified woman with the other. But now that I've been in Russia, where people aren't quite as afraid and alienated from each other, I realize that I didn't HAVE to endure that—the social/sexual script I'd been handed in suburban California is one of the bleakest in man's history. Turns out that there are several other scripts out there in the global village far superior, with far happier beginnings, middles, and endings than the American one.

For Russian girls, the stakes in sex are pretty simple: money, and/or self-destructive adventure. When American women try to tell their Russian sisters that they have it all wrong, that in fact they're being oppressed and demeaned, Russian girls invariably assume that the *amerikanka* is a frustrated spinster. *Dyevushki* value the surface far more than deluded Americans. They judge each other by how beautiful they look, how much makeup they wear, how high their miniskirts are cut... under those criteria, any American feminist's ethos is immediately undercut. Russia's a tough crowd, tough crowd.

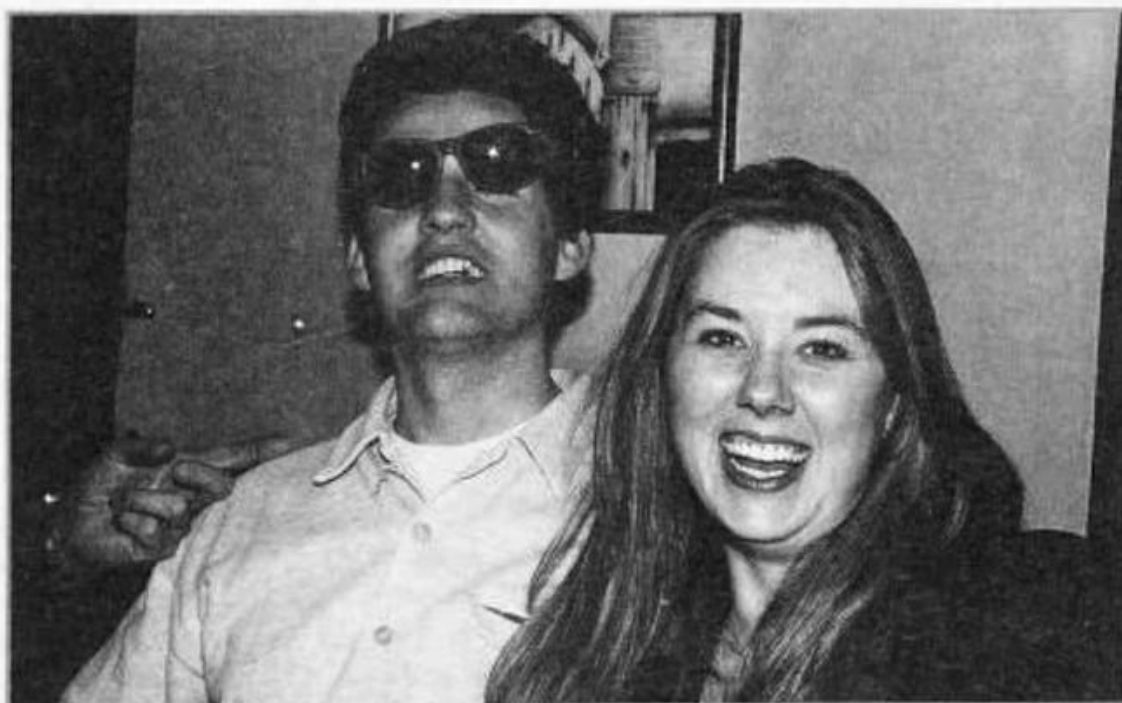
The gulf between the two is unbridgeable. I remember entire feminist groups thriving in Prague—Czech women were eager to gain Western acceptance via any route. Those same Prague-based feminist organizations made a few failed attempts to crack the Russian market. I knew one of the leaders, a Canadian Jew named Rachel. She told me, after a doomed tour of Moscow and St. Petersburg, that the Russians were "primitive" and "hopeless." The feminists' main problem is that they were marketing a less attractive alternative to the wildly flawed but never-boring local sexual narrative. For Russians, there is no greater sin than a boring, safe life. Everything else is negotiable. In that frame, American feminism falls as flat as would a Russian nerd coming to a high school class in California and advising the kids that they should listen to Boney-M and wear tight Vietnamese-manufactured counterfeit Levi's if they wanted to be cool—which, if the Soviets had won the Cold War, they might have done.

But such bizarre advice wouldn't wash with the kids—and neither will a feminist's advice in Russia. The *dyevushki* have the game down pretty well here, even if it usually ends up with marrying a wife-beating, syphilis-infected, drunken loser who can't so much as change the lightbulb.

But that part comes later for the *dyevushki*. And they know it. So they live it up to the max while they have the upper hand, when nature is good to them. They know that time is working against them. Youth is a dirty word here—most go straight to adulthood by the age of 14. I can count five women I've slept with who lost their virginity at age 11; they

TOP 10 PICK-UP LINES USED ON EXPAT WOMEN

- 1) You know, I'm tired of women expecting me to sleep with them on the first night. It makes me feel like an object.
- 2) I don't know about you, but for me, my career is the most important thing.
- 3) I think make-up makes women look cheap, don't you?
- 4) Hey, have you seen Legal Eagles?
- 5) I won't lie—I'm a lazy alcoholic, and I just want someone to take care of me.
- 6) Hey, are you gonna finish that?
- 7) I think women improve with age.
- 8) Oh Jesus, I'm gonna be sick!
- 9) Oh, so you're a speedskater? No? I just thought...
- 10) Right now, I'd fuck anything.



EXPAT BEAUTY. It's an oxymoron. Pictured here are the homecoming king and queen of Moscow's English-speaking expat crowd. If they're really nutty, they might even drink beer.

Death Porn



Femme Fatale: The Miss Militsia Competition heats up during the shoot-the-swarthy-foreigner leg of the competition.

In Honor of Women's day, Death Porn offers a glimpse of the better sex at work, at play, and at murder.

Soap on a Rope

A kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Romanova, tried to hang a 20-month-old baby

Even the average Russian policewoman exuded 1000 microns more sexual energy waves than our best expatellas.

treat it as dry fact, like when their first teeth grew, and not as a psychology-loaded tragedy. A Russian woman is at the peak of her power from about age 13 until 20. After that, beauty is subjected to the cruel forces of entropy, which renders them unrecognizable beasts—Division II nose-guards—by the age of 30. That's why most have been married at least once by the time they hit 20—in the provinces, the age is more like 17.

Russian girls are the most physically attractive women on earth, and they are all available to the right bidder. The Supermodel types usually wind up on the arms of some middle-aged, roly-poly businessman. Chechens and Georgians were "in" when I first arrived in Moscow; now, Slavic-blooded flatheads have replaced them. Middle-aged and rich is the key. The rest—the sevens and eights—are up for grabs. Even the whores for sale at Night Flight, Metelitsa, and Monte Carlo clubs are the kind of girls you'd only expect to see in *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issues or Ratt videos. But anyone can have them—for a price (about \$200 at Night Flight, from \$300 to \$700 or more at Metelitsa).

Nearly every Westerner who comes here—male and female—is shocked by the beauty factor. It takes a while for the brain to trust the eyes. During the Cold War, we were brainwashed to expect mustached bodybuilders and gruff-voiced fireplugs—Kara Deyerin types—not dainty, leggy teenie-vixens. Their Eurasian features (pale skin, eyes that are both slanted and large, colored gray or ice-blue, and

sleek legs like a gazelle's) and exaggerated feminine gestures stir things in the expat male's primordial consciousness. Perhaps it has something to do with the gratuitous fellatio-friendly lipstick jobs girls here wear: bright red paint from nose to chin, which screams: "I am capable of sucking your dick so hard that you'll have to pull the sheets out of your ass!" In America such women are available only to producers and rock stars. In Russia, they're everywhere—they're the norm. And expat men have a leg up on everyone.

Expats represent the ticket out of the smoldering ruins of this Visa-caged East, and into the glorious, clean, civilized West. This puts nearly all expat men into a position they'd never been trained for: that of heavy-metal guitarists having to choose among potential groupies. Every bar, every restaurant, every day at work, there is some attractive Russian *djevushka*—whose stunning beauty and tender age the expat man had always assumed was beyond his reach—distracting him from his work. He can barely contain himself. Many expat guys I know run amok here, like escaped convicts offered a free Happy Hour at the Mustang Ranch, consuming as many women as possible, in the fear that someday, this opportunity will vanish, like a dream.

Others just can't get used to the idea. They stand around in bars and nightclubs, clutching their beers, staring at the items with a dumb, scared expression. They can't believe that they have rights to any of it—they're afraid that they'll be permanently damaged if they try. Or worse, that they're being watched, tested, if not by the Feminist INTERPOL Police, then by God himself.

Russian parents encourage their teenage daughters to date men in their 30s—men who offer experience, maturity and money—preferably Western men. So teenage *djevs* make themselves available. It takes a while for most American men to get the nerve up to sleep with a teenager. Well, not that long. He's a bit awkward at first. He's worried about social consequences. His conscience tells him something's wrong with fucking a teenager, although the rest of his body takes out a pair of two-by-fours and clubs his conscience unconscious.

Once he crosses that line, that's it, he's spoiled forever. That's why his former expat girlfriend will say about him, "He's been ruined . . . he's not like he used to be . . ." I say "former" because I don't know of a single American couple that came to Russia together and didn't split apart after six months because Biff decided he wanted to play Axl Rose while the Axl-in' was good.

My expat girlfriend, Suzanne, said the exact same thing about me. We started dating a month after I moved to

Moscow. Then she left for Belgium, and when she returned to Moscow a year later, she didn't like the New Me. I used to be shier and clumsier. I was more likable before.

Expat women like my old girlfriend get hit with a double-whammy of shit luck in Moscow: First, they're physically out-classed by the Russian girls; and secondly, the Russian men are slouched, pasty, unkempt, and, in most Western women's eyes, the ugliest men in Europe. And yet... even the Russian men don't want expat women. Which leaves—exactly no one wanting expat women. That's right: *no one*.

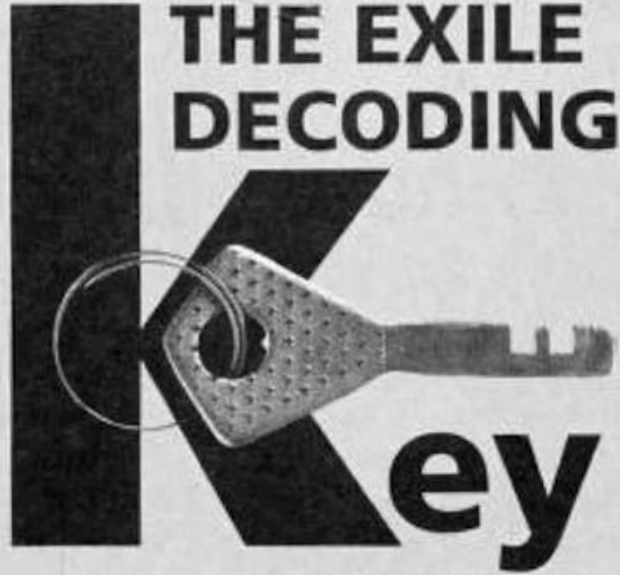
In order to survive, American women in Moscow try to adapt—at least those who want to keep a foot in the Darwinian lottery. Some start pouring on makeup and dressing like the local sluts, but somehow that makes them even more pathetic. Most get looser, much looser.

They'll sleep with anyone. Even the *eXile's* villain costar, the gas-bellied, balding Owen Matthews, boasts an entire shelf of American women trophies. It's the saddest statement of expat female desperation—all those American girls that Owen conquered. They submitted the way women in conquered lands submitted to their sweaty, barbaric conquerors in days of yore. And those were the lucky ones—at least they got laid by someone.


One famous story tells of a USAID woman who complained to another friend, "It's gotten so bad here that I've resorted to licking pussy." Other American women still hold out hope. They survive by casing certain expat-only bars where they prey on fresh-off-the-boat expat men who don't speak a word of Russian—they're the only ones with whom she has a chance of building a relationship. Many just give up, focus on their jobs, sock away the hot dough like Downing, and return home to America where she's back in the driver's seat. She's comforted only by the





Things That Do & Don't Suck



THE EXILE DECODING

 **Fahkie Factor!** Will you "do it tonight"? ★ = not even David Hasselhoff could score here ★★ = Unless you carry a cell-phone and a wad of worthless GKOs, you'll have a tough time of it ★★★ = patrons here are like spider monkeys during mating season: you'll have to pry them off your legs with a wood scraper

 **Flathead Factor!** Will you walk out alive? ★ = probably ★★ = compliment this club's gentlemen on the Euclidean flatness of their heads, and they'll let you live ★★★ = do you believe in God? You might want to consider it before coming here

 **Foam Factor!** Will cheap-O eXile readers afford the beer? ★ = \$2-\$3 per beer ★★ = \$4-\$5 per beer ★★★ = \$6-\$60,000

thought that when Biff comes back, vengeance will be hers. Because when Biff shows up at JFK passport control, he's going to have an ego-slashing time readjusting to America's dry, flat, sexless narrative. It's just one way that Russia, pretending to be overrun by the West, is quietly poisoning its "conqueror." The same way that other "conquerors"—Sweden, France, Germany—limped out of here squeaking in shock, emasculated forever.

We published an article in the *eXile* spelling out these unpleasant truths. To this day, nearly the entire female expat community won't talk to us. Having the truth aired out in public like that was salt in the wounds—like pissing in the wounds, blowing your nose in them, and laughing the whole time. They didn't appreciate that very much.

About a month after we launched the *eXile*, I started getting a call from some kind of nervous American nerd asking how he could contribute to the newspaper, since he was a big fan. He stuttered when he spoke to me; he tried to drop hip expressions, but they came out wrong and forced. I did my best to put him off. I have a terrible prejudice about writers who cold-call me—I assume that they must be worthless if they're crawling up to me. It's the same tried-and-true formula that has led to a disastrous record in the field of long-term relationships with girls: If she wants me, something must be wrong with her.

This guy had sent a letter to our [sic] page, a place for readers to submit themselves to open abuse in exchange for an *eXile* T-shirt, and signed his name "Johnny Chen." I thought the name was a joke or a pseudonym, since few people sent us letters using their real names. About a month after that, he called me again, and asked if he could pick up his *eXile* [sic] T-shirt. I told him to come by after work that day, so that I would miss him. Another fear of mine is that anyone who comes to our office has one intention: to murder me for things I've written.

The next day, I asked Marcus, who was in the office when this "Johnny Chen" came by, what he looked like. I'd expected some nerd surfer-type with a soccer hairdo. Chen had some of that coastal California inflection, although he'd clearly been excluded from the crowd.

Marcus shrugged. "Oh, I don't know. He looked like some normal Asian-American guy."

"You mean he's really a Johnny Chen?"

Marcus turned and laughed, adjusting his gold wire-rimmed glasses. "Yeah, he's really a 'Johnny Chen.' He also asked me to leave this for you to read. I'm sure he's the writer you've been dreaming of and more."

Marcus handed me a large manila envelope addressed to "Mark Ames" in large letters.

I didn't open it for another few months, assuming that it was an attack on me. I put it on our desk, and let it serve as the bottom layer upon which several layers of paper sediment built and built, especially after Taibbi joined.

Then disaster struck the *eXile*. Owen, who wrote club reviews for us under the pseudonym "Robert Plant," got worse and worse as a writer. Not only did he never get his pieces in on time (once he handed his piece to us through the barred-window grill on deadline night—he was so late that the security guards wouldn't let him in), but he even wrote reviews on clubs and bars that he never visited. And every piece was the same: Russian-managed bars sucked and lacked taste, and Western-style clubs were signs of hope. Readers complained.

Just as Taibbi and I were trying to figure out what to do, I got another call from Johnny Chen.

"You never answered me, Mark. Just tell me yes or no. Don't you realize that you're passing up an opportunity?"

I looked through the bars in our window, across the courtyard, and up to the roof. We were located on the ground floor of a residential apartment block, a horseshoe of eight-story buildings. This crazed gook's probably Oswalding me from the roof across the way, with a cell-phone and a scope-rifle.

"Look, I understand your newspaper better than anyone," he went on. "It's basically *Revenge of the Nerds*. But you guys aren't the real thing. I've seen you and Taibbi—you look like a pair of wrestlers. You guys aren't the real thing, you know. I am. I can give you an authentic dweeb's view of Russian nightlife. All I ask for in exchange is one of your *eXile* press cards you guys have, so that I can get into clubs and stuff free, and use it to impress girls. In return, let me write your club reviews. Let me at least try. Your Robert Plant guy sucks, and you know it. Everyone I talk to thinks he's a joke, and you're losing cred. But just think: What newspaper, anywhere in the world, would ever hire a thirty-one-year-old Asian-American like me, a fucking information manager at a Big Five firm, to write their club reviews? You guys are always trying to buck convention and stuff, and you try to be hip by being unhip: Well, here's your chance to make nerd history. Think about it: If it can be proven that a guy like me can get laid and have a wild nightlife in Moscow, then literally ANYBODY can. That's what I tried to tell you in my letter you never read."

Goddamnit, he was right! I mean, only if he could write. But fuck it, even if Chen couldn't write, we'd use his persona, publish his picture, and edit the hell out of it, just to bring the Moscow Decadence myth to a new level. Chen wouldn't be the first shitty writer we'd used for the sake of using crazed, shitty writers: Bobby Brown, the totally mad New Jersey expat who runs a pirate video rental store out of his apartment, faxes us his trademark video reviews. Brown was

a short Italian who always wore unbuttoned shirts showing off his gold medallion. If you went to his apartment to take a video, he'd keep you for hours recounting every Steven Segal or Jean-Claude Van Damme film, comparing them to his own experiences fighting off armed *bandity* with his feet and fists. Brown would lose a writing competition to Koko the gorilla . . . and yet, he became a literary legend in the *eXile*. Chen, therefore, had a lot of room in which to maneuver.

His first review was about a disastrous evening out to a strip joint called Rasputin. The short Chechen club manager was so sure that Chen was a fraud posing as a journalist that he set him up. He sat Chen down at a barstool and motioned one of the girls to join him for a drink. When the aging red-haired stripper-whore sat next to Chen for some light conversation, she ordered a glass of champagne, then later walked. The barman presented the Chenster with the bill: \$150 for the glass of champagne, \$20 for each gin and tonic that the manager had offered him.

Chen threw a fit. He told the barman that he refused to pay. The barman called a manager over, a different manager than the Chechen, who said he had no idea that Chen had been invited as a journalist/guest. The Chechen was gone for the night. Meaning, pay up, bub. Chen threw a fit. He told them he was leaving, like it or not. They could take him out back and beat him, but he wasn't going to victim to a shit Bangkok scam like that. For some strange reason, they backed down, an example of the kind of luck that Chen has had ever since moving to Moscow.

When he came into the office to deliver his Rasputin piece, I was shocked at whom we'd hired as our Voice Of Hipness: Chen's longish, parted black hair, square wire-

the *eXile* womyn-friendly decoding key:



• Sensitive Guy Factor! Will you meet a sensitive man? ★ = jerk central: these savages refuse to wear condoms ★★ = half the guys here have crew-neck sweaters and are interested in what you say ★★★ = successful HIV-negative bachelors who drive Volvo wagons with child safety seats just waiting for you!



• Dyevushka Factor! Will Russkaya blinies steal your thunder? ★ = they're all 16, peroxide and loose—don't even bother ★★ = most of the dyevs are escorted by dangerous Caucasian men ★★★ = surplus of monolingual expat guys who don't know what they're missing means you can even cap an attitude here



• Free Drink Factor! Will the male patrons buy you a drink here? ★ = only if you're for sale ★★ = if you smile long and hard enough ★★★ = you don't even have to wear such humiliating throwbacks as makeup and miniskirts to score a free drink here—in fact, being too feminine could be a net minus!

For one issue, we made a brave attempt to reach out to the female community. Part of that reaching-out process meant excising all the sexism, and making Moscow as fat-ankled-friendly to expat women as possible. It didn't work.

CHAPTER SIX

rimmed glasses, and beige corduroy pants, and a slight pigeon-toed slouch, spoke of years of halfheartedly masturbating by the computer table. In person, he was much shier and tongue-tied, although on the phone and in print, his voice reflected at least a good working knowledge of coastal California slang.

Chen started living up to his promise as the approaching-middle-age-nerd who shamelessly groped his way into corporeal heaven. He abused his press card as much as possible. He'd flash it in everyone's face, and it paid. At first, I thought his tales of sexual conquest were exaggeration, but once, I saw him at a club crudely French-kissing two teenagers. They weren't cute, but they were alive. I found myself even getting sort of pissed off. The bastard! Leeching off our sweat and tears for his cheap thrills! Then Chen started dabbling in heavy drugs. Dabbling? More like Hoovering them off anyone and anything he could find. When Chen came into our offices, we had to hide everything. Piles of phenamine, normally sitting out by our computers on production night, would suddenly be locked into the cupboards. Even our female sales staff hid.

Later, it was Chen's famous "rape" review of a club, in which he allegedly wrote about how he raped a girl who'd fallen off the bartop at the Hungry Duck and into his arms, that sparked Stanford professor, Carnegie Endowment honcho and Clinton administration tool Michael McFaul to begin his official ban-the-*eXile* campaign. Chen made headlines in every Russian-studies academic's Internet mail programs. He became the subject of heated exchanges between journalists, and the focal point of a First Amendment debate. But more on that later. . . .

Chen ate the publicity up. "Russian girls get really excited when they see your name in a newspaper," he told me, spittle building on his lips. He'd carry laminated copies of the articles with him into clubs and show them off. "I'm really glad that McFaul jerk attacked me. I've never scored so much pussy in my life!"

When the Hungry Duck bar and grill opened at the end of 1995, I remember thinking, *There goes the neighborhood*. America's worldwide blandification effort had just planted a seedling in the center of Moscow. Moscow was still pretty barren at the time. It had a kind of an *Omega Man* postapocalyptic feel: all those massive, heavy gray buildings, tombs of the mid-20th century. The storefronts were still mostly dead, dimly lit—if at all—after dark. City lights came from the apartments, gloomy beige backlit curtains. The real commercial explosion that Moscow is now famous for

didn't take place until after the presidential elections in 1996. Up to then, it was still sort of a toss-up whether or not Moscow would succumb to the homogenizing influence of the West, or whether it would somehow fuck it up, slow it down. I had a latent fear that I'd wake up one morning, and Moscow would be transformed into Atlanta, with microbreweries on every street corner, and sport utility vehicles with child safety seats clogging the streets. The way other once-interesting European cities decayed into blandness: Berlin, Prague, Paris.

Prague is an excellent example. I saw what happened to Prague, how it became a safe, tourist-friendly, boring little addition to the global village. Prague could have gone either way after the communists were thrown out. In 1991 it was still a mess—a heavy element of the mid-20th century still suffocated the average visitor: excess cement, crude architecture, and terrible food. But Prague had one advantage from the Western point of view: good, cheap beer. Cheap Beer meant that the Germans would never leave the place alone. Cheap Beer meant that fresh-out-of-college Americans would make it their home away from home. The young Czechs were desperate to rush the EU frat house, and the Semester at Sea Americans who shackled up there were effective in steering Prague away from its suspicious, time-warped past and toward the familiar: something like Haight Street meets *Reality Bites*. If they haven't already met.

There was another part—I couldn't much talk about it at the time, because when you're around Americans your whole life, you learn to censor yourself. Women. The Czech women . . . they just weren't happening. At their best, they looked like those Muppets from the film *Willow*. That *Willow* look is the more pure Slavic blood. But few had that pure Slavic blood. Too much Teutonic trash had fouled the gene pool. Bad skin, not like the baby's ass complexion that most Russians have. Worse, the Czech women were already getting attitudes. They were spoiled by the oversupply of foreign tourists, making them as inaccessible to me as—well, as America. They began to acquire that cold, determined expression.

My Czech girlfriend, Radka, didn't help much when it came to forming my opinion of her people. When I lived at the European Care Home, I'd wake up in the night to hear the loud hum of some vibrator under the sheets. She went through a dozen of them during our relationship. Mangled cucumbers collected under her pillow. She'd whisper things into my ear, playful lines that had once turned me on: "Daddy, what is this? Daddy? . . . Daddy, baby wants you to do that thing to me . . ." It made me want to puke; sex was my enemy. Only the scabies mites saved me from having to respond sexually.

We came to Prague together planning on making a quick buck, hiring some Slovak servants, but everything went bad,

everything reverted to that familiar, awful Central European love-triangle script. It was a life without dignity, a small life.

Russia wasn't like that—not in 1991, when I visited as a tourist. Russian women were uniformly prettier, and more accessible. I was a kind of White God stepping onto the shores of the Neva. I didn't take advantage of that situation—nothing in my American upbringing had prepared me for it—but the memory stayed with me, and gave me Hope in those long years of sexual famine. I dreamed often of Russian women: In my mind, they were exiles in a remote, abandoned colony from which there was no escape. If I could only get transported to their distant colony—if I could find a space shuttle to get me there, I was sure that they'd appreciate me more than the females on my own planet.

I found a short-wave Russian-language radio station when I lived in Prague, and listened to the voice, although I didn't understand the words. The melody—when Russian women speak, there is a melody, a song to their speech that is unlike anything else. Almost exaggerated girlishness. I imagined the announcer: her porcelain complexion, her soft round face, and eyes of surrender.

So I dreamed of the East without telling myself exactly why. The West—that was my enemy. The West meant creeping impotence. The West meant anesthetized famine. The West meant a cozy extinction.

Reports filtered into Prague about how horrible Ukraine was, and how lucky we all had it. The bohemians' CW was that we shouldn't complain about the lack of services and food choices, because compared to people in the former Soviet Union, we were living in Paradise.

Farther to the east of the dreadful Ukraine was Russia, and Moscow. The nose-pierced CW on Moscow was even worse: crime, filth, and, again, no food. Food was all that was on these progressive grunge-types' minds. Russia's rep really put the fear of God into them. It was too authentically alien, whereas Prague was the safe simulation. Western visitors loathed Moscow, and hated the fact that the Muscovites fucked everything up (i.e., they didn't do things OUR way). From my point of view, as a refugee looking for a place to exile myself, a paradigm-refugee seeking an alternative universe,



Moby Dick Does Moscow

By Johnny Chen

Call me Chen. There I was, on a Saturday night, cruising Moscow in search of the great mythical white whale—which in our case just meant a decent new nightclub. The irony of it all was that I was cruising in a rented white 4-door Merc—the White Merc in search of the White Whale. Delicious irony, ain't it?

By now you may have guessed that the nightclub in question has something to do with the legendary American novel *Moby Dick*, although I'd be reaching if I tried to make a literal connection between the book and the club. *Moby Dick* isn't exactly a new club, but it has completely changed its schtick from a shabby bandy disco to an "underground" techno club, one of several "underground" techno clubs that dot provincial Moscow (if only those quotes around "underground" had Java script fingers curling up and down).

Here I'll have to make a quick digression so that readers out there—particularly American readers—can understand what this overused word "underground," in its current 1990s incarnation, means. The word "underground" has almost no relation to its previous meaning, which I think traces its roots to Dostoevsky's *Notes From The Underground*, published in the mid-1860s. Up until the grunge explosion of 1991, "underground" generally referred to a kind of aesthetic or lifestyle that literally had to hide itself underground in order to avoid serious social/legal consequences, including violence. Fetishists, punks, junkies, homosexuals, skinheads, revolutionaries, artists whose works risked censorship or imprisonment—they and their circles were, until this decade, referred to as "underground." But if the West is good at one thing it's in taking something once-considered dangerous, defanging it, and repackaging it for commercial consumption.

Hence, the 90s techno definition of the word "underground" no longer refers to that which is dangerous, but rather that which is trendy, one step ahead of the mainstream. It is a complete inverse of the previous meaning, when the underground did everything to avoid the mainstream out of fear of being found out; today's underground is similar to the Russian marketing word "eksklusivny," and therefore attracts the mainstream.

Now that you've learned your lesson in 90s technospeak, let's return to *Moby Dick*, one of the better "underground" techno clubs in provincial Moscow. The nicest thing about *Moby Dick* is that it's a funny place. It's located in the first floor on the side of a typical block apartment building; the stairwell leading up to the chillout is made up of those heavy cement steps that reek of the FSU; and best of all, the patrons can't dance for shit. All except for two. One, who wore red overalls, white gloves and sunglasses, looked just like Fred "Rerun" Stokes from *What's Happening!*, while another, a woman doing the robot, reminded us of Yarnell from *Shields & Yarnell*.

But there's another reason to go. The kids—mostly under 18 years old—are a Belgian pedophile's dream come true. My nightclubbin' companion, in his early 30s and wearing an orange linen blazer, went fly fishing near the billiards table (yep, that's right—another Moscow club with billiards) and almost hooked a 14-year-old blondinka with barely budding breasts and the cutest little nose ring this side of Seattle.

I wouldn't be fair if I didn't talk about the really bitchin' DJs they had last Friday. They played some of the best house music I've heard in ages, ranging from hardcore to Tibetan chant/trance, while in the upstairs chillout, a besunglassed DJ spun some trippy experimental stuff that made us feel like we were having flashbacks to our hippie days, even though I never had hippie days.

Drinks are cheap, there are no bandits, and the entire atmosphere is somehow charming: provincial Muscovites trying to recreate the all-too-cool Water Club scene, and failing.

As one girl in the skimpiest little dayglo miniskirt said to me, "I prefer Moby Deek to Luch. It's more underground." I guess that means that skimpy dayglo mini-skirts will be the fashion this summer. That, and technodweebs imitating Rerun.



See *Bind Your Bones* for details

CHAPTER SIX

Moscow's alienness made it an ideal escape. The more crazy laws and illogical, frustrating barriers that the Russian government put up to thwart foreign investment, the better for me. The more Westerners getting shot or having their business stripped away by the Mafia or corrupt officials, the more likely I'd be able to fit in. Less competition. Moscow was so far away from Prague, so inaccessible, that it had a chance of being spared.

And now, smack in the middle of the jungle, some frat-boy podling had planted its roots and it called itself the Hungry Duck. There goes the paradigm, I thought despondently.

I refused to go to the Duck when it opened. When I heard that they were starting to advertise in *Living Here*, I was bummed. That meant I couldn't trash them in our club and bar guide, since we were desperate for advertisers. A couple of months later, a Mexican lawyer friend of mine went there and reported to me how "these fucking frat-boy idiots at the Hungry Duck were tossing coasters at everyone, including me, thinking they're back in college . . . I almost decked one dude in a baseball cap, but someone pulled me away." He has a similar disdain for ordinary people and their ordinary amusements. "I didn't come to Russia just to wind up at a third-rate Chico State frat party. Jesus fuckin'-A!"

As 1996 progressed, the nightlife scene in Moscow was getting bolder in every way. Ptyutch catered to underground techno drug fiends. You could score coke or E right there. More bars and dance clubs were opening, and the Russian girls had become noticeably more fashionable, confident, and drug-wise. The radical gap between the Russian girls of James's crowd—model-types in Italian boutique clothes—and the masses of girls who had to sneak into *podyezdy* and basements or other people's apartments to party in the years up until '96 was beginning to narrow. Moscow's nightlife was becoming larger and more democratic. Normally, that would fill Americans' hearts with joy and hope—just the word "democratic." But here, that meant debauchery, drugs, and sexually transmitted diseases raised to a new level not seen since . . . well, not seen at all in my lifetime. Even the Duck was supposedly mutating into something medieval.

The democratization of the nightlife led to Moscow becoming a city-state of depravity. We milked the



A Fistful of Pain

or How Can I Relax with this Phist in My Ass?

by Johnny Chen

Every once in awhile it happens: a night on the town so hellish, so horrible, so full of disappointment and misery that you almost wish you were back in Milwaukee.

Last weekend, my friend and I decided we'd hit the outskirts of town, but we'd do it in style. After all, this is my first article for the *eXile*, and I wanted to make a positive impression. So we rented a 4-door white Merc, dressed ourselves to the hilt in gold chains, shiny Italian shoes, and open silk shirts revealing hairy chests (even though my chest is as bald as a baby's butt). We were looking sharp—like nothing would stop us.

My friend and I decided to travel off the beaten path, so we headed way, way the heck out to the Sevastopol Hotel complex. The numerous towering blocks that make up the Sevastopol could easily solve the Hutu refugee crisis (assuming you forced them to live in tight, inhuman, Amnesty-report-inducing conditions). We pulled up around the back of the complex, where the bright lights of club "Relax" beckoned us.

The entrance looks like the lobby to any large Soviet block building stretching from Brest to Vladivostok, complete with seedy creeps playing slots, stale papirosi stench, and crusty gardeners. To coin a paraphrase of Robert Plant's, anyone who was cool wasn't there. Which, using Chen's reverse logic, should mean a superior evening for a pair of washed-up lechers. . . right?

Normally, yes. But not here. We'd hoped to "Relax" and settle into an evening of quiet pedophilia, when we were obstructed by two sets of flat-heads, one in the lobby guarding the elevator entrance, and one on the fourth floor guarding the elevator exit.

We took the elevator up to the fourth floor, and, after crossing the dimly lit beige foyer, we entered the black-light discotheque that is known as Relax. The bar area was nearly empty, while the cheesy dancefloor was about one-third full of Wannabe-But-Never-like-New Russians, or what I call "Wabners." We noticed about 15 teenie chicks, and about 11 Wabner guys, some who desperately tried to grow mustaches, some who desperately tried to shape their heads into a menacingly flat shape, all of whom wore loose-fitting silk shirts. They were uniformly the worst dancers in the Moskovsky Oblast—walking stiffly, straight out of the mall scene in *Dawn of the Dead*, saw horses in fancy clothes, lug stamps with shoes. (You better stop me—I gotta million of 'em.)

For the *eXpat* man-about-town, a scene like this should have said, "It's like shooting fish in a barrel." I emphasize "should have." On this theory, we made our move. The prettiest dyer of them all, who danced like a Shiva with an extremely stiff back, sauntered past us; my friend reached out to say hello, groping for her miniskirt, when she angrily knocked his hand away and told him to back off. Stunned by this unprecedented rejection, my friend decided to recover his pride by hitting up on one of the ugliest girls in the club. She had peroxidized hair, heavy black eyebrows, and a chin that recalled the puppet "Madame."

"Can I get to know you?" my friend asked, pulling up a stool next to her. "No," she curtly replied, turning away. It was useless. At first we thought it was our fault, until we realized, no, it's their fault.

So we stormed off to the Treasure Island, located in the next korpus over, with the same lobby, the same junkyard dog flat-head guarding the elevator, and the same hostility. We flashed the flatheads our *eXile* cards and told them that we had arrived to rape their women, score free drinks, then abuse their club in our newspaper. For some reason, they refused to let us in for free. We were livid. Look, I didn't give up the life of a quietly successful laundromat manager and enter journalism only to get treated like a commoner. The cover at the door was a laughable 250,000 rubles, far more than truly cool places like Titarek or Balgakov. They must have been going on the theory that anyone stupid enough to go all the way out there was stuck, and they'd pay whatever ridiculous cover to get in, even if the club was located in the Sevastopol. The truth is, Treasure Island is more like Gilligan's Island: a far-out dump, a bad sitcom, with a few babes on the level of Ginger and Marianne, but management as whacked-out as Mr. Howell. After some hollow threats to ruin their club, we got into our Merc and sped away. All in all, the Sevastopol was a dive, a ream job. I have a solution. I say Russia should trade this Sevastopol to the Ukraine, in return for their Sevastopol. That way, Ukraine can own a piece of Russia (albeit the worst piece), while Russia would get in return what is rightfully hers.

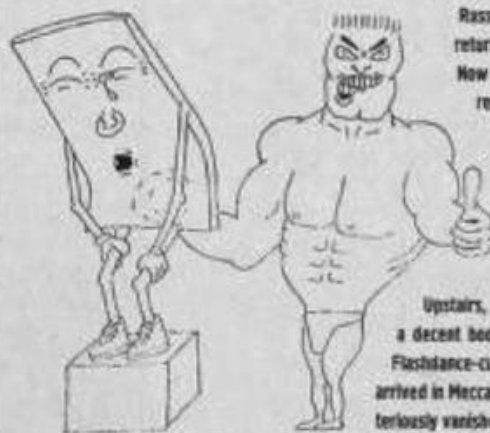
Now would be an appropriate moment to introduce to our readers Johnny Chen's "Phist O' The Week Award." This week's Phistie goes to Rasputin, a new strip club located near Park Kultury, which we visited upon an invitation from the management. We met the manager on the second floor, the floor o' sin, after passing through the authentically seedy ground-level bar area, which features red velvet on the walls. So far, so good.

Upstairs, the strip show was already in high gear. A woman with a decent bod, but a crocodilian expression, worked the pole like a Flashdance-cum-Ed-Nasty veteran. My friend and I thought we'd arrived in Mecca. The manager offered us some gin and tonics, then mysteriously vanished, only to be replaced by one of the hoes. She sat down next to me and chatted me up, making me feel like a real man. Then, she leaned over to the barman. "Sasha, champanskoye pozhalistha," she chirped. We watched a few more strippers work the poles (the "girls" had

a kind of unpleasant "lived-in" look to them). When we'd had enough of it all, we asked for the bill. This is when Mr. Phistie arrived. The total for four gin and tonics: \$222 dollars! The champagne that the "ho ordered cost a whopping \$150 for a glass, which was charged to my bill! Now as any seasoned SE Asia traveller will tell you, this is the oldest scam in the books. I spent almost a half an hour arguing the bill, when they finally agreed to strike the \$150, leaving us with a \$72 bill for five gin and tonics, all of which had been offered to us by the management. So to you, Rasputin, I duly honor my first Phistie. Keep up the shoddy work!

Robert Plant has been suspended from the *eXile* pending investigation into a "burgers for articles" scandal. He is currently in Windsor rehearsing for a world tour.

See *Leave Your Liver* for details



Mr. Phistie Salutes Rasputin,
Moscow's Newest Strip Bar!

PLASMA GIVES TECHNO BLOOD



A lot of things are supposed to have died over the past year or two: Yeltsin, The Moscow Tribune, and techno music are the first three walking zombies that come to mind.

They were supposed to die, but they didn't. In fact, they seem to get stronger—I'm thinking of the Trib in particular. I mean, holy Jesus Christ, how do they do it? Crawling back from the brink of death every three months... if I ever have any contract disputes with these eXile pricks, I'm heading straight to Anthony Louis's office... then again, I'd asked he might name me Editor-in-Chief. I mean, how do you follow in the footsteps of Howard Gelfond? Or Jose Alcala? Or Vasy Malashin?

You don't. You don't even try. Like the Trib and the Phox, techno not only doesn't die, it comes back with a vengeance, like some nasty STD.

Our newspaper has been pretty rough on techno culture. Whether rave, house, gabber, breakbeat, acid-punk, trance, and so on... it's all techno to us, because it's all beats and bleeps.

Well, enough of my yakkity. Let's hop in the taxi (no White Mercedes) and take a techno cruise.

My first stop was Krasnaya, the bastard child of Moby Deek, last year's Provincial Moscow Club Of The Month. Krasnaya continues the successful formula that made Moby Deek such a success: take a freestyle-era beat, spray a bunch of day-glo paint around, get a rapper sound system, and pack it out of City-10 kids. What made Moby Deek cool was the upstairs still-out and the fact that it was never "discovered." That brought in provincial Muscovites from all over, with the average age about 16. Max. That struck a chord on the Chechen's Perv-O-Meter, but for some reason I never returned, something I half-regretted.

Krasnaya, located in some kind of shipping warehouse near Paveletsky Vozel, opened up in January and has already earned a following: City-10ers with Dr. Seuss ski caps and long-sleeved striped tops. When we were there, about 3/4ths of the kids were slumped head-first into the tables, drooling on their shirts.

The age factor was about a year older than Moby Deek's, and a year wiser. An extra year of brain damage will do that to you. It also features the single stupidest prop in techno history: an old 14-inch TV set appropriated in orange and green day-glo. Trippy, dude. All in all, I recommend it if you're looking for the proper medicines, but be warned: you'll be hard-pressed to start up some interesting conversation.

My next stop is the find of the year. I'd sort of avoided hitting Plasma for a couple of months, even though I stuck it into our club and bar guide, because I figured it would be the same shit as Galsatka or Robosesh. Well, Galsatka, which had a much-publicized "war" with Plasma (hard to imagine techno people at war) over who played the best bleeps 'n bips, lost. Kaput. Closed. And it's a good thing, because Plasma, the brain-child of Aerodance legend Timur Mamedov, kicks techno butt. The theme here is definitely Goa: eight-armed Indian gods and intricate Hindu spider-web patterns adorn the black walls. The music is softer than Aerodance, although later in the night things approximated a sort of soft-hardcore. Best of all were the two bars, serving up cheap liquor and the crowd: mainly MGU and younger students. They weren't as coked up as the Krasnaya kids, and they were definitely a level higher on the beauty front.

One girl, Emilia, was on the prowl for speed. She was 16, stupid, and stacked. My type of gal. Before my friend spotted her GOR for a slink of speed, she was dead as a rock. After making the rounds with some photo-facelift upstairs, she headed off to the bathroom and returned the spunky 'n Emilia I always knew she should be. There were others of Emilia's caliber, some even with brains. If you have any interest in youth culture, a cool cheap club or stacked techno babes, then imagine some Plasma this weekend, and on the 14th, check out a 99% party... at Krasnaya.



THE WHITE GOD FACTOR

theme without shame or subtlety. It's one of the things that made us famous. Why not? It was true, and it goes hand-in-hand with the moral and political corruption. When *Newsweek* and *Time* ran pieces in September of 1997 about "Moscow Decadence," both magazines cited the *eXile* as a key source. A famous American TV correspondent came to Moscow in the fall of 1997, and stopped by our offices, allegedly to do an entire segment on the *eXile*. He repeatedly asked Taibbi whether or not clubs that we claimed were hotbeds of sexual activity actually existed. He wanted us to escort him around, to show him the ropes. He opened up our "Bar-Dak" bar and club section in the newspaper, and pointed to each club that had a high "fahkie factor." Was it true? he demanded. Was it really that easy to get laid at those clubs?... He asked to meet Johnny Chen, but we were under obligation to protect him from too much publicity, so we said that Chen was on vacation—even though he was probably sawing up a teenage girl who'd OD'd on his jones stash, sticking her bones in the basement incinerator.

Later, when it became clear that his *eXile* piece wasn't going to run on his network news show, a local production assistant admitted to me that the only reason he came to our offices was to find out how he could get laid in Moscow. "He read your newspaper when he got here, and he forced our bureau into a panic to arrange an interview. We had to rally everyone, get the tapes, the cameramen. All because he wanted to get laid in Moscow. He's a fucking pig." Her voice had that clenched, pent-up contempt that you often hear from American women here.

The piece never ran, but the Anchorhead came back again as the crisis in Russia exploded the following summer, and interviewed the *eXile* about... you guessed it... the club scene.

When the *eXile* hit the streets, our English-language competitors, the *Moscow Times* and *Tribune*, were developing plans to copy our bar and club guide. But they were at a disadvantage: they had to maintain that respectable, paper-of-record veneer. So the *Moscow Times* started up an entertainment section called "MT Out," with the club guide named "Going Out." The *Tribune* soon followed with their "Time Out" section, including a club and bar guide with short, quasi-racy descriptions to match ours.

When it was obvious they were stealing the *eXile*'s guide idea, to the point of mentioning sex and drugs in their reviews, we added a feature that no one could steal: the "fahkie factor," a three-star rating system on how easy it is to score in a given establishment. We figured the hell with it, no point in being clever and indirect: there's only one reason why people go to a bar, and that's to get laid. The icon pictured those Olympic stick figures in doggie-style sex; one star meant no chance, two stars meant that if you carried a couple cellphones or waved your passport around and offered false promises of marriage and citizenship, you might get lucky, and three stars signified that you'd have to zap the sex-starved patrons off your legs with a cattle prod if you wanted to keep yourself from getting raped.... There was no way to gear the guide equally toward men and expat women. I talked to several expat women and fished for advice, but all admitted that there wasn't a single club in Moscow that expatellas considered a premier spot for finding quality men. So, for the sake of professional accuracy, we airbrushed expat women out of the nightlife picture.

Because of our cynicism, I earned the rep of a common pervert (Taibbi was spared somewhat, since he covered more "serious" topics).

Once, we interviewed a potential journalist, a graduate of Wellesley College. She arrived at our offices dressed very much the part of a New England woman with a higher education: severe sweater, horn-rimmed glasses, no makeup, flat voice.... And black. Well, mulatto. At the end of the interview, she told me, "You know, you're really different than what I'd imagined. I thought you'd have an open silk shirt and a big medallion in your hairy chest. But you're much different."

We fired her after one issue.

It was and still is strange for me to believe that anyone could take me for even an aging skirt-chaser, a kind of Burt Reynolds of Moscow. Nothing could have been further from the truth. When I lived in America, it wasn't uncommon for me to go an entire year without sex. I never really understood the game. I just found the whole American courtship ritual terrifying. When you first meet a woman there, you are assumed to be an HIV-positive, razor-wielding stalker. Your first task is to convince her that you're harm-

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less. But not too harmless—that would be boring. You've got to have some kind of angle as well, something that implies you're dangerous and unique—in a safe way. I never quite got how to modulate between those two poles.

I got worse and worse at it as time went on. Being unemployed and 25 was bad; 26 and living with your Czech girlfriend, her mother, and two geriatric patients in their nursing home was worse; 27 and still unemployed made me too authentically dangerous, taking me completely out of the contest. I just couldn't fake it, and American women have excellent noses for distinguishing between affected psychopaths and real ones.

Even before, even when I was in college and viable, I still failed. If fear didn't hold me back, then logic did: I just didn't see the upside to it all. I'd been in love once—that's a long story. I had a few dates—they never lasted long, usually because I'd discover something about them that repulsed me: a rank box, budding wrinkles, bony knuckles. . . . If I got laid, I didn't feel the pride of a conqueror. In fact, just the opposite: the minute I'd ejaculate, I'd plunge into depression, often ordering my dates to leave immediately. It got to the point where I understood exactly what Soviet serial murder Anatoly Slivko meant when he described his state of mind after sex with his wife: "Nausea, despair, tears."

Slivko was executed for kidnapping young boys in their Pioneer uniforms and hanging them on meat hooks while filming, then later masturbating to those films. My fetishes were tamer, but Slivko and I were in the same ballpark when it came to post-coital depression.

I arrived in Russia after nine dry months. Two years earlier, when I visited the Soviet Union as a tourist, I had a brief affair. Her name was Olga. Memories of her kept me going during the long famine between 1991 and 1993. Even the few times I'd fuck my Czech girlfriend, scabies crawling all over us, I'd think of Olga. I'd sometimes fantasize that it was Olga who gave me the scabies, and, therefore, that her blood and mine were mixing in their mandibles. It was the only way I could live with them.

I looked to Russia as my savior, a place where love was still possible. My affair with Olga was used as evidence to convince me. I filtered her through the characters of Russian novels I'd read and reread: Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Solzhenitsyn, Limonov. . . . I consumed those novels as a means of escaping the bleak present, and, I see now, as a means of preparing my eventual move. Intelligence work.

I paid a lot of attention to the women in those Russian novels. They were so unlike the ironic, self-conscious American women that I knew—so drastically unlike them that I didn't believe that they existed. For an American, it's hard to believe that other white people could be different from us. Russian women couldn't pos-

sibly be wildly capricious or slavishly self-sacrificing or self-destructive or quietly obedient.

Even physically it was hard to picture them. I didn't believe that they could have "gray eyes" and "ruddy cheeks" as they were often described. . . . Where I came from, people had blue or brown or fake green eyes and sun-poisoned, crusty-complexioned chins. But then I came to the Soviet Union and saw for myself that, to quote from Malcolm X, "I say you been tricked! You been had! Bamboozled! Hoodwinked! Thrown for a loop! . . ."

My stepfather's friend lined up my visa, and an American contact in Moscow. The contact was the former manager of his wine-distributing business, a Californian named Ted Krashenko. Ted met me at the airport in Moscow, bless him. He pulled me out of the crowd of menacing petty criminals in cheap leather jackets, stinking of sour cigarette smoke, and rushed me to his Chevrolet pickup in the airport parking lot.

Ted was in his early thirties, slightly balding, with a pock-marked complexion masked by twice-weekly visits to the tanning booth, and slow-witted. He dressed in that post-frat boy Dockers way that clearly marked him as an American—as key to sexual success at the time as a great plume of feathers is to a peacock.

On my first night after moving here, September 9, 1993, Ted took me straight from the airport to the Arbat Blues Club, the only expat live music hangout in Moscow at the time. I didn't even have time to shower.

That Chevy pickup was Ted's own. Probably one of five pickups in Moscow in 1993. He drove me from his high-rise apartment near the MosFilm Studios to the center of town, behind the Arbat. I didn't get it at first. I expected Moscow to be completely barren and alien, and here he was, excitedly talking up this "blues club." We got out of the car, and walked a couple of blocks, past abandoned one-and-two-story 19th century houses, down narrow lanes. And then came to a club. I looked at those lopsided Tsarist-era houses and fantasized about what went on in there: a lonely daughter, a mad poet, someone smoking a bowl of Kyrgyz opium. . . .

It was a club all right: no different than, say, a blues club in Prague. White, aging, beer-bellied blues. A front room bar area, stacked with lawn furniture, serving iced beer. And a black-lit band room, with a large dance area, and a stage, with lights, sound, and an expat band belting out harmless party songs. "Riiiiide, Sally riiiiide!"

Ted introduced me to a dozen or so expats. They were kinder to me than the people back home. They assumed that I was one of them, on their side—a besieged noble living reluctantly among the savages. I tried to be polite, although I wanted out. I wanted to roam the streets, and not be stuck in this too-familiar blues bar. Ted led me into the dance-hall area. I was immediately struck by

the change in Russian girls from 1991 to 1993: they were looking more familiar, more Western . . . *less desperate* . . . which was bad for me, I knew.

Ted prodded me out to the dance floor. I felt so stupid. I couldn't believe I'd traveled 7,000 miles . . . *for this*. It was like being at L.A. Rocks in my hometown suburb, or C.B. Hannigan's Bar & Grill, or a zillion other idiotic places.

"The only good thing about living in this fucking city is the girls," he told me, yelling into my ear. I smiled and nodded my head. "Usually you can score if you're American," he continued.

He pointed to a pair of girls, reasonably attractive but cold in the eyes.

"Let's dance with them," he said. I wavered, but he pressed me. "You know, Mark, I'm really glad to have someone like you here, someone my age who I can meet chicks with."

I'd come expecting just to fall into some Dostoyevsky narrative, and here I was, in a bad frat house. . . .

Ted made an obvious, almost goofy move to get in front of one of the two girls to start dancing with her. I felt I had to do it for Ted—I owed him. It was my rent payment. I started coolly dancing up around the other side, trying not to look too interested so as not to scare her away (unsuccessful tactic perfected in the 27 Years' War of Attrition back in California). I wanted to sneak up on her so that, once she found me dancing in front of her, it wouldn't be as though I'd tried to. That's the big crime where I come from: showing that you care. They'll lock you up in your room for 27 years for that! Anyway, the Russian girl looks at me—I flash what is probably an unnerving attempt at a smile that comes off more like a rabid mountain gorilla baring its teeth. . . . Immediately, she turns away, spins around, and starts dancing with her back to me, moving toward the opposite side of the floor.

Ted grabbed me with an embarrassed look on his face and said, "Don't worry, Mark, she's a bitch. Some of these Russian chicks have attitudes now. Forget about it."

I remember thinking: "Wait . . . that wasn't supposed to happen! I just failed!"

Ah, my oh my. I hadn't left California at all. The very concept of escape was flawed from the beginning. Moscow would be overrun just as quickly as Prague was. Fukayama was right. The End of History meant the End of Mark's Sexual History. Time to head to the American Embassy and turn myself in.

On my second night in Moscow, Ted took me to another party. That's where I met Polina.

The party was held at Park Place, a Western-amenities office/apartments biosphere, one of about five or six Western biospheres that dotted what was then Moscow's bleak, pre-boomtown *Blade Runner* landscape. I remember being shocked by a lot of things that night, not the least of which was the incred-

ibly sub-par collection of chinless bores. The American guys were uniformly geeks—baloney sandwich and Topsiders types—while the American girls were plain, lumpy, loud, fixated on "the local market" talk. . . . One guy bragged to me about how he'd been in a barbershop quartet back at college, and he was trying to put one together here, too.

I had a naive notion before coming to Moscow that the expats here would either be high-powered suits, or brainy Slavophile types. Instead, Moscow got the sub-middle of America, the ones who weren't even trying.

Among all this bland human furniture, one corner of beauty stood out: a group of four Russian girls, one of whom was Polina.

Before I met her, I'd watched an incredible scene, the kind of thing I've seen many times since, but only here in Russia. Some pinched, chinless middle-aged American manager was chasing his tall 18-year-old *dyevushka* around—she clearly didn't care for him much. She was wearing a brand-new pair of white and baby blue Reebok sneakers, courtesy of Sugar Daddy. In 1993, Reeboks really meant something. Sugar Daddy flipped out when some younger, healthier American started dancing with his girl. Sugar Daddy had lost all sense of proportion: he slugged the luckless competitor, then tried grabbing his *dyev* for some hugging and kissing. She rolled her eyes and walked off with her friends, laughing. He had O. J. Simpson written all over his face: it was clear he was going to lose her. . . .

But what interested me was that he had had the chance to spend even one precious week, or night, with this goddess, this Titian painting. . . . She was at her prime: 18, long golden hair, bright green eyes, slender legs like a doe's. I smelled her as she walked past: vanilla and light body odor. No aging American man can allow that to slip through his fingers. I'd be surprised if today, her head isn't sealed in a glass jar, hidden in Sugar Daddy's closet, while the rest of her body has been taxidermized and stuffed under Sugar Daddy's bed. . . .

Then I met Polina. She had a wonderfully bright smile. And gray eyes. And ruddy cheeks. She talked literature with me. We went out for dinner. I was so shocked that a woman could make my heart race like that again . . . I was sure I was in love. She called me late at night after our first date and kept me on the phone for two hours, telling me that she didn't want to be alone. I didn't get the hint—even though it wasn't really a hint—it was more like an air-raid siren screaming at me to come over to her house and fuck. But . . . look, I was stupid. I was just coming out of a coma. Twenty-seven years of coma.

Polina and I dated a few more times. I wanted to take things slowly. I wanted to live out the literary romance. But I was awkward and hesitant, behavior which is supposed to win you the lead girl in the movies, but which, particularly here in Russia, is as

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charming to a woman as farting. After a week, Polina had had enough of me. She'd roll her eyes at everything I said. She was always distracted. I took her once to see a play, an English version of the *Brothers Karamazov* at the Chekhov theater; she walked out before intermission, leaving me alone. We went out for a dinner; she saw an old boyfriend, and left me to join him. She wouldn't even kiss me good-bye. Then she arranged to meet me on a date and never showed. I remember her snickering as she arranged our meeting place.

This is when I learned the word *dinamit*. It means to "dump"—or, as the surfers in my hometown would say, to "shine." Only *dinamit* is crueler; you shine the person by explicitly arranging to meet them at a certain place, never intending to show up, and you repeat the performance until the moron figures out that you don't want to see him.

"It was a good experience"—that's how my spin doctors described it. They kept my devastated interior hidden from the public for months, for fear of panicking the markets.

I was shortly rescued by Suzanne. She came to Moscow as a student. And was probably getting dissed by the other students in favor of the *dyevs*. But for me, Suzanne was the Savior: dolphin-tight body, smooth and well-proportioned. Two months after we started dating in Moscow, she returned to Belgium to finish her degree. That put me in a difficult position: remain true to a Westerner, thereby going against one of the very tenets of my Russia-paradigm exile, or abandon her and thus, my last connection to the West.

In the spring of 1994, when I was in Sochi trying to arrange a corrupt trade deal with my Mauritian Indian partner and a director for a local chain of retail stores, I almost had my first affair. I was in the hotel lobby of the Sochi Radisson-Lazurnaya Hotel, discussing with Ravi and Nikolai Ivanovich how we were going to bilk Ivanovich's state firm out of thousands of dollars and stuff them into our pockets. Nikolai Ivanovich, a young, blond-haired hustler who always wore white button-down shirts and white slacks, charmed our cocktail waitress into falling for me. He told her that I couldn't stop talking about her. He said that I wanted to take her to America with me. Nikolai Ivanovich had a big laugh over the whole thing. He wanted to soften up his American partner-in-crime. And like sheep to the slaughter, the *dyevushka* was charmed.

Later, the cocktail waitress met me in a park across the street, after the lobby bar closed. It was after midnight. A light breeze blew up from the Black Sea. It was warm and humid. We sat on a bench, beneath a willow tree. I made a move—she began heaving and breathing heavily. She was ready to let me fuck her right on the bench . . . but something grossed me out. Maybe it was that bolt-sized mole on her neck, or the burnt odor from her

cheap platinum hair dye. I literally dry-heaved while we were kissing. I couldn't take it, and eventually left.

Nine months after I moved to Russia and just a few weeks before I was supposed to visit Suzanne in Brussels, I made my move. Her name was Stasya. She was ordinary-looking and undemanding, slightly dumpy, with a bulbous nose and a big smile—and nineteen. Gray eyes, ruddy cheeks. Stasya had that spark of life in her. She liked to drink a fruity liqueur called Misty and hang out in parks and make fun of people. And have sex. She was planning to move away from Russia to meet up with her American boyfriend. We had a month before she was set to leave Moscow to meet him—some spoiled skate rat whose rich father ran a U.S. government-funded project in Kharkov. Before moving, Stasya wanted to have fun with me. She was a good teacher. She put me into the metaphor with Russian women. I learned a few "secrets of success with Russian girls": like how to be cruel and yet impulsively romantic; and how to demand what you want from them when you want it, sex or otherwise. How to rape them, basically.

Suzanne vanished from my screen. That was that.

After that, I briefly dated a Cossack girl who loathed sex but submitted anyway. She'd lay on her back and grimace while I slithered away on top of her.

Then I hooked into James's crowd, where I met Lydia, five-foot-ten, long black hair and Cleopatra bangs—a real baroness of darkness.

I danced with her at a new disco, back when there were still few discos. We kissed on the dance floor. Later, I saw another one of James's earl-level friends, a kraut named Hakim, corner Lydia and try kissing her. She stood passively still, and didn't push him away. Then she returned to me. I pretended not to notice.

She asked me to accompany her and her friend, Tanya, home in a taxi. I agreed. We dropped Tanya off, and then, heart beating, I suggested we stop off at my place.

"Why didn't you just say that earlier?" she laughed.

We came back to my apartment, and she immediately started to undress in my bedroom. I was surprised, but I kept quiet, taking off my clothes. Naturally, my sock got stuck on my foot, and I nearly tripped over.

"One minute," she said, kissing me. She went into the shower, and came back five minutes later, towel around her body.

She lay down in bed next to me. I hesitated. Then I made a move. She heaved, breathed heavily, then pushed me off of her.

"No, I can't, Mark. I've never done this before."

But I was partially trained up by this time. I attacked her, forcing open her legs. Her resistance couldn't even be described as

token. She was clearly grateful that I was coming off as the aggressor. . . . After that, we slept together a few times—I'd never been with someone who was as dramatic in bed as her, moaning and crying.

Lydia and I didn't last long.

On a boys' night out with James's crowd, the subject of girls came up. Specifically, the subject of Lydia.

James smiled mischievously, put his arm around me, and asked, "Who among us has already slept with Mark's Lydia?"

Three French guys raised their hands. Laughter.

"Okay, now: who has fucked Lydia without a condom?" James asked. Again, three Gallic hands sky-high, and more swinish laughter.

"Okay, now for the big question: who has fucked her in the ass?"

Again, three hands WAY up high, transforming into clumsy EU high fives.

That was it. I never spoke to Lydia again.

That experience depressed me. Especially when I factored in everything my Russian friends had told me about their *djevushki*. "Never, ever trust them, Mark. They'll fuck whomever they want. Russian girls are never loyal to a man. They're only loyal to their caprices. They take what they want."

It made me miss Suzanne. Terribly. So I groveled back to her over the telephone. We had long telephone conversations. I apologized for my sins. I was a bastard. We agreed to meet in Brussels, at her parents' apartment, then from there, move to Moscow together. When we spoke, I recognized some change in her voice. She'd become more ironic. She wanted to talk about sex. About vibrators. Bisexual anecdotes. It should have clued me in—that the dolphin had swum away. But I edited that out.

We met up in Brussels. She didn't want to come meet me at the airport. I took a train to her metro stop, and hauled my suitcase up to her apartment. She coldly greeted me. We lay down in her bed. The first thing I noticed was that she'd lost her dolphin-skin compactness. Flesh moved. And her cunt—it wasn't glovelike. I finished early, and she slapped my shoulders. "No! Don't! Don't cum!"

Afterward, in the light, I saw that she had developed wrinkles around her mouth. The wrinkles of someone who had been getting fucked.

We fought bitterly. She wouldn't confess more than a few details. A German doctor was all she'd admit. A German! Jesus Christ! They were probably doing things like pissing in each other's mouths, icky bourgeois Euro-decadence! Ugh! Anyway, I caved. She moved in with me, but our relation-

ship was bitter and unsatisfying. From then until just before the *eXile* was launched, we were essentially living out the doomed expat relationship—I had the occasional affair, and was constantly frustrated by the affairs I didn't have.

Then came 1997, the year we started up the *eXile*. Suzanne and I broke up. And I broke out. That person who was holed up in the upstairs bedroom at his father's suburban house, tugging on a decreasingly responding organ, reading books about serial murderers in order to find clues about himself . . . that person was a bad memory, packed away somewhere in the cellophane and cobwebs of my fatty brain cells.

Now, I'm embarrassed to admit sexual success—out of respect for that long famine I endured. I had grown used to my failure. I was proud of occupying the basement. Between 1965 and 1993, no one had it worse than me. It made me a one-man comic routine, although the hours were tough. When you're used to failing for so long, you wind up taking pride in it, and despising everyone who has it good. You develop an entire moral system based on the alleged benefits of failure. Failure has its aesthetic virtues, for one. But now that's changed, and while my body is grateful, my mind is a little less so: I'd spent years writing from the point of view of a failure, and now. . . . After four years in Russia, I've had to do a little editing of the memory—editing of that Failure Bible I'd penned in my head.

It wasn't my fault—all that failure. As the evidence shows, it was America's fault. Just as certain plants or animals wither and die when placed in the wrong environment, so I was doomed in America. I'm a cold-weather plant. A cold-weather poppy.

The year that the *eXile* was born, the Hungry Duck had irrevocably mutated from its humble mainstream inception into a vomit-drenched, blood and-semen-stained Gomorrah that is constantly under threat of closure from horrified public officials, rival corrupt police departments, and predatory mafia gangs who'd like to get a piece of the action.

Every night, the place is packed wall-to-wall with out-of-control Russians and thrill-seeking expats. The Russians who come to the Duck are not the most beautiful, wealthy, or educated. They are usually lumpenprole types who come with a purpose: to drink themselves blind, dance on the bar counter, find someone to fuck, and somewhere along the line make time for a fistfight or two. I have never been there without seeing some saloon-style brawl, which goes invariably like this:

Scene One: misunderstanding between two heavily inebriated Russians

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Scene Two: skipping the usual 15-minute American-style "come on, I dare you!" fists and boots immediately fly.

CUT TO: two more fights break out, then two more—no fewer than four more fights always accompany the core fight

Scene Three: one is knocked to the floor, and begins to receive the inevitable boot-kicks to the temple, a specialty of Russian fighting

Scene Four: Hungry Duck security arrives—these guys are trained special forces thugs who handpick two or three combatants and proceed to pummel them mercilessly, usually with body blows so as to avoid leaving scars

Scene Five: unlucky combatants are pacified, dragged downstairs, and given a good thrashing in the gated courtyard in front of the Duck. Blood slicks on the floor and walls are soon washed away by flying beer and vomit.

It's all in a night's fun.

The Duck was a steady advertiser when I was at *Living Here*, and an even more solid client of the *eXile*. The owner, Canadian national Doug Steele, even offered to fund the *eXile* at its inception, but at the time I thought it was wiser to work with an experienced publisher who had the whole infrastructure set up. Nonetheless, most people closely identify the Duck with the *eXile*, which works fine for both of our businesses, even if it isn't true.

One time we managed to offend our readers so much that Doug threatened to pull his advertising. Taibbi had run an over-the-top photo in one of his mock-serious editorials, this one extolling the viability of investing in the *eXile* at a time when the Russian stock market was in a free fall. In the editorial, Taibbi printed a picture of a woman with a champagne bottle sticking out of her ass as an example of the kinds of things we are willing to print in order to ensure that people read the *eXile*, since no other publication would print such pictures. The point of the article was, invest in the *eXile*, because we'd do anything it took to get you a high ROI, return on investment.

It was a great joke that incited the whole expat community to revolt with a kind of torches-and-rakes lynching frenzy that had been brewing for months. Advertisers pulled, including, or so he threatened, Doug from the Duck. The community was momentarily bound together in their indignation toward the *eXile*. You knew that if you upset Doug, you must have really gone too far. Taibbi felt terrible about it: he fell into one of his self-hating funks, promising never to do it again, although five minutes later, he'd bark, "Fuck 'em!"

When Taibbi and I went to visit Doug to kiss-up, he laughed and said it was no big deal. He'd received about twenty phone calls from friends and patrons, asking how he could associate with or advertise in a newspaper that printed such smut.

"The problem is that everyone thinks I have a piece of the *eXile*," Doug told us, laughing.

Shortly after, Doug created a special Hungry Duck version of Ladies' Night that made our champagne bottle seem like bathroom graffiti in comparison. Ladies' Night is another word for rape camp. On Ladies' Night, only girls (generally ages 12 through 25) are allowed in, while all men are kept at bay from 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. The girls are offered free drinks, as much and as fast as they can down them. Not just offered free drinks, but pumped full of free drinks. . . . Russians aren't known for their moderation when it comes to liquor; your average five-foot-one *dyev* could put any NFL lineman under the table. The point of Ladies' Night is to get the girls as drunk as possible in a two-hour period, then to open the floodgates to the guys and let the rape camp festivities begin. It was a brilliant idea to raise the volume of vomit and semen to levels yet unseen even in the Duck.

Taibbi and I were invited to be guest bartenders at the second Ladies' Night. I'd never bartended before, and I was kind of nervous. A half hour before Ladies' Night began, we met with the night manager, Craig, a 32-year-old Southern Californian whose Joe Biden-like baldness would have severely limited his sexual opportunities at home, but who, here in Moscow, seems to have a new teenager every week in his apartment. The night we met him, he showed us two 18-year-old blond ballerinas from Siberia staying in his apartment. He described them dancing around his kitchen, giggling and prancing "like a pair of does." You can't shut Craig up when it comes to sexual braggadocio.

At 6:50 P.M., we took these bendable, neon-liquid sticks, waved them around to get them all neon-y, then passed them out to the girls, while security cleared the men from the bar and made them wait at the door. All except for the table of drunken interior ministry cops—they could stay and rape whomever they liked.

At first I was nervous, then I realized—I could do whatever the fuck I wanted. Between 7:00 and 9:00, I drank more liquor than any of my customers except one: a short 16-year-old named Alla, my intended victim. She had the Lolita factor going, with these cute fluorescent buttons pinned all over her sweater top and her hippie hairdo. . . . I found it touching, and served her up with three back-to-back triple tequila fizzes, then a straight-up tequila and a rum and coke chaser. We kissed across the bar table, much to the disgust of Taibbi, who was frantically running around the bar making sure that the customers were satisfied. He was on his way to earning an Employee of the Month plaque.

That night, I must have drunkenly slobbered into seven or

ON WOMEN'S COMPARATIVE SEXUALITY

by Doctor Limonov

Doctor Limonov studied first-hand love-making habits of different women, that he could compare their qualities, stretching from the time of 70s until now, geography of his copulations stretching across most of northern hemisphere. What follows is result of rigorous research.

Brazilian. Fernanda, 26, was of a Spanish blood. Black hair, darkish skin, with a heavy ass and massive thighs. Too well-educated, studied at university under professor-writer Jorge-Luis Borges. Not very good in bed because unflexible body. Complained of inconvenience of throwing legs too high and of general "cruelty" of treatment in bed. However, love-making with her was an intense experience, as she was a daughter of wealthy merchant and Edward-man was poor and unemployed. She called him with hate "Trotsky." He fucked her with hate and "cruelty." They met in the East Village of New York.

American. Next door girl, Julie, 22, eldest daughter of FBI agent, from a Virginian family of six children. Tall, pretty, heavy ass, slim long legs, but little bit cross-eyed. Of simple, almost peasant habits, she was a house-keeper of a rich New York City socialite, she made her own bread, and practiced belly dancing. Superb, unbeatable friend, she felt little of love-making 'cause of too big vagina and some other probably clinical reasons that her partner Edward ignored.¹

Jewish. Marilyn, 21. Tall, slim, perfect tits. Have had some psychological problems, resulted in a strange phobia, in a habit to pinch out hair of eyebrows and those on her head. Sported a wig constantly, even if under a shower. Was a very good fucker, one of the best in Edward's life.²

French. Drug-dealer Ellen, 37. Aging jail-bird, in and out of prison. Skinny, wrinkled, may be too hot and sleazy inside, but very good as a love-partner. Very attentive to the man's needs, proud to be "clean French woman." She would clean her partner's genitals after love-making with a hot wet towel, saying, "I am not an American, I am French woman." Used Quaaludes/cocaine combination for love-making. Good old girl. God save her at the Ricker's Island Women's Yard. If she is still there.

Mongol. Yelena, 20, nick-named "Tugrik." Daughter of a pure-blooded Mongol from Ulan-Bator in Republic of Mongolia and Russian mother. Mongol-faced and Russian-bodied. Pretty, tall, elegant girl with a charming drunken habit and accompanying it



nymphomania. Completely shameless, born to fuck, "everybody's darling," opening her legs after few whiskeys.

French. Jacqueline, Countess, 40. Tall, skinny, alcoholic, from Parisian world of high fashion. Used to drink heavily and have a habit of an alcoholic truck-driver, rather than those of countess. When drunk, would fall, would enter driver's door of her car, would exit by crawling out from the passenger door. Always kept liter bottle of a cheap beer next to bed in order to drink it at night. Good passionate lover, pissed when having an orgasm.

Scottish. Fiona, 31, TV star. She was recognized by the crowd when she walked streets of London, 'cause she played in popular TV soap opera. Heavy build Scottish woman. Unpleasant heavy odor of her vagina was so unbearable that have killed all sexual sentiments. Biggest failure of Edward's sexual life. She also proved to be greedy. For two years (!) she bombarded Edward with demand to pay her back some small money spent by her on Xeroxing his manuscript.

French. Anne and Carol, about 25, editors of known porno magazine in Paris. Anne: small, slim, tender, and nymphomaniac. She fucked in every possible way with a great enthusiasm. But Carol, oh Carol, was a real miracle. Tall, heavy long legs, animal ass, big tits, slim shoulders. Face of a village whore, defect of a speech (she lisped), she wore a terrible tasteless clothes as a conderge. Anne was a very good fucker, she wept when fucked (preferred to be fucked into her rear), but Carol, oh, Carol was above Anne and above any woman. Carol's talent of lovemaking was of a supernatural origin. She moved, groaned and excited man in such a way that all men who happened to sleep with her were charmed forever. One

moment one felt he fucks the majestic queen, the next moment that obscene fat animal. Carol was a Devil or a dirty big-assed goddess of lust.

German. Renata, 35, artist-painter from Munich. Prussian aristocrat. Almost skeleton, very tall, pretty, well-educated, extremely literate. Strange in bed, like a big, skinny cold child, that needs to be warmed up.³

Serbian. Milica, 17, student. Very big, of a heavy beauty. Black hair, big Turkish lips and ass, Slavic puffy face. Her cunt leaked with desire, like that of a big young animal. Too big vagina, inconvenient, but nice to feel anyway, feels like a man making love to young horse.

Russian. Masha, 17, National-Bolshevik Party member. Tender, big tits, fat, good-natured small child. Rosy cheeks. Feels as one fucks his own fat daughter.

Russian. Natasha, 19. From a "New Russian's" divorced family. Have no tits at all, round ass, face of a girl of 13. Wears a Doc Marten's high boots, and "Nai-Nai" clothes. Her list of lovers have a name of a leading singer of known Russian rock group and at least one bandit. Funny, insolent, she fucks of desire to be adult. One fucks her as a daughter of an enemy.

Peruvian woman. No name, age is uncertain. From a crowd of women that God sent to Edward that is worth of mentioning separately. Peruvian woman was an American Indian pure blood, she had a narrow "Aztec's" nose, very narrow strangely long angles, enormous haunches and ass, huge long tits with a brightly red nipples. She was like an extraterrestrial, not a human.

¹DESERVE TO MENTION: that good women very often lousy lovers.

²NOTE: No doubt, in general Jewish girls should be prized in a matter of fucking.

³ANOTHER COMPARISON OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WITH HER: Auschwitz's victim love.

Edward Limonov is the author of several novels, short stories and collections of poetry, which have been translated into more than 20 languages around the world. His most famous works include "It's Me, Eddie," and "Memoirs of a Russian Punk." He is currently the head of the National-Bolshevik Party, a far-right wing nationalist party in Russia.

CHAPTER SIX

COUNTDOWNS
5/1 - 8 TO 9
4/1 - 9 TO 10
3/1 - 10 TO 11
2/1 - 11 TO 12
GO NUTS!
GO NUTS!
GO NUTS!

TUES.
RUSSIA'S BEST
LADIES NIGHT
YOU'VE HEARD
ABOUT IT. YES,
IT'S TRUE...
LADIES DRINK
ANYTHING FREE
FROM 7 - 9.
MEN CANNOT
COME IN UNTIL
9 PM

WED.
COUNTDOWNS
5/1 - 8 TO 9
4/1 - 9 TO 10
3/1 - 10 TO 11
2/1 - 11 TO 12
GO NUTS!
GO NUTS!
GO NUTS!

THUR.
COUNTDOWNS
HAVE MOVED
TO
WEDNESDAY.
WE'RE NOT
DOING THIS TO
SCREW YOU
UP. JUST WANT
TO MAKE YOUR
THURSDAY
MORNINGS
REALLY
SHITTY!!!

**RUSSIA'S BEST
LADIES NIGHT IS
EXTENDED TO
FEMALE FRIDAYS
SAME AS
TUESDAYS
LADIES DRINK
FREE FROM 7 - 9
PM ANYTHING !!!
MEN CAN'T COME
UNTIL 9:00 PM**

**Ladies Night
Madness!**

Heineken
PREMIUM QUALITY

HUNGRY DUCK
BAR and GRILL

923-6158

eight different teenage mouths. A few of them had vomit trickling from their lips. There were puddles of vomit outside the women's bathroom, and a kind of river of vomit coming out of the stalls. Underaged girls were harshing in the men's bathroom as well. You needed galoshes to get around there.

At 9:00 P.M., the men poured in, ready to pounce on the weakened girls. Fights broke out, heads were kicked. I saw Alla get on the bar counter and make out with some sweaty Russian jerk in a Chess King silk shirt. Then she swapped spit with some 40-year-old cop, before breaking away. She tried to jump from the outer bar counter to the inner bar top, where the beer taps were. The only problem was a deep, four-foot moat, the area where the bartenders walked between pouring beers and serving customers. In mid-flight from outer to inner bar, Alla disappeared. All I saw was her head drop. About five minutes later, a bartender picked her up. She was woozy. Her teeth bled a little, but otherwise she was fine. One of the bartenders stood

her on the countertop. She wobbled a bit, then right away started kissing someone else and grabbing his crotch.

I stuck with her because she was the drunkest and the youngest that I could see. We went back to my place before midnight and had a bizarre, not entirely satisfying round of sex, which left me with severe bite wounds on my stomach, chin, and tongue.

A few days later, she came to meet me with two of her friends, one who was also 16, and another, Natasha, who looked even younger.

Russian law states that any woman 16 or over is eligible; if a girl is between the ages of 14 and 16, and she looks 16, then she is still legal, so long as she didn't prove to you that she's under 16.

I needed somewhere to take these girls besides my shitty little apartment. So I called my old friend Andy Weir, the investment banker with the \$3,500 apartment, \$13,000 Jacuzzi, and full Kremlin view.

"Andy, what're you doing?" I asked.

"Well, I'm off to this fucking boring expat banker party. Why?"

"Night of the Living Expats again, huh?"

"I'll take any other option, Ames, if you've got one."

"Well, if you're interested, there're these three 16-year-old girls here at my place and I need someone to help me entertain them. You're the only guy I'd like to share this evening with."

He laughed, and told me to come over right away.

We took a cab to Andy's and loaded up with a few more bottles of liquor, several bottles of beer and juice, and a few packs of cigarettes. The two sixteen-year-olds, Alla and Dasha, sang songs as they got drunker. One was a ballad about soldiers in Afghanistan. They were hard to understand: they spoke in pure *mat*, Russian language's version of cuss, which is several times richer and filthier than English cuss. We could barely understand them. The word *pizda*, or cunt, can be mutated into so many different forms of speech and meanings just by adding prefixes, suffixes, changing a vowel here or there, extending it, attaching it to another word. . . . We couldn't keep up. Natasha, with her New Jersey sheepdog bangs, pug nose, and large black eyes, kept quiet most of the time, clearly the "younger sister" of the three. Dasha and Alla were really nuts—loud and careless.

At some point, Alla and Dasha stripped down and hopped into Andy's Jacuzzi. They drank, smoked, and sang. Then they started to have sex together. I snuck my hand through the curtain and snapped some photos, just to send to my friends back in America, the ones who are barred from dating any women who are happy, carefree, and young. I like making my friends suffer—it's a form of bragging, like spiking the ball in the end zone right into your defender's shoes. I can't help it—I can't enjoy my own little victories unless people I love suffer proportionately.

When I went back into the TV room, Andy pulled me aside with a worried grin on his face.

"Dude, do you realize . . . do you know how old that Natasha is?" he said.

"Sixteen?"

"No! No, she's fif-teen. Fif-teen!" Right then, my pervometer needle hit the red. I had to have her, even if she was homely. I sat down next to her on the couch and fed her another double martini with pineapple juice, and asked her to take off her clothes now, to prepare for the Jacuzzi.

"Why?" she asked, keeping her eyes to the floor, but smiling.

"So you'll be ready," I said. I was assuming the role of Rod Steiger from *Doctor Zhivago*, the classic rake. I'd really traded up literary models over the past couple of years, from Myshkin to Svidrigailov.

"Why do you want me to be ready?" she asked, sipping her drink shyly and still avoiding my eyes.

"Actually, hell: I just want to see your body," I admitted, throwing my hands up. "I'm really attracted to you, Natasha."

"What about Alla?" she asked. I could already see her weakening, knowing Russian girls and their willingness to betray friends, lovers, and anyone else. "You're with her, aren't you?"

"What about her?" I said. "I want you."

It took very little work. Alla caught us kissing in the bedroom a little later. She protested some. She even set off a fainting fit in front of us. I'm not sure whether she was faking it, but her face and neck turned red, and she collapsed on the floor, barely breathing. Dasha ran up, made me hold Alla up by the shoulders, then she punched her as hard as she could in the heart, four or five times. Alla awoke, coughing.

We finally threw Alla out on the street, penniless. She headed over to Bell's, a rival disco to the Duck. Who knows what happened there—she probably went home with the drunkest, most diseased jerk.

I took Natasha back home with me. My elevator stinks worse than a dog kennel. I live on the top floor, where, inevitably, some bum is sleeping by the trash chute, shit in his pants. A romantic walk to my apartment. . . .

When we got to my apartment, Natasha quietly took her clothes off, then asked to take a shower. I waited in my bedroom. She came back ten minutes later, wrapped in a towel, and sat on the bed, sipping a beer. I pulled her towel off. She giggled nervously, still not looking at me. I pulled her down, and put her drink on my bed table.

After sex, she confessed to me that she had a three-month-old baby, and the father had abandoned her.

"Svoloch," she said. "Bastard."

I asked her why she didn't have an abortion. We got into an argument roughly similar to the one I had almost a year earlier with Katya, one of my first *eXile*-era girlfriends. About three months after we started dating, Katya sat on my lap and told me she had some exciting news: she was pregnant, and I was the father!

I panicked. Children are my worst nightmare—worse than worst. I'd rather wind up in a Hutu death camp than father a child. My aversion to children is religious: I hate the way they look, the gurgling sounds they make, and the time and money that they require, time and money that I don't have. I told Katya that I wasn't ready to be a father—she told me that that was fine, she could give the baby to her parents, who live in Chukotka, in the Far East of Siberia, some gold-mining GULAG town. Her parents would be more than happy to have a living creature to keep them company. Katya

CHAPTER SIX

and I could take the child back when we were ready, she explained.

"No, Katya, you don't understand. I *cannot* have a child. I *do not like* children. I *hate* them. They *disgust* me, physically."

"But I can't have an abortion," she pleaded. "I was told that if I did, I'd never be able to have a child."

I knew she was bluffing, so I countered with the RU-486 pill. I offered to fly to France, pick one up, and bring it back for her. "It's totally safe," I cheerily offered.

"I can't do that," she said. "I can't kill our child."

Right then, I stared at Katya with a look—I'm not sure how it appeared to her, but in my mind, I was starting to contemplate two courses of action: murder, or AWOL.

"What will you do, kill me?" she said, laughing nervously.

"Maybe, yeah," I replied. "I'll throw you off my balcony. I'll make it look like an accident."

She started to cry, but I was relentless. I told her that if she had the child, she would be killing me, so it was an act of self-defense. And if I didn't kill her, then I would flee Moscow and she'd never find me. Her child would be fatherless. He wouldn't have an Oedipal complex like the other kids; his complexes would be monumental, guaranteed to make her life a living hell. He would terrorize her and despise her until the day she died. I was relentless. I attacked her the Russian way: I wore her down for hours during the night, KGB interrogation-style.

Wearing down your opponent is a formula for success in Russia. Take Peter the Great against Charles XII, or Kutuzov against Napoleon or Zhukov against the Wehrmacht. They simply wore down their opponents.

At 5:30 the next morning, Katya, acting the martyr, quietly slipped out of my apartment, made a beeline to the abortion clinic, and sucked the little fucker out.

She called me periodically after that. I couldn't get her off my case. So, I wrote a column, mentioning her name and what she did to me, naming her the worst woman of the year. I didn't mince words—I was wired on weeks of accumulated phenamine when I wrote that column about how I coerced her to have an abortion, under threat of death. All that speed makes you throw caution to the wind—you can move mountains when you're railing.

Katya called me crying a couple of days later, asking me how I could be so cruel.

"What did I do? I don't understand," I said, playing dumb.

"Don't you know that my friends read your columns!" She hung up in an outburst of tears, and briefly, for a good ten minutes, I had one of those soul-searching moments, asking myself, *Who am I? What's become of me? Have I taken things*

editorial A Crash-Proof Moscow Stock

We here at the eXile have a suggestion for all of you who got killed in last week's stock market fiasco: invest in us.

One of the major reasons the Asian markets collapsed was that the securities being traded on those markets were hugely overvalued. You won't have that problem with the eXile. Our value is nothing. Zero. Everybody knows that. Throw your money at us—even a dollar of it—and it has nowhere to go but up.

George Soros will never be able to precipitate a world sell-off of stocks by unloading his interests in the eXile. The reason? George Soros would never invest in the eXile. We think he sucks, and we tell him so. About the only thing Soros would ever give us is a quiet working over by his security guards, or a buzzing by one of his private jets.

Objectively speaking, the eXile is a great investment. We have no debts. Our revenues are steady and can easily be increased rapidly, simply by ordering an end to the honest restaurant and club reviews which have so pointlessly cost this paper so much in advertising sales. And, perhaps most importantly, we have an endless reserve of bad ideas, meaning we will never deplete our supply of natural resources.

The eXile has no competitors. We are the only publication in Russia willing to publish pictures like the one below in order to attract readers. And we are not merely sensationalist: our staff brings expertise to the table. The average eXile employee can tell from one glance what brand of champagne is featured in that photo.



That's training. That's experience. You won't get that with your average expatriate publication, whose writers are all wet, so to speak, behind the ears. No, the eXile's is an office peopled with seasoned veterans, in whose practiced hands your investment is as safe as your bubbly.

The eXile is a company with a global outlook. It has looked all around the globe and observed that it has no potential for growth anywhere outside of Moscow. It is therefore totally insulated from international developments. And since virtually no one in Moscow takes it seriously, it is also almost completely insulated from local developments as well. In short, it is an investment vehicle that exists as though in a vacuum, neither gaining nor losing value with the passage of time, the progression of historical events, or the migration to and fro of potential readers.

The only danger for potential investors, as far as we can see, is that other investors might also begin to recognize our newspaper's value. If that happens, still more investors might hear that others have invested in our newspaper. At that point, we might become a hot commodity, and still more investors will seek to buy our shares. Then, before we know it, we'll be part of mutual funds offered to insurance salesmen in Idaho and housewives in Bourgogne. And then, suddenly—and we're not saying this would happen—one of those investors might get cold feet and back out, and we'd have a whole mess on our hands as everyone scrambled to sell. I mean, we'd just feel awful if that insurance salesman in Idaho lost his nest-egg because of us.

Still, we don't think that will happen. Because we know that in real life, the market doesn't operate that way. Traders and brokers aren't so shallow and unethical as to try to profit on the speculative rise of overvalued securities. No, what they look at are cold, hard facts—company infrastructure, real estate, revenues, and honest revenue potential. We know that even if our stock was rising, no one would invest in us if they weren't sure we were really worth it.

And we are. We promise. So send in your check today. Now, if we could only find an opener...



too far? . . . Then I popped in a *South Park* video that Krazy Kevin gave me, and forgot about it.

Funny, but that column nearly got me lynched a few weeks later by Kathy Lally of the *Baltimore Sun*. That's a long story. . . . And speaking of abortions, Natasha told me that night that the reason she didn't Hoover her baby was because the doctor had told her that if she had an abortion, she'd never have children. A familiar tale here.

It was hard to imagine that Natasha had squatted out a baby. Her cunt was as tight as a cat's ass. She was impenetrable, like prying open a mollusk. Nothing like a mother. I knew: I'd slept with mothers before—they're a lot wider. Sex with them is like probing a straw in a mildew-lined German beer mug.

A few nights later, Natasha tried coming over to my house at two in the morning. She rang the doorbell for a half hour straight. I got up, pulled the doorbell ringer out of the wall, tore the metal magnet plates out of their rubber tabs, ripped out some spring contraption, dropped it all on the floor, then went back to sleep. She called and called, but I didn't answer.

On the next Ladies' Night, I heard a story about a 15-year-old girl who'd drunk too much and had a miscarriage in the Duck's bathroom. She came running out with blood smeared all over her legs and blood on the bathroom walls, mixed with the usual vomit—other people's vomit. Doug and Craig arranged to have her taken to the hospital, where they learned she'd had a nasty cut on her leg from broken glass and from falling off the bar counter. There was no miscarriage. She was still safely pregnant.

Later, they brought her back to the Duck so that her two 16-year-old friends could take her home to her parents. They all drove back to her parents', but her mother ran out and ordered them to leave in a hurry. The 15-year-old girl's father, a *militsia* sergeant, said that he would kill his daughter for drinking and partying recklessly while still pregnant. If she showed her face, he would kill her. So the girls went back to the Duck and stayed at Doug's apartment for the night.

I saw Doug the next morning after that incident. He had rings around his eyes, and was shaking his head.

"The police are a little upset with the Duck," he told me. "But hell, it's not the first time."

The week before, a competing interior ministry police division had raided the Duck with machine guns and truncheons. A few weeks earlier, a corrupt cop had his eyeball literally knocked out of its socket in a fight with another cop from a different department. All these things get smoothed

over, even when an underaged girl has a miscarriage in your toilet.

As I heard Doug recount the story, I couldn't help but think that the 15-year-old in question was Natasha.

That night, I started getting phone calls from Natasha and her friends, asking if she could move in with me.

"Why did you tell me that you had a child?" I asked her. "I'd heard from someone else that you're four months pregnant, and not that you have a three-month-old baby."

"So you figured that out," she flatly replied.

"You're pregnant, Natasha. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why does it matter!" she snapped. "Would you not want to see me if I'm pregnant?" She wasn't even angry—she was flabbergasted that I wouldn't want to fuck her just because she was four months pregnant.

"*Svoloch', blyad'!*" she said. "Fucking bastard."

I got another call three nights later from Natasha at six A.M., telling me she was at a pay phone in front of my building and she had nowhere to go.

"Leave me the fuck alone," I told her, hanging up. I figured she had to be with a friend, and she was playing the homeless girl to sucker me into letting her into my apartment. I knew what to expect once she got in the door. She'd never leave. She and the little monster growing inside would plant a flag in front of my TV. She'd clean my dishes and cook me fried meat and potatoes. She'd shower and lie down and let me fuck her. But she'd never leave.

Johnny Chen may have proved to all of Moscow that literally ANY expat could, if he so desired, live out his debauched daydreams. But before Chen popularized the notion, any number of even less attractive American men were on to the game. Among them was the late Paul Tatum, and his coterie of whore-hopping middle-aged perverts. I met some of them the week after Tatum was murdered. I was sitting in the Starlite Diner at Mayakovsky Square when a bearded Grizzly Adams type yelled out my name.

"Hey, you're Mark Ames, right? Mark Ames!" He stretched his arms, winked, and nodded his head, motioning for me to come to his booth.

I was cornered—there was no way out.

Grizzly asked me to sit down with him and another man, some sort of middle-aged Indian nerd with buckteeth whose name I think was Vik, short for Vikram. They started off by complimenting me, laughing about a very cruel joke I once played on a *Moscow Times* columnist Helen Womack. I panicked until I realized that they sincerely enjoyed it.

CHAPTER SIX

Hungry Duck





*** ** ***

Cheers: eddie alert! Female Friday's boasts of almost a thousand drunks, crazed chicks and far too few dudes, while the success of the Ladies' Nite formula has led the Duck to add a new Sodom Sundays. You thought that the den of sin had seen and done it all... but now they're offering to get all chicks blindly drunk on FREE liquor from 7-9pm Tuesdays, Fri's and Sun's, while keeping the men at bay. Then at 9pm, the doors open, and the men pour in, and the rape camp festivities begin. Thank god for antibiotics! Mondays still feature countdown drinks. Perhaps the most notorious bar in the Northern Hemisphere. Always jam-packed. Look for Moscow's only ekpat ek-con, Stanley Williams, fresh out of jail and on the wheels of steel. You are guaranteed to see at least one beanie fall teeth-first into the corner of the bar-counter. Cheers: Bar girls sing karaoke over dance tunes. If you're not really drunk when you fall off the bar, it hurts. High 'Yosemite Sam' barroom fight factor. On Titular Tuesdays, chicks start to bail by eleven, so lotta-hunters better act quick. Cover 35 rubles (SOR on Ladies' Night).
MC: Kaznitsky Mast
Phone: 923-8158
Address: Pustechinaya UL. 9 (next to the Kaznitsky Mast Metro)
Hours: 12:00 - 6:00

"There's something serious I want to talk to you about," Grizzly said, putting his arm around me. "It's about Paul. He was a very close friend of mine, so I'm wondering what you're planning on writing about his murder. See, cuz the *Moscow Times* and all these people are lying. You know and I know who killed Paul. But the goddamn cowards won't talk about it. Paul was a very, very close friend of mine. He was a hero. A hero. And no one wants to take notice."

I quietly nodded my head. At the time, I was planning on running a lead story mocking Tatum's murder. An assassin with a Kalashnikov had busted eleven caps in Tatum's back, just outside the

Radisson-Slavyanskaya Hotel, where his disputed 40 percent stake became the eleven stakes in his ass. . . . I was considering various tasteless front-page banners: "Paul Takes a Fall!," "Bull's Eye!," "Tatum Checks Out For Good!"

"Everybody knows who killed him," Grizzly said. He lit a cigarette and curled his mouth, disgusted. "And they're keeping quiet, and pretending they don't know. We've got to do something, Mark. I want to take action. I want to get the American community involved. We're going to write a letter to the American Chamber of Commerce about those bastards at the Radisson," Grizzly went on. "We're going to arrange a boycott of the Radisson until they admit it."

"Uh-huh."

"Maybe you can help us write it, Mark? You're a good writer and all."

"I don't know, I'll have to see." I remember sitting there, stuck between these two clowns, wondering, are they serious? Do they think they're going to bring an international hotel chain to its knees merely because their whoring buddy got blasted?

"Paul was really a hero, you know. And he was a guy who loved life. He was a crusader. Wasn't he?"

The Indian nodded his head solemnly.

"He was just a guy who loved life. He—" Grizzly paused, then smiled knowingly. "You know, one of Paul's favorite things was coming out to a bar I own out in Kirov." He turned to the Indian and winked.

"Oh yeah, Paul loved it," the Indian concurred, breaking a collusive, mischievous smile, then covering his buckteeth with his hands.

"I own a bar out there in Kirov called 'The American Saloon.' Have you heard of it?"

"No."

"Well, it's the best-kept secret in Russia. I'm telling you, Mark—" He jabbed me with his cigarette finger. "You would love it. You've never seen anything like it." Grizzly nudged the Indian with his elbow. Then both laughed knowingly. "Yep, you—I know you'd really like it. It's your kind of place."

This column, written in the depths of a blinding crank binge, was the spark that first ignited *Baltimore Sun* correspondent Kathy Lally to call for censoring the *exile*.

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P. 2

HERE'S TO THE HEROINES

My ideal woman has no womb. No tubes. No ovaries. No womb. The rest is negotiable.

Maykovsky

By Mark Ames



Just under a year ago, we published a piece about the woes of ekpat women in Russia. Almost the entire female American community came clamoring to our offices like an angry peasant mob, with torches, rakes, and pitchforks.

We escaped, but a year later, as the guest editorial I swear it's real and comic prove, nothing has changed and no one has learned anything. Ekpat women are still growing anger lines around their mouths, stuck in a situation they'd never dreamed of: like consumer goods that cannot compete with the locally manufactured products, they wind up collecting dust on the shelves, marked down five times over, and finally dumped in overstock or returned to the manufacturer to be melted down and sold for scrap.

But instead of rehearsing the sordid truth, I'd like to dedicate a Women's Day column to some of the women I've come to know over the last year.

Katya. For some reason, she still calls me. She tried pulling the oldest stunts in the book last spring. When a woman claims she can't have an abortion because her alleged doctor allegedly told her that if she does, she'll never have children again, call her bluff. Tell her you'll fly to France, pick up an RU-486 pill, fly back, and pop it in her mouth over a nice dinner at Horse and Hound. You'll accompany her to the toilet when Junior squirts out like a bowl of borcht; you'll even flick Junior's sardine eyes off her thighs, because I can.

That's when she changes her tact—she tells you she can't kill a living baby. "Kill what?" you demand. "It's not a baby—it's a fucking larva!"

"But at two months, it already has hands and feet," she protests.

"And a tail!" you reply. "And sardine eyes!"

But she won't give, so you're left with no choice: you threaten to kill her.

That's what I did. And it worked. At 5:30 the next morning, Katya quietly got out of bed and left my apartment, acting like a martyr.

On a brighter note, Natasha, the 16-year-old pregnant girl who thought she'd had a miscarriage at the Duck a few weeks back, finally did the Right Thing. I guarantee that her fatherless child would have grown up to be one of those elevator rapists—he had the "really stupid criminal" icon written all over his translucent forehead; now, thanks to Natasha's sage decision, his fetal membranes are getting boiled down in some sewage treatment plant on the outskirts of town, and believe me, folks, it's better for all of us. I'd suggest sterilizing Natasha now, for the good of society, like what the Swedes used to do to their degenerates. As far as I'm concerned, this Women's Day, Natasha deserves one of those cheap trophy cups with the inscription: "World's Greatest Mom!" Signed, Junior.

Which leads me to two truly heroic women who are linked not just by their prison experiences, but by their determination to live life in that massive, depopulated continent beyond the pale of society.

Lena is insane, which is why, as much as I like her, I've been trying to shine her. She still has everything she owns in my apartment: two cheap duffel bags packed full of women's clothes. Evidence of a big, drunken, horny mistake on my part. She had just been deported from a Western European country after serving three and a half years in jail. You had to figure . . . a young attractive Russian girl who hasn't seen the light of freedom in three and a half years, and you're the first guy she's going to spend the night with . . . as the black guy says to Clint Eastwood in *Dirty Harry*, "I gotta know." Christ, I gotta know too fucking much for my tastes.

You don't meet too many women like Lena. It's as if each day is her last. Most people don't experience in a lifetime the kind of savage adventures she falls into on a daily basis. Since I've known her, she's been raped, robbed, beaten, detained for heroin possession, nearly murdered . . . In the scariest incident, a pair of flathead pimps who mistook her for a deadbeat whore (Lena briefly moved into a Komsomolskaya with two teenage whores when I told her to split) beat her in the kidneys to extract what they thought was their rightful protection out; they dunked her head into a bathtub full of water until she nearly drowned. They eventually let her go, having squeezed her for every last ruble she had, but the other two girls weren't so lucky; they were driven out to a forest, stripped naked, and left to walk back to the nearest road, two hours away. There are other, worse things that happened to Lena that she said she couldn't even tell me about.

Lena had some great prison stories to tell me. Like how she raped a Bulgarian girl, age 19, in the showers; and how said Bulgarian became a sort of willing slave after a few weeks. "It's strange," she observed. "All the girls I raped became that way."

The other heroine I want to honor is still sitting in jail. I'm speaking of Alina Vitukhnovskaya, the poet jailed for allegedly selling seven books worth of LSD to a pair of junkies. The justices have already retracted their broad confessions, and all the evidence collapsed; the judge ordered her moved to Sertskiy Psychiatric Ward, an infamous sanitarium where dissidents were interred during the Soviet days.

Last week, they shipped her back to Women's Prison #6, where she sits awaiting more trials and hearings. Her bogus case goes back to 1994, and no one knows if or when it will end.

Alina and I have been in correspondence recently. Her letters are really impressive: you can tell that the physical confinement has driven her already hyper-detailed inner world to develop entire cities, underground railroads, population transfers within that hyper-aesthetized mind of hers . . . There is a serenity in her written voice, reflecting a strength you don't expect from a petty prisoner. I nearly grew envious of her intense focus, made manic by her confinement. When you think about all the brain cells wasted out here in civilian life, worrying about money and food and meetings and work, you get envious . . . until you remember that she's in a Russian prison. These aren't nice prisons. These are *Midnight Express* prisons. And yet, Alina seems to be growing stronger. "I don't want to be and will not be a victim," she wrote me.

Alina and Lena are two women who deserve to be celebrated on Women's Day because, in their own ways, they are both heroines—in the guerrilla war against blandness and ordinariness.

One thing Alina asked me was to publish her address in our newspaper so that you, readers, might send her letters to relieve her boredom. This Women's Day, why don't you write her a letter, to someone far more deserving of Women's Day accolades than any of us civvies. Her only request is that you write the letters in Russian. And please, don't bore her with maudlin do-goodie letters of how bad you feel for her. Tell her horrible stories about yourself or your neighbors or your ex-lovers. Send her naked pictures of yourself soaping down a llama. Whatever you do, just don't bore her. She deserves better.

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Alina Vitukhnovskoi

How to be Mad and Happy at Fifty-Five



Considering subject for my column for present issue I have asked Mark Ames what he wants me to write. Mark suggested to me to write a piece on the subject of

health care, something sounding like "How to stay fit at 55," written by Frank Sinatra or Jane Fonda. I laughed. Then I thought, "Why not, as tomorrow is my birthday. I am going to be a fifty-five, and I feel as mad and crazy as ever, as at thirty-five, so why not?"

So I will attempt to create something like "way to a good health," or "How to stay fit," or "How to be mad and happy at fifty-five," or "Doctor's Limonov advises to a middle-aged man."

First requirement to fulfil is: the man of fifty-five should go to bed only with young girls. For its religious origins Taibbi have recommended usage of only very young girls, not older than twenty, as it said in a sacred book "Makhmudra-Tilaka." Just recently I heard on Radio Liberty that scientists made an astonishing discovery: longevity of a male's life depends on quantity of orgasms he gets during his life. Man who experience many orgasms during his entire life, excluding old age, live longer and stay younger.

So, in order to stay young, throw away your old wife, never even look at overweight, wrinkled women. Find yourself a pretty teenage girl and fuck her as often as you can. Don't let a complex of inferiority to overcome you. Contrary to all rules of bourgeois society, in reality young girls like to get an attention of older man, it flatters them. Many girls would be proud to go to bed with you, it will give them enormous sexual thrill that they lack in relationship with partners of their own age. Besides, some girls dream of sexual relationships with their fathers. You will be welcome as a thrilling substitute, believe me, or rather I am not Doctor Limonov. Young girls will excite you better. Young girls have a tight, hot pussies, their love juice is a boiling one, on the contrary, love juice of an older woman is glue-like. Young laugh, their freshness, even their naive stupidity will have a rejuvenating effect on you. Listen to stupid hit songs with them, get them drunk, fuck them and be happy.

Don't be upset by your age, don't let social pressure on you to become so strong that you will be choked by numbers of your age. Psychological victory over your age will open you a way to pleasurable and easy life. However, don't stay with a same girl for a long time. Change them.

Take care of your look. It's easy, just don't eat too much. Russian middle-aged man usually overweight, American men also, as both countries have a bad eating habits. Don't eat three times a day-eat twice a day. Me, for at least twenty years now I never eat breakfast. In the morning I drink few cups of a very strong coffee, or a very strong tea. I never eat before 2pm, or even before 4pm. Second meal I eat between 5 and 9pm. I never limited myself in food consuming, I eat a lot. But for last few years I eat very little of bread, or no bread at all. I like meat, especially pork meat. From a Serbian war I brought a habit of eating lots of raw onions. My weight now is 67 kilograms. I consume alcohol with pleasure, but sometimes I don't drink during a week or so. I never drink before 8pm.

As to sport, I have in my apartment my dumb-bells and a weight of 16 kilos. From time to time I do some exercises with weights.

To conclude I must again underline the importance of getting rid of psychological burden of your age, of those silly numbers. Believe yourself as if you don't know your age. As you don't know what behavior is required by society from a man of your age.

Transgress all taboos, be mad. That is the key to a happiness of a man of fifty-five.

"Really? Wow."

"Am I bullshitting him?" Grizzly asked the Indian.

"No way," the Indian said sternly.

"Every month or so we get a train full of Americans and ride into Kirov to party at my bar. It's wild down there, because all the girls want to be with Americans."

"Yes, they love *us Americans*," the Indian agreed, nodding feverishly.

"Every guy who goes down there gets laid," Grizzly calmly continued. "I mean the ratio of girls to men there is like five to one. And I'm not talking whores here, Mark. These are all fine girls, not the working-types. They just come for a good time, because they like American men. People just go nuts, they really let loose. You should have seen—Vik here—the last time we were in Kirov, Vik was dancing on top of the roulette table, and he and a stripper, Olga—was it Olga or Larissa?"

The Indian bared his teeth and spat: "Both!" He wiped his mouth and laughed.

"Both of the girls were stripping Vik here until he was in his underwear. Isn't that right, Vik?"

"I was in my underwear, it's true! I was dancing in my underwear on top of the roulette table, man. And these girls were doing everything to me! I swear to god, man."

I looked at the Indian, imagining him in his yellow-stained ball-hugger underwear and Gandhi-like chicken legs dancing atop a roulette table while a pack of peroxide whores groped at him. A frightening scenario, but given the utter desperation in the regions of Russia, not entirely impossible.

"The girls there will do *anything* to be with an American, they really love us," Grizzly said.

"It's true, *we Americans* are like *royalty* down there, man," the Indian agreed.

Grizzly and I exchanged phone numbers. I figured, you never know, there might be a story there. I also decided to tone down the Paul-Is-Dead story, because I was sure that if I ran it, I'd have to duke it out with a bearded 50-year-old freak, and I just didn't see what I had to gain from that.

Every few weeks after our first meeting, I'd get a call from Grizzly urging me to join his trainload of sad, middle-aged Americans for a weekend of chasing desperate, provincial Russian divorcees. It sounded like great material for a column, at the very least.

Shortly after Taibbi joined the *exile*, I had the time and the stomach for it. Then somehow Owen Matthews got wind of the Kirov sex train. The scoop was gone. I was going to back out, but Owen pushed me.

"Come on, Ames," Owen urged me. "You've got to go with me. This is going to be fucking hilarious. Think about it. On the one hand, you've got these loser businessmen. Fat, balding . . ." He laughed, but I don't know why—Owen, at age 25, was already "fat, balding" . . . "And then you have this miserable, depressed town called 'Kirov' full of lonely, desperate teenagers who we can just take into our rooms, mace them and use them, like farm animals in ways that God didn't intend."

The thought of spending a weekend with Grizzly, the Indian, Owen, and even lesser humans made me nervous. I'd have no escape. But I knew that the basic premise was true: girls in the provinces are far more desperate than girls in Moscow and St. Petersburg, who have been spoiled by contact with too many Westerners. Kirov is like Moscow was seven or eight years ago: the Westerner premium is high, grossly overvalued. A girl from Kirov, stuck 1,000 kilometers east of Moscow, in the middle of fucking nowhere, has two choices: either marry some drunken, wife-beating Pasha, whose factory never pays him, and never leave that miserable, snow-and-rust-stained steppe, or hook up with an American and have the chance to live in civilization. The awful knowledge that you will never, ever leave a city like Kirov would drive anyone to take extreme measures . . . even sleeping with Owen Matthews, or a drunken Indian who *claims* to be American. . . .

I arrived in Kirov with my friend Andy a day after everyone else. We drank ourselves silly on the overnight ride, then popped open a bottle of vodka when we awoke in the morning. We headed over to the hotel, a heavy gray block structure set in the middle of decaying lots and half-finished buildings, and made a straight beeline up to Owen's room.

CHAPTER SIX

He was miserably hungover, and offered us a bottle of his wine.

"How is the American Saloon?" we asked.

"It sucks. It's a joke," he said. "These guys are such losers you wouldn't believe it. Half of the guys are like these bald freaks, then there's this guy with a soccer haircut, and another with like this Ronald McDonald perm and a mustache. And no one—I mean no one—got laid."

I knew what that meant in Owen-speak: he'd been dissed by every chick in town.

Just then, Grizzly barged into Owen's hotel room, sighed dramatically, then dropped onto a chair. He was shirtless, dressed only in sweat bottoms and tennis shoes. He was thinner and smaller than I'd remembered, which was a relief.

"Boy did we have a helluva night last night," he said. "Whew! My wife Larissa's in there with another girl, Tanya. Man, I am wiped out. You know, these Russian girls, they really like bisexual sex."

Owen snickered; Grizzly lifted his head and squinted at me, with an almost worried expression.

"You wanna see my wife and Tanya? They're just lying in bed together, in each other's arms. You wanna see them?"

"No thanks," I said.

"Come on."

"No really, I don't want to," I said.

"Just for a second. I'm afraid maybe you guys don't believe me. Owen, tell 'em how it was last night."

"Oh don't worry, I've told them," Owen snickered.

"You sure you don't want to look at my wife and Tanya? They're sound asleep, you won't bother them. It's really beautiful, man, just seeing the two of them curled up. Man, they really tired me out."

"No really, that's okay."

Andy and I escaped, then reappeared at the American Saloon at about 9 o'clock at night. It was empty, except for the group of American and English losers. Everyone wore an ironic expression, as if the reason they came was really a joke—as if they were spectators, and not actors in this low-rent comedy with gag tuba soundtrack. One British man in his late 30s, with spectacles and combed-back hair, explained that he came to Kirov to buy some local art; he was an art collector. Another American made fun of himself. Only the guy with the soccer haircut, Chris, and his friend Ronald McDonald, were beneath self-mockery.

"Things should pick up here soon," Grizzly said, looking worried.

But things didn't pick up.

His wife did a pole dance with Tanya. I was dying to leave, but Grizzly sat down right next to me.

"You should have seen those two go at it last night," he whispered into my ear. He pointed to the British art dealer and Ronald McDonald. "Those two—I let them watch."

We finally got out of there and headed to a disco called "*Zapretnaya Zona*," or Forbidden Zone. Unlike the American Saloon, with its cheesy Wild West theme and cheap wood paneling, *Zapretnaya Zona* was a large disco, a huge dance floor with a fifty-foot-high ceiling, lasers, and booming techno music. I met a girl over by the bar who was a stage dancer. Her name was Natasha. Yet another Natasha. Natasha #6. She was eighteen, with long golden hair and a large, aquiline nose, and full breasts. She gave me her address, and told me to come by her place the next day. She didn't have a telephone—most residents of Kirov don't have telephones.

Later, Andy and I found Owen in the upstairs bar talking to a group of girls. When we made to sit down with them, Owen snarled condescendingly. "Do I have to do everything for you losers?"

I got to know one of the girls, Alyona. She was pretty, but conversation with her was tough—it was like sucking water from a brick. I couldn't tell if she was deaf. Andy talked up a blond-haired teenager with a cute, pudgy face, while Owen led his wet, doe-eyed Irena by the hand onto the dance floor.

"This girl is so in love with me," Owen told me. "She says to me, 'Oh Owen, you dance so well.' God, it's like shooting fish in a barrel here. I'm going to mace her and use her like a farm animal in ways that God didn't intend." He laughed, then scooted away.

Sometime a bit later in the evening, Owen got slapped in the face and dumped. He hit up on another girl, a sort of peroxide techno dyke whom I learned had a reputation in Kirov for boning anything with a pulse. She was the town slut.

"I don't know what's wrong with that bitch Irena," Owen told me, sucking on a cigarette. "But this other girl's fantastically sexy. She and I are going to rendezvous tomorrow at two o'clock next to Kirov's statue. It's all so devilishly romantic."

The town slut never showed. She "dynamited" him, as they say. Things aren't always easy for expats.

W

hen we started the *eXile*, I met a warm, honest, and slightly attractive, if dumpy, American girl of Slavic descent, Tamara. We became good friends. I tolerated her more predictable fresh-

out-of-college small talk about gender politics. Tamara wasn't cold and ambitious; instead, she was desperate for solid companionship. She would attach herself to any suitor—a frat type, a degenerate like me, rich, poor . . . it didn't matter who. But then she foisted herself on me sexually. Normally, I have a pretty strong willpower when it comes to resisting sensual pleasures. I can keep a baggie of heroin or speed in my little Lao jar for months, if only to test my will, before using it up. Anyway I caved with Tamara. There's just something about a girl sitting at your feet and begging you—*begging you*—to fuck her.

It was a disaster. I forgot what Americans are like! I hadn't slept with one since 1991—six whole years. The petting part went fine, but when the panties come off, all those years of brainwashing and conditioning suddenly reveal themselves. First you get an earful of dry, half-ironic quips . . . a sort of pre-penetration negotiation . . . then the condom question is popped, followed by a reprimand . . . you try to get into position, but she's . . . she's . . . she's *talking to you, commenting on things*. Another ironic quip. Don't do this, but make sure you do that. Yes, that. Don't come before me. Do touch me like that. My last boyfriend did this. I've slept with Y number of guys. My childhood, let me tell you all about it. . . . I was horrified: this isn't sex—*this is therapy!* . . . *a job interview!* . . . *yard work!* . . . After a few minutes, I lost my erection, and never slept with Tamara again. I can never go back, that much is clear. Russia has taught me that American women are incapable of enjoying ANYTHING on this planet.

Moscow of the '90s will vanish, like so many enviable eras. There have been other islands of corrupt paradise driven to extinction, even in my lifetime. I'm thinking of Laos in the early 1970s, before the communist takeover, when opium dens were on every street corner in Vientiane. I envy those reporters who lived there. A quiet Lao woman, packing your opium pipe and lying supine beside you, massaging you, not asking for anything in return. All that's gone now. You have to go looking in the villages. And even there, it's vanishing. No girls to pack your pipe. Self-service. The DEA is successfully transforming Laos from a country of peaceful opium-smokers lolling in the clouds into Marlboro-smoking, wife-beating drunkards. I was there. I saw it. That left an impression on me, on the temporal nature of Eden and Sodom. Whenever Eden or Sodom appears, a DEA agent is sure to helicopter in and shut it down. A Michael McFaul or Jerry Falwell.

The DEA's best hope here is to Americanize the Russian women—to make them less desperate, to put Reeboks on

their feet and shapeless Gap skirts on their legs. I know very well that an ex-nerd like myself (eleven times decorated for excessive lameness in the line of duty) has profited from an historical glitch: descending upon a defeated, ruined empire whose buildings, and girls, have been left intact. Instead of sacking the place and burning it down, expats have slowly bled it, a quiet sacking stretched out over a decade, masked as a "market transformation."

That's how a jaw-dropping goddess like Alyona wound up with someone like me.

Alyona lived in a depressed suburb of one of the most miserable, doomed cities in Russia: Kirov. Not even Kirov, but a village outside of Kirov. With the military-industrial complex finished, Kirov has absolutely no *raison d'être*. Just hundreds of thousands of citizen-refugees trying to keep from freezing and starving to death, stuck out in the middle of the flat, dead earth between Kazan and Nizhni Novgorod, wondering if the government will ever pay them their pensions and wages. In Vyatskiye Polyani, a small town in the Kirov oblast built around a giant defense factory, the desperation is so great that you wouldn't even bother with a "White God" factor. More like "White Galactical Emperor-God" factor. The population of Vyatskiye Polyani dropped from 80,000 to less than 20,000 between 1992 and 1994, as the factory stopped receiving government funding, and the people stopped receiving wages.

One enterprising nutcase, Alexander Komin, saw this as an opportunity to mix his own market economics theories with certain sadistic impulses. In 1996, he spent months building a complete basement-factory underneath his tiny garage-shed, then lured local women into the shed by promising them some vodka. Once inside, he locked them up and forced them to produce goods such as oven mitts and boxer shorts. He raped them, tortured them, murdered one attempted escapee by forcing her to drink antifreeze, and drilled the word RAB ("SLAVE") into their foreheads, just to get that corporate teamwork thing going. The business was going so well that he was even photographed and honored by the local chief of police, whom he presented with a gift—needlework wall art produced in Komin's "factory." Several months later, one of his slaves got pregnant. Komin was flabbergasted. "Do you really think it was me?" he asked the slave. "Who else could have done it?" she replied. He determined to do the honorable thing and marry her—but the minute he took her down to the courthouse, she turned him in.

Proving, of course, the one major drawback to having a relationship with a Russian woman: she is congenitally unfaithful.

CHAPTER SIX

No story better sums up "Russian Reforms" than this little heart-warmer. Someday, this will be made into a four-boxes-o'-Kleenex film, a kind of *Sleepless in Seattle* meets *I Spit On Your Grave*. Note that the women pictured have the word "Slave" drilled into their foreheads.



INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT

There are many reasons to commit murder. There are even many reasons to spend years building an underground cavern in which to imprison and torture kidnapped strangers. If one is greedy and/or a sadistic sex fiend, these things make sense. But if your aim is to start up a low-overhead boxer short company, murder, kidnapping and torture don't seem like logical options. Nonetheless, one Aleksandr Komin of the Kirov suburb of Vyatskiye Polyani did just that. According to Komsomolskaya Pravda, Komin and a friend, Aleksandr Mikheyev, spent four years building a multi-story basement under his garage on the edge of town. Neighbors remarked at his industriousness. When he was finished, he began putting the basement to good use. He lured a series of men and women into the garage with vodka, then knocked them out with drugs and/or blows to the head and imprisoned them underground, where they were set to work making boxer shorts on sewing machines. He tattooed the word "Slave" ("rab") on his captives' foreheads, fed them on black bread and potatoes, and forced them to go to the bathroom into a 40-liter plastic barrel. For technical expertise he had to capture a seamstress who was the friend of a friend named Nikolai Malikh; Malikh's body was found in the local landfill two years after his seamstress friend disappeared. One worker named Vera Tolpayeva who lost the will to work was given a choice of suicide options: electric shock or antifreeze ingestion. She chose antifreeze and died after two days of agony; Komin had his first organized labor uprising when the remaining slaves refused to make ground beef out of her and eat her. Give 'em an inch and they take a mile, huh? In any case, tune in to the next issue of the *eXile* for more details on this story, which ended unhappily for the pair of Kirov slave drivers.



Edward Limonov, in his most recent book, *Anatomy of a Hero*, writes: "Russian women are usually, physically speaking, attractive, but morally—they are repulsive creatures, cripples."

Limonov has been married three times to Russians, and hasn't lived in America for almost 20 years. He remembers the loyalty of American women with fondness, perhaps rightly so. Russian women are not reliable, but then again, neither are most Russian men. At least half of the girls I met here married at age 18 or 19, and, after having a child, were

dumped by their older husbands, who couldn't resist the urge to hunt down a fresh new teenager. Russians' lax attitude toward fidelity is, in my opinion, highly progressive and rational, so long as it isn't covered in lies. Since most people enter relationships in Russia expecting an affair sooner or later, you can deal with it. It's hypocrisy that scares me the most.

The Russian masses have been abandoned by their government and by the West, because they're no longer needed. And within that frame of abandonment, Russian women have to think about the man they'll marry—a man, if he's Russian, who's likely to abandon her, after beating her, infecting her with syphilis, and milking her for all her dough. Tens of millions of people live in dire circumstances, stranded in the center of the world's largest continent, with little hope of going anywhere. Which means—sexual opportunity for me.

Over the last fifteen years, the only place in Russia that's felt some improvement is Moscow. Moscow is decadent and terrifying, but until the crisis hit in the summer of 1998, it wasn't desperate. Up to 85 percent of the nation's wealth is sucked into Moscow. It's a lamprey, a school of liver flukes, bleeding the Russian corpse dry. Moscow only holds 10 of the nation's 145 million... which leaves... hold on a sec... 135 million wretched souls. Half of whom are women. A significant number of whom are young and attractive.

Alyona came from one of the many cities and towns whose few resources had been sucked dry in order to enrich Moscow. Her "options" are limited, galley-slave options. It's either sewing oven mitts in some freak's garage-dungeon, or sleeping with Mark Ames, Joe Blow, or a thousand other unappealing American expats who represent a kind of lottery ticket out of that dead end and into hope.

Nothing signified her desperate fate more than the evening of our first "date." She and a friend took a train from Kirov to Moscow to meet Andy and me. We took them for a walk on the Arbat, then to a shitty, dilapidated laser tag club in some overheated building basement. They couldn't get enough. Later, we took them to Planet Hollywood for dinner and afterward, to the Chuck Norris Beverly Hills Club, a casino nightclub infrequented by hookers and semi-respectable thugs. We were seated in a special balcony area for the concert—the Zaitsev Sisters: a grotesquely saggy,

MOSCOW BABYLON

by Roman Papsuev & Mark Ames *note: based on a true story (see "Innovative Management" in Death Porn)



heavily made-up forty-something twin-sister duo lip-synching the shittiest Russian pop Muzak I'd ever heard in my life.

During the show, Alyona could barely contain her joy. The Zaitsev Sisters were one of her favorites! She sighed and squealed. Finally, she grabbed my hand, kissed me, bounced in her seat, and told me, "This is the best night of my life, Mark. Thank you so much!" Later, at Andy's, with the Kremlin lit up in the background, Alyona returned the favor.

In the provinces, not only is life maximally shitty, but chances of escape are almost nil. A provincial isn't even allowed into Moscow, where the old Soviet pass-system to control the population inflow is still in effect. The few Westerners who do go out to a region on business are bound to be grubby oil-worker types or chinless suits looking to squeeze out a last easy buck. They usually don't have the strategic sophistication to tap into the unspoiled beauty; instead, they'll head into their hotel lobby and pick up a 100-dollar whore for the night. Leaving all those nonwhores stranded. Which, ah shucks, leaves a lotta pickins for fellers like me.

It's not as if you have to search hard for attractive *dyevs* when you leave Moscow. You just need to have a sharper eye, since the provincials dress less fashionably. My eye is pretty well-trained: I actually dislike the local equivalent of sorority girls, and prefer the more awkward ones. I

find the provincial far more attractive.

Andy and I wasted little time taking advantage of the gross overvaluation of our stocks relative to their real underlying value. We set out to exploit as much regional desperation as possible. We called these "provincial runs."

We set a course for Kirov.

Andy and I found Owen sitting at a table with four teenagers. He made a bitter quip about us being scavengers, which wasn't far from the truth: using Owen as the Marines to soften up the enemy was pretty effective. Any girl who has been railroaded into a corner with Owen for 20 minutes is ripe for comparatively decent guys

like Andy and me. That was when I met Alyona. I left her my phone number in Moscow and told her to call me if she ever came to town.

Later on, I met one of the stage dancers, Natasha. She came off the stage to talk and dance with me. I was surprised—I'd underestimated the White God Factor. I was also feeling more and more acutely ill, although I tried not to let it slow me up.

Natasha left by 3 A.M., but not before writing down her address on a card for me. Most people in Kirov don't even have their own phones, so you just have to show up at their house. She lived on Industrial Lane (*Ulitsa Industrialnaya*).

Feeling woozy, I soon left the disco. Headache and nausea expanded until it became almost unbearable. My neck muscles tightened up. I returned to my hotel room, took two aspirins, then fell asleep in a kind of delirium. I started shivering and sweating. My whole body convulsed. At some point I lost track of where I was. Then I awoke, and ran to the toilet, violently vomiting, then turning over for an explosion of diarrhea. They were practically concurrent. I was spraying out of both ends, a sprinkler of shit and vomit! The bathroom walls were splattered with half-digested slop. I'd just be wiping my ass for the eighth time with Kirov's finest sandpaper/toilet paper, when . . . WHOOSH!—out comes a gelatinous chunk of yesterday's pulled pork sandwich. But the worst of all was the pain—the neck pains and the headaches. I fell back into delirium, not sure when I was dreaming the pain, dreaming the vomiting, and actually

CHAPTER SIX

5/20/93

Dear Mark!

How are things?

It's my third letter to you. I hope you have got my last letter.

I don't know what to begin with.

At first, about your trip to California. How did you spend your time? How did Bob feel after wedding? How did you relax?

And as for me I didn't waste my time too. In the 16th of April I was celebrating my birthday. So now I quite "know" and in year I shall be allowed to have strong drinks!

I was thrown down with presents, as you know I had a jubilee.

Recently my fellow friend watched TV programme on ATB, which is called "НПО ЭТО" and she saw Mark and you taking part in it. That's a pity. I didn't have an opportunity to see you again. I want to tell you (about) some words about myself.

As for my work, now I don't work & Karantse (то что я сейчас и работаю).

I returned to place where I had worked before and I don't regret!

My study at the University is going on! Oh!

Of course it is difficult. My session begins in June. It will last from 10 till 23.

Truly speaking I have a little fear! These are my latest news.

I'm eager to find out about your life.

Очень много думаю о тебе и

сгораю, что мы не можем увидеться снова.

Я скучаю!

So I finish my letter and send you photos. And I hope you will like them.

Also I send my new address:

One of several desperate letters sent by Alyona, from her miserable village, "Raduzhny" (meaning "happy"), to the Big City in Moscow, where there lived a hairy, sleazy, desperate old American named Mark.

doing it. At some point I'd pass out for what seemed like days, only to wake up twenty minutes later, run to the toilet, and vomit up a few drops of bile. Then turn over in a hurry—but there's nothing left to diarrhea, just colon pains, and a squirt or two.

Finally I passed out again, and awoke at around 1:30 in the afternoon. I felt like I'd sparred ten rounds with Tex Cobb.

Nothing but body blows. At least I was alive. After showering and shaving, I realized that I even had a little strength in me. Enough strength to meet the dancer before my train left.

She'd left me her address on a napkin. "17 Industrialnaya Ul. Dom 16. Kv. 68." I had a taxi driver take me there, to Industrial Lane. It was a lane like a zillion others in the provinces: ten or so dilapidated block-style apartment buildings painted a weak shade of blue, peeling plaster, muddy roads, a small "park" that usually meant more mud, a couple of dead trees, twisted metal, trash . . . I walked up the stairwell—their building had no elevator—and rang the doorbell. She greeted me, and introduced me to her mother, a quiet, polite woman. They had bright red oriental carpets hanging everywhere in their cramped apartment. There was an odor of cheap perfume, talcum, and some kind of buttery soup. The mother offered me tea and we spoke a little bit about music, San Francisco, journalism. Natasha took my hand and we went for a walk toward the center. She said she wanted to show me a church, her favorite church in Kirov. I bought her a canned Gin & Tonic at a kiosk, and we hopped in a trolley bus. Unfortunately, the church was closed, but she then pointed to my hotel and, as if surprised, said, "Aren't you staying there?"

"Yeah."

"Well, what should we do?" she said, disappointed but smiling.

"I don't know. Do you want to see my hotel?"

"Sure," she said.

I guess I was lucky. The dancer didn't expect much more than a sexual experience with an American.

It was interesting. She was only eighteen, but she was already a fully bloomed whore. She wanted me to hit her in the face while we fucked. I slapped her hard, and her whole body rippled. I smacked her again. I was worn out, but I wasn't going to let her get the best of me, this provincial bitch. I didn't know that they were such decadent beasts, way out here in the middle of nowhere. It says a lot about human nature. . . .

I drove her back to her house on the way to the train station. She was sad to see me go. You could see it written on her face: "Golly, when will I ever get the chance to get beaten by an American again?" I was too wiped out to feel much but vague self-pity. I'd made a pretty impressive comeback from the toilet to the bed. I promised to write her. I never did.

When we returned to Moscow, Owen wrote up a feature piece in the *Moscow Times* called "Fear and Loathing in Kirov," even quoting the same Samuel Johnson line that HST used. He portrayed my friend Andy as a loser, and him-

The White God Factor

by Mark Ames



When I was checking out of my hotel in Minsk earlier this month, one of the cleaning women approached me with an obsequious steel-toothed smile.

"You're leaving already?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm sorry to go," I answered.

"I wanted to introduce you to one of my daughters. I brought pictures... Well, the oldest one is twenty-eight. Maybe... she's too old for you? She has a young

boy. I also have an eighteen-year-old daughter. I can introduce you to either one. Which would you prefer?"

"They both sound nice."

She was persistent about pimping one of her daughters off on me. She wouldn't rest until at least one of her daughters had the honor of being sodomized by me, a red-blooded American. After all, I was a White God, and these days in Minsk, White Gods are few and far between. She showed me a pair of black and white neo-Soviet passport photos: Sveta, the 28-year-old, and Anna, the 18-year-old. H'm. This was a tough choice. Should I take door number one—fresh, nubile, easily-impressed; or door number two—divorced, with child... Damn, this was a real brain teaser...

How did I wind up with this steel helmet and sword, wading onto the shores of a wheel-less Indian settlement, way out here in Eastern Europe?

Even though Minsk is actually a clean, quiet, friendly city—a jewel by provincial Russian standards—it is almost totally devoid of foreigners. Ever since Lukashenko came to power, greedy, underqualified Western "entrepreneurs" saw their gold-plated lollipops snatched from their mouths. So they split town, realizing that their chances of participating in the economic rape of Belarus was next to nil; Lukashenko had basically cancelled "privatization" and "foreign aid," the stuff we live by.

There's a lot of good going on there that never gets reported, in part because Westerners haven't made a killing, and in part because Lukashenko doesn't use journalists well the way Chubais & Co. do. For example, did you know that Belarus posted a 2.6 percent gain in GDP last year, and a massive 11 percent gain in the first half of this year—all achieved in total defiance of World Bank and IMF advice? Of course not-reporting that kind of good news about Belarus, or the fact that Lukashenko's approval rating among the population would make any world leader drool with envy, might confuse our sense of good and bad, right and wrong. So he's a "tyrant," and Belarus is an "economic basket case." Consider this recent editorial, "Russia and Its Tyrant Neighbor," from that ultimate paper of record, the New York Times: "Belarus's economy, which looks the same as it did 10 years ago, is so feeble that it makes Russia's economy look robust." Well, there's some truth to this: ten years ago, the economies of both countries were about double the size of what they are today—meaning if Belarus's economy looks like it did ten years ago (and indeed it is getting there faster than its "booming" neighbor Russia), it is the envy of nearly all of the FSU. Belarus doesn't have wage arrears problems and miners' wives laying down on railroad tracks like Russia. In fact, Russia only paid off its arrears by

changing the terms of its gas supply agreements, squeezing Belarus for a huge sum of cash (at the advice of anti-Belarusian Western advisors).

If Lukashenko could run in a free and fair Russian election, he could possibly win—which means Chubais' friends would lose everything they've been amassing. That's why the "Russian liberals"—the English-speaking thieves—despise him. (One minor point: the opposition press IS alive in Belarus. The Minsk News, the only English-language newspaper in Belarus, is rabidly anti-Lukashenko—in comparison, the Moscow Times reads as though Chubais himself edits it. *Imya*, the popular Minsk weekly, not only savages Lukashenko with words, but always prints a brutal, hilarious exile-esque full page picture of the president in highly unflattering poses.)

Grim portrayals mean people are loathe to even visit, much less invest, in Belarus. Almost everyone here asked me, before I left for Minsk, if I wasn't worried about getting arrested. Not at all—hell, if anything, I'd happily offer my services as a kind of Goebbels to the Lukashenko regime, should they ever need a PR guy. The way I see it, thanks to Lukashenko's badboy rhetoric, the cleaning woman offered me her daughters. So he's all right by me. And this is the point I want to get across here. If a poll were held today, I would be one of the 55 percent of Belorussians who recently gave their leader a thumbs-up of approval, and not one of the nine percent of Russians who approve of Yeltsin. Why? Because frankly, I like being a White God. It feels good walking down the street and having people throw themselves at your feet. I had no fewer than three marriage proposals, including one from a "virgin." It was hilarious and gratifying and I never expect to experience that again in Europe.

Men dream of being White Gods because, more than anything, it is sexually appealing. For women, it's a bit different. Women generally aren't turned on by desperate male losers the way men get excited by desperate girls. But this doesn't mean that the White God Factor doesn't appeal to women as well—only for them, it's usually a sentimental thing. Women also like being in the position of strength—in this case, to "help the needy."

When I was in Laos, this German Greens type complained that the White God Factor was already receding. "It's not so good in Laos anymore," she said with a hint of frustration. "The people aren't as poor as they used to be. Four or five years ago it was better." She didn't even realize how evil that was—wishing that the locals were more poor, only in order to satisfy her sentimental desire to be "helpful." Whatever—the point is, it's almost ALWAYS good for us when others suffer and we don't.

So thank you Mr. Lukashenko for saying the wrong things in the wrong way to the wrong people. And a big thank you to you, *The New York Times*, for spreading cheap Cold War lies about an alleged tyrant and his allegedly basket-case nation. And oh yes, to you as well, all the aggrieved bankers, IFIs (international finance institutions) and human rights activists for helping to scare all the White People away from Belarus. All of you helped make my five days in Minsk among the most memorable of my recent life.

Alive & Yellow

by Mark Ames



There's this new Moscow City advertisement in the metro—I can't remember the words exactly, but it's from a letter Chekhov had written, in which he says that once you've grown used to Moscow, you'll never leave. I started thinking about how true that was, in a twisted sort of way. It's not a healthy, heartwarming, Sleepless in Seattle kind of love-more like an abusive relationship, the kind so emotionally damaging that it can only be cured with heavy shock treatment and Prozac.

Somehow in my mind, the Chekhov postcard got transformed into: "If you've grown used to Moscow, you're damaged forever." All of us who have begun to think that Russia makes sense, are damaged forever—and, I would argue, for the better. After all, the alternative is much worse. Only an asshole would dedicate his life to his career and ESPN—which is why America is filled with so many assholes. I could have been one of those assholes—instead, I became THIS kind of asshole. Follow me.

Exactly two weeks ago, I saw another corpse—my tenth since arriving. Even before I got a good look, I knew he'd been thrown out of a window from the seven-story Staliner building...

I stopped before the corpse to, as MT Out would say, "check it out." It wasn't as nasty as I'd expected. Except for the left tibia, which poked out of his knee like a giant pink turkey bone, he looked like he'd died with some dignity. People passed by, pakyeti in hand, casting a nonchalant glance on their way to the metro. Even the cops seemed bored, waiting for the ambulance to come. The ambulance wasn't in any hurry.

I proudly realized that my own reaction was anything but horror, and I that I'd acquired some of the Russian "ravnodushnost," or indifference.

At least, I thought so. Last Friday night, I met up with Polina, a Latvian girl whom I'd got to know a few nights before in a drunken haze at Jacko's bash. We headed out to Maks-Club, a flathead-infested disco that she described as "solidny." She paid for nearly everything, making her a winner in my eyes.

Later, we headed back to her apartment (on her coin), way out in the distant suburbs. She had a large selection of videos, and asked me which one I wanted to watch. I suggested "Anal Kanal 3," a German porn flick featuring a black man with an fourteen-inch tool. I guess this is how Germans purge themselves of Nazi war guilt—letting Helga get sodomized by all the untermenschen. What's next? Anal Kanal 4: featuring Rabbi Schlöng spraying face paint on a group of Hitlerjugen?

Just as we were crawling into bed, Polina got a phone call. It was her husband, or ex-husband... He said he'd seen us at the Maks-Club, and he wanted to meet with her and talk. Polina hung up, and told me a few interesting tidbits: such as, her husband Seryozh is a serious bandit who is on Russia's wanted list for selling illegal weapons, and that he's a major coke head. "If he gets ten grams, he just snorts it all up and goes crazy," she told me. "I'm afraid he's coked

up right now." My first thought was, gee, I'd like to get to know this guy.

Seconds later, Seryozh called again. He was raging jealous. He wanted to come over that second and see her. She told him no again, that her father was staying with her. He told her something that made her blanch, her eyes bugged out. She held her hand over the phone, and whispered, "He's right outside my window! He's calling from his mobile phone from right out the window. Stay down!"

Here's where things get ugly. She agreed to meet him out on the street, and told me to stay in bed, not to move. But I didn't listen. The minute she walked out of the door to meet him, I got up and dressed, just in case. What a horrible way to go: a victim of "domestic violence," six bullet holes in my gut. No glory in that. My pretzel corpse in a suburban Moscow podyezd...

I waited. An hour had gone by, an hour of terror and cowardice. I decided to act. I moved from the bedroom and crawled up to the window to look down onto the street. No one was there. I sat down on the couch in the TV room and went over my options. Either she took off with him, or he killed her. Either way, I figured, I was fucked. My selfish instincts, perfected over the years in California, seized control. I had three options: either stay in the apartment and wait, hoping that the steel door would protect me; sneak out, run up the stairwell, and hide; or make a sprinting "Run, niggal RUN!" break for it.

Just then, a car pulled up. It stopped below her window. I heard her voice, and that of another man. It was too late. They came up the stairs, then stopped outside the front door. I bet a bullet hurts a lot worse than they make it look in the movies. I hid in the back room, in the dark, looking out the 2nd floor balcony, wondering if I should jump. The image of the defenestration guy flashed... that snapped tibia sticking out of his knee.

She opened the door, and closed it. Then checked the bedroom. I wasn't there. She stopped. I didn't hear Seryozh's voice. Did he leave? Yes! She's alone! When she saw me in the back room, I tried to pretend as though I'd just tied up my shoe laces, that I wasn't afraid of nuthin'.

"I was about to leave," I said, taking little notice of her swollen red face. She was crying and shaking.

Then she told me what had happened. When she walked out of the door, Seryozh grabbed her by the hair, got her in a headlock, and tried dragging her into a car driven by his crony. She finally broke free and ran out onto the main street, where an unmarked militia car happened to be passing-by. They saved her, but naturally, they didn't lock Seryozh up—after all, it was just a "domestic dispute." She was disappointed by my cowardice, but hey, as the 70s California anthem goes, "You can't please everyone/ so you've got to please yourself."

When it was all over, we crawled back into bed, and, in a way I can't explain, reenacted some of the violence of the evening. It was... interesting. When I left the next morning, I saw that metro ad again, and thought, "Yep, I'm damaged for the better."

Needless to say, I'll be seeing Polina again real soon.

self as a suave, detached lady-killer. I didn't get it: there were witnesses who could testify to the contrary!

We also learned what my illness was from. One of the Americans on that doomed Kirov trip, the soccer-hairdo guy, died of meningitis. Based on the symptoms of my illness, it was thought that I may have been the carrier.

So Kirov provided me with cheap, colonialist sex, Owen with invented memories of ribaldry, and Chris, the soccer-hairdo guy, with a brutal death.

A couple of months later, Owen was hired out by *Newsweek*. Just in time to write their cover story on "Decadent Moscow."

By the late summer, I was off to Belarus, the country with the highest White God factor in all of Europe. There, all of the necessary elements converge: economic desperation, a complete dearth of Americans, and, worst (or best) of all, political oppression in the form of dictator Alexander Lukashenko. I hadn't actually experienced a White God reading like that since I was a tourist in 1991. A good salary there was \$70 a month. Clubs and restaurants were a fifth or less the price of Moscow's. My instruments were going haywire. The needles vibrated wildly in the red danger zone of White God-ness.

On my first day, I was nearly raped by a beefy Ukrainian girl who worked for the government tax inspectorate. I thought she looked sort of like Laura Dern, but when I looked closer, I realized that she was a tank. When we kissed, she rammed her tongue into my teeth so hard that she nearly loosened two of them. I feigned exhaustion and took a taxi home, but I was impressed with the level of desperation, and what that meant for my personal prospects. The next night, I got a call in my hotel room offering me a whore for \$35 an hour, or \$100 for the night. I foolishly took her for the night and drank myself silly, even though I had an interview with the finance minister the following morning.

The next day, sitting on some steps next to a freeway, a 19-year-old girl introduced herself to me. She wondered if I was Arab—Arabs were apparently hot items in Minsk until Lukashenko tossed them out. They were shocked that I was an American—wow! A real American!? No Americans come here anymore!

The girl introduced me to her younger sister, Yulia, a short little punkish type who had just turned 17. I took them for a walk. We ate a snack at McDonald's. They were clearly destitute. Poor but alive and playful. They inhaled their milkshakes and french fries, while I looked on. Then we bought some beers and walked to the Park Janki Kupali,

a pleasant, green park full of bright red flowers and healthy grass and a variety of deciduous trees. Much greener than any Moscow park. We sat on a bench and talked. Their parents had died in a car accident several years earlier. Yulia was in the car at the time, and they thought she'd died too. Now they lived with their aunt, whom they called their mother, and their cousin, who was an asshole of some kind. I got the feeling that he was raping the older one, while he abused Yulia by telling her that she was fat and ugly and she'd never find a decent man.

I took them out to a "high-class" Uzbeki restaurant for dinner—at ten bucks a head, they were in shock. We drank a few bottles of wine and chowed down some *plov*. That was when I found out that Yulia was a virgin. At that point, her sister ceased to exist in my eyes. Vanished, just like that. Yulia understood, and so did her sister, who quietly accepted it. Yulia and I walked her older sister back home, then I took Yulia back to the Minsk Hotel, where a six-dollar bribe got us past security. Yulia lost her playful edge. She quietly took off her clothes and lay on her back, legs slightly apart. She was my first virgin ever, and it wasn't an easy job. She insisted that I not wear a condom. We spent the next couple of days hanging out and trying mostly in vain to consummate. When she saw me off at the train station, she said to me, "Can you promise me one thing? Please don't forget me, if only for a few days more." I still call Yulia periodically—I'd like her to come out and stay with me, but for some reason she won't. I may have transmitted something from the whore to her.

When I left the hotel, one of the steel-toothed maids from my floor told me that she had wanted to introduce me to her daughters, but then . . . well, she'd seen me with so many women.

I was embarrassed, expecting to get into trouble. I apologized, and told her that I regretted not meeting her daughters.

"Well, you still can!" she beamed. "One is a little older, twenty-eight, with a child. My youngest is eighteen. Are you interested? I could show you their pictures first."

"I'll come back," I promised. "I'll meet you then."

She wrote out her phone number and begged me to call when I returned.

The last provincial run of 1997 that Andy and I took was to Yaroslavl, one of the oldest cities in Russia, part of the famed Golden Ring. We figured that basically, any place outside of Moscow would offer up a high White God factor, and since Yaroslavl's population was 600,000, there had to be at least one equivalent disco-range to Kirov's *Zapretnaya Zona*. On our first night out Andy I and decided to take a walk. A

CHAPTER SIX

few steps outside of our hotel room, we ran into two teenage girls who were being heavily harassed by rapist-packed cars, horns a-honkin'. The girls were strolling, not innocently, scouting for the best deal when we arrived. When the girls saw us, they ran up and asked us to save them. Andy and I turned to each other and burst out laughing: we knew exactly what this meant. It was already in the bag. We took them out to the "coolest" club in Yaroslavl, some sad little bar with cheesy Formica and a small disco area. We fed them shrimp and cocktails, then took them back to our hotel.

Andy's girl was 17, and mine had just turned 18 that night. Andy's was far more attractive, I thought. There was something about her I really liked. He didn't appreciate her, because Andy has a penchant for Playboy-type women. Personally, I don't like them too magazine-pretty.

Mine, Alla, was a chunky redhead, but that was fine with me. Up to 18, their bodies are as taut as volleyballs, from head to foot. None of the stitching has loosened or unraveled. It's not fair that such flesh is wasted on drunken, ungrateful dirtheads. Only a man over 30 can truly appreciate the value of an 18- or a 17- or a 15-year-old's body. As it turned out, Alla was also a virgin. Her hymen must have had thorns on the inside: she screamed bloody murder at any thrust. My hotel room was right next to the floor watch, who must have heard everything.

Alla wasn't yelling sexlike yells—these were bloodcurdling screams that would have brought in a SWAT team back home. Right after I came, she rolled on her back, let out two small burps, then got up and ran to the bathroom and spent the rest of the night puking, while I slept. . . . It's kind of a strange feeling, when a girl starts puking the minute you come inside of her. Puking all night long. For some reason, she drew water in the bathtub and did most of her puking in there. But forgot to drain it. When I pissed the following morning, I noticed the tub all brown, little undigested shrimps floating near the top.

Andy and I met in L'vov, in western Ukraine, the following spring. The woman at the front desk asked us, after we checked in, if we were interested in "brides." She smiled knowingly. A crusty Soviet man in a suit straddled up to our side, squinting intently.

"Of course, we plan on meeting some beautiful brides here," we joked.

"But why go out, when you can have them brought here," the woman said knowingly.

"So you have some brides for us?" we asked.

"Only the best," she said.

"But what if we want to meet some nice girls at a disco or on the street," we suggested. "Can we bring them back?"

"But why do that?" the woman protested. "We'll bring you *our* girls. It's *safer*, they won't steal from you or poison your drink."

"No, but we want to meet regular girls, in a disco."

The old Soviet man shook his head, confused, while the woman smiled condescendingly. Her expression said, "There are no 'normal' girls in this part of the world. They're all whores."

I'm writing this chapter a month after Lena left me. A different Lena—Lena number nine. Russian creativity wilts when it comes to the difficult task of naming their children. Lena was my closest Russian girlfriend. We didn't make it very far: three hell-bent weeks of body fluids, hard drugs, and venereal disease. All that's left is a cheap black duffel bag, the kind shuttle-traders and third-world types use, and a few scars on my dick. Our last sexual blowout left my prick looking like it got destroyed in a fifty-car pileup. She'd fucked probably ten or twenty other men during the three weeks we lived together. That's a thought that's jolted me upright in bed more than a few times. Best to hire the censors to edit that memory.

I met her the night of the *eXile*'s first anniversary party. We held it at an underground squat club called Titan. A ripped-out basement underneath a Stalin-era residential building in downtown Moscow, just off Tverskaya Street. Titan is just about the only club in Moscow that isn't packed with gauche overstock Italian-style furniture in a sad attempt to appear respectable and modern. In fact, there's no furniture whatever. Not even a floor. Some throwaway grammar school desks, a few bent chairs, some tables. . . . Only the small dance hall has a floor as such: a stretch of cement. The walls of the club are covered in Day-Glo orange and green spray paint and graffiti.

Most of the patrons at Titan are orphans, street punks, skin-heads, white power bikers who couldn't afford a Big Wheel. The night of our *eXile* first-year anniversary bash, the bikers and skins lifted purses, cameras, anything they could get their hands on. One after another, some middle-class *eXile* invitee would come running up to me or Taibbi with tears in his eyes, wondering what happened to his watch, her bracelet.

Lena had just been released from a prison near Berlin, and deported for good from Germany. She'd spent three and a half years in jail there for drug trafficking. It wasn't the first jail she'd lived in: she'd briefly spent time in jails in Belgium and Poland, too.

She arrived with police escort in Moscow on the evening of our anniversary party, February 6, 1998. She got a ride from the airport to downtown Moscow by sucking off one of the taxi drivers and his dispatcher at the airport. They convinced her to leave her bags with them, probably hoping to coax her into another barter deal later on. She had two bags at the time—all of her belongings were stuffed into them.

Somehow she wound up at the Karusel Club, on Tverskaya Street. The Karusel is a swank flathead nightclub/casino that boasted \$75 cocktails and a \$200 cover charge. She was tanked by the time she arrived. After getting it on with one or two of the security staff, they led her around the corner, to the basement club Titan, and dumped her there.

At the club, she met a friend of mine, who introduced me to her. She had thick, curly, long golden braids, and sly, Asiatic eyes, chestnut-colored. Her puggish nose and oval face were decidedly Slavic, but her bronze complexion was Caucasian.

After she sucked off one of my friends right in the center of the club, I wound up with her at closing time. I was tanked on cheap vodka and riding the first phenamine waves. Lena attacked me. She hugged and kissed me, and asked me if she could stay at my place for the night. I let her stay with me; I was suckered.

The following evening, when we met up with my friend Andy, she tried to climb a rung up the ladder. Andy had wheels: a Mercedes-Benz . . . she did everything to seduce him, and when he didn't respond, she flat-out told him that she was ready to dump me and move in with him. Andy split, leaving us at a club, and I threw her out of the house. That's when she pulled one of her many film noir femme fatale moves on me.

As she grabbed her bag and purse to leave for good, she whispered, "Can't we just fuck one more time before I go? I promise I'll leave after that."

I was a sucker. I always am.

The next day, she disappeared. I didn't hear from her, and wondered if she had gone forever. Then at around ten at night, someone rang my doorbell. Usually that terrifies me: it's got to be someone I don't want to see. An angry neighbor or reader, or an ex-girlfriend holding our baby. So I didn't answer. A neighbor, the half-French guy who lives across the hall, banged on my door.

"She's ringing my doorbell, Mark," he said, pointing down the hallway. "You answer it."

There, I saw Lena slumped against the entranceway wall, held up by a well-dressed young Russian man. Another woman was with them: they apologized to me, and handed Lena over to me. They were old friends of Lena's, from childhood, before she moved from Moscow to Germany. They'd

just seen one another that day for the first time in years. It was the last time they ever wanted to see her.

Lena stumbled into my apartment, then slumped against the wall and fell to the floor.

"You're on heroin?" I asked her.

She nodded yes. It was the best heroin she'd ever had. And she'd saved me a little. Ah, the savage little princess! She wasn't so bad after all! I snorted up the line, and we spent the entire evening drooling, floating, and fucking. It was one of the most wonderful nights of my life.

After that, Lena and I had a certain connection, something beyond the pale of love. Uncut. No impurities. The next day, I woke up late in the afternoon, tossed Lena out, and stumbled to work. We were supposed to meet at my house at midnight, but I was late. She decided that I'd stood her up. And went drinking in Gorky Park with a pair of guys. She fucked one of them, and was almost raped by the other. Maybe she was just out earning money as a hooker. I still don't know.

After that, she stood out in front of my apartment, trying to flag a car down. I saw her there when I returned home at around 2 A.M. She looked like a common whore, the way she held her hand out on the street, shifting from one foot to the other the way other street whores do. I wasn't sure it was Lena—she wasn't wearing the same jacket I saw her in earlier in the day, so I figured it must be someone else. I walked right past her. We looked each other in the face. But the combination of my bad vision and the heroin still affecting me . . . I didn't believe it could be her, so I walked past, and home. She told me she thought that I'd simply decided to ignore her. So she went home with another guy that night, fucked him, and smashed a vodka bottle into the head of yet another man who tried raping her. The next afternoon, she slept with the man's wife as well, before reaching me. I was out of my mind by that time.

Lena was unlike any woman I'd ever known. So many times, I've been told by women here, "Russian girls do what they want. We aren't like Westerners in that way. When we want something, we do it, and worry about the consequences later."

In that sense, Lena was a grotesque of a Russian woman's soul. If she wanted to fuck, she fucked everyone and everything in sight. If she wanted to get high, she'd go to the point of OD-ing. In Germany, she had been interred in a psychiatric hospital for borderline-insanity because it was determined that she had no inhibitions.

Her mother died of cancer while she was in jail. Her brother died in her arms of a heroin overdose, while she was on furlough, shortly after their mother died. And her Azerbaijani

A Nihil Strain of Nationalism

by Mark Ames



"You Americans are stupid. I hate you and your country."

I heard it but didn't pay attention: my head was pounding, and I'd barely slept.

"You dirty Americans," he continued. "I hate you. You have no culture and no history."

If he's talking to me, he's got a point. I smelled like shit after a night of downing gin and tonics, chasing a pair of giraffes around a Kursk disco, then passing out in my clothes. I hadn't showered, and worst of all, I'd been stuck on the overnight train with the most noisome collection of black earth peasants the world has ever known. The pungent odor of cheesy feet and cheap tobacco billowed out of every compartment, sticking to my clothes.

"You are a stupid country, America is." This hangover apparition sounded realer and realer—and it spoke good English too.

I was walking on the platform at Kursky Vokzal, heading back home with my mentor, Dr. John Dolan, while this voice hassled me.

"What's going on?" I mumbled.

The professor nervously laughed. "Uh, I think this guy's a nationalist nut. Let's hurry."

"No! I am no nationalist nut!" the nut screeched.

I turned to get a good look. He was dressed like a Swede in his green and brown patterned sweater, wire-rimmed glasses and fresh haircut, wife-in-arm. Hardly your typical, pasty nationalist nut.

"Russia is a great country," he said, fighting to control his anger.

"I agree," I honestly replied.

"I hope we throw all you dirty Yankees out of Russia."

"What a great idea," I said. "Throw everyone out. Then Russia will be an economic powerhouse." I understood that I might get into a fistfight. It would be ugly: rolling on the slushy platform, slugging it out with some middle-aged Russian couple... boating the husband and wife into human kasha... it might not be very honorable, but it's better than getting purse-whipped to death.

"No, just throw dirty Americans out. Not Europeans. Only Americans. I hate you all."

Now it was getting downright embarrassing. Dr. Dolan fled the scene, leaving me alone. People were staring, including the militia.

"America is the stupidest country on earth."

"Yeah, I guess that's why we won the cold war," I said. "If we were a little smarter, we might have wound up like you."

His wife cringed and grabbed his arm.

"I hope we throw you dirty Yankees out!" he screeched.

"So do I!" I said.

The nationalist turned back to me with a look of puzzled horror, but his wife pulled him away, melting into the crowd.

"What was wrong with that asshole?" I asked.

"Uh, Mark, don't you remember..."

Dr. Dolan slapped his head and squinted nervously.

"Remember what?"

"Like, uh, all those things you were saying on the train? I think we should get out of here quick before they arrest us." He wasn't joking. He picked up his pace, powerwalking towards the metro. Then he snapped: "That guy understood what you were saying. Everything!"

"Oh. Oops."

Now that I think about it, yeah, I was pretty bad on the train. Like when the sort-of-youngish conductor woman walked by, and I'd say straight to her face, "I bet you've fucked so many passengers in your day that you lost count fifteen years ago." She didn't understand me—she smiled dumbly, two front teeth missing. "It's true, isn't it? You can't even remember the last guy you boned," Dr. Dolan yelled nervously, which only egged me on. "You know the Georgian joke about why Russians have patronymics—so the mothers can remember who the father of their child is. This conductor here has probably squatted out a few rats whose patronymics are 'ya-ne-znayu-vich' or 'ya-ne-vspomnyu-vich.' Think about it. All a guy has to do is barge into her compartment with a bottle of vodka, and within seconds her panties are hanging from the curtain rod."

Eesh. I guess the middle-aged nationalist heard every word. He was probably a decent, polite man with kind feelings towards Americans before I arrived. It would be hard to explain that it was all affectionate humor on my

part. It would be harder to explain the long episode with the three-year-old girl. She came out to play with us in the corridor, sitting on my lap. I held her on my knee and said, in English, "Ah, let me guess what you're going to be when you grow up... h'm... a slut? A prostitute? An amoral money-grubber? Can you say 'slut'?" Little Katya smiled and giggled, and I giggled back.

Dr. Dolan backed away at the time, panting nervously. "Uh, I don't know, Mark. This is where my nihilism ends."

"Come on, she doesn't understand yet, do you?" I bounced the little peasant girl on my knee while her grandmother—who stank like a slaughterhouse—smiled at me. "Let me guess, Katya. You lost your virginity in the maternity ward, didn't you? Dragged one of the orderlies into your crib. Couldn't hold out a few years for a horny old foreigner like myself, huh?"

It's true, I was a real bastard. Four straight hours of this, laughing at my own jokes. What a card! A quipomatic! And that old nut probably sat in his compartment, hearing every word, wringing his hands, plotting his revenge, too cowardly to break a bottle over my head. Instead, he cringed, complaining bitterly to his wife, plotting and plotting... he practiced those pathetic nationalist lines in English, for hours, to impress upon me how intelligent he, a Russian, was in comparison to me, the vulgar American imperialist... and the worst part was, I agreed with most of what he had to say. His poor wife...

He'd have never understood if I told him that it was all done out of love. That my sick jokes proved more than sentimental words my affection for Russia. "Kill Your Idols"—that was Sonic Youth's motto. A good motto. But I could never explain it. So I've tried making up for it. I tried being a good nationalist. I went to the Gamaun demonstration that was supposed to take place at the Chisty Prudy metro station last Tuesday at 4:00. I was the only sucker who showed. Then I published a piece in Limonka. Let's see, what else? Well, here, this column is sort of my confession to the Truth Commission. I know, I'm leaving a lot out. Even I can't print most of the things I said on that train ride. Take it from me, it was bad. That poor old bastard had every right to attack me. I should be more careful.

father had been poisoned by her jealous stepmother. Her only surviving relative was a grandmother in Astrakhan, on the Caspian Sea. You can't blame her for taking life a day at a time after all that.

I finally booted Lena out of my house. All those drugs, all that fucking, it was one big distraction. I started noticing flaws, too. A little mustache that I'd never seen. And her hands: coarse, rough fingers, like a man's. Then it started hurting when I pissed. I went in for tests, and although they came up negative, I was sure there was some kind of monster setting up an amusement park in my urethra. Finally, one of the doctors prescribed Azitromitsin, an all-purpose super-antibiotic. Within a month, I was healed. The sores took a bit longer. I thought those might have been syphilis or herpes sores, but they turned out to be abrasions from too much roughhousing. The prick is a sensitive organ, all capillaries, veins, and skin as thin and delicate as butterfly wings. I had her treat it like ground meat, and the results were something like Stalingrad.

Lena finally ditched me, taking one of the two black duffel bags with her, and leaving the other one behind, nearly empty. She left a few pair of underwear, some socks, a T-shirt, a cheap tracksuit, and some documents in German, her deportation papers, I suppose. I haven't heard from her ever since I threw her out for good. Having a disease-ridden whore lying in bed next to me could only lead to worse and worse things. One of her lovers was an officer of some kind in the OMON paramilitary troops. She'd call his pager under the pseudonym "Sergei," so that his jealous wife wouldn't find out; then he'd call back to my apartment asking for Lena. God knows why she sucked his dick: probably she needed a Moscow registration stamp.

I miss her sometimes. I guess that's why I haven't thrown that ridiculous Blue Ocean duffel bag of hers away. I still think there's a chance she'll call me to claim it.

When Lena moved into my apartment, I was seeing about six other girls. Lena always answered my phone. If a woman called, she'd chew her out and threaten her life if the girl ever called again.

"It'll be cunts for you," she'd growl. Lena meant it too. All those years in prison made her pretty damn tough. She'd tell me bedtime stories of the women she'd raped. There was a thin 19-year-old Bulgarian girl who became her bitch. The story of how Lena cornered her in the shower, beat and kicked her for ten minutes, then made her lick her under threat of pain, was my favorite.

Around that time, I had an article published in the techno-

hip magazine *Ptyutch* about an Ugly American running around Moscow like a baseball-capped Hun. It led to an embarrassing television appearance on the show *Pro Eto*, a cheesy, sex-obsessed, *Oprah*-esque talk show. The young, attractive mulatto emcee clearly had it in for Taibbi and me. She led us with questions making us out to be vulgar foreigners taking advantage of Russians. She brought an obese, spinster feminist, Jean MacKenzie, on to the show to counter our arguments. The whole thing was embarrassing—Jean is so frighteningly fat, and the makeup people turned her into a kind of grotesque Cesar Romero—that we pulled our punches.

We didn't come off looking too good. I never saw the actual show, but it's what I've heard. Nevertheless, it did pump up the fame bubble. I've signed several autographs since.

Just the other night, I was on the Old Arbat with Owen, when a sudden downpour forced us to take refuge under a colonnaded roof in front of a theater. Sitting on the cement steps were two punk girls, one with a baseball cap that said "Skinhead," the other with a nose ring.

Owen and I moved close to the girls to get a better look. They were cute, my type. Orphans? Runaways?

Out of nowhere, some egg-shaped beast with a cavewoman's face, dressed in a motorcycle jacket and black jeans, approached me and said, in good English, "I saw you on television."

I hesitated, and mistakenly acknowledged that yes, it was me she saw.

"Get away from these girls," she said indignantly. "You are here to get free Russian girls, aren't you? Well, get away from these ones. I know what you want."

"I came here to get out of the rain," I said, laughing.

"No you didn't. You came here for free Russian girls. I saw you on television. Go away."

I made some lame attempt at confronting her. But, in fact, I was unnerved. The week before, I'd received a pretty valid-looking death-threat fax from somebody calling himself "H8 RED." He wrote, in his two-page rant, "One of us has to leave, Marky, and it's not gonna be me. Remember your article about 'Dying Here'? That's gonna be you if you don't get the fuck out now."

People were getting to know me. And they were on to me. If Russia was going pitchfork, that could mean bad news for me. When people go pitchfork, guys like me—who have been running around their country, whoopin' it up and raping their womenfolk—wind up skewered and posted on the city gates, stake through the ass, out the mouth, organs dripping like jelly onto the blood-caked earth.

Amen.

