

Stupid Frigging Fool

By Roy Den Hollander

Part 1

Dream Lover

On a warm July night in Moscow 1999, I was rushing back to my apartment on Kutuzovsky Prospect, slightly drunk, and hoping that the party I had walked by earlier in the evening was still going. I couldn't get out of mind the two tall, beautiful Russian girls I had spotted. They were wearing full-length black gowns, standing and talking outside the party that had overflowed from the basement office of the building. Russian babes are real women—not like the man-haters in America who try to act like men, or at least how they perceive men to act. No, young Russian women—I should say “girls” because to them the term “women” is an insult that means “old ladies”—are pure femininity—dazzling, sweet smelling lures waiting to give delights, understanding and loyalty.

It was just before midnight as I walked around the corner into the driveway to my front door. I smiled on seeing a handful of people still partying outside. I began to reconnoiter for an opportunity, but stopped when I heard a couple of guys speaking English—two middle-aged American men wrapped in a haze of desire were flirting with two teenage Russian girls. Being middle-age myself, this looked like the place for me. I started talking with the two guys. One of the Americans was a dentist and the other ran a restaurant-disco-casino called Fellini's in Moscow. Both were obvious low-life amateurs when it came to girls, with one trying to give fashion tips to the seventeen year old by playing with her hair and repeatedly tying and untying her open blouse underneath of which she wore nothing. I guess the summer nights get very warm in Moscow for girls. My aging eyes strained to see through the darkness, only partially lit

by the corner street lamp and the neon light over the basement office door. After my eyes soaked in as much as they could of the seventeen year old, I turned my attention to the sixteen year old, who had the type of face I liked but could only speak Russian, while I couldn't say anything in Russian beyond the level of a three year old. So, I headed toward the heart of the party to find my own piece of heaven on earth. But, before reaching the basement door, a Russian man speaking good English said in an authoritative tone, "This party is for members only."

Being a slightly obnoxious American lawyer, I responded, "So what do I have to do to become a member?"

"Are you an American?" he asked.

"Of course I am," I replied, a little full of myself.

His demeanor instantly changed to friendliness, the type only a fool would trust. He introduced himself as Leo, and motioned me to go inside. I descended half a dozen stairs on the outside of the building, ducked my head to avoid hitting the top of the doorframe and walked into the party. I saw ten or more Russian girls—all in their late teens or early twenties. Even better, there were hardly any guys, and those guys were all Russians. I had stumbled into a gold mine of females. Although I was twenty years or more older than these babes, I was an American, and that made me prime meat in the eyes of virtually all Russian girls, especially when compared to Russian men. Russian guys generally dress better and show better manners towards girls, such as, opening doors for them, putting on their coats and the like. But Russian girls consider them weak, physically dirty, prone to alcoholism, undependable and notoriously unfaithful.

At the bar, which looked like the type a working class family in Queens would have in its basement, I saw a cute girl of around twenty. My opening line in English prompted her to get up and walk away. “Oh well, I guess I’ll have a drink instead,” I said to the empty bar stool and turned to order a drink.

The bartender spoke some English and we struggled through a rudimentary conversation. He told me the basement was the office of a modeling firm run by Leo, and that there were models’ parties every Friday night. I had hit pay dirt.

I heard someone behind me say my name, turned and there she stood—blond, a few inches taller than me, blue-gray eyes—stunningly beautiful and with an innocent, fresh smile beaming from her face that told me I was the one and only. A glow seemed to surround her, and I fell like a sack of bricks. I knew I could not let her get away, as she was “the one.”

“Hi I’m Angelina.”

“I’m Roy,” I gushed in anticipation. “Do you want a drink?”

“No, but you like to go outside?”

“Sure,” I said, thinking *I will go with you anywhere.*

Outside, I suggested we sit down on an outcrop of the building. She was concerned that the paint was wet. I tested it and said, “Seems to be dry.” We sat and talked. Angelina spoke fair enough English so we could communicate. During our conversation, a bizarre notion struck me that this girl would be a worthy opponent, but I pushed it out of my mind. She worked as a model and dancer, lived in Krasnodar near the Black Sea, was twenty-three and didn’t have a boyfriend at the moment. As a teenager she won the long jump championship of Russia three years in a row but then injured her foot, which sunk her athletic career. She earned an undergraduate degree in Physical Education and started graduate school, but the lack of money

caused her to pursue dancing and modeling. One of her modeling pictures hung in an exclusive clothing store just a few blocks down Kutuzovsky.

Unlike America, Russia offers few occupations in which people can make a decent living. Once I helped a friend deliver food to a couple in Moscow, both of whom had doctorate degrees and taught at a prestigious university but were starving because all their income went to feed their child. The lady who cleaned my Moscow apartment held a PhD in public health. Jobs with the government paid so little that she and other health workers ignored their official duties in order to earn money by providing menial services to foreigners and Russian gangsters. Outside of Moscow, there are even fewer opportunities to find jobs that pay well enough to afford decent shelter and prevent hunger.

Angelina said Leo invited her to Moscow for a week to do some modeling. She stayed in an apartment Leo kept for his out of town models on the other side of the courtyard that separated the buildings in the apartment complex. The two teenage girls were also staying in the same apartment. It was late, and Angelina needed to work the next day. She asked me to walk her to the apartment, since the courtyard had no lights and was a darken tangle of shrubbery and trees the size of a city block. The Soviets tended to build everything on a gargantuan scale, probably to over come a justified feeling of inferiority. Moscow's main city streets are six and eight lanes wide.

On our way, I naturally asked her out for the next day, Saturday.

She said, "I must make modeling tomorrow afternoon but after I have time. Call Leo to see if it okay with him."

Surprised, I asked, "What does Leo have to do with it?"

“I need his permission.” I thought that strange. Why should a modeling agent have to give his permission for one of his girls to go on a date?

“Okay, I’ll call him,” and she gave me his telephone number and the one for the apartment she stayed in.

At her door I hugged her and tried a kiss on the lips but no go. She was taller than me, and all she had to do to put her lips out of reach was to look upward. Even on tiptoes, I couldn’t get near those luscious red promises on this girl of at least six feet three inches in her shoes. All right, I could wait and said good night. I walked back through the darkness under the trees wondering why Leo needed to okay my dating one of his models. Probably Angelina wanted to make sure Leo didn’t have another modeling shoot scheduled for tomorrow evening or for the day after, but she could ask Leo that herself. Or perhaps Leo required prior approval for his models to go on a date to make sure they didn’t show up the day after with bags under their eyes—understandable. Back at the party, I asked the two Americans I had met earlier about this Friday night event I stumbled into worked. They were distinctly unenlightening. When I mentioned that I would be going out with Angelina the next night, the Fellini casino manager snapped, “No, she’s not going out with you. Angelina and the two teenage girls are going to a party at my casino.” I held my tongue and my martial arts training as the anger flashed into my brain. Who was this low life telling me whom I could date? But he quickly added in a reconciliatory fashion that I should also come to the party. Keeping my options open, I agreed, thinking maybe I will work something out where Angelina and I are alone.

I went home, but sensing something was wrong. I thought about forgetting Angelina but then reasoned: let’s see what happens. After all, I might enjoy a little Russian adventure.

Manhunt

The next afternoon, Angelina called to ask whether I had talked to Leo about going out with her that night. I said, “No, I thought you had to go to the party at the Fellini Casino.” She laughed.

“Don’t worry about it,” she said. “Call Leo now; he in his office.”

“Okay,” and why not I thought.

I felt elated that this beautiful, young, Russian girl wanted to go out with me instead of going to a casino party, which is considered the height of the social circuit in Russia. Then again, Russians also considered McDonalds as the *chic* place to dine.

On the telephone, Leo invited my downstairs to his office. My third floor apartment overlooked the basement entrance to his modeling agency. Many successful Russian businesses operate out of the basements of residential buildings, especially in prestigious neighborhoods such as Kutuzovsky Prospect. Zoning regulations, as with other laws in Russia, are basically meaningless unless a government official wants a bribe to keep an un-enforced law un-enforced.

Once again, I descended the steps to the office entrance now blocked by a steel door with a peephole—rang the bell, waited while some one inside scrutinized me and listened to a number of locks unlocking and the sliding of a heavy metal bar. The door opened to show a smiling, pretty, young girl. She didn’t say a word, just walked me down the hall toward Leo’s office. The hallway sported artsy photographs of scantily clad young ladies—typical for a model agency. In his office, however, were a couple of not so artsy framed Penthouse covers.

Leo greeted me with a firm handshake and a friendly hello, introducing himself as Leonid Perlin. His greased back, black hair and overly dark clothes did little to alleviate the sense of sleaze that pervaded his office. He motioned me to a black leather chair in which I sunk well

below the level of the desk at which Leo took a seat. A not so subtle way of trying to make visitors feel weak unless they had more power than Leo. At the time I did, so the difference in height didn't matter.

“What brings you to Moscow?” he asked. His English was better than Angelina's.

“I'm a lawyer and business consultant from New York City who was hired by an American firm to manage and improve their Russian operations.” Actually, my employer originally hired me to assist the firm's manager, Joe, by marketing its services to Western companies in Russia. But when I arrived in Moscow, Joe had decided to leave and the manager's job fell to me.

“What firm?”

“Kroll Associates,” I told him despite Joe's warning to keep a low profile because the firm did investigations and security work. Joe tended to over dramatize the job, imaging himself a secret agent behind enemy lines.

Leo never heard of the company. “What's its business?” he asked.

“It's essentially a modern day private detective firm. Western companies that want to do business with Russians, or even Russian companies operating in their own country, hire us to investigate their potential partners, suppliers and buyers. Sometimes we also track down funds that disappeared from a joint venture or business transaction. We even provide physical protection for businessmen in Russia.”

“Is it dangerous?”

“Not for an American,” I responded. “But the Russians who assist us could have problems.”

“Are you here permanently?”

“No, my consultancy contract is for six months, then back to America unless it’s extended.”

Now it was my turn to ask questions—still feeling in the back of my mind something odd about this place. “And what about you? What do you run here?”

“A modeling agency and introduction business.”

“What’s an introduction agency?” I honestly asked.

“We bring together foreign men and Russian girls. If an American man wants a pretty, young wife, we can introduce him to as many girls as he wants over a period of a week. If the girl he chooses is interested in him, then she can visit him in America so that they can get to know each other better.”

“Do many of the introductions end in marriage?”

“I won’t take on men clients over forty. The difference in age is too great between a twenty-year-old girl and a man over forty.” Leo didn’t answer my question, but that’s a common tactic among Russians who want to avoid the truth, which means most Russians. I let it go, not really caring about his dating business’ success.

He pushed some papers about his introduction services and fee schedule across his desk. The English version was awkwardly written, and I assumed this guy probably didn’t find much business for his introduction services by using such an advertising brochure. For a fee of about \$5,000, Leo will meet the American client at the airport, set him up in an apartment for a week, arrange for meals and interpreters and show him pictures of lots of girls from which the client chooses the ones he wants to meet. Leo kept using the word “client,” which struck me as strange in describing men who buy a bride. But what did I know, never having used an introduction agency myself.

“Very interesting,” I insincerely said. “If I come across any American guys looking for a Russian wife I’ll send them to you.”

“Please do. I am always ready to help out an American,” he replied.

I changed the topic to my reason for being there. “What about last night’s party? Angelina said I needed to ask you about taking her out tonight. Is that right?”

“Alina is a very beautiful and independent girl. She does some work for me.”

“Who’s Alina?” I asked.

“That’s what we call her around here, but she uses the name Angelina.”

I immediately assumed the two names were Russian derivations of each other. A Russian name can take on many different forms depending on the relationship between the person and the one using the name. Some forms are considered formal, some friendly and others endearing.

One name can have three or more different forms.

“What kind of work does she do?” I asked, looking for consistency.

“Modeling and dancing,” he responded.

“So what about this Friday night party of yours? How does it work?” I asked matter-of-factly. I didn’t want to press too hard because once a Russian thinks someone is digging into his affairs—the iron curtain falls. But I wanted information to put to rest my instinct’s subtle sense of suspicion about Leo’s business while at the same time giving the girl I had fallen head-over-heels for a fair chance. After all, my suspicions might simply result from my ignorance of an alien culture. Similar behaviors in dissimilar societies often have different meanings.

Leo said, “Every Friday night I have a party where I bring together some girls and men. The men pay fifty dollars to get in and they meet the girls.”

“Where do you get the girls?” I asked as though searching for the source of the Nile.

“I have books of very pretty girls, mostly from Moscow but also other Russian cities. They send me their pictures hoping to become models. I invite them to my studio where I take a few photos. Unfortunately, most of the girls cannot afford a professional portfolio, but I do what I can with snap shots. We could make big business with an investment that allowed me to shoot professional portfolios.”

I knew Leo was referring to me when he said, “We.” My eight years of traveling to the remnants of the “Evil Empire” made me wary of investing money with Russians. They have a proclivity of using investments for personal needs or sending them to their overseas bank accounts. Then they concoct some lame story about how the money disappeared. Many Russians in their blind arrogance actually believe Americans should feel honored to be cheated by them. Leo’s books, however, did contain pictures of some real beauties, so I filed away his business proposal in my memory on the chance that some western modeling agency might want to exploit this Russian gold mine of feminine girls.

“So what happens at your Friday night parties?” I continued, still not sure what went on.

“When a man sees a girl he likes, I introduce the two of them. If she likes him, then they decide what to do.”

“What do you mean, they decide what to do?”

I expected a knowing smile, but none came. “They make their own arrangement. Maybe the man will take her to a club, begin dating her, even possibly marrying her or something else.” That “or something else” exhibited the Russian knack for euphemisms, and my heart started sinking.

“So they decide on a price for going to the ballet or opera or some place else and begin a romance.”

“Right,” he said. “It’s the same as an Internet dating service. The man pays so much to meet some girls. They talk and decide which way the relationship will go, if any.” Stated that way, it all made sense and began alleviating my nebulous suspicion about Angelina.

“So what’s the going rate?” I asked.

“A hundred dollars or more. It all depends on the couple.”

I could afford that, I mused.

Leo continued that his modeling business wasn’t doing too well because he didn’t have the capital to compete with “Red Star,” Russia’s top modeling firm. According to him, Red Star made lots of money because it hired out many of its models as prostitutes, which Leo refused to do. Red Star, he said, could also squash any serious competition because it belonged to a powerful organized crime group or Krisha as the Russians call them. A more descriptive American term is Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organization or RICO, which is a group of people or businesses whose moneymaking involves one illegal activity or another. In Russia, most businesses, including foreign companies, cannot survive without engaging in some illegal activities, and virtually every successful Russian business—whether legitimate, criminal or a mixture of both—is part of a Krisha or RICO. The mixture of criminal and legal activities is actually the preferable way of doing business throughout all levels of the Russian economy, especially for large conglomerates. Not only businessmen commit crimes and belong to or rely on Krishas, so do universities, many media outfits and trade unions. It’s a way of life created out of centuries of corruption that has turned Russia into a land of RICOs.

Krishas are not just a group of former KGB and military thugs meeting at “social clubs” the way the American mob does, but include government officials reaching as high as the President and his inner circle. Krishas cut deals, merge and war with each other. Taken together

they comprise the Russian mafia and, some say, the Russian State. Krishas may extort money from foreign companies in the form of “charitable contributions.” These help avoid certain “acts of the gods” that could destroy a company’s assets, disappear an executive or cause over zealous scrutiny by a government agency. The big money for Krishas, however, comes from sweetheart deals with the government and Presidential decrees that favor a Krisha’s legitimate business activities. The government—national, regional, and local—still runs the show in Russia, and the real boss of a Krisha is usually a big shot in one of the levels of government with the boss of bosses for Russia being its President. Federal Security Service or F.S.B. agents, who are in the agency’s reserves, still keep an eye on major corporations and banks by working in them. Any enterprise or individual who wants to make money needs government backing and approval.

The former Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, and his Krisha controlled all major real estate developments in the city because the city still owned all the land. His group also ran the counterfeiting of western goods in Moscow. Many officials from the police to Luzhkov’s inner circle received a cut. President Yeltsin’s inner circle, which masterminded the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000, consisted of various Krishas cooperating in a loose form of a confederacy. The Krishas amassed huge empires of oil, natural gas, media, automobile production and aluminum manufacturing and were publicly headed by the so-called oligarchs. But even the oligarchs were merely front men for powerful officials, and the fortunes of their empires rose and fell depending on the governmental clout of their political godfathers. Over a handful of years, one Krisha allied with Yeltsin gained control of the aluminum industry through the assassination of dozens of executives and government officials. Everyone knew the Chernoy brothers were behind the slaughter, but no prosecutions ever resulted. The Chernoy

subsequently became clients of Kroll Associates and Putin carried on in the Yeltsin tradition—only the names of the criminals changed.

Leo complained he couldn't compete too vigorously with "Red Star" because of its Krishna, so he expanded his business into "exotic" films. Not what I wanted to hear. He added, perhaps reading my face, "No sex, just scantily clad girls and guys—a coed Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue in moving pictures. Actually, I'm waiting for three girls right now to show up to go shoot a film."

After some more discussion, the three girls for the exotic video showed up. Naturally, Angelina was one of them. I guess I suspected it all along but still couldn't imagine that the girl I was crazy about wore next to no clothes in moving pictures. She was surprised to see me, as if I had just learned something about her she did not want me to know. I promised Leo I would keep in touch; we exchanged business cards. I told Angelina I would call her after the shoot, kissed her on the cheek and left.

Now I hoped that kiss on the cheek would tell her that I was sincerely interested in her as a person, which for me made no sense. If I were ten years younger, I would have run the other way as fast as I could. All my life I avoided girls who sold vicarious thrills because I assumed them promiscuous. True I did not know for sure what Angelina did, maybe as she said, "Just a model and dancer," but the situation didn't feel right. The importance of my health and physical condition always made me fearful of catching something from overly promiscuous girls. Also, when I get a girl's clothes off, I cannot keep myself from putting my face between her legs. The idea of ingesting the remnants of the prior inhabitant of a girl's intimate parts simply makes me gag. But I reasoned that Angelina must value her health as highly as I do mine; after all, she was an athlete. She won the Russian female long jump championship for her age group three years in

a row when in high school, so I doubted she'd engage in any risky activities. Still I wondered what I was doing but kept stumbling along.

Angel Baby

Later that afternoon, Angelina once again called me before I had the chance to telephone her to arrange for our date. That kiss on the cheek must have worked. She realizes I really care about her.

She asked whether I had a camera and told me to bring it. She sounded enthusiastic. When we met on the other side of the courtyard, I remembered my discussion with Leo and gave her a hundred dollar bill.

“What is this for?” She asked as if insulted.

I figured I was paying for a date that night, so her question threw me. Guess she's just a typical girl after all, and Leo was trying to pump me for money. So as not to insult her further, I said, “It is a gift. Leo suggested it. I understand how difficult it is to live in Russia, so I am sure you can use it.” She considered it was too much, but I insisted.

Putting her arm on my shoulders and insisting that I walk on her right, even though the Russian tradition is for guys to walk on the girl's left, we headed to the Park of Victory. Angelina 's six feet three inches in her shoes made her at least three inches taller than me so that her arm rested naturally across the top of my shoulders. I felt the strange comfort of a woman who cared enough to take me under her wing.

Most Muscovites consider the Park of Victory the ugliest park in their city, but I like it. The place is huge. A large open plaza lined with fountains leads up to a thousand foot tall obelisk. Behind it, located at the top of a wide expanse of stairs, is a semi circular museum that

opens out toward the obelisk. The top of the museum looks like a flattened German Kaiser helmet.

Walking with Angelina, I felt young again. I felt hopeful. Angelina was tall and beautiful. She wore her blond hair down to her shoulders and everyone was looking at her.

“Why does everybody look at me?” she naively asked.

“Because you are beautiful,” I said. Although I felt a little jealous, since looking like an obvious American and not a bad looking guy, Russians usually stared at me, especially the girls, but now even the girls were starring at Angelina.

I said to myself, ““So what, this doll is with me, it is warm, it is sunny and I am somebody, at least in Russia.” Moscow has beautiful weather for two months during the summer, and it stays light until 11 pm. My life was looking up.

The moment we entered the park, Angelina wanted her picture taken with both her camera and mine. This girl knew how to strike a pose, no awkward moments in front of the camera for her. She clearly had modeling talent. As we walked along, we stopped for a few more photographs, and she got a man to take our picture together. Angelina impressed me as smart and educated although her English required me to speak slowly and use more common words than a lawyer normally would. But what really struck me was the good heartedness that beamed from her smile as if coming from the soul of a happy little girl. She led me to a bench on the landing behind the museum that overlooked acres of trees interrupted by long promenades radiating in different directions. The sun neared the western horizon in front of us.

“Do you read numbers?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Give me your birthday and I will read your numbers.”

“Oh, numerology,” which I considered along with palm reading, astrology, magic and religion a pathetic attempt by people to find meaning in their insignificant lives. But if going along will bring me closer to this pretty girl, I won’t rain on her parade.

“Okay,” I said and proceeded to lie about my birth date. Naturally, I wanted her to think I was younger; otherwise, she might not see me as a boyfriend. Still, it made me feel guilty because what she thought she was about to discover, since she clearly believed in numerology, would not apply to me. To her, I would be someone else.

She pulled out a small notebook and pen from her purse. That impressed me. How many girls carry pen and paper? I noticed she wore a lot of rings on both hands. Scribbling calculations and drawing graphs with a believer’s intensity, she concluded that besides having money, I had all the attributes necessary to get what I wanted out of life. I partially agreed since I had some investments, but didn’t know what I wanted from life.

She responded, “Don’t worry you will, and then nothing will be able to keep you from your dream.”

“Okay,” I said, sadly wishing I had a dream, and asked, “What is your dream?”

“To be a model and have my picture on a magazine cover.”

“You’re lucky, you know what you want.” I said with genuine admiration.

We talked more about her hopes, and I realized that despite James Joyce’s criticism of modeling as a pornographic art, I admired her conviction to pursue her dream no matter what. I offered her encouragement with my usual career counseling speech, which I have never been able to follow myself. Everyone is born with a set of aptitudes that makes him particularly suited for a certain occupation. Each of us knows what that is when we are young but often allow others to convince us to pursue a different career in order to assure that we can make a living.

What most people do not understand is that if you do what you love the money will come, at least in America. Angelina, however, was a young lady from Krasnodar that had an even worse economy than Moscow. In Krasnodar, as with most of Russia outside of Moscow, over a majority of the people were unemployed, underemployed or were owed months in back pay. Many were literally starving. Angelina's mother worked as a college instructor and gymnastic coach but earned only \$35 a month, just enough to get by. Some retired folks on worthless pensions committed suicide rather than face the shame of begging in order to survive. Yet Angelina had the guts to pursue her heart's desire trapped in a dangerous land with few opportunities. I felt like a pampered western dandy.

“Can I read your palm?” she asked.

“Alright,” I agreed continuing to indulge her obvious belief in the supernatural; after all, it made for conversation and drawing closer to this delicious girl.

As she scrutinized both my palms, she said, “You are intelligent, a hard worker and have many talents.” Then, as if surprised, she paused and finally said with noticeable concern, “You also have a guardian angel watching over you.”

Always feeling the victim of life, I responded, “I doubt it!”

“No,” she strongly insisted, “There is an angel who protects you from evil. She is with you now.”

I was a little surprised by her conviction, but then my heart jumped hoping what I was about to say was true. “Maybe it is you Angel?” Her concern turned to a giggle and from then on I called her Angel.

She continued with her palm reading and massaging my ego by adding to my attributes, all of which I had heard before in readings by other girls. But then she murmured, “Hmmm,” and looked closely at both my palms.

“Well that’s all,” she abruptly said.

“What do you mean?” I said. “What did you see?”

“Oh, nothing important.”

“Oh no you don’t. Come on, what did you see?” I continued to press even though she, like other fortunetellers, would probably hide any bad divinations. But she surprised me.

“You have a short life line,” which she showed me in both hands.

“Well that fits,” I concurred. “I can’t say I have much of a desire for longevity. My life has not gone the way I would have wished it. So how long do I have?” Not that I really cared.

“You shouldn’t think like that. The God has put you here for a reason. But you must fight for your realization. All my life my mother and I have had to fight. When my father left us, he wanted to take our apartment and all the furniture and leave us with nothing. But my mother fought him and won. He got nothing. When I competed for the long jump championship, I was losing but I had one jump left. My anger drove me to fight, and I won on the last jump. You must not give up.”

I felt ashamed of my wallowing but also felt joy, since I had found a unique woman—yes woman—in Angel: not only beautiful, feminine and smart, but wise and tough.

I wanted to stay there forever talking with her on that bench and watching the sun sink into the west, but she said, “Let’s go to the disco!”

Out on Kutuzovsky Prospect, which ran by the park, I let her flag us a ride, since more cars were likely to stop for her than me. When a car would stop, she’d open the front door and

bend over in her black tights to negotiate a price with the driver while I stared at her from behind. A pleasing arrangement, although not as pleasing as it could have been since she wore a sweater tied around her waist that draped over one of the more appealing parts of a girl's body.

Her tenacity in finding an inexpensive ride impressed me. She tried car after car pushing for the lowest fare possible. No wastrel this girl—saving money delighted her. What struck me as sad, however, was that she negotiated to save me fifty cents to a dollar—a lot of money for her but small change to an American. I sensed in her a desperation about poverty and an unnatural joy in money. Often she'd spot on the sidewalk a kopeck, worth about 1/25th of a U.S. cent, pick it up and immediately break into her beaming childlike smile. My mother did the same for American coins when I was a kid. Poverty to Angel apparently meant starvation; to me it meant eating at home instead of in a good restaurant. I wondered whether I would ever be able to understand her. Angel finally found a ride for a price she liked. I agreed, and we headed to find the Propaganda Disco.

Hailing a private car for a ride rather than a taxi is the rule, not the exception, in Russia. Car owners generally pick up strangers going in their direction in order to make some extra rubles. Sounds dangerous, but Russians don't mug each other on a regular basis as in America. Perhaps it is the old Soviet regime conditioning of comradeship or fear of the police. Russians dread the police the way Americans do criminals. When a Russian finds himself in a dangerous situation, he calls his family, friends or a private security firm—never the police. The government pays the police so little that cops regularly resort to crime and bribes just to make a subsistent living. A favored moneymaker is to pull over a car and demand payment for some minor violation or the officer will lock the driver up, which will cost even more money for the

driver to bribe his way out of jail. Russians also want to keep the police in the dark because cops often tip off gangsters as to likely targets.

Russia's amateur taxi drivers do present one problem other than their occasional drunk driving. They don't always know how to get to where the passenger wants to go, although they say they do in order to win a fare. On the other hand, they will take the time to consult their maps and ask other drivers. But sometimes the rider has to end the exploration of unknown parts and find another ride. Angel and I had such a driver and ended up walking around for about an hour looking for the disco. During our trek, I feared she'd think me a jerk and, like the typical American girl, start blaming me for the discomfort of walking around lost, but she did not. After a stop at McDonalds, her favorite place to eat I learned, we finally found the disco.

As with all Moscow discos, it was small compared to New York City's dance factories but just as loud. Angel danced, danced and danced some more. I had never seen anyone dance like her. She moved like a snake undulating to the music. She smiled sweetly like a child with a lollipop and then instantly turned into a temptress. However, I had too much experience with girls to fall for this Hollywood vamp approach, so I would laugh and then she would laugh but she kept returning to that femme fatale act as though by habit. It didn't matter, I was a happy duck. This was the best I felt in years. None of the Russian guys tried to cut in on us as American clowns do in New York City—clearly the Russian guys were more civilized in that sense. After more than an hour of nonstop dancing, I began thinking this beautiful, young woman actually likes me—she likes me—and enjoys being with me. Then the realization knifed through my brain: “Naturally she likes you, you idiot, you paid her \$100. That's the average family income for a month in Moscow.” I went into a tailspin and immediately decided not to

touch this girl because I would never know whether her response was for money or because she liked me.

We danced a little more and I said, “Let’s go.”

“Just a few more dances?” she asked and I agreed.

On the way back, I asked, “What did you think of the place?”

“The crowd was too young and there was not enough room to dance. I like a lot of space so I can do my dance routine.” Dance routine sounded a little strange, but all girls have their own dance styles they use to show off. She suggested, “Let’s go to another place tomorrow night but also do something in the afternoon”

“Okay, I’ll call you around noon.” Tomorrow was Sunday and I had no work to do.

Back at her apartment, I remembered my vow not to make a move on her and didn’t. We talked a little, and then I kissed her on the cheek good night and left. Walking back to my apartment through the still-darkness of the courtyard filled with trees and shrubs didn’t alarm me. I enjoyed the minor sense of danger that the night offered in this precarious place, as I did in New York City when I’d turn now a dark alleyway late at night just for the challenge. Sometimes in a life, it is possible to reach a point where a person wants to know what is dangerous so that he can consciously pursue it.

Despite my misgivings about Leo’s agency, something drew me to Angel. In the foreboding blackness of the courtyard, I discovered a theme that always controlled my life but I never articulated: I couldn’t fall romantically for a girl unless I liked her as a person and, more importantly, she liked me as a person.

Then She Kissed Me

The next day Angel again called me before I had the chance to call her. This girl is anxious; maybe she really likes me instead of the hundred-dollar bill I gave her.

I hurried over to meet her on the patio outside her apartment. She laughed at the lifeline on my palm that I had drawn longer with a pen. We walked to the Park of Victory again and took more photographs, mostly of her and at her direction. Actually, the day revolved around my taking pictures of Angel—fine with me, she was beautiful and I was falling in love.

After a short while in the park, Angel asked, “Do you know of any other parks in Moscow we could go to?”

Don’t blow this Roy, I said to myself. She didn’t think much of the disco last night, so here was my chance to impress her by coming up with a park that she likes. I racked my brain and tried hard but drew a blank. I began to sweat.

Then Angel said, “I saw a place not far from here across a bridge in that direction.” She pointed east.

“Gorky Park,” I jumped with relief. Angel was great. She saved me the embarrassment of failing again to come up with a place she liked. American men more often than not try hard to please their girlfriends of which American girls take full advantage. But in Russia the men don’t give a damn about a girl’s desires because they are out to please only themselves. I often wondered why those guys were so selfish.

On Kutuzovsky Prospect, Angel hailed a few cars looking for the lowest price again. I noticed she wore the same black slacks with the same sweater tied around her waist but a different blouse. Girls never wear the same of anything two days in a row, so once again I imagined poverty stalking her like a plague. She negotiated with one driver after another. I

thought every price was okay, but she said, “I don’t want to waste your money. We shouldn’t pay people who are greedy.”

“Okay,” I was not going to argue with this unique girl who wanted to save me money. What a find when compared with the gold diggers in America, a characteristic of most U.S. girls. Angel was not only stunningly beautiful and pleasant but also thrifty. When she thought she found a ride for the right price, she looked to me for final approval. This caused me to add respectful to her growing list of desirable qualities. American girls couldn’t hold a candle to her.

Gorky Park is mostly an old fashion Soviet amusement park with a roller coaster, Ferris wheel, bumper cars and other rides. The park’s chief concession to modern times is the disco music, which blares so loudly a person can only escape it at a good distance from the park.

Inside the park, we bought a couple of ice cream cones. Angel complained she did not want to get fat but couldn’t resist at least one ice cream. She had a weakness for sweets, just like me. As usual, she directed me to take pictures of her. She possessed a knack for setting up a shot, which I assumed came from her modeling work. Angel asked a couple of middle-aged ladies to take our picture together, after which I took one of the ladies with their camera. While focusing in on these females in my age bracket, I thanked the fates I was not back in America. All those political correctionalists trying to con me into dating ladies my age—meaning over the hill—with the lie that only middle-aged maturity can fulfill my needs for a companion. Give me a break! Why would I want to wake up in the morning next to some overweight, flabby female when I can have something like Angel?

I turned to look for her and saw some Russian sailor hitting on her about twenty yards away. How did that happen so quickly? She was standing right next to me only a few seconds ago. As I rushed over to put an end to this little scene, I wondered why her face looked as

cheerful and inviting as when she talked to me. Could she be interested in this sailor? I put my arm around her and kissed her on the cheek, demonstrating to both of them that I considered her mine. But the sailor was drunk and made an objection in Russian to which I said, “Get lost!” On hearing my English, he must have realized I was American and just stood there dumbfounded holding his beer. Sometimes Americans have that effect on Russians for they know, but often refuse to admit, that we won the cold war and they lost—badly.

As we walked away, Angel said, “You do not have to worry Roy, I can handle myself.”

“Okay, next time I will let you handle it,” I said, still a little upset. I then tried to kiss her on the lips in the hope of allaying my insecurity, but she yielded me only her cheek, saying, “You mess my lipstick.” All right, I rationalized; models place more importance on their appearances than the rest of us. I did try, however, to kiss her lips a few more times during the day but without success. Even for a model her reluctance seemed strange.

But before those failed attempts, off to the amusement rides we went. The roller coaster, bumper cars and a ride that hung everyone upside down turned Angel into a little girl. She laughed, giggled and screamed like she was ten. I avoided the roller coaster and the upside-down ride knowing they would turn my stomach inside out, but Angel loved them. Just before the upside-down ride began, Angel sat looking like a carefree, innocent child filled with anticipation. All of me wanted to hold her tight, to shield her from the horrors of Russia.

The economic situation in Russia at the close of the 20th century was so desperate that many families only survived by allowing their young daughters to sell themselves. The girls call it “turning our bodies into supermarkets.” They used the term supermarket because under communism such stores did not exist. Only with the coming of the so-called market economy did supermarkets and rampant prostitution appear. Many high school girls and college coeds

team up with a couple of their friends for *banyas*, or bathhouse orgies. They share themselves among a few Russian or Western men with each girl earning \$50 or more for a night. Other girls chose to frequent clubs where foreigners, meaning men with money, hang out. If a Russian girl at such a club agrees to go home with a guy, she will sleep with him but afterward demand money. One night stands in Russia for foreigners are exclusively business deals from the girl's point of view.

There are also parties organized by Russians where foreigners and Russian men with money attend. Russia's rich are commonly called "New Russians," and virtually all of them acquired their wealth through some form of criminal activity. The girls at such parties are considered amateur prostitutes because they sell themselves only periodically and don't take all comers. These parties in the early part of an evening look amusingly like innocent grammar school dances where the boys cluster in groups and the girls separate into cliques waiting for the overly shy boys to approach them. But the similarity ends with a few drinks and the lap dancers doing their strip tease that leads them into taking off the clothes of some of the guys. Meanwhile, the organizer scurries from table to table introducing guy to girl and pushing them into nocturnal deals. As the evening wears on, the bleak, hopeless reality of Russia, ever present behind the smiles and laughter, pushes its way through with the bone chilling realization that many girls attend these parties because they are chronically hungry and desperate. Most of them dream about a family and career after graduation but for now they must survive. Russia also has lots of professional prostitutes who are in it to make as much money as they can in order to afford the glamorous life. No regrets for them, just greed.

Angel got off the upside-down her ride all smiles. We walked around to some more attractions, holding hands or her arm lying across my shoulders with me always on her right. At

the magic house where curved mirrors change a person's appearance, Angel would only let me take a picture of her image in the mirror that made her look thinner. She clearly worried about her weight, as I guessed all models and dancers do. It was early evening, so I suggested we go eat at the Stardust Diner.

“What's a diner?” she asked.

I tried to explain but decided it would be better to just go there and show her. The Stardust looks like a diner out of the nineteen fifties, which it emphasizes with lots of American fifties memorabilia hanging on the walls. The food is mainly American as is the music. When I ordered a root beer, she thought it was an American beer with alcohol. I smiled, gave her a taste and she liked it. It was as pleasing to me as showing a daughter new and wondrous experiences.

“So Angel, what other dreams do you have?”

“My dream to buy an apartment in the City of Krasnodar for me and mother,” she said with determination.

“I thought you already lived in Krasnodar.”

“No, my house in little village outside of the city. It not a good place to live—very dangerous. I want mother to have a decent apartment. She an honest woman who lived a hard life. She deserve better.”

“A worthy goal,” I said. “What kind of an apartment are you looking for?”

“At least two rooms.”

Russians describe apartments by the total number of rooms excluding the kitchen and bathroom. A two-room apartment consists of one bedroom and a living room—pretty good for just a mother and daughter in Russia.

“How much does such an apartment cost?” I asked.

She hesitated in answering, apparently debating whether to tell the truth or not. I could not understand why the reluctance, so I said, “What’s the big deal. How much does it cost?”

“Around \$15,000,” she finally said.

“Not too bad,” I replied like an ignorant American who did not realize at the time that from her economic perspective \$15,000 was as hard to come by as \$450,000 would be for me. The average monthly income for a family in America was 30 times greater than a family in Russia. Just multiplying a price by thirty yields an amount that allows an American to understand what the cost of something means to the average Russian.

Not understanding how high a hurdle this Russian girl had set for herself, I matter-of-factly asked, “How are going to make it?”

“Earlier this year I danced in Cyprus where I saved up a fair amount.”

“That must have been nice: warm climate, sun and sea. Where did you dance?”

“In a night club,” she answered.

Sounded as though she worked as a go-go girl. “What type of dancing?”

“Modern,” she quickly answered, clearly a euphemism for go-go dancing.

“How did you like it?”

“Very much. I am an artist. I use my movements to paint a picture and communicate what I feel inside. It gives me great joy to express myself to music”

“Not unlike Isadora Duncan,” I said.

“Exactly,” she replied. Once again, I was impressed. I always enjoyed hanging out with artists because they seemed different then the rest of us: more exciting life-styles, or was it that they used art as an excuse for reprehensible conduct?

“So how much did you save up dancing.” I intrusively asked while a strange idea took form in my head.

“Oh, some,” she evaded. Russians are even more reluctant than Americans to talk about their finances because most Russians fear robbery or extortion by criminals, which for them includes the tax authorities. Every Russian who earns income has to file with an individual tax inspector who will demand a bribe if there is any indication that the person made more money than reported. But nearly all Russians underreport their incomes because of the ridiculously high tax rates, so the inspectors concentrate on those who appear well off betting they can pay the largest bribes. In response, Russians try to keep a low financial profile in order to pay as small a bribe as possible to the tax inspectors along with evading taxes. In a society where most people once squealed on each other under the Communists, a low profile meant telling nothing to anyone.

Still, I pressed, “How much is some? Don’t worry, I am not going to tell anyone.”

She got that look again about whether to tell the truth or not.

“Well, I saved around \$6,000.” She reluctantly answered.

“So how are you going to make the rest?”

“I will have to go dance in some other country. I cannot earn that kind of money in Russia.”

The look of lost on her face when she said that tugged at my heart. I wondered whether she used the word dance as a euphemism for other activity and called it art so she could live with herself. I hurriedly finalized the idea bouncing around in my head.

“I may go to Mexico,” she added.

Oh, brother, a tall, blue-eyed blonde in Mexico. Now there's an invitation to trouble. Besides, for some strange reason, ever since I was a little kid, I hated Mexico even though I never visited there.

"Look, I will lend you \$10,000," I offered in an effort to protect her from the world.

"You kid me."

"No I am serious, or I would not say it."

"You're crazy. Why do you want to help me? Who am I to you? Do you want to control me by my owing you money? I do not want to owe anyone a lot of money," she said as if holding a knife ready to strike.

Her hostility instead of gratitude threw me. All I could mutter was, "I love you."

"Why? You don't even know me and I don't know you. How can you love someone without knowing them?"

Regaining some of my composure, "It's possible to meet someone whom you know at first sight is the one—the one you do not want to lose. That's how I felt the moment I turned around and saw you at Leo's party. Your image entered through my eyes and touched something in my unconscious. Look," I added defensively, "if you are worried about owing me the money, we can make it a long term agreement and essentially forget about it if you can't pay me back."

She tensed her face, narrowed her eyes and stared unflinching into my eyes in that peculiar Russian fashion of trying to third degree someone into telling the truth. But I was telling the truth, although it made no sense to hand over ten grand to a Russian model and dancer whom I met two days earlier.

I added, "I don't want you doing something stupid just to make \$10,000. You know things are a lot more dangerous today than they use to be." But I could tell she was not buying

it. Maybe something inside her stubbornly resisted owing anybody anything. An admirable quality—independence, but in the extreme, it can lead to unnecessarily desperate acts.

“I won’t do anything stupid,” she firmly said.

“I hope so for your sake, but think about my offer, okay.”

“I will,” she replied, but I knew she wouldn’t.

“So when are you going to Mexico?”

“I’m not sure. Leo is trying to make arrangements now, but it difficult to get visas.”

That was an understatement. Most governments considered young Russian women the least desirable visitors or immigrants. Just the opposite of what many men believed, including me. I suspected the worldwide feminist conspiracy responsible for such stupid government policies, especially in America. The feminists knew they couldn’t compete with the beauty and strength of Russian girls.

I sincerely but sadly said, “I hope everything works out well for you, and you get your apartment. If I can help, let me know.” We finished dinner around 10:00 PM as the sun began to set and strolled over to a small park with a couple of oversized statues of former Communist leaders. Many of the ubiquitous symbols of communism and its cult of personality still stood throughout Russia in tribute to the bankrupt economy that couldn’t afford to tear them down and as an unintended concession to the old Soviet ways of hypocrisy and dishonesty that continued throughout the country.

Angel said, “There is a church near here that I want to go to. Today is Sunday and I haven’t gone to church yet.”

“Okay let’s go. Which way?” Religion meant nothing to me, but I enjoyed the architecture of churches.

“Down that street,” she pointed. On our way, Angel choreographed a few more pictures of herself with me as the adoring photographer.

At the Russian Orthodox Church, Angel put a kerchief on her head, crossed her self and we entered.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church began picking up the pieces of the influence it previously held under the czars. It seemed as though the entire population got religion at once. The government, whether federal, regional or local, provides a lot of financial and other assistance to the Church, just as it did under the czars. The Moscow City Government used tax revenues to finance part of the rebuilding of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior that Stalin blew up because he didn't like it intruding on the view from his office window. The remainder of the money to resurrect the Cathedral came from criminals enriched by their corrupt allies in government who together continue to loot public assets. And that's a lot, since the government still owns or controls much of the property in Russia. The head of the Church often consults with powerful officials who generally give him what he wants, such as when President Yeltsin issued decrees, which have the effect of law, making it difficult for other religions to recruit followers.

Angel quietly bought a few candles and gave me one.

“What do I do with this?” I asked.

She whispered, “Go around to a painting of one of the Saints and light the candle from another candle burning in front of the picture. When you light the candle, ask the Saint to protect a loved one or make a wish and put the lighted candle in one of the holders.”

I am generally open-minded to different philosophies, but this type of religious mumbo jumbo could not logically help me or anyone I cared about. Yet in the back of my mind, I knew

forces I couldn't explain had wasted my life, so I decided why not light a candle—maybe it would work. Besides, I knew enough diplomacy to respect the beliefs of others—especially those of a young and pretty “other” of the opposite sex.

“How do I know which Saint to choose?” I asked. “These paintings all looked the same to me.”

“There,” she pointed to one, “he will help you.”

I could not think of any loved ones alive or dead whom I wanted to protect. Actually, I couldn't think of any loved ones at all, so I asked this ancient painting to keep Angle safe and make her mine for at least a few years.

Russian churches that survived the Commies, as did this church, are hundreds of years old and often small and intimate inside by American standards. There are no seats, so during a service the faithful stand facing a wall of paintings and icons inlaid with gold and silver that reaches to the ceiling. Believers think that heaven exists behind the wall of religious symbols. Once the archbishop in Kursk allowed me to walk behind an icon wall at his diocese but would not let my interpreter join me since females aren't allowed. It didn't look like heaven to me—dusty, dirty with metal struts propping up the wall as if scenery for the theater. Maybe I was missing something.

Angel moved from saint to saint, crossing herself, lighting candles and praying. She obviously believed, since no one would go through that ritual as many times as she did with such an earnest expression and not believe. I felt somewhat envious. Maybe religion offered more than a last delusory hope for the desperate.

We walked out of the church into the Moscow night. Angel wanted to go back to the Park of Victory because at night the water fountains lit up red and she wanted to take more

pictures. So back we went. The bright red lights thrilled her, she struck her poses—which never stopped amazing me, I took the pictures and finally our last role of film in her camera ran out. Both of us were too tired to bother with a disco, so we decided to go the next night, Monday.

We crossed under Kutuzovsky Prospect heading back to her apartment. Because the streets are so wide in Moscow, the city built underpasses for pedestrians; otherwise, people would have to run a gauntlet of the less than considerate Moscow drivers speeding along these multilane highways.

I innocently suggested, “Let’s stop at my apartment, and I will get you another role of film for your camera.”

When we got to my apartment building, she stopped without me realizing it. I kept walking toward the entrance until I noticed she wasn’t at my side. I turned with a questioning look and thought I saw a scared little girl. “I’ll wait here,” she said.

“Come on. I’m only going to get you a role of film. You might like to see the apartment.” I meant what I said. She followed me into the building. In the elevator, I tried to ease her obvious fears that I would put the make on her, “It’s a nice apartment. Joseph Stalin’s daughter used to live there.” We entered the apartment. “Look around,” I said, “I will go get the film.” I walked through the living room to the bedroom, grabbed the film, turned to go back out and there was Angel sitting on my bed.

“Oh, why did you do that?” I said disappointedly, believing she felt obligated to pay me back for the \$100 and the rides at Gorky Park.

“Let me give you a massage,” she said without emotion.

“All right,” sadly admitting to myself she’s not the girl of my dreams that Bobby Darin sang about in “Beyond the Sea.” So, I might as well enjoy a night of fun for all my time. I sat

next to her, tried to kiss her, but instead she made me take off my shirt and to my surprise gave me a real, non-sexual, massage. I returned the favor. Lying face down she lifted her halter top up to her neck, which gave me a look at the side of her naked left breast. A vision I would ponder often over the next month. She undid the sweater around her waist revealing a red paint stain on the seat of her tights. I realized that when I had told her to sit down outside of Leo's party, the paint where she sat was not dry. I felt guilty for ruining this girl's tights for she probably could not afford another pair. I decided to buy her another pair. I gave Angel a polite massage, enjoying every minute of it and keeping my hands respectfully away from her intimate areas, although I kept debating whether to make a serious move on her. After all, here was this beautiful girl lying on my bed with her topped pulled up. But I decided no. I was going to show her I was different than those other guys—that I wanted a long-term relationship, not a one-night stand.

“Thanks,” she said. “That was a good massage.” I gave her the film and we left.

“You are a good man,” she said as I walked her across the courtyard to her apartment.

“You the only one who did not sexually push yourself on me. All other men always want something.”

This time when we said good night standing outside her apartment, she kissed my lips but in away they had never been kissed before. She held my face with both her hands as I looked upward into her face and kissed me with light, very short caresses that became stronger and stronger until she pressed a long hard kiss on my lips. When she pulled back with a slightly artificially sounding sign, I was hers. What a great sensation. Looking up into her face I felt safe, cared for and loved. Here was a reason for living. We agreed to go to a disco the next

evening. Then I returned back through the dark twisted forest to my apartment, happy I had come to Russia.

Let's Dance

At work on Monday, I recounted my weekend to the outgoing American manager Joe whom I was replacing. He knew Russia better than I, and all he said was don't fall in love too quickly with a Russian. I laughingly responded that I had already fallen.

In the evening, Angel called me just as I returned from work. These Russian girls were great; they have the courage and finesse to pursue men without appearing desperate like American girls. Once again we arranged to meet on the patio outside the apartment where she was staying. On my way out, I grabbed the Moscow Times, which publishes a description of the crowd, atmosphere and happenings at the most popular discos, clubs and other entertainment spots. Like most Russians, Angel preferred American and European music. I also took the flowers I had bought for Angel on my way home from work. Russian tradition calls for giving a girl 3, 5 or another odd number of flowers because even numbers are considered unlucky. Also seven is usually the maximum number you give a girl because, as Russian men say, you don't want her to think you can't live without her. Funny, I always thought that was one of the definitions of love. Anyway, at the time I did not know about these Russian conventions but lucked out by giving Angel three flowers.

"Oh, they are beautiful," she exclaimed with her bright, happy, childlike smile. "They smell great and their color show how you see me. I am doing my Masters Thesis on the psychological meaning of color."

"I thought you studied Physical Education," I said surprised.

“That was my undergraduate degree, but I am going for a graduate degree in Practical Psychology. I am very good at it.”

This put Angel in a new light. She not only possessed the physical strength and temper of the will of an athlete but also studied how to influence the emotional and behavioral characteristics of people. Much more impressive, and maybe I should be a little more careful for Angel’s sunny smile hid a keen intelligence. But why should I worry, I graduated with honors from George Washington University Law School and Columbia University Business School, so how much of a threat could she pose to me. Besides, a thesis on colors seemed a bit superficial, so I blindly followed my heart.

“What do your graduate studies tell you about these pink and white carnations?” I asked as we walked over to the Park of Victory, since it was too early to hit the discos. “When you were looking for flowers to give me, your soul was trying to match its feelings for me with the colors.”

“I’m not sure about my soul, since I do not believe I have one...”

“Everybody has a soul,” she quickly interjected.

“Well, let’s just say my unconscious mind prodded me to choose these flowers.”

“Okay, if that is how you can understand it,” she politely replied. “Your unconscious mind felt a harmony between the way you thought of me and the color of the flowers.”

“I can believe that. When I was trying to decide what flowers to buy, I concentrated on the shapes and colors, hoping to sense which ones seemed right for you. I looked over a bunch of flowers until I felt these were the right ones. But why did I choose pink and white?”

“Every color expresses a feeling,” she explained with a teacher’s patience. “When your eyes took in the red it spoke passion to you and the white touched your feelings of innocence when with me.”

“I understand, passion and the innocence of childhood—a strange combination.”

We sat on the same bench as we did our first evening in the park looking west at the falling sun while I held my arm around her waist. She told me more about her Masters Thesis by going through the primary and secondary colors and the types of emotions they evoke in the human soul or for me the unconscious mind. She wrote the colors down in her little notebook as she explained the results of her research with the pride of a dedicated scientist.

“So when will you receive your Masters?” I asked.

“Probably never,” she wispily said. “I stopped my studies because my mother and I needed money. I sometimes wish I had not wasted two years of studying and teaching after college but started modeling right away.”

“What would you rather do? Pursue your Masters or model.” I said.

“Model,” she responded.

“So now you are doing what you want. You are lucky. Most people, like me, never pursue their first best destiny. Most just look for a secure occupation that will enable them to survive but not flourish. You are going after what you really want. I envy you.”

“You envy me,” she laughed. “Let’s go to the disco.” Maybe she missed the point, but it would come up again as these types of conversations always continue throughout a relationship.

We headed off searching for a disco using the Moscow Times as our guide, but it was Monday night and even Moscow discos were dead. Still, the ones we did visit based on the Times’ descriptions made me wonder whether a reporter had recently visited any of them. Many

discos change or disappear quickly in Moscow as owners move on to new money laundering schemes, loot the business or meet a violent end. The high incidence of unnatural death among all types of Russian businessmen contributed to the drop in average life expectancy for males from 65 to 59 years since the fall of the Soviet Union. Many Russians consider liquidating rivals as just another way to compete successfully.

After rejecting a few discos, we saw the Metallica Casino-Disco while riding down New Arbat; Angel suggested we check it out. Moscow casinos can't compare with Atlantic City or Las Vegas. They are small with tiny neon signs and offer no special attractions other than young pretty girls for sale inside. Angel thought the place too expensive, and one of the numerous tuxedo hoods guarding the door kindly referred us down the block to the Mirage Disco.

Hoods or euphemistically security guards are common for any Russian business where a fair amount of cash exchanges hands. These guards usually comprise the more brutal members of Russia's intelligence agencies, military or national police force. Most security personnel continue to work at their official jobs because that enables them to carry firearms and use government power to assist their employers or clients. Russia has one of the toughest gun control systems in the world, so only persons connected with certain government agencies have access to firearms. That means government employees and their associates do most of the shooting and killing.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, law and order collapsed with it. Many high-ranking government officials, seeing a capitalistic opportunity, recruited intelligence, law enforcement and military personnel to moonlight for the private security firms those officials set up. The firms sell services once furnished by the police. Each firm belongs to a Krisha controlled by influential members of the local, regional or national government.

Security at the Mirage frisked me but made Angel walk through a metal detector in deference to her sex. Another indication of the schizoid way that Russian men treated Russian girls—at times respectful, protective but also fearful. I have seen Russian coeds put to flight hostile, drunken Russian men or shame them into obsequiousness. But at other times, Russian men will punch-out a girlfriend with no qualms at all.

The disco was nearly empty but spacious with the feel of class. The maitre d' courteously seated us. Angel put her flowers by her chair, and we ordered drinks and salads—she wanted to lose weight.

“Let’s dance,” she said grabbing my hand and leading me to the center of the dance floor, which we had to ourselves. I then saw why she had complained about the crowded dance floor at Propaganda. This girl needed room to dance. Her arms moved in rhythm with her legs and body as she glided across large parts of the floor. She did not gyrate but flowed, undulating sensuously, releasing the magic of a young girl’s heart, which put a smile on my face that I couldn’t wipe off no matter how hard I tried. As we danced more people entered the disco, but for a long time we were the only ones out on the floor—the center of attraction, as our small audience looked on. I loved it. Angel’s dancing beat mine, but I had a few good moves. I moved in close to Angel rubbing my abdomen against hers and sliding around to her rear where, without touching, I would reach around in front of her and run my hands over her breast and towards her groin. She would spin away with a little girl giggle and go into her temptress routine, parting her mouth and lowering her eyelids. Every so often she would clasp her two hands together with both index fingers pointing at me to simulate a pistol. She would jerk her hands back as if shooting and then blow the smoke from the barrel with her parted lips. I didn’t understand the symbolism but so what. At times I suggestively kneeled in front of her looking

straight at the V between her legs and moved forward toward her as she moved away with a knowing smile. What fun, and I felt we were drawing closer to each other out on that dance floor.

We took a few breaks whenever Angel thought a particular song was not good for dancing. I ran out of steam around one in the morning. I could tell she wanted to dance all night long, but I had to work the next day. As we left the club, a couple of girls entered. She stared at them with an expression on her face that made me think she was jealous because they were as tall and blond as her.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Prostitutes,” she disparagingly said.

“How can you tell?”

“I know,” she said.

Gee, I thought, she must really hate prostitutes. I just stay away from them.

When we got back to our building on Kutozovsky, she realized she had left her flowers at the disco.

“Let’s grab a ride back,” I said.

“But it will cost you money. It doesn’t make sense to spend the money for a car just to get some flowers.”

“It’s only a few dollars.”

“Yes, but you can use that money to buy food,” she replied. “There were times when my mother and I didn’t have enough to buy bread—we went hungry, so you must think ahead before spending any money.”

I really admired Angel's concern for me and felt terribly sad that life had not treated her better. I hoped I would be able to change that.

"You're right Angel—for Russia. But in America people with the level of education and skills of you and your mother can easily make enough for a comfortable living without worrying about going hungry. Believe me, the cost of the ride to pick up the flowers will not result in me missing a meal."

"America must be so different than here," she said. "You decide."

"Well, these were the first flowers I gave you, so they symbolize the future of our relationship. I do not want to abandon them in a disco. Let's hail a car."

"You are crazy," she said good-naturedly, "to go back for flowers."

When we arrived at the disco, Angel said, "You must go in to get them, I will not. And make sure you look in mirror when inside." The tone of her voice rushed me inside before I realized how strange that she wouldn't come in and what she said about a mirror.

On my way up the stairs, I imagined I would have to go through the garbage to find the flowers. But when I entered the disco, the maitre d' just looked as if he was waiting for me and showed me over to the bar without saying anything. He pointed to the flowers in a vase waiting for their owner's return. These Russians really have some endearing characteristics. They were so considerate as to take the trouble to put the flowers in water. What a pleasant surprise. It seemed to me that they sincerely wanted the romance of a Russian and American to blossom. I thanked everyone but didn't give a tip because they would have felt insulted. Once when I gave a Russian waitress a big tip, she got insulted and gave half of it back. On the way out, I looked in a mirror and finally remembered that Russians, always superstitious, believe if you go back to

get something you forgot, you have to look in a mirror to avoid any negative repercussions. So if looking in the mirror made everything fine, why didn't Angel come inside with me?

I soon forgot my question when I handed her the flowers. Angel beamed her smile and said with wonder, "I can't believe you did this. You are crazy." Those words made me feel like a Knight in a fairy tale, willing to do the impractical just to please the princess. What was happening to me?

Outside her apartment, Angel delighted me with her special brand of quick light kisses leading up to one strong long one—kissing her just kept getting better and better.

I told her I couldn't make plans for the following night because Kroll's Director of European Operations, Anne H. Tiedemann, was in town from London and wanted to give a farewell party to the departing manager Joe.

"I just as soon skip the party and go out with you," I said.

"But work is important," she wisely replied. "It enables you to live and enjoy what life has to offer. You must do what is required."

"True, true, but some bosses are just a pain because they're too insecure and narrow minded for the position they hold. That's generally true of American Feminazis. And Tiedemann is not just a Feminazi but a lesbian—two strikes."

"What's a Feminazi?" Angel asked.

"The same as a feminist, usually an unattractive American girl who blames men for everything that ever went wrong in her life. A feminazi thinks if she were a man she would be rewarded for the superior talents she has deluded herself into believing she possesses. They generally don't even realize that the reason they keep their jobs, despite their incompetence, is the accident of nature that made them a girl."

“I don’t understand,” Angel said.

“When a woman becomes pregnant, there is a point where the child could become male or female. It can go either way. So the fact that I am a man and you are a girl was the result of accidents of nature.”

“I understand,” she added mimicking me in a teasing way because I often adopt a professorial approach in explaining something.

“There is an interesting theory that comes out of this biological ability to end up as a boy or a girl. Whether man or woman, we always feel that part of us is missing. You had the potential to be a boy, and I the potential to be a girl. We both miss the other half that neither of us became. And it is that other half whom we are looking for as a lover—someone to make us whole. Understand?”

“Uh-huh,” was all she said.

“Well, anyway, just to wrap up my exposition, these American Feminazis threw away the powers that millions years of evolution gave them in order to hold their own with men. They now try to act the way they perceive men as acting. The result is they make themselves caricatures, neither men nor women, just uncivil she-males, or I should say she-devils. They don’t realize that evolution designed men with certain abilities and women with certain abilities so that they would work together as a team by uniting the missing half with each complementing the other.”

“You must be able to deal with anybody,” Angel said, not really understanding the tragedy that had befallen American women over the past twenty-five years.

“You’re right, but American men are tired of dealing with American Feminazis, so we go to Russia, South America or Asia to find real women like you who know their power lies in their

femininity. Mother Nature evolved men to be attracted to femininity not masculinity. American girls do not realize the power they have given up in their foolish quest for dominance. Some even believe they can exercise the power of both sexes, but combining opposites usually cancels each other out, leaving a zero, which is how many American men see American women. I'm sorry, I'm preaching."

"It's alright. It helps me understand you better," she said as she hugged and kissed me. "Call me if the party ends early. Good night."

Someday We Will Be Together

At work the next day, I mentioned to Joe the story about retrieving the flowers from the disco. He responded, "This is Russia! She might want you to save your money, so you can spend it on her."

"A possibility," I said as my suspicions temporarily reared their hydra heads again.

Kroll's farewell party for Joe took place at a fancy restaurant, by Russian standards, in the western part of Moscow where the New Russians build their million-dollar "dachas," a term that literally means summerhouse, alongside the plebeian dachas of the average Muscovite.

Most Russians live year-round in city apartments. There is no suburban sprawl as in America, only large forests, steppes or intermittent tracks of dachas. City residents visit their dachas over the weekends or for longer periods of time. The spread of dachas grew out of a need for food rather than a desire for leisure. Under Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviets realized their collective farms could no longer feed the population, so they started providing small plots of government land to large numbers of apartment dwellers to grow food for personal consumption in order to stave off mass starvation. The Government craved out sections of some forests and plains and divided the cleared land into parcels ranging from a tenth of an acre to a third.

Russians planted anything they could grow and eat on these little plots of real estate. They built small cottages and shacks for shelter during the growing and harvesting seasons from early spring to the end of September or October. Apartment dwellers turned into master gardeners eternally searching for seeds, which like everything else were in short supply. On Fridays during the summer, a mass exodus began from every Soviet city. People left work early, jostling each other for seats on trains and buses to get to their mini-farms for tending over the weekend. These little plots of homegrown food avoided starvation for many under the Communists by producing around 80% of Russia's potatoes and vegetables and one-third of the meat and milk. By 1991, 30% of Russia's families supplemented their meals with dacha grown food.

Today, the average Russian still scurries off every weekend in the spring and summer to fend off hunger. Dacha gardens in the late 1990s accounted for 50% of Russia's agricultural production. Also in the late 1990s, the New Russians invaded certain dacha areas, such as western Moscow, outside of the urban centers. The New Russians, or perhaps more accurately old Russians no longer restrained by the Communist Party from engaging in rampant thievery and other crimes, acquired loot and influence to acquire large plots of land on which they build palatial homes. No hunger there. These few have plenty because the many of Russia have next to nothing. The New Russians require lots of security, however, as is always the case with thieves fearing that someone else will do to them what they do to others.

The western Moscow restaurant was decorated as a Czar's hunting lodge to cater to the delusions of grandeur of the racketeers living in the area. The food was ordinary as in most Moscow restaurants. For a good meal, a foreigner needed to eat in the home of a Russian acquaintance. But unless the acquaintance belonged to the class of New Russians, his family

would have to scrimp on other meals the rest of the month in order to live up to the tradition of Russian hospitality.

The Kroll party ended late, but Angel and I still met for a short while on the patio outside her apartment. In the darkness, her kisses changed to longer ones with more feeling. I lightly caressed with the back of my fingers one of her breasts.

“Please don’t,” she said. “I too get excited from touching and need release.”

“Okay,” I complied. I never heard that kind of honesty from American girls. They always try to make a man feel as if they are doing him a favor by allowing him to touch them. American girls are very adept at making a man feel guilty, as if he foisted his natural desires on a reluctant female. In truth, girls reap most of the sexual satisfaction because they enjoy sex more than men; otherwise, they wouldn’t risk the burdens of pregnancy as often as they do. If a man faced the same risk, the enjoyment he receives from sex could never drive him to the same level of promiscuity as the average girl. Angel admitted the power that passionate caressing had over her, and I found that refreshing.

For the next two nights we danced until morning. She wanted to dance and dance all night long. The euphoria I felt when with her and anxiousness when not made me want to be by her side always. We only kissed and hugged, but I was in heaven—I was in love and also exhausted, since I had to work each day. At times I felt like the dancing dead, but as one of the Russian investigators in the office said, “You can sleep later, enjoy yourself now while you’ve got the chance.” So, I enjoyed myself but felt a little hurt when she asked me not to dance so close to her because it interfered with her dance routine. I always saw dancing as a way for two people to join together emotionally by following the impulses for intimacy that the music frees from their unconsciousness. But Angel wanted room to perform, so I remained at a distance.

Besides her dancing, Angel could also sing. On our last night out, she sang to me Whitney Houston's classic "I Will Always Love You," and actually hit all the notes. I was impressed and on top of the world.

My perception of her world grew but it didn't mean I fully grasped it. Her words painted a relentless fight to survive the forces of Russia that incessantly denigrate and threaten not only a person's pursuit of happiness but also one's very existence. I felt deeply sorry for Angel. As happens so often in the Russia that grinds people's dreams under foot, her father turned into an alcoholic when she was eight, and from then on her happy childhood turned into a nightmare. Once when her mother went on tour as a dancer, her father and his drunken friends ate the food her mother left for Angel, so she went hungry for days. Another time when she was thirteen, she said he attacked her sexually, but what exactly happened she wouldn't say. Other times she said he physically beat her and half suffocated her with a pillow. Outside the family she ran into the medieval nightmare of a quasi-Moslem culture. Angel's parents moved from Samara, Russia to Grozny, Chechnya when she was little. Once she reached puberty, she said the men on the public buses sometimes grabbed intimate parts of her body, including between her legs. As a girl in that culture, she told me she couldn't do anything about it. At night she could not venture out after eight o'clock for fear that some man would rape her or decide to carry her off to live with him. In 1991 at sixteen, Angel's mother divorced her father, and mother and daughter moved to Krasnodar. The Soviet Union had just collapsed, and the nightmare of an alcoholic, abusive father and Muslim Chechnya were replaced by the merciless brutality of Russia's market economy relentlessly stalking the two of them she said for destruction, as it did so many other honest and hard working Russians. Angel tried teaching to help her and her mother survive, but the money couldn't even pay for a telephone, so she turned to modeling and dancing.

She told me the modeling jobs Leo had lined up for her during her stay had fallen through because the employers thought her overweight, including the producers of the “exotic” film. In Russia the only type of modeling that pays livable wages is fashion, which requires very thin girls. America, on the other hand, has many different types of modeling that pay well, such as sports. Despite the lack of work, she always appeared cheerful, but must have felt crushed and frightened after coming all the way to Moscow in the hope of earning a couple of hundred dollars only to go home empty handed. I could not imagine the fear that looming hunger created in the breast of this sweet girl. I decided to give her some more money when she left.

Angel asked me to help her get to the airport late Friday afternoon for her flight back home to Krasnodar. I hired Kroll’s driver and his car, picked up a large bouquet of flowers and arrived outside her apartment at the time she wanted, but the driver and I ended up waiting about a half hour—very uncharacteristic of Angel, who always kept close track of the time. During the wait, I realized that she never invited me inside the apartment where she stayed. The one in which Leo housed his models from out of town. Why not I wondered, but then forgot about it when Angel suddenly appeared out of nowhere all a glow, giggly and pleased.

“Where did you come from?” I asked.

“I just shopping.” But she didn’t carry any bags, not even her purse. Before I could ask another question, she beamed, “Oh, the flowers are beautiful. They are so big. How will I carry them with everything else? No matter I will manage, I always do. I carried eight bags when I came back from Cyprus and didn’t lose any of them.” Eight bags—I liked her can do attitude.

“Why so many bags when you flew back from Cyprus?” I asked.

“Oh, I was bringing lots of presents.”

“How many bags did you go to Cyprus with?”

“Two,” she said.

Lots of presents was right, I thought!

I took her aside out of hearing range of the driver knowing how private Russians are about some things. “I hope this will help,” and pressed another \$100 bill into her hand.

“I can’t take this,” she objected. “It’s too much.”

“Take it,” I insisted. “You said that Leo couldn’t find you any work while you were here. This will make up for that.”

“But it is too much. You have to think about yourself,” she pushed. I am always a little surprised when someone, especially a girl, expresses concern for me. Angel had a good heart.

“Look, I can afford it and besides you need it more than I do.”

“Thank you.” She put her arm around my shoulder, smiled innocently and kissed me, “My trip would have been a waste if I had not met you.” That made me feel great.

“If you need more, call me,” I said, not realizing she probably couldn’t even afford the long distance telephone call.

“I couldn’t do that,” she resisted.

“I want to help Angel, so call or write.”

“How can you help me if you are in Moscow and I am in Krasnodar? This is Russia and you are an American. If you need help, you call me.” She said with a knowing smile that puzzled me until I dismissed it as bravado.

“Angel, you, like so many other Russians I have met, underestimate us Americans. Remember we won the cold war, not Russia.”

Looking down into my eyes she smiled a wolfish grin, “But you are in my country now. Russians can be very dangerous—I know.”

“Angel, you don’t get it. I am an American lawyer with resources. I can go anywhere I want and probably solve any problem that comes up.”

“Just keep yourself safe in Moscow and write me.” Her caring made me feel wanted.

She wrote down her address and pager number. “I do not have a telephone, but you can call me at this number at a friend’s house this Saturday around nine in the evening. When you call I will try to answer, but if someone else does just ask for Angelina. Don’t say anything else to them and don’t call that number unless I tell you to.”

“Okay, but why the cloak and dagger?” I asked surprised.

“Russians are very envious. If they think you have more than them, they will make trouble for you—try to tear you down or take what you got. It best to keep your life to yourself unless you sure you can trust someone and that takes time. You are too open, you must be more careful with what you say to Russians.”

“What can a Russian do to me?”

“Oooo, you will be surprised. We have many ways,” she again wolfishly grinned.

Naturally, I ignored her warning, believing it was time for Russians to put away their secretive Soviet mentality and join the civilized world.

“Here, this is to protect you.” She gave me a wallet size card with religious figures on it. “These are icons of three saints who will keep you safe. Keep them with you at all times, Moscow is a dangerous place for Westerners, and I do not want anything to happen to you.” I was skeptical that the reproduction of ancient portraits could protect me, yet a long-time-ago college course in Quantum Mechanics and my recent readings of Joseph Campbell made me realize that as Hamlet said there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our

philosophies. Anyway, the card was small and fitted in my wallet, so I ended up keeping it next to my favorite picture of Angel and me at Gorky Park.

“When are you coming back to Moscow?” I asked.

“I don’t know yet but I will let you know. It depends on what jobs there are.”

“Well, I can always come to Krasnodar for the weekend,” I suggested.

“You must be patient. Do not let yourself become crazy—wait for me.”

“Okay, I will wait.”

I held her all the way to the airport with my head on her shoulders. Weren’t these roles supposed to be reversed, I wondered? After all she wasn’t my mother. We kissed goodbye, promised to write and I would call her Saturday evening. Things were going my way. Angel told me on one of our dates that she didn’t have a boyfriend—part of me wanted to believe it but part of me did not. Whether she told the truth didn’t seem to matter at this point. I knew Angel wasn’t mine yet, but I was sure I would eventually win her, as I had every other girl I managed to kiss on the lips. Besides, how could any Russian man compete with an American—an American lawyer at that? Russian guys might act smoother with the ladies, but only an American man will give them respect and compassion.

Riding with my driver back to the office, I asked him did he see where Angel came from when she appeared out of the blue. He didn’t know but was sure she didn’t come from the direction of the shops as she said because he would have seen her in the rear view mirror—bizarre.

On Saturday, promptly at 9 PM, I telephoned the number in Krasnodar that Angel had given me. A middle-aged woman answered, but Angel immediately got on the line. I told her I missed her dearly and asked when she’d return to Moscow. She didn’t know but told me to

“keep my patience.” We only talked a few minutes. I wanted to go on longer, but she had to meet her mother. She gave me a date and time to call her again at that number. On the next call, I talked to apparently the same middle-aged woman in broken English for less than a minute before Angel took the receiver. After another all too short conversation, Angel insisted that I throw the number away saying it no longer worked. As a good lawyer would, I naturally kept it.

Angel changed the way we communicated. I no longer called a number on a specific day and time. She'd telephone to give me a number to immediately ring her back on so that she could, as she said, avoid the costly long distance bills for which she didn't have the money. I kept those numbers as well. At the end of our telephone conversations, she always said do not call that particular number again unless she told me to. After a while, all of these 007 precautions seemed more ridiculous than suspicious, but every so often I wondered why. I told one of the Russian investigators at work about the convoluted ways of reaching her. He suggested we investigate her. It wouldn't cost much, but I declined. This was the girl I loved—I should trust her.

Black Slacks

After a month of coming up to speed on Kroll's operations for the former Soviet Union, August marked my first month as manager. The six-month contract I signed with Kroll required me to not only direct the detective agency's investigations and security details in Russia but also improve its administration and market its services to Western companies. Neither the previous manager nor his and now my boss Tiedemann, who worked in London, had a clue about running a business or dealing with employees. Tiedemann also tended to violate both Russian and American laws despite or because of her cop mentality. I had a lot to do, which was good, since Angel was in Krasnodar. One of my tasks involved resurrecting Kroll's newsletter on the

political and economic situation in Russia that we began sending to the firm's clients doing business in Russia.

The presidential election, unless canceled—such things did happen in the former Soviet Union, would take place in the spring or summer of the following year, 2000. Many contenders were jockeying for position. It was a little unclear, but the Russian Constitution seemed to prevent Boris Yeltsin from running for a third term. As though a law ever stopped a Russian intent on enriching himself, which Yeltsin and his associates did repeatedly. Yeltsin's health, however, made another run for him unlikely unless the Russians were dumb enough, and they weren't, to accept a nearly brain dead President. Yeltsin and his allies had looted the country for seven years, so to continue their plundering his inner circle, whom the press duped the "Family," needed a compliant candidate to succeed the President. But rampant corruption, a criminal economy and the falling standard of living for most Russians made such a candidate's chances of winning the Presidency nil.

Yeltsin chose as his successor Vladimir Putin, the then Prime Minister and former head of the Federal Security Force, known in Russia as the F.S.B. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in November 1991, the K.G.B. was renamed F.S.B. for public relations reasons. The F.S.B. continued to conduct intelligence operations inside and outside of Russia, and is basically a combination of America's Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency. Kroll's investigators used their extensive intelligence experience, contacts and knowledge of Russian politics to conclude that Putin would never win the Presidential election. He was politically savvy in the back rooms but unknown to most Russians, never held elected office and an incompetent manager. Most observers of the Russian scene reached the same conclusion. We sent out our newsletter predicting the party formed by an alliance between the

Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, and the former Prime Minister of Russia, Yevgeny Primakov, was the odds on favorite to win next year with Primakov taking the Presidency. But a year in Russia is an eternity and not just for politics.

On the weekends, I usually worked and took long walks in the Park of Victory where Angel and I used to stroll. I felt lonely and missed her. Once in a while, I'd go out night clubbing with my American friends, but to my mind none of the girls could hold a candle to Angel. They did not interest me, partly because I thought Angel more beautiful, courageous, good-hearted and in need of my help but also I can only go out with one girl at a time. A serial monogamous my friends call me. I never understood how some of them managed to date more than one girl at a time. Where do they find the time and the emotional equipoise? Sex is enjoyable, but I always felt it only made sense with someone I really liked and trusted. Otherwise, why engage in such intimacy that opens the heart and makes one vulnerable to another person. A heart closed with deceit or mistrust prevents not only an emotional but metaphysical intermingling where lovers experience their beings living and breathing inside of each other during sex. Assuming both are capable of multiple orgasms, sex is then a physical act that transposes into a transcendental union with another part of the universe, a living part, that dispels the illusion of being condemned to existing separately and apart. How I dreamed of such a union with Angel despite a sense of uneasiness that she brought into my life. In one letter to her, I wrote:

“I am concerned for you, I worry about you, I want you to be happy and successful. Why? Because I believe the fates have decided to make it so. There is a current running through the universe affecting everything. When a person's intuition accesses that current, it tells him what he must do or what road to take. If he does not, then he will forever regret it as Eugene O'Negin did in Pushkin's play. After the happy week we spent dancing, walking, talking and hugging, it is clear to me that if I have any purpose left, it is to help you.

“As I said, I do not know about the world you work in and, perhaps because of that, I think it is dangerous. However, danger and risk may be necessary in order to pursue your career.

This is usually part of any career; there are always risks that a person must take to succeed. But if you are taking risks or increasing your danger to obtain the apartment, I can lend you fifteen thousand instead of ten, and you can pay me back when you want. Then you can court the world for your career and know that the risks are worth your success.

“I know what you are saying, “Who is this crazy American? Why does he want to help me? What does he want from me? Well think of it this way. You gave me the card with the icons to protect me. I could not have given it to myself because I did not know about it and am not a believer. You know about it and you are a believer, so your concern for me caused you to do what you could in this world to protect me. Well my concern for you causes me to do what I can to protect you.”

I started looking into modeling in Europe and America for I knew Angel didn't have a clue about how to pursue her occupation in the countries that paid good money for models. Russia never had a free flow of information available to the public. Under the Soviets, information meant power, but now under the Nomenklatura freebooters, information means money. Access to government documents is not a matter of right but of cash. Enough hard currency can buy any information the government possesses, and for former dictatorships like Russia, that's a lot. The Soviets and present government officials kept multiple records of everything. A transaction in America that takes one document takes three or more in Russia with everyone in required to sign somewhere. In order to avoid forgeries, Russians perfect complex scrawls that Swiss bankers would envy. Angel must have spent days perfecting her intricate signature. Growing up in such an environment that tightly controls information, Angel could never imagine the wealth of data available to her on modeling in the West.

I checked out a few modeling web sites and ordered a couple of books over the Internet with my credit card. Angel, like most Russians, did not have a credit card. They preferred to pay cash, since it did not leave a record from which the tax authorities could estimate incomes. Neither did most Russians own a computer, and among those that did, few could afford the twenty dollars a month for Internet service. I also contacted a close friend in New York City who used to model for tips on how Angel should go about breaking into the business and even

posted on Kroll's London computer bulletin board, which employees used for personally related messages, that I was looking for contacts in the modeling industry for a Russian model friend of mine. Surprisingly, my London boss Tiedemann responded immediately to my message, but chastised me for posting it because she said "Russian model" meant whore. I almost quit right there and then. A man would not have wasted his time or good relations with one of his direct reports by butting into someone's personal affairs. Where did this lesbo man-hater get off accusing my girlfriend—who was superior to my boss in every way—of being a whore? Decades ago, I vowed never to take a job in which my immediate boss was a Feminazi, but Joe's surprise abandonment of Kroll, a firm he vowed never to work for again, left me the Moscow manager having to deal with a female that couldn't get her sexes straight. Well, at least Tiedemann was in London, had she worked in Moscow, I would have left for New York.

Remembering that Angel had ruined a pair of her black tights by sitting on wet paint at my suggestion during Leo's party, I asked the female, office accountant to suggest a store where I could pick up a pair. She told me to try Gumm, the department store on Red Square. Not knowing Angel's size, I took along the picture of the two of us standing together at Gorky Park. I figured the sales girl could guess Angel's size by comparison. I found the same type of tights, but they carried a price tag of \$120. Who could afford these prices in Russia—only the New Russians. But they were for Angel, so I charged them.

Later, I asked one of the Russian investigators why the accountant would suggest such an expensive store? He said, "Russians use to value intelligence and art but, today, only money. The more you pay the better, even if what you get is not worth the price. Paying a lot enhances your status and shows you are better than others. She naturally assumed you did not want to lose prestige by paying a low price for the tights."

I explained to the accountant the American preoccupation with getting what you pay for or better, not less, and asked her to recommend a place where a person could find bargains for my future reference. She referred me to one of the many open-air markets in Moscow where small merchants group together to sell different wares and where most Russians shop. Every Russian city has these types of markets that first became popular in the middle ages.

I tried sending flowers to Angel in Krasnodar, but Russia did not have an FTD florist system. Just another example of the difficulty of organizing a nationwide payment system for goods because of the fear that someone would devise a scheme for defrauding customers by not delivering the promised products. Russian businessmen do not play fair. The only thing moral to them is what furthers their interests, and they will commit any crime, they will lie and they will cheat and to them that is moral. In Russia, if a businessman tricks someone, it is the victim's fault for not protecting himself. Naturally, a social system of con artists coupled with a legal system incapable of enforcing the rule of law makes economic progress nearly impossible. Russia, however, is not a lawless country. It has the laws on the books necessary for a modern economy to function, but most laws are not enforced because of corruption and the pervasive Russian mindset of not caring what happens to their fellow citizens.

The postal system among cities barely functioned because employees opened mail they thought might contain something of value or just dumped letters in the garbage to avoid the work of delivering them. Angel meant too much for me to allow a heartless culture to crush our burgeoning romance or her hopes, so I sent her letters by DHL and left little messages on her pager such as, "Just a reminder that someone is on your side, thinking about you and waiting to help" or just "Love Roy." Toward the end of August, Angel sent me two very sexy pictures on which she splashed some of her perfume. She, like most Russian girls, had a love affair with

perfumes, probably to help mask the odor when with Russian men who didn't bath very often and rarely used deodorant. One of the photographs showed her evocatively posed, stretched out on a large bed dressed only in a black lace top and black panties. On the back she wrote in red ink "For you Roy! from passionate Angelina," which she covered with a few red lipstick kisses. In the other, a shot from her waist up, she stood in her bra while sexily pulling one shoulder strap down. "Your mysterious Angelina" in red with red kisses adorned the back. The pictures lifted my spirits, but I wondered who took them, most likely an old boy friend. I replied with a message on her pager:

"I received your photographs and put them on the pillow next to mine so that I could smell your perfume the night through and dream of you. Can you squeeze yourself into the next letter you send? Then when I open it, you will pop out. Good idea—right. But if your magic only works on me and not letters, then please send more pictures with your perfume. I miss you terribly. There is no sunshine when you are gone, so let me pay for your trips to Moscow and then there will be lots of sunshine here."

Angel called a few days later to make my wish come true. She would fly into Moscow late Friday evening.

"Will you pick me up at the airport?" she asked.

"Sure," I would do anything for her. "How long are you going to be here?" I naturally hoped a long time.

"I don't know. It depends on my business with Leo. I may go to Mexico with him and another girl to do some modeling." My heart sank. If there was one country I never liked, it was Mexico. Well, I would wait and see rather than worry about something that might not happen.

On the way to the airport with my driver, I stopped at one of the many roadside stands selling flowers. Russians are enamored with flowers. The subways, the roadways are populated with little stands selling all types of flowers even in the middle of Moscow's arctic winters. Driving up to the airport, I sensed that Angel was not going to be in town long and that she

would try to sleep some place other than my apartment. All right, I knew it would take a while to win her. At the airport, carrying a large bouquet of assorted flowers, I scanned the crowd coming off the airplane on the dimly lit tarmac. Many of Russia's airports do not have gantries for deplaning; instead, like American airports in the 1950s, the passengers descend a stairway that is rolled out to the plane. I was anxious not to miss her, which was rather foolish, because in her street shoes at six feet three inches—six-one in bare feet—she stood taller than most and her beauty out shined our girls. I broke out in a smile when I spotted her and waited until she passed through the opening in the fence between the runway and parking lot. We hugged and kissed each other.

“The flowers are great, they are so beautiful,” she happily said.

“How was the flight?”

“I was so tired that I kept falling asleep, but the seats were so small that I kept falling against the man next to me.”

“He must have enjoyed that.”

She laughed, “Can you take me to Leo's? I need to see him tonight.”

Not a problem, since Leo's office was in the basement of the building where I lived. In the car heading to Leo's, I couldn't help but hug her all the way.

“Listen, Roy, I am going to stay in the flat Leo has for his out of town models. Okay?” Angel said. Naturally, I felt let down, but there was nothing I could do.

“You know you can stay in my apartment if you want. Nothing will happen unless you want it to.” I always found that when a girl was ready for sex, she'd make a clear move. All I needed to do was make myself available and wait, so I continued to wait for Angel.

At Leo's office, Angel talked with him privately behind closed doors. When she came out she said, "I guess it is fate. I will stay in your flat because Leo has other girls staying in his place."

"Don't worry. You can have my bedroom; it has a lock on it and I will sleep on the coach."

She smiled assuredly, looked down into my face and ran her hand through my hair as though I was a little boy, "I not afraid. Let's go. I have much to do tomorrow. I will leave early Sunday morning to fly with Leo to Mexico City." Rats! She was going to Mexico; now I began to worry.

"How long are you going to be there?"

"My visa is only for two weeks, so I will probably be back by the middle of September."

For some reason I felt otherwise and said, "No. I think you will be there for a long time."

"That's not possible; my visa is only for two weeks. I will do some modeling and come back with Leo soon. Don't be pessimistic."

"We will see."

In my apartment, I showed her the bed where we innocently gave each other massages a month earlier. She just stood there as if demanding something.

"Don't worry, here are some clean sheets. It's a comfortable bed." I added, but she still just stood there like a princess demanding something. I finally guessed and made the bed for her.

Before going to sleep, we had a bite in the kitchen and talked about her upcoming trip and what she wanted to do the next day, Saturday. Russians tend to spend lots of time sitting around the kitchen table, drinking tea, nibbling on small cakes and talking late into the night.

We didn't stay up very late because Angel was tired from her two-hour flight. She retired to my bedroom, and I prepared the couch in the living room for me. Before turning out the lights, she called me into the bedroom to kiss her good night. When I walked in, she was completely under the covers except for her face and long flowing blond hair. She looked like a defenseless but overwhelmingly beautiful little girl beaming innocently up at me. I kissed her lips and forehead and said good night.

You've Got The Magic Touch

The next morning, Angel woke me early because she needed to find some medicine before she flew off to Mexico the following day. Finding medicine in Moscow is often an exasperating chore, outside of Moscow—often impossible. We trudged from one pharmacy to another for about three hours until she found a medicine that was an approximation for what she wanted. Under the Communists, Russia did not have an economy dedicated to satisfying consumers' needs and wants because most of the wealth went for guns, bombs and missiles. After the fall of communism, the consumer still goes without because much of the wealth flows into the overseas bank accounts of the crooked government officials.

I asked Angel what kind of medicine she was looking for but only got a vague response of "a preparation to cleanse my body." I couldn't figure out what cleansing the body meant, some Russian health habit probably. I didn't pry and soon forgot about it once she found what she wanted and we headed, at her suggestion, to the Exhibition Center in North Moscow.

The Exhibition Center used to house exhibits touting the latest technological achievements that claimed to make life in the Soviet Union a utopia compared with the West. Because of press censorship, most of the empire's citizens didn't know that the Soviet Union lagged behind the West by years and decades in nearly all areas of modern life except for rockets

and nukes. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russians finally saw an accurate picture of life elsewhere and realized that their piece of the planet resembled not just a third world nation but more like a fourth. South American countries made better cars and appliances, and I could easily find restaurants in Amazon jungle towns serving food far superior to Moscow eateries. The managers of the Exhibition Center, however, quickly adapted to the new hunger of Russia's citizens for Western ways by setting up an amusement park.

Inside the Center, Angel's eyes went big at the sight of a loop-de-loop and the largest Ferris wheel I ever saw. Something about rides turned Angel from a hardheaded model into an excited, happy little girl. It was as if an eight year old took over the six feet one inch body of this physically matured woman. We chose an open seat on the Ferris wheel that hung its inhabitants out in mid-air 75 meters above the ground rather than an enclosed compartment. At the top, as we looked over the Moscow skyline on an overcast day, the mature woman pushed out the joyous child to wonder how she and her mother would fair in the land of criminals. It made me want to help but also began my understanding of what her agent Leo had meant when he said that Angelina was a very strong-willed girl. She wanted to make it on her own without any charity. Angel next hopped on the loop-de-loop, which I avoided not wanting to lose the contents of my stomach. I took some pictures catching her screams of pleasure streaking along upside down and then grinning as she wobbled off the ride.

After the Exhibition Center, we window-shopped along Tverskaya Street, Moscow's Fifth Avenue but even more expensive. In one shop, I bought her a lipstick for twenty dollars. Outside she cooed it was the most expensive present anyone had ever given her. That shocked me. How could the world not have adorned this twenty-three year-old beauty with suitcases of gifts? I could not fathom such, but here before me stood the evidence. And then it hit me as to

why she avoided kissing on the lips until late at night—she could not afford to put on lipstick more than a couple of times a day. Such desperate straits wrenched at my heart. We crossed the street to Patio Pizza, a restaurant chain that ran Pizza Hut in Russia, probably through some form of unfair competition or threats. During our meal we ended up talking about prostitution.

As the broad-minded condescending liberal, I remarked, “I can understand why someone who does not have enough to eat or decent shelter would sell their body. I could never hold that against any girl.”

I didn’t mean Angel by any stretch of the conversation, but she apparently thought I did and blurted out, “I am not a prostitute. My body not a supermarket.”

“I didn’t say you were. I only said I can understand how a girl in desperate straits could end up working as one,” I quickly replied trying to straighten out the misunderstanding.

Rather than allow the miscommunication to spiral into an argument, she surprisingly said, “You are a man who has a good heart. I don’t meet many like that. You are very special!” That made me feel great and hopeful I would eventually win her love. She added, “I will tell you all about my past the next time we meet.”

That surprised me since I never had asked about her past, which was her business. But if she wanted to talk about it to further our understanding of each other, fine, so I said, “Okay, it’s a deal.”

Next, we went to one of the open-air markets to buy food for dinner, which Angel volunteered to cook. She warned me to watch my wallet because such markets were filled with thieves and con artists—not unlike Russia as a whole I mused to myself. The food was amazingly cheap by my standards, but she haggled over every purchase saving rubles and kopecks and smiling like a cheshire cat after besting some merchant. It turned out that she was

right about the thieves. My wallet did not disappear, but my mobile did. Angel almost broke down in tears, saying, “I should not have brought you here. It is my fault. Your mobile was so expensive, what will you do.”

“Kroll paid for the mobile, so don’t worry about it. You were not to blame. Let’s go back to my apartment and have dinner.”

When she walked into my kitchen, she put on her glasses and changed from the hard bargainer of the market place to a homemaker. She looked ten years older, not just to my eyes but in the photographs. Angel moved effortlessly from one role to another, not just in mannerism, but in her physical appearance as though she could turn from vamp to little girl to businesswoman to housewife at will. I’d never seen anything like that except in the movies.

She made a typical Russian dinner of salad, generic meat and a couple of vegetables. The portions were around half the size of what Americans normally have for dinner, but that is common throughout Russia. I guess people can grow use to not having enough to eat, but then again, Americans over eat.

Angel needed to go to bed early since she had to be in Leo’s studio downstairs at 4 AM to catch her ride to the airport for the flight to Mexico. Before sleep, I gave her a massage like last time that she wanted. I pressed between the vertebrae along her back, squeezed the muscles down each arm to the palm and out to the fingertips and did the same with her legs to the feet and toes. She reminded me to squeeze particularly hard on her feet, which were plenty big, eleven inches. I assumed she suffered from previous athletic injuries, as did various parts of my body from my lacrosse and rugby days. I then tucked her in, set the alarm for the night of early morning and kissed her on the lips and forehead good night. My night turned out to be not good at all. Something I ate kept me tossing most of the time. At first I concluded it was the weird

apples she had bought, but my American anti-acid had no effect. Not only my stomach felt strange but also my brain as it swam through conscious and semi-conscious states all night long. Finally the alarm rang.

We went downstairs to Leo's studio at four in the morning. A few other people were there. I told Angel I'd wait until they left but she said there was no need. I sensed that my importance in her life had instantly diminished the moment we entered Leo's studio. She kissed me goodbye rather quickly, turned and focused her attention elsewhere. No long goodbyes for this girl. I felt sick anyway, so I went home to slip between the sheets that still smelled of Angel and dreamed of salvation. But the next night while lying in bed I knew that whether Angel brought salvation or destruction, I would win in the end.

You've Really Got a Hold on Me

The workload at Kroll picked up dramatically in September as business always does at that time of year in Russia. The old totalitarian regime created behavioral patterns among Russians that continue to persist following the collapse of communism. The entire country virtually closes down in August as much of the population flocks off on their vacations to tend their dacha vegetable gardens. Another mass vacation takes place in December from just before the 25th until the middle of January. During this time, it seems the entire country goes on a three-week drunk that makes it impossible to get anything done.

Some widespread behavioral patterns reach deep into the personalities of Russians. Pretty young Russian girls always appear happy and pleasant toward men with influence and money, especially foreigners, but bitterly critical and deprecating of young Russian men just starting out, and nearly all Russian guys tend to exhibit a strain of moroseness as though some plague pursued them their entire lives.

Part of my job at Kroll required me to educate some of its Western clients to the reality of doing business with Russians. I usually told our clients that all Russian businesses and organizations operated to one degree or another outside the laws of accepted commercial activities in the United States and Europe because if they didn't, they couldn't survive. For example, any venture needed the protection of local, regional or national public officials or it was doomed. Protection meant paying bribes directly, or laundering the money through charitable organizations, or providing a hidden ownership interest in the commercial venture. The trick for any business venture was to remain friendly with the politicians who were in power at the moment. One Western bank had invested large sums with a Moscow conglomerate that had excellent connections with Moscow's Mayor Luzhkov but poor relations with the people around Yelstin—the Family. In early September 1999, it looked like Luzhkov and Primakov's political party would win the Presidency the following year, but a victory by the Family would endanger the bank's investments.

Most of the work at Kroll consisted of investigating the backgrounds of various Russian businessmen and their companies with which Western corporations were considering dealing. Kroll focused on determining whether the Russians were sufficiently crooked to assure favorable treatment by the government but not so crooked as to abscond with all the Western investors' funds or goods, which tended to happen quite often, or create a public relations nightmare for the Westerners. Some of our clients nearly stumbled into business relations with the worst elements of Russia's criminal business world—the Chechens. Mayor Luzhkov and his administrators were making lots of money by allowing a Chechen Krisha to operate in certain areas of Moscow. Chechen gangsters are ruthless even by Russian standards and by no means stupid. They maintained control of various business facilities, such as the Armand Hammer Center, by using

assassinations and political clout. An effective combination in Russia, especially when assassins tended to use bazookas the way American mobsters once used Tommy guns.

One of Kroll's clients was considering a deal involving the Armand Hammer Center until we verbally warned its officers to stay away. A deal with Chechen gangsters could not only result in horrendous publicity for the company but also threaten the lives of its Moscow executives if a dispute arose. You don't take Chechen gangsters to court. Our giving of a verbal rather than written report was required by Kroll's policy in Russia of keeping references to specific organized crime activities out of its documents in order to prevent retaliation or their use by the government against Kroll.

Generally, Kroll was on the side of the good guys who just wanted to make a reasonable profit in Russia even though it required practices frowned on by the American Government. But part of one case came our way through Tiedemann, the European head in London, who allied Kroll with two of the worst in Russia. Tiedemann accepted as clients the monopolists of Russia's aluminum industry, which nearly caused a revolt in the Moscow office by the Russian investigators. The two Chernoy brothers had recently gained near complete control of the aluminum industry after years of competition, bloody even by Russian standards, in which at least forty persons, including business executives and even government officials, were murdered.

The aluminum war began when the Chernoy brothers used their influence with the Family to get Yeltsin to sign a decree that exempted aluminum shipped aboard from export tariffs. The tariff exemption allowed Russian aluminum manufacturers to sell ingots below the world price but still make large profits that they siphoned into overseas bank accounts for themselves and friendly officials rather than reinvesting to modernize Russia's aluminum industry. In effect, the decree gave aluminum manufacturers the green light to loot the industry.

The promise of profits was huge, and, as it turned out, so was the death rate as manufacturers battled for control. In the end, the Chernoy brothers won; their competition peacefully at rest six feet under. But the allegations of their criminal acts, evidence and many witnesses still lived. So the brothers hired Kroll to find out which agencies and individuals had information on their aluminum war activities that might cause them problems in the future. Tiedemann accepted the contract with the Chernoy brothers because the price was right. And she accepted the contract even though it was a conflict of interest, since Kroll had previously investigated the Chernoy brothers for another client. Kroll provided the brothers with the information requested, and they most likely purchased the files of incriminating evidence from various Russian agencies—not an uncommon occurrence. The F.S.B. in 1999 would sell its files for around \$50,000. As for the witnesses, I can only imagine what happened to them.

On any case, the way Kroll determined who knew what went to the heart of acquiring information in Russia. Every person with information, from close associates of the President, to the F.S.B., to the police, to the neighborhood librarian, will sell it for the right price. In the Bank of New York money laundering case, one source close to the Family and knowledgeable about the transfer of money overseas wanted \$200,000 for his information because he would have to disappear once he provided it. The Bank, however, was not interested in paying that amount. Generally the price for information depended on how much danger its release to the public would put the informant in.

A week after Angel left, I called Leo's agency to check on their return date. The secretary told me Leo and Angel were coming back late Friday night on September 10th. I couldn't wait. Angel hadn't sent me any word from Mexico probably because she was busy. But it didn't matter; she would be back soon, and I would be at the airport to meet the love of my

life. I'd give her the short letter I had planned to send her in Mexico but couldn't because I didn't have an address. It told how I felt, which made me confident that my sincerity and empathy would move me closer to her heart:

“When you left this last time, I felt lonelier than the first time. Will my loneliness increase every time you leave?”

“Being a dancer in a club and model must be very difficult. To enjoy doing something but to face criticism for doing it requires much more strength than most people have.” (Angel told me that most Russians look down on go go girls and models.)

“I wish I could protect you from all the idiots of the world, but then you would not grow to your full potential.

“I am you and you are me. Is that possible?”

“I hope you are all right. I, however, am not since you are far away and I worry much about you. Yes, you are a mature woman, but trouble, like men, is attracted to beautiful ladies.”

The night of Angel's scheduled return, I left work early to change into all black clothes and splash on the cologne that she liked. Angel was very fashion conscious and thought Russian men in basic black dressed better than any men in the world. However, their failure to bath regularly or use prodigious amounts of cologne turned her off. I made sure not to make that mistake. I met my driver, picked up a bouquet of pink roses because they reminded me of my guardian Angel, and we headed for the airport and a new chapter in my life.

Moscow's international airport Sheremetvo 2 is located in the middle of a forest only about fifteen minutes from the high-rise buildings of the city. Unlike New York City where office and apartment buildings gradually transform into suburbia, many parts of Moscow abruptly change from high-rises to dense forest. There are sections where one side of a road is lined with apartment buildings and the other side with woods. Russia lacks a middle-class, suburban population. Cities do have enclaves of upscale houses, but these are owned by the New Russians, the new thieves, and hardly middle class. The vast majority of Russians live in cities while the poorest occupy small villages scattered throughout the country consisting of houses built before the 1917 Revolution that lack hot water and modern toilets.

Driving down the lonely road to the airport surrounded by fields and forest, I looked at the night sky and felt that something was not right, but quickly pushed it out of my conscious for I would soon rest my head on the shoulder of my very tall soul mate. My driver and I arrived early and luckily found a couple of seats in which to wait. Moscow's premier airport lacks a lot, such as enough terminal seats, toilet paper and orderly lines—true everywhere in Russia. The concept that each person has a right to a spot in a line based on when he shows up does not register with Russians. They believe in the mob approach with everyone trying to cut in front of others or jostling their way to the front. Perhaps living in a society of limited resources where the last in line might starve keeps Russians behaviorally stuck in the middle ages. Angel would often just walk up to the front of a group amassed at a window as though no one else was waiting. Usually the most aggressive line cutters are New Russians who think of themselves as the new nobility. Perhaps they are for the average Russian never speaks up to object.

When McDonalds first opened in Moscow, the line stretched down the block between two rows of metal barricades. The space between the barricades was wide enough for three people, but only two stood abreast, with one lane open. I could not figure the reason for the open lane until I saw New Russians and their black clad bodyguards using it as a passing lane to cut in front of everyone else. That ticked me off, so I stepped into the passing lane in order to block the cheaters but still kept my place with respect to the others in line. Some New Russian thugs came along, clearly realized I was an American by my Brooks Brothers' suit, so they made a detour around me by pushing out of the way the Russians who were standing next to me. None of the assaulted Russians said a word. Once while at a nightclub in western Moscow where friends of mine in the band "No Problem" were playing, a New Russian simply pushed me out of the path

he was traversing across the floor. When I responded with a few choice words in English, he said, “Oh, you are an American. I apologize.” Guess if I was Russian, I’d have ended up dead.

Sheremetov 2 consists of one passenger terminal, dimly lit, and decorated in bleak colors with many employees scurrying about apparently accomplishing nothing in a very rude manner. Dealing with Russian bureaucrats, such as custom officials, requires an ability to act convincingly as either a supplicant or comedian. Bureaucrats wheel power in Russia virtually unrestrained as to which rules they will enforce or ignore. They are controlled only by their superiors, assuming their superiors know and care about an underling’s arbitrary actions. There are no effective appeal procedures within the administrative or legal systems for challenging a government official’s decision other than a “gift” of hard currency or some other valuable item. To avoid the cost of bribes requires winning over bureaucrats before they dig in their heels.

When dealing with female officials, it’s best to figuratively prostrate oneself, for as with any girl with the upper hand, they are intransigent driven by a personal desire for the mass settling of old scores. With male bureaucrats, situational humor works, the more absurd the better. The men generally waive me through laughing because they realize the absurdity of the system in which they live. The females do not. Their souls, like many American feminists, emanate a hatred for men. The feminists blame men for everything that ever went wrong in their lives, including the decisions they consciously and willingly made. The reason for such hostility in Russian females comes from the simple fact that as between the sexes, Russia is a buyers market with females the sellers. In the 15 to 64 age group, there are 3.5 million more girls than guys out of a total of 102 million. The large disparity in numbers drive females to spend heavily and devote much time to advertising their wares, that is, their bodies. Their skirts are shorter and slit higher; their blouses more transparent and cut lower; their walks, mannerisms and smells

more feminine; their duplicity more insidious; and their goods sold more cheaply, which requires more customers to make a living.

When I saw that Angel's plane had landed, my heart pounded and I headed for the gate with my flowers. I saw her agent, Leo, exit from the gate first, and I knew her beauty would soon enter my eyes to touch my heart. I waited and waited but no Angel. Hopefully, she was tied up waiting for her luggage or perhaps was coming on another plane. Leo saw me and came over.

"Where's Angel?" I immediately asked.

"She has decided to stay in Mexico for three months more."

My dream shattered.

Leo saw the destitution in my face and quickly said, "She wrote you a letter and asked me to give it to you."

I took it with renewed hope, ripped it open and read. My heart broke. Leo had delivered a goodbye letter.

Leo tried to cheer me by saying, "She likes you Roy, but she needs to make money to buy an apartment."

I turned, tried to throw the flowers into the trash bin but my driver stopped me, so I told him to give them to his wife. We left, but as we were leaving in the car I reread Angel's letter. Because of her rudimentary English, I could not determine whether any hope for my dream remained. I saw Leo walking to his car as we waited to exit the airport parking area. I needed more of an explanation about what Angel was trying to tell me in a language not her own and why she stayed in Mexico. So I jumped out of the car and ran over to Leo.

“Leo, I don’t understand from her English whether she is telling me she likes me but we will not see each other again, or whether we may meet again. Did she talk to you about her letter?”

“I told Alina to write the letter in Russian so she would be sure that she was telling you what she wanted. You could then get an accurate translation, so there would be no miss communication. But she is very head strong and said her English was good enough.”

“I wish she had listen to you,” I anxiously said. “Now I have a letter that I am not sure what it says or what she is doing in Mexico.”

“She is safe and dancing in a club whose owners I know well,” Leo said.

Somehow that did not relieve my anxiety for her well-being. I disliked Mexico and didn’t trust most Russians to tell Americans the truth about anything. It seemed they always tell Westerners what they think Westerners want to hear. My Russian friends said it was because Russians do not want to hurt another person’s feelings. I found this ridiculous, considering the history of brutality in Russia and the present day disregard among Russians for their fellow countrymen.

Every spring, the melting snows reveal the bodies of senior citizens in the outskirts of Moscow. They didn’t commit suicide; they were murdered. These seniors, usually without families or close friends, were tricked into signing over their apartments for promises of cash, which they needed because their pensions didn’t provide them with enough to survive. If they refused to sign, their signatures were forged. They were then killed and dumped in the snowdrifts on the edges of Moscow. The value of even the smallest apartment rose dramatically in Russia’s criminal economy so as to make the murder of pensioners lucrative. If the victims had relatives or friends living with them, the murderers’ scheme would fail because Russian law

requires everyone living in an apartment to consent to its transfer. The organized gangsters that commit these crimes would have to kill everyone in the apartment or forge all the tenants' signatures—unlikely even for Russian mobsters.

The police could easily track the gang of criminals responsible because all levels of government still keep records on just about everything and everyone. Both the Czars and the Soviets collected vast amounts of information on citizens in order to identify potential opponents. Any totalitarian regime needs extensive information on the population or risk losing control of its subjects. Since old bureaucratic habits die-hard, government agencies continued to collect lots of data on people and activities. Every person whether resident or visitor within any city or town in Russia, must be registered at a local address. The police periodically canvas apartments to determine who lives there. Once an officer knocked on my door and took my name and business telephone number. With all that available information, identifying a body, connecting it to an apartment and tracking down the persons who took over and then sold that apartment should be easy, but no one cares because most of these pensioners were alone.

Russia is a land without mercy. Government officials are too busy looting the country and the average Russian too busy trying to survive. No one has the time or instinct for compassion or civility. The brain's neuron center for empathy is distinctly lacking in Russia: ethics is what someone can get away with. For protection and survival, Russians band together into extended families of relatives and friends in which members control each other through a Kafka-type psychology rooted in fear. Anyone outside the family does not count. Anyone within the extended family must be protected because the survival or prosperity of all members depends on everyone. Each extended family engages in whatever activity, illegal or immoral, it deems necessary to further the economic interests of their collective whole. This social structure

of extended families, which often evolve into RICOs, include the poorest households in the provinces right up to Yeltsin's inner circle and now Putin's.

Leo saw the doubts run across my face as to Angel's safety and her feelings for me. He told me to stop by his office the next day, and we would talk. I agreed and went looking for my driver whom I could not find, so I hailed a ride home. All the way, I thought about the scene from the movie Casablanca where Humphrey Bogart waits for Ingrid Bergman at the Paris train station until his piano friend shows up with a good-bye note from her. As the train pulls out with the rain pouring down, the look on Bogart's face expressed the dejection I felt and the way he threw away the note, my disgust for Angel's actions.

Lying in bed that night, my instinct told me to forget this girl, which is what I usually did when a girlfriend or potential girlfriend acted with such inconsideration. But in the discontent of middle age and having lived too long among overly psychoanalyzed New Yorkers, I decided to try the therapy cult's approach and "work" at this budding relationship rather than terminate it.

Do You Love Me

Before meeting Leo the next day, Saturday, I read and reread Angel's letter looking for some evidence that she cared for me and was safe. She opened the letter with, "Written to you your Angelina." And closed with, "I kiss to you a lot and embrace too much." But in between she left open whether we would see each other again because she decided to stay in Mexico for apparently an indefinite length of time to make money to buy an apartment. She did, however, include a different address than the one she first gave me for sending letters. The new address was her home in a village outside Krasnodar where she lived with her mother: Yablonevsky in the Adygea Republic. So whose address was the original one she gave me, I wondered? Angel thanked me for the presents I gave her, said I had a good heart and soul and wished that my

dreams come true. That didn't seem possible since I dreamt of her. From the letter, Angel apparently enjoyed Mexico, meeting many people through her dancing and modeling and going to Acapulco for a photo shoot. But the letter only made me feel more alone, dejected and concerned about her. Did this girl care about me or not? Was she safe, or did Leo force her into indenture servitude to Mexicans? Maybe I would catch a flight to Mexico City for a long weekend to find out.

I left my apartment to see Leo, intent on finding out how to reach Angel. I walked down the speakeasy type steps to the door with multiple locks, a metal bar and a peephole and stepped into the world of Leo's Russian modeling business. As always, an attractive young lady showed me into his office where I sat in the chair that put me at least a foot below Leo seated behind his desk.

"So how can I help you with Alina?" Leo began.

"I really care about this girl and don't want anything bad to happen to her," I warned. "I'm worried about her alone in Mexico."

"There is nothing to worry about," Leo said. But I couldn't tell whether his statement genuine or feigned. "She is safe. She dances in a high-class club where nobody can touch her and is escorted to and from work by guards. I know the people who run the club and they are legitimate, strictly business." That only increased my concern. "Strictly business" in Mexico meant to me that anything goes in the pursuit of money, and Angel might be trapped in a situation not of her own choosing.

"How can I contact her? What is her telephone number? She didn't give me a number in the letter." My imagination played scenes of Leo selling Angel to a band of Mexican white slavers who made her write the letter. It all made sense for a detective thriller. The one person

with the resources to save Angel was I, an American lawyer working for a worldwide detective agency. So in order to get the American out of the picture, the Mexicans force his girlfriend to write a goodbye letter, breaking his heart and demoralizing him from looking any deeper into the situation. Well, it wasn't going to work.

I continued, "I want to talk to her Leo, I want to make sure she is okay. You understand my concern."

"Of course, I don't know how to reach her, but she will contact me in a week or so, and I will tell her you want to call her."

Leo must have thought me an idiot. Who was he kidding that he didn't know how to contact someone working for him in a foreign country? My suspicions multiplied. Why was he trying to keep me from talking with Angel? I didn't let on that I thought he was hiding something so as to keep him from suspecting the plan forming in my head to find Angel. I changed the conversation to try to find out more about Angel and her involvement with Leo's modeling agency. Leo said Alina was a good girl from a poor family, and that he had found her some modeling work in Moscow over the years. Her first job paid \$50, and for her the money was magical because she never thought she would ever earn so much in such a short period of time. Angel told me the same story about how excited she was on earning her first \$50. To her it was a miracle. I did not understand the importance until I used some of my business school skills to estimate the economic value of \$50 to a Russian from the provinces. The equivalent for an American was \$1,000.

The residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg refer to the rest of Russia as the "provinces" and consider the people living there, whether in city or village, as country bumpkins: unsophisticated, poorly educated, crude and greedy. Russian men from either of these two cities

say a girl from the provinces makes a good housewife because she will be forever grateful to her husband for bringing her to Moscow or St. Petersburg. The reason for any gratitude lies in the economies of the two cities that far outstrip any other areas of Russia. A young Russian on his or her own can find work of some type in Moscow or St. Petersburg to make enough to survive and help his or her family mired in the poverty of the provinces. But Russians cannot just pack their bags and head to Moscow or St. Petersburg looking for a job. All Russians must carry an internal passport that lists where they live. When they travel outside their hometown, they must register with the police department in the city they visit. If they stay in a hotel, the hotel handles the registration, but if they stay with friends, the police may deny them registration without a bribe that many cannot afford. Throughout Moscow and St. Petersburg, the police randomly check registrations. A person caught without the proper registration will end up on a train back home or pay a bribe either in money, sex or some other valuable commodity.

Since Moscow and St. Petersburg are virtually the only places that provide a decent chance to make a living, registration in these cities means escape from a dead-end life of poverty in the provinces. Both guys and girls from the provinces look for spouses in Moscow—their ticket to a better life. Many beautiful girls from the provinces flock to Moscow and St. Petersburg to sell their assets in the lap-dancing clubs, casinos and brothels in order to earn enough money to support their families at home and live the glamorous life. When a cop catches one without a proper registration, she'll pay the bribe with sex or some of the money she earned selling sex.

After I left Leo's agency, I decided to put my plan for finding Angel into action. I did not trust Leo and had heard too many stories from the American media of innocent young Russian girls lured overseas with the promise of good money from legitimate jobs only to have

their passports taken away and forced into prostitution. This was not going to happen to my other half. And besides, how difficult could it be to find a six-foot-one Russian blond go-go dancer in a club in Mexico City. All I needed was a private detective.

In the evening, an American friend working at Credit Suisse called to invite me to a party at one of Moscow's nightclubs.

"I'm not much in the mood for going out Vadim." I said after telling him my tale of woe.

"You are going to have to get over her Roy and this is the way to do it."

"I don't want to get over her. I want to find her and talk with her."

"You're not going to find her tonight so come with us."

Not wanting to spend the night in my apartment, I met him and his Russian lady friends at Vermel's. The girls were all very pretty and nice and listened to my tale of woe about Angel. My friend, who had immigrated to America from Azerbaijan when a child, asked me, "Do you still think that Russian women are more desirable than American?"

I answered, "Definitely, they are more feminine, tougher and understanding than all these American girls who try to act like men by forgetting what sex they were born as."

"True, Russian girls are more feminine, but perhaps that makes them more deadly," he laughed. "Here are three beautiful Russian girls and many more all around you to help you forget Angel."

Vadim's friends all smiled deliciously, but I couldn't forget about Angel. I worried that her obsessive drive to make money to buy an apartment may have led her into doing something stupid or dangerous. I went home and wrote Angel a letter; assuming she would receive it some day, in which I quoted from a Rock 'n' Roll song:

“Wherever you go, what ever you do, I will be right here (or in New York) waiting for you. Whatever it takes or how my heart brakes. I’ll be right here waiting for you.”

My personal concerns soon seemed small compared to events in Moscow. Terrorists began randomly blowing up apartment buildings in September 1999. Hundreds of innocent human beings died in these explosions that turned high-rise apartment buildings into piles of rubble. The authorities were helpless at catching the culprits. Psychics tried to predict which apartment houses were next. Residents set up night patrols to spot any suspicious persons or cars near their buildings. Many husbands and wives sent their children and grandparents to their dachas in the countryside to get them out of harm’s way. When I went to bed at night I wondered whether I would wake up under tons of bricks.

Yeltsin’s Government and the media, still subservient to the Federal Government, blamed the Chechens. Some of my Russian friends who were highly educated cursed the Chechens and wished death to all of them including the children. Most Russians see Chechens as primitive life forms worthy of extinction. I knew the Chechens were brutal but did not think them so stupid as to incur the wraith of a militarily stronger country whose rank and file population despised them.

My knowledge of Chechen criminal activities came from the first case I worked on For Kroll. The Moscow City Government wanted an American firm to manage a hotel-conference center. We discovered that Chechen organized crime ran the hotel, conference center and shops and provided the entire complex with services from laundry to protection to prostitution. The murder of two influential executives at the complex had also occurred, which was par for the course of lucrative Russian businesses. The American company at our suggestion declined to take the job. From our investigation, I learned that Chechen mobsters ran valuable businesses throughout Moscow and most of their profits flowed to Chechnya. Chechen and the Slavic

Russian mobsters had divided up Moscow by regions and industry while Mayor Luzhkov made sure that the two operated more or less peacefully and paid tribute to his city government.

Luzhkov and his inner circle not only exacted a share of the wealth from Moscow's criminal activities but ran their own illegal enterprises. At times it was difficult to distinguish between the activities of the city government and organized crime groups.

Russia's national police force, the Ministry of the Internal Affairs, or M.V.D., and the F.S.B., were both controlled by Luzhkov's opponents Yeltsin and Prime Minister Putin who used the bombings to crackdown on Chechen gangs in Moscow by deporting and jailing members, which cut deeply into Chechen criminal profits along with the tribute paid to Luzhkov. At the same time, the bombings undermined Luzhkov's image as an effective, strong leader because he could not protect city residents from the bombers. The Yeltsin dominated media raised questions about Luzhkov's competence and whether he was fit for the vice presidency for which he was running with his ally Primakov going for the presidency.

The damage that the aftermath of the bombings did to Mayor Luzhkov's political standing and Chechen criminal activities made it unlikely that the Chechens were responsible for this latest round of butchery. The people behind the bombings knew how to manipulate Russian fear and hatred of the Chechens. Some Russian professionals in the intelligence field blamed Prime Minister Putin, then Yeltsin's candidate for President, and his supporters as the culprits. Putin was running a near dead last in the polls to replace President Yeltsin, but after the bombings and resulting wave of hysteria sweeping Russia, the population clamored for a strong leader to put an end to Chechen terror.

At the time, Russia was technically in a state of war with Chechnya over its invasion of Dagestan in August, but the public was generally opposed to supporting a second Chechen war

just three years after the end of a previously costly and largely failed conflict with Chechnya. That all changed with the bombings. The Russian populace now wanted to destroy Chechnya, and Putin jumped into the lead for the Presidency, surpassing the alliance of Primakov and Luzhkov.

Chechnya has been a pawn in Russian power politics since the late 1700s when Catherine the Great's imperialistic ambitions expanded Russia southward. Catherine gained military control over Chechnya by treaty with Georgia but suffered defeat when she tried to exercise it. The Chechens and Russians have fought each other off and on ever since. The two populations differ in ethnic background, language and religion. Most Chechens are Sunni Muslims while Russians are usually Christian Orthodox, or at least profess to be such. Under the Soviets, many Russians at the Government's urging emigrated to Chechnya where they formed the ruling elite with the best jobs, the most perquisites and all the power that they arbitrarily exercised to further their own self-interests.

Chechnya made the perfect scapegoat for Putin's ruthless drive to power even when it looked like the Chechens didn't do the bombings. On the evening of September 22nd, with all of Moscow on alert, the bombers targeted an apartment building in the city of Ryazan, southeast of the capital. A resident of the building noticed strangers moving heavy sacks into the basement from a car. He called the police, but the strangers escaped before the cops arrived. A test by the police showed the sacks contained explosives. As the police blocked all roads from the city searching for the suspects, a telephone company employee overheard a long-distance conversation between the F.S.B. office in Moscow and individuals in Ryazan. The person in the F.S.B. office warned those in Ryazan to take care and avoid the police patrols that were looking for the bombers. Apparently, the F.S.B. was warning the bombers. When the story broke, the

F.S.B. lamely claimed it had placed the sacks in the basement, but they contained only sugar and it was merely conducting a training exercise. The resulting investigation by Russia's attorney general went nowhere because of stonewalling by the F.S.B., and the lawyer appointed to a public commission to conduct an inquiry was arrested before making his findings public. Witnesses did identify an F.S.B. agent as renting the basement in one of the bombed buildings in Moscow, but the agent then died in a car crash in Cyprus. In the end, the Russian courts adopted the F.S.B.'s conclusion that a couple of Chechen warlords were responsible. As an American executive told me, "What a frigging amazing place! The Government butchers innocent civilians so the powerful can remain in power, and on top of it all, the population knows the Government lied but still supports its war in Chechnya."

At least Angel did not face the danger of living in Moscow. But what other dangers confronted her in Mexico City. I finally tracked down a private detective in Mexico City through one of our Moscow subcontractors and was just about to hire him when Leo called to say he received a fax from Angel telling him to give me her address and telephone and fax numbers. So, just as I suspected, he knew all along how to reach her but refused to tell me. Why the secrecy? Oh well, maybe he didn't understand the nature of my relationship with her.

I called Angel right away. It was three in the morning her time, but she picked up.

"Hello Angel, it's Roy."

She giggled like a little girl, "I am glad you called. So Leo gave you my number."

"Yes. Are you okay?"

"Yes, I am fine. Leo told me you were worried about me, how sweet."

"When I read your letter, I couldn't understand why you said we would never see each other again. I thought you were being kept in Mexico against your will."

“Oh Roy, don’t worry,” she said seriously. “I am safe doing the work I want. I wrote the letter to thank you for your help. You told me your contract with the firm in Moscow was over in December, and I don’t know when I will leave here. I don’t think we will see each other again because you will go back to America before I return.”

My heart sank, but I wasn’t dead yet. “Angel, the contract might be extended and if not, I have enough money saved so that I can stay in Moscow for a while past December.”

“You can do that?” she sounded surprised.

“Yes, for a while. I don’t want to lose you. Besides, you did ask me to wait, so I will wait. Do you have any idea when you might be coming back to Moscow?”

“I am not sure; it may be three or four months. We will see what happens.” Not exactly what I wanted to hear.

“What type of work are you doing?” I asked.

Somewhat vaguely she answered, “I do modeling and dance in a club here. I just got home from work when you called. The club is very nice and the food is excellent. I have to watch my diet or I will get fat like I did in Cyprus.”

“I met you when you came back from Cyprus and you didn’t look fat to me.”

“Phew, I was almost as fat as when I first wanted to be a model at sixteen.”

“Well, I didn’t think so. What is a good time to call you?”

“I start work at 2:30 in the afternoon and leave at 2:30 in the morning, so I am usually home by three.”

“That’s a long work day!”

“I know, but I need the money to buy an apartment for me and my mother.” Once again her single minded drive for an apartment troubled me, but I admired her tenacity and courage to

go after what she wanted. For it was a worthy goal—a comfortable and safe home. Everybody wanted that, even me.

“Is it safe leaving work so late at night?” I asked, my concern still showing.

“Yes, the club bodyguards escort us girls to our apartment. You have nothing to worry about Roy. We are well taken care of. The apartment is lovely with a color television. I share it with two other girls who dance at the club.”

“Is this a good time to call you from now on?” I again asked to make sure and a leave my fear of annoying her with late night calls.

“Yes, and fax me your address and telephone numbers in Moscow, so I can write you or call you.”

“Will do.”

“I kiss you and hold you,” she seductively whispered into the telephone.

“I love you and miss you,” I said as she giggled her goodbye.

The following Saturday, somewhat to my surprise, my waking mind came face-to-face with a decision I needed to make between two alternatives: whether to forget about Angel or continue to pursue her? Apparently, my unconscious had processed the past two months of my involvement with this beautiful and talented Russian girl to put me in a position where emotionally I could go either way. Each of the two times Angel left, I felt miserable right afterward, but within a week or so the symptoms evaporated. I couldn't figure out why if I loved her. Ten years earlier, I would have forgotten about her because her actions and my intuition signaled too many warnings. Besides, all my life I knew I should avoid marriage. I used to refer to it as the one stupid mistake I never made, but behind the flippancy laid a serious warning. Yet

now in middle age, I was thinking in a very conformist and for me peculiar fashion that I was missing part of life by never marrying.

Changes in a person's philosophy generally do not happen at once but germinate in the unconscious mind until an external event brings to light a different belief. In the couple of years before meeting Angel, my reading of Joseph Campbell's writings and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Perceval* probably worked on my unconscious waiting for an event to convince me I was missing a key aspect of living—uniting with my “soul mate” or “other half”. Campbell's books on mythology often referred to the popularization of romantic or “courtly” love in 12th century Europe as epitomized in the book *Perceval*. The troubadours in the 12th century started singing of a higher reality accessed through romantic love that united men and women in a bliss filled metaphysical union that partially satisfied man's eternal yearning for feeling connected with what lies behind our perceptions of reality. Until the troubadours' popularization of romantic love, the primary relationship between a man and a woman consisted of marriage as a political and economic partnership. The advent of romantic love augured our modern day Western concept of people marrying primarily for love and not economic advantage.

Now that I met Angel, I thought, maybe the troubadours had discovered something, and all those moon, June, swoon, love tunes expressed more than the pleasures of sex or the security of companionship. When reading Campbell's *Creative Mythology*, I even created a visualization that represented the ideal life for me, assuming romantic love was not just another female illusion for manipulating men. Standing facing me was a tall, beautiful blond woman representing my other half and me her other half. Into our metaphysical union flowed art from her talents and vocation and physics from mine. Together we helped each other achieve not just material security but the joy of pursuing the work for which we were born and the peace of

feeling united with each other as part of the universe. Angel seemed to fit the bill. Besides dancing and modeling, she drew, acted and sang. Here was my chance to achieve my dream life, so I decided to pursue her until I won her. I vowed to call and write her once a week.

The bombings in Moscow and other cities subsided a couple of weeks later, but the out cry for revenge grew as Putin and the oligarchs backing him used their control of the media to fuel Russian war fever with stories of atrocities committed by Chechens against Russians living in Chechnya. Unlike in America, the Russia's Federal Government still controlled key industries, including the media, through direct ownership, state oversight committees and private owners who owed their newly gained business empires to connections with Yeltsin's inner circle. Putin and his allied oligarchs easily manipulated the news in order to mobilize most of the population behind Russia's troop invasion of Chechnya in October.

In order to assure victory in the presidential election for 2000, Putin needed news reports of Russian victories with relatively few Russian troop casualties but many Chechen deaths, whether civilian or military did not matter given the hatred of the Chechens. Stories of Russian military successes in which reporters depicted the Chechens as barbarians filled most of the airways and newspapers. Media outlets controlled by oligarchs beholdng to Yeltsin and allied with Putin fired any newsman who dared to report both sides of the war. The few independent newspapers and television stations reporting on the brutality of both Russian and Chechen fighters ran into harsh criticism from Putin's media cronies, fell victim to hostile business takeovers by Putin's oligarchs, and faced sanctions from the Media Ministry for interviewing Chechen leaders. Independent news outlets were even raided by government officials searching for evidence of tax evasion or other law breaking—not hard to find about any Russian business, or individual for that matter.

Most Russians, but not all, violate laws, agreements or other social or moral obligations when it is to their advantage. Russia is largely a country of liars and cheaters because survival under the Communists and Czars required chicanery and mendacity to survive or get ahead. The insatiable demands for bribes by the ubiquitous bureaucracy over 500 hundred years did not instill a sense of honesty but rather the belief that dishonesty was the best policy. When Lenin took power, he only changed the heads of the government agencies by replacing nobleman with Communist Party members. The rank and file bureaucrats remained to continue the tradition of bribery and the arbitrary exercise of power that bled away the value created by industry and stifled individual initiative. After Czarist rule and communism, the law of dishonesty is probably genetically encoded into most Russians. No one could have been a supporter of the Czar or Communist who did not suffer a horrible conversion that overturned all decent values. In 1999, a conservative estimate put government graft at over \$20 billion in an economy with a GDP of only \$184 billion.

A person might think that Russia needs more legislation to put an end to such massive corruption, but it wouldn't matter. Thanks to the Communists, the country already has an over abundance of laws that affect more areas of human activity than even most European nations. In Russia, statutes no longer exist to govern conduct, redress grievances or provide a degree of certainty on which people can rely in the conduct of their affairs. Rather the laws provide government officials with the power to exact favors and money from individuals and businesses by threatening them with enforcement of the regulations—essentially institutionalized extortion. I always advised Kroll's clients to obey the multitude of rules applying to their operations or risk government officials showing up to demand bribes or even a stake in their businesses.

Lonely Weekends

Through the fall of 1999, Angel worked in Mexico and the war in Chechnya raged with Putin looking the odds on favorite to win the presidency the following year. I called Angel weekly and wrote frequently, but she never wrote back. I asked her why, and she said that her days were filled with work and on the weekends she visited many beautiful areas in Mexico but always alone.

“She doesn’t write you because she does not care,” my female tutor of Russian brutally said.

I refused to accept this. Girls were always attracted to me, ever since I was eight. And once I kissed a girl, she was mine—not always immediately but eventually. I was sure this six-foot-one Russian beauty would be no different. Besides, few Russian man would do for her what I would. We discussed my taking her to America for a visit around Christmas time, which thrilled her. She might not love me now but she would. I kept calling, writing and on her birthday, November 10th, I sent her a bouquet of roses, which I imagined no one else did. I sincerely loved and cared about this girl. I dearly missed her and empathized with how lonely she must feel in a country so far from her home where she did not speak the language.

Despite the promptings of my heart, my intuition and logic still wondered about Angel’s reticence. But I always dismissed any misgivings with the rational that Angel, as most Russians, was secretive in order to protect herself from a corrupt government and various criminals. The Russian investigators in the office knew about Angel’s trip to Mexico and my concerns, since I possessed that common American failing of notoriously expressing my thoughts and feelings. Once again, they suggested investigating Angel and, this time, her agent Leo just to make sure I didn’t end up in a “difficult situation” as they euphemistically put it. Quite logical, but I chose

what I thought was the honorable route and declined. If I could not trust the girl I loved, I deserved whatever consequences came. Then again, perhaps part of me did not want to know the truth. Russians have a saying, “It is better not to know too much because then you can believe what you want.” Americans, however, have a saying too, “The truth shall make you free.” But at the time, I was in Russia, immersed in a culture closer to the medieval ages than the 20th century with all the eddies and whirl pools of an intangible sea driving my thoughts and actions in bizarre directions.

A few months in another culture can dramatically affect a person’s conduct without him realizing it. One of Kroll’s Fortune 500 clients sent its American manager back home after exhibiting “peculiar” behavior reminiscent of a feudal aristocrat and attributable to living in Russia. When I first met Kroll’s overall boss of Europe and the Middle East, a former CIA officer, he warned me against “going native,” which he defined as losing touch with who you are—an average middle-class American. Working in Russia, created the unseen danger of assimilation into the behavioral patterns of influential Russians because the entire society saw foreigners and New Russians as the economic and power elite of the country. For example, the manager of another Western client liked to tell the story of how he threw a temper tantrum at a policeman for stopping his chauffeur driven car while rushing to an appointment. The police officer demurely apologized and let the manager proceed as though he were a member of the nobility. In America, he would have ended up with a ticket or in jail. Many foreigners not only arrogantly puff themselves up in importance but also begin to follow the Russian maxim, “Tell the truth and you are doomed, tell a convincing lie that you believe yourself and you prosper.” Tiedemann, my immediate supervisor in London, who visited Russia frequently, had this down pat.

The infectiousness of the Russian prevalence for dishonesty once again entered the political spotlight in the fall of 1999 when a money laundering scandal hit the Bank of New York that involved Yeltsin, the Family and the Russian mafia. It didn't touch Putin because at the time he was new to the Prime Minister post and had no fortune to wash overseas.

Some Russian intelligence officials considered Yeltsin and his inner circle as the most influential of gangs within the Russian mafia. As president, Yeltsin ruled Russia almost as an Emperor. When he could not buy off or politically bludgeon the legislature into doing his bidding, he issued decrees that had the force of law. His inner circle of allies controlled the executive branch and the armed forces and ruled over key industries that allowed them to loot billions from the country. Much of the expropriated wealth ended up in safe markets for investment, such as the United States. Even the Family could not adequately reduce the risk of investing in Russia because of the unstable economy, embezzlement by other mafia gangs and the always precarious nature of power in Russia. Today's insider could just as easily become tomorrow's orphan, so Yeltsin's favorites and other gangsters transported much of their stolen wealth overseas. In the late 1990s over one billion dollars a month left Russia. Much of it gained by illegal means on which no taxes were paid.

The Bank of New York alone moved seven billion dollars of Russian mafia money out of the country during the late 1990s. The money funneled through three accounts into unlicensed banking operations set up in Queens, New York and Jersey City, New Jersey. Many transactions came from a Moscow bank run by Yeltsin's financial advisor. The Bank of New York hired Kroll to conduct an investigation into the money laundering accusations in order to shift the blame to the Family and Russian mafia for tricking an allegedly honest Bank of New York. Another reason was to show U.S. investigators that the Bank was doing all it could to prevent

such illegal activities in the future. Simply put, the bank got caught making lots of money washing Russian mafia cash, so it hired Kroll to help with the damage control.

The Kroll office in New York and Tiedemann in London ran the investigation—often sending their own agents to Moscow without confiding in the Moscow office what they were doing and severely restraining the Moscow office’s activity in the case. Tiedemann assigned the Moscow office the task of finding the Russians involved in providing the money for washing, but we were forbidden to track down any leads pointing to the Bank of New York’s culpability and what leads we came across were deep-sixed. Meanwhile, she and the New York agents were busy covering-up those trails. Tiedemann often limited or circumvented the Moscow office when she wanted to conduct an unethical investigation or manipulate the results to favor a high-paying client.

The Moscow office’s investigation into the Russian side of the money laundering reached right up to the Family, but we could not get inside because our sources of information feared for their lives. They wouldn’t talk no matter how much they were paid because they knew the power of the Family could reach anyone anywhere in the world. In a different case, we did breach the Mayor of Moscow’s inner circle to the extent of receiving reports on arguments between the Mayor and one of his close business allies, but obtaining information directly from inside Yeltsin’s Family was just not possible. Although nearly everyone and everything was for sale in Russia and people were willing to sell the lives of others for the right price, they were not about to sell their own lives.

The money laundering information we gathered showed politically well-connected persons funneling large amounts of money from illegal and legal activities to America without paying Russian taxes—no surprise there. Kroll’s efforts helped the Bank of New York avoid

criminal prosecution by paying a \$38 million fine and promising to abide by U.S. money laundering laws in the future. Not bad, a small fine given its assets and swearing not to do it again. The only persons criminally prosecuted, or more accurately scapegoated, by U.S. prosecutors, were a Senior Vice President for the Bank and her husband whom the Russian mob paid \$1.8 million to help transfer money and prepare documents for Russians to enter the U.S. illegally so that they could enjoy their laundered riches in America. The two also got off easy with five years probation.

During the unfolding of the scandal in the U.S. press, the Russian government and its controlled media mocked the American government for chasing windmills and insulting the character of Russians in general. The use of ridicule and attempts to make others feel ashamed are typical feints used throughout Russia's mendacious culture. The country's legal system never existed for discovering the truth and redressing grievances, only to preserve the power of first the Czars, then the Communists and now the New Russians. Consequently, Russians resort to psychology when accused of wrongdoing by someone whom they cannot bribe, maim, murder or otherwise influence. First they laugh good-naturedly and teasingly imply that such fanciful accusations will make the accuser look foolish to others. If that does not work, they assume the role of the innocent, misunderstood victim persecuted by unjust forces and unfairly treated. Russian girls are masters with both techniques; especially, when they add tears to the mix—many of them can cry a will. No one with half-a-brain believes the Russian government and its media lap dogs, but that doesn't matter. The influential in Russia never pay for their crimes. The Family and those close to it who laundered money continued as members of the power elite under Putin or enjoyed their stolen wealth overseas.

Stay

Two and a half months after Angel left, I found myself working in the office at night as usual and writing:

My Precious Angel,

It is Saturday night, dark and cold outside with snow on the ground and me here in a lonely office working because there is no one to go DANCING with. Where are you Angel? Why am I always alone? I thought you said I had a guardian angel to protect me. Doesn't that mean protection from loneliness? Are you that protection? Will our differences doom the short future you saw in my hand? —enough of my moaning and groaning.

Don't you become weary of this space-time continuum? Life has not been easy for you as it has been for others who have so much they cannot decide what to choose from and then complain with tears of hypocrisy that they have to make a choice.

Oh well, I miss you, I look at your photos, I sleep with the toy dog you gave me, but the perfume scent is gone, and I still feel lonely. I wonder whether we have a future and, if so, how long? I guess I should just let the universe and its metaphysical underpinnings unfold—after all you have a longer period of uncertainty facing you than I have.

I guess you are the only one I have now.

Love Roy

On November 15, Angel sent me a fax that she was flying back to Moscow on the 30th.

“It your love—Angelina. Little time and we can see each other. I'm think about you. It will be nice to be together. I hold you a lot, kiss a lot and miss.” Her message made me feel like her teddy bear, although I didn't know whether she had one. I was sure; however, she didn't have a three-foot high teddy bear, so I bought her one as a homecoming present. Angel sent her fax on stationary from the Westin Hotel in Acapulco, which seemed strange since she worked in Mexico City.

November 19 brought another fax with her flight information in which she asked me to call, saying it was very, very important and closing “I kiss you! I hold you! Your Angelina.”

I called her, “What's up Angel?”

“I am so happy you called. Did you get my faxes?”

“Yes. Is everything okay?”

“Yes. But I will be bringing back a lot of cash with me and I wanted to know whether you will meet me at the airport?”

“I’ll be there.”

“Can you also help me get through customs without declaring how much money I am bringing with me?” This was not unusual; most Russians want to avoid anyone, especially customs, from knowing how much money they have for fear of criminals and tax inspectors.

“I will arrange for you to go through the VIP lounge.” I said.

One way of smuggling in or out of Russia involved paying a well connected travel agent \$200 or having an influential person arrange for custom officials to escort the traveler and his luggage through the VIP lounge in order to avoid any inspection of the person’s bags. Naturally, the custom officials require a gratuity.

“That will be good,” she said. “Call me again Friday night after work to make sure everything is okay.”

“Fine, pleasant dreams lover,” I said. She said farewell with her usual I kiss you, hold you and miss you.

I made the arrangements through the firm’s travel agent and called Angel that Friday—but no answer. Strange, unlike most Russians and girls everywhere, Angel was always punctual in keeping to her schedule, just like an American businessman. I tried a few more times but still no answer. Now I began to worry. I did not have the number for the club she worked at, but even if I did, the place was already closed, so there was not much I could do except hope she was all right.

Around midnight Angel’s agent, Leo, called me at home.

“Roy, it is Leo. Angel is in jail,” he blurted out.

Oh, great, “What happened?”

“The police raided the club and arrested all the girls who did not have working visas.”

Hell, I asked myself, what kind of a club did she work in as visions ran through my head of Federalalies busting a nightclub with scantily clad “showgirls” screaming as they are thrown into the paddy wagon?

Leo added, “I thought you might be able to help get her out of jail so that she does not miss her flight on Monday.”

I was surprised at his apparent concern for her. “Give me the name and number of the club,” which he did, which also surprised me because up until then both he and Angel always ducked giving me either. I had simply chalked their reticence up to engrained Soviet secrecy.

“I will see what I can do to get her out Leo.”

“One more thing,” Leo said. “When she comes back she’ll be carrying a lot of money, including my commission. I think Angel and the money would be safer at your apartment than my office. I don’t have a safe here.”

“Okay, that makes sense. Thanks for calling me.”

When I hung up the telephone, I wondered why Leo called me. He clearly had contacts in Mexico City were he did some of his modeling business. And although we met a couple of times while Angel was in Mexico, we were not buddies. Leo, like most Russians, only dealt with Westerners on a business level, usually trying to obtain financing for some scheme or another in which the Russians always promised the sun, the moon and the stars in return for handing over dollars to them.

Enough speculating, first things first—Angel was in trouble and I had to help her somehow. I could just imagine what a Mexican jail was like. I traveled to Ecuador some years

earlier where one of the presidential candidates at the time showed me the prison in his nation's capital—no air conditioning, no color TV, no three-square meals a day and no clean sheets—just filth, stench and brutality.

I called our firm's office in Mexico City and told the manager the story. He said he would track down which jail she was in and use his pull to free her.

"Great," I said. Then I asked, "What kind of a place is The Men's Club?"

"It is a high class titty bar, no prostitution, just beautiful girls giving lap dances. I've been there a few times. Tell your girlfriend to introduce me to some of her fellow dancers there. I'm not rich enough to attract any of them on my own."

"Will do. Thanks a lot," and I hung up.

So Angel wasn't a model or go-go girl as she led me to believe but a lap dancer for rich men—that hurt. Yet over the course of the weekend, I rationalized that how else could a pretty young Russian girl make a living coming from a dead end society like Russia. At least she didn't resort to prostitution as all those girls at the clubs Rasputin, Sirius and many other places in Moscow. Then again, undulating intimate parts of the body in close proximity to strangers' faces while wearing only thong panties in return for money might amount to a form of prostitution. But I understood that desperate circumstances could drive decent people to desperate acts in order to survive. And the situation in the provinces where Angel lived was desperate. Anyway, I believed she was smart enough not to do anything stupid and had a good heart. All she needed was an opportunity to pursue a legitimate career in modeling, singing or acting, and she would put away the lap dancing. However, that meant bringing her to America and her changing from the typical Russian view of the future as the immediate to the American long-term view necessary to build a career. But I was sure she could do it with my help.

On Monday, the manager of Kroll's Mexico City office called to tell me that the authorities released Angel before he had a chance to intervene.

"Apparently someone else with influence got her out of the immigration prison."

"So she was arrested for a visa violation?" I asked.

"Right, and the immigration police put her on a plane for Germany."

He gave me the plane information, which was the same flight she planned to take originally, but I didn't know whether she intended to still catch the connecting flight to Moscow that she had faxed me about. I called the Frankfurt airport to page her. A little later, Angel called the office.

"Roy, it is your Angelina," she temptingly said.

"Are you all right? What happened?"

"It long story and I tell you in Moscow. Can you get me through customs?"

I told her it was all arranged and what she needed to do when she got off the airplane.

She said, "I will be bringing a lot of cash so it important that I do not have to declare it."

"I understand. It is all taken care of."

"I have to go catch my plane. I kiss you, I hold you, I miss you," she giggled as she hung up.

Something troubled me about the whole situation, so I sat down with the Russian investigators in the office for their take on what happened and Leo's involvement. They suggested that I keep Angel's money locked in the office because Leo might hire some policemen to knock on my door and search my apartment. If they found Angel's money for which she had no custom declarations, the cops would take it and she'd never see it again. The police might not even wait until Angel and I returned to my apartment but grab us at the airport

on Leo's signal. Leo told me he planned to be at the airport to meet Angel and the other girl who went to Mexico with him and Angel back in August. The investigators also warned that Angel might conspire with Leo believing that I would make good her loss. That way she would double her money and Leo his commission. I didn't think Angel would ever do anything like that, but Leo would. My instinct agreed with the investigators' advice not to show at the airport, and, for once, I followed my instinct. I telephoned Leo that I couldn't make it to the airport and told him about the arrangements for Angel to go through the VIP lounge in order to avoid Customs. Angel would stay in one of his apartments for the night and I'd picked her up the next day.

Always the vain girl, Angel didn't wear her glasses when she exited the plane, so she missed the sign with her name held by the guy who would have escorted her to the VIP lounge. When she hit Customs, she simply lied about the over eight thousand dollars in cash and travelers checks she was carrying. Customs cleared her, and Leo took her and the other girl back to his office. The next morning, I went by to meet my smiling, tan Angel. We kissed, and she put her arm over my shoulder in that same protective fashion.

"Roy, I can only stay in Moscow a couple of days. I have to take my money back to my mother in Krasnodar so it will be safe. You understand, don't you?"

I understood her desire to get home with her money after three months overseas but was not happy about it.

"So when do I see you again?"

"I will be back in the middle of December to pick up the rest of my money that Alfredo is bringing me from Mexico."

"Who is Alfredo? Does he work at the club?"

“Yes he does and is a good friend who will bring the rest of my money to Moscow. The police took me directly from the jail to the airplane. I could only pick up my clothes and the money I had hidden in them. Alfredo has the rest of my money, about \$18,000.”

“That’s a lot of money,” I said. In total, she made \$26,000 for three months work tax-free, which was better than my earnings in the same period. “Is Alfredo also coming to Moscow on the club’s business?”

“No, he’s just doing me a favor.”

“He’s going to fly all the way from Mexico City to Moscow, risk smuggling in thousands of dollars, just to do you a favor?” This didn’t sound logical to me for some guy who worked in a titty bar.

“You’re jealous, how sweet,” she beamed her childish smile. “Don’t worry Roy, Alfredo is just a good friend with a kind heart.” Something didn’t fit, but I soon forgot about it with Angel beside me.

We took her bags to my apartment and her money to the office for safe keeping until she left, which I told Leo we were doing to prevent any uninvited cops on the take from showing up at my apartment. I gave Angel lots of flowers and the three-foot high teddy bear. Before going to the Bolshoi ballet, we visited Leo for her to pay him his commission, 20% of her gross in Mexico. After the ballet, Angel made a series of calls from my apartment to Mexico City to check on her money and confirm when it would be brought to Moscow. As I sat down next to her while she presumably talked to Alfredo, she crumbled up a slip of paper with telephone numbers on it so that I could not see them. Why the secrecy, I once again wondered, but as always, I let it go.

We spent our first night together during with Angel drinking too much wine and asking me a peculiar question, “Now that we are boy and girlfriend, how many girls have you had sex with in the past three months?”

I replied, “How many guys have you had sex with in the past three months?” She was clearly surprised by my response and eventually said none. My intuition told me she lied, but I was in no position to protest because I had played around with my secretary for a couple of months.

Angel and I worked out the details of my taking her to America for ten days in January. She couldn't go over Christmas because she wanted to spend the holidays with her mother. The year before she had worked in Cyprus during Christmas, so it was important for her to spend the holidays with her mother this year. I told her what documents to bring back to Moscow so that we could go to the U.S. Embassy and get her a tourist visa. On the day she left, I hired an armed bodyguard to escort us to the airport for Angel's two-hour flight to Krasnodar. I didn't put it past Leo to try to pull a fast one, since he knew which flight she would take and how much money she carried. Eight thousand U.S. dollars equaled \$160,000 of buying power in Russia. I also worried about Angel arriving in Krasnodar with so much cash, but I had no means to protect her there. She assured me she would be safe in her hometown because her mother would meet her at the airport. That did not assuage my fear much. What could her mother do against gangsters, call the police?

No one relies on the police for protection in Russia. Instead, those with money hire private security agencies that ironically employ policemen to do what their government jobs require of them. It is hard to blame the cops when their government salaries are so small and usually paid months late. The cops see their bosses all the way up to Yeltsin taking payoffs in

one form or another or using government positions to make money on the side. Why should the cops be the only suckers to act honestly?

Angel knew Russia better than I, so I put my apprehension aside, and all the way to the airport, she held me like a child, which seemed natural.

Angel promised, “I will call you when I know the exact day of my arrival back to Moscow.”

“And call me as soon as you arrive to let me know you made it back safely.” I asked as we kissed goodbye.

My concern went beyond the danger over her carrying so much cash to flying on a local airline. Under the Soviets, air travel inside the empire was a dangerous proposition. Each major city owned an airline that the local bureaucrats managed—not exactly a prescription for safety. In order to fly to a particular city required passage on either that city or the departing city’s airline—there were no others. Politicians do not appreciate negative publicity, so airplane crashes were often not reported. People waiting for their friends and loved ones at airports were told nothing. After a few days, they realized the truth.

With the collapse of communism, the officials running the local airlines could no longer keep accidents secret, but their incompetence in operating heavier than air flight remained unchanged. And to make the situation worse, a new danger arose. Previously, the Communist Party prevented government officials from egregiously looting state assets, but now rampant embezzlement thrived in the bureaucracies. Large portions of budgeted funds for maintenance disappeared and planes took off with a minimum of fuel because officials had sold the rest. Throughout Russia, bureaucrats cut airline safety to a minimum and below in order to enrich themselves.

When I didn't hear from Angel the following day I began to worry. I sent her a page, "Did you arrive safely? Love Roy." But still no response. During the wait to hear from her, my maid told me that someone had recently gone through everything in my apartment, and that two sets of my gloves were missing. Did Angel steal them? Nah, it made no sense.

Two days after her scheduled arrival, I sent another page, still no response. I didn't hear from her until three days after she arrived. I couldn't understand why she delayed in calling. She knew how much I worried about her traveling with so much money and flying.

"Angel, where have you been? Did you receive my pages?"

"Yes, I got them but was not able to call you until now. Everything went fine. My mother met me at the airport."

"Why didn't you call sooner?"

"I was not near a telephone where I could call," she said. "You know I don't have a phone in my house." I knew that but also knew that all Russian Post Offices have telephones for calling long distance. True, most Russians could not afford to make long distance calls, but Angel had just gone home with \$8,000 to an economy where the average yearly income for households amounted to \$1200.

I quickly forgot my concerns when she said, "I miss you Roy and want to be with you when I am back in Moscow."

"When will that be?"

"I am not sure yet, but around the 15th. I will call you just before my arrival. Roy I need you to do me a favor."

"Okay, what?"

“I need to know banks in Moscow with ATM machines that give cash in dollars. My friend from Mexico brings a BankMex Card with some my money on it, and I need an ATM machine to get the cash from it.”

“I will find out. Is there a place I can call you with the information?”

“No,” she answered, “page me and I will call you back. When do we go to Embassy to get my tourist visa?”

“We can go any day of the week, but we have to get there around six in the morning to stand in line. The Embassy opens up at eight.”

“Okay, I bring all documents with me. Can your driver pick me up at train station?”

“Not a problem, we will both meet you. Just let me know which station and when.”

“That is good. I kiss you, hug you and miss you.”

“And I love you,” I replied.

Angel called back a few days later for the list of banks with cash machines. Using ATM debit cards to transport money overseas was rather sophisticated, but it required a bank account, which meant she had one in Mexico City or used the account of a friend there, probably Alfredo.

Young Blood

About a week later on Tuesday, December 14th, my secretary says, “Angel is on the line.” I assumed she was calling in response to the pages I sent her in Krasnodar the previous week. Once again, I was surprised she hadn’t called earlier.

“Did you get my pages?” I asked.

“No,” she said in a low, contrite voice.

“I sent one on Friday and Saturday. I was worried when you didn’t answer.”

“Oh, you know Russia,” she uneasily said. “Nothing works here.” Then in a sultry voice, “I’m in Moscow Roy and want to see you very badly.”

“What! When did you arrive?”

“I took train and got in early morning at seven.”

“Why didn’t you call? I would have picked you up.”

“I didn’t want to bother you. Anyway, I had to meet Alfredo to get my money.”

“Did you get it all?”

“Yes. Now me and mother can buy apartment. I am so happy. Can I come to your office?”

“Where are you, I can send my driver to pick you up.”

“No. I need to do some things first. I will meet you in your office.”

“Okay. I have some meetings but will tell the staff to expect you. I should be back by late afternoon.

“I want to be with you Roy. I missed you,” she said again in her vamp voice.

“And I you, Angel.”

“Are you sure, you don’t want my driver to pick you up?”

“Yes, I will be okay”

“See you later then.”

As I hung up, I felt something was not right. First, during our previous call, Angel made sure that I could pick her up at the train station, but then she arrives without any notice. Second, she failed to answer my pages sent to her in Krasnodar, the only place her pager worked—it didn’t work in Moscow. Perhaps she wasn’t there but on her way to Moscow by train or already in Moscow if she flew. Assuming she took a train on Friday from Krasnodar, she would arrive

on Saturday, meaning she had been in Moscow for at least three days before she called me. Finally, she came to town to get her money from a so-called good friend who was willing to fly all the way from Mexico City to Moscow just to do the good deed of delivering her money. This strained my understanding of human nature. I asked the firm's Russian investigators whether we could find out which train or plane Angel took from Krasnodar to Moscow, the date and time of its arrival and the date that any Mexicans with the first name of Alfredo arrived in Moscow within the past week. After a few telephone calls, they said yes, but it would cost me a few hundred dollars. I told them to let me think about it. The cost didn't matter, but I worried about the impact my spying on the girl I loved would have on our future relationship, since no matter the result, the act of my distrust would always remain a secret between us. I always considered a relationship based on dishonesty as doomed.

I believed that a true union with ones other half proceeded through four levels, each requiring honesty by both persons. Beginning at the physical when two people find each other's appearance appealing. Then moving into the mental where they realize the other is as smart as they are. Philosophies and behavior patterns may differ, but each respects and enjoys the others intellectual abilities and insights. At the third, emotional level, compassion and passion combine in a desire to be with the other person. Lies, secrets and dishonesty can creep in at any of these three levels to prevent one party from opening up completely to the other. Open hearts can't hide lies and dishonesty or keep secrets. Without open hearts, two people will never achieve the metaphysical fourth level where the physical, mental and emotional levels combine during the act of sex to produce an experience of each person merging into the other. For a brief time, both exist in a metaphysical union not just with the other person but also with the universe for each is a part of that universe.

Riding to my afternoon meetings, I concluded that Angel probably arrived in town a few days earlier to payoff Alfredo with sexual favors for bringing her money from Mexico. I understood how important the money was for her and her mother, and had it not been for the police raid on the club where she danced, she would have brought it all back with her. I further excused her conduct by rationalizing that our affair had only just started and payment to Alfredo was an obligation incurred before Angel and I became intimate. I decided to let this incident go, but if another one happened, the relationship ends.

As a lawyer, I've noticed that a key problem with the profession is that lawyers could convincingly argue any proposition to the point where the truth or proper course of action depended solely on the outcome they wanted. Perhaps, I had fallen victim to this skill by giving Angel a second chance.

When I arrived back at Kroll, the door to my office was closed. My secretary said Angel had been in there for a while and was probably sleeping. I quietly opened the door to check but found her intently looking at a document on my computer screen. My computer contained the files from present and past cases, Kroll's web of information sources in Russia, informants in Europe and America as well as a direct link into Kroll's database, which stored the most secret information for the entire firm around the world.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing, just playing," she said clicking the exit symbol so the document disappeared.

"I thought you didn't know anything about computers."

"I don't, that's why I try to learn. Aren't you glad to see me?" She smiled innocently and I forgot about the computer.

When I saw her jumbo-size suitcase I said, “You should have let me send my driver. How did you manage to carry this here?”

“It was no problem. I am a strong Russian girl,” she said as she struggled to move the suitcase out of the way.

“How did you get here? By metro?”

“Yes.”

“You must have had a difficult time lugging that bag around.” It didn’t make sense to me why she chose to drag this large, heavy bag, which she could barely move around my office, through the metro system when my driver would have made things easy for her. Oh well, we were together again and the office staff thought highly of Angel except my Russian secretary. She pulled me aside to say, “She’s using you Roy!” But I dismissed the warning as jealousy.

Angel had charmed the three investigators, which included two wily middle-aged Russian men and a British girl in her twenties, who believed herself a man. The British girl, Tiedemann’s girlfriend, was impressed with and sexually attracted to Angel. “She’s a big girl,” the Brit said in a tone of desire and submission. The Russian guys were particularly impressed with Angel washing everyone’s luncheon dishes. Companies in Moscow generally provide kitchens for employees to prepare their meals because most Russian workers can’t afford to buy their meals, and, even if they could, Moscow doesn’t have many places to grab a quick meal. The Kroll office included a kitchen and everyone brought his or her own lunch except me. I hired my secretary’s mother to prepare both my lunch and dinner at the office.

The male investigators said Angel was the type of Russian girl that would make an excellent wife. This allayed my suspicions and greatly pleased me, since previously, after seeing her pictures and hearing she worked as a model, they told me to watch out and suggested

investigating her. One of the investigator's had spoken from inside knowledge about Russian models. His niece worked for Russia's top agency Red Star and for years she brought her female model friends to his dacha.

“All they talked about was how they used this man or that man. They bragged about how many men they could keep on the hook at one time. None of these girls expressed any concern for morality. All they wanted was money and the glamorous life and would do anything to get both. No self-respect, no dignity at all. I got so fed up listening to these whores that I kicked them out of my dacha and vowed never to see my niece again, and I haven't. But I can see Angel is not like those lazy whores. She knows about woman's work and is willing to do it.”

I felt proud and happy that the investigators, even the lesbian Brit, now approved of Angel.

I asked her, “How long are you going to stay this time?”

“I have a fight back in two days.”

“Only two days,” I protested.

She drew closer and put her arm over my shoulders, “Roy I have to go back to Krasnodar as soon as possible, so me and my mother can buy an apartment before end of year. A new law begins the first of next year. It will make us tell where we got our money to buy an apartment. It will cause me problems if I have to say I make the money in Mexico.”

“I'm sure it would. The government would make you pay taxes.”

“Yes,” she said.

Later the Russian investigators in the office told me the purpose of the law was not to crack down on tax cheats but to stop the purchase of real estate with money from illegal

activities, such as prostitution. Well, lap dancing wasn't prostitution, so Angel didn't have to worry unless the authorities refused to believe her, which they would in order to extract a bribe.

Real estate in Russia, for practical purposes, did not mean land, just buildings, houses and apartments. When communism collapsed, the business occupying a building or people living in an apartment or house became owners of the structure rather than just tenants, but the land on which a structure stood remained the state's. So these new owners could sell buildings, houses and apartments but not land. No one, including businesses, could buy land, but anyone could lease it from the local government for, in some cases, 99 years. The inability to buy and sell land made foreign investment in real estate risky because any lease of land required the continuing good graces of government officials. Once a project turned into a moneymaker, however, officials reasoned they should reap the benefits rather than the foreign investor whose funds made it all possible. Local governments could and did renege on lease contracts to force foreign investors to sell at a loss to the brash young Russians who acted as the fronts for and were usually related to the corrupt officials—the real power in Russia.

Similar scams frequently occurred to foreign investors under Russia's bizarre corporation law. Prior to 1998, foreign capital flowed into Russia seeking high returns as compared to the risk. With the help of the International Monetary Fund, the national government and some regional and local governments began borrowing in the international market of public debt. This signaled to private investors that the risk of investing in Russia had diminished significantly. The rush was on for high returns, which caused a flood of foreign money into Russia.

When foreigners invest in another country, they exchange their own currency for that of the country in which the investment is made, in Russia's case the ruble. An American must convert dollars to rubles before making a legal investment in Russia. At some point the investor

will sell the stock he bought, receive dividends or collect loan payments all in the form of rubles. Rubles don't do a foreign investor any good in his own country, so he needs to exchange the rubles into his own currency. A person can't buy chewing gum in America with rubles. A serious problem can arise when the foreigner finally goes to switch the rubles from his investment into his currency—the rubles may buy fewer dollars than the investor originally put into Russia. To avoid this problem, the investor pays a bank to agree to give him so many dollars for a certain number of rubles over a period of time that assures the investor will not lose on converting rubles. Banks run by competent managers can make a good return providing this service. Russia, however, had very few competent bank managers.

In 1998, the Russian government defaulted on its loans to the West. Private investors took this as a signal to cash out. They went to various Russian banks with the rubles from their investments requesting the banks pay them the amount previously agreed in dollars or other foreign currency in exchange for the investors' rubles. Unfortunately for the foreign investors, agreements meant nothing in Russia. Most of the Russian banks refused to pay because when the government defaulted, the value of the Russian ruble plummeted. If the bankers lived up to their agreements, they would lose most or all of their wealth as a result of their own greed and incompetence. They thought it better for foreign investors to lose, so they began secretly transferring the money owed foreign investors to overseas havens or corporate entities different from the banks.

One case at Kroll involved a number of Western banks that bought stock in and made loans to a large Moscow bank. With the fall of the ruble, the Moscow bank saw an opportunity to avoid paying its foreign currency contracts and cheat our Western clients out of their investment while saddling them with the bank's currency losses. The Moscow bank did this by

simply transferring most of its valuable assets to another bank that the Russian executives controlled. They left the original bank with all its liabilities but no assets to pay them. The Western investors had no recourse because their claim was only against the original bank that now had a negative value. They could not go after the assets transferred to the second bank because it was a different legal entity although run by the same Russians. Sounds nuts, but Russian corporation law permitted this type of embezzlement. In civilized countries, such conduct usually puts the bankers in jail.

The following day, Angel and I got up early to wait in the dark arctic cold outside the U.S. Embassy to obtain her a tourist visa. There are always long lines of Russians waiting to try their luck at a visa to America. Some want to visit their relatives, but most want to leave Russia for good. One typical method for leaving the motherland behind involves a tourist or student visa. Once in America and after the visa expires, the Russian simply stays put working in the underground economy. Russians know that most of the workers in the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service are like their own bureaucrats—inept and lazy, so the chance of getting caught and deported once in America are slim to none. But getting the visa in the first place can prove difficult, especially for young Russians.

The most favorable method of entry for Russian females is to marry an American because then they can travel back and forth, work in America legally and eventually bring their relatives over. One Russian girl expressed the attitude of many, “I don’t care if he is fat, old or ugly, I will do anything to get out of here.” Once they have lived in the U.S. for two years, they become permanent residents and can divorce their husband, which they usually do, taking some or a lot of his money with the help of a divorce court manned by Feminazis just waiting to vent their hostility against a guy.

The Embassy personnel understand that many Russians, especially females in their twenties, will say or do anything to escape their homeland, so the personnel make the procedure as difficult and arbitrary as possible. After waiting two hours in the cold and another hour inside, Angel and I finally made it to a clerk. We presented the papers and the clerk, a Russian female, decided on her own initiative, contrary to the Embassy's guidelines, to require an additional document that I did not have. It's an old Russian trick of arbitrarily making last minute demands inconsistent with the rules in order to dissuade someone from doing what they had a right to do. It played on the average Russian's ingrained acceptance that bureaucrats could make up the rules as they went along. The clerk obviously hoped to throw a monkey wrench into our plans or at least dishearten us into giving up. Angel began to argue, but I knew it was useless, so I pulled my ace. I told the clerk to contact the American officer at the Embassy whom I had talked with a number of times about obtaining a visa for Angel. I originally contacted him just in case some lower level bureaucrat gave us a hard time. Russians always jump for their superiors, especially if they are Americans. She contacted the officer and granted Angel her visa immediately.

"I can't believe it. We got my visa and so quickly. Great," Angel said as she hugged and kissed me. "Now I go to America."

"You will see it is a different place—the land of opportunity."

"What do you mean by opportunity?" she asked.

"In America, if you work hard, have a little bit of luck and treat people decently, you can achieve your dreams. You can work at whatever it is you wish and make enough money for a house, a car and to raise a family in a safe environment. You do not have to sacrifice your dreams and self respect just to survive like in Russia where only the criminals succeed."

“I will see for myself,” Angel said somewhat disbelievingly, which made sense. She grew up in a culture where its citizens had no rights, no opportunities unless the band of thugs who hijacked the government, whether Communists or racketeers, disdainfully granted such. How could she possibly understand the axiomatic belief of virtually all Americans that because they are human beings, they have rights that no government can take away; that the government and its bureaucrats work for the citizens rather than lording over them as feudal barons once did. How could she realize the power of such a belief in tens of millions of people. America never had a dictator. Richard Nixon tried, but the political system got rid of him because he had broken the American moral against widespread violation of the citizens’ Constitutional rights. A more practical guarantee of individual rights that many communist minded Americans don’t realize is that before any government decided to assume dictatorial powers, it would have to contend with the 200 million guns owned by Americans. In Russia, only the government and criminals—who are usually the same—have weapons; therefore, they do pretty much what they want.

Since Angel wanted to spend the holidays with her mother, at the suggestion of one of the Russian investigators in the office, I asked her whether she wanted me to visit her in Krasnodar. The investigator reasoned that if Angel really cared for me, she would agree, but he added as a caveat that the village she lived in just outside of Krasnodar was a dangerous place for a Westerner. Angel seemed surprised by the idea and asked, “Where would you stay? My house is too small for guests.”

“I’ll stay in a hotel,” I said, which caused her to pause and think.

“But it is too expensive,” she protested. “You know how I try to save your money. I’m not like other girls who take a man’s money.”

“I can afford it.”

“Let me think about it. I’ll have to talk to mom,” she concluded.

At night, Angel and I went to a party thrown by a young American, Tony Wong, who headed up the Russian operation for the American pharmaceutical company Schering-Plough, which I referred to as Scherring-Hoe. Tony and I met through one of my professors at Columbia University’s Business School. As with most American man working in Moscow, Tony’s major recreational activity consisted of bedding as many young, although not necessarily pretty, girls as possible, which included a 14 year-old Cuban girl that he often bragged about. Tony, a firm believer in quantity over quality, actually kept count. I attributed the high number to part braggadocio and part a character flaw of chasing any girl who dated one of his friends or associates. He apparently assumed that since a girl was going out with someone he knew; she should also go out with him. Naturally, he made a play for Angel even though she was almost twice his height. She thought it very strange that an American would chase another American’s girl.

“Even in a disco, the worst Russian gangster did not try to cut in on another Russian’s girl,” she said.

“Tony’s not typical of American men,” I replied. “But there do exist some who just don’t have the guts to find their own girl in America, so they feed off of others. But in Moscow with so many Russian girls wanting to date American guys, I just don’t understand Tony’s tactics.”

For Russian girls, an American boyfriend meant the glamorous life that only dollars could buy. Americans generally lived in luxurious apartments, drove nice cars or were chauffeured around at the expense of their companies. They could afford the best discos, restaurants and culture while your average Russian girl entertained herself by sitting around the

kitchen table, drinking tea, eating chocolate and talking with friends—not a girl’s idea of fun as her looks tick away. The beauty of most Russian girls burn brightly from puberty to their late twenties when they start to turn sour on life as age robs them of their looks and, therefore, their power. The girl who bets on her beauty in Russia has about ten years to satiate her desire for fun and adventure and to score big. Angel always admonished me, “Don’t waste your time!” as though she believed it paramount to pack an entire lifetime into relatively few years.

Russian girls also find American companies attractive because they provide the best paying jobs. Most begin as secretaries, whom Russians refer to as “secretutes” since a secretary generally provides her boss with sexual services. But unlike working for a Russian boss, a secretute can advance within an American company and by socializing with her boss, she’ll meet lots of other Americans willing to show her a good time in return for sexual favors. A win-win situation for a Russian girl as long as she stays attractive. The boss, of course, enjoys a young, pretty girl the likes of which would never consider going out with him in America unless he had a lot more money. Even when the American boss keeps hands off, there is the advantage of not having to worry about some employee dragging him into court for sexual harassment in an effort to sex-mail the company and destroy a man over an innocent remark complimenting a girl’s appearance. The American guys I knew in Russia went there in large part to escape persecution by a social order twisted to favor females by turning a blind eye to the weaknesses and strengths that Mother Nature gave both sexes over millions of years of evolution. Russia also allowed these guys to believe themselves special despite prior social and career failures in America. Russian girls knew all this and used it to their own advantage.

The next day, Angel agreed to my visiting her over the New Year’s weekend, which for Russians amounts to our Christmas, New Year’s and the Fourth of July all rolled into one

holiday. On New Year's Eve, Russians exchange presents, get drunk, party and set off fireworks. The approaching New Year held added significance since it also marked the beginning of a new millennium, which for the countless Russians who believed in superstitions carried a heightened sense of caution. For me, nothing changes on New Year's or New Millennium Day, so any omens of ill fortune were buried by my rational mind.

While preparing to leave for the airport, Angel asked some strange questions, which she repeated a number of times over the next month or so.

Folding her clothes, she matter-of-factly asked, "Does your firm work with the F.B.I.?"

"Sure, some of Kroll's employees are former F.B.I. agents. Why do you ask?"

"Maybe I could find work with them."

That surprised me. "I thought you wanted to be a model."

"Yes, but if it not workout, I will need other job. Doesn't the F.B.I. have an office in Russia?"

"Sure, it's in Moscow."

"You must have lots of contacts in F.B.I.?"

"Not I, that's all handled through London or New York."

"But you know the people in London and New York, right?"

"Sure, I go through them now and then."

"The F.B.I. works with the F.S.B here in Russia, doesn't it?"

"More or less, also the Ministry of Internal Affairs."

"Kroll must have lots of contacts in the F.S.B. and the Ministry?" she asked rolling up her panties.

“That’s how we get information to help our clients. The bodyguard I hired for you last time works for the F.S.B.”

“Your clients are big American corporations?”

“Mostly.”

“They hire you for information?”

“And sometimes protection.”

“Why all the questions Angel?”

“I just research the job market.”

My driver and I took Angel to the plane. I positioned myself across her lap and fell asleep with my face nestling between her neck and shoulder. I couldn’t get over the security I felt in her size. This time she carried \$18,000 in cash, but I was not as worried. Angel clearly knew how to function in Russia; besides, Leo knew nothing about it.

Before boarding the plane, she said, “I look to us being together for the new millennium in my home. Remember, I am poor so my house is small and lack many things.”

“That is not important to me. It is you I want, not your house.”

“Oh, I hope so,” she laughed. “I could not see you living in my house. It would be too difficult for you.”

“I have lived in some difficult places,” I said. “Russians seem to think Americans are weak.”

“Living is so difficult in my country. It makes us strong. Americans do not have the problems we have and so we grow up tougher,” she proudly said.

“If Americans are so weak, why did we win the cold war?”

“Oh, you are a war hero now,” she said sarcastically with her arm over my shoulder and playing with my hair. “We will give you a medal in Krasnodar,” she laughed good-naturedly.

We kissed. “Be careful and call me when you arrive.”

“I will think of you and miss you until New Year’s. Be careful in Moscow. I have special love for you. So long for now,” she said with her model smile.

Pretty Little Angel Eyes

This time Angel called as soon as she arrived in Krasnodar. All was well; she and her money were safe. I wondered where she kept her \$26,000—definitely not in a bank. Russians knew better than to trust any bank in that country with their money. Under the Soviets, a large bank account triggered an investigation into where the funds came from. Such investigations often ended with the account holder in the gulag or graveyard with bureaucrats expropriating the money. Russia’s present system of kleptocracy proves no less risk for money entrusted to a bank. Tax officials will use bank records to target well-off depositors for a bribe to avoid prosecution for tax evasion. Or a bank will simply declare insolvency in which the depositors’ funds disappear into the executives’ pockets, which occurred all across Russia in 1998. Federal deposit insurance didn’t exist in Russia, and, if it had, the government couldn’t have afforded to pay. Over the decades, Russians have created ingenious ways of hiding their money in their apartments using false ceilings, hidden doors and double bottoms in draws or storing its value in jewelry.

Angel earnestly asked, “Roy, this will be a big New Year celebration because of the new millennium. Can you bring some fireworks?”

“What kind of fireworks?”

“The ones that shoot into the air and explode, the big ones,” she giggled. “I can’t find them in Krasnodar but I think they sell them in Moscow.”

“Wait a minute,” I said. “You want me to bring firework rockets on an airplane.”

“Yes, big ones that explode with lots of lights,” she innocently said. Bright lights and neon colors thrilled Angel. Every time we passed a brightly lit casino in Moscow, she said with a strange awe, “Oh, the lights are so beautiful. It is great. My hometown is so dark.”

I had visions of walking on an airplane, my arms full of rockets that would promptly blow up in mid-flight. Ironically, given the Russian disregard for safety, the stewardesses might actually let me on the plane with the fireworks. On flights within the country, passengers bring on huge suitcases and maybe an animal or two that are stowed in the aisle or if small enough held in their laps. They are afraid the luggage handlers will steal their bags for which the airline will not pay because it assumes the victim of the theft will lie about the value of his stolen belongings, which they will. I loved Angel, but I wasn’t going to risk a Russian stewardess permitting me on an airplane with rockets.

“I don’t think they will let me on the plane with them, Angel,” I somewhat dissembled not wanting to show what a Russian would consider cowardice for not trying to hide the rockets in my luggage.

“Oh,” she said as if surprised. “You really think they will not let you on the plane with them?”

“Yes, I do,” I said.

“Why don’t you hide them in your luggage?” she responded.

“The ones I saw in Moscow are too big for my luggage,” I lied.

“Oh,” she said somewhat disappointed but then just as quickly brightened, “I will try to find some here.”

“Good idea. I will give you the money when I arrive,” I said, relieved to escape that situation.

For the next two week I ran around Moscow buying presents for her and her mother. Angel told me her mother had been a dancer in her earlier years, so I got her a pictorial book of Bolshoi performances along with various other gifts. For Angel I bought a CD player, jewelry and lot more.

Work consisted mainly of two cases: one involving a high-speed electronic data system. A consortium of foreign investors wanted to invest in the construction of an electronic data system that would carry email, television and other digital information throughout Moscow. A large Russian communication conglomerate with good ties to Moscow’s Mayor Luzhkov had run out of money before completing the system. The foreign investors concluded the system would generate huge profits providing the executives of the conglomerate also maintained good connections with the Prime Minister Putin, the odds on favorite to win the Presidency thanks to the war in Chechnya. Because Luzhkov opposed Putin, a Putin Presidency would threaten Luzhkov’s political influence and the conglomerate’s success if it was tied too closely to Luzhkov.

In Russia, winners go to extreme measures to bury their opponents—both figuratively and literally. The success of any business depends on political connections. The foreign consortium worried that with the possible political demise of Luzhkov, Putin would transfer control of the electronic data system to another company more closely connected with him. Our investigation found that the Russian conglomerate had excellent connections with Putin, so the

foreign consortium's investment was safe by Russian standards. We also discovered that the new digital transmission system would enabled the Russian Government to eavesdrop on any transmission, including all the emails going into, around and out of Moscow. Kroll immediately began measures to encrypt its emails.

The other case concerned finding the culprits behind the counterfeiting of a Western brand of instant coffee. Russian counterfeiters always get something wrong with the packaging of their fake products because it costs too much to accurately duplicate foreign labeling. The bogus labels made finding the retailers easy by simply going to various markets looking for the telltale signs of the counterfeiter's label. Moscow, as with other Russian cities, has a small number of large open-air markets consisting of many small shops where Russians purchase most of their consumer items. It turned out that every large market in Moscow sold the counterfeit coffee. No surprise there since eighty per cent of the foreign coffee sold in Russia is counterfeit.

Kroll's contract agents, members of the F.S.B., backtracked the counterfeit coffee to the wholesaler and then the manufacturer by examining the records kept by a few retailers and the wholesaler. When a law enforcement official shows up at a Russian's business requesting to look at its records, the business better comply even though the official may be moonlighting for a private company such as Kroll because payment to a high ranking official could land the owner in jail or heavily fined. That's the way private investigations usually work in Russia: using law enforcement officials, no matter how high their rank, who rent out their police powers because it pays better than the government. The wholesaler's records listed the apparent manufacturer and times of delivery. To make sure they found the real culprits, our agents followed the delivery trucks back to their source. The counterfeiters operated under the aegis of the city government

with profits channeled to the Mayor's office and other officials right on down to police officers. There wasn't any cost-effective way for our client to put a halt to that.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the influx of Western and Asian products caused many Russians to stop buying the low quality and often-dangerous goods produced within their country. Under the old Communist regime, manufacturers didn't care about quality because there was no competition nor enforceable safety requirements, since consumer lawsuits went nowhere in the Soviet courts and the government didn't care. With the fall of communism, manufacturers still didn't care about safety because of the continuing incompetence and corruption of the courts and the government. They do care, however, about competition, which they deal with by simply marketing their low quality products under imported brand names. Counterfeit televisions, radios, clothing, food products, medicines, liquor, beer, wine, toiletries and many other items flood the Russian market. Usually the prevalence of a counterfeit product far exceeds the number of the genuine import, so most Russians never realize they've purchased fake goods because they never bought the originals that allow for comparisons. Even foreigners, who sometimes can tell the difference between counterfeit and genuine goods, continue to buy fake products because no one knows where to find authentic items.

Counterfeiting grew into a big business for local governments in the 1990s because they continued to control most of the manufacturing facilities in Russia, just as they did under communism. Privatization didn't touch many production plants, and in those it did, the local government kept a large ownership stake. Public officials earned huge profits passing off cheap Russian goods as the better quality and more expensive imported brands. Foreign producers tried lobbying the Federal Government to crack down on local counterfeiting but failed, since many federal officials also shared in the counterfeiting profits, and they were not about to

destroy a key source of funds that assured power for their political allies in local governments. The most successful RICOs stretch from the President's inner circle down to the traffic cop extorting money from motorists.

With Christmas approaching, business and government operations nearly ceased in Russia. From around the 25th of December to the middle of January, many Russians got drunk then sobered up so they could start drinking again. The population binged on food, drink and doing nothing at all, which, except for necessary services run by drunks, virtually shut down the entire country. This extended hiatus from work evolved after the fall of communism when Russians decided to celebrate both the Western holidays and the pre-Soviet observance of the orthodox Christmas on January 7 and orthodox New Year's a week later. The Russians created an opportunity for an extended vacation in Cyprus, Turkey or at their dachas and took it without regard for the long-term economic consequences.

Goin South

On the night before New Year's Eve, loaded down with presents, I boarded my plane for the warmer climate of Krasnodar and Angel. In Moscow, the snow was falling with the temperature well below zero. The plane taxied out to the runway but then stopped just before we were about to take off. The captain said there would be a slight delay to clean the runway. Two hours later, still sitting on the tarmac, the stewardesses started serving dinner while we waited. No sooner did I cut into my generic Russian meat than the pilot decided to take off. As the plane rumbled down the runway picking up speed, the passengers tried, with varying degrees of success, to keep their dinners out of their laps. Then the plane shot up steeply like a combat fighter. The acceleration slammed passengers into their seats while they juggled trays of less and less food in an effort to nullify the forces splattering meals over them, the seats and the cabin

floor. Some succeeded, most didn't. I was lucky. Once the plane leveled off, the stewardesses and passengers laughed about the incident expressing a resigned acceptance of "What do you expect from Russia."

Two hours late, I arrived around 10 PM instead of eight a little worried that Angel might not have waited, knowing her frustration with tardiness. The taxi drivers, as they do at any Russian airport, mob the disembarking passengers at the gate exit to hawk their services, making it difficult to spot friends. But there she stood, tall and beautiful with an older woman, nearly a foot shorter than her. She put her arm on my shoulders, looked down into my eyes and kissed me; I was happy.

"You're late. We have been waiting for hours. We did not know what happened."

"The snow in Moscow delayed our take off," I said.

"As usual they tell us nothing," Angel complained about the airline officials. The Soviet fear that a late plane often meant a crashed plane still haunted Russians.

Angel introduced me to her mother, Inessa, who didn't speak English, but I learned later that she, like so many other Russians, understood the language but pretended not to.

Taking charge, Angel said, "First we go to the hotel where you and I will stay. Mom will then drive back to the village with this very nice gentleman who agreed to take us for much less than other drivers. Can you pay for the car?"

"Of course," I said.

I started to kiss her, but she was hesitant and said, "Not in the car, in front of my mom and the driver."

The drive to the hotel took me through various sections of Krasnodar while Angel told me a little about her home. Krasnodar's population totaled around one million, a fairly large city

by Russian standards and like all cities except Moscow and St. Petersburg crushingly poor. As we drove, the night darkness seemed in the process of strangling any light coming from homes, buildings or streetlamps. I never saw such a place where the night fought so relentlessly against the light except for the Bogside in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. Immediately, I understood why Angel liked the bright city lights, only hopelessness patrolled these streets.

Criminals ran the city, lived in big houses and rode around in Mercedes Benzes while the rest struggled through a dead end existence of poverty and humiliation. Like the aristocracy and Communists before them, the criminal bosses of Krasnodar, many former Soviet big shots, occupied powerful government posts from which they arrogantly and arbitrarily enforced their will. Even their younger underlings, Krasnodar's New Russians, flaunted an untouchable status by ignoring traffic rules, forcing average folk to move to a less favorable table in a public restaurant, never waiting in line, renting the town's most beautiful models as semen depositories and living the indulgent life above the law. The bosses didn't battle other ruthless gangsters and politicians to the top of the power structure; they simply worked their way up under the Communists the way many executives do in American corporations. The organization that had restrained the conduct of Russian political bosses—the Communist Party, lost its power with the empire's collapse, which allowed cowardly Kafkian bureaucrats to turn into embolden bullies.

During the drive, I saw that most of the city's buildings consisted of small, one-story single-family houses made of brick with outhouses for toilets and, according to Angel, no hot running water. Except for some large, newly constructed houses built by New Russians, the homes were old and dilapidated with windows covered by the grim of the ever-present industrial air pollution. The tallest buildings consisted of hotels and apartment complexes of about 10 stories with hot running water supplied by the city but turned off every night from 9 PM to early

the next morning to allegedly save energy. More likely, the Mayor sold the city's fuel at a token price to his associates and relatives who then sold it in the marketplace for a killing with a large share of the profits going into the Mayor's overseas account, probably in Cyprus. The dimly lit city center on Krasnaya Ulitsa or Red Street contained mainly retail shops in low-rise buildings mostly constructed before the 1917 Revolution. Krasnaya Ulitsa stretched straight as an arrow for two maybe three miles, and for much of that distance, a park with a pedestrian walk ran down the middle between the car lanes.

Around 11 PM, we arrived at the Moscow Hotel on Krasnaya Ulitsa where I had booked a room on the recommendation of one of Kroll's sources. Angel and I said goodbye to her mother, and I paid the driver to take Inessa back to her house in the village. The lighting inside the hotel only added a few more watts to the dimness of the city center, probably intentional in order to cover a dilapidated and architecturally ugly hotel built under the Communists.

Krasnodar had a number of hotels, but the city government allowed foreigners to stay at only two in order to more easily keep an eye on them. Old Soviet behavior died hard, but also assured that foreigners were charged higher rates, since the income went back to the city and its bureaucrats. Russian hotels generally charge Westerners five, ten and even twenty times as much as they do Russians—not unlike banana republics where prices rise dramatically when a Westerner walks through the door. The most cost effective way to visit Russia was to use friends living there to find a private room for a fraction of the hotel rates and someone to guide the visitor away from money fleecing restaurants, stores and women. Despite the Russians 70 years of isolation from the rest of the world, they knew all the little schemes used to separate a foreigner from his money—it's in their genes.

The quality of accommodations didn't differ between the two hotels allowing foreigners, but the Moscow Hotel cost one-fifth the rate of the Intourist Hotel, which was why I stayed at the Moscow. The doors in the hotel's rooms hung crooked and opened the wrong way, some frames lacked trimming and the sinks were not attached to the wall, so when I leaned on one it almost land on my toes. The beds, only a little wider than a camping cot, used plywood boards for a box spring on which laid a decade or decades old mattress that had never been turned. The Moscow Hotel also rented suites with double cots, one of which I had mistakenly reserved. Hotel suites catered to prostitutes and their clients, were filthy and, in the one I rented, still sported a used condom lying on the floor.

As soon as we entered our less than paradisiacal abode, Angel said, "You must always lock the door twice and leave the key in the lock so no one can insert a duplicate key from the outside."

"You're kidding," I said. "Who would want to break in here?"

"You are American. To Russians that means money. Chechnya is not far from here and there are plenty of Chechen gangsters in Krasnodar."

"What can they do to me? My firm has contacts with the F.S.B., F.B.I. and C.I.A.," I said full of myself.

"That means nothing to the Chechens. I know; I used to live with them. They will kidnap you, hold you for ransom and for each delay in payment cut off a part of your body until there is nothing left."

"Not a pleasant prospect." I jokingly answered.

"Please! Just do what I say. I know how to live in Russia."

"Okay, if it makes you happy."

She smiled, held me and put her hand on my head, “Yes Roy. It will make me happy.”

Changing the subject she said, “Tomorrow in the morning, I must go some places by myself.”

I assumed she wanted to let me sleep late or didn’t want to bore me with tagging along as she did her chores. “I don’t mind going with you. It will give me a chance to see some of Krasnodar.”

“No. I must go myself. It will be better if you wait here,” she firmly said.

“Whatever you want. I’ll go out for a walk.”

“No, you mustn’t,” she quickly said. “Russia is a dangerous place.”

“Angel, I have traveled around different parts of Russia by myself many times. Besides I live in New York City. I know how to take care of myself. You do not have to worry about me getting hurt or lost on the streets of Krasnodar.”

“I don’t want to worry about some crazy Russian hurting you,” she sweetly said.

Gee this girl really cares about me. “Okay, whatever you want.”

“Good,” she smiled. “Then in the afternoon we will go to my house in the village and celebrate New Year’s Eve with mom.”

Angel pulled out of her bag bread, meats, utensils and the type of water heater I hadn’t seen since my college dorm days for making tea. This girl came prepared.

“The food is for you Roy. You must be hungry after your flight,” she caringly said.

“That’s for sure. But don’t you want some?”

“No, I already ate and I still on my diet. Tea is fine for me.”

We talked while I stuffed my face, then played around and went to sleep. I fell right off into a strange dreamland even though it usually takes me an hour or more to fall asleep no matter how tired I am.

Next morning, Angel ran her errands and I watched television in the hotel room.

While switching through the four channels in Krasnodar, one of the Russian investigators from the office called to say that Yeltsin had just resigned the Presidency and appointed Pupin acting president.

“That means Putin will almost certainly be elected to a full four-year term in the spring,” I said.

“Unless the war in Chechnya goes dramatically bad, there is no stopping him,” the investigator replied. “The F.S.B. and the oligarchs did a good job of out maneuvering Luzhkov and Primakov with the Chechen War.”

“What happens to them now?”

“They will try to placate Putin in order to preserve some of their power by not running an aggressive campaign against him or perhaps even support him.”

“The courageous way out,” I sarcastically remarked.

“Exactly,” he laughed. “Russia is about survival, not dignity. Enjoy your New Year’s Eve.”

“You too.”

Party Lights

When Angel returned, we grabbed the presents, food and champagne I brought from Moscow for New Year’s Eve. As always Angel dickered with a couple of taxis looking for the lowest rate and complained, “Everybody in Russia wants to cheat you. They are so greedy.”

Angel's village, Yablonovsky, laid just outside the city limits of Krasnodar. At the roadblock on the city border, armed guards checked people entering Krasnodar but not leaving. Russians considered Krasnodar well managed despite the wholesale corruption because the Mayor ran the city with a strong hand. Like a boss of bosses, he enforced a code of cooperation among the different Krishas that minimized violent confrontations by ensuring all the gangs participated in the fleecing of Krasnodar's population. In return, the average citizen didn't have to worry about street crime or terrorists. Yablonovsky was a different story. There anything could happen. Krishas battled violently, store owners didn't know which gang to pay protection and when the sun went down, average citizens generally stayed at home behind locked doors.

When Angel attended college in Krasnodar at the Academy of Physical Culture, where she graduated in 1996, public buses didn't go beyond the Krasnodar city limits because of the danger. Angel couldn't afford a taxi, so she traversed the miles from the city border to her home on foot. In the dark of winter, she ran in fear that some hoodlums might grab her and have their way with her. I felt so sorry for her going through such an ordeal. I wished I could have been there to help her.

Angel's neighborhood consisted mainly of small one-floor houses with no basements or attics. Here and there a New Russian two story house sprung up but even those sat on tiny plots of land. There wasn't as much to steal in southern Russia as in Moscow, so the New Russians weren't as rich. A high fence of solid metal surrounded Angel's house with a locked gate in the front. When we arrived, her mother was outside in their tiny front yard washing clothes in cold water with her bare hands in the winter weather. They couldn't afford a washing machine. The house had no hot water, no shower, no bath and an outhouse in the back from which the user could watch snowflakes fall through the cracks in the wooden door of the unheated commode.

Inside the front and only door to the house, stood a small kitchen with a gas stove, sink, couple of cabinets and a tiny table for two pushed against the front window. On the wall to the left of the front door hung coats and on the floor were piled up shoes and slippers. Russians always change from shoes to slippers when entering their homes, not just out of cleanliness, but because many believe the devil lives outside their doors and street shoes that traipse through the devil's environment carry bad luck into their homes unless placed off in a corner. After the kitchen was a tiny foyer the size of a large closet in which the two kept their vanity table and Angel's many stuffed animals. How could she afford all of those, I wondered. The last and largest room in the house served as the living, dining and bedroom—that was it. These two women were poor, terribly poor and had always been poor; yet they appeared cheerful, hopeful and hospitable in their poverty.

Angel and her mother created a cozy and warm atmosphere with holiday decorations that included a plastic Christmas tree. The television or a radio stayed on all the time, except, I assumed, when they slept. The barrio of Guayaquil, Ecuador used a similar technique to ward off the depressing environment. Angel's mother seemed genuinely nice and modest, looking after my needs as she would a son. Angel brought out her photograph albums—one for the family and six dedicated to her. I browsed through them while she provided commentary and her mother prepared dinner in the kitchen.

“My parents moved to Grozny when I was very little.” She showed me a photograph of a man in his thirties holding a baby. “And this is our apartment in Grozny. It was very big with four rooms.”

“My father was an officer in the M.V.D. in Grozny, and until I turned 10, we were very happy.” In Russia, as in the former Soviet Union, the police, or M.V.D., are a nationwide

agency controlled by the national government. Individual towns do not have their own police departments beholding to the Mayor but rather a division of the M.V.D. handles local law enforcement right down to the traffic cop.

“I thought you said everything was fine until you were eight?”

“No,” Angel continued, “We were happy until I was 10. Then he started drinking and when mom went traveling as a dancer, my father would beat me and not give me enough food. He would invite his friends over to play cards and drink. Then they would eat the food my mom left for me. I was always hungry.”

She told me the story before, but my heart still ached for her. I couldn’t change the past, so all I said was, “I’m sorry Angel.”

“When I was 13, he sexually attacked me.” She told me that before also. Angel didn’t go into details, and I didn’t ask but assumed he raped her.

“Mom decided to divorce him and move to Krasnodar when I was sixteen. It was very difficult. My father wanted half our apartment but Mom fought him in court and won. Mom sent me to Krasnodar in 1991 where I lived in a dormitory and went to the Academy of Physical Culture. I was always hungry.” Angel often said she was always hungry. “Mom sold our apartment, bought this house and moved all our belongings here with the help of a wonderful Chechen man.”

“I am so sorry you and your mother went through such a hell,” I sincerely said. “If I had known you then, I could have helped.”

Angel laughed and in a nice way said, “What could you an American do here in Russia?”

I responded a little defensively, “In 1991, after the fall of communism—a lot. We Americans are not as weak as you think.”

“Oh, my superman. Next time I will call you and you will fly to me.” She laughed, but really believed I could not have helped her.

I noticed that all the pictures of her before she started college clearly showed a nasty and angry, although pretty, young girl. A few of these also showed a very fat girl, which surprised me. I pointed them out and Angel quickly grabbed them saying, “Those aren’t suppose to be there!” She then ran off to hide them in her vanity room. I tried to joke about her past stoutness, but she didn’t take kindly to it, so I dropped the subject, not asking the obvious question: “If she was always hungry, how did she get so fat?” But I did ask about the mystery as to why the photographs of her after she started college showed a cheery, bright and smiling girl as though overnight her entire psychological makeup had changed.

She said, “When sixteen, I started reading the Russian philosopher Sergey Nikolaevich Lazarev who wrote about karma. I realized that my anger would get me nowhere but only punish me. People would not want to help me if I always angry. I started to believe in the God of the new human race, the new world outlook. It combine science and religion in a society where people be both saints and creators, and the God helped me change inside.”

Sounded a little Hitlerian to me but understandable given the insecurities of the changes undergoing in Russia in 1991. Still, overnight conversions, especially those involving religion, made me skeptical. How can someone growing up in poverty in a dysfunctional society like Russia change herself into a good-spirited person? But, apparently, she did. Angel never lost her temper with me and always appeared cheerful and kind. Yet something prompted me to ask for one of the angry anti-Angel pictures, “Can I keep one these photos of you when you were sixteen?”

“If you want,” she seemed surprised but unconcerned.

We moved on through this pictorial celebration of Angel but not necessarily in chronological order.

“These pictures are of the Russian long jump championships in high school. I won them three years in a row.” I heard that before also but was still impressed. “Here are shots from our track meets at the institute. I did not do well then because I injured a bone in my foot. I would have tried for the Olympics, if I had not injured myself, but I do not think I would have made it because all those athletes take steroids. I didn’t want to do that to my body and lose my femininity.”

“Drugs can exact a heavy price but mainly they are just a waste of time,” I knowingly said with a double meaning that she missed. “But successful athletes in Russia live well, with the state providing all kinds of benefits: cars, apartments and money. Don’t they?”

“Not anymore,” she sourly answered. “Now the bureaucrats only help themselves. After the fall in 1991, the only way to get ahead was to work in the government or as a criminal working for government bureaucrats.”

“Not so in America.”

“I will see.”

Then with pride she directed my attention to three other packed albums, “These have my modeling pictures.” I saw lots of nude and semi nude photographs that clearly pleased Angel but made me feel jealous.

“Who took these photos?” I asked, wondering whether that was all he did. I didn’t know anything about the modeling industry except that the mass media seemed to always report stories of unscrupulous photographers taking advantage of innocent girls.

“Various photographers, they are all professionals,” she added, as if knowing I suspected something more went on at these shoots. I decided I would just have to get use to strange men looking at my girl’s body since that is what a model sells.

None of the photos in these albums showed between her legs, but that didn’t mean none were taken, so I tried to catch her off guard by asking, “Where are the photos that show the rest of you?”

Angel matter-of-factly said, “I don’t permit those kind of pictures. I am an artist.” That was a relief. Some parts of the modeling industry could provide a decent way to make a living, and Angel apparently understood this as she avoided the more sordid temptations for making big money.

Proud of her recent travels, Angel pulled out some photos of her in Mexico, including the “good friend” Alfredo, middle-aged and fat, two other guys and two girls, one a friend from Lithuania, Azul, who also danced at The Men’s Club. Angel said they were taken on a weekend trip to some Mexican ruins.

“You told me that when you went away for the weekends you were always alone.” I said.

“Not all the time.”

“Yes all the time. In one of your faxes, you said I am always alone on the weekends.”

She ignored the discrepancy, “This guy and girl are married. She is Russian and friends with me and Azul. Alfredo and this other guy are the couple’s friends. We all simply took a trip together.”

I let it go until the photos of a smiling Angel lying on a hotel balcony with the background clearly identifiable as Cancun. Not all of her showed, but she was completely naked. “Who took these pictures?” I asked, my suspicions immediately returned.

“Azul, of course. We traveled a lot together.”

“So who is the girl in the back ground by the railing?”

“Just some girl. I don’t know who.”

“Do you always have strange girls on your hotel balcony? Who paid for the hotel room anyway?”

“I have to help mom in the kitchen,” she abruptly said and just got up and walked out.

Russians tend to ignore questions or statements for which they have no appropriate or face saving response.

I wasn’t happy about what these photos implied but wanted so much to believe in her that I even began thinking this Alfredo was just a good friend of hers and Azul’s. Possibly he took the two of them to resorts so that people would envy him traveling with two pretty young ladies or to convince himself that such girls enjoyed his company. But then I estimated the costs in my head to fly, house and feed two girls for a weekend in Cancun and knew only a fool would believe Angel’s fairy tale. Alfredo clearly received a return on his investment, which meant Angel misled me about her extracurricular activities in Mexico. However, once again, I rationalized that I really had no grounds to object because our romance didn’t begin until after Mexico. Still, her dissembling bothered me, as I saw a little deeper into her behavior. Her memory didn’t match mine: she couldn’t keep her stories straight but possessed an excellent ability to invent stories on the spot.

When I finished the last album, Angel came back from the kitchen, pulled out the videotapes of the beauty contests in which she competed over the past four years. Her presence on videotape came across even better than in the still photos; a transition most models can’t make. The video camera loved her and she loved it. My previous work as a writer and producer

in television news taught me when someone belonged in front of the camera, and Angel did. All the other contestants looked stiff and ill at ease in comparison to her. Videotape simply emphasized Angel's brightness and cheerfulness.

We watched the videos of the Miss Krasnodar and Miss Fa, which she won in 1998. These contests were big time in Russia, similar to state and regional contests in the U.S. In the Miss Fa contest, Angel did a dance and acting routine of professional quality. As good as I ever saw back in the states. Immediately, I realized that with the right management and a little luck she might make it big in America.

"You really have talent Angel, I am impressed."

"But in Russia, talent means nothing anymore," she accurately pointed out. "Under the Soviets, the state rewarded artists for their work, but now they starved, no one cares and the criminals steal everything."

"Yes, but in America artists can make a decent living and some even achieve great things. Sure they have to work hard...."

"I no afraid of work."

"With a little luck, artists can support themselves in relative comfort and raise a family doing what they love."

"Oh, America is a fairy tale," she laughed.

"No, it's a place that gives people the chance, not the guarantee, to achieve their dreams. When we go there next month, I will introduce you to a couple of my friends. One was a model and now sings and acts in plays, and another played lead guitar in a famous rock band and now produces records. They are not rich but make a living doing what they love."

"I wish for my dreams to come true but I will see."

I, on the other hand, confidently entertained visions of managing the career of an up and coming star of the stage, screen, fashion magazines and rock 'n' roll. As a lawyer with an MBA, I knew I could make her dreams come true. My friends would put me in touch with influential people in the entertainment industry, and I could protect her from its sharks. It all seemed to fit: brains, talent and a decent girl deserving a chance. It also promised a new adventure for me.

Angel grabbed the runner up spot in the Miss Krasnodar pageant in which the winner went on to vie for the title of Miss Russia.

"I didn't win the Miss Krasnodar title because I was poor," she said. "Here the winner has to buy her own clothes for public appearances as Miss Krasnodar. They don't give her a wardrobe. The judges knew I couldn't afford fashionable clothes, so they gave the title to a girl with rich parents."

"I'm sorry," I said, not sure whether to believe her or not since it sounded like sour grapes.

"Let me show you my first beauty contest," as she pushed the tape into a video player, which I assumed she just bought with some of the \$28,000 she brought back from Mexico.

The tape showed a group of girls painted in different colors. "Which contest is this?" I asked.

"Body art," she gleefully answered.

I looked closer. "Are these girls wearing any clothes?"

"No. We cover our bodies with paint. It is art," she emphasized over and over.

"Besides, no one can see anything because of the paint." Not exactly true, I could see plenty just watching the tape.

Angel continued, “I was so nervous before I went on stage. I was afraid someone would recognize me and tell my mother.”

“Where is this?”

“It was right here in Krasnodar. I was a student in the institute at the time.”

“How could you go on stage without any clothes in your hometown and not think someone would recognize you?” I asked, but she did not answer.

“I won this contest because of the design painted on my body and my fan dance,” she proudly recounted her triumph.

All the contestants did a dance of their own choosing, but Angel’s fan dance made the others look like amateurs. I understood why she won but not why she danced naked in front of an audience in her hometown. Her prize was a CD player, but she pleaded with the contest sponsors to award her a camera instead, which they did.

“I always dreamed of owning a camera and then I won one, and now I have gotten the CD player too as your present to me. It must have been fated,” she said, sincerely believing in an omnipotent intelligence that directs the events in people’s lives. She probably wanted the camera to take pictures of herself.

The tape of another local contest that Angel won showed her with the man she called her first love.

“That is Alexei my first boy friend,” she said with fondness.

“Good looking guy,” I said with jealousy.

She then proceeded to tell me about Alexey, the man to whom she lost her virginity. All girls do this. Why? I don’t know.

“Alexei and I met at this contest. When I won, he presented me with flowers and carried me off the stage. He was very strong.” That was an understatement; Angel weighed around 150 pounds. “We went together for over a year before making love, which for me was the first time. I was twenty-one.” No lovers before twenty-one for such a beautiful girl sounded unlikely to me, especially in Russia where, next to vodka, sex ranked the most popular form of escape from the malaise of Russian life. But then again, one of my former Russian girl friends, very pretty, kept her virginity until twenty-one. “We made love here in the house the first time. My mother found out and was furious with me. We went out for nearly four years, but he had no money and would not look for good paying work. Then he left me for another woman. Alexei was the only man I had sex with.”

All girls do this routine too, or something similar. They say without any prompting how many guys they went to bed with: one, two or three—never any more. It doesn’t matter their age, twenty or forty, the most guys they slept with before me never tops three. I never could figure how that was possible? All of my buddies, including me, have slept with more than three girls, so assuming we make up a representative statistical sample, who are all the guys out there sleeping with? Maybe there are a relatively small number of girls who take on thousands of men each, but I doubt it. The girls I dated simply lied.

“Here is dinner,” Angel said as her mother brought in the first course.

When Russians entertain guests, the dinners go on for hours with many courses and many different drinks. They spare no expense in showing their hospitality. The dinner that night easily cost a month’s salary for her mother, which amounted to around thirty-five dollars for teaching at a college, the same Academy of Physical Culture where Angel graduated. Nearly every lifting of the glass required a toast, which is an art form in itself in Russia. After my

second toast, I ran out of things to say, which was surprising for me, since the wine wasn't strong, the glasses small, and I usually don't drink passed my ability to think. For some reason, my concentration vanished into a stupor of well-being. Angel and her mother, however, rambled on and on, toast after toast. With Russians the more you say the better, that way no one will remember any of your words—I guess. Angel couldn't eat too much because she was about to burst the seams of her skintight mini dress.

About five minutes before midnight, Angel jumped up, somewhat drunk, ran into the foyer, came back carrying enough fire power for a troop of soldiers and said, "Let's hurry outside for the fireworks."

I grabbed a coat but not Angel; she hit the cold unfazed in her low cut, ultra mini silver dress. Russian genes, I assumed. No streetlamps on her block, only the dim light from stars and windows that barely made visible the indistinct forms of plenty of people moving around and talking in the street. Looked like the entire neighborhood was out there waiting for the town fireworks somewhere off in the distance. Angel squatted like a child full of glee with her mini ridding around the upper most parts of her un-childlike legs, setting up her own rockets, which I thought would be hard pressed to complete with the town's fireworks.

Then at midnight, all around me explosions went off, screaming rockets careened every which way and bright colored flashes lit up the block. The town didn't put on a fireworks show—each and every household did. It looked like a war as far as the eyes could see. Every small group of people in the street shot off its own fireworks disregarding what lay in the line of fire. Rockets and explosions went off in all directions near and far, quickly scaring me out of my euphoria into the alertness of a ball carrier in a rugby game. Angel jumped up and down, squealing like a little kid while her rockets exploded all over the place. Rocket after rocket,

bomb after bomb, this six-foot-three beauty in heels with glittered blond hair, painted face and gold chains cavorted in the noise and bursting lights. Her metamorphose into an ecstatic little child seemed complete and endeared her all the more to me. All around us, other Russians were laughing and cheering in total disregard of their rockets hitting houses, neighbors or themselves. After ducking a couple of projectiles, I concluded these people were nuts. Finally it stopped, and the bleak, deep silence of the country took over. We went back inside, where Angel and her mother donned dragon masks.

“Why the masks?” I asked.

“2000 is the year of the Angry Dragon,” Angel said grinning and slightly drunk.

“So what does that mean?”

“Successes can vanish or be illusionary. Things look better than they are. Great caution is needed before acting because fortunes as well as disasters will come in massive waves. There will be a lot of surprises and anger. But from some anger will arise the righting of wrongs and the success of justice over injustice. The dragon has the power of transformation. But we must learn which battles to lose in order to win our wars.”

“Sounds like any other year to me,” I cynically replied.

“You will see this year’s difference at the end. The dragon turns and shows the full moon. Look at it in the sky; it is a reminder of the gift that you have been given. The Moon shows choice and earth nature. You can make a choice but cannot escape your nature.”

“Ookay,” I said, trying to shake the haze out of my head in a vain attempt at comprehension.

Angel and Inessa continued the celebration by setting off poppers that shot confetti and sparks all over the place. They appeared oblivious to any fire hazard. Russians don’t look too

far ahead, but her and he mother's lack of a minute or two foresight to a possible blaze seemed extreme. Luckily, no fire occurred, and the two enjoyed themselves, as did I.

Around two in the morning, Angel and I walked out into the silent darkness to hail a car back to the hotel. She seemed alert, but I was groggy even though I had drunk little.

She warned, "It very dangerous to go out at night around here. Many people are robbed, so do not say anything in the car; otherwise, they will know you are an American."

"What ever you say, but I don't feel any danger here. The stars are out, it's peaceful and we are alone." I always enjoyed the quite-loneliness of night in secluded places—the opportunity to feel the currents of life and wonder how it all works. But I knew nothing of how life worked on that dark and chilly road with houses of people who never hoped to fulfill their dreams because the avarice of a few made the lives of so many nothing more than a struggle to survive.

"Sssh, be quiet. Someone may hear you. It is dangerous here."

Step By Step

The next evening we took an overnight train to Sochi on the Black Sea. Angel bought the cheap sleeping accommodations where my feet hung out into the open corridor along with the rest of the passengers who looked like refugees. I told her to buy a cabin for privacy, but she wanted to save money.

Under the Communists when the iron curtain kept most Russians imprisoned in the Soviet Union, Sochi turned into a favored warm weather resort for the Nomenklatura, or influential communist bosses. After the fall of communism, middle-class Russians, the few who existed, started vacationing in Sochi while the Nomenklatura, now influential criminal bosses, travel to Florida and the Mediterranean, especially Cyprus.

Sochi had an attraction to it, even in winter. It sported a tropical, lighthearted feeling unlike the gloom and oppression of other Russian cities. The hotel looked like a classy American one out of the 1930s: well built, fine decorations and brightly lit. Angel brought along the water heater for tea plus bread and meats, but once again she only drank tea while I ate the food as late night snacks over our two nights stay.

The Sochi restaurants were nice, the food not too bad and during one lunch while talking about her acting talents, Angel said to me, “Do you want to see me cry?”

“You can cry at will!” I said amazed.

“Watch.” Within seconds tears began rolling down her cheeks. I’d never seen anyone do that before.

“How’d you do that?” I asked.

“Oh, it easy,” was her response.

We went to a few discos—Angel cannot live without dancing. We shopped, saw the sights and caught the circus, which Angel, like all little girls, loved. She especially liked the tigers.

“I was born in the year of the cat,” she said. “And the tiger is my favorite animal.”

“Do you consider yourself a tiger?” I half jokingly asked.

“You will see my power someday, be careful,” she responded looking down into my eyes. I dismissed her remark as bravado. Later, I learned she was born in the year of the rabbit.

On our last day while walking in a park, we ran into a Russian guy and girl whom Angel knew. They talked in Russian; I didn’t understand a word and then they left.

“Why didn’t you introduce me?” I asked.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I forget.”

“You always forget. Whenever we run into someone in Krasnodar that you know, you never introduce me. How come?”

“I just become so involved in talking with my friends that I never think about it. It not important. These two were models at the agency I worked for in Krasnodar.”

“Okay, but it would be nice if you introduced me in the future.”

“I promise Roy,” she said as she smiled.

That night when we returned to the hotel, Angel turned on the television. Angel and her mother always turned on a radio or television when inside but only occasionally paid attention to either as they went about their routines. Maybe the background noise made them less lonely or distracted unpleasant thoughts. Whatever, when Angel turned on the television, she immediately let out a whoop of pleasure.

“Come watch,” she excitedly said. “This is my all-time favorite movie.”

I walked over to the TV thinking some classic such as *Casablanca* was on.

“*Showgirls* my favorite,” she said bouncing up and down on the bed in joy. “It is about Los Angeles.”

“Never heard of it,” I said. “But with that title, I’m sure it’s about Las Vegas, not Los Angeles.” I sat next to her to watch. The story told of a good looking blonde who used her body and lack of ethics to work her way up from a lap dancer selling sexual favors to a showgirl at a Las Vegas Casino.

Angel loved the movie and what she described as the glamorous lifestyle it depicted. To me, what little I watched, duped in Russian, looked like a trashy film depicting part of America’s sex industry. I was surprised she liked it. Oh well, people have different tastes. My favorite movie was *Milk Money*.

Angel blurted out, “I always wanted to be a showgirl. It my dream.”

That also surprised me. I didn’t say anything but quickly assumed Angel meant she wanted to work as a Las Vegas showgirl—not as a ho like the character in the movie, which I assumed the film exaggerated for dramatic purposes. If Angel wanted to walk around as a Ziegfeld girl sprouting feathers—fine. I wasn’t going to rain on her dream. Too many self-righteous and failed people try to discourage the dreams of others by pushing cowardice under the guise of practicality. I wasn’t going to do that to Angel.

After the movie, Angel insisted I take some pictures of her playing the roll of a femme fatale in her thong panties and stockings. Not a problem, and I happily snapped away with her slithering around on the floor in one seductive pose after another, performing as well as any sexy actress. The movie apparently inspired her.

Afterward, she giggled like a little girl happy with her play-acting, but I knew posing for pictures was serious business to her. Everywhere we went, we took lots of pictures mostly of her striking one pose or another. When one roll of film was finished, she immediately found a developer and on receiving the prints, quickly look through them with a critical eye for the few good enough for her portfolio. Angel knew her business. The remainder she gave to me, which usually included the shots of the two of us together. She always said, “I want you to have these so you will always remember your Angel.”

On the over night train back to Krasnodar, we shared a semi-private cabin with a manager of the Transneft Pipeline Company, his wife and little daughter. He didn’t speak English, so Angel did her best to translate. The executive treated us courteously because I was American, but the true nature of an arrogant and mean person showed through his pretense of friendliness. His wife clearly feared him, but his daughter didn’t.

The Transneft Pipeline Company built and controlled nearly all the oil pipelines in Russia. It was one of the many Soviet era monopolies that continued in tact with the same officials using the same inept management style; only now they embezzled huge amounts of public resources in the name of Adam Smith rather than the little they stole in the name of Karl Marx. The Transneft manager fitted the mold of a New Russian businessman in that he was nothing more than a duplicate of the old Communist bureaucrat: a sycophant to his superiors, a brutal tyrant to his subordinates and competent only at lying, cheating, stealing and pretending. When communism fell, most Russian officials quickly picked up the terminology of democracy and capitalism such as “freedom of speech,” “profit motivated” and “mutual benefit” in an effort to convince foreigners that their old Soviet habits of fraud and corruption had died with communism—they hadn’t. Russians simply used the new terminology to appear committed to civilized behavior because that increased their chances of tricking Westerners out of something of value. *Caveat emptor* still ruled in Russia, which the Russians translated as “If I cheat you, it is your fault.”

Before we reached Krasnodar, the Transneft manager invited Angel and me to dinner at his house the next day before I flew back to Moscow. We accepted on Angel’s condition that she could bring her mother.

Our train arrived real early in the morning, so rather than going to a hotel, Angel and I went back to her mother’s house to sleep. The house had only one small bed with one of its sides pushed up against the wall of the large room. I made a comment in passing that it made more sense to pull the bed away from the wall so that each person could climb in and out without disturbing the other.

After doing my best at washing up in the kitchen out of pans of hot water, I headed for bed.

“Don’t lie on the side near the wall. That my spot,” Angel said.

“Alright.”

When she came to bed, she positioned the front of her body in the right angle made by the bed and the wall with her back facing outward. Strange position, but even stranger was she did not move from that position the entire time she slept. She just stayed huddled against the wall.

At mid-afternoon, Angel, her mother and I visited the Transneft manager for dinner. Naturally, he lived in one of the larger houses in Krasnodar, surrounded by a high solid steel fence and protected by two bodyguards. Business in Russia often turned deadly, especially for Russian executives. The manager welcomed us warmly, proudly showed us around his plush house, doted on his pretty ten-year-old daughter and sat us down for a long dinner. As dinner progressed our host drank glass after glass of vodka followed by a glass of water that he poured from a pitcher kept on the floor by his chair. As with most Russian businessmen who believed in the illusion of their own toughness, our host wanted to show us that he could consume large quantities of alcohol without getting too drunk, which was why he drank so much water. Alina’s mother also consumed a fair amount of liquor and turned into an embarrassing and clearly feeble-minded drunk.

Our host likely suffered from an inferiority complex toward Americans as a result of the Soviet Union losing the cold war. Following World War II, communist propaganda touted the Soviet Union as the most desirable place to live as well as the strongest and most technologically advanced nation on earth. Its collapse shocked most Russians by undercutting their beliefs in the

country and themselves. Their vaunted view of their status in the world crashed to that of inhabitants of a third-world nation distinguished only by its nuclear arsenal. Unable to dispute the demise of their empire at the hands of America, Russians rationalized that as individuals they were still tougher than Americans; that is, they could drink more, suffer longer and cheat better.

On the other hand, perhaps like girls, they had lived lies so long that they could not recognize the trash heap of history on which their nation had landed. The Transneft manager proclaimed that Russia would soon catch up and surpass America now that communism was dead. He sounded delusional to me. A nation without the rule of law, where crime paid all the time and honesty never proved best was doomed to muddle along as a banana republic dependent on loans from the International Monetary Fund. Once Russia no longer posed a nuclear threat as a result of warhead dismantling and the wholesale looting of maintenance funds and new parts needed to keep its missiles functioning, the loans would decrease dramatically leaving Russia's tenuous economy even worse off. Of course, I kept my thoughts to myself and wished his country a speedy recovery.

When the time arrived to catch my flight back to Moscow, our host sent Angel and me to the airport in his chauffeur driven black Mercedes, the car of choice for Russian executives and racketeers. Angel gave me a care package of cookies and sweets, we kissed and hugged good-bye, I boarded the airplane and Angel went back to the dinner party.

Devil or Angel

In Moscow, I began making arrangements for taking Angel to America for ten days during the end of January. Since bright lights, glitz and showgirls thrilled her, I suggested a trip to Las Vegas that she happily agreed to, but I don't think she believed it would happen—Russian pessimism.

Work included arranging for the security of a couple of high level executives from a Fortune 100 company who were scheduled to visit St. Petersburg and Moscow. We made the appropriate contribution to the local police so they would escort the executives from one point to another without stopping for red lights and post guards outside their hotel rooms. A little extreme by my thinking, but American executives always believe themselves more important than they are.

Another case involved a Western investment bank that sunk large sums of its clients' money into a poorly run Moscow based conglomerate. Investment bankers often push through deals that make little economic sense because they receive their commission upfront long before a transaction goes south. In the case of the Moscow conglomerate, the investment bank wanted to justify losing its clients' funds with an after-the-fact report from Kroll that the investment bank had actually made a wise investment because the Moscow conglomerate had a reputation for effective management and was politically well connected. Such, of course, was a lie.

The Moscow business community knew the conglomerate operated with little regard for standard business practices and the conglomerate's appearance of growth resulted from it borrowing money to buy up unrelated businesses whose income was then added to the conglomerate's revenues. Solid growth occurs when a business increases its income by selling more goods or services, not by buying up other companies. The conglomerate also blatantly violated accounting principals by transferring the assets from one company to another at the chairman's directions in a duplicitous effort to bolster shareholder value of a particular company owned by the conglomerate when that company was seeking additional investments. The investment bank had stupidly failed to conduct such due diligence before investing its clients'

funds. The bank's managers blew up over our report of their failure and tried to pressure us into changing it, but we stuck by the facts and lost the bank as a future customer.

In a third case, Kroll electronically swept an American executive's apartment for listening devices. We did a lot of this on a regular basis but usually in a company's offices where sensitive business discussions occurred. In this case, we found listening devices implanted in the walls through out the apartment. The executive could not hold a secret conversation anywhere in his apartment. The Russia agency most likely responsible was the F.S.B. because in recent years its focus had shifted from politics to economic espionage. The executive decided to move.

A couple of weeks before Angel and I left for America, my Russian tutor from New York and her best friend arrived in Moscow. Both were born in the Soviet Union and both immigrated to New York when they were around ten. They continued to visit their relatives in Russia and had grown into twenty-year-old amalgams of both cultures. Naturally, I gushed to them about Angel and how I thought she might be the one. They listened politely. Both had always thought it strange that a middle-aged man like me never married, so I expected them to wish me good luck. They said nothing until I showed them her picture, then they went ballistic in unison. "You idiot! She's a whore playing you for a fool. Two years from now you will see that it was all planned. All she wants is a green card. She will say anything; do anything to get to America."

"How do you know that? You never met her," I weakly said, taken aback by their reaction, especially because I knew they always told me the truth as they saw it.

"Look at her you fool. Can't you see it? Look at the picture. Look at that hair, she must iron it daily." These two girls were young and pretty but often brutal; however, they always had my interests at heart.

“I don’t understand,” I said a little bewildered. “So her hair is a little burned.”

“Yea, like she stuck her head in a pail of beach. Look, we know what we are talking about. We know how Russians and Americans think. Romance between the two doesn’t work. The mindsets, the beliefs and understandings are too different. Neither of us will seriously date an American guy because one wouldn’t know how to deal with us.”

“There is something to that,” I sarcastically joked. “The moment you two moved into my apartment you immediately dropped your suitcases and started going through all the closets, draws and cupboards.”

“Very funny, Roy! But this is serious. Listen, there are pretty young girls in Russia, like your Angel, think of them as a distinct class, they care about nobody but themselves. They can act, cry, pretend and will do anything to get what they want, which is money and out of Russia. They have no dignity or self-respect and are willing to take it up-the-ass from whomever pays them enough. America has the same type of girls. You call them “white trash” or “trailer park trash” or plain “ho.” You don’t have to talk to them, you can tell just by looking at them. Well this Angel of yours is Russian trash, but you can’t see it because you grew up in America. We however can.”

This hurt. I had known these two for a couple of years and respected their insights, especially concerning Russia, and often lusted after their bodies. I knew they worried about my making a real stupid mistake, but I thought them wrong—Angel had a good heart. She deserved a chance at a better life, and I was going to give it to her.

A few days after my friends left for New York, my lesbian boss from London arrived with cash, as she always did, for paying off various officials, to negotiate another six-month contract with me and to provide some useless suggestions for running the business. As the

European coordinator for the firm, Tiedemann visited Moscow and the other European operations in Paris, Frankfurt and Johannesburg every two months—nice vacation spots. All the country managers dreaded her visits, not just because of her Nazi personality, but her dumb and dangerous decisions. For example, at the end of Kroll's fiscal year, she violated accounting regulations by attributing expenses incurred in 1999 to the year 2000 in order to falsely inflate the Moscow office's profit for 1999. At the time, Kroll was in negotiations to sell the company to the Blackstone Group, so a lie about profits in Russia increased the sales price for Kroll, which benefited all the officers holding Kroll stock, such as Tiedemann. She also violated Russian tax codes by filing perjured documents with the Russian Government in which Kroll falsely claimed that the Moscow office functioned only as a marketing representative of the London office. It did a lot more, such as provide intelligence and security services in Russia. Tiedemann also refused to eliminate Kroll's practice in Russia of violating the United States Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by paying public officials for information available only to the federal, regional or local governments and then selling that information to Kroll's clients.

The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act applied to Kroll because it was an American firm and to Tiedemann who was a U.S. Citizen. On her periodic trips to Moscow, she carried thousands of U.S. dollars and at other times sent cash by Western Union to maintain the office's slush fund for paying government officials for information and security services. On one of the many times I objected to the practice, she said that as long as she got the British girl or Russian investigators in the office to make the actual payments, she did not need to worry—that of course was wrong. The Act reaches any American making or facilitating such payments. I couldn't understand how a company that employed so many former police officers, intelligence agents and prosecutors could run its operations this way unless no one higher up knew about Tiedemann's actions.

Imagination

Angel sounded excited over the telephone about our upcoming trip to New York City and Las Vegas and would book a flight to arrive in Moscow the day before we left.

“Why don’t you come a few days earlier so that we can spend some more time together?” I suggested.

“I can’t Roy. Me and Mom have found an apartment we want to buy, but I am afraid the sellers will cheat us. We have to make sure all the paper work is done correctly, and my mom needs me to help her.”

That made sense, so I didn’t complain. “Alright, I understand how important the apartment is to you.”

“I miss you Roy and can’t wait to be with you.”

“And I love you,” I sincerely replied.

On January 19, 2000, Angel and I flew to New York City. Abroad the plane, I gave her a few tips on American manners.

“If you bump into someone, just say excuse me or I’m sorry. Don’t just ignore the person as they do in Russia. And whatever you do, don’t push someone just because they are in your way. It could cause a fight in America.” Often times, Russians in a hurry just bulldoze other people out of their way without an apology and more miraculously without a fight. The people just put up with someone pushing them aside or banging a suitcase into their knees while they sit in a subway car. The Russians doing the assaulting don’t give a damn about others, and the assaulted persons don’t believe they have any rights to defend or just fear that the batterer, often girls, have connections.

“I understand,” she somewhat patronizingly said with her mischievous grin.

“This is important,” I said a little over protectively. “Many people carry guns in America and people have been shot over such slights. If you anger someone in New York City, you know I’ll be the one to get shot trying to protect you.”

“Oh,” she smiled sarcastically, mussing the hair on the top of my head, “you are a hero protecting your Angel.”

“Okay, okay, just try to remember to act civil and say ‘excuse me.’”

“Yes Roy.”

“Oh, and if you get lost or need any type of help, find a policeman.”

“Why would I want a policeman?” she asked with surprise.

“Because unlike Russia, in America they will help, especially you since you are a foreigner and a beautiful girl.”

“You think I am beautiful?” she smiled waiting for the answer she wanted.

“You know you are beautiful, just look in the mirror.”

“I hope I am. Remember that Russian philosopher I told you whose book change my life?”

“The one about karma?”

“Yes. Lazarev says when you get up in the morning and go to bed at night to say over and over something positive about your life. He also warns not to criticize or degrade yourself or others, avoid the negative down path.”

“What do you mean, ‘negative down path’?”

“Negative emotions don’t give to you what you want, they bring only what you don’t want. If every time you repeat to yourself why you can’t have a subject of your dreams, you never get this. Start to talk to yourself by saying why you may have what you want.

Concentrate what do you want to have but not on what you don't want. Many people knowing what they don't want, but very few knowing what they want."

"Sounds like good advice for some, the power of positive thinking, but I think I would rather know the truth then make up an illusion."

"Why you need the truth?"

"Without the truth you can't make an accurate decision. You will end up doing something that will cause more harm then the good that positive thinking provides."

"You need the God," she self-assuredly said.

"So what do you tell yourself every day?"

"That God is good, and I am beautiful."

A little narcissistic, I thought, but then again her looks were her ticket. "Anyway, if you need help, go to a policeman. They will not try to take advantage of you or make you pay a bribe. They may ask you out for a date, but will not extort money from you and will help you."

"This is strange to think of a policeman as someone who will help and not hurt you," she mulled, trying to grasp the concept.

"It's America, Angel. The police are paid a decent salary, and there is a special department that investigates police corruption, which is not corrupt itself. Besides, most cops work as cops because they want to help people."

"That is good."

"Oh, and above all else never, never try to bribe any policeman or government official or you will end up in jail."

"You are kidding? If you do not pay how do you get them to do anything?"

“Well, except for cops and firemen, it is sometimes difficult to get officials to do their job, but you can’t bribe them, unless the official is a President, such as Billy-Bob Clinton. I think he would like you. You are much better looking than Monica.” At which point Angel proceeded to hit me multiple times on the arm, only in part good-naturedly. We began wrestling, a habit we frequently pursued in public and private. She was very strong for a girl. I had the advantage in upper body strength, but her legs were more powerful than mine. But Angel’s physical prowess had deep weaknesses. Once during a pillow fight, I put the pillow over her face and she freaked out. She also went nuts if while playing around I put her in a chokehold—memories of her past. A few of the passengers on the plane looked askance at us, but we ignore them and went on wrestling since we were having fun.

During the flight, she drew my portrait, which wasn’t bad. She seemed ideal to me: a model, dancer, singer and artist all rolled up in one beautiful and smart package. She also spent time writing in Russian in a composition notebook that I assumed she kept as a diary.

Before going through customs at Kennedy Airport, I advised her, “If an officer gives you a hard time, tell him you are traveling with your boyfriend who is an American lawyer.”

“Why?”

“Bureaucrats in America generally want to avoid any problems and lawyers mean just that. Here, the individual has specific rights under the laws, which most lawyers know but average Americans don’t. Bureaucrats take advantage of the public’s ignorance to try to make their jobs easier by pressuring people into doing things that people have the right not to or by just acting arbitrarily. Bureaucrats aren’t supposed to do either but they do. However, if a lawyer is involved, bureaucrats know they will just create a lot of problems for themselves by not going by the book.”

Sure enough, one official started asking Angel lots of questions until she pointed to me standing in the waiting area watching the two and mentioned my occupation. The official remarked in surprise, “a lawyer!” and passed her through. Often times the lawyer routine works in America but never in Russia. Only money talks there.

The moment we walked into my apartment in New York, she wanted to go out, I wanted to sleep after fifteen hours of traveling. Angel insisted, and as usual got her way. She possessed energy in abundance and the stubbornness of an iron will. I wondered whether anyone ever successfully opposed her desires. We went to a trendy Westside restaurant populated with New York’s young, arrogant and greedy where the prices shocked her.

“Why is it so expensive here?” she asked. “These meals cost what university instructors in my town are paid in a month!”

“People are paid a lot more in America, so by comparison the prices aren’t so bad.”

“Not in Krasnodar, most people can’t afford to go to a restaurant, even once a year. My mother has never even been to a restaurant.”

“I thought when your mother was young she traveled around the Soviet Union and Europe as a dancer. Remember that picture you showed me of her and you as a little girl in Germany. She must have eaten in restaurants.”

“Under the old system back then she could but not now. Only the criminals and their friends can afford to regularly go to restaurants and discos.”

“You go to discos all the time with your friends.” I said.

“That’s different.”

“How so?”

“We will talk about that later,” which was one of Angel’s favorite tactics for not answering a question along with pretending not to hear it in the first place or saying “You wouldn’t understand,” or going into a monologue on some tangential point. Most Russians have an uncanny ability, which Angel had in abundance, to talk and talk without getting to the point in the hope their listener eventually forgot or gave up on the original question that started the soliloquy.

After dinner, we went to the Sony Imax to see “Fantasia 2000,” which made Angel giggle and smile like a Cheshire cat. The huge screen wowed her, and the Disney characters were as real for her as they were for child. “It’s like virtual reality. I feel I am inside the movie,” she gushed.

Over the next few days before leaving for Las Vegas, I tried to show Angel a few of the different occupations she could realistically pursue in America by introducing her to friends who worked in modeling, acting, rock ‘n’ roll and physical training. I wanted to help her get out of lap dancing and make her wish come true by finding in America the occupation meant for her. Everyone has a first best destiny, and I wanted to help Angle find hers.

Biology theorizes that at birth an infant’s brain is arranged in such a fashion that best suits the child for a particular career. Psychology can assist in determining that career by measuring at least sixteen different aptitudes that a person may possess at birth. The aptitudes aren’t learned; they are hard-wired into the brain. Most people have four or five aptitudes and most jobs require a similar number. The trick for a man, and I believed for girls, was to work at a career that used his aptitudes and, therefore, best fitted the structures of his brain. That career would be a man’s first-best destiny. If he ignored such a career, feelings of boredom, uselessness and that he should be doing something else would haunt him all the days of his life.

Nearly everybody realizes as a child or teenager what fascinates them so much that they dream of making it their life's work. Unfortunately, parents or environments may convince or scare young adults into forsaking their destiny. Many turn away from their dreams for what they perceive as a safer, more likely path to a materially comfortable or affluent life. They fail to realize that by pursuing their dreams, the money, security and status will come as though by magic. It's only common sense that when people work at activities they love, they will more likely achieve success than pursuing a compromise dictated by their fears. They will also find greater satisfaction than toiling at a disliked job just for the money. Besides, those who deny their dreams will find their dreams haunting them throughout their lives. A television program, book, individual or some other trigger will time and time again remind folks who missed their first-best destiny of what they threw away. By middle age, such persons will feel uneasy about their lives as though something is not right and perhaps they should have gone for their dreams instead. And the regret of failing to pursue what they wanted will plague them everyday. No amount of alcohol, drugs, therapy, sex, religion, eastern philosophy or mysticism will assuage the misery—only death relieves that pain. I didn't want that to happen to Angel as it did me, and I knew that with my contacts and knowledge I could help her reach her dreams.

Angel and I first met with my martial arts instructor and friend. Mark worked as the sports trainer in a college athletic department. Angel loved athletics, graduated with a teaching degree from a college devoted to sports and taught aerobics in Krasnodar. Her mother also taught aerobics and worked as a trainer at the college Angel attended. The field of physical fitness looked like a possible fit with Angel's aptitudes. In Russia, unfortunately, anyone who worked as a teacher or trainer lived in poverty. Only crime and sex paid in the former Soviet Union. But in America, Angel's love of sports and exercise could provide her the opportunity to

live a middle-class lifestyle or better, if she wished, by teaching or training. Mark briefed her on the industry, including the different jobs immediately available, their requirements, salary and the long term potential that included training movie stars and marketing her own fitness video. Mark even offered to use his connections to help Angel find a job, but she decided not to pursue that avenue.

“I think I want to do modeling more than teach exercise. I know I am a little old for a model but I want to try before it is too late.”

“Fine,” I said. “We will have dinner tomorrow night with my friend Cindi who was a model, rock ‘n’ roll singer and now works as an actress. She will have lots of suggestions and know exactly how to approach the business.”

Cindi brought to dinner the owner of an agency that employed models and actors for corporate events. The two briefed Angel about the different areas of the modeling and acting business, how to go about breaking into both and what pit falls to avoid. They advised that pursuing a modeling or entertainment career required perseverance and hard work that often entailed a second job as a waitress or bartender. The agency owner offered to use Angel as a model when she returned to America. I could see Angel’s brain going to work, trying to figure out how to take advantage of the knowledge and opportunity my friends offered.

After dinner, she firmly told me, “I want to come back here and try to become a model but I must hurry. I don’t want to waste the time. I wish I didn’t spend those two years after the institute doing my dissertation. I just wasted my time.”

“We’ll come back, don’t worry,” I said.

“But how can I get a work visa?”

“Let me work on it.”

“Okay, but if I can’t come to America then I will go work in somewhere else. Maybe Japan or Europe.” I knew what that meant—more lap dancing.

After meeting with my friends, Angel surprised me by insisting on going to lap dance clubs to check out the job prospects. The clubs in New York City that served alcohol only allow the girls to strip to their tong panties.

Angel adamantly said, “I don’t want to do striptease and I don’t want anyone to touch me. It is dirty work and I do not like it.” I learned in the vernacular of the lap-dancing industry, “striptease” meant taking everything off.

“I thought you never did striptease and no one ever touched you?” I probed a seeming inconsistency.

“I didn’t but I know girls who did. I don’t like it.”

So we visited Scores and Flash Dancers, the classiest, assuming such a description makes sense of New York City’s gentlemen clubs, as they are euphemistically called. The girls go to a customer’s table and ask whether he or she wants a dance. Angel said many of the dancers she worked with in Mexico preferred stripping for girls rather than guys. During a song a girl wiggles out of her long evening dress leaving her naked except for a tong panty. She then undulates various intimate parts of her body in close proximity to the customer’s face. Management allegedly forbids the lap dancers to touch anyone, but many rub their knees and asses against the customer’s crouch. The customer, however, can’t touch the girls and management apparently strictly enforces this through the many bouncers with sloping foreheads stationed about the room. For one song of about three minutes the girl receives \$20 cash. Or if the customer wants, the girl will sit and talk with him, make him feel she’s interested in him, for

a fee of course. There were also VIP rooms that cost hundreds of dollars, but what went on in them, I couldn't tell.

Angel asked more questions of the girls at these joints than she did of my friends who briefed her on fitness, acting and modeling jobs. She was especially interested in how much the strippers made a night: average \$600 to \$800, which shocked me. A normal workweek meant \$3000 to \$4000 pure profit since these babes didn't pay taxes. Perhaps I should have been born a girl.

Angel again surprised me with "It will be my second job instead of working as a waitress or bartender. I will make more money and not have to worry about being poor. I can only do this while I am young so I must do it now."

"But if you work as a waitress or bartender, it's only part time, which allows you more time for your dream of modeling or acting."

"Me and Mom are poor, and I need to save up at least \$50,000, so we can feel safe in Russia. I can only do that while I'm young."

"Things work differently here Angel. To succeed in modeling or acting requires a lot of work and being able to change your work schedule around. From what the girls said, these clubs don't allow that. Also, you'll have a better chance of securing a long-term occupation by concentrating on it now when you are young."

"No, I will do the dancing until I saved up enough."

"Okay," I relented. "But once your legitimate career begins to move or you saved your \$50,000, then you can devote fulltime to modeling or acting and forget this unpleasant lap dancing."

“It is art,” she quickly protested. “When I dance I go some place else where I think only of the movement of my body.”

“Well that is one way to look at it,” I diplomatically said, wondering how taking off her clothes for money so that strange men could get excited rose to the level of art.

“If I come back here to work, I don’t want to be dependent on anyone. I need my own money.”

I wasn’t happy. “Angel, sure these lap dancing jobs pay a lot of money, but working five nights a week from 8 PM to four in the morning is going to take a toll on your looks and health. Look at this place,” as I gestured with my arm to the main room at Flash Dancers. “It’s dark, dingy, full of smoke, naked girls and drooling losers who never went with a pretty girl in their lives. Think also of the impact on your psyche.”

“Oh, don’t worry Roy,” she once again mockingly said with her arm over my shoulders. “I am a strong girl.”

Well at least she wouldn’t turn into a financial burden like some of my prior girlfriends. I warned her, “Whatever you do, don’t tell anyone in America you are working as a lap dancer. It may be acceptable in Russia, but here they might think you are a prostitute.”

“I not a prostitute,” she retorted so quickly it startled me—boy, she hated hookers.

“I know you aren’t. Just that people might think that. Even though you will be making more money than most Americans, they will still look down on you. This is not Russia where only money counts. Here certain jobs are considered illegitimate: that is, low level, and people will look at you as low class and a bad person. They will not want to help you in your career.”

“I will remember that.”

Viva Las Vegas

After four days in New York City, we headed for Las Vegas. Angel made entries in her composition notebook while we waited for our flight and on the plane.

Flying over the desert, she said with disappointment, “I don’t see anything. I don’t think there is much out here.” I assumed she thought the western part of the United States was like the northeast: one vast sprawl of buildings and houses. But then the plane turned to land and she saw Las Vegas out her window.

“Oh! There it is! Look at all the buildings out here in the middle of nowhere. It’s great,” she excitedly said.

We checked in at the Paris Hotel that has a huge casino with the ceiling painted like the noonday sky. It took Angel a few trips through the casino to realize the ceiling was not the real sky. Such childish confusion and wonder endeared her to me.

Our first night we had dinner with a married couple from New York City that were friends of mine for years. They recently semi-retired to Las Vegas. The wife ran an antique business but previously worked as a political operative in New York, and her husband once served as Chief of Police for Manhattan and Brooklyn and the manager of security for one of America’s richest men. They lent us their video camera, which Angel quickly took command of and gave us tickets to the more popular performances that featured Las Vegas showgirls—Angel’s dream.

Neither Angel nor I gambled, so we spent our time touring the casinos and Las Vegas attractions. I looked the ultimate tourist, lugging the video camera and two still cameras slung around my neck so that Angel could record her trip for prosperity. At her direction, I took pictures of her with various Las Vegas sites in the background. Angel preferred the video

camera in front of which she played hostess to her imagined audience of fans. With the tape rolling, she droned on interminably in a travel log type monologue without saying anything imaginative as she walked and pointed out various attractions. Her monologue did pick up when she came across a nude statue of a man on a pedestal before which she made some sexual gestures and tried to enlist my participation, without success. These rather crude antics bothered me because they looked like what low-class, uneducated girls from trailer parks did, but I let it go. In addition to play-acting the travel hostess, the little girl in Angel made sure to go on as many amusement rides as possible. But at night the career woman took over for the little girl as Angel focused intently on the topless shows we attended.

After the first showgirls extravaganza, she exclaimed, “That was great. Those girls were so beautiful and glamorous and the way they walked,” as she imitated them. “I want to do that. I have always dreamed of it. And I know now you don’t need big tits to do it.” Angel usually referred to her breasts as though they were assets that she did not have enough of but also rationalized, they stayed firm longer with the nipples erect.

“Well, like I said, ‘America is the place where dreams can come true.’ I’ll call some of the casinos to find out how someone becomes a show girl.”

“That would be great. Let’s go to one of the gentlemen clubs. I want to see what they are like and whether I would want to work in any,” she added.

That I didn’t like. I kept hoping she’d focus on the less tawdry end of show biz, but Angel always came back to the lap-dancing clubs, wanting to check out the employment opportunities. Frankly, I began to feel troubled in these places. How many naked girls can a man look at in a short period of time without getting bored? Also the clubs’ commercialization of vicarious sexual thrills began to somewhat repulse me. Everyone knew the girls in these

joints didn't give a damn about the men but only wanted their money, just as Tina Turner sang about in the song "Private Dancer." So then why would a man go to these strip clubs: to engage in a form of self-delusion that the girls really liked him or in the hope of finding a girl to go home with him for a few hundred dollars? Even the rent-a-sex reason made no sense to me. I always thought sexual relations matter only when two people honestly cared and were mutually attracted to each other, and that human complexity required emotional as well as metaphysical connections for sex to achieve true satisfaction beyond the purely sensual or ego gratification.

I replied to Angel's request, "Aren't you tired of these clubs? After all you worked in them in Cyprus, Mexico and now you want to work in them here?"

"It's my business. I want to see whether I can do it here."

We went to the "Paradise," which an American executive in Moscow said was the better of the lot. The club's manager was impressed with Angel's height and told her to come audition when she came back but she would need a license from the county to work. Like Flash Dancers in New York City, the girls stripped to their tongs and the customers could not touch.

Once again, Angel made it a point to tell me she didn't want to work in the all-nude clubs or where the men touched the girls. "They were dirty. I don't like dancing naked or men touching me."

"They were dirty," I repeated using her past tense. "I thought all the clubs you worked in you only stripped to your panties and that the men could not touch you."

She hesitated and only answered part of the question, "Sometimes a man would touch me, and I would call the bouncer over." I didn't press the part about naked dancing.

Also like Flash Dancers and most of the other lap-dancing clubs in America, this club was run by organized crime, which didn't bother Angel a bit. I couldn't figure out why.

The following day, I contacted the manager in charge of entertainment at the MGM Grand. He told me that many of the Las Vegas shows were put together in New York City and suggested how to find the producers there that were recruiting. For shows organized in Las Vegas, he referred me to a publication that ran recruiting notices. I told him a little about Angel, and he advised that before going to any auditions, she needed to learn basic dance steps and taking singing lessons would also help, but given her height, she should have no problem finding a job as a showgirl.

In response to the news, Angel said determinedly, “Now I must come back here.” Las Vegas was nice for a vacation but to live there didn’t thrill me. But if Angel wanted to work there, then I would live there with her. I was sure I could find a job, or maybe just end up managing Angel’s legitimate career and keep her from the spiraling decline into the dead end of easy money in the sex industry.

We met my married friends for dinner again. The wife wanted to give Angel a necklace but she would not take it. She explained to me later she feared it was a trick that my friends would want something from her in return. I chalked it up to different cultures and tried to explain to Angel that most Americans give gifts from the heart and my friends considered her a friend because she was with me. But Angel didn’t get it. Perhaps she was more scared of the world than she let on.

After dinner, the former police chief took me aside as he usually did when he thought I was heading for trouble. “Be careful of that girl. She is not everything she pretends to be.”

“There are probably parts of her past I would rather not know, but she has had a hard life, and I can help her.” I said.

“I told you this once before, you’re not responsible for anyone but yourself.”

“I remember. It was concerning another Russian girl. I will watch out.” But I didn’t really think Angel could do me any harm.

The Chief added, “You know that stuff you told me about her reluctance to kiss when you first met her, well, hookers don’t like to kiss on the lips either for fear of losing their business objectivity. I don’t think she’s one but go easy.”

“A friend of mine in Moscow said the same about Russian girls in general. They’ll let you fondle any part of their body but fear losing their hearts with a kiss. Does that mean all young Russian girls are hookers?” We laughed.

Everyday since we left Moscow, Angel called her mother to check on the status of their efforts to purchase an apartment. One day, Angel got off the phone all smiles and happy.

“A miracle has happen. I and mom own an apartment. It great, our own apartment at last with a bathroom, two bedrooms and hot water in a safe part of town.”

I congratulated her. As a middle-class American, I couldn’t imagine it a miracle, but from her reaction, she clearly did.

“How much did it cost?” I asked.

“Twenty-four thousand dollars, and we still have to renovate it. It needs new kitchen and bathroom, the walls and ceilings must be painted and the floor redone, and on top of that, we will have to buy new furniture. A lot of work and expenses yet.”

“Let me know if I can help.”

“You are an American man and not used to hard work. It would strain your muscles too much. Mom and I can do it.” Her remarks didn’t insult me because they were typical of third-world girls. Most Russian, Latin and Asian babes believe the Feminazis emasculated all American men. But that’s generally true only for guys in the government, media, education or

living on the Westside of Manhattan. Most girls don't realize that the capacity for brutality of third-world men exists only when they have more power than others. The real viciousness of American men comes out when they are the underdogs with their backs against the wall. In time, Angel will learn a few men still exist in America.

Before we left Las Vegas, I bought a Barbie Doll for the daughter of the Transneft official we had met on the train from Sochi. Russian dolls couldn't match Barbie although real live Russian girls did. I knew the daughter would like it and asked Angel to give it to her when she returned to Krasnodar.

Could This Be Magic

On the plane back to New York City, Angel seemed deep in thought much of the time and wrote a lot in her composition notebook.

In New York before we caught the Phantom of the Opera, we ate at another trendy Westside restaurant.

Angel looked at me in an inquiring way, squinted her eyes and said, "There is something interfering here. I sense it."

My marital arts training spun me around in my chair looking for trouble, but there was none there. "What are you talking about?"

"I think someone put a curse on you."

"Only my mother, but thank goodness she's dead," I only half-jokingly said.

"I'm serious Roy. Your secretary at Kroll did something. I could tell the way she looked at you in the office. She liked you, didn't she?"

"We dated for a while, but she's planning to marry this Australian guy who is visiting her in Moscow."

“Did she ever prepare a meal for you?”

“No. We went to restaurants. But her mother prepares my meals in the office during the workweek. Why?”

“Now I know what is going on,” Angel declared.

“What are you talking about?”

“Your secretary wants to keep you. She does not want anyone else to have you, so she has used her mother to cast a spell on you.” Oh brother, not this black magic stuff again. I didn’t believe in it, but Angle did, so I indulged her.

“Why would she want me when she has someone else?”

“Life is uncertain in Russia, and some girls want to keep more than one man tied to them, so if they lose one, they will still have someone to help them. Russian girls will cast a spell so that the man will only want them and not go out with another girl. The man will feel depressed and not want to work.”

“I feel that all the time.”

“Stop Roy! This is dangerous. There are powerful forces at work here. Your secretary cast her spell by putting some of her menstrual flow into the food her mother prepared for you.”

That went well with my spaghetti. “Wouldn’t her mother know about that?”

“Her mother probably helped her. We Russian daughters are the product of our mothers, not our fathers. Our fathers live their own lives while the mothers and daughters stick together.”

“Nice society,” I sarcastically remarked. “So right now, I am under my secretary’s curse that will prevent us from getting closer and cause arguments like the one we had last night when you fainted because of the emotions welling up inside of you. Did her curse cause you to faint?”

“No. She’s using black magic against you, not me. That made you say things that hurt me and caused me to faint. She wants an emotional crack to occur between us.”

“All I said was if you’re not happy, we can end the relationship. You got to see New York and Las Vegas. That’s a plus.”

“I don’t want to go into that now.”

“Fine, but how do you know she used black magic?”

“Black magic is used to do something to another person. It’s very dangerous because it will come back to you many times stronger unless you protect yourself. White magic is to protect yourself from harm that others want to cause you. So when we get to Moscow, I will take you to a white magic man who will protect you from your secretary’s spell.”

Visions of a medicine man dancing and chanting went through my head. Naturally, I didn’t believe any of this hocus-pocus, but it might turn into an interesting story, so I agreed.

“Okay, anything that may help, I will try.”

Angel loved the Phantom of the Opera, but I didn’t understand it. She tried to explain the middle-aged Phantom’s sacrifice for the beautiful, young artist, but it made no sense to me.

“Why would the Phantom sacrifice himself for her when she loved a man her own age?”

“Because he loved her and wanted to help her.”

“Well, whatever you say, but I still don’t understand.”

As she put her arm over my shoulders, she said, “My bewilder American lawyer. You will someday.”

After the show, we met my rock ‘n’ roll buddy at the recording studio previously known as the “Power Station.” Pat had moved from playing lead guitar for Meat Loaf to producing. When we arrived, he was mixing a record for a male singer, but both of them willingly took a

break to show Angel around the studio. Such is the power of pretty girls. The two also briefed Angel on the type of jobs available in the music business for backup singers and dancers. Pat offered to hook her into some auditions when she came back. Afterward Angel said that if she came back to America to work, she wanted to concentrate on modeling—not acting, singing or dancing. Fine, the choice was hers, but modeling seemed the less likely chance of success given her age, now 24.

Angel and I spent ten days and nights together in America with a few arguments caused by misunderstandings. She was prone to crying rather than getting angry during our disputes, but I never knew whether her tears were real. By the end of our stay, she clearly wanted to come back and work in America, and I clearly wanted to stay with her. Although her desire to work as a lap dancer still bothered me, I rationalized it wouldn't take long to earn the \$50,000 nest egg for her and her mother. Besides, once her legitimate career took off, she wouldn't have the time for stripping. Any suspicions about her occupation extending to other areas of the sex industry dissipated, in part, because she was so awful in bed. I've dated a few girls, and Angel rated the worst when it came to sex, so I concluded no one would ever pay for her services in bed.

She insisted on a purely mechanical routine to warm her up—no spontaneity, no creativity wanted. Much to my surprise, she didn't even like having oral sex performed on her—a rarity for girls. And anal sex was taboo because of a bad experience that she refused to elaborate on. She called warming her up “making me ready,” which allowed her to orgasm quickly during intercourse. Making her ready started with a little kissing of the lips, then the suitor moved his mouth to her ears, which she rarely cleaned, where he waited for a few moans as the signal to play with her hair and lightly kiss her closed eyes. After a few more moans, onto her breasts, which tasted awful no matter how long or hot a shower she took, and she took

scalding showers. Her breasts seemed impregnated with the foul odors of the clubs in which she had spent so much time dancing. When ready, she would curl up into a fetal position during intercourse with her knees between her and the guy as though pushing him away but yet wanting him to stay until she climaxed. She kept her eyes tightly shut all the while and obviously entered a world to herself. There was no feeling of connection with her, no communication of emotions or a shared experience. She concentrated solely on reaching orgasm, which usually took her about five minutes. Then she would lie like a log wanting to stop just when I was warming up. During the entire ritual there was an ever-present bad odor coming from her sex organs. I told her she probably needed to go see a doctor because something was wrong down there. She just ignored it. Sexually, Angel stunk both literally and figuratively, but I still loved her with an emphasis on the compassionate part of love rather than the passionate.

My Russian tutor in New York, whom I talked with over the phone, took exception with my reasoning, though not so brutally this time. She said, “You know it is all about sex. If you really love a person, you will enjoy sex with them much more than you would enjoy better sex with a person you don’t love.”

Back in the U.S.S.R. Boy

Back in Moscow, Angel found a person she referred to as a “white magic man” from an advertising weekly regularly delivered to my apartment. I always tossed this shoppers’ guide without looking at it believing it consisted of coupons and the latest sales on consumer products and services. Unlike American shopper guides, this one advertised the services of witches, warlocks, mediums, clairvoyants, diviners and other assorted weirdoes. Apparently Angel was not the only Russian to believe in such mumbo-jumbo. It was obviously a booming business with the vast majority of Russians using “magic people” to attain their heart’s desire. Now I

knew the Russians were nuts, who else would put up with a Czar and the Commies, but magic? Despite my mockery, Angel was serious and insistent on me seeing this guy to remove the curse, so I went along.

On January 31, 2000, after the sun went down in gloomy, snow-covered Moscow, we entered a shabby office in a dingy apartment building in the southeastern part of the city. The magic-man looked in his thirties, tall, sharp features with black hair. He escorted us into a small dimly lit room with a table covered by a black cloth on which sat a black candle in an ugly and ornate brass holder. I couldn't quite make out the figures on the candle holder. The magic-man closed the door behind us and motioned that we sit in the two chairs with our backs to the door, directing me to sit on Angel's right. The magic-man sat behind the table facing us and lit the candle. If this guy was a white magician, why all the black accouterments, so I turned to Angel, "I thought this guy practiced white magic?"

"Shush, I'll explain later," she said. Now I had heard that from her before and didn't expect any subsequent explanation, but, if this childish ritual made her happy, then fine with me.

The magic-man, whom I now assumed deluded himself a practitioner of the black arts, spoke only in Russian, so I did not understand what was said but as usual relied on Angel's translation. The magic-man listened to Angel and then melted some wax in a small can, waited for it to cool, and then gave his analysis. Angel translated that the magic-man found a mild spell placed on me by my secretary to make me want her and no other woman. Angel triumphantly added, "You see, I was right. I know about these things." Why wasn't I surprised with the sorcerer's conclusion?

The magic-man continued to explain that to exorcise the spell; he needed a photograph of me from the front that showed me in a receptive position. Angel explained a picture in which I looked straight at the camera without crossed arms so that I would be open to the exorcism.

I looked at her puzzled. What difference did my arms make or which way I looked in the photograph? She read my expression and said, “Don’t worry, I will pick it out.” Fine, I thought, at least my head doesn’t have to do a 360°.

Angel and the sorcerer made arrangements for her to drop off my photograph for him to cast a protective spell to cancel my secretary’s curse. The black magic-man then wrapped the melted wax in paper and said for me to bury it in the snow when I left. Angel told me to pay him twenty dollars, but when I went to hand him the money, he shrank back as though I was the black magic-man and motioned for me to put it on the table.

Angel explained, “It is dangerous to take money or anything directly from people because someone can use it as a way to put a curse on you.”

“What does he do when he goes shopping for something?”

“Shush!”

Boy, these Russians were superstitious, I thought. No wonder the economy didn’t function with everyone scared to accept money because it might carry a curse dooming them to a fate worse than death. I put the twenty on the table and didn’t even think about shaking hands goodbye. Angel and I went outside into the darkness where she told me to bury the melted wax in a snow bank.

“Why a snow bank? It’s only going to melt leaving the wax for the street sweeper, if they have one out here. Shouldn’t I bury it in some deep, dark forest?”

“You Americans! Just do what the magic-man says. We know about these things.” Into the snow bank it went.

Driving back to the office with Angel, I felt immersed in a narcotic fog of feeling good from which crystallized the thought that Angel was all that mattered in my life. Work, career or death didn't concern me—only Angel. I attributed this strange elation and conclusion to my contract with Kroll ending soon. Despite previous negotiations, Kroll decided not to renew my consultancy in order to save money. Fine with me, the work had been interesting although not very challenging, living in Russia was okay, but I could do without dealing with the pathologically insecure lesbo boss in London and her lover in the office. As with most feminazis, who can't act like a guy because they're not and can't act like a girl because they're neutered, these two didn't understand how the world really worked or how to deal with people.

Later in the evening, Angel went through some photographs of me.

“This one will do,” she said with her Cheshire grin as she showed me a photograph of me smiling with my arms at my side.

The following day, she delivered the photograph to the magic-man and warned me, “You must pick up the photograph before the end of seven days. I will be in Krasnodar preparing for my eye operation, so I can't do it for you. It's very important to take the picture before the end of seven days; otherwise, the spell will not work. Have your driver take you, and leave your wallet in the car, but you must go into his office alone.”

“Don't you trust this guy,” I asked little surprised at such precautions.

“I don't trust any Russians,” she emphatically replied.

“Then why don't I take my driver inside with me or a body guard for that matter?”

“No, you mustn't! The magic-man might turn angry, and you don't want that.”

“What’s he going to do, put a curse on me?” I laughed.

“Be careful Roy. You don’t know what you are dealing with here. These magic-men are very powerful in Russia.”

“Okay, I’ll go in alone to make you happy.”

She grinned, mused up my hair and said, “Remember to leave him another twenty dollars.”

“Fine,” thinking this magic business simply wasted my time. “What do I do then with the photograph?” Wondering whether I needed to bury it in the snow again.

Surprisingly she said, “I don’t know. Whatever you want.” Apparently, the magic-man hadn’t thought of it.

Seeing my puzzlement, she quickly added, “Keep it with you.”

The next evening while still in Moscow, Angel and I visited her agent Leo. She wanted to collect some money she thought Leo owed her concerning her work in Mexico. She asked me to wait in another room while she and Leo discussed business. My intuition didn’t like that, but I rationalized they would talk in Russian anyway. After their meeting, Angel seemed relieved, telling me that Leo was going to call her Mexican agent Maria, who had arranged for her to work at The Men’s Club, to find out what happened to some of her money.

“How many agents do you have?” I asked.

“Too many and they all take some of my money. Leo sends girls to Maria in Mexico City and she finds them dancing jobs in the clubs. Leo takes 20% and Maria 15%.”

“How do the clubs make money?”

“Some take a percentage of the girl’s earnings and others make the girl pay the club a set amount to dance each night. The Men’s Club took 15% so for every \$20 dance, Leo got four dollars, Maria three and the club three. But I don’t complain; \$11 a dance for me is good.”

“Time for you to find different work.”

“I dream of modeling. It what I like, but in Russia I am not what they want. Here they only want girls for runway modeling. I do not have thin enough body.”

“Well, as my friend told you in New York, there are many different modeling careers in America, such as fitness modeling that you could do.”

“Yes, it my dream.”

As we walked back to my apartment on February 2nd, Candlemas Eve, in the cold and dark along Kutuzovsky Prospect, I asked Angel to marry me. The words jumped out of my mouth without me realizing it—no rehearsal, no running over the exact phrasing and no nervousness. Just lost in a fog again; my will suspended while the rest of me executed some prearranged program.

“Are you serious?” she asked.

“Yes, I am serious,” I said although I didn’t feel serious. I didn’t feel anything.

Angel said nothing; she waited then, “I don’t know. Let me think about it.”

“Okay,” I said as a momentary light flashed through the fog bringing a sense of dread for the results of a terrible mistake heading my way.

As we walked, I remembered, as I so often did, the girl I should have married but didn’t because of a stupid decision of mine. In 1968 the workings of the universe introduced me to Jennifer whom I knew right away was the one, my soul mate. With an open, generous and kind personality, Jennifer made my thoughts loom less menacing on me. She played a great game of

touch football, catching the ball behind her head when necessary and enjoying the roughness. She was tough, more so than Angel, but a genuinely nice person. While smart, at times Jennifer displayed a mind boggling naiveté as when she said she thought the height of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado might block out the moon at night—her favorite object for pondering. Ironically, or I now realize, fatefully the decision not to marry Jennifer sent my life in a direction I wished I never went.

Back then, a college course in Quantum Mechanics and General Relativity had lit a passion in me to delve the mysteries of the universe. The course turned my understanding of the universe upside down. After each class, I felt like Alice in Wonderland—common sense meant nothing. The universe was not as I thought; it thrilled and astonished me. In class, philosophy, science and mysticism met. No theory was outrageous unless based on the mundane understanding of our everyday perceptions. What my five senses had told me all my life was nothing but an illusion. The true nature of the universe was stranger than any tale. I wanted to understand the metaphysics of that nature in scientific rather than intuitive terms, which meant majoring in physics.

I knew that marrying Jennifer would mean settling down into a career in order to meet my obligations to wife and family, and the only career that interested me was one in physics. My wandering days would end. Years later in the 1990s while reading Joseph Campbell, I concluded that fundamental forces had been at work on me in that late sixties' summer. Jennifer appeared in my life with her dark bottomless eyes and black hair to steer me in the direction of understanding the workings of the universe by attracting me into the underworld of intuitive knowledge. She would have set me on a life-long process of carrying understanding from the world of metaphysics to the light of consciousness in the form of the mathematical language of

physics. A worthy vocation, but I didn't marry her, and every day I regretted not following the path Jennifer represented because of my succumbing to fear and pride in deciding to wander eclectically from one endeavor to another that eventually brought me to Angel.

Two nights later over dinner at the Pushkin Restaurant, Angel answered my proposal by agreeing to marry me. Usually, when Angel had asked for time to think before answering a question, she forgot about it, and I would have to prod her for an answer. Either her memory wasn't very good, or she hoped I'd forget having asked the question. Buying time was apparently one of her tactics for bypassing a potential problem. This time, for some reason, I refrained from reminding her about my proposal. Perhaps my unconscious knew something I didn't.

"I will marry you Roy but I want to make some things clear," she said with her innocent smile.

"Fine," I said. "Discussing issues beforehand is always better than waiting for a problem later."

"We will live as husband and wife and you will help me find work in America in my favorite business?"

"Right, Cindi is willing to help you with the modeling. You know my contract with Kroll ends this month, and I plan to go back to America and take you with me. In order to do that, we need to go through certain procedures at the U.S. Embassy. Now they might, although I doubt it, decide not to let you into America. In that case, we can live in Moscow or go to some other country. I said before, I think you are very talented and besides loving you, I want to help you reach your dreams. As a lawyer with an MBA, I can do that. It's common in America for husbands and wives to help each other in not only emotional ways but in material terms and in

their careers. Often two people working together can achieve much more than two people working separately. So I see our marriage as two people who love each other and want to help each other.” Angel just looked blankly. When Russians don’t understand something they don’t say so because it makes them feel humiliated. “Do you understand,” I added.

“I understand,” she sarcastically said with a smile.

“Do you love me Angel?”

She leaned forward with her Cheshire smile, touched my hand and said, “I have special love for you Roy.” In the words of a famous fictional detective, I felt like a toad on a wet rock with a snake looking at the back of my neck. She added, “So you will try to get me papers to work in America?”

“That’s just what I said, and help you in your career like you want. It is all part of our being married.”

“How long will it take for my papers to America?”

“About three months after we marry, maybe shorter.”

“I go back to Krasnodar for my eye operation, so let’s get marry after that.”

“Fine, and since you will have your own career and money in America, I would like a prenuptial that says you will not take my money if we divorce.” She seemed a little surprised at this.

“Why do you want this paper?”

“Because otherwise you could marry me, and after a few years, take a lot of my money through a divorce.”

“You Americans always think about money. What about the feelings of the heart?”

“Just as you are concerned about working in America, I am concerned about not losing a lot of my money.”

“Okay, but you must do everything you can to get me work papers in America, and I want a paper that says you can’t send me out of the America,” she added.

“It’s not up to me to decide whether you could stay in America if we divorced. Immigration authorities make that decision.”

“But I will be able to work?”

“Yes,” I repeated.

“Okay,” she grinned innocently. “Here’s to us and America,” she toasted.

The following day I took Angel to the airport to fly home to Krasnodar. She needed to help her mother renovate their new apartment and undergo laser eye surgery to correct her inability to see people at a distant. She couldn’t stand contacts because after eight hours of working in a smoky club, they irritated her eyes. And glasses she really disliked. Probably because they insulted her vanity and club proprietors rarely hired four-eyed girls, although Angel looked stunning in them. Angel also said she needed to assist in transferring the old house to one of her aunts, which, as any transaction in Russia, still required long hours, numerous approvals and multiple stamps and papers all invented to maintain full employment in the Soviet Union that no longer existed. The aunt, a sister of Angel’s mother, lived with her husband and daughter in the far east of Russia on Sakhalin Island. They wanted to move to Krasnodar because on Sakhalin not only jobs were scarce but also food—people were starving while the criminals running the government stole millions. Angel said that compared to Sakhalin, Krasnodar looked like the land of prosperity. It surprised me to hear that Angel and her mother had relatives. She

never mentioned them before, so I assumed her and her mother were a family of two only.

Angel said her mother had two sisters but only stayed in contact with the one in Sakhalin.

Before boarding the plane, Angel reminded me “Don’t forget to pick up the photograph from the magic man before the end of the week or the spell will not work. And hurry with the paper work, so we can get married in Krasnodar soon.”

“I will get it done as fast as possible, but my job doesn’t end until the last week of February.” I didn’t understand her rush.

Once again she asked, “How long after we are married will I get my visa to America?”

“As I said before, the visa could take up to three months.”

“I hope it goes faster, but its okay, since it will take me three months to recover from my eye surgery.”

“Three months!” I said in surprise. “I thought it only took a week or so. That’s what they advertise, even in Russia.”

“No,” she said with her innocent smile. “My doctor says that for three months I can’t get excited, drink alcohol, eat sweets, dance or party. I must keep my blood pressure low and that includes sex.”

“Are you sure about this? I don’t think I would trust a Russian doctor who says it takes three months to recover.”

“He one of the best in the world. The eye institute in Krasnodar was set up by the inventor of the laser eye surgery.”

“If it’s so good, why does it take three months to recover when in Moscow and America it’s only a week?” Angel just ignored the question.

“Don’t worry Roy. I will be fine; he is a good doctor. Russia is one of the best in the world for this technology.” Angel, like so many Russians, still bought into some of the old Soviet propaganda extolling the country’s technological prowess, but the reality made me fear that something might go wrong.

Russia boasts free modern medical care for everyone, but Russians with money go overseas for serious treatment or import Western specialists. Even Yeltsin flew in a Western heart surgeon. And the term “free” in Russian lexicography really means paying money under the table to the state employed physicians and nurses; otherwise, a patient’s chances of recovery drops dramatically. Patients pay nurses for clean syringes rather than gamble with a nurse reusing a disposable, improperly sterilized syringe because it reduces hospital costs allowing the money saved to go into the administrators, doctors and nurses’ pockets. The Hippocratic oath holds no meaning in Russia. The members of the medical profession—like everyone else—hustle for themselves, close relatives or friends while hiding behind a veil of fine words about compassion and justice that they rarely practice.

In the West, we at least have medical malpractice lawyers, who despite all the criticism, act as a deterrent to egregious medical blunders. Doctors in America kill and maim a little less because of the fear that lawyers will rob them of so much. But in Russia, the lack of a functioning legal system permits doctors to kill and mutilate with impunity through negligence, recklessness or drunkenness. If Angel’s doctor made a mistake, the only recourse would be to hire a criminal group operating in Krasnodar to extort compensation from the doctor, and the enforcers would take around 50%.

“I hope nothing happens with the operation,” I said, deeply concerned.

“Just think positive thoughts, and I will be find.”

“Okay, have a safe trip.”

Angel called me a couple of times from Krasnodar to make sure I picked up the photo from the magic-man within the time limit. At the end of the week I visited the magic-man’s office. He was not there, but his overly apprehensive female helper, which I chalked up to her drinking a few too many cups of coffee, handed me the photograph and more melted wax wrapped in paper as though they were radioactive materials. In broken English and sign language, she communicated that I should flush the wax down the toilet. I headed for the office toilet, but she quickly, almost in a panic, stopped me. No, no, she emotionally shook her head, indicating that I must use the toilet in my apartment. She demanded \$20, telling me to put it on the table with the black cloth, and after I paid, gave me the bum’s rush out the door. Good grief, these witches and warlocks were a bunch of sticklers and not very friendly. At home I flushed the wax down the toilet and put the photograph in a safe place.

To my Russian tutor in New York, who had visited me in Moscow with her friend, I sent news of the engagement by email in which I hoped the direction of my life had changed. I planned to manage Angel’s legitimate career and go back to college to study quantum cosmology, a branch of physics. True to form my tutor replied:

“Hey Roy, I think you are an idiot, but I’m not going to say anything because you already know what I want to say. I think the only “career” that Angel could get is in the porno business, but it is your business, and don’t cry to me when she leaves you and takes everything from you.”

During February, I called Angel about twice a week and at times questioned myself why I didn’t call her more often; after all she was my fiancée. We exchanged Valentine day cards. Her card said:

“A lot of loves, my dear Roy. From all my heart it for you...Love—it flower. And this flower you must give—calories, care, all your clean feeling. And after, ...after will come to you wonder! Care your flower, to be happy with this, what you have. Don’t make unimprovable mistake. With tenderness, loves—your enigmatic outspoken flower, Angelina... with love.”

Angel talked better English than she wrote, but the sentiment came through—very sweet. When February 14th arrived, I turned the page in my schedule book to find a note that Angel had secretly written in it before she left—very nice. “Roy, care your love! It very easy destroy, but how is difficult is back. I have feeling to you—don’t broken it. Keep yourself concentrated. And construct your love. Love—it respect, trust. Love—it life, so take it and have enjoy!!! With love Angel.”

My work responsibilities ended sooner than expected, which enabled me to complete the paper work, required by both the Russian and American governments for their citizens to marry, just before Angel underwent her eye operation. I told her I’d fly to Krasnodar to be with her during the operation. But, to my surprise, she said no because there would be nothing for me to do while she was in the hospital. I explained the point was for me to provide her with emotional support, not to find activities to consume my time. But she insisted I not come until the end of the month.

“Okay, but I’ll call you in the hospital.”

“You can’t,” she said. “There are no telephones.”

“I thought even Russian hospitals have a telephone on the floor.”

“Look Roy, it better that you not call me at the hospital. Russians are very nosy always looking for information to use against people.”

“We’re going to be married Angel. How can they use that against you?”

“If Russians know that someone goes to America, they will try to get money by kidnapping or threatening harm to family members in Russia. I will call you as soon as I come home from hospital. Do this for your Angel.

“Okay, but I doubt you have to worry about anything like that.” All of this troubled me, although she did have a point. One of the cases at Kroll required us to find the whereabouts of Miss Russia of 1991. She was scamming some French investment banker claiming he knocked her up. But she didn’t want to stay in Paris and allegedly went back to Moscow to have their

child. The banker wanted to know whether she was in Moscow and actually pregnant. We found someone with her passport living in the apartment of Miss Russia's parents in Moscow but at the same time found someone with her passport staying indefinitely at the very expensive Pierre Hotel on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. The girl in Moscow wasn't pregnant, but the one in New York City was—from whom, who knew? We, therefore, concluded the girl at the Pierre the real Miss Russia and the girl in Moscow a cousin pretending to be her in order to prevent gangsters from discovering the former Miss Russian's expensive life style and threatening her family in Moscow unless Miss Russia paid them a stipend.

I booked my tickets for the end of February, leaving my return date open because we still needed to complete some paper work in Krasnodar for the Russian Marriage Registry Office, commonly called ZAGS, before scheduling our wedding. ZAGS traditionally performed weddings and kept the marriage records. Under the Soviets, only weddings performed by ZAGS were legally recognized. Some couples also had religious ceremonies, but to the Communists, they were meaningless. After the demise of communism, religious weddings tied couples into legal knots as effectively as ZAGS, but many Russians still preferred a marriage at ZAGS. Once ZAGS received all the required documents, it usually scheduled a wedding a month later. I didn't mind hanging around Krasnodar for a month, but once again Angel didn't want to wait. She decided to bribe the head of ZAGS in her district for a wedding as soon as possible.

“Why the rush,” I asked her over the telephone.

“I don't want to waste the time. I wasted three years after college working in Krasnodar that I wish I didn't. It will still take three months to get my visa. All of my money goes for our apartment, so I need to start making money again soon.”

“I can lend you some money if you need it.”

“No, I want my own money and to get on with my career.” Again I rationalized her wishes. This time by thinking if I were in her position, I’d also want to leave Russia as soon as possible.

In Moscow, I waited until the end of the month with next to nothing to do, contacted my friends in the U.S. and met with my friends in Moscow to tell them about my marriage plans. To my amazement, each and every one of them, whether Russian, American or European, said I was an idiot. One dear petite friend, Maria, who came from England, worked for a religious charity helping orphans, sang with a great voice in the band “No Problem” and whom I never heard utter a curse, responded to the news of my forthcoming marriage with “You stupid fucking fool! You stupid fucking fool! Are you some kind of an idiot? All she wants is a green card, and then it’s so long sucker. How can you do this? I told you love doesn’t exist in Russia, and I’ve been here longer than you. I thought you were smart. Well Roy, I will pray for you—you needed it! Damn it! I can’t believe this! I hope I’m wrong. Well, call me when you get back from Krasnodar.”

Maria’s reaction shocked me, but for some reason it didn’t fully register. She was a close friend with my interests at heart, but I consciously ignored what she said without even considering the possible truth of it. The same with my other friends, I valued their advice; all of them were smart, but I didn’t even pause to wonder whether I was making a stupid mistake. Not at all my usual mode of operation. But their warnings did work on my unconscious so that by the time I boarded my flight to Krasnodar on February 28, 2000, I wanted answers from Angel to a number of questions. If I didn’t get believable responses, then I was homeward bound without a wife.

I Can't Help Myself

Angel met me at the airport with her usual smile, hugs and arm over my shoulders.

“How are your eyes?” I asked.

“They are improving slowly. I can't read anything and must remain calm. No strenuous work. Tomorrow, mom and me move into our new apartment. It great! I have dreamed of this for a long time.”

Angel's mother, Inessa, enlisted a number of her students from the Gymnastic Department at the Academy of Physical Culture to help with the move. One student showed with a flat bed truck more appropriate for carrying bulldozers than household goods. The move was a typical Russian operation—no planning and no organization, they just psyched themselves up, drank a lot of coffee and moved in all directions as fast and carelessly as possible, apparently trying to beat some imaginary clock. Glasses were smashed, boxes dropped and injuries incurred, but everyone, to my surprise, remained cheerful as they laughingly dismissed the damage to property and bodies. The students worked for free and gave Inessa and Angel house warming presents after the move. The new apartment was large by Russian standards with two bedrooms, but it needed a lot of work.

That evening, Angel and I took a walk down the park in the middle of the main street, Krasnaya Ulitsa, strolling along with other lovers and folks. The weather was much more mild in Krasnodar than Moscow, and by Russian standards, spring would arrive the next day on March 1 instead of the vernal equinox of March 21 as in the post-medieval countries.

“We need to get some things straight before our marriage,” I said.

“Always the lawyer,” she ginned putting her arm over my shoulders. “What is it now?”

“I just think we should be clear about what each expects from the other. I know that Russians tend to see marriage as a matter of economic convenience rather than a romantic union. But as you know, I, like most Americans, see marriage as an emotional bond in which each helps the other in their life and career.”

“You will be my husband and I your wife. You will help me get to America where I can work?”

“Yes, and we will live together in New York.”

“And I will be able to work.”

“Yes. I will do everything I can to help you pursue your dream of modeling, acting or singing. I always told every girlfriend of mine that she must be financially independent. Nobody wants to rely on someone else for economic well-being. Humans tend to take advantage of those who are dependent on them. And a lasting relationship can’t exist when one person can dictate to the other, which is what happens when one party enters a relationship for economic gain rather than love.”

“So, my Roy has had many girls,” she teasing said.

“Only one at a time, a serial monogamous.”

“Ohhh, you are faithful,” she mockingly replied.

“Which brings me to the main point. When we are married, I expect you not to go out with anyone else or try to trick me. I know Russian husbands and wives tend to have lovers on the side, but I don’t work that way. I expect you as I want a faithful and honest spouse.”

She didn’t say a word, just looked down into my eyes with her Cheshire smile. I pressed the point because I didn’t want to hear any of her excuses later that she didn’t understand or

didn't agree. "Look Angel, the way to deal with me is to be truthful. Tell me the truth, and we can work anything out. If you try to manipulate me, I will know and lots of trouble will result."

"I truthful with you Roy. Are you truthful with me?"

"You know I am."

"Do you agree not to go out with other men while we are married and not try to trick me?"

She lowered her eyes and contritely said, "Yes Roy."

The next day, Angel and I started running around preparing the necessary paper work encountering one bureaucratic obstacle or another. For example, I needed an address in Krasnodar. My Moscow residence wouldn't do because ZAGS didn't allow out-of-towners to marry locals, and I couldn't use Angel's address because ZAGS didn't like couples living together before their marriage. We ended up paying the Moscow Hotel Manager some money for a document stating I resided at the hotel. Money and gifts can buy anything in Russia, such as a way around stupid bureaucratic rules—probably the only reason for the rules in the first place—and procedures that assure fairness. Angle used flowers and candy, bought by me, to bribe the ZAGS female commandant into moving our wedding to near the front of the line—a ten-day wait instead of thirty.

At night, Angel wanted to hit the discos, which was fine by me. The places were more civilized than the deafening, in your face, behemoth caverns of New York City. They also started earlier, around 10 PM, and you could carry on a conversation without screaming in someone's ear. The men were also different; they demonstrated some class unlike the white guys in America who danced with themselves like pigeons trying to attract a mate. The clubs also put on mini-dance reviews called "ballets" around midnight. The discos hired dance troops

made up of local residents to perform various skits. The dancers were excellent, in my opinion much better than any professionals I saw in America.

One night, we ran into the finalists for the Miss Krasnodar beauty pageant dancing in a pack at a disco with free admission for girls. Why else would they be there, unless some guys were paying the way? All these babes were stunning, tall, beautiful, well dressed and sexy—pure femininity. A modern day American girl bred on feminazism didn't have a prayer of competing.

Krasnodar began looking like a little piece of heaven right here on earth because as gorgeous as these beauty contestants were, many of the young ladies I saw in that city were just as attractive. Actually, Angel didn't look so extraordinarily pretty in her hometown, and I understood why she always needed assurances about her looks. Even the average girl in the street appeared beautiful—no blue jeans, hiking boots or faces without makeup. Skirts, stockings and shoes with heels highlighted the female form in Krasnodar. These girls wanted to look like girls, not men. More sexy girls probably inhabited that town than any place I had ever visited. In the street, I looked until my eyes hurt, but the Russian men barely paid these beauties any attention. At first, I assumed the men were used to this extreme femininity, but then I remembered it was a buyers' market. With significantly more girls than guys in Russia, the man with a little money could take his pick. That meant the girls, the sellers, needed to advertise their wares the best they could, which resulted in super-feminine felines strutting the boulevards, quick to smile in an innocently alluring way and willing to engage in conversation with any half decently dressed guy that approached them. Still, my "glut of girls theory" didn't explain why Russian men weren't aggressively grabbing this girl or that one to spend many of their waking hours playing with these lovely things. The Russian men apparently preferred spending most of

their leisure time hanging out in groups of other men, virtually ignoring the sensual beauties swishing passed. My analysis was missing something.

The following evening as Angel and I walked to the disco “Joy,” I raised another of the concerns I wanted resolved before the wedding. This one went back to last August, before she left for Mexico when Angel volunteered to tell me all about her past. At the time, her statement surprised me because I didn’t ask about her past. She brought the subject up and promised to tell me her life story the next time we met. She didn’t, so ever since then, I periodically reminded her, but she always said, “Don’t worry Roy, I tell you later,” but later never came. By evading that promise, she made me wonder about her ability to keep her word and her honesty. I didn’t care about the bad things she may have done before we met; everybody regrets some of their past. But I needed to believe that when she told me something it was the truth, when she made a promise, it was not to deceive. Relationships don’t work unless based on honesty, so with our wedding looming, I decided to find out whether Angel would finally keep her promise. If not, then I would fly back to Moscow still a single man.

“Remember you said you were going to tell me about your past?”

“Yes,” she defensively answered.

“Well, what about it?”

“You already know about my past.”

“No, I don’t. What were you doing in Cyprus?”

“I was dancing in a club.”

“You mean you were stripping in a club.”

“That is dancing—it is art.”

“Did you take all your clothes off? Did you go out with your customers?”

“I always wore thong panties, never nude dancing. Sometimes I gave a customer a massage at his hotel.”

“You went to a customer’s hotel!”

“Only if he were a friend—nothing ever happened. I just gave him a massage. I very good at massage.”

“Wait a minute. You’d leave the club, go to his hotel and all he wants is a massage?”

“I don’t want to talk about this anymore. I just had a serious operation and my doctor says I should not get upset.”

I was waiting for the tears, but they didn’t come so I continued. “Look Angel, you’re the one who promised to tell me about your past. I didn’t ask about it.”

“Yes, I know, and now I wish I didn’t.”

“Don’t you realize that when you make a promise you’re supposed to keep it unless something prevents you?”

“You make promises and don’t keep them.”

“Name one,” she couldn’t. “Angel I don’t care what you did before we slept together in December. All you have to do is tell the truth. You made a promise to tell the truth about your past. I didn’t force you into that promise; you made it yourself, so tell the truth!”

“I told you the truth,” she stamped her foot.

“All of it?”

“Yes!”

“In America when a person keeps from telling something important, that’s a lie too.”

Now she started the tears, “You are offending me. You forget who I am to you.”

“So none of these good-friend customers ever tried to have sex with you in a hotel?”

“Some tried but I told them I was on my period.”

I knew that wouldn't deter everybody. “You went to a hotel with your customers and never had sex!”

“Yes.”

Then I remembered Bill Clinton and asked, “What does sex mean to you?”

“Only intercourse,” she said.

“Okay, did you ever play with a customer sexually like jerking him off or letting him play with your tits and crouch?”

“Stop it!” she stamped again like a horse. “I'm a good girl. I didn't go to Cyprus to have sex. I needed money and made it dancing in a club. It is art what I do!”

I let it go for then, but unless Angel stopped her dissembling and prevarication, I was going back to Moscow sooner than planned.

The next day we went to a notary for both of us to sign the prenuptial contract that my lawyer in Moscow prepared. Notaries in Russia, usually women, make a good living, not by charging a couple of rubles for their signatures but extracting exorbitant fees from the populace. They can do this because the government requires a notary's signature on all documents filed with a public agency while other documents need a notary's signature in order to have legal effect. The government also limits the number of notaries in any town, so their high fees are largely protected from market competition.

Our notary, a fat, mean-spirited, male-less female of which there are many in Russia, advised Angel to change certain portions of the prenuptial contract. Russian females in any profession believe they have a god-given right to meddle in the affairs of the people who pay them. The notary proceeded to change the prenuptial on the spot, in Russian of course. Angel

avored this rewrite because the notary sided with her—sisters united against men allegedly trying to take advantage of poor defenseless women and all that malarkey. I began to boil at the interference because when I previously sent Angel a copy, I included money to pay for her own lawyer to review it. When I walked into the notary's office, I believed she had done that since she told me the contract was fine. But she hadn't.

I couldn't figure out the reason for Angel not reviewing a document of such importance with an attorney before we went to the notary. Did she pocket the money for a lawyer thinking the notary would give her advice for which I would pay, or perhaps she arranged with the notary before hand to make changes favorable to her on the spot assuming I would rely on Angel's translation of the changes? How convenient for Angel I thought. With my lawyer in Moscow, any consultations with him were unlikely given the telephone system out of Krasnodar. I tried to clear my head of the ever-present conspiratorial mentality of Russians. After the notary made her changes, I made sure we went to an independent translator to tell me in English what they were. Some of the changes I okayed, and some I didn't. We signed three original copies: one for the notary, one for Angel and one for me. Angel put our two copies in her bag.

Angel wanted to take in an amusement ride, so we took a private taxi to the end of Krasnaya Ulitsa where the movie theatre housed a couple of rides and a few holes of miniature golf. Angel introduced me to the manager of the theater, one of the few times she introduced me to anyone. He didn't speak English but was friendly and let Angel ride for free—always a special treat for her. Angel later told me the manager was Chechen and she met him when she first came to Krasnodar to stay in the college dormitory while her mother was still in Grozny making arrangements to move their household goods. She said the Chechen was very kind hearted because he helped her and her mother find a house and to move.

On our way back to her apartment, Angel started talking about how much she liked her stay in Mexico and the beautiful places she visited. I took the opportunity to give her another chance to keep her promise to tell me about her past and see whether she could speak the truth without her tongue catching fire.

“In the one and only letter you sent me from Mexico, you said you wanted to stay in Mexico to model, but you weren’t modeling, you were giving lap dances in a club. Why did you lie?”

“I didn’t lie, I did a little modeling.”

“You mean when you only tell part of the truth and leave the rest out you’re not lying?”

She grinned that Cheshire smile, “Exactly! It’s being artful.”

“Didn’t we talk about this last night?”

“You talked about. I listened,” again that cat smile.

“You don’t get it do you. When you prevaricate, that means hide the truth, it’s the same as lying.”

“Not in Russia.”

“But in America and with me, when you fail to tell something important that is lying. If it’s not the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, it’s lying.”

She looked at me in disbelief, “That’s not the way in Russia. Here a lie is only when you say something false. It our way.”

“I’m sure it is! I have run into it everywhere I go in Russia. All right, in one of your two faxes from Mexico, you said that you went to many beautiful places but were always alone. During New Year’s Eve, you showed me pictures of you naked in a lounge chair on a hotel in Cancun. Who paid for the hotel, who paid for the airplane, I know you didn’t.”

“I don’t remember.”

“You stayed in an expensive hotel in Cancun and don’t remember who paid for it?”

“I answered your question, now stop being aggressive to me!” Then she stamped one of those size eleven feet again.

“Well at least that means you didn’t pay for it. So what did you give in return for someone taking you to Cancun and those other places in Mexico?” She ignored this question, but it didn’t matter because the main purpose of this grilling was to see whether she could tell the truth. She couldn’t.

I continued, “You said during New Year’s that you traveled with friends to different places. Were these men friends and did you provide them with sexual favors? Sexual favors mean not only intercourse but other acts such as....”

“Enough! You’re upsetting me and my doctor forbids it!”

“Your doctor again. I thought recovery from these laser operations took only a week—not three months.”

“I am a sick girl and you should not be so aggressive with me. You forget who I am.”

“Just tell the truth Angel. You said you would or was that a lie too.”

“I have told you the truth! And I am not going to talk about it anymore.”

“No you haven’t told the truth. First it’s one story, then another, then I don’t remember or some other excuse. You’re the one who volunteered to tell me about your past. I didn’t ask.”

“Yes, I know and that was a mistake.”

“Well, I don’t want to make a mistake either, so I’m thinking of canceling the wedding. I’ll decide in a couple of days. All my instinct tells me this is stupid and I should go home.”

Her eyes narrowed and glared at me with cold-blooded resolve, “As you wish.”

Later that afternoon Angel said, “I have to go meet someone. I will be back in a couple of hours.”

“I’ll go with you,” I said, distrustfully.

“You can’t come along.”

Now I was really suspicious, “Why not?”

“My friend is very fragile and afraid of strangers. Just your being there would upset her, she is very sensitive. You can come to the apartment house, but I can’t take you inside.”

“Going to see another of your boyfriends?” I said, not believing this story about some strange shy woman.

“No, I am not!”

“Why don’t I believe you?” I sarcastically said, “That’s okay, I’ll stay here in your apartment.” I hadn’t reached a final decision but pretty much knew I would shelve the entire relationship, so any afternoon tryst didn’t really matter.

When she returned, I asked her for my copy of the prenuptial just in case. She handed me one from her bag, but as I went to put it in my suitcase, my instinct told me to check it, and sure enough it was a draft version without signatures and notarization, which in Russia and America meant useless. I was sure Angel gave me the unsigned copy on purpose, hoping I wouldn’t notice. Did she think me that stupid?

“Nice try, but I would like a signed copy.”

Without a word she nonchalantly handed me a signed version.

The next day we got up in the morning, did some errands and Angel prepared lunch for the first time. She said she wanted to save me money from eating in restaurants. I was on the verge of a final decision to leave and would start formulating an escape that afternoon. After

lunch, however, I fell asleep for the entire afternoon. Couldn't understand why, since I never slept in the afternoon, no matter how tired, and that morning's activities were by no means exhausting.

I awoke around four in a fog, feeling very mellow and unable to concentrate. Angel made dinner, I think, and we went to a disco, but I still can't remember which one.

The next day after lunch, I fell asleep again for the whole afternoon. When I awoke, I felt euphoric, couldn't think straight, but knew something was wrong. I tried to think, to grab hold of my reason to finally decide not to go through with the marriage and arrange my departure, but I couldn't reach a decision on either the marriage or the escape. Both kept slipping away from my will. All I could do was to say over and over about marrying Angel, "This is stupid, stupid, stupid." Angel even told me with a grin later, what I was saying. Obviously she eavesdropped on me when I was alone and talking to myself in an effort to think out loud since my brain no longer seemed to function. The next day I fell asleep again after lunch and also became constipated. Angel said it must be the change in diet, which made no sense because the food in Krasnodar was the same fare as in Moscow. In fact, I began to think the food Angel prepared was great, even though it consisted mainly of hot dogs and frozen vegetables or spaghetti.

I don't know for how many days this went on: up in the morning for errands necessary for the wedding, Angel preparing lunch and my falling asleep in the afternoon. Another strange routine started, I think around the same time as my afternoon naps, but I'm not sure since those days seemed vague and indistinct with one flowing into the other without break. Angel started going into her bedroom warning me not to disturb her because she was communing with some

“negative forces” and my entering could cause me harm. To the dysfunctional state of my consciousness at the time, her statement actually sounded rational.

My concerns about Angel’s ability to tell the truth vanished, and, I think, although I am not sure, that our sex life stopped. I can still remember my first couple of nights in Krasnodar and Angel’s foul body odor during sex. The city Government turned off the hot water to the entire town every night at around 9 PM, so when we returned from the discos usually at 2 or 3 AM, there was no hot water for a shower. No big deal, I thought at first, but when I went to bed with Angel, she smelled so bad without first taking a shower that I nearly gagged. Once again, I told her to see a doctor, but she refused to admit there was anything wrong. “Russian men never complained about any smells,” she retorted.

Her mother usually came home from work around five o’clock, after my daily nap, and scurried about the apartment doing one domestic task or another as though trying to keep the demons of her mind distracted with busy work. In the early evenings, Angel began excusing herself for a couple of hours to visit her friend Natasha who lived upstairs in the same building. I asked Angel to introduce me to Natasha, but she refused, and given my befuddled, apathetic mental state at the time, I put up with that and quickly forgot my thinking of Natasha as Angel’s lesbian lover. On more than one occasion, Angel remarked about how she enjoyed giving and receiving from women lap dances because their touch was more caressing and thrilling to her. I dismissed such talk as the usual transparent efforts by girls to needlessly cause their boyfriends emotional distress out of an innate sense of insecurity and as trendy pop rot rubbish

One night Angel said she was going to audition for the manager of a popular disco for a ballet troop he planned to send to Italy.

“Why are you auditioning to go to Italy to dance when we are getting married in a few days,” I asked with surprise. By now, my thoughts of calling off the wedding had vanished in a haze of well-being.

“I need to work Roy. I don’t want to sit around doing nothing while we wait for my visa. What if I don’t get the visa? I don’t want to lose the time. Besides, if they hire me, it will last only a couple of weeks during the end of May. I have never traveled to Italy and want so much to see it.” My warning sensors should have activated, but I felt too spaced to worry.

I went with her and met Alexey Smolin the manager. He seemed like a bright, ambitious young New Russian and only spoke Russian. Actually, all the people I met while with Angel in Krasnodar only spoke Russian in front of me, so I never understood what they talked about and was completely dependent on Angel for any translations. At Smolin’s club, Angel auditioned, wiggling around as though stripping, which meant the job included lap dancing. Alexey said maybe and gave us free tickets to his club.

The remainder of that week or so in March, I still couldn’t see clearly in my mind. But I do know that on Saturday, March 11, 2000, early in the morning, Angel prepared breakfast and we headed to ZAGS to get married. The wedding room I recall from seeing a week earlier looked very nice, painted in pastels, a high ceiling and polished wood floors located in a well kept 19th century building. When we entered the wedding palace, as Russians called it, I felt elated as I had since Angel began preparing my meals. There were a number of couples waiting to get married, surrounded by relatives and friends.

“Where’s your mother?” I asked.

“She had to work.”

“On a Saturday?” I replied. “And what about your friends? There is no one here but us.”

“It’s a secret,” she said and at the time it seemed to make sense to me.

After a short wait for the other couples’ ceremonies, the wedding march began to play for us and we walked into the marriage room, I think. The ceremony was in Russian, which meant I didn’t understand a thing, so Angel told me what to do and say. At the end, I recall kissing her for an extended period of time, and she started slapping me on the chest to stop. Not what I expected from my wife. We signed the registry and someone took pictures. After the ceremony, Angel took me to the Aeroflot office and booked me on a flight back to Moscow. She said the earliest one was for Monday.

“Trying to get rid of me,” I said, as some of my old reasoning flashed through.

“Roy, you must get back to Moscow to file the papers for my visa.” Always the visa, I said to myself. “Okay, after I file the papers, let’s take our honeymoon to some place in Russia.” The honeymoon was my idea, and at first, Angel seemed to go along.

She responded, “I would like to go to Samara where I was born to see whether I can find my father.” A couple of months earlier, Angel said her father lived in Tver and asked me to use the firm to try to find him. We tried, but no luck. So what was he now doing in Samara, but the logical inconsistency faded away, and all I said was “That’s find with me. How will you find him?”

“He has a brother and other relatives there who may know where he is.”

“Are you sure you want to do this? You said he beat you as a kid and sexually attacked you when you were 13.”

“I just want to see him.” She sounded like a little girl lost who had never seen her father, which didn’t make sense because she lived with him and her mother in Grozny until her parents divorced when she was sixteen.

We also visited a travel agent about taking a tour of seven ancient and very famous towns that circled Moscow. Angel said she would handle the arrangements for the towns around Moscow and to visit Samara. I volunteered to schedule the trip, but she insisted she could get a better deal for our honeymoon through Krasnodar agents than I could in Moscow.

On our wedding night, Angel wanted to celebrate by taking her mother to a fancy restaurant because she never got to go out.

“Doesn’t Inessa have any boyfriends?” I asked.

“Mom doesn’t date. She had such a bad time with my father that she stays away from men. My father was the only man she ever knew.” I found that hard to believe, but still in a fog, let it go.

The restaurant was nice by Russian standards, and, as always when we went to a restaurant, Angel got the waitress to take pictures of the food and us. I never did understand her habit of taking pictures of restaurant meals. She often told me she knew hunger when young and especially liked to tell the story about when as a young hungry teenager she came out of church and gave her last kopeck to a beggar who proceeded to insult her for giving so little, which made her weep.

On Sunday after the wedding, Angel said she needed to change my flight from Monday to Tuesday because I had to stay an extra day to help her with the tax authorities.

She explained, “I told you before about the new law that took effect in the beginning of the year. When someone buys an apartment the tax people want to know where the money came

from to make sure it's not from crime. I need you to sign a paper in front of a notary saying that you gave me \$15,000 to buy my apartment."

My mind was still so muddled that I, a lawyer, agreed to this fraud. "Whatever you want," I automatically said.

A day later than she planned, Angel put me on a plane to Moscow secure that the tax authorities wouldn't trouble her. I still don't remember going to the airport, what we said to each other or the flight, but I felt pretty good as I had for the passed week or so.

Everybody's Somebody's Fool

In Moscow, the glow of Krasnodar soon wore off. I began feeling really depressed, restless and irritable but assumed it was the boredom of not working and the isolation of living in a country where I didn't speak the language. I called Angel repeatedly and asked her to come to Moscow because of the loneliness, but my entreaties didn't move her. She always had an excuse for staying in Krasnodar. Her eye doctor required follow up visits, her mother needed help in fixing up their new apartment or she had to prepare documents to transfer her old house in the village to her mother's sister. I gave up trying to convince this Russian wife to come live with her American husband and began pushing her about arranging our honeymoon.

"When are we going on our honeymoon?" I asked during each telephone conversation.

"When do I get my visa?" she'd always reply.

"There's nothing more I can do in Moscow with the visa. We just have to wait."

"Mom doesn't think it is a good idea for me to see my dad in Samara," which was her reason for killing that part of the honeymoon plan, so I started prodding her about the trip around the ancient cities outside of Moscow. She kept saying, "I am waiting for the travel agent to return from Moscow." After hearing that a few times, I volunteered to make the arrangements

myself in Moscow, but she said, “You must be patient. I can make our trip cheaper from here, and I still have things to do in Krasnodar.”

After three weeks of Angel’s procrastination, I gave up on a honeymoon, joined a gym, started studying Russian at the Pushkin Institute, made half-hearted attempts at finding work in Moscow and tried to battle the intense loneliness by filling my social schedule with museums, clubs and friends.

When I saw Maria at a club where her band No Problem played, she didn’t berate me about marrying Angel but asked about the ceremony. “What did Angel wear at the wedding?”

I stopped to think, looked at her in bewilderment and said, “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know!” she yelled, as some of the club customers turned to look.

“I can’t remember. I’m trying to picture the ceremony, but draw a blank. I remember the building, the brightly colored rooms and people. But the details escape me.”

“I thought you lawyers had good memories.”

“I do, but I can’t grasp it clearly. It all seems vague. I know I went through the ceremony because I can remember some parts of it, but her dress, not a clue.”

“Were you drunk?”

“At nine in the morning? No way. It just doesn’t make sense.”

“Who else was there?”

“Just Angel and me.”

“What about her mother?”

“She had to work.”

“Work!” Maria yelled again with fewer customers turning to stare. “You’re telling me that your wife’s mother didn’t even bother to go to her daughter’s wedding?”

“She wasn’t there as I recall.”

“You are a stupid fucking fool!” she yelled one last time, but no one noticed by then and added, “I hope for you it works out, but I doubt it.”

A few days later, I received a letter from Angel with the wedding photographs that she said the ZAGS photographer took. I called Maria up to answer her question, “Except for a white dickey, she wore all black.”

“Black! She wore black and you couldn’t remember that!” Maria yelled into the phone. “Didn’t you ever go to a wedding; didn’t you ever see a wedding? The bride wears white or some light happy tone, not the color of death.”

“Well, she did wear a white scarf,” I lamely replied.

“You idiot! How could you not remember your bride wearing black to your wedding?”

“Beats me why I don’t remember. I must have noticed it but guess it just seemed natural at the time.”

“Natural! No one wears all black to a wedding, except witches or the mistress of the anti-Christ! She’s a witch Roy, and you’re doomed if you don’t get rid of her.”

“Look, I know our views of the universe differ. I believe in quantum mechanics, you believe in an omnipresent God, but witches? Even if they do exist, they are nothing more than psychopaths.”

“So who wants to be married to a psychopath?”

“You have a point there.”

“I know I’m not going to convert you, but there are things in this universe that no one understands. You just have to believe. Evil exists and often disguises itself behind a pretty face and fine words. Be careful Roy, the devil’s lies fool many smart men.”

As usual, I didn't buy Maria's religious views but did consider her warning to dump Angel. There were too many troubling occurrences concerning my wife: she always came up with an excuse not to live with me in Moscow, she delayed and delayed our honeymoon into no honeymoon, she didn't want me to visit her during her eye operation, and once we were married, she rushed me out of Krasnodar to start working on her visa. Something she always asked about whenever we talked. Maybe I was just another customer to her. On the other hand, I admired her determination to pursue her dreams of modeling and knew that in Russia her fate promised only a desperate struggle to survive. I still believed Angel deserved a chance at something better, which meant bringing her to America: one of the few places in the world where opportunity waited for the courageous to seize it and dreams had a fighting chance of coming true. I didn't want her to end up like me, haunted decade after decade with the gnawing regret of dreams untried. So once again compassion or some other forces in the universe ruled, and I overlooked Angel's disturbing conduct and put Maria's warning on hold but not out of mind. During many quiet, spring nights while walking in Moscow, I said to myself, "If her aim was to make as much money as possible in America, then I would end the entire episode immediately, but she wants to pursue her dreams, so I will go along for now. If she doesn't start acting like a wife, I'll annul the marriage and she'll end up back in Russia." But while my waking self settled on one course of action, nightmares plagued my sleep with Angel selling herself for more and more money.

Angel's mother, Inessa, actually came to Moscow before Angel did, although only to switch trains on her way to an aerobics' convention in St. Petersburg. Angel asked me to meet Inessa with my driver and take Inessa to her connecting train at a station across town, which was fine with me. Moscow has a number of train stations spread through out the city. Each station

handles trains going to or arriving from a certain part of the country. For example, trains to and from the north, which includes St. Petersburg, use a different station than those for Siberia. The train stations erected before the Communists, as with all other architecture in Russia, are beautiful, spacious and painted in bright pastels while the Communist era creations are gray, drab rectangular-boxes.

Inessa and my driver flirted all the way to her connecting station. Many of Inessa's mannerisms reminded me of Angel, but what surprised me was how adept her coquetry appeared for a woman who avoided men. Perhaps her genes made practice unnecessary. After dropping off Inessa, my driver, clearly impressed or emotionally massaged, said Inessa "very good Russian woman" who unfortunately married a nasty militiaman officer that drank too much and beat her. Exactly what Angel told me about her father, the former Chief of the M.V.D. in Grozny, or militia as the Russians refer to their national police force.

A week later and a month after our marriage, Angel traveled by train to Moscow to take the required medical examination for her visa with a U.S. Embassy approved doctor and ostensibly to spend time with her husband.

My driver and I picked her up at the station and drove back to my apartment.

"Nice of you to visit your husband. I'm surprised you decided to extend your stay from five to nine days." I sarcastically remarked.

"I told you, I have many things to do in Krasnodar. I very busy."

"I thought your eye doctor told you to take it easy."

"I am getting better, so I can do more now."

"Good, then you can answer some of the questions you didn't before we got married."

She put her arm over my shoulders and grinned down at me “In Russia, it better not to know too much because then you can believe what you want.”

“In America, it’s better to know the truth for it will set you free.”

“But I am Russian, and all Russian girls have a ‘private life’ about which their boyfriends are not allowed to ask. If the boy loves the girl then he respects her; love and respect are the same. If he respects her, he will not inquire into her ‘private life.’ The girl will not reveal her ‘private life’ because the boy will not understand, or the boy will think less of his girl. As time goes by, the girl will decide to reveal parts of her ‘private life’ when it safe and when the boy can understand her reasons for engaging in the activities that make up her ‘private life’. The two will grow closer together. This is love in Russia.”

“Sounds like the young wife in *Casablanca* rationalizing her intended infidelity with the police captain or something out of the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.”

“What cabinet?”

“Never mind. Look, if I know that someone is living a secret life, but I do not know what they are actually doing, and I know they will lie and hide the truth about these secret activities, but I do not know which, how could I ever believe them about anything? I know they lie about some things but do not know which things, so I assume they lie about most things. If I cannot believe what someone says, how can I trust them? Without trust, how can one be close to or love someone?”

“You will understand.”

“Does this ‘private life’ mean you don’t wear your wedding ring in Krasnodar?”

“I wear it, see!” she held up her right hand.

“Barely with all the other rings you have on the same figure. Why do you have three or four rings on the wedding finger? Are you trying to hide it?”

“I’m tired after 36 hours on the train and need some sleep. We will talk later.” Angel seemed more confident than when I grilled her in Krasnodar. No stamping of the feet this time.

A day after her arrival I began feeling happy again and my doubts vanished in the haze that swept over my consciousness. Angel did the shopping and prepared the meals, which were the same fare as in Krasnodar, but I thought surprisingly good. In Krasnodar, Angel said the warm climate made the region Russia’s agricultural center and the producers kept the best food for the area, which was why I found her meals there so good. But now in Moscow, even that city’s inferior quality of food started tasting as good as in Krasnodar. Angel, however, usually prepared herself something different than she did for me because she was on a diet.

At Angel’s insistence, we went to discos and of course strip clubs where as a veteran of Cyprus, Mexico and a visitor to U.S. clubs, Angel held court, spouting advice to the younger girls gathered around her as though she possessed the grail to glamour and fortune. During her nine-day stay; I noticed some peculiar traits for the first time. She always slept with her watch on that beeped every hour, and after engaging in sex, she didn’t sleep in the nude, a pair of panties always appeared out of nowhere to cover her bottom. I couldn’t figure out where she hid those panties until one day I lifted her pillow and there was a pair waiting, I assumed, to protect against any additional entries. Were they a little girl’s armor against surprises in the night or a tollgate?

I introduced her to my friends, many of whom warned me against marrying her, and, to my surprise, they all liked her and thought her a nice girl. Angel even won over Maria, who told me her opinion of Angel, as a ruthless gold-digging witch, was wrong. The two of them talked a

lot about religion, and Maria decided Angel a spiritual person whom she could trust. They quickly became friends. I assumed the initial misgivings by my friends about Angel came from the pictures they saw of her, which showed a blond tart on the make, and their stereotypical thinking that all pretty young girls from the Russian provinces were sharks out to get as much money as possible through any means available. After meeting her, however, they changed their minds, and my suspicions settled into my unconscious buried under the rationales that they had stemmed from middle-aged paranoia and cultural differences.

While in town, Angel checked out a couple of what she called casting agencies for jobs, which I assumed were lap-dancing recruiters, but they didn't want her. We visited Leo, where Angel talked a couple of girls into going to Mexico as dancers and agreed to look for girls from Krasnodar for Leo to send to various parts of the world in return for a percentage of their earnings. Leo showed Angel and me a few pictures from Mexico of him, her and another man.

“Who's the guy?” I asked as my suspicions welled up.

Angel got a disagreeable look on her face and said, “He works at the club.”

“Nice rooms,” I remarked still looking at the pictures. “Where are they?”

“That is my apartment, when we moved in.” she replied. Leo didn't say anything, but I sensed the universe, once again, trying to tell me something that I wouldn't realize for a while.

After a mentally foggy but euphoric nine days of which I still remember little, Angel returned to Krasnodar once again saying she needed to see her eye doctor, help her mother with their apartment and prepare the documents to transfer her house to her aunt. She left behind some food with instructions on how to prepare my own meals rather than, as she said, wasting my money in restaurants. She would return by the end of May for her visa interview at the

Embassy. If all went well at the interview, which I was sure of since I would be there doing most of the talking, Angel would receive her visa that day.

Once again after we parted, the glow wore off, but this time it took a week. A couple of days after I finished all of her prepared food; I fell back into the underworld of depression, loneliness and suspicion. Russia always put me through experiences on a more elemental level than elsewhere. The forces flowing through nature careened deeper into my being in that country by circumventing the protection of empirical Western beliefs. The archetypal unconscious of Russia drove its residents' psyches without any balancing by rational conscious decisions as in America. Empirical reasoning just didn't work in Russia. A person needed to follow his instinct because no agreement, law nor behavior could be relied on to narrow down the possibilities, only unforeseen surprises were constant, and only intuition could determine a course of action. The conscious mind just didn't measure up to the task of living in Russia—too many variables to deal with and the mistakes too costly. One wrong move and life ended; whereas, in America, falls were often broken by safety nets, only the chronic screw up ended in a bottomless pit.

Out from my unconscious flowed the same old disbeliefs in her excuses for not living with me. I began keeping track of my calls to Angel in Krasnodar that went unanswered as an indication she was not in her apartment or not in Krasnodar. For some reason, she instructed her mother not to answer calls that failed to show the telephone number on the caller id of her home phone or mobile. Since calls from within Russia but outside the Krasnodar region didn't register on her caller id, whenever Angel's home phone didn't answer, it meant she was out of the apartment. And whenever her mobile didn't answer, it meant she was out of Krasnodar because on those occasions she left her mobile with her mother. I did reach Angel periodically but never

could convince her to come to Moscow before her visa interview, although she claimed her “private life” now in the past. I guess even from her point of view that was a lame excuse for not answering my questions.

To while away the days, I added to working out at the gym and learning Russian reading detective stories, starting with the *Maltese Falcon*, which featured a ruthless, mean-minded woman driven by greed for money. I also kept in touch with my Russian tutor in America who, always to the point, warned me again and again:

“Your wife is milking you for money; it is obvious, so be careful not to be left on the street. Do I understand correctly that you live in different cities? If that is the case are you actually thinking that she is faithful to you? I wouldn’t bet on it. Go and get yourself a girlfriend but don’t get emotionally attached; after all, any girl is going to be using you as well as you’ll be using her. Look at it like a business deal, but not like prostitution, just to spend time and have fun. I’m more sure that Angel is not faithful to you, so why be a sucker? You do know she wants to come to America, and that is all she needs you for; get it into your head finally!

I tried following my tutor’s advice and sometimes went to the “Hungry Duck” with an American executive working in Moscow. Between 7:30 and 9:30 PM, the bar admitted only girls who were allowed to drink free for those two hours. Around 9:00 PM, the guys started to line up outside thinking about the inebriated girls inside. At 9:30 PM, the club opened its doors to men. Inside, a guy could easily find “working girls,” that means prostitutes, high school and college babes out for a good time or to make some extra cash and uneducated girls from some of the poorer provinces bowled over by the nightlife of the big city. The Duck was small, dank and dark with two concentric rings of bars over four feet high and two feet wide on which most of the dancing occurred and from which drunks often fell. Around eleven, one or more girls, sometimes with the help of a friendly male stranger, would strip to her panties and display her assets dancing on the bar. I never saw any girl strip completely, but it must have happened. Other girls willing rubbed their bodies against guys while dancing, or parted their legs so that a

guy could look up their dresses when they danced on the bar. Some of the girls didn't bother wearing underwear and would deep-knee bend to give a guy a better view and get closer to his drooling mouth but then quickly stand up with a teasing smile. As for rubbing their bodies while dancing, the girls would go just so far and no more. If a guy tried to become too intimate, the girls backed off. Russian girls were exhibitionists to a point but would not cross some puritanical line in public. If one of these babes at the Hungry Duck agreed to leave with a guy, she was his for the night, usually at a cost of a few hundred rubles, fifteen dollars.

On my excursions to the Duck, I usually met a hot willing babe or two, but something kept me from taking anyone home for the night, which didn't make any sense. Why throw away these young nubile opportunities?

Control over my life kept slipping through the holes in my will pushed by lame rationalizations. I could have gone back to New York City or any place else in the world but sat alone in Moscow with nothing interesting to do waiting for a visa for a wife that refused to live with me or go on a honeymoon. This was not my style. More than once in my past, I had jumped a plane home to leave behind some self-indulgent girl who thought she had me on the ropes. Why not this time?

By the last day in April 2000, I actually considered that black magic might worked in Russia just because so many people there believed it did and assumed Angel arranged for the black magic-man to cast a spell causing me to marry her. But whether magic worked or not, I didn't care, all I wanted to know was did those two conspired against me. I went looking for the magic-man. More than once, I stopped by unannounced at the sorcerer's lair, accompanied by my driver and interpreter, but either Mr. Black Magic wasn't there or hiding inside. Fine, I'd

find the truth about Angel some other way, since even black magic can't win out over persistence.

My tutor in America warned me against my new quest for knowledge, "She might get her way before you can prove anything, and then what is the point of showing her that you knew it all along, she already got what she wanted. I think that you should just divorce her and let her take over some other idiot. Angel has cheated on you, cheats on you and will cheat on you all the time if you don't break it off. It is, as we say in Russia, understandable even to a hedgehog."

Suspicion

Saturday May 6, 2000, an inspiration flashed through my mind. I jumped out of bed and dialed Angel's "good friend" in Mexico, Alfredo. I kept his number since December when Angel gave it to me in case she couldn't reach him from Krasnodar. She thought I could help recover her money left in Mexico if a problem arose. I called Alfredo because sometimes a direct question surprises people into an honest answer. He might admit to having an affair with Angel when he was in Russia.

After introducing myself, I asked him about the day he came to Moscow back in December. He said he couldn't talk but would call me back. Six hours later, Angel called my mobile telephone, which was strange because she never called it before. She always telephoned my apartment phone and never in the afternoon but always in the evening. Angel had nothing new or significant to say, so I assumed Alfredo called her to tell her of my questioning him. That prompted her to contact me to try to figure out what I suspected or knew. Two days later, Alfredo called me back. His English was quite good.

"Sorry for not returning your call earlier. Business you know."

“On the weekend? I thought most operations shut down in Mexico over Saturday and Sunday,” I replied.

“Some do, some don’t. So what can I do for you?”

“As I asked before, how did you meet Angelina?” I assumed he’d tell me to drop dead, but instead he went into what sounded by the tenor of his voice and the text as a scripted story.

“We were only good friends,” he quickly and defensively said, not answering the question I asked.

“But how did you meet her?”

“Through my girlfriend Azul, who also danced at The Men’s Club here in Mexico City. Azul and Angelina were best friends, so Angelina accompanied Azul and me when we traveled around Mexico.”

“Not much privacy?”

“I didn’t mine.”

“But you paid all the bills for both of them to travel to resorts such as Acapulco and Cancun. Rather expensive I understand.”

Alfredo hesitated because such conduct look ridiculous paying for a girl from whom he received nothing in return. “Uh, Azul and Angelina were very close and didn’t want to be separated.” Oh, how lame a response was that?

“So what were you doing in Moscow in December?”

“I traveled there on business and only saw Angelina for a few hours in order to withdraw her money from my debit card.”

“She told me you came here only to bring her money because you worked for the club.”

Again I fully expected Alfredo to object, but he didn’t.

“No, no, no, I had important business in Moscow. I run my own company. I can’t imagine how she thought I worked for the club.”

“Neither can I, since she traveled around Mexico with you. One would think she could at least remember what you do.”

“She traveled with Azul and me.”

“Fine, thanks for the call Alfredo.”

Like most third-worlders, Alfredo was a liar. I didn’t believe his story and hired a Kroll investigator to check the exact dates in December for Angel and Alfredo’s arrivals in Moscow. If the dates coincided and were earlier than the day Angel showed up at my office with the story she had just arrived in town, then the two probably hooked up.

Over Easter, I tried to reach Angel but no answers late Saturday and Sunday. She finally called late Sunday.

“Where have you been, I tried to reach you.”

“I just go out with my friends in town.”

“Didn’t you take your mobile?”

“I forgot. Listen Roy,” she switched into her wheedling voice. “Next Thursday, I go to visit an old friend in Kannevskaya village outside Krasnodar. We grew up together in Chechnya, and I haven’t seen her since I left Grozny. I really want to see her again.”

“Okay,” I said.

“I’ll be away until Monday.”

“Are you still going to arrive in Moscow on the seven o’clock train next Wednesday morning? We still need to do some preparation for the visa interview on the following Tuesday.”

“I’ll be on the train but while in the village you won’t be able to reach me because my friend doesn’t have a telephone, and my mobile won’t work that far outside of Krasnodar.”

Right away the depths of my unconscious sent a warning. Here we go again. What is this girl scheming this time?

“Give me the name of that village again.” I wanted to check whether it existed and its location. “And when are you leaving? Thursday afternoon and returning Monday afternoon.”

“That’s right.”

“Okay, I will telephone you Thursday morning before you leave,” I said.

“Are you checking up on me, my husband?”

“Do I have reason to, my wife?”

“You Americans don’t believe anybody!”

“Long before you were born, John Kennedy said in a speech directed at Premier Khrushchev, ‘Civility should not be mistaken for weakness and sincerity is always subject to proof.’”

“I not Khrushchev!” she objected.

“But you are Russian.” I replied

The village checked out, only a few hours outside Krasnodar, but my feeling of something not right kept bothering me.

On Thursday, I called Angel at her home in Krasnodar. She said she would call me when she returned the next Monday, and I would then call her right back to make sure she actually telephoned from her home.

I wished her a safe trip, which Russian tradition required when a loved one or friend traveled. Going from one place to another in Russia didn’t engender feelings of security thanks

to careless common carriers, police looking for bribes and Chechen terrorists. Both the Czars and Communists restricted travel in order to keep track of their citizens, so the infrastructure that supports safe and comfortable journeys never fully evolved. As a result, Russians appealed to irrational protections such as well wishes from friends and taking a few moments to sit and mediate before embarking. Most Russians believe the thoughts of others and their own along with unrelated actions can influence hidden energies of the universe to affect events in the observable world. Angel often talked about using her mind and rituals to assert her will on unknown forces to avert or cast an “evil eye”. Unlike Russia, America, in large part, replaced a reliance on the supernatural with a belief in science, technology and individual rights to create a society of relative security and predictability.

On Saturday, Angel called me again.

“I thought you were in the village where your mobile didn’t work,” I said surprised, assuming she used her mobile because the village allegedly had no telephones.

She stumbled and said, “I will leave today. My, my trip was delayed because a modeling job came up yesterday.”

“What type of modeling job?”

“It was, it was...promotional.” She seemed to be reaching for an explanation.

“What kind of promotion?” I pressed.

“Oh, just handing out samples. It was fun. I will tell you all about it when I see you next Tuesday.”

“You mean Wednesday.”

“Yes, yes, Wednesday. Do you miss me my husband,” she said in her seductive voice so as to change the subject.

I provided the obligatory yes.

“Oh, and since I am leaving late for the village, I wouldn’t be able to call you Monday from Krasnodar before I board the train.”

“Why not?”

“I want to stay with my friend as long as I can, so I will go directly from the village to the train.”

“What about your bags.”

“I have everything I need for Moscow with me.”

“Okay, I will meet you when you arrive Wednesday morning,” I said, all the time thinking this call made no sense. But once again, I knew that with time the real explanation would become evident as it always did when something happened that made no sense or stood out incongruously.

You Can’t Judge A Book By Its Cover

The evening before Angel’s scheduled arrival in Moscow from Krasnodar, my doorbell rang. Probably the militia, checking on who was living here again. Ever since the apartment buildings’ bombings last September, the police periodically checked to make sure the person registered at an apartment actually lived there. The city government hoped to find terrorists or at least Chechens living illegally in Moscow. I ignored the ringing, but it persisted. Then a thought out of left field hit me, could it be Angel? No, she was not that dumb to pull the same suspicious stunt she did in December by showing up earlier than scheduled. The ringing continued. I finally opened the door, and there stood Angel, six feet three inches in her shoes, smiling innocently but looking extremely tired, more tired than usual for the trip from Krasnodar. The universe tried to tell me something from that, but I didn’t know what, so I would have to wait

and stay alert. I stared up at her, suspecting she had pulled another deceit—like meeting some boy friend in Moscow a few days earlier.

“Aren’t you going to invite your wife in?” she asked with guile.

“What are you doing here?” I said, starting to cross-examine her. “You were supposed to be on the train from Krasnodar tomorrow morning.”

“I came early because I got a ride. Let me in Hollander!” She never before referred to me by my last name. It sounded like she had decided to mentally distance herself from me.

“You shouldn’t keep your wife standing in the hallway after a long trip!”

I helped her in with her bags. “How did you get here?”

“Save your questions. First, I need to use our bathroom.”

“What do you mean ‘our’ bathroom? It’s my apartment.”

“It’s our apartment, my dear husband. Everything in here is ours Hollander. You must remember I am your wife,” as she put her arm over my shoulders and kissed me. Now I knew something was wrong. First she addresses me with the impersonal use of my last name, then she refers to us as a married unit, which she also never did before.

“I will explain everything after I wash up and make us dinner, my darling husband.” She headed for the bathroom.

Angel prepared a meal and we sat down at the kitchen table.

“So how did you get here?” I once again asked.

“I found a van that drove to Moscow and it was cheaper than the train so I took it.”

“You’re telling me that there are commercial vans taking passengers from Krasnodar to Moscow?”

“Yes.”

“You said back on New Year’s Eve that traveling the roads in southern Russia was dangerous because of bandits and Chechens.”

“Oh not so dangerous. Are you concerned about my safety, my dear husband?”

‘Husband’ again, what was her game, I wondered.

“How much did the van cost you?”

“Oh not much.”

“How much did it cost?” I persisted. The details always trip up a liar.

She dismissively said, “I don’t remember exactly,” that from the girl who quibbled over a few rubles for a taxi ride.

“Where’s your ticket?”

“I threw it away. Why all the questions Hollander, don’t you believe me?” I was not going to let her side track me.

“Where are their offices in Moscow?”

“Different parts of Moscow.”

“Where?”

“I don’t know exactly.”

“Where did the van stop in Moscow?”

She hesitated, “They let me off in front of your apartment building.”

“How nice of them, door to door service. So you went to the trouble after a long trip to throw away your ticket between the front of my apartment building and my apartment door?”

“They didn’t give me a ticket. They were friends who were driving to Moscow.” The story’s details changed to account for her inconsistent answers. Now I knew she was lying, but why?

“I thought you took a van run by a business.”

“No, I didn’t mean business. They were friends of mine coming to Moscow, so I paid them some rubles for a ride and they left me off by your apartment building.”

“How much did you pay them?”

“I told you I don’t remember, now stop it Hollander! I still have problems with my eyes and shouldn’t get upset.”

Look who was talking about becoming upset, I thought to myself? I was not only upset but hurt and angry. She still wasn’t telling the truth, and this time it concerned something she did while we were married. After dinner, I felt a little better and somewhat groggy. Still suspicious, I decided to put the incident away for later thinking. During sex, the suspicion resurfaced briefly because she felt different inside, I filed the information away with all the other pieces from that evening.

The next few days we scrambled around getting additional documents and preparing for her visa interview. We almost failed to obtain one crucial document. Angel worked in Cyprus for over six months in the first half of 1999, so she needed a police report that showed no record of arrests on the island. A month earlier, Angel contacted the Athanasious whom she referred to as her “impresarios,” the agents who arranged for her employment. Irina Athanasiou promised to obtain the document from the police and mail it to Angel’s address in Krasnodar. Angel said the document didn’t arrive before she left for Moscow with her friends in the van. I called the agents office and talked with Irina who said the police report went out in plenty of time to reach Angel in Krasnodar. It should have arrived by Saturday when Angel left to visit her friend in the village. Irina’s statement should have raised my suspicions again about Angel’s story of traveling directly from her friend’s village to Moscow without checking at home for such an

important document. But once again my brain wasn't functioning very well, so I blindly assumed the unreliability of the Russian mail service delayed delivery. Irina said she would send a copy express mail to us in Moscow.

Irina and I chatted a little. She was a Russian who married a Greek named Melios. He and his brother Marios owned a couple of clubs in Limassol, Cyprus: Zygos, where Angel worked and another club called Tramps—nice name, but it didn't register amid the stupor I was feeling. The three Athanasiuos used their agency Irinis to import girls, mostly from Russia, to dance in the clubs that Marios managed. Irina had the contacts with various Russian model agencies to obtain the girls while Melios dealt with Cypriot immigration to obtain work visas for the girls as artists.

The other concern over the upcoming visa interview was the incident in Mexico where Angel said the police took her into custody for working at The Men's Club without a work visa. Her visa for Mexico listed her as a translator and had expired by the time of the raid. Angel couldn't speak a word of Spanish, so clearly Leo and his contacts in Mexico bribed some Mexican official to get her a visa. I assumed that was how Russia's so-called model agencies were able to send Russian girls all around the world including America, which was where the girls could make the most money. On one occasion, Leo told me he had regularly bribed an official at the American Embassy \$3,000 to \$4,000 to obtain visas for his girls to work in lap-dancing clubs in Southern California.

Angel worked in Mexico for only three months, so she didn't need to provide the American Embassy with a police report, but her visa application required that she report any arrests. "Arrest," however, is a legal term that does not include detention. So whether the Mexican authorities arrested or detained Angel depended on exactly what happened. Angel said,

“It was Friday night, I was working, when all of a sudden the lights came on and the police were everywhere. They took us to an immigration center where I stayed until the following Monday when they put me on the airplane flight to Moscow for which I had a ticket.”

“Did they take your name, fingerprints or photograph you?” I asked her.

“No.”

“Did they say you were under arrest?”

“No.”

I then consulted with an American lawyer practicing law in Moscow. He drafted a legal memorandum that concluded the facts indicated a detention and not an arrest. I wanted the memorandum thinking that the INS probably ran each applicant’s name through an international database set up by cooperating immigration services around the world that kept track of arrests. Given the close economic ties between America and Mexico, I assumed Mexico participated in such a database. If Angel’s name came up, then I would have a legal argument that she was detained but not arrested.

While preparing for the interview, Angel wanted to register herself as a resident of Moscow so that, as she said, she could live and work in the city in case the Embassy denied her a visa. That didn’t make sense to me because I doubted the Embassy would deny her a visa, but even if it did, she often told me she refused to work in clubs in Russia. So why did she need a document allowing her to stay and work in Moscow as long as she liked?

Angel called working in a club in Russia, “low-level work.” To which I usually asked, “How do you know it is low level, if you never danced in Russian clubs?”

“Girls tell me.”

She especially complained about the way Russian men with money treated Russian girls. “They go into a club and take whatever girl they want, treat her rudely and the girl can’t do anything about it.” Her complaints made me feel morally superior since my upbringing in America taught me that a man treats a lady with deference. Still something always troubled me about Angel’s criticisms of Russian men. The Russian guys I knew didn’t act like that. Maybe my Western tendency to believe women until they clearly showed themselves undeserving of it gave me a skewed perspective of a culture in which the cynicism of men toward women might merely provide the men with protection.

Was Angel planning on the both of us living together and working in Moscow with her doing only modeling if the Embassy denied her visa? I didn’t think so because once she said that if she didn’t receive a visa, she’d go with Leo’s help back to Mexico or some other country. I let that ride at the time because if she did the marriage was over.

Logical or not, I okayed Angel registering in Moscow. My driver agreed to help in dealing with the bureaucracy and allowed her to use his address for her registration. Registering took a couple of afternoons in which Angel and my driver stood in long lines and wrangled with bureaucrats. During one of those afternoons, I took the opportunity to search through her bags looking for any evidence that she came to Moscow sooner than she said. I found none, but just as I was about to give up, I noticed the composition notebook in which she always wrote standing upright inside her bag. How did I miss that, I wondered? A quick scan and I knew it was her diary. Could she be that stupid to leave her diary where I could find it? Since I didn’t read Russian, she probably thought her secrets safe, but she failed to consider copy machines and translators.

My heart pounded hard in my chest as I tried to decide whether to invade her secret world. The truth will set you free, I remembered and rushed off to the nearest copier down the block. The operator made it part way through the diary when he hit Angel's writing in blue ink. The machine couldn't copy it, so I rushed a couple of more blocks down Kutuzovsky to another copier, sweating and fearing all the time that Angel would come home before I completed my mission. I stood impatiently, heart still beating fast, waiting for the second copier to finish. Not since I was a little boy trying to hide something from my mother did I feel like this. What are you afraid of, I kept asking myself. Even if she finds out, what can she do, we're in Russia not America. Finally, with a copy of her diary from the beginning of 1999 to the present, I rushed back home in a sweat, replaced the original as best I remembered in her bag and thought hard of a place to hide the copy. I decided to get the copy out of the apartment because I knew Angel regularly went through my things when I was not around. I didn't want her finding the copy because she would destroy it on the spot and then talk me into believing I was wrong for copying it because she always told the truth. I put the copy in a brown envelope, called my tutor and arranged to hand the package off to her in the metro without telling her what it contained. My tutor disliked Angel, but even so, I knew that young Russian women tended to defend other young Russian women no matter how despicable their acts. I feared my tutor might not agree to hold on to the diary if she knew what it was or might even deep six it because of this unwritten alliance among young Russian ladies in their war against Russian men.

In the evening, after Angel returned from registering, she sternly said, "You have gone through my bag."

I began to sweat. Did she suspect I copied her diary? I answered, "No, I merely moved it."

“You lie!” and she narrowed her eyes as though looking into my mind. “You disrespect me by going through my things.”

“And you disrespect me by telling lies,” I countered.

“Don’t go through me bag again,” she warned and went back to her things in the other room of my apartment.

On Saturday, I met with my tutor hoping she would translate Angel’s diary before the visa interview on Tuesday. But when I told her what it was, she refused. I knew any effort at persuasion was fruitless because of the Russian female camaraderie against men. I asked whether she could recommend another translator. She said she would, but I knew she wouldn’t. Russians are experts at saying yes when they mean no, and only a sixth sense or being Russian can tell. I left and called a CEO friend of mine at an investment fund. He was a traditional American man like myself on whom I could count for help. He didn’t buy into the current wimp ethic foisted on modern American men by shrew like female authority figures. He got his secretary to round up a trustworthy Russian man to do the translation. Unfortunately, he could not start until after the visa interview and, assuming the visa came through, after Angel returned to Krasnodar to pack for our planned trip to New York City. I decided to keep my options open: go through with the interview, since I still possessed no hard evidence but only suspicions about my wife’s duplicity, then get the diary translated and decide what to do afterward. If I kept possession of the visa documents the Embassy will likely grant her, she wouldn’t be able to sneak into America before I notify the Embassy that the marriage is over, which will prevent it from issuing her a duplicate visa. Depending on what the diary said, I go back to New York City alone or with a wife.

Sunday May 28, 2000, five days after Angel's arrival in Moscow and two days before the visa interview, the weather was warm and sunny. Maria, now Angel's friend, invited us on a picnic she organized for her band and a group of friends to a beautiful area of woods and lakes north of Moscow. In a caravan of four cars loaded with Russians, Europeans, one American, food and drink, we headed for the countryside.

Muscovites take every opportunity to leave their city not just because of the air pollution, abandoned stockpiles of pesticides or contaminated toxic waste sites but more deadly health threats. When I first traveled to Russia, just after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I noticed digital lights above the entrances to the post offices but wondered why the numbers shown by the lights were in the teens or twenties. Then I remembered that Russia went by military time. One day while walking passed the post office in the building where I was staying, I saw the numbers change from 14 to 13 and asked my interpreter, "What's wrong with the clock? Does time run backward in Russia?"

She laughed, "That's not a clock. It's a Geiger counter. It warns people whether there is a lot of radioactivity in the area on any particular day."

Later, I learned that Moscow even had a department devoted to finding radioactive hot spots in the city. The Soviet Union, even more so than America, pushed atomic power as a cheap, efficient source of energy in the sixties and seventies. The government widely distributed nuclear materials to public agencies and scientists. Trouble arose when the materials could no longer generate power but were still radioactively harmful. Rather than going through the cost and trouble of properly disposing of the waste, the Commie's dumped it anywhere as if throwing leaves over the fence into a neighbor's yard. So now there are hot spots all over Moscow, but no one knows where they all are. Many buildings, including additions to Moscow State University,

were built on radioactive sites or out of radioactive materials. Since my initial trip to Russia in 1991, the city Government turned off the Geiger counters to save electricity, and the radioactive hunting department does next to nothing for lack of funds. No one cares because all are on the make for themselves. Russia is an alien social order that still hasn't passed through the Renaissance, Reformation or touched the era of Constitutional Liberalism.

When our caravan arrived at the camp area, Angel rushed over to the horses. Like most girls, she loved riding and proceeded to gallop off into the woods. I took in the view feeling content although somewhat unclear in my thinking and waited for the serving of lunch by our barbecue chef, a British businessman who worked in Moscow while maintaining a wife and children in England. Angel galloped back, thrilled as a child from her ride. We took a walk in the woods where others also strolled. I started to seduce her but she clearly didn't want to engage in any romantic activity. Other than that episode, Angel acted very affectionate making me feel as she often did as the most important person in the world. I enjoyed a sense of well-being that we were married.

On the day of Angel's visa interview, we arrived at the Embassy early in the morning to stand on line. One of my translators, Sasha, joined us just in case Angel needed some translations. When Sasha showed up, she looked at Angel and then at me and screwed her face into a look of disgust as though Angel epitomized the worst of Russian womanhood. I naturally thought Sasha wrong; while smart and very pretty, she was only nineteen. The Embassy opened; we handed in the required papers and waited about 20 minutes until we were called to the window for the interview. The amount of time the interviewer spent reviewing Angel's documents was laughably short, maybe five minutes. The interview itself last another five minutes with me answering most of the questions. At the conclusion, the interviewer granted

Angel a visa. She smiled from ear to ear as one of her dreams came true. We congratulated each other on her visa of which I took possession saying, “safekeeping purposes.” I thank Sasha about whom Angel later remarked in a lustful manner that Sasha was very desirable. I just looked at her.

The entire visa process was pretty much a joke from a security point of view. The Embassy officials try to browbeat applicants into not pursuing a visa or create burdensome document requirements in an effort to keep the number of visas issued below a certain number. The bureaucrats, however, should know better. Any Russian will forge documents to get what he wants, and most are amazingly adept at it as though they learned it in grammar school along with the three “Rs.” In Krasnodar, I watched in amazement as Angel forged signatures or altered documents with precision concerning her apartment. “My courses in calligraphy help me with this,” she once said with that Cheshire grin of getting away with something.

As far as Embassy personnel scrutinizing documents or making background checks to ferret out characters dangerous to Americans and our freedoms, they take the sloth approach with only a cursory review. The American bureaucrats probably figure why waste time or energy that they need for partying with sociable Russian men or women.

I don’t remember much more of that week except Angel making dinner and arranging for our flight to New York, which Angel insisted on happening as soon as possible. The earliest tickets were for June 22nd, three weeks off. On Sunday evening, my driver and I took Angel to the train for Krasnodar. She had to go home to pack and put her affairs in order for her immigration to New York City. At the train station, she kept telling me not to wait to see her off, something new for her. Despite my befuddled thinking since her arrival, I still suspected that her failure to take a train to Moscow meant she came early to play with one of her boyfriend’s.

Maybe Alfredo came back to town, and she planned to rejoin him, so she wanted me to leave before the train left. With her Moscow registration, she no longer needed to worry about staying in town for more than three days. I decided to wait, escorted her on the train to her berth, said goodbye and watched from the platform as the train pull out of the station.

Right after Angel left on June 4th, I received a call from a friend of mine in London. Carol and her mother wanted to visit Moscow for a weekend, so I invited them to stay with me and volunteered to pick them up at the airport and show them around the city. Carol worked as an audit manager at one of the “Big Five” accounting firms and wherever she traveled, she took her mother along. They scheduled their arrival for that Friday and would return to London the following Monday.

During the week leading up to their arrival, the clearness in my thinking returned to normal but without the depression that accompanied my previous separations from Angel. The translator that my CEO friend found to translate Angel’s dairy contacted me. Igor agreed to do the translation without feigning any moral objections. It actually seemed very natural to him, as though he understood the harm certain Russian females could cause a man. Since my plane for the States left in a couple of weeks, I was in a rush. We agreed the quickest way to do the translation was for the two of us to sit down and have him read the diary to me in English while I took notes. We arranged to meet at the business center at the Radisson Slavinskaya Hotel.

The Radisson Business Center was the brainchild of an American businessman. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western businesses flocked to Moscow to open up a previously closed market to the moneymaking wonders of capitalism and consumerism. Moscow lacked most of the infrastructure businesses needed, such as reliable communications, faxes, computers, printers and a quiet comfortable setting to discuss business deals. So an American set up and

financed the Radisson Business Center to provide Western businessmen with the tools of their trade. He included Russian partners in his venture in order to provide the necessary connections for doing anything in Moscow and to satisfy Russian legislation requiring the inclusion of Russians in any foreign business that conducted certain activities in the country. After a few years of profitable operation, the American's Russian partners decided to maneuver him out of the business by simply incorporating a new firm, without him, to operate the Business Center. That often happens in Russia. After Western businesses invest the capital and know-how to make a venture successful, the Russian partners, motivated by their religious conviction to greed, use the corrupt legal system to remove the Westerners from the business. The Russians transfer the assets to a second corporation and hire the police or a security firm to take control of those assets and the business's location. Most Westerners complain to their respective governments because the Russian legal system offers no recourse, and most foreign governments do nothing, so the foreign investor usually cuts his losses and moves on. Not so with the founder of the Radisson Business Center, he refused to move on, so one day while waiting for a train in the Moscow Metro, a contract killer shot him dead. Needless to say, no one was ever tried for the murder although everyone knew the people behind it.

My True Story

On Thursday, June 8, 2000, I met Igor at the Radisson Business Center to begin translating Angel's diary. Although I copied her diary from the beginning of 1999, when she went to Cyprus, to just before her visa interview in Moscow at the end of May 2000, Igor and I started with Angel's 23 July 1999 diary entry—the day I met her. Her life before we started dating didn't concern me, so we skipped over her doings in Cyprus. Igor looked through the material and estimated it would take us a few days. I stressed that I wanted the complete truth as

she wrote it, no matter how brutal. I had no use for the Russian tendency to euphemize the truth purportedly out of a concern for the feelings of others, when the real reason was a selfish desire to hide from the bleak reality of a society without a conscience. Igor began translating, and I started a slow spiraling descent into Angel's underworld.

Angel came to Moscow in July 1999 not to model but to make money dancing completely naked at a party sponsored by a Moscow magazine. She found the party "cheery," especially when another girl danced with a "dildo munching on it all the time." Angel also made money as the sole player in an "erotic" film produced by an American that was shot just before I took her to the airport the first time to fly back to Krasnodar. That's why she was late meeting my driver and me as we waited outside Leo's apartment used for his out-of-town models. She wasn't shopping as she claimed. The mystery behind her appearing out of nowhere was that she snuck out of the apartment where she shot the film. Her diary described it as "undressing," and each of the onlookers paid her \$20. While in Moscow, she also visited a doctor for the venereal disease called "Gardnerella," which causes a foul smell. Thank goodness I didn't sleep with her then.

Her arrival in Krasnodar was to the arms of her boyfriend of nearly four years, Alexei. When I called the number at which Angel told me not to talk to anyone but her, the woman with whom I conversed was Alexei's mother. No wonder Angel told me not to call that number again. Alexei saw one of the pager messages I sent to Angel in which I closed with "Love Roy." Alexei demanded to know what it meant and who was this guy. Angel replied, "It means nothing. He is just a good friend." Alexei bought Angel's lie along with a few other deceptions about her activities in Moscow and after a couple of weeks, asked her to marry him. She refused because he didn't have enough money—two thousand dollars to be exact. Two thousand dollars

doesn't sound like much, but in Krasnodar the buying power was equivalent to \$50,000 in America. Igor remarked that girls from the provinces found any way possible to get money.

Alexei didn't give up his courtship. He clearly loved Angel, but without money, his love didn't translate into a cash flow for her. Alexei didn't fully realize this nor that Angel hung out with another guy name Andrey who managed the club Imperio in Krasnodar. Alexei continued to give her what he could, not knowing that Angel, with accountant like diligence, listed in her diary the cost of every present followed with "Thank you dear, I love you." One gift was a videotape of what became her favorite movie: *Showgirls*. Angel's diary clearly showed an obsession with the material world, which stood in stark contrast to the monologues she frequently gave me on the importance of spiritual matters in her life. Igor commented, this girl reminds me of Janus, the Roman god of two faces.

At the end of August 1999, Angel received a message from Leo to fly to Moscow immediately so that she could leave for Mexico with him and another girl, Tanya. The flights out of Krasnodar were all booked, so she used her F.S.B. contact to acquire a ticket. Agents in the F.S.B. can accomplish what ordinary citizens cannot, provided the agents receive a currency of value to them—dollars or sex. Angel's diary didn't say what she paid. Before leaving for Moscow, Angel and Alexei took a vacation in which she suffered from a vaginal infection. The medicine she spent so much time looking for in Moscow was for this condition, whatever it was. Alexei and Angel partied a lot, and without Alexei knowing, she did some lap dancing. No wonder Angel looked tired when she arrived in Moscow.

In Mexico City, Leo's partner, Salvador, met them at the airport. I realized that in the photographs Leo showed me of him and Angel in her Mexican apartment, the other man pictured didn't work at The Men's Club as Angel had said but was Salvador. While visiting his house,

Salvador showed Angel full frontal and rear naked pictures of her he obtained from Leo's Internet site. He told her that he wanted the girl in the photographs, who was Angel, as his girl friend.

Angel toured Mexico City with Leo and Tanya, but Angel didn't get along with Tanya who criticized her for using cheap lipstick while Angel retorted in her diary that Tanya was cheap herself. In person, Angel assumed the mask of humility, honesty and criticized no one, but the pages of her diary painted an arrogant, duplicitous, caviling and egotistical young lady. When a shoeshine boy tried to polish Angel's shoes in return for a kiss, Angel wrote, "For my kiss he would lose all his proceeds." She remarked how when walking in the street with Tanya, she, not Tanya, attracted stares, whistles and men jumped out of cars when they saw her. At discos, it was always her that the crowds looked at in admiration—not the beautiful friends she danced with such as the finalists in the Miss Krasnodar beauty contest. She believed herself a great dancer in the vein of Isadora Duncan when in reality, as a dance friend of mine later observed, her moves were limited to that of a stripper and her lack of coordination kept her from even doing the Salsa properly. Before she went to bed and when she awoke, Angel told herself over and over, "I am beautiful, I am beautiful...."

Salvador took Angel, Tanya and Leo to Acapulco and there made his move on Angel; she rebuffed his attempts. On learning this, Leo scolded her for knowing better. He brought her to Mexico for Salvador and to work as a lap dancer, which she knew and agreed to when Leo made the arrangements a month ago. Leo warned her against always trying to get something for nothing. Angel agreed that since Salvador spent so much of his money on her "it was fair to spend a night with him." From her diary emerged the personality of a true middle-eastern businesswoman—always trying to get the better of the other party. She believed in caveat

emptor—buyer beware, and didn't feel fully satisfied unless she cheated another somehow. But if a client undercounted the number of lap dances she gave, the hostility smoldering inside her burst into outraged on the pages of her dairy but into tears before the client or a club's bouncers.

Through Leo's connections, Angel and Tanya found work at the The Men's Club, where girls from around the world gave lap dances in their tong panties. The customers paid \$20 for about a three-minute dance from which \$4 went to Leo, \$2 to the managers of the club and \$3 to Maria, who helped obtained visas for the lap dancers under the pretense of them working as translators and placed the girls in various clubs in Mexico City. Angel made \$11 on each dance. Girls on the day shift from 2:30 PM to 8 PM pocketed around \$250 while on the 8 PM to 2:30 AM shift they averaged \$300. Angel worked both shifts.

Listening to Igor's translation, my heart cracked a little more with each man whom Angel, often euphemistically, described her involvement. The Angel I loved was merely an illusion concocted by a consummate con artist. Her diary showed an uncanny ability to get away with telling the most preposterous lies in the face of overwhelming evidence that she spoke falsely. She convinced young, middle-aged and older men to trust her, to help her because she needed them and cared about them. I remembered the effect of her soliloquies on me. I never could recall the words for their impact came more from the tone of her voice and the look in her eyes that swept aside all logic leaving the glow of believing the absurd because she made you want to believe. Her false feminine warm heartedness masked a calculating businesswoman who kept throughout her diary a balance sheet of material gain. Angel saw every interaction with another human as an opportunity to acquire something she didn't deserve. Lie, cheat or deceive but make sure you win something of value was her motto. When a guy didn't give enough, she

cursed him in her diary, “Let God be his judge!” but if he gave more than expected, she asked God to bless him.

Angel was no fool, she knew how to market herself and, perhaps more important, which market segment to ruthlessly pursue—men with a good heart, that is, suckers! Angel didn’t take all suitors in Mexico; she focused on her market segment. The men she used sounded decent and caring toward her, wanting her as their regular girl friend, or at least the image she so effectively created of a kindhearted, decent girl trying to survive in a cruel and unjust world that oppressed women. She not only used the arsenal of weapons of the traditional female grounded in deception but also effectively exploited modern day feminazi propaganda of female victimization.

Angel left nothing to chance in her pursuit of money. Besides her methodical materialistic practicality, she invoked religion by appealing to the Russian Orthodox Saint Nicolas the Thaumaturge to help “us” in all our business. Her regular usage in her diary of the plural pronoun to refer to herself at first seemed strange until I learned that her mother had set Angel on her course to wealth and perhaps fame. For Angel, she and her mother were in a partnership to exploit men’s passion for a pretty young lady and sympathy for her hard luck stories. A letter from her mother encouraged Angel to have “many new conquests.”

My translator and I pushed on through the dark, self-deluding, cruel and ultimately lonely reaches and experiences of a mind maniacally driven by greed to whom the gods had given physical beauty and smarts as she exploited those gifts in Mexico City.

September 16, 1999

During my first day dancing at the Men’s Club, I made 16 dances, 27 dances yesterday and 31 dances today. I could make even more but I did not manage to receive order for dances until too late. Yesterday, when there was a pause, I thought that my music began and hurried to

the stage. Everybody laughed because there was no music, so I ran away in a pretense to change my dress.

Today I bought for 189 pesos white sandals and a silver chain for wearing on foot and a bright dress for 600 pesos.

Today one fucker promised me to give his credit card. I went with this idiot; I left my work before my working time actually ended. But he gave me (I could hardly manage to beg it) \$60, he promised to give me \$300 more; later, we made fun. But when I refused to kiss him, here he all of a sudden changed his tone; he said that he was a citizen of Mexico and that he would go to police... He took back all money... He was the most down man... Ali... Fucker...

Azul, Tanya, me and men went to Karnavaca to a restaurant. We dined for 4 hours. He annoyed me. It was on Saturday. But in the evening he ordered 13 dances. My customer promised me to gift a dress, a nice dress.

Yesterday I danced for one man – he gave me \$200. And today I danced to two men – they ordered 20 dances, and one more man ordered 6 dances.

We went to cinema with German guys. I liked it, and Tanya liked it so-so. I allowed myself to make pedicure – it took 1 hour and cost 80 pesos.

Today is my mom's birthday! She is 49 now! Let my mum be happy! I wish her good health, very good health, immense love, happiness, luck in everything, peace and well being!!! Let God bless us two!!!

September 19, 1999

After a long delay, I decided to call up my darling boyfriend Alexei. His voice was dry. I was saying that I miss him, and he never mentioned that he missed me, he did not say anything encouraging to me. After it I burst into tears. I even do not want to call him up any more. He even was not glad to hear my voice. I do not know. Maybe all this was due to the fact that he had broken his car and not my deciding to stay in Mexico.

I had my second meeting with Mavro, we went to a restaurant where there are fountains. It was nice. We went to airport. It was so magnificent: large field and aircrafts. We kissed and played; it was so nice.

On Saturday I made 8 dances. One idiot cheated me – I lost 11 dollars. Let God be his judge!

Azul, Louis, her customer, and me went to his home and ate Japanese meals – it was very tasty. In the evening we went to a restaurant and later we moved to the bar of Latin American music. We had a nice time; we danced and everybody was looking at me...

Today the weather is so fine, the sun is shining brightly, but there are no customers. And a bit later all of them came at the same time... I bought a bright dress! Tomorrow I am going to buy some more things (a top and a skirt).

My God bless me! Give me wisdom, forces and patience! Our Lady save and give us love! Guardian angel, keep us! Nicolas the Thaumaturge, help us in all our business!

September 23, 1999

There were the following interesting events these days. Now I have \$3600!!! God be praised! I plan to soon go to the all-nude Penthouse Club and to work there a little because the girls there make more money. God help me!

On Monday I made 25 dances. On Tuesday I made 37 dances! Today I made 35 dances! On Tuesday a man called me, he looked very simple. He ordered 4 dances and gave me 2500 pesos! On Wednesday he sent me a basket of red roses! God give happiness to him!

I met with Pablo. He is very good at kissing... But his character is rather heavy.

At the club I made 20 dances for one customer! God give him love and real happiness! (I gave to his young friend my name card with telephone number, and he by mistake passed to my customer. It was terrible!) Before it one fucker drove me to tears. He was tall and had attractive appearance. But he accosted to me with questions: Why did I speak at once about money? Why did I think only about money? He repeated all this about 5 times. I could not stand it and went away weeping. Fuck! Let God be his judge!

Later in the evening, I got acquainted with Max. He looks very attractive. He promised to take me to watch the underwater world with porpoises. He sent to me wonderful roses 7 pieces. Tanya has disappeared and Azul was frightened by it. Later it turned out that Tanya fell ill a little...

Roy called me up. He told me that he loved me and was going to wait for me to return to Moscow.

My God bless me!!! Give us forces and patience and guard us against all evil!!!

October 02, 1999

On Sunday and on Saturday, Azul, Alfredo and me went to an old Mexican town four hours outside Mexico City. We waited for this trip for a long time. Sometimes he could go, sometimes he had to prepare a number... But we went! We bought fruits... We came to such an old, such a nice city. Colors of houses were so picturesque! In the evening we visited disco. We danced there and crowds came to watch us, especially me. In the night I thrice changed my bed, going to another one, because Alfredo wanted sex. I had a dream that somebody touches me between my legs, but I could not understand who it was. I felt some movement. I woke up and saw him with erection. In the morning I told him that I was not a prostitute! He apologized. Alfredo gifted to me earrings and a topaz pendant. He gifted to Azul a silver bracelet as a present to her birthday (\$450). It was wonderful! A marvelous trip.

It was difficult on Sunday and on Monday as well. Each day I made 22 – 25 dances.

On Thursday... I woke up in the morning, washed, and Azul told me: "Let us run, faster!" At first I did not understand her and thought that it was some kind of a game, then I heard something falling down. I ran. In front of me on steps slowly ran a woman. I ran out in pajama so I took a security's suit. Near by stood a house and I saw how its jalousie was hanging here and there. It was terrible... My heart was beating hard... Alfredo and I went to change money – I thought that somebody had stolen my 500\$ because the package was empty... I began to weep hysterically but Alfredo was a nice fellow, he soothed me and said that he would give me those \$500, nothing had actually happened. I thought that a lad who was examining the house after the earthquake had taken the money, because the bag with money was open, but the money was there. In my room everything was falling down...

At work my eyes ached and watered from my contacts, customers did not want me.

At the Penthouse Club the dancers spread open their places. Nobody wanted me... I made only 6 dances in Penthouse. I understood – yes, somebody has put an evil eye upon me.

I finally removed the evil eye – what a relief!!!

At work there was a special show advertising the club attended by Mexican stars, I was “Miss Russia”. They shot me for TV, took photos! It was so wonderful! Azul celebrated her birthday. I gifted her a silver wine-glass. Let God give her all the best! Today she was working hard in Acarico. It was a favor to her. Alfredo bought me some food, fruits and underpants.

After I called my darling Alexei, I decided not to call him any more because of his questions: “What do you do there?” And after I began to quarrel with him because he had not said once “miss you” or “love you”, he said, “Why do you call me names? I’m not doing what you’re doing in Mexico for money.” I gave him my fax number – and never received anything from him by fax!!! If he does not answer to me first, I will not write to him myself!

Mavro has appeared again. Well, we shall see him!

My God bless us and save us!!!

October 09, 1999

There have happened a lot of events. On Saturday Mavro and me went to his house. The house is good, large. We kissed, did something more. He bought me jogging shoes but they too small, so he will exchange them. We went to aqua-park where we rode attractions. It was outstanding!

The next day, Sunday, Alfredo and me went to look at the pyramids. It was wonderful; I climbed to the very top! He gifted me a pair of silver bracelets and many other things. The pyramids belong to the God of Sun and the God of Moon. I meditated and accumulated energy. Then we went to the restaurant, which is situated inside a rock with candles and Mexican folk dances. They invited me to dance, and I jumped a little. It was cheery, everybody looked at me.

I bought a red dress, it gave at the seams on the first day, I brought it back to sew up. They apologized before me.

At the club on Monday I had 22 dances, on Wednesday I had 45 dances, thanks to Raul. He wrote out to me a check for 5000 pesos! The next day I received this money. Let God give him love and happiness.

On Thursday I made 39 dances. On Friday I made 27 dances, \$60 was given to me by one man from Florida. There were different situations. One customer insisted that I had danced for him not 3 but only 2 dances – it all makes me feel nervous, I told bouncer. Prior to it I had a clear face but yesterday in the evening it covered with spots... Mavro promised me to change jogging shoes and said that he had left them at home. All of it was actually a lie. He behaved to me like he did to his other girl (he took back all things he had bought to her – fucker, son of a bitch). Today he told me by phone that if I wanted to separate from him, that it was my own problem and he would separate from me with great pleasure (I felt that our relations would not last for long).

Azul, Alfredo and me went to ride horses – it was wonderful! These horses had a lighter saddle. First we went to mountains and then descended. Wonder!

I got acquainted with Sydney, he is from Australia, and we shall see what will come out of it!

I so miss my dear boyfriend Alexei. And what about him?

I called up my mum – the first thing she told me was that Yevgeniy Martianov who trained me in the broad jump when I was in college would be in Mexico City at a conference. My mum greatly feared that he might learn what I was doing in Mexico City. It would cause a scandal at the Academy.

On Sunday, Sydney and me went to his home and had sex. Then we went to Entertainment Park where we rode all kinds of attractions; he bought so many tickets that we won prizes – small toys. Then we left Entertainment Park went to a church to pray and later I got inebriated. We are acquainted for already a month and a half. He too often says that he loves me; there has come time to check his feelings. I understood that Mavro wanted only to have sex with me. I did not give it to him, so he became very angry and could hardly restrain himself. And then he began “to separate from me”.

My God, bless us! Give us forces and patience! Our Lady save us and give us love! Guardian angel, save and keep us! Nicolas the Thaumaturge, help us in all our deeds!!!

October 17, 1999

Now I am in Cancun. We went on Friday, early in the morning. I went with Alfredo, Azul and Martin. The hotel is so magnificent... It is situated in such a nice place... We did not sleep in the night from Thursday to Friday (I made 34 dances). I sunbathe without clothes on the balcony and Alfredo took pictures. Color of the sea is so pleasant. Alfredo wanted intercourse. But I told him that I had menstruation. The next day we went to the park “X-SCARLET”. First we walked along the river one photo cost \$8—so much. It was so interesting to roam among rocks, light everywhere is so different.

My suspicions about the sunbathing photo Angel showed me on New Year’s Eve proved true. Azul didn’t take the picture as Angel claimed, but her client Alfredo did with Azul standing in the background. Alfredo paid for Angel and Martin for Azul on the Cancun trip. Alfredo wasn’t as magnanimous as he claimed in taking Angel along on trips just because she was Azul’s friend. No, Alfredo took Angel along for him, and the story he told me over the telephone about the two of them being just “good friends” was probably concocted by him and Angel.

Then we went to dolphins. They had interesting skin. We swam with dolphins. We caressed dolphins’ bodies. They do not like if somebody touches their muzzles. Than we were lying on the water and two dolphins were carrying us along like in the film about some superhero. “I am superhero.” It was overwhelming.

We went to watch a concert of folk music. I felt cold... Alfredo took care of me. We had hardly managed to persuade him to feed us. Alfredo did not want to feed us.

Today in the morning Alfredo left us – he went for a business meeting. We were swimming all the day; I played volleyball. Then we went to a rock music restaurant. We watched stars and sea.

On Wednesday at the club I made 52 dances. Raul has ordered 32 dances. It was my record!!! He gifted to me a lot of roses. Let God send happiness to him!

I called up my darling Alexei and asked him to call me up on Tuesday. He reluctantly answered that he could dedicate to me only one minute. Thank you for your generosity!

My God, give me forces, patience and bless me!!!

October 30, 1999

The week after Cancun was very interesting. It was so good without Alfredo; nobody begging for sex all the time. Sydney came to the club; he did not pay for dances, but he promised to return money later. I had his jacket, so I did not fear for the money. There came a few men from Boston. On Friday we danced to them.

I went to Acapulco with Yatsento; he missed me. We traveled in the night from Friday to Saturday. All the way I was sleeping. The hotel has a swimming pool with flowers. It was wonderful... He more or less gave me to sleep. In the morning we had our breakfast on the balcony with a nice view on Pacific Ocean and of the city. We went to the beach where we flew with a parachute pulled by a motorboat. Practically all the beach boys asked to take photo of me. I had my photos with a parachute and a seashell.

In the evening we went to a restaurant; from there it is nice to watch Acapulco all in lights. We were sitting at the table with candles. Yatsento as well annoyed to me with his accosts. But he is more self-restrained than Alfredo.

Now I am sitting in the plane with Alfredo flying to Puerto Vallarta. I am nor very much happy, because I know that I will live with him in hotel. I am tired of ... with him.

Last week to the club came Max, he gifted to me a golden chain and a perfume. Then he bought to me a chocolate. After work I had to go with him to a hotel three or four times. (We are taking off now.)

We have quarreled with Sydney. He spoke about his feelings, he gave money for my dances and I returned his jacket. All this talk of feelings is bullshit. When we fixed time for a meeting he never came and I wasted my time and lost money. When we went with a man from Boston to Acapulco, Sydney felt upset because I promised to go with him. (It is so nice to look out of the plane's illuminator – we are flying over mountains and forests on our way to Puerto Vallarta...) I understand Sydney, but he does not keep his word. He speaks too much of love, but he does not prove it. For example, I asked him to meet with me on Friday, but he simply did not come... He is a young selfish fool.

I called up Alexei's mother. He has not sent me a single fax – "It is too expensive for me!" he says. I said to his mother that he had forgotten about me, but she said that he had written me a letter.

My agent Leo in Moscow annoyed me with his faxes about money. Sometimes our calculations do not coincide. He sends faxes every day. I must be careful Leo does not find out I do not pay him all I agreed. Maria, his partner here, says that if I will decide to return to Mexico, I have to call her up without Leo's involvement. Then I will make more money.

God, give me forces to lower my weight! Bless us! Amen!

November 1, 1999

Only 10 days are left till I will meet my 24th birthday.

Puerto Vallarta is such a wonderful place. If only I were here with my darling Alexei. I have been thinking about my boy for a long time. I would so much like to be with him at this

moment. This is a magnificent hotel where you do not need to think about your food, all is included in hotel price. Two days cost \$600 for each including meals and cost of flight. It was so wonderful! I swam in the swimming pool, played volleyball in water, where they serve cocktails, a tasty one, tequila with concentrated lemon, and we splashed the losers with water. It was wonderful! Alfredo and me played as well table tennis and there he succeeded better than at volley ball. I recall my boy Alexei– I think I love him, because I all the time think about him, and does he think about me. He did not send me a written line for the two months. I think, I will receive nothing from him even on my birthday. Why?

In Puerta Vallarta there were a lot of people from the north of America. There were as well Poles and people from Byelorussia. In the evening we go to local disco. There I saw a homosexual man. He had on a white evening dress. We danced a little, and in the evening Alfredo annoyed me with silly talk of love. He said that he feels deeply for me and that I do not understand him. I told him a lie to keep him at bay. I said that somebody tried to rape me and I ran away. He got angry, began to look for a doctor, but then again began to accost to me. I have so hardened; I felt nothing because I am so tired of his pawing... I used different ways but nothing worked with him. He allowed me to sleep. The next day he made me touch him in the bathroom. "It is common; just a little bit," he pleaded. I swore so much. But then he came - God be praised!

Later we rode water motorcycle. I kept maximum speed, and he feared. We also went by sailing vessel! I could not stand his touches! He is old; he might be my father! His smell, I do not like it. I see that he likes me but I am tired of him making me do things, which I do not like to do... I am thankful to him.

Today is Alfredo's birthday. I presented to him a postcard and a little angel. Alfredo said that the plane would take off at 14:00, and it turned out that the plane took off at 15:30. Smart fellow...

With God's help, with God's blessing, amen!

November 12, 1999

Alfredo, Azul and me again went to another resort town. He promised not to want sex with me. The flight took 45 minutes. Hotel was so marvelous! On the first day we played tennis. In the evening he again began to accost to me... We went to disco, danced and changed partners. It was wonderful!

The next day Alfredo and me rode water motorcycles. It was outstanding! He bought to me slippers.

I called up my darling Alexei. I asked his mother whether he had another girl. She called him to the phone. When I asked him why he had not written to me he answered: "I will try to find time for it." "Why do you prefer not to speak to me? Do you want to end our relations?" He did not answer anything. I asked: "Why do you behave like that?" He answered, "I am fed up with everything, with what you do for money. When you said you were going to stay in Mexico for the money, I felt as if something broke in me, a string snapped."

After this conversation I was weeping for 20 minutes.

In the evening there was an interesting competition between couples. I put roll of toilet paper between my legs and Alfredo, blind folded, put broom handle between his legs. I gave instructions for him to put broom handle into hole in toilet paper. Then we ran to drink beer through a tube that was very sexy. Then the couples were given one minute to swap clothes.

Finally the girls were blind folded and had to feel between all the men's legs to identify who was their partner. We won 4 tests of 5.

Alfredo accosted me in bed again. I ran away and later he apologized.

On Monday back at work, I made 20 dances for 6 hours of work. On Tuesday I met Manuel, who paid me \$500, plus toilet water. It was a nice evening. In the evening I made 23 dances – the business went not so good. But my 500\$... Jorge said that he would present to me 24 roses for my birthday.

Alfredo called me up at 00:05am on my birthday. He said that he had especially set his alarm clock and congratulated me. In the morning – it was wonderful. I had just opened my eyes when they brought to me roses – from Roy. Later he rang to me and congratulated me.

Later came Alfonso. He gifted to me a rose, a set of chains for hands and feet and a postcard in Russian wishing to me happiness. Alfredo came to me and presented gilded flowers and a postcard with warm words. Very nice roses with sunflowers. We went to a restaurant and ate very tasty salmon. Alfredo ordered an unusually tasty pie.

At work it was wonderful. One customer bought 18 dancers! Prior to it 2 customers ordered 8 and 7 dances each. Linda, Yulya and Azul sang to me. It was wonderful! Then the club presented to me a cake. It was my best birthday. It was not saddened by the fact that somebody had stolen my 1000 pesos and 1000 pesos from another girl. One more friend presented to me a rose and a large stuffed dog.

Yesterday Alfredo bought me a nice bag for 1300 pesos – class! But he got mad – he wants to have sex with me. I think that I will agree to it in order not to go to work. Yesterday he paid to me for two hours as much as he pays for 10 dances at the club—\$200. We went to a park and then to a church. He came to the club and bought 10 dances! Let God bless him!

Leo faxed me saying he had not received his money – the bank in Russia does not take money for some reason.

My God, I thank you from all my soul for everything!!! Bless us, give us wisdom, forces and patience! Our Lady, protect us against all misfortunes, give us immense peace, well being, strengthen our belief and hope!!!

Guardian angel, keep us! Keep my money safe, money of all of us! Nicolas the Thaumaturge! Be my quick assistant in my business and in my losing weight! All Saints, help me!

Thank You, my God, for all ordeals, for my wonderful 23 years! Bless me in my new 24 year!!!

November 20, 1999

What a surprise I received on Saturday! Azul congratulated me with birthday as soon as I opened my eyes. Then Alfredo and I went to ride on horsebacks. We went to the park and rode attractions, and then we went to a restaurant. Garçons began to bring meals and at that moment to the hall entered Tanya with a pie – surprise! There arrived Yulya and Paco, Xavier. We danced; it was merry! I am very grateful to everybody.

At the same day I made 18 dances. I got acquainted with Aleho – it was so marvelous! On Sunday Alfonso and me went to the city. We had a walk and bought aromatic sticks. We sat near the church on the grass... It was so wonderful! I have rested in my soul so well! Then we went to a Mexican restaurant. We returned home and went to the region where there was a lot of youngsters and bought yogurt. We wanted Cappuccino but there was a line. It was wonderful!

On Monday I again worried about money – I spoke to Leonid by phone. I made that day 11 dances, and Alfredo paid to me for 14—\$280. We went to a nightclub. Girls there have nice breasts and figures. A brunette danced to me in the private room. Alfredo helped, she was slightly biting me and rubbed me between my legs. I like the way girls do it. Then Alfredo wanted to take me to the hotel. When I refused he went into hysterics and began to cry. He said that he could not wait any more and that I was playing with him. I understood that I had to stop putting him off or he would stop paying me money. I drank some rum and gave it to him. He was happy...

I interrupted Igor to check the date of the month for Monday. Sure enough, November 15, the date of the fax on Westin Hotel stationary in which Angel said she visited places alone in Mexico, thought about me and missed me but obviously not enough to refrain from sex with Alfredo.

The next day Alfredo presented to me a toy dog – it is a wonder! On Tuesday he again paid for 14 dances. We went to “Titanium”. All men were looking at me and I was looking at the girls. I had drunk so much that I gave it to him that night; I was drunk and spoke much in Russian.

On Wednesday and on Thursday I had 41 dances every day--\$820 each day. Friday I had 45 dances. Benjamin gave me money and ticket to go to Cancun. Alfonso presented to me a silver bracelet and lent to me his jacket. He fell in love with me... Yesterday I was with Max. He told me that my visa would soon be ready, so I masturbated him and he was happy.

“Yesterday” meant November 19 the date of the second fax Angel sent me from Mexico. In it she asked me to call her to help her avoid customs when she returned. True to her cozen nature, she wrote, “I kiss you! I hold you! Your Angelina.” I couldn’t tell whether she held part of Max before or after writing the fax.

November 23, 1999

I am on the way back. We stopped in the hotel “Fiesta Americana”. And it has began... We had been waiting for a room for an hour and a half. At 15 o’clock we entered the room – it was filled with tobacco smoke, lay hair and condom wrappings. We could not prove that we had a bank account for 3000 pesos for the hotel. In the restaurant there is a sad music; customers had to pay for drinks separately. The swimming pool was good. We met boys, had a meal in the evening – the boys paid for us. Then we went to a disco. There was such a show... Sometimes there were water bubbles. In the night we went to the sea to swim. It was something unusual. In Caribbean sea there were my admirer and Azul. We did not kiss though we wanted.

The next day we went to gym. I had a good training. In the evening we went to a shop. Azul and me had \$600 each. Azul bought a cap and a bag, and I bought the next day jogging

shoes. In the evening I was laying on the surface of the sea, all in darkness. The next day we asked to wake us up but they did not do it. We were nearly late for AQUA WORLD. We rode water motorcycles and when we were parking instructor turned over our water motorcycle. It was wonderful to see large fishes swimming in water near me. We went back along the seaside.

In the evening I ran in gym for 60 minutes. Then we went shopping. We bought jogging shoes to me. In the night I said good-bye to the sea.

Today Thanks to God there were no problems with coupons. Azul leaves the day after tomorrow. My God, bless us!!!

November 29, 1999

When Azul was leaving she did not even wake me up. She left to me a message saying that she loved me, thanked me for everything and will miss our playing.

I had a good result on Tuesday – 41, 45, 41 dances. Raul again appeared here. He bought 15 dances and went away (he was with a friend). First business went so-so, but later, approximately from November 23, I had to work much.

On Thursday I could hardly manage to make 41 dances. Alfonso and I went to a Mexican restaurant. He wanted to leave for Monterrey. We gave to each other our addresses. He said that he loved me... I went with Enriko to a good Japanese restaurant.

Friday has come. Alfredo said to me not to work. I did not have to work because it was a holiday but I wanted to earn the money since I would be returning home in another week on November 29.

With Alfredo's assistance I received a Banamex Visa debit card on which I can put much of my money, so I can take it out of Mexico and into Russia with out customs knowing. The rest I will put on to travelers cheques, but not too much for customs might find them.

My customer Jose came and took 20 dances. I danced 2 dances more. I danced as well 6 dances for another customer. And all of a sudden there switched on the light – police everywhere! It was a raid. They checked everyone for drugs. We were divided into two separate groups – Mexican girls and foreign girls. Then they shot us with video camera and pushed us into a bus with bars on windows. There were so many policemen. They took us to a police station and we stayed there from 11pm to 4am in the morning. They wrote down our names, took our fingerprints. Cuban girls were crying. Then they took us to the immigration jail. All of us were so cold. There were Yulya and I, and as well Cuban girls – all of us slept in the prison cell on the floor. We slept only 4 hours. We thought that they would let us go soon but they did not. Then the bell rang and they brought to us some meal. The club brought to us socks, sweaters, and meals from McDonalds and fruits. At first we all kept together, were merry, there was a woman from Cuba with braids. Everybody felt sorry for her, but later when somebody of us took photo of her, she began shouting and gave us away to police. Policeman wanted to know who had taken photo, but all of us refused to say. When he went away we teased that Cuban woman, laughed at her and her braids.

By now it didn't surprise me that Angel sanitized the real story of the police raid on The Men's Club in order to obtain her visa. Her diary describes an arrest—not a detention.

Then Hungarian girls began to separate from us. Yulya is a kind girl – when we were sleeping she covered me with a blanket and tried to help in everything. I tried to help her as well. She is a nice girl.

Two girls from Hungary went away on Sunday. Policemen did not allow them even to take their things. From police station they went directly to airport.

On Monday, November 29, I called up Francisco – he is a friend of Max. I asked him to take me out of here. He told me that it was impossible. I don't know what has happened to my things. I do not know what happened to my visa that Max was getting me. Alfredo called me up and told me that a girl had gathered my things. She did not find one of my bags. I was nervous – maybe she took it and just said that she did not find it?! Later Alfredo and Maria have found everything, they gathered and brought to me all my things. I am so thankful to them! Now I have with me cash for Leo – \$2200, my Traveler's Cheques – \$5000 and another \$2100 in cash and the remaining \$18,000 is with Alfredo who promised to bring the \$18,000 to me in Russia in 10 days. My God, I hope that he will bring it; this money is my flat. I worked hard to earn this money, 10 –12 hours a day.

When they brought our things in sacks from the club, one Hungarian girl found out that somebody had stolen her money, perfume and cosmetics. It was good that I took everything with me.

They took me out of prison at 20:30 and my plane was to take off at 21:10! I did not see Alfredo and Maria, because the police put me right on my flight to Russia. Katherine and Yana said later that Alfonso was waiting for me and he was very upset. But I didn't not manage to see anybody...

Our Tanya was also frightened and decided to fly back to Russia with me. She is sitting now here, in the plane, somewhere to the left from me. God be praised, she sits rather far from me.

I would not desire anybody to fly from Mexico as I did.

I thank you, Mexico, with all my heart for everything! I will come back!

Now we are approaching Frankfurt. My God bless me!

Alfredo bought to me a jacket, pullover and a sports suit. I hope very much that I will receive my money by mid-December. My God. Help me! Bless and forgive us, protect us!!!

My translator, Igor, said he was exhausted while I felt emotionally stunned from bouncing down into the ever-deeper circles of marriage hell. We stopped for the day. I had never believed in the concept of a soul, but whatever animated my life, Angel's diary had blasted it—such utter disappointment in a person. How could anyone live such a life—no dignity, no self-respect, none of the nobler qualities that humans struggled for over millenniums in order to grow beyond the desires dictated by the lowest chakra of bodily appetites? Angel reminded me of the panther from H.G. Wells' *Island of Dr. Moreau* that kept reverting back to her animal nature. So far her diary never once mentioned any of the virtues of compassion, enlightenment

or honesty, only the sordid vices of lies, cheating, hypocrisy and using sex for material gain. She even tried to pull down God by entreating him to help her in her business endeavors. I'm not religious, but even I wouldn't tempt the fates by asking God to bless someone I successfully scammed while damning those I didn't. It's almost as though she thought of herself as one of God's angels, doing his bidding to raise funds for paradise by tricking guys.

Despite the revulsion, I still tried to find some hope in this sea of filth. Such is the weakness of men when it comes to women. The mask behind which the real Angel lived, that carefully crafted counterfeit image continued to hold sway over me, and I started rationalizing again by telling myself her actions weren't so bad. After all, she came from an impoverished childhood and the materialism of the middle class in even a third world country like Mexico simply overwhelmed her. She accepted the largess of men who fell for her and provided them geisha like pleasures in return. So what? She boosted their egos by pretending to like them and distracted them from their staid existence with her endearing girlish thrill of discos, amusement parks and travel. She made the middle-aged man feel young again, and the young man feel wanted. But none of it was true, just a con, and no self-delusion could hide that one of those middle-aged guys was I, although I tried to convince myself otherwise. Her diary clearly showed she pined for her Alexei—not me. Still the illusions my conscious mind constructed to avoid the pain persisted while my intuition kept bubbling up with the sense that her diary probably left out the worst of her actions.

Igor asked, “Are you sure she is Russian? Her Russian grammar is awful. It is as though she never learned the language. She gets most of the conjugations wrong and writes as though she were German.”

“Her birth certificate says she was born in Samara, but her mother, according to Angel, took her to Germany when she was an infant. Maybe she learned German first, but she never mentioned being able to speak it, and I never heard her use it. Just another errant piece of the puzzle,” I said dejectedly not really concerned about her linguistic abilities.

“How did her mother get permission to leave Russian back then? That would be in the late 70s and only important people could leave.”

“Angel said her mother traveled around Russian a lot as a dancer and also went to Germany as a dancer.”

“Was her mother a ballet dancer?” Igor asked.

“No, modern dance.”

“Strange, I don’t see the Soviets allowing a dancer with a young baby to travel to Europe unless she was a ballet dancer.”

“There is much about Angel that I am finding strange.”

Igor continued. “She really keeps a close track of the money she spends and makes. And I noticed that she always is trying to take advantage. She wants something but tries to avoid giving something in return.

“In America, we call that the consummate con artist.”

My translator laughed, “So, same time tomorrow?”

“Okay, see you then.”

I dragged my stomped heart home, decided against going to a couple of meetings, took a sleeping pill and forgot my worries in the land of oblivion.

I Put a Spell On You

The next day, hope reared her deceitful head with the justification that Angel really wasn't my girlfriend while in Mexico. Before she went to Mexico, we went out for a few nights, kissed a little, one massage and nothing more. How could I expect fidelity from someone who didn't owe me any? My struggle, however, to find a lawyerly argument that kept Angel as my true soul mate failed to realize the obvious—a girl who did what she did in Mexico would never be anyone's soul mate. But I didn't see that at the time. Igor picked up translating the diary with Angel's December 7, 1999, entry, which was a week after her deportation from Mexico and arrival in Moscow. I hoped the virtues she often talked about in her soliloquies, and I desperately wanted her to possess showed themselves in the remaining part of her diary.

In Frankfurt I avoided Tanya. The airport paging system told me to report to a message office. There was a message for me to call Roy. He could not meet me when I landed, but told me he arranged for me to get through customs without trouble and that Leo would be at the airport.

In Moscow I tried to sneak through the custom line for nothing to declare but they stopped me, searched my bag and found my \$9,300. I was asked where I worked and where I took all these money. I answered that all these money are a present of my boy-friend – and you are welcome to see and to check. They let me in.

It turned out that 2 men should have met me and should have helped to come through customs without problems. Leo knew it and on purpose came later. But he was fooled because he did not know that most my money would come later with Alfredo and the commission I finally paid Leo \$1400 less than I owed him. I had to spend the night in a studio. But thanks to God all ended well.

Apparently, Angel and Leo weren't in on a scheme, as Kroll's investigators thought, that the two would have the militia confiscate the money from my apartment and then try to con me into making good their loses. Leo's actions still looked suspicious for whatever reason while Angel wanted to cheat Leo out of some of the commission she owed him, which she did.

The next day Roy and I went to the Bolshoi Ballet "Giselle". Roy gifted to me a huge bear and hired an FSB agent to guard me and my money because he suspected Leo might try to use his police contacts to arrest me on a false charge and take my money.

In Krasnodar, my darling Alexei met me with white flowers. He did not even embrace me and was silent all the way home. He did not want to enter my house. He wanted me to hate him. He shouted that he was unfaithful to me. At home I went into hysteric, my mum helped me very much. I have so much pain inside.

The next day he came to ask me to give him a chance. I decided to give him a chance. We went to Sochi to buy me a sheepskin coat and spend a couple of days. When we made love he did all usual things but somewhat automatically. He sniffed and looked away from me. He said that he missed my body. I understood that the same thing he said to another woman (32 years old with a child 7 years old). It hurts me inside...

We went to Sochi and everywhere he was paying for everything. In the train he spread out the bed, it was wonderful. But it is not the same as before, I feel it. He takes care of me, but it goes not out of his soul. He can hardly utter the word "love".

No wonder Angel didn't fear for her money. After landing in Krasnodar, she had arrange for her boy friend to meet her at the airport, and the reason she didn't call me for three days to confirm her safe arrival was because she and Alexei went to Sochi.

After Sochi on returning to Krasnodar, we went to a restaurant, but he was mistaken if he thought that I would forget everything so easily. We love each other but he does not understand how much aches my soul... He tried to make a wall of those little quarrels, which were between us, he wanted to stop love... But he did not manage to do it.

I don't have that respect and trust to him which I had before. He went every day to training instead of staying with me for a single day. And when I went to see model friends at beauty pageant, he was outraged that I did not spend this time with him. Earlier he worried about me, and now. His mother was shocked by his attitude towards me.

I think that he does not love me any more. When we make love, and I want to do it twice, he tells me that he had tired. What for do I need this inactivity? He shows that he wants to forget me. I don't respect and trust him, which I had before. I keep him now as a man whom I need for solving my problems, for transport. But sometimes I use him as a sexual partner because now I am not active in my business in Krasnodar. I want very much to find a foreigner and to live abroad; I want to buy a flat and marry a foreigner, but I do not want to live in Krasnodar!

Alfredo called me up – he insisted that I live with him in his hotel room in Moscow. My God, give me wisdom, forces and patience!!! Bless me!!!

December 10, 1999

Now I am sitting on the train to Moscow in a berth with 3 men—they want me. I called up Alfredo and now I am going to him for my 18,600 dollars. Mum looks for apartments to buy. The most important thing is that Alfredo bring all my money. I hope he will be accurate.

My God, bless me! Give us wisdom, forces and patience!

December 19, 1999

I arrived to Moscow early Friday morning December 10. I left my luggage in the baggage office and the whole day walked around Moscow. I sat for 3 hours in the hotel "Rossiya" waiting for Alfredo. At last! It turned out that he bought Traveler's Cheques for 7,000 dollars and another \$7,000 we would get from traveler's checks he said were lost and the rest on a debit card. That way he was able to hide from Mexican authorities how much money he took out of Mexico. He is smart that way and teaches me how best to avoid the law, but I must pay him in sex.

Oh god, that night was such a torture to me. I understand his feelings and I had to drink. When he said, "I want to fuck you, Angi!" I do not know why but I wanted to laugh. Though I respect his feelings and all he does for me.

I worried very much – I feared that Roy would notice me in town.

So I received my 18,600 dollars plus \$600 from Alfredo for staying with him. I am thankful to him. My God, bless Your slave Alfredo!

Alfredo hired a taxi for me that took me to where Roy worked—I had a very heavy bag and couldn't take it by metro. Thank goodness everything turned out all right. I got my money and Roy did not see me in Moscow with Alfredo. Roy believed that I just arrived that day by train. Thanks to God for keeping my secrets!

So, when Angel called me at the office on December 14, she was really calling from Alfredo's room at the Rossiya Hotel. And the way she got the heavy bag she could barely carry to my office was by a taxi in which Alfredo put her.

Roy and I got up early the next morning at 5 o'clock for receiving an American visa. It was so cold to stay in the line. To my great surprise they gave us visa at once – now I am going to go with Roy to America on January 19. Let God bless me!

Roy presented to me a cellular phone. I was so glad!

I have flown home to Krasnodar and my money is safe.

December 18, 1999 – date of my complete breaking relations with Alexei. He always avoids me. I myself told him to stop playing these games. He answered that he had feelings to the other woman. He killed his love to me. I recollected my nurse friend Lena's words that Alexei did not see me as his wife.

Now I have a cellular phone on which I have already received calls from Mexico and from Sochi.

Mum and me looked at flats. We chose one with 3 rooms, and there is a discount of \$2500 because it requires repairs. It causes us so much nerves to hurry the paper work before the new law takes effect next year. If we cannot register our apartment before January, I will have to say how I got the money to buy it. We paid \$1000 for urgent registration and papers and services of the lawyer – but this dullard is constantly letting us down. We finally missed the deadline for filing papers because of him. Now we just hope that a bribe to the government officials will let us submit the papers after the deadline. I want to receive it as quick as possible! My God, help me!!!

I received communion and colored my hair. Volume of my thighs has lowered only by 1 cm to 102 cm. My God, give me forces to lower my weight more and quicker!!! With God's assistance!!!

January 05, 2000

Here is the New Year! The Year 2000! My God, bless me! I thank You for all, for all!!! Let mum and me go with God's blessing and help!!!

On December 30, 1999, mum and me met Roy, the plane was late by 2 hours. We took Roy to "Moscow" hotel, the taxi cost 130 rubles and included taking mum to her house. I spent a night in hotel, in the first class room.

After Roy and me went to celebrate to home. He brought so many presents. There was a player with a disk, and many little things – chocolate, cornflakes. Mum as well received wonderful presents – gloves, a casket for earrings. I presented to mum a Dictaphone. And I presented to Roy a placard with my photo. He was glad.

Mum and me on New Year's Eve and in Christmas night did magic to divine our future. We used bread, onion and an eggshell with a candle. Fortune promised to mum a large gain and to me it promised winning a competition. My God, help us, and give us wisdom, forces and patience! My God, bless me!!!

I didn't remember any hocus-pocus stuff from New Year's Eve. How did those two sneak that by me in such a tiny house?

We met the New Year very well, shot a little fireworks. I had not overeaten – may be for the first time. We wanted to call a taxi but we did not manage – all telephone lines were busy. At approximately 2:30am we went to stop a car. There were few cars in the street. We rather quickly stopped a car and the driver took only 30 rubles! The next day, on January 01, we wanted to go to Sochi by bus, but the route was cancelled, it was good, that we managed to return those tickets and to buy tickets for a train. He was disappointed to go in an open berth. The way was easy. We arrived early morning.

We slept at the hotel, then went to the market. Roy bought to me socks and underpants. In the evening we went to "Prestige" disco. When I was in the cloakroom, Roy quarreled with a drunken boy and had early struck him. Roy did not want that drunken boy to sit with us. Then we went to another disco; it was "Ultra". Next day Roy upset me to tears – he made me to evoke unpleasant memories of my life in Cyprus when he asked me what I did there. I never should have told him, I would talk about my past. Now he wants to keep me to that promise. He says it not what I did but that I be truthful with him. Why does he want the truth? Then he himself got angry because I did not want to speak of it, but I changed the subject of our conversation.

We walked to the park where I met a model friend from Krasnodar. Roy asked me why I did not introduce him. I don't want him to know about my private life. Then we visited circus, where tigers scuffled with each other and the animal trainer could hardly manage to calm them down. After it, we had a meal and went to the railway station for our train back home.

Our fellow travelers in our train compartment were Sergey and his wife. We drank a little and talked. At night Sergey snored so loud that I could not sleep.

The next day mum and me went to visit Sergey at his house. He works in Baku, Azerbaijan and Novorossiysk, something connected with oil. He said much about Russia, that it would show itself to America, that Russia was not worse than America.

After Roy flew back to Moscow, I frightened Alexei – I let him know that I spy a little after him and his girl-friend. He was frightened. Today his mum told me that his girl-friend's name is Tanya, that she has a seven years old child and that she is 32. Alexei called me up and asked me not to come to his house. He was frightened of my magic powers. When he called me up the next time I refused to speak with him. Let God be judge to him and to all his deeds!

Tomorrow mum and me shall go to settle our relations with the apartment sellers. They are going to cheat us, I am sure of it!

My God, give us wisdom, forces and patience! Our Lady save us! Guardian angel, keep us! Nicolas the Thaumaturge and all Saints, help us! With Gods blessing and help!!!

January 17, 2000

Alexey called me up and told me to take all my things from his mother's apartment and never to come there again. Later I came to his mother and took a bath there. His mother handed to me a large package with my things. Cover of the package with razors was opened and there was absent one razor. I was infuriated by this fact. Son of a bitch! I took all my photos where we were together. I was trembling with indignation. In this state of feelings I wrote to him a message – “You are bloody son of a bitch! It all will come back to you!” I told his mother that I am not going to carry heavy things – let him himself bring all these things to me. He came to me and I asked my mum to speak to him. They spoke calmly; he was smiling. He thinks that I lost an excellent opportunity to marry. I called him up later and told him all I thought about that razor. He began to shout, he told me there was no razor missing and to go to the shop and check other packages with razors. There was so much hatred in his voice. My God, what a monster he is. My God, let You be judge of his deeds.

I visited Irina; she is from Grozny. I and mum bought fabric for an evening dress. We bought as well skirts (a short one – 450 rubles and a long one – 1300 rubles) and a beret. Irina (she is 31) married Sergey (he is 27) in the end of October. God give her happiness!!! God send her a child!

I begin to keep to a diet. I grew thin by 4 kilos. Volume of my thighs is still 102. God, give me forces to grow thin; I so much want to be thin! I am tired of being thick! I began to loose actively my weight!!!

Alfredo called me up each week. He told me that he missed me, loved me and wanted me. On January 15 he has his birthday.

Roy also called me up. Once he called me up when I was looking at his photo. The next time he called me up when I was reading a horoscope of his. Roy says that I am the only happiness of his. He wants me to be near him. If only he were younger. Information about Roy, which is at my disposal at present, satisfies me completely. We shall see how events will go... I turned away an evil eye, which was on me. Let God do so that nobody hindered me.

Our sellers of flat continue to be dilatory. They continue to lie that they have already prepared documents, but they did not. They wanted more money for us to move in early.

I asked Volodya to help mum to complete the purchase of our apartment since I will soon leave for a visit to America. My God bless us to complete this bargain without unpleasant surprises!

January 23, 2000

Now I am in a plane flying to Las Vegas from New York City... In airport I saw one Russian man, I desired him, what can I say.

When I came to New York one bore custom official asked me too many questions – what for I came, who and where and so on. But when I answered that Roy is my future husband her ugly face had immediately changed.

New York looks just as I fancied. I did not like dark color of house walls.

Roy does not like American women because they too much strive to be like men. Roy thinks that all American girls should be sent to Russia where they will have to put up with Russian men and all Russian girls should go to America as a reward for their femininity. That way, American women will get what they deserve for the past 30 years of attacking American men.

I called up to Mexico to Maria. She told me that after my arrest at the Men's Club there was one more raid by the police, still all girls from Czechoslovakia and Hungary have come back, but nobody can give any guaranties of no future arrests. She told that she might try to make for me a paper allowing me to work in the club. Salvadore accuses me for the club raids – he said that it was I who set police against the club. I do not know whether it is worthwhile going back to Mexico.

I got Roy to take me in New York to two clubs – everywhere there is so much chaos in these clubs. There is no show in the clubs where the girls go on stage; they can only take off clothes on stage to thong panties and cannot sit or lie on the stage. When the girls take off clothes on stage they make some money but most is made doing lap dances for the customers at tables. While making table dance those dancing may touch the customers but the customers cannot touch them. Also the girls cannot leave work with one of there customers, but they can make dates to meet customers after hours. A table dance is \$20, but in comparison with the club in Mexico girls were dancing worse. There are private rooms where the girl can make \$100 or more for a half hour.

Roy and me went to the "Imax". It was something like cinema, but there was a huge screen in which you seemed to enter virtual reality. We saw a Walt Disney film. Then we went to a Russian restaurant where I immediately began to feel nostalgia to Russia. In Japanese restaurant each slice of sushi cost 1 dollar. Roy took me to a shop. I found there a nice roll-neck sweater, but Roy told me that it was too expensive – \$60. Why then he took me to an expensive shop and allowed to choose if all there was too expensive to him? I found something for my hair \$15 and he again said that it was too expensive. Then we went to a restaurant and there he paid 75 dollars. Why does he grudge spending money on things, which I will wear for a long time? Sometimes I don't understand him. He drove me to tears. I did not want to tell him how offensive it is when somebody takes you to an expensive shop, proposes to choose something and then says that everything there is too expensive. He began to argue with me. I will not stand it! He has no right to criticize me! Their cultural traditions of truth and talking disagreements over don't matter to me; let him restrain himself!

We met an actress friend Cindy, Frank and producer Everett who produces shows and looks for people. They are very interesting people. My God, let me find work in my favorite kind of business! My God, bless me!

January 27, 2000

Now I am in the plane flying back to New York from Las Vegas.

What happened in Las Vegas? When I came there I was looking at all surrounding me with widely open eyes. Oh, these hotels... Casino, where people waste such a lot of money. Me stayed in "Paris" hotel. The room was very nice. In the evening Roy and me went to watch showgirls. Small artists executed acrobatic tricks and danced cancan there.

In the evening we met Patsy and her husband. We had a look at their house – it was neat, clean and cozy. Patsy wanted to present me a nice embellishment, a necklace. I liked it very much, but I feared she wanted something from me and did not accept it.

Then we went to a show, where our places were next to the stage, so I could not see the general picture. It was a magnificent show; costumes were very good. Main subject was beginning of the 19th century. One dancer was looking at me. Then there appeared tigers in a cage. I enjoyed that show very much.

I got Roy to take me to a men's club. Roy drank much. There was a show where girls were dancing rather well. All was the same as in New York – they took 20 dollars for a dance. Roy said he was getting tired of going to these clubs with me and watching all these nude girls dancing. This is my business and I need to learn where I can make the most money.

We went to the "Crazy girls" show. There was nothing interesting; it looked very cheap in comparison with preceding shows.

Yesterday we went to "New York" hotel. There I rode the roller coaster. It was exciting. The day before it I went to a "virtual reality" show in which I flew between poles, and fell down. Yesterday's evening show was something like a circus. There were brothers from Mexico who juggled.

Yesterday we discussed philosophical problems and Roy disagreed and raised his voice. I decided to change subject of conversation and to make a photo. Suddenly he smiled. I do not know, but it worthwhile marrying him only for the purpose to receive American citizenship. He is not the person I need. He took care of me, when I pretended to loose consciousness, he was anxious. He is too open with his emotions.

Angel obviously had considered marrying me well before I ever proposed so that she could work in America.

I called up to mum. She received a letter from Maria in Mexico concerning visa. Maria's guarantee that Salvador will not make me trouble for my past business is not sufficient for me. Maria said she sent money she owed me to Leo in December and he lied to me that he did not receive it. I have to clear this up when in Moscow.

My God, I don't know what to do. May be, I will have to go for a month to Mexico. May be I will have to earn money in Moscow.

My God, give me wisdom and forces!!!

January 29, 2000

My travels have ended. Now I am sitting in the airport waiting for our flight back to Moscow. Yesterday I managed to call up to Azul – it turned out that she had been to Holland. She is trying to find out whether it is possible to get a visa to work in Mexico or not.

My God, what shall I do? May be I shall go to Mexico for a month, but it is a risk. But it is as well money... On the other hand, to live with Roy and work in Moscow. I shall think it over. Roy is good as a friend and sexual partner, but Roy as a husband....

What happened one night after Las Vegas? I was in a good mood, and he was merry as well. Then I made a mistake. Roy has strong intuition. I must be more careful in the future. I couldn't think quickly of how to change the situation, so I went to another room. He followed me and brought a dressing gown and covered me with it. He said calmly that if I wanted to end our relation then we would come back and that was all. He is a fool, he knows that I depend on him and behaves indecently. I went back to the room. I embraced him and he embraced me. We made love in the table and I finished twice. Then I went into my tears act and pretended to shiver and faked a faint. It had the effect on him I wanted.

The next evening we went to a restaurant. There we spoke about different things and I brought up magic and the evil eye. When he said his secretary's mother use to prepare his meals at work, I knew his secretary had bedeviled Roy through his food to make him want her and no one else. I told him when we go back to Moscow I will try to find a way to avert her bad eye. I could tell he still did not believe in magic, which makes it all the more easy for me. He agreed to go with me to see a white magic man to protect him from his secretary's curse. But I will find a black magic man to end the secretary's spell and put on one that assures he does what I want.

Igor exclaimed, "This girl will stop at nothing!"

"I'm beginning to realize that."

Then we went to a performance "Phantom of the Opera". It is a story of a phantom who fell in love with a girl and she loved another man. After, we met Pat at a record studio, he trusts in God. There an attractive boy from France sang a sexual song. It was very interesting.

My God, bless me!!! I thank You for everything!!!

February 04, 2000

We arrived in Moscow at approximately 12:30pm and went to bed. We woke up at 7:40pm – got up, had a meal and made love. Next day in the morning we again had a meal. I spent a long time finding a magic man willing to do what I wanted with Roy without having to pay a lot of money. I chose an attractive tall black magic man with a sharp eye. I brought to him Roy and the magic man said that it was strong negative influence on Roy but he could easily replace it with the spell I wanted. The next day I brought to him Roy's photo so he could bind Roy to me and end the magic of Roy's secretary.

My conversation with Leo about the money Maria sent to him for me was interesting! He said that Maria was lying and agreed to make a direct call to her to prove that he did not receive the money. He said that he did not want those financial problems to become an obstacle in our

relations. I agreed. He had helped to me a lot and I am thankful for this. After my meeting with Leo in the evening, Roy made me proposal. The magic worked! Thanks to God!

On Tuesday, February 2, 2000, my mum called to say our flat became really ours! We bought it!!! A miracle has happened. God be praised! Thank goodness!

In the evening I spoke to Roy about marriage. I said that I do not think I am ready, and I was not sure about him, and that the only way to make sure in everything was to go to America with a visa to work. If I do it, it will be business for me and later the time will show. And plus he began speaking about a paper according to which I will not have any right on his money in the case of divorce. So, in this case I will receive nothing... In my turn I told him about a paper according to which he would have no right to send me out of the country. He drank 2 glasses of wine and became foolish. The talk became senseless.

On the 3rd of February I went for a walk with an attractive man with oriental appearance told my fortune by hand. I was told that I would have two children and my relations with Roy would become more profitable from the end of February. I was interesting to that man with oriental appearance. We drank some wine and talked.

I stayed in Moscow a few days, I cooked for Roy, cleaned his things, I went in the snowfall to pay with for my and his phones. I think he will miss me.

My God, give me wisdom and bless me!

February 19, 2000

At last I returned home! Thank goodness, I am away from Roy!

For the next two weeks, I have been making repair in our new flat. My mum is ill with a strong cough in the night. Alfredo called me up – he masturbated himself while he spoke to me. We spoke about 40 minutes. He is crazy with sex for me. I told him that I am sitting in white underwear and touching my private parts. Roy phoned to me right after from London. He sounded suspicious. How could he know? I made him recollect who I am for him for the time being. I told that I have no money. He felt sorry for me and promised to bring some and asked how much. I answered he should decide.

Alfredo called again and I complained that I have no money. He promised to me that he would transfer to my debit account 1000 dollars, but I asked for a lesser sum – 500 dollars. I don't want him to think he only means money to me. He invited me to Paris, he told me that he could not live without me, that he wanted me badly.

On February 13, I saw my old boyfriend Alexei with his woman. It was a shock to him. He went by without greeting me. He led her aside. They were walking and watching me. My heart was banging. They went away.

On February 14, I called up Roy and Alfredo and greeted them with St. Valentine's Day and to see they got my cards.

Gee, I wondered whether Angel wrote Alfredo the same malarkey she did me that her love was like a "flower" that required my "clean feelings to grow it."

In the evening I went to a concert. I was photographed with a famous man whom I told that I had my photos with many well-known persons and now I would have my photo with him

as well. “Then you must visit me personally to pick up the photo,” he said. I did, but he drank too much that day to do anything in bed.

Now I am preparing for my laser eye operation. I will endure it but then I will forget about glasses. I went to consultation. I worry. I phoned to Lena, my nurse friend the clairvoyant, and she said that I might do this operation. Lena said as well that the business with Roy is very advantageous for me.

I have bought a coat for 2400 rubles. It is fashionable; its sleeves are a little short.

My God, bless me, give forces and patience! Our Lady, protect us against misfortunes and save us! Guardian angel, keep us! Nicolas the Thaumaturge help me in all my deeds and business! All Saints help me!!!

“Who is this Nicolas the Thaumaturge she keeps beseeching?” I asked Igor.

“He’s a Saint from the fourth century on whom Santa Claus is modeled. Nicolas was the Eastern Orthodox archbishop of Lycia, Turkey who people believed worked wonders for children, sailors, perfumers and unmarried girls. Legend has it that he kept three girls from selling themselves into prostitution in order to support their aged father by going to their house at night, opening the windows in the bedrooms for the first two girls and leaving a bag of gold. The window of the third girl was locked, so he dropped the gold down the chimney into the third girl’s stocking that wear hanging on the fireplace mantle to dry.”

“Sounds familiar, I see why Angel likes this guy: something for nothing.”

Igor and I stopped for the day because I needed to leave for the airport to meet my friends arriving from London.

My hope that Angel cared about me more than a means for working in America was clearly on the ropes. All her smiles and affectionate words apparently met nothing other than to mask the truth—a manic drive for money and psychotic need to keep up appearances. Light started to pierce the stupor of my illusions. Angel saw me as just another in a long and growing line of suckers, albeit her best and most stupid one. Her denigration of me hurt, but I found especially sad what her words revealed about her character. It seemed as though the real Angel lacked what the fake Angel worked so hard at pretending to have: heart, compassion and self-

respect. She clearly knew what decency met for she outwardly acted that way. Her spoken words exhibited an understanding of ethical behavior, but inside virtue apparently held no sway—only selfish gain. I began to fear she was incapable of putting herself in the place of another person whom she hurt when material gain was at stake. Her diary showed that when she looked out on the world she only saw a reflection of herself. Any little slight stirred her to anger as though some lesser life form dared to transgress the laws of the universe by annoying her. She took offense so easily and held it to her chest as though it were a precious diamond that she could never let go and never forgive. From her perspective, all circled around the sun of Angel, which may be why in some instances in her dairy Angel didn't even refer to me when I was there. Perhaps I married the true egotist, lacking in empathy or remorse.

She and her mother's use of magic to gain their ends made them both look like mental cases, and Angel's mixing it with an apparent sincere devotion to a Christian God seemed hypocritically bizarre. Even if she found an illusion of power in practicing magic, how could she still believe in God, especially when Angel used a black magic-man—it just didn't make any sense.

“What about this magic,” I asked Igor. “Is this common in Russia?”

“You would be surprised at how many Russians believe in magic. They use it to catch a wife or husband, to win in a business deal and punish their enemies.”

“You're kidding? People really believe it works?”

“Absolutely! And it makes sense. In Russia under the Czars, Communists and now the Criminals, the average person always had little if any protection from the whims of the powerful or rich. Belief and the practice of magic satisfy the need to reduce this sense of powerlessness. It provides an illusion in which to hide from the truth of their vulnerability. Not just the

uneducated proletarians in the provinces believe but professionals and other accomplished persons because there is no other way to even hope to avenge the violation of their rights or win a confrontation. The courts don't work, it costs money to hire hoodlums and you need connections to influence government officials to do what they are supposed to."

"All right, magic becomes a substitute means for not only righting wrongs but causing wrongs or venting anger. And because there are no other means available to most people, it may actually work—in Russia! But how can someone believe in magic and God at the same time?"

"All Russians know that the use of magic to influence another person, rather than just to protect oneself, is black magic, which means that whatever harm you cause another will come back to you many times over."

"That's what I am saying. If Angel knows this why does she use it?"

"Because she believes her devotion to God through going to church, buying icons, lighting candles and praying will protect her from any harm that may result from her use of black magic.

"Very cunning and logically sound but I doubt any God would fall for it."

"She obviously believes so."

"So, she's conning God the same way she conned me and others"

"That's probably what she is doing and thinks it acceptable behavior.

"Somehow, I don't think it will work. So, when can we meet again?"

"How about Sunday? Same time?"

"Okay, see you then."

I met my driver and headed to the airport to meet my friends from London. All this nonsense about black magic, white magic, evil eyes, curses and spells was beginning to take its

toll on my system of rational beliefs. I tried to bolster my beliefs with the argument that while science's explanations, especially quantum physics, painted a strange picture of the universe and left many unanswered questions, the idea that any malevolent heart could use such mumbo jumbo to manipulate the forces of the universe made no logical sense. Still the thought nagged at my mind, what if it did work? Look at what happened to me in less than a year in Russia. I did something I vowed never to do—got married. And despite all the warning signs, married the type of person, which I always avoided through out my life because the emotional filth of such girls revolted me, not to mention the danger of disease.

I struggled to understand what was going on and came up with the theory that perhaps living in a country where most of the people believed in magic somehow influenced the time-space continuum to make magic effective. Maybe all the psychic energy from these millions of twisted Russian minds warped the laws of physics to make ancient rituals and beliefs work. If that were true, I was doomed. My logic and will couldn't save me in Russia. I hoped my friends' arrival would bring some sanity to my thinking. They lived in England that most civilized of modern countries, so their presence in Moscow might bring some modernity back to the medieval ages in which I felt trapped. At least they could help me fight magic with magic since, as my reasoning went, they both grew up in Jamaica. A voodoo ceremony to get Angel out of my soul seemed to make sense. But I didn't believe in the soul and why should an audit manager from a Big Five accounting firm know anything about voodoo. This was all nuts!

I Put A Spell On You (Again)

I showed my Jamaican friends, Carol and her mother Thelma, around Moscow, which to my surprised they liked even after being attacked by Gypsies. Bands of Gypsies used to regularly accost Western tourists in Moscow—picking pockets and stealing purses. These bands

of around eight boys and girls in their teens or twenties carrying what appeared to be babies would surround and jostle tourists pretending to beg for money but actually grab wallets, jewelry and purses then runaway. The young women used their apparent babies as psychological shields to deter tourists from slugging them during the pushing, bumping and robbing. In the wake of the apartment building bombings the previous year, the Mayor's security forces ran all the Gypsies out of Moscow. So when I saw a band of Gypsies in the metro, I was surprised but still warned my friends to stay alert. Unfortunately, we let our guard down by talking about our next stop and the Gypsies attacked. I stunned two of the mothers with a right to one's face and a left to the gut of another—the only type of argument a female understands. The Gypsies backed off liked the cowards they were crying that I hit a mother with an alleged baby in her arms. I moved in to pummel the two some more, but the entire group took off. I knew the babies these “virtuous” mothers carried were probably corpses or just dolls. My Russian friends previously told me that the Gypsies stole babies and used them or dolls to engender sympathy from tourists when begging. Even after an infant dies, the Gypsies continue to use it for a time heavily wrapped in cloth so as to create the illusion that the child still lives.

I turned to my friends. They were all right and had held their own against the mugging. Carol and Thelma had clocked a couple more of the attackers, but one Gypsy got away with Carol's wallet from her purse. Carol lost her credit cards, a little money and some identification but not her passport. I explained to my friends we could report the incident to the militia, which would take the rest of the day given the Russian addiction to paper work maximization and most likely yield no results even with the appropriate bribes. Besides, Gypsies in Moscow used only the cash they stole because the few Russian businesses, even the criminal establishments, would never accept a credit card from a Gypsy, not because they knew the Gypsy stole it, but because

Russians considered Gypsies spiritually filthy and avoided any contact beyond the exchange of cash. Carol decided to forgo the militia and contacted her credit card companies.

Thelma, as did Carol, well knew about my troubles over Angel and asked, “Do you think your wife sent them after us?”

“I didn’t even think of that, why would she?”

Carol interjected, “Maybe she’s afraid we’ll bring you to your senses.”

“What’s wrong with my senses?”

Carol laughed, “Look at you, all this talk about voodoo and magic and then marrying a girl like that. Where’s the logical lawyer I used to know?”

“Well you believe in magic, don’t you?”

“I believe in God and that evil people exist. But even your wife must have some good in her.”

Thelma added, “Well, there are strange things in this world and some very harmful, but only God can protect you.”

This didn’t do me much good since the idea of a benevolent intelligence running the universe seemed nothing more than a desire to find meaning in the tragedies of life where no meaning existed. Believing some father or mother-like figure occupied a hidden dimension from which it watched over mankind and guided events in its all knowing wisdom might allow some to accept the vagaries of life, but I believed in the “will” for changing matters.

The next day, my driver showed my friends around while I continued with my translator, Igor, delving the sordid life of my wife.

“Do you think we can finish today?” I asked.

“Let’s see. The last entry we did was February 19, 2000, and the next one is April 5. Are we missing part of her diary?”

“No. Angel under went a laser eye operation on February 23 and was unable to read or write for about six weeks. I assume that’s why she didn’t make any journal entries during that time.”

“So, we have from April 5 to May 23 to do.”

“That’s the day she surprised me by showing up at my apartment in the evening with the absurd story of hitching a ride from Krasnodar to Moscow with friends.”

“We should be able to finish today. What about the diary entries before you met her?”

“I’m not concerned with those now, maybe later, I don’t know. Let’s get the rest of this show on the road for now,” I said somewhat bitterly but hoping in my heart that there were no further painful surprises coming my way.

April 05, 2000

My God, so much time has passed! How much nerves took and how many troubles gave to me Mr. Hollander! On the March 01, 2000 mum and me moved to our new flat. He helped us along with my mother’s students. But it takes too much nerve to deal with his bloody philosophy.

I suffered so much because of him and all the work we had to do to marry at ZAGS. Just days prior to our marriage he said that he might cancel everything because I told him that I did not like to speak with him about my past. He infuriated me - I had to speak about Cyprus, about Mexico, that I was tired there and did not want and did not have sex there. Roy did take care of me but morally he was sucking me dry, I so went to the clairvoyant who gave me salts and sugars to admix into his food. His smile began to look like a smile of innocent angel. And on Saturday, March 11, 2000, I led him to ZAGS where we got married. It was merry! I did not accept it seriously; for me it was only business. I become so tired of him... He is a complete fool...

“Wait a minute,” I said. “She went to whom and for what to put into my food?”

“The word in Russian means a person that has powers to solve problems, make people do things and see the future.”

“Another magic-man?” I asked derisively.

“More than someone who just delves in the arcane arts. It’s a person very common in Russia who provides spiritual and everyday advice, reads cards or other signs to predict the future and provides herbs and other natural medicines. Many Russian seek out such people to help them with their health, love affairs, business and what not. Your wife went to one and got what she called “salts and sugars” that she put in your food. There’s no other way to translate what it was.”

“Probably some hocus pocus she had put on the salt and sugar for my food. What a darling?” But I arrogantly dismissed her actions as inconsequential. “Okay, let’s continue.”

At the end of March in the Miss Krasnodar beauty pageant, my friend Inna was awarded title “Miss Charming” and “Miss Russian Radio” – all thanks to Dmitri Morozov the photographer who taught us girls to pose with and without clothes. My friend Alena took the first place. After it we had such a party. I danced sometimes with Morozov and sometimes with one more young man. I danced so much that I was presented with a basket of “Silver Line” perfume. Then, when I went to the disco “Joy”, the manager Alexey Smolin told me that he wanted me and that I was driving him mad. He bought a bottle of Champaign. I was near to going with him.

Yesterday Katya and me had a nice time in disco “Orbita”. We corrupted a poor boy—kissed him, rubbed parts of his body while we danced, it was fun.

My mum went yesterday, April 4 in the evening to St. Petersburg. My God, help her! I got Roy to use his driver to take her from one train station in Moscow to another. While she was gone I got acquainted with Arsen whom I brought over to my flat. He is tall and looked like a good monster from a tale. We spent two days in my flat but then I tired of him sexually. I began to step aside from him.

God be praised, Arsen finally stopped calling me up. I was cold when I spoke to him last. He could not even help me tune my TV aerial and began himself to speak sarcastically about my stoutness.

What I had with Volodya! He took keys from Vadik. It was an old, badly groomed flat where Vadik’s mother recently hung herself. We had some wine and made love. We have done this many times before. Afterwards he had a rest and I was cooling. He is good at making love. We had it twice and the second time he even did not prepare. I did not come. He was preparing in an interesting way. It is strange, but I cannot finish unless I have a real man. He wanted me to make blowjob, but I can’t. For the past 1.5 years, I have been masturbating my customers nearly everyday and to have that in my mouth, I cannot. Roy will never understand my not making blowjob, because he is a man.

“This all happened after you were married, right? Igor asked.

“You’ve got it, about three weeks after the wedding. Ha! She couldn’t come to Moscow because her eye doctor didn’t want her to become excited from having sex or partying. What a low-life lying tart. Let’s continue.”

Roy wrote to me a letter saying how it was difficult for him to be alone. Frankly speaking, I cannot imagine what I will do with him in Moscow. Listen to his philosophy? To wash, to clean and to cook? And leave my mother all alone. And if somebody recognizes me and says something to him than all my work might be lost. If I loved him then maybe. I was infuriated by his words that I consider him just a good customer. I am so tired of his sixth sense. I told him I thought of him as boy friend since our second date. He is such son of a bitch, I was so angry with him. I believe that we have to discuss our relations so I can make him less suspicious. On the one hand, I would like that we remained friends, but he would not hinder my meetings with friends and I would give freedom to him. My God, give me wisdom!!!

For 2 weeks I have been running from 30 minutes up to 1 hour.

“No exercise was another of her doctor’s so-called orders for her three month recovery that apparently took only a couple of weeks.” I interjected

We gave interview about my eye correction for television. I described how many problems I had with bad eyesight. I spoke about transport, acquaintances, inconvenience of glasses, lenses irritate eyes. I had doubts before operation but now I am happy and I don’t want even to think about glasses except for sunglasses. It is so wonderful to see the world with your own eyes! My interview will be broadcasted next Sunday, in the program “Accent”.

It took a long time to make my second passport, because there was conducted an investigation from Maikop where I use to live. But thanks to God, I have now 2 passports. Maybe I will go for a week to Mexico and meet Alfredo to earn some money. But I need a good reason for Roy. It is dangerous, but I will see.

“Looks like my darling wife began planning a secret trip to Mexico after our engagement but before the marriage.” I again interrupted.

Katya and me went to discos. In “Joy” there was “Hit FM”, nice music. Last time some boys wanted to get acquainted with us, but they did not succeed, because we sat to a taxi accompanied by gangsters. I tried to seduce Alexey Smolin, to get him or anyone to help me renovate the ceiling in my flat but without success.

Katya fell ill high temperature and no voice. I had to put keys to Natasha’s flat in post box. I hope that everything will be all right, because I keep there all my secret things with my girl friend.

Alfredo called and I told him everything about Roy, about my plans. He accepted it with understanding.

My God give me wisdom, forces and patience, teach us and help us! My God, bless us!!!

Now I knew why Angel wanted to stay in Krasnodar rather than go on a honeymoon or live with me in Moscow—to party and whore around.

April 20, 2000

Now I am coming back from Moscow and my visit to Roy. I was intended not to take money from Roy in order to prove him that I do not treat him as a customer. When I arrived, he met me with pink roses, 11 flowers. I went to the church and immediately began menstruation – on Wednesday. That should keep him away. I ran along riverside. On April 18 I made a record – I ran for 1 hour and 10 minutes and covered approximately 9 km. I went to casting to “Vidi Vinci” for strip tease. Natasha Gubina liked me. She phoned to me a few times, I agreed and allowed to include me into database which cost to me \$50. I want to recompense this money.

It was warm in Moscow. I bought for myself lacquered shoes; it cost 25 dollars and 20 rubles, I bought as well two blouses, make-up, a pencil, and icons of angel to protect me. Roy presented to me a pot with flowers and in the evening he presented as well yellow and red tulips.

I had casting at Jabrail’s. He promised to me striptease, but I think he lied to me.

On Thursday we went to a disco. First we went to “Hippopotamus”, but it was closed. We wanted to go to another one, but Roy refused. He spends \$100 for a dinner but his greediness does not allow him to spend \$3 for a disco. We went to a disco in Tverskaya Street. There were few people but I had fun.

On Thursday we went to “Hippopotamus”. For an hour and a half I had been studying Latin American dances that they were teaching there. It was marvelous! But at 1 o’clock in the night Roy got tired and we left. He is a bore.

On Friday we went to Leo’s party. There were more girls than boys. I persuaded girls to go to Mexico. Leo said that Salvador felt offended with me, because I had love affair with Alfonso, I abandon him and he informed police. It is foolish. Leo simply feared that I can leave him and work for myself. I had to lie that I borrowed from Roy \$10,000 because I lost \$7,000 from my Mexico money so I could not pay Leo \$1400 commission. I will try to cooperate with him – look for girls ready to work in Mexico. Each girl will pay to me 100 dollars a month. My God, bless me!!!

Then Roy and I went to “Country bar”. There we saw a girl, his friend, Maria from England and her Moscow boy friend. She is pregnant from him. At first she didn’t like me but I remember Roy saying she was religious so I talked about God and won her over. Then we went to another place – there it was all the same. Some foreigners were looking at me.

On Sunday I made Roy take me to club “Dolls”. Entrance fee is 50 dollars per person. Girls are nice, but table dance costs 50 dollars and private striptease with more costs \$100. Roy was shocked by prices. I told girls about dancing in Cyprus and Mexico. Thank goodness Roy does not understand Russian. Then we went to RADISSON to a dance show. It was an excellent show and it continued for 1 hour. Praise to God, Roy did ask about my former life. The salts and sugars still work but his intuition caused him to say that I was cunning. I burst into tears and agreed that I was the worst, the most cunning etc. My tears worked. Roy began to sooth me. He said that he wanted to be nearer to me. For the first time he came in me. Oh, my God, whom I allowed to do it, I must have been drunk!

What will happen if I will not receive a visa to America? I will go – with Leo’s help – to Greece or to Venezuela and forget about Mr. Hollander. In June I am sure to go somewhere!

My God, give us wisdom, forces and patience! My God, bless me!!!
“Well, my wife clearly keeps her options open,” I remarked.

May 19, 2000

Angel’s entry started with “Now I am sitting in the airport and wait departure for Moscow.”

As Igor continued translating, I wondered what Angel was doing in an airport on 19 May 2000 heading to Moscow? That was the Friday she originally planned to visit her Grozny friend in Kannevskaya village outside Krasnodar, but, as she said, she postponed her visit until Saturday, May 20, to make some money handing out samples. Why would Angel fly to Moscow on Friday, back to Krasnodar to hand out samples on Saturday, the day she called to tell me about the delay in visiting her friend, then take a bus to Kannevskaya, a town that lacked telephones? Something was up.

On April 29 there was a show in dramatic theater. I was so glad to see my acquaintances. A good show, it lasted for approximately 3 hours. There were 50 models participating in the show. There were no free places in auditorium. That night my mum and me met Easter. We were inside church. During procession we were nearly knocked down by crowd. Nevertheless, it was wonderful!

My old boy friend’s mother had never phoned to me. She has now other interest for her son.

Katya and me walked. It was raining; the weather was cool. We went to club “Samson-16”. My former boyfriend, Alexei, was there with his girl; he always takes her along. In the break he disappeared without leaving a trace. He is scared of me. On the way from disco Katya got acquainted with Andrei in white Mercedes. I went with Andrei and Katya to the same place I tried to seduce Alexey Smolin. When Andrei made me ready for sex and I said I was ready, it turned out that what Andrei wanted was a surprise. He wanted sex with Katya and me at the same time. My friend Katya was against this and this upset Andrei and Andrei was left with nothing.

So that’s why I couldn’t reach Angel over Easter—figures.

Ma went away and this time I did not bring anybody home with me although I wish I had. So I came to Volodya. I told him that I want to go to a picnic out of the city and play. He began to refuse; he said that he had already gone out of the city with Vadik. I insisted and he admitted that he is married, he has a child, two years old, and he had married in 1998. His wife is from Kazakhstan but she is Russian. He lied, he wanted me and all the times we had sex he continued to lie. I was shocked.

My “husband” Hollander called Alfredo up. When Alfredo told me about it I wanted to reject everything. Just on that very day I passed money for visa to Italy. Roy felt why on that very day... He said that he was my husband and he wanted to marry me (but we are already married – probably, he wanted something more serious). He began to ask Alfredo about our relations. Alfredo did not answer, instead he called me up and we agreed that Azul was whom Alfredo wanted. Roy asked him how long Alfredo stayed with me in December; what was between us in Mexico and in Moscow. We agreed that Alfredo escorted me in my trips around Mexico, because he fell in love with Azul and they took me with them. Alfredo said that I was only a good friend of his. He was in Moscow for 1 day and half of that day he spent with me cashing the travelers’ checks and taking money off of debit card so I had all the money I earned in Mexico.

I was right about that fat Mexican lying to me that he and Angel were only good friends and the two scheming to deceive me. At least not all my facilities had failed me in Russia, and I assumed her visa to Italy was to go dance in Smolin’s ballet that she auditioned for back in March.

As usual in the Moscow airport there is something interesting. I had problems connected with a strange signature in my second passport. I spent the night not bad. I spoke to Dima who works in the circus and lived in Japan and in Italy. God send happiness to him. I phoned up to Hollander to explain I would not be home for his call on Monday because I was now on my way to the village two days late. He was suspicious and asked what kind of promotion, the name of the product, what exactly I had done. I just said the usual and would explain all details when I saw him. Then he asked how I could go to the train for Moscow and the visa interview without picking up things at my flat. This I expected and said I would bring all things with me to village. I think he is fooled. What will be with Hollander, with visa...

Praise to God, on May 20 I came to Milan.

“Milan!” I interrupted Igor. “What the hell is she doing there? She was supposed to be at Kannevskaya. So that’s what the Italy visa was for.”

“Shall we continue? Igor asked.

“Definitely!”

The man in customs was a fool but I had a ticket and I did not fear. He spoke a little Spanish. He asked: “What for did you come?” That is not any damned business of his. Alfredo met me and we went to “Lloyd” hotel. He was so happy. He gifted to me small diamond golden ring—the first man in my life to gift me diamonds. He presented me earrings and a chain. I gifted to him my portrait, caviar and sweets. We made love. In a few minutes I came.

We went for a walk in Milan, talked to each other. The next day we went to Florence. It took three hours – we went by a speed train. In Florence we visited museums. There Alfredo

gifted to me golden earrings and a golden ring with a garnet. When we went to Florence the train was practically empty and we touched each other, giving a start if somebody was passing by. We returned in the evening, approximately at midnight. We were tired but we went to a disco where they played Latin American dances. I danced so good that a few girls began to dance with us.

The next day (May 22) in the morning we went to agencies for lap dancers but none of them was interested in me: they wanted another kind of girls - dark-haired and swarthy. It means that this is not mine. Then we went to Venice. On the way Alfredo was kissing me telling me he wants me. He was obsessed that I was taking advantage of him—wanted him only for money. We sailed along channel in a little steamer. Then we went to a square where there was a church. We were there only for four hours but it was marvelous. Alfredo kissed me, told me that he wanted me, embraced me. Roy never behaves like that - he always fears something. He fears that I will take his money and he is always tensed. Having come back we went to a nightclub where the girls sell sex. There were a lot of Russian girls, and we chose one for one drink – 25 dollars. Alfredo danced with a girl and then he went away to the private room with her. I pretended to be jealous and he made excuses to me. But after it we had a storm of a night. I could not finish for a long time but he took the first position – when I was lying on the back and my legs were raised in vertical position. Yes and also the drops I took worked and I finished. I performed oral sex on him. We slept only three hours in the night. Previous night he did not allow me to sleep – touched, caressed. And in the morning I again finished quickly. And he is so happy when I finish. A wonder! And Roy is simply a fool. After it I can hardly expect that I will want him!

Alfredo paid me \$600 and wanted to give \$100 more, but I refused. My God, send to him health and happiness! In the street a woman asked him to buy her an ice-cream and he did it! A man at the station asked to give him some money – he had not sum sufficient to buy a ticket - and Alfredo gave money to him. This is what I call humanity. Alfredo has a very generous soul and heart. My God, send to him all the best!!!

And now it is very important to me to extinguish all evidence. I closed package with adhesive tape and tried to hide gold and money. I hope so Roy did not learn anything. Amen!
I thank you my God for everything; bless me!

Igor looked at me and said, “I’m sorry.”

“So am I, so am I.”

Once again a man is felled by the archetype of the twisted, treacherous soul marked by the prettiest of faces and pretending to be lost and helpless so a man will want to save her.

Angel’s latest but worst deception was now clear. She used her second passport to meet Alfredo in Italy in order to keep the customs’ stamp out of her original passport because I would need to show it to INS during her visa interview. She must have applied for the second passport around the same time she sent me the Valentine Day’s card of love, flowers and inveigling me to have

clean feelings for her. “Clean feelings,” what a hypocrite! Tricks, lies, deception, they’re meat and drink to her.

In April and May while she planned her Italian assignation and committed adultery with one guy after another she sent me cards in which she proclaimed, “My love husband! I’m so miss on you, but I must help my mother. I send you this picture of spring flowers from all my heart. I kiss and hold you. You present me the best moments of my life and with special love. Your wife.” What a mistress of deceit! The story about visiting her friend in Kannevskaya was the cover with the Saturday May 20th telephone call coming from the Moscow airport while she waited for her flight to Italy. Her original cover was probably that stuff she told me before our wedding in March about going to Italy to dance at the end of May. For some reason she discarded that one but over the months she maintained a cool pose while waiting to pull off her coup.

What a revolting development this was: my wife of three months rendezvousing with a fat, middle-aged creep from Mexico. I knew there was a reason why I always hated Mexico. Apparently time didn’t flow like a stream in one direction but was more of a swirling gas that could make the future a cause of the past.

When my roller coaster ride hit bottom, the anger came—time to get this slut out of my life and teach her a lesson in justice.

“Well, it’s over,” I said to Igor as we parted.

“That is best. Bad girls like her are a disgrace. They’ll drag you down because they are no good.”

“You’re right Igor. Thanks for the help.”

Cathy's Clown

I walked back to my apartment on Kutuzovsky Prospect outraged and set on retribution. My plan consisted of showing Leo the section of Angel's diary where she described cheating him out of \$1400—not a small sum in Russia. Knowing Leo, he would intimidate her into paying and then stop doing business with her because she didn't swindle a little—like all his girls—but a lot. Handing over the money would hit Angel where it hurt—in her avarice and, especially, her ego. She fed her arrogance with victories gained by a win-at-any-cost attitude. She ignored all the rules, but like all cheats, whenever she lost, even a minor engagement, she crumbled and pleaded for what she never showed others—mercy. The ending of her business relations with Leo would also block her alternative plan to work in Venezuela or Greece and leave her scrambling to find another agent to provide visas and club contacts outside of Russia. Naturally the marriage was over, and since I had her visa documents needed for entry into America, she wasn't going there. When I walked into my apartment, I declared to Carol and Thelma I was going to get divorced and brought them up to date on the latest from my wife's diary. When I told them about my plans for vengeance, they surprisingly argued against it.

“Why not? She deserves it. Don't you believe in justice?” I said.

Thelma said, “I don't think it's a good idea. It will get you nowhere. It will just come back and hurt you. You only torture yourself by walking around with your anger for her. Your anger doesn't hurt her—it hurts you. Just let her go and chalk it up to an experience.”

“Yea, Roy,” as Carol joined in, “You don't want justice, you want revenge and that will consume you while she's out doing what she wants and making her way in the world. She's like the aliens in the movie *Independence Day* except she goes from man to man taking what she can get and moves on.”

“She should be stopped then, or taught that if she keeps it up, she’ll pay.”

“But she is still a human being and like all people, a mixture of good and bad.”

Her statement struck a chord of understanding and some relief, but it wasn’t in the Roy I knew and alien words came out of my mouth, “You’re right! She’s both good and evil.”

“People like this are their own torture,” Carol continued. “You think she doesn’t feel pain everyday for what she does?”

“I didn’t see any of that in her dairy,” I replied.

“Believe me, she does. How could any human not?”

Thelma than said, “I had the same situation with my ex-husband. He went out with other women, so I left him, but then he came back and begged that I forgive him, promising he would change, so I gave him another chance. For a while he remained faithful, then he started playing around again. He just couldn’t help himself, and I learned that people don’t change and you can’t make them change. It’s best to stay away from them; just let them go their way and God will deal with them in his own way. You should forget her and move on with your life.”

Normally any appeals to God I dismissed as irrelevant and a mere manifestation of wishful thinking. Generally, religion held as much credence for me as magic. But these weren’t normal times for me. Metaphysical realities of good and evil kept breaking through my shields of reason, swamping me in a sea of confusion. The belief system I used for making decisions short-circuited. I was helpless to stop the anarchy sweeping up from my unconscious to rend my logic. I couldn’t stop myself from doing fundamentally stupid things and listening to others who knew less because I no longer felt confident to make decisions. Somehow the words of these ladies swayed me more quickly than I thought possible. Maybe because their growing up in Jamaica made them more attuned to dealing with the basic demons of nature that haunted me in

Russia. To my surprise and contrary to my long held beliefs about justice, I decided not to seek retribution and immediately felt somewhat relieved.

In the evening, my friends and I went to see Maria sing with her band. Maria and Angel had grown close primarily through their talk about God. Angel professed a literal belief, as did Maria. When I told Maria the truth about Angel, her soul rocked back in shock, her face convulsed into the anguish of having a knife sunk into her heart by someone she trusted. Seeing her reaction, I wished I hadn't told her. I never imagined she would take it so hard. Angel's glib words and uncanny knack to assume the persona that caused another person to open their heart to her claimed another victim. The illusion and reality were so diametrically opposite that Maria looked even more upset than me while her Russian boyfriend didn't seem surprised at all. He advised I just move on and forget about her.

Sunday morning June 11th, the three-month anniversary of my marriage, I lay awake in bed sensing trouble. I felt an evil presence surrounding me; the continuing metaphysical manifestations from Angel living in my apartment were trying to control me by befuddling my thinking, sapping my will. I finally accepted that magic worked, at least in Russia, as I watched it inexorably drag me into a malevolent maelstrom. Her magic created a fog of apathy and fear in my mind while erecting unexpected obstacles to any saving course of action—the trap kept closing tighter. Carol showed me my horoscope from the paper:

The more you think about a complex matter, the more uncomfortable you become. It doesn't matter how many angles you try to view it from or how many inventive ideas you try to come up with. You just can't seem to reconcile a need with the circumstance you are in.

But I wasn't dead yet. Angel's magic was not all-powerful; otherwise, I never would have found her diary. As with any human being, the magic practitioner can't foresee every occurrence that might interfere with her plans. Angel couldn't predict my friends' visit. I sensed

their roots in Jamaica and their Christian beliefs were keeping Angel's baleful magic at bay as long as they stayed with me in Moscow, but their flight back to London left the next day. Then I saw my escape—go to London with them. I told them my plan, and they said I could stay with them for a few days until they flew to New York where Carol needed to go on business. My escape route from the Dark Angel became clear—London and then New York, all the time in the protective company of my Jamaican friends. I reasoned that once in America, the Dark Angel's primitive earth powers would fail against the bulwark of the world's most modern and enlightened society. I bought a ticket and packed my bags. What I couldn't fit, such as blankets, furniture and a boom box, I gave to the orphanage where Maria worked and said goodbye to the insanity of Russia.

When we arrived at Heathrow in London, I bumped into Kroll's Chief of European and Middle Eastern operations. He always treated the people in Moscow decently, unlike my former boss, the lesbian Tiedemann. When I ran into him, I was planning on exposing the incompetence and criminal activities of Tiedemann to the president of the Blackstone Group that recently took over Kroll. But having relinquished my desire for justice against one female, I relieve the lesbian as well. None of these acts fit my nature as I remembered it before Russia, but now magnanimity made me feel like the member of a cult doing what the cult wanted.

On our way out of the airport, I pointed to the Concorde parked on the runway.

Carol asked, "What's special about the Concorde?"

"It's the fastest passenger jet made. It flies so high that it skirts outer space."

Carol looked at me with surprise and said, "Your whole face just lighted up and your eyes widened when you said that. I never saw you look like that before." And then I knew that my childhood dream of space travel was the direction I should have pursued all my life. Maybe

not as the astronaut I wanted to be but working in the field of space flight was clearly my first best destiny. Why didn't I understand that sooner? How did I forget what I knew as a child? But I didn't forget. All my life different experiences kept reminding me of my desire to explore the heavens through physics and space exploration, but at each opportunity I turned my back on my dreams. Was I so afraid of disaster resulting from the pursuit of something I loved? Did I fear that once I reached my dream, reality would show me the disappointing truth, as it did with Angel, and the dream would evaporate forever? Nothing made sense anymore.

Late one night in my friends' apartment, I told Carol about the time Angel took me to a black magic-man just before I proposed to her.

"You're kidding?" she said. "Why didn't you run out of there when you saw the black clothe on the table?"

"Because I didn't believe in any of that witchcraft stuff, and it seemed important to Angel, so I figured what's the big deal."

"The big deal is you ended up marrying a Russian slut whom I now see would just as soon cut your throat if she thought it would make her money. Face it; she'd follow a dollar to hell!"

"Probably."

"What's with you white boys always letting your girlfriends make chumps of you?"

"It must be in our genes."

"Where's the picture of you that the guy cast a spell on?"

I pulled it out of my suitcase and showed it to her.

"I know what to do with this. We're going to burn it, which is what should happen to that witch Angel." So on a dreary, rainy midnight in an upscale London apartment a young

Jamaican lady with an MBA and a middle-aged American lawyer, also with an MBA, ritually burned a photograph that a ruthless Russian witch used to marshal unknown forces of the universe to marry the lawyer so he would bring her to New York where she could make lots of money as a lap dancer.

Soon after waking the next morning, an epiphany struck my consciousness: Walking around with hostility towards others cuts a person off from fully living his life and pursuing his destiny. All my life I saw other people, even strangers in the street, as potential enemies with whom conflict seemed more likely than cooperation. I understood that, except for my few friends, I didn't like people because they scared me; and when someone is afraid, he hates others for causing him the humiliation and himself for allowing it. But where did this ever-present fear come from—my genes or the way my mother raised me? I opted for the culpability of my mother with some assistance from my father. Both of them were Nazis in the sense that they felt superior to others and believed themselves the sole possessors of the truth concerning any topic. In reality, they were scared little people without the courage or self-respect to say what they believed. Like Angel, they knew what was right; they just conveniently let it slip their conscience. For them every word, every act served their material desires or conformed to accepted beliefs of the small narrow-minded suburban town in which I grew up. The best advice their cowardice permitted them to articulate were the insincere admonitions of platitudes they hypocritically failed to follow in their own lives. Naturally the fear and trembling that ran their lives festered in me a view of the world as unfriendly, manipulative and hostile.

At birth, a child's brain contains virtually all the synapses, the switching centers for thoughts that a child will need throughout life. The newborn infant, however, lacks many of the connections between the synapses called dendrites. These dendrites are needed in order for

thoughts to flow through the brain from synapse to synapse. Most dendrites form in the child's brain from birth until the age of ten, as though constructing a superhighway system. The arrangements of the dendrites significantly depend on the child's environment, and a particular configuration apparently determines the child's behavior in a certain situation. The route that an electrical impulse takes through the brain can be analogized to a thought, so the thought depends on the route and the route depends on the roads it can take or how the dendrites are arranged. Where the dendrites are organized in a manner that allow thoughts that match the reality of a particular social order, than the person should function well within that society because his analysis of any situation will reflect reality and enable him to take effective action.

Another way to understand the crucial importance of the network of dendrites on a person's ability to function within a particular social order is to consider the arrangement of dendrites as the brain's program. When the body's five senses transmit messages to the brain, the program, or particular arrangement of dendrites, provides an interpretation as to the meaning of an event in the external society. The interpretation—whether verbal or emotional, which is the language of the unconscious—provides a person's conscious with an understanding or sense on which the person can decide a course of action. A functional program provides a person with an accurate interpretation and, therefore, effective action; whereas, a dysfunctional program presents a situation that does not exist, so the resulting course of action has no effect or just creates difficulties. For example, many times I wrongly interpreted a girl's look as an invitation when, in fact, it was only a tease to build her ego by tricking me into hitting on her. Consequently, because of significantly different upbringing and slightly different genetic material, some individuals are better able to draw the right conclusions about the world around them and act accordingly.

Lying in bed, my analysis seemed to make sense. The reason for the great success of the human species was its adaptability, which was made possible because the brains of its young were still partially unformed at birth. As a result, a human child born into anyone of different social orders: tribal, feudal, dictatorial, democratic or other, could adapt immediately given a local environment that accurately mimicked the society as a whole. For instance, American parents used to teach their children in words and by example that honesty was the best policy. Such conduct created a set of dendrites that allowed one person to rely on the word of another. This one simple concept programmed into most Americans enabled many people to assume that when another American gave his word, the odds were he would keep it. The former chairman of one of the Big Five accounting firms once said that his most valuable asset was his word. Keeping his word allowed others to rely on his promises and vice versa, which streamlined business transactions and provided a basis of certainty for future actions. America, however, has changed with the win at all cost zealotry of the political correctionalists. The PCers believe that only they know the truth and what is right, so whatever unethical or intolerant means they use is justified. That naturally requires a different strategy and set of dendrites to function successfully. Dishonesty is now the best policy in America, as it has always been in Russia.

Of a child's two parents, usually the mother exercises the most influence on the offspring, at least during the formative years, so the success or failure of an individual within a certain social system largely depends on her. The mother essentially transfers her dendrite structure onto the child by her behavior and words. A dysfunctional mother will probably yield a dysfunctional child. For me, my mother exercised the greatest influence during my childhood. Her unpredictable hysterics, narcissism, deviousness, cruelty and cold heartedness disposed me

to fearing most people but, ironically, not her or someone like her, such as my wife. With either of them, I felt right at home.

My epiphany on that day in London evaporated for a time my ever-present fear that manifested itself in hostility to people. But I didn't understand why this realization occurred now, so late in life. Perhaps taking my friends' advice to forgo retribution against Angel or the burning of my picture on which she had a spell cast or my escape from Russia, a country steeped in the dark underworld forces of a more primitive time, dragged from my unconscious enlightenment that no logic could convince me of believing.

Feeling no malice toward any man, women or witch, I decided the proper thing to do was write Angel a letter telling her the marriage, if one could call it that, was over and why. I was sure her contingency plan to go to Greece or Venezuela would kick in the moment I turned up absent from Moscow. No sentiment held her back when it came to business and money, but my own sense of fair play required I send the letter. I started with the usual opening lines that developed into a habit whenever I telephoned her. She often teased me about those lines by saying she knew who it was by my voice, although she sounded strangely appreciative of my inquiring into her well being as though she thought nobody cared, or was that just another of her feints:

June 13, 2000

Hello Angel.

It is Roy.

How are you?

Perhaps if I had opened my heart more and been more loving, we would still be together. But I do not think that whatever I said, whatever I did, whatever misunderstandings we had—none of those mistakes justified what you did to harm me from the beginning of March to Milan.

But I will always be thankful to the universe, for as long as I live, for bringing me, for a little while, a Good Angel and a Fallen Angel in one person. Your words as the Good Angel coupled with your actions as the Fallen Angel gave me a revelation. If a person goes through life with hate in his heart for other people, then he creates his own prison of self-torment from which

he will fail to see the beauty of life. I deeply thank you for that understanding and, as a result, I sincerely, from my heart, forgive you.

You once said that love meant trust and respect. I trust and respect the Good Angel, I always did, but given what I know now, I could never trust nor respect the Fallen Angel.

Sometime in the future, three little words will become more important than “I love you”. Those words will be “Let me help”. I tried the best I could to help you reach your dreams, but the Fallen Angel was too powerful for me.

I honestly hope your dreams still come true. Don’t give up; you will make it, if you sincerely respect people.

Goodbye my dear one.

I sent the letter by one-day delivery, and the next day flew back to New York City on the same flight as Carol and Thelma using what protection they could provide me against the reach of the Dark Angel’s magic. I planned to go back to college to study physics and spend the remainder of my life exploring the secrets of the universe. But only a fool makes any kind of allowance for hope and happy endings.