

Lovers in Saint Petersburg

Stories of a Reckless Girl

By Rozana Mihalache

December 19, 2010

“A flower bouquet for your girl, sir?”

The old lady cuts off his way and smiles at him with a snag.

“This is the last one”, says the old woman and hands him the small bouquet with violets. He is tempted to refuse it, moving it aside with his arm, and to walk away, but accepts it, for whatever reason, getting a few coins out of his pocket.

The old woman gives him an even bigger smile and bows her head. She spits the money and puts it down her bosom.

“Good luck, sir, may it bring your good luck!”

G. moves on, taking firm, quick steps. Several carriages pass him by, and a few acquaintances – clients of his from the bank - say hello. He greets them back, tipping his hat and hiding the violets behind his back.

Even though it's spring time, it's still freezing outside and the snow hasn't yet melted on the streets of Saint Petersburg. The man takes a turn onto a backstreet and stops in front of a small hotel. He takes a swift look both ways, and then goes inside. He goes up the stairs in a hurry, taking two steps at a time.

He stops next to a door. He straightens his coat and runs his right hand through his hair. He knocks. After a couple of seconds the door opens and G. steps inside the room.

Hardly had he offered her the violets, when A. already jumped into his arms.

“You came!”

They kissed passionately, almost desperately.

“How are you, what’s new”, he asked her with a faint voice, as if slain from the long kiss.

“Hold on, I’ll tell you right now...”

But she bursts into tears. Her whole body shivers.

G. holds her even more tightly in his arms and walks her over to the bed. They sit down on the side of the bed, and she cuddles up to his chest, like a child.

He pats her on the back, and talks to her as if to a restless girl.

“Hushh now... there, there! Have you been waiting for me long?”

A. nods affirmatively.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t able to come sooner. Would you forgive me?”

A. nods again.

He gently grabs her chin making her raise her head and look at him.

He takes his handkerchief out of his pocket and wipes her tears away.

He kisses her swiftly on the tip of her nose and starts rocking with her in his arms.

G. gets a glimpse of himself in the mirror on the wall and his gaze lingers upon his own face. He kisses her temple and whispers to her.

“We’ll find a way, you’ll see! Ok?”

She blows her nose and releases herself from the embrace. She goes to the window. She grabs her waist with her hands.

G. pours himself some tea from the samovar placed on the table in the corner of the room. He adds a teaspoon of jam and sits down on the chair near the table. He drinks his tea quietly.

A. breaks the silence with a trembling voice.

“Avoid people, keep out of sight, because otherwise...we would be seen as criminals.”

She starts crying again.

G. goes over to her and holds her by the shoulders.

“Give it a rest, sweetheart. You’ve cried a little, but that’s it. Enough!”

“I can’t imagine a way out of this.”

“How, how, how...we have to, you’ll see. We’ll discuss it together and we’ll find a solution. Just stop crying now.”

He hugged her and leaned his head on her shoulder.

They are both reflected in the mirror, with their backs turned.

“We’ll go back to Yalta, and from there we can run away wherever we want. Just the two of us. Somewhere.. somewhere far away, where no one would know us.”

“To run away from our responsibilities, how...”

“We wouldn’t be running away from our responsibilities, jut towards our new lives. A new life. And we’re going to have a house, with a garden and a swing...you’ll see...”

G. kept whispering about their future plans, into her ear, leading her into a dance without music, as night falls on Saint Petersburg.

(Short story inspired by the novella The Lady and the Dog by A.P. Chekhov)

Translated by: **Elena-Cătălina Bodolan** and **Mădălina-Ioana Borcău**

MTTLC, Bucharest University