

# **The Story of My Journey to Russia/Ukraine in 2002 Through Seven Cities in Search of Love**

**The most interesting and memorable six weeks of my life**

**By [Winston Wu](#)**

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## Introduction

Privet! ("Hello" in Russian) My name is Winston Wu, Founder of HappierAbroad.com. This is the story that inspired me to start the Happier Abroad movement. It is a tale of my search for love in Russia and Ukraine through seven cities back in Summer of 2002, which turned out to be the most interesting and memorable six weeks of my life. For the first time in my life, I finally lived and felt "alive", rather than stuck in a bored lonely rut where nothing ever happened, which was how most of my life in the US was.

This story took place in the Summer of 2002 from July 15 to August 31. It tells the story of how Russia became a part of my soul during my voyage through seven cities in Russia/Ukraine in search of love, and the valuable life lessons I learned. This is all of it uncensored - the good, the bad, and the ugly, unedited. I have described everything in a way that allows the reader to feel and experience each significant moment of the trip as I did, to provide a Reality TV experience. You may also download the journal updates I wrote during this trip and the subsequent at:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/Blogs.htm>

During this trip when I typed up my periodic updates in internet cafes and emailed them to my mailing lists audience, I was more pressed for time and therefore I could only summarize everything briefly. Now that I'm back home, I am able to take the time to write the story in its complete version. I know this may turn out to be long, but I promise not to make it boring. Although I am writing this two months after the trip, I am recalling all the details and experiences vividly, using my journal updates as reference.

I hope you enjoy reading this engaging account.

Feedback can be sent to me at my email [WWu777us@yahoo.com](mailto:WWu777us@yahoo.com) or contact form:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/contact.php>

Sincerely,  
Winston Wu

## Relevant links of interest

To view photos of the females and places described in this story, see my Photojournals, Photo Collage and Slide Shows at:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/Photos.htm>

You may purchase a copy of the video footage I took during this trip through this page:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/OrderRussiaVideos.htm>

As a result of the experiences and lessons from my Russia trips, I've written an advice guide for first time travelers to Russia and for dating Russian women too, available in my ebook catalogue at:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/ebooks.php>

If you feel enriched or benefited from my experiences and discoveries, you may help contribute to my site and movement by buying my ebooks, Russia Videos or joining one of my dating sites at these links:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/ebooks.php>

<http://www.happierabroad.com/OrderRussiaVideos.htm>

<http://www.happierabroad.com/MeetForeignWomen.htm>

Let me begin by explaining the background that led me to Russia/Ukraine in the first place.

## **The Problems That Drove Me to Search For Love in Russia/Ukraine**

After my ex-girlfriend Robin left me after 2.5 years of living together with plans to marry, my dating and love life has been almost non-existent. She left suddenly with no warning and no attempt to work things out or listen to me. It was like having one of your body limbs torn off instantly with no warning or negotiation or consideration for your feelings. (Imagine that!) It was the most sudden and devastating experience in my life, and worst of all, it came from the person whom I trusted most in my life.

After suffering in depression and agony, and being incapacitated for a few months, I left for Nevada to do a show with my friend there and stayed about eight months. I had a great time there, met many new people, got involved in show biz, did some paranormal ghost hunting investigations, got into some commercials and other acting jobs, and even got a new girlfriend. The experiences there recuperated me back to normal. The girlfriend I had in Nevada, though, only lasted 6 weeks. It was the most bizarre breakup I've ever had. Everything was going great until the last day, when after losing her car keys in the snow on December 2, 2001, she suddenly changed her complete attitude and behavior toward me. It was shocking coming from someone who was supposedly mature and well polished. I had been super nice to her, didn't make any of the mistakes I did with Robin, but eventually she saw red flags in every little thing I did, and twisted or used almost everything I said against me. After that, with the winter season and the declining economy, my work situation went downhill too.

With nothing left in Nevada, I went back home to Washington to figure out what to do next. Luckily for me, I immediately got a job offer for a position I applied for a year earlier with the State Employment Security Office. Ever since then my dating life has gotten nowhere. I would meet many women all around town and on the internet and almost all of them would say that they had a boyfriend, thought they were too good for me, or had some other excuse. To them, I was either not their type or we had nothing in common. Since I had a wide variety of knowledge and interests, this perplexed me. I didn't know what would interest these girls and how I would appeal to them. Since I was single and without a committed lover, I felt that during this period, I should be dating many girls and having fun, but noooooo my single life has never been like that, either here or in California where I grew up. Instead, it's always been one let down after another, getting nowhere and being ignored by almost every decent looking woman around me.

It seemed that girls wouldn't even talk to me unless it was for business reasons or pragmatic reasons (such as if they're a waitress, retail store worker offering assistance, etc.), and if I tried to change that by socializing with them or getting to know them, they would make me feel awkward like I was doing

something wrong. Gee whiz! How are people around here supposed to procreate and further the species if this is how it is?!?!?!?!? I know I know, maybe I'm just not good enough for them, but why? I am not fat or ugly, and most people consider me to be from decent looking to cute or handsome, so I couldn't figure out what the problem was, and neither could any of my female friends I asked.

I had this same problem in California too, before I moved up here in 1998 to be with Robin. Still, I persisted in my efforts because I'm not a loser or a quitter and I felt I deserved better than this. However, the reality was that most of the time when I met a girl here, we would have little to talk about, she would be unwilling and impatient to give me any of her time, there would be no chemistry, and nothing I said would sound interesting to them even though I had a wide variety of topical knowledge. Even when a girl gave me her number, she would never follow up on it. If I called her, she would either never answer her phone (screening her calls out), always say she was about to leave, or make excuses for not meeting me. It was a lose-lose situation all around. I never had them figured out, but someone must have, because most of these girls are seen around town with punk ass looking guys, who somehow managed to get these young hot American girls, which I can't.

I also tried meeting them off the internet too, through instant messaging and internet personals. Most of the time though, when I sent them my nice looking cute quality photo, about 60 or 70 percent of the girls would stop talking to me altogether. And as for the rest, when we met, if they were decent looking and above, then they would have no interest in me and give me bad apathetic vibes, and it would turn out to be a one time meeting, regardless of what they told me at the end of the date. The only ones that liked me were the most unattractive types that weren't even slightly proportional in weight.

Before I met Robin, this also happened for years in California as well. And these things would happen even when I followed those overused cliches like "Be confident and like yourself, and others will like you and be attracted to your confidence too." In fact, I have never found even the slightest correlation between your confidence and how attracted women are to you. When a woman has genuinely liked me before, she still would like me even when I showed low confidence, and when a woman was not interested in me, it didn't matter if I seemed confident or felt confident or not. She still didn't like me. And that other overused cliché that says that chicks like guys who don't need them, is often false as well. I have found that these cliches were true only if the girl was **ALREADY** interested in you prior. They don't matter if she wasn't interested in you in the first place. But people still spout these cliches like they are gospel truth or something. Very bizarre indeed.

Anyway, it seems that most white girls like punk guys, tall white guys, airhead jocks, or black or hispanic guys, rarely an Asian guy. The deck was constantly stacked against me no matter how hard I tried. And with all the hundreds of women I've pursued and tried to get to know, I only had three real girlfriends to show for it. Therefore, my hit rate with American girls was less than 1 percent. That's just totally unacceptable to me. When I lose a girlfriend, I should be able to replace her if I want. But this was ridiculous. When I was about to lose a relationship, being in this type of futile situation was what I always dreaded. This totally was against the freedom and choices that I felt that America should be about.

But unfortunately, America to me equals loneliness and disappointment and frustration. Americans, particular American girls, have always treated me like a misfit and outcast, not because I wanted to be, but because that's how I was seen, and how the chemistry between us was. Obviously, despite the media hype, America is not for everyone. I didn't have these problems with sociality and dating when I

lived for a year in Taiwan, for example. There, girls fought over me, and I was treated like an interesting and likable person. I did not feel that I deserved this. American girls treated me like I was a different species than them, a species that they didn't want to have anything to do with. I've always had trouble even getting into the same social groups as good looking white American girls. They don't even want me as a friend. And we don't usually have anything in common either for some reason, either because they wanted it that way, they have so few interests, or simply have no interest or desire in having me in their lives.

Again, all of this was unacceptable to me, and rather than everyday stomping my foot and getting frustrated and turning to God and saying "Come on!" in frustration, I looked for other alternatives to this problem. Before I met Robin, I had started looking into the Russian Mail Order Bride (which is a very derogatory term to these elegant princesses, but I use that term here only for identification purposes since that is what they are called in this country) business, but after I moved to be with her, I felt it was no longer necessary. I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life with her. I never thought that it would ever become necessary again. So Russia and its women were put out of my mind for years. Now, I was mysteriously drawn to it, like it was a last hope for me.

The reason I did not pursue Asian women of my ethnicity instead was because I am generally attracted to Caucasian women, and find very few Asian women to be attractive. In addition, Asian women tend to have values and interests that are very different than me. I know because I grew up in California and have even lived a year in Taiwan (where I was told by some people that my mentality was too different from the Taiwanese women to be truly compatible with them) and knew many of them.

So the logical choice seemed to be Russian women. I started using the most popular websites to get addresses or emails to those Russian women I found attractive, to start correspondence with them. Contrary to common perception, you can't just order a bride to be sent to you. You have to write her first, narrow down your choices, and then visit her in her country. It is almost impossible for a girl there to get a visa to the USA, not even a tourist visa. The only way is to visit her, and pick the right one, and apply for a fiance visa with the US Embassy there, and the whole process could take between several months to 6 or 9 months. And furthermore, I did not feel that the term "Mail Order Bride" was appropriate. In fact, it was both demeaning and false. First of all, you can't order them to come or write you. All you can do is order their contact information. The rest is just like the internet personals process here in the USA. You write each other and see how much you have in common. Second, the term is demeaning to them. Most of these are intelligent attitude free women who are more intelligent and nice and attitude free than most American girls, for sure. (that I can guarantee you after my trip)

At first, I felt awkward about this whole process because it is against the norm in our society. Nothing in our culture or media encourages this kind of thing. In fact, people often look down on it and those who do it are seen as losers and misfits that couldn't make it with American women. (even if that was true about me, hey it wasn't my choice to be unsuccessful with American women!) So I felt ambivalent about it at first, but the process had an exotic feel to it as well since we were dealing with women from the other side of the planet. Eventually though, I found many logical reasons why I had to do this. I made a list of them in fact. Here they are.

1. First of all, in the USA, I do not have my choice of young attractive women because I am not considered attractive by this culture's standards and women do not consider me "dating material". I can't even get decent looking women. It seems the only women that really like me here are

unattractive, heavyset, desperate women, which is totally not my type. On the other hand, in Russia I have my choice of young attractive women to choose from. For some reason, I am considered attractive and relationship material there, not just because of my US citizenship either. Therefore, it is much more logical to look for a serious mate from Russia because I have my choice from available attractive women with good values, whereas here I have no choices and many factors (described below) are against me. Wouldn't you rather have choices than no choices? Therefore, where there were no choices, I had to take action to create choices.

2. The second reason is that even when I can get relationships with attractive women in America, they will not stay long because our culture and media teaches them that whenever there is a problem in the relationship, to just get out and forget about the guy. Our culture has always encouraged selfishness, and that is no mystery. They are not faithful or stable in relationships. They do not try to solve the problems in their relationship. They will only stay during the good times, but bail out during the bad times. You can give them your love, time, heart, and money and in the end they will show their true colors because it was all about them and their needs all along, not yours. This is usually shocking the first time for those who have never experienced it. I do not believe this is how true love should be. My relationships with American women have also been this way. I do not want to give my heart and love to someone again if they are just going to throw it in the garbage when they are done. I am getting old and do not want to waste time with the games that American women play. I don't have energy for that anymore. Russian women on the other hand, are generally known to be giving, supportive, and faithful to their husbands. They aren't perfect of course, but at least they are much CLOSER to being this way than most American girls are. Both Americans who know Russian women and Russians have concurred with this image of Russian women.
3. The third reason is that attractive women here do not want nice men. They may say they want a nice man, but their actions will not lead them to be with one. Most of the attractive women here only want to be with jerks who treat them bad because it is more challenging to them. Men who treat them good are boring and not interesting enough for them. They need the drama of trying to change someone. I cannot treat someone badly because it is not in my nature and character to do so. I know all this sounds crazy and sad, but it is the truth. Even American women will not deny this. Russian women, fortunately, do not have this tendency to prefer jerks over nice men. They tend to be more evolved than that.
4. The fourth reason is that most attractive American women appreciate different qualities than my qualities. They prefer tall athletic white men, rather than short cute intellectual deep Asian men. They do not find me ugly, but I do not have the qualities and features that they value. This has been my experience from pursuing hundreds of American girls before, observed couples, talking to them, and observing their preferences described in their personal ads, etc. Although I have many fine qualities over most American men such as intelligence, intellectualism, high understanding, artistic abilities, sensitivity, inner qualities, romantic traits, diverse interests, and deep soulful qualities, etc. these qualities are not appreciated or sought after by most young attractive American women. Instead, they are seen as weaknesses. On the other hand, Russian women who see my photo tend to tell me that they can see qualities they like in me such as those above. The evidence for this is obvious. Besides pursuing many girls here, I have also put many photo personal ads in places such as Match.com and have gotten no responses. The girls that I respond to on those personals hardly ever write back to me when I send them my photo. On the other hand, many beautiful young Russian women have written back to me to express their interest when I sent them the same photo, and told



me the qualities they see in me from my photo, and given me many compliments. They've also written me first when I placed a photo in their online services and expressed their interest in me. This has gotten me even more excited about them.

5. The fifth reason is that I have much better personal chemistry with Russian women. With American girls, almost everyone I meet in person soon concludes that we have nothing in common and/or that I'm not their type, offering vague explanations that I can't use to pinpoint the problem with. On the other hand, my online and phone conversations with Russian girls were much more lively, enjoyable, natural, deep, intellectual, and less awkward. They were usually left with both of us still interested in each other. They made me feel warm and likable. And even with the Russian women who don't speak much English, I still have more to talk about with them than with most young American girls who can only say "Yeah", "Yeah", "Really?", "Cool", and "Nice meeting you", which leads nowhere except more boredom and loneliness. Therefore, I have much better chemistry with them intellectually, emotionally, and naturally. After knowing some Russian women, you realize that they act the way God intended women to be, and you also realize that the way American women are is far off from the real norm.

So you see, my objective is to have a long term relationship with an attractive woman with good values. There are so many undesirable factors here working against me in that endeavor. It is much more LOGICAL and PROBABLE that I can obtain that objective with Russian women than with American women. Does this all make sense now? Eventually, I realized that no matter how scared I was to go to a foreign country and not know the language, anything was better than the alternative, which was to stay here in this crappy town for the upcoming summer and continually be ignored by the women here, and have nothing but boredom and loneliness to look forward to everyday. Would you want that? Therefore, in a situation where I didn't have choices, I had to take action and CREATE choices. I was brave, resourceful, and determined. Anything was better than more weeks and months of regret for not living the life I wanted. What's the worse that could happen? After all, as the saying goes, "You regret more the things you didn't do than the things you did do." What it comes down to is that the fear of regret was much greater in me than the fear of doing something unorthodox.

## **The Big Picture**

Despite all the above explanations, here's the big picture. Each day, week, month, and year that goes by is gone forever and never comes back. Therefore each moment that goes by is precious and priceless. Looking back on the last ten years, I don't see that many happy special memories, except a few moments, which is not as much as I would like, especially if you compare them to the whole. Here in the USA, I don't really have any fun, don't get invited to parties, don't get female companionship, don't get dates, never get to do anything hip, never get to be popular, don't get any attention or get taken seriously by the opposite sex, don't have good times with cool people, etc. Almost 100 percent of American girls that I ask out give me nothing but stupid excuses of one sort or another. And even when I do have occasional slices of these things, it's always rare, short and fleeting.

Most people on the other hand, have had their fair share of all of these things. You hear young people talk all the time about the wild, crazy, fun things they did all the time, and the people that were with them. There is little I can do about all this because it all feels like it's the natural way it should be due to my chemistry, vibes, and place in this society. It's not about what I do or don't do, but about intangible things that are difficult to define. All of this is totally unacceptable to me, and I don't think it

should be this way. I believe that I should have choices. I believe that I should have a choice in whether I want to be alone tonight or not. I believe that I should have choices in whether I want to be dating or in a relationship or not. I believe that I should be able to find people to have good times with when I want to. Instead, life here gives me none of these choices and just forces me into having nothing. A big part of the reason for this is that people here are generally snobbier than the rest of the world, and have such high standards for things. People just don't seem interested in having me be part of their lives.

Therefore, life in America for me has been mostly filled with loneliness, disappointment, emptiness, rejection, frustration, isolation, and alienation. In fact, when I even hear the word "America" the next word that comes to my mind is "loneliness". That's how bad it is. Most people, on the other hand, have choices in these matters. How often do you hear the news claim that these kind of things are national problems? (Many victim-blaming Americans will try to blame me for these type of things of course, because they like to blame those who complain and whine, but they can't logically do so because I am the one actively trying to change these things.)

As I already mentioned, I feel a lot of regret toward the past ten years. I have learned many things, but I didn't get my fair share of good times, happy memories, and special moments. I feel like I've wasted most of my youth already. I don't have many years of youth left, and you're only young once. Therefore, I don't want to waste anymore years in regret. I find it pointless to follow the ideal of corporate America and become a slave to money and work, when there's no good times, female companionship, love, special moments, special memories, etc. to go with it. As the wise will tell you, the most memorable moments of your life don't involve money. Looking back on the last ten years and on my childhood before that, I see a huge deficit that needs to be made up. Therefore, rather than continuing with all this, having each moment pass by in regret, disappointment, and loneliness, and being deprived of female companionship, affection, and love, I believe in taking action. Since I have all these things I want in Russia, it's obviously much better for me to go there and help close some of these deficits.

Regardless of any condemnation or ridicule I may receive, the simple truth is that I was GIVEN a loser status in my society, and thus treated as such. I NEVER EVER asked for it or earned it! And that is the honest truth, so help me God.

Simply put, I have needs. But my position and status in the dating/mating game here does not allow me any way to fulfill those needs. Girls do not want a relationship with me, nor do they want casual sex with me. They either only want friendship, to be an acquaintance, to use me, or nothing at all to do with me. That puts me in a position where I am forced to resort to extreme methods and tactics (since "extreme situations require extreme measures, but I won't even go into what extreme things I've done), one of which is going abroad and doing the Russian bride-seeking route.

## **Preparation, Plan and Strategy**

I began the process by searching through many internet marriage agencies and browsing the photos and profiles. I used a variety of them. They each had their own policies. Some of the sites were free, others you had to pay a small cost for each address you order, and others you paid memberships for to get unlimited access to all the addresses. And some were a combination of the above. Some of the addresses contained emails too, others didn't. I created a nice form letter to send as well as my printed photo. I sent these both through postal air mail and emails when that was unavailable. I got great

responses to my form letter and photo. A lot of gorgeous women who would never have given me the time of day in the USA started writing me back and expressing interest. I know that many people who hear this will suddenly think "Yeah, well that's because they want to use you to get a visa to America" but that wasn't really true, and I'll explain that in detail later on.

Later on, I also joined a moderated email discussion list relating to this topic called RussianBrideList@yahoogroups.com. I learned a lot from this list which helped me prepare for the trip, including do's and don'ts, what to bring, how to behave in the culture, etc. A common topic on this list was whether it is better to go visit just one woman and risk putting all your eggs in one basket, or visit many women and risk them being angry if they found out about each other. I had this concern as well. What I learned was that although both methods had their risks and advantages, most men who have been through this process found that the visit many women strategy was the best one. If you put all your eggs in one basket and things went wrong, then you would have wasted a lot of time and money. Therefore, it was best to narrow it down to several top candidates in terms of compatibility and visit them. Still, a third strategy recommended to me was to visit them in order of the most compatible woman to you, and if it worked out, then to stay with that woman the rest of the trip and cancel with the rest, and go from there. I thought of doing that too, but then I would have to break my promises to the rest, and besides, even if I hit it off with the first one, I'll never know if the next one is better. However, the women I arranged to visit lived in different geographical areas, and they each had their own time and vacation schedules around school and work, so that was what I took into final consideration when I finalized my plan.

After several months, I narrowed it down to 3 primary women, Olga in St. Petersburg (Russia), Julia in Cherepovets (Russia), and Elena in Mariupol (Ukraine). (I have to admit that all three of these were attractive sexy blondes, whom I have least experience with even though I find them the most desirable!) I would start with Olga in St. Petersburg because not only was it where one of the nation's major international airports was, but since that city was considered the crown jewel of Russia, I felt that I wanted it to be my introduction and starting point to the country. Besides, I knew that I could more easily find English speaking people to help me if I was in one of the big cities. Here was the strategy I formulated. I would make this trip a total of six weeks from July 15 to August 31. The first four weeks would be in Russia and the last two in Ukraine, due to financial cost and visa limitations. Since the first two primary women lived in Russia, I would split my month there in half, reserving two weeks for each of them. For the third one in Ukraine, I would reserve the next two weeks for her, but not more because by then I knew I would have already spent a lot of money. As backup in case things went wrong and opened up available time, I would bring the contact information for the backup ladies as well as for some local agencies that could arrange on-the-spot introductions. If I did not click with the primary women, and therefore my time with them ended early, then I would use the remaining two weeks I reserved for each of them to visit the backup women, arrange other introductions with the local agencies, or just mingle and meet women there on my own. Here was the outline of the strategy.

#### **I. Week One and Two, July 15 to July 31, in St. Petersburg, Russia.**

**A. Primary Plan: Visit Olga and see how things go. Accommodation in hostel because I was on a budget and did not want to pay for an overpriced hotel or apartment. Besides, in a hostel I can meet people and travel around with them, whereas in a hotel and apartment, it would not be as easy to meet people.**

- B. Alternate Plan: If things went wrong, then call my backup lady in the same city, and call some local agencies such as "A Foreign Affair" to arrange more introductions. Or tour the area with people from my hostel or the locals, and meet women there on my own.**
- C. Second Alternate Plan: If plan B didn't get anywhere, then I could just leave early to visit my next girl in Cherepovets.**

## **II. Week Three and Four, August 1 to August 14, in Cherepovets, Russia.**

- A. Primary Plan: Visit Julia and her friends and family. Accommodations would either be in Julia's home or in her parents' second flat.**
- B. Alternate Plan: If things went wrong, I had no backups there and no agencies were in the area, since it was a small non-tourist city, so I would just leave early and go to Ukraine to have more time with Elena.**

## **III. Week Five and Six, August 15 to August 31, in Mariupol, Ukraine.**

- A. Primary Plan: Visit Elena in Mariupol. Accommodation in hotel she recommended there. If things go well, we might go away together to the beaches of Odessa or city of Kiev.**
- B. Alternate Plan: If things went wrong, I had several other backup girls in other parts of Ukraine that I could go visit. And the contact information for several agencies in the country as well.**

Now, my objectives here was not necessarily to get engaged during this trip (although I was open to that possibility), but to:

- 1) Narrow down the field to the best candidates for a long term serious relationship/marriage,**
- 2) Date a lot of women (which I've always dreamed of doing but never done) and have fun,**
- 3) Satisfy my wanderlust for travel, experience another culture, learn things and have new experiences.**

After doing some research on travel agencies and visas, I got visas for both Russia and Ukraine from a travel agency called GoToRussia.net (recommended to me by the email list), and reserved my plane tickets for July 15 to August 31 through them as well. I would arrive in St. Petersburg, Russia, but my departing flight would leave from Kiev, Ukraine. Originally, I was supposed to fly on Aeroflot, a Russian airline that had the lowest prices on airfare to Russia. However, since I would be returning from Kiev, Ukraine, the Aeroflot flight from there back to the USA would have to land in Moscow first and I would have to transfer flights. Unfortunately, this would mean that I would have to re-enter Russia, which would require a double-entry visa rather than a single-entry visa. (yes, even just transferring flights at the airport counts as a re-entry!) I researched the cost and found that the increase in the price of the double-entry visa made the total expense equal to the higher priced fare on Lufthansa airlines, which had a direct flight from Kiev to the USA that wouldn't require a transfer in Moscow. Since the travel agent told me that Lufthansa was a better and more comfortable airline, and more reliable as well in terms of its schedule and timeliness, I felt that I might as well just go with Lufthansa then. I also brought some gifts, candy, and wine for the three ladies I was going to visit, my big travel guide, pocket Russian-English dictionaries, mini-phrasebooks, and plenty of cash, ATM cards, credit cards, visa documents and papers, passport, and papers with all the ladies' and agencies' contact information on them. Everything was all set, to the best of my knowledge. Whatever happened beyond that would have to be dealt with on the spot and with my resourcefulness (which has always been my forte).

The issues that I didn't have the details worked out for were the transportation issues within these two countries. I knew that I would have to ride the train between cities, which was the common and best way, but since it was too much trouble to try to reserve the train tickets beforehand, I knew I would have to figure it out when I got there. I only hoped it wasn't too much trouble. Fortunately, I heard train prices were very cheap. I figured that in St. Petersburg, since the hostel staff spoke English really well, they could help me out, give me directions, or write where I wanted to go on a piece of paper in Russian to take to the train station. And in Cherepovets, I could get Julia or her family and friends to help me buy the train ticket to Ukraine, and just tell them that I wanted to make use of my vacation and tour that country as well. As for Ukraine, I could just get Elena's help in getting train tickets to Kiev for my flight home, which wouldn't require any excuses. The one problem I dreaded was how to contact Elena in Ukraine while I was in Russia. You see, I gave her the impression that I was visiting her first (for obvious reasons) and during the month before visiting her, I knew she would expect some regular phone calls to discuss the plans of my arrival and accommodations. However, since I was to be in Russia for a month before visiting her, I was not sure how I would manage regular phone calls to her, since calling Ukraine from Russia is much more expensive than you would expect. And besides, I wasn't sure if when I called her from Russia, if I should tell her that I was in Russia and deal with explaining it to her, or if I should pretend that I'm in the USA, in which case I couldn't complain about expensive short phone calls because my calling card from the USA only cost me about 10 cents a minute there. Now this was a sketchy gray area that I wasn't sure how I would deal with. Perhaps, I thought, I could just send her a letter from Russia and explain to her why I couldn't call.

## **Week One: The Wonders of St. Petersburg**

### **Chapter 1: The departure, flight and arrival in Russia**

As the weeks approached the departure date for my trip, I felt more and more nervous. I knew this was a venture into the unknown, and that anything could happen. The uncertainty of it all made me feel anxious, especially since I was going to be in a foreign country where all the rules I knew didn't apply. I started packing a week before my departure. The day before my departure, I spent the whole day packing. It ended up taking much longer than I thought, since I kept looking to see what I missed. In fact, it took up the whole night til dawn, so I did not even get any sleep before the flight. The next morning, my parents drove me to the Seattle Airport. I was to fly to Chicago first on United, then transfer planes and take Lufthansa to Frankfurt, Germany. From there, I would transfer to another Lufthansa plane and head to St. Petersburg, Russia.

During the flight to Chicago, I became so nervous that I kept asking myself "I can't believe I'm really going to Russia for real! What am I doing? Am I crazy? This is so unorthodox. I'm going to a foreign unknown country where anything can happen! It's a voyage into the unknown, and I'll have to trust and hope that a higher power will be watching over me!" Still, I kept wondering if all this was a big mistake. I knew it wasn't and that I had made the right decision, but human nature and the fear of the unknown kept putting these doubts in me. I tried to keep myself occupied by reading my travel guide most of the time. Near the end of the flight, as I went to the bathroom, I noticed a sexy young white girl that was all arms and legs sitting by herself. After mustering much courage, I sat next to her and asked if I could sit here and hang out, and she said "sure". I tried to make conversation, but after a while, she

asked me to leave and I did so, thinking "I'm glad I'll be getting away from these snotty prudish American girls."

At Chicago's Ohara Airport, I had a few hours layover, so I went to eat at a Mexican grill place in the airport, and chatted with an American businessman there who was transferring to the same flight as me. He was on his way to Germany again after returning from there a few days ago, because of a business emergency that came up. We talked until the time came to get on the Lufthansa flight to Germany. Since this was a long distance across the Atlantic flight, it was a big 747 plane. Onboard, I marveled at how clean and luxurious looking the interior of the plane was. It was much better than any American or Asian 747 airline jet I had ever been on. I noticed that almost everyone on the plane was German. It appeared that I was the only one there who would be transferring to go to Russia. Not surprising I guess, given the number of flights going there. Oh well, I'm sure I would find some Russian people to talk to on the flight from Germany to Russia. The meals they served on this plane were also much better than any airline food I had before. But most of my thoughts were preoccupied. I couldn't stop thinking about what a big step this was, and I kept feeling nervous when I realized that I had absolutely no idea what lay in store for me the next six weeks.

During the flight, I talked to a nice German girl next to me who was on her way back to Germany after spending a year as a foreign exchange student in Texas. While I was talking to her, I thought "Wow these European girls sure have intelligent and substantive things to say. Their words reflect an inner life that is well developed and sophisticated, and without snobbiness or attitude. If this were an American girl, we would have ran out of things to say after 5 minutes, with nothing left to say except 'yeah' and 'cool'. This is neat. I hope the girls in Russia are like this too."

After the inflight movie, the lights were dimmed and the window shutters were pulled down. It was sleep time. Now was my chance to catch up on some sleep that I missed the night before while packing. It seemed like I woke up many times and tossed and turned. Sleeping on planes is so hard. I don't know how people do it. When I woke up after who knows how many hours, the onboard TV screen showed a map that indicated that we were above London.

When we arrived in Frankfurt, Germany, I had a five hour layover, so I walked around and shopped. It was a fancy looking airport, and I was enamored at the mix of so many people from around the world at that airport. Apparently, this was a big transfer airport, just like Chicago was. Unfortunately, the people working at the airport shops didn't seem that friendly. "Oh well" I thought. "This isn't America, and so I guess I can't expect the fake clichéish customer service smile that is mandated back in the USA." I bought a few postcards of Frankfurt to send some people. When I sat down at a coffee/espresso cafe to write on them, I sensed lots of smoke around me. "Wait a second." I thought, "Smoking is allowed in this airport?" As I glanced around, I noticed that every single person in the cafe was smoking, except me. I guess Europeans love to smoke. Oh well. While I was writing on the postcard, a group of Dutch tourists sat in the table next to me (yes they were tall) and starting making small talk with me. It was refreshing to finally run into some friendly people at this airport. It turned out that they were on their way back to Holland after visiting China.

Near the end of the five hour layover, I approached the gate to my next flight, and I sat down. An Egyptian girl next to me told me that there was an underground metro station below this airport, and that I could have taken the subway into the city of Frankfurt to look around. It was too bad I didn't learn this before, because that would have been fun, but now the time left was too short, and I'd hate to go

and risk getting lost too. At the terminal to my next flight, I finally noticed some Russian people in the waiting area. Now I can mingle and talk about my trip! One of my immediate concerns was how to get from the St. Petersburg airport to the hostel I had reservations at. I had heard from the email list that the taxis at the airport are mafia-run and will charge you as high as \$30 to \$50 to take you somewhere, compared to the normal rate of \$2 to \$3, and it is best to avoid them if possible. I would gladly do so, but the problem is that since my flight arrives in St. Petersburg at 11pm, the buses and metro system would be closed by the time I got through customs! Therefore, I had no choice but to use the mafia-run taxis! To avoid this, I thought I might find some people on the flight to split a taxi cost with. So I started asking around, but I found that almost all the people there were part of a tour and would be taking a tour bus at the airport. Later on, I met a Russian woman and a tall Asian guy who was from Los Angeles. They were both being picked up by people, so I could not share a ride with them, but they suggested that I call for a city taxi when I got to the airport. However, neither of them were sure whether there were any pay phones at the airport, and they weren't sure if I could even exchange my cash into Russian rubles there either because the exchange center might be closed when we arrived too! So the Russian woman offered to make a call for me to a taxi service on her mobile phone (what we in the states call a "cell phone") when we got to the airport. As we all small talked, I asked the Asian guy from LA, named Brian, if he was there to meet some mail order brides too, but he seemed vague in his response, so I left it at that. All I knew was that he was meeting a woman friend there. (I would later run into him again in St. Petersburg. Read the chapter on the second week for details.)

When we all got in line to enter the gate, it was suddenly announced on the air that the flight was overbooked (cause everyone showed up this time), and that they were offering money and a free night at a hotel in exchange for volunteers to stay behind and take the next day's flight. As no one volunteered, they kept raising the compensation higher. Eventually it was \$300 in cash and \$300 in credit toward future airline tickets, and a free night's hotel stay in Frankfurt. It was very tempting to me, and if I wasn't tight about my schedule and a control freak about it, I would have gladly volunteered. Eventually someone did volunteer, so we all proceeded onboard.

This was a much smaller Lufthansa plane, and not as fancy. On the flight, a young Spanish guy and a young Russian guy sat next to me. They were both very talkative and friendly. We all talked like old friends. The guy from Spain was going to be a foreign exchange student and live with a Russian family. The Russian guy was from St. Petersburg and was going back after some long boat trip, though I wasn't clear as to what it was for, but it sounded like it was his work. The Russian guy gave me advice about getting around St. Petersburg and what to expect, and he was so friendly and positive that I was hoping that all Russian guys would be like this.

After about two hours, the captain signaled that we were now approaching St. Petersburg. "This is it" I thought. As the plane approached St. Petersburg, I looked out the window and saw a lot of greenery all around. It wasn't like rolling pastures per say, but more like a worn and ancient landscape with some character to it. It looked very country and rural. I kept looking for big buildings and skyscrapers, but I didn't see any. As the view of the land became closer, I thought "Oh my gosh! I can't believe I'm actually about to land in Russia. I never thought in my life that I would ever visit this country. All my life I've heard nothing but bad fearful things about this country from the media and from my history teachers. To Americans, this is like the land of the forbidden, and now I'm here! I only hope I live to tell about it. If I do, it'll be something to be proud of, since then I can say that I've been to a country that most Americans are fearful and ignorant about." As I got excited about this prospect, with my adventurous appetite flowing, I realized that unfortunately, I had absolutely no idea what would lay in

store for me the next 6 weeks! It could be the best experience of my life, or the worst experience, or something I totally didn't expect! I also realized that I was now in a foreign country that I hardly knew anything about. It was like an alien land on another planet. Nothing I knew about how things are back in the USA would apply here. I had to drop all my preconceived notions and relearn everything from scratch, and go carefully one step at a time. After we reached touchdown, I suddenly realized that although it's supposed to be 11pm here, it was still light out. I asked the Russian guy next to me about this, and he explained to me that it was called "White Nights", which was a period of a few weeks in St. Petersburg every year in July when the sun would only set for a few hours, kind of like in Alaska.

When we all got off the plane and entered the airport, the three of us then exchanged email addresses and then got into the line for customs. Waiting in line, I noticed that all the signs and billboards in the airport were in Russian Cyrillic. "Oh great" I thought, "Now I can't even read anything around me. I'm illiterate now!" When I got to the customs lady, I noticed how gorgeous and cute she was, but she also had a frowned look and an apathetic one as well. I guess people here don't have to smile, which I already knew from my prior research. There was a good side to this though, because this also meant that since it was normal to look grumpy, people wouldn't be giving me BS pep talks for not smiling 24 hours a day like they would in the USA! (where people think there is something wrong with you and try to fix up your attitude if you're not positive and smiling 24 hours a day everyday) After the customs check, I went to the baggage claim area and met up with the tall Asian guy and the Russian woman I talked to in the Frankfurt airport. The woman tried to call a taxi service for me, but couldn't find the number. So I brought out the number for the hostel I was staying at, to try to see if I could get them to send a driver to me, which I learned from their website would be about \$25, less than the mafia taxi. When I used her cell phone to call them, they said that it was too late to schedule a driver from them and that I had to schedule this in advance if I wanted this service. I also found out that the city bus and metro system were already closed for the night. Realizing that there was nothing I could do, I proceeded reluctantly to the outside exit, knowing that I would be scam bait for the mafia taxis. As I walked the corridor to the outside, I noticed some Russian stewardesses sitting in some chairs in a corner, and I marveled at how hot and perfect looking they were. They looked like they walked out of some magazine. I wanted to stop and say hi but the rush of the crowd behind me kept pushing me forward.

When I got outside, I immediately noticed the humidity and hot air and the sense that I was now in a strange foreign land. As I approached the parking lot, I saw a group of mafia run taxis parked in front of me, with drivers waiting outside of them, and to my right I saw the other passengers getting into tour buses to pick them up. I stopped and contemplated what to do, and how to not be scammed. But the mafia taxi drivers didn't even give me time to think. When they saw me stop and look indecisive, they approached me in their nice suits and offered a ride to me. They spoke pretty good English, obviously. When I asked about the price, they wanted \$50. "Yeah right" I thought. I argued and negotiated with them, and finally they brought it down to \$35, but no less. Being alone in a foreign country, I feared for my safety, so I asked to see some proof that they were an official service. I didn't want to risk being kidnapped! They had none to show me, but they offered to call the airport security so I could ask them if it was safe to get in their car or not. I agreed, and so they called a uniformed guard out from the airport. He couldn't speak English, but I managed to point to the taxis and say to him "Is it ok? Yes?" and he said "Yes" and nodded. So I conceded and got in the car with my luggage and showed the driver the address I needed to get to. He sped off immediately and right away I noticed how worn and bumpy the roads were, even at the airport. I knew I could not expect smooth maintained roads here. None of the safety laws of the USA applied here!



As we approached the city of St. Petersburg, it gradually became dark. I looked at the window and was in awe at what I saw. The city was much more modern than I had expected. I didn't know why I thought it would be primitive. But there were flashing neon signs, urban sights, and people walking everywhere in well dressed outfits. I knew that it would be like this from the descriptions I read on the internet, but seeing this myself was even better because it confirmed all of it. It was nothing like what you would see of Russia from the US media, which often showed Russia to be poor and primitive. And furthermore, the Russian pop music that was playing in the taxi cab confirmed to me further that I was in some strange exotic land. I did see some people watching during the ride too, and couldn't believe how many tall gorgeous women with long legs there were, even at this time of night. I couldn't wait to get out and meet them, and test to see if all the talk I heard about them being friendly and approachable to foreigners was true or not! I sure hoped it was. If so, this would be a paradise! As it became dark, the city lights and life looked very colorful and fancy. My fear was replaced with excitement! As we drove, I also kept looking closely at the mafia cab driver to see if he would suddenly pull out a gun and yell "Stay right where you are!" To calm my nervousness about this, I made small talk with him and tried to be funny and act innocent.

Finally, we arrived at my hostel which was on the side of the big Neva River. The driver got out and helped me unload my luggage. I paid him the \$35 and as I was about to turn around he said "What about tip?" I said "I thought I read that you don't tip taxis in Russia!" but I went ahead and gave him a dollar anyway. I walked up to the big old door of the hostel, and opened it. The interior of it looked like an old building with a history all right. I walked in and looked around. There was nobody there, not even a receptionist. "That's funny" I thought, because I was told by them on the phone and on the website that there would be a hostel staff available there 24 hours a day. I looked around and noticed that the office to my right was locked and closed and the security booth to my left was empty. Not knowing what to do, I yelled out "Hello! Is anyone here?" No one responded. I could have sworn that I was at the right place because the big sign outside did say "St. Petersburg International Hostel Holiday". I went out and double checked it and confirmed it. When I got back in the hall, I thought "Well there's another big door in front of me. Maybe I should just go through it and I'll be able to find a receptionist beyond it." It's the only logical answer. So I did that, and sure enough to my left was a hallway with a reception area. I walked to it and greeted the receptionist saying that I arrived. I checked in, paid by credit card for a few days, got the key to my room, some blankets, pillows, and toiletries. I would be in a double bunk room, but I would have it to myself since no one else needed it. I also noticed European guests coming and going throughout the lobby. They all spoke with exotic European accents.

Before going to my room, I called Olga, the lady I came to see in this city, and told her that I arrived. She was glad and said that we would arrange to meet tomorrow. Even though I hadn't slept well for 48 hours, my adrenaline was pumped with excitement at being here, so I wasn't really tired but full of energy. I went outside to gaze at this exotic new world in the moonlight. I looked at the romantic Neva River and bridge, lit by the moonlight. The sight was surreal and I could feel the culture all around me. As I sat down outside and marveled at it all, some European girls came up to the door and we exchanged hello's. I asked them where they were from and they said Holland. I told them about my long time Dutch pen pal Karin, and then I explained that I just arrived here and asked them how they liked this city so far. They said it was great, but then pointed to the bridge and warned me that if I cross it to the other side of town and didn't come back before 1am, that the bridge would open up for a few hours to let the ships pass through, and that I would be stuck on the other side for several hours until 4am. They explained that it had already happened to them, and they didn't mind it because it was fun

being on the other side just drinking and mingling with people and hanging out. I thanked them for the advice and wished them goodnight. I went to my room, settled down, and laid on my bed. As I lay, I felt relieved that I had made it safely here, with English speaking staff here ready to help me get around. I quickly fell asleep.

## **Chapter 2: Getting acquainted in a strange foreign land**

The next morning, I woke up early. (being in a new place always makes me wake up early) I still couldn't believe I was in Russia, the land of the forbidden. "Wow!" I thought. I looked out my window and marveled at it all, even though there was just a street alley outside. I watched as many well dressed people walked through that alley, all with stoic faces. I wondered if they were happy or not. I went to the shower/bathroom and took a shower and brushed my teeth. Along the way, I said good morning to all the other hostel guests, which were all smiley and friendly. It was a cultural mix alright, there were people from everywhere.

When I went to the cafeteria for breakfast, there was a tall skinny gorgeous brunette serving the free included meals. She looked apathetic and robotic, like someone doing a mindless chore. I tried to make small talk with her to try to learn what Russian girls were like, but she spoke no English. I sat down at an available table and ate. It actually wasn't too bad. After I was finished, three young girls came in and sat at my table. I said hi to them and when they greeted me, I noticed that they had American accents. It turned out that they were all from the USA. It was nice to hear some familiarity in a foreign land. As I explained to them that I just arrived and was new to everything, they told me that they were actually near the end of their year long trip. I was surprised, since all three of them looked young enough to just be out of high school. They told me that they had just spent most of the year in a rural area of Eastern Siberia, along the east coast of Russia facing Japan. They had just finished their term of service (as to what, I don't really remember) and rode the famous Trans-Siberian Railway across Siberia to visit European Russia and St. Petersburg, and were leaving tomorrow to go back home. As I explained to them the purpose of my trip here, I tried to withhold telling them about my dissatisfaction with American women back home, for obvious reasons. :)

After breakfast, I went to the reception lobby and told them that I needed to find a bank to exchange money in and find where the nearest metro station was as well. They gave me a free map and circled where they both were, but the marks were ambiguous. I decided that I'll just go take a walk and probably find it somehow and ask for directions if I needed to. With nervousness and excitement, I walked out the front door to see St. Petersburg in daylight for the first time! I felt intrigued as I realized that I was now in a public part of a non-English speaking world. It would be an exciting challenge at least, I thought. As I looked at the street in front of me, I noticed how small and European-looking the cars were, and how some of them looked poorly maintained as well. I began walking in the right direction down the block, and noticed how attractive and well dressed the girls here were. And almost all of them were thin too, hardly any were overweight. I also noticed that the dress styles of the girls here were unique and individualistic. Unlike American girls who dressed according to a common or trendy norm with narrow variations, in comparison each girl here dressed according to her own individual style, even if that style was odd or exotic looking. There was much more variety and artistic flair in their dress style. Well I wasn't sure where I was going, so I decided to ask for directions, and used this as an opportunity to try to talk to some of the girls here. Remembering all the talk on the email list from the guys about how the women here were as easy to pick up as flies, I stopped some of

the girls passing by and said "English?" and they said a quick "No" and walked on by. "Gee", I thought, "thanks for the effort."

I didn't want to wander around aimlessly, so I decided to turn around back to the hostel and as I did, I took some photos of the area. When I got back to the hostel entrance, I met some other American tourists and explained where I was going to them. They offered to help me find the bank and metro station if I followed them, so I did. As we walked, they told me that their passport had been pickpocketed recently and that they were in a mess trying to get a new one. I told them that I was lucky to have a passport protector belt around my torso under my shirt, which I now realized would come in handy. We made a right turn and walked toward the big metro station. There was a small street in front, but it was difficult to cross it because the drivers were storming by there and not stopping for the pedestrians. It looked pretty dangerous, and even more so when I saw how close they were zooming by the pedestrians, who did not have the slightest look of danger on their faces. Such a low margin of error, I thought, but it all seemed normal to them and no one seemed to get hit, even if lots of cars zoomed by them within inches while they were standing in the middle of the street. "Like I said" I thought "this is a different world." When we got inside the metro station, I noticed how people rushed in and out of the gates, like they were in a big hurry. They did not seem anxious or aggressive either. The rush was like a natural thoughtless flow that was normal to them. A few times I felt as if I was going to be run over. The American couple waved me goodbye and pointed to me where the bank was. I walked out and noticed a lower side into the station building. Inside was a huge waiting area with ticket windows and a gigantic schedule on the wall. I saw some people sitting in the waiting area including a tall skinny tanned gorgeous blonde who was an absolute knockout. "Now's my chance to meet some of the women here" I thought. I would use the asking directions to the bank as a conversation opener. When I talked to her, she didn't speak English but pointed in the direction of the bank. I thanked her and was about to leave when I turned back around and asked if I could get her telephone number and call her sometime. She politely said "No. Please no." I hoped to find some women soon who were interested in me, I thought.

I left the station and looked for the bank, but couldn't find it. None of the signs were in English so I couldn't use any clues to help me. So I took one of my Russian phrase books out of my backpack and looked up the phrase "Where is the bank?" with the corresponding Russian sentence beneath it. I showed it to some pedestrians and they tried pointing me in the right direction along with Russian words I couldn't understand. However, there were just too many businesses and doors on every street that it was hard for me to find it from just from a finger point. As I got closer and closer, eventually someone pointed to the exact entrance, so I went in and exchanged 100 dollars there, which equaled about 3200 rubles.

Afterward, I walked back to the hostel to call Olga to see what time and where she wanted to meet. I bought a prepaid calling card from the hostel reception and made the call. One of the first things I learned about public calling in Russia, from looking at the screen that deducted your credits, was that even if no one answers the phone while it's ringing, you still get credits deducted from your card! Like I already said, this is a different world! I called Olga and she told me to meet her at a public place near her home, that was across the bridge on another side of the city. I dared not ride the metro alone to try to find it since I couldn't even read the signs there, so I elected to take a taxi. I had a Russian staff person nearby talk to Olga and write down the name of the place to meet her at in Russian, so I could show the taxi driver. Then I went to the nearest metro station to buy some flowers to give Olga. As I was trying to cross the street to the metro station, I ran into the three Americans girls that I met earlier

that morning during breakfast. I explained to them what I was doing, and they recommended that if I wanted to save money, I could hold out my hand with my palm face down and hail a gypsy cab, which is a private unmarked taxi cab driven by a person working for himself and not a company. I said "Are you crazy? That's dangerous! I could get mugged if I just got into any unmarked car that stopped!", to which they replied "Oh no. Here it is safe to do that. We have been doing it all year, and saved a lot of money doing it too. Trust us. It's the norm here." I replied "Well I'll think about it. I just arrived in this country and I'm not ready to be taking chances just yet." so I waved goodbye to them and wished them a safe journey home since it was their last day. I bought some roses at the flower stand outside the station. I remembered to get an odd number of flowers, since in Russian custom, even numbered roses were used at funerals. So I got three roses wrapped up and paid for it. It was sure cheap compared to the rates I'm used to back home. I walked back to the hostel and had the receptionist call for a taxi because if the driver didn't understand me, I could have the English speaking hostel staff help interpret. After ten minutes, the taxi pulled up behind the hostel, and I opened the door, leaned in and showed him the address written down. He nodded and then I took out my phrase book and pointed at the phrase "How much will this cost?" to him. He wrote down about 150 rubles, which was about 5 dollars, but I managed to bargain down the price to about 100 rubles. So I got in and he took me for a ride.

He drove pretty aggressively just like the first taxi driver that brought me to the hostel the night before. It looked very dangerous and a couple of times it seemed like we were inches from hitting other cars. I enjoyed the view though. There were lots of people everywhere, and well dressed too. The sights looked very historic and cultured, like part of a rich past and heritage. We finally drove across a long stretch of lawn with lots of festivities going on, games, mini-carnivals, little rides, etc. It was crowded. Finally, we stopped in front of a big building that looked like a theatre. I thought "This doesn't look like an apartment complex." and then I showed him the address and said "Are you sure?" and he said nodded and said that was it. So I got out and paid him for the ride.

### **Chapter 3: Meeting with Olga**

After waiting in front of the building for a while, I became anxious. I had talked to her for a long time by phone and email, and now we were going to meet. I was nervous about how it would turn out. I always felt that she was kind of one dimensional and not much substance to her, based on our phone conversations, but I didn't really care because she was my physical type and she expressed interest and attraction to me, which were all that mattered to me now, since women that are my type in the USA do not tend to even acknowledge my existence. Therefore, anything above that would interest me. (You can see her photo and profile that I first saw at this link, but keep in mind that in person she looks way better: <http://www.russianfriendfinder.net/showa.shtml?id=679>)

As I waited, I became more anxious that I was in the wrong place, so I went up to a guy nearby sitting down and pantomimed to him that I was waiting for a friend, and asked him if he could call her for me. He agreed to and I gave him the number to call. He called her and spoke some Russian and then hung up and told me that she was already on her way and that I was in the right place. I kept pacing back and forth thinking "This is it." Finally, she ran up the stairs to the plaza and blew me away! She was blonde, tan and gorgeous. Much more than I expected from her photos! She looked like a bombshell. I thought "Oh my gosh!" and went up to her and gave her a hug. I think I kissed her cheek too, if I remember. Then I asked the guy who called her for me to take our picture and he did, which is how I got the picture with her in the photo album. (She looked way hotter in person than in that photo

though.) I pointed to the theatre and asked her "You don't live there do you?" and she said "No of course not. I decided to meet here because the taxi driver would know it better than if you had given him my address." Then after some small talk, she suggested we go to a cafe, so we went.

As we walked through the streets and the crowd, I kept thinking how flabbergasted I was at her appearance. Usually a hot blonde would never give me the time of day, now I was going somewhere with one! To me, this was a historical moment, like the breaking of a world record. (I know that sounds cheesy and geeky, but that's how I really felt!) I felt like all the other guys looking at me now were envious, wondering why she was with me. I felt a high from that because such a moment is so rare back in the USA. She pointed out to me the school that she taught at, which looked really old, and then we stopped at the entrance to her apartment building. She told me to wait there for her, while she takes the roses and gift I brought for her (some perfume from JC Penney) and puts it away in her flat. (their term for "apartment") I was hoping she wasn't about to ditch me! She came back down after a short while and we continued walking. I felt like we were running out of things to say, so I kept looking around for things to comment on.

Finally we reached the cafe. It was very nice inside, like a Valentine treat in red colors, for a romantic setting. When I saw the menus, I was glad that there was an English section too. The items seemed very tasty and were named with romantic sexy overtones. This was obviously a lover's cafe. I wondered if she was implying anything by bringing me here :) After we ordered some desserts and pancakes, we started making small talk and getting to know each other. I did not feel we really had much to talk about, and I had mixed feelings about the chemistry we were having. But I thought "Well she's so hot, it doesn't matter! I guess I'll try my best to get along with her and produce chemistry. I mean, man it's worth it. If I could ever bring a girl like this back to the USA, it would be a prize/trophy that would be bigger than winning the Nobel Prize!" What a thought! Finally, our food came and it was very tasty. It was also easy to enjoy since the prices were pretty cheap too. After we were done, we ordered some more and more. Since the quantity of the dishes were small, it was easy to eat a lot of them. They were very tasty and good, like French dessert cuisine. I offered to share some of what I ordered with Olga, but she refused. When I asked her if I could try what she had, she reluctantly agreed. Not exactly a very giving or sharing person, I thought. I wondered if that was a bad sign. Something was strange about her. She didn't seem all there. She spoke decent English though. When she didn't understand me, she took out her English-Russian electronic dictionary (that thing was very fancy!) to look it up. After we were done, I paid for the check and we left. All of what we ordered was only 500 rubles, which was about 17 dollars, wow!

After the cafe, we went shopping for a bit and she gave me a walking tour of some of the area. Then we headed for an internet cafe that she knew of, so she could check her email. The one she usually went to to write me back was closed, so we looked for another one. Finally we found it. It was very hot inside and humid, and the fan barely helped. As she checked her email, I tried to get on the computer to check mine too. When I looked at the Windows screen, I noticed that all of the words and menus were in Russian. "Great" I thought. I managed to find a way to switch to English though. However, I could not check my AOL email because their browser would not load up AOL Anywhere, which probably was too intricate for their browser. So I went to my Yahoo email instead and wrote emailed my parents to tell them that I had arrived safely. After I was done, I went over to Olga to show her how to search for things on the internet. As I was looking over her shoulder, I kissed her on the cheek and she blushed and giggled. Then I asked if she wanted a massage and she said ok so I massaged her for a while. For some reason, her skin did not feel as good as it looked. There seemed to be something fake about her. I

can't explain it, but maybe it was the way her makeup was put on or something, and she obviously had a lot on.

After Olga was done, we went out and found a park bench to sit at. As we talked, I kind of felt like we ran out of things to say, so I kept trying to look for more things to comment on. She seemed pretty dense alright. Then I showed her some footage from my camcorder of the sights I filmed so far, and then I took some footage of her sitting on the bench.

After a while, we got up and she said that she had to meet a friend at 6pm to help her pick out something for two hours, and that I could come with her, but she would have to leave me somewhere for two hours and meet up with me later. I agreed so we went down to the nearest metro station to go to the downtown area. I paid five rubles for the metro token, then descended this incredibly long escalator down this tunnel. It looked surreal in a way. There were so many people constantly heading down and up. You never know who you could run into here! When we got to the bottom, I followed her into the subway which was also very crowded. The signs at each stop and the announcement over the subway intercom were all in Russian. Like my tour book said, they consider it your duty to learn their language here. We got off at the huge metro station on Nevsky Prospect, the biggest street downtown, with shops and billboards inside, including a gigantic screen with advertisements and promotions running on it, with various networks of escalators going in all directions. If it wasn't for Olga, this would be like a gigantic maze to me, and I'd be lost among all the non-English signs. We both got some soft drinks while we waited for her friend, under the big promo screen. When her brunette friend finally showed up, she introduced us but I thought her smile was kind of strange. Then Olga told me to meet them back here under the big promo screen of the metro station in two hours. She showed me where I could take a walking tour of shops and cathedrals in the meantime, so I waved goodbye and set about exploring the area by myself.

As I walked the other direction I couldn't believe how crowded it was, and also how fast everyone was walking. It didn't look like everyone was in a hurry either, it just looked like their normal pace. I just kept on walking forward, making sure to stay on the same street, and let the moment guide me. After a few blocks, I came to a huge dark brown cathedral on my left, with a big fountain park in front of it. (I now know it as Kazansky Church, or The Cathedral of the Mother of God) After I strolled around the fountain park, doing some people watching, I walked up to the entrance of the cathedral, hoping that it was free to get in. No one was taking tickets at the door, so I just walked in. Inside was a magnificent display of Christian art, paintings, colored glass, etc. It was also nice to be out of the heat too. I assumed that it was a Russian Orthodox Church. There was a ceremony going on in there, and a priest was at the podium reading something in Latin, while the people gathered in front were repeating back what he said. I toured around and took some pictures. You can see these pictures in my online photo album. Suddenly, a staff person came up to me and pointed to my camera and waved his fingers in a "no" fashion. I got the message and put my camera away. I found a curb along the wall to sit on to take a rest and marvel at the interior of this building, and the exotic Latin chants and songs I was hearing in the background. As the ceremony progressed, the group of priests started walking around, followed by the crowd. When I took out my soda bottle to drink, another staff person pointed at me and waved a "no" again. I felt embarrassed and put it away in my backpack. After a while, I got up and headed back outside into the heat again.

As I looked around the crowds of seated people, I saw a little short blonde girl sitting by herself on the curb, so I sat near her to try to strike up a conversation. As I took out my Russian phrase book, I talked

to her to see if she could speak English and asked her some questions about the cathedral. She didn't understand me, but she looked intrigued by me. So I continued and pointed to phrases in the Russian phrasebook to try to communicate with her. It was very difficult, even to just make small talk. All I could figure out was that her name was Natasha and that she was 19 and lived in the outskirts of this city. Since she looked curious and intrigued by me, I continued, even though we weren't getting anywhere, but it was amusing to try. Apparently, she showed the same patience toward me. We both spent a lot of time sifting through my dictionaries and phrase books to try to talk to each other. All I could gather about what she was doing there was waiting for her brother, which I wasn't even sure I understood correctly. lol After a while, I looked at my watch and realized that it was almost time for me to go back to meet Olga and her friend again. I signaled to her that I had to go back to the metro station, and she got up and said that she was going to go there as well, so we started walking back together. I asked her "But aren't you waiting for your brother?" but she didn't understand. As we walked along the sidewalk together, she asked me if I had a photo to give her. Puzzled since no one I just met had ever asked me that before, I said "Why would you need a photo of me if you already know what I look like?" Was she that fond of me already, I wondered? She didn't understand my question, so I said "No I don't have any photos with me, (I always carry photos of me in case someone asks for them. Right. lol <sarcastic>) but I can email you some. Ok?" She nodded, and I asked her if I could get her telephone number and email, which she understood because they use the same words for those things in Russia. She nodded but signaled that she had nothing to write with. Well neither did I, but I had paper so I took it out and attempted to stop a passing pedestrian to ask to borrow a pen. The first few people I asked didn't understand me, so they just continued walking on. I wasn't sure if it was normal here to ask for help from strangers, so I felt a bit embarrassed, hoping I wasn't making a fool out of myself. As I looked for someone friendly to ask for a pen, I suddenly realized how cute this scene was. Here was a little blonde girl who looked sweet and innocent standing in front of me looking intrigued and waiting for my next move, while hordes of people rushed by us like race cars. It was such a cute scene!!! Finally, a lady stopped to let us borrow her pen, and we exchanged phone numbers and emails on pieces of paper. Afterward, she motioned that it was better to write her rather than telephone her, since she could understand written English better than spoken English. Then she pointed across the street and indicated that the metro station there was closer, and to follow her. I said "No, I'm headed to the other station this way, because I have to meet my friend Olga there." I wasn't sure if she understood me, so I opened up my dictionary and pointed to the word "rendezvous" to her, and then pointed at myself and toward the metro station I was headed to. I wasn't sure if she understood me or not, but we waved goodbye to each other anyway. (To this day, she has written me some emails and surprised me because she is able to write decent English by email even though in person she could hardly speak any!)

When I got back to the big promo screen at the main metro station, Olga and her friend showed up only minutes later. She introduced us and said her friend's name was "Nata". They decided to take me back to the area where my hostel was and get something to eat in that area. I followed them along while Olga's friend kept asking me questions about me and America, due to her curiosity with foreigners. I wondered if she was interested in me or not, but it didn't matter because Olga was way hotter. On the subway, Olga explained to me that I needed to start learning how to ride the metro because she couldn't always be with me on it. I said ok, but asked how I would know which direction the train was going and when to stop. Her answer was very vague and she basically said to just do it. Not exactly very helpful.

When we got off at my station, which was called Ploschad Lenina, Olga's friend Nata took us to an eatery with a singer/keyboard player inside. We ordered some food and sat down. The music was very good. I took out my camera and set it on an adjacent table and filmed some footage of all three of us. When the keyboard player sang a soft romantic song, Nata asked me if I wanted to dance, but I said "My dancing is very bad." I then asked Olga if she wanted to dance, but she said that this wasn't the right place to do it. At the end of our meal, Olga finished her bottle of mineral water and asked if I could get her another one. I said "sure" and took her empty bottle, brought it to the cashier, gave them the empty bottle and said "one more" while making the "one" signal with my index finger. They took out a bottle from the fridge with a different color wrapper on it, and I asked "Are you sure it's the same kind?" and they nodded "Yes" so I paid 20 rubles for it. When we opened the new bottle and tasted it, we found that it was mineral water with gas in it, like a Club Soda. Yuck! I took it back with an American consumer complaint on my face, and said "This is the wrong one. I wanted water with NO gas!" So they gave me another one without gas in it. I assumed they were fixing their mistake so I took it without paying for it. After Olga and I shared it and finished it up, we were about to leave when the cashier said something to me. Olga said that they wanted me to pay for the extra bottle of water. I told Olga that they made a mistake in giving us the wrong kind of mineral water, and that I shouldn't have to pay for it. She translated it to them and told me "They don't want to pay for the extra water bottle." to which I replied "Well I don't want to have to pay for their mistake either! I gave them the exact bottle that I wanted another one of, so they should have known!" But Olga said that things didn't work that way here in Russia, so I gave in and gave them another 20 rubles.

When we got outside, Olga explained to me that this was Russia, not America, and that here if they mess up your order, even if it's their fault, you still have to pay for it. That's the custom here, and that the exception to it was if you went to a fancy expensive restaurant. I shook my head and said "I still don't think that's right" to which she replied "It doesn't matter what you think. No one cares what you think here. You have to follow the customs here." When we got back to my local metro station, it was about 9pm now even though it was still bright daylight. I asked if Olga wanted to come to the hostel with me so I could introduce her to everyone and open the bottle of wine with her. She replied "But you told me that your room isn't very nice" and at that point, I kind of regretted staying in a hostel, but oh well, if she really liked me, it shouldn't matter. Then Olga told me that she would be busy all day and night tomorrow, Thursday, with her teaching job and babysitting job, and that I should call her Friday morning so we could plan to get together again. I said ok and thanked her for the meeting. I gave her a goodbye hug and moved in to kiss her, and she turned her cheek to me. After kissing her cheek, I pointed to my lips, and she blushed and shook her head, and then waved me goodbye. As she was about to leave, I suddenly said "Olga, wait. I have a question. Do you still like me after today?" because I didn't want to be guessing all night whether things would go anywhere from here. She smiled and said "Yes, why not?" and left. I had no idea if that was genuine or not. Back at the hostel, I told the Europeans hanging out there about my day, how hot Olga was and how I was on a high to be around her. I even showed them video clips from my camcorder and they all agreed that she was hot alright.

#### **Chapter 4: Taking care of business and further exploration of the city**

The next day, on Thursday, since Olga wasn't available that day, I decided to take care of some business. I had to register my visa and also email people on my situation and ask for advice about Olga. I tried using the hostel computer for email, but it was too slow and AOL's complicated website for checking email was too much for the old computer to handle. After an hour of frustration, I gave up



and talked to this Australian guy there who told me that the internet cafes in downtown were faster and cheaper too. He said that he was headed there today and that I could come along. After I got the directions from the hostel staff for the visa registration office, we left.

As we got down the metro station into the subway (thank goodness I didn't have to try to ride this hectic system alone yet!) he, David, explained to me that he had just finished several weeks of volunteering at as a Christian teacher and counselor for a summer camp for kids, and that he was spending his last week in Russia touring St. Petersburg. He definitely was a nice kind-hearted chap for sure! We got off at the same main metro station on Nevsky Prospect that Olga took me to the prior day. The big inexpensive internet cafe we went to was just across the street from it, and it had air conditioning too! Inside, I thanked him and we both sat at our computers. AOL's site was still slow, but it was working at least. I began sending a mass email to everyone on my list who was interested in what was going on with me, updated them and asked them for advice about Olga, saying that I had mixed feelings about her because although she expressed an interest in seeing me again, I didn't feel that we had great chemistry together. But I said that I still wanted to try, because she was as hot as hell, and even looked a little like Britney Spears, and couldn't be any closer to my ideal physical type. I knew I was sounding immature and shallow to tell everyone that, but I was telling it like it is!

As I was finishing up checking my email, my computer was getting slow and taking very long to load every webpage. So I glanced around and noticed a cute girl behind me who was also waiting for a website to load up. Making small talk, I said "It's slow isn't it?" and to my surprise, she fluently answered "Yes, very much so." Glad that she could speak English, I continued making small talk with her, and complimented her on her good English. I learned that her name was Lilia, and that she was assisting a French student next to her by helping him with errands and showing him around the city. As she was finishing up, I was enamoured that she was so friendly and open, so I asked her if she would be interested in getting together sometime to do something, and she said sure, so we exchanged phone numbers and emails. (I gave my hostel number and home number) Then David, the Australian guy, came up and said goodbye to me, and I thanked him for his help. Then I waved goodbye to Lilia as well.

After I was done checking email, I took a long walk to the visa registration office, which was on Ligovsky Prospect, asking directions along the way. As I neared the last block, the street suddenly became filled with rubble, concrete, construction equipment, bulldozers, dangerous holes, etc. I wondered if I was in a restricted area, yet the crowd was continuing to walk through it. I thought "This is unbelievable. In the USA, an area under heavy construction like this would be restricted from the public due to safety laws, yet everyone here just walks right through it like it's a normal sidewalk!" Carefully making my way along the street, I looked for the office by searching the numbers of each building, but I couldn't find it, so I went into a fast food place to ask about it. They pointed me through an archway to a back alley, and I went up to the metal door, thinking "This is crazy. Registering visas here for tourists is the law, and the place to do it at isn't even labeled well, and worst of all, you have to go into an alley off the street to find it. Talk about making things convenient for tourists!" I rang the bell and went up to a smoke filled office to register my visa. I was disappointed to learn that I had to pay another \$20 to register my visa, because I had already paid that fee to the travel agency GoToRussia.net, but apparently I found out that it would only apply for the Moscow visa registration office, not the St. Petersburg one. (I was originally going to register my visa at the Moscow airport when I transferred flights to St. Petersburg, but when I switched airlines to Luftansa for the reasons I mentioned in the Preparation, Plan and Strategy chapter, I went to St. Petersburg directly from

Frankfurt, Germany instead.) I reluctantly paid them, hoping I could get a refund from GoToRussia.net later (which I did).

On my way back, I stopped at a hip looking Starbucks-like place with a parrot on its signage called "Marko Cafe" to get some dessert because I was hungry. Inside, I was taken aback by all the tall skinny hippish gorgeous girls there were inside. "Wow", I thought, "This place looks so modern and these gorgeous city girls are all stylishly modern dressed. The American media that made Russia look primitive and backward was certainly wrong!" The jello dessert I got was mediocre, but at least it was sweet. Then I walked back to the metro station to head back to my hostel. This would be the first time I would be riding it alone. "Here goes nothing", I thought. I paid the cashier at the window for my metro token and went down the escalator hoping that I wouldn't end up being lost for hours. As I stood on the long descending escalator, I funnily noticed that some people would be rushing down the escalator passing you on the left side, but on the escalators going up, no one would be running up the long flight of stairs. lol I guess at least gravity was constant here :) I also noticed that many young couples were taking the time on the escalator to hold and kiss a lot. I felt envious and thought "Those guys on the email list that said that Russians were uncomfortable with public displays of affection were sure wrong!" When I got to the bottom of the platform, I realized that I now had to figure out which train on the right and left was going north. I opened up the metro train map that was given to me by the hostel with my hostel station circled, and used it to ask for help from people. I went up to people and pointed to the circled station on the map and asked them which of the two trains to take to go that way. They gladly helped and showed me the right train. Onboard, I did the same and asked people how many more stops to get to the circled station on my map. They understood my question of "How many more stops?" when I signaled 1, 2, 3, and so on with my fingers. I realized that I could just count the stops until my station by just looking on my map and counting the stops between the station I came from to the one at my destination. When we arrived at my station, the people I asked to help me pointed to me that this was my stop. I thanked them by saying "Spashiba" which is "thank you" in Russian and got out. When I got up to the top of the escalator, I was relieved to recognize the interior of my local station :) Whew! I made it through safely on my first metro ride alone! I got something to drink and relaxed and watched the sunset.

Then I walked back to my hostel and relaxed, wondering about the approach I should take with Olga tomorrow. I also ran into David the Australian again and told him about my day. I then went up to the fourth floor of the hostel, where I heard there was a balcony where people there hung out at and drank at night. Up there, I found some Dutch guys hanging out and celebrating their last day here. I talked to them a bit and told them about Olga the day before, showing them video clips from my camcorder of Olga the day before. I explained that although Olga was gorgeous and my ideal looking type, she had no personality or depth to her at all, and that I wasn't sure what to do with her next. One of the guys told me that it didn't matter how a girl looked, because if no chemistry was there and she didn't treat you right, it wasn't worth "sh\*\*". He said that one girl he met in the bar the other night kept holding him and begging him to take her away with him back to Holland, but he brushed her off.

## **Chapter 5: St. Petersburg tours with Jasson and Jesús**

The next day on Friday morning, I ate breakfast and wondered what I should say to Olga today. I decided that it's best to ask her what she thinks of me and if we have any chance at a relationship, so I didn't live in doubt and waste time with her. During breakfast, I got out my camcorder and took some

footage of the breakfast area. Surprisingly, the breakfast server lady, whom I described before as always looking grumpy and apathetic, suddenly smiled when the camera was pointed at her. I said "Kak vas zavut?" which in Russian meant "What is your name" and she smiled and said "Maya". I guess people want to make a good impression in front of the camera. All the other tourists I filmed there also acted friendlier and happier than usual when the camera was pointed at them.

Then I went to the lobby to use the payphone there. I called Olga to see what she wanted to do today, but she said that she had to go shopping with her sister in the morning, then work all day and night again, first at her teaching job and then at her babysitting job at night. Frustrated, I said "Olga, you knew months ago that I was coming this week. Why did you not make time for us this week? Why did you not arrange your schedule in advance?" She replied "I told you before, my schedule changes everyday and I cannot predict it. Right now I have these obligations today and I have no choice. Call me tomorrow morning ok?" I sadly agreed and said "Ok, I will try to find something else to do then. Bye." and then hung up. Realizing that I had no idea when or if ever I would see Olga again, I decided to start enacting my backup plan (described in the Preparation, Plan and Strategy section) in the meantime and went to my room to take out the paper sheet of phone numbers from my luggage, to call Natalia from Anastasia Web, who started writing me shortly before I left for my trip. She had agreed to show me around when I arrived in this city.

When I got back to the lobby, there were two guys there, one was speaking with a Mexican accent, and the other was dark skinned but I couldn't tell what nationality he was. They were talking about a tour and so I asked about it, knowing that I might not have anything to do today. They said that they had a guided tour around the city scheduled in a van with a tour guide, and that if I came, it would be cheaper for all of us because the fare would be divided into three instead of two. I asked the price if I joined, and he said 15 dollars so I agreed, but said that I just needed a few minutes to make a phone call to someone. I called Natalia and when she answered, it was obvious that she couldn't understand anything I was saying so I looked at the hostel receptionist across the lobby and beckoned with my hand for her to come over. I said "Can you ask her where and when she wants to meet me?" and she said ok and spoke with her briefly in Russian and then hung up and wrote down the name of the metro station that she wanted to meet me at, and said that she'll meet me there at 8pm. She said that this metro station on Nevsky was the easiest place to meet someone because it is small and has easy to see entrances and exits which are close together. This was perfect, I thought, because it now gives me time to go on the tour with these two guys first. I thanked her and put the paper in my pocket. Then I grabbed my backpack with my camera and camcorder inside and told the two men that I was ready. We got into a parked van outside with a male driver and female English speaker inside, and then got acquainted. The Mexican guy was named Jesús (pronounced Huises) and was from Los Angeles touring both Russia and Europe. The other guy was named Jasson (yes his name is spelled with two "s"s) and was from Lebanon. We got acquainted very easily and felt like old friends and comrades.

The van first stopped on request at a nearby electronics store, and we went in because Jesús wanted to get a voltage converter (from the foreign 220 volt to American 110 volt) so he could charge his camcorder batteries. When they said they didn't have it, I told him "Don't worry. I brought one that I got from Radio Shack. You can just borrow mine." so he agreed and we went back to the van. The next stop was at their tour agency office, so we could pay the tour fee. After I paid them the 15 dollars in cash, I asked them if they could give me some contact information for any local marriage agencies. They said they worked with one called A Foreign Affair and gave me their contact number. "Perfect!" I

thought "since I had ordered addresses from their agency before and was just wondering if they had a local office in this city." I put the paper in my pocket and thanked them, and we were on our way.

As we drove through the main streets, the female guide spoke through a microphone and described the sights that we passed by. Our next stop was at a plaza with historical buildings all around it. Immediately, some salesman carrying boxes full of souvenir boxes came to us to pitch their hard sell. They spoke English very good too, and I was surprised that they'd use their great language skills to do this. As I hesitated and looked at the boxes, they continued with their exotic Russian accents in trying to persuade me with what they could give me for what price. I did like the boxes and the Russian decorations and pictures on them, so they did catch my interest. When I bargained with them, they said my price was too low and below their cost. Then Jasson nudged me and said "Just walk away and they'll give in." So I did but they still persisted at getting me to agree to their price for three boxes. (which you can see on my video tape) Finally, I got tired of all this bargaining and re-bargained for a middle price and bought two boxes. Jesús also bought one of the boxes himself. Then we took pictures for each other with our cameras around the site and got back on the tour van.

The next stop was in front of the big massive cathedral structure called The Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ that you often see in photos and films of St. Petersburg with a canal leading to it. Just before we got out, the male driver said "Be careful of the gypsies." I asked "Why?" and then got out when the van door opened. Immediately, a dark gypsy girl who looked about 4 or 5 years old ran up to us and said "money, money" and even starting grabbing Jasson's arm while he was walking around. (This is on my camcorder video tape, which some of you might have already seen.) I noticed that the girl's parents were in the background sitting down while letting their daughter do this work. The little girl looked like she hadn't had a bath in a long time too. I felt bad for them. I gave the little girl some rubles and then we walked around the giant cathedral. Unfortunately, they wouldn't let us go inside for photos without paying admission, which was pointless since we had a short time limit on how long we could be there. So we walked around the plaza and took pictures of the structure from outside. (You can see these photos in my online photo album too.) Along the courtyard, there was a girl playing wonderful serene music on her guitar. We took photos with her and donated some money in her donation box. I filmed her with my camcorder too, and amazingly if you watch the tape on any TV (even an old one) you will hear the sound from her guitar music coming out just like if it was coming from an acoustic wave radio. I have no idea how it comes through so well. We also got some snacks to eat too, and since I was a vegetarian, I got a potato sandwich. Jesús also took a lot of footage with his camcorder, which was much newer than mine and had a much longer lasting battery, so he was able to take much longer shots than me! After a while, the guides called us and we went back to the van.

We next stopped at a park alongside the Neva River's edge. It had a spacious view of the wide section of the river. There was a post wedding tour going on there, and a lady in a wedding dress was riding on a horse there. It was a lovely scene. After taking pictures for each other, I went to a souvenir stand nearby and bought a blue matroska doll, which is five wooden dollars in one with each progressively smaller doll inside the larger one. Then we got back in the van and went in front of the famous Hermitage Winter Palace Museum, a gigantic palace that harbored a vast collection of art, paintings, sculptures, relics, antiques, etc. from all over the world. It used to be the palace of the Czar Peter the Great. The courtyard between the buildings of the palace was huge, and I could visualize it once harboring an army of 10,000 soldiers easily. I badly wanted to get a chance to go inside this palace. It looked so massive and surreal. Jesús talked to our tour guides and then said that they could drop us off here to go inside at the end of the tour. "Awesome!" I thought. Next we went to a location near the

horseman statue carousel that is often shown in pictures and films of the city. From there we could also see St. Isaac's Cathedral. After taking some more photos, we headed back to the Hermitage Winter Palace, where our guided tour ended.

## **Chapter 6: The wonders of the Hermitage Winter Palace and meeting Natasha E.**

(Note: The reason I put Natasha E. in the chapter title is so as to not confuse her with Natalia T., my backup girl from Anastasia Web Agency)

As the three of us approached the giant gate of the Hermitage Winter Palace, we marveled at its size. Its interior was decorated in splendor, and it was very crowded inside with both Russians and foreign tourists. I knew from my travel guide book that there was a cheaper fare for Russians and a more expensive fare for foreigners. I was hoping to try to get the local fare. When we got to the ticket office, they automatically charged me the foreign fare of \$10 rather than the local fare of \$2. Jasson had to pay the same fare as me but Jesús got the local fare somehow because of some special pass he had. We then were directed to leave our backpacks with some luggage clerks who took it and gave us a number tag claim. We made sure to get our cameras and video camera out first. As we went through the guards and ticket takers, one of them suddenly pointed to our cameras and we realized that we had to pay extra for bringing in cameras and camcorders. We went back and paid another hundred rubles for a ticket to do that, and came back in again.

After we climbed the first grand staircase to the first level (or is it second level?) we realized we were immediately in a labyrinth. There wasn't only one way to go either, there were multiple forks and turns at every corridor, hall, and room. We knew we had to stick together because if we got lost, there would be no way to find each other and no intercom was set up there (and even if there was an intercom, I'm not sure how it would help anyway lol). Although the antiques, paintings, and relics were beautiful and grande, it was difficult for me to enjoy it all because the heat inside was incredible, and I constantly sweated a lot even though I rarely sweat in general. There was no air conditioning inside like there would have been in the states, and it was humid as well. And to make matters worse, the thousands of people around us inside raised the temperature in there with their body heat as well! Had it been cool, it would have been much more enjoyable. The relics and paintings here were not just from Russia, but from all over the world too.

As we went from room to room, hall to hall, in the labyrinth, taking pictures and video footage, I suddenly was not even sure anymore whether we were passing the same area twice or if this was new territory. It was hard to tell, so I kept asking "Have we been here before?" My bad sense of direction didn't help either. There were also little kiosks scattered throughout the Winter Palace which sold books and souvenirs on the Hermitage. We chatted and made small talk with some of the girls working at these kiosks and they taught us some Russian and were very friendly and open. When we got to some windows, we looked outside at the humongous courtyard that lay in the center of all the buildings of this palace. Just to give you an idea, it looked about as big as the big courtyard in the middle of "The Forbidden City" did in the movie "The Last Emperor." Because of my vivid imagination and interest in military history, I imagined a vast army belonging to the Czar lined up in that courtyard in formations and beautifully tailored uniforms. However, rather than an army, the courtyard was lined with dozens of tour buses. We noticed plenty of tour groups everywhere in there, with the guide holding up number signs so their group members can keep track of where they were. As we passed these groups, we heard

mostly European languages being spoken by the guides. But there were tour groups from all over the world in every language.

Eventually, we ascended to the second and third floors of the palace too. The third floor was mainly a small painting gallery with a gift shop inside. After that, we decided we had had enough and should begin descending to the exit. My feet were killing me at that point too. As we began trying to find our way down, we realized there was still plenty of areas of the palace museum that we missed, so we stopped in them along the way.

At one point, we passed through a big red room with a giant pot in the center. As I was filming footage of it with my camcorder, Jasson and Jesús passed to the next room. I started making my way to follow them when a girl with a great firm hard body and dark brown hair tied in a braided pony tail walked by. The back of her looked a lot like the back of the video game character Lara Croft on the game "Tomb Raider". Wanting to get a shot of her great looking backside, I turned the camera at her and walked forward. When she turned around, I turned off the recording in my camera. Immediately she made eye contact with me. I stared at her back and smiled. She looked like she had something to say to me, so I waited to see what she was going to do. After a few seconds of staring at each other, she said something, and I said "What?" And she said "You from Japan?" and I said "Me? Oh no, I'm from America, but I'm Chinese American. You?" to which she replied "Russian." She appeared interested in conversing further, so we did. Although she barely spoke any English, we at least made attempts to communicate with my dictionary and breaking our messages into small parts. I noticed that she sort of had an Eastern exotic look to her, though not Asian or Indian or Arabic. It's very difficult to describe. After a while, since I got good friendly interested vibes from her, I asked if I could call her and she said nodded. Borrowing a pen from someone nearby again, I got out some paper and wrote her my number at the hostel (I had no direct line there but people could call and leave messages with the receptionist), my email and number in the USA. I gave her a delicate brown piece of receipt paper and she wrote her hotel phone number, room number (so I could ask for the extension to her room, get your mind out of the gutter!), and mobile telephone number.

As we were doing this, Jasson and Jesús came back for me to see what the delay was. When they saw me and this girl writing stuff down for each other, they immediately knew what was going on and became patient in waiting for me. After we were done exchanging numbers, I introduced them all. Her name, she said, was Natasha. As we mingled for a bit, I noticed and liked how perky her personality was. She had a way of making you feel likable and giggly with her perky cute smile and voice. Her attitude and perkiness was contagious and I felt good and upbeat just being around her. As we mingled, we suddenly took out our camcorders and decided to film each other. Natasha also took out hers as well. It was a small flat square shaped video camera and looked very expensive. "She must come from a rich family" I thought. When I also noticed that she had braces, I thought that she must definitely come from an affluent family if she can afford that as well because so far I haven't seen anyone else in Russia with braces. We all filmed clips of each other introducing each other with our three camcorders. I also got a picture of me and Natasha taken with my camera by one of my friends. (You can see it in the online photo album)

Afterward, as we asked about each other, we found out that Natasha was lost and looking for her friend. I kept trying to ask her "Where did you last see her?" but she didn't understand my question. Finally, I led her out of the room to find a staff person. When I did, I explained to the staff person in English that Natasha was lost and asked if she could help her. The staff person spoke to Natasha in

Russian for a while, and then told me that there was nothing they could do and that she would have to go wait at the front entrance for her friend. She also seemed to say that Natasha was part of a tour, so I asked "Can't you track down where this tour is right now?" and she replied "Russian tours are not like European tours. They do not wait for you. The only thing she can do now is wait at the front entrance." Natasha seemed in a hurry so she started walking toward the front entrance and I waved her goodbye.

As she walked off, I looked at her great looking back body side again and thought "I can't believe I just made eye contact with a good looking girl like that across a crowded room and just exchanged phone numbers like that! That NEVER happens in the USA! Russia sure is VERY different after all! I hope she really likes me. She gave me a lot of good vibes. I'll definitely call her tomorrow and I hope we get together soon. Perhaps Olga ditching me today was a blessing after all since I met someone far more interesting." Then I rejoined Jasson and Jesús and we slowly made our way to the entrance we came in through earlier.

When we got outside, I noticed that Natasha was standing out there re-united with her friend, who was a short blonde girl. I went up to her again and said "So you found your friend!" and she introduced her friend with the same name as her, Natasha again. As the five of us mingled, Jasson suddenly began chatting with two Arabic girls nearby. As me and Natasha were trying to understand each other, Jasson came forward with the two Arabic girls and told me that these Arabic girls could speak both Russian and Arabic and could translate between me and Natasha. I said "But I don't speak Arabic" and he replied "Ah but I do, so you just tell me your message in English, and I'll translate it into Arabic to these two girls, and they will translate it into Russian to Natasha." A light bulb clicked within me. "That's a great idea!" I said. So I began relaying messages through this process, to Jasson in English, then he to the Arabic girls in Arabic, and them to Natasha in Russian. Natasha replied by going the opposite way, to the Arabic girls in Russian, who in turn translated to Jasson in Arabic, who in turn translated to me in English. It was a perfect combination. I was amazed at the teamwork that was going on here. It seemed that outer forces were helping me get to know Natasha. Everything seemed to be clicking. I took this all as a good sign. Finally, Natasha relayed to me through the process that she and her friend were on their way to see the ballet, and that I could come with them if I wanted to. I didn't want to impose, and plus me and my friends already had plans to go explore St. Isaacs Cathedral after this, so I suggested that I call her tomorrow and we could just meet then. She relayed that that was a good plan, so we said our goodbyes and departed. I thanked the two Arabic girls for their help and we went on our way.

## **Chapter 7: Further exploration of the city and nightlife**

Knowing that St. Isaacs Cathedral was within walking distance, we circled around the streets looking for its structure to walk toward. At first, we were lost for a while and going in circles. Finally, I asked some people who pointed us the way. Making sure we didn't go in circles, I went to the other side from where we were, and finally we spotted it. When we went inside, we were mesmerized by how tall the ceiling was and how vast and high the paintings were on the inside. We toured the inside and took our photos and videos. Jesús wanted go outside and pay for admittance to walk up a railway to the outside of the top circular dome of the Cathedral, but it was almost closing time for the place so we decided against it. We all felt hungry though, so we decided to look for a place to eat and sit down.

Outside, I mentioned that earlier when we were lost looking for the Cathedral, I noticed an Italian place that looked nice, so we agreed to go there. After retracing our steps, we found it and sat down at an outdoor table with a canvas roof. It was very nice. And I was glad to be able to finally rest my sore feet. I wasn't accustomed to all this walking. Although it was a fancy looking place, the prices were pretty low by American standards. When I ordered several drinks, (I was so hot and thirsty and the drinks were too small so I kept having to order more) I noticed that they never came with ice. I learned from Jasson and Jesús, who met before me while touring in Moscow together, that in this country, like most countries, they do not put ice in drinks. I requested some though, so the waitress brought me a bowl of ice. I put it in my drinks to make them colder and finally felt the coolness of my juice and coke. However, as I chewed the ice from my drinks, I felt a bad taste in them. Then I suddenly realized that the water for this ice may very well be from the tap water here, which we aren't supposed to drink because it'll give you diarrhea! "Oh no!" I thought. "No wonder they don't put ice in the drinks here." I also learned that clean drinking water here in Russia was not free in any restaurant, unlike it is in the USA, and at that moment I missed how convenient things were in the USA, because I was not used to having to pay for water all the time.

In the middle of my meal, I suddenly looked at my watch and realized that it was almost time for me to go meet Natalia from Anastasia Web (not the Natasha I just met at the Hermitage!) at the metro station she told the hostel staff. I asked the waitress for a box, then gave the box to my friends to take back to the hostel for me, paid for my meal and gathered my things to leave. I told my friends I'd meet them back at the hostel and then asked the wait staff how to get to the metro station I needed to find. Fortunately, they told me it was within walking distance and directed me to the way. I thanked them and went on my way. Along the way, I asked several pedestrians to point the way when I wasn't sure where I was, showing them the paper with the metro station name on it. The girls I asked seem to look at me curiously after I walked away from them. I kind of enjoyed this kind of attention of being an exotic foreigner. Eventually, I came to Nevsky Prospect again and felt relieved that I was in familiar territory. When I got to the appointed metro station, I could see why it was an easy place to meet someone at. The entrance and exits were small and close together, and the inside of it was a small area with one escalator going down and one going up it. Two people looking for each other here can't possibly miss each other. I realized that I was about 15 minutes late but she was nowhere to be seen.

After half an hour of waiting and prowling about, I asked a tall nicely dressed girl who was waiting for someone herself, if she could use her cell phone to call Natalia's home for me and ask if she was coming or not. (at this time, I thought using cell phones to make local calls here were free!) She understood me, nodded and took it out and dialed the number I showed her. After speaking on the phone briefly in Russian, she said that she talked to Natalia's mother and that she has no idea where she is. "Oh great" I thought. But I wasn't that disappointed because I was already very tired after this long day and wanted to go home and rest. After another half hour of waiting, making my total wait equal to an hour now, I decided to leave, wondering what happened since we couldn't have possibly missed each other if she had really shown up. I went down the escalator into the metro station, using my circled map again to ask for directions to my metro station. I made it back safely again and went into my hostel tired and exhausted and ready to rest for the rest of the night.

When I got back, I told Jasson and Jesús about what happened and that I had been stood up for some reason. Then they suggested that we browse some local bars tonight. I was ambivalent about that but since we already had such great and memorable adventures together, I agreed, knowing that it would be more fun to go with them. After getting directions for some local bars from the hostel staff, we ran into



some European guys including a tall guy from Finland named Marko. He was very friendly and interesting. After talking to them, Marko suggested that we follow them to a bar he's been to before downtown and then a friend he's meeting there will direct us to a great nightclub that we can go to called "The Metro Club." Too tired to do another excursion into downtown, I kind of suggested to my two friends that we just stick to our original plan of going somewhere local. However, they were enthused by Marko's plan and so they wanted to follow him instead. I reluctantly came along, shaking my tired head.

As all of us walked back to the metro station, I realized that it was almost midnight. So I said "Wait a second. The metro station is almost closed, and if it's still open it won't be when we get back and furthermore we'd be stuck in downtown til 4am because of the opening of the bridges too!" Marko said not to worry because if you pay a taxi driver enough, he will find an alternate lesser known route back to the hostel for you. But Jasson and Jesús didn't really care, and told me that since we're all here on vacation that we should make the best use of our time and see and do as much as possible. We all went down into the deserted station, and the subway did come for one last round into downtown. When we got off the station at Nevsky Prospect (yes again!), Marko found a cute girl by herself walking out of the station as well and then began talking and flirting with her. She smiled and was very friendly about it, and took all of our flirting with a good attitude. I realized yet again that the girls here really are different because she did not show the slightest snobbiness or defensiveness or attitude that an American girl would have shown at least in part. When Marko offered her to join us, she politely refused saying she had somewhere else to go and so we all said goodbye to her. She left with a blush and smile. Flirting here sure feels so clean and fun!

Out on the street of Nevsky, Marko led us the way to a large but deserted bar and pool area. It was pretty quiet in there and the lights were well lit. We all sat down at a table as Marko told us to wait for his friend to show up, who was an English speaking Russian girl he met before that would give us suggestions as to where to go next. After a while, the door opened and a very tall incredibly good looking stylishly dressed girl walked in. She looked like she walked straight out of Cosmopolitan magazine! I thought "That can't be her can it? Is this Marko guy this lucky!?" Marko said "Oh there she is." and got up and greet her, saying that they haven't seen each other in a long time. He introduced her as Alina to all of us and we all introduced ourselves to her one by one. It was obvious that all of us had our jaws dropped and were captivated by her. She held the attention of all 7 or 8 of us. She also spoke English fluently too. As we all scooted and made room for her, she sat down at the end of the table next to me and Marko (yes I was glad about that :)). As we all talked, eventually the table split up into two discussion groups, with our half of the table's conversation being controlled by Alina. Marko explained that he had met her about a year ago at a big disco club called "The Metro Club". She then asked him how his girlfriend was, and he said he was still with her and they were doing fine. Then Alina and I started making small talk as well, and I found out that she visited the USA in New York for a few months before. She mentioned that she was offered to sign up with some modeling agencies while she was there, but she didn't feel she could go far in it because her facial bone structure wasn't the right kind for the industry. When she mentioned that she is interested in some work study program in the USA, I offered to help her out since I used to work for my state local Employment Office. She gladly accepted and took down my email address and gave me hers so that she could contact me about it later. Marko also gave me his email address.

Then I talked to Alina about my impression of St. Petersburg and Russia so far. When I said "Well one thing I've noticed for sure. The girls in your country are much more intelligent than the girls in my

country. It's very obvious just from the conversations I've had so far." she replied "Well that is a great compliment to us." After a while, Marko and Alina decided that they needed some private time alone to catch up on some stuff, so he suggested that the rest of us go to The Metro Club. Outside, Alina hailed some gypsy cabs for us and said that as a local she can get us better rates, so she hailed two of them. One for me and my two friends, and the other for the rest of the group of European guys. After speaking to both drivers and getting us a fare of only 50 rubles, we got in and left.

The car we were in was obviously old and unstable and badly maintained. I kept wondering if it was going to fall apart. The driver was in an army camouflaged uniform and seemed kind of aloof. Halfway during the drive, he stopped and said some things to us and pointed to him having to make more turns ahead. "Yeah so?" I said "Why doesn't he proceed?" Jesús explained that it was obvious that he wanted more money. "No fair!" I protested, "He already agreed to the price that Alina got for us. He can't just change the deal in the middle of the drive!" But the driver persisted, so Jesús gave in and told us not to worry about it and that it was still cheap. I then asked "Is he saying that the trip is farther than expected, so he should be paid more? Or that he has to drive a detour around some construction, which increased our fare?" but Jesús did not know, only that he wanted more money. Angry about this man's lack of integrity and slimy trick, I reluctantly agreed so we didn't have to sit here stalled. After we each gave him a little more money, he started the car and proceeded again.

We were dropped off in front of the Metro Club, which was three stories high and looked really fancy, though from the looks of it, it didn't seem like it was very crowded in there. As we waited for the other taxi with the rest of the group to show up, I roamed around a bit in front of the disco building and saw a sign that said the price for entrance was 350 rubles (I think) which was equal to over 10 dollars. "I don't think I want to pay 10 dollars for this. It may not even be worth it." I said. Beside that, I was puzzled because since most people here make about 50 dollars a month, how could they possibly afford to pay 10 dollars for a disco entrance fee? This time, both my friends agreed, so we decided to wait outside for the other taxi to arrive and then decide with them what to do next. After a long time, they never showed up, which concerned us. We hoped the rest of the guys were ok. Since there was an outdoor cafe next to the parking lot, I suggested we sit down to have a snack and drink while we waited for the other guys to show up. We went in and they bought some Russian beer while I got a tall can of orange vodka. As I drank it, I noticed myself getting strongly buzzed, but since it tasted good, I continued drinking it. By then, I was already very dizzy and knew I was in bad shape.

After a while, we all decided to try to head back now, realizing that the other taxi probably wasn't going to show up. We talked to several parked taxis, which all quoted us the same price, which was higher during the middle of the night. Being the cheapscape that I am, I suggested we try to bargain down the price, but Jesús said that's the best price we are going to get at this time of night, so we just got in one. After speaking to the driver, Jesús said that the driver knew a way to get us across the other side of the river to our hostel, even though the bridges were still up. How he did so, I do not know because as he drove, I faded in and out of consciousness because of the orange vodka I had, which I still drank from because it was still in my hand. The next thing I knew, we were at the front of our hostel and it was about 5am. I sluggishly with great effort got out of the cab, paid my share of the fare, and walked slowly to my room. Now THAT was probably the most I'd ever done in a day! Before I left though, Jesús told me that another tour was arranged for tomorrow morning. This time it would be with a private driver who would show us the outskirts of St. Petersburg. Therefore, we could only sleep for a few hours. I told them to wake me up if I accidentally overslept. Then I went to my room, set my alarm, and in complete exhaustion immediately fell fast asleep.

## **Chapter 8: Pushkin and Peterhoff tours with Jasson and Jesús**

The next morning, I missed breakfast at 9am because I had to catch up on some sleep. Then I met up with Jasson and Jesús to go on our next tour. I knew I was supposed to call Olga today to find out her schedule, but I didn't want to deal with her because I had just had the time of my life yesterday with my two new friends, who were like brothers to me now. And the energy we all had together during our journeys seemed almost magical too, so I didn't want to miss out on another memorable day with them. Plus, they were leaving to go elsewhere the day after too, and I'd much rather be with them on another special adventure than with a bland blonde who was a boring conversationalist, not knowing where it would go.

Our guide today was Sergey, a private tour guide with his own car who spoke great English and was very accommodating. He had a very accommodating and friendly manner. We first stopped at a bank we could exchange some currency into Russian rubles. As I was negotiating the rate with the teller, I suddenly found out that I would get a little less rubles per dollar than the bank I went to before. Then Sergey stepped in and said that with his Russian passport, he could get me the normal rate instead of the higher foreigner rate. He did it for me and I thanked him for it.

As he drove us through the city, he pointed out to various landmarks and buildings and told us stories about them. We passed two city gates which he explained were landmarks erected to celebrate the defeat of Napoleon and Hitler. As we left the urban part of the city, I was glad to be away from the hustle and bustle and toward open space and peace and quiet. The rush and crowdedness of the city had been emotionally draining for me. While it was nice to be out in the countryside, I felt a little anxious at the way Sergey was speeding down the road. What made it more unnerving was the fact that these roads had holes and cracks all over them, which could flip a car going over them at a high velocity.

The first place we stopped at was a park called Catherine's Palace in Pushkin. Sergey parked the car in what looked like a huge estate with well maintained lawns and parks. There was a huge blue building next to us called Catherine's Palace. We got out and roamed the area as Sergey led the way. The whole park estate looked something like the huge estate in the movie "Pride and Prejudice" based on the novel by Jane Austen. It was very vast and well maintained. The grass looked like it was cut and trimmed constantly. There was also a big lake in the middle of it. If it weren't for the heat, I would feel very cool and relaxed. There were tourists from all over the world roaming around. As we approached a rock fountain in the middle of the park surrounded by a group of tourists drinking from it, Sergey explained that the water pouring from the rock was ok to drink. (the only place I've seen so far where you can drink the water without buying it!) All of us took turns drinking from the water, which was very refreshing and soothing in the heat and humidity.

Afterward, we ran into a group of girls who seemed to be tourists as well. Jesús and Jasson mingled with them and soon began taking pictures and video footage with them. I brought mine out as well and took some video of them mingling and flirting around. As a short girl wearing red and white approached, I said "Kak vas zavut?" (meaning "what's your name" in Russian) and she looked into the camera and said "Oxsana." They understood me! How cute! Then Jesús had a photo taken of him carrying Oxsana in his arms. "Wow they sure are friendly!" I thought. "Most American girls would not have let a stranger carry them like that, and with a smile on their faces too!" Then I went up and took a

photo with Oxsana while carrying her too. After the group of girls left, some of them looked back at my friends as they were walking away, and Jasson said that one of the girls gave him sort of a sexual look (but I don't remember the details). However, we didn't want to act on it because most of those girls were teenagers.

As we made a circle back to Catherine Palace, we all discussed whether we wanted to pay to go inside the palace to take pictures and videos. Jesús wanted to go in and get tons of footage. I didn't though, because it was already hot and humid outside with a gentle breeze at least, and I knew after yesterday in the Winter Palace that being inside a building with no air conditioning would make it worse and I'd be sweating like crazy in there. Jasson was fine either way. After discussing it, we decided that Jesús would go in by himself, while the rest of us would wait outside, get something to eat and sit down. Sergey, our guide, said that me and Jasson could go to a cafe nearby and get some snacks while he went to his car to take a nap. We went off in search of the cafe, but had difficulty finding it. After using my dictionary several times with people, we finally found it, but it was an indoor place that didn't look very nice. We both ordered some beer and coke and sat down to drink for a bit. The waitress was really hot, so I kind of flirted with her and made a pass at her, but she gently refused. (the girls here at least do not make you feel stupid or offended when they refuse you) Then a guy walked in, talked to the waitress a long time, then talked to us about where we were from and such and such. After I finished my coke, we decided to go back outside and get something to eat at the food stands since the cafe menu was all in Russian and I didn't want to bother trying to understand it. I ordered a big bottle of beer and left.

So we left to return to the outdoor snack and souvenir stand area. After we got some drinks, I went back to Sergey's car parked in the shade and got out the box with my dinner last night at that Italian restaurant that I didn't finish, which was a meal of rice and vegetables. It smelled slightly sour, but I didn't care because I was so hungry. I brought it back to the snack/souvenir area and looked for a place to sit. I saw an empty chair in the middle of the street next to some souvenir stands. I asked the girls working nearby if I could sit down and eat there, and they said yes, speaking a little English. When I realized I needed a fork or spoon, I took out my dictionary to ask where I could get one. They pointed me to a lady selling snacks in the corner. When I went to get it, she gave me a plastic fork and asked for one ruble in exchange. (nothing in Russia is free, not even plastic forks, sugar cubes, or ketchup!) Afterward, I sat down on the chair in the middle of the street and was finally set to enjoy my meal and beer. Jasson went to get some hot dogs and other things. As I ate, we both chatted with two girls nearby working at the souvenir stands. One of them was named Dasha. The other Katja. There were both very attractive, looked about 19 or 20, and spoke some English. Dasha told me that she had been to the USA before for a few weeks (either as an exchange student or because of her father's business, I don't remember). When we talked about the differences between American girls and Russian girls, she said in a beautiful exotic accent "The difference between our girls and yours is that in your country, the women do not have very many interests." I replied "Exactly! I've always noticed the same thing. I have so little to talk about with American girls most of the time. There are so few hot topics that I can tap into with them. It's always frustrated me!" I was wondering if based on what Dasha said, that it would mean that I would find much more in common with the girls here because they, like me, have a much wider variety of interests. If so, that would be fantastic and I would be right in coming here after all! I hoped she was right. After Jasson had a photo taken with Katja, I asked for one too, and she took a photo with me while I sat down in my lunch chair.

When I finished my meal and beer, I got up and looked at what Dasha and Katja had to sell at their souvenir stands. After she showed me all the items, I decided that a t-shirt would be nice so I picked one out that said "From Russia with Love" on it and the whole Russian alphabet on the back of the shirt. Then we exchanged email addresses with them. Dasha said that she is interested in finding a tall American boyfriend if possible, and that it would be great if I could help her. I said "sure" and wondered why it appeared that she wasn't considering me to be a candidate, but then again, she was taller than me. Then Jesús came out of the palace and found us sitting there. When we asked him how it was in there, he said it was ok and shrugged his shoulders. Sergey also came back and asked if we were ready to go to the next place, which was Peterhoff. We said ok and bid Dasha and Katja goodbye and promised to write them.

The drive this time was longer through various fields and little buildings. Sergey sped again as usual, and not only that, but he seemed to be missing cars when passing them by inches. When I remarked how dangerous this seemed, he said with pride "Don't worry. I can feel the road in my soul. Driving is second nature to me. I know exactly what I'm doing." Then he added "Besides, what would life be without a little risk? Russian men love to take risks." I said "Well Americans like to take risks too, but....." to which he replied "Americans? No. I have taken many Americans on tour before and they care so much about safety and caution." I then said "Well maybe not the tourists you meet, which tend to be older, but young people in America often take foolish risks." As we passed what appeared to be a police station or check point, he told us to put on our seatbelts, or else he might be fined. As we approached Peterhoff, Sergey pointed to a nice looking building that he said was a traditional Russian restaurant. It was a large wooden building that looked like a giant log cabin. Jesús asked some more about it and then he suggested that it would be a good idea to stop in and try the food there. Sergey said there was enough time for it if we wished, and that the prices would not be too expensive. So we agreed to go and Sergey parked the car there. He said he'd wait outside and read while we went in.

The inside was marvelous. It had exotic colorful traditional Russian decorations that looked like they were from the 19th Century or something, and beautiful souvenirs for sale in the restaurant lobby as well. In addition, all of it was in the setting of a warm cozy atmosphere of a log cabin resort. The restaurant staff were also very friendly and upbeat, and dressed in colorful outfits that looked like village people from the past. It was cute as well. As we sat down, I became excited. Everything here was so wonderful, even the plates, silverware and wine glasses! And to top it all off, the menus here had English in them as well. Finally! I've never felt so happy being in a restaurant before! Jesús started taking video camera footage everywhere. It was like he couldn't stop. I think I ordered some pancakes and salad and smoothies, but I don't remember. Jasson and Jesús ordered bigger meals though. As our food came, we were delighted at how delicious it was.

During the conversation, the topic shifted to the Middle East. I told Jasson that in my country, the media makes the Middle East look like a dangerous place with religious fanatics ready to kill you at any moment. He explained that in Lebanon, the American tourists that come there also tell him that, and that most of the Middle East was nothing like that at all. He said that only the Gulf part of the Middle East was dangerous. The majority of it was more warm and friendly than one could imagine. He explained that it was the custom in his country of Lebanon, and most of the Middle East, for shop owners to treat you like family when you come to their store. And that it was not uncommon for him and other shop owners there to invite tourists to stay in their homes after visiting their store. When he meets American tourists, he said, he always treated them like family, and they left amazed and wondering why the area was so different than what the American media portrayed. He also said that the

people in his country have such high values, that you could leave your wallet in the middle of a crowded street, then come back two days later and it would still be there! "No way!" I said. When I brought up the issue of terrorists, and why they like to hit Israel all the time, he asked me if people had a right to defend themselves if their land was invaded. "Of course" I said, "but what does this have to do with terrorizing Israel?" He explained that Israel brutally took and conquered land that had belonged to the neighboring countries, and that those countries merely wanted to do whatever they could to make Israel give back their stolen land. "I didn't know that" I said "If that's so, our media rarely mentions that, if ever. I wonder why. Perhaps our government supports Israel because of the Christian influence in our country, so they will say anything in favor of it."

I wondered if Jasson was spouting propaganda or real history, but something in his tone told me that he knew what he was talking about. He then said that it would be a great experience for me to visit the Middle East sometime and learn the truth about it. I would also always be welcome to stay in his home, where he and his father ran a watch and jewelry shop. He also added that if I were to go to his country, the girls there would give me lots of attention as well, perhaps even more than the Russian girls here do. After our meals and snacks, the waiter brought us some red wine, complimentary on the house. I tried it and it tasted really good. How nice of them, I thought. Jesús continued to take video and photos, but one photo of us with my camera was enough for me. After we paid for the meals, we realized that we had spent a lot of time there, although it was very delightful. I've never experienced so much enthusiasm in a restaurant before. We then said goodbye to all the wait staff there and made our way out the door. When we greeted Sergey, we explained what a great time we just had.

Sergey then drove us into Peterhoff, explaining that this area contained half of the marvels of St. Petersburg, and that to miss it would be to miss half of the wonders here. We parked in a crowded parking lot, and got out. Immediately, there was the smell of food and barbecue all around there, with lots of people hungrily eating at outside tables. I wished at that moment that I wasn't a vegetarian! As we lined up to buy tickets at the booth, I was filled with wonder at what lay beyond those gates. After we paid and passed the gates, we were in a courtyard with horses being led by guides. One lady was trying to get on, but she was afraid and her friend was encouraging her. I video taped the funny scene. No explanation was needed that the guides were hoping we would ride those horses and pay them. The thing is, there were so many good looking girls that were guiding the horses. As we passed them, they kept offering us rides. I was interested, but Sergey said that it wasn't a good idea now because we had limited time left before the main attraction, which were the fountain parks and palaces ahead, closed, and it was better to ride the horses afterward. Made perfect sense to me, so I agreed.

As we passed the courtyard into a trail, we suddenly came upon a surreal magnificent sight that looked like a part of heaven itself. Before us lay a plethora of golden statues, fountains, springs, ponds, palaces, and parks! It was truly a sight to behold with awe and wonder. The three of us stood in awe for a while, and time seemed to stand still for a moment. Then I took some photos, and Sergey led us down the steps. There were people and excited tourists everywhere. The palace stood at the top of the hill, while golden statues and fountains filled the slopes toward the park fountains below. As we descended the steps, I realized more than ever how devoid of culture the US really is in comparison to all this. "What we have are mostly corporate and commercial buildings." I thought. When we reached the bottom, Sergey explained that below the fountains here was an underground chamber that Peter the Great and Catherine used, and that if we wanted to go into it, we would have to pay a small fee. I wasn't interested because I was fine out here above ground, but my two friends were, so we decided to meet up half an hour later at a concrete structure that we all pointed at.

After they left to tour the underground chamber, I explored around the area at the foot of the sloping fountains. As I walked around one of the fountains, I saw a man and woman in Victorian style costumes taking photos with tourists. When they were done, they gestured to me to come take a photo with them. "Does it cost anything?" I asked? "Only one dollar or thirty rubles" they said. I agreed, so I put down my stuff, gave my camera to a third costumed person with them, and got in the center of the costumed couple. After the photo was taken, the man left but the lady quickly took my other hand and said "And now a dancing pose." It seemed I had little choice, so I followed along. While the guy took another photo, she whispered "Only one more dollar." How honest of her to tell me in advance, I thought. Then she said "One more. A romantic pose." Ok whatever, I thought, it's only one more dollar. Afterward, I picked up my stuff and walked around some more before sitting down at the concrete structure that we agreed to meet at. My legs and feet were tired so I wanted to rest and just look at the sights before me.

After about 10 minutes, Sergey and my two friends came out to meet me. I asked them if it was worth it, and they said it was interesting, but ok. As we walked around the other side of the big fountain, we saw another costumed couple taking pictures with people for money. When they gestured toward us to take photos with them for only one dollar, I said that I had already did it with the couple on the other side, but Jesús hadn't so he went to them. Before I could warn him that they would hustle him for two more dollars after the first photo, they had already pulled him in. I stood and watched in amusement as they hustled the second and third photo on him the same way the other couple did to me. Afterward, I told Jesús that the same thing happened to me, but I couldn't warn him in time. He just shrugged and said "Well that's how they do things, the usual hustle." When the couple pointed to me, I pointed to the other couple on the other side and said that I already did it with them. Then I pointed to the costumed woman, and because she was more attractive than the woman in the first couple that hustled me, I jokingly said "Ok how much for a photo of a kiss with her then?" The couple laughed at me and the lady said "100 dollars!" Then the man stepped forward and said "It's free if the kiss photo is with me!" and everyone around me laughed. I blushed a little and felt embarrassed. (NOTE: If this was a fictional story, I would mention that what I just jokingly said was a foreshadowing of a significant event that would happen two weeks later. But since all of this is purely non-fiction, I will use the term "foreshadowing" anyway, because interestingly enough, something of this nature which I just joked about here would occur on a larger scale two weeks later with Julia in Cherepovets. See the later chapters on Cherepovets for the details.)

Then Sergey led us toward the rest of the fountains deeper in the park. As we strolled along, we came upon other little fountains and structures, even some dragon heads pouring out water. We then came to an area filled with rock beds that children were running back and forth through, while sprinklers were shooting out at them at uneven intervals. It was a nice way to cool off for them, and I was tempted to run through them too. At first, the sprinklers appeared to be shooting up after the children and adults ran across the rock beds. This made it appear as though the children were stepping on some trigger switch as they ran across the rocks. However, Sergey pointed to a man watching them and told us to watch his leg. Sure enough, every time the man's leg pressed down on something, the sprinklers went off. The children only thought that the sprinklers were going after them. All the other sprinkler rock beds were the same way. We also passed by a scene where tourists were throwing coins into the metal boot of a statue for good luck, Sergey explained. As we strolled around some more, Sergey told us that the park was closing and that people were starting to clear out.

We made our way back to the Palace with the main fountains and golden statues, and started ascending the steps. When we got back to the courtyard with the horses and guides, there were only a few guides left. One guide, a hot tanned girl with a skimpy shirt on, was nearby. I was too tired to do any of the horse rides, but I wanted to get a photo of her, so I went up to her and gestured if I could take a photo with her. She said in a sharp tone "Niet! Niet!" (which means "no" in Russian) and pointed toward the horse and said some Russian. I figured that she said I could get a photo on the horse with her if I paid for a ride on the horse first. I declined and we walked on. Since we were so thirsty and it was still hot and humid, we all bought some soft drinks, although it was difficult to find cold ones. Interesting enough, it seemed that in many of the cart freezers, the ice cream in them was able to remain frozen in there, but the plastic bottled soft drinks were all warm despite being in the seemingly same temperature that froze the ice cream. Many of the freezer carts were like this. Odd. As we approached Sergey's car, we saw a man pulling a bear cub on a leash. It was interesting, so I tried to ask what the bear was for. Sergey asked him for me and told me that I could pay him for a photo with the bear cub. It was cute but I didn't feel like being near a little bear at the moment, so I declined. So we got into Sergey's car and left. It had been a fantastic day, and my legs were tired and I felt dehydrated in the heat again.

Along the way back to the city, Sergey showed us a few more sights along the way, and told us a little about his personal life and his wife. At a point near the Hermitage Palace and the Neva River, he pointed to a building and said that there were some popular bars and discos here that we could go to later at night if we wanted. Jesús was very interested in it, so he took down directions to it so we could go later. As we approached our hostel, Sergey asked me why I was in Russia. When I explained to him about the mail order brides and my search for love, he said "Why didn't you say so before? I could introduce you to many girls." I said ok and to call me at my hostel if he found anyone to introduce me to. Then we all got out and paid Sergey and we each told him how wonderful and special our tour was, and how thankful to him we were. He was very flattered and told us that he enjoyed our company too. Then I asked if he had a business card and brochure that he could give me, so I could pass his services on to others, such as the men on my email list, [RussianBrideList@yahoogroups.com](mailto:RussianBrideList@yahoogroups.com). He gave me a brochure with his wife's opera school's advertising on it, and said that he shared the same email address. (If anyone reading this wants it, let me know) We said our final thanks and heartfelt warm goodbyes, and left.

In the lounge, Jesús said that we should rest for a while and then tonight we should go visit those bars and clubs that Sergey pointed out to us. I said it sounded good but that I wanted to call the Natasha that I met in the Winter Palace yesterday to see if she wanted to meet me tonight. Since she seemed to like me and flirted with me a lot, it might go somewhere, I thought. I should follow up on it at least. After finding a Russian girl guide there who could translate for me, I took out the piece of paper with her cell phone number on it, my prepaid calling card and gave her a call. When I heard her cute upbeat voice, I became excited and said "Hi Natasha?" and she immediately recognized me and said "Hi Winston." Wow she remembered me right away! I tried to make small talk with her, but she didn't understand me. So I gave the phone to the translator girl and said "Ask her when and where she would like to meet me again." After talking to her for a brief moment, she hung up the phone and said that Natasha wants to meet me at Aurora Landing at 7pm, which was an hour from now. "Great!" I thought. After getting directions to it on my hostel map, I was told that it was the sight where that naval ship I've seen before was harbored, and that it would be in walking distance. I went back to my room to lay down for a while, and then got up, video taped my hostel room and told the camera who I was about to go meet again, and to wish me luck. Then I got my things together, fixed my hair, washed my face, put on some cologne, and left.



## **Chapter 9: Meeting with Natasha E. again at Aurora Landing**

As I walked along the street, I saw to my right a gate with security guards in them and people looking out the windows of the buildings. I had read in the tour book that there was a prison near my hostel, but I wasn't sure if this was it or not. Either way, I was nervous walking past the uniformed security guards inside, because I wasn't sure if they would grab me for trespassing or not, even though I was outside the gate. So I walked speedily. Then the sidewalk ended and I had to walk on a grassy slope. The walk was a lot longer than I thought. I looked at my watch and realized that I would probably be a little late. When I got to a little street next to St. Petersburg Hotel, I shook my head because although the street was small and should be easy to cross, it wasn't, because cars were randomly coming out of the corner and speeding like crazy through it. Finally, when it was clear, I ran across it.

After passing the huge hotel, I saw the bridge I was to cross to get to Aurora landing, and the naval ship on the other side of it as well. It looked like a long walk, and it was already 7pm, so I started walking briskly. As I walked across the bridge, I felt a little nervous and kept wondering what to say to Natasha when I saw her and if I should suggest that we go anywhere. I guess we'll just see when we meet, I thought. When I got to the other side of the bridge, I quickly rushed to the naval ship, hoping that Natasha was still there waiting for me. As I neared it, I saw an outdoor cafe near the entrance to the ship, with tables outside. Squinting and looking hard for Natasha's gorgeous figure, I smiled when I saw her approach me in the distance. She was wearing high heels this time and her legs looked incredibly sexy and gorgeous as she walked toward me. As she got closer to me, I saw an enthusiastic smile on her face, and right then I felt at ease and knew that everything would be ok. I couldn't believe how hot and sexy she looked today in her skimpy outfit, and as we walked toward each other, I thought "If only my friends back home could see me now!"

When we reached each other, we both hugged and then she led me to a table where her other friend, the short blonde that she was trying to find yesterday in the Winter Palace who also named Natasha, sat. She then pointed to the beer on the table and said that if I wanted one, to go inside the cafe and get it. The beer looked very tasty so I agreed and went in. The person in front of me who was ordering seemed to take forever, and so did the bartender, which made me anxious because I was anxious to go outside and join Natasha. Finally I got to the counter and ordered the beer in a big plastic cup and when I got outside, Natasha and her friend got up and beckoned me to follow her. We came upon a thick cement railing over the Neva River and sat down on it. I felt very comfortable and even a bit upbeat now because she was so giggly, warm, and enthusiastic. I decided I would tell her about my day. Using my guidebook, I tried to tell her that I was on tour in Pushkin and Peterhoff today. I even showed her clips from my camcorder of the area. She remarked that they had just been there today too! I asked when, and Natasha took out some paper and pen and wrote down the times that she was there, which I discovered were a few hours before me. It's too bad we didn't run into each other there again, I thought.

Then we started telling each other about ourselves. I was intrigued and I thought that communicating with her would be fun and challenging. I used as simple English as possible, occasionally using my dictionary and her pen and paper as well. She was able to understand most of what I said, and answer most of my questions as well. As we were communicating, I realized that I was fortunate because like me, she also had really keen communication skills, and could deduce a lot of what I was saying. Being a champion in the game of Pictionary helped me a lot here, but her keenness and quick wit helped out

at the other end. I knew this combination of skills between us should solve a great deal of our language problem. I was very glad for it too. And in addition, she was very playful with me as well.

From the conversation, I learned that she was 23, from a city south of Moscow called Tula, (she showed me on a map) and was on a guided tour here. I was also surprised to find out that the hotel she was staying in was close to mine. In fact, I had passed it on the way here. It was St. Petersburg Hotel, the one that I had trouble crossing the street next to. When I saw a silver ring on her middle finger, I pointed to it and said "Natasha married?" and pointed to the word "married" in my dictionary. She looked at it and said "No. Natasha no married." I breathed a sigh of relief. Then I thought of a song I could show her. I remembered what the Russian National Anthem sounded like, because I've seen the movie Rocky IV so many times, where they played it before the match between Rocky and Drago. When I sang it, she recognized it and showed me how to sing it correctly. After a while, I suggested that we video tape ourselves singing it together. She agreed, and her other friend took both our camcorders and one at a time taped us both singing the Russian National Anthem, with her singing the actual words, while me humming it. We had to do several takes though, because she didn't work my camcorder correctly. A couple of times after the takes, Natasha pinched me in the belly. I hope that's a good sign, I thought. She also semi held my hand while singing too. I kept hoping she would hold it completely. When we finally got it on both our camcorders, we rested a while.

Then I asked her what she wanted to do tonight. She said that she and her friend were both very tired and wanted to go rest in their hotel room for a few hours, and then come out again at 11pm to watch the Neva bridges open up at night, which was a popular tourist event. She said that tomorrow we should meet in front of her hotel at 7:30pm and go to the Metro Disco Club, and that I should call her at 7pm first before coming to confirm it. I agreed and said it was a plan. So we got up and started walking together across the bridge and back to our hotels. While crossing the bridge, I noticed that she was semi making the motions to hold my hand, but stopped herself and didn't do it all the way because we were still so new to each other probably. But she was giggling at everything I said. When she taught me that the bridge we were walking on was called "most" in Russian, I repeated it and added a few other Russian words to it. She giggled and pinched my stomach again.

When we got to her hotel, she said goodbye to me and I said I'd call her at 7pm tomorrow. I blew her a kiss and left. As I walked back to my hostel, I thought "Wow! She does seem to really like me. I can't believe how lucky I am! This never happens in the USA. And I met her accidentally yesterday too. She is so gorgeous too, and her personality makes me feel so happy and giggly to be around. She gives off a great aura. I really hope this leads somewhere. She seems like a keeper."

## **Chapter 10: Exploring the nightlife and meeting the US Marines**

When I returned to the hostel, I showed Jasson, Jesús, and others there the video clip of me and Natasha singing the Russian National Anthem in front of the Neva River. They all agreed that she looked great there. After a few hours, Jesús suggested that we go to the bars and discos that Sergey suggested were popular. I agreed, wondering what we would get into next. So we set out later and decided to eat something first. Getting off at Nevsky Prospect, we decided to just walk along the main downtown street and expected to find some interesting restaurant to try. Unfortunately though, since everything was labeled in Russian, we did not even know a restaurant even when we saw it! We had to rely on seeing clearly through the windows of the street buildings whether it was a place to eat or not.

After a long walk, we decided that we were spending too much time looking, so I suggested we just go to McDonald's, which a pedestrian told us was just a few blocks ahead. At first, Jesús protested, saying that it was pointless to come all the way to Russia just to eat McDonald's and that he preferred trying something more culturally Russian. After a while, he gave in and said to just go to McDonald's. We found it after a few blocks, and stood in a very long crowded line to get our order. Once inside, it was very nice to finally be in a place with air conditioning. When we got to the counter, I decided to forget my vegetarianism for once and order a Filet-O-Fish combo meal. This time though, the big coke I ordered had ice in it! How nice! The Filet-O-Fish tasted so good, much better than I remembered it. Since McDonald's was considered a classy high class place to eat in this country, they seemed to make the quality of the food here much better than in the US. After we finished our meals, we set out again toward the street that Sergey told us about. It should be straight ahead a few more blocks.

When we got to the street along the Neva River and near the Winter Palace that Sergey told us about, we got out and were on a crowded walkway by the Neva River filled with young people hanging out and a few light festivities going on. There were even boats with restaurants in them anchored by the walkway. As we walked along, I stopped to see something. In the beautiful dusk, I saw a surreal sight. At the edge of the river on the other side, were buildings and palaces of different colors. What made it surreal was that the colors from the buildings were reflecting off the waters of the Neva River in front of it, showing a glowing patchwork of colors emanating from it! Wow, I had never seen anything like that before! In addition to the surreal sight, there was exotic Russian music playing from the festivities along the walkway as well. It was right then that I realized just why this city had a reputation for being beautiful and romantic at night. This was it, I thought. It could get no better a sight than right now. I only wished that I had someone special with me to see it, such as Natasha.

As I stood in awe of the surreal view and environment, Jasson and Jesús, who were ahead, walked back to me and said "Come on, Winston!" I said we should hang out here for a while and meeting the girls along the walkway here, but they wanted to hurry up and find the popular bar they were looking for. I reluctantly moved along forward. We also passed by a big platform boat with disco lights in it and crowds dancing on it. I suggested we go to that one because it was outdoors in the cool breeze, rather than the heat and humidity in the bar. But Jesús said that entering there would be very expensive. So we went and finally found the bar we were looking for. After paying a 5 dollar entrance fee, we descended the stairs and went in. I rarely went to bars in general, so I wasn't sure what to expect. Inside, there was a bar and then noises of a disco in the back. As we passed the bar tables, I noticed a good looking blonde sitting by herself, so I looked at her and smiled and she smiled back. Then I went up to her and said "Hi how are you?" and she spoke replied in almost fluent English. Then I said "May I join you?" and she said "Yes. Sure." When I sat down and offered to buy her a drink, she said "Yes." and then she said she wanted a beer. As we talked, I ordered two beers for us from the cocktail waitress. She spoke pretty good English, and we didn't seem to have much chemistry, but I continued trying to connect with her anyway. Jasson and Jesús came back and saw me talking to her, so they went up ahead to the disco area. When the beers and the tab came, I was shocked that the beers were about 4 dollars each. That's more than they would be in the USA! Looking perplexed, I asked if there was some mistake, but the waitress and the girl I was talking to said no. I reluctantly paid the price, regretting that I had been so generous. The blonde I was talking to was actually waiting for her girlfriend to come back from the disco. Several times she went into it and came back after not finding her. After a while, she got up and said that she was going to join her other friends at a nearby table, and then left. I waited

a while for her to come back, but she didn't. So much for that, and what a waste of money on the expensive beer too!

I walked forward to the disco area, and amidst the noise and smoke, saw my two friends mingling about and watching people dance. I saw Jasson mingling with a voluptuous but hot blonde who has enormous breasts, and Jesús mingling with a group of tall men who looked to me to be American. As I approached them, Jesús introduced them to me and said that they were US Marines. I introduced myself to them and told them where I was from. Then I said to one of them, "Aren't the women here so much different than back home?" and he said "Yeah! They're much wilder!" I replied "No I didn't mean that. I mean they're much nicer, smarter, and attitude-free." but I wasn't sure if he paid attention. He seemed too much into the music and the drinking to care. Then I made my way to some tables nearby where some girls were sitting by themselves. Looking at their faces, they looked like they were stoned or something. They didn't look like proper girls, but they were attractive. I picked the most attractive one to talk to, but she could barely speak English and didn't seem very interested in me. She declined my offer to dance too. (I have never had much luck in bars and discos for some reason.) Then she said that she was married too. After a while, she and the other girls sitting there got up and left one by one. I glanced across and Jasson was sitting at a table with that voluptuous blonde. I saw him order a martini for her. I didn't know what to do next so I just sat and listened to the music. After a while, Jasson came up to me and told me that the girl he was talking to was actually a prostitute, and wanted 100 dollars for an hour. I was surprised because she seemed too reserved and self-absorbed to be one, and plus she didn't seem to approach or solicit any customers like prostitutes usually would in the USA or Canada. Jasson remarked that he heard that prostitutes here aren't allowed to initiate the approach first, and that the custom here was for the men to make the offer first. Interesting, I thought, but I wondered how anyone would know then who was a prostitute and who wasn't. I mean, if a guy guessed wrong, he could get slapped in the face! Then Jesús came up to us and said that the US Marines he was talking to offered to take us all to another more wilder disco with them. They had a van and driver assigned to them that could transport us too. They both wanted to go with them, so I followed along.

Outside, we got into their white van, and I introduced myself to the rest of the Marines while they did the same to me. As the driver started the van, a staff person from the bar we just came out of came up to me outside my window and when I rolled down my window, he pointed to the unfinished beer bottle I was holding and seemed to say something and then "ruble" after it. It sounded like he wanted me to pay to take the beer with me to go. Looking confused, I said "Why should I have to do that? It makes no sense. Are you crazy? This beer was overpriced enough as it is." Then I gestured with my hand for him to go away, but he persisted. As the van backed up, he finally gave up and walked away. During the drive, I asked the Marines why they were stationed here, and they said that they were there to protect the US Embassy. One guy in particular (I forget his name) was very talkative and seemed to have a lot to say about everything.

The van pulled up next to a crowded disco place that was next to the big Church of Christ the Savior that we had toured two days earlier. When we went in, it was so packed that you could barely move without bumping into someone. There was almost no breathing space at all. This caused such a high level of humidity from the body heat that I began sweating profusely. There was a second floor above us as well. We went to this bar area in the back, and the Marines told us that they could get us free drinks because they knew the bartenders there. Since the beer from the other bar had already begun to make me feel buzzed (I have a low tolerance level), I said that I just wanted ice water. Then the Marines started taking sips of vodka and then using cigarette lighters to fire up their tongues afterward,

blowing little flames out of their mouths. Several of them took turns doing it. They acted macho while doing it and everyone around them cheered on. Then they kept urging me to try it too, but I kept politely declining, saying "Nah, that's ok. Not really my thing." After I finished several glasses of ice water (you don't know how hot and dehydrated I was!), I roamed about looking for girls to dance with. But they were either all with other guys, closely packed in groups of other girls, or just too far away for me to reach because movement in there was very difficult and inconvenient. So I ended up standing in the corner leaning against a table counter with my glass of ice water on it and waiting and watching for any available girls that might glance my way.

After a while, as I reached behind me for another drink from my glass of ice water, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around. It was Brian the tall Asian guy from LA I met at the airport!!!!!!! I said "Oh hey you!" As we talked, I realized that he was drunk and just spouting things non-stop. He was talking my ear off! He said that the female friend that picked him up at the airport was gone because he sent her home, and that she was only interested in his money. I then asked him if he had also come to meet mail order brides that he was writing to, too. He admitted that he had gone that route before several times, but the women usually tended to just use him for his money, making him spend a lot on them, and never really getting serious with him. This was too bad for them, he said, because he had about a million dollars to offer them. (since he was drunk, I took that with a grain of salt) He said that he sort of gave up on the process long ago and now just came to Russia to have fun and meet women on the spot instead, which seemed to work better for him. I agreed and said that anything is better than trying to deal with women back home in the USA because I couldn't get anywhere with them no matter what I did. He agreed and said that his experience with women in LA was the same. At that moment, I felt a little pessimistic about my chances with the agency women I was about to meet here and I hoped that my experiences would not turn out like his. As we talked, I started trying to dance with a tall skinny blonde next to me, but she seemed to prefer to ignore me instead. Why doesn't she get intrigued that I'm a foreigner, I thought. After a while, I told him to give me his email address later on tonight so I could email him later and tell him how the rest of my trip turned out. (I didn't see him again later though, so we never exchanged emails :( I have no idea how to get in touch with him now because I don't know his last name, other than to call Luftansa Airline and ask them for anyone named Brian on my flight roster that day.) He agreed and then I roamed around a bit and then I decided to go outside to get a breath of fresh air because the crowd, noise, and smoke was getting to me. Besides, I thought, maybe there will be some nice girls hanging out outside, and it would be easier to talk and hear them out there too.

Outside, I marveled at how pretty and romantic the big Church of Christ the Savior was next to us. It glowed in the moonlight and streetlights with a luminescent beauty. Looking around, I saw a few people relaxing around including two girls sitting down on the sidewalk across the street in front of the canal protruding from the gigantic church. I went up to them and said hello. They replied and made small talk. They looked sort of trashy, but their English was excellent and I would have thought that they were European girls if I had met them elsewhere. When I asked why they were outside rather than in the disco, they said they just weren't in the mood for dancing. One of them told me that her occupation was as a Safari tour guide through the wilderness jungle area of Russia. I looked at her strangely because she did not look like a nature or safari type person at all! In fact, she had too much makeup on and looked like a Hollywood streetwalker. I wasn't sure if she was being truthful or not, but why would she lie to me about this I wondered. I thought she might be a prostitute, but I didn't want to assume things and ask her about it because if I was wrong, it might be insulting to her. Plus, I figured that if she were a prostitute, then she would have made an offer to me by now. After a while, a car

pulled up and a guy inside gestured to both of them, and they took off in his car. I had no idea who he was.

Then the talkative Marine I mentioned came out and hung out a bit. I told him about the two girls I just met and what happened. He said that they were probably prostitutes, and that the claim one of them made about being a safari tour guide was probably a lie. When I asked him why they would lie about such a thing, he said that that was just how they were. He then went on in a long tirade about how things were in Russia. He spoke in a very detailed confident manner, like he had studied Russia for a long time. But much of what he said sounded bogus and far fetched, and I had the feeling that he had got his knowledge from bad biased sources. Among the things he said were that half the women in St. Petersburg were prostitutes, not necessarily professional ones, but that they would be willing to exchange sex for money if offered. He said that most women here had no other way to make money. And that HIV was rampant here. Then he said that the only people that have money here are those in the mafia or affiliated with them. When I told him about the Natasha I met in the Winter Palace the other day who seemed to be rich because she had an expensive looking camcorder and braces and could afford to go to the ballet, he said that she was probably from a mafia family or affiliated with one. I hoped he wasn't right. (Recently, I told Natasha this on the phone and she laughed and said "No! Nastasha no mafia.")

After a while, I went back inside to see what Jasson and Jesús were doing. But I couldn't find them anywhere in the packed crowd. So I decided to go upstairs to see what was going on up there. Making my way up a thin spiral staircase, I realized that the top floor was just a table serving area. I suddenly heard someone call my name, "Winston!". Looking around, I saw a man wave to me from a corner where he was sitting with a group of people, mostly girls. It was Marko, the Finnish guy who took us to the bar last night to meet Alina! I went over to him and his group and they made a seat for me. I told him that Jasson and Jesús were here too, and that I would bring them over later to say hi. Marko introduced me to his Russian girlfriend, who was a skinny brunette with short hair. We joked around a lot and I tried to talk to them but it was difficult with all the noise of the disco around. I flirted around with a young brunette in the group, but Marko's girlfriend told me that she already had a boyfriend. After a while, I realized that I felt very icky now because the sweat that had been pouring from my body profusely had now drenched my body, and I felt like my body was all covered in dry salt. I had never felt so salty and sticky before! Not only that, but all the girls around me felt sweaty and sticky to the touch too, so I was kind of turned off for a while and didn't feel as attracted to girls there as usual.

After a while, I felt so hot and humid all over that it was uncomfortable sitting there with them at the table, so I got up and said that I'd look for my two friends and bring them up here to talk to them. I managed to find Jasson downstairs and bring him up to talk to them. Then I felt it was time to go outside again to get out of the heat and humidity. After a while of relaxing outside in the cool air, I saw the chatty Marine come outside again, this time with a cute petite girl in his arms. How come I'm the only one not getting lucky tonight, I thought. And I wondered again why I never seemed to have any luck with girls in bars or discos. I walked over to them and said hi to them. The girl was cuddling with him and kissing him occasionally, although they could not understand each other. I pulled out my Russian phrase book and showed the Marine the section on socializing there, and said that he could point to any phrase in there such as "Can I take you home tonight?" or "What's your phone number?" and there would be the Russian translation below it. He took the phrasebook and they toyed around with it for a while, smiling and giggling while using it to communicate with each other. I told him "I hope for your sake that she's not a prostitute too." and he said "Nah, I don't think so." I kept looking

around for available girls to meet so I wouldn't feel left out, but was having no luck. Looking at my watch, I realized it was already past 4am. I asked the Marine if me and my two friends could get a ride back to our hostel in their van and driver when it came to pick them up, and he said it would be no problem, but that we would have to be ready in an hour. I said "cool" and then went back inside the disco to find my two friends to inform them of this. I couldn't find Jesús anywhere but I found Jasson upstairs with Marko's group and told him about it.

As I went about looking for Jesús, near the door a trashy looking blonde with wrinkles on her face and missing teeth yelled out to me "Hey, you want sex?" I checked her out and then said "No thanks." When she persisted and put me on the spot saying "You don't like sex or something?" I replied that of course I did, but not right now. She kept asking why not. Then out of curiosity for how much they charged here, I asked her how much she would charge, and she said 100 dollars for one hour, and that I wouldn't even have to get a hotel room, because she would be willing to go find some bushes with me. I shook my head because I had heard that it was much cheaper here than that. I won't be taken advantage of just because I'm a foreigner, I thought. I also asked her why her English was so good and that she must be from Europe. She admitted to being from Eastern Europe. Looking her over again, I didn't feel that I could get aroused by her, so I said no thanks again and that I had to look for my friend right now anyway. She then said "You want your friend, or you want sex?" I brushed her off and kept looking for Jesús. Finally I found him and told him the plan to get back to our hostel, but then Jasson was missing. After finally finding both of them, I told them to be outside soon because the van was coming any time now. I had enough of this place anyway.

While I waited outside, the morning light had already come up, and I asked the Marine why the prostitutes here seemed to speak the best English compared to all the girls. He said that many of them come from Eastern Europe to practice it here. I wondered why. Finally the white van pulled up and I brought my two friends out to get ready to leave. The chatty Marine and his girl got in as well. "Are you allowed to bring her back to your housing quarters?" I asked. He said that he wasn't and that he was just playing along and would probably drop her off at her home. As they drove us back to the hostel, they told me that they were holding a party at the US Embassy on Friday night, and that I was invited and could bring guests if I wanted to. Jesús and Jasson would not be able to make it though, because they would be gone by then, but I could and said I would keep it in mind. Both of them though, kept raving about the great time they just had tonight compared to last night. When they asked me if I had fun, I just said "It was alright."

When we got back to the hostel, it was already bright morning, and I was dead exhausted again. Tomorrow, my two friends would be leaving though. They would be heading back to Moscow together, where they first met in a hostel there. From there, Jasson would be flying back to Lebanon, but Jesús was headed to Europe for the next part of his vacation. I promised to say goodbye to them tomorrow before they left. I would feel sad though, because after their departure, I would be here alone again to deal with invariables like Olga and the agency women again. I nicknamed all of us "The Three Amigos" because Jesús was Mexican. They both heartily agreed, and said that it was a pity that our journey together would come to an end tomorrow. I took solace in that our time together was special to me, and that the future after them would only bring new interesting adventures ahead. I went to sleep knowing that I would sleep in a bit today and miss the 9am breakfast for sure.

## **Chapter 11: Meeting with Natalia T. from Anastasia Web**

(Note: Natalia T. refers to my backup lady from Anastasia Web, not to be confused with Natasha E. from the Winter Palace.)

I got up the next morning on Sunday at about 11am. Knowing that I had already missed the hostel breakfast, I got ready so I could say my goodbyes to Jasson and Jesús. I planned after that to call Olga again and also to call the Natalia from Anastasia Web that never showed up two days ago, to find out what happened and possibly reschedule our meeting. (I called her Natalia T. in the chapter title to avoid any confusion with Natasha E. from the Winter Palace.) After getting ready, I went up to Jasson and Jesús' room and knocked. They opened the door and I realized that I had woken them up. I apologized and layed down in an empty bunk as well to catch up on some sleep. After about an hour, we all slowly started waking up. I asked them when they were leaving for Moscow and they said probably in a few hours. We started saying our goodbyes to each other and Jesús remarked that all good things come to an end. I also said that I was sad that our "Three Amigos" bond was about to end. We all exchanged emails and I promised to tell them how the rest of my trip would go. They went to the showers and got themselves ready. I bid them one more farewell and went down to the lobby.

I bought some more prepaid callings cards and first called Olga to see if she was free today. When she picked up the phone, she immediately said "Why did you not call me over the weekend?" I told her that I was busy with tours, just like she was probably busy the last few days. I was surprised she said that because I thought she didn't really care about me, since she seemed so apathetic in general. Then I asked if she was free today and she said she wasn't and that I should call her on Wednesday morning instead. I became upset and again I asked her "Olga, I don't understand something. You knew I was coming here months ago. How come you didn't set aside time for me?" She replied "I'm sorry but I never promised that I would spend a certain amount of time with you. I said before, my schedule is hard to predict." Whatever, I thought. Perhaps this is a good thing and I'll find something else better, such as I did when I met Natasha in the Hermitage.

After saying goodbye and hanging up, I decided it was time now to enact my backup plan to visit the other agency girl there, and to go to local agencies to get more introductions. (described in my chapter "Preparation, Plan and Strategy") First I called Natalia from Anastasia Web Agency ([www.anastasiaweb.com](http://www.anastasiaweb.com)) with a translator to help me. I asked her through the translator why she didn't show up two days ago at the metro station entrance she suggested. She claimed that she was there and waited 40 minutes for me before she left. That's impossible, I thought, because I was there 15 minutes late but definitely not 40 minutes late, and the metro entrance was so small that you couldn't possibly miss anyone, and I had scoured every inch of that small area for her for over an hour! Perhaps she's an airhead and was waiting at a completely different station? If so, that would be odd though because she was the one who picked the station entrance I waited at, which she chose because it was small and easy to find someone at. Whatever, I thought. The translator said she was free to meet me today and suggested a station on Nevsky Prospect again. I didn't want a repeat of being stood up two days ago by her, especially if she was at the wrong station the whole time, so I suggested to meet at my local station of Ploschad Lenina. Natalia agreed and said she would meet me under the big clock hanging over the front of the metro building at 1pm. The translator also said that Natalia could only spend the afternoon with me because she had to prepare some tax documents for work that night too. That worked out perfectly since I had a meeting with Natasha (from the Winter Palace) that night anyway.



After the plans were set, I thanked the translator and got my backpack and stuff together to be on my way. Before I left though, I thought I would give one full service agency which was run by a lady named Ludmila a call to try to set up an appointment for the next day. I was referred to her by someone from the Russian Bride email list, for help with anything I needed including introduction to ladies in her profile. She told me that she didn't have very many ladies in the age range that I wanted, but that she would call the few that were to see if they were available. When I asked if I could come to her office to look at her photo album of ladies, she offered to come to my hostel to pick me up and bring me there, but I said that I already had plans and that maybe tomorrow we could do that. Then she asked me if I was comfortable in the hostel and offered to arrange accommodations for me in an apartment there instead. I said I was fine here and that it wasn't necessary for me to spend more on an apartment, especially since I don't have a lady that I need a private apartment to spend time with there. She didn't seem to believe me and kept on insisting that an apartment would make me more comfortable, but I politely declined her offer. Then I said I would call her tomorrow and said goodbye.

I made the short walk to my local metro station Ploschad Lenina. I thought about getting flowers at the stands near there, but since I wasn't even sure if she would show up, I decided against it. I sat on the benches nearby in an easily visible area to wait for her. I watched as hundreds of people went back and forth, looking for her. I only had seen two photos of her online, which were gorgeous, but I wasn't sure what she would look like in person. I only exchanged a few translated letters with this woman through the agency, shortly before I left for my trip, so I knew very little about her and had no idea how we would work out, or if we would even have fun together. But I had a weird feeling about this though, because her voice on the phone sounded stoic, quiet, and unenthusiastic. For a while, I watched people passed by, looking for anyone who looked similar to the way she looked in her photos. I did see some ladies that resembled her, but they walked by so quickly and did not seem to be looking for anyone.

When I realized it was now half an hour after our appointed meeting time here, I became worried. I hope she wasn't going to stand me up again! Sheesh! Wondering if she perhaps was waiting at another entrance of the huge metro station building, I got up and began walking around the perimeter of the massive square structure. I passed the food stand area (which was open 24 hours a day and even had vegetarian sandwiches and burritos for me that were cheap) and looked around the other entrances there, but I didn't see her there and there weren't any clocks above those entrances anyway. It seemed to take a long time to walk around even half the perimeter of this building. When I got to the back side of the metro station, there was a fence blocking me and on the other side of it were some trains that looked like they were meant for long distance trips. Surely she couldn't be waiting over there! I looked at my watch and realized that it was now almost an hour past our appointed meeting time! Why can't I meet people who show up on time, I thought. I began making my way back to the main front entrance again.

Right when I got back to the main entrance of the station, I felt a tap on my shoulder. Turning around, I recognized a lady with Natalia facial features. Immediately I recognized that she looked kind of grouchy and had a frown. She wasn't as gorgeous as in her two photos but she was attractive and tall nevertheless. She quietly said "Natalia" to identify herself. Thanks for being so brief, warm and saying my name, I thought sarcastically. I smiled and said "Oh hi!" She then said "Sorry I late. I went to work first." I replied "Oh that's ok." Then she said "What would you like to do now?" I thought about it and said "I don't know. What do you suggest? Have you eaten lunch yet? Perhaps we can go to a restaurant for lunch downtown?" She didn't seem to understand any English, so I took out my phrase book and looked up the words to show her. She understood. Then I asked if she knew any Chinese restaurants in

this city, since I hadn't eaten it for so long and perhaps some Chinese people would be running it, in which case I could at least speak Chinese with them to order what I wanted. She said she knew one and agreed to go, so we both went into the station, bought our metro tokens from the teller, and went down the long escalator. During the subway ride, she kept trying to say things but I couldn't understand any of it, so I gave her my dictionary to use. She pointed to a word that translated as "strange and unusual" and pointed to me and the crowd on the train. I said "Strange? You mean me or them?" She didn't understand so I shrugged in frustration. What a strange thing for her to say, I thought. I didn't like that I was already getting weird vibes from her. Perhaps she meant something else and the dictionary didn't have an exact translation and there was a misunderstanding here, I thought.

When we got off on Nevsky Prospect, there was pouring rain outside, and Natalia seemed indecisive as to where to go to find the Chinese restaurant. I suggested asking someone, but she just pointed the way down the street. We walked down for a bit and after a while, I felt like we were lost and wondered why we didn't just get off at a closer metro station to here. Realizing we were lost, she stopped and asked for directions and then beckoned me to turn back the other way. Since we were both already wet and unprepared for the rain, I then said "You know, it isn't that important to find a Chinese restaurant. Any other good place would be ok too." I tried my best to communicate this to her, but she insisted on trying to find it. Finally we found it and went inside. It was beautiful red and exotic inside. The hostess sat us down and we were glad to be out of the rain. I was also glad to be able to finally get some good food. To be honest, the food here hadn't been anywhere near as good as back home so far. I asked for an English menu and fortunately they had one. We both decided what we wanted, and then I took out the camcorder from my backpack and took some footage of her while she was ordering. She didn't look happy at the time and had a frustrated look instead. While I was ordering, I wanted to confirm a few things so I asked if the owners could speak Chinese and the waitress said yes and got one of them out for me. A lady came out who was Vietnamese but could also speak Chinese. After confirming a few things with her, I finished my order. Trying to cheer Natalia up, I talked and tried to be funny. It seemed to help, but not much. When our food came, it looked very tasty but in small portions. It was very delicious and I was glad that the items here were inexpensive in US dollars.

After Natalia had some food, she looked happier and more smiley. So I took out my camcorder to capture the different side of her. Then we took some photos of each other sitting across the table too. After I finished my meal, she asked me why I didn't order any meat or chicken. I said I didn't like it, but then she replied "No. You must eat meat or chicken." Then she took the spoon and put some sweet and sour pork on my rice. Oh no, I thought. I haven't eaten real sweet and sour pork in over ten years. But I didn't want to look strange to her, so I forced myself to eat it. It was awful and disgusting, especially after not eating meat for ten years. I tried to get used to it but I didn't think I could, not after the way it tasted now. I did like the red sour sauce on it at least though. But still, I pretended to enjoy them, and even ate some more of them.

After we were done, I suggested we take a walk and maybe visit some shopping malls. When we went outside, the rain had cleared up. We went around some shopping areas and up to a nice fountain in the middle of a small courtyard entrance with a rolling wet metal ball in it, which was cool to the touch. People were also throwing coins at a ledge nearby. Natalia said that they were doing it for good luck. To try to impress her, I took out a ruble to show her that I could land it up there with my precision throwing. After three times of being very close, I finally got it up there. She smiled faintly. Then we walked into a big mall inside with two floors. We explored many shops on both levels of the mall and I took a few takes from my camcorder. I bought some ice cream for both of us, and later a yellow flower

for her (her choice of color, not mine!). Then we went to a grocery store so she could look for some things. Inside, she pointed at various fruits and vegetables and told me their names in Russian. I learned that banana was "banan". How cute. I pointed at some of them too and told her the names in English.

Afterward, it was time for her to get back home so we went down into the metro again. Along the way, we stopped to look at a box full of kittens for sale in one of the tunnel walkways. They were so cute and the owner of them kept having to put them back into the box whenever they would crawl out of there. We then rode the metro together to a transfer station where we would depart on different routes. At the transfer station, I hugged her and then moved in for a kiss, but she turned her cheek and let me kiss that instead. That sucked, I thought. Maybe she doesn't really like me, because if she did then she wouldn't have done that. I said I would call her later. But deep down inside, I knew there wasn't really that much chemistry between us.

## **Chapter 12: Evening plans with Natasha E. spoiled by simple mistake**

Returning to the hostel, I showed some of the guys there the video footage I took of Natalia from my camcorder. They said that she was pretty but they didn't understand how we could communicate when she didn't speak any English. I said that most of our talk was like baby talk. We merely pointed to things and said their names and used facial gestures for the rest, along with dictionaries of course. It was funny but kind of non-productive. lol I also ran into Jasson and Jesús again, who had still not left. They said they were about to soon. Now it was getting close to the time for me to call Natasha (from Winter Palace) again so we could meet somewhere and perhaps go to the Metro Disco as discussed the day before. I noticed that it was starting to rain again, and I hoped it wouldn't spoil my plans with Natasha. I reached into my pocket to get her number. I couldn't find it! Anxiously, I checked and rechecked every little piece of paper in my pocket for her mobile telephone number, but the gray piece of paper with it written on it was simply gone! I started getting real worried. I went back to my hostel room and searched through all the pockets of my other pants, and also the side pocket of my backpack where I stored some phone numbers on paper as well. It was nowhere to be found! I rechecked everything many times over, not wanting to give up, but it was simply gone. I thought of what to do now. The only other contact information I had for her was her hotel phone number and room number, so I got that out instead. I certainly hoped she was waiting in her room and not somewhere else, or else this wouldn't work. I called the hotel, which was St. Petersburg Hotel, and asked if the operator spoke English, which she did, and then I asked to be transferred to her room number. She did so but no one picked up. I called back to do it a second time and the same thing happened. I now felt very discouraged and it was now a little past the time I was supposed to call her mobile number. Perhaps Natasha was waiting somewhere else for me to call her on her mobile phone. If so, there was nothing I could do about it. By now, the rain was pouring hard, so that further dampened my mood and made me think that perhaps it's better to stay inside tonight anyway. But who knows, Natasha could still be waiting for me to call so we could meet somewhere, and I wouldn't know it unless I was able to reach her somehow. Being the resourceful person I am, I continued to look for a way to solve this problem. Finally, I decided to just show up in front of her hotel entrance as we planned after I was supposed to call her at 7pm. Maybe she would be waiting there anyway. If not, I would just leave a message for her with the hotel receptionist.

So I made the long brisk walk to her hotel through the rain which was a ways down the street. Since I didn't have the time or mood to bring my umbrella with me, I got soaked wet during the long walk.

When I got to the front entrance of the big hotel, she wasn't there, so I went in and searched around the lobby and restaurant area and shops area to see if she was hanging around there, but she was nowhere to be seen. I then went up the elevator to her room number and knocked on the door. No one answered. My heart started to sink. This girl seemed to really like me (which was rare for me, especially from someone as attractive as her) and I was going to miss a night out with her just because her phone number on a piece of paper mysteriously vanished from my pocket! It simply wasn't fair! Normally I am a very organized person who never loses things, so I was not used to these things happening. The only thing I could do now was to leave a message for her with the hotel receptionist. I went up to the receptionist, who spoke some English fortunately, and asked for what options there were. She said I could leave a note for Natasha with the hotel key lady who takes and gives guests their room keys when they went out and came in. This lady, she explained, would give the note to Natasha when she came in to pick up her room key. I wrote the note in English explaining to her what had happened, and asked her to call my hostel as soon as possible to give it to me again. I had one of the receptionists translate it into Russian for me on the same piece of paper. Then I gave it to the key lady but when she opened the key drawer to put it in the appropriate slot, she said that her keys weren't there, and that Natasha must have kept them with her when she went out. "Do most people do that?" I asked. She said not usually since the key is attached to a big heavy piece that is usually an uncomfortable burden to put in your pocket, but that some may still do anyway. I knew that I often carried my room key out with me even though I wasn't supposed to because I simply didn't want to deal with the hassle of waiting in line in the lobby to ask for it back. But anyway, this wasn't good news for me because it meant that whenever Natasha came back to her hotel today, she wouldn't need to pick up her keys from the key lady and therefore wouldn't get my note either, at least not tonight. There was nothing else I could do now so I just left the note for her there and left. Perhaps since Natasha was out somewhere and wasn't in her room getting ready, she wasn't available tonight anyway, but there was no way I could know. By now the rain cleared up again so at least I would have a dry walk back.

During the walk back, I started to feel depressed. "I still can't believe this" I thought, "Natasha is the only girl so far who seems to really like me, and it just so happens that the piece of paper with her mobile number on it is the only thing that is missing from my pocket, and right on the day that we were going to go out too! This had to be the ultimate case of Murphy's Law! How could this happen? And why? I hardly ever lose anything!" I kept kicking myself for not copying down her number somewhere else as a backup. I also knew that this was a precious opportunity lost because Natasha was on a tour that would soon conclude and send her back home to Tula, so we didn't have very many chances left to meet here and go out.

Back at the hostel, I sat in the TV lounge room feeling sad and depressed. I saw Jasson and Jesús pass by and I said "Oh you guys are still here?" They said that they were about to bring their luggage out now to wait for a taxi to take them to the bus station for the ride to Moscow. I briefly told them about my spoiled plans with Natasha tonight and then I sat back down in the lounge. I knew that I ought to help my two buddies and wait outside with them for their taxi, but at this point I was too depressed to bother and plus my feet were very sore from all the walking I've done the last few days. I later regretted this though, because we had all been through so much together and the least I could have done was seen them off before they left. I knew from that point on that I would be alone here again and have to try to find new company among the guests. And I knew that soon Natasha would have to leave to go back to her town of Tula because the tour she was on had a set schedule which would conclude soon. I only hoped that something else enjoyable would happen during the rest of my time here in St. Petersburg. If not, I could leave early to go to Cherepovets (8 hours east of here by train) to meet my

second primary girl Julia so that I could have more time with her. I thought that I would have a good time with her because every time I called her before she got excited and stoked, and seemed really eager to see me, so she might really like me too, at least I hoped. Mingling around the rest of the night, I met a friendly group of Dutch travelers. So far, every Dutch person I've met has been very friendly, warm, outgoing, and attitude-free. That was so cool. This group was planning to do a long hiking camping trip in Siberia after their visit here in St. Petersburg. They must have a lot of courage and adventure to want to do that, I thought. One of the girls with them was very cute too.

## **Week Two: The Rest of My Time in St. Petersburg**

### **Chapter 13: Shocking discovery about Olga at Pulkovskaya Hotel**

The next day on Monday morning, I had breakfast and then decided to use the day productively by visiting some local agencies and seeing if they can arrange some introductions for me. I knew it would take a while to browse through their photo album catalogues anyway, so it would be a day's worth of work. First I called Ludmila again to see if she would like to come pick me up today to bring me to her agency office, which she ran out of her apartment flat. She told me that it would be useless now because she already contacted the few women in her catalogue that were in my age range preference (18-30), and none of them were in town. Therefore, she couldn't arrange any introductions for me anytime soon. She suggested another local agency she knew of, but she said it would cost me 50 dollars just to go in and browse through their photo catalogue. That's crazy, I thought. I decided it wasn't worth it because I could just go to the A Foreign Affair ([www.loveme.com](http://www.loveme.com)) office here in town that was referred to me a few days ago in the tour office that I stopped at with Jasson and Jesús to pay for our tour. (back in Chapter 5) I knew it was free to browse through their catalogue there and plus they were one of the biggest Russian bride agencies in the country so I knew they would have the biggest selection. After I told Ludmila this, she then again suggested that she put me in an apartment here to make me more comfortable. Again, I explained to her that I was fine where I was, and so she finally gave up on it. I wondered if she got any kickbacks for referring people to apartments here.

Then I said goodbye to her and took out the phone number from my pocket for A Foreign Affair agency. I gave them a call and a man there named Tim who spoke excellent English told me that I could come in and browse their selection of local women on their office computer, then pick the ones I'm interested in, and they will call them to arrange meetings with me. It sounded like a great idea to me, so I asked for exact directions and then thanked him. Their office was located in Pulkovskaya Hotel and the metro stop near it would be further south on the red colored route than I had gone so far. I got everything ready including my backpack, double checked the directions I got with the hostel staff, and then went on my way.

Along the walk to the metro station I stopped to get some pastries and had fun trying to figure out what was inside each of them. I pointed to various ones that looked interesting and asked the seller "This?" and then "And this?" He used my pocket dictionary to tell me what was inside each one. It felt like a fun game after a while, and I enjoyed it so I didn't rush it. Finally, I picked a lemon pastry and an apple pastry as well. I couldn't believe how cheap and big they were. They should fill me up for a while.

In the metro subway, I used the counting stops method and asked others in the train for confirmation before getting off. When I got off at what I thought was the right stop, I stepped onto the long escalator

winding up. During the long wait, I asked a young tall very attractive brunette next to me if I was at the right metro station, showing her the metro map with the destination stop circled. She spoke English and said that this wasn't it and that I had gotten off one stop too early. I thanked her and then noticed that there was a purity about her attitude toward me, so I started making small talk. She said her name was Svetlana. Since she seemed so kind, open, attitude free, and gorgeous I decided to go for it and ask for her contact information. Besides, I also wanted to test to see if the gorgeous girls here were really so much different than the gorgeous girls back home. "Can I get your phone number and email?" I asked. She shrugged casually and said "Sure." She took out a pen from her stylish purse and tore off a piece of paper from a notebook and wrote down both her phone number and email address. I thanked her and wrote down mine for her too. Then I asked her if she would like to have lunch or coffee now. She said that she couldn't because she had to be somewhere now, so I said ok and that I would call her sometime. When we got to the top of the escalator, we said goodbye and I turned to take the escalator going back down. I went up to the uniformed lady guarding the escalators and showed her the word "mistake" in my pocket dictionary to indicate that I had come up here by mistake. She let me go down without paying for another metro token.

During the wait down the escalator, I thought "Wow I can't believe this. The girls here are so cool, friendly, and attitude free. It's no fluke after all! I can't believe this is real. Where have I been? I know that in the USA if I ask girls I don't know for their number, they would usually either say 'No', 'I'm sorry but I don't know you', 'I don't give my number out to strangers', or 'I have a boyfriend'. The girls here aren't paranoid at all and have a totally different attitude!" Before I thought that that might have been a myth, but now I knew it was reality, and I knew that my chances of dating here and finding quality girls that were interested in me were very high. I felt ecstatic about my discovery here about how girls are, and I couldn't wait to tell everyone back home about this. But I also knew that when I got back home and flaunted all this on people, that many would be offended and try to cut me down and discredit me. But I didn't care because the truth was the truth and I was too excited about this to not share it.

When I got to the bottom of the escalator, I took the metro again and got off at the next stop, confirming with others nearby that I was at the circled stop on my map. When I got to the top of the escalator, there was a tunnel leading out to the street with many people standing and waiting in it with folded umbrellas. I soon realized why when I saw that it was pouring very hard outside. I did not have my umbrella with me either because I was not expecting it to rain today. After waiting a few minutes, I decided that I didn't want to waste time just standing here and plus I am not afraid of water or of walking through rain. So I walked up the steps to the street surface and just before I got out into the open, I realized that the rain was coming down much harder than I thought. Maybe this was a bad idea, I thought. But I went out anyway, and within seconds I was drenched hard. It was like a garden hose was being shot at me at full blast. I quickly went back down the tunnel to wait.

After standing around impatiently for a few moments, I saw that the rain had been reduced to a drizzle now. I went up outside and asked some pedestrians where Pulkovskaya Hotel was, saying "Gdeh Pulkovskaya Hotel?" ("Gdeh" means "Where") Some people pointed to me the way and then one young teenage boy told me to follow him. As we walked, he said "I will take you there if you give me money." I replied "No that's ok. Just point me in the right direction and I should be able to find it on my own." but he kept walking with me anyway, making small talk along the way. He was a nice boy and I felt a little guilty not offering him a little money, but I didn't want to be pressured either since I already

told him it wasn't necessary. After a few blocks, I saw it in the distance. It was humongous. No one could miss it.

When we got to the front entrance, he said goodbye to me and I was thinking about how much to give him for a tip when he turned around and walked away. Then I went inside, somewhat soaked, and went up to the receptionist to ask where the AFA office was. She said to wait while she called someone from that office to come down and escort me up. After a few moments, a young lady came out of the elevator, greeted me, and escorted me up to the office. Inside were desks, couches, and two modern computers with comfortable chairs and big screens. It looked comfortable and inviting. I introduced myself to Tim and he told me to go on the internet on one of their computers and look through their website, writing down the names and ID's of the local ladies I was interested in. He would call the ones I wrote down and if they agreed to meet me, then I would pay the agency 30 dollars per introduction. He gave me a pen and paper and I sat down at a computer. There were some American men coming in and out of the office sporadically, sometimes to sit and relax. When one guy sat in a couch near me, I asked him if he thought it was amazing that the women here are so different, friendly, unsnobby, and attitude-free, compared to American women. He agreed, and so did Tim. I boasted about how easily I had been meeting girls here randomly and casually and Tim remarked that that was one of the beauties about this country. When he said that a good way to meet girls here is by asking for directions, I said excitedly "Yeah! In fact, that happened to me on the way here when I got off the wrong metro stop and a tall gorgeous girl I talked to on the escalator gave me her number and email! It was never this easy back in America!" I was also glad that I was in a place where I could say this and not be flamed by anyone who was insulted.

The search engine on their site pulled up about 800 women in St. Petersburg in my age preference category. I started writing down names and ID numbers. Soon the list grew so long that I thought that I had picked too many. However, I did not know how to narrow it down because I can't really do that based on just photos and profiles of them without meeting them in person. And besides, perhaps only a small percentage of the ones I wrote down would want to meet me anyway. So I continued browsing on. Some of them also had short video clips of them introducing themselves, which gave them a more real touch. Occasionally, I stopped to take a break and mingled with the men relaxing in the office. I soon learned that these American men were staying in this hotel as part of a social tour hosted by the agency. A social tour is an organized tour arranged by an agency for Western marriage minded men to come and meet many ladies looking for foreign husbands through big parties and social events. The tour usually included lodging, transportation, and admittance to the social parties and events, which featured up to several hundred ladies per event. I had researched this option prior to my trip but found that it was way too expensive (usually about several thousand dollars, not including airfare) and much more than I needed to spend anyway.

After an hour or two of browsing, a very vocal man walked in. He looked in his late forties or early fifties, was somewhat bald, and dark skinned. Since he was so excited and spoke so loudly, I couldn't help but hear everything he said. As he paced around in confusion, he told everyone that he had met this 21 year old knockout girl at a social tour last week, and that after a few days together he had asked her to marry him. She agreed but said that she needed to get permission from her dad first, and since he lived out of town, she had to travel a few days to meet him and ask for his permission. He said that he hadn't heard from her in a while, and was fraught with anxiety in waiting out the outcome of this. He kept saying "Oh no! What am I going to do?" and then jokingly said to the staff there "This is all your fault!" Then he recollected to us that when they first met, she approached him and a group of guys at

the party and immediately pointed to him and said "You! Come here. Sit down." and told him immediately that he was the one for her. He felt so lucky that day. And he couldn't believe how stunningly gorgeous she was either. He showed us a photo of her, which showed her far away but you could tell that she was attractive. He said that the photo didn't do her justice and that she was way hotter in person. Then he said that the reason he was worried about her getting her father's permission was that he was 27 years older than her and might perhaps be even older than her father! "Whoa!" I thought, "This was stuff that could go on the Jerry Springer Show!" And he also agonized at how his family and friends back home would accept this. After a while, it got annoying and distracting listening to this. I also felt a little envious too, since the agency women I had met so far were nothing like that to me, and were instead apathetic and passive. I wondered when I would get this lucky too. Eventually the guy sat down and talked to one of the female staff members, who was very thin and attractive. He got her to agree to going out for a bite to eat with him in a while to help him get his mind off things. I continued browsing and surprisingly stumbled upon my primary lady Olga's profile and photo on their site as well. "These guys don't know what hot is until they've seen my Olga," I arrogantly thought.

After another hour or so, I was almost finishing up with my browsing and selection, when another man walked in who looked to be in his fifties. He looked well polished, with a beer belly, and affluent. We made some small talk and he introduced himself as Richard. He also was another lucky fellow because he got engaged to this young lady named Elena as well. They already went shopping for her engagement ring and now had plans to take the train to go to Finland together. I explained to him my situation and why I was up here in this office. I told him about the lady I came to meet here and how she kept blowing me off after our first meeting because she was always busy with other things, and so I wanted to use my time productively to arrange other introductions here. He said I was doing the right thing. Then he took out some photos to show me. First he showed me some photos of his fiancé Elena, who was a moderately attractive brunette, much younger than him of course. Then he put on the table a photo of his fiancée's sister, saying "And this is her sister Olga." I looked at it and for a moment time seemed to stop as my heart skipped a beat. Sure enough, that was MY OLGA in the photo! You could even see her name tag in the photo that said "Olga" on it. At first, I wasn't sure if I was dreaming or not. That was definitely her alright. No mistake about it. I said "Wait a second. This Olga is your fiancée's sister?" He replied "Yes, I met them both at a social tour party last week. They both came together. I started going out with Elena and Olga hooked up with this guy named Mark and they've been hanging out together ever since. In fact, she's in Mark's room right now in 2251." I looked shocked and said "So she is here now in this hotel in room 2251?" Richard replied "Yes, but she's with a GUY right now in his room."

I was utterly stunned. I couldn't believe it. I felt shocked, bewildered, hurt and confused at the same time. I never came up here expecting to discover something like this! What are the odds of this happening? What a coincidence this was that I would stumble here into this office in this huge city, meet this guy Richard, and find this all out! This couldn't be real. No, not after all the excitement I felt after meeting Olga. This must be a dream, I thought. I waited to see if I would wake up, but I didn't. As I stood there shocked and motionless, Richard said "Are you ok? Is something wrong?" I quickly pulled myself out of my trance and sadly explained, "Well, you see, this Olga is the lady I told you about. She's the one I came to see who's been blowing me off. The photo you showed me is her alright. No doubt about it." He looked embarrassed and remarked, "Sorry to hear that, and sorry to have to be the one to break the news to you, but she's been spending the whole week with Mark. That's probably why she's been blowing you off."



After discussing it with him further, I learned that she had met Mark at the social tour during the weekend before my arrival on Tuesday night, and that he was a rich man and had been taking her out and spending a lot of money on her. He said that there was only one day last week that they weren't together, and I slyly smiled and said "I know. It was last Wednesday, because I was with her the whole day that day." When I told him that Olga said she had to go shopping with her sister last Friday morning and then go to work afterward, he said that the shopping with her sister was true because she went with Elena and him to help pick out Elena's engagement ring. Richard said that he got the impression that Olga was a gold digger type, but that her sister was not like her at all. He also said that Mark was a trophy hunter type, who had been to Russia many times before, but he still liked the guy anyhow. I also learned that Mark took Olga to some nice beach on the outskirts of the city over the weekend. I felt that I must have looked so inferior to her compared to the rich guy Mark since I was staying in a hostel and he was staying here in this nice big hotel and hiring a driver to take her around. Then he told me that Olga and Mark were not engaged so I might still have a chance with Olga. But I didn't care because at that moment, I lost all respect for Olga and knew she wasn't worth my time anyway. I'm sure there were much better people out there to meet than her. I also realized that her ideal looks didn't matter to me anymore, and that it was a mistake to put so much emphasis on looks in the first place. Perhaps looks aren't that important after all, since dignity and betrayal can ruin them.

I wasn't mad at Olga because she was going out with other men though. We weren't committed and therefore she wasn't obligated to me only. And after all, I came to see other women beside her too. What I was mad about was that she was seeing multiple men at the SAME TIME, which took away from our time together that we planned a long time ago. She knew several months ago the exact date that I would come, and she said that she would arrange time for me when I came. Now that I made the big move and expense to come here, she blows me off and leaves me to find something else to do on the spot, which I did successfully, but still, it was very rude, inconsiderate, and clumsy of her to do this. At least I arranged my visits with my three primary women for different weeks in different time slots, not at the same time which would have been stupid. But perhaps this was a good thing, I thought, because it's better that I know this about Olga now than later, so I don't waste any more time, effort, or money on her. I should focus my efforts on better and more interesting people like Natasha E. for instance. (and speaking of her, I still had to figure out how to reach her before she left the city) So perhaps this incident was a blessing in disguise.

Richard said that he was sorry to be the bearer of this news to me, but that he did not want to get involved and would not bring this up to Olga, Mark, or his fiancée Elena either. I told him it was ok and that I would confront Olga about this later if I saw her again. He told me that I was doing the right thing by coming to this agency office and arranging for other introductions while I waited for Olga to be available again. "Well it was the only logical thing for me to do now." I said. He wished me luck and departed.

I finished up my selection from the rest of the profiles on the website and got up, stretched my muscles, and gave my selection list to Tim. He said that he would start calling them and then he would leave a message for me if he found any that wanted to meet me. I then thought of a great solution to the Natasha E. problem described in the last chapter. If Natasha never came to the key lady to pick up her room keys because she always carried them with her, I could just tape the note on the door to her room! Surely she would get it there. Bingo. Why didn't I think of that yesterday? I quickly wrote my message to her on a blank sheet of paper and asked Tim if he could translate those sentences for me in Russian in the half of the paper below my message. He said ok and did it for me. I also borrowed some packing

tape pieces and taped half of each strip to the edges of the paper, leaving the other half hanging out to put on her door. I thanked Tim and left. Out in the hallway, I was still angry and hurt about Olga, and thought of going to her room in 2251 to knock and surprise her and get the last laugh. But then I realized that it wasn't really worth it and it wouldn't accomplish anything. It's best if I just left with my dignity intact. I walked down the corridor to the elevator feeling dejected. What worse could happen now? I hoped at least, that I wouldn't have the embarrassment of running into Olga and Mark in the hall or elevator while leaving this hotel. Down in the lobby, I saw one of the guys who came into the office earlier. I asked him how much this social tour cost and he said about 3000 dollars, not including airfare. Then he looked annoyed and told me that if I really wanted to know, I could find out all this information on the website. Fine, be that way, I thought.

Walking out of the hotel, I thought that my only consolation now is that I met a much better and more interesting girl, Natasha E., as a result of Olga's betrayal, so perhaps all this was a blessing after all. And now, since I had already mentally written off Olga, I now set my sights toward my second primary girl Julia in Cherepovets. I was considering calling her soon, and leaving this city earlier than I planned to go see her. I knew that Julia would probably treat me better since she seemed more stoked and excited about me whenever we talked. Plus, I would be staying in Julia's flat so we would be in constant contact. And I had yet to experience hospitality in a Russian home, and this would be my chance to finally experience it. On the walk back to the metro station, I looked for something to eat since I was hungry but couldn't find anything good nearby.

When I got back to my home metro station, I went to the food stands on the side of the station and got some mixed vegetable wraps. I also got an iceless but cold large coke. It was a very good meal that hit the spot. In fact, I bought a second veggie wrap as well. I couldn't believe how inexpensive this meal was and how full it made me. Feeling well fed, I now started the walk to St. Petersburg Hotel to tape the translated note on Natasha's hotel room door. When I entered the lobby, I checked with the key lady to see if Natasha picked up the note I left for her the day before. Unfortunately, she hadn't and the note was still in her key slot there. Obviously, she must carry the room keys with her when she leaves and comes back. I again checked the hotel restaurant and gift shops for her, but she wasn't around. So I went up to her floor and firmly taped the note on her hotel room door. I left thinking "I hope this works, because this is my last resort."

Back at the hostel, I told the Australian David (the Christian camp counselor who took me to the internet cafe during my second day) about what happened at the AFA office at Pulkoskaya Hotel. He said he was sorry to hear about it but agreed that it was better that I know about this now than later so I don't waste my time with her and can move on. The rest of the night, I mingled with the Dutch group, some folks from Spain, and some new European guests. We played table tennis and watched some TV in the lounge. Trying to decide what to do tomorrow, I looked through the phone numbers in my pocket and called some of the girls. I got a hold of Lilia, the girl I met in the internet cafe on the day after I met Olga (described in Chapter 4), and she said she would check her schedule and leave a message for me at the hostel tomorrow about her availability tomorrow.

## **Chapter 14: Neva River canal boat ride with Lilia**

The next morning on Tuesday, I went to the hostel breakfast and had the usual tea, jam biscuit, yogurt, and cereal. I sat down at the table with the Australian David and told him how shocked I still was about

the discovery yesterday. When I remarked that perhaps this was a sign from God to show me Olga's true nature, he agreed and said he was thinking the same thing. We both believed that everything happens for a reason.

After breakfast I went to the lobby and the receptionist beckoned me over. To my heart's relief, she handed me a message from Natasha E. with her mobile phone number on it! My note on her hotel room door had worked! I wouldn't lose contact with her forever after all! Whew! In addition, the receptionist also handed me a message from Lilia, the girl I met in the internet cafe whom I had called yesterday. She said that she would be free after noon today if I wanted to meet. Cool, I thought. I first called Natasha E's mobile number to see if there was any chance for us to get together before she left town. She recognized my voice immediately again with an upbeat giggly tone. I tried asking her where she was the night we were supposed to meet in front of her hotel entrance, but she didn't seem to understand me. So I dropped it and asked when she was going to Tula. She said "Today, in a few hours." I felt my heart sink a little. There was no chance for us to go out on the town now. I asked if she wanted to meet for a few hours before she left, but she couldn't either because the tour was taking them somewhere today first before taking them back home. I asked if she could stay behind a few more days but she said she couldn't because the tour was taking her back home. So I sadly said goodbye and that I would call her again another time. Who knows, I thought. Perhaps I'll get a chance sometime later to pass by Tula and visit her. Then I said "Ya sku chai" which means "I'll miss you" in Russian. She repeated it back to me and then said "Kiss" before saying goodbye. I hung up hoping to see her again sometime.

After wallowing in sadness for a while, I picked up the phone again to call Lilia. She greeted me and I was happy to hear her voice. She said she was free for the afternoon and was open to suggestions. I suggested the boat canal ride through the Neva River that I hadn't gotten a chance to go on yet. She said that was a good idea and then suggested me to meet her at the small station on Nevsky Prospect where it is easy to find people, the same one that I waited for Natalia T. at when she never showed up. I didn't want there to be any mistake about this entrance so I made sure by referring to the small flower shop right on the side of the exit doors that I had seen before. She said "Yes! That's the one I'm talking about. I will meet you there at 1pm." I was excited to see her, but my evening tonight was free, so I decided to call Natalia T. again to see if she wanted to try to meet me again. Since she couldn't speak English, I found a translator tour guide girl nearby to help. I asked her to ask if she would like to meet me tonight. We called her and she picked up the phone. The translator girl said that she was free tonight and that we could meet at 7pm. Not wanting to be stood up at the station on Nevsky again, I played it safe and said to meet at my local Ploshad Lenina station again, where we met last time. She agreed. Then I remembered a suggestion by one of the American men on tour I met at the AFA office in Pulkovskaya Hotel to hire a translator from AFA if I go out with a woman here who didn't speak English. He said it would be very helpful and was only 8 dollars an hour. So I called AFA and got some referrals for two female translators for hire. I called both of them and left a message for each. Then I went to the hostel staff and asked if they knew of any translators I could hire for cheaper. They said maybe but all the ones they called were unavailable on such short notice. So I decided to just bank on the two referrals that AFA gave me.

On my way to the local metro station, I again conversed with the pastry salesman about what was inside each line of them, and bought a few to munch on. This is becoming a routine now, I thought. When I got to the Nevsky metro station, I wasn't sure which corridor would lead to which of the three entrances, so I decided to exit the main one and just walk down the street to the small one that I was to

meet Lilia at. The walk took a long time and I started jogging when I realized that I was already a few minutes late. When I finally got there, I was panting and short of breath, but I saw her waiting in front of the entrance. I walked up behind her and tapped her shoulder. She said a warm enthusiastic "Hi!" and I apologized for being a little late. She said it was ok and that she wasn't waiting here long. We then walked to one of the launching points for the canal rides. She explained to me that the past few days she had been helping out and translating for a French student, the guy that was with her when I first met her at the internet cafe, as part of her university assignment, but that he was unappreciative and uninterested in anything she showed him. So she was fed up with it already. I told her that that was too bad and that I wouldn't be like that. As we moved through the line to get on the boat, we walked up on a cracked steep narrow cement platform that had a nasty drop into a construction area next to it on the side, with no railings for protection. That's odd, I thought, that they would make the public just walk up here through this hazard. If someone fell off this narrow cracked platform to the construction site below, they could be seriously hurt. There would have been laws against this in the USA! I told Lilia about this and she said "Yes, it's very bad." When we got to the front of the line, the boatman wanted me to pay the higher foreigner price. I asked Lilia to ask them if since I was with a Russian, if I could pay the local price. Lilia asked them in Russian but they refused, so I paid the foreigner price. I offered to pay for Lilia but she declined and said she could pay her own way. (something Olga would never have done!) Then we got onboard. I felt excited because I had never been on a canal ride like this before. It looked just like the romantic rides through Venice that you see in pictures.

During the ride, Lilia translated what the boat guide was saying in Russian. At times she went beyond it and told me about each building we passed and the history associated with it. She told me that she studied and read about the history of this area all her life. I was amazed because girls her age (about 20) don't usually know this much about history nor are they interested in it. Her English was excellent and I liked her exotic accent too. In addition, I noticed that she had a very warm, open, and clean personality, and that I felt a good aura around her which made me feel relaxed, open, and enthusiastic. It was also a bright sunny clear day. We also chit chatted about various things, and I learned some interesting things about her. She studies at the university in St. Petersburg, is taking guitar classes, and is planning on taking Japanese and Chinese in future quarters. A girl with so many interests! That was my kind of girl, I thought. She was also interested in religion and Chinese philosophy, so I told her a little about what I knew about the Tao and the union of opposites that it represents, which symbolize balance and harmony. We had great intellectual chemistry together and she seemed interested in deep things I said (something which I was NOT accustomed to from girls back home for sure!). We also passed under many bridges, and often the bottom ceiling of the bridge would pass above us so low that I could reach out my hand while sitting down and touch it. You could see how low it got on my camcorder footage. This tour was obviously not meant for standing up! I took some photos of the tour and then we took photos with each other using both our cameras.

Near the end of the tour, we started talking about people and culture in America and Russia. I told her how most people in my country feared Russia and thought that it was a scary and dangerous place because of all the bad media coverage it received in the USA, along with decades of Cold War propaganda by our political leaders. She blushed and shook her head at all of that propaganda, and I said that I now realize how funny all of that was now since I was here and it was nothing like it was portrayed by our media and political leaders.

Then I told her that when a typical American thinks of Russia, he/she thinks of many poor starving people standing in 5 hour lines in the freezing cold just to get a piece of bread, because those images

often made the cover of Time Magazine and other media publications back in the 80's. Lilia was shocked and exclaimed that that was just one situation in one place a long time ago and it certainly wasn't the norm here at all. I told her that our media just had a way of making other countries look bad, not just Russia. They want us to think that everyone else in the world outside the USA is suffering and in extreme situations. She said that Russians have no trouble finding food here and do not have to wait in long lines. I said I noticed that because I see food being sold everywhere here on every corner. When I asked her where she dreamed of traveling, she mentioned parts of Europe. But when I asked her if she ever wanted to visit the USA, she said it wasn't one of her hot spots, but then she added "But if everyone there were like you, it would be a great place that I would want to visit it." Wow! That was one of the best compliments I ever received! I haven't felt so appreciated in a long time. Soon the boat returned to its starting point. The ride lasted about an hour. We got off and decided to walk to a nearby theater to see what was playing.

During the walk, I also told her some other crazy things. I said that some Americans think that Russian women want to come to the USA so they can be just like American women. She blushed again in surprise and said "No we do not want to be like them. We are proud to be Russian women." and I replied "You should be! So far, the women here have been better and more interesting in comparison!" Then I told her about how my best friend Michael warned that if I got into trouble here, that he heard that the Soviets will put me in prison, chain my wrists, and smash my fingers with metal hammers. She blushed again and I said "Isn't that crazy?" and she said "Where do they get these crazy ideas from?" Lilia also told me that the people she knows that visited the USA all said the same thing, that Americans are fun to party with, but other than that, they have little to talk about or offer because they hardly have any interests or any intellectual life in comparison with people here. That was their honest impression. I told her that was exactly how I felt too. In general, I could only talk about intellectual things in America with older people. Since our young people have no interest in those things, I've always had problems connecting with people my own age. There just wasn't any general chemistry with them, and they showed little interest in me too. American youngsters usually only talk about parties, music, sports, their life, their jobs, and their money. Everything else was uninteresting to them, which made it difficult and unnatural to have a decent conversation with young American girls.

When we reached a nearby cinema, the sign only showed two movies playing, Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones, and Men in Black II. Since I had already seen the new Star Wars movie, I suggested we see Men in Black II instead. The schedule on it showed a time that was about to start. But when Lilia inquired about it at the window, she said that it was a mistake and that the next showing wouldn't be til an hour later. Lilia said she didn't have enough time to wait for that showing because she had to go meet the French student to take him somewhere later, so we had to pass on the movie. Instead, I suggested that we go to the dessert cafe "Marko Cafe" that I went to on my second day here after I registered my visa. She agreed and said she thinks she knows the one I'm talking about. As we walked, I asked her if she knew what the word "cute" meant. She wasn't sure so I spelled it out for her. When she said it sounded familiar, I took out my dictionary and showed the Russian definition to her. Then she said "Oh yes. We have that word here too but we don't use it often." Then I said "Well I think you are very cute." Then she blushed a little and said "You are cute too." That made me blush a little. Later on, I asked her "Aren't you curious about why I'm in Russia?" She said that now that I mentioned it, she is wondering about it now. I told her that if I told her, she might think I was crazy. She said that now I made her very curious and she was anxious to know now. I pondered whether I should tell her and if it would ruin her good image of me. Then she said "Don't worry. You can tell me. I'm sure it's no big deal." I said "Ok, wait til we get to the cafe though."

Inside the cafe, we ordered some mixed jello fruit treats. It took me a while before I admitted that I came here looking for a wife or a serious relationship. She acted surprised at first, then she said "Well I wish you luck in finding that here." Wondering if she was a potential candidate, I asked her "Well would you ever consider living outside of Russia?" and she said no because she loves her country here and only wishes to visit other countries for travel. I said that I understood and that if I wasn't successful in my love endeavors here, that I would contact her a few years later and ask if she was available or had changed her mind. She said that she hoped that I would have found someone before then. Afterward, it was time for her to get going so we left and started walking to the nearest metro station together. As we said our heartfelt goodbyes, she said to let her know whenever I come back to St. Petersburg again. Then we kissed each other on the cheek and departed. As we were walking away from each other, we found ourselves saying goodbyes all over again and then hugged and kissed each other on the cheek again. Finally I left and took the metro back to my local station.

At Ploschad Lenina, my local station, I got off and went up the usual long escalator. When I got up to the top, I was not in the usual interior of the building. It looked totally different. Confused, I asked people around me if I was in the right station, and they said I was. For a minute, I wondered if I was in the Twilight Zone or something. Then I realized that I was probably on the other side of the station and that I got here because I went up the escalators on the opposite side of the platform from my usual end. I just figured that I'd go out and walk around the outside of the building to the other side. Unfortunately, it was raining outside again and I had to get wet while I was outside trying to figure out where I was. The building I came out of was obviously not the same building as I usually came out of but a completely different one. The usual big building must be several streets away, I thought. However, I was lost because I didn't recognize any of the streets around me. While going around in circles, I came back to the exit I came out of again, and went up to a tall friendly looking fellow with glasses to ask him for directions. He spoke English and said "I don't know. I just arrived here." When I asked from where, he said "I just flew in from Copenhagen, Denmark." I laughed and said "Oh! You should be asking for my help then. Where are you staying at?" When he said the hostel nearby, I said "Oh, well I'm just your man then. I'm staying there too, so you can just follow me."

With me leading the way now, I decided to head in the last possible direction that I hadn't tried yet, which would probably be the correct direction. It turned out that it was. I told him that I needed to go to the bank first and that he could wait for me inside or go on to the hostel. He elected to wait in the bank lobby. I changed another hundred dollars into rubles while soaking wet and dripping water all over the floor, and then we left. He told me he was on vacation here because he got some time off work. I showed him how easy it was to find the hostel, and that from the big station you just make one left turn to get to it. Inside the lobby, I relaxed a bit and mingled with the other tourists. I showed them the video footage I took from the canal boat ride and they found it interesting to try out sometime. Then the receptionist told me that one of the translators from AFA, Svetlana, had returned my message and said that she would be available tonight for interpretation. I called her back and told her to meet me at my local Ploschad Lenina station at 7pm.

## **Chapter 15: Second date with Natalia T. from Anastasia Web**

After changing clothes and getting ready, I went in front of my station at 7pm. Svetlana the translator immediately met me and greeted me. We got acquainted while we waited for Natalia T. As we talked, I

asked Svetlana whether it was a bad sign last time that Natalia T. wouldn't kiss me after our first date and instead turned her cheek. She said not necessarily and that there is no absolute rule for this sort of thing and that each situation was different and unique. We waited a long time for her, and soon it was almost an hour past the time she was supposed to show up. Not again! I became worried and said that if she doesn't show up in the next 15 minutes, we should just leave and I'd pay her for the hour she was here. At about 8pm, we finally saw her approach in sunglasses. She immediately went up to the translator without even acknowledging my existence, and said some things to her in Russian. Svetlana said that Natalia T. apologized for being late and that she had to stay overtime for work. For the next few minutes, Natalia kept talking to her and barely even greeted me. How nice of her (sarcastic). I suggested going to an Italian restaurant, and Svetlana said she knew of one on Nevsky that we could go to. She said that taking a taxi would be quicker and that if she hailed it, she could get a local price of 50 rubles. She did so and we got in and rode to Nevsky.

The restaurant inside was beautiful and fancy looking. They had an English portion of their menu fortunately. After we ordered, Svetlana took some photos of us with my camera. The food was wonderful and hit the spot for my craving for Italian. Svetlana translated as we asked questions about each other. On paper, we seemed compatible and had similar views on many things and common interests as well. The only thing that Natalia claimed she disliked was last time when we were looking for the Chinese restaurant, I kept telling her that we could just go somewhere else instead if she couldn't find it. Natalia felt that if we made plans, that we should stick to them. I admired that in a way, because it showed persistence. When I asked her why she indicated that the people on the subway saw me as strange, she said that she didn't mean it that way and that she was saying that I looked exotic and foreign to them. When I asked if she wished to continue seeing me, she smiled and nodded. Although these were good signs and we seemed compatible, I felt that somehow a spark was missing, and that she wasn't all there. I wondered if this pricey dinner and what I was going to have to pay the translator was all worth it. After the nice delicious dinner we ordered some very good white wine.

After we finished talking and asking all the getting to know each other questions, I asked what she wanted to do afterward and gave some suggestions. Natalia said that the evening boat ride sounded good, and that next time we could go to a bar or disco. So I paid Svetlana her \$8 an hour and asked for the check. And yes I had to pay for the hour she waited for Natalia with me at the metro station. Natalia also said that next time she preferred to have Svetlana as our translator again because she didn't like to change once she got used to someone. After paying for the meal, we said goodbye to Svetlana and left together. Now it was back to communicating by primitive body language again, I thought.

We walked to the same launching area that I went to earlier with Lilia. Not the same ride again, I thought. But hopefully this one would be different because it was dusk already and perhaps the moonlit ride would be more romantic. There weren't that many people in the boat we got in, so we sat in there for a long time and waited. Natalia explained to me with her fingers that there had to be at least 16 passengers in the boat for the guide to start the tour, or else he wouldn't make any money off it. While we waited, I sort of made the move to slightly hold her hand, but she wasn't warm to the touch, and after a while she said "Friend." I replied "Friend what?" and chuckled. I couldn't believe that after the good time and seemingly good chemistry and communication that we had, that she still wasn't ready to hold hands yet. It made me wonder. After a long time of waiting, I saw that another waiting boat on the other side of the bridge was almost fully loaded. I motioned to Natalia that that boat was almost full and that we should go to that one instead. She refused for some reason, and I never figured out why, so we continued to stay in this one and wait. Then the boat on the other side filled up and started to move

off. I wondered why we just lost our chance. It didn't make any sense, but it was never explained. So we continued to wait in our boat. It was now only us and one other couple. After it was clear that no one else was coming, we all stepped off the boat and walked back to the street. Perhaps we would find another more busy launching area, I thought.

We walked around to various parts of the river but found no other tour boats being boarded. We even walked through the courtyard of the Hermitage. I suggested we just go to a bar or disco now instead, but she preferred to save that for next time. After a while, she said we were going home now and we walked to the metro station. We rode together to the transfer station where we would go our separate ways, and throughout the ride, she barely even looked at me. I was disappointed because I thought we would be warming up by now. How long was she going to stay an ice princess, I wondered. At the transfer station, she stayed on the train while I got off. I gave her a hug and when I kissed her on the cheek this time, she barely even flinched. Thanks for making me feel so warm and appreciated, I thought sarcastically. I walked back to the hostel feeling disappointed at how this evening ended. She was nowhere as warm, interesting and bright as Lilia was, I thought.

## **Chapter 16: European company and USA critique**

Back at the hostel, I told the people there about my new, met new tourists, mingled a bit, and sat in the TV lounge pondering my next move. Things haven't been going so great here in the dating department, I thought. Unless I started meeting some cool exciting girls from my list for AFA that Tim was calling, I should plan to leave soon to go see my second girl Julia, I thought. Although I told her that I wouldn't arrive until July 31, which was next week, I thought of calling her and telling her that I got some extra time off work so I arrived early (that was the only explanation I could think of). Her neighbor and translator Elena told me over the phone when I was in the USA that when I arrived, they planned to come to St. Petersburg to see the sights with me and pick me up. That would be nice, I thought, cause if Julia came to my hostel here, I could show her off to all my friends at the hostel, who would be envious of me for such a hottie :) But then again, I don't want her coming here too soon because Tim from AFA may set me up with some interesting ladies from list, and I would want to give them a chance first. But anyhow, I was getting tired of the hustle and bustle of this city and wanted to go somewhere quieter like Pushkin and Peterhoff was. Perhaps the girls outside of this city would be nicer, more old-fashioned, have better values, and be less interested in money and material things, I hoped.

I chatted with and got more acquainted with the Danish guy that I met earlier at the metro station and led him here. He told me some things about his country, which I knew almost nothing about. One interesting thing I learned from him was that the famous Danish butter cookies in tin boxes and tubs that we have in the USA are very rare in Denmark. Who would've thought that? He said that he only saw those cookies once in his country, although they were popular abroad. But, we both laughed, it's good not to see too many of them because they were so rich and fattening! I also met a new Australian guy also named David Boots. He was very laid back and big and seemed like a traveling open-minded kind of guy. He told me about how wonderful and inexpensive the hostels were in Australia, and that you had a clean entertainment area with food, music, pool, and many amenities where people would party every night, and that this hostel was no comparison. I also met some nice Spanish guys, a Spanish couple, some girls from Argentina, and a boisterous Greek man with long sideburns. I joked around the Dutch hiking group as well, and we all played table tennis too. I teamed up with the cute girl in their



group and humored them since they were all beginners. I wished that people back home were as cool with me as these people were.

The next morning on Wednesday, I had breakfast with some of the Spanish people and I learned that everyone there today had plans to visit areas where I had already been. I was invited to go with some of them, but I already had enough of walking around. Then I tried calling Olga today to see what her plans were, but she wasn't home. So I rested on my bed for a while, and decided that I would spend a leisurely day at the internet cafe today because there was A LOT to update everyone on. I had not written an update to my email lists since the day after the first meeting with Olga where I was all stoked. A lot had happened since then so I knew I would need plenty of time to update everyone on everything that's happened since then. So I went to the Cro Magnon Internet Cafe on Nevsky, sat in my favorite spot under the air conditioning (ahhhhhhh!), and spent several hours typing up my next journal update to everyone including my Russian Bride List email group. While there, I used their phone to call Tim of AFA to check on the status of my women selection list. The staff said that he was off today and to call back tomorrow. I stayed at the internet cafe until about 5 or 6pm, then paid the cost and left, hoping that since it was early evening, some of the hostel tourists would be back and we could go do something.

Back at my local station, I ate at the burrito stands on the side of the station. At the hostel, people were slowly starting to come back from their excursions. I mingled with them and learned more about Europe, then went to my room to take a short nap. Afterward, I came out to mingle again. For the new tourists, I played Mr. Tour Guide and helped them get acquainted with the area and told them how to find the bank, the metro station, the eateries, etc. I talked to this American named Scott who had just arrived and after I told him all the basics, I took him and his friend out to the burrito stands of the metro station for an evening meal. At a cigarette booth there, I poked my head in and said to the young girl working there, "You very krashivah (beautiful)". When she didn't understand, I repeated it, and then she patted her hand on her chest and said "Oh! Spashiba! (thank you)". How cute!

After we came back, I played table tennis (or ping pong) with the two Spanish guys and they ended up winning most of the games. Even though we had about the same skill level, they displayed a deep level of concentration and competitiveness that I have rarely seen in others (I couldn't understand how else they kept winning!). They were the only people in the hostel so far who could beat me. Later on, I and others were chit chatting with these two Spanish guys outside. They told me that they and everyone they knew who had gone to the USA before all came back saying the same thing, which was that Americans were fun to party with, but beyond that you couldn't do much else with them or connect with them in any other way. The extent of most of their interactions with Americans were to say to each other "Hey, what's up?" and beyond there wasn't much else to talk about. I was surprised that they could describe exactly how I felt. I admitted that I felt the same way all my life in the USA even though I grew up there. I just could never relate to the mainstream majority of young people my age. And I was glad I could express my feelings about this matter here in a foreign country among foreigners where I wouldn't be condemned or criticized for saying the truth. Of course, had I said that in the USA, people would have looked down on me as rude and offensive. Here though, I was safe from all that.

I also realized that one could view the USA much more objectively and truthfully from OUTSIDE of it than from inside of it. The reason is that when you're inside the USA, you are caught up in its lifestyle, culture, hype, etc. and you automatically think it's the norm. When you're outside of it though and not exposed to all that, then you are in a better more objective position to see it as it is. In this position, I

realized that America is basically about hype, not reality and that hype is what sells in that country, not reality. Given a choice between hype and reality, Americans almost always choose hype, and I could now see countless examples to illustrate this, from everyday conversations to common cliches, to media icons, to media sensationalism, to cultural values, to pop psychology/new age thinking to politics. For example, in politics the better candidate with more integrity doesn't usually win the election, but the better BSer does. Hype has been such a religion in the USA that it's used to hide people from reality and cover them from it. Many Europeans, however, could see through this hype from outside the USA, but few Americans could. Probably so because Americans are conditioned by their culture and society to be wrapped up in hype, money, consumption, immediate gratification, and worse of all they think that this is the norm and ideal of life, and therefore never question whether there is a life beyond it. The lifestyle of the USA just looks like a never ending vicious cycle where people are forced by societal conditions to become slaves to money, suppressing their spiritual natures and spiritual freedom. The majority of Americans of course, have never been overseas and therefore are not familiar with the world beyond theirs except through their highly distorted propaganda from the media (as we explained through examples in Chapter 14 during the boat ride with Lilia). In fact, most Americans know absolutely nothing about Russia, and what they think they know about it are extreme distortions and lies.

Then the two Spanish guys and two Argentinian girls then got into a long detailed discussion about politics and society in their countries, and it was beyond me since I was not familiar with the topic. But as I listened to them, I was amazed at the depth of what their conversation since all four of them appeared to be in their early twenties. This was rare to see in my country, because in the USA a discussion like they were having was usually had by people in their thirties or forties or older. There was a definite difference here. After talking til late, we all eventually turned in for the night.

(Please note: I do not remember the exact order of the events and interactions I described above regarding this night, only that they all did happen at some point, therefore the sequence here may not be accurate.)

## **Chapter 17: Movie with Olga and call to Julia**

The next day on Thursday, I had breakfast and then went about exploring for a bit. I finally found the grocery store that people had been telling me about. I had to stand in line to get in though, as there was some kind of crowd control system in place. They also took your bags at the entrance and gave you a tag number, to prevent any shoplifting. I just looked around but didn't find anything I wanted, so I left and went to the post office to mail out some postcards to people. It was a tedious process to ask people everywhere where it was, using my dictionary for the word "pochtah (post office)" because I couldn't understand them and all they could do was point to a general direction. Even inside it, I had a difficult time explaining what I wanted to do, but when I showed them the address that I wanted to mail it to, they were more helpful. Afterward, I realized that I still had not solved the problem of how to get in touch with Elena of Mariupol, Ukraine to confirm my arrival, discuss accommodations and plans. I also wasn't sure if I should tell her that I was now in Russia or not, because if I did I would have to give her a good explanation at the unexpected change of plans. The only excuse I could think of was that my other job ended earlier than I expected and so I had a few extra weeks that I decided to use by going to Russia first and visiting the sights there. I would not feel right telling her that I was in the USA getting ready for my trip to see her, since I was now in Russia. That would just be too awkward, and even

David (the Australian college Bible student) agreed with that when I discussed it with him over breakfast this morning. So I wanted to contact her and use the few weeks in Russia excuse. However, I couldn't figure out how. If I used the prepaid calling cards, I could probably only talk to her for a minute before it would expire (I've seen how fast the credits go down when you call long distance with them!) and that wouldn't accomplish anything and it would be too rushed. Besides, doing it that way would give away immediately that I was not at home in the USA because when I called her from home before, I didn't have extreme time constraints on our talk time. And even then, I wouldn't have time to explain to her why I was in Russia because the calling card would expire in a minute! It would just be too much of a hassle and I would have to buy many prepaid cards to have a decent conversation with her. And plus, I wasn't sure how she would take the news that I was in Russia now, and if it would tarnish things between us. So I felt a feeling of avoidance toward contacting her. The only other way I could think of was to send her a letter by air mail explaining everything, and that I still intended to arrive in her town on August 15. However, that could take weeks to get to her, and I had promised her a call this week. By now, she was probably wondering why she hadn't heard from me. As I agonized over this, I decided to figure it out later.

When I got back to the hostel during the afternoon, I called Olga again and this time she was there. She said she had to go shopping with her sister this afternoon, but would be free tonight afterward, and suggested we go see a new movie playing that starred Richard Gere. I agreed and decided that after the movie, I would confront her about what I discovered at Pulkovskaya Hotel last Monday and tell her that since it was obvious that she wasn't interested in me, that I am leaving for Cherepovets to see my next girl Julia. She told me to meet her at a metro station that was close to the theater, but since it was a new one to me, I had someone nearby talk to her and write it down for me. Then I told her about the party at the American Consulate that the Marines I met were holding tomorrow night, and asked if she was interested in going. She said "An American party? Very interesting." I said "Yes, you can meet many American men there if you like" (since she apparently wasn't satisfied with me). She decided she wanted to go and asked if she could bring her friend Nata that I met the day we met. I said she could and that we should all meet at a station tomorrow nearby the Consulate.

Afterward, I called Tim from AFA to see if he called the ladies on my list yet. He said he did and couldn't get a hold of many of them but that he would call me soon if he had some introductions for me. Then I went to the hostel receptionist to pay with my credit card for my next two days stay here. (all this time I had been paying every two or three days because I was not sure how long I would stay here) By this time, I had decided that tonight would be a good time to call Julia in Cherepovets and tell her that I had arrived in St. Petersburg and see if she still wanted to come here to pick me up like Elena said, or if she wanted me to just go there. She had always been very enthused about me, and it was about time I could use that, since I wasn't feeling very loved or appreciated here right now with all that had happened. And I felt that there was little point in staying here longer since the only girl that seemed to really like me so far, Natasha E, had gone back to her hometown of Tula, and my two close friends/Amigos had left too, so there was no one left here. And in addition, I knew that the odds were that the introductions set up for me by AFA were probably not going to work out because I didn't know any of those women and random matchings like that have a very low probability of working out.

So I felt it was time to prepare to leave, and the first step would be to call Julia. I was eager to go somewhere where I would feel special. I knew that Julia was a popular girl in her town and had many friends who would be welcoming to me because I was with her. I took a short nap and then a few hours later got out Elena's (Julia's neighbor whom I had to call because Julia didn't have a phone in her flat)

phone number and asked a hostel staff person to help interpret. I said to the staff person, "Tell her where I am now, and ask her if she wants to come here as planned or if she wants me to go there to Cherepovets." I called the number and noticed that credits on the prepaid card were going down fast since it was long distance. Someone answered the phone and I said "Hi Elena?" and she replied "Niet" and then said something in Russian that indicated that Elena wasn't home. So I said "Is this Julia?" and she said "Da" so I said "Oh! This is Winston." She immediately got excited and said "Winston! I'm very happy to hear your voice!" I said me too, and the usual "Ya sku chai yo (I miss you)" and she repeated it back to me. Then I said "Julia, I am in St. Petersburg now." She exclaimed "Hah? St. Petersburg! Ohhhh!" Then I said "Wait, here is a translator now." I gave the phone to the hostel staff waiting and she spoke to Julia for a bit in Russian. Afterward, she told me that Julia will talk it over with Elena and decide later and that I should call them back tomorrow evening. Then I talked to Julia a bit longer and said the usual lovey dovey stuff. When I saw that my credits were almost gone, I told her that there was no more time on my card and that I will call her tomorrow. We kissed each other on the phone a few times and finally said bye.

Then I started preparing to meet Olga tonight. I rode to the appointed metro station an hour and a half early so I could find something to eat there before I met Olga. I took out the piece of paper with the station written on it (I had never been to this station before) and showed it to people who pointed me the right way. When I got there, the most obvious and simple choice for me to eat at was McDonald's. I was craving for the food there anyway, since Russian food was nowhere as tasty as American food was. I went in and had the usual Filet-O-Fish combo meal, then sat and spaced out for a while in deep thought about all that had happened and the meaning of it. Then I walked back to the entrance of the station to wait for Olga.

After a while, she arrived and greeted me and hugged me. We started walking to the movie theater. I thought about when I should confront her about my discovery at Pulkovskaya Hotel but since we were in a rush now, I decided to try to do it afterward. We went inside the theater and to my surprise it was much fancier than the one I tried to go to with Lilia. The inside looked like a luxury hotel. Olga said that the seating could be full since we had no reservations. At the ticket window, there was a computer screen next to it that showed the layout of the theater seating and the seats still available were in a different color or something (I don't remember what it was). The layout of the seating on the screen reminded me of the layout you saw when you were buying tickets for a baseball or hockey game. Even the restrooms here were sparkling and clean like those of a 5 star hostel. I have never seen a movie theater like this before. Not even the spotless theater that I saw in Japan 11 years ago could compare to this. Olga sure has expensive tastes, I thought, as I realized that this was probably a theater for rich people. I only hoped that our tickets wouldn't be costing a bundle, because I knew I would have to pay for hers as well. Fortunately, there were plenty of seats available and I paid 200 rubles for each ticket, which was about 7 dollars each. Not as much as I feared for a place like this, and about what it would be in the USA.

Inside, I was surprised to see that the seats were not like regular mass seats, but were a series of cozy large couches with coffee tables in front of them. How intimate and private, I thought. If only there was something more going on between me and Olga to make use of this. We sat down in our couch and made ourselves comfortable. I looked for signs from Olga that would allow me to hold her and get closer on this intimate cozy couch, but there were none. It seemed like such a waste of an opportunity for an intimate romantic setting like this. The movie started, and it turned out to be a Richard Gere movie called "Unfaithful". (gee I wondered sarcastically what it could be about) It was all dubbed in

Russian and it wasn't exactly pleasant hearing Richard Gere speak hard Russian, but I could deduce most of what was going on. It was a typical love affair movie with the cheating on your spouse motif, which in this case was the woman cheating on her husband played by Gere. Then, as expected, trouble starts when Gere discovers the affair. It was ironic though, because this movie sort of symbolized me finding out about Olga's betrayal of me a few days ago. A few times, I asked Olga to translate for me what was just said.

During the movie, we saw a waitress walking around and Olga said she wanted a juice. I waited til the waitress got closer and then beckoned her to come over. Olga told her what she wanted, but I only wanted a glass of water. When she came back later with a big glass of juice for Olga, I asked her how much it was and was dumbfounded when it was 180 rubles!!!!!! That was about \$5.50 USD! What a ripoff! (not that \$5.50 would make me broke but it just wasn't worth it to pay that for a drink in a theater, and for someone who doesn't even care about you!) What kind of juice costs that much? I looked at the waitress for a way out of this but reluctantly paid it. Not wanting to miss out on what I just paid too much for, I took the straw out of my water glass and asked if I could try some of the juice too. Olga reluctantly let me try some (I don't know why she wasn't into sharing like everyone else here) and sure enough it was tasty, fresh and fruity. Then she quickly finished off the rest of the large glass, leaving no more for me. Now I felt so used. What does she think I am? Her sugar daddy? Even if I was, at least she was supposed to give something back, at the very least show a gold digger's or prostitute's affection toward me, but she was giving me nothing at all, period. Not even stimulating conversation. She was just "there."

In any case, I was through with these kind of dates. I did not come to Russia to throw money at people for nothing. I decided that from now on I would be more stingy and ask women like her to pay their own way and for their own drinks, rather than taking advantage of me. What I didn't understand was why she was making me pay her way. In the USA, if a girl isn't romantically interested in you, she pays her own way when you go out. They do that cause their pride won't let you pay for them. Olga doesn't seem to have the slightest bit of honor or dignity at all. It seems like you could spend a million dollars on her and she wouldn't lift a finger for you. She seemed like a pure taker, giving nothing back. She also seemed so apathetic that if you were struck down by lightning, she probably wouldn't even flinch. And she has the most bland personality I've ever seen, like that of a plant. Even a dog or cat has more personality than her. All she says most of the time is "very interesting" or "very nice" or "very bad". What a waste of time. I felt sorry for Mark now rather than envious, because he probably spent a lot of money on her, and for what? Even if he got sex out of it, she probably wasn't worth any of the money he spent on her.

The movie had a weird ending and when we left outside, I asked Olga if we could sit down somewhere because I had a surprise for her. She said she had no time because the metro stations were about to close for the night and she didn't want to miss her ride home, so she suggested I tell her tomorrow at the American Consulate party. Eager to get it off my chest now, I insisted and told her that there was still 20 minutes left before the subway closed down, and that even if she missed it, I would pay for her cab ride home if she let me reveal what I want to reveal to her. She said she felt unsafe in the cabs here, and refused to give me time to talk to her now. So I bid her goodbye and told her I would call her tomorrow morning when I found out what station was closest to the American Consulate. She gave me a hug and kissed me on the cheek and left.

I went down into the metro station too for my ride back to the hostel. When I got to the transfer point station though, the doors to the next train would not open up. After a while, I realized that the subway had shut down for the night. I tried to ask some fellow passengers waiting around for alternatives. After mingling about a bit, a man in a nice fancy suit came up to me and asked me where I was going. When I said "Ploschad Lenina" he said that I could ride with him and his cab driver and they would drop me off there. I wasn't sure about this and my American paranoia mentality told me that it might be dangerous to ride with a stranger. But after reading his face and body language, I concluded that he was safe and friendly, so I agreed. Inside the cab, he wrote on a note that he was a "jurist" and could help me if I ever needed it. He wrote down his number for me and at first I was confused because I didn't understand how a professional juror could help me. Then after asking him more questions and after he told me more about his occupation, I realized that he was a lawyer and when I pointed to that word in my dictionary, he nodded. When the cab dropped me off, I asked him if I could help pay my share of the cab fare, and he said that it wasn't necessary and that he was glad to help me. I thanked him and left.

Back at the hostel, I told the guys about the fancy theater and then I told David (Australian Bible college student) about how I felt about Olga. That night, the other David from Australia who was big and heavyset, and I went for a walk around the area to get a bite to eat. We ordered some snacks at the 24 hour burrito stands and we talked about how things were here and how they were in Australia. We joked about all the holes and cracks in the roads here and how bad the healthcare here probably was. When I jokingly asked "What would you do if you needed an operation right now?" he said "I'd get on a plane to go back home for it." We then made some circles around the blocks to see what was open, but only some cafes and casinos were still open. At one point, as we were crossing a street, a car sped around a corner very fast and for a second I wasn't sure whether to dodge right or left, and neither was the driver, so I waited to see where he would turn and to my relief he whizzed just past me. David said that for a moment there he thought I was going to be hit. The drivers here seemed so reckless. After our long walk, we went back to the hostel.

At the entrance, we talked to the Argentinian girls. Then the married Spanish couple came out and I told them about the conversation with the two Spanish guys yesterday and what they said about the lack of intelligent conversation in the USA. When I said it was true what they said about the USA, the couple teased me and said "Then why did you suggest that we visit the USA someday?" David and I opened some beers again and hung out at the balcony on the fourth floor with the rest of the tourists. We were drinking and talking about life and politics of our respective countries. There was this British girl that joined us who appeared to be in her mid-twenties. I explained to her about my purpose for coming here and my chemistry with American girls vs. Russian girls. At first, she was skeptical of my claims, but when I started giving her concrete examples, she started agreeing with me and seeing the logic of my decision. When she was telling the group about the society and problems in her country, I was also amazed at how in-depth it was. This further confirmed my earlier observations. When it got close to midnight, we saw from the balcony the Neva River bridge open up to let the ships pass through. This sight was one of the tourist attractions here so I video taped it. It was fun watching the ships pass through because they were coming in all shapes and sizes, including some very long oil tankers. Then it got late and I was feeling buzzed so I turned in for the night.

## **Chapter 18: Party at US Consulate and confrontation with Olga**

The next morning on Friday, I had the usual breakfast and then since I had nothing to lose, finally worked up the courage to ask the tall brunette breakfast lady Maya out. I used my phrase book and pointed to the phrase "Would you like to go out with me tonight?" and she waved her hand and said "No. Please no." When I asked "Why not?" she just politely repeated "No. Please no."

Then I called the American consulate to confirm the street where they were at and the nearest metro station to it. I also asked if the party tonight was still on and they said that it was and that any guests I bring would have to bring their passport as well. I called Olga and told her the name of the metro station that was closest to it and to bring her passport. Since it started at 9pm, we agreed to meet there at 8pm. Then I called several girls that I met here that had given me their number so far, to try to invite them to the party at the Consulate tonight, but all of them were either busy or not home. So I guess I was stuck with going with Olga and her friend.

Then I called Natalia T. with the help of a translator to see if she wanted to do the boat ride this afternoon and after that to ask if she'd like to go to the Consulate party too. She seemed affirmative about it, saying "Meeting today?" before I switched to the translator. The translator said she agreed to meet me this afternoon at 3pm. Since I trusted her to not stand me up now, and since the boat ride was on Nevsky, I suggested that we meet at the small easy to meet at entrance to the Nevsky metro station that we were supposed to meet at the first time. She agreed and it was set. Then I went to the lobby to ask the hostel staff about how to get tickets for the train to Cherepovets in case I needed to later. They gave me directions for getting to the train ticket station, and wrote down in Russian that I needed to know the schedule, time, and fares for the ticket to Cherepovets, so I could show it to the staff at the ticket window.

For a trial run, I stopped by the ticket station to inquire about the tickets and rates to Cherepovets. I was hoping that I wouldn't be charged higher prices for being a foreigner. After showing around the piece of paper with what I needed, I got the runaround and was thrown from window to window. Eventually, a staff person wrote down some answers to my questions. I did not understand what was written down, so I kept the note so I could show the hostel staff later. Then I was led by a security guard to a slow line in another office. When I looked at my watch though, I realized that I didn't have enough time left to continue this process because it was almost 3pm, time for my meeting with Natalia T. So I left. At least I knew where the ticketing office was now and could come back tomorrow with more time available.

I rode to the small entrance to the Nevsky metro station and waited. Not surprisingly, she wasn't there again. After half an hour, I became worried and walked around to the other two entrances of this station to see if she had mistakenly showed up there. I saw no sign of her so I went back and forth between all the stations, wondering if she was also toggling between the stations looking for me too, in a game of tag. Getting tired of this, I went back to the small entrance and sat down there to wait. I tried calling her home on a pay phone with a girl who spoke English helping me, but her mom didn't know where she was. It was now an hour past the time we were supposed to meet here, and since she was an hour late for our last two meetings, I thought that by now she should show up. But she didn't.

Soon I realized that like Olga, I was wasting my time with her. Natalia T. had been inconsiderate toward me by standing me up twice now, being an hour late for the last two meetings, and wasn't warm or affectionate toward me at all. Therefore, I realized that I was glad that she didn't show up, because if she did, I would have just wasted money on her like I did with Olga. I wouldn't have gotten anything

out of it and I would have felt disgruntled as well like I did last night. Whatever happened to her, perhaps God was doing me a favor, I thought.

Not wanting all my waiting to be for nothing, I noticed that a short punkish girl that had been sitting there waiting for a long time, and I decided to make conversation with her. She seemed intrigued with me and interested in communicating with me, even though she didn't speak English. I showed her various phrases from my phrasebook, including "Can you remove my root canal (in the dental section)" as a joke, which made her laugh. After the getting to know each other questions, we talked about the metro system and she indicated that she had a way of riding the metro without paying. Curious, I asked her to show me how. I pointed to the word "demonstrate" in my dictionary. She said she would in a bit. Then I said to her "You are very....." and then pointed to the word "cunning" in my dictionary. She smiled, shrugged, and said "Hey, it's Russia!"

After a while, I said that I had to leave soon, so if she wanted, she could show me now. So she got up, led me through the exit doors to some low metal bars near the door that separated the metro gate area from outside, put her hand on the bar, and casually hopped over it. Then she hopped back and said "like that". I laughed and said "That's so easy. Where is the security guard that's usually here though?" (I pointed to the word "guard" in my dictionary. She said that he wasn't here now, and that I could try it if I wanted to. I said that I didn't want to risk being caught if he came back because I knew the penalty for foreigners breaking laws would be higher and that they would probably ask me for a bribe to let me go. As we talked, some other teens came in and hopped over the low metal bars into the escalator area. She pointed to them and said "Like that. Many do this." Amused, I thanked her for showing me this and said that I had to go now. I said that it was nice meeting her and that I would look for her here the next time I passed through, and she said that she hung out here at this entrance a lot, so this is where she would be. My conscience wouldn't let me practice what she taught me, so I paid for the metro token and went down the escalator.

Back at the hostel, I showed the staff the note written down by one of the ticket ladies, and they told me that it listed the train number and price for the ticket. Wow it was cheap, only about 6 dollars when converted, and for a 10 hour train ride too! The note wasn't clear about the departure time of the ride though. Then I called Elena and Julia. Elena answered and we talked for a while. (she speaks good English and is our translator) I asked her if Julia was surprised yesterday when I called and told her I was in St. Petersburg, and Elena said "Yes, very much so." When I asked if they were going to come here or if I was going to go there, she said that I should take the train to them. Then I asked why they didn't want to come visit St. Petersburg anymore, and Elena said "We have no money." How cute, I thought. So I agreed to ride the train to Cherepovets and I said that I could leave here was Monday night (after my meeting with Anna). Elena told me that she rode the train from here to there before, and that it departs daily at 8pm and arrives in Cherepovets at 6am the next morning. We decided that I would buy the tickets tomorrow morning on Saturday and then call them that same night to confirm that I was set and would arrive in their town on Tuesday morning.

With my phone business done for the night, I quickly prepared to go meet Olga and her friend Nata for the party at the American Consulate. After getting ready, I rode to the appointed station and since I was 15 minutes early, I went to a nearby burrito/sandwich stand and got my usual veggie pocket with ranch sauce and coke. I didn't even finish my first bite when Olga and Nata showed up and immediately rushed me to hurry up and go. I said that I preferred to finish my meal first and that it would only take me about 10 or 15 more minutes. But Olga insisted that we start walking now and that I could eat along



the way while walking. I didn't see the need for that and explained to them that it was 10 minutes to 8pm, the party at the Consulate doesn't start til 9pm, it was only a few blocks from here, and besides most people don't show up to disco parties until about 10pm anyway! So we had way more time to kill than we knew what to do with. But they pressured me to leave now anyway, and I started walking and trying to eat the messy burrito at the same time. I couldn't believe how inconsiderate Olga was, especially after I explained to her the ample time schedule that we had right now. Now I realized more than ever that this woman was completely self-centered and ignorant of everyone else's feelings. At this point, I lost all interest in her and she no longer seemed attractive to me anymore. Also, for some reason her black outfit and makeup didn't make her anywhere near as attractive as she was when I first saw her in the blue clothes. I didn't know why, if it was the clothes, makeup, or my impression of her, but she was no longer that "hot" to me anymore.

We found the street that the Consulate was on and it looked like an abandoned torn up street. I couldn't believe they would place an American government building on a street like this. I was expecting a modern tall building with an American flag in front of it. The street here looked like it was barely drivable. When we had trouble finding it, I suggested we sit down for a while so I could finish my meal. They did and we all joked a little bit while I finished up my meal. I said that Olga's feet and toes looked sexy in her high heels. Her friend then said something to Olga and Olga jokingly said that her friend felt jealous because I didn't say the same about her feet. I thought of bringing up to Olga the story about what I discovered at Pulkovskaya Hotel, but I didn't want to say it with Nata around and plus we were in a joking mood at the moment, not a serious one.

After I finished up my meal, we walked around a bit more and then we saw a short line of people outside. Looking closer, I realized that it was the American consulate and that we had finally found it. It was still way early, but they were already letting people in. We lined up and a security guard who looked more Russian than American, including his uniform, searched us and checked our passports. We went past the gate and up the stairs to a large disco and bar area. I recognized some of the Marines inside from last weekend and greeted them. There were only a few people there so we sat at the bar and waited around. Out of curiosity, I asked them how many Marines were stationed at this consulate, and they said "We can't tell you. That's classified information." and I felt slightly embarrassed for even asking. Next to where we were sitting, there was a giant fan pointed at us. It felt very soothing to be so close to it, but Nata complained and said it made her cold and asked if I could move it away. I got up, looked at it and wondered how I was going to move that giant thing. Then I clasped my hands around the pole and tried to twist it away in another direction. I couldn't so I sat down, and then Nata told me to ask one of the Marines to either move the big fan or turn it off. I did so, and one of them went up to it, grabbed the pole with both his hands, lifted it off the ground and rotated it the other way. Olga and Nata looked at each other and said "Wow!" I felt embarrassed that I didn't do it that way so I walked up to it and tried the same thing, and sure enough, I was able to pick it up by the pole and rotate it as well, though not as steadily as the Marine did. It's amazing what the power of belief can do sometimes.

The bartender gave us our first round of drinks free on the house, at the permission of one of the Marines I met before. It didn't take long before Olga and Nata almost finished their champagne. Then I thought "Oh no, don't tell me that they're going to make me pay for their next drink!" Sure enough, they ordered a refill on their champagne, and the bartender poured it for them. Then he said "120 rubles total for both." Olga looked at me and said "120 rubles". At that moment, I was about to tell Olga and her friend to pay for themselves and that I was not going to throw money for them for no reason, and especially not for Nata since she was Olga's guest, not mine. (Why should I be treating Olga's guests?

Who does she think I am exactly?) But it didn't seem appropriate for me to refuse at the moment because we were all in a cheerful joking mood, so it would have been awkward for me to do that. The bartender asked me if I was paying for them, and I reached for my wallet and muttered "Well I guess. I don't think I have a choice here." When I took out a hundred ruble bill, I couldn't bring myself to bring out another 20 rubles so I put the hundred ruble bill on the table and lied saying that I had no more money. I figured that this subtle trick of mine would prevent them from snoozing off me anymore. In an indirect way, I was saying to them that I wasn't going to pay for them anymore tonight, by giving them the impression that I had no more money. I didn't care if this made me look poor or unprepared to them, because I didn't feel that I needed the approval of people like them anyway. I brought them along with me only for their company in case no one else here would talk to me. The strategy worked and Nata reached for her purse to pay the other 20 rubles, and they didn't ask me to pay for them anymore after that. I was glad but I felt a little upset that I had to lose 100 rubles that I shouldn't have thrown away.

As we waited, chit chatted and listened to the music playing (which alternated between Russian and American music), people began coming in, including some real gorgeous young girls stylishly dressed who sat down on the other side. (how I wished I were on that side now) Within an hour, the place became crowded and the bartenders were busy getting drinks for everyone. Soon the lights dimmed and the disco ball started spinning colored lights everywhere, but no one was dancing yet. (it always takes a while before people start getting into it and few people are bold enough to go out and be the first ones to dance for some reason) I started people watching, hoping to meet people more interesting than the two I came with. With the loud music in the background though, I knew that conversation would be difficult and that I would have to talk close to people's ears, which I hated doing because it felt tacky. I talked to a few people near where we were, but I couldn't find any free girls because the ones across from us that were hot were huddled in their own groups and looked busy chatting among themselves. Besides, I had never been good at meeting people at discos because I never knew what to say or do in these environments. They never felt natural to me and I wasn't sure how to get girls' attention in these places. Even my resourceful mind couldn't figure out what to say or do. There's usually very little to comment on in this environment other than asking their name, where they're from, what they're doing in town, how they like the music, etc. If they give short answers that don't lead to any other topic, then there's very little left to say and we come to a dead end. Besides, people don't come to these places to have deep discussions over loud music anyway. And I'm not a good dancer either, so I am usually at a loss for what to do in these kind of places.

Eventually people started to dance on the floor, and we just started people watching. I asked Olga if she wanted to dance now, and she kept saying that she had to wait til she got in the mood. Then she wrote down the name of a favorite song of hers and asked me if I could make a request of the DJ for it. I explained to her a few times that I wasn't that close to these people enough to be asking for special favors like this, but she seemed confused by that. After a while, Olga told me to watch her and Nata's purses and then they both went on the floor and danced together. I watched as Olga moved her butt to the fast techno rhythm. At first, I thought it looked sexy but then I thought "big deal".

When they came back to the bar, they cooled themselves off and then went to the bathroom in the back. Then a slow dance song came on and as people began slow dancing, I waited for Olga to come back so I could ask her to slow dance with me. But she stayed in the bathroom throughout the whole song though, and only came back after it was over. Boy I started getting frustrated. Then they made me watch their things again while they went and danced together. Now I became annoyed. I came here to

have a good time, not to be Olga's errand boy. It was inconsiderate that she didn't even ask me to dance with them. How much worse could she get? This was so humiliating. I felt so warm and appreciated by her (yeah right). When this happened the third time, I decided I had it and asked someone nearby to watch Olga and Nata's belongings, then I went up to them on the dance floor and started dancing with them to give Olga the message that she wasn't supposed to do this. Olga looked at me in shock and said "You are supposed to watch our things!" I told her that I had someone else keeping an eye on their things, but she still looked worried and didn't dance with me long before she walked off with Nata to check on the status of their belongings. After they sat down again, Nata nudged me and said that I should go dance with Olga. I looked at Olga but she didn't look interested, so I muttered that Olga probably didn't want to dance with me. By now, I felt like a fool for trying to get anything meaningful out of Olga, so my attention started wandering elsewhere, hoping to meet other people that might be more interesting. Perhaps I could start mingling with other girls and ignore Olga to try to make her jealous. Usually, I hate resorting to this type of technique, but there was nothing else to do at this point.

I saw this young skinny blonde with a wild face dancing around like nobody was watching. She was by herself most of the time, so I gathered up the courage and went to dance in front of her. She looked friendly toward me, but probably since I didn't have much rhythm in my dancing, she said in an exotic Russian accent "Let's play billiards". I loved how she said "billiards" in a strong Russian accent. I said ok and we went to the pool table. Although I wasn't good at dancing, I was good at pool. Although I held back to give her chances to win, she was simply terrible at it and eventually I got all my balls in including the eight ball at the end. She didn't want to play anymore after that so other people came up to challenge me instead. The next guy did beat me and threw me off the challenge ladder, so I went back to check on Olga and Nata.

I noticed that after all this time, none of the many guys there approached or hit on Olga throughout the whole night, so I started wondering how that could be if she was as hot as I made her out to be all this time. Perhaps she wasn't and I was just wrong and crazy, I thought. Certainly, at this point, she looked far less attractive to me now, both physically and because of my overall impression of her. There was just nothing to her, not even basic human consideration, respect, or kindness. Or maybe there was just a huge misunderstanding between us. Whatever. It didn't really matter because I felt that I wanted better than this anyway. After a while, Olga looked at her watch, thanked me for inviting them and told me that they had to go now to catch the metro train before it closed. I bid them goodbye, knowing that I'll probably never see them again since I wasn't planning on asking her out anymore. Then I suddenly realized that I still hadn't confronted Olga about what I discovered about her at the AFA office, because the chance never came up and I was distracted the whole night by the disco environment. I realized that I should have taken her outside earlier to discuss this with her and get it off my chest.

So I followed them as they were leaving and told Olga that we forgot to talk about the important thing I was going to tell her yesterday as we planned. She said that she had no time to stop for it and that I could tell her what I wanted while she walked to the metro station. I argued and said that it was best if we sat down and talked about it because it was important and not something to talk about casually while walking. I told her I only needed 5 minutes. She refused and started heading toward the exit so I was forced to follow them to say my piece. The guard let us out the gate of the consulate, and as we walked down the street, I thought of how I would say my piece while rushing to the metro station. It felt so awkward and not the way I imagined and rehearsed this confrontation to be, but I had to act fast or else I would lose my chance to reveal my surprise to her. I kept saying "Olga, please stop" but she said "I cannot" and kept on walking. When we got close to the metro station, I finally blurted out that I

knew where she had been all week and that I discovered some interesting things about her at the AFA office of Pulkovskaya hotel. And that her sister's fiancée Richard told me where she had been the whole week. She just kept walking as usual and barely flinched with any emotion or surprise. Then I asked "So did you get engaged with Mark?" and she replied "No, we just go." meaning that they just hung out and went around. Then I quickly explained that I wasn't mad that she was dating other guys, but I was mad that just before my planned arrival which she knew of months in advance, she went to the AFA social tour and met a guy, pushing me out of our planned week together. I asked her why she did this in the first place. She said that she didn't plan to go to the AFA social tour, and that her sister went to it and told her to go to, so she went to it out of curiosity, not knowing that she would end up spending the week with Mark. (besides him being rich, perhaps she figured that since Mark was there for only a week while I was there for two weeks, that she could just spend the second week with me?) Then because she said all this with no emotion, I asked her if she was surprised that I found all this out. She nonchalantly said in a monotone voice "Yes. Very much so." (I'm sure she would make a great actress <sarcastic>) Then I said that I was leaving in a few days for Cherepovets. She looked a little surprised now and said "You're not going home?" I said no, and then she said "You have a girl there?" and I said "sort of" and before I had a chance to say my next rehearsed line which was "Olga, why would I go home now? Didn't you know I came here to find a lover and serious relationship, not to throw money at you! Since nothing is happening between us, of course I have to go to my next girl. Do you think I'm here for no reason?", she smiled slightly, kissed me on the cheek, said goodbye, and left into the metro station.

I wasn't ready to go home yet, so I walked back to the consulate to enjoy the rest of the party. As I walked, I knew that that was the last I would see of Olga since I strongly disliked her now and definitely knew I deserved better and that there were women out there who could treat me better. I breathed a sigh of relief, but I was upset that I didn't get that last rehearsed line in to her, because it would have strongly made my point to her in the way that I wanted. I pondered whether I should call her tomorrow morning to get that last line in or not, or whether I should just email it to her.

As I approached the entrance to the consulate, the young blonde with the wild looking face that I danced with for a while and played pool with came out, waved to me and said "Bye" as she walked past me. I turned around and was about to ask if I could get her number, but she was walking very fast and it wasn't worth it anyway since I don't usually get along that well with her type. The guard searched me again, checked my passport, and let me through. Inside, almost half the people had left now. I gave the Marines my backpack to put under their counter so I wouldn't have to keep track of it (my camcorder was in it). I saw two girls sitting at a table looking bored, so I went up to one of them, a pretty brunette who spoke good English, and started mingling. She said she worked at the consulate here giving haircuts to the staff. Then I went to the bathroom and in the bathroom hallway I saw some people playing on a fooseball table, one of my favorite games. I invited the brunette I talked to and her friend to come and play. I teamed up with another guy against both girls, and I was amazed at how good these two girls were at this game. They had a lot of power in their shots and scored a lot of points against us. The games were close, but me and the other guy won most of the time. I loved playing this game, but it was annoying having to wipe off sweat from my forehead every few seconds.

After playing, we went back out to the disco area and a slow dance song started playing. I asked the hair dresser brunette if she'd like to dance and she said sure. As we slow danced she said in my ear "You are very good at that game we played." I replied "Thanks. If only I was as good at dancing though." (cause then the girls in these kind of places would like me!) Afterward, I asked for her phone

number but she said no. As people were clearing out and going outside, I kept looking for a chance to meet this gorgeous hot blonde I saw there who wore something that showed almost her whole torso beside her chest, which showed her sexy shoulders and back. She looked like she might be American too, based on her facial expressions and mannerisms, but I couldn't hear her words because of the loud music playing. I didn't get a chance to meet her and she eventually left, unfortunately.

After it was very sparse and still in there, I decided it was time to leave and go back home. Before I left, a tall Marine told me the next of their next party there, but I thanked him and told him that I would be out of this city by then. I got my backpack from behind the counter and walked out to the gate guard. Since the metro was already closed, I asked if he could call for a taxi. He said that it wasn't necessary and that I could just go out onto the street and hail one myself easily. I went around the block but couldn't find any official taxis, and I still didn't feel comfortable hailing gypsy cabs, especially at this time of night. As I walked, I realized from my map that I was within walking distance of my hostel and that I could just walk across the bridge in the distance to get to it. But I was nervous walking alone at this time of night, even if it was just a 15 minute walk. And beside, my feet were still killing me from the intensive walking I did all week. I preferred to just find a taxi and pay a small fee for a 2 or 3 minute ride across the bridge.

Eventually I saw a well dressed doorman standing in front of a glass door with a fancy looking hall inside. I thought it was a hotel but after talking to him for a bit, I found out it was some upscale night club. When I asked if he could call a taxi for me, he pointed to a guy nearby and said that he could give me a ride. When he came up to me, I told him where I wanted to go across the bridge, and asked him how much it would cost. He wrote down on a piece of paper "200 rubles". I laughed at his ridiculous proposal. I usually paid 100 rubles for a ride across the city, and he wanted 200 rubles for a 2 or 3 minute ride across the bridge? I was planning to give him 10 or 20 rubles for it! Even though night fares tend to be higher, this was still ridiculous. What does he think I am, a stupid gullible tourist? Feeling angry and insulted, I pointed my finger at him and laughed at the top of my lungs. I wanted to try to make him feel stupid and nullify his insult by making it into a joke. Then I chewed him out in English, knowing that he didn't understand me, but I did so anyway to get it off my chest. After my disappointment with Olga, I didn't need to feel insulted now as well. I took the piece of paper and wrote my offer of 20 rubles on it. He turned around and brushed me off and muttered something about that not even being able to pay for gas. Well at least I got my chance to insult him back, I thought.

After realizing that we weren't going to come to a deal, I left and decided to just walk across the bridge anyway. I walked briskly and got to the bridge a lot quicker than I expected. I felt safe on this open bridge because no one could sneak up behind me. When I got to the middle of the bridge, I stopped to admire the night scene of the river before me. Then I took out my camcorder and took some footage of the view before me. As I did so, I spoke and said that I just got back from the party at the US Consulate, that I'm fed up with Olga, that things haven't been going that well in St. Petersburg, and that I was going to Cherepovets in a few days with hopefully better luck. Then I walked back to my hostel just on the other side and mingled a little with the fellow tourists before I went to sleep.

## **Chapter 19: Arranging meetings, train ticket, and talk with Natalia O.**

Saturday morning, after breakfast, I got a message from Tim of AFA saying that he had good news for me and that he found some introductions for me. First though, I decided to give Olga a call to say

goodbye and give her the last rehearsed line that I didn't get a chance to say last night. Her neighbor answered (they share a phone line) and said that she wasn't home. I decided I wasn't even going to waste any more calling card credits calling her anymore because she wasn't even worthy of that. So I went to the pay phone to call Tim of AFA. He said that he had already called half of the women on my list (which, trust me, was a lot) and that he found six women who were interested in meeting me. He said he would give me their phone numbers and I could call them to arrange meetings with them on my own. But I didn't want to get all their numbers because I would be charged 30 dollars for each one, and plus I did not have much time left here in this city to meet all of them, so I said that I would go to the internet cafe first to look at the profiles and photos of the six women and narrow them down a bit before calling him back for the final selection. Tim seemed annoyed at this and expected that I would meet everyone that he set up for me so that they could be paid for each introduction. I could understand that his motive was for me to pay hefty for all six women's phone numbers, and that he felt that I owed them that for all the time he put into calling these women for me. But on the other hand, I was not here to maximize their profit margins and realistically I could not meet all these women in the short time I had left in this city, and in addition, I did not expect him to take so long to set up these introductions. So I had to do what I had to do. I explained this to Tim and he sort of made me feel bad about it like I wronged them. There was obviously a misunderstanding between us at the start, because I was under the impression that he would call them to see who was interested in me, and I would make the final decision as to who to meet, but he was under the impression that I would meet everyone he called that expressed an interest. But it was too late to fix it now. Finally, he reluctantly agreed to my plan to go to the internet cafe to narrow it down, so he gave me the names and ID's of the six women for me to look up on their site.

First though, I had to go to the train ticket office again to finally purchase my ticket to Cherepovets. Inside the station, I looked around the offices for indications that someone there might speak English. When I saw an office for a tour company, I decided that it was my best chance. Sure enough, I was right. A tall exotic Russian lady inside spoke good English, but she wasn't sure where I needed to go to buy tickets. (you'd think that people who work at this station would know, or at least it should be common knowledge to people who go there regularly!) So she took me to another line to ask about it. After asking, she showed me the window I needed to get to. Since she was attractive and exotic looking, I asked her more questions than I needed to and flirted with her a little too. Then I went to the row of windows that she directed me to. There were over a dozen lines with consecutive numbers over the windows, and I had no idea which one to go to! When I showed several people the note with the directions on it, they all pointed me to different windows. Not knowing what else to do, I just went to the first one suggested, figuring that if it was the wrong one, the staff inside would direct me to the correct window. As I stood in line, I noticed that some people came up and took cuts to the front of the line, making my wait even longer. This made me annoyed, but no one else seemed to care. I had no idea why. As I got close to the front, the rest of the line before me turned into a disorganized huddle around a small window. Everyone seemed to know their place in the huddle.

When I asked some people around me if I was in the correct line, most of them did not understand me, but for some reason I got a lot of attention there and people were looking at me and talking about me it seemed. One guy came up who spoke English and offered some help for me. I asked him if I was in the correct line to buy tickets for Cherepovets, but he seemed unsure himself. He said he would ask the window person with me and translate for me. I thanked him. Then, for some reason, the person in front pointed to me to go to the very front. I had no idea why they were giving me cuts. I showed the lady my note with instructions for purchasing a ticket to Cherepovets for Monday, and the man who was

helping me spoke some things to her. She looked at it as though it were a complicated matter that she had to figure out. (I didn't understand why purchasing a ticket to a city ten hours east of here is such a complicated and ambiguous matter to them!) Then she pointed to the window next to us and when we went there, the people there were kind enough to let me go to the front immediately. There was a young cute girl in the window. "She's too cute to be in there" I thought. The man helping me and I repeated the same drill, showing her the note while he talked to her. Finally, this girl looked like she knew what to do and asked me for my passport while she ordered the ticket on her computer. I paid the rubles equivalent to about 6 dollars, and she issued me the beige train ticket. Finally! The man helping me then explained to me the details written on the ticket, including the train number, cart number, seat number, day, time, etc. As Elena said, it left at 8pm and arrived the next day at 6am. I put the ticket safely in my passport protector belt hidden beneath my shirt, and went back to the metro to go on my way to the internet cafe.

At the Cro Magnon internet cafe, I looked at the ID's of the six women introduced to me on AFA's website. It was a hard decision to make because all I had was their looks in the photo and cliché words in their profiles. I had to rely on instinct and judgment of personality based on their appearance. Finally, I narrowed it down to three based on who seemed to have the nicest personality and were easiest to get along with. (I have my ways of determining these things based on appearance and most of the time I am right!) They were Anna, Yulia, and Evgeniya. I called Tim and gave him my final choices and he gave me the numbers of each of them. I called them all from the internet cafe because the staff person was generous enough to let me use their phone, but none of them were home. Then I checked my email and wrote some as well. I was glad to receive a scanned handwritten letter in Russian from Evgeniya of Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, who was one of my backup girls there that I had been writing to before. I had it printed out and the staff person there translated it for me. It was very sweet. Perhaps I will get to meet her when I go to Ukraine, I thought. (I did visit her in fact, and you can read about it in the later chapters of my visit to the Ukraine)

As I finished up the rest of my emails, I felt bored and wanted to find someone to socialize with. Maybe I could meet someone here as nice as Lilia again, I thought. Looking around, I saw a pretty girl with blonde/brownish hair at a computer in the other room. When I walked by her, I saw her browsing through a website with personal ads on it in English. That gave it away to me that she must be versatile in English. So I looked at her, made eye contact, smiled, and waved. She smiled and waved back. I felt the cooties and butterflies in my stomach now :) Since her response seemed positive, I now felt comfortable enough to approach her and start a conversation. I did so, and as I expected, she spoke good English. We made some small talk and asked the usual introduction questions. I told her where I was from and the usual basic information. Her name was Natalia. (I know, I know, such a common name by now.) She seemed pretty friendly. Then I said I was done with my emails and was going to look for something to eat. I asked her if she would like to come along. She said sure and then asked me to wait outside while she goes to the bathroom first. Out in the courtyard, I thought again how cool it was that it was so easy to meet girls here randomly like this.

After a few minutes, she came down the stairs with her backpack and we started walking. I suggested McDonald's, but she said she wasn't fond of that place. So I suggested Pizza Hut and she agreed. Inside, we both ordered two slices of pizza each, some coke, and two little cups of tea. (yes I paid for it) I did not see the ham underneath my slices when I ordered them, but I just ate it down anyway after realizing it. We talked about all sorts of things, from our lives, to impressions of Russia and America, culture, customs, media, etc. When I told her about the party at the US Consulate last night, she said

she heard about it but didn't have a chance to go. At one point, I even asked her if she thought I was strange when I first smiled and waved at her in the internet cafe. She said "Yes, a little." I also took my camera out and snapped a photo of her (which you can see in my online album). We exchanged email addresses and phone numbers as well. After over an hour, I asked if she wanted some dessert. She said yes and I suggested we go to Baskin Robbin because they had better ice cream than here. She agreed and we went out but it was already dark and we had trouble finding our way around (she didn't come to this area often). Eventually we found it but it was closed. So I bought us some freezer ice cream from the street carts instead. It was getting late, so she had to get back home. (she lived with her family in a hostel) I escorted her to the metro station, even though she said I didn't need to. Before we departed, she said I could call her sometime, and then we both took our separate trains.

Back at the hostel, I called the three ladies set up for me by AFA and arranged meetings with two of them. The first one, Yulia, agreed to meet me tomorrow at noon at the main entrance of the Nevsky metro station, at the top of the escalator underneath the huge screen promo TV screen (where Olga took me to my first day there). Yulia spoke good English and we had no trouble understanding each other and the details of our plan. She said she would take me to see some of the sights of the city. The second girl, Anna, spoke fluent English and said she would be out of town this weekend but that she could meet me Monday morning instead at the fountain area in front of Kazansky Cathedral (where that short cute blonde girl Natasha asked me for a photo of myself). She sounded like a nice, innocent, kind hearted girl, so I was sure we would be able to get along as friends at least. The third girl, Evgeniya, was not home and I was told by her sister to call her tomorrow because she would be out late. Then I called Elena and Julia and told them that I bought the tickets for the time and day that we agreed on.

## **Chapter 20: Stood-up Sunday**

Sunday morning, I called the Evgeniya introduced to me by AFA since I wasn't able to get a hold of her yesterday. She was home this time and we talked for a long time. Her English was very good and we had no trouble understanding each other. We had some good conversational chemistry and she was definitely no airhead. Since I already had a meeting with Yulia from AFA at noon today, I asked if she was available to meet me tonight. She said she was and that we could go to Hollywood Nights, which was downtown. We planned to meet at the small entrance to the Nevsky station that was easy to meet at but also where Natalia T. stood me up twice at. My day was set, I thought.

After getting ready for my first meeting with Yulia, I left with the usual pastry snack in my hand while entering the metro station. I got to the top point of the escalator to the big promo screen area of the Nevsky station about 20 minutes late. Anxiously, I looked around to see where Yulia was, ready to say hello and apologize for being a little late, but no one who resembled her made eye contact with me like she was looking for me. I walked around the huge area meticulously looking for anyone who looked like the Yulia I saw on the AFA website. After a while, I started asking every girl who was standing and waiting around that even slightly resembled Yulia, if her name was Yulia. All of them said no. After an hour of this, I started getting worried. What could have possibly happened? She sounded serious and sincere on the phone, so I wondered what went wrong. I was sure she said she'd meet me here, and I even took out the piece of paper with the entrance name that someone wrote down for me after talking to her on the phone, and showed it to several people in the station, and they all said I was in the right place. I looked for a pay phone that could accept my prepaid phone card, and called her, but



she wasn't home. Maybe she was just terribly late, I thought. So I continued to wait at the top of the escalator rising to it, watching everyone who came up it to see if she would arrive.

During the second hour of waiting, I was surprised to see Lilia (whom I went on the boat tour with in Chapter 14) again rise from the escalator with a friend. She saw me and greeted me and introduced me to her friend. I said hi and briefly explained that I had been waiting for someone for over an hour. She wished me luck and we said goodbye. After almost two hours of waiting, I decided to make use of the time again and started making small talk with a young blonde girl with short hair next to me, who was also waiting for someone. She seemed nice and shy though, and spoke a little English, but not much. When she didn't understand me, we used the dictionary. I tried to explain to her that I had waited for somebody for so long now. Her name was Mila.

When her friend that she was waiting for arrived, she introduced us. Then her friend went to get something in the adjacent shopping mall connected to the station, while Mila took me outside to talk some more. I asked if she had email, and we exchanged it. (We currently write friendly letters to each other) Then I explained to her that my hostel laundry service had lost almost all my socks and that I had no more left, so I needed to buy new ones. (actually, I later found out that they weren't lost, just shrunk, which is why I didn't recognize them in the pickup area) She said she could help me find where to buy new socks if I followed them, because they were about to shop for a Birthday present for someone. I agreed, and when Mila's friend returned, we walked around the huge mall a bit. I said I wanted something cheap, so they took me outside, and led me to a large crowded tightly spaced outdoor shopping bazaar. It was huge and I was surprised that I never seen this area before. While we were walking through it, many peddlers sitting in the middle of the street handed out to me what looked like lottery tickets, saying something in Russian. Everytime they did that, Mila said to me "Don't believe them. They are liar." I deduced that those men were peddling fake lottery tickets as part of a scam. I replied "Don't worry. I'm not an easy person to trick." We came upon a huge stack of socks sold in large packages. Although they were very thin, they were only a few dollars per package, which contained about ten socks, so I bought one. Then the three of us went to some gift shops before they finally bought an artsy ornament thing that was a piggy bank. Afterward, we bid each other goodbye and promised to write each other. I was now hungry for food, and I didn't know where to go, so I walked to McDonald's again. During the long walk to McDonald's, a girl wearing a Russian cultural quilt stopped me to see if I wanted to visit the quilt shop. I did so, and it was nice but I didn't find anything worth buying. As I left, I got a photo with the cute quilt girl. After eating at McDonald's, I went to the internet cafe to pass the time before my next appointment at 8pm, and spent the next few hours writing back people and reading emails.

When it got close to 8pm, I packed my things together and prepared to walk to the small entrance of the metro station to meet Evgeniya. At the flower shop adjacent to the entrance, I bought a small rose bouquet for her. After waiting for a while and looking at everyone coming out of the exit doors, I started walking around like before to look for anyone waiting around who looked like Evgeniya's photos. I asked a few people who might resemble her, but none of them were named Evgeniya. After half an hour of this, I became worried and thought "No, I can't be stood up again. Not twice in one day. What are the odds?!" But she wasn't here, so I did the same thing I did on Friday afternoon when Natalia T. didn't show up, and walked around to the other two station entrances to see if she had arrived there by mistake. No luck there either. Not knowing what to do, I continued touring around all three station entrances, using the brisk walking as an outlet for my frustration energy. After an hour and a half had passed, I sat down on the steps of the small entrance again in disbelief, realizing that I had to

face the fact that I was probably stood up again. As I sat, anger, insult, and frustration started setting in. Two stand-ups in one day? How could this be? And I wasted two hours already waiting for each girl, for a total today of four hours wasted! I felt so enraged and insulted! My only consolation was that at least I had a case now for getting back the fee I paid AFA for these two introductions, cause I definitely ain't paying \$30 a piece or \$60 total just to wait 4 hours at the metro station for nothing! No way. That would just add insult to injury. To vent my current frustration, I decided I would call Tim of AFA and leave a message venting my disappointment about today. Since my prepaid phone cards were out of credits, and I couldn't figure out the coin operated payphones, I asked a young muscular guy nearby if I could borrow his cell phone for a few minutes. He let me use it and I made the call and left Tim a long message about how frustrated and insulted today I was about being stood up twice, and that I wasn't going to pay for these introductions, except maybe for Anna tomorrow if she shows up. (Note: Since they had my credit card number, they ended up charging me for the introductions anyway. When I got back to the US, I disputed this with AFA but all they would do is give me credit toward a listing in their gentlemen's catalog. Eventually, I disputed this with my credit card company and finally won and got all the charges credited back. An AFA director called me to find out what happened, and after I explained the story to him, he said that Tim had acted improperly in arranging meetings like this because all meetings were supposed to take place at the office.)

Afterward, I gave the cell phone back to the guy. Then he kept trying to tell me something. I figured he wanted some money for the call, so I offered him ten or twenty rubles, but he refused it. Whatever he wanted, he was very insistent about it. Then he talked to another guy nearby, and the other guy wrote down "\$2" on a piece of paper and said "You must give him 2 dollars." I thought "2 dollars for a few minutes phone call? Yeah right. It's not that expensive here, or else who could afford to use their cell phone?" Feeling insulted that he was trying to take advantage of me, I refused on the basis of principle, not money. (or perhaps it was pride?) I tried offering him 10 or 20 rubles again, but he refused. He kept insisting and wouldn't quit. He even started talking in my face. After a while, I became real annoyed. I raised my voice at him in English and said "Look dude. I'm not stupid here. A quick call like that doesn't cost 2 dollars! Don't insult me!" When he still wouldn't quit, I became angry, gave him a threatening stern look, and said "Look, you're really starting to f\*\*\*ing annoy me now! I'm not in a good mood right now because of a bad experience today, so do not piss me off any further!" This exchange went on for a while, and he still persisted and followed me around, so I headed for the metro entrance to leave. Inside, I waited to see if he would go away, but he followed me in, and as he did, I braced for physical combat in case it happened. He didn't try to get physical though, and instead just continued talking down my face. Then I had it and finally walked away, looking over my shoulder as I did to see if he would do anything. I put the token in the gate and went down the escalator, relieved that a physical confrontation had been avoided. I didn't expect that to happen because I borrowed people's cell phones several times before and none of them ever asked me anything for it, even though I made them offers. (Note: When I came back from my trip, a girl named Yulia that I met in Ukraine at the airport read about this even in my journal and wrote to me in an email that it probably did cost the guy 2 dollars for a short phone call because her cell phone bill was charged the same way. So it's possible I was wrong about this.)

Back at the hostel, I gave the mini flower bouquet I had bought for Evgeniya to one of the hostel staff as a thank you for all their help (and since I didn't know what else to do with it) and she put it in a vase near the window sill. The staff person also gave me a note with a message from Anna, the third introduction from AFA that I was supposed to meet Monday morning at the fountain in front of Kazansky Cathedral, that said that she couldn't make out appointment tomorrow because her

grandmother had just passed away, and asked if I could call her tomorrow night to reschedule for Tuesday instead. Since I would be on the train to Cherepovets tomorrow night, I tried calling her tonight to tell her that I was leaving town and couldn't reschedule for Tuesday, but she wasn't at her home and no one answered on her cell phone either, so I figured I'd just email her later since she gave that to me last time we talked on the phone. Oh well, I thought, there goes my third introduction from AFA. But I appreciated that at least Anna called to cancel so I wasn't just stood up again, which didn't surprise me since she seemed really sincere and responsible. That night, the Greek guy with sideburns celebrated his Birthday and gave us all some sweet tasty cake. It was really good. I mingled with the tourists a bit before going to bed.

## **Chapter 21: Leaving St. Petersburg for Cherepovets**

The next morning, with my date for today canceled, I figured I'd just relax until my departure tonight for Cherepovets. I had breakfast, then walked around a bit. I met this old American couple who was there visiting some friends. They were very kind and friendly like small town folk. When they needed to know where the Ploschad Lenina station was because they were going to meet their friend there, I took them to it to show them. As I did, I told them briefly about why I was here, and railed about Olga and how she wouldn't even flinch if I stood in front of her and was struck by lightning. The lady laughed at that. At the park in front of the metro station, their friends came to pick them up. The lady wished me luck for my trip to Cherepovets, and said that it's too bad I wouldn't be around later because they would invite me to dinner if I was. I bid them farewell and then hung around the park benches in deep thought and contemplation.

To be honest, by now I couldn't wait to get out of St. Petersburg because I was sick and tired and drained of the hustle and bustle of this city. I wanted to go somewhere like Pushkin with more open space and friendly small town people. I felt that I had stayed here too long, and that after the first week it had lagged on without much progress or purpose. I saw a girl nearby reading a book. After a while, I was bored so I tried talking to her. We talked a little but didn't seem to have much chemistry and she didn't seem that enthusiastic, so I said goodbye and left.

I didn't want to hang out here any longer cause it was so hot, so I went back to the hostel and hung around a bit. I wandered to the end of the hostel hall where a travel agency office was set up. There was usually a tall gorgeous brunette who looked like a ballerina in there and spoke English, but she wasn't there today. Another lady that looked like her did walk in and then out for a bit. I chatted with her for a while and found out that she was the other tall brunette's lady's sister. Then since she spoke fluent English, I asked her if she could translate a call for me to Natasha E. She said sure and so I wrote down my message on paper asking if she could meet me somewhere during the next two weeks so we could hook up again, and handed it to the tall ballerina-like lady. I bought a new prepaid card and called Natasha E.'s cell phone. Then I handed it to the tall brunette and she read my note to her in Russian. After a few minutes, she smiled and chuckled while she talked to her and said "Ok harasho, harasho" (meaning "ok good, good") and then hung up. I didn't know what it meant at the time, but the words "harasho" sounded sweet and exotic. Afterward, I asked her what "harasho" meant and she said it means either "good" or "ok". She told me that Natasha E. said I was welcome to visit her in Tula sometime, or else I could write her a letter from America and she would get it translated by someone there.

Then we sat in the hostel lounge for a while, while she waited for a ride or something, and I waited for my evening train. From conversing with her further, I learned that she was married (sorry guys) to some rich guy (obviously, with what she was wearing and the accessories she had) and she didn't get along with her mother at all, cause they always argued and didn't see eye to eye on anything. I even saw her arguing with her on her cell phone. I asked if I could snap a photo of her for my album, but she said no. Then it came time for me to leave to catch my train to Cherepovets, so I asked the hostel staff to call a taxi for me because I didn't want to bother taking my huge luggage on the metro. They did and soon the taxi came in the back and a man came in. I bid farewell to everyone there and the tall ballerina girl wished me luck.

The taxi speedily took me to the train station and when he dropped me off, the driver whistled to a man carrying a wheel cart. The man came over and I looked at the driver thinking "Are you saying I'm so weak that I can't roll my luggage to the train station?" The man loaded my luggage onto his cart and I paid the driver and we went on our way. At the train platform, we stopped and I said I could take it from here. He then asked me for money. I didn't know how much he wanted, so I grabbed a young man standing with his gorgeous girlfriend and parents, who looked like he might speak English. He listened to the cart man and then said that he was asking me for 200 rubles. I gasped and said "Come on now." I didn't even ask for his help, and I don't know how things work around here, but I didn't feel that he or anyone had a right to just name any price they want after a service. These things are supposed to be bargained for in advance. Otherwise, anyone could take advantage of me unethically, and I wouldn't have that. . (I am a very generous person to those I like, but not to every single stranger, or else I'd go broke! Sorry but that's reality. Everything adds up.) So I told him it was too much and offered him 50 rubles instead.

After a while of arguing, he saw that I was insistent, so he shrugged and took the 50 rubles. I then showed the young man my ticket and asked him if one of the parked trains was mine. He said the one in front of us was the right train, but we couldn't board it yet. Since they were going to Cherepovets too on the same train, I figured I'd just follow them. During the wait, I asked his tall blonde girlfriend if she spoke English and she blushed and shook her head embarrassingly. (like a modest Asian girl would have done, how cute)

After a while, there was a call to board the train. The young man pointed to the appropriate cart I was to go to and find my seat number. I lined up, brought up my heavy luggage up the steep stairs one at a time, and rolled them inside to find my seat. I hoped that these trains were more comfortable than the metro ones, and sure enough they were. Inside, were spacious seats around a table that you could load luggage under. The seats in each compartment also doubled as bunk beds. Above these seats were two more bunk beds. Each person was assigned a bunk bed/seat, and if the person assigned to the bottom one wanted to lay down and sleep, then the other person was either forced to go up to his/her bunk above or else sit across on the other side. Across from the four bunk seats was a smaller table with two mini seats the all folded into one complete bunk bed, and above that, another bunk bed seat as well. It was all efficiently arranged so that each person had their own bunk seat. I found my seat number and loaded my luggage beneath the bottom seat. In my section were some old ladies, and across from me were some men in army camouflage uniform. It was very hot and sweaty in there, so I looked at the window and tried to open it, but it only budged a few inches down. No more. I pointed at the window and looked at everyone around me, but no one knew how to pull it down further. Since it was so hot and humid inside, and there was nothing else to do, I continued trying to find a way to lower the window. I desperately needed some cool air or breeze. I played around with all the switches and knobs,

but it was no use. People around me said some things that seemed to indicate that once the train started moving, the wind would help cool off the temperature in the train. I sat down and just tried to relax then. Noticing that everyone around me looked stoic and unexcited, I tried to say silly things in English to people around me, especially the army people, to make them laugh or brighten them up, but they just looked mildly amused.

When I saw people starting to eat snacks, I realized that in my rush here, I had totally forgotten to buy any food! Not only that, but I also forgot to buy flowers for Julia when she picks me up at the train station! What happened to my great memory and organizational skills? Then a lady from the next section to me handed me some tasty looking pastry in a package. I said "For me?" and she said yes, and then pointed to a young girl near her and said "It's from her". I was flattered and I remembered reading in my guide book that people on trains here share food. How sweet, I thought. Too bad people aren't this nice back home! But I also felt bad that I had no food to offer anyone else here as well. I hated just being a "taker". (I was no Olga!) I ate the tasty pastry, and the train stewardess brought some black tea and sugar as well. (it was only 5 rubles) It was a very hearty snack. The stewardess took our tickets and also money for bedsheets and pillows. I decided that I wasn't sure if I needed them to sleep since it was so hot, but that I would get them later if I wanted them. Soon the train started moving, and I thought "Thank goodness I'm finally leaving this exhausting city. On to new territory now!"

The train moved slowly at times, then picked up again to go faster. Sometimes it just stopped for a while at a non-station for no apparent reason, possibly to reload the coal that fueled it. I watched outside the window as the outskirts of St. Petersburg went by. I kept muttering to myself "Come on, go go. Let's get out of this busy city to somewhere more peaceful." I felt very excited and filled with intrigue and curiosity at what lay outside of St. Petersburg, which up to now had been my only experience of Russia, the largest country in the world. I wondered what the rest of it was like.

During the ride, I met this mom who spoke English and her teenage daughter. We talked for a bit, and she answered all my questions about this ride and what Cherepovets was like. She was a great help in this new environment and venture. She explained to me that Cherepovets was a city not well known, and with big factories as its major industry. They had just come back from a trip to Africa earlier this Summer. Her husband though, didn't have time to go on these journeys with them because of his work. Now they were on their way to Cherepovets to visit some relatives there. (By the way, generally only Russians from this region know where Cherepovets is. It's not known by foreigners and not a tourist place. This means I may be one of the only foreigners there. It'll be fun to be rare and exotic, I thought. But I hoped that the attention I received would be positive.) The mom's daughter's hair was curled up in two balls that looked like Princess Leia, and she didn't speak much. When I asked the mom why her daughter was so quiet, she said "She is like dog. She listens but doesn't speak." The daughter understood, giggled embarrassingly, and slapped her mom on the shoulder lightly. It must have been funny to be compared to a dog. lol She also explained to me that the food cafe on the train was only in one cart, which was located 8 or 9 carts down. Although I contemplated going there for dinner, I didn't want to cross 8 or 9 carts to get there and leave my luggage and camcorder back there. In fact, I wanted to take my camcorder out to get footage of what the inside of these trains were like, but I was afraid that if someone saw it, they might try to steal it later. So I decided to wait until everyone was sleeping.

Soon people were getting ready to sleep. The lady next to my seat prepared her mattress, pillow and bedsheets on the bunk above me and climbed in to hit the sack. Most on the train did the same. I wasn't tired yet, so I just sat on my bunk, spacing out, and in deep wonder about what lay ahead for me in

Cherepovets. The more I thought about it, the more nervous and anxious I became, not knowing what lay ahead of me, and realizing that since I never met this Julia before, I didn't really know what to expect or how to prepare for it. From initial impressions of her from her photos and our phone conversations, I knew she was a wild party animal type, and very popular and friendly too. In the USA, I could never get along with this type of person, even if I tried. However, that was mostly because those type of people didn't want to get along with me. Therefore, I wasn't even sure how I should act to fit in with her and her friends, or if I would even be able to do so. I kept wondering whether she would like me or not, and how she would react to me once she realized I was different from her and couldn't dance that well. I wondered if she would keep up the same level of enthusiasm toward me in that case. If not, then I wondered if I should try to act like her and her friends in order to fit in and be liked. But even if I did, I wasn't sure about the extent that I could keep that up. In either case, I was hoping that this wasn't going to turn out to be a disaster, and that we would have fun at least. And of course, I wondered if she would show any physical affection for me, unlike Olga and Natalia T. She seemed like the type that would because she seemed a bit floosy, but you never know.

During the night, I kept tossing and turning on my bunk bed worrying about all this. Since the lights were off and everyone was asleep, I would have taken out my camcorder to get footage now, but it was too dark to shoot anything. There was nothing to do now but try to sleep. I decided not to pay for bedsheets and pillow because I didn't feel they would make much difference to me. I unrolled my bare mattress at least and lay down on it. It was comfortable at least, but it was difficult for me to sleep with the movement and shaking of the train, along with the worrying about how tomorrow would go. Eventually I got maybe a few hours of sleep, but not much. It wasn't long at this time of year before daylight crept back up again.

When I got up, most people were still asleep, so I took out my camcorder and got a little bit of footage of the inside of the train. Soon people began rising and rolling up their mattress, bedsheets and pillows and putting on their day clothes. This is such an efficient system after all, I thought. It all works out. I rolled up my mattress too and placed it above. As we waited for the final approach to Cherepovets, the stewardess gave us more tea and sugar, and I drank it and tried to calm myself because I was beginning to feel more and more nervous. I told the English speaking mom how nervous I was at meeting Julia, and she just said not to worry about it and that it would all be ok. I just had a deep feeling that strange things were about to happen. Kind of like that mixed feeling you get before you enter a casino about whether you should be coming here or not. Finally the train arrived at the Cherepovets station, and everyone got up to take their luggage and began departing. Here goes nothing, I thought.

## **Week Three: Crazy time in Cherepovets**

### **Chapter 22: Getting acquainted with Julia and her family**

With both my heavy luggage in hand, and my gift bag with presents in them, I stood in line on the train as people got off. At the door, I took down my luggage one at a time. When I walked down fully loaded, my nervousness became numbed and I looked around for any sign of Julia. The platform was long in both directions, so I just started walking in the same direction as everyone else. Soon I recognized her in the distance with two friends, one of which was Elena. As she got closer, I recognized her face (I had many clear photos of her already) and thought "Oh my gosh." She saw me too and as we got closer, I immediately saw her personality clear on her face, which showed a very

wild, erratic, and even wicked person. You could see the wildness and instability in her eyes. It was so clear and strong. My immediate thought was "What have I gotten myself into?" Not knowing how to greet her, I walked up to her and gave her a hug. She was wearing jeans, jean jacket, and strange pointy shoes that looked like alligator skin. (wearing pointy shoes is a common Russian woman fashion style, but it was very strange to me) I immediately felt like I was hugging someone of a different density and energy than me. It just didn't feel the way I had hoped. Julia introduced Elena and her male friend Vitalik. Vitalik helped carry some of my luggage, and we walked down the platform to the station where her dad Nikoli was waiting with a car. I had seen pictures of her dad before, and he looked the same in person, like a happy big strong man with a beer belly. We loaded my luggage in the back of the car, got in with me taking the front seat, and drove off. Elena, our translator, asked me how long I was planning to stay and if I wanted to stay in a hotel or in Julia's flat. I said that I wasn't sure how long I would stay and that it depended on how things went, and that it would be nice to stay in their flat like we planned. Then she asked if I wanted to see a driving tour of Cherepovets first, or go home and sleep. I said I wouldn't mind a short tour, so we drove around the small city a bit.

During the ride, I showed them my blue matreshka doll from St. Petersburg from the Jasson/Jesús tours, which I had stowed in the gift bag, and separated them into all five wooden dolls. They laughed as I showed each smaller doll inside the other. Cherepovets seemed like a small city that was fairly modernized with newer buildings than St. Petersburg. It seemed quiet and uneventful, but that was ok by me because I actually felt refreshed right now because I was away from the hustle and bustle of St. Petersburg. We crossed several bridges overlooking some rivers, and they put in some modern Russian techno music, which Elena lip synced. These people seemed like fun at least, and I hoped we would get along. After the short tour, we headed for Julia's flat. As we entered the complex of tall apartment buildings, we went over roads with huge holes in them. As we went over huge holes and cracks, I joked to them that tomorrow I'd get up and fix these roads for them. lol We parked the car, unloaded my luggage, and took the elevator up to their floor.

Inside her flat, we all went to the kitchen and while Julia prepared some food, I brought out my gifts to them. First, I brought out the red wine I was supposed to give Olga (but there was never a chance to open it together) and gave it to them to put in the fridge. Then I brought out the box of aplets and cotlets for them that I brought from Washington. (the famous Orchard brand made in Cashmere, WA) They tried it and loved it. Julia brought us all some bread, cheese, and meat slices. Then she poured us all some wine and we toasted and Elena said "To our meeting". Julia then brought out some souvenirs from her trip to Egypt to show me. She said something and Elena said "She said maybe you two could go there someday." Already, I thought? Oh well, maybe it's a sign that she likes me then. When Julia changed into more comfortable loose clothes with tank top and shorts, I then saw how hot she really was, with a tanned hard body and sexy lips and perky personality. I couldn't help but devilishly think "Oh my. I hope we do work out and she eventually gets affectionate toward me." (I never had anything to do with a hot blonde before in the USA, because they rarely crossed paths with me and they never showed any interest in me.) After I had some of the bread and cheese, Elena asked why I didn't eat any of the meat slices. Not wanting to sound awkward by telling them that I was a vegetarian, I just said I wasn't in the mood for it right now. She said it seemed strange to eat bread without meat. I said maybe later. Elena said that Julia was wondering if she looked the same in person as in her photos. I said yes, and that she was just as beautiful. After the snack, they saw how tired I was since I barely slept on the train, so they said I should take a nap. I agreed and went into the living room where they unfolded the sofa into a bed for me, and I laid down. As I impurely thought "I wonder if Julia will come in and join me for a snuggle", I quickly fell asleep.

When I woke up a few hours later, the door opened and someone who looked like Julia except taller and bigger walked in and looked at me in intrigue. I thought that my vision might be blurry from the sleep or something, but I realized that it was probably her younger sister, who had just got home and wanted to take a glance at the "new specimen" lol. Before I could say hi, she walked back out the door, probably fearing that she had woken me up. I lay in bed for a while longer, not knowing whether I should get up and talk to everybody or not. Finally, I got up and went to the kitchen. Julia was there preparing something. She greeted me and introduced me to her mom, but there was little she could say because we couldn't understand each other. Then she showed me a bunch of photos taken from her trip to Egypt. I was stunned. There were many bikini shots of her laying near a swimming pool that showed her incredible hardbody that was to die for. I couldn't help but be filled with insatiable lust. My mind was totally in the gutter now. (I later scanned some of them at Vitalik's flat and can show you them by email if you want) There were also pictures of Egyptian guys she was with, desert landscapes, city of Cairo, and the pyramids in the background. The pyramids were too expensive for her to go in. so there were no interior shots of them. There were also photos of her family and friends in town.

Then I took out my camcorder and shot some footage of her introducing herself, saying "I love Winston" (how floosy can you get?), the pyramid souvenirs she had on top of her TV, and the view from outside her balcony. When I went on the balcony, Julia came out and pointed down and said "It's park." When her mother came out too, I gave her the camcorder and put my arm around Julia and kissed her cheek, and she did the same back. Afterward, I showed her the footage I took from my camcorder viewscreen and we had a good laugh about it. Later on, Vitalik came in and I got some footage of him and Julia too. In it though, Julia pointed to me and said "I love Winston" then she introduced Vitalik and immediately said "I love Vitalik". Geez, that sure made me feel special considering how easy it was to earn "her love". Elena came too and we all decided to go to the beach.

We went down to the white car again and Julia drove us around. We stopped at a beach near a river first. I brought my swimsuit and changed in the a stall in some bushes. Nobody wanted to swim though, except me. They said the water was too dirty for them, but there were many other people swimming there. Before going in, I got a picture taken with Julia on my camera. Then I slowly went in the water and waded around. When I got near some kids splashing around, they stopped to look at me with curiosity. It was interesting being so rare and exotic here. After swimming around a bit, I got out and when I laid down to get a suntan, Julia came up and said we should go now. I think she got bored just watching me swim. I felt good where I was so I said I wanted to stay a while longer, but Julia insisted and they started walking back to the car, so I got up and followed. What a short time at the beach! We drove around to a few other places and then stopped at "Pyramid" the restaurant/discotheque that she used to work at. Julia went in to talk to her boss and a few friends, and then came back.

For the rest of the day, we talked and joked around a lot in her flat, hung out on the balcony and drank, etc. Throughout the day, Julia acted oddly. She would wink at me a lot and blow kisses at me from across the room, and I would reciprocate, but other times she just looked at me in amusement. She seemed very flighty and hot and cold. When I repeated what she said in Russian, she laughed hysterically, teasing me at the same time. She was definitely a person that was easily amused, like me. I realized that she was a fun person to joke and party with, but for a serious relationship? Well I wish, especially considering how physically gorgeous she was, but I knew she wasn't long term relationship material. But she was fun to be around, and had a very bubbly personality that was in ways larger than life. In other words, she was interesting (especially much more so than Olga <the one I met in St.



Petersburg, not the Olga that was Julia's sister> was at least) and I wondered how far I would get with her.

In the evening, we went out on the balcony drinking beer. When she pointed to some underwear and bras hanging on a drying rack out there, she called them "glushaki" and laughed so hard when I said it too. (I later learned that "glushaki" is not the Russian word for underwear, as no other Russians knew what that word meant, but it was a word that Julia invented as a pet name for underwear. Don't ask me how she got that word.) Then we made a series of jokes involving that word. It sort of became an inside joke among us. When we spotted Elena below on the street walking home from school with some male students, Julia and I called out to her and when I said "Elena, what color is your glushaki?" Julia laughed uncontrollably. (Usually, it's a good sign when you can make a girl laugh, but when she laughs this easily, it might be an exception.) As Elena stood down there chatting with the group of male students, Julia and I yelled and teased at her from above. It was an amusing time.

Later, Elena came up to join us for a while. I asked Elena to ask Julia about the other flat her family owned that she mentioned in letters that I could stay in, and they said that it was currently rented out to another family. At one point, Julia asked to see my passport. At first I hesitated because I didn't want her to see the Ukraine visa attached to one of the pages inside my passport. It would be difficult and awkward to try to explain that. But then I realized that if I didn't let her see my passport, then it would look suspicious to her anyway. So I tried to use the "I don't want you to see my bad passport picture" as an excuse, but it didn't work, so I let her see my passport, hoping that she would not notice the Ukraine visa in it. But she did notice it and showed her parents. Then she asked me "You have woman in Ukraine?" Embarrassed, I replied "No. No. I just want to go there to sightsee after Russia because I heard the beaches around the Black Sea were nice." Not sure if what I said was believable, I added, "In fact, I'd like to invite you to come to Ukraine with me so you can enjoy it with me." But she said that she probably couldn't because in a few weeks she had to go to Poland to register for college. The subject quickly dropped and I was relieved.

Her mom and dad were really hospitable to me and light-hearted in nature as well. (they had to be to put up with Julia, or perhaps it ran in the family?) They fed me a big dinner, including akroshka (a Russian salad soup), bleen (Russian pancakes), some stuffed burritos, bread, biscuits, cake, and cookies. We used my dictionary often to communicate when Elena wasn't around. That night, I also watched some Russian TV with them but I couldn't understand a word of it. But I was surprised when Julia showed me a network music entertainment program that she taped with her in it being interviewed. (I guess now she has an excuse to act famous after all) In the scene, a host brought his microphone to Julia who was all covered in mud (I don't know why she was covered in mud, perhaps she was mud wrestling or it was some type of contest or show) and asked her a question to which she gave a short comment. (It was all in Russian, so I didn't understand it.) I was shocked that it was her on TV, and at my request she rewound it again so I could see that it was really her. Afterward, I felt a little honored that I now knew a girl who took part of something on network TV. (most girls I knew in my life never did anything like that before) They told me that tomorrow we would be going to Julia's grandmother's village to visit and stay for a while. I slept that night on the couch turned bed in the living room.

## **Chapter 23: Swimming and biking at grandmother's village**

The next morning I packed a small luggage and Julia drove me and her mom in the family stick-shift car to her grandmother's village. I was excited to be going on a drive through the exotic Russian countryside. It was a very sunny, bright and hot day. The drive was filled with lush greenery and vast farmlands. Julia blasted the car stereo with her Russian music tapes which I enjoyed very much. I liked the melodies, rhythm and exotic words in them. I guess I was developing a thing for Russian culture and music. During the ride, I tried to hold her right hand once when it was set down by her side, but after a few seconds she said something in Russian and brought her hand back to the wheel. I think she said "I need this hand to drive" or "Not while I'm driving" or something, I don't know.

After about an hour of driving, we pulled into another freeway and then into the village. It was a cluster of small houses and shacks with yards around them. We stopped in front of a brown house and got out. Immediately a skinny dog with black spots and a cat with no ears came up to us. I petted them but felt sorry for the cat and wondered how it lost its ears. Julia introduced her dog as "Drushka" (though she sometimes called him "Drujork", I don't know if that was another name for him) and her cat too but I don't remember its name. She explained to me using the dictionary that the cat lost its ears after it got into a fight with another animal. We went in and her grandmother greeted us and I introduced myself. Julia's great grandmother was there laying on the bed too, but too old to move much. Julia's sister Olga was also there. (she came here the day before, possibly to make room for me to sleep on their couch bed last night) I brought my little luggage in and settled in one of the two beds in the big guest room. It was nice and cool in the guestroom, which was a great shelter from the sweltering heat outside. They gave me some snacks to eat and then I took out my camcorder to take some footage of this village home. First I filmed Julia's grandmother and said "Kak vas zavut?" (What's your name?) and she said proudly said "Valentina!" and waved her hand (which not surprisingly made Julia laugh hysterically). Then I pointed it at Julia and then her great grandmother, and then I walked into the hall to the guest bedroom to look for Olga. While I did so, Julia's mom Tatiana said "Winston, patome. Patome." (which meant "later") We had some lunch in the family room, sitting on the couches and beds while watching TV. As we talked about the decorations around the family room, I used the words "exotic" (the word is also the same in Russian and means the same thing) and "krashiva" (means "beautiful" in Russian) repeatedly and Julia got a kick out of it, repeating those words after me in laughter. She was so easy to amuse, like me. At times, when they couldn't understand what I was saying, I thought "Man, where is Elena? I wish she had come along so she could translate."

Later, Olga came back from visiting her boyfriend, and I took some footage of her with my camcorder. In a take with her and Julia sitting next to each other, I said "Olga look like Julia." Then I said "Olga, kak vas zavut?" (I know, it's a totally dumb question to say "Olga, what's your name?" and I often laugh about this when I watch the tape, but I wanted her to introduce herself) and she said "Olga. Also Olya. Sister of Julia. Gorad Cherepovets. (which means "City of Cherepovets")) Then I said "Stand" and she reluctantly and embarrassingly stood up. I asked "Olga, how old?" and when she didn't understand, Julia translated it and told her "Skolkah billiot?" ('how old are you' in Russian) Olga said "Shest naghtsat" which was 16 in Russian, and then she said "sixteen" in English. I said into the camera that she was a very beautiful sister. Then she got tired of this and said "Sho. Finish." and I stopped recording. It was a lot of fun. One thing I appreciated about Russians like them were that they could find so much joy and amusement in little things, something that people who are spoiled don't appreciate.

In the afternoon, they asked if I wanted go swimming in the river. (I knew what they meant because Julia's mom made a doggy paddle swimming motion with her arms.) I agreed and changed into my

swimsuit. Then we all left, Julia, her mom Tatiana, sister Olga, and I. We walked through very tall grass, and I was disgusted because I've always disliked walking through tall grass for some reason. It was kind of spooky to me. I also noticed Julia was able to walk through rugged terrain easily and naturally. She seemed used to it, which to me was a bit surprising for a "hot" girl. (I know, I know, perhaps I'm just a wimp. I know you're thinking that too.) Soon we reached the river bank, and Julia's mom jumped in it first and swam around. Julia said that we were headed for another part of the river and that Tatiana would follow us there later. We walked along the bank a little to a broken fragile looking wooden bridge hanging across the river. There were several kids and teenagers swimming here and laying about. As I looked at the bridge wondering if it would be safe to cross, Julia walked out on it to the middle and sat down next to a boy there. As I was taking off my shirt and putting my towel, shorts, wallet, and passport belt down in a safe place on the grass, Julia and the boy held hands and jumped into the river. Soon she came to shore and asked me to go in and swim. At first, I went out onto the broken wooden bridge, walking cautiously with each step. Some of the planks on it felt soft like it could snap if I put too much weight on it. I don't know how Julia walked across it so confidently and safely. I asked Julia if she wanted to come jump in with me again, but she said she would just watch me. When I stood in the middle of the bridge and looked down, I prepared to jump but decided that I would rather go in gradually instead in case the water was too cold. So I walked back and entered in from the shore. It was cold and I got in slowly. Soon Julia's mom swam to our section and joined us.

After swimming some laps around the river, I came out shivering and walked cautiously across the wooden bridge to jump in this time since my body was now accustomed to the water temperature. I splashed hard and dropped deep in the dark black water before coming back up. Olga swam a little too but not much. She soon left to go somewhere. When I got out to dry off, I talked to Julia in English, and then I noticed three teenage girls sitting on their towels looking at me with intrigue. Right then and there, I felt like a movie star being checked out and admired by girls. (I love this country!) I went up to them and said hi and then some words in English to amuse them (even though I knew they probably wouldn't understand me). They looked amused, giggled, and spoke some Russian among themselves. With an audience staring at me, I made some jokes and said some silly things in English. Soon Julia came over and spoke to them too. We sat down next to them and Julia explained to them who I was, using the word "internet" so I deduced that she was saying that we met over the internet. Then I put my arm around Julia and said "Yes that's right. This is my Julia." so as to brag to them a little. I gave each of the girls an American penny coin from my wallet. Since American dollars are abundant here while American coins are not used, it would be a rare souvenir to them. They each told us their names and their ages, and as I expected, they were teenagers. After conversing back and forth a long time, two of them left because it was time to go home, and one remaining girl stayed behind to talk to Julia. After a long talk, we decided it was time to leave.

Julia, her mom, and I walked back through a different path that was more flat, even, and normal. I wondered why we didn't go this way when we came since it was so much easier. During the walk, I held Julia's hand and it felt good, but after a while, she wriggled her hand back. I don't think she felt natural walking this way. When we got back to the village house, I asked if they had a bicycle, and Julia brought one out for me. She said she'd wait here while I rode it around, so I took it for a spin around the rugged village road. As I circled around, old folks came out and stared at me wondering who I was. I also said hi to families and kids walking about, who looked at me like I was new and different. When I got to some old buildings that looked like they were part of a town or school, I turned around and rode back to the house. When I arrived and parked the bicycle, I sat next to Julia on the front yard bench and she gave me a flower she picked, saying "Winston, this is my heart for you." I was

flattered at first, but then again I remembered how easily words like that came from her on impulse. Then she took the bicycle for a spin while I waited. Afterward, we took some photos together, which you can see in my online album.

Afterward, we went in and sat on the couch to wait for dinner. Soon Julia had her pet named for me, she called me "Winston panda". (referring to the Eastern panda bear) I soon called her "Julia koala" and we played around with animal names a lot. Julia had a great laugh when I called Olga "crocodile" and some other bizarre animal names as well. (by the way, many animal names in Russian are the same as in English) By now, there were so many inside jokes between us that to an outsider they would appear hokey and strange, but to us they were with the flow and funny. Later we sat on the couch together while her mom and grandmother cooked dinner. Julia took a notepad and wrote down some words to me for fun. At first, they were just funny. Then she wrote some lovey dovey stuff to me. I played along with it, but deep down I wished she wouldn't play with my feelings like this. Why can't she be someone who means what they say? Suddenly, I was shocked when she wrote something like "I like wild sex all night." I wasn't sure how to react to that. She was so hot and I was so turned on sitting next to her that I badly wanted the chance for some physical affection from her, but why did she write that to me now? Then she wrote that she liked position number 2, which she called "doggy style". I said that my ex-girlfriend liked that style too.

This talk was really turning me on now, especially coming from someone next to me with a killer hardbody. Following the direction of my raging hormones now, I wrote on the notepad "Let's kiss." But she wrote "No. No kiss." When I asked "Why not?" she said that Russian custom was to not kiss until marriage. Yeah right. Her? The wild crazy girl who acts floosy and just wrote that she liked wild sex all night now is saying that she doesn't kiss until marriage? Who does she think she's trying to fool here? Then I asked if she would kiss if we were married, and she said "Yes, of course if we were married." Since I didn't believe that she only kissed within marriage, I asked her if she had an ex-boyfriend before, and when she said yes, I asked her if she had kissed with him before. When she admitted that she had, I became upset and asked why then she just told me that she only kisses within marriage. She didn't really respond to this and I was upset and hurt. Then she said not to talk about her ex-boyfriend because she was really hurt by that relationship and he always got drunk and into fights. This topic had now spoiled the mood of our conversation. Then dinner was ready and I ate it with a frown and feeling rejected.

After dinner, I took some footage with camcorder of Julia introducing her dog Drujork. Then a group of Julia and Olga's friends stopped by. We went out to greet them and Julia introduced us all. We all joked around and laughed for a while, and then I brought out my camcorder and Julia used it to take some footage of all of us outside. We each introduced ourselves and Olga grabbed me and kissed me on the cheek, and I in turn kissed another girl also named Olga on the head and then kissed the first Olga back as well. Julia then tried to get footage of her mom, but she ran away because she was camera shy, so she took a close up of her dog Drujork instead. Later on, to get a reaction out of me and to shock me, she said "America 9/11" and then laughed deliberately and hysterically like it was something to laugh at. I exclaimed, "Julia! If you did that in America, you would be dead!" I couldn't believe this girl. Then Julia told me that tomorrow morning she had to drive back to Cherepovets, and that I should wait for her in the village until afternoon. I kept trying to ask her why I couldn't go with her, but she didn't understand my question and just kept repeating what she initially said. I asked because we never seemed to have any time alone and I was wondering why she would only be around me with other people.

Soon it was dark and mosquitoes were biting at us, so we all got into Julia's car to continue hanging out. I sat in the driver's seat next to Julia and as we joked around, Julia soon pointed to all her private body parts and taught me how to say them in Russian. When I repeated those words, she and her friends laughed hysterically. After a long time, Julia's mom came out to tell us it was bed time, and we went in and said goodbye to the friends. As Julia and I went in the hall, I looked at her wondering if now would be a good moment to try to kiss her, but she just pushed me to keep going ahead into the house. I slept in the guestroom on one of the beds, while Julia, her mom, and sister slept on the bed across from me. (yes those beds were big enough for all of them) I had a hard time falling asleep but eventually I did.

The next morning, I got up late and everyone else in the room was gone. I heard talk and laughter out in the living room across the hall, but I just laid there and thought about what had happened so far, wondering how far I was going to get with Julia and what I should do next. I also fantasized about how hot and sexy she was. If it wasn't for her sexy body, appearance and aura, I probably wouldn't be putting up with this hot/cold treatment. But I didn't understand what was going on though. She said in her letters that she liked me and was very attracted to me, and right now she acts interested in me somewhat. So why then does she not show any affection for me or hold hands with me for long? Perhaps my appearance wasn't what she imagined or she doesn't feel that I'm manly or rugged enough for her? From her photo albums that she showed me, she seemed very sexual, uninhibited, wild, and sensual in her poses, and she said in her letters that she found me very attractive and that she "loved me", "wanted me", "misses me", etc. In addition, the things she talked about since we met reveal that she has a very dirty mind as well, so in theory she should have shown me some physical affection by now, but she didn't. However, so far she had flirted with me, taunted me, tempted me, etc. so I wasn't sure what to make of it all.

After a long time, Julia walked in (ohhh she looked like a surreal angel that was too hot to look at), said good morning, sat down on my bed and told me that breakfast was ready. I took her hand and thanked her and said that I would be ready soon. Then she left and I got dressed and went out to the family room. But by then, Julia was gone and her mom told me that she went out to swim and then to "doosh" which meant to take a shower. I asked how she was taking a shower exactly, since I needed to take one myself, but they had a hard time explaining it to me. After I ate some snacks and biscuits, Julia came back and when I asked her how she "dooshed" and where at, she laughed with wild amusement again. She pointed outside somewhere, but didn't know how to explain it to me. Perhaps there was some stall outside where they poured buckets of water on themselves like they do in third world countries. But every time I brought it up, she would use it as an excuse to laugh hysterically again. When I asked her why she didn't drive to Cherepovets like she said, she said that they had decided instead that this afternoon we should all go back to Cherepovets together. When I asked why, she said that the shower facilities were more convenient there.

Later, lunch was ready and they set the table in the guestroom for Julia and me. When Julia and I blew kisses and licked our tongues at each other from across the room, Tatiana caught us, pointed her finger at us and told us not to lick our tongues at each other anymore. They brought a bottle of champagne for us and as we drank the bottle together, I began to feel a little buzzed. (I know, I have a low tolerance level!) During the meal, Julia explained to me that she did dream of going to America, but that her current plans were to go to college in Poland for college. I learned that she was a city girl (no surprise there) and that if she was in America, she would want to live somewhere like Los Angeles, Las Vegas,

or New York. Then when we somehow got to talking about my ex-girlfriend, I asked her "Julia, you want to be my girlfriend?" and she pointed at me and said "You, my boyfriend? Ok." and nodded. I wasn't sure how serious to take that though, after all that's happened so far. Soon I became so buzzed that I couldn't sit straight or stand straight and Julia and her mom were amused by it. When I couldn't finish my large bowl of soup, Tatiana took it and said that she would give it to the dog Drujork. I grimaced and said "No, don't give it to the dog. That's gross to think of him eating from the same bowl as me!" and they both laughed uncontrollably by this. For the next few days in fact, they referred to this incident and how I reacted to it when she said she'd give my meal to the dog Drujork.

After lunch, Tatiana asked if I wanted to go swim one more time. I said yes and we all went to the river again. Julia rode the bike this time instead of walking. Again we used the same path covered in tall grass, and I didn't understand why we didn't just go through the easier trail that we came back on last time. Today was cloudy though, and when we got to the river, there was hardly anybody there. It was too cold for Julia to swim in, but I jumped in dry from the bridge this time, and swam around a bit. When I got out though, I was constantly bitten by mosquitoes and to make things worse, I saw black leeches on my legs sucking blood from me. I quickly brushed them all off but they kept coming, so I quickly put on my pants. By now though, my legs were filled with red bumps, which showed for months afterwards.

Soon a group of boys came to hang out. They stared at me occasionally and I waved and said hi to them. They were amused, and after a while, a tall muscular teenage boy with his shirt off came to talk to us. Somehow, we got to talking about riding the bike, and I said that the trails here were too bumpy for me to ride since I didn't have good skills in handling a bike. But the athletic looking teenage boy told me to ride it and that he would jog along with me. Julia told me to go for it and so I wouldn't look like a spoil-sport, I agreed to it. The bike was more sturdy and stable than I expected, and I held it well on the bumpy winding trails. The boy jogged along with me and often passed me up, which embarrassed me a little. He was certainly in shape all right. We both went out a long way and then came back. When I offered to do it again, he agreed and we went a second round.

Afterward, we waved goodbye to the group of boys and left to go back to the village through the easy trail back. We packed our things in the car and said our goodbyes to Julia's grandmother and great grandmother. They gave us big glass jars of jam and fruit to take along. Olga stayed behind though, probably so she could spend time with her boyfriend. As we were leaving the house, we saw Olga and her boyfriend and I waved to them. During the drive back, I asked if we could stop by a grocery store so I could get us all some pop. It was so hot and humid, and we were constantly thirsty. Julia said we could do so along the way, but that the village supermarket was "very bad" so we wouldn't stop there. We again played the tapes in the car of the music I loved. After an hour, we were back in Cherepovets and we stopped at a grocery store there, but Julia said that since we were almost home, we could just get something to drink at home. When Tatiana got out and went inside the grocery store, I wondered if Julia and I would finally have a few minutes alone in the car at least, but after a few seconds, Julia got out and went in as well. Groggily, I got out and went in too. Then we went back to their home and all took showers. I felt clean once again!

## **Chapter 24: Toyed and intimidated by Julia's moodiness**

During the shower, I did some thinking and decided to find Elena so that we could sit down together with Julia and have a serious talk regarding my concerns about me and Julia. If Julia didn't like me or wasn't interested, I wanted to know now because I didn't want to overstay my welcome and could leave early to go somewhere else if they wanted to. After the shower, I didn't have to wait long because Elena came in to visit us. She talked to Julia briefly and then said that they wanted to talk to me too. I wondered they had the same concerns on their mind. When we sat down, it turned out that they only had some trivial questions to ask me. Then I told Elena that I wanted to ask Julia a few things. First, I asked why she never wanted to spend time alone with me or go out alone with me. Julia looked at me and said "Never" and then something followed by "Ya ni panimayu". Elena said that Julia would feel awkward being out alone with me because she wouldn't understand anything I said, but not because she didn't like me. Then I asked why Julia joined the marriage agency ([www.russianfriendfinder.net](http://www.russianfriendfinder.net)) if she intended to go to Poland for the next few years of college. Elena talked to her and then said that Julia didn't decide to go to Poland yet at the time she joined that agency, and that she only wants to visit the USA, not live there constantly because it would be too far away from her home and family. But on the other hand, Poland was close enough for her to come back and visit by train. Oh great, I thought. Perhaps she was hoping that European men would respond to her profile on the agency's website. When I said that I didn't feel that Julia wanted a serious relationship with me, she said that even if she wanted a serious relationship with me, she still has to go to college in Poland for five years, because it's cheaper there and she has an aunt there that she can live with, and it's closer to Russia so she can visit her family anytime. (I know, that didn't really answer my question) I wonder why she never told me that in her letters before. Finally, I asked if Julia preferred that I left early before the two weeks I planned to spend with her were up, or if she wanted me to stay longer. She said that she preferred that I stayed here until she left for Poland. I nodded and that was the end of the serious talk. I guess I would just wait and see what happened next.

I don't remember exact details of the rest of this day, but I do know that at this point my fears started coming true. Sure enough, the inside jokes between us continued, and soon we had a good time as she taught me various Russian swear words, laughing hilariously as I repeated them and tried to pronounce them accurately. It was somewhat amusing and you couldn't help but feel that it was fun too because Julia's laughter was contagious somewhat. She even introduced me to some of her friends and neighbors, and demonstrated to them the cuss words she taught me. They in turn were also amused by my pronunciation of them. Some of the dirty words I learned were "Pajole nawhee" which meant the same thing as the "F" word, "Pizz-dee" which even now no Russian is able to translate the meaning of (but they warn not to say it to strangers in Russia or else you may get into fights), and "Whee sway si, go buoy tre see" which means "blow job and swallow." When I pronounced these words with some passion in my voice to some guy friends of Elena, they gave me a high five and said "good", "good." I couldn't believe I was engaging in such juvenile things, but it was amusing at least.

Soon though, Julia began to show me her moody mean bitchy side as well, especially when no one else was around. For some reason, she acted different toward me and less playful when no one else was around, which was the opposite of what I had hoped. Since my arrival here, I had been waiting for the time when me and Julia could be alone to see what kind of chemistry we had, and because I hoped something would happen too of course (wink). But awkwardly enough, now that we had a chance to be alone, she gave me these weird stares that looked moody enough that she could start bitching at me for anything. And sure enough, she did. She started yelling at me in Russian with a mean face for who knows what, for little things such as misplacing things, and leaving my shoes on the living room carpet rather than near the front door (at least she could tell me nicely!). This was not what I had hoped for at

all. It didn't make sense, and I wasn't sure how to play her game. But this is how it starting getting now that her mom was out grocery shopping, her dad away for several days on a truck driving trip for work, and her sister still back at the village. During these moments, I felt a little intimidated by her and somewhat scared too by her moody gaze, which you wouldn't see on my camcorder footage because she only showed her good side when the camera was pointed at her. At this point, I had to keep resorting to making her laugh again with the inside jokes, my pronunciation of Russian cuss words, etc., to try to bring her back to her jovial side again so I wouldn't have to deal with this moody side of her. It often worked and brought a temporary smile to her face, but I grew tired of this silly game and decided that I obviously should leave soon. There didn't seem to be any point in continuing this. She didn't seem to be interested in me romantically, treated me like I was some toy, and intimidated me with her moodiness. I began to wonder whether she was trying to make me leave, despite what Elena told me about her wanting me to stay until she went to Poland, or whether she had bipolar disorder or some other mental disorder. Either way, I saw no point in enduring through this (especially when I was getting nothing out of it) and realized that I ought to leave soon. From here, my choices were to either go to Tula to visit Natasha E. to follow up on the thing we had going back in St. Petersburg, or to go to Ukraine early to visit my third primary girl Elena in Mariupol. I still had over a week left on my Russian visa, so I wanted to spend my time wisely and fruitfully. And since my Ukrainian visa was good for a total of three months from the time I got it, I could go there anytime now. I decided that if I left here early, it would be better to go visit Natasha E. in Tula first for the remainder of my visa here, since I already had two weeks after next week reserved for Elena in Ukraine, and plus I had already met Natasha E. and had some chemistry with her while Elena was still an unknown. When I opened the maps in my Lonely Planet Guidebook, I saw that Tula was just a little below Moscow, which was directly south of here on the way to Mariupol, Ukraine! Perfect, I thought! That would work out well.

In the evening, the three of us, Julia, Elena, and I, went to the local supermarket across from their apartment complex to get some food, treats, and champagne. I bought most of it since I was staying for free in Julia's place. Julia and Elena loved champagne and they began asking for it everyday. I didn't mind since I liked it too and the price of it here was much cheaper than in America. That night, Julia continued her strange treatment of me, and I began to feel more and more like her toy. Wondering what tactic to use myself, I remembered that a guy whom I emailed Julia's photos to before my trip said that she looked like a player and that I should try to be a challenge to her or else she would lose interest. I wondered though, how I could be a challenge to her. Perhaps I should start acting like I didn't care about her, and that her games had no effect on me, and that I wasn't turned on by her anymore. I did these things, and they did seem to have a temporary effect on her, for she began trying to get my attention more, and at times she would look at me with affectionate eyes and ask "What's wrong?" I wasn't sure how long to keep this up though, and what I would accomplish by this, but it was the only thing I could do at this point. When I began getting flirty with her and giving her attention again though, she resorted to her usual behavior of toying with me and having fun at my expense, along with being bitchy toward me when she felt like it. So all my act of being a challenge to her did was temporarily get her attention, not much else.

She was amused though, when I said that she looked like a cross between Britney Spears and Anna Kournikova. Soon she also started calling me "durak" which meant "fool" in Russian. I don't know why. That night, before bedtime, I went out into the balcony by myself to think about what to do. Noticing that I was out there, Julia came out and had a look of concern and affection on her face. She said "Winston, what is wrong? You ok?" I looked at her apathetically and said "Nothing". Then she said "I love you. Goodnight." and then left with a guilty look on her face. I wish I could believe her, but



somehow I knew I shouldn't take anything she said seriously. I decided though, that sometime tomorrow I would tell them that I planned to leave because I was tired of being Julia's toy.

The next day, Julia, Elena, and I rode the bus into town to do some errands, shopping, and sightseeing. We went to the bank so Julia could withdraw some money and go to the train station to get information on tickets to Poland. They showed me some shops around town, and I bought them ice cream and pizza as well. In the pizza parlour, we ran into a tall totally gorgeous skinny modern looking blonde that Julia knew. As Elena and I stood in line to place the order, Julia sat down with her and chatted (probably telling her wonderful things about me no doubt lol). When we came back, the tall hot blonde had left but left a plate full of leftover pizza crusts (I never understood why people did that since it was my favorite part). Since I didn't mind eating the leftovers from a totally hot babe, I took some of her leftover pizza crusts and ate them (hell yeah, since I would exchange saliva and fluids with her anyway, what's wrong with eating her leftover pizza crusts?). Julia and Elena looked at me shockingly and then Julia called me "durak" (fool) again. Why not though, since the odds are almost none that I would get any kind of a disease from this. It was all mostly psychological anyway.

Afterward we went to a quilt and souvenir shop similar to the one I went to in St. Petersburg. Afterward, we went to a cathedral with green cone rooftops, but it was closed for a wedding ceremony, so we just looked at it from outside and Julia unenthusiastically posed for a photo with me. On the way home, for fun I said "Vitalik is very krashiva (beautiful)" which made them laugh and call me "Winston, you blue man." (A blue man in Russia refers to a gay or homosexual man) This quickly became another one of our inside jokes over the next few days (and even now when I talk to them on the phone, we refer to it). We stopped at the supermarket, which by the way was also inside a shopping mall, to get groceries and champagne again.

That night, with Elena back at her flat next door, I was left alone with Julia again to deal with her moodiness again. I didn't want to deal with this again though, and decided that a break from each other might be good. So I said that I wanted to go find an internet cafe tonight so I could check my email and write my next journal update. Julia had Elena come in to make some calls for me to find out where the nearest one was. After I agreed to go to it, she called for a taxi to pick me up. When it came, I asked Elena to write down the address of Julia's flat so I could show it to the taxi driver when I came back. Elena talked to the driver, who told us that he knew where some were. I left and told them I'd be back in a few hours. We only drove a few minutes to get there (I could've just walked if I knew where it was!). When we got to a small hidden computer cafe with a few kids in there playing 3-D shooting games, I asked the driver to come in with me to make sure it was an internet cafe and that I was ok with the cost per hour. A guy who worked in there wrote down the price per hour for me on a piece of paper, giving me a discount since I wasn't uploading any files to their computer, and it was pretty cheap (about \$1 an hour) so I accepted and paid the taxi driver the agreed on fare. The driver stopped and indicated that he wanted a little more because he had to come in here with me, but I looked at him with the "Come on now. Get real." look and he gave up and left. I immediately filled my list audience and the Russian Bride List on what had happened so far, since my last journal update from St. Petersburg that was written just before I went to the movies with Olga. I filled them in on what had happened since then til now. I explained at the end that I was fed up with how Julia was treating me and since I was getting nothing out of it, I had decided to leave soon. I remarked that it was a pity though, that I was leaving someone as physically hot and sexy as Julia, but there was no other choice.

I also wrote AFA an email to forward to Tim in St. Petersburg explaining what had happened with the two ladies that stood me up and the third one canceling on me as well, and that I do not wish to be charged for these introductions or else I would dispute it with my credit card company (which I always won). I also wrote the third girl introduced by AFA, Anna, at the email she gave me explaining to her why I couldn't reschedule with her for Tuesday because I left for Cherepovets on Monday night. There was this pretty and tall girl that was hanging out at the staff desk that I was going to ask out, but when she went up to the guy that worked there who was playing video games, and hugged him from behind like a girlfriend does, I realized that it was pointless to try, no matter how exotic I might be to them. After I was all done with my emails, it was already past 11pm, so I asked them to call a cab for me. The cab quickly came and only made one turn to get back to Julia's apartment complex.

## **Chapter 25: Immoral exchanges and paid affections**

(WARNING: This chapter contains adult content that may offend some people. If you are one of these people, you should skip this chapter.)

When I came back from the internet cafe, Julia and Elena were laying down on the couch bed in the living room watching TV with the lights off. No one else was home because her mom and sister were at the village, and her dad was away on a truck driving trip. As I hoped, Julia looked relaxed and low-key after our break from each other. I sat next to them and offered to massage Julia's legs. This time, she accepted and I began rubbing her legs, thighs, calves, feet, and even her lower back. It felt so good (to her too since I have a talent for massage) to be able to finally feel around my dream tanned hard body (my fantasy) and this went on for about an hour. While I did it, I suggested we go to Moscow tomorrow, so I could stay and continue on from there. (It would be a subtle way of leaving here without saying so directly) They said they would look into getting cheaper fares for it on a bus from someone they knew. Then we talked about getting some champagne, so Julia and I went to a local 24 hour liquor stand at the corner of the street. They didn't have champagne, so we got some wine and coke instead.

Back in her flat, as we were opening the wine bottle, Elena brought some vodka for me to try. Neither of them liked vodka but they wanted to watch me drink it. I took a few sips and it burned my throat and felt so strong and heavy that I was instantly buzzed. The three of us had wine and started saying crazy things. Julia was now wearing a tight mini-skirt that showed off her legs and buttocks well. As the lyrics in a Tim McGraw song went "She was killing me in that miniskirt". I kept thinking "If only I could have a piece of her. I'd feel like I gone to heaven!" As we were joking and teasing each other, somehow the topic went to the size of my private part, and then to the idea of Julia doing a striptease tonight. She named her price for it and as we negotiated, somehow the topic became what else she was willing to do for a price. (I don't remember who initiated it because we were all buzzed at the time, but it was probably me) Soon I was asking her what price she'd be willing to kiss or perform sexual favors for. She quoted some prices for those things for me, and at first I thought she was joking. Then my eyebrows were raised when I realized that she was serious. This was my chance to get a piece of her, I thought. But this wasn't the way I wanted it to be! But oh well, it was better than nothing at least. And besides, I wanted to leave here with some type of interesting memory and experience rather than just leave with nothing but disappointment and rejection with nothing to show for. Besides, since I had been deprived of female companionship, physical affection, dates, fun, parties, good times, etc. the last since months in the USA, and also deprived of the affection I came here to have so far during the 2 and

a half weeks that I had been in Russia, I knew this would finally be my chance to end this drought or deficit.

Now, I knew if I followed through with all this that outsiders and friends that heard about this later may criticize me, scoff at me, condemn me morally, look down on me, etc., but at least this story wouldn't be boring. And as you well know, it's easy for people to think that even doing something shocking and immoral is better than pure boredom and nothingness. I would rather come away from this visit with a shocking, revolting, or controversial experience like this, rather than with "I visited Julia and she was gorgeous but she toyed around with me and was hot/cold and moody toward me so I left in confusion and disappointment" which would be humiliating, boring, and empty to admit. At least this experience would fill a void, and I could at least claim I got "something" out of it. (Therefore, before you condemn what you are about to read, keep all of the above in mind because it does make sense, even in its own way.) Besides, I also knew that if I didn't go through with this, I would definitely regret it later and always wish that I had! And as the familiar saying goes "You regret more the things you didn't do, than the things you did."

So we went into the living room and negotiated what was about to take place. Eventually we agreed on 50 dollars for 15 minutes of topless French kissing, and one photo of the action taken by Elena with my camera. I tried to get them to agree to filming us using my camcorder, but Julia didn't feel comfortable with that. I took a 50 dollar bill from the reserve cash envelope of my backpack and we agreed that I would put it under the blankets for Elena to take once the action started. Then it began. Julia took off her tanktop shirt and as I leaned forward to make out with her, my thoughts were "This can't be happening. It's too good to be true. Please don't let this be a dream!" We began French kissing hard. Julia was as good as I imagined. I figured that any wild girl with a sexy figure, goddess aura and who was a dance queen would have to be a great erotic kisser as well. And I was right. She seemed to be putting a lot into it too. I alternated between kissing her mouth, breasts, and whole torso. It was soooooooooo good (if you don't mind me saying). I felt like I was in nirvana. Elena took the 50 dollar bill from beneath the blankets, positioned my camera, and then took the flash photo. (Yes I scanned it, but I decided to remove it from the online photo album to make it more clean. lol) Eventually she laid down and I got on top of her. Since I was hard, I started poking her through my jeans and her body responded naturally. This went on longer than the agreed upon 15 minutes but there was no way I was going to be the one to stop first, so I continued on for a while longer. Eventually when I stopped to reposition my cock, Julia put her hand on my shoulder to indicate that we were stopping now. (I wish I hadn't done that!)

Afterward, we rested and then negotiated another deal. (I was already too turned on to stop) At her caliber, morals or self-dignity didn't matter! In dollars I only had another 50 dollar bill left in the reserve cash envelope, along with some hundred dollar bills, but I didn't want to give another whole 50 dollar bill, so I tried to negotiate something for 20 or 30 dollars instead. We agreed on something for 20 or 30 dollars, but I couldn't split a 50 dollar bill at the moment, and they wouldn't accept me paying them the next day for it, so there was no choice but to negotiate something for the other 50 dollar bill! At this time, I wished so badly that I had broken up that 50 dollar bill beforehand! The next deal we negotiated was for her to do a striptease for me for 10 minutes, followed by another 10 minute makeout again, and then a 5 minute hand job, along with another photo taken of it, for the same price. Again, Elena would take the 50 dollar bill after it started, but this time from underneath a rug. When Julia started the striptease, I was shocked. She had the kind of moves that you would see in a classy strip club. I now believed her claim that she had done some professional stripping before at a cafe. I was

visually turned on by her moves and her goddess attitude. When she sat on my lap for the makeout, she somehow let me put it in about a quarter way, (but no more) but I couldn't really do much for some reason. Elena took the money and photo again. During the action, I kept trying to cum even though it was only in partway, but for some reason I couldn't.

After the allotted time, Julia stopped. I protested saying that I wasn't finished yet, but Julia said that she already went farther than planned already by getting on top of me and letting me put it in part way, so that was enough. When she went to the bathroom to get cleaned up, I quickly climaxed on my own. Afterward we all layed in the bed in her parents' master bedroom and relaxed. Then Elena asked me if I wanted to give Julia 100 rubles for 7 minutes of more kissing, and I said "For only 100 rubles (\$3) this time? Well sure!" This time it was slow, relaxed and lasted a long time. Then we were all tired so we decided to go to sleep. Julia and Elena slept in the parents' master bedroom. I asked to join them, but Julia said that her father could come back at any random moment during the night, so I shouldn't. I went to my couch bed in the living room then and Julia smiled and said "To be continued." I went to bed with a feeling of a high and a sense of peace finally.

## **Chapter 26: Narcotic kisses from the bombshell Katya**

The next morning, I laid in bed in disbelief wondering if it was all a dream. I still felt the high and sense of peace that I went to bed with. I couldn't believe what had just happened the night before. After all the tension built up over the past week, it finally escalated into this? It seemed so surreal. I never thought I would ever get a piece of someone so hot and out of reach to me. But along with my disbelief, I also wondered how I would report all this in my next journal entry update, or if even I should report it at all. I also thought of my close friend Michael, thinking "Wait til he hears about this." I knew that if I wrote about this shocking incident in my next journal update, that people would be outraged and I'd be condemned and flamed in all sorts of ways from both my personal list and the Russian Bride List. I knew that everyone I knew, even those that were closest to me and supported me the most, would either laugh at me or hate me for this. However, all this was too good to keep a secret, I thought. Why hide it? I should just tell the truth and take whatever reaction came. Besides, I didn't want to just post another update about my failure here. That would be boring and humiliating. At least this time I could shock everyone with something interesting at least, however controversial it was. Therefore, I decided to tell about this shocking incident in the next journal update.

Julia came in briefly to say hi with a smile on her face like she had just had sex last night. lol After taking a shower, the three of us again went into town to do some errands. We stopped by the mall with the supermarket inside to have some espresso and pastries there in an espresso cafe. Then we went to look for sandals for me because I felt like my feet couldn't breathe in my shoes. The ones at the mall were too expensive, so we went to some street shopping bazaars. I found a nice looking one with a Nike logo on it, but then upon closer inspection I realized that the glue used to hold the sandals together was of very cheap quality, so it wasn't really Nike but a copycat (which they could get away with in Russia). I didn't care anyway and bought it anyway, and Julia again called me "durak"(fool) for it. We also went to the train station again so Julia could use the 100 dollars I gave her last night to pay for her ticket to Poland.

When we came back home, Julia and I were alone again. Since I was in the mood for more affections, I made another offer and for 100 rubles got a minute of french kissing. It was really good and left me

with another high. When she left to wash up again and wipe her face excessively (I don't know why since I'm clean and she said she loved my white teeth), her friend Vitalik came over to visit for a while. After he left, I asked Julia if she told him about last night and she said no and to keep it a secret. Then there was another ring at the door and when Julia answered it, I heard a girl's voice and thought it was Elena so I called out "Hi Elena" but it wasn't her. When she entered, I couldn't believe my eyes and went ga ga immediately. A tall gorgeous blonde bombshell in a black leather jacket and an amazingly pretty face entered. I immediately recognized her from one of the photo albums that Julia showed me before of her friends. I guess the best way to describe her is that she looked somewhat like Sarah Michelle Geller when she smiles. Julia said "Winston, this is my girlfriend Katya." I quickly got up from laying on the couch to appear proper to her and said "Oh hi. I remember you from the photo album Julia showed me. Nice to meet you. Ochen priatna. (which means "nice to meet you" in Russian)" Katya spoke no English though, so Julia had to translate it to her. After Katya sat down, Julia talked to her a few minutes and told her about the dirty words she taught me in Russian and how funny it was. When she asked me to repeat them, I hesitated thinking "Oh no! This is not the way I want to be introduced to someone as hot as her!" Katya only seemed amused a bit by it and then left to go to the supermarket to get some cigarettes.

When she returned, I took out my camcorder and camera (because I knew I just had to get some photographic/film evidence of her to show everyone back home) to get some takes of her. First I took photos of her and Julia, and then of her and me. Then I filmed her with my camcorder while Julia told her what to say, which was basically "Hi, my name is Katya. From Russia. I want American boyfriend." Since I started recording a few seconds after she began, I said we needed to do a retake. In the retake though, Julia sat next to her this time and they both introduced themselves. After Katya said "My name is Katya" in an exotic sweet high pitched Russian accent, Julia said "From Russia. Katya very very want American boyfriend. Jalatai labagati! (which means "preferably a rich one")" and then kissed Katya on the cheek. I ended it by saying "Katya, kiss." and she blew a kiss. We played it back and they watched it. Wow Katya looked fantastic on film. Definitely model material. I also found out that Katya has also done professional strip dancing before at a cafe, which wasn't surprising to me. Then the unthinkable happened. Julia said "Winston, how about you kiss with Katya for 5 minutes for 10 dollars?" At first, I thought she was joking. In disbelief, I said "What?! I just met her. Are you serious? Really?" Then I saw that Julia wasn't joking, so I added "Well ok, if she agrees to it" and I wondered who's idea this was, hoping that she wasn't pressuring Katya into it. Julia asked Katya and then said "Yes, she said ok." I couldn't believe it. Again? My luck couldn't be this good! It's always been my fantasy to do this with someone I just met, because doing this after weeks of slowly getting to know them takes the mystery and novelty out of it. Now my chance has come, and after yesterday, I get to makeout with another blonde goddess? Wow. Where does Julia find friends like this, I wondered. But this was an unprecedented opportunity. A girl who looked anywhere near like Katya in the USA would not even acknowledge my existence! Now I get to do something physically intimate with someone of her stratosphere? I just met her and was still in the stage of trying to make an impression on her, and now I get to do this? Wow! So I agreed to it and looked for 300 rubles (equivalent to about 10 dollars) in my passport protector belt. I only had a 500 ruble bill though, and Katya only had a 100 ruble bill to give me change with, so Julia re-negotiated for 400 rubles for a 7 minute kiss instead, plus a photo from my camera of the action. I tried to get it on video camera as well, but Katya wasn't comfortable with that either.

After the exchange, it started and Katya came and sat on my couch bed. I thought "I can't believe this. She's really going through with this? Someone as hot and untouchable looking as her?" I leaned

forward into her and in total disbelief, sunk my lips into her goddess lips. Along with the high I felt, her lips tasted like cherry because of her lipstick. She was an erotic kisser and we french kissed hard. I really put a lot into it. While doing so, I thought "I can't believe this. I just met her so she's like a total stranger to me and at the same time this feels so personal!" But I couldn't complain because it was like a dream come true. Julia took the photograph (which you can see in my online album) and then left the room. (I don't know why she didn't want to stay and watch lol) After a few minutes, I brought her up from the couch bed with our lips still locked into a standing position so I could hold her and feel her body close to me at the same time. I wanted to do it like a movie scene. Occasionally I kissed her neck and shoulders too, rubbing her shoulders frequently as well. Through it all, I realized that the thought of this moment was what the high was really all about, the physical act itself would get flat after a while. After 7 long minutes of nirvana, Julia came in and announced that the time was up, and Katya stopped and pulled away with a smile. I was in a daze and trance. Since last night, I had already made out intimately with two of my dream girl types that had I met in the USA would not have even acknowledged my existence! I felt as though I won the lottery twice in a row! This was some experience, however a-moral it was.

Afterward, Katya sat down in her chair again and Julia told me that Katya said she enjoyed kissing me. I said "me too" and blew kisses at Katya from my couch bed, which in turn she reciprocated back. She was sweet as well, I thought. Then as we sat and watched some TV, I asked Julia "Does Katya really want to go to America?" Julia replied "Yes, very much so." So I casually offered, "I'd be willing to be Katya's boyfriend then. How about she come to America with me on a fiance visa, since you can't because of your plans in Poland?" Julia asked her about it and then said "Katya said ok." I couldn't believe how casually she said that despite how casually I asked that, and I wondered if Katya knew what I was asking or not. (but why would a goddess need to be careful with what she said anyway? lol) Then we talked about the opportunities available for her in the USA and what Katya liked to do. I learned that she likes waitressing and stripteasing. During this conversation, I thought to myself "Winston are you nuts? You just asked a girl you've only known a few minutes and paid to kiss, to marry you?! What do you think you're doing?" Oh well, why not try? If there's even a remote chance... Then I said "Well if Katya is serious about coming with me to America, she should come with me to the US Embassy in Moscow to apply for a visa." Katya said ok to that too.

Then Julia sent me and Katya to the supermarket to buy some champagne, cigarettes, and others stuff. In the elevator going down, I leaned forward to try to kiss Katya again, and she gave me a peck on the lips (yes for free this time!). While walking on the little pathway together, I wondered how serious Katya really was about what we just discussed. I also noticed though, to no surprise, that she walked naturally fast in a ditzy sort of way, like there was a sort of flightiness about her.

In the supermarket, people around us kept turning their heads to look at us. They were probably checking out Katya or else wondering what a girl like her was doing with someone like me! Wow, what a privilege. Now I knew what it was like to be a hot girl and the attention they get daily. I loved it. For once, I was the envy of every guy around me! Just think, if people around here are surprised by Katya being with me, just think how shocked people would be in the USA if they saw me walking around with her?! (though in the USA, I could never keep a girl like her because she'd find someone richer and better looking and leave me in no time. lol) When we got what we needed and were in the checkout line, I leaned forward again for another kiss, and she gave me a peck on the lips. Wow, in public this time, I thought! Her kisses were sweet like narcotic candy and left me with a high and buzz. Then as I started pointing to items stocked next to the checkout line to ask if they were good and to

make conversation, she just took those items and threw them into our shopping cart impulsively (since she knew I was paying for them). Soon our cart was filled with lots more little items. "Whoa whoa" I thought, "Slow down. I just asked about those things for fun, I didn't mean to throw them in. lol" At least they were little things though like gum, candy, and cigarettes. I realized after she put them in at such a thoughtless and quick pace that she probably isn't someone who thinks too much about what she does, and probably said yes to my offer to take her to America without thinking about it.

As we were leaving the supermarket, we stopped at the pizza parlour near the entrance to the mall because I wanted to see if Katya wanted anything to eat from there. She pointed to some fruit cups encased in pie crusts and I said ok, but I let her ask the person behind the counter for them because I wanted to hear her exotic Russian accent again. When the counter person took out two of them, I said "Oh no, I don't need one. Just one for her." When Katya said "No?", I wasn't sure if she thought I was saying no to the whole thing, so I said never mind, and we got two of them. Katya gave one to me and I started eating it as we walked. It was very good and tasty. While we walked with all the bags I was carrying, my arms starting feeling sore, but I tried my best to not show the pain on my face because I didn't want to look weak in front of this goddess! So I stopped to rest my arms occasionally and re-tied my shoelaces as the excuse to stop. Since it was now sprinkling outside, I opened the umbrella I brought along and Katya got under it as well and took my arm. Finally, someone treats me like a man! She was the first person in Russia to do that so far. I tried making some conversation with her, but she understood almost no words in English.

When we got back to Julia's flat, we opened the champagne bottle to each have a drink and watched Julia's music videos. Later on, I taped them all sitting around and asked them to sing too. A popular Russian song was on now and it was sweet seeing Katya mutter its words in Russian, while Julia said "Oops I....." after I compared her to Britney Spears. Elena was the only one who didn't want to sing and didn't even like to be video taped. Julia then talked about Katya doing a striptease for me, and then following it with another kiss if I wanted to. I thought about it but said that I had enough of these kind of deals and that I came here to look for some real love. But I said I wouldn't mind seeing a sample of her stripteasing anyway. So she did give me a sample that lasted about a minute and wow, just as I expected, she had the moves of a pro too, just like Julia but with her own style. I was still reluctant to pay her for a professional striptease though. When I asked when Katya wanted to go to Moscow with me to go to the US Embassy, she said "Zaftra" meaning tomorrow.

As it got late, Katya said she had to go home now. I felt sad though because I wasn't sure if I would get to see her again (who knows what the daily life of a girl like hers was?). But she called me over before she went out the front door to give me a goodbye kiss. Again, her lipstick tasted like narcotic cherry candy to me, which left me with a high. I knew I would feel the effects of it for a while. Afterward, Julia didn't seem to like it whenever I talked about Katya or brought her up, but I didn't understand why since Julia was the one who suggested we kiss, and since Julia didn't seem to have a genuine romantic interest in me. But what an awesome day it was anyway. I couldn't wait to scan the photos taken today and last night of our makeouts to show all my friends and acquaintances.

## **Chapter 27: Search for internet cafe, streetwalk, and girl gangfight**

The next day, the water line was cut off from Julia's flat and there was no water to shower with, or cook with. Julia said that this was normal because they were fixing the pipes now and that there was

nothing we could do but wait. When I suggested calling the utility company as we would do in the USA, Julia's father Nikoli, who had now returned, joked that the maintenance workers were probably now passed out on the floor from drinking vodka. lol In the last few days, we occasionally saw people passed out and lying on the floor outside. Each time, Julia and Elena would say "Russian vodka!" Elena said that her flat next door still had water, but for some reason she wouldn't let me shower there. Without my usual morning shower, I went with Julia and Elena into town again to do some errands. Julia had a hilarious time saying long dirty phrases in Russian to me and about me. When I repeated them back to her using the best of my memory, substituting her name instead of mine, she laughed so hard each time that her head turned back. I had no idea what she was saying each time, but I could tell they were of a dirty or silly nature.

When we came back, Julia started getting moody and bitchy at me again, and no one else was around to make her hide that side of her again. At these times I even wished her parents or sister were around because she wouldn't act this way around them. (It's bad when you have to hope a girl's parents are around just to protect you from her.) She started kicking me around like I was garbage or something. Thinking that it might put her in a giggly good mood again, I gave her 300 rubles for a five minute kiss, but it didn't and this time she kissed me passively with her eyes in the direction of the TV (thanks a lot). Not knowing what else to do, I decided it was time for another break at the internet cafe until Julia returns to normal again. Plus, I couldn't wait to tell everyone in the next update about what had happened the last two days. So I told her where I was going and that I didn't need a taxi this time because I could try to find it by walking since it was so close and I could ask people along the way too. She said "Fine, then go."

As I left, I decided that it was now time to prepare to leave this city again. I was supposed to leave two days ago but I stayed a bit longer for you know what, and now I had enough of it and didn't want to continue paying for these kind of things. It was fun and amusing, but I came here to search for true love. Therefore, there was little left for me to do here and I wanted to make use of the rest of the time on my visa. And plus, the longer I stayed here, the more money I would be spending on all sorts of things, and I needed to save this for the other prospects that I am going to visit. I wouldn't want to arrive to the other women broke after all. I decided that I would announce tonight that I was going to Moscow tomorrow and that Julia and Elena could come with me if they like, but that I would just stay there afterward so I could contact Natasha E.

I went down the building elevator, made my way to the big street in front of the supermarket mall, and then asked some parked taxi drivers where the internet cafe was. I took out the words "internet cafe" written in Russian on a piece of paper that Elena wrote down for me, and said "Gdeh?" (Where?) and showed them the piece of paper. They only knew one in downtown, they didn't know where the one I went to that was in walking distance. So I asked some pedestrians and they weren't sure either. One lady even pointed me in the wrong direction to a convenience store, where the clerks didn't know either. I also went inside a little casino but no one there knew where the nearby one was either. This was odd, how could no one who lived here know where the internet cafe was that was just around the corner? I could have sworn that a few days ago when the taxi driver drove me back here from it, that it was a very short ride of only a few minutes with just one turn involved. So it had to be close and within walking distance, but how could none of the residents here know about it? Thinking that someone here had to know about it, I walked across to the supermarket mall entrance to ask everyone coming out. Someone had to know, I thought. And if I asked enough people coming out of the supermarket mall, the odds were that I would find someone who's been there before.



Deciding to be selective though, I looked for people who looked like computer people or brainy in some way. I thought that these kind of people would be most likely to know. Unfortunately, everyone I stopped who fit that description didn't know where it was either. All they knew was the one downtown. But I didn't want to ride the bus there and risk getting lost because I wouldn't even know where to stop at. And I didn't feel the need to pay a taxi driver to go there since I knew there was one within walking distance somewhere. So I persisted. There was this one lady who spoke some English and tried to be especially helpful by asking other pedestrians for me. She had no luck either. Eventually, we started making small talk and introducing ourselves. Her name was Yulia and went to college around here. She seemed fascinated that I was a foreigner and eventually we exchanged contact information. I said that I was probably leaving this city in the next day or so, and that if I had time, I would call her before then and maybe do something. (I didn't have time to call her when I was there, but I called her a few times when I returned to the USA and she has always answered with delight and enthusiasm. In addition, she wrote me some emails saying that it was a rare and unexpected experience to meet an American in Cherepovets, and that she never forget our meeting. Wow they do treat me like a celebrity there!) After a while, she, her friend and a little boy with them said goodbye to me.

I figured that if I walked around a few blocks, and looked around some corners, I could find it somehow, since it shouldn't be too far around the corner. I remembered from the taxi ride back that there was a turn right after we left, and then it was straight down the road to Julia's apartment complex. Following my instincts, I walked across the street and continued straight down it away from Julia's apartment complex. I felt that it was somewhere around the corner here. At each corner, I turned and walked down a bit, asking people along the way if they knew where it was, with still no result. This was very very odd indeed, I thought. It had to be around here somewhere, and I must have asked about 20 people so far and no one ever heard of it! How can people who live here not know? This continued on for the few blocks down, and I was about to give up when I saw two young girls talking to an old couple, possibly their parents. One of the girls was kind of heavy set but from her face she seemed nice. The other was short and skinny and looked a bit wacky. I broke their conversation and asked them if they knew where the closest internet cafe was. They looked at me with intrigue, but said they weren't sure. I told the short skinny girl that her reddish multicolored skirt looked very "exotic" (the word in Russian is the same) and she laughed and looked amused. I thanked them and walked a bit further down wondering how much farther I wanted to go before I gave up. Soon I decided that this was becoming a wild goose chase and it was time to give up and go back.

When I started walking the other way, I ran into the same two girls again that just helped me. I said hi and that I couldn't find it and had given up now. But they said that they might know where it is and that I should follow them. I thought it might be fun, so I did. They were very friendly and joking and seemed amused by me. They didn't understand much English but I was able to get across most of what I wanted to say through pantomimes and dictionaries. They said that they were sisters, and that the older couple they were talking to earlier were not their parents, but some relatives. When I described it as a place where little kids play video games on the PC, they said they think they know where it is. Along the way, we stopped at little convenience store and they bought some Baltic 9 beers and gave one to me. After drinking part of the bottle, I became buzzed and indicated so. I'm not normally buzzed that easily, but I guess the fatigue or malnutrition might have lowered my tolerance level.

After more long walking, I realized that they could not be taking me to the same internet cafe that I went to because it was nowhere near this far away with so many turns. Plus it was getting dark now and

I was so far from Julia's complex now that I became worried about finding my way back, since we had made many turns. I still had the paper that Elena gave me with their address on it though, so I figured I would have to just take a taxi and show them the paper. Since I had already come this far with these two girls though, I figured I would just stick with them until we reached the destination they were bringing me to. Perhaps it was another internet cafe. We seemed to be wandering aimlessly though, so I wondered if they really knew where it was or if they were just messing around. Eventually we came to the place they wanted to bring me to, but it turned out to be a billards and casino place with no video games or internet cafe. A guy coming out told us this, then he asked me many questions about myself and the USA since I was a foreigner. After chatting with him and sitting on the dirty steps for a long time, I decided it was time to get a cab and go back. It was already late and dark. Since I was hungry though, I asked the two girls to take me to a convenience store where I can buy food. We went into a bakery nearby and I bought some bread and pastries for me and them. They were cheap and very good.

Then we started down the street to look for a taxi for me. We headed toward where we saw some parked and waiting earlier. As we walked, we passed by a group of street girls with dark complexions. They looked, acted, and talked like city girl punks. One of the girls that was with me, the short skinny girl with the red dress, talked to one of the punk girls, and said something derogatory that rubbed her the wrong way. As we walked away from them, the punk girl that was insulted followed us along with the rest of her group. She looked like she had a score to settle. Soon she and the short skinny girl were yelling and insulting each other. It was now a huge shouting match. I saw that it could get physical soon, so I tried to break up their fight so we could go. But they persisted and soon the young punk girl looked very threatening and was about to lunge at her, when the other girl with me got in front of her and tried to talk her out of it. It didn't work though, and the punk girl went around her, grabbed the girl who insulted her, and struck her face while pulling her hair.

I said "No, stop it!" and moved in to intercept. I tried to pry her fingers open from grabbing her hair but they were clenched tight. Although this was difficult, I thought that at least my attempt would be a distraction enough for her to stop hitting my new friend. At least I could block any more strikes from here. The group of punk girls were momentarily surprised that I was speaking English, but that didn't distract them long. After a long struggle, one of the punk girl's friends came up and pulled me away. She waved her finger at me like she was saying no. I couldn't understand what she was saying, but it seemed like she was telling me not to interfere and stay out of it. I tried getting around her to protect my new friend again, but she continued blocking me. I talked to her in English and told her to stop, hoping that it would amuse and distract her, but it only did so mildly. The struggle continued and the insulted girl kept trying to attack the other girl again, with the sister trying to talk her out of it. Now I thought "I can't believe I got away from the psycho moody Julia just to get involved in this!"

A few little boys watching nearby came to me with wonder and intrigue on their faces, and when I told them where I was from, they looked surprised and then asked me for my autograph on their hand. I felt like a famous child role model or something. lol I gave it to them, while cautiously keeping an eye on the feuding girls. Eventually, it looked like it ended and we walked away from them to continue where we were going. But when I looked behind me as we walked away, I saw them decide to come after us again. "Oh no, not again" I thought. I told my two friends to walk faster since we were almost to the parked taxis, but as we turned, the punk girls cut through the bushes and intercepted us just before we reached the parked taxis. The feud started again and the taxi drivers watched it passively. This time, the punk girl pulled on my companion's red shirt and even yanked off her necklace. Again, I blocked and tried to restrain her, but this time it looked like her friends were going to attack from the other side. Not

knowing how I was going to protect her from two angles, I shielded her by holding her tight in my arms (yeah I know, great excuse to do so this time :)).

It seemed to work and they just kept shouting at her now. If they were to all attack now, I thought that I may be forced to fighting these girls myself, but I hoped it wouldn't come to that. Soon it looked like the tension eased a little, so I released my friend for a while. Her sister told me that these punk girls were drunk on vodka or something, but she didn't know how to explain to me what the argument was about. Eventually, I saw both feuding girls hugging each other. It looked like they had made up. The sister told me that everything was alright now and that I could get into my taxi parked in front of us now. I did so in relief, showed the driver the piece of paper with the address on it, and we sped off. I guess I'll probably never know what the fight was all about, but since the two girls I met have my email address, maybe when they learn English they'll write me and explain it someday.

When we reached Julia's apartment complex, the driver didn't know exactly which building it was (there were a lot of buildings in this complex) and wasn't sure how to find it, so I told him to just drop me off and let me find it myself. I paid him and figured that since we walked through here many times to the supermarket, I could recognize the path eventually. It was very dark now though, and I circled several times around the same buildings, often in completely dark areas with no light. I felt that this might be dangerous, but I realized that the people here were not violent or paranoid and that it was mostly my imagination. Eventually, I found my way to the main street with the supermarket mall at least. I figured I could just trace the path from here, but in the dark it was difficult and soon I was lost again. I saw some outdoor cafes that looked fun and wished we had visited them before. After going around in circles again, I saw a girl walking her dog and approached her to ask for her help. I thought since it was so badly lighted here, that she might get scared and walk away, but she didn't. (I've always had the innocent look!) She looked at the piece of paper with the address on it and showed me the way. When we got there, I recognized the front entrance to Julia's apartment building and she followed me in.

When Julia answered the door, I turned around and introduced the girl who helped me find my way back, but she stood at a distance and quickly waved goodbye. To my delight, Julia looked happy and giggly again. Inside, I explained with pantomimes to Julia and Elena what had just happened with the girl gang fight and all. They only looked mildly amused, but they quickly grabbed the bag of pastry bread from my hand to have for themselves. They seemed more amused though, by my repeating of whatever dirty things Julia said to me in Russian, than in my story about the day. I also told them that I definitely wanted to go to Moscow tomorrow this time, and that I needed to get the tickets tomorrow morning. Unfortunately, the water still hadn't come back yet so I still couldn't take a shower. When I asked Julia how she was going to take a shower now, she said that tomorrow morning she would go to Katya's flat and use their shower. When I asked "What about me?" she just said "You stay here." Enraged because Julia didn't even try to see if I could use one of her friend's showers like any considerate host would have done, I got mad and chewed her out, giving her a lecture in English on how to be considerate to guests and having common courtesy. I needed a shower badly now and she wouldn't even lift a finger to help, and after all the abuse she had already given me, I was now fed up. After I raised my voice at her in stern anger, she got mad too and said "If you don't like it here, then ok! Finished! Tomorrow you go back to St. Petersburg!" When I asked her why she treated me so bad now, she said something like "Because you rowt, and I'm beautiful." (I didn't and still don't know what "rowt" means, but she used it jokingly before and said that it was like a monster or something, so I

assume here that it meant "ugly looking" or "monster-like") My feelings were kind of hurt, and we stopped talking for a while and soon we all went to bed.

When I got up to get a half cup of water from the water kettle to rinse out my mouth after I brushed my teeth, Julia saw it and looked at me sternly and said "That water is for my father's tea in the morning!" I replied, "Ok. I am just taking a little to rinse my mouth. That's all." Sheesh, there was plenty of water in the kettle and I only needed a miniscule amount and she scolded me for that? I couldn't wait to get out of here now and return to the world of normal mature people!

## **Chapter 28: Money feud and warm goodbye from everyone**

The next morning, Julia came in with a look of guilt on her face and apologized to me for yelling last night. She held my hand and said "You good boy. I'm sorry ok?" I said "Ok, but you said I was rowt." She replied "No, you no rowt. That was a joke." I accepted her apology, said sorry myself, and then said "Ok are we friends now again?" and she said yes. After she left, I heard her hollering with joy and singing. I wondered what had happened. She came back and said the water was back on again. I hoped she wasn't joking! I breathed a huge sigh of relief because I hadn't been able to take a shower in two days. Since she already showered, I went in and took a nice long hot shower.

Afterward, Elena came in and we went to the balcony to discuss going to Moscow. She said that they couldn't afford to pay for the tickets for themselves and that if I wanted them to go with me, I would have to pay for them. It would be 480 rubles for each of them round trip. That was too much for me as I had already gone to the ATM machine in the supermarket mall to withdraw cash several times, and I hated withdrawing from my reserve funds, which were supposed to be saved up for my visits to the other girls. Instead, I offered to either pay for one night for them at the hostel I was staying at (which I could pay for with my credit card anyway) or else pay half of their train tickets. They refused and wouldn't settle for any less than completely paying for their round trip train tickets. When they said they had no money, I asked about all the money I gave Julia for those pleasures the other night which was plenty to pay for these train tickets. Elena said that that money was for Julia to buy new clothes, new panties, and to repay some of her debts. I also replied that I needed my money for other things too, and that I didn't want to risk running out when I got to Ukraine. I felt that it was a matter of principle now, and since I didn't need them to come with me that badly, I stood my ground on my conditions. Since we couldn't come to a resolution, we realized that that was it and that they wouldn't be coming with me and that I would be going alone. I felt a little bad about this, and I worried that this might burn some bridges between us, but I didn't want to be taken advantage of anymore either.

During my stay here, they had behaved as though I had an unlimited bottomless supply of cash. This wasn't surprising though, because I had heard beforehand from trip reports on my email list of similar experiences. Guys often said that in Russia, the women they dated acted as though they were a bottomless supply of cash. I didn't understand this though, because even though Americans on the average may be richer than them, in either case they should have the common sense to know that resources and money are limited, not unlimited. There was a thing called scarcity in this world, and they should have been taught that in economics class. I couldn't believe that Russians who are so educated compared to us don't know about this concept. You can spend like there's no tomorrow all you want, but the reality was that scarcity would catch up with you and you would realize that all your money is gone. That's how people go broke, even in the USA. Even Americans who have a lot of

money know that they wouldn't be rich if they had spent all their money as soon as they got it. No one can get rich that way.

Whatever the case, I felt that they had to learn a lesson that my resources, and my generosity as well, was not unlimited and unconditional. I felt that it was a lesson in economics and ethics to them. This allowed me to feel that I was doing it for a good cause. Besides, why should I spend so much money on them if they're just friends anyway? Even Vitalik had been starting to look for excuses to leech off me now. These people seemed to have no shame in directly asking me to buy something for them. I found this odd and wasn't sure how to deal with it because I wasn't accustomed to it.

In the USA and Asia, where most of my experiences had been, people don't ask someone else directly to buy things for them because it's considered shameful and rude, even if you ask a friend, unless you do it to your spouse, significant other, or parents. Therefore, although most of my impressions of Russian people had been positive, this was something I saw as negative. It seemed that some Russians had no dignity or shame when they ask others for something directly. Most people I knew would have felt disgraced by having to resort to that. But these people seemed to have no conscience when they pressured you to spend money on them. And if you refuse even once, they make you feel guilty about it and even call you "greedy". I don't know why so many of them use the word "greedy" in this manner but I explained to them many times that a greedy person is someone who wants to take money, not someone who wants to without it or keep it. That's called being "stingy" or "cheap". Ironically, since they were seeking to take, technically they were the ones being "greedy", not me. And this made them seem hypocritical, since they were more guilty themselves of what they were accusing me of than I was. How could they not realize this? Why didn't they feel "greedy" as well? And why were they so inconsiderate of my budget and resources? Isn't there some double standard here?

Besides, I had already been generous about a lot of things, and there had to be a stopping point. I think with the next Russian girl I meet, I should set things straight first and tell her that their perception from Hollywood movies of all Americans being rich millionaires is not true, and explain the concept of scarcity to her. Even those who have a high income in the USA usually have huge expenses, payments, and mortgages to balance their affluence out. (Note: I didn't know it at the time, but I later learned that Russians don't usually have the mortgages and payments that we are used to in the US, and therefore they couldn't relate to them. Most of their small income is extra money they can use on themselves and therefore they mistakenly assume that it was the same for us.) Fortunately though, not all Russians are like this, since if you remember from chapter 14, Lilia insisted that she pay her own way when we went on the canal boat ride together.

As I mentioned therefore, I stood my ground, since my resources were limited and I wanted to save it for the woman who would be my true love and soulmate. This made Elena and Julia angry and sour faced, but I felt like I was doing the right thing. They wouldn't talk to me for a while, and wouldn't even take me to the train station to get my tickets. So Julia's mom Tatiana offered to take me instead. Before we left though, Tatiana and Julia had an argument about me. I could tell that Julia was complaining about how stingy I was, especially after they let me stay in their flat for free. (I could tell that she felt that I should spend the money I would have if I had stayed in a hotel, on being generous to them.) Tatiana rebuked her and told her not to be so angry over this. Then she took me by bus to the train station to get my tickets for Moscow tonight. On the way, I constantly showed her the nice pink fingernail polish that Julia had painted on my middle finger, and kept saying "kraseeva?" to which she replied "No. Winston. On man no good." It was funny. (I left the pink nail polish on my middle finger

for weeks afterward, in memory of Julia.) We stood in a slow line to get my tickets and rode the bus back. I was gracious for her help and paid for the bus ride and offered her some treats, which she refused.

When we got back, Julia seemed friendly and happy again, and the celebration of my departure started. The music was on and Julia did this sexy dance for me with the song "Pretty Woman" playing on her stereo. I enjoyed it and captured it on my camcorder to prove that she was a dance goddess (which I showed to many people afterward, most of which said "she has the moves"). Then they all said their heartfelt goodbyes to me, especially her mom who liked me a lot. Tatiana gave me a gift that was a big candle holder with some Russian design on it. Then she finally allowed me to video tape her after she put on some makeup, because she had been camera shy the whole time. I decided to get them cake and champagne one last time as a goodbye present, so Julia's sister Olga took me to the supermarket to get it. At least we all seemed to be ending on friendly terms.

Throughout the day, I kept asking Julia about Katya several times because I wanted to see if she wanted to go with me to Moscow to go to the US Embassy and ask about getting a fiance visa as we discussed. But everytime I mentioned Katya, Julia just cussed "Pizz-dee" at me like she was jealous or something. I didn't understand why though, since we couldn't have a relationship and she didn't seem interested in me personally. Perhaps she was just jealous that I was giving Katya attention over her, and it was an ego thing. But now I regretted not getting Katya's contact info. before she left because I had no way of contacting her now, except through Julia. If I didn't see her before I left, I figured I would try to write her or call her, but without any contact info. the best I could do was send it to Julia's address and hope she would forward it to her. I felt so angry at myself now. I knew that Katya wasn't wife material or even girlfriend material, but since she was such a goddess, I had to try. At least she was "show off" material. lol

Next, we all took many photos of each other and it soon escalated into them willing to do erotic poses for me in exchange for asking for money. Each time I asked to take a photo of them doing something, they would hold out their hand and say "Money. Money." Even the sweet innocent little sister Olga was now doing this, along with Vitalik. I guess when everyone else was doing it, it made it easier for them to copycat and conform. I didn't want to pay them for each erotic photo though, so I refused. Eventually they started pointing at me and yelling "Scrooge! Scrooge!" jokingly. (Sheesh, at least Scrooge was rich) This now felt like that situation where you go to a pond full of ducks and throw bread to one of them, and the whole pack comes and follow you. I couldn't believe the asking money for favors thing had become such a habit so easily. lol

Then it came time for me to go to the train station, and I got the most warm dramatic goodbye I ever had. As I packed all my things into my luggage, everyone hugged me like they would really miss me. Before I left, Julia even asked me if I brought any condoms with me. When I said yes, she asked if she could have some for her and Vitalik. I wasn't sure if she was joking or not, but I said no and that the condoms I brought were for girls that had sex with me, not with someone else. Sheesh! Julia, Elena, and Vitalik would accompany me in a taxi to the train station while Olga and Tatiana would stay behind, because the cab couldn't fit anymore. When the cab we called arrived, we went down the elevator and out the door of the apartment building. Outside, Tatiana and Olga yelled and waved to me from high above on the balcony. It was like a scene out of some movie, I thought. We loaded my luggage into the cab and went on our way.

At the train station, we had some time left, so they decided to get some treats from me one last time by going to the little snack cafe there for a snack feast of beer, pastries, and pistachios. As we ate and said our goodbyes, we talked about Julia coming to visit me in December so I could take her to Las Vegas (every gold digger's dream place lol). Julia always wanted to go there, so I said she could go to the US Embassy and ask for a tourist visa, no matter how difficult it was. I knew all this was just playtalk, but it was an entertaining idea. Julia looked at me affectionately and said something and Elena said that Julia said that she misses me already. Then Vitalik took Julia's hand and held it for a while. Wondering if Julia would warm up to me now that I was about to leave, I tried taking her other hand, but she wouldn't let me hold it. (Gee, thanks a lot)

Then my train arrived, and they helped me load my luggage into my seat compartment, and then we all posed for a group photo together in the train entrance. As we said our final goodbye, Julia looked at me, and I wondered if she was going to kiss me on the mouth this time for her goodbye kiss. But she didn't and just kissed me on both my cheeks instead, and I did the same back. (apparently mouth kisses from her to me are only for payments!) Then I gave Elena and Vitalik hugs too and they stepped off the train. I went back to my seat and looked at them through the window. Julia and Elena were enthusiastically yelling "Goodbye Winston! I love you! We love you! I will miss you!" I said the same back "Bye Julia! I love you! Bye Elena! I love you!" and we blew kisses at each other. This went on for a while until the train engine started, and while we slowly moved, they slowly ran with the train as long as they could to continue saying goodbye and "love you's" to me. Eventually the train sped up and they were gone.

I sat down on my seat not knowing what to think. That was the warmest most enthusiastic goodbye I ever had, and I was glad to finally return to the normal sane mature world but I knew that part of me would miss Julia and her friends as well. I had mixed feelings about the whole thing. It was like a paradox. It was a nice ending to a crazy time I had there, and she may have been a wild sexy nut, but she was amusing alright to say the least. You'd have to be there to know what I mean. I decided that I would try to at least remain friends with Julia, since she was fun and interesting at least, despite all the bad things about her and even though we could never have a serious relationship.

I looked at two proper looking girls sitting across from me, and wondered what they thought of the demonstrative goodbye scene that they had just witnessed. I figured that they must think I am a popular person or something. lol I introduced myself to them and found that one of them spoke decent English. I showed them some clips from my camcorder of Julia and her sexy dance to the "Pretty Woman" song. They were surprised and amused by it. I guess Russian women aren't normally as demonstrative as Julia was. These two ladies were from Cherepovets and going to Moscow to visit some relatives. One of them was an aerobics instructor too, and when I asked if I could take her class, she laughed and said yes but then said that they were expensive.

As it got late, they prepared their bunks for bed. When I found that my assigned bunk was on the top this time, I didn't like it because I was afraid that I might roll off of it during the shaky train ride, so looked for a way to change it and found the perfect solution. Since one of the girls was bunked on the other side above, and the other below, I offered to switch places with one of them so they could both be next to each other and talk. They agreed gladly and we prepared our bedsheets and pillows for the night. (Note: The reason my bunk was assigned on the top this time was because when I was buying my train ticket with Tatiana, they asked if I wanted the top or bottom level, and I said the top level

because I mistakenly assumed that the train had two floors like Amtrak, and I wanted the higher floor so I could see the scenery better.)

That night, I couldn't sleep because of some tea I just had, so I wandered around. During a train pit stop, I poked my head out the train door and saw two train stewardesses standing outside for a smoke break. For fun, I spoke some English to them and commented on how cold it was or something. I didn't expect them to understand, but I did this just to be unique and different and get some attention because I was bored. Surprisingly, one of them, a young blonde stewardess, answered me back in English, and as we spoke to each other from across, I realized that she was quite fluent in English and didn't even seem to have a Russian accent. After her cigarette break, she came in and we both talked some more. Her name was Lyuba and she was a college student from Cherepovets working on this train for her summer to make some money. She told me how much she envied that I was from America, and that she disliked being in her country and wished to go abroad if she could. I found that she had the opposite views from me in the America vs. Russia issue, and it was interesting to see this. Perhaps it was a sign to me that the grass is always greener on the other side and that nothing is going to be perfect because you have to make the best of it with your attitude. I gave her a penny as a souvenir and we exchanged email addresses. (Note: She later wrote me and recently I called her and had a nice chat. We discussed trading places since we each preferred to be in the other's country, and also that I would visit her in Cherepovets next time I visited Julia again. She also said she would help me out if I needed to escape from Julia for a while again. lol It's interesting that she speaks English with more of a European accent than a Russian accent, which is a compliment to her since she said she disliked Russian accents. It was also funny that she mentioned that when she heard me speaking English to her on the train, she thought she was hallucinating at first. lol)

## **Week Four: Moscow and Tula With Natasha E.**

### **Chapter 29: Transit in Moscow**

The next morning as we approached Moscow, we got up and made our bunk beds. As we did, I sang a Russian song I had often heard to the two girls that went something like this "Na nee nay strauss nayat nayat..." and they recognized it since it was a popular song, but laughed at my pronunciation and attempt. I couldn't believe I was going to Moscow now. Back in St. Petersburg, I had vowed not to go to Moscow because I was tired of the crowded hustle and bustle there, and the tourists at the hostel who had already been to Moscow told me not to go if that's how I felt about St. Petersburg. But now the circumstances sort of brought me here, and I hoped to make the best of it. My plan was to 1) go to the hostel listed in my traveler's guide, 2) rest a bit after the emotional drama I went through, 3) meet some fellow travelers there perhaps and join a day tour with them to see some of Moscow, 4) find an internet cafe to write up my next exciting juicy update on the last few days, 5) get a haircut, and 6) call Natasha E. to let her know I was nearby and see if she wanted to come to Moscow or have me visit her in Tula.

We arrived in Moscow early in the morning, and I got off the train on a long platform. With so much luggage, I moved slowly in the direction of the crowd, with everyone else passing me due to their lighter luggage. A taxi driver on the platform asked if I needed a cab, and even though I did, I refused because I figured that the parked ones waiting ahead would be cheaper. When I got off the long platform into a courtyard bustling with activity, a uniformed policeman walked up to me to ask for



something. Trying to get away from him, I said "Ya ni panimayu" but he followed me and persisted. I asked him what he wanted and then he said "Passport." Oh no, I thought. I had heard in St. Petersburg from the other hostel tourists that the police in Moscow will check your passport all the time, unlike St. Petersburg where they almost never do it. Now was my first time being checked and I only hoped this policeman wasn't going to try to make an excuse to ask me for a bribe, which is what they're reputed for. I came here half-heartedly and I'm not even sure it was a good idea too, and now I'm faced with this. I showed him my passport and visa and as he checked them, I thought "Ok go away. Go away." Fortunately, he gave it back to me and did so.

I rolled my luggage to the big street in front of the courtyard and as I looked at the immensely busy street and tall buildings all around me, I thought "Why did I come here? Maybe it was a mistake. I don't know what to do here or where to go. All I have is a sketchy plan to stay at a hostel for a while and do a few errands." Feeling a bit anxious and overwhelmed, I calmed myself and proceeded with the next logical step of getting a cab. I went to some parked cabs and showed them the address of the hostel I wanted to go to, which was called Traveller's Guest House. The driver wanted 200 rubles, and I wanted to only pay 100. He wouldn't lower it at all, so I asked another driver who quoted me the same price. Using some bargaining strategy, I decided to wait them out a bit to see if they would give in and come to me with a lower offer. But they didn't and acted as if they had the edge here, not me. So I held my hand out on the street to hail a gypsy cab, which is generally cheaper than official cabs. It took a long time, but eventually one stopped and offered 150 rubles, which I accepted because I didn't want to stand around all day.

He brought me to the front of a very nice building. I struggled to get both my heavy luggage carts up the stairs to the elevator and up to the floor that the hostel was on. When I got to the office, there were many tourists in the lobby and I waited in a long line to get to the receptionist. She told me that they were booked with a large group already had reservations tonight and suggested that I try either Youth Asia Hostel or Sherstone Hostel. She said that there was a free phone on a lower floor that I could use for all calls within Moscow. I went to that floor and called Sherstone Hostel first. A girl answered who spoke completely fluent English and said there was room. I thanked her, went down to the street again, and hailed another gypsy cab. A guy in a nice looking Mercedes car pulled up, and I wondered if he was mafia or not, but he didn't seem to project that kind of aura. He seemed very friendly and laid back, and this time we drove across a bigger stretch of town. The traffic here was very busy alright, and the road rules seemed like they were lawless. Cars just squeezed through other cars much the same way people squeeze through each other in a crowd. It looked very dangerous, and certainly would be illegal in the USA, but it seemed like the norm here and surprisingly I didn't see any accidents. He could tell I was nervous by the way he was driving, and tried to calm me down. I tried to distract myself by asking about the noteworthy buildings we passed, including a tall radio station tower that he said was temporarily out of service. I didn't see the famous cone towers that you often see in commercial photos of Moscow though. When we got there, it was located on a small side street in a more quiet part of town. It didn't say "Sherstone Hostel" on the front of it so I wasn't sure if it was it but he assured me that it was the right address. I was fortunate that he only wanted 150 rubles, so I paid him and thanked him before he left.

Inside, I was surprised to be in the lobby of a nice looking hotel. It didn't look like a hostel at all. I wondered if a place like this could possibly be that cheap to stay in, as they told me it was 15 dollars a night. (I later learned from my guidebook that the hostel here was actually part of another hotel and was composed of a block of rooms they rented out.) The security guard told me to go up to the fourth floor

for the office of Sherstone Hostel, and since the elevator wasn't working now, I had to carry my two heavy luggages up many flights of stairs. It was exhausting and I stopped to rest often, but I finally made it to the fourth floor. The corridors looked like those of a nice hotel alright, and were very long too. I found the office of the hostel there, and inside was a girl behind a big desk with some male backpackers around her. I asked if she was Gallaja, the receptionist I spoke to on the phone when I called, and when she said she was, I said "Wow you are more beautiful than I imagined!" to which the other backpackers blurted out laughing and said "Good one. Good one." Then I jokingly said "Do I get a discount now?" and she looked at me sarcastically.

As I paid for my first night, I told Gallaja and the other guests about why I came to Russia and the experience I just had with Julia in Cherepovets. I even showed them clips from my camcorder of Julia doing the sexy dance to "Pretty Woman" and the guys were especially amused by it. Then I fast forwarded to the end of the last recorded part of the tape and took some footage of Gallaja and the guys, saying "Ok Gallaja, now it's your turn to striptease." Then the guys chanting in unison "Striptease! Striptease!" but Gallaja only smiled sarcastically and then continued to talk about business. I was amazed at how fluent her English was. She was the most fluent Russian English speaker that I had met so far. What was also funny was that her accent was more like that of an Asian girl than a Russian girl. (When I later told her this, she said no one had ever told her that before, and that her accent is her own individualized accent.)

Gallaja told me that there are two general types of Russian women that I will meet from the internet marriage agencies. The first type were those who just wanted a visa out of their country, and will accept any partner that is tolerable. The second type were those who didn't intend to leave their country, but just liked having foreign men come visit them and spend money on them. According to her, the ones that I met so far fit more in the second type. She does have a point though, I thought, since the women I got along best with during my trip so far were the ones I met outside of the agencies.

After I paid with the credit card, I went to my room and settled in. It was a very nice looking four bunk room with a private bathroom and shower. I found a corner to put my luggage in next to some other belongings, and rested in my top bunk for a while to catch up on some sleep that I didn't get on the train ride. I felt emotionally drained from the experience in Cherepovets, and as I lay, I wondered what the meaning of it all was and what there was to learn from it. I felt so used now and wished that I could find somebody who would like me for me, and not for money. Eventually, I fell asleep. After a few hours nap, I got up and took a nice long hot shower.

Afterward, I went back down to Gallaja's desk to ask where I could find an internet cafe nearby. She showed me some on the map in Moscow, but they would all require riding the metro, which I didn't want to try yet. Looking at the Moscow metro map in my guidebook, it looked very intimidating and complex with a ring route around it all too. Talk about confusion. It looked much more complicated and elaborate than the one in St. Petersburg, and I was not in the mood for exploring now, only for taking care of business. So I decided to look for one within walking distance instead. Gallaja said that I could try some nearby hotels and post offices because they would probably have some internet cafes in them, but they might be a bit more expensive. I decided to try this first. So I got directions for a post office and hotel and left. Outside, I took a little footage with my camcorder of the surrounding area and then went on my way.

I walked across the small street to a little courtyard and got some pastry snacks for the walk. I walked to several buildings and asked people for directions again. They pointed the way to the post office, and after a confusing time, I found it. But inside there was no internet cafe and the staff had great difficulty answering my questions. It felt like every simple question to them was a big task. So I left and decided to try the hotel instead. After another wild goose chase, I found it and was directed to a room with one computer to use for the guests. But someone was using it though, and the lady at the desk told me that the rates were 90 rubles an hour, which was almost triple the standard rate. Since I knew I would need to use it for hours to write my long update to everyone, I decided to later look for another internet cafe instead.

After the blonde lady using the computer there was done, she got up and gave me a prowling look like she wanted me, but since she was kind of old for me, I smiled and didn't do anything about it. The lady at the desk was nice enough to help me by taking out the phone book and calling a couple of places up for me to check rates and hours. I told her that I preferred one close by that was a short and simple metro ride away. She managed to find one that was inexpensive, open 24 hours, and only a few metro stops away. Hurray! I thanked her and since she was cute, I asked her out to dinner tonight, but she declined politely.

I left and with a little bit of a hassle, found my way back to Sherstone hostel. I checked the cafes close by and unfortunately none of them served any vegetarian food, so I just bought a bag of cookies and pastries to eat. By the time, I got back, I decided to ask Gallaja to translate a call to Natasha E. for me but she had already left for the night so I bought a prepaid calling card in the hotel and planned to do it tomorrow. I wished I knew some people here to go explore the nightlife with but I was too tired and drowsy so I went to my room and prepared to go to bed. My other roommates still weren't back yet from wherever they were.

Later on, a new guy came in to settle on the bunk bed across from me. He introduced himself as Jason from New Jersey. We talked a little and he explained to me that he was involved in some environmental volunteer program and that tomorrow morning he would be going to meet up with a group for their project somewhere far away in a rural area. I in turn told him my story briefly and showed him clips from my camcorder of Julia dancing. He said that she definitely had the moves and must have done this professionally before. He warned me that if I didn't cross the green light at the gate in the Moscow metro station in time, these metal bars would come smashing down from the side and could go into my nuts. That sounded scary to me, and made me wary of riding it. Before he went to bed, he wrote in his notebook journal and mentioned that he would write about meeting me and what I showed him too. We both soon went to sleep.

### **Chapter 30: Call to Natasha, trip to McDonald's and internet cafe**

The next morning, Jason woke me to say goodbye before he left. After falling asleep again, I awoke to three guys greeting me. They said that they were my roommates and had just returned not long ago from being out drinking all night. They were from the Serbia/Croatia area and told me what happened to them last night. During the taxi ride back to this hostel, they asked the driver to stop so they could pee in the bushes. As they were doing so, a policeman caught them by chance and then took them all down to the station. Since their language is similar to Russian (I didn't know this!) they were able to communicate with the Russian policemen in the station. After apologizing to them, they fined them a

small fee and then one of them drove the three youngsters back to their hostel. When they were dropped off, as they were about to enter the doorway to the hostel though, another policeman stopped them to ask if they were drunk, and they said "Oh no, not again!" and quickly explained to him that they just came back from the police station and paid their fine. It was an amusing story, and they are lucky to be able to speak a language similar to Russian because if I were in that situation, I'm not sure how I could have gotten out of it. They even said that if I were ever brought to a police station, I would be fined a lot more, probably about 100 dollars, since I carry an American passport and they think we're rich.

We also talked about US foreign policy and one guy said that it was scary that the US had so much military power that they were starting to abuse it. I agreed, and then when I told him that I felt that sleeping on the top bunk in this room was dangerous because one could fall off, he said not to worry about it. Then I told him that a few months ago on an aircraft carrier heading toward Afghanistan, a Navy sailor was killed when he rolled off his top bunk bed and hit his head on something hard. He then replied, "So if you're in the US military, you're more likely to be killed falling off a bunk bed than in battle huh?" We both laughed. Afterward, they bid goodbye to me since they were about to leave to visit another part of Russia. When they left, I was glad because now I had the place to myself and could enjoy some peace and quiet.

After showering, I went to the reception desk so Gallaja could give me my breakfast meal ticket, which was included in the price. After a hearty breakfast of eggs, bread, and cereal, I went back to Gallaja to ask about translating a call to Natasha E. in Tula. She said she would love to, but that the phone in her office isn't able to make calls to the access number listed on my prepaid card. I thought that was odd since it could make calls to anywhere else in Moscow, but she insisted that she knew what she was talking about. And she couldn't use another phone either because her job required her to be in this office until about 8 or 9pm. (and no I wasn't shameful enough to ask her to use her lunch break to help me) The only way to do it would be to wait until she got off work or to find someone else in the hotel who spoke English and Russian. I didn't want to wait til night time for her to be available so I went down to the lobby to see if any of the staff spoke English fluently. None did, unfortunately, but a young guy working at the hotel bar named Sasha said he would be willing to help translate the call. However, he didn't speak English and I needed one that could so they could read my message to her.

As I pondered what to do, a light bulb lit up in my head! I had the perfect idea. I could just write my message to Natasha in English on a piece of paper, give it to Gallaja upstairs to translate into Russian by hand, then it back down to Sasha at the bar to read to Natasha. After that, he could write down her response in Russian, and I could then take it back to Gallaja for translation to English to me. That would worked out great! Why didn't I think of it before? So I proceeded with my plan and wrote Natasha a message telling her where I was and if she would like to come here or have me go there, etc. Gallaja translated it and then Sasha called Natasha with my message. (I was also fortunate that Natasha's cell phone number was Moscow based so the prepaid calling card contained a lot of minutes since it was a local number.) He wrote down Natasha's message to me and as he did, I noticed him writing down some time and numbers down. It obviously meant that she wanted to see me since it looked like information for the train schedule! I was so delighted!

Afterward, Sasha was at least able to tell me that she wanted me to come to Tula, that it was 3 hours away by train, and that a train left for there about every 3 hours. He also said that after I buy the ticket, he would call Natasha back for me and tell her my arrival time and train number. Fortunately, he also

told me that I could get the ticket for the ride from the ticket booth right across the lobby in this hotel! There would only be a small service charge for it, and I wouldn't have to go to the station to wait in long lines and fuss with translations like I did in St. Petersburg! The small service fee was definitely worth avoiding the hassle. Sasha explained all these things to me despite not being able to speak any English. He did it in a variety of clever ways using drawings, pantomimes, analogies, etc. He was brilliant and resourceful, and used many of the same techniques that I was used to using. I knew for sure he would have made an excellent Pictionary champion! I had never met a guy so skilled in using drawings and analogies to communicate. He ought to be a professor or something, not a hotel bartender!

I took the message he wrote back to Gallaja and waited almost an hour for her to be free since she was busy helping other people. Afterward, she looked at the message and confirmed most of what I already knew. I went back down to the lobby and Sasha helped me buy the train ticket to Tula, which was very cheap too. Then he called Natasha again and gave her my train number and arrival time, which was about 6pm. I was so excited to be seeing her again! I thanked Sasha graciously and bought him some ice cream for his help. When I asked him where I could get a haircut, he pointed to another part of the lobby where there was a hair salon. Perfect, now all my needs in coming here were set! Tonight I would go to the internet cafe to write my long update, then tomorrow morning I would get a haircut at the salon here, and in the afternoon at 3pm I would take the train to Tula! The only objective I came here that wouldn't be fulfilled was the tour Moscow for a day with some fellow travellers, which wasn't all that important anyway. I would rather save this time for Natasha instead. To tell you the truth, this whole translating process with Sasha and Gallaja took a lot longer than you would think, several hours actually, and by the time it was finished it was already early evening. I went up to Gallaja to have her write down the names of the metro stations in Russian that I would transfer at and get off at. She and some Filipino tourists also told me where I could find a McDonald's to eat first before going to the internet cafe. When I asked her what I could get her for a thank you gift, she said a milkshake from McDonald's would be fine. So I left and went on my way.

It was a long walk to the nearest metro station, and when I finally found it, I was again asked to see my passport by the security guard at the gate. I bought my metro ticket (not token here since it's a paper ticket this time), put it in, took it out and when I saw the green light, quickly went through. (per Jason's warning) When I went down the long escalator, I was amazed at how clean and spotless the floor and walls here were. It was much cleaner than in St. Petersburg and almost as clean as Japan. In addition, the marble was set in nice pastel colors. When I rode to the station two stops down where the McDonald's was, I got off and this time, I didn't even need to ask for help because the signs were so well labeled unlike the St. Petersburg metro. It was all very clear and unambiguous. The tunnels and halls had signs describing the name of the stations they would lead to if I took the train it lead to. All I had to do was look at the stations that Gallaja wrote down for me in order and find them on the signs. It was all much easier than I thought. I had read that the Moscow metro system was considered the most efficient in the world, and now I knew why. I also marveled at the artwork and glass designs inside that looked like they were from a great cathedral. I had read that the Moscow metro was like an underground museum and now I knew why. I never expected a metro to have that.

I rode up the escalator to the street level and was in a large crowded courtyard. I was told McDonald's would be right on the corner when I stepped off, but it wasn't. Confused, I asked several people, and they pointed me in the direction that I would find it. When I walked that way for a while though, I couldn't see McDonald's anywhere. By now I was already walking down a big crowded street with

many lanes. When I asked another two ladies passing by, they pointed me down in the same direction I was already walking and indicated that it was about a 15 - 20 minute walk down. I now realized what had happened. The Filipino guy told me the wrong station to get off at. He said that it was on the corner right from the entrance of the metro station, but it must have been from the corner of the next metro station, not the one I got off at. So he was off by one station. Oh well, he was a tourist too and is subject to mistakes like these.

Hungry for some real food now, I walked the long 15 - 20 minutes down the street and finally saw the big yellow "M" in the distance. I walked faster and soon stood across from a two story McDonald's building on the other side of the street. However, the problem was that between me and McDonald's were ten lanes of fast heavy traffic, five lanes going one way and the other five going the other way. I stood there thinking "Hey, I'm not going to play Frogger to get to McDonald's!" So I walked down further looking for a signaled crosswalk. After a long walk, I finally found one and when it turned green, I raced across, wondering when I would finally get some food. When I got across, I turned to walk back to McDonald's again. As I did, I saw the metro station I was supposed to get off at which was just across from it. I can't believe how much time I wasted now just to find McDonald's. What a hassle! I went in and ordered a Filet-O-Fish meal and hungrily ate all of it. After I was done, I ordered an exotic fruit flavored milkshake for Gallaja to go and went on my way.

It was now raining and I made my way quickly to the metro station I was supposed to get off at. Since there was only five rubles left on my metro card, just enough for one ride, I thought that the machine would eat my card like the subway gate does in San Francisco's BART subway system, where I grew up at. However, I experienced Jason's warning instead and as I walked forward before removing my metro card that I didn't see pop up, the metal bar gates came crashing down in front of me. I jolted in fright and couldn't believe how much force those metal bars came down with. I touched the metal bars and noticed how strong and solid they were. Had they come down on me directly I might have been seriously or permanently injured! This was not funny and I wondered why this was necessary! (a guy on the Russian Bride List recently told me though, that he has seen the metal gates crash on someone and it didn't hurt him, but I don't know whether to believe him or not) A security card quickly walked up to me and checked my passport (yeah like that's so related to this incident with the gate). Then I put my metro card in and took it out this time before I passed through. As I descended down the long escalator, I took out my camcorder to get a shot of how long it was this time.

On the train, just before I got to the transfer station, I noticed that the brown bag with the milkshake in it was now leaking. It was dripping fast on the train floor. I covered the leak with my hand but it overflowed on my hand and continued leaking out. I felt extremely embarrassed now and people were looking at me attempting in futility to cover a fast leak with my hand. It seemed like forever before we finally stopped at my station. I rushed out and anxiously looked for a garbage can to empty the excess in the bag but there was none around! (where is the garbage can when you need it most?) After running around with my hand still covering the leak, I finally found a garbage can and emptied the excess milkshake into it. Drying out the bag as much as I could, I cleaned the milkshake with the napkins in the bag, put it back in, and held it tightly so it wouldn't tip again. My hands were now sticky with dried milkshake on them and I couldn't wait to wash them. What an embarrassing and stupid problem! All because I wanted to be nice to a girl who helped me too! After going through several tunnels with clear signs labeled on them, I found my transfer train to the ring route, and rode to the next transfer point as well. It was all so easy and clear. After the next transfer I rode to my final metro station and rode up to the surface. The McDonald's excursion had taken up most of the evening and now it was late, about 10

or 11pm. I couldn't believe all the time I had used up in finding McDonald's. At least this internet cafe was open 24 hours though, but now I realized I would have to stay real late.

After showing some people the street address, I found the internet cafe which was on the second floor of a plain looking building. I washed my hands, sat down in relief, and as I typed up my next long update, I drank the rest of the milkshake I got for Gallaja, because I didn't want to deal with it anymore and she wouldn't be back til tomorrow morning anyway. In the update, I wrote down everything that happened since the last update in Cherepovets, including all the juicy details, and it took much longer than I expected. I knew I would be flamed for revealing all that I did in chapter 25 and 26, but at least it was interesting this time.

Hours went by and soon it was so late that I realized the metro was closed and that I would have to wait til tomorrow morning for it to open again. That time came though, when I wasn't even finished with the update yet! As I wrote in the update that it was dark in the am hours outside and that I would be taking a taxi back since I didn't want to get mugged on the way to the metro and on the way to the hostel, I felt silly writing it because dawn had already arrived. I concluded the journal update by saying that out of the three primary women I came to visit, it was two down now and one to go. In theory, Elena of Mariupol was my last hope out of the three, which was all very well because I was told beforehand that she was the best prospect out of the one because she seemed the most serious with the best quality character. My Dutch pen pal also wrote me and said that in Holland there is a saying that the third one is usually the best one. In any case, I knew that Elena wasn't a gold digger type at least, because she did say that she was concerned about the money I would be spending to see her, which would make her feel guilty if things didn't work out between us.

When I finally finished and sent the update to all my lists, I responded to all the essential email as well. I was shocked and baffled to find that on my Russian Bride List, one guy was questioning whether I was hoaxing all my updates or not because they sounded too silly to be true, and then another guy said he used some ISP tracing technology to trace my posts to Colorado. After that, several guys on the list then believed him and now claimed that I was sitting somewhere in Colorado hoaxing all these updates in Russia. How silly was this! I wrote to the list and told them that I already had 90 minutes of camcorder footage which I could dub for anyone who doubted that I was in Russia, along with many photographs taken. It was all so silly that I laughed.

## **Chapter 31: Preparing to leave for Tula**

At dawn, I finally finished and to my surprise, I was only charged for 3 hours instead of the 6 or 7 I spent there. I wondered if they made a mistake, but I didn't ask about it since it was to my advantage, so I paid and left. When I got to the entrance of the metro station, I saw some policeman standing outside and stopping foreign looking people for their passports. Not wanting to deal with them again, I decided to wait around until they left. I walked in circles around the station until they finally left, then went in and took the metro back.

When I arrived back at my station, I went up the escalator and was astonished that this was not the same entrance I went in last night. I took out the paper with my station written on it and everyone around confirmed that I was at the right one. For a moment, I thought I was in the Twilight Zone. Then I decided to be more constructive. I thought that perhaps I went up the escalator on the wrong side

since there was another escalator going up the other side. All I would have to do now is find the entrance that the other escalator led up to, which shouldn't be far. Of course, I could pay another five rubles to go back down and exit from the other side too, but I didn't want to deal with those scary metro gates again. I mean what if the sensor on those things malfunctioned and the metal gates killed someone? It was very nerveing to go through them each time, so I didn't want to deal with it again.

Looking around, I saw a hub in the distance that looked like the one I came out of so I figured it must be the other entrance. The problem was that an inaccessible abandoned series of train tracks lay between here and there, so I would have to find some way around to the other side. When I walked down the grass to an overview to get a better look, suddenly a large pack of wild dogs ran in my direction. I realized that everyone else was too far away from me, and that I was alone and defenseless against these dogs. I held my breath as the large pack of dogs ran past me, wondering if they were going to attack me. But they barely noticed me and I breathed a sigh of relief when they all passed by. I wished them all well though since they looked hungry and probably had to scavenge for food everyday.

As I scouted around, I saw a bridge in the distance that would lead me across the train tracks. This was a lot of trouble just to avoid going back through the metro gate! I began to wish I had gone back through the metro gate now since this was a very long walk and I was tired cause I stayed up all night at the internet cafe. After a long walk, I made my way across the bridge and then I had to look to find ways through the other streets and buildings to the other hub. Eventually, I found some hidden streets that brought me across to the direction I wanted. This was like a puzzle or maze now! When I finally got to the other hub though, I found that although it was a metro entrance/exit, it wasn't the one I came in the day before either! Lost and confused now, I figured that the entrance I went in yesterday must be close by at least, but where? I decided to walk back down and look for some familiar streets. After walking around in circles, I decided to show someone the address to my hostel and ask them where it was. As I looked around for someone to ask, I suddenly was struck with a feeling of familiarity at the street underpass in front of me. Wait a second, I thought. Wasn't this the same one that I passed the first day I was here when I was looking for the internet cafe? I crossed it to the other side, and sure enough it was! I recognized the building on the other side as the hotel I went to before to ask about the internet cafe there. Relieved, I quickly and easily made my way back to Sherstone hostel.

Inside, I went up to Gallaja's office and she said that since it was almost 10 am, I would have to check out now within 15 minutes or else pay for another night. Since I wanted to have breakfast and shower before I checked out, I paid for the extra day anyway. I then had a nice breakfast in the hotel cafe, took a nice long hot shower, and a very short nap. Then I decided to go down to the salon for my haircut so I had Gallaja translate instructions I wrote for my haircut to give to the stylist, and went down to the hotel salon. She was cutting another lady's hair and I waited over an hour. Finally, she was done and when it was my turn, I gave her the translated instructions. I figured I would trust her judgment with the rest. She did a decent job and when we were done, I asked for a little mousse or gel to style my hair like they always do back home. Afterward, when I paid her the agreed upon price, she asked me for 30 rubles more. When I asked why, she said that it was for the mousse I asked for. How can a little squirt of mousse cost a whole dollar, I thought. That was so crazy and shady. I was used to that being free back home. I could have probably argued with her and won it, but since we were already talking very friendly to each other, I decided not to dispute it.

Afterward, I had Sasha call Natasha one more time to tell her I was leaving now for the train. This time I talked to Natasha myself briefly and although we couldn't understand each other much, she giggled a



lot. Then I brought my luggage down and Sasha called a taxi for me. There was a delay and it took a while, and when it finally arrived, Sasha said that time was very tight and I would have to tell the driver to hurry. I had figured leaving an hour before the departure time was enough, but apparently it wasn't because it was a long ride there through heavy traffic. Sasha told the driver about my train schedule and to try to rush to it in time. By now I had learned a new and useful Russian word called "Skolkah?" which meant "How much?". I was glad to know this word now since I was constantly paying for services here and would need to use it often. I used it with the driver to get the fare first before getting in, but Sasha said not to worry about it and that we needed to rush.

We quickly left and the driver performed many maneuvers that I didn't think were possible with a vehicle. For example, at a stop light with a whole fleet of cars stopped in front of us, he simply wiggled through them like a quarterback running through a group of defensive linebackers. It looked so dangerous yet he did it smoothly and easily. I kept bracing myself for an accident and this seemed more like a roller coaster ride than a car ride. These roads were completely lawless alright. I don't know how drivers could get away with these type of maneuvers and not get hit. During the ride, he looked at my train ticket schedule and said we would make it just in time.

When we finally arrived, I rushed into the big train station. It was huge inside and I had no idea where to go, so I asked this old man nearby who looked like a janitor or maintenance person for help. He looked at my train ticket and beckoned me to follow him. We rushed down some stairs through tunnels and finally up to the train platform. He quickly showed me the train cart to go in and before I went in, I gave him 50 rubles for his help even though he didn't ask for anything. I was only inside the train for 3 minutes before it started moving. Whew! If I had been just a few minutes more late, I wouldn't have made it. There dramatic close calls were fun but not what I preferred.

I loaded my luggage in my seat cart and sat down with a group of young people. A man in a business suit was also next to me. As we all introduced ourselves, they shared their food and drink with me. I only wanted to have their soda, but they kept insisting on mixing it with vodka for me. This made it harder and slower to drink, but I did it anyway for group conformity sake. I learned that they were on vacation to Sevastopol, Ukraine, which was part of the Crimean peninsula of the Black Sea. This train to Tula would continue on to Ukraine after my stop. I thought the man next to me in the business suit looked German, but he was Russian and on his way to Tula too. The travelling group knew a lot about Russia, Ukraine and other nearby countries so we discussed about them and their comparisons of them. They also told me about various cities in Russia that I inquired about. According to them, the Crimean peninsula that they were going to was phenomenally beautiful with lots of aqua activities. I said that I was going to Ukraine later but I didn't know if I would get a chance to visit Crimea or not. When I asked them why the Moscow police always wanted to check my passport, they explained that the police system was corrupt in that city and that the purpose of the constant checking was a money making system to them. The police there hope that I forget my passport one day, because it gives them an excuse to ask for a bribe. This helps bring in income to their department. That's so shady, I thought, and law enforcement should not be engaging in such practices. But, they said, only the police in certain cities were like that, not in all cities, and that is why I didn't experience it in St. Petersburg or Cherepovets.

I also took some footage of them with my camcorder, but one of the guys covered his face and said he didn't like it. When we discussed what Tula was like, they told me that it was famous for manufacturing rifles. They also said accommodations there would be very cheap. Then the

conversation sort of went in the gutter as we talked about the prostitutes there. One guy said that the prostitutes at the hotels there only charged 20 dollars an hour or 75 dollars for the whole night. I was shocked at how cheap that was and told them that in the USA, prostitutes and call girls usually charge 200 dollars an hour. They replied "No. No. Not here though." They also told me that prostitution was legal in this country and that I wouldn't be arrested for it. I couldn't believe this guy was telling me all this with his girlfriend nearby. Are the girls here really so tolerant? Although the cheap prostitution there was tempting, I wasn't sure if it was a good idea since I was there for Natasha E. and she might not like it if she found out about it. I didn't want her to think that I was a creep, after all.

The man in the business suit next to me said he was returning to Tula from Moscow and gave me a portion of a Tula brand cookie he bought a few days ago. It was very good and tasted kind of like gingerbread with some filling in it that was similar to the Fig Newton cookie filling. I can't think of any other way to describe it. During the ride, I also became a bit nervous as I realized that I didn't really know this girl Natasha very well and wasn't sure what to expect when I saw her again. I wasn't even sure if she really liked me as much as I thought, since she didn't speak much English. The ride was only three hours long this time and we soon reached Tula.

## **Chapter 32: Reunion with Natasha E. in Tula**

When we got off, I didn't see Natasha at the platform yet so I wondered whether I should find a payphone to call her or not. But I didn't need to because one of the guys I was talking to came out to help me. He said he would call her for me on his cell phone. Remembering that incident in St. Petersburg with the guy asking me for 2 dollars after using his cell phone, I asked him how much he wanted first for making the call to Natasha, using the new word I learned, "Skolkah?" He said not to worry about it and that it was on him. What nice people! After I gave him the number, he called her and told her I had arrived. She was on the way now, he said. I bid him farewell and gave him my email address. I was glad to have such friendly warm help.

The man in the business suit who got off with me said he would wait around with me in case I needed anymore help. He suggested that I stay in Hotel Moskva which was just across from the train station. It was very inexpensive, about 15 dollars a night, he said. Waiting around anxiously, I started to become nervous. I hoped that things would go well here, at least better than they did in Cherepovets. The nervousness I felt made the wait seem like forever and I constantly looked around for any sight of her.

After what seemed like forever, I finally saw her with her other friend I met in St. Petersburg, also named Natasha. She was wearing a warm red turtleneck sweater with slacks (not the sexy outfit she had in St. Petersburg, darn) and her hair was tied up differently now. It was hard to explain why, but she looked a little different than I remembered her. But I was glad to see her again though, and when she reached me, we hugged each other a long time. Then she locked her arm around mine, and pulled me away like I was hers. Immediately I felt butterflies in my stomach. The man in the business suit went along with us and rolled my other luggage cart for me since Natasha had one of my arms. I introduced them as we walked. We descended down some stairs through a tunnel and out into the street on the other side. We decided to all share a cab, but first, we waited outside as Natasha went into Motel Moskva to make some inquiries for me. Then she came out and said "No good" and suggested that I go to Hotel Victoria instead, which was in another part of town. We all got into a cab and inside, Natasha now took my hand and held it firmly. Delightfully, I thought "It looks like she really does like me after

all!" I was now very glad that I had come here. As the cab pulled into the city street, I pointed ahead and excitedly said "Tula!" to which Natasha and her friend laughed. Then I used an inside joke from the time with Julia and said "Very exotic!" which mildly amused them too. I also joked and indicated that since both their names were Natasha, whenever I called the name "Natasha" both their heads would turn, which was funny to them as well. The man in the business suit got off first, and we continued on our way to Hotel Victoria.

When we reached it, I was about to pay for the cab fare when Natasha stopped me to pay for me instead. Wow I was so flattered. (Finally I meet someone who can be a giver and not just a taker) The hotel was not what I expected at all. It was situated in a remote neighborhood around some old buildings, inside a gate. It looked like a flat one story building with a nice garden around it. The inside was very nice and cozy looking. There was a friendly group of staff inside waiting to serve me. It was a nice atmosphere at least. The price was about 600 rubles a day, a little more than Hotel Moskva, but Natasha claimed that it was better quality and comfort. I appreciated that she was looking out for my benefit and comfort, since I was not used to people here being that considerate with my needs. The room inside was very nice and looked like an apartment. Even my picky parents would have been pleased with this place. I settled my luggage inside and Natasha said that she and her friend had to go back to work now and that they would come pick me up tonight to go to a discotheque.

Before they left, I asked her about the night in St. Petersburg when we were supposed to meet again (where I lost her number) and what had happened to our plans. She has a hard time understanding my question, and I don't know if she ever did, but she seemed to get it after a while and mentioned that she was still on a tour activity at the time we were supposed to meet. (If that's so, it meant that she wasn't sure if she would be free that night, and that's why she said to call her first before coming, but as I mentioned in chapter 12, I lost her number.) When they left, I went outside to take some footage with my camcorder of the garden and of the inside of this hotel. Then I took a nice long hot shower.

After a few hours, Natasha arrived in a nice black outfit. We rode the taxi back to Hotel Moskva to wait for Natasha 2 (from now on I will refer to her friend as Natasha 2), who would meet us there and go with us to the discotheque. When she arrived, Natasha told me to wait here with Natasha 2 while she went to go do something. While we waited, I decided to go into the lobby to ask if they took credit cards in case I wanted to relocate there, and whether they could exchange dollars for rubles. In the lobby, I saw a dark lounge where a group of skimpy dressed girls sat in. I could tell that they were probably prostitutes, the ones the guys on the train told me about. I saw the visa/mastercard logos inside, so I assumed that they did take credit cards, but Natasha 2 seemed to say that it referred to withdrawing cash from your credit card. She also said that it was better to exchange dollars at the bank than here.

When Natasha came back, we went to a building called Albany which was a discotheque with a series of restaurants around them. I paid the driver this time and we went in through a crowded outdoor restaurant into a smaller indoor one. We tried getting seats there but it was full, so we decided to eat at the cafe inside the discotheque. We paid the entrance fee, got our hands stamped with some fluorescent mark, and went in to an aqua-marine lighted classy-looking place. It was early and sparsely populated. While we ordered, Natasha tried her best to explain to me what each item on the menu was. When she told me that she had her own business, I had a hard time figuring out what it was. First she drew some circles, then some connecting circles that looked like chain links. I made some silly guesses which made her laugh, including "banana?", but I finally got it when I pointed to the word "sausage" in my

dictionary. She operated a sausage stand selling frozen rolls. She must have a very strong work ethic to maintain that for 12 hours a day, I thought. We ordered some really good champagne, pancakes ("bleen") and other things. Natasha had a meal with rice and some strange vegetable that I couldn't describe. At first, I thought it was steak or liver, but when she put some in my mouth, it tasted more like eggplant or something. (maybe that's what it was) As the food was served to us slowly, people started coming in. And just like at the St. Petersburg disco, everyone was shy to be the first to dance on the floor.

After a long time, eventually a few brave people went out on the disco floor. It was surprising though, because they weren't even very good dancers. It was even longer before there was a decent sized crowd in there. Then Natasha grabbed my hand and suggested we all go on the dance floor now. (perhaps she was waiting for a certain song to come on) The three of us went out there and I thought "Oh no. Now I have to let her find out that I'm a bad dancer with no rhythm." As I danced lightly hoping that my bad rhythm wouldn't show, I noticed that she was giggling slightly and wondered if she was laughing at me. After a while, Natasha took us off the floor for some reason, but we later went back out there one more time. When it was getting late, Natasha said that we should go soon because she and Natasha 2 had to work tomorrow. We went back to our table and I paid the waitress for everything we ordered. Then Natasha wrote on paper that tomorrow she would pick me up at the hotel at 1 or 2pm, depending on how soon she could get off work.

We took a cab back to my hotel and Natasha walked me in. As we said goodnight, she gave me a sweet kiss on the lips and left. (yes it gave me a little buzz) I prepared for bed and laid down with a good feeling, thinking "Wow she really does seem to like me!" Later that night, I came out of my room to socialize with the staff, who were on shift all night, and it was fun trying to communicate to them. Later on, I even showed them some magic tricks, sleight of hand tricks, and card tricks I learned when I lived in Virginia City, Nevada.

### **Chapter 33: Touring Tula and Tolstoy with Natasha E.**

The next morning, I went out into the hotel lobby to pay for the next night's stay here, and was greeted by all the staff who eagerly wanted to serve me or help me. They were all nice and enthusiastic but I couldn't understand a thing they were saying. One lady in particular named Olga, who was the administrator here, took the lead in trying to communicate with me but she spoke no English either. I found her attempts to be very cute and endearing though. Then they offered me breakfast in their big restaurant inside, and after a confusing ordeal telling them what I wanted from the food items section of my phrasebook, I ordered some eggs and toast. The restaurant inside was very fancy looking, and so huge too. There were hardly any other guests here besides me and so many staff around, so I felt like an honored guest.

Afterward, I waited at 1pm and then 2pm for Natasha to arrive. When she didn't, I became worried and wondered if she got held up or something. If she did, it's strange that she didn't call. Eventually, I took out her cell phone number to ask one of the staff to call her for me. They did and said that Natasha would be here at 5pm instead. I had a long wait ahead so I watched TV for a while and as I saw some American movies on with scenes of the good old USA, I started feeling homesick for the first time. Then I went out the back entrance of the hotel to look around. I met a light brown cat wandering about and sat down to pet him for a long time. Eventually he sat on my lap too. Ah, a Russian cat, I thought. I

wondered if this cat "pa Ruski?" (speaks Russian) When I joked about it to the hotel staff, they said that he would say "meow meow" in Russian. lol I tried asking them if they knew where the ATM machine was. To demonstrate what I was looking for, I took out my debit card, made the slide in motion, the punch button motion, and the take cash out motion. They knew what I was referring to but had trouble explaining to me where it was.

Finally Natasha arrived at around 5pm. We first went to the bank so I could withdraw some cash from the ATM machine. For fun, I let her enter my pin number at the machine and told her what buttons to press. (fortunately, they had menus in English) Next, we went to the train station to check the schedule for the ride to Mariupol, Ukraine, because I told her that we needed to do that sometime soon because my visa in Russia expires on August 15 and needed to be out of the country by then or else I'd be heavily fined.

At the station, Natasha talked to the train teller and took down some notes for me. When she asked me what I wanted to eat, I asked if there was a Chinese or Italian restaurant and she said there was both but that the Chinese one was closer, so we went to there. Inside was an exotic red Asian theme that is common in Chinese restaurants. The menus were all in Russian and this time, the owners didn't speak any Chinese so I had a very difficult time figuring out how to order. After some time, I ordered one thing I knew of and then let Natasha do the rest. While we waited, I snapped a picture of Natasha with my camera (which you can see in the online album). The food that came was very good, and it was mostly meat and chicken dishes, which I ate some of even though I was a vegetarian.

During dinner, Natasha tried her best to explain the train schedule to Mariupol to me. She said it departed for Mariupol at 8pm each day and what the price was. (I think it was a little over 800 rubles, but I'm not sure) I also asked her about her ethnic background. She seemed to have an exotic Eastern look to her, and I wondered if she was mixed or not. But she said she was just Russian and nothing else. (I'm not sure if she really understood my question or not though) I also learned that she only lived with her mom now because her dad died a few years ago during an operation. Her mom ran a clothing store business, and Natasha was an only child, like me.

Afterward, we went outside to take a cab to the internet cafe, but I heard some good Russian music playing at a tape/CD stand nearby so I said I wanted to get a tape with Russian hit songs to take home. I asked Natasha for her recommendations and she picked one out for me that turned out to be pretty good. As we rode the taxi to the internet cafe, Natasha surprised me by showing me that she knew some words in Chinese. She said "Wo ay ni" which means "I love you" in Chinese. She seemed to say it playfully, so I wasn't sure if she was saying those words to me, or just demonstrating that she knew how to say it in Chinese (or perhaps it was a subconscious message?) The internet cafe turned out to be in a little shack on a neighborhood street. Inside was a smoke filled area with a small cafe, bar, and row of computers. There were many kids and teens in there playing video games and smoking. The price, remarkably, was less than a dollar per hour. I told Natasha I'd make it quick, and when I asked if she wanted to use a computer too, I found out that she didn't know how and had no interest. She acted as if she couldn't even use a keyboard. While I went on the computer, she sat at the bar. I bought her a beer to keep her occupied there.

As I glanced at her occasionally to see if she was alright, I could see on her face that she didn't really want to be there and wasn't that comfortable in this area. No long updates to the list today, I thought. So I tried to be as quick and brief as possible. First, I wrote a brief update to my lists that I was in Tula

now and how happy I was to finally find someone who likes me for me. Then I looked at some of the hate mail about me on the Russian Bride List and responded to those I thought deserved a response to. There were so many misconceptions and attacks about me on there now, especially after my last update about the paid affections in Cherepovets, that I was just so fed up. These guys seemed to be bringing me down emotionally, which wasn't what I needed during my trip. They predicted disaster after disaster for me, so I was glad to email the list with the good news from my update finally. (one guy even compared my trip reports to watching crash and burn race cars) Not wanting to make my honey wait, I quickly skimmed the rest.

Then I realized that there was something very important I needed to do. I had forgotten all this time about trying to get in touch with Elena of Mariupol to follow up and confirm my arrival date. I couldn't figure out what to do about it when I was in St. Petersburg, so I just brushed it off and now I realized that I needed to do something about it because I would be going to Mariupol, Ukraine in a few days! After telling Natasha that I was almost done, I proceeded to email several agency owners I knew of that had translators who could call Russia or Ukraine. I described my emergency need to have them contact Elena in Mariupol for me to deliver my message that I was still arriving on the planned date by train to her city. I gave them her number to call too, and said I would pay for this service later. Since this was an emergency and I couldn't wait for a response from them first, I sent this email to all of them, knowing that if they all call her to deliver this message, I might have to pay several agencies for this. Afterward, I told Natasha I was finished, and she was eager to leave. When I asked why she looked uncomfortable in there, she indicated it was the smoke and small confined space.

To be honest, I don't remember what else happened that night, but it was probably nothing much. I was glad though, that I felt like we were a couple now, and were holding hands almost all the time. I hadn't felt this way in a long long time. Something special seemed to be brewing. Before we went home though, she said that tomorrow we would be going to the home and garden of the Russian author Leo Tolstoy, which was now an historic park as well, located on the outskirts of here. When she dropped me off at my hotel again, she kissed me goodnight again on the mouth. This time though, I was so into it that I moved forward for another kiss again. She gave it to me again, but it might have been a bad idea to do this because during the next two days, she only let me kiss her on the cheek. (Perhaps she thought I was getting too much into kissing? I don't know.)

That night I came out to visit the hotel staff again. For the first time, I noticed a pool table area through a side corridor. I wished I had seen it there before cause it would have given me something to do when I was bored. It was now occupied though, by two old men with two young pretty girls. I wondered whether those young girls were prostitutes or not. They were playing Russian billiards, which was different than American billiards in that 1) the white ball was bigger, and 2) the pockets were smaller. This, of course made it difficult to hit the balls in, and much more challenging as well. After introducing myself, I asked if I could try a shot and the guy let me. I hit what appeared to be an easy shot but it just bounced off the pocket. Obviously I had to have very tight accuracy as there was almost no margin of error. As I waited to play a game with one of them, Olga and a male hotel staff came in and pulled me out. Each time I tried to go back in, they would rush me back out again. When I asked why they were doing this, they said those people in the pool room were "bad people" and that I should stay away from them. I protested because they seemed nice to me and I felt I could deal with them, but they still wouldn't let me back in. I couldn't believe that these hotel staff people were acting like my parents or something.

After those "bad" people left, me and the hotel staff guy who pulled me out went in the pool room to play a game of Russian billiards. Every shot was harder than it looked, even the easiest ones, and the game went on a long time. I was told that in this game, I had to use lots of power to force the balls in, but I felt that accuracy and touch were more important, because those were my assets and what I have always used to win. As we played, I got better and started winning. Each ball we hit in was racked in a spot where we could total them after the game, to see who won. Eventually I won (but I won't say that it was because my way won out, although I could lol) and I was amazed to win because this was the first game of Russian billiards I had ever played.

The next morning, Natasha arrived early and we had breakfast outdoors under the "" in the garden. It was a nice romantic scene, and the breakfast tasted very good. There was this thick orange colored mixed fruit juice that Natasha ordered which kept attracting bees to it. We kept shooing them away but they always returned. When they kept landing in the juice and getting stuck, we laughed each time and Natasha scooped it out so it wouldn't drown. It was a good sign to me that she showed respect toward the life of the bees, which is something my parents would have admired since they are devout Buddhists. When we both finished that sweet glass of juice together, the bees finally stopped coming. We were able to enjoy the rest of the breakfast in peace. After we finished, Natasha wrote down her address for me in Russian so that I could write her in the future. I told her that I would miss her very much when the time came for me to leave here. Deep down, I knew that a sad goodbye was destined to come.

After breakfast, we rode to a cathedral with a plethora of Christian paintings in its interior. Although it was a small cathedral, the paintings and statues were well packed in there. We lit some incense sticks and put them in one of the tin cauldrons. I put mine next to hers to be romantic. Then I got some sodas for both of us, and we went to a bus stop where she said that Natasha 2 would meet us at. From there we would go to Tolstoy park. When she arrived, we all took a bus to the outskirts of Tula. When I joked about "striptease", Natasha said that we could go to a striptease place tonight if I wanted to. I wondered if she was joking or not. (she was) After a long ride, we got off at a rural area with pastures, and walked through a long trail of farms and green pastures. While walking, we picked the small fruit off the nearby trees that tasted like pears, but were the size of berries.

The trail led to a gate with a visitor center and shop outside. They bought some ice cream for us and then purchased a book in English for me about this historic park and home of Tolstoy. (I didn't know it at the time, but when I read the book later on, I found out that this was the Tolstoy who wrote the famous novel "War and Peace"!) We paid a small entrance fee and went in. During the walk in the hot sunny day, I filmed the path a little, with a quick shot of them in it as well. There was a beautiful lake to our left that reminded me of the one I saw in Pushkin back in St. Petersburg.

When we reached the end of the path, a big white house stood before us with a flower garden around it. I wanted to go in, but a ticket was required, and when Natasha asked about it, we found out that the ticket couldn't even be bought at the door of the home. We would have to go all the way back to the visitor center outside and get it! The problem was that this home closed at 5pm and it was now 4:30pm. If I ran back down the path to get the tickets and back, I might be able to do it in 15 minutes but that would only give us another 15 minutes to tour the home. They would not extend the hours either. This ticket system is very inefficient and would be laughed at in the USA, I thought. We decided it wasn't worth the trouble and continued to walk to the other areas of the park instead.

After making a circle of the park, and not being able to go in any of the buildings since they all closed at 5pm, we started on our way out since it was almost 6pm, which was the time that the park closed. On the trail back, I shot a clip of the lake near us and Natasha said the name of it in Russian. My feet were now sore from all the walking. When we got on a bus heading back parked next to the visitor center, it was a relief to sit down. I didn't understand though, that if the bus came out to the visitor center, why we didn't just ride directly here in the first place instead of the long walk. When we discussed where to eat tonight, I suggested the Italian restaurant Natasha told me about.

When the bus dropped us off back in Tula, Natasha said that she needed to go home to change, while Natasha 2 would escort me back to my hotel room to hang out with me until she arrived. (Obviously she's very trusting of her friend!) Then we would go to the Italian restaurant afterward. As I rode the bus and walked to the hotel with Natasha 2, I tried talking to her but she couldn't understand a thing I was saying at all. When we passed a cafe with some teens playing pool, they all looked at me with smiles and curiosity. I wished I had time to socialize with them. We had trouble finding the hotel for a while, but eventually we found it and as we relaxed on the couch in my room while watching TV, I offered to bring her a beer from the hotel restaurant and she accepted. I also took out the Budweiser beer bottle that I brought from the USA, to let her try. (I had brought it for one of Julia's guy friends, who requested it, but we never had the chance to see him, so I never gave it to him.)

Soon Natasha arrived (allowing no time for anything bad to happen lol) in a nice looking black dress. I took a photo of both of them with my camera, then I let them try the Budweiser beer. They said it wasn't very good and that Russian beer was way better. (geez, it was great bringing that from halfway around the world just to hear that. lol) Then we went on our way to the Italian restaurant.

The cab took us pretty far up some hills. From there, a great view of the city lay before us. I knew that a restaurant with a view like this was probably going to be expensive or fancy. We rode through a neighborhood of American style rich looking homes. These were the first full-sized homes I'd seen and I knew we were in a rich area. The odds were that this was an expensive fancy restaurant. And this was odd anyway since I'm not used to seeing restaurants in residential neighborhoods. When we arrived at the restaurant, it looked like a big neighborhood clubhouse made of beige bricks. We went in to a big hall with a high dome overhead. This was definitely a very fancy looking place for the rich alright!

At first, we sat inside, but then later we decided to sit outside in the nice garden with a fountain and view of the city because it looked better out there. In this huge place, there were no other customers except just one couple far away! How could this be? I thought about it and realized that probably because most people here couldn't afford to come here. I felt a little guilty for being here then, and I wondered if Natasha and her friend felt lucky to be here now. We talked to the waiter, and found out that this wasn't even an Italian restaurant but a Spanish one. (I had never been to or heard of a Spanish restaurant before, so I had no idea even what to order) Even more strange, they later told me that they didn't even have an English menu and didn't even take credit cards! (You'd think a place like this would have such simple amenities!) But then again, this was the small city of Tula, not Moscow, and wasn't even a tourist city. I was fortunate to have a lot of cash on me though.

Since the outdoor scene was so nice and luxurious, I had the waiter snap a photo of us (which is in my online album). Not knowing what to order, I asked if they had pasta. They didn't, but the waiter said he could custom make it for me, so I accepted. The two Natashas ordered some things too. First came the very nice bottle of champagne. The waiter, dressed in a tuxedo, held the bottle with a white cloth



around it, and poured our glasses slowly and steadily. He did this each time he refilled our glasses, stopping at regular intervals to allow the bubbles to level down first before pouring more. This was living! I had never received this kind of service before. It made me feel like I was a member of the rich and famous. We had some very good bread and soup for appetizer, and then our meals came. My spaghetti dish was hard to describe. It wasn't exactly what you would imagine. Instead of red or white sauce, it had a brown paste that seemed more like barbecue sauce than spaghetti sauce. I don't know if this was the Spanish version of pasta or if this was the best they could do with the ingredients they had. All the food was very good and five star quality.

When dusk broke out, the lamp lights around us went on, and a disco ball in a roof covered area went on and spread colored lights under the roof. I didn't know why since no one was there. Natasha got a phone call and after talking for a while, she seemed upset. When I asked her what was wrong, she said her business was going bad and that she was close to being bankrupt. I felt bad for her and upset that such news came at this time. When we finished, she seemed very anxious to go, and wasn't even in the mood to go to the disco ball area to slow dance a bit. I paid the bill and to my relief, it was only about 900 rubles, about 30 dollars, which is what the standard price of a restaurant meal would be for 3 people in the USA. So it wasn't as expensive as I thought it would be. (But of course, perhaps Natasha and her friend helped by trying to order as cheap as possible)

But Natasha now seemed agitated, jumpy, and even a bit moody. We quickly got into a cab to go home and when I kept asking her what was wrong and why she seemed angry, she just said no and that she wasn't angry. But she seemed angry about something though, and her tone reflected it. Throughout the day, I had used the word "Pacheemoo?" (meaning "Why?") too many times, and she seemed to ridicule my frequent use of it. When I said "You don't like 'Pacheemoo?'", she said that using it all the time was no good. (It's not that I usually like to ask "Why?" all the time, it's just that since my Russian language capability was so limited, I started using that word to make conversation.)

I held her hand and said not to worry and that I would try to help if I could. That only made her smile briefly as she said "Winston help Natasha?" When we got back, it was almost 11pm and she only let me kiss her on the cheek this time, as I mentioned previously. Before she left, she said that tomorrow for lunch, she would bring me over to her home and make a home cooked meal for me. That was nice and I felt honored. I was glad she was so considerate and had such good values.

Later that night, two wealthy looking men came in with two young girls with long legs. I was instantly jealous since I didn't have any girls tonight to stay with in my room. They came in laughing like they had just been drinking or something. I wondered if those girls were prostitutes, but I wasn't sure. The men were very talkative with me though, and were intrigued that I was a foreigner.

### **Chapter 34: Home cooked meal and romantic slow dance**

The next day, Natasha came to pick me up. I checked out and took out my luggage because I wanted to try Hotel Moskva tonight to see what it was like and see if it was cheaper (and have a chance to chat with the prostitutes there too, which I had seen hanging out in the lounge a few nights ago). Besides, it was right across from the train station which would make it easier for me to get there when I had to leave. Natasha protested though, but reluctantly agreed (I don't know why she was so much against it, perhaps she didn't want me to be tempted by the prostitutes, or she just saw that place as shady). She

did say though, that it would be more expensive than Hotel Victoria, but that directly contradicted what the guys on the train told me, so I was curious to find out which was true.

First, we went to Hotel Moskva to check me in. They had a machine to take credit cards, but it was broken so I had to pay cash again. As I thought, the price per night of 15 dollars here was a bit cheaper than Hotel Victoria, as the guys on the train I took here told me, and I wondered why Natasha thought it would be more expensive. Since I had an enormous amount of dirty clothes, I had Natasha ask about a laundromat for me. The maid said they would wash them for a small fee for me, so I gave them my load. Then we walked across to the train station again to purchase my tickets to Mariupol, Ukraine. We bought it for the next day, and as we did, I knew I would be very sad to leave here. Then we rode the bus to an outdoor grocery market near her home and bought some vegetables and fruits. Natasha bought a big watermelon and I held it for a long time as she bought some other things. To relax my arm, I constantly switched the watermelon between both arms. (sorry but I'm no superman!) She bought a variety of vegetables and I offered to pay for them, but she said it was her treat this time.

We walked to her apartment building nearby. Fortunately, she lived on the first floor so we didn't have to climb any steps to get in. Behind the gate and door, her flat was extremely tidy and exotically decorated like an Asian family's home. She had many souvenirs and artifacts from her trip to Japan. While she prepared the meal for us, she had me sit down and look through some photo albums from her trip to Japan. Looking through them, it looked like she had a good time there, and knew many Japanese boys. There were many photos of her with some friends at the Disneyland park in Japan as well. I wondered where she got the money to do all that, especially since Japan was a very expensive country. I noticed in her photos with people that she seemed to be a touchy feely type of person and she often had her hand around guy's arms in the photos with them. I began to wonder if she was like that with everyone, because if so, then I wasn't as special to her as I thought. I watched some TV too as I waited. After a while, lunch was ready and it looked like she had prepared a lot. It was a full course meal. She prepared these meat dumplings (Russian dumplings are similar to Chinese dumplings, I found out), vegetables, rice, salad and other things. It was very good, organized and I began to feel that she was good wife material. I ate the dumplings she cooked, even though I was a vegetarian. For dessert, we had the watermelon and this sweet pie that she called "pirog". It was also very good and tasty, and she wrapped a few pieces to give to Natasha 2 later. After the meal, she said that she had to go to her driving school for a few hours, and would meet up with me afterward. I said that I would either be at the internet cafe or back at the hotel. She wrote the address of the internet cafe for me on a piece of paper to give me to the taxi driver, and then left for her driving school.

I rode the taxi to the internet cafe, which was around this big coliseum with circus images on it. (yes I asked about it and found that it wasn't circus season now so there was no show there) I quickly got to work and finished up the tasks I didn't finish last time. First, I had to take care of the message to Elena business. One guy named Doug from the Russian Bride List, who with his wife ran a translation service, had his Ukrainian wife Olga call Elena for me already. They reported that Elena would wait for me there as long as I gave her the train number, date, and time of arrival. Another agency said they had someone call Elena for me, but all he told her was that he could not understand my message in English to her, that was it. And they wanted to charge me for it too! How strange.

Since Doug and his wife could do the job, I thanked them and sent my next message to Elena through them. They indicated that they would bill me and I could pay them when I got back home. I took out the train ticket I bought and typed in the train number, arrival date and time. As I typed in the time, I

remembered that Ukraine was one hour behind Moscow time, so I wasn't sure whether the arrival time on my ticket was based on Moscow time or Ukrainian time. I asked several people in the internet cafe and they all unanimously agreed that the arrival time was Moscow time. I felt strange about it though, because I think Natasha told me it was Ukrainian time and in general most arrival times are in the time zone of the area you arrive in. But then again, how could so many locals be wrong? So I accepted their conclusion and entered in the arrival time as Moscow time. (I later learned that this was wrong though) Then I wrote some other essential emails and read/responded to some more of that fiesty Russian Bride List.

Before I knew it, there was a tap on my shoulder and I was startled to see Natasha and Natasha 2 behind me. I asked why they weren't in driving school and they said the teacher let them out early today. So I told them I was almost done, and they both sat down at a table to have some beer while they waited. Before long, I turned around and saw on their faces that they preferred not to be there again. Feeling guilty for making them wait, I went up to them and asked "Do you want to go now?" and Natasha said yes, that it was getting late, and that they had to get up early for work tomorrow. So I paid for my internet time and left with them.

They said they were taking me to a cafe now, as we walked. We reached an outdoor cafe with a grill and sat down. We ordered some ice cream, and soon this guy joined us who was jovial, vocal, funny, and demonstrative. He said he was a friend of Natasha and was quite a character. He started saying crazy wacky things at random, and the way he did it made everyone laugh. But I didn't get all his jokes though, or what was funny every time. He ordered some sausage pieces for us and vodka for himself. He drank each glass of vodka from his bottle down like a horse. Later on, a handsome guy came up to Natasha and greeted her with a kiss on her mouth. "Oh great," I thought "does she kiss all her friends like that? If so, then I'm nothing special!"

When Natasha saw me look shocked, she pointed to the guy and said "He's friend" in a manner that said "Don't worry, he's just a friend." Then her "friend" went up to a piano keyboard and speaker and prepared to do some singing. (I wish I had these talents to impress Natasha with) Later, the rowdy guy drinking vodka at our table joined him and they sang a duet together. It was nice and lively, so I took some footage of them singing together with my camcorder, and a bit of Natasha as well. When I got to her, I blew some kisses at her and she blew a bunch back.

After the song, the rowdy guy came back and offered to take us for a ride in his car. Natasha wanted to go but I said "Natasha, no! He drank lots of vodka!" but the guy said that was only a little to him and nothing compared to what he usually drank. But all the education I had from the USA about drinking and driving warned me against it, so I told Natasha it wasn't a good idea. But she persisted and said it would be fun, so she led me to his car. He said that he would just take us for a joy spin, and opened the door to let Natasha in. Since she was going to do this anyway, I figured that if she got killed, at least we would die together (isn't that romantic of me?). So I got in too, and the guy immediately pulled his car out like it was a racing car, sped at full blast down the empty street, made a sharp turn, sped full blast the other way, and finally stopped. It was scary and I wondered if we would die, but Natasha seemed to enjoy it.

We walked back to the cafe table, and I was glad we survived it. Then Natasha went to the bathroom, and when she came back, there was a slow song being sung by her friend now, so she asked me to slow dance with her. I felt the cooties and did. (it doesn't take much skill or rhythm to slow dance obviously)

It was very romantic and I felt very special holding her. I wondered if I should now try to attempt to kiss her, but I figured why take the risk since so far she has already been taking the lead in these things and usually calling the shots in my favor? So I decided to just let her give me signs for when she was ready for these kind of things. The slow dance was long and very special to me. I began to realize that I was now developing strong feelings toward her, and that our goodbye would be very sad indeed.

Afterward, we sat down again and the rowdy guy called his daughter on his cell phone. When he told her there was an American right now at the table, he gave me the phone and said that his 15 year old daughter wanted to talk to me and that she spoke some English. I took it and talked to her for a while, though by now my English was rusty from lack of use for so long. She asked me some basic questions, and then said that she wanted to come meet me. I said that I was leaving tomorrow for Ukraine so if she wanted to meet me, it would have to be tomorrow morning or afternoon. I told her the name of my hotel and room number, and after I did so, I thought "Oh no. That might not have sounded good in front of Natasha." But I would reassure her that she just wanted to come and practice her English with me.

Finally, I told her that if she missed me tomorrow, that she could email me sometime, and that I would give her father my email address, which I did afterward. After I was finished talking to her, Natasha said it was getting late and time to go now. Before we left, I told her that I liked the song that was playing (which was named "он чужой"), so she checked the tape playing in the stereo system and then wrote down the name of the group that sang it, which was "Gosti Iz Buduyu" so that I could buy the tape tomorrow.

So we left and rode the taxi back to Hotel Moskva. During the ride, I looked at Natasha and told her in Russian that I would miss her and had a sad look on my face. She just said "Winston, please." in a "come on now, don't be that way" tone. As Natasha escorted me in, she said "Winston, today no good." I asked "Why?" and she said "Winston talk to the man's daughter on phone, no good." I reassured her saying "Oh don't worry about that. She just wanted to come practice her English with me. That's all. Honestly." But I wasn't sure if Natasha understood me or not. In any case, she said she had work and then driving school tomorrow night, but she would try her best to come see me before I left for Ukraine. I told her that I would be here waiting in the hotel lobby at 6pm tomorrow in case she showed up. She gave me a kiss on the cheek and left.

I went up to my hotel room and pondered whether I should go back down to the lobby and talk to the prostitutes for fun tonight. At first, I figured it would be degrading to the romantic last night that me and Natasha just had, especially with the slow dance. But then I realized that it would be my last chance to talk to them to see what they were like here too. After debating with myself over what to do, I decided that just talking to them was no harm, and that I didn't have to do anything they wanted if I didn't want to. But I wanted to wait a while first, in case Natasha decided to come back to spy on me to see whether I would approach the prostitutes in the lounge or not.

After over an hour, I finally got the courage to go down to the lobby. There was this tall hot looking brunette that I saw out of the corner of my eye before, that I hoped would be there. I saw her standing outside on the steps this time, but as I paced around gathering up some courage, she suddenly was gone. I hoped she was in the lounge or something. I walked up to the dark dim sitting area of the lounge and said hi to them. They looked at me casually and said a passive hi. A lot of them spoke good

English. I asked them if I could sit down and they said yes. After making small talk, I asked how business was, and they said it was good.

As I checked all the girls out, I realized that most of them didn't look good close up, and that was probably the reason for the dim lighting in this area, to cover that facet up. In general, I heard that the bad brothels with the least attractive women tend to dim the lights inside so you wouldn't see their wrinkles or imperfections, since everyone looks better in the dim light. It was an old trick, I heard, and it wasn't a good sign that it was being played out in here. I noticed that the tall brunette to the right of me was probably the one that I had seen outside earlier who looked very hot to me. She was the only one I found attractive in the group. I tried talking to her, but she spoke no English and looked at me with a stuck-up bad attitude. In fact, she seemed to be the only one who spoke no English. Great. When I asked about their rates, they did say that they charged 20 dollars per hour, but that the all nighter would be 100 dollars, not 75 dollars like the guy on the train said. Perhaps his knowledge was outdated, because they said those were the prices for everyone, not just foreigners.

I pointed to the tall brunette next to me that I was attracted to and said "I like her." One of the other call girls said "Well it's 20 dollars an hour if you want her." I was very tempted, but these ladies were giving off such bad shady vibes that I was feeling uneasy about this. When they asked me why I was in Russia, I said I was looking for a wife, and they chuckled. Then I pointed to the brunette I was attracted to and said "You want to go to America?" Another lady translated my question to her and then said "She does, but she doesn't want to be your wife." When I asked why, the attractive brunette stood up and asked me to stand up too. She indicated how much taller she was than me, which with her high heels was well over a foot. Then we sat down and they looked at me impatiently to see if I was going to pay one of them or not. As I looked at the one I liked, I could sort of tell that she was thicker than I thought, and that her clothes hid it well, but she was still attractive nevertheless.

When I appeared indecisive for a while, the attractive brunette and another girl walked outside to have a cigarette. I went too, to walk around and think. The hot brunette then followed me and said "Ok, 20 dollars one hour. Ok?" As I talked to her, out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone who looked like Natasha. If it was her, I thought she was going to come up the steps to say "Winston, aha!" but it turned out to be someone who just looked like her and wore the same colors she wore earlier. When this happened though, my heart skipped a beat and it took a while before I could cool down the terror level that just went up in me. I realized that 20 dollars an hour for a hot girl was a steal, since in the USA it would cost 200 dollars an hour. This was an unbelievable bargain, and I would regret it if I missed out on it. So I decided to continue the negotiation. I told the sexy brunette that I only had rubles, not dollars, and that I counted 100 rubles of the 600 ruble equivalent to 20 dollars. I said I could look for more money in my luggage, and asked if I could pay her in my room.

Her friend said that I would have to pay her here first before she went up with me, and that's how it worked. When I protested saying that she could just take the money and not come up, she promised me that they don't do that and they always keep their end of the bargain. I still preferred that she came up though, and after a debate over this, she finally agreed to come up with her friend tagging along, if I would pay her the money at my door. So I led them to the elevator, embarrassed as we passed by the night clerk, and took them up to my floor. When I opened the door to my room, they waited outside impatiently, unwilling to come in. They were now looking very agitated. I showed them the cash from my wallet and said I was just short of the 600 rubles and that I would have to take a taxi to the ATM machine to get more money out. They both shook their heads, sighed and quickly left.

Man, I did NOT like their attitude at all, nor the look on their faces. I thought about whether I really should take a cab to the ATM, because my hormones were wanting me to, but I decided that I was really turned off by these girls' attitude and the depraved vibes I felt from them. Plus, the night and dance I just had with Natasha was special to me, so I didn't want to ruin or degrade that by doing this either. So in the end, that was the excuse I needed to not follow through with this. Although I realized that I was missing out on an unbeatable bargain, I figured that this night was too special for me, and that if I wanted to do this later on, there would probably be other chances. I went to bed not knowing whether I made the right choice or not.

### **Chapter 35: Tearful and poetic goodbye scene**

The next morning, the maid knocked and brought in my washed and neatly folded laundry that I gave them yesterday. That rowdy man's daughter didn't show up, so I took my luggage down to the lobby to check out (yes I looked in the lounge wondering if I had one last chance, but the hookers were already gone) and had them put my luggage in the storage closet for a small fee until my train departure tonight. I figured that today I would get something to eat, go to the internet cafe to check the status on the message to Elena, go shopping for more Russian music tapes, and then come back here by 6pm to wait for Natasha.

First, I went to the hotel restaurant to look for some breakfast but I couldn't even read their menu, so I said forget it. The hotel snack bar stand didn't have anything that looked good either. So I went outside to the little food stands around the courtyard. There were plenty of stands selling the famous Tula cookie that I liked, and they were huge and cheap, so I bought several of them to snack on. I also munched on a potato pocket too. While I walked around, old ladies from the gypsy groups walking around kept tapping my shoulder to ask something. At first, I told them I couldn't understand them, then I realized they were asking for money. I knew if I gave one of them a coin, that dozens would gather around me asking for some too. So I tried my best to ignore them. After I was done, I left the bustling crowds there and headed toward a group of parked taxis. After asking "Skolkah?", I tried bargaining with one of them for a lower fare to the internet cafe, but he wouldn't budge, and my waiting around didn't affect him either. So I gave in and accepted his fare.

In the internet cafe, I checked on the status of my message to Elena. Doug wrote me back saying that his wife had talked to Elena and given her the time and date, and that she would be there. I thanked him and told him that he was a lifesaver. Then I wrote another quick update to my lists, saying that Natasha was special to me now, that I had feelings for her, and that I would leave my heart in Tula. I was so sad to be leaving. Afterward, when I was paying for the time, I realized that I would just have barely enough cash left for the taxi and not enough for the Russian music tapes I wanted to buy. So I tried to explain this to the clerk and she let me off the hook by letting 10 or 20 rubles go.

When I went outside, this tall crazy homeless person tried talking to me. I looked at him and felt sorry for him and the life that these people must go through here. But I just said to him in English "Look, I would love to help you but I'm broke and I don't speak Russian. So there's not much I can do. God bless you." I felt a little guilty walking away though, and I think the reason I felt so compassionate right now was because of the sad emotions I was feeling now about leaving Tula (and as we all know, one emotion can easily trigger others to come out more easily). I decided that since I had some extra time, I

would go back to the cafe I was at last night and since there was a pool table there, look for people to play pool with and socialize. But at the intersection, I wasn't sure which way the cafe was, so I tried both ways, but neither way led to it, and I felt that it wasn't that far. So I wasn't sure what happened to it. Perhaps it looked different in the day or was arranged differently. I only saw one outdoor cafe that was similar to it but the buildings around it weren't the same as the one last night. So I gave up and walked toward where there was probably some shops with Russian music tapes for sale.

When I saw a police station ahead with an officer standing outside, I became nervous that they would stop me and check me, so I went around it by crossing the street and walking quickly past it on the other side. I reached some rows of shops and found a music stand. But the wait was a long one as this guy was taking forever. Eventually, he let me pass so I could get my order. I took out the paper that Natasha wrote the name of the group, "Gosti Iz Buduyu" on and showed it to her. She took out two tapes of that group's hits, a newer one and an older one, she explained. She said they contained most of the same songs, but that she recommended the newer one. So I picked that one and paid the 30 rubles for it.

Then I decided to get some flowers to give Natasha as a goodbye present, so I strolled along the street looking for flower stands. I came upon one with a little barefoot girl and her mom standing behind it. I looked at her selection and eventually settled on some red carnations. I picked an odd number of them and asked if she could wrap them up with the standard silver paper. The little girl said to wait while she ran across to the store to get some silver plastic wrap. She scurried like a pro across the crowded street, and came back in a few minutes with the wrap. During the wait, I saw that there were other flower stands nearby that were better equipped with supplies and selection, but it didn't matter because I appreciate the little girl's effort and was glad to give my business to her instead.

After I paid for it, I knew that I didn't have enough left for a cab ride, so I asked where an ATM machine was. If it wasn't within walking distance, I would have to hail a cab and tell him that I would pay him after he took me to the ATM machine first. To ask, I used the same method that I used in Hotel Victoria with taking out my debit card, making the slide in motion, the punch button motion, and the take cash out motion. The little girl said to follow her and another person nearby went with us. We went into a huge empty courtyard in front of what looked like a government building with the common statue of Lenin there. I thought this building might be city hall or something. I took out my camcorder and shot some footage of the courtyard and of them, saying that this was my last day in Tula and that I would miss it and Natasha very much. They pointed in the distance to a big building which I recognized instantly as the bank with the ATM machine I went to before. I thanked them and walked across the courtyard to the bank. I decided to withdraw a little extra cash since I might take Natasha to eat one more time before I left. Afterward, I walked to a parked taxi in front and showed him the name Hotel Moskva on my room ticket.

When he dropped me off there, it was still early so I decided to walk to the Tula cookie stands to get a few more to take with me on the train. I knew it was a 20 hour ride so I wanted to bring along a lot to eat. They came in so many different designs and shapes, so it was amusing to choose among them. When I walked back to the hotel lobby, I was joyfully surprised to see Natasha waiting there for me already. She got up, hugged me, and asked if the red carnation bouquet was for her. I said of course. When I asked about her driving school, she said she was scheduled for it now but decided to skip it tonight to see me off. Then we decided to go look for something to eat, and after a quick glance, we decided that the easiest option was the hotel restaurant. We walked in, got a table for two, and noticed

how formal and fancy it was. There was a stage with a big heart in the background and balloon decorations as well. It looked set for a wedding or something, but I thought it would set a perfect theme for our goodbye dinner.

As we sat and looked at the menu, I pointed to it and asked the usual "Angliski?" (meaning "English?" because I was always checking to see if they had menus in English) which I had asked so far each time we had a menu in front of us, and she said the usual "Winston, no. No angliski." It was becoming a cute inside joke between us now. We ordered some champagne and some snacks. I offered her a Tula cookie, but she said those weren't special to her as a local, and that she never cared for them much. We both started having a sad look on our faces, and I wanted to make up for last night so I told her that regarding what she said before she dropped me off about my talking to the rowdy man's daughter on his cell phone, that she had nothing to worry about and that I only liked her. I wasn't sure if she understood me or not, but her facial expression seemed to indicate that she did somewhat.

Soon the sadness grew, and the sad music in the background made it even more so. I saw the sad look on her face, and took her hand and said "Natasha, look. I promise to come back ok? There will be another time. I promise." I took out my dictionary and tried to show her what I was saying, but the best words I could find to describe my meaning were "eventually" and "someday". I hoped she understood. Then I asked when her birthday was and she said December 27. I said I would send her a letter and a present for her birthday. But she smiled and said that she preferred that I send her myself as a birthday present instead. That was really sweet. Then something happened. I was shocked and touched when I saw a tear come down her cheek. I was so moved as right then I realized that she did have feelings for me after all.

Not knowing what else to do, I followed the cliché move in this situation, and wiped the tear from her cheek with my finger. In my own twist though, I took my finger and slowly licked the teardrop from it, symbolizing that her emotions would be a part of me inside. She shed a second teardrop and I did the same. I was speechless. I couldn't believe after all I've been through on this trip, it came down to this, and with a woman I met by accident here too (or perhaps by fate). It was all so surreal and I could feel the unity and synchronicity behind it. I gave her a long hug afterward.

We ate our small meal and drank our champagne, and then we had the waiter take photos of us with our cameras. Soon it came time for me to go. I told Natasha I would call her, and she said to call her from Ukraine too if I could. I said I would try my best to. I felt all numb inside and wasn't sure how to take it all in. I left the money on the table, and we slowly got up and went to the hotel lobby to get my luggage out of the storage closet. She helped me carry one of the carts and we made our way across to the train. I felt completely numb inside as we did so. I really didn't want to see us part. We got on the train and she helped me load my luggage under the seat. As I watched her talk to the other passengers in Russian for me since they were reluctant to get up, I savored hearing her exotic words one last time. And as she loaded one of my carts under the seat compartment, I looked at her adoringly and realized what a sweetheart she really was. This was it, and I knew I would remember this day for a long long time. I never had this sad and sentimental of a goodbye scene before.

When my stuff was loaded in, she kissed me on the lips a few times, gave me a long hug, and slowly walked toward the exit door as I escorted her out. She climbed down to the platform, and turned around to wave goodbye and blow me a kiss. I said from above "Natasha... wo ay ni" ("I love you" in Chinese, which we had already used before) and she said "Wo ay ni" back to me and walked away. As I turned



to head back to my seat, I realized that I wanted to see her live as long as I could, so I stepped down the steps a little and poked my head out the door to watch her as she left. I saw the back side of her walking away slowly down the platform, and I savored her endearing image as long as I could. When I saw her carrying away the carnation bouquet, I felt like she was carrying away my heart with her. My heart sank as her figure became smaller and smaller in the distance. Time seemed to stop for a moment. When she became a speck in the distance, I knew she would be gone in a few seconds. Right then I muttered "My God, no!" Then some people walked behind her and when they passed, she vanished. I suddenly felt numb all over. I was in denial, and couldn't believe she was just gone like that, such a special girl. Although watching her fade was sad, it was poetic in a way because it symbolized what she meant to me.

I slowly walked back to my seat not knowing how to accept it and take it all in. (I never knew why she didn't stand outside to wait for my train to leave like Julia and her friends did) That was probably the saddest goodbye I ever experienced. (And to this day, I still remember it vividly and recall it often) To make things worse, the tune of the sad music from the restaurant we just went to was still playing in my head. As the train started moving, I whispered "Goodbye my love" and looked out the window in a motionless gaze. The memories with her began playing through my mind like a flashback, from the first time we first passed each other and made eye contact in the Hermitage museum, to singing the Russian national anthem in front of the Neva River, to the reunion again in Tula where she took my hand. The flashbacks played over and over in my head, like scenes on TV where they play someone's memory flashbacks in black and white with usually a sappy song like "Memory." I felt overcome with emotion.

Soon the train attendant came and collected my ticket. When she asked me to pay for the bedsheets now, I said "Later. Not now. Leave me alone." and showed her my sad look to let her know I was going through something. She didn't seem to get it and kept persisting. I kept repeating myself and then finally I remembered the Russian word for "evening" and I said "viechir, ok?" She seemed to understand that time and went away.

After some time, I was invited to sit with the train attendants in their section. I told everyone there, including some passengers, that I was mourning for a woman I just left behind. When they asked me "You love her?" I said "I think so." Then they offered me champagne and vodka to help me get over this, but I refused it because I was already buzzed from the champagne I had with Natasha. (By the way, this time I was in a higher class section of the train that had sliding doors to each cart. Apparently, Natasha must have put me in this class when we bought my ticket.)

To try to distract myself, I went back to the train attendant area to socialize a little and get some info. for what to expect in Ukraine. There was a man there from Mariupol who worked as a taxi driver. He told me a little about Mariupol, how to get around, and the currency in Ukraine. I learned that instead of rubles, they used grivnas there, and one dollar was equal to about 5.5 grivnas. Then he gave me his cell number in case I ever needed a taxi. All this talk was a temporary distraction though. Eventually, I went to my cart and laid down in my upper bunk bed. I barely even noticed the cute young blonde in the cart next to me, who was very quiet and reserved herself. I couldn't think of anything except Natasha and us, and kept wondering if we had any future together. I wondered how serious she was about me, and whether I even really knew her or not since the language barrier made it difficult for us to understand each other.

When night fell, I couldn't sleep so I got up and stared out the window in the train hall in deep thought. Occasionally, I sat on the fold-out chair in the hall too. With everyone asleep, the atmosphere was now conducive for deep thought and reflection. As I recollected the events of this trip, I suddenly realized that what they say about everything happening for a reason was true after all. It all made sense now...

Back in St. Petersburg, I met Natasha at the museum the day that Olga, my first primary girl, ditched me to be with a guy she met at the social tours. Although at the time, I was angry at her for ditching me, I now realized that if that hadn't happened, I would never have gone to the Hermitage Museum with the two people I met and met a better quality girl like Natasha. So I felt thankful now that things didn't go as planned with Olga. Later on, when I went to visit my second primary girl Julia in Cherepovets, things went bad too and it became unbearable to be around her after the fifth day. That freed up the second week I set aside for her, which I used to go to Moscow and call Natasha from there. If that hadn't happened either, then I wouldn't have had that free week to visit Natasha.

To summarize, if things hadn't gone wrong with the first two primary girls, then the time and memories that I had with Natasha wouldn't have happened. And it's best that they did because she is the only one so far who is a keeper and definitely relationship material. To top it all off, Natasha's home city just happened to be nearby along the way to Ukraine where I had planned to go. It all seemed to fit together nicely. The things that I thought had gone wrong actually turned out to be blessings in disguise! So everything does happen for a reason after all. How interesting indeed!

Regardless of my future with Natasha, I felt that God or the universe had taught me an important lesson here. You see, I had selected the first two primary girls mainly on their looks. It was like God knew that things were going to turn out bad with them, so he sent an angel like Natasha to rescue me and renew my faith in love. It was like God was saying to me, "Winston, you made some bad choices and got burned, but there is hope because someone can like you for you after all, and here's the proof." It was like God or life was teaching me that how a woman treats you is more important in the long term than how she looks (not that Natasha is bad looking by any means). I had always known this in theory, which didn't amount to much, but now that I knew this from experience, it was more apparent and meaningful now. In any case, this was a beautiful experience at least. At least my faith in love was renewed by it. And I took consolation that our time would come again someday.

But now I had another problem to deal with. I was going to Mariupol now to see my third primary girl Elena. How would I deal with her now that my heart was back there with Natasha? Should I even try to make things work with her and give it a chance? Or should I not even try? It seemed logical to proceed as planned and see how things would go because my future and compatibility with Natasha was uncertain, and this would at least provide a backup opportunity. After that, I could choose the most suitable one based on my experiences. This seemed logical, but part of me also felt like I would be cheating on Natasha if I did that.

Regardless, I was also emotionally drained right now after all I'd been through, and I would feel bad coming to Elena in this condition, having nothing to offer her. So during this long ride, I would have to find a way to get it back together for her, at least for politeness sake. I knew that Elena was a good girl (the best of the three primaries according to many who saw all their photos) and she deserved better than this. Furthermore, I would also have to find a way to explain it to her about why I went to Russia before Ukraine, like she had thought I would. I wondered if I should tell her the truth about the girls I visited, or else just explain it as sightseeing. I decided if I had to, I should just tell her the truth and if

she was really caring and understanding, she would accept it. If not, then she probably wasn't the one anyway. As the hours went on, I tried my best to clear my head and re-energize myself to move onward toward whatever further adventures lie ahead in Ukraine for the next 2 weeks. But in actuality, all I could think of was Natasha and what she meant to me.

(Note: I think I should be upfront and let you all know in advance that the drama of my trip ends here, and the next two weeks of my trip are mostly mundane and laid back. Although the next two weeks may be somewhat interesting or amusing, they are not really as significant as the previous four weeks. So you may stop here if you wish. I will continue writing chapters of the next two weeks of the trip anyway, to make this a complete story. But I just wanted to tell you all this in advance so you don't go expecting some more crazy adventures and get disappointed. Remember that this trip story is about reality, not fiction, so I just tell everything like it was. Read on if you wish though.)

## **Week Five: Mariupol and Dnepropetrovsk**

### **Chapter 36: Reluctant arrival in Mariupol**

I only managed to sleep lightly a little that night. Early in the morning, the train stopped and some uniformed people came in. I knew that they were customs agents and that we had probably reached the border of Ukraine. They checked my passport, quickly stamped my visa and left. Not long after, we stopped again, and another group of customs agents came in. This time, they stayed longer and put two stamps on my Ukrainian visa attached inside my passport, a square one and a circle one. (I wondered at the time why customs people came in twice, but later I realized that the first group were probably Russian customs who stamped the exit date on my Russian visa, while the second group were Ukrainian customs who checked passports and visas for entry to their country.) The ladies in my cart who were trying to sleep became annoyed by their intrusion and said something that seemed like "Ok go away now and let us sleep." One of them even closed the sliding door on the customs agents.

Afterward, the hours on the train dragged on because we weren't due in Mariupol until 2pm this afternoon. For breakfast and lunch, I had more of the delicious and filling Tula cookies that I brought along. Throughout the morning, I got better at getting myself together for the meeting with Elena. By the late morning, I felt ready to deal with it. After noontime, I started getting nervous about the meeting with her, as I usually did. The train made many stops at various Ukrainian cities along the way, and each time I looked at the route map on the wall and felt more nervous as we approached Mariupol, which was right at the edge of the Sea of Azov, a smaller body of water linked to the right of the big Black Sea. I also found out from asking that the arrival time on my ticket was Ukrainian time, not Moscow time. (so much for the collective wisdom of the locals in the Tula internet cafe!) So Elena would have to wait an extra hour, which wasn't too bad, but I would make sure to apologize to her for it. By the way, Elena spoke very good English on the phone, so communication wouldn't be a problem with her. (Note: If you want to see her online photos in her profile, here is the link: <http://www.russian-women.net/cgi-bin/rwn.pl?show=ib3484>)

When it finally got close to 2pm, we all prepared our things for arrival. I felt more and more nervous now. When the train stopped in Mariupol, I thought "This is it" and braced myself for the meeting with Elena. I rolled my luggage with everyone else down the aisle to the exit door. When I stepped down, I looked around for any sign of Elena but didn't see any. As I slowly headed toward the station building

in the distance where a crowd of people were sitting, I noticed a blonde lady in the distance get up and walk toward me. It was Elena! I smiled, set my luggage aside, said hello and gave her a hug. She looked a bit thicker than in her photos, but she was still pretty and attractive nevertheless.

When I asked her how long she waited, I was surprised to hear her say five hours. At first I thought she was joking, but she was serious. She explained to me that the lady I had call her (Doug's wife Olga) told her that I would be coming from Kiev but didn't tell her the time. So she called the station to check the schedule for the day and found out that the train from Kiev arrived there at 9am. When she came at that time, I didn't show up on the Kiev train so she just decided to wait five hours for the Moscow train, after realizing that the train number Olga gave her corresponded to that one. (I later learned that the reason she chose to wait five hours rather than just go back home was because she was on a tight budget of 8 dollars a month, given to her by her college program, and therefore could not afford another taxi ride!)

I didn't understand how she wasn't told the time of my arrival though, since I had clearly emailed Doug the arrival time of my train, and although it was off by an hour because I thought it was Moscow time, it definitely wasn't off by five hours! This was bizarre indeed. (Note: Upon returning to the states, Doug told me that since I told him that I was probably coming to Mariupol from Kiev <I had thought my train would pass through Kiev on the way, but it didn't!> that that's what Olga told Elena as well. That was the cause of the misunderstanding. However, Doug maintained that Olga did tell Elena the time of my arrival, although Elena claims that she didn't.)

I was going to hail a taxi to pick us up, but Elena told me not to because she was going to call for one herself. After she did so, I asked why she didn't just let me hail one since the gypsy cabs were cheaper. She replied that here in Ukraine, it was different and that the official cabs are cheaper. How odd, I thought. While we waited, I took a welcome photo with her.

The cab arrived and took us to the hotel Elena reserved for me. It looked very nice and I was glad that they accepted credit cards. In fact, they allowed guests to pay after their stay, rather than before like all the hotels I had been to. This was odd and I wondered how they stopped people who could just leave or escape without paying. After Elena escorted me to my room, she said she would take me to the bank to cash my traveler's checks for grivnas first. We walked along a long sidewalk lined with palm trees on a street that looked a lot more modernized than the Russia I was used to.

Along the way, Elena pointed out her university to me and some shopping malls. We visited a few banks but they either couldn't cash traveler's checks or else the department within them that could already closed for the day. So I withdrew some grivna cash from their ATM machine instead. As we walked back to my hotel, Elena told me she was wary walking with me because girls here seen walking with foreigners are usually labeled as prostitutes or women who sell out for money. When she warned me about the dangers of getting mugged here, I said that it looked safe and peaceful here, and that even if someone did try to do that to me, I'd just cuss at them and say "Pajole nawhee". When I uttered that swear word in Russian, she looked at me like she was shocked and offended. I apologized and said that I didn't know the word was that bad (since Julia seemed to enjoy hearing it).

When we got back to my hotel, Elena said she had to go home to do some errands and would come back for me tonight at 6pm so we could go out. She said she wanted me to meet her in the lobby because she feared if she were seen coming up to my room, people would think she was a prostitute.

Exhausted, I was in the mood for a nice long hot shower before taking a nap. But the hot water only trickled out while the cold water was fully functional. I played around with the knobs but the best I could do with it was to get a small stream of lukewarm water, which wasn't good enough for me. Using the phone in my room, I called the lady at the reception desk and she said that someone would fix it later, but for now I should transfer to another room. Since I already got settled here though, and I didn't like to change things, I insisted on staying in this room.

A maintenance person did come in after a while, but he wasn't able to fix the hot water valve so the receptionist told me that it would be tomorrow before they could bring in a plumbing specialist. So I took a lukewarm shower with a small water stream. Shivering, I dried myself off and laid down for a while. I started feeling sad again for missing Natasha, and turned on the TV to try to distract myself. There was a news channel in English to watch at least. But it was repetitive so I tried to sleep instead. When I couldn't, I went out to the balcony in my room to people watch. I saw some hot girls walk by on the street in the distance, and wondered if I should go out and try to mingle with them. But to be honest, I felt like calling Natasha to tell her that I arrived and that I missed her so much, but I knew she was probably working right now. I decided I would try calling her tonight after she got off work. As it got close to 6pm, I got up and sat on the chair. Soon the sadness of the goodbye scene sunk in, and since no one was around now, I started to release it by shedding some tears.

### **Chapter 37: The confession that ruined any possible relations**

When it was 6pm, I went down to the hotel lobby to wait for Elena. She arrived very punctually, and we decided to go have Italian food. It was too bad she didn't tell the cab that dropped her off to wait for us, because we had to go outside so she could use her calling card to call for a cab. We waited a long while for it, and I wondered if this was necessary. Since there were many cabs around us, I still didn't get why she always had to call for one. Surely that wasn't common practice here, because if it was then the cabs wouldn't be patrolling for customers. And if it was so much better to call for one as she said earlier, then everyone else would be doing it too. I wondered if this was just a personal quirk of hers. Perhaps she had one bad experience that led her to this habit. But I wasn't going to try to argue with her about it, since if I did it would be a sign of distrust of her judgment within her own homeland.

When we got in the cab that arrived though, I tried to ask the price of the fare in advance as I usually did using the word "Skolkah?" but Elena stopped me and said it wasn't necessary. I thought this was strange and told her that not only was it common sense to negotiate the fare first but it was also suggested in my Russia travel guide too. I didn't understand why she was against such a simple safe practice, because she seemed like a very smart girl after all. She said that the cabs she called always quoted the standard fares, about 6 grivnas, and that they never try to overcharge you. Then she looked a little agitated when she remarked that I ought to trust her decisions in her own city. I didn't understand why I had to feel guilty just for following a safe practice.

The cab took us to this big restaurant with an Egyptian theme inside. There was a Sphinx and some Tutankamun type statues, along with a disco dance floor, which was empty since it was early. We sat down at a big table and ordered some pizza, drinks, and ice cream. When Elena saw that I had ordered a vegetarian pizza, she thought it was strange that I didn't want any meat, chicken or fish on it. I felt unfortunate that someone as bright as her was also kind of judgmental.

When the waitress interrupted our conversation and brought our food, she wanted payment immediately. I wasn't used to this and expected to pay at the end, so I felt that she was being rude and pushy, and I showed it on my face. After paying her with disdain, I continued talking to Elena. I found out that when I didn't call her again for four weeks after we last talked, which was just before I left for my trip, she thought that I had found someone else and changed my mind about visiting her. So she mentally wrote me off as a cancellation on her. She knew that in these long distance correspondences, it was to be expected that some might just disappear at some point after they changed their minds. Therefore, it was a big surprise to her to get a call from a translator that told her I was about to come. I felt bad about this and that I couldn't find a way to get in touch with her when I was in Russia. She informed me that I could have sent her a telegram from the post office, which would have been quick and efficient. But I never knew about that option.

I then decided that sooner or later, I would have to tell her the truth as to what I was doing in Russia. I don't know why I did that, but at the time, my thought was that it would be a quick way to screen her out. If she was worth having, she would be understanding about my decisions and actions. I didn't want to waste anymore time or money with ladies who weren't relationship material. And besides, I was only going to reveal to her my failures with Olga in St. Petersburg and Julia in Cherepovets. I wasn't going to reveal about my success with and feelings for Natasha yet, unless it was definite that there was no possibility of relations between us.

Therefore, I thought that revealing those two failures and the lessons I learned from them would make her feel glorified that she was not like those two women, and would also give me a reason to compliment her. It would show that I learned some lessons and was now ready for a serious person. In addition, I felt that she had a right to know the truth, and my conscience told me that I owed that to her. Also, I thought that she would ask me about it sooner or later anyway, so I might as well get it out now. (When I think about it now though, I think that since my heart was still with Natasha, I felt that Elena was expendable and so I didn't care about the risk of losing her.)

So after she told me that some friends had visited her the past few weeks and that she had fun with them, I told her that I had some stories to tell her about too. I proceeded to admit to her that I had visited two other ladies from internet agencies before her in Russia. I summarized how Olga ditched me for a guy she met on the social tours just before I arrived, and how I shockingly found out about it later on at Pulkovskaya Hotel. I also described her clueless, one-dimensional personality, and gold digger nature that made her a pure taker who just uses people for money. Then I briefly described Julia's moody character and her hot/cold treatment of me. And also how she cared more about my money than me. (I made sure to leave out the part about the immoral exchanges and paid affections of course.) Elena listened but I could tell from her face that she wasn't very happy to hear about all this. When I asked how she felt about all this, she replied that although she was sorry for how I was mistreated by these two women, she wasn't happy to hear the news about my visit to them, and was now having mixed feelings. She said she would need time to sort out her feelings now.

When I asked her what story she had from the friends who visited her a few weeks ago, she said that her story was not as interesting as what I had experienced, but that a foreign friend had come to visit her and they went around and had a nice time. (She later admitted to me that this foreign friend was one of the men who wrote to her through the marriage agency, so I don't understand the double standard here.) I could tell that she looked troubled and distracted though, and I felt that she was not reacting to my news as I had expected.

Trying to change to a lighthearted subject, we talked about other things, but I felt that the chemistry was damaged, perhaps permanently. She cracked a few jokes that I didn't get, such as that after dinner she was going to come back to my hotel room and dance with me til she owned me (it was something like that). I wondered if she was trying to make a pass at me, but she explained that it was a common joke. I didn't really get it, and although I had been warned beforehand on the internet that Russian humor was different than American humor and that I might have trouble understanding it, I realized that something deeper was becoming apparent here. The signs were already showing that we were mentally incompatible because of these little misunderstandings between us, from the practice of asking the taxi fare in advance, to simple humorous comments, to looks of confusion on our faces. I knew from experience, especially with my third girlfriend, that when two people continue to have misunderstandings over little things, that it was an obvious sign that they were mentally incompatible.

Deep down, I knew this was probably the case here, but being the tolerant patient person I am, I decided to continue with things to see how it would play out. In addition, I also began to see that she was an over-analytical type, and in my experience, people like that tend to always find things that were wrong or that bothered them, because the very nature of their mentality led them to look for imperfections and dwell on them. Again, I knew this from the experience with my third girlfriend, who was a perfect example of this.

When we talked about our plans for visiting Odessa, Kiev or the beaches along the Black Sea, Elena said that she had already given it a lot of thought and decided that she wouldn't be comfortable living with me in some accommodations far away. I offered that if we went, I could get two rooms for us instead of one then, but she still looked reluctant and said she would think about it. As it got late, the lights in the place dimmed, and a few people were now dancing on the Egyptian themed disco floor. I asked if she wanted to dance a little but she said she wasn't in the mood and was too tired. She said we should leave soon since she has college classes tomorrow. Elena said that tomorrow I was invited for lunch at her home, and that I would get to meet her mom and friends. I told her that I would also present to her the presents I brought for her. We left the restaurant and outside, she looked for a payphone to call for a taxi again.

After a long wait, it arrived and along the way, the driver stopped and said something to Elena. She translated and said that we would have to pay a few more grivnas because the driver needed to take a detour. Remembering that the same tactic was used by the St. Petersburg taxi driver back in Chapter 7, I protested and said that she should contest it because it was a common scam they used to increase the price a little. Elena looked upset and then said "Ok then! Let me pay for this ride since I make so much money, 8 dollars a month!" Confused, I said "No, no Elena. I didn't ask you to pay, it was just to protest against a cheap common scam. I just don't like to be taken advantage of, that's all." Right then, I disliked how she twisted my meaning around and I was baffled by her logic system. But her outburst just confirmed to me again that we were mentally incompatible because of our misunderstandings. When we got to my hotel, I reluctantly paid the driver the increased fare, and then Elena took the cab home from there. She said she would call me tomorrow to tell me what time she was picking me up.

Back in my hotel room, I had mixed feelings about tonight. But I didn't care though, since I wanted to call Natasha really bad now. After getting instructions from the night receptionist in the lobby, I picked up the phone in my room and called Natasha's cell phone number. She answered and I was so happy to hear her voice. I told her I was in Ukraine now and that I missed her so much (in Russian). She

reciprocated and said that she missed me and added the word "bolshoy" which meant "big" or "a lot". Then we talked about her day a little bit and after that I said I would try to call her again in a few days. I felt a little better now after hearing her voice again.

### **Chapter 38: Visit to Elena's home and the inevitable decision**

The next morning, the plumbing specialist came in and fixed the hot water valve in my shower. I finally was able to take a nice long hot shower. Afterward, I got a call from a strange lady fluent in English who asked if I wanted a massage or hot sex tonight. I wondered if this was some kind of game because I had never received this kind of call before. When I asked her who she was and how she got my number, she said that she was a call girl and had a contract with the hotel to solicit her services to the guests. The hotel in turn would get their share of the profits of course. It was totally legal, she told me, and normal in this country. When I said maybe and asked about her age and appearance, she became evasive. That was a bad sign to me, so I said no, but she kept being pushy and trying to persuade me, so I just said I wasn't interested but she could leave me her number in case I changed my mind. She left me her cell number, and asked if I wanted her to call again tonight, but I said no and that I would call her if I was interested. What a weird experience.

Thinking ahead, I made a call to an agency office in Simferopol, Ukraine to leave a message for one of my backup girls, Irina. I said that I had arrived in Ukraine and that I could visit her in about a week if she wanted. They said they would deliver the message to her and that I should call back later to get the response. Then I waited for Elena's call, but got impatient waiting, so I decided to go down to the lobby to see if I could get some snacks in the hotel restaurant while I waited. In the lobby, I told the receptionist that if Elena called for me, to come get me in the restaurant so I could take the call. As I entered the restaurant, I suddenly remembered that yesterday when I checked in, they told me that one free breakfast in the restaurant was included with my stay, but that it was from 8am to 11am. I looked at my watch and was dismayed to find out that it was just past 11am now. I asked the waitress in the little cozy restaurant if I could still get the breakfast, but she said that it was too late and that I would have to order from the menu now. I knew I should save my appetite for Elena's home cooked meal, but I was so hungry now that I felt that I could use a snack at least.

Looking at the menu, which had an English section this time, I found the cheese spaghetti item to be irresistible (and it was so cheap too). It reminded me of the brown mizithra cheese spaghetti item on the menu at "The Old Spaghetti Factory" restaurant back in the states. So I sat down and ordered it. Since I noticed that only some items on the menu had English translations next to them, while others didn't, I asked the wait staff about it out of curiosity, saying "Pacheemoo this have Angliski, but this doesn't?" but they didn't seem to understand my question or know how to explain it to me. Two fellow guests sitting at a nearby table overheard my question and laughed at me for some reason. When my meal came along with pieces of bread, it was so good and really hit the spot. I felt that this was a light meal and that soon my appetite would return again for Elena's meal.

Afterward, I went up to my room and within a few minutes Elena called and said I could come over now. She also said that she called earlier but was told that I was in the restaurant (I was mad that they didn't come tell me!). I told her I only had a snack and was still hungry. She told me to come by taxi and show the driver the same address that I used to write letters to her before. Down in the lobby, I had the receptionist call a cab for me.



With my gift bag in hand, I showed the cab driver the paper with her address on it, and then tried to tell him that I wanted to stop and pick up flowers on the way first. I showed him the word "flowers" in the dictionary and then pointed to Elena's address and he understood. He took me to a flower stand where I got a wrapped rose bouquet and then we continued to Elena's home. When we reached the foot of her apartment building, she was standing outside waiting so we could spot her. I didn't recognize her at first though because she was wearing shorts and T-shirts, which was more casual than I had seen her before. I paid the driver and then gave her the rose bouquet. She said a very nonchalant thank you and then led me up to her floor.

Inside, her mom and grandmother greeted me. They seemed very warm and enthusiastic. Her home was very well decorated and organized. I took off my shoes and changed into slippers, which was the usual habit in Russian homes (it's also the usual habit in Asian homes as well, so I was used to it). I presented the gifts I brought for them from Washington, which included a box of Cherry Orchard Aplets and Cotlets and a nice bottle of red wine. I also gave them one of the large Tula cookies I had. They liked the aplets and cotlets very much, and also the red wine which tasted a lot better than I expected (since I'm not normally fond of red wine, and prefer white wine instead). I myself had never tried the brand of red wine I brought, but I heard it was good. They only moderately liked the Tula cookie though.

They brought me a series of treats as well, both of the salty and of the sweet kind. They were very good, and Elena made sure that they were all meatless. I became full very fast. Somehow it was so hot in the flat, so when I mentioned it, they brought out a fan for me. Elena showed me her coin collection from all over the world, and then I remembered the Canadian coins I brought for her. I gave her the denominations and then an American penny, nickel and dime (I had already ran out of quarters by then) which she didn't have in her collection. I told her that when I returned to the states, I would mail her the American quarter she was missing. Elena only lived with her mother since her parents were divorced. Her mother was a doctor, and her grandmother worked at a beach resort 40 minutes from here.

After lunch, Elena showed me her room and I was surprised to see a poster of a boxer on her wall. She didn't seem like the boxing type fan at all. She introduced the boxer and told me who he was, and that she was a fan of it. Then we sat down on the couch in her room and talked a bit. When I asked her if we could visit the beach resort that her grandmother worked at, she said she couldn't today because her family had to go to a funeral that this afternoon that a friend invited them too. When I asked if we could do it tomorrow, she said she didn't know. I got a queasy feeling in my stomach now as I sensed that she was reluctant to travel anywhere with me.

Then I brought up the subject of our plans to go to Odessa or Kiev and when she said "I think you should go to Odessa, but not with me." my heart started to sink as I knew what she was implying. When I asked why she was saying that, she started to explain to me that she had stayed up all night thinking about us and came to some conclusions. She said that she didn't like how things went last night at the restaurant, and with my confessions of what had happened before coming here. She said that what I told her made her feel like she was nothing special and was just the next person in line for me.

When I explained to her my reasons for revealing those things to her (which were outlined in Chapter 37), she said that those reasons were wrong, that it would have been better to keep those things a secret or even to have lied to her about them, and in fact she would have preferred that I did. I felt confused

by such an admission because I thought that the saying "honesty is the best policy" might be true, but now I realized that it wasn't. And furthermore, I realized that honesty wasn't such a virtue after all since it can be used against you as well. (What a great excuse to justify lying and omission of truth now, I guess) I knew that such a realization was very politically and morally incorrect, but the reality was that this experience and other experiences I had before had shown that to be the case.

Elena also said that if I hadn't made those confessions of why I went to Russia, that she would not have asked me about it to probe for the truth anyway. This made me feel very foolish indeed for adopting such a clumsy strategy. She also said that in her philosophy, she doesn't believe in giving men who hurt her a second chance, because if they do it once, it will only be a matter of time before they do it again. I remarked that I've heard that reasoning from people before, but I never agreed with it.

Besides what I did, Elena also cited the misunderstandings we had yesterday that indicated that we had a mental incompatibility. I admitted that I had come to the same conclusion too after the misunderstandings we had yesterday. She said that she felt insulted when I tried to check the price of the taxi fares before getting in, because I was in effect saying that I didn't trust her judgment in her own city. I apologized and claimed that I was only following common safe practices, and that people don't usually condemn me for that habit. Referring to the increased fare last night, she also said that the driver's claim to the increased fare was legit and not a scam, and when she said "Ok then! Let me pay for this ride since I make so much money, 8 dollars a month!" she was angry at me. I calmly explained to her why I protested that and about the experience I had in St. Petersburg when the driver did the same thing, and that I was just trying to stop someone from taking advantage of us as a matter of principle.

Then she said that while I was in the restroom of the restaurant last night, the waitress came over and told her how unmanly I acted when I counted my change, and asked the price of everything. The waitress said that she never saw a man who was so efficient and calculating with his money before. I laughed at how outrageous that was, and said that where I'm from, it is extremely common and normal to count change that's been given to you, in fact, the people giving you change are supposed to count it for you to show you that it's accurate. I told her that I couldn't tell her how many times I have spotted errors on my receipts and in the change given back to me, so it was logical to check it.

But she claimed that the Americans she met on the beach resort her grandmother worked at were not like that and were very generous. I told her that that was an exception since those Americans were probably affluent or else afraid of looking stingy, and that back in the USA, most people will count their change and ask about prices. After all, we are not as rich as they think, and the liabilities and debt we have usually balance out the income. In any case, I was mad at that waitress for gossiping about me like that behind my back, and I wished I could give her a piece of my mind. What, does she think that to be manly, one should throw money like it's endless? How stupid.

To top it all off, she said that when we walked together, she would often hear people mutter "You prostitute." as we walked by them. She didn't like that, she said, and she would only put up with it if there was something special between us but there wasn't, so she didn't feel it was worth it to endure it. I was surprised because I didn't notice people muttering anything as we passed them, and besides, none of the other women I went out with during my trip so far complained about that. Who knows, perhaps it happened to the other girls I went out with too, but they just weren't as sensitive about it as Elena was. But after she told me this, I realized that one of the advantages of living in the USA is that people

don't do that to you, at least not verbally to someone they don't even know. Elena also said that since she thought I wasn't coming anymore, that she didn't prepare her schedule for me, and so wouldn't have much time for me anyway.

During our serious talk, Elena also confessed to me that the foreign friend who visited her a few weeks ago was an American man who had been writing her that she met through the marriage agency too. She said that he came to visit only her, and that he only had a week. There was not any special chemistry between them, but they had a nice time visiting a few nearby places and having good conversation. They departed as friends. She also showed me a huge stack of envelopes and letters, saying that these were all the men who wrote her from the agencies. There were about a hundred letters with photographs and gifts here, she said, but that she only gave her home phone number to me and one other guy, because we were her top two choices. She thought we were both quality relationship material.

When I claimed that it seemed like a double standard that she was condemning me for visiting multiple while having multiple men visit her too, she claimed that she was much more selective than I had been, and that she was only serious about me and one other person. In any case, she said that it was better if I don't waste any more time here in Mariupol, and that my time would be better spent visiting the other women here that I had as backups. (We agreed before my trip that I would visit her first in Ukraine and then if things didn't work out, I could go visit some other women, or get more introductions from the marriage agencies around here.)

I reluctantly told her that she was right, but that I felt that she judged me too quickly. After all, just because there are misunderstandings at first doesn't mean that they won't start to diminish as you get to know each other and become acquainted with each other's ways. But she said that her intuition told her strongly that her conclusions were right, and that this was her decision. She apologized if she hurt me in any way, and that she hoped we could still be friends at least. I said ok and then asked if she could accompany me to the train station tomorrow to help me buy tickets for Dnepropetrovsk or Simferopol, where my next two backup women were. She said it would be no problem.

With nothing to lose, I told her about the experience with Natasha in Tula and the special feelings we had for each other. She said that if that's so, then I ought to follow up on those special feelings. I replied that I would later on, but that I couldn't go back to Russia now because my visa there was expired. Soon it came time for her and her mom to leave, so they called a cab to take me back to my hotel.

## **Chapter 39: Planning my next move, and a wandering night**

I rode back to my hotel feeling a bit ego deflated. That was the first time during this trip that I had been rejected so directly and clearly. The other rejections I had experienced were much more subtle and non-verbal. But I appreciated Elena's frankness though. At least she wasn't going to play games, use me, or waste my time either. Back at the hotel, I realized that my options now were to visit one of my backup women. I had three backup women in Ukraine. Evgeniya in Dnepropetrovsk, Irina in Simferopol, and another Elena in Vinnitsa. Evgeniya and Irina were very attractive in their photos, while Elena in Vinnitsa was not as attractive. Therefore, I decided to go to either Dnepropetrovsk or Simferopol next. Looking on the Ukraine map in my Lonely Planet travel guide, I saw that Dnepropetrovsk was just

west of here halfway between here and Simferopol. Therefore, it was logical to try to go to Dnepropetrovsk first. So I went to my room and called Evgeniya.

Now Evgeniya was an extremely cute and petite 19 year old girl who looked very young like a child, but seemed very proper and nice to me. She was the same sign as me, Pisces, but she spoke almost no English and when we talked on the phone, she cutely would only say "Da. Da. Da." and "Ya ni panila." The rest I couldn't understand. But I would call her anyway and if we couldn't communicate, I would either try to find someone in the hotel to translate or else have Elena talk to her the next day. I dialed her number and her sweet cute voice picked up. When I asked for Evgeniya, she said the usual "Da." and then I said, "This is Winston. I am in Ukraina (not a misspelling, it is the Russian slang name for Ukraine)." She acted surprised and said "Huh? Oh!" I tried telling her that I was in Mariupol right now, but she didn't understand and didn't seem to recognize the name. I said the name "Mariupol" many times, but she still didn't get it and it wasn't that hard to pronounce. I couldn't believe she didn't know where Mariupol was since it wasn't that far on the map from Dnepropetrovsk. (She's probably not an "A" student in geography!)

Then I said I could come visit her tomorrow if she wanted to, but she didn't understand that either, so I just told her I would call back with a translator and ended the conversation after that. Then I called back the agency in Simferopol about the message I left for Irina earlier. They said that they called Irina's grandmother, who talked with Irina, and that she would be happy to meet me in Simferopol at the agency's office. They just wanted to know when. I said probably in about five days or so, and that I would call them back and keep them updated.

Having nothing else to do, I wandered around the hotel, going outside to the outdoor cafe, then the recreation room, the bar, etc. There were some affluent looking people downstairs in the outdoor cafe but I ended up talking to some lady in the dark who was taking notes on a pad. It soon rained hard, so I went in. Later that night, I started looking for guests who spoke English so they could call Evgeniya for me. I found one guy at the mini expresso bar in the lobby who spoke some English and agreed to help me.

After paying the receptionist a small fee to use the lobby phone to make a long distance call, he called Evgeniya to deliver my message. When he was done, he said that she would be happy for me to come visit her tomorrow, and that she just needed to know the time of my arrival. I thanked him and offered to buy him a drink, but he said he'd take 20 grivnas instead. I looked in my wallet but I only had 50 grivna bills. When I told him that, he said "Ok I'll take 50 grivnas then." I looked at him sarcastically with a "yeah right, what do you think I am, Santa Claus?" type of look and then said "Look, I just said I wanted to buy you a drink for your help." and then he said nevermind. What a cheap and casual attempt, I thought. In my country, it is shameful and rude to outright ask for cash like that.

Scoping around, I heard music coming from the door of the other bigger restaurant in the lobby (not the one I ate at earlier) so I opened the door to see what was going on. There were two ladies and two gentlemen dancing with a singer on a small stage. One of the ladies put her hand on my head poking through the door, and pushed it out. Everyone inside laughed. Weirder out, I closed the door and went exploring around some more. Later, I came back again and with the door to the big restaurant open, the same lady who pushed me out now beckoned me to come on in to dance. I said that I was a bad dancer, but she said to just come in anyway, so I went in and hopped and swirled with them as best as I could. They were all having a good time alright, although no one seemed to dance that well. Afterward, I sat

at a table there to order food. The pasta dishes there were good and cheap, so why not? This time I ordered tomato pasta, and afterward the waiter looked at me strangely and said "That's it?" I said "Yeah, I just want a snack, not a meal." Why was it his business what I ordered? Is he trying to tell me how to run my life or something? How weird. It was very good and I tried to order a second helping but the kitchen was closed by then.

After the meal, it was about 10pm now so I went up to my room. Soon that call girl who called me in the morning called again. I kept telling her that I wasn't interested, but she kept persisting. So I asked her age again and what she looked like. She continued being evasive about her age again, so I said that I am only interested in doing something like this with the 18-25 age group. She kept trying to convince me to accept otherwise, and even offered to come visit me so we could negotiate in person. I knew that she was probably far beyond my age range preference, so her visit would have been pointless and would also have made me feel obligated to give her something for coming out here. I told her this, but she kept insisting and even said that she wouldn't make me pay her taxi fare or anything for coming to my hotel. I didn't believe her and knew that if she came, she would try something to convince me to pay for her services. When I asked what she charged for sex, she said 100 dollars an hour. Whoa! That was way more than the 20 dollars per hour rate in Tula! Who does she think she is? Just because I'm a foreigner, she thinks she can get five times the usual rate out of me? No way, especially since she wasn't in my age range preference anyway. I would only pay for someone who was attractive to me and gave me a high to be around. So after debating her for a long time, she finally gave up. That was the most pushy call girl I ever met!

Feeling bored and lonely due to the rejection I got from Elena this afternoon, I went down to the lobby to talk to the nightwatch staff. I told them I couldn't sleep, and they said "Why? You want a woman?" I thought they were teasing me, but then I saw that they were seriously trying to be helpful. He said that he could call one for me and she would be here in 15 minutes. Then I could decide if I liked her or not. There was no obligation. I told him the name of the lady who called me in my room, and he knew who she was because she worked with this hotel all the time. When I asked him if she was attractive, he just said so-so. (I knew it!) After thinking it over a while, I decided that the experience might help pep me up after the rejection from Elena. I said ok but only if he could find some girls between 18 and 25, and of course don't call that girl who called me. He agreed but said it might be difficult to find girls in that range, but he would try. I thought to myself, "What am I doing?" again.

He made some calls, and soon a lady walked in who looked slutty, fake, and like she was trying to cover her age. She immediately sat on my lap, put her arm around me, and greeted me. I immediately recognized from her voice that she was the same lady who called me in my room! That bastard! I told him specifically and clearly not to call her, and he did anyway and lied to me about it. How disrespectful! When I asked her name, she was reluctant to tell me. Then I said her name for her (I don't remember what it was right now) and she reluctantly admitted it but tried to change the subject to what I wanted tonight. I reiterated my objections that I already stated to her many times, and after a while, she gave up and sat on the other couch to talk to the nightwatch people.

For the next hour, they both talked about me and what I was doing here. I explained my purpose of finding a serious long term partner and he said that should be no problem because there were plenty of girls here who wanted to go to the USA. But I said that I haven't met many so far, and that most of the girls I met either wanted to stay in their own country, or else go to Europe to be closer to home and be able to come back to visit their family easier. When I asked about the tall blonde gorgeous waitress in

the restaurant I saw this morning, he said that she was married. He said he would introduce me to some girls who wanted to go to the USA tomorrow, but I said that it was too late because I was leaving for Dnepropetrovsk tomorrow. I offered that if he could introduce me to some girls tomorrow morning, and I liked them, I might stay a while longer for them. He said ok and asked what I would give him if a girl he introduced me to worked out with me? I said, "I don't know. What would you want?" He didn't know though, so I just said I would give him credit and invite him to the wedding. I guess he needed a reward as an incentive. lol Anyway, it was now 4am though, so I bid them goodnight and went to bed.

## **Chapter 40: Deep conversation and playful goodbye**

The next morning, I made sure not to miss the breakfast included with my stay this time. It turned out to be some simple things stacked in trays on a table, and one breakfast item from the menu. Some of the items tasted strange, but others were ok. The juice was good at least. But what I wanted most of all was the tall blonde gorgeous waitress there. She had these long smooth white legs in sexy shoes, which were killing me because legs and feet are fetishes of mine, especially when they looked unblemished like hers were. But she was so tall and like the nightwatch man said, she was married, so I had no chance, but I could dream at least. I wish I could take her to the USA and rub her legs all day :) (had she been the call girl, I would have accepted in a heartbeat!) After breakfast, I sat and watched the TV in the restaurant. The waitress sat down to watch it at the table across from me too. I tried talking to her but she didn't speak English. When I cracked a joke, I used it as a chance to tap her leg for fun (but not my favorite part of it). (Oh yeah!)

After breakfast, I called Elena and then I brought the luggage down from my room and put it in their storage closet. I explained that I would be taking the train sometime today. Then I waited for Elena and she showed up punctually as usual. I thought she would give me weird looks after yesterday, but instead she was very warm and in a good mood. As we left, the waiter who served me spaghetti last night said something about me to her that sounded like a snide insult. I asked Elena what he said but she kept saying "You don't want to know." (What a cowardly prick) We first went to the train station to get tickets for Dnepropetrovsk, and I reimbursed her for the cab fare she paid to come to my hotel. (Since finding out that she earned 8 dollars a month, I was afraid to let her pay for anything.) The departure time was 4pm and we weren't sure about the arrival time, but Elena said it looked like 5pm. Only an hour away, I thought? It looked close on the map, but not that close. I was perplexed for a while. If it was only an hour away, why not take a bus instead, I asked. But Elena said she heard that the bus to there would be more expensive than the train, which was dirt cheap by our standards. (I later found out that Elena was way off about the arrival time.) On the way back to my hotel, Elena asked me if I would like some company today until my departure. I humbly said "Sure, if you have some time that is." She said she did and I appreciated it. She said she would take me to see some of her city for a few hours.

When we got back to my hotel, she called Evgeniya for me and told her my arrival time in Dnepropetrovsk. Then we did a little walking tour of her city. First we went to a mall and had some snacks at the cafe inside of it. Then we walked through some parks in her university and through some city parks as well. They were very nice and well maintained. This seemed like a middle or upper class city compared to the rest. But of course, this was the first Ukrainian city I've been to, so I had no idea what the rest of the country was like. We had some deep and substantive conversations. She was very intelligent and had a lot of deep thoughts to share. It was a shame that I was leaving her so soon. I

would love to have gotten to know her better. Now I kind of regretted being so honest and telling her about why I was in Russia, but as I already learned during this trip, everything happens for a reason, so perhaps this was for the best too. But it seemed that we were starting to connect now, which was ironic because I was about to leave.

We talked about a lot of things, including our reasons for joining this agency, and so forth. She still said she didn't like men who came and visited multiple women. But I explained to her our reasons for doing so and the tactics involved, including the advice that us Russian-wife seekers usually give each other on group email lists. I explained that it made sense to male logic to visit multiple women since you didn't know who you would click with, and the high risk of visiting only one woman whom you don't even know how it will work out. I said that it was a probability game to us, and compared it to pulling the handle multiple times on a slot machine. "The more times you pull, the higher chance you have of hitting it off. That's how a lot of men think." I said.

And of course, I told her that the men who come here are always advised never to tell the women they visit that they are visiting other women too (a mistake I made with her of course). Therefore, the men who came to visit her may have visited others without her knowledge, but she knew the last one didn't because she saw his plane tickets. It turned out that several other men have visited her before, but they didn't work out with her and ended up as friends. Like me, she also put them in one of the hotels here. I also told her about the silliness of the Russian Bride List I was on, and how any lie told about you there is automatically believed by everyone. I told her that the latest lie about me was that I was in Colorado fabricating all my trip report updates to the list for fun, and that some people were actually believing it. We had a good laugh about that.

Elena said that after all that she's gone through with men from the marriage agencies, she's decided to take a break from it for now to figure out what she really wants. Right now, she is focused on her studies at the university, in which she majors in metallurgy and steel manufacturing. She said that both of us seem to be in a wandering stage, and are probably not ready for a serious relationship or marriage like we think we are.

When I told her about my luck or fate in meeting Natasha at the museum in St. Petersburg, she said that perhaps she should start visiting museums soon then. lol She said she wanted to know how the rest of my trip here went, so I told her I would call her or write her about it later. When I mentioned that I had been writing journal entry updates of my trip, she said that she wanted a copy and to send her one after my trip. I said maybe because some of the contents may make me look bad (such as the chapters with Julia!) but that if I did, I would edit it first. lol We seemed to understand each other well now, and could talk at ease since it was understood that we were just friends. She no longer had a problem with hearing about the other girls on my trip, and was instead curious about them now.

When I asked if she would like to see highlights of my trip from my camcorder, at first she said no thank you, but later she got curious and changed her mind. I rewound it and showed her some of Olga in St. Petersburg, then some clips of Julia in Cherepovets as well. When she heard Julia say that she loved me and then right after that that she loved Vitalik, Elena said "She loves everybody." We also watched Julia's sexy dancing scene. Elena agreed that Julia seemed crazy and immature. When I sarcastically asked "Wouldn't you love to meet her? Wouldn't you both get along great?" she said "No way." Then I showed her clips of Natasha in Tula, and afterward she said that Natasha was more attractive than Julia. I said "Really? But Julia is sexier by conventional standards." but Elena disagreed

and said that Natasha looked smarter and had more class. I said she was definitely right about that. She said that in retrospect, it might have been better if I had visited her first and then the other two primary girls afterward, but I explained to her about their schedules and of course that I wouldn't have met Natasha if I had done it that way. Then it was time for us to start heading back now.

I took some footage of Elena for the first time now when we were on a city street. Then as we took a side trail back to my hotel that ran along a high overview of the Black Sea, I took some more video footage of the view of the water and ships. When I focused the camera on her again, I asked "Do you have anything to say?" She said "Yes I do." and then proceeded with a nice speech about how she was glad to meet me, that she was sorry there wasn't something special between us, and that she hopes we can be friends and that I will call and write her later. And finally, that she wished me luck in finding my other half. It was no cliché BS, and she sounded very sincere and warm about it all. I was touched by her kindness and thanked her. At least I knew I would be leaving with a good feeling now. She seemed like a close friend or sister to me now.

Then I joked that maybe as I took off on the plane in Kiev, that she might run alongside the airstrip and yell, "Winston, wait, don't go! I love you!" like a scene from the movies. I knew that wasn't going to happen, but it was fun to imagine it. We got back to the hotel to get my luggage from their storage room, and then went to the train station. When we got to the front of the station and the sloping walkway where I rolled my luggage down, Elena nostalgically said "This is where the story began" which was funny because those were my exact thoughts as well. (It's funny when you're reminiscing how it seems like it was only yesterday when you first got here.) Before I got onboard the train, I gave her a last hug and jokingly said "See you on the airstrip in Kiev, maybe."

From the window next to my seat, we looked out at each other and flirted warm goodbyes for a long time. We waved at each other, blew kisses at each other, smiled, used sign language to say I will miss you, and she used finger communication to tell me to write her and call her when I got back home. I also kept waving my hand at my face to indicate how hot it was in here, and I had to keep wiping my forehead because sweat kept dripping down. She looked sympathetic about it but tried to cheer me up. When I pretended to cry, she shook her head and said "no" and then drew letters in the air with her fingers that spelled "Happy Ending." As we kept repeating these things in cycles, I took out my camcorder to film some of it, since it was such lighthearted fun, and I wanted to capture some of it. Then the train jolted as it started to move, and we both playfully gasped at each other. We continued to blow kisses until she was out of sight. As I sat back in my seat, I thought "What a nice quality girl. It's such a pity that I left so soon. I wonder if it was a mistake."

The temperature inside the train started cooling down as it went faster. There weren't many people on this train except some guys playing cards and one young girl laying down. I soon became the center of their attention after talking to them. I amused them with my magic card tricks, and then they offered me some vodka but I refused. Wondering if it was really only an hour to Dnepropetrovsk, I tried asking them when we would reach Dnepropetrovsk, but I couldn't understand their answers, and they made gestures that seemed to say "Don't worry about it. Sit down and relax."

When it got to 5pm I started getting anxious and wondering if my stop was near. Each time the train stopped, even for just pit stops, I would point outside and ask them "Dnepropetrovsk?" and they would all reply "Niet. Niet." and brushed their arms as if to say "Don't worry about it. Sit down and relax." One guy even sounded like he was telling me to take a nap. I soon found out why though. A younger



guy nearby came and wrote down the time we would reach Dnepropetrovsk. I couldn't believe it and thought there must be some mistake. He wrote "00:15" which if my knowledge of military time is correct, is 12:15 midnight! Holy cow! That's way off. I looked at my train ticket in disbelief and then saw in dismay that next to the 4pm departure time, were the numbers "00.15". I wondered how Elena and I could have missed that. It was right next to the 4pm departure time! Perhaps the zeroes are just ignored by the human brain or something. But I felt silly for being 7 hours off. I didn't understand though, why it would take 8 hours to get to Dnepropetrovsk. On the map, it looked very close to Mariupol, almost like a neighbor.

But now I was very worried and concerned. Since Elena thought the arrival time was 5pm, she probably told that to Evgeniya on the phone too. If Evgeniya was waiting at the train station now, what would she do when I didn't show up? Surely, she wouldn't wait there for me until midnight. I just hoped that she would somehow find out the correct time of my arrival. I know that anyone could just easily find out at the train station, but I also know that some people hate asking questions too (such as my own father) so I just hoped that she wasn't one of them. I explained this to the guy who told me the correct time of arrival in Dnepropetrovsk, and he offered to help by calling her for me on his cell phone. I said that was a good idea and asked how much I would have to pay him, but he said not to worry about it. However, he couldn't get it to work now for some reason. Perhaps his phone couldn't pick up a signal here or couldn't make long distance calls. It seemed that he was the only one here who had a cell phone though, so there was nothing else I could do but wait until I got there. I was just afraid that if I got there and she wasn't there, that she might not answer the phone at midnight either if she was asleep. Everyone there told me not to worry about it though, because she would probably figure out my arrival schedule somehow. I sat down prepared for a long ride and thought, "Oh great. After all that I've been through, now I'm on a very long train ride to see a girl who looks like a kid. How nice indeed." I just felt so emotionally exhausted now, and wondered what would happen next on this trip.

## **Chapter 41: Picked up by a teen model in Dnepropetrovsk**

At 10pm, everyone was sleeping on the train, but I couldn't go to sleep since my stop was in two hours, so I had nothing to do but sit in silence. I felt awkward about meeting someone who looked like a child, and wondered what the point of it was and what good could come out of it. I felt like I was robbing the baby from its cradle. I only hoped that she only looked like a child and didn't act like one. (If you want to see the photos I saw of her beforehand, here is the link to her profile on AFA:

<http://www.loveme.com/women/info31141.htm>) To top it all off, she didn't even speak any English hardly. What would we do? How would we communicate? And furthermore, what exactly was the point of this bouncing from girl to the next? I would rather just spend the whole time with one girl. It would have been more meaningful that way.

When it was midnight, I got my luggage out to prepare for departure. The train went over a bridge overlooking a nice moonlit river view, and then stopped in the next city. The train stewardess came up to me and beckoned to me that it was my stop. I said "Dnepropetrovsk?" and she nodded. With everyone still asleep, I rolled my luggage through the aisle and brought it down one by one. I stepped down to the platform into the quiet stillness of the midnight air. Very few people got off and those that did soon vanished. Following the usual maneuver, I glanced around for any sign of Evgeniya quickly and then right when I started walking in the lighted direction of the platform, I saw a tall figure in purple come out of the darkness and approach me. I couldn't believe it! I felt stunned as I realized it

was her. She looked much more gorgeous than she did in her pictures. In fact, she looked like a teen model. She was very skinny, wore a pretty purple dress, and had gorgeous make up on. She was cute and hot at the same time! It was almost surreal. (In her photos, she was very cute but dressed plain and casual without makeup.) She was tall at that time was she was wearing high heels. I recognized her but said "Evgeniya?" anyway.

She smiled and slightly nodded her head. I walked to her slowly and have her a hug that lasted a long time. The reason it was such a long hug wasn't because she was so glad to see me, but more so because she didn't know when to let go until I did. Lol I could tell she was kind of an indecisive girl. Then, since she was so well made up, I asked a passerby to take a photo of us for me. (in my online album too) In her other arm, she carried a big English-Russian dictionary cause she couldn't hardly speak any English.

To everything I said, she replied "Ya ni panila" in such a cute and endearing voice that I began to love hearing it. (It means "I don't understand" in the feminine tense, which I can't use of course. Men can only use "Ya ni panimayu" or "Ya ni ponyil" while women can use "Ya ni panimayu" or "Ya ni panila") We walked down the platform and she dragged along my smaller cart for me. When we paused on the steps leading down into the tunnel walkway to carry the luggage down over the steps, I took out her scanned letter from my backpack printed out from the internet cafe in St. Petersburg. She recognized it and blushed. Since she couldn't carry my cart over the steps, I carried both of them myself.

When we got to the other side of the tunnel, we emerged in front of the station with a big parking lot in front of us. I asked if she wanted a drink and when she said yes I went to a small snack bar next to us and got us both some small Sprite bottles. There were two policemen circling around and when they looked at me, I became nervous. I asked Evgeniya, "Ok where are we going now?" and she said "Ya ni panila." I tried asking several variations of it, including "Where now?", "You and me, where?" and "Where we go?" but each time she just said "Ya ni panila." It was so cute the way she said it, but it wasn't the time for cuteness now since the policemen circling around me at this time of night were making me nervous. I had no idea if the policemen here were corrupt or not, since I learned that they were only in some cities. So I took out my dictionary but in my rush, I couldn't find a phrase that said "Where are we going now?" so I showed her the word "where" in the dictionary instead. She pondered my meaning but still wasn't sure what I was asking, so I said "Evgeniya, um, you and me, Gdeh?" and pointed toward the city with my hands making the "where" sign. She looked puzzled, and then said "Ya ni panila" again.

I couldn't believe it. Obviously, this girl wasn't very bright. Most people I met so far who couldn't speak any English would have gotten my meaning by now, but she was still lost. So now we had another problem. Even if we got through this, how were we going to communicate during my visit here if she couldn't understand the simplest things I said? Not only could she not understand any English, but she didn't have the nonverbal communication skills that Natasha and others had.

This went on for a while, about 15 to 20 minutes, and she just stood there looking clueless. This was now beginning to feel awkward. I wished Elena in Mariupol was here to help translate. Realizing that this was going nowhere, I decided to take charge. I opened my Lonely Planet guidebook to the accommodations section of Dnepropetrovsk, and found one decent hotel here called "Hotel Central" with the address on it. I showed it to Evgeniya but she didn't know what to say about it. When I asked

if I should go there, she didn't seem to understand the question either. So I just said "Let's go" and walked toward some parked taxis. I showed the address for Hotel Central to a driver and asked "Skolkah?" When he said 15 grivnas, I thought that was a lot but I didn't want to try to bargain it down because I was afraid that it might give Evgeniya a bad impression, like it did with Elena. So I just accepted and we loaded my luggage and got in. The driver seemed very humorous and acted like he was proud to serve me because I was a foreigner.

On the way, this song I really liked (called "люби меня ио-французски") played in the cab (it's on one of the tapes I bought in Tula). Evgeniya and I started moving to the rhythm of the song and then she said "Discotheque?" I said "Yeah. You like discotheque?" and she nodded. (after that, everytime I hear that song, it reminds me of being in the taxi with her lol) When I saw her leaning forward and grab the front seat with her skinny arm, I thought of how much she looked like a miniature action figure or doll. So cute!!!

When we got to Hotel Central, I went inside the fancy looking lobby to ask about rates. I was shocked when they quoted 350 grivnas (about 60 dollars) a night! My guidebook had listed a much lower price range for this hotel. Why so expensive, I wondered. To appear "manly", (the waitress who told Elena said) I tried not to care about the price and pretend that money was nothing to me, so as to appear rich and generous to Evgeniya. But I was very reluctant to pay 60 dollars a night when I was used to spending 15 dollars a night.

As I stood there not knowing what to do, Evgeniya came up to me and said "Winston, let's go my home." (finally she spoke some English!) That was just the excuse I needed! I said ok and we went out and hailed another taxi. She gave the driver the directions to her home and we were dropped off in front of a tall apartment building. This time, the fare was only 7 grivnas though, so the other guy must have ripped me off. The elevator inside her building was broken so we carried my luggage up the stairs of several floors. When we got close to her floor, Evgeniya suddenly discovered that my smaller cart was not as heavy and she thought and was able to carry it with one of her arms (I knew that princess could do it, she must have just been intimidated by the prospect of lifting luggage earlier).

When we got in, I greeted her mother and took off my shoes. They put my luggage in a bedroom that looked like it belonged to someone. It actually belonged to her grandmother, but she wasn't here. Then we sat at the table in the kitchen while her mom brought us some tea and snacks. Her mom couldn't speak English either, so we were all at a communication loss. We used the dictionary to translate a few things though. Evgeniya brought me some photo albums to look at. Inside, were the ones I saw of her on the internet, and many others as well. There were photos of her in Odessa, at school with friends, graduating from high school, in nursing class, and with cousins and friends. She used the dictionary to describe each photo to me. She looked very cute and young in all her photos, and although she was 19, she looked like she was 13 or 14. Since she was a Pisces like me, it didn't surprise me that she acted clueless and indecisive earlier, because those are some of the characteristics of the sun sign (another characteristic of it is that they tend to look younger than their age, there you go again). But then again, I had a history of not getting along well with people of my same sun sign, so it wasn't a great thing.

In turn, I showed them some artifacts I bought from my trip, including the matreshka doll (which always amused everyone as I kept opening them to reveal smaller dolls) and the two wooden boxes, both from St. Petersburg. Then using my map, I showed them where I had been so far. I pointed to my arrival city St. Petersburg, then Cherepovets, Moscow, Tula, Mariupol, and finally here. Although the

dictionary helped, I still kept getting "Ya ni panila" responses to most things I said. So I showed her the word "awkward" in my dictionary and said "This is very awkward." and she nodded in agreement. I wondered if it was a good idea to come here and if it was a mistake. I decided that tomorrow I would try to call to call Elena in Mariupol and have her translate between us over the phone. After the tea and cookies, we went to sleep and I slept on the bed in grandma's room. I wondered what we would do tomorrow.

## **Chapter 42: Evgeniya shows me her city on a teen date**

The next morning, we had breakfast at the kitchen table. The food was good and plentiful, and they gave me a variety of things. Her mom was very hospitable. I even ate the meat items they gave me though I was a vegetarian, so as to not be rude or inconvenience them. Since the hot water line was not working in their home, they had to boil water in a pot and leave it in the bathroom. To take a shower, I had to mix the hot water in the pot and cold water from the bathtub in a separate hand pan to pour on me for the shower. It sounds tedious, but it worked. After the shower, I asked what we were doing today, and Evgeniya took my dictionary and showed me the word "to take a walk." I thought of calling Elena to translate between us over the phone, but I was reluctant to make long distant calls on their phone, so I wasn't sure what to do. I brought it up to them, but Evgeniya said that it wasn't necessary because her sister Yulia spoke some English and would be home today.

After we got ready, Evgeniya, her mom, and I went out into the city street. At the corner, her mom went somewhere else and left Evgeniya and I to go on our own. We walked down the main street of Karl Marx Prospect and took a trolley bus to another area. Since I had said this morning that I needed to buy dental floss, making the motion of flossing my teeth to describe it, I knew we were going to the supermarket first. (My gums had been itching the last few weeks since I had forgotten to bring my dental floss on this trip and wasn't able to floss)

Along the way were rows of outdoor shopping bazaars. Evgeniya reached put her hand out for me to hold it, so I did. How cute. I was surprised that she wanted to hold hands so soon. Now I felt like a couple with a teen model! (Just what I always wanted, especially back in high school!) And of course, I was proud to show her off too (like I was with Katya in Chapter 26). Inside the supermarket, I got my dental floss, new toothbrush, and a few other snacks. I offered to buy fruit and champagne for her mom, but she said to do it later since we would be walking more. At the checkout, the cashier gave me a hokey looking rubber action figure as a free gift because it came with the toothbrush. I kept it and decided to give it to Evgeniya since I had no use for it.

Next, we rode the bus to the city park. There was a mini-carnival spread out with rides and food stands. Since I was holding hands with a girl who looked like a teenager at a carnival, this now felt like a high school date or something. At the edge of a park lake, I asked if she wanted to ride the peddle boats, and she said yes. But I wanted to get some film footage first so I took out my camcorder, and Evgeniya immediately shyed away to avoid the camera. I took some video of the lake, park, and then turned the camera toward Evgeniya, who shyly turned her head and walked away. I said "Come on now, you're very krashivah!" She continued to be camera shy and said things in Russian (later translated as "No need to take me with the camera. Let's go get some beer").

Then we got on the peddle boat and both peddled toward the other side of the lake. When we got to the other side, we were under some long branches and leaves sticking out from a tree that shaded us and brushed against our heads. Evgeniya said to stop here and said it was "romantica". I agreed, and took some footage of our ride from here, shaking some leaves in front of the camera for fun. Then I said "Kak dila?" and she said "Harasho" so it could be caught on tape as well since that word sounded so exotic to me and the way she said it made it cute in addition as well. I also took a close up of Evgeniya's feet too, which were in her high heeled shoes. She laughed when she saw the viewscreen. We paddled to other sides too and then came back. It was a fun ride. We were starting to enjoy each other now and it no longer felt awkward. Evgeniya now used my little red pocket dictionary to communicate with me. It worked for most things, and she was no longer as shy as before. Although I enjoyed being with Evgeniya, I still missed Natasha and almost felt like I was now cheating on her too.

At another side of the park, we crossed a bridge and when I was about to take a photo of her on it with a view in the background, she suggested we take one together instead, so I had a stranger walking by do that for us. Then she looked for a restroom and found one on another side of the park. It was one of those that you had to pay a gatekeeper for though, but only like a portion of a grivna. When she came out of it, I gave her money to reimburse her for the cost of using the restroom. She refused it, and opened my dictionary to show me the phrase "to insult." I said, "Oh I'm so sorry. I won't do that again." and kissed her on the cheek. She politely said "Repeat please." and so I kissed her on the cheek again. (How cute!) Well at least now I know that she has some pride, unlike some gold diggers I knew in St. Petersburg!

Next, we went to a shopping mall with several stories. We looked at various things but one thing that caught my attention was a silver necklace with a pendant of the Pisces symbol of two fishes. I said that it would make the perfect gift for her since we're both Pisces. lol Before we left the mall, I took some footage of it. Evgeniya now smiled happily into the camera. She was no longer camera shy. Cool. Outside, we passed a McDonald's and I asked her if she'd ever been to one, and she said no. When I asked if she would like to try it, she said not now but maybe later. She indicated that we were going to a river next.

So we took the trolleybus to another side of the city. Before us stood a gate of pillars with Russian words on top of them. I filmed it and asked her to read off to me what those words said. She did but I didn't understand a word of it. At this point, everything she said to me in Russian, I just said "Da" to copy her habit, but eventually she caught on and knew that I was just humoring her. She started asking question that I was supposed to say no to for fun since I would say "Da" to them too. This park had no amusement parks but was much more elegant. I knew it was probably a city park of some sort. We went through a long path lined with benches and nice looking buildings and monuments. It seemed to go on forever, but it was very nice.

Along the way, I bought us both some Baltic 9 beer bottles, which she told me was called "piva". While drinking it I became buzzed. When Evgeniya noticed this, she asked if I was this, and brought her hand to the front of her forehead with her fingers crossed pointing to the front. It obviously meant cross eyed, drunk, or buzzed. And I said "a little" but when she was surprised at how I got buzzed so easily, I said "Just kidding. Joke." But I was really buzzed and dizzy so I frequently used the cross finger sign on the forehead to tell her how I felt. Each time, she pointed at me and said "You?" We did that so much that it became an inside joke.

When we reached a big building, there was a wedding going on outside of it. Soon we realized that there were not one, but four weddings all going on at the same time. It was a lovely place to get married all right. I took some video footage of the weddings and the park. Then I asked Evgeniya "Are you looking to get married?" She blushed and said no that she wasn't ready and that she was too young. (I wondered why she joined the AFA introduction agency then!? Perhaps she wanted to find her soulmate first, like she said?) We walked down the path further and soon came to a view of a big river with a bridge over it. A winding trail led down to it. While crossing the bridge, we took some more photos on it, then moved out of the way for cars that went by. I also noticed that there was another bridge across from us with trains going over it. I wondered if that was the bridge I crossed last night on the train here, but the trains that went over it didn't look like passenger trains though.

When we reached the other side, we were on some island or peninsula extending out into the river. Our legs were now tired so we sat down on the bench for a while. She also used it as a cigarette break. By the way, she confided to me earlier that day that she had a smoking habit which she hid from her mom by chewing mint gum (Orbit brand) after each smoke. Although she said she only smoked once every few days, so far today she had several cigarette breaks, so I gathered that she probably is ashamed to admit that her habit is more than that. As might be expected, she didn't dare let me film her smoking with my camcorder though. lol Each time she smoked today though, I would wave a pointed index finger at her for fun. It soon became another inside joke. After our break, an old man with a bag collecting empty beer bottles (possibly for recycling or reusing) came by to collect our beer bottles (they are common over there).

Soon we were in another park with mini-carnivals in it. This one had a horse stable in it that was open for rides to the public. Evgeniya was interested in riding it, so I paid the 5 grivnas for a ride for her. As she got on, I took out my camcorder to film the ride. She looked cute on the horse. The trainer pulled the horse around the courtyard and occasionally made it run a bit. Evgeniya rode on it steadily. After two laps around the courtyard, she got off and asked if I wanted to go on it too. At first, I was reluctant because I hadn't ridden a horse in so long and the seat didn't look very stable, but she talked me into it. This time, Evgeniya would film me as I rode the horse. When I got on, I noticed that the seat didn't feel steady but wobbled a lot. This made me nervous and so I leaned forward to get a firmer hold on the saddle. I realized that this would make me look wimpy on the camera, but safety was the most important thing to me right now. It got especially nervewracking as the trainer signaled the horse to run a bit, which made the ride very bumpy. As Evgeniya filmed me, she said some Russian things into the camera (which was later translated to me as "Winston, if you are able to translate this, I want to say that you are very nice and sweet and that I will miss you, and I hope that you will write me after you leave.")

We continued on to the edge of the island/peninsula and came upon a big beach. It was cloudy today so there weren't many people, but I could tell it was a popular area because of the outdoor cafes and volleyball nets hanging still without activity. We put our stuff down and played in the water a bit. I took some photos of her, including one of her holding my red pocket dictionary which she seemed like she couldn't live without. I also took some video footage of her dancing and kicking around in the water. I said "discotheque" and she kicked a splash at me. Then I called her a teen model again (they have the same word for model as we do) as I had been doing throughout the day and she shook her head and said "No" humbly. I also went in the water a bit, but not too far because it seemed like it might be dirty since it part of the river that big ships went through. We sat down to rest on the sand for a while, and soon it was almost 6pm and we realized it was time to get back home.

Right when we started walking back, it began to rain. Neither of us had umbrellas with us so we went to the shelter of a cafe with an extended roof. I bought us some coffee and ice cream to pass the time. When the rain turned into a fizzle we continued the walk. Right before we crossed the bridge again, she pointed to a circular building on the hill with a courtyard extending out. She said it was a popular discotheque we could go to sometime. We made our way back along the same route, through the bridge, the big city park, and finally onto the trolley bus again. Our legs were very sore from all the walking, but it was very nice and tranquil. I offered to carry her along the way to make it "romantica" but she politely declined. But when she walked above me on a cement edge of a side lawn, I picked her up by surprise and spun her around, then put her down.

When we were a few blocks from her home, we stopped into a small grocery store so I could buy some fruits, champagne, and chocolate for them. Then we went back to her home and her sister Yulia was waiting for us. Also with her was her boyfriend Oleg. They had just come back from a week's vacation together in the Crimea peninsula. They were both very tall. I greeted them both and they started practicing their English with me. Yulia was Evgeniya's older sister, and although she was also quiet, shy, and polite like Evgeniya, she was much taller. Oleg was even taller and had a handsome slavic look. He looked somewhat like a famous Russian singer. They asked me about my life in America, and other curious questions. The mom made a nice dinner for the four of us, and then we had the fruits and champagne I bought. I also showed them the video footage that I took of Evgeniya and I today. Then I told them that today, most of our verbal conversations were composed of mostly "Da"s and "Ya ni panila"s but we got by anyway. Yulia translated that to her mom for me.

Before we went to bed that night, I gave Evgeniya the rubber action figure that I got from the supermarket earlier that day as a promotional gift for buying the toothbrush. She accepted it, looked flattered, and then kissed me on the mouth, saying "Thank you for the present." Wow, I'm glad that these girls are so appreciative of little things. But I felt strange that our first kiss came as a result of a hokey looking rubber action figure exchanged. It was a strange reason for a first kiss, but I enjoyed the sweet taste of her lips nevertheless.

### **Chapter 43: Next day with Evgeniya, Yulia, and Oleg**

The next morning, I took the shower with the usual method. After breakfast, Oleg came by and gave me a paper with a message in English that was produced by a computer translator. It was very broken and choppy but I was able to decipher most of its meaning. It basically told me about themselves, that I shouldn't call Evgeniya "Geniya" (the short version of her name) because it's derogatory to her, and that if I needed to, there is a hotel in town called Hotel Dnepropetrovsk that only costs 20 dollars per day (I wonder why it wasn't listed in my travel guidebook). I wasn't sure though, if the mention of the hotel meant that I ought to stay there instead of in Evgeniya's home, so grandma could have her room back.

Then the four of us, Evgeniya, Yulia, and Oleg, went out for a walk. We went down the same street through some street markets, where paintings and crafts were being sold. Then we went to the park with the mini-carnivals again. This time, I bought cotton candy for us, Evgeniya and I shared one, while Yulia and Oleg shared another one. Then Evgeniya and I played air hockey inside an arcade (it was her first time at it). I played lightly against her but the funniest part was when she threw the hand paddle accidentally across while swinging for the puck. lol

Afterward, Evgeniya and Yulia decided to go on the ride with the fast moving carousel swing chairs. I declined to go because it would make me feel so dizzy that I could vomit, and Oleg declined as well for some reason (besides, they have nowhere near the maintenance standards as they do in the US). So only Evgeniya and Yulia went. I filmed their ride as the swings got higher in the air, spinning them around in fast circles. Evgeniya seemed to enjoy it and shook her legs in a "weeee!" mood. It was difficult following their chairs with my camcorder as they rapidly moved overhead though. After the ride, I showed them the footage I took on the viewscreen.

Next, we went to McDonald's. It was Evgeniya's first time there. I got her a cheeseburger, fries, and milkshake. She liked it very much, especially the milkshake. I got some food for Yulia and Oleg too. They also liked the milkshake in particular. Oleg filmed me introducing the food to Evgeniya with my camcorder. Afterward, we all bought some more "piva" (beer) bottles to drink and walk with. Nearby, we sat in front of a vast fountain and had photos taken of us. Then Oleg filmed us sitting and drinking in front of the beautiful fountain, with the camcorder. Afterward, we walked to a big cathedral and at the gates were asked by a beggar for money. Oleg gave him a coin. He is such a nice guy. Yulia must be very lucky. Then they told me to go in with Evgeniya while they waited outside because they were not Russian Orthodox like Evgeniya was. Inside was the same plethora of paintings, artwork, and statues that I saw in the Tula cathedral as well. We also put incense sticks in one of the cauldrons represented by the Saints.

Later on, we walked across the bridge again to the edge of the river, where a cruise boat was docked and loading passengers. It looked fun so I suggested we go for a ride. Oleg asked the price and told me it was 5 grivnas per person. How cheap, I thought! In the USA, something like this would be about 10 or 15 dollars per person. 5 grivnas was a little less than one dollar! Oleg and Yulia said they ran out of cash, so I paid for everyone to take the cruise. We went to the top deck of the boat where there were tables and a cafe. Before the boat took off, Evgeniya and Yulia went down to the restroom. They took a long time, and Oleg and I talked as we waited. When they were unusually long, I went down to see what happened, and found them standing together on the lower deck talking. (I wondered if they were gossiping about me) When I asked if they found the restroom, they said yes and then walked back up to join us. Then they watched my stuff as Oleg and I went to the restroom too. I came back first and when they asked where Oleg was, I joked that I picked him up and threw him into the river. lol They laughed. When he came back, we ordered some drinks and espressos. I wondered why they didn't come to collect the ride fares yet like they always did immediately on the train.

The view and sunset were gorgeous, so I decided to take some photos of us with the view in the background. After Yulia took a photo of Evgeniya and me on the aft end of the ship, I re-enacted the romantic scene with Evgeniya from the movie "Titanic" where Jack covers Rose's eyes and spreads her arms outward to the sea from the ship. I wasn't sure if they would recognize it, but they did and Yulia laughed "Titanica!" almost immediately. Then Yulia suggested that she film us doing that with my camcorder, so we did. When Evgeniya's arms were spread out toward the water, I whispered in her ear "Say, 'I'm the king of the world!'" but she shook her head in embarrassment.

When we sat down again, I told Evgeniya that I was thinking of going to Odessa or Simferopol, Crimea in a few days and that she could come with me if she wanted to. She said maybe but didn't know if her mother would permit it (after all, we just met, and since she was still like a child, her parents would naturally be overprotective). Oleg and Yulia recommended Crimea and said it was incredibly beautiful



since they just came back from there. The cruise around the river lasted about an hour, then returned to the launching dock. Near the end, they finally collected our fares but not the price for the espresso. As we got up to de-board, I wondered if it was free or something. But I got my answer when the waitress came running across the deck to remind us that we didn't pay for it, so I paid it.

When we got off the boat, Oleg pointed to the big Hotel Dnepropetrovsk nearby and said it was there in case I needed it. Since I wasn't sure if they preferred me to stay there instead of in their home, I played it safe and said I would go into the lobby and get a brochure with the hotel contact information and address on it. Then after we got back I would ask them if they preferred that I stay in the hotel, and if they did, I would bring my stuff down and take a taxi there. I asked Yulia about it, but she said she didn't know and would ask their mom about it when we got back. So I went inside to a nice spacious looking lobby and waited in line. It took too long so I just went up to the front and asked for the hotel phone number and address. The hotel looked nice and had many entertainment facilities, including a casino, restaurant, and bowling alley. As we walked out, I pointed to the bowling alley and asked Evgeniya if she ever bowled before. She said no. But we were in a rush to get back for dinner, so there was no time to play.

We took some trolley buses back and went to the outdoor produce market nearby first. After they bought some groceries, we walked to the bus stop. During the walk, I felt like trying to kiss Evgeniya but didn't know when and wanted to wait til we were alone. The chance came when Oleg and Yulia went ahead to look at a bus schedule. I turned toward Evgeniya and said "Evgeniya?" When she looked at me, I leaned my head slightly forward but she shook her head and said "No." Just before we got back home, I bought some watermelon from a street peddler along the way. The selection was dubious though, because most of the good melons were already taken, and the ones that were left were not that crisp looking. But it was my only chance to get it for them, so I took one.

During dinner, we were fed a hearty meal with some sausage patties. I ate a few of the patties, but the taste soon weirded me out, so I stopped and said that I was full. Oleg took my last sausage patty. After dinner, we cut open the watermelon I bought, and laughed when it was all white and tasteless inside. That bozo peddler probably knew that this would happen but still sold it to us on purpose! I asked if we could exchange or return the melon like we could in the USA, but they said that things don't work that way in this country. Here, what you buy is nonrefundable, even if it's defective. (Another thing I missed about the USA)

When Evgeniya got a phone call, I heard her doing the same thing she did to me, saying "Da", "Da", "Da", in response to almost everything. It was so cute and reminded me of our prior conversations. By now, Evgeniya's grandmother was back, so I asked Yulia if I should let her have her bedroom back and go to the hotel. She asked her mom and then said "Don't worry about it." There was room for everyone to sleep, I found out, when I saw them convert every couch and chair in the living room into a bed. These people have a very practical intricate system, I thought, just like they do with the bunks on the trains.

## **Chapter 44: Bad news and trip to discotheque**

Later on in the night, we talked about going to a discotheque tonight. Only Evgeniya was interested though, cause Yulia and Oleg didn't enjoy those places that much. So Oleg left and said he would see

me tomorrow. At 10pm, we all seemed tired so I asked Evgeniya if she really wanted to go tonight, or if she preferred to go tomorrow. Either way would be ok with me. She told me to wait while she talked to her sister in the kitchen. She came back with a note to me in English that Yulia wrote. It said that we could not go to the discotheque tomorrow because mom said that tomorrow night they had to leave for Russia for over a week to visit her aunt on her birthday. I was stunned and couldn't believe it. Here we were having a good time, and Evgeniya and I seemed to be clicking so far, and now this would squelch the momentum! I was hoping to have a few more days with her to see how things would develop, but now that chance would be gone and I would never know how it would have played out. This sucked majorly and I was still in disbelief. Furthermore, I was upset too. Why would her mom make them do this while a foreigner from halfway around the world was visiting them? It's a rare opportunity for both of us, it's not like I can just come back and forth anytime. I didn't understand why her mom couldn't make her go a few days later, so we could have more time together. Perhaps she was against our relations and wanted to put a stop to them, using this as the excuse? Or perhaps since her mom knew that I had already visited many cities before coming to them, that I had only planned to visit them for a short while before my next stop. Or even worse, could it be that Evgeniya and Yulia concocted this story to get rid of me because Evgeniya didn't like me as much as she pretended? I couldn't say for sure. But my suspicions about Evgeniya subsided then when I saw the sad look on her face too.

After sulking for a while, we decided to go to the discotheque tonight since this was our last chance. We both got changed into more dressy clothes and then went on our way. In the taxi ride, I asked Evgeniya if she could ask her mom if she could leave a few days later, but she wasn't sure if that would work. After all, I don't know how flexible their plans and schedule was. We got off at the city park with the pillar gates and walked into the big park in the dark. The discotheque was up ahead a ways in the circular building I saw yesterday. The lamps were out and it was almost completely dark, so I held her and led the way. It felt very romantic. When we heard some drunk people nearby in the dark but couldn't see them, I laughed at them and showed Evgeniya the cross fingered forehead sign to refer to them.

When we finally reached the discotheque, we stood in line to get our hands stamped by the fluorescent print. The place was mostly outdoors and was very crowded, despite it being a Sunday night, and there was no place to sit. We walked around looking but every single chair and table was taken. Finally, we just sat at the bar area. There were some dancers on the stage while the main public was dancing in the area below the stage. The music was great and I asked Evgeniya if she wanted to dance, but she said she wasn't in the mood to yet. We ordered some juice cocktails and then sat and listened to the music.

Soon she needed a cigarette and since she ran out of them, she asked if I could get her a pack. She pointed in the menu to the cigarette brand "Lucky Strike". It was so cute. I knew that it was a bad habit she was trying to kick, so I said I didn't want to perpetuate the habit and refused for her own good. But she persisted and kept saying "Winston, I want smoke." I replied, "Ok. I understand. Ok. Ok." But she sighed and continued repeating herself, adding, "I want it now. Now. Now." but keeping a polite tone of voice. It was so cute the way she sweetly uttered "Now. Now." (You should have been there!) It was demanding yet undemanding at the same time. Finally, I didn't want to make her suffer, so I gave in, but I attached a condition to it. Remembering the deals I made with Julia in Cherepovets, I said "Ok, but for a little kiss first." She said no to that offer, but continued persisting for the cigarettes. So I finally gave in and bought her the whole pack. There were many in there and I knew it would last for many cigarette breaks. She had her smoke in relief.

Soon there was a little show on the stage, and they asked for volunteers. Some people went up and were asked to do erotic dances and whatever crazy things the host with the microphone said. Then it started getting explicit. He had a man strip his clothes down to his underwear. Then the audience braced as the announcer indicated that the man would soon be removing his last piece of clothing. I wondered if they were getting some prize for this. When he finally removed his underwear showing his private parts, everyone gasped, including Evgeniya, who covered her mouth with her hand. Afterward, as we watched everyone dance, I asked Evgeniya if she was ready to dance yet, but she said no and that I could go dance if I wanted to. She said that she was tired and wanted to sleep, so we should leave soon. I wondered why we came here then, if she didn't want to dance.

Before long, we got up and left. Outside, she showed me some other discotheques next door as well. Since that one had a slow dance song playing, I asked Evgeniya to slow dance with me at least since we didn't dance at all yet, and we did for a while. Then we saw some parked taxis next to the buildings, so we headed for them so we wouldn't have to make the long walk back to the park gates. The drivers wanted to charge twice as much though, and I figured because the people coming out of these discotheques had no other choice. So I used that as an excuse to suggest walking back to the park gates because I was in the mood for another long romantic moonlit walk with her. She was tired, but agreed. As we reached the park gates, I said I would miss her very much, and she said "Me too." Then I said "Evgeniya, have you enjoyed our time so far?" and showed her the word "enjoy" in the dictionary. She nodded and said yes. The taxi rates here were not much different than back at the discotheque, so we just took it and went back home.

## **Chapter 45: Leaving Dnepropetrovsk for Crimea**

The next morning, Oleg came over with another computer translated message for me in choppy English. It described the income people make here, that someone with a degree who makes 100 dollars a month is considered well off by their standards, and that Evgeniya hopes to achieve this by going to college. It also said that since I took some video footage of them the last few days, that Oleg wanted to go buy a cable to make copies from my camcorder to a VHS tape for them. I didn't want him to attempt that because they might accidentally see clips of the other girls I visited if I gave them the tape, so I tried to discourage it. (Besides, I later found out that since Ukraine (and Russia as well) uses British PAL format on their video tapes while we use American NTSC format on ours, the signal wouldn't have been compatible anyway.)

Instead, I promised to make them a video tape copy when I got back to the states. Oleg's translated letter concluded that if I wanted to get roses for Evgeniya, that she likes white ones. Then their mother asked me what a nurse would make in the USA, since that was her profession. When I said what the starting salary and what it could go up to after that, she was shocked and Evgeniya said that she ought to move to the USA then. But I also informed them that the income there is usually balanced by the liabilities and debt, which balances it out somehow. Like all things, there are trade-offs. I told them that since they were leaving tonight, that they could take me to the train station this afternoon so I could get a ticket to Simferopol.

After breakfast, Evgeniya took me to the bank so I could cash in my traveler's checks. This time they were open and I was put in a long bureaucratic process of signing paper after paper, not even knowing what I was signing since the documents were in Russian! Finally, I got a wadful of grivnas for the

traveler's checks. I went outside, where Evgeniya was waiting for a long time, and apologized for the long wait. After we went home, the four of us, including Evgeniya, Yulia, and Oleg went out again. While crossing the street, a car almost hit me and Evgeniya. As it passed by, I yelled "Asshole!" Then I said to Evgeniya, "It means the same as 'Pajole Nawhee'" and she covered her mouth and gasped in surprise. Yulia and Oleg had nothing to say about it.

Afterward, I tried to make something lighthearted about it by using the inside joke of waving the pointed index finger. Evgeniya followed suit and did the same to me. We went to some more markets, and then to McDonald's again. I was glad to treat them to some treats one last time, and to let Evgeniya taste the milkshake again. Since she couldn't afford to usually eat here, I realized it may be her last time here, at least for a while. It was odd to think that something like McDonald's could be so rare and special to someone. I explained to the three of them that in the USA, taking a girl to McDonald's on a date would insult her, and it was considered a low class meal there. But of course, the McDonald's here tasted better than in the USA. Perhaps the McDonald's abroad doesn't have to follow the same rules and are allowed to put in tastier ingredients? (could be a bad thing, you never know) They continued asking about my work, home life, goals, etc. I didn't have much to show for, but I tried to make it interesting at least.

We next went to the train station to get my ticket. They took me to a side office with no lines inside, and I wondered why everyone doesn't just come here instead of waiting in line. Oleg asked me if I was going to Sevastopol or Simferopol. I said Simferopol, and then Yulia asked why since Sevastopol was on the edge of the water with more to do. I was reluctant to tell them about the agency in Simferopol that had arranged a meeting with Irina (one of my backup girls) for me. So I just told them that I knew people in Simferopol that could help me. Oleg asked the office lady and told me that there were two departure times for Simferopol, one at 7:30pm and another at 9:15pm. I said I preferred the 9:15pm time so I could have more time together with Evgeniya. Besides, since their departure time for Russia was 9:30pm, we could all leave together so they wouldn't have to make two trips. Yulia tried to persuade me to take the 7:30pm one instead because Evgeniya didn't like to say prolonged goodbyes to me, and that she wanted to personally take me to the 7:30pm departure train. That was strange, I thought. If Evgeniya is going to miss me, then why does she prefer that I leave sooner? How odd.

I looked at Yulia suspiciously, wondering if she was saying this because they didn't really have a 9:30pm departure for Russia because they were setting me up, and was afraid that I would discover it if I left at the same time as them. After all, if we all left together and they had no luggage, I would know something was fishy. I wondered whether to call Yulia's bluff or not, but she looked like she had honest eyes and a sincere face, so I let it go. But since I was curious whether it was a set up or not, I decided to take the 9:15pm departure train anyway, just to see what would happen. So I insisted on it and Oleg had me come up to show them my passport and pay for the ticket.

On the way back to their home, I looked for white flower bouquets to get Evgeniya, but only saw red ones. So I got those instead and then hid them behind my back, walked up to her and surprised her with them, even though she already saw me buying them first. lol Then we passed by the same street peddler that I bought the tasteless watermelon from yesterday. This time, I looked at her and lectured her in English on ethics and honesty, just for fun, knowing that the peddler wouldn't understand me. Evgeniya laughed hard at it.

Back inside, we had a final dinner together, and then I took a last photo with Evgeniya with her holding the flowers I bought her. We all sat in the living room as I filmed them all one last time, saying goodbye to them too. When I put the camera on Evgeniya, she had a sad look on her face. I said, "Goodbye Evgeniya, I will miss you." and she asked something in Russian which I didn't understand, but I just said "Da" anyway. She repeated "Da" after me, knowing that I was humoring her. (What she asked, I later found out, was "Did you like it here?") Then I said, "Anything else?" and she said "Shto?" (What?) I repeated "Anything else?" and she said her cute "Ya ni panila" one last time. (I was glad to get that last one on video tape this time!) Then Yulia asked me if I would visit them next year, and I looked at Evgeniya and said, "Maybe. It depends on my funds next year and whether Evgeniya wants me to." I started packing and getting my luggage ready, and they did the same, although I wondered if they were doing it as a set up to look convincing to me that they were really going to Russia.

At 8:45pm it was time for us to all go. I was surprised the three of them who were going to Russia, Evgeniya, Yulia, and their mom, all only carried one luggage among them. I wondered how one luggage could have enough clothes and supplies for three people for one week. It looked very suspicious to me indeed, and I began to think that the one luggage was just a lazy attempt to get by in making it look like they had packed to go somewhere to fool me. If it was, it wasn't a very good con because it looked too obvious. However, their grandmother who stayed behind gave them all goodbye hugs and kisses as if to wish them well on the trip. If this whole thing was a set-up, it's hard to believe that the old lady would be behind it too. So maybe my suspicions were wrong, I thought.

We went down the floors to the street and all walked together. The time was getting close and I wondered if I would make it, so I suggested that we take a taxi, but Yulia said it wasn't necessary and that a minivan bus would get there just as fast, but cheaper. We waited for one and when it arrived, only Evgeniya, Oleg, and I got in. Yulia and her mom said they would catch up with us on the next one. When we got in, I was a bit confused that Evgeniya didn't even sit next to me in our final hour, but instead sat in an individual seat on the other side of the van. Oleg sat next to me instead with my other luggage.

When we got off in front of the station, we waited until Yulia and mom arrived. I bought us some soda bottles in the meantime. When Yulia and mom arrived, they all went to get something while Evgeniya and I stood guard over the luggage. I thought that this might be my chance to give her a goodbye kiss since it may be our last moment of privacy, so I said "Goodbye Evgeniya" and leaned forward. She was shy about it at first, but then went through with it. During the kiss, when I instinctively put my tongue out, she stopped and pulled back, waving a pointed index finger at me as if to say "No. No. That's bad." When they came back, we walked through the underground tunnel to get to the other side. As we walked, Evgeniya made a writing gesture with her hands to say "Write me, ok?" I nodded and said ok. Then I said, "Maybe Evgeniya come to visit America someday?" and she said "Maybe."

When we got to the other side, Evgeniya and Oleg helped me load my luggage onto the train. This time though, my assigned seat and bunk was on the small side of the aisle that only had room for two, which were the lowest class seats. This was because it was all they had left for me. I didn't even have a seat compartment to put my luggage into, and the ones across from me were all full, so all I could do was put both my carts on my top bunk itself, leaving me no room for sleeping. Great, I thought. When we were done, Evgeniya gave me one final kiss goodbye, and I savored it knowing it was the last one. Then she walked off and I gave Oleg a hug as well. He would be missed too since he was a fine man whose company I found very pleasant.

When I walked them to the train door, I saw Yulia and mom standing there too. We waved goodbye to each other and blew kisses. Then when I went back to my seat, the people in the benches across from me told me that someone outside the window was waiting for me. When I came over to look, I saw Evgeniya standing there looking sweet as ever in the soft nightlight wearing a white sport jacket and smiling so sweet and innocent. She looked absolutely beautiful like a fairy Thumbellina out there. I felt so sad and touched. We continued waving and blowing kisses for a while. Then I took out my camera to take a photo of her standing out there so sweetly. (I wish I had used my camcorder instead, since the photo didn't capture the essence of what I saw) Soon after, the train jolted to signal that it was about to move, and I sadly waved her goodbye one last time.

I sat back in my seat, the sweet taste from her lips still lingering in my senses, and thought that this process was now getting to be too emotionally draining. All these sad goodbyes, and re-adjustments to new environments and people, were taxing both mentally and emotionally. Getting acquainted with someone, become familiar with their ways and quirks, then adjusting to them, and finally leaving to a new place to start the nervous process all over again was becoming crazy. Furthermore, I don't even know what the point of my visit in Dnepropetrovsk was. We had a good time and got along, but the substance of it was unclear and unmentioned even. We never discussed where this was all going, where we would carry it to next, whether we were compatible for a serious relationship or not, etc. So the purpose of my last visit seemed so undefined. I guess that's what you get when you don't correspond with someone for long before you meet them, and when you go visit "backup" girls.

It wasn't long before people started getting ready to sleep. Unfortunately, I had nowhere to sleep since all my luggage was on my bunk, but I had nowhere to sit either since all the lower seats were now being turned into bunks to sleep in. Having no choice, I climbed into my top bunk with the luggage on it. I laid there with my body twisted between the two luggage carts and bunk. It was very uncomfortable but I tried not to think about it. As the train shook, it wasn't easy to hold on though, so I held onto one of the side metal poles with my hand. Looking for an alternative to this meager situation, I got up and patrolled the entire train cart for open bunks, but there were none and even ones that were momentarily empty soon were occupied by their residents who came back from the bathroom. Since we wouldn't arrive in Simferopol until 6am tomorrow, this was going to be a long uncomfortable ride for me. Oh well, people have lived through worse, I guess.

(Note: When I returned to America, Evgeniya's sister Yulia wrote me a letter that addressed my suspicions described in my letter to them, which you can see in the [Appendix section](#). It was in Russian, but I was able to understand it after I used an online translator. It basically said that their trip to Russia was planned at the beginning of the summer long before I arrived, and that Evgeniya didn't know I would come just a few days before their departure date. In response to my theory that they concocted the plan on the lower level of the boat when they were there talking for so long, she said "Winston, you do not take offence, but you the same detective, as Evgeniya a kangaroo." (funny, I know) and then said that at that time, they had not seen each other for a month and that she wanted to hear about the friend's wedding that Evgeniya went to because they chose a gift for it together. In response to the suspicious sign of them all sharing one luggage for a week's trip, she said that Russian people do not travel with big luggage like Americans do, and that their mom was surprised that I brought along so much luggage for one person.)

## **Week Six: Simferopol and Perenalvov village in Crimea**

### **Chapter 46: Getting things ready in Simferopol**

I didn't have a decent seat or bed again that night on the train until everyone got up again. Then I was able to join the group on the other side with the long bench seats. I had some tea as we approached Simferopol. My plan there was to take the taxi either to Hotel Ukraine or Hotel Moskva (both listed in my guidebook) and then call the agency to set up the meeting with Irina, and then go from there. If it didn't work out with her, I'm sure the agency could arrange other introductions. So that was the plan.

When I got off the train and stepped into this reputed land of paradise, I thought, "Here we go again." This time though, there was no one to pick me up, so I felt like a lone traveler who had to make it on his own. It was awkward and felt out of place. The palm trees at this station made it seem more exotic and tropical though. A bunch of taxi drivers waiting for customers identified me as a tourist immediately and kept offering rides. I didn't like the pushy ones so I refused them. Instead, I picked a guy who was laid back and nice. I showed him the address for Hotel Ukraine and we were on our way. When we arrived, it looked mediocre and he went in the lobby with me to ask for availability and rates (see, my instincts about him being nice were right). They had no free rooms tonight, so the driver said that Hotel Moskva was a better bet.

So we drove there, and I noticed how similar it looked to the one I stayed at in Tula. Must be a national chain hotel, I thought. This time, there was availability, including free breakfast, but they took no credit cards, so I knew I would have to keep withdrawing cash from ATM's again, which was tedious. But the rooms were very inexpensive here, so that was nice. Fortunately though, they did have different class rooms to choose from for various prices, so I asked if they could show them to me first before I decided. A staff person led me up to check the different types of rooms. There wasn't much difference between them other than how fancy they looked, although the bed in the highest class room was of better quality. Other than that, they all had the basic amenities and facilities that you needed. So it was basically a choice between the lower class room and the middle class room, which I saw no difference between so I just picked the lower class room.

After paying for the room (only a little over 60 grivnas, about 12 dollars, what a bargain) and settling my luggage in, I felt hungry so I asked if they were serving the free breakfast now, since it was still about 8am. They were and gave me a paper meal ticket. (I assumed at the time that all breakfasts during the stay were free, and that the breakfast now and tomorrow morning were both free, but that was wrong because only one free breakfast was included per night's stay.) I went up to the cafe on the fifth floor and got some food finally. Then I went to my room to nap a few hours.

When I arose, went to the view from my window and took some footage from my camcorder, mainly to record a verbal update on things. I explained what happened with Evgeniya and wondered the reasons for the abrupt ending of that visit. I used the rotary phone in my room to call the agency in town. I had to dial several times though, because you had to roll the numbers evenly and carefully, and I also kept moving the numbers too far beyond the finger stopper part. When they picked up, I announced who I was and that I was now in Simferopol. They said they would call Irina's grandmother to ask her when she could come meet me. They explained that the grandmother had to go to Irina's village to deliver messages to her because they had no phone there. So we would have to wait to hear back from her.

"Her village?" I thought. "Oh great, so she's a primitive country girl. I'm sure we'll get along great (being sarcastic)." They told me to call them back in a few hours, and that if she came here to meet me, it would probably be tomorrow. Since I had nothing else to do today, I asked them if I could come by their office and browse the profiles of any other women they had in the area, as a backup just in case. It was the only productive thing I could think of doing. They said yes and gave me the address there. Then I took a shower and watched TV for a bit before calling them back. When I called back, they told me that Irina would come from her village here tomorrow to meet me at 12 noon. Next, I went to the maid/key taker lady of my level and showed her the address, asking her if she knew how to take the bus there. She didn't and called someone else out to try to explain it to me, but they had a hard time explaining it, despite all our efforts, so I gave up and decided to just take the taxi instead.

Before I went though, I decided to do one thing first out of curiosity. Since I still wasn't sure if Evgeniya and her family set me up with their story of leaving for Russia or not, I decided that I could test this by calling them now and if anyone beside the grandma who stayed behind picks up, then it would prove that they were lying. I went back to my room but was unable to make long distance calls for some reason. When I inquired the floor maid about it, she said that I would have to make the call using operator assistance, which would be billed to my room. However, I didn't want to do it that way because I wanted my "spy call" to be anonymous, and the operator may tell them my name or location. Either way, I didn't want to risk it, so I decided to buy a prepaid calling card instead. The floor maid told me that the bus station just a block down the street sold them, and also that there was an ATM machine in there. Perfect, I thought.

I walked down to the bus station but before I went in, two policemen came up to me to check my passport. Oh great, so the policemen here were the corrupt type too. Since my rotary phone in the hotel room couldn't use these prepaid cards that you had to insert into a payphone, I made my call from the row of payphone booths lined up inside. I called Evgeniya's home, bracing my heart in case I discovered a lying conspiracy, but an old lady's voice answered, and I realized that it was her grandma, so I quickly hung up. Well there's my answer. I guess they really did go to Russia after all, or else they expected that I would call to check (nahhhhh!). I also withdrew some cash from the ATM machine before I left.

Back at the hotel, I got ready to go to the agency. I picked one of the parked taxis in front of the hotel, and left. The agency office was unmarked from the outside, but we found the street and number. I opened the door into a spacious office with two girls running it and one girl browsing in front of a computer. The staff girls introduced themselves to me as Vika and Inna. Vika was a tall blonde who was somewhat plump but with a very pretty and hospitable face and smile. Inna was more petite, with dark hair and an exotic look, and seemed quiet and laid back. They could speak English, but not fluently. It was a very laid back atmosphere in here. The other girl was a client who was browsing men's profiles in front of one of their computers. After chatting with Vika and Inna for a while, I told them that I had just arrived from Dnepropetrovsk, and showed them Evgeniya's photos online on AFA's website (which again is at: <http://www.loveme.com/women/info31141.htm>). Then I showed them some video clips of her from my camcorder viewscreen.

Afterward, I said "You want to see someone very interesting?" and then rewound the tape to Julia in Cherepovets. When they saw her saying "I love Winston" and then right after saying "I love Vitalik", Vika shook her head and said, "She loves everybody." After watching her do the sexy dance, Vika said, "Winston, are you looking for a wife or someone to keep you company? Why did you visit her? That



girl is not someone who would make a good wife." I laughed and said that I know, but that I didn't know that beforehand. They told me that they had met Irina before, and that she was very shy and sweet, but that she couldn't speak any English.

When the other girl was done browsing, I went used the computer to browse through the women on AFA's website who lived in this area. Although they were not an AFA office, they were an affiliate and helped arrange social tours in Crimea for them. Therefore, they had contact information for the women registered with AFA in this area. When I asked what I would have to pay, amazingly they said they could introduce me to every lady in this area on that site for a total of 10 dollars if I wanted, it was up to me. They were totally laid back about it. Wow. After browsing and writing down the ID numbers of the ladies I found interesting, I copied it down onto another piece of paper and gave it to Vika, saying that this was the backup list in case things didn't work out with Irina. Then I asked them where an internet cafe around here was, and they told me that Inna was about to go home and would show me the way. Now Inna had dark hair and was very attractive with an exotic Cleopatra look, so I was interested in her too, but they told me that she was married.

Inna walked me out to the city street and to the 24 hour internet cafe. Inside, she told me the rate was 6 grivnas per hour. I thanked her and said goodbye. I bought a drink from outside, and then sat down to write my next update. I noticed an American man talking nearby, but had no interest in talking to him now even though I was a little homesick. I started from where I left off last time back in Tula. I described the sad poetic goodbye scene with Natasha, what happened with Elena in Mariupol, and then with Evgeniya in Dnepropetrovsk as well. Then I explained why I was here and what my next plan was. There was a LOT to tell since last time, and it ended up taking me til almost midnight to write it all. I concluded it by saying that since I was missing Natasha E. again, that I would try calling her again tomorrow, since I didn't get to do it today. Then I answered any essential email and left. They called a cab to take me back to my hotel. The night rates as you would imagine, were a little higher.

## **Chapter 47: Meeting with Irina**

The next morning, I found out that I couldn't have another free breakfast like I thought because the room only included one ticket for it, which I had used up yesterday. So I just paid for it instead. Afterward, I went out to a parked taxi to take me to the agency office to meet Irina at noon.

(If you want to see the photos of her that I saw of her beforehand, here is the link to her profile on AFA: <http://www.loveme.com/cgi-bin/extraphoto.pl?40867&2&Irina>)

When I arrived, she wasn't there yet, so I waited around nervously. Vika explained to me that she was coming a long way by trolley bus so she might be delayed a bit. Soon the doorbell rang and I braced myself for our first meeting. I was nervous even though I'd been through this process so many times already. Vika called out, "Winston, she's here." Irina came up to me smiling and looking excited on her face, and then kissed my cheek and held my hand for a while. Vika translated for us and said that she was pleased to meet me and asked how my flight was. (Like I really just flew in, right. That was a long time ago!) I said that it was long but smooth. Then I asked what she wanted to do today, and if she wanted to go to the famed Yalta, which was the hot spot here. She said that she wanted to take me on a day tour of Simferopol first, then tomorrow she would take me to her village an hour away, which lay

between here and Yalta, and that after that we could go to Yalta from there. Sounded like a plan. I grabbed my backpack and we went out the door. She was familiar with the area so she led the way.

Now, Irina was more plain looking than in her photos, and she had a sort of rugged look (not in a muscular way though) as well, especially on her face. In other words, she wasn't as attractive and elegant as in her photo, but she wasn't bad either. I wanted to give everyone a chance too. She understood almost nothing I said, so I had to resort to the pocket dictionary again. I bought us some ice cream, and she led me to a park area. I took a photo of her in front of an antique tank, and then we walked alongside a river. I kept trying to be funny and pointing to the shallow water while making swimming pantomimes. She laughed and seemed amused easily. Soon we came to the same mini-carnivals in this park as were in the Dnepropetrovsk park. She wasn't interested in any of the rides or the horseback riding, so I bought us some cotton candy instead.

We later found a little zoo and she expressed interest in that so we went in. Inside were a variety of animals, but the conditions of their habitat didn't look that great, and I hoped they weren't suffering too much. We saw buffalos, bears, monkeys, cheetah's, turtles, goats, etc. I took some footage of the animals and then of Irina too. I learned a new Russian word too, because after she pronounced her last name on camera, she laughed and said "Pashlee" which means "Let's go." Before we left, I fed the goats some cotton candy and they liked it. We next went to a small aquarium nearby, with fish, sealife, reptiles, and snakes. I took a little footage in there too.

Afterward, we went through more city parks. At one point on the path, we came to a five way intersection and I made fun of it as we stood there deciding which way to go. Irina laughed again and picked a way for us. As we walked back to the city street, I extended my elbow out to her and she took my arm. Although we seemed to be different, she was easily amused whenever I tried to be funny. Throughout the day, whenever I pointed to a cat or dog passing by, she would always say, "Doma" (home) meaning that she had one at home. She kept using that word a lot when I pointed to things. I began to wonder why she kept thinking of her home while we were out. It was kind of unusual. Perhaps she was a total homebody or something and didn't spend much time outside her village.

Back on the city street, I asked her if there was a movie theater we could go to around here, but she said no (I later found out that she was wrong). Instead, we went to look for something to eat. The cafes we went to check out looked unappetizing, so I decided to pass on them. When we couldn't find anything nearby, we just settled for the McDonald's across from the train station. I bought her a similar meal that Evgeniya had, with the cheeseburger, fries, and milkshake combo. When she asked me what the price of it was, she said "Whoa, bolshoy!" She meant that it was a lot of money, but it wasn't even by American prices because it was less here than the equivalent of what you'd pay for if you ate at McDonald's in the states. She looked at the food indecisively though, and seemed reluctant to try it, but she finally ate it slowly.

When it was past 6pm, she said she had to get back home now. We planned to meet tomorrow at 10am at the agency office again and ride the bus to her home in her village. She took me to the minivan bus stop that she said would take me back to Hostel Moskva, and I kissed her on the cheek before she left. I wondered if I should have invited her back to my hotel room or not. When the minivan bus came, I said, "Hotel Moskva?" and the driver nodded. No one needed to tell me which stop to get off of though, because I could see it when we got to the right stop.

Back at the hotel, it was still early so I decided to take a walk to the market bazaar down the street. There were many things, but I just bought some pastries. I met two beautiful girls doing a cigarette promotion there. One of them was a dark haired beauty queen that looked a lot like Winnie on the show "The Wonder Years". The other one helped me out when I asked about another hotel supposedly around here that was really cheap. I wanted to check it out, so she led me around the corner to it. My guidebook though, said that I would have to "convince" the staff to let me stay there. lol Inside the lobby, they told me it was unavailable, and that I should go to Hotel Moskva across the street. Not sure how to "convince" them since they couldn't understand English, I joked around with them and even showed them the word "convince" in my dictionary, pointing to what the guidebook said as well. I asked them how I could convince them exactly, but I wasn't sure if they got it, and they just kept saying no, so I thanked them and left. Outside, I looked for those cigarette sales girls again to chat with them and perhaps ask them out, but they were gone by then.

In my room, I decided to try to call Natasha again, so I asked the floor maid to show me how to make an operator assisted call. However, the operator couldn't speak English so the maid suggested making the call on her phone for me using the number I gave her. She attempted it but hung up and said that the operator wasn't able to get through because of a zoning problem, but she wasn't sure if Natasha was out of zone or if her number was not in a zone you could call to from the Ukraine. The latter would make no sense though. I knew that Natasha paid for her cell phone service every week and that some weeks when she was low on funds, she would not pay for it. So perhaps her service was off this week or something. I don't know, but I decided to go to the bus station and use a prepaid card to try calling from there.

Before I took the elevator down though, the maid and a group of people were eating and drinking on the floor lounge, and invited me to join them. I said maybe later. I walked to the bus station and bought another prepaid card. When I called Natasha from the payphone booth, I got a message in Russian and then in English that said, "The subscriber is either unavailable or out of the zone. Please try your call again later." I waited and tried a few more times, but I kept getting the same message. I now felt a little depressed because I looked forward so much to hearing her voice again and was missing her badly now. But there was nothing I could do, so I walked back to the hotel sadly.

Near the entrance to the hotel, I saw a cute waitress at an outside drink cafe bar. We made eye contact and she flirted back, so I went up to her and introduced myself. Her name was Irina too. There weren't many customers, so we chatted and flirted for a while. Then I asked her if she wanted to go to America, and she said sure, so I said that we would have to get married first. She said ok, and I said meet me here tomorrow morning so we could go get married right away. She said ok. Boy she's just as good of an actor as I am since she was very convincing! I also saw two girls sitting on the bench, one of them looked like a gorgeous blonde but I only saw her from the corner of my eye. I wondered if they were prostitutes. I joined the group eating and drinking in my floor lobby for a while, and told them how much I missed a girl back in Tula. They poured me a drink.

## **Chapter 48: A secret fantasy comes true**

Feeling sad and lonely now, I went down to the lobby to see if I could chat with those two girls sitting on the bench that might be prostitutes. They were gone, but the security guard there asked if I was bored and wanted a woman. He said he could have the bartender there call for one if I liked. I wasn't

sure about that and preferred to check them out first, so I asked about the blonde sitting outside. They told me that there were some prostitutes outside earlier but weren't sure if they were the ones I saw or not. Instead, they told me that their driver would go bring one back for me and I could decide if I wanted her or not. There was no obligation. I said ok but that I only wanted between 18 and 25.

The driver left and came back soon. I braced myself nervously. To my delight, he came back with a young short blonde with a cute smiley face. I looked at her and said "Yeah!" A pimp with her said that it was 30 dollars per hour or 100 dollars for the whole night. I took the hour deal and asked if I could buy her a drink first so we could get comfortable first since I didn't like to rush things. She said ok, and I made sure first that this warm up period wouldn't count off my hour before proceeding. She introduced herself to me as Lena. But she could speak almost no English.

Inside the little bar, I got drinks for both of us, and Lena ordered the most expensive beer. I tried it and it was good though. Then, since there was music, I asked if she wanted to slow dance and she said sure. During the slow dance, I tried to kiss her and we kissed very intimately. I liked her a lot, she was very cute, smiley, upbeat, and was very easy going and agreeable. She didn't have an attitude or argue with you like other prostitutes I met did. Then she asked if I wanted to go to the room now and I said ok. We were allowed to take our unfinished beers in the glass cups with us.

When we got to my floor, the floor maids who were sitting on the couch said something to her. She responded automatically with a coolness about her, and then threw them a piece of paper, and they all laughed hysterically. I felt embarrassed. (I figured that they asked her for a pass or ID since guests are only allowed until a certain time in some Russian hotels, and she must have said something slick or funny to indicate that she was a call girl that made them laugh. The paper she threw was probably some ID or pass she was accustomed to giving at hotels. In either case, she acted like a total pro. lol)

Back in my room, we started making out and I was delighted that this girl seemed so uninhibited. When we got undressed, I asked her if it was ok if I video taped it and she said yes. WOW!!!!!! I had always wanted to do that, but none of my ex-girlfriends would allow it. Now I had the chance to do one of my secret fantasies, and she agreed with it. I couldn't believe it. This was too good to be true! I put a new tape in my camcorder and placed it on top of my luggage cart pointing up at us. Lena tried to put it on the TV to get a better widescreen angle (wow perhaps she's done this kind of thing before!), and I should have listened to her, but I didn't and put it on the chair instead, thinking that it was better because it was closer to us. After turning it on, Lena turned off the light and turn the TV on, perhaps to use as our light source. (Perhaps since we were videotaping it, she wanted the room to be dimly lit so she wouldn't be recognized?)

We sat on the bed and started making out again. After we undressed, she put a condom on me and got on top. I've always hated using condoms because I couldn't perform in them, and they took the pleasure out of it a lot. After a while, we changed positions to see if it would work better with me on top. (Unknown to me at the time, the camera was at an angle that only captured part of us. It was only when Lena repositioned it at one point did it capture a better view of the action. When I discovered this later on, I was amazed that she knew where to point my own camcorder from the front without even seeing the viewscreen, while I didn't. She must be a real pro in more ways than one!) When the condom fell off, we replaced it with one that I brought. At one point when we were changing positions, she pointed to my condom and asked if I wanted to remove it. I wasn't sure if she was asking that so she could give me a blow job or so we could have sex without it, so I hesitated and we just continued.

After a long time with her being on top, I climaxed. It was difficult to do so though, with the condom on. Then she went to the bathroom and I stopped the camcorder and turned on the lights. When she came out, she asked if I wanted to "doosh" (shower or wash up), and I thought "No way. You could rob me and take my camcorder while I'm in the shower!" So she lay beneath the sheets and we snuggled. By now, it seemed like it had already been past an hour, but I wasn't going to mention it. While we lay in bed watching TV together, I made out with her lightly some more. Then as she got up and dressed, I took a photo of her legs (my fetish area) for memory and took a photo of us as well using my extended left arm to point the camera at us close up. I asked for her phone number and she wrote me down her cell number. Just before she left, I hugged her and then said "Yas coo chai" (I will miss you) and she quietly said it back and then left. I was glad to be able to go to bed that night with a smile on my face at last :) I couldn't believe one of my dark fantasies had just come true! I knew I had better protect my camcorder tapes at all costs now!

## **Chapter 49: The cows and pastures of Perenalvov village**

The next morning, I had my included breakfast in the cafe on the 5th floor. Then I showered and called the agency to tell them that I was meeting Irina today at 10am and would be running a little late. They said she was already there waiting, and would pass the message to her. Then I packed my luggage and checked out, since tonight I was going to be staying in Irina's village. Outside the lobby, I looked for the Irina waitress to say goodbye and joke about getting married again, but she wasn't there. I took one of the parked taxis to the agency office again, and came in with all my luggage.

Irina was there waiting for me and I gave her a hug. Before we left, I asked Vika to ask Irina if everything was ok yesterday and if she was ok with continuing on. She said yes and that yesterday was pretty fun. But she warned though, that the path from the bus stop to her village is steep and windy, so I may have a difficult time getting my luggage up it. Then I said that I wanted to get some fruits or vegetables to bring Irina's family since I didn't have anything else. They said there was a produce market a few blocks away and Irina said she would take me there. After getting a variety of fruit, we came back to the office and Vika called for a cab. The cab took us to the front of the train station, where the trolleybuses going to Yalta departed from.

While waiting for the trolleybus, we kept getting hounded by private taxi drivers offering rides to Yalta for 30 dollars. Why do so when the trolleybus there was less than 2 dollars, I thought. I bought some soda bottles for Irina and I while we waited. When we got on the trolleybus, it moved slowly since not only was it big, but it was powered by electric cables hooked onto the bus above it. Sometimes, the bus would halt and the driver would have to go out and reposition the hook to restart the power. It was an interesting experience, like an extended version of the San Francisco cable car. At one point, after more people got in, a fresh leaf suddenly fell in my lap. I took it and looked up, but the roof of the bus above me had no opening or sun roof at all. So I showed this to Irina, pointed up to the roof, and then showed her the word "miracle" and "supernatural" in my dictionary. She laughed because it was so silly. (Of course, unless it truly was a miracle, the leaf probably blew sideways from someone who just got in the bus.)

After an hour's ride, Irina motioned to me that we had arrived at the stop. After we got off, I dragged both my luggage carts across the street and proceeded up a slope. It was long path to the hill in the

distance, and I knew this hike with my heavy luggage carts would be strenuous. And as I thought, it sure was. I had to stop frequently to catch my breath and relax my arms. Irina was way up ahead since she was only carrying my light cart, while I was carrying the big heavy one. This was embarrassing to me too, because I hated looking wimpy and weak to her. I realized that we should have taken the cement walkway on the other side, which would have been much easier to roll the wheels of my luggage on.

After a slow exhausting hike, we finally reached the top. Her village was not what I expected at all. I was expecting a cluster of huts or primitive homes (like Julia's grandmother's village near Cherepovets), but instead it was a cluster of tall apartment buildings, situated on top of a hill. When we got inside her flat, I greeted her mom, a rugged looking woman with short hair and some silver teeth. I set my things down in the guest room with two beds, and since I felt unusually drowsy, I took a nap and fell asleep. A few hours later, I woke up to an empty house. I wondered where everyone went. With nothing else to do, I looked outside the window and watched people pass by. I saw a pretty looking blonde looking outside a window across in the other building. Then I saw Irina's mom talking to her before she came in. When I asked her mom, "Gdeh Irina?" she motioned that she was outside and then put her two index fingers on the side of her head to refer to a cow. Then she made a spanking motion with her arm, which told me that Irina was out herding cows and whipping them into motion. I wish I could go out and see it, but I wouldn't know where to go.

Later on Irina came back. Soon the pretty blonde that I saw across the street came by too. Her name was Alona and was a close friend of Irina's. In fact, I could tell that the whole neighborhood here was close knit, unlike most suburban neighborhoods in the US where people just mind their own business. I like the Russian/foreign way better. Irina's mom showed me some photo collections of Irina and her friends and family. I noticed the elegant beautiful one that was featured in her online profile. It looked much better than she did in person, but perhaps she was just made up that day. I thought of asking when we were going to Yalta, but I knew it wouldn't be today since I was drowsy and tired for some reason, and Irina looked in a homebody mood as well. When I heard Alona refer to Irina as "Ira", I soon started calling her that as well. It was short and sweet and I liked it.

Later, her dad came back as well. His name was Yuliy and he was a tall well built man who was very friendly with a few silver teeth as well. I learned that he worked nearby at an army fort, which was the prime occupation of most of the males in this village. He was very open toward me and asked me many questions. For dinner that night, they fed me a nice bowl of borsch soup, bread, tea, and cookies. That night, I slept on the bed on the far side of the guest room while Ira slept on the bed on the other side of the room. I kissed her goodnight on the cheek. (Oh and no, we never even came close to doing anything.)

The next morning, the hot water line in their home was out, so I had to take a manual shower in mixed lukewarm water. After breakfast, Ira said we were going out for a bit with her friend Alona. We walked to the outskirts of the village to a series of hilly pastures amidst the high elevation. We came to some cows and then I saw Ira at work. She herded them with a stick and her aggressive voice, poking them and yelling at them to move. I was very surprised because I had never seen a woman do this so aggressively before. There was no doubt now that she was a masculine tomboy. Her every move revealed it. I felt discouraged by this though, since tomboys and I don't tend to mix well. But I was a bit intrigued by her and wanted to find out what more there was to her. This was obviously her daily chore, but I didn't know if she got paid for it or did it as an obligation to somebody. Alona even told me the

exact number of the cows here, 64, and the name of Ira's personal pet cow. I'm sure she had some way of distinguishing them. I know nothing of herding cows, but I surmised that the reason this had to be done was because each day as they were eating grass, they would wander farther away from the village, so someone had to herd them back close to the village. That was my best guess. Later, she somehow got them all to stampeded together toward the direction she wanted.

Alona and I sat on a rock while watching all this. She asked me many questions and spoke a little English. When it got to why I was here, I told her I was searching for love, and she pointed to Ira and said "With Ira?" I replied, "I don't know. We'll see." We also sat at a former cement bunker and later climbed some big anti-aircraft cannons. Irina rejoined us. As we were sitting and relaxing, two kids approached. They came with naughty looks on their faces and started talking to Ira and Alona. They referred to me at one point but I couldn't understand anything they said. Later, I could tell they were starting to act like smartasses from the way they were talking. Then they took Ira's water bottle, opened up the cap and spit in it several times. It was sick. Eventually the two boys left and Alona indicated that they were crazy by circling her index finger near her head.

As we walked back, Ira continued herding the cows forward along the way. I kept wondering why I was here, thinking "Great, I come here looking for a wife or serious relationship, and I end up here in these pastures herding 64 cows to who knows where." After we got home, we were supposed to go to Yalta that afternoon, but she never brought it up so I assumed she was too tired or not interested in going today. Instead, we hung around the village, going to the little grocery store within, and the small village bar too.

Everyone was very friendly and enthusiastic toward me, all except Ira, who seemed to get quieter by the minute. I began to feel that she was ignoring me and treating me like a stranger. This was a bad sign. I began to wonder why she even brought me here if she was disinterested in me. Even her pets gave me more attention than her. Plus, for some reason I continually felt groggy and drowsy. I wondered if I was sick or had a cold. Perhaps I picked up something in St. Petersburg, since the water there is known to have bacteria that can make you sick and have diarrhea. Although I did not often drink the faucet water there, I used it to brush my teeth, so the bacteria could have contaminated me subtly that way. In any case, the rest of this day was relatively uneventful.

## **Chapter 50: Visit to Alushta beach and boardwalk**

The next day, it was Ukraine's national independence day, their equivalent to our 4th of July holiday. I hoped we would go somewhere to celebrate. Early in the morning, Ira sat outside on the little balcony smoking and looking like she was in deep thought. I wondered if she was thinking what a mistake it was to bring me here. When she came in, she looked at me with a cold expressionless stare and so I confronted her by saying, "Ira, do you...", showing her the word "dislike" in the dictionary, and then pointing to myself. She shook her head and said no. Then I asked I used to the dictionary to ask why she looked "upset" and she said she wasn't.

After breakfast, Alona came over again, and I asked Ira if we were going to Yalta today. She shook her head and when I asked why, Alona translated to me that the holiday festivities in this area were going on in Simferopol today, not in Yalta. So I wondered if we were going to Simferopol then, but it was a long way away and I wasn't enthused about that city. Furthermore, since Ira gave me weird stares and

looks, I didn't feel like asking her much. This other neighbor, a teenage boy, also came over and talked to me for a bit. I showed him some of my sleight of hand magic tricks and card tricks, and he showed me his own version of them as well. It was a good way to pass the time.

In the early afternoon, Alona came and told me that she and Ira had decided to go to Alushta today, which was a small beach area closer to us than Yalta. I got my things together and the three of us left. Outside in the village, I took some video footage of the village and of Ira and Alona. Then we walked down to the bus stop. After about a 45 minute bus ride, we arrived. It was obvious that this was a beach area because people were walking by in swimming trunks and towels. That also made it a great place to check out girls too :) The sidewalk to the beach was lined with food stands, souvenir stands, and all sorts of things that made it wondrous along the way. Many unique and creative items were sold there. The shopping by itself was worth the trip.

When we got to the beachside, it was mostly a boardwalk with carnival rides, cafes, souvenir stands, etc. The swimming areas were beds of pebbles where people lay and swam. The water looked very blue-greenish and refreshing. I wanted to go in bad. But unfortunately, I didn't have my swimming trunks with me since I did not know we were going to swim today. I wish Ira had told me. Alona said I could buy some swimming trunks for sale here if I wanted to, but I didn't feel like doing that.

Alona was interested in going on the fast ferris wheel ride where you sat in cages that would spin upside down, but Ira and I weren't. I offered to buy her a ticket for the ride if she wanted to go on her own, but she said she would only be comfortable with it if someone went with her. I knew I would be sick and vomit if I went, but I don't know what Ira's excuse was. Since we were hungry, we went to one of the outdoor cafes first. I bought something that looked like a cross between pizza and tortilla bread, and some beers for all of us. Alona, always a very optimistic person, told me that Ira thinks I am "very good". I said thank you, wondering if Alona was guessing that, or going by what Ira told her.

Then I asked Ira if she wanted to go to America someday. She said "No" and when I asked "You never want to leave Ukraine?" she said "Never". When I asked why, she said something about momma and papa, and I knew she meant that she didn't want to live too far away from her family because she would miss them. Upset and shocked, I said, "Then why did you join the agency?" When she didn't understand what "agency" was, I showed her the dictionary and then said, "Agency, remember? Vika and Inna, where we met?" I repeated, "Pacheemoo (Why) you joined agency with Vika and Inna?" All she responded with was, "Nieznayu" (I don't know).

Oh great, I thought. What a hypocrite. It didn't make sense at all why she joined the AFA agency. Perhaps she was just telling me this to let me know subtly that she wasn't interested in me, or perhaps she had changed her mind since joining the agency. But whatever the case, this girl was obviously a waste of my time. I decided that I would leave here soon to go back to Simferopol and get more introductions from the agency. I would leave tomorrow, but tomorrow was Sunday and the agency office wouldn't be open so there would be no point. Therefore, I decided to announce later that I would leave Monday morning then.

After the snack, we walked down to one of the gravel pebble beaches to swim. Since none of us had swimming trunks with us, Ira and Alona went in with their clothes on, while I just rolled up my pants and waded in up to my knees. I would have gone in with my clothes on too, but my bag with my camcorder and camera were in the backpack, and I was afraid that it might get stolen if I left it there



unattended. So I just took a photo of Ira and Alona out in the water to their necks instead. They looked like they were having fun, and I envied it.

Afterward, we continued down the boardwalk with Ira and Alona soaking wet in their clothes. We went through a park where people were playing outdoor table tennis, mini-racing cars, and bumper cars. Near the end, we came to a tall monolith with a red star on it. It looked very Soviet alright, and I wanted to get some footage and photos of such an icon. Besides, I always thought the red star looked pretty cool. Alona took a photo of Ira and I at the foot of the red star monolith, and I got some camcorder footage of it too.

We then stopped at this table where a young cute Asian girl was selling wine poured into cups. I got one for us to share, and then the Asian girl started talking to Ira and Alona, who explained who I was. The cute Asian girl with dark skin was from Korea, I think, and she spoke Russian like a local. She was the first Asian-Russian I've met who could speak the language fluently. When she and Alona went off to find a bathroom, Ira and I sat down at a bench to wait. Just for the heck of it, I tapped Ira and leaned forward to ask for a kiss, but she shook her head. When Alona and the Asian girl returned, we started on our way back.

During the walk back through the boardwalk, I wondered if Ira would hold my hand, so I offered it to her. She held it with a somewhat passive grip, but it felt good to hold it anyway. Alona said that it's good that we were holding hands. Along the way, we saw a big crowd around some event going on. It was some 7up promotion or contest with a host running it. Some girls dressed in green were dancing, and volunteers came up to do crazy things and get interviewed. With so many tall people in front of us, we couldn't see much of it, but Ira and Alona managed to squeeze in and even get 7up paper crowns. Since I couldn't even understand what they were saying, I just stood outside the crowd and waited. After a long wait, they decided to finally go. I saw an ATM machine so I went to get some more cash. Next, we stopped to ride the bumper cars. Alona wasn't interested, so Ira and I rode in one. I let her drive and she seemed a little amused by the ride and crashes.

Afterward, we walked back to a bus station. The bus we needed wasn't due to leave for another hour, so we sat down on the bench and waited. While we waited, I said I had to use the bathroom and left, but went to a payphone booth instead. I used my prepaid card to call the Simferopol agency and told them that things weren't working out with Irina and that I was coming back to Simferopol soon for more introductions. When they asked what happened, I told them about her apathetic treatment of me and that she just said she would never want to leave Ukraine. They said that it was strange and to call them when I was in town again. I came back to the bench to wait until our bus arrived. I told Ira that I wanted to go back to Simferopol the day after tomorrow, but Ira looked like she barely cared.

During the bus ride, I tried to capture some footage of the beautiful mountains and views along the way, but bushes kept blocking me right when I turned on the recording. I also filmed two young hot girls sitting across from us, one of which looked like Cleopatra. They saw me doing this and waving at them, and Ira looked embarrassed and explained to them that I'm from America (and probably acting like a crazy tourist). When I filmed Ira, she laughed and said "No, not me."

Back at her home, I rested a bit while Ira went out to do some cow herding. Then I felt like taking a walk and talking to people in the neighborhood, so I went out for a bit. I circled around a bit and then saw a young mom with a baby carriage that I saw yesterday and waved at briefly. She looked at me

curiously and then we talked. Her name was Lyuba, and we could barely understand each other. She followed me back to the front of Ira's home and I waited outside with her since I had nothing else to do inside. When Ira got back, I followed her in and said goodbye to Lyuba. While waiting for dinner, I took some footage of them in the kitchen, along with their cat and dog. Then some relatives came to stay for the night.

Later in the night, Ira and her mom took me to a friend's home in the village for a little get together. When we got there, they were just finished having a feast. They offered me something, but I was only willing to have some snacks. Then they played some American movie for me. When it got late, we walked back but some other neighbors invited me to the village bar with them, so I went with them and parted ways with Ira and her mom, who didn't want to come. After getting some drinks, we went around to a sitting area in the back. A young army man with us went to join a group sitting at a table. There was a cute girl in the group, and some young girls sitting at a table next to them who were checking me out. I was about to go introduce myself to them when one of the mothers with me, grabbed my arm to pull me to an empty table. I tried to break free so I could go talk to those young girls, but she didn't want me to for some reason. Instead, we sat at our own table. I was bored and upset for not being allowed to talk to the young girls there.

After a while, the group of girls at the next table left, and when they did, one of them turned back to look at me. Then the young army officer came back to join us as well. After that, Ira and her mom arrived and joined us. (It would have been cool if I had been with those girls at the next table when Ira arrived lol) Soon the young army officer became drunk and started asking me crazy questions. He asked me what my name was many times, and then some other dumb question that I kept saying no to. Soon after he kept doing it, I said "no no no no no no" many times, and Ira said let's go. I did like though, the way he kept calling me "Vinston". In fact, so far almost all Russians and Ukrainians had called me "Vinston" instead of "Winston" because there was no "W" sound in their language, so they could only use the "V" sound. It was interesting.

When we got back home, I chatted with Ira's dad Yuliy for a long time. He asked me many questions about America and the army there. I knew almost nothing except the basics though. He told me a little about what life was like in the Ukrainian army and how bad it was because you had to do everything you were told. Sometimes, they even call you in the middle of the night to go somewhere for hours and you have no choice but to go. He was also kind enough to give me a Ukrainian army badge as a souvenir. Yuliy said that at one time, he also worked for the police in Simferopol, and that they were corrupt and he didn't like them. (that would explain why they keep checking my passport every time they saw me) Then he said that tomorrow morning, he would take me to see a tank at the army fort that he worked at. The relatives that were staying here tonight also came back from wherever. Among them was a mother, daughter, and son. The daughter was about 18-20, a bit plump but kind of cute.

When I tried to take a shower that night, something weird happened. You see, in the morning the water was all cold on both valves. Now the water was hot on both valves! Back home, I had seen the water turn all cold on both valves when the hot water tank ran out or the gas tank broke, but I had never seen it where both valves had only steaming hot water before. How unusual and funny! Then, after 11pm, both valves were out of water completely! I told Yuliy how funny this was, and he happily said, "Hey, it's Russia." (There's that phrase again that people say to laugh off when things go crazy in this country. It's nice that people can make fun of their own country like that. However, this is Ukraine though, but I guess they can say that too since Ukraine used to be part of Russia.)

When we went to bed, the relatives slept in the guest room with me on the other beds. The son kept joking around with me. He even called me the infamous "Winston cigarettes" that I had heard all throughout childhood. Then we started talking about his sister in the room (I don't remember her name). I said that since we were bored, she should striptease for us. The brother said that she would do it for 100 dollars. I said no way. Then he joked, "How about sex with her for 1000 dollars?" I said sure but the sister hit him for that. We continued joking around until we fell asleep.

## **Chapter 51: Visit to army fort, tank, cows and sheep**

The next morning, before I could shower, Yuliy took me to his army fort to see an antique tank. We went out and were soon joined by one of his fellow officers with a hat on. While we stopped to talk, the officer said that there was an American woman over there. I looked and said "Where?" Soon an older lady and a young girl came our way, and the officer beckoned them to come over. He pointed out the older lady as the American. I said hi and she greeted me with the familiar American accent. She said she was from North Carolina and was here doing some teaching as part of a missionary work project. The young girl with her, a gorgeous girl with sandy blonde hair, said she was a Russian American living in North Carolina as well, who came here to be the lady's translator. I briefly explained what I was doing here and that I wished I had a translator too. It was interesting to meet them because they were a glimpse back home to the world I was familiar with, but trying to speak English with them was awkward because I hadn't used it so long that it was kind of rusty. After they left, I regretted not getting that young girl's email or something, but then I thought, "Nah, she lives too far away from me anyway."

We continued on to the army fort and climbed over some barbed wire. He took me across a field and inside a building. Yuliy chatted with the men in there then took me out to another field nearby. The big old tank lay before us. It was bigger than I imagined and was a grand symbol of mankind's development of machines and warfare. I climbed it in awe. I don't think I've climbed onto a tank since 1985 when I climbed an old American one in Honolulu, Hawaii. Then I gave Yuliy my camera to take some photos of me. After that, I gave him my camcorder to shoot footage of me too. Then he climbed onto the tank with me while the other officer held the camcorder. Ira's dad took my hand in comradeship and said, "It's friendship." He was such a cool guy. The officer walked around the tank as he filmed us, at my request because the sun was behind us from where he was at first.

As we walked back, I told Yuliy that I was leaving tomorrow, and that I wanted to thank them by buying some champagne and watermelon. He said I could get champagne at the village bar or grocery store. And then he invited me to the village bar where some of his buddies were at anyway, so I went. Inside, we sat at a table with the other military buddies who were smoking and drinking. Most of them drank vodka and kept offering it to me, but I couldn't tolerate much of it. So I bought some beer instead, but the bottle they recommended was too bitter for me, so I gave it away. When I asked if I could try someone else's beer, Yuliy said, "In our country, everything on a table belongs to everyone. There is no "yours" or "mine". I told him it was the opposite in my country, and that I liked their way better.

After a while, Ira's mom came in and looked upset. She started yelling at Yuliy and then dragged him away back home. I don't know why she was so upset, perhaps she was afraid he would come home drunk or something. She beckoned for me to leave too, but I said I wanted to buy them some

champagne and watermelon first. So she took me to the little grocery store next door. I checked the price of the same bottle of champagne at the grocery store and then at the bar, and found that the one at the store was cheaper, although they were right next to each other. When I asked why, they said something like bars just naturally charge more. I just bought the bottle at the grocery store. Then outside, Ira's mom took me to an outside table where a peddler was selling some watermelons. I picked the best one at her suggestion. Back at their home, I put the champagne in the refrigerator and watermelon on the kitchen table. Then I showered and took a nap for a while.

When I awoke, I looked for Ira to ask when she was going cow herding again because I wanted to capture some of it with my camcorder. I didn't see her til later, and when I asked her, she said we could go now if I wanted to. Her mom went along too. As we went, they walked unusually fast for some reason, and even my brisk walking couldn't keep up with them. Even when I just glanced another way, when I glanced back, it was like they gained more yards within a second. The way they were walking was almost superhuman. I didn't understand the rush either. But the reality was that they were getting farther and farther from me, and I knew that at this rate they would soon be out of my sight. I didn't feel that I should have to run to catch up with them though, and I couldn't believe that they would just leave me in the dust like that. It would be very inconsiderate and strange of them to do so. A normal person would at least slow down so I could keep them in sight. But not these two, they just sped up like I wasn't even there following them.

When we got to the hills, they were a speck in the distance and soon vanished behind the hill they crossed. I made it to the last place I saw them before they vanished, but I couldn't see them anywhere. The trail ahead forked several ways and they left me no way of knowing where to go. I listened to sounds but it was quiet. So I just relied on gut instinct from the last time we went through here and picked where I felt was the right trail. The hills rolled on as I walked but there was no sign of them. I also kept an eye out for the sight of any cows too. I wasn't sure what to do but continue on and listen for any sounds of them or the cows. I even walked through some mud along an unpaved path.

Eventually, I heard the voice of Ira's mom shouting ahead. Then I saw them in the distance behind bushes herding the cows together. When I caught up with them, I angrily said, "Pacheemoo" and made the walk fast gesture with my fingers. Ira replied, "Shto pacheemoo?" I repeated the question but she didn't seem to understand it. So I said forget it and then turned on my camcorder but the battery was almost out. I was only to get a few seconds of footage of Ira walking with a stick toward the cows. Then I got another few seconds, but after that the battery was dead. I kept taking out the battery and putting it back in because sometimes that gives it a little burst of energy, but it didn't work this time because it was too dried up.

As I stood there fiddling with the battery and camcorder, a sheep herder approached the area with about a hundred sheep and lambs surrounding him. Soon a whole plethora of them were in front of me. It was a very tranquil sight as sheep are known for their gentle tranquil nature. I felt relaxed watching them all. But I really regretted that my camcorder was out of power because this would have made for good footage too. I kept trying and pushing the record button though, but it was futile. The sheep herder then said something to me and at first I thought he was asking me for money for filming his sheep (after what I've been through, I wouldn't be surprised!) but then he pointed to his wrist so I knew he was asking for the time. I told him in Russian. Then he and the sheep passed by.

I made my way back toward where Ira and her mom went to. This time, I went a different way and descended into a deep crest under some trees. It was a pretty path but since it was unpaved I just hoped I wouldn't step through some mud or quicksand. lol Soon I caught up to them and another young boy who appeared and was herding the cows too. As I walked with them, the boy went to some cows behind me and commanded them to stampede ahead. One of the cows darted toward me and I ran out of its way. As the big bulk of mass ran by me, I thought, "I didn't come all this way on my trip through 6 Russian cities to finally be finished off by a charging cow!" No, that's not how it would end for me! My destiny was still ahead. But the running out of the way of the cow reminded me somewhat of the scene in St. Petersburg while I was walking with the Australian guy when I ran out of the way of a car.

When we got back to the village, I saw someone wave at me from a distance. (At least someone notices me around here, I thought) Looking closer, I saw that it was Lyuba and she was with Valera. They were pushing Lyuba's baby carriage. They beckoned me to come over to them and I did since their company was much more warm and pleasant than Ira's. So I veered in their direction while Ira and her mom went home. Lyuba introduced the other girl to me as Valera, who looked very young, like 18-20, and cute as well. Unfortunately, I found out that Valera was married too. I walked with them, talked and laughed. We made circles around the village and stopped at one of the grocery stores so I could get them some ice cream bars. I had no idea if they were just walking the baby or actually trying to go somewhere though.

At one point, I even started pushing the baby carriage for them. I showed them the Russian cuss words that Julia in Cherepovets taught me, that they were greatly amused and reacted to them. I also wrote down my contact information for them in case they wanted to write me someday. Eventually it started getting dark and Lyuba ran into her husband. Then I took a photo of Lyuba and Valera, and also had Lyuba take one of Valera and me. Then Lyuba left with her husband while Valera and I walked back.

I really liked Valera, she was cool and laid back and fun to joke with. And I began to wish I was the one married to her. When we passed by a tall water tower with two cyclinder tanks below it, she pointed to it and used my dictionary to say that it looked like a man's genitals. lol Then I showed her that for everyone who passes by us, I was going to say "Kak dila?" (How are you? <informal>) to them and if they didn't answer and passed by, I would turn around and say, "Pajole nawhee" (The "F" word) back at them. She reacted with great amusement and astonishment and especially more so as I actually did this a few times. Then I kept joking that I ought to call out the words "Pajole Nawhee" real loud in the village courtyard, and that if I did, a bunch of people would run down with sticks to beat me. She laughed and nodded. This was great fun and a stress reliever for all that awkward tension around Ira. When we got to Valera's building, I hugged her and said goodbye. Back in Ira's home, after dinner, we opened the champagne bottle and cut the watermelon slices. I thanked their parents for their hospitality.

## **Chapter 52: Back to Simferopol for on-the-spot introductions**

The next morning, I packed my things into my luggage to prepare to leave. Yuliy wasn't around, so I didn't get to say goodbye to him. After packing everything up into my two luggage carts, I dragged them to the front door, but Ira's mom said to wait first until she and Ira go somewhere first. While I waited, Alona came in and talked to me a bit. I told her that I was leaving cause Ira ignored me and didn't seem to like me. She seemed surprised about it and had no idea why Ira was treating me like that. I guess Ira was silent about it to even her friends. Alona was very nice and warm though, so she was

good company. It was too bad that Ira wasn't like her. I basically told Alona that I was tired after travelling to so many cities already with mixed results. I said that some girls I met liked me, but Ira wasn't one of them. Alona was very understanding. When I asked her why Ira even joined the agency since she never wanted to leave the Ukraine, Alona said she wasn't sure but that she thinks that it may have been Ira's grandmother's idea to get her into the agency.

When Ira and her mom returned, they said that Ira and Alona would take me to the bus stop below the hill. We went and I was glad to finally get out of here and to be out of Ira's awkwardness. This time, I rolled my luggage down the cement walkway, which was a lot easier although the steps were bumpy. Alona talked to me during the walk down, but Ira was mostly silent. Near the bottom, we passed two cute teenage girls, but there was no time to talk to them because my bus was just arriving. I got to it just in time, put my luggage onboard, and gave Ira one last hug and kiss on the cheek just for the heck of it. While I did though, the bus doors closed up and banged onto me, but reopened. lol Then I got onboard and the bus took off.

An hour later, I got off the stop in front of Hotel Moskva. I rolled my luggage toward the entrance and looked for the Ira waitress I had flirted with before, but she wasn't there now. I checked in again into the same class room as I had before and then went up to rest in relief that I was away from the jungle girl Ira now. After resting a bit, I called the agency office to tell them of my status. They said that they would start calling the girls' ID's that I wrote down from the website a few days ago, and call me back if they got any results. Then I took some footage of the view from the window and gave a verbal update as to what was happening now.

I only had about three days left before I had to leave for Kiev for my flight home. I wondered if I should try to make it to Odessa or not, since there was an agency there that emailed me and said they would try to help me out with some introductions. And there was an American ex-pat living there as well who said he'd show me around. But time was short, and if I spent a day riding there, I would only have two days left. I wasn't sure if that would be worth it or not. I didn't even know where to stay there. There was also another backup girl in Vinnitsa, but that was close to Kiev, and I wasn't that enthused about her anyway. So I figured I'd just stick here and see what happened with the introductions from the agency office here.

Later on, I got a call from the agency office. Vika said that there was a girl who was interested in meeting me, but she wasn't on my list. She just happened to pass through the office and heard about me. Vika also said that almost all of the girls on my list were either gone, out of town, or working right now, so they had a lot of trouble getting a hold of them. I said I'd come down to meet her at 4pm, and they said that was fine. I knew there was a very low probability of these blind meetings even turning into simple friendships, but what else did I have to do today? If the meeting didn't work out, I'd just go to the internet cafe from there and write my next update.

After freshening up, I prepared to leave. I took the taxi down to the agency office and greeted Vika and Inna again. They asked what happened with Ira and I explained it to them, including her act of ignoring me and her statement that she never wanted to leave Ukraine. They said that it was strange, because Ira had told them before that she was interested in going to America. Well, I thought, either she's changed her mind since then, or she lied to me as an excuse to reject me, or else she lied to the agency because she half-heartedly joined it since as Alona told me, her grandmother might be the one behind it. In any case, we weren't a good match, so it didn't matter. Vika showed me the online photos of the lady I was

about to meet. She was in her late 20's and so so looking. Here is the profile she showed me:  
<http://www.loveme.com/women/info35914.htm>)

A while later, the lady who was to meet me here showed up. She was cute and decent looking, but not normally the kind of girl I would go for. And I could tell that she was probably a different kind of person than me. But I would give her a chance anyway to see what happened (what else did I have to do?). She greeted me very passively and didn't even shake my hand. How polite of her. Then after Vika introduced us, I suggested we sit in front of the computer to use the [www.translate.ru](http://www.translate.ru) website to translate between us, since she spoke no English. I tried to act lighthearted but she seemed really serious. We talked about our occupations and she said she was a nurse. I showed her my form introduction letter from a disk in my backpack, and translated parts of it, but she said she didn't need to see it all. Instead, she said she wanted to just "associate" with me, according to the dictionary definition she pointed to. I thought the word "to associate" meant that she was interested in getting to know me, but I was wrong. This was confusing. She probably meant that she wanted to converse with me, because she denied later ever saying that she was interested in getting acquainted with me. How odd. She said that we were too different and not compatible.

When I asked what the problem was, whether she didn't like my looks, and why she came to that conclusion so quickly, she said that appearance didn't matter, and that her intuition told her that we had different outlooks on life. How the hell did she know what my "outlook on life" was? How strange. I tried telling her that intuition is a feeling and is not a reliable tool, but she claimed that her intuition was usually reliable and right. I knew it was a female thing to use their intuition to gauge compatibility, since males don't usually trust their intuition as much, and instead facts and appearance to form their judgment. Oh well, I thought, perhaps intuition may not be reliable in all other areas of life, but perhaps it was reliable in determining whether a person is compatible with you or not. After a while, I gave up and asked her if she wanted to go home, and she quickly nodded yes. She left and barely even said goodbye. What a great attitude she had. How nice and polite of her. Boy she made me feel so special, NOT!

As she left, she said something to Vika and then Vika looked at me and shrugged, saying "Nothing I can do about it." I said, "I know. I know." Then I asked permission to check my email on their computer, and they said sure. I checked it for a bit, and then started messing around with Vika and Inna. I copied the file with my journal entries from my disk into Vika's computer, so she could read it sometime. While conversing, Vika said that I was hung on looks because I only picked the hottest babes. I said, "That's not true. Why do you say that?" and she said, "It is obvious from the girls you already visited and from the girls you picked on your list here." I laughed and then I started flirting with them. First, I said, "Vika is very kraseeva (beautiful)" and she said "Thank you." Then I said, "Inna is very kraseeva" and Vika said, "Winston, you like to flatter people don't you?" (as my friend Michael always said, "Winston Wu, the kind of flattery". lol) I replied, "But it's true!" Then Vika said, "Every woman is kraseeva" but I replied, "Not every!" Soon, telling the girls there that they were "very kraseeva" became an inside joke among us.

When the agency office started closing, I told them that I was heading to the internet cafe and they said they'd call me tomorrow if they had any more introductions for me. But I said, "Why can't I just have an introduction with Inna?" Since Inna had already left, and Vika had no time, I would have to find the internet cafe by myself, which should be easy since I have the address written down.

Outside, I walked down the street looking for where to turn. I remember from last time Inna took me that there was just one turn here, but all the turns looked similar. After going back and forth a bit, I asked people for directions and eventually someone showed me the right corner to turn at. I got there quickly and went in to type up my next update. I told everyone what happened with Ira and what I was up to now. At the end of the update, I apologized that this update was boring and uneventful, but that was reality and my updates were all the facts.

Then, on the Russian Bride List, I got a message from Terry, one of the guys who gave me a hard time earlier for being obsessed with Britney Spears type blondes. He said that if I was still in Simferopol, to contact him because he would be glad to help me "sort things out." I thought it would be interesting to finally meet one of these people from the list who knew my whole story here, so I accepted and wrote him back, asking him for his phone number here. Since these guys had been so mean to me, I wondered if Terry was under the impression that I was hoaxing my trip reports from Colorado, and using this proposed meeting to test if I was here or not. But in any case, even if he was, he would soon have proof that I was here when we met, and then he could tell the Russian Bride List that he could confirm that I was indeed here and not in Colorado. Then the last laugh would be on them, and I'd get a chance to see if those guys would be man enough to admit that they were wrong or not.

When I finished, it was late and I took a taxi back home. I was going to call Natasha but it was very late now and she would be sleeping. So I wondered if I should get another call girl like Lena or someone else. It was so cheap so why not? But I talked myself out of it and walked across to a convenience store to get some snacks instead. When I came back, I flirted with this lady Tatiana who worked at a little cigarette/alcohol kiosk in the lobby. She pleasantly tolerated it but showed little emotion on her face.

### **Chapter 53: Awkward introduction, and a call to an American expatriate**

The next day, while deciding what to do, I got a call from the agency office saying that another girl there wanted to meet me. I said I'd be there in two hours. Then I went down and before I left, I flirted with the lobby kiosk girl again by saying, "Viecherum, you and me, discotheque?" (Tonight, you and me, disco?) to which she said no because she had to work til midnight. Then I went to the little cafe outside and said hi to Ira the waitress again, and told her I was back but that I didn't have much fun where I went and didn't even get to go to Yalta.

Then I rode the taxi to the agency office. There were two new girls there. One had short hair and was so so looking, and the other was much more pretty and elegant and I recognized her from her profile. The short haired one was the one who wanted to meet me though. I would have been interested in the pretty one, but Vika had warned me about her yesterday when I saw her profile online (at <http://www.loveme.com/women/info41778.htm>), saying that a male client who dated her said she was very shallow, had a bad personality and undesirable habits. But now she was here, and I just politely said hi and said I recognized her from her profile.

The one that wanted to meet me wasn't really my type, but I gave it a shot anyway. I asked to view her profile, and she showed it to me (at <http://www.loveme.com/women/info37903.htm>). We used the same online site to communicate ([www.translate.ru](http://www.translate.ru)). This time, she didn't blow me off right away like the lady did yesterday, but we didn't seem to have much chemistry either. When I asked if she wanted



to do anything tonight, she said she would have to go back home and call me about it later, so I left her my number. Then, using their computer, I went onto my email to see if Terry had written back with his phone number. He did and I copied it down and left. Before I left, another staff member named Anna, a tall skinny blonde in her 30's who I joked looked like an Olympic swimmer, wrote a note in Russian for me that said I needed a train ticket to Kiev, so I could take it to the train station when I was ready to buy the ticket.

Back at my hotel, I gave Terry a call. His wife answered and went to get him. I introduced myself and we chatted a bit. When I said, "Now are you convinced that I'm here and not in Colorado?" he said that he was never one of the people on the list who suspected that, and that the quality of the phone reception on my end confirmed to him that I was in the Ukraine. (Actually, to this day, those who accused me of hoaxing my updates from Colorado never apologized or admitted that they were wrong. In fact, everyone asked said they were not one of those who thought that. It's funny how stubborn the human ego is!) He said that he was busy tonight and that we could get together tomorrow. He and his translator and helper Yevgeniy would show me around the big market bazaars and go to a cafe too. Yevgeniy would also help me get tickets at the train station for Kiev. We agreed to meet at noon tomorrow.

That evening, the girl I met in the agency office called me too. She sort of said that she was busy tonight and couldn't do anything, but would call me later if she had time. I asked if she wanted to come to my hotel later and she sounded surprised and said, "To your hotel?" to which I replied, "Yeah, just to meet me here I mean." I sort of knew she was going to make an excuse tonight. And as I suspected, that was the last I heard from her. (I told you that's how these random blind meetings tend to go!)

Since it was still early evening, I decided now to call Natasha. I missed her so much now and hadn't talked to her since my first day in Mariupol. I walked to the bus station with the row of payphones and bought a new prepaid card. This time there was a ring and I was excited. When she picked up, I heard her familiar voice say "Hallo" and I said "Hi Natasha?" and she let out a long sigh and said "Ohhhhhh Winston!" I immediately said "Yas coo chai yo bolshoy" and she said something I didn't recognize but I knew she was saying something similar. I saw on the time meter that I only had 2 minutes on this card though, so I knew I'd have to make it quick.

She asked if I was still in Mariupol, and I said no that I was now in Simferopol in Crimea. I asked her if she knew where that was, and she said yes. I then said, "I wish Natasha was here with me" and she replied, "Winston, Natasha no time." I said, "I know, but I meant that I wished Natasha was here." I'm not sure she understood what the word "wish" meant. Then the time meter was a few seconds from being out, so I said I'd call her right back. I bought another prepaid card and called her back to finish my conversation. I told her that I was leaving in a few days to go to Kiev and that I would try to call her from there. Then I said, "Natasha? Ummm... Ummmmm... I love you" and she sounded surprised and giggled a bit, then said, "I love you too" but I wasn't sure if she really meant that or was just saying it back for the heck of it. Then I said "kiss" and then "goodbye".

Next, I called Elena in Mariupol to update her on how things were going, like I said I would. I felt like she was now an old friend that I could trust. She answered happily and I quickly updated her on how things went with Evgeniya and then Irina. When the time ran out, we said goodbye and she said she would wait for my call from the USA. I tried withdrawing cash from the ATM machine there, but it

was down for maintenance. Just for going into that area though, two policemen who came in just as I was leaving stopped me to check my passport.

When I came back to the hotel, I stopped to talk to the waitress Ira again, and while doing so, another waitress came out of the hotel restaurant inside to bring food out to somebody, and I noticed how gorgeous and Cinderella-like she was. She was petite, had brown hair, and a cute angel face with a sweet demeanor that made you feel like a school boy. I didn't know there was a restaurant in there, and I was hungry, and I wanted to meet that waitress too, so I went in to get something to eat. It was a nice fancy place, and that waitress came and led me to a table. Her name was Nastya (short for Anastasia) and gave me a menu. There was a little English in it so I could understand some of it. I ordered a vegetable dish, some pancakes, and bread. Then I chatted with Nastya a bit but she seemed very reserved and conservative. When I asked her if she'd like to come to America, she said "No I love my home here." The food I ordered was very good and tasty.

Afterward, I paced around the lobby and small casino wondering if I should get another call girl. I felt like doing so, but my morals made me feel reluctant. While chatting with the security guard, the driver of the hotel saw me wandering about and asked me if I wanted a woman again by using his hands to outline a woman's hourglass figure. (He also was the one who drove Lena to me a couple of nights ago, by the way, so he knew I was game for these kind of things) I said not tonight, and then told him and the security guard to wait while I went up to my room to get something. I got my camcorder and put the new tape of the sex with Lena in it. Then I came down and showed them some clips of it. The bartender came out to watch too. They were all amused by it, and I thought it was cool to show it, but now I felt embarrassed.

Then that beautiful waitress Nastya came out because she just got off work. She said she wanted to see what we were all looking at, and I said no that it was not something for her to see. That made her more curious and she asked why she couldn't see it. I didn't know how to explain it to her so I just said that it was dirty. I think eventually she figured it out or someone else told her though. When I was done, I put in the other tape I usually used, fast forwarded it to the last taped spot, and then taped a few seconds of Nastya. She didn't look very happy about it on camera, and I said I would tape over it if she wanted, and she said to please do that. Then the driver took her home. When she left, I told the security guard and bartender that Nastya was so beautiful. They agreed. When I asked them if she could be bought for a price by saying, "Nastya... skolkah?" and then pointing up to my room, they understood and said no she's not that kind of girl.

## **Chapter 54: American Expatriate Terry shares his experience and wisdom**

The next morning, I had breakfast and then called Terry to confirm our meeting time at noon today. Then I went down to the lobby. In the elevator down, there were some tourists with me. When it stopped and I got out at the wrong floor, I ran back in and said "What the hell?" Realizing that I was a fellow American, the tourists inside asked where I was from and what I was doing here. After telling them, they told me they were on vacation here. I sat down in the lobby and waited.

Right before noon, Terry and his translator came. He was a man in his late forties or early fifties, had a rugged look about him, and a dark beard and mustache. You could tell he was someone with experience to utilize and share, and he had a sharp gaze that told you if he knew something, he knew it

well. The translator with him was a tall skinny boy about 19 or 20. Terry walked up to me where I was sitting and asked, "Are you Winston?" I said yes, arose and shook his hand. He introduced me to Yevgeniy, his translator. We then went on our way.

Yevgeniy recommended we take the bus because it was the most cost effective. So we rode it to a part of town near the city center. We walked on some crowded streets to an inner walkway. Terry showed me where one of his favorite cafes was, and we sat down. But the menu wasn't very extensive, and since I was a vegetarian, it made it even more difficult to find something to eat. So they recommended another place that would have a better variety of selection. I apologized and said I hoped I wasn't causing any inconvenience, but they said it didn't matter.

So we went to a bigger cafe that was located inside a courtyard and sat down. The menu was more extensive this time, and Yevgeniy interpreted the items on there for me. I ordered some appetizers and a meal with eggs, while they ordered their own thing. After the waitress came and took our order, I took out my camcorder and began to show Terry various clips of all seven of the women I visited so far, starting with Olga in St. Petersburg. Now, I didn't have to explain much other than who they were, because Terry was on one of the email lists where I sent my periodic updates of my trip to, so he knew my story basically and what had happened at each visit. I only needed to tell him the names of the people I showed him.

When I showed him clips of Julia in Cherepovets, he said that he had met her type before during his travels here, and that she was an opportunist seeking to exploit people for her own benefit. He said people that like may be entertaining for a while, but that was it and you should treat it as such. Yevgeniy was mildly amused by Julia's sexy goodbye dance scene though. He commented that he also knew another girl who was a Britney Spears look-alike as well, but she had absolutely no personality, substance, or awareness of anything going on around her. When I showed Natasha E. in Tulah, Terry said that she was pretty. Then when he saw Evgeniya of Dnepropetrovsk, he exclaimed that she looked like she was 12 years old! lol Finally, I showed him clips of Irina from Perenalvov village and he said that she looked somewhat backward like a village girl. Then I told him how she ignored me while I visited her home and that I was confused as to why she brought me there in the first place. Terry replied, "Well, what does she have to lose?"

Then our meal came, and it was very hearty and plentiful. Terry told me that what I had experienced so far was fairly typical, and that he had experienced many similar things during his trips the last few years. He said that I had just begun the process of finding a wife here, and that I should prepare for a long process ahead of me, because that's how it is with most people who take on this venture. When I asked him how long it took him to find his wife, he said four years, and I looked deflated and slouched on my seat. Then I asked him about all those other people on the list who got engaged after a few weeks, but he said that those were the exception, not the norm, and even then most of those quick engagements tended to not work out in the long run. In any case, he just said to be prepared in case I am not one of the exceptions, because it usually turns into a very extensive process, which might be a good thing anyway since marriage is a huge important decision that should not be made lightly anyway.

He also complimented me for being brave enough to travel alone to six different cities so far in a country that most Americans grew up fearing, saying that that in itself is a great accomplishment. He said that when I got back home, it would probably take me two or three months to sort out my thoughts and feelings about the experiences of this trip, since a lot of my worldviews and experiences were now

changed so much by it. (He was definitely right about that!) He also felt that he did not sense my claim that the Russian Bride List we were on was ganging up on me or attacking me out of vindictiveness. He said he didn't see what I claimed about them, and that they were just giving me a hard time to teach me a lesson. When the check came, I offered to pay my share, but Terry said he would get it for me. I thanked him graciously.

After the hearty meal, Terry said he would show me the biggest outdoor shopping bazaar in this town. He said he had to get some appliance accessories for his home anyway. So we walked a few blocks to it. During the walk, Terry told me more about who he was and how he got here. I learned that he spent much of his time during his trips in a Siberian town of Russia called Tomsk. There, he was very popular with the locals and especially the women. There was even this one incident where he defied the corrupt authorities who tried to harass him and arrest him on something they hoped to profit from, as a result of shady politics within government. He ended up winning in the end, with the help of his lawyer, and as a result, he was elevated to the status of a hero in the town of Tomsk. He said at that time, he could have any woman in the town. Eventually, he settled down with his wife Olga and her son. Although Olga had used the introduction agencies before, they did not meet that way. Instead, they met through a mutual friend in Tomsk.

After that, they decided to live together here in Ukraine along with Olga's son. He mentioned that he liked the kind of lifestyle here, which you couldn't get it in the states. Since then, he has found work here by doing economic development projects for American companies and Ukrainian companies. He said that there is a vast market potential here that could be utilized into a booming economy given the right conditions. Since he didn't like the hustle and bustle of the big cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg, he had always stayed in the towns and small cities.

Terry agreed with me about how the women here were generally different than the ones back in the states, and described the women here as a "different breed". I liked that term and wholeheartedly agreed with it. However, I knew that I would be echoing this discovery when I got back to the states, and that people would be offended and try to discredit me to protect their egos. (and sure enough, that's exactly what happened!) But I knew from my experiences that this was true beyond a shadow of a doubt, and that I would take consolation in the fact that I was among the lucky ones to find this out. He also said that after his divorce from an American woman and experiencing Russia's women, he lost interest in American women and found them boring in comparison. I could see how that could be since the women here have much inner depth, values, and culture to them than the average American woman.

Since living here, he said that there have been obstacles and inconveniences as well. He described this one incident like this, "You don't know what the word 'inconvenience' really means until you've been dragged from your bed in the middle of the night by the police." I looked shocked and asked him what he was talking about. He related to me that the police here in Simferopol were corrupt (which I knew because Ira's father Yuliy told me this because he used to work for them), and that they tried to nail him and fine him for some technical violation in order to try to profit from it. They didn't even give him any warning and instead just dragged him out of bed in the middle of the night.

While detained, he threatened to contact his lawyer and some other powerful people he knew who would get them in trouble, so they released him. But they still keep an eye on him though, to see what else they can nail him for. One time, they even harassed his translator Yevgeniy because he forgot his passport, just because he was with Terry. Despite these kind of obstacles, he still prefers to live here

because the lifestyle suits him better. I admired this man for living the way he believed, rather than according to what society taught. He had courage and integrity, I thought, and was true to himself even if his choices were unconventional by the standards of American society.

The outdoor main market bazaar was huge, much bigger than any I had been to before, and Terry bought some appliance accessories, vegetables, and other things. I bought some ice cream and offered to get some for them too, but they weren't in the mood for it. Afterward, we all took the bus to Terry's home. It was a nicely decorated spacious flat in a quiet area. Terry introduced me to his wife Olga, who was a tall skinny woman in her mid-thirties. She had a somewhat dark complexion and was very polite. While Terry went off to do something, Yevgeniy and I sat down at the kitchen table while Olga gave us some juice, pie, and cookies.

When Terry came back, he showed me around his place and his computer in the living room too. Then he said that later on, Yevgeniya would take me to the train station to get my ticket for Kiev. They warned that I had better get them soon because the college kids were now going home from here to start school again, so the trains may be close to full. Then I told them that since tomorrow was my last day here, I planned to take a trip to see Yalta since I never saw it. I didn't want to leave here without seeing it because it would feel foolish to tell people that I came to Crimea and never saw Yalta or hung out at the beach much. Besides, I hadn't gone swimming all summer, and if I missed this opportunity, I wouldn't get to swim in warm clean waters the rest of the summer either because the beaches and lakes back in Washington were cold and filthy. Since I didn't have anyone to go with, I would probably go alone.

Terry had Yevgeniy call some girls he knew to see if they were available to accompany me there as an acquaintance. He dialed some numbers but they were all either not home or working tomorrow. We knew that it would be difficult to find someone on such short notice. So I just prepared to go alone and asked Yevgeniy for directions on taking the right bus.

Afterward, Terry wanted to take a nap, so Yevgeniy and I prepared to leave. I thanked Terry for all his help and hospitality and said goodbye. He said it was a pleasure and that if I could stop by again before I left, he said he would tell the Russian Bride List that I existed and that my stories were true.

Yevgeniy took me by bus to the train station. He translated for me and helped me buy the tickets. Fortunately, there were still plenty of seats available. At that time, I thought that it was ironic that my last helping hand in this trip came from someone from the Russian Bride List, a group that has been overly critical of me so far like a nemesis. On the way back, I bought a soda bottle and offered to get him one but he refused. Next, we headed for the agency office. Since he was such a good translator, I said that maybe he could get a job at the agency arranging social tours for AFA. I don't remember why I had to stop at the agency now, but I think it was to check if I had any more introductions since I didn't get a chance to call them that day yet. We went in and Yevgeniy talked to the staff briefly before leaving.

The staff told me that they still couldn't get a hold of anyone on my list, but they had someone in mind for me that was sweet and might make a good match for me. In addition, she may be able to go with me to Yalta tomorrow too. They showed me her photo online and I thought she was somewhat pretty. Then

they called her and talked to her briefly. She was curious about me, so they gave the phone to me, but she didn't speak much English. But she left me her number to call her tomorrow though.

Then I asked any of the staff if they would be willing to go with me to Yalta tomorrow, but none of them had time except for Vika's older sister, who was visiting there. She said she might be willing to go with me, but just as an acquaintance, not a date. I could tell she didn't seem that enthused about it though. After a while, she said that maybe it's better if I call that lady they introduced to me on the phone later and see if she'd be willing to go with me. I said ok. For a while, I did the usual inside joke with them by calling all the lady staff there "very kraseeva". Vika again said that I had a flattering mouth, and that all women were beautiful. When I was ready to go home, Anna walked me to the bus stop that would take me back to Hotel Moskva.

On the minivan bus, I tried to tell the bus driver to let me know when we get to the stop near Hotel Moskva in case I missed it. He didn't seem to understand me, but a young girl nearby told me that she was getting off near there and would walk me there. When we got off, I saw Hotel Moskva looming right down the street (you couldn't miss it) but the girl wanted to walk me there anyway so I wouldn't get lost. (She had no idea if this was my first time there or not) I helped her out by carrying one of her bags during the walk. She barely spoke any English, but was pretty and attractive and somewhat exotic looking. Her name was Elya. After we got to the front of the hotel, I opened my phrase book and pointed to the phrase, "Would you like to go out with me tonight?" She said she couldn't because she had to catch a long distance bus at the station down the street (where I made my prepaid card calls) soon. So I asked if I could have her address to write to her instead. She said yes and wrote me her address. I wrote her mine as well. Then we said goodbye and departed. (I wrote Elya by air mail when I got home from the trip. She wrote back and said she was a Tatar and originally from Uzbekistan, and that she will never forget our meeting, and hopes to meet me again someday.)

## **Chapter 55: The sweet angel-faced waitress at the cafe**

Later, I came out to go to the bus station ATM machine to withdraw more cash to pay for tomorrow night's stay here (and a call girl later if I wanted one). Afterward, I went across the street to see what was going on up there. As I walked further up, I saw an outdoor cafe with polished wooden tables. It looked very nice. A pretty young waitress in there with a face of a fairy or angel made eye contact with me and beckoned me to come in. I wondered what she could want. Whatever it was, I couldn't resist a face like that! I went in the cafe, and as I suspected, she told me to sit down and order something to eat. Gee thanks a lot, I'm so flattered that you had no ulterior motives for asking me to come here, I thought. She gave me a menu as I tried to make conversation with her. She was very sweet and polite and attentive. But she was also reserved with values. I could tell she was probably momma's favorite girl. She had a face as pure and innocent as a girl from a classic fairy tale story too. I couldn't read the menu though, so at her suggestion, I ordered coffee and cookies. After I was done with them, she asked if I wanted tea, and I said yes.

Often, she used my dictionary to try to communicate with me. She also often said "One moment please" in a sweet exotic accent and left for a while. I took out my camcorder and captured her doing that a few times, cause she looked so pretty when she did it. (Everyone who has seen my video has said that she looks very sweet and pretty.) Whenever she came to check on me, I talked to her and asked her if she was single and interested in going to America. She said she was married or engaged (not sure

which one) and I said no way because she looked too young. Then she replied that girls here get married very young now.

After my tea, she asked if I wanted ice cream, because she wanted some too. I didn't understand what her wanting some had to do with me wanting some, then I realized that she was asking me to order two, one for her too. How strange, I thought. I have never ever had a waitress I just met ask if I could order something for her too. I thought that perhaps she was going to sit down and have ice cream with me though, so I agreed to it. She brought two ice creams out of the freezer sealed in a colorful pink wrap and plastic container, and put them both on my table. I took mine and opened it to eat it. As I ate it, I wondered if she was going to sit down and eat her ice cream with me, but she didn't. When she next came around, I asked if she was going to sit down to eat her ice cream now, but she said she was too busy to. Then when she finally had a minute, she took her ice cream and ate it while standing up at her counter. Gee, thanks a lot, I thought, for asking me to buy you something and not even sitting with me to eat it.

When I finished my ice cream, I asked her for the check. Then I asked if I could get a photo with her and she reluctantly said ok. When we posed, I moved to put my arm around her, but she took it off and said she didn't want to take the photo that way. Then the other waitress took the picture (and you can see it in my album if you want). When the check came, I looked at it and was shocked that both ice creams cost 20 grivnas altogether! I couldn't believe it and asked if there was some mistake.

(Please note: Although 20 grivnas is about 4 dollars and for two ice creams in a cafe in the USA that would be a normal price, you have to understand something. Normally I am not that stingy and in the US I would not have been shocked by that price for two ice creams, but you have to understand that for the last 6 weeks here I was used to paying for cheap prices for things. In fact, ice cream in the Ukraine so far had never been more than one grivna each, especially if it came from the freezer. So because I was already accustomed to things being a certain way, it shocked me when something deviated from the norm so greatly. And as you and anyone who has worked in retail well knows, anyone can be spoiled into taking something for granted if they are used to having it a certain way for a length of time.)

She said that there was no mistake and that the ice cream I bought is a special kind from Greece (just across the Black Sea from here). Well, I thought, that's nice considering that it didn't taste any different from any other ice cream in the world. I guess this is what I get for listening to Elena of Mariupol's advice about never asking the price for an item before you order it! I left the appropriate cash on the table, said goodbye to my waitress and left. While walking away, the waitress ran after me. I stopped to see what she wanted, and she said that I forgot to leave payment. I said I left it on the table and walked back with her to see what happened. I sure hoped someone didn't steal it. When we got back, another waitress told her it was ok and that they found the cash, so I left again.

Back in the hotel lobby, I went to Tatiana's kiosk to flirt with her again. This time though, I tried to be more practical and asked her where I could find the bus stop for Yalta tomorrow. She drew a map and said it was just across the street. Then a couple came to sit at the kiosk. They talked to me, asked many questions about my country and why I was here, and then bought drinks for me. He kept toasting me and everyone else, saying over and over, "America good". But I kept saying, "It's not as good as you think. Come on now."

## Chapter 56: Swimming in Yalta on my last day

The next morning, I called the girl the agency introduced me to on the phone yesterday. But she wasn't home and her brother said that she went to the hospital with her mom because she was feeling sick. He said to try back later that afternoon, but I couldn't because I was leaving for Yalta. So I just left her my email address instead, in case we didn't get to meet. Then I had breakfast, showered, paid for my next night's stay, and then went down to look for the bus stop to Yalta. Unlike Alushta, I remembered to bring my swimming trunks this time by wearing them beneath my pants. Tatiana was in the lobby again so I confirmed the directions she gave me. I walked in the direction she showed me, but it seemed like forever and there was no bus stop. So I asked some other people walking by, and they pointed me a completely different way. Soon I became confused. I had no idea how far it was or where I was walking. So I walked back to the street directly across from my hotel where there was often a large group of people waiting for a bus. Surely someone there would know.

When I got there, I asked a young girl and she told me to follow her and she would tell me where to transfer for it. So I got on her bus and it was so crowded inside that I couldn't move an inch without bumping into people. It was so crowded that at every stop the bus made, no one could get on, and no one wanted to get off too! Finally, some people got off and I sat down, but soon it became so crowded again that people were squished tightly against me. I remembered reading about this being common in Russia.

At the train station stop, the girl helping me beckoned me to get off. I did and followed her to a ticket window. On the way, many taxi drivers again came to offer me rides to Yalta for 30 dollars. I said no way because I could go by bus for less than 2 dollars. We stood in line for a while and she told me when the trolleybus would come. The teller said I could just pay on the bus, which would come in 30 minutes. Then another guy came up to us to solicit rides. After talking to him, the girl said I should just go with him since he is shuttling people to Yalta in his van, and it would be the same price as the trolleybus except I would get there faster. So I followed her advice and thanked her. There was a group of young guys and an older couple with us on the van.

The van drove quickly and beyond the stop at Irina's village, the road became steeper but you could see many beautiful views from here. I saw so many hot looking girls with shorts on standing at the bus stops along the way too. For some reason, I kept feeling unusually drowsy. I don't know if it was the heat getting to me or not. We passed through several beautiful towns along the way, and each time I thought that we had reached Yalta. But the driver who made stops there said it wasn't Yalta yet.

After a long ride and hilly ride, we finally reached Yalta and everyone got off. It was beautiful and had a resort like atmosphere about it. Before leaving, I asked what time the latest departing bus was, and another passenger said the bus back departed every hour until 10pm. Then I asked what direction the beach was, and they pointed me to just walk straight down the main sidewalk. So that's where I went. I had no plan or guide here, so I just figured I'd go with the flow. Whatever happens, at least now I can say I've been to Yalta! I thought the beach was close by, but it turned out to be very far away. I walked very long through shops, outdoor markets, buildings, etc. Along the way, I asked people where the beach was by saying, "Gdeh..." and then making swimming movements with my hands. They all told me to just continue down the sidewalk where I was going. But it seemed to take forever. I should have just taken a bus through this, but I didn't want to risk getting lost.



Soon I felt hungry, so I stopped by at a food stand. I ordered a veggie wrap and some tea. While eating it, I set my hot tea down on a table in front of me, but was annoyed by this kid who continually shook the table even though he saw that my tea was on it. I couldn't hold the tea in my hand for long either because the water in it was scorching hot through the thin plastic cup. Finally, his mom came to take him away and I was glad to put the tea back down on the table again. After the small meal, I went beyond the food stand where there was a series of produce markets. I thought I would look for some pastries or cookies to take with me to the beach. I found some cookies and bought a big bagful of them. Then I went back and continued down the long gorgeous sidewalk.

After another long walk, I soon saw a boardwalk ahead with carnival rides. There was a big two story McDonald's in it too. Along the way, I saw this killer blonde with tanned skin. I walked fast to catch up with her and tried talking to her. She soon realized that I was trying to hit on her, so she just grinned and nodded and walked away in another direction. I veered off toward the boardwalk and looked around. There were many rides, carnival games, and food stands, but I wanted to swim since I hadn't done that here yet, except for the time in Alushta where I didn't even have my swimsuit with me. After all, the wonderful beaches were what made this area famous. So I asked people where the beach was, and they pointed down the boardwalk. I walked all the way to the end of it, and finally saw a small pebble beach nearby. I was slightly disappointed and said, "That's it?" I'm sure there were better beaches at Yalta, but I had no idea where they were and I didn't want to risk going on a bus to find them and get lost, so I just settled for this one instead.

I found an open spot, spread out my towel, and sat down. I relaxed and watched people play around in the water. I was glad to finally get a chance to swim in warm clear light blue waters. Back home in Washington, the waters at the shores and lakes were dark, cold, and filthy, so I never had any chance to swim in natural ocean water. I knew this day would be my only chance this Summer.

I ate some of my cookies, then undressed into my swimming trunks. After asking some people nearby to watch my stuff, I walked across the pebbled shore to the water. The pebbles were somewhat hard on the feet, but I got used to it fast. The water felt good, and soon I went all the way in. Right now, the waves were getting stronger and pushing toward the shore, so I swam against it and it was fun. I saw that no one was staying out here for long, and they were coming and going in spurts. I stood at the point where my head was just above the water and jumped the waves for a while.

When I tried coming back to shore, I discovered that the task was more daunting than I thought. Not only were the waves ripping strongly and then pulling back, but the stones and pebbles here made it very difficult to keep your balance. I wasn't the only one though, because many other people were having trouble keeping their balance while trying to get back as well. Eventually I had to get down and crawl part of the way to make it. After I returned to shore, I helped some of the other people trying to get back as well, by extending my hand to them.

After drying off, I went back in a few more times to repeat the same thing. Since other people were having their pictures taken, I had someone take a photo of me in front of the water with my camera too. After a few hours, the sun was setting and there was a shade over the beach now, which made it cold to sit in. People were also dispersing from here and there weren't many left. So I prepared to leave. I dried off, got dressed, then packed my bag and walked toward the boardwalk. I got a soda bottle and then saw some attractive girls working at the carnival games, so I tried flirting with them, but they barely

reacted to me. So I continued on to the end of the boardwalk and made my way back up the sidewalk that I came from.

Along the way, two hot teenage girls passed by, and when I asked for directions as an excuse to talk to them, I said to one of them, "Are you a model?" and she looked flattered and giggled. Then I walked away and continued on (but to this day I regret not asking her out or asking for her phone number because they really seemed friendly and were so hot!).

Eventually, I reached the little bus station I got off of, and started asking people which bus to take to get to Simferopol. I was told where to wait for it, and saw that a crowd of people were waiting for it too. I saw that some of the people had tickets though, and I wasn't sure if I could get on without one and just pay onboard, so I asked around, but no one was sure.

While asking around among a group of students, an older man in his 50's or 60's with a mellow demeanor approached me and said he thinks you can just pay when you get onboard. I could tell that he was a westerner and he said he was from Canada. I was shocked when he said he was from the part of Canada that was just above where I lived in Washington state! He lived near the Surrey area of Vancouver, British Columbia, just above Bellingham, WA. We chatted a bit and he told me that he was here visiting a woman he met on the internet a long time ago. He introduced her to me and I said hi. They had been vacationing together for a few months now.

## **Chapter 57: Meeting with Masha from Russia**

When the bus came, we lined up to get onboard. The students all got onboard, and then when it got to me and the Canadian man with his woman, the driver wasn't sure if there was room for us so he checked. While we waited, the Canadian man said that I had a better chance of getting on than him and his girlfriend because said I was just one more person while he had two in his party. Then the driver came out and said there was just had enough room for the three of us so we got to go.

I got onboard and sat next to the Canadian man. I offered my seat to his girlfriend but she preferred to sit at the front of the bus. He said she preferred it that way because she wouldn't feel the motion sickness as much up there. While we waited for the bus to take off, the young college students behind me noticed me and started asking where I was from. I told them and then they asked me if they could come to America, and I said sure. One of them, a girl on the other side, said something about me to a guy two rows behind me. Then that guy turned to me, pointed at her and said, "She just said that you are pretty." (Note: In Russia and Ukraine, it is normal to call a man "pretty" because to them, it means the same as "handsome" to us.) I felt flattered and wondered if she actually said that. Actually, I hoped she did because she was very attractive and pretty herself. I said thank you and asked her name. She said it was Alona (like Ira's friend).

Then the bus took off and the Canadian man started talking my ear off. He explained to me that he met this woman he was visiting now from the internet on the website [www.friendfinder.com](http://www.friendfinder.com). Later he visited her here and they hit it off. Since then, he's come back to visit her a few times, and they are considering getting engaged and applying for a fiancée visa to Canada for her. He said that this summer, he has been with her for almost three months already. I asked him how he could afford the time to be here that long, and he said he was retired. He told me how wonderful it was here, especially

the Crimea area, and how he loved the culture and people too. Then I told him a little about my trip and the experiences I had so far. He was impressed and said that he was envious that I had dated seven women while he only spent time with one.

But I told him not to be envious and that I was envious of him instead because I preferred to have spent all that time with just one special woman instead. I explained to him that it was emotionally draining to constantly get used to someone with their personalities, ways and quirks, and then to be pulled away by circumstance to the next person to start the getting acquainted process all over again. Then there's the sad goodbyes and the nervousness of meeting a new person again. After a while, all this makes you feel like you're spreading yourself thin, and is mentally, emotionally draining as well. In any case, he was interested in my experiences and adventures, and he was interested in watching my video tape footage when I copied it onto VHS. So he took down my email and contact information in his notebook, and promised to email or call me when he got back so that we could get together sometime. (I never heard from him though, and I don't know why.)

Then when I mentioned how many people here will try to use shady excuses and methods to squeeze money out of you, he told me what he learned about Ukrainian history. He said he had the same Lonely Planet guidebook that I had and that he read in it that Stalin actually engineered a famine one time that killed thousands of people. I thought that was very cruel and senseless, and wondered why he did that. But I looked at that story in my guidebook and couldn't find any reason for it. The Canadian man explained that the people of this country, therefore, have been through a lot of extreme conditions like this that left thousands dead or starving, so they eventually developed ways to try to survive, and that one of these ways was the way they try to squeeze money off of me. He said that after the history they've been through, they've had no choice but to develop habits like these. I felt sad and sorry for the Ukrainian people after learning this, and I began to admire their strength and spirit for having endured through all this. If what this Canadian man said was right, then I misjudged these people for their habits, and I now felt some regret for doing so.

When the bus got to their stop, the Canadian man bid me goodbye and that he would be in touch. Then he and his girlfriend walked off the bus. I was relieved now because although he was very nice, he had been talking my ear off to the point where I started ignoring him and pretending to listen by nodding. He was one of those people who when you brought up even the most casual thing, he would go off on it.

While we were talking, I had taken out a piece of paper from my pocket and written my email address on it. Since the other guy said that Alona said I was "pretty" and I thought she was very attractive as well, I decided to give her my email address so she could write me if she wanted to. While talking to the Canadian guy though, I kept looking for a chance to reach over to Alona and hand it to her, but there was not an opportunity. Now there was room to reach across the aisle and hand it to her. When I turned to do so though, I was surprised to see another girl sitting next to me in my seat. She was short with dark blonde hair, and very cute and friendly looking. While I was wondering if my eyes were playing tricks on me or not, she said, "Hi my name is Masha. I would like to speak English with you." I told her my name too and we started getting acquainted.

I liked how she was very cute and bold. In the USA, no one would ever just deliberately come to sit next to you and introduce themselves like that just because you were a foreigner. I felt very lucky in a sense. Masha told me that she and the rest of the college group here were from a Russian city called

Izhevsk, which was located near central Russia. They had obviously come a long way and were on vacation together. Now they were heading back, and tonight they would catch a train back to Izhevsk. I kept wondering if I should reach over and hand my email address to Alona now, but I was afraid it might look rude to Masha.

When Masha asked me why I was here, I wanted to answer her, so I took out my red pocket dictionary and showed her the word "search" and then she said "for what?" Then I pointed to the word "wife" and she giggled and laughed. So far, several people I had told this to laughed in that manner, and I didn't understand why. I wondered if they were laughing at me or just surprised. Then I said hold on a second and reached over to hand Alona the paper with my email address on it. Alona looked confused at first, but then took it and opened it up. I said it was my email and she seemed to understand. I said to write me sometime and she nodded her head.

Then I turned my head back toward Masha and asked if she had an email address too. She said yes and we decided to exchange it too. I took out another piece of paper but by now it was dark and the bus interior was dimly lit so we couldn't see enough to write something on paper. A guy behind us tried to help by lighting his cigarette lighter next to where I was writing, but it only provided a little light and he couldn't maintain it for long either. After several tries, we gave up and just decided that we would exchange email addresses when we got off the bus. Then I laid my head down on the top of the seat in front of me to rest for a while. After a few minutes, I got up to talk to Masha again but she was gone. I hoped I hadn't offended her or anything.

The bus reached Simferopol, and when we stopped in front of Hotel Moskva, I realized that this was my stop, but I decided not to get off because Masha and I were supposed to exchange email addresses when we got off the bus, so I decided to stay on until her stop at the train station. I'm sure I could easily take another bus back here, I thought. Besides, I had no plans tonight anyway so it was no rush. When we got to the train station, everyone got off.

Outside, I found Masha again and went up to her to ask if I had offended her because she disappeared suddenly. She said no I didn't and that she just wanted to let me sleep. We exchanged email addresses and then I said I was going to McDonald's across the street and invited her to come along if she wanted to. I said I would treat her to coffee or a snack. She said thank you and maybe later but now she had to go with her group to carry their luggage to the train station first. I offered to help carry her bag and she said sure. When I picked it up though, it was a lot heavier than I expected, and I could tell it must be densely packed or contain something heavy. It soon became a burden on my right arm, but I didn't want to show it on my face so I just hid any feeling of pain and carried the bag like I was a competent man. We walked across to a small courtyard in front of the station where she and her group put all their bags down.

(Later on, I told her the truth about how heavy her bags really were and how I hid the grimace from my face. She laughed and said at the time she thought I handled it well and successfully. lol She said she wasn't surprised though because her bag was very heavy because it contained many souvenirs that she bought in Crimea that she wanted as reminders for her trip there.)

When I put her bag down into the pile, I said I would go to McDonald's now and that she could join me later if she wanted to. Otherwise, I would write her when I got back. She said ok and we said goodbye. I also said goodbye to Alona too and to write me sometime. I walked across to McDonald's and ordered

a meal. As I sat down to eat, I ate slowly to give her time to come if she wanted to. When I finished the meal, I thought she decided not to come so I was about to empty my tray into the garbage.

But when I got up though, I suddenly saw her and some people from her group arrive through the doors. I went up to her and said I was just finished with my meal. Then I stood in line with Masha. When one of her friends in front of her said she was one grivna short of paying for her order, Masha started looking for a spare grivna for her. I took one out and gave it to her friend. Then Masha ordered some coffee. When the cashier pointed to some apple pies to see if I wanted that to go with it, I said no that's ok. But then Masha said yes, she wanted it. So the cashier put it on our tray. After I paid it, we sat down at a table next to her fellow friends.

I told her that I didn't know where her city was, I took out a map from my travel guidebook so she could show me where it is. She pointed to where Izhevsk was and I could see it was very far from here, and east from the route I traveled in Russia. As she drank her coffee, I noticed that she looked very sluggish and passive. I asked if anything was wrong. She said no and why I asked. I said because she wasn't smiling or cheerful. Looking perplexed, she asked, "Why must I always be smiling and happy?" I replied that I don't know, but in my country people always try to cheer you up because we somehow believe that everyone should be happy, positive, and enthusiastic 24 hours a day. If you weren't, people would treat it like there was something wrong with you and try to "fix" you up. At least that's how it was in California where I grew up (which was the king of hype). Therefore, I was accustomed to this practice of cheering others up when they look down.

She said that was interesting. (I didn't tell her this, but I guess another reason I asked her that was because in the USA, when you first meet someone and act unenthusiastic, people take it as a sign that you are not interested in them or you don't like them. So I was probing as to whether this was the case with her or not. Fortunately, it wasn't.)

At that point, it suddenly hit me how much more genuine their society really is compared to ours. While we live in a world of hype and sensationalism, they don't and live in a world of reality instead. While we unrealistically expect everyone to be happy and bright 24 hours a day, they don't and just let people be the way they are and the way they feel without trying to "fix" them. But even when people are "fixed" up or cheered up in the USA because they don't look happy at the moment, the fix up usually results in a fake smile on the surface anyway. Also, as many from Europe and Asia have told me in the past, they noticed that most smiles in America are contrived and unnatural like some sort of artificial mask they put on to pretend they're happy and cover their emptiness inside in order to conform to the societal norm. This applied both at work, out in public, and even among friends.

But in other countries, people feel that someone who smiles all the time is either weird or shady. They also said that although people don't smile as much in other countries, the advantage of that is that when you do see someone smile, at least you'll know it's genuine. I realized now that this applies to Russia/Ukraine too. (In email, I explained all this to Masha and she found it very interesting and remembered well the scene where she asked me why she was always supposed to smile. I told her that I often use this example when comparing the USA to other countries.)

Then Masha said that she was feeling very sleepy now because she had gotten up at 5am this morning to watch the beautiful sunrise, and that was why she looked that way now. She said the coffee I bought her was helping her stay awake though. When she and her friends next to us were finished with their

snacks and got up, Masha said goodbye to me and that it was nice to meet me. I told her I would write her when I got back.

I walked out of McDonald's and looked for someone to tell me where the bus stop to Hotel Moskva was. I knew the bus number to take, but the stops around the street didn't have those numbers. I asked a few people nearby but they weren't sure. Eventually, someone pointed me across the street so I headed that way. When I couldn't find it, I circled around and headed back. Then two policemen saw me wandering and approached me to check my passport again. (Ugh!) This time, I looked at them and said, "You hope to get a bribe from me huh?" but they didn't understand so I just showed them my passport and visa. They thumbed through it and returned it to me. I was glad to get out of that situation again. Now I thought that this was a lot more trouble than I thought, and I began to wonder if it was worth it or not to get off here instead of at my stop just to exchange email addresses with Masha. (And it definitely was, as I would later find out.)

Then I walked across the street and probed around some more for a bus stop with the right numbers on them. I ran into a boy of about 14 or 15 and asked him about the bus to Hotel Moskva. He said to follow him. He led me to a bus stop around the corner where people were waiting on a bench. He asked a lady selling snacks next to it and she confirmed that it was the right stop. I bought a paper cup of sunflower seeds from her, and shared it with the boy. Then he waited for the bus with me while chatting with me because different buses came to this stop and he would tell me which one to get on. When one arrived that had the number he was looking for, he said this was the one, and I gave him the sunflower seed cup and thanked him before getting on the bus.

(Note: After my trip, Masha and I wrote a lot to each other by email. I have also called her several times. She is perhaps the sweetest girl I've ever met, and sent me very touching cards by air mail for Christmas and New Year's. We also exchanged some Christmas presents too. We often reminisce about our short meeting on the bus and in Simferopol. And now she is eagerly waiting my visit to her city of Izhevsk on my next trip because I promised I would come to see her. It just happens to be along my path anyway since there are several cities near there that I was planning to visit anyway. Alona though, never wrote me.)

## **Chapter 58: One last attempt to satisfy lust**

Back at my hotel, I relaxed and then decided that since this was my last day, I wanted to get one last night of action. So I went to the driver and said I wanted a woman tonight. He said that instead of driving one to me, he would take me around this time so I could choose who I wanted. I said I might be interested in Lena again, if there was no one else I liked available.

First he drove me to a street where Lena and two other girls were. When Lena saw me in the car, she put her hand on her mouth and gasped as she recognized me. I waved to her and blew a kiss. The driver went out and talked to them, then pointed to one of the other girls and asked if I was interested in her. But she was too chubby for me and I wanted someone thinner. So I said no and asked if I could have Lena again instead. Lena said no because she was already on her way home for the night, but recommended the chubby girl instead. I took another look at her but decided that I didn't want to pay for someone I wasn't really attracted to. I was also interested in the girl between them, who had brown hair and looked a little like Lena. I wondered if she was Lena's sister, so I asked about that, and she said

yes she was her sister. Although she was a bit more plump than Lena, she was still attractive and cute, so I was interested in her.

I now felt very excited about this because I had never had both a girl and her sister before, so I wanted this opportunity. But she said she was on her way home for the night too. I tried convincing her to come with me anyway, but she said she couldn't. So the only choice left was the chubby one that I didn't like. I said no, so the driver said he'd take me somewhere else to look. Before we left, I reached out to Lena and she came over and kissed me for old times sake.

Then we drove to another part of town in front of a cafe. The driver got out and brought some girls out to show me. But they were either too old or too fat for me. So we continued going to other areas, but each time we got the same result. I kept trying to tell the driver that I wanted someone skinnier by using my hands to outline a skinny figure to him. He seemed to understand and was trying his best. I felt like scum through all this though. After a few more failed screenings, he looked like he had given up and was driving back to the hotel.

When we got back though, he acted like he knew of one more place to try so he started the car again and took me just up the street in front of a little indoor cafe. Inside, I saw a man dancing around with two dark haired girls. The driver went in and brought them out. They were both had dark hair and skin and looked very exotic. This time I liked what I saw, because one of them was young, proportionate, and do-able. So I pointed to her and said ok. I got out and opened the back door for her, and then got in with her. Inside we held hands and she started acting giggly and kissing me. Suddenly, I was shocked as I realized that her face bore a resemblance to my Natasha. I told her this and said, "You look so much like my Natasha!"

The driver took us back to my hotel. When we got out, the driver asked me how many hours I wanted with her. I said just one and so I paid her 150 grivnas. After giving her the cash, the driver asked me for some money too. I was about to give him some but then the girl said something to him and she told me to nevermind it. (I think she must have told him she or someone else would give him a cut of the profits from me or something.) Then she grabbed my hand and led me through the hotel entrance. She asked if I wanted to order a bottle of champagne from the bar, but I said only if you won't start the hour clock til we got to my room. She didn't understand me though, so we just went up. In the elevator, she was very giggly and spontaneous and even grabbed me and groped me a few times.

Back in my room, we danced around a bit before she started undressing. I did my thing and started kissing her breasts, but she kept taking control and making me do other things. She made me sit down while she massaged me and as she went down, I could tell that she was going to give me a blow job. But unlike most men, I wasn't really into blow jobs, so I tried to tell her that I just wanted straight sex. But I could tell that she preferred the blow job. Perhaps she didn't like to have straight sex with her clients and preferred to give them blow jobs to make them climax so she wouldn't have to have sex. I'm not sure, but it seemed that way. After a clash of wills, she finally let me suck her breasts so I could warm up for straight sex.

When I asked if I could video tape this, she suddenly became shocked and said no. (I thought she would be open to it like Lena was!) I said ok but then I realized I shouldn't have asked that because it sort of ruined her mood. She constantly checked around for hidden video cameras nervously and never looked relaxed anymore. I kept telling her that there was no hidden camera that was pointed at us, but

she wasn't sure whether to believe me or not. So she kept getting up to look behind every curtain and corner. This disrupted our tempo greatly. I finally showed her that my camcorder was under the bed where it could not possibly be taping us.

When she finally undressed, she put the condom on me and gave me a quick blow job to get it hard. Then I got on top of her and put it in. It was hard performing with a condom on and I had a hard time (no pun intended) trying to stay hard too. I came close to climaxing a few times but couldn't do it. While being on top, I whispered in her ear, "I love you" because it's one of my fantasies to do that. She blurted out laughing after I did that. Obviously, she understood that phrase.

Then it was her turn to get on top, but the condom soon fell off so I tried to put it back on but could only get half of it back. I said that I almost finished when I was on top of her so we should try that again. While on top this time, the condom fell off but she didn't notice. Although I sensed that it had fallen off, I kept trying to put it in her again anyway because it was much more pleasurable and easy that way. But she soon noticed it and got up to check. We put it back on and continued for a short while longer, but then she stopped and looked at her watch. She said she had to go and started to get dressed. I looked at mine and said it's only been a little over half an hour, so our time wasn't up yet. But she gestured that if she didn't get back soon, her man (pimp or boyfriend, I'm not sure) would hit her angrily.

I became angry too and said that I had paid for an hour and wanted my time's worth. But she said she had to get back or else she'd get beaten, and that if I wanted her to stay longer, I would have to pay more. I didn't understand why she would be beaten though, since we were under the allotted time, not over it. And I didn't like how she was breaking the bargain, so I became angry and complained to her that she was cheating me. This argument went on for almost 15 minutes and I kept saying, "I don't want to waste our paid time arguing. We could be using this time to have sex instead of arguing." I was very upset about this wasted time that could have been spent having sex so I could finish. But she persisted and said she was sorry and pleaded with me not to complain to anyone about this. Then she said goodbye and left.

I sat down feeling very disappointed and dissatisfied. This had been nowhere near as fun as it was with Lena. I quickly climaxed on my bed, and then went down to the lobby to complain to the driver about the girl robbing me of half our time. I used my watch and pen and paper to tell him what I meant. He seemed to understand but just shrugged. There was nothing he could do about it, he implied. So I just went back up to my room and called it a night. Maybe I shouldn't be doing these kind of things, I thought.

## **Chapter 59: The journey to Kiev**

The next morning, before checking out, I tried giving Terry a call to thank him and say goodbye, but I found that I lost the piece of paper with his number on it. I couldn't find it anywhere, either in my pants or backpack or luggage. So I decided that I would stop at the agency office along the way to say goodbye to them, get Terry's number from my email from their computer, and email my dad to confirm to him to pick me up at the airport too.



After I packed everything, I went down to check out. Then I said goodbye to Tatiana and got her address to write to too. After that, I went out to see Ira the waitress to hug her goodbye too. She gave me her address too, and we took a photo together. Then I walked out to where the parked taxis usually were, but there were none at all there this time. That's odd, I thought. Usually there's always several waiting, but now there's not even one. I went back in the lobby and asked the security guard if he could call a cab for me. He said he would try but that they were all busy now and there might be a delay. Great, I thought, just what I need when I need to catch a train today. After a while of waiting around, I decided to walk out to the street myself and try to hail one. I stood on the street and held my arm out. Several came by but they were all full with people. Finally, an empty one stopped and I got in. I gave him the address to the agency office.

When I got there, I ran in and asked if I could use their email quickly. They said ok and then they said they had wondered if I was going to come in today to say goodbye to them. I didn't plan to, but I guess now I could. I quickly wrote my dad to confirm my pickup at the airport, and then wrote down Terry's number again too. After asking the staff to call a cab for me, I asked to borrow the phone and then gave him a call. He said it was a pleasure to meet me and that he wished me well and a safe journey home. I asked him about Tomsk, the town in Siberia he stayed at for a long time, and what agencies there were there. He said to check the search engines on the internet to find them. Then I said I had to catch a taxi now to catch my train so we said goodbye. Vika told me the cab was already outside, so I gave them all a hug and rolled my luggage out to it.

As the cab drove me to the train station, I looked at this city one last time to say goodbye. I also knew that I would be saying goodbye to this whole trip too, and would remember it very fondly afterward. In any case, as Terry said, I had a lot to sort out too about all that I had experienced, the meaning of it all, and where to go from here.

After he dropped me off at the train station, I went through the courtyard I said goodbye to Masha at last night and walked to the platforms. When I got there, a long train was waiting, and I went up to an attendant standing outside, pointed to the train and asked, "Kiev?" She nodded, so I walked down the long platform looking for my cart number listed on my ticket. Along the way, I bought some soda pop and snacks for the ride from a peddler. When I finally found my cart, I showed the attendant outside my ticket and she let me in.

I rolled my luggage to my seat number at the very end and loaded my luggage in the seat compartment. There was a girl sitting across from me in my compartment wearing a camouflaged tank top with a pretty face and auburn hair. After loading my luggage in, I sat down and said hello. She was very nice and friendly. She introduced herself to me as Katya (yes that name reminded me of the memorable one in Cherepovets), and shared her chips and big liter coke bottle with me. Although she didn't speak much English, she was able to use my dictionaries and phrasebooks to communicate most things to me. She was very pleasant to be with, and I knew she would be great company for this long trip.

When the train started moving, I looked around and realized that there were hardly any people here. It was sparsely populated, so there was never any danger of it being full like Terry, Yevgeniy, and the agency staff feared. In fact, Katya and I were the only ones in our compartment. (Ooooh, I thought, that leaves the option for things to get steamy :)) We told each other about ourselves, and I told her where I had been. She told me that she was going back to Kiev to head back to school, and that she had just visited her family in Yalta. I told her that I went there yesterday too, but didn't do much but swim at a

small beach. Katya also said that she had modeled before and gone to Paris before. I could believe it though, since she had incredibly well proportioned legs. Unfortunately for me though, she said she was married or engaged (I wasn't sure which one she meant) to a guy in Kiev. However, she was only 20 while he was 32. As we got acquainted, I took out my camcorder and filmed a bit of her, saying "Kak dila?" while she said "Harasho. Ok." Then I filmed the greenish scenery outside the train window for a while.

After an hour or so, a group of teens from several compartments down passed by us to go to the cross through area between train carts to smoke. When they came back, they noticed me and sat down in our compartment to ask about me. I told them where I was from and they became intrigued and hung out with us. One of them said, "America, class" and gave a thumbs up. (In Russian, the word "class" means similar to "cool") I replied, "Not really, at least not for me."

Then I showed them the bad words I learned from Julia of Cherepovets, and they were surprised and amused by them. Since I mentioned Julia, I showed them clips of her from my camcorder, and they were amused by her antics and dance scene. Then I fast forwarded to where I left off and filmed us all. One of the girls introduced each of them and where they were from. The whole group, three girls and two boys, were all from a city called Nikolia, Ukraine. One of the girls named Lyuba was very cute and pretty. After the introductions, while still recording, I said "Ok now say 'Whee suoi see guboy tree see'". One of the guys said it and made a blow job motion with his hand, and they all blushed and laughed. Lyuba looked away in embarrassment for a moment. Then I asked the next person in line, Lyuba, to say it, but she shook her hands indicating "not me." No one else wanted to say it and the girl who introduced everyone, Sousha, said, "It's very bad. I don't talk about it." in a very exotic accent.

Then as Lyuba looked through my red pocket dictionary, I said, "Lyuba, you have beautiful legs." She said "what?" and I repeated it and then tapped her sexy legs with my hand to show her what I was talking about. She said "Oh. Thank you" but saying "thank you" like "tank you" since there is no "th" sound in the Russian language. How cute! After that, I stopped recording.

When it came time for their smoke break, Katya joined them and they all went to the cross through area again. When they did this a second time, I went along with them so I wouldn't be left out. The cross through area, was filled with the smoke from all their cigarettes, and I was lucky that I was good at tolerating it. I noticed that some of them were smoking Winston brand cigarettes, my own brand. Since I never tried my own brand cigarettes before, I asked if I could try it and Lyuba gave me hers. I inhaled and exhaled a few puffs. It gave me a little warm sensation in my throat, but that was it. I didn't taste anything. I didn't understand what the appeal and addiction of this was. but I wasn't going make it a habit so I could find out. Throughout the ride, I repeated this on a few more of their smoke breaks but got the same result.

At one of the stops along the way, we got out during a break to get some beer and whatever food the peddlers out there were selling. We all got some beer, and I bought some melons for us. Inside, we cut one open and sliced it up to share. It was very good. I didn't know what kind of melon it was, but it seemed like a cross between orange cantaloupe and green honeydew. As the group of teens shuffled between my compartment and theirs, I laid down to try to take a nap. They came back a few times with different clothes changes to amuse us. Then I gave them my email and contact info. and one of the guys gave me his email as well (but everytime I wrote to it though, it bounced back). When I asked for Katya's, she said that she didn't have hers memorized, but would email me and give it to me that way.

After a few hours, we reached their stop at Nikolia. As they prepared to leave, we said goodbye to each other and gave hugs. I said "Yas coo chai" to Lyuba and she repeated it back. I went with them to the exit door and waved at them. When the train took off again, it was just me and Katya again now. We both relaxed across from each other, (although I wished that she was relaxing on my side in my arms). When I commented on her pretty high heeled shoes, it gave me an excuse to rub her smooth ankle while pointing at it. (Ohhh yeah!)

When night fell, Katya and I prepared for bed. She told me that she had several sisters who were very pretty and were single, and that she could introduce me to them if I wanted to. I said sure and she said that when she emailed me, I should send her my photo, bio and letter so she could pass it on to them. When I asked her how to get to the airport from the train station in Kiev, she said there was a bus but she wasn't sure which one it was. So she suggested that when we reached Kiev, her fiance/husband would help me out with that.

Before going to sleep, I mentioned to Katya about Evgeniya of Dnepropetrovsk and I wondered what she said to me while taping me when I was riding the horse. So I sat on Katya's side and showed her the video clip that Evgeniya took of me. Katya listened and had a hard time explaining it to me, but said that Evgeniya said I was good and to write her someday. Then as we lay in our bottom bunks, we looked at each other through under the table between us and blew kisses. I wanted to kiss her goodnight on the cheek, but I wasn't sure if I should. Somehow, she finally let me and I kissed her quickly on the cheek. She fell asleep quickly but I had a hard time doing so.

When I woke up several hours later, it was almost dawning and we were approaching Kiev and due to arrive at 6am. Katya went to the bathroom to change and I went to brush my teeth. After folding our bedsheets and mattresses and getting ready, we sat down, and the train steward came by to chat with us. I offered him the other two melons I bought because I knew I couldn't get it through customs. He gladly took it.

When we reached Kiev, we got our things and de-boarded. Katya's fiance/husband was already waiting below on the platform. She introduced us and told him about my need to get to the airport. He told me to follow them. We climbed the stairs to the station, which were not very luggage-friendly. But the station inside was very modernized. Katya's partner helped roll one of my luggage carts for me. When we got to the other side, we descended into the street.

Outside, a flurry of taxi drivers came offering rides but the ride to the airport would be expensive by taxi. Plus, I had over five hours to kill to get there, so there was no rush. Katya's partner told me that he knew of a bus stop in the city center that would take me to the airport, and that they were taking a taxi through there anyway, so I should come along with them and they would drop me off at that bus stop. Sounded like a good plan.

We rode a taxi to the city center, which was close by. I noticed how modern the city was. I had heard many good things about it and that it was culturally exciting and worth visiting, but I regretted not having the chance too. Not only did I not have time, but I didn't know anyone here either. When we got to the bus stop, Katya's partner and I got out with my luggage, and he showed me where to wait. There were two other people waiting there too, and we confirmed with them that they were going to the airport too. They said the bus would be here in about 40 minutes. I thanked Katya's partner for his help

and told him that Katya had my email and that if he ever needed any help in the US, to let me know. Then I got in the taxi to say goodbye to Katya and gave her a hug.

At the bus stop, I chatted with the two other people. There was a lady and her father. They were going to somewhere in Europe, I think it was Italy. While we waited, a van driver came up to us and talked to the two other people. They told me that he was looking for people to take to the airport, and that if he could find 7 more people beside us, he would charge us all the same fare as the bus and get us there faster. Therefore, if 7 more people could be found, it would be a good idea to go with him. The driver left to go look. Some moments later, he came back and talked to the other two people. They in turn told me that he found enough people now and that we should go with him. So we walked to his van and loaded our luggage in. Before we left, I took out my camcorder and took some footage of the city street in front of us, saying that this is probably all I'll see of Kiev although I heard great things about it. The van drove us through highways to get to the airport. Along the way, I filmed a little more footage from the window. I chatted with the lady from the bus stop a bit. When we talked about her father, since he was wearing a nice suit, I joked that maybe he was mafia and she said not to joke about things like that. I apologized.

When we got to the airport, we unloaded and the lady told me where to go for my flight. I thanked her and said goodbye. I rolled my luggage to the entrance and found myself in a waiting area. It was now about 9am and my flight was at 1pm, so I had four hours to kill. First, I decided to call Natasha again to tell her that I was in Kiev now and about to fly home. I asked the airport staff where I could find a payphone, and went into a post office area with a row of payphone booths. There, I bought a prepaid calling card. When I tried calling her cell phone though, I got a series of weird beeps and I wasn't sure if I connected or not. So I tried several times more, entering in the number in a variety of ways, and even trying the other payphones. But nothing seemed to work, and I'd get either weird beeps or a busy signal or nothing. Eventually, I gave up and decided to call her when I got home. I sold my prepaid card, which still had most of the minutes on it, to someone else who needed one at a discounted price. I still had an old used up one that I could keep as a souvenir, though. Before I left, I met a young Ukrainian American guy from New York who had just arrived and was trying to get a hold of somebody too. We both commented on how tricky the phone system here was.

Next, since I was hungry, I looked for something to eat. There was a big cafeteria near the waiting room, but the food was very expensive and didn't look that great. I saw a sign for a restaurant pointing upstairs, so I asked someone to watch my luggage while I went up there to look. But the door was locked so I figured it wasn't open yet. As a result, I had no choice but to settle for the expensive cafeteria. I had to wait though, since they were tallying up the cash registers to change shifts. I ordered some small snacks and tea and sat down to eat slowly. After the meal, I had nothing to do but people watch. I noticed this mega electric hot tall tanned girl across the cafeteria on the other side. I wanted to approach her but I couldn't work up the guts. While checking her out, I walked out of the cafeteria to look for a currency exchange booth. I found one and exchanged most of the rest of my grivnas, leaving one of each of the smaller denominations and coins for a keepsake souvenir.

When there was 90 minutes left before my flight, I decided it was time to pass through the gates now. I asked this really hot petite blonde girl standing in the waiting room about where to go to check in, and she said to just go through the gates over there. I wished I had asked her name and email address, but for some reason I didn't so I went ahead to the check in gates. They checked my plane tickets and had me put my luggage through the security scanners.

Up ahead was a Lufthansa check in counter, where I gave them my tickets and they loaded my luggage into the conveyor belt. I then went upstairs and next was the exiting customs gate. They checked my passport, stamped my visa, and then looked at my customs item slip. They asked me how much cash I was bringing out, and when I told them how little it was, they just let it go since it wasn't high enough for them to bother to verify its source. When they asked what I was bringing out of the country, I said just some souvenirs like matreshka dolls and boxes. When I didn't understand something they asked, a young Ukrainian girl behind me who spoke English interpreted for me.

## **Chapter 60: The flight home and final reflections**

I passed through the customs gate and walked into the final waiting area. There were beautiful electronic items in display cases along the way. As I stood in the final waiting area, the girl who helped translate back there caught up and we started chatting. Soon we were both sitting down and engaged in some good conversation. Her name was Yulia and she was a Ukrainian girl attending college in Italy. She was going back there now after visiting her family here in Ukraine. I told her a little bit about me and where I was going. We both emphasized with each other now since we felt sad to leave here now and knew we would miss it very much.

I also mentioned my observations and comparisons between here and the USA. I said how much friendlier and open people here were, and how much easier it was to meet people here since they weren't uptight and snobby. Also, I said that during my trip I saw how much more rich and meaningful the culture here was. And of course, I especially noticed how the girls here have much more substance and maturity than they do in the USA. Yulia agreed with me on these things and said that her friends who visited the USA before said similar things. In fact, one of them had gone to study in the US before, but came back after a few weeks saying it was too devoid of culture and didn't like the shallow lifestyle there. I agreed and said that the US is mostly about work and money and that the lifestyle puts you in a meaningless rut. And that now that I've been here, I would realize it more than ever when I returned to the states. Although I said all this sincerely, I still felt like a fool for saying all this because I was the one going back there, not her. In fact, everyone I've talked to on the way here have said they were going to Europe or some other country, but I was the only one going to America. So I felt foolish going there and complaining about it at the same time. It just made me look sort of stupid. But at least I knew that here I wasn't alone in my views.

When I asked Yulia how old she was, I was surprised when she said 18. No way. I told her that in my country, almost no 18 year old girl talks as maturely and substantively as she did. She sounded experienced, able to reflect on things, and had a lot of knowledge about things. The typical girl her age in the USA is air-headish, impatient, uninterested in deep conversation, and very shallow. Not their fault, but that's how our culture, environment and media make people into. In fact, I described how when I talk to most young girls in my country, all they can say to me is "Yeah", "Really?", and "Cool". Anything else I talk about they act like it's beyond them. Therefore, since Yulia is not the only young Russian girl like this, I surmised that the average young girl here has the equivalent maturity of a girl ten years older in the USA, but without the snobbiness and attitude. What this means is that in Russia/Ukraine, you get the maturity of an older woman in a young girl's body, the best of both worlds!

Yulia also told me that she lived for some time with her family on some remote islands off the east coast of Russia. I opened my guidebook and she showed me where they were on the map. They were very beautiful and exotic, she said. And the paragraphs in my travel guide about them said the same thing. Later on, we exchanged email addresses and she even let me take a photo with her. I knew it would be my last photo taken for the trip and I thought it would be appropriate to have it taken in the airport. (You can see it as the last slide in my online photo album.)

After an hour of conversing, there was an announcement for boarding and we lined up with the others to the gate. But it wasn't clear which gate to go to though, so we wandered about a bit while waiting for direction from airport staff. Eventually, it was clear which gate to line up in and we waited there. After showing them our tickets and passports, we walked through the tunnel platform into the plane.

Inside the plane, Yulia took her seat in the first class section. How lucky she is! I wanted to sit with her there, but knew that I wouldn't be allowed. So we said goodbye and she wished me a good flight. I walked to my economy seat and sat down. A little girl and her mother joined me next to my seat. Although she was Ukrainian, the little girl couldn't understand me when I said "Kak dila?" but she could understand "How are you?" because she kept saying "Fine" in a baby voice.

I looked out the window realizing that that would be the last time I stepped on Russian soil this trip. I knew I would remember all of this fondly. It gave me a chuckle to remember how I arrived here six weeks ago in terror of the unknown at what lay in the six weeks in front of me, wondering if I would survive through this trip. Now though, I could feel proud that I had experienced a country that most Americans feared for six weeks, and would live to tell about it. It would be an accomplishment few in my country could boast of.

As the plane started down the runway, I video taped the takeoff. As we rose into the air, I looked back down and knew that I would be leaving my heart behind back there. I felt a deep sadness and sentiment now. Six weeks ago I came in fear, now I left in sadness. My only consolation now was that at least I would be returning to a westernized world ruled by English where I wouldn't have to deal with menus and signs I couldn't read, using dictionaries to communicate with people, etc. At least I was returning to a world I understood and was familiar with. But I knew there would be another time that I would return again. That was definite.

Like my arrival flight, this flight would go through the same transfer route in reverse, first to Frankfurt, Germany, then to Chicago and finally to Seattle. When we landed in Frankfurt, there wasn't the five hour layover that there was last time though. I looked at my ticket and my next flight was in 30 minutes, so I rushed through the airport. The German customs check didn't take that long fortunately, and then I walked briskly to my next gate. A tall brown hair German girl who looked interesting that I would have liked to get to know if I had time, helped me along the way. On the way, I met up with Yulia again and she said her flight to Italy was about to leave too, so she was rushing as well. We made it just in time.

On the large jumbo jet flight to Chicago, I was seated next to a mellow German man with glasses. I talked to him about Germany a bit and what it was like there. I filmed the takeoff again and from above he pointed out the Rhine River to me. I asked him if the Rhine was where the Bridge of Remaggen was that I saw in an old World War II movie, where the Americans tried to capture it to cross into Germany while Hitler tried to destroy the bridge. But he wasn't familiar with what I was talking about, so he

didn't know. When I asked him what German women were like, he said that they were very strong and independent like American women are. But when I asked him if they were as snobby and feminist as American women, he said, "Oh no, they're not like that."

During the flight, there was this computer animated image of a German boy in the plane seat demonstrating safety procedures. The instructions in German sounded very exotic to me, like Russian did. After the safety instructions, the animated boy on the screen just sat there and made random funny movements. It was very amusing to watch. The inflight movie was about three witches with Sandra Bullock (maybe it was "Practical Magic?"). It was nice because it reminded me of life back in the USA, although it wasn't a very good movie. Instead, I put on my headphones and listened to different music stations while I relaxed. I soon dozed off.

While asleep, I had a dream that ended with something causing pain to my ears. When I awoke, the sun outside was shining in my face, and I found that ears were in a lot of pain. The air pressure was tight in my ears, more than it had ever been, and I became worried that something was wrong. It had never gotten this bad before. I tried to pop them by yawning, which usually worked, but it didn't this time. I nudged the German guy next to me and told him that my ears were in pain, though I could barely even hear my own voice. He told me to close my mouth, fill it with air, and then squeeze the air in my cheeks with my fingers. It worked and I was relieved that my ears were back to normal.

When we arrived in Chicago, it was night time there. As I adjusted my watch to the time here, I was shocked to find that my next connecting flight to Seattle would leave in 10 minutes, and we were still rolling on the runway to dock at the airport! There was no way I could de-board here and go through the US customs process all within 10 minutes! How could this happen? We weren't late so how could my travel agent have done this? I just hoped that they would be able to reschedule me on another flight to Seattle tonight.

When I de-boarded and went through the US customs process, I walked to the United Airlines counter (United has a partnership with Lufthansa to handle their transfer flights here) and told them about my situation, showing them my tickets. I found out that it was worse than I thought. My connecting flight to Seattle had actually been rescheduled to leave even earlier. In fact, it had left an hour before I even landed! I asked them why that happened, and they said that it happens once in a while for various reasons, and that I was supposed to call in advance to check the schedule, and that it was rescheduled a few weeks ago. I told them I couldn't have because I was in the Ukraine and asked, "You wouldn't have had a toll free number that I could have called from there would you?" They said probably not. (Yes I could have checked their schedule on their website from the internet cafe in Russia, but this never happened to me before so I didn't expect it.) At this point, they told me to go talk to a manager in the next terminal about putting me on another flight to Seattle. Although I was anxious now, I was glad that I could at least communicate fluently now in my own country without using dictionaries or drawings.

I ran over to the next terminal and asked the United staff for the manager. It took a long time for them to get one, so I had to resort to my former American habit of complaining as a consumer when I got slow service. I went up to them again and told them this was an emergency. So they rushed the manager to me and I explained the situation. He said they would do their best to fix the problem and handed me over to a reservation specialist. The reservation guy was an artsy looking guy with scruffy hair and a mellow attitude. He reminded me of the image of an artistic jazz player in Chicago. His calm

lighthearted attitude set me at ease as he said he would book me on another flight to Seattle. Normally, I wouldn't be that anxious about this, but my parents were picking me up and were driving 90 minutes to get to the Seattle airport. Since they didn't have a cell phone, the only way I could leave a message for them was on their answering machine, which my dad claimed he would check occasionally in case I experienced a delay.

The reservation guy said that the only flight to Seattle left tonight was an American Airlines flight that left in 20 minutes. He said I might be able to make it if I ran, or he could just book me in a hotel inside the airport tonight, at their expense, and have me on a flight to Seattle in the morning. He recommended the latter, and I wondered if he did so because there was a business reason for not putting me on another company's flight. However, he also said that my luggage would not arrive in Seattle until tomorrow anyway, since it was too late to load it onto the American Airlines flight. It would be driven to me when it arrived though. I had never had a free hotel stay before, so it sounded nice, but my parents were waiting at the Seattle airport, and if I took the flight tomorrow morning, they would have to drive 90 minutes again to pick me up.

I didn't want to inconvenience them like that, so I decided to try to make the American Airlines flight in 20 minutes. The reservation guy said ok and gave me the transfer ticket. I ran up the plank but then had second thoughts. I would rather arrive with my luggage, I thought. So I turned around and told him I preferred the latter offer. He said ok and offered me several morning flight times. I picked one close to noon so I could sleep in (I really needed it!) Then he issued me a hotel ticket, a bag of hygiene amenities, and some meal vouchers. After he told me where to find the hotel inside the airport, I left. I never knew they put a hotel in an airport, but this was Ohara Airport, one of the largest in the world, so they probably had a need for it.

The hotel was very nice and luxurious, and I was glad to be pampered with western style amenities for this trouble. At the check in line, I told some British people what had happened, and they were in shock. I rode the elevator up to my room. The room was very fancy and luxurious and looked like it would normally cost about a hundred dollars. I appreciated that at least. I picked up the phone in my room and used my domestic calling card to leave a message for my parents, explaining what happened and giving them my new arrival time tomorrow.

The room had a wireless keyboard where you could order internet access to use, play video games, etc. I used it to send some greeting cards to people from Chicago. I didn't like using the wireless keyboard though, because I had to push many keys twice before it would register. This made typing really slow. Then I shot some footage of the room with my camcorder, saying briefly what had happened. Afterward, my curiosity brought me down to the lobby and hotel mall to see what was going on. There was a gym, tanning salon, and restaurant open. The restaurant looked very fancy, dark, and romantic like a scene out of a commercial. I thought, "If only I had a special Russian woman with me to take in there. It would be perfect." Then I went back to my room and took a shower in my luxurious fancy bathroom. I was glad to have fully functional hot water again! If only one of my Russian girlfriends were here, they would feel pampered by all this too. Afterward, I went to sleep in my luxurious queen-sized bed.

The next morning, I called my parents and they told me they had gotten my message and would come pick me up again today. After showering, I heard some noise outside, so I opened the door. At the same time, the door across from me opened and a young American girl in white bathrobes saw me in my



underwear and said, "Oooohhh, naked!" I felt embarrassed and replied, "Nah ah. I'm wearing underwear." She said, "Underwear doesn't count. It's the same thing." I was about to say, "If you like it, come get me then." but refrained for some reason. After all that I went through with Russian women, I was a bit stunned at this reaction from an American girl. It told me I was back home again.

As I got dressed, brushed my teeth with the bag of amenities, and made coffee with the included coffee maker, I heard the girl across from me yelling and arguing with some guy out there. Thank God I wasn't dealing with American girls anymore, I thought. I opened the door anyway to ask if she was alright, and she said yeah.

Down in the hotel lobby, I had this 50 dollar off coupon with a 100 dollar purchase for the jewelry store that I wasn't going to use, so I decided to look for someone to give it to. I saw a tall attractive American girl and decided to give it to her, using it as an opportunity to see if girls here were so different after all. I went up to her and offered it. She said she wasn't going to buy any jewelry, but that her mom might be interested so she took it. Sure enough, as I feared, she talked to me in a snobby closed manner that told me I wasn't allowed to even try to extend the conversation with her or socialize in any way because I wasn't worth her time and she had better things to do. You could see it and feel it in her vibes and body language. "Oh no" I thought "It's back to snob-land now." I felt deflated as I realized that I could no longer just approach girls I saw anywhere and get acquainted with them as I had the past six weeks. Now I felt like Superman who had lost all his powers (like in the movie "Superman II"). I knew this would suck, and that I would feel withdrawal symptoms soon. I was going to pull my usual maneuver of asking for her email address, but decided not to.

After I checked out of the hotel, I went to the area where the reservation guy who helped me last night was at to check in. He greeted me warmly and then walked me to where I needed to go next. As we walked, he said "Winston, you know, you're a cute guy." At first, I wondered if he was a "blue man" (gay) as Julia and Elena would say, but then I realized that it didn't matter and asked why. He said that I handled the situation last night well and that I was unusually calm. I replied, "Do you mean that most people in that situation would have gotten a lot angrier and said 'Why can't you folks f\*\*\*ing do your job right...'" He said, "Yeah that's right." I replied, "Yeah well, I just came from Russia, and when a service goes wrong there, I'm used to not being able to complain like an American consumer. There, they just say 'Hey, it's Russia!'" The agent laughed and was intrigued that I had just been to Russia.

In the final waiting hall, I decided to use my meal voucher to get something from the airport eateries rather than the hotel restaurant, which was more expensive. On the way, I saw another hot American girl and decided to ask her the time to see if American girls were really so different from the girls I had been with the past six weeks. Sure enough, again she answered with a snobby closed attitude and vibe that told me I could ask her a simple question like that, but that was it. Looking around, I found an old favorite of mine back in California that I didn't have in Washington, Uno's Pizzeria. They made some of the best deep dished pizza in the world, so I bought some pizza there with my meal voucher. It was soooooo good and hit the spot. I took it to the waiting area at my gate and ate it. I sat next to a teenage girl and her parents who were going back to Seattle. They told me they had just been on vacation here in Chicago, and the food was so awesome here. They were shocked when I told them I had just come from Russia. I told them that I loved the trip but that the food there wasn't that great, and that the best food I had was at McDonald's, which made them laugh.

I boarded the noon flight and found myself sitting next to an Austrian guy. He said he was a pilot for Lufthansa airlines and was on his way to visit a friend in Seattle. As I asked him what being a pilot was like, he said that it was decent pay but they took almost half your salary in taxes. He said that the airlines of the Middle East and Egypt paid much better and treated you like family. He also said that each flight for him was like a new adventure, and that he always tells himself that as long as he takes care of his own safety during the flight, the lives of the passengers would be safe as well. That's how he doesn't get overwhelmed with thinking about the safety of all his passengers.

As you might expect, we also discussed views about American people and society. I brought up some of the same things I talked to Yulia about at the airport, and he agreed with much of it. He shared the same views that 1) the American lifestyle and mentality is looked down upon in Europe, and that 2) young Americans tend to have very poor conversation skills compared to young Europeans, and that 3) Europeans are much more real about life and themselves. I said that I realized that this is why there are so few European and Russian immigrants in the USA, compared to so many Asian immigrants. The Asian mentality of sacrificing everything for career and money, and fits in with the American corporate mentality, while the more evolved free spirited intellectual European and Russian mentality doesn't. I also told him about what the Spanish tourists told me at the hostel in St. Petersburg, that everyone they knew who went to the USA came back saying that people couldn't hold a conversation beyond, "What's up?"

In a moment of truth, I realized that America isn't about "what really is" but about "what sells". People here live in their own world, not in reality. They tend to prefer feel good hype and propaganda over reality, facts, and truth. For example, beliefs like "Life is what you make it", "Your fate and destiny are in your complete control", "Attitude is everything", "You can achieve anything and be anything you want if you just set your mind to it", "You can be happy and positive 24 hours a day if you just choose to be" etc. are pure crap when analyzed logically, and contradict reality yet are religiously believed in in the USA, even against all the facts. (I could easily write extensive essays debunking these beliefs and mottos.) Although those cliché mottos contain kernels of truth under certain circumstances, people in the USA take them in the extreme as gospel truth. And anyone who denies any of those popular mottos of hype is automatically labeled as being pessimistic, having a bad attitude, or victim mentality. The rest of the world sees through that bullshit. I explained that have debated and won against many Americans about the falseness of these hyped beliefs. But no matter how many arguments I technically win or how badly they're cornered, they still choose to believe the false hype and resort to labeling me as one of the above.

Remembering the discussion with Masha in Simferopol, I explained that this is why Americans tend to smile even when they're not happy. Because in our society, we're taught that if you're not happy, positive, and optimistic 24 hours a day, then there's something wrong with you and your attitude and mentality need to be fixed. That is what pop psychologists, motivational speakers and many Americans seem to teach and imply. Well that isn't reality and it's not human nature either, and while the rest of the world accepts that, Americans don't seem to get it. That's why people in other countries have a view that American smiles and happy faces are not genuine or natural, but fake and contrived. I explained that in my country, if you act or look unhappy, people will look down upon you and invalidate your feelings. Friends will think you're being rude to them (as I did with Masha), and you will get in trouble at work as well. While in Russia, I noticed that people look the way they really feel, even when they're at work or in a service oriented job. They are allowed to feel unhappy or down if that's how they really feel, unlike the USA where you have to fake happiness and confidence all day long. I never really

realized that until now. When I first came to Russia six weeks ago, I wondered why many Russians showed miserable and unhappy faces, and didn't pep themselves up like we would. Now though, I realized that at least those Russians were being honest with how they really felt, while Americans tend to fake happiness and smiles which aren't even genuine.

I also explained that I never understood why when people in my country ask the typical "How are you?" that you always had to say you were fine, good or great even if it wasn't true. What's the point of asking then? Is it just to motivate you to lie or force yourself to feel positive? Any other answer would be considered rude, since people who ask that question don't really care how you are, but use it as a greeting gesture. The Austrian pilot told me that when his friends ask him how he is, they are genuinely interested in how he is whether he's doing good or bad. He also said that in Europe, when you are asked how you are, it is acceptable to say that you are not feeling good or happy if that is the truth.

Again, I felt like a fool for saying all these things about my own country, especially since we were in the USA now. But I believed in telling things as they are and how I see them, rather than parroting the kind of BS hype that there already is enough of in this country. Since everything we talked about was politically incorrect though, I looked around to see if anyone else was listening who might be offended. Later on, a stewardess came by and told the Austrian pilot that there was now a seat available for him in first class if he liked, and he accepted, said goodbye to me, and left. (The perks of being an airline pilot I guess)

In the seats nearby, were a group of college or high school students with "Washington Cheerleaders" on their t-shirts. When I heard the way they spoke to each other, I noticed how airheadish and pointless it was. I thought "Oh great. Why did I come back here? These airheads with no conversation skills at all are why I left here in the first place!" I realized that in all my travels around the world, people like these were among the most bland, cultureless, and dull that I had ever met. Unfortunately, they comprised the majority of young people in my area.

During the flight, I kept thinking about my whole trip, wondering what I accomplished exactly and whether it was worth it or not. In summary, I visited a total of 7 women and hit it off with only 2 of them. Terry had said that that was a good average, and maybe it was, but I had no idea whether those 2 women were willing to carry our relationship to the next level or not. So I wasn't sure whether these two "hits" were going to have any long term results or not, though Natasha was the best prospect. That was the question lingering in my mind. But, I thought, either way, I had a lot of interesting experiences that I never would have had in the USA, and learned many things about another culture. I felt that I was personally enriched by all of this, and that being on my own for 6 weeks in a foreign non-English speaking country did help me to grow up a little as well. Perhaps, I thought, these things alone made it worth it, regardless of what the long term results are. And besides, the 7 women I dated, I made many new quality friendships and associations which could lead to somewhere, or at least provide a network of contacts that could lead somewhere.

Another problem that lay ahead for me though, was that I knew I would be in reverse culture shock when I got back, as I had already been accustomed to the way things were in Russia and Ukraine. Since I had lived in Taiwan for a year ten years ago, I knew what reverse culture shock was like. But this one would be on a much larger scale than that time, because this trip has changed my whole view of the world, of myself and society, and of my relationships with women. I knew I would go through an awkward adjustment period, not only with the lifestyle back home, but with my mentality toward life

and my future as well. Terry had predicted that this period would last anywhere from two to three months, and I knew that he was right. Oh well, at least I would know what a Russian immigrant goes through when he goes through the culture shock too.

When we flew over Mt. Rainier, I took some video footage of it. Seeing that on a plane always told me that we were close to Seattle now. When the plane landed, I waited til we docked before I filmed it and said with completely certainty, "I'm glad I made it back alive to tell about this trip to the forbidden country!"

After I got off, I retrieved my luggage and waited outside for my parents to pick me up. When they did, my dad smiled and the first thing he said was "You're a very brave man" in Taiwanese. Before driving me home, we went to a Chinese restaurant near Seattle and bought some groceries too. I heartily ate the meal, since I hadn't had much of the kind of food I was used to throughout my whole trip. After they drove me home, I spent all day and night unpacking and settling down, bracing myself for the reverse culture shock ahead of me.

## **Aftermath**

Since coming home, I emailed my final update to everyone, and as Terry and I predicted, I went through a reverse culture shock for a few months. I had become so accustomed and integrated in Russian society, that life here now felt awkward. I feel that Russia lives inside of me and has become a permanent part of my soul, changing me internally forever. I kind of feel like the character played by Kevin Costner did in the movie "Dances With Wolves" after he discovered and integrated with Indian life and culture. Whenever someone tries to discredit me or tells me that what I experienced wasn't true, I use that example and tell them that they are like telling Kevin Costner's character that what he experienced with the Indians wasn't true and all in his head. I tell them that it's pointless because he knows what he experienced, and you only have speculation and bias.

I started a new sales job for a cell phone company here, where I gradually learned to speak English fluently again as a result. It was a big asset in helping me to save up enough money for a longer trip next time. In fact, I think about returning to Russia everyday. I have gone through periods of homesickness for it, especially since I don't have the joy and warmth from people here that I had in Russia. Like I said, it's a totally different atmosphere. I have made a few Russian friends here that emphasize with how I feel, fortunately. I have kept in touch by phone and email with many of the Russian girls I visited and new friends I met along the way as well. It has helped lift my spirits. Everytime I watch the tape from my camcorder footage, it lifts my spirits as well since I am reminded of the wonderful memories there.

I now feel that this trip provided the most special memories of my life. It was very enriching in a lot of ways. It opened me to a new world, and showed me that there was much more to the world than the one I was familiar with. And that there are much more interesting people out there that shared my views than the ones I grew up around. It also renewed my faith in love and in myself, that I could be liked and accepted after all. Although I had my share of good and bad experiences during the trip, that is life. The important thing is that you learn from both the good and bad experiences. It reminds me of the movie "Grand Canyon". For those of you who haven't seen it (or have but didn't get the metaphor in it), it portrays the lives and dramas that people go through in real life, showing the conflicts, dramas, and

experiences of it all. At the end, the group of people go to the Grand Canyon, look at the panoramic view before them and say that they like it. The metaphor represented by the Grand Canyon at the end was to show you that although life has its ups and downs, peaks and valleys, just like the geological layout of the Grand Canyon, when you look at the big picture from afar it actually looks beautiful and meaningful in the end. That's how I began to see the experiences of my trip as well.

Since I was so passionate about my experiences and what I learned from my trip, I decided to write this book and chronicle all the special experiences and memories. Not only to share with others, but for my own records as well, since memories tend to dim with time. I wanted a hard copy for my own records as well, to check back on in case I'm not sure about something. Since it was the most special and meaningful trip of my life, it was worth the effort to do this. Also, I bought a scanner and scanned all the best photos from my trip and put them on an AOL pictures website, for all to see as a photo journal of my trip. For many reasons, described in the conclusions section below, I now strongly feel that my soulmate is in Russia, whether I have already met her or not, and I have endeavored to continue searching until I have found her. In addition, I also feel that Russia has become a permanent part of my soul, and changed me forever.

### **Update on the women I visited**

Here is an update on the women I visited and met during the trip.

- I still keep in touch with Natasha E. in Tula and call her once in a while. She misses me a lot too, and is always happy to hear from me. I told her that I would return as promised, and she is looking forward to it as well. I plan to see her first on my next trip. Although she doesn't speak much English, we are able to say a few things on the phone, and even use sound effects to describe what we are talking about. (One time, when she told me that she was getting her braces off, she clattered her teeth to refer to them.) I will never forget the goodbye scene we had. It was the most touching one I ever had. She has closed down her sausage stand business for the winter, and I don't know if she plans to open it again because she cited problems with it. She plans to go to Japan for a few months to work and make some money, after my next visit to her. I now have a Russian friend call her when I want to translate something important. Natasha is a good quality woman, is intelligent and responsible, and has treated me very well. However, I do not know how compatible we are or if she is the right person for me. I also do not know how she feels about us too, but I imagine she is thinking the same thing. Only time will tell. But she is my best prospect at the moment. I did buy her a nice black dress for Christmas though, and she liked it very much.
- I tried calling Julia in Cherepovets when I got back, but she and Elena were gone for college a few months. In December, she came back from college in Poland and wrote me and gave me her new cell number. She said she didn't receive a copy of our photos and the video I took of our visit, although I sent them. I contacted her a few times by phone and it went very well. She says she misses me, and is very friendly and enthusiastic when I call her. She invites me to visit her again in Cherepovets on my next trip. We also had fun reciting many of our inside jokes on the phone. I have concluded that although she is not wife material, she is fun and entertaining to be around, and I wish to continue being friends with her at least. She does have a good heart and conscience though, despite her behavior. I plan to see and Katya again on my next trip for a while. In her city is also the train stewardess I met, Lyuba, and I plan to visit her anyway so I

might as well visit all of them. I have sent the copy of the photos and video a few times, and she has finally received it.

- I tried calling Evgeniya of Dnepropetrovsk a few weeks after I got back, the other girl who seemed interested in me, but she hung up on the phone on me. I don't know why. I felt a little hurt by it. So I sent her a copy of our photos together and a video copy of our visit together, and included a letter thanking her for everything, saying that I had a good time, and asking her why she didn't want to talk to me and so rudely hanged up. She didn't write back, but her sister Yulia did and said she apologized for Evgeniya's behavior in hanging up on me. She offered no explanation other than that Evgeniya is a very "changeable and moody" person. She also dispelled my conspiracy theory about them making up the trip to Russia as a set up, claiming that they planned that trip at the beginning of summer and didn't know when I would come. Yulia said that she and Oleg enjoyed meeting me. I don't know how to explain what happened with Evgeniya, since she said she liked me on the video tape and that she would miss me and that she hoped I would write her. I guess she somehow changed her mind about me for whatever reason.
- I have talked to Elena of Mariupol a few times and we talk like old friends. She is a very good and understanding person to talk to, and harbors no ill will toward me at all. She is very interested in my trip reports and in this new book, and I promised to send her a copy on disk when it's done. I don't know if I will ever see her again though. But she is a great person that I would recommend to anyone. Everyone who has seen her on my video tape agrees. My dad even said that if we had been compatible, that she would have made a great wife.
- As to the remaining three of the seven, Olga of St. Petersburg, Natalia T. of St. Petersburg, and Irina of Perenalvov village, I haven't bothered to talk to them because there was no chemistry between us of any kind, and I didn't feel that our time together resulted in anything, not even friendship. I didn't even enjoy the conversation with them, which wasn't the slightest bit stimulating. Out of politeness though, I sent copies of our photos to Natalia T. and Irina. But not to Olga, because there was only one photo of us anyway and I have too low of an opinion of her to even bother.
- As to the other girls I met there outside the agencies, I have kept in touch with most of them either by phone or email or both. I love them because they are so enthusiastic when I call, and gasp in surprise like a celebrity called them. No one here has ever made me feel that way before. In particular, I am very close to Masha from Izhevsk, whom I met on the bus from Yalta to Simferopol if you remember. She is one of the sweetest girls I've ever met. We write each other often and share so many things. She has encouraged me, supported me, and lifted my spirits often. We exchanged gifts and cards over the holidays, and she is a very special person to me. I promised to visit her in her town of Izhevsk when I return and she is looking forward to it. I also have contacted Lilia (who took me on the canal boat ride) and Mila (whom I met while being stood up by an AFA girl) of St. Petersburg, the other Yulia in Cherepovets (who tried to help me on the street when I was looking for the internet cafe), and Lyuba from Cherepovets (the train stewardess I met when I left Cherepovets). A few others wrote me briefly, but not consistently. They are all very warm and enthusiastic when I call them, and remember me with fondness, saying our meeting was an unexpected pleasant surprise to them. Lyuba even said that

when she first heard me speaking English outside the train, that she thought she was hallucinating. lol

- In addition, there are some new girls I have been writing and calling with that I met through agencies and other contacts. Our correspondences have gone well, so I plan to try to visit them too.

## **My plans to return**

I have moved my return date up several times due to the task of completing this book and preparing many other things for a longer trip, but at this point I have set it for the middle of February 2003. I plan to go to Latvia first, where an old friend of mine Vika lives. From there, I plan to ride the bus to Moscow, where I will meet Natasha E. who plans to book an excursion for us. I picked that big city because it is close to her and because I did not really see much of it last time I was there. I will try to spend as much time with Natasha as possible, maybe even going back to Tula with her, but I realize that she has to go to Japan at some point. After my visit to her, I plan to visit Julia and Lyuba in Cherepovets for a while, and perhaps even celebrating my birthday with them. Then I plan to go to central Russia to visit some new women I have been corresponding with from cities such as Kazan, Yoshkar-Ola, and Cheboksary. And of course, Masha from Izhevsk lives in that region as well.

I have obtained a three month visa for a longer stay this time, although I booked my flight for a two month stay, since I can change my departure date later if I want. During this time, I will try to see if I can get a job teaching English at a school or a job at a US Embassy, so that I can get a work visa to stay longer. That way, I won't feel rushed to find my soulmate and can have time to grow any relationship that naturally grows.

Although this outlined plan is sketchy at best, it is the best I can do at the moment. The rest will just have to come as they come, and I'll just have to take it day by day and see what happens. After all, from the plans I made for my last trip and how it actually turned out, we all know how plans end up. I trust that destiny, fate, and the higher powers will reveal their plan and will, and it will be all for the best. Either way, I am not pressuring myself to make a certain result happen. After all, as the saying goes, it's the journey that's wonderful, not the destination. And I believe I have been led to this journey for a reason.

Note: To read the story of my subsequent trips to Russia, download these journal updates:

<http://www.happierabroad.com/RussiaJournals2003.doc>

<http://www.happierabroad.com/RussiaJournals2004.doc>

## **My Conclusions after the trip**

Here is what I have learned and discovered from the trip so far about Russia and Russian women, and some of my conclusions. Keep in mind though that much of this is not politically correct, and may offend those who are big on political correctness. Also keep in mind that these conclusions do not describe "all" American women or "all" Russian women, only general tendencies. So before you say "Not all American women are like this" or "Not all Russian women are like this" or "I know people

who don't fit your stereotype", remember that no one including me disagrees with that. However, also remember that not all Japanese people are short and not all Dutch people are tall, but that doesn't mean that Japanese people aren't generally short or that Dutch people aren't generally tall. Likewise, I know some people in the Pacific Northwest of the US who are dark or tanned, but that doesn't mean that most people there aren't light skinned or pale. It's all about general tendencies, not absolutes. No one is claiming absolutes here.

- 1) First of all, there is no question that Russian women are very different from American women. Not that everyone of one group or nationality is the same, but we are speaking on the average here. Russian women have much better qualities, in terms of values, behavior, attitudes, and personality. They have an inner life, and are intellectual, substantive, and feminine. The average Russian girl has a personality like Snow White or Cinderella. Not that all of them are like that, but a WAY higher proportion of them are than in America. They act the way God originally intended women to be. I often use the Cinderella analogy to describe the difference between Russian women and American women. I tell people that the average American girl's personality is like one of Cinderella's step-sisters, while the average Russian girl's personality is like Cinderella. Although they are not perfect angels like many mail order bride agencies described, they are a lot CLOSER to being that way than American women are. That's the bottom line. I can guarantee that.
- 2) American women are definitely not the norm of how women around the world are. In fact, nowhere in the world are women as hard to get along with as in America. Compared to women in every other country, they have the worst and least interesting personality and attitude.
- 3) With a typical Russian woman, you get the best of both worlds in several ways. First, a typical Russian girl has the equivalent maturity of an American woman ten years older than her. For example, a typical Russian 20 year old has about the same maturity of an American woman who is 30, but without the snobbiness, selfishness, feminism, and attitude. Therefore, with a typical Russian woman, you get the best of both worlds, the maturity of an older woman inside the body of a younger woman. Second, you also get the best qualities from both the East and West. They have the outer beauty that the American girls have (without the snobbiness, feminism, and bad personality), the inner values and character that the Asian girls have (without the closed mindedness and rigid ways), and the intelligence and sense of culture that the European girls have.
- 4) I personally definitely have much better chemistry with Russian girls in general than with any other women on the planet. They treat me 100 times better than American girls do and have in the past. With them, I don't feel awkward and unnatural like I do around American girls I try to socialize with. They don't make me feel like a fish out of water. When I approach Russian girls, I don't feel the force field vibes that American girls give me (such as the tall attractive girl at the hotel lobby in the airport gave me). They make me feel like a man and a likable person, not a misfit and outcast like American girls make me into. The five reasons I cited in the beginning chapter of this book about why I was led to Russia were all solidly confirmed on this trip. Besides the experiences on my trip, this was further evidence recently when I responded to about a hundred ads on [www.datadate.com](http://www.datadate.com). I wrote the same short form letter to about a hundred girls from my state and from Russia. It included a link to my profile on the site with my best photos. The thing is, I got 7 responses from gorgeous girls, and ALL of them were Russian! None of the American girls responded to me at all! Zero. This proves that it has nothing to do with my attitude, as politically correct new agers think, because I sent the same short form letter to all of them through the internet,



where my attitude couldn't have been a factor. This obviously demonstrates again that they appreciate me and find me more appealing. And this isn't my first experience with personal ads either. For years, I have used such sites as Match.com, American Singles, AOL Photopersonals, etc. Each time the result would be the same. If I wrote to them and sent them my pictures, almost none of the normal looking girls and above would write back, only the most desperate, overweight and unattractive ones. This was very insulting and ego deflating to me. And even with the ones that did, they would only write a few short emails and then flake out soon and vanish. This especially happens on the Hot or Not website ([www.hotornot.com](http://www.hotornot.com)).

- 5) However, you won't hear any of this on the media though. You won't hear about the good qualities of Russian women or the happy marriage stories with Russian women and American men. The media only likes to show bad horror stories involving "mail order brides" to use that derogatory term again. There are reasons for this. First, our media has a tendency to prefer reporting bad news, horror stories, and tragedies in general, for both domestic and international news. It provides more shock value to hold audiences' attention. If they showed happy stories and good things most of the time, people would be bored really fast and advertisers wouldn't be sponsoring the media. Therefore, they mostly like to show bad stories, while mixing in a good story occasionally here and there. Second, our media is mostly feminist run because its main target audience is American women. This is not because American women watch TV more than American men, but because American women tend to buy things they see on commercials more than American men do. Therefore, the advertisers sponsor programs and shows that they know will appeal to women mostly. This is why you see so much male bashing in the media, talk shows, movies, sitcoms, etc. That's why the typical talk show or movie likes to portray men as jerks who treat their women bad and dump them without regard to their feelings, when the reality is that statistically it is the women who initiate breakups 90 percent of the time while the men want to try to work out the relationship. Programs that make women look like victim appeal more to women, that's why you see this theme so often even though in reality it's the other way around. This is why you won't hear anything about the good qualities of Russian women or the happy successes of couples who met through mail order bride agencies. It offends American women viewers.
- 6) Everyone I know who has gone to Russia all agree that any American man can get a better looking girl in Russia than he can in the US. That much is certain.
- 7) A typical Russian girl is a much better conversationalist than a typical American girl. By far, there's absolutely no comparison. As I said before, all most American girls say to me is "Yeah", "Really", and "Cool". With the Russian girls, even those that don't speak any English have more to say to me than that. Like Natasha, they will try a variety of ways to communicate with you. And their body language and behavior is much more interesting anyway.
- 8) It seems that friendships overseas are more long lasting and of higher quality. The new friends I met in Russia and in other countries seem to indicate that they are there for the long run. On the other hand, friendships and relationships in the US are fleeting and superficial, and it is harder to find a friend or lover who will stick with you through thick and thin, because people mostly care about themselves here. That's one of the reasons we have a 50 percent divorce rate in this country. In many other countries, many people you meet will treat you right away like an old friend or sibling.

- 9) It seems that a Russian woman and American man is a logical matchup for several reasons. Both of them complain about the lack of quality available singles of the opposite sex. In the USA, it is very difficult to find a quality single American woman. Although the complaint that "the good ones are all taken" is not entirely true, it is true that MOST of the good ones are taken though. With American women, the good quality keeper ones are taken early on or married. The rest after that are usually either very picky with high standards (like the character of Ally in the TV series "Ally McBeal") or they are too hard to get along with to hold a relationship. This stacks the odds against single American men. Therefore, there is a deficit of single quality good keeper women in the USA. Likewise, in Russia, the women complain that there are not enough quality men able to support them (though I disagree with that since my experience of Russian men has been mostly positive). Therefore, the logical solution to both those deficits is to match with each other.
- 10) American women see nice sensitive guys as weak and unchallenging. They accept their kindness and favors from them, but will take it for granted and give them no dating material credit for it. On the other hand, Russian women and all other women around the world as far as I know, give nice sensitive guys credit for being the way they are. They value it and see it as attractive. Also, intellectuals and those who are nerdy by the standards of our culture are looked down upon by most women who consider themselves cool or hip. In everywhere else around the world, nerds and intellectuals are considered interesting and likable. They have nothing to be ashamed of for being the way they are. Only in the US are they persecuted and seen as uncool misfits.

## **Answers to Common Objections and FAQ's**

Ever since I have written out many of the ideas in the conclusion section by email, I have received many common objections and frequently asked questions. Since I am tired of repeating the same answers to the same questions over and over again every time someone new asks them, I have decided to create this section so I can copy and paste it to anyone who makes these comments or asks these questions. Keep in mind though, that when I refer to American women or Russian women below, I am referring to most of them, not all of them. So please do not accuse me of implying that everyone in one category is the same. Here are the common objections and frequently asked questions, with my answers below them.

### **1. Russian women just treat you better because they want to come to America. They see you as a ticket out of their impoverished country for a better life. They are desperate to leave their country**

A: This is such a common ridiculous claim. Only people who have never been to Russia think that people there are desperate to leave their country. No one I know who has spent considerable time there think that people there are desperate to leave their country. Russians are a proud people of their country and culture.

There are many points to make about this. First of all, Americans are not the standard to compare the rest of the world by. Just because people in other countries are different, doesn't mean that they must have ulterior motives. Why can't people be naturally or inherently different without having ulterior motives? Second, most Russian women are NOT trying to leave their country to live abroad. That's a false egocentric media image. Most Russian women love to travel and visit other countries, but they are

not trying to relocate abroad permanently. They love their own country and prefer to stay if they can. And most of those that do want to live abroad do not want to live in America. They tend to prefer Europe because it is closer to them so they can come back and forth to visit their families easier and because their culture is more similar to it. Most of the ones who are desperate to come to America are the gold digger type women who love America for its riches and money, not the good hearted women. Third, even with the Russian women in marriage agencies, most of them were not desperate. They merely viewed foreign relations as an option. They weren't basing all their hopes on it. Only a small percentage of them project desperate vibes. Fourth, the Russian women who were not trying to live abroad generally did not treat me any less than the ones that did, and definitely a lot better than girls in America do. They went out with me as well and didn't see me as a waste of their time. Fifth, I even get along better with Russian girls that live in America than I do with American girls. Their personalities and attitudes are just so much more natural and pleasant. And like me, they are naturally curious and intellectual by nature. Sixth, even with those that want to leave their country for a better life, at least they want to do it with someone they're compatible with and would be happy with. Having one motive does not exclude a second one too. If they do not like someone or are not compatible with someone, most of them will not continue to pursue romantic relations with the man. After all, who wants to be with someone they wouldn't be happy with. Any of us would do the same. Finally, it's not just about the way Russian women treat people, but also that they're fundamentally different. In fact, it's part of their culture too. Here is what my friend Masha in Izhevsk said about this, and she has given me permission to quote her:

"I don't think that Russians treated you so well only to your being a rich, Hospitality is an integral part of Russian character, and you can see it during travelling by trains when people in one compartment became good friends, spending together not much time and treating each other with their food. On my way to Izhevsk, I was in one compartment with an old woman and spent 2 days together and she told me about all her life since her childhood and when she got off the train( but earlier than I) she introduced me to all her relatives who came to meet her at the station. So, don't think that you was met good only due to your been a foreigner, rich foreigner, may be, you can't understand why they did so, and I can't explain - it's Russian character, if you'll come to Russia again and live for a while, may be then you will understand and even feel why."

## **2. Russian women treat you better because they see you as rich.**

A: Some Russian women may treat me better or like me more because they see me as rich by their standards, and it may play a small factor in others, but it is by no means the exclusive or main reason. In addition, the girls I didn't spend money on treated me very warmly and enthusiastically and went out with me too. The reasons, as far as I can tell, why Russian women treat me much better are the following: 1) Some see me as rich and wealthy or of a higher social class, 2) Others who don't care about money see me as an interesting exotic novelty or rare opportunity to practice their English, 3) They are NATURALLY more friendly, open, and intellectual than Westernized women. The paragraph from Masha above illustrates that as well:

"I don't think that Russians treated you so well only to your being a rich, Hospitality is an integral part of Russian character, and you can see it during travelling by trains when people in one compartment became good friends, spending together not much time and treating each other with their food. On my way to Izhevsk, I was in one compartment with an old woman and

spent 2 days together and she told me about all her life since her childhood and when she got off the train( but earlier than I) she introduced me to all her relatives who came to meet her at the station. So, don't think that you was met good only due to your been a foreigner, rich foreigner, may be, you can't understand why they did so, and I can't explain - it's Russian character, if you'll come to Russia again and live for a while, may be then you will understand and even feel why."

**3. Russian girls treat you better because you're a foreigner and they are intrigued by your novelty. The novelty will soon wear off.**

A: This is a really dumb one, but I've gotten it a few times. You'd think that people who say this would get the answer to it from their own common sense. First of all, the novelty of everything in life wears off eventually. In every friendship and relationship, the novelty of the meeting or encounter soon wears off. That applies to the new car or house or fancy item you buy too. So what? That's a fact of life and does nothing to detract from my arguments above. We all know that the friendships and relationships that last when the novelty wears off are those that have a substantive basis, common bond, meaningful purpose, or mutual tangible benefit. That's why when the novelty of me wears off, some people lose interest in me while others continue to like me or associate with me. But the bottom line is that the PERCENTAGE of those who still like me after the novelty wears off is much HIGHER than the people that like me here. Also, another main point to understand is that this "novelty" opens up doors and opportunities that otherwise wouldn't exist for me. This allows me the chance to meet many quality women that I otherwise wouldn't meet, thereby increasing my chances of meeting people that I would be compatible with. In other words, it increases the odds. Sure, some will discover that we have nothing in common after the novelty wore off, but many others won't and will stay because we have some chemistry. That's life.

I can't believe I had to explain this one because it should be deduced from common sense without asking. And as I already mentioned, I have much better chemistry with them, than with American women. Why do you think many of the girls I met have invited me back to visit them, if my novelty wore off and that's all there was?

**4. The Russian woman that you bring to the US will mostly likely leave you after they get their green card.**

A: Again, as mentioned in the answer to objection number one, a Russian woman who wants to come to the US wants to do so with someone they are compatible with and will be happy with. Unless they are super desperate, they will take the best they can get. Besides, you can tell if someone truly loves you or if they're just faking it. No one, not even the best actor, can fake something for too long. It will show. We all have intuition and sixth sense that can sense things even if we're not aware of it consciously. That's why you have to choose the right one, not just any one. Finally, it might be interesting to note that according to the INS website, the success rate of American man/Russian woman couples is much higher than the success rate of American couples in this country. The site said that after five years, the percentage of American man/Russian woman couples that stay together is about 80 percent, while the national average is 50 percent. Here is the link to the site:

<http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/repstudies/Mobappa.htm>

**5. American women have to be paranoid and stuck up for their own safety since there are so many dangerous men in this country such as rapists and killers.**

A: First of all, if that's so then why don't women in other countries have to be that way too? Obviously, there is something in our society that makes people become dysfunctional. I'm not sure what that is but I have several theories. One is that perhaps because American women tend to treat men like crap, it makes men feel more desperate, deprived, and insane, causing deviant behaviors in them, which in turn makes American women more paranoid, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle. Second, it's not just about American women being paranoid, but snobby, picky, flaky, unstable, etc. especially toward people like me who don't fit the ideal image of what an attractive male is like. And it's also about how they treat me, their attitudes and selfishness as well. These traits were manifest in my two American women ex-girlfriends too. Therefore, it's not about one trait here, but the whole package, the big picture.

**6. Guys like you are just losers who can't get women in their own country.**

A: This is only partially true, but with conditions. First of all, that may apply to some, but every guy who pursues this process has his own reasons for doing so. Some are doing it because the women in their country doesn't cut it with their standards. Some want a woman with old fashioned values that is focused on family and not just career. Others just want a better looking or younger woman than they can get in the US. Second, even if people saw me as a "loser" in my own country doesn't mean I chose them to think that. I may have chosen to be a winner, but the women here see me as a loser because I'm not their type and won't give me the time of day. For example, for years in California, I saw myself as attractive and dating material and a winner with girls, but that attitude didn't actually make me that way to women. Therefore, I'm a loser according to their perception, not because of what I see myself as or what I make myself as. We all know that how we see ourselves may be different than how people see us. In any case, the guys doing this are doing what they feel is best for them. Who are you to judge? Destiny and God have many ways of bringing people together, and sometimes it's through unconventional ways as well. Why would you think that God only works through society's conventional accepted ways?

**7. You can't generalize Russian women and American women like that. Not everyone in each group is the same. There are good and bad people everywhere you go.**

A: This is a standard politically correct but naive defense. First of all, no one disputes that not everyone in a group or country are all the same. I never claimed that, even if my tone of writing implied it. And no one else I ever met claimed it either. What I did claim are the tendencies in general of what American women and Russian women are like. There is nothing wrong with that. We all generalize about some things to a degree, it's only when someone's ego is attacked or hurt that politically correct defenses like these are used. Second, just because you know of one or a few examples that are contrary to a tendency or general rule does not mean that it's been debunked. For example, in general, Japanese people are considered generally short while Dutch people are considered generally tall. Now, just because you know some tall Japanese people and short Dutch people does not disprove those general tendencies. Likewise, not all people in the Pacific Northwest of the USA are light skinned and pale either, but that doesn't mean that most aren't. There is diversity everywhere. The difference is in the PERCENTAGES. There is nothing wrong with recognizing PATTERNS among groups. Patterns exist, and only those who have ethical problems with that would deny them. Also, of course there are good and bad people everywhere, but that doesn't mean that people are the same everywhere either. Location

does matter a lot, and people are different in different locations, for many factors we won't get into. Just remember that I don't make American women or Russian women the way they are. I just tell it like it is. So don't blame the messenger. This leads some to use the next argument against me, which is just as silly.

**8. American women treat you like crap because of your attitude toward them, which is evidenced by what you wrote about them. You probably treat them like sex objects too.**

A: This is a total cop out, and is an example of one trying to change the facts to fit their beliefs, rather than update their beliefs to fit the facts. The belief or assumption being preserved here is that American women are good people and that if they treat you bad, then you must be the problem or there must be something wrong with you. That's not how it works. The truth is, I formed my current attitude about most American women AFTER many years of attitude-free experience with them, NOT BEFORE! For years I loved them and fantasized about them, and wanted to be popular and accepted by them. I thought that by being nice to them and treating them good, they would like me and do the same for me back. But it doesn't work that way, because they don't see me as dating material or even friend material. I'm just not worth their time, and not in their league. They act like I don't even have a right to pursue them or try to get into their social circles. Almost every normal American girl I meet has treated me like that. All I've gotten for my years of effort was rejection, loneliness, isolation, boredom, and regret over time that passed without the good times with them I could have had. Out of the thousands of American girls I've liked or been interested in, I've only had two American girlfriends to show for it. That's a hit rate of far less than one percent. Other people don't have that problem, and things should not be this hard either. That's really messed up. Those results are totally unacceptable to me. That's why I had to pursue a different avenue. Heck, those American girls who turned me down didn't even see me as friend material, claiming that I wasn't what they were looking for and that we had nothing in common.

In fact, I can prove definitively that it wasn't about my attitude. Most American women I meet online or through personal ads blow me off or stop talking to me after I send them a nice photo of me, even if they liked what they heard about me before. That solidly demonstrates that it's not about my attitude, but about appearance, taste, type, or the flakiness and instability of these women, etc. And it proves that the "attitude worshippers" out there are wrong when they say that. Therefore, my attitude or chip on my shoulder is NOT the main factor at work here.

Anyway, the bottom line is that all my life I've had a good attitude toward American women, and got nothing but crap in return for it. That's why I've finally woken up to reality and changed my views of them to fit reality, rather than the other way around like people who make this argument do. Therefore, my attitude toward them came AFTER my experiences with them, not BEFORE. If you're still not convinced, I challenge you to do this then. Pray and ask God to put you through a year or six months of getting turned down for social situations and friendships by every normal person of the opposite sex in your country. Ask him to put you through all the getting stood up by women, dates cancelled, flaking out on me, excuses they always give me for not getting together, etc. Ask him to put you through getting nothing but one lame excuse after another from the opposite sex for anything. Go through six months or a year of this, and see if you can blame me for feeling how I feel. I absolutely guarantee you that you wouldn't blame me after that. Sorry, but I see myself as a winner, so I refuse to be treated like a loser by women who think otherwise.

As to the second argument, sure I am sexually attracted to many American women that I find attractive. Who wouldn't be? But that doesn't mean that I treat them like sex objects. On the contrary, I've been very nice to them and used all kinds of ways and approached to gain their affections and interest, but they haven't worked. Women want guys they want to be nice them, not guys they aren't interested in. Like I mentioned before, you don't get bonus points ONLY for being nice to them. You might with women in every other part of the world, but not with American women. Like I said, they don't even see me as friend material, hence it doesn't matter whether I treat them like sex objects or not. They don't see me as worth their time or attention.

## **9. You haven't met most American women to make claims about them like that.**

A: This is just a cheap tactic to raise the bar to an impossible standard to try to discredit me. The fact is, no one can personally meet the majority of over 150 million American women. But fortunately, this shady tactic is easy to refute. One does not have to meet every member of a group or item in the world to know what they are generally like. For example, you don't have to every hot stove or range in the world to claim that they are hot enough to burn you. Likewise, you don't have to see every tree in the world to say that most of them are green. Also, here are some similar lame ass questions for you. Do most Asian people have black hair? If yes, how do you know? You haven't met most Asian people! Also, do most parents in America prefer that their children NOT be kidnapped? If so, how do you know? You haven't met most American parents! Do most people prefer to get shot with a gun? If not, how do you know? You haven't met most people! Get real. Some things are just too obvious and this is one of them.

## **10. Maybe the problem is you?**

A: This non-specific, sweeping, useless emotional response would be fine if it were accompanied by specific descriptions of what is wrong with me or what I'm doing wrong. Then we could discuss and analyze it. But the way it stands, it offers nothing useful and is more an emotional statement designed to cheaply try to put the blame back on me without offering any substance behind it. The fact of the matter is, it's not a question of who's fault this is or who is the problem. It's just a matter of being a mismatch with American women in a lot of ways, in terms of looks, personality, and vibes among other things. Some things just don't mix. For example, ketchup and milk don't mix well, but that doesn't mean either one of them is defective or bad. If you put the ketchup on a hot dog and the milk with cereal, then those things mix well. Same with me and American women. I may not mix well with them, but I do more so with foreign women in general (and so do many guys, but the media won't tell you that of course) My personality and ethnicity seem to not naturally jive with American women. Their media programmed tastes just don't favor a person like me. Most of them are only interested in white guys, and the few that are open to interracial dating tend to be interested in hispanics and blacks first. Asians and orientals are considered least attractive on their list. Many have even told me this directly, and those who have not said it publicly strongly imply it by their actions, choices, and behavior. On the other hand, I have much better chemistry in many ways with Russian women. And I am considered more attractive by the standards of their culture and taste. Heck, it's even possible that they are drawn more to my Asian genes because their genes of a Slavic origin may have connected roots to it. I don't know. But the final point I want to make about this is that if the problem was really with me, then how come I don't have this problem with Russian women and women in most countries outside of North America?

## **11. If you feel that way, why don't you just move to Russia then?**

A: I wouldn't rule that out and it is something I would consider. But you have to take into account that it's not that simple to just move into a country. You would have to get a long visa, a work visa, student visa, year long business visa, etc. And even then, it's temporary and there are periodic updates. In any case, such a decision is complex and not that simple as just making a statement like that. But if destiny leads me that way, I would consider it.

## **Appendix A: Letters I wrote to the women I visited**

Here are the letters I wrote either by email or air mail to 6 of the 7 main women I visited during my trip, except for Olga of St. Petersburg because I didn't feel that I had anything to say to her. For the ones that don't understand English, I included a copy translated into Russian by an online program at [www.translate.ru](http://www.translate.ru).

### **To Natalia T. of St. Petersburg**

Dear Natalia,

Hello. This is Winston Wu. We met a few times when I was in St. Petersburg in July. Do you remember? I am back home in America now after my 6 week trip in Russia and Ukraine. You gave me your address when we were together, so I wanted to write you to say thank you, and to give you a copy of our photos.

I want to say thank you for going out with me a few days, and for showing me around your city. I enjoyed your company and your pretty smile. However, I feel that you do not really like me. I also feel that you are not interested in me. That was my impression. Furthermore, I felt humiliated when you never appeared for our last appointment. I do not know what happened that day. In fact, you did not appear for two of our scheduled meetings. I do not understand why. Both instances happened at the same metro station on Nevsky Prospect, so perhaps there was some misunderstanding. However, everyone at the metro station told me that I was in the right station, which was the small one across from the cathedral and fountain. Perhaps you wanted to avoid me on those days? If that is true, I prefer that you had been honest and told me so. If you did not like me, why did you not tell me? I felt humiliated when I waited two hours for you when you never appeared.

If I am wrong in my feeling or understanding, then you may write back and tell me. If you have anything to tell me, you may also write me back. Otherwise, I wish you luck and happiness. My home address is:

(address omitted)

Or you may email me at [WWu777us@yahoo.com](mailto:WWu777us@yahoo.com). You may write me in Russian, because I have a way to translate Russian letters. I plan to return to your country someday, because I love Russia and its culture. I have included a copy of our photos together with this letter. You look beautiful in all the photos. I hope you like them. I am also sending you a Russian version of this letter, if you do not



understand this letter. The Russian letter was translated by a computer, so it may not be accurate, but it is the best I can do now. Goodbye for now.

Sincerely,  
Winston Wu

### **To Julia and Katya of Cherepovets**

Dear Yulia,

Hello, this is Winston. How are you? Kak dila? I am sorry I have taken so long to write. I have missed you and thought about our time together and my visit. Here are copies of our photos together and a video tape of the film I took with you during my visit. I hope you like them. I had a lot of fun during my visit with you. You are a fun person to be around, and very wild too. You seem very jolly. You are definitely not boring. You are very interesting but controversial. I still have a little bit left of the pink fingernail polish that you put on my finger. I left it there to remind me of you. Please tell your parents thank you for their hospitality and kindness too.

However Yulia, I must say that I do not understand the reason for your behavior toward me. Sometimes you made me feel very uncomfortable when you looked at me with a mean and angry face. I was not sure what to say or do during those moments. Also, you alternated between being nice and being hostile and teasing toward me. I was confused at such behavior. I did not know what to think or believe. Can you explain to me what was happening? You told me it was because you were like a child and immature, but I feel that there was more to the story than just that.

I did not feel that you had any romantic feelings toward me. You never wanted to spend time alone with me, and any affection you showed toward me was very short. Can you tell me the reason for this? Did you not like my appearance? Did you not feel any chemistry with me? Were you disappointed by me in some way? Did you think I was funny or strange to you? What happened? Were you doing these things to cause me to leave?

In your letters to me before my visit, you seemed very sincere and honest. After my visit with you, I felt very hurt and emotionally drained. I laid in bed in the Moscow hostel for a long time. I felt like you cared about my money more than you cared about me. You must know that I came to Russia to look for genuine love, not to be used for fun and money. I did enjoy all the things we did though. But I still felt hurt deep down inside. Nevertheless, I did forgive you later and realized that it was all for the best. I also sensed that despite your eccentricity, you were a good person deep down. I sensed that you had a caring heart deep down inside. I do not feel that you understood your own behavior.

Despite all of this, you are generally a fun person to be around. I hope we can remain good friends. I have tried to call you a few times after I returned to America, but Elena's mom said that neither you nor Elena was home. I think she also said that you two were away. Are you in Poland now? Do you have an email address or telephone number in Poland? How do you like it there?

Regarding the video tape I sent you, it is in American NTSC format. I have learned that VCR's in your country are all PAL format. PAL is incompatible with NTSC. I have investigated the possible solutions

to this problem. I have learned that it is very expensive for me to convert my tape to PAL here in America. I have also learned that it is easier and inexpensive to convert NTSC tapes to PAL in your country. To view the tape, you must go to a video electronics store. Tell them that you need to convert the tape from NTSC to PAL and they will understand what to do. However, I have also heard that some of the VCR's in your country will have a toggle switch to let you view NTSC tapes. You can check your VCR to see if it has this ability, by searching for such a toggle switch for NTSC and PAL.

Yulia, you may not take the time to translate this letter. Therefore, I have included a Russian translation of it for your convenience. The translation was done by a computer, so it may be inaccurate and ambiguous. I hope you are not disappointed toward me and I hope we can have good relations.

I have also included a letter to Katya. Can you please give it to her? PLEASE! IT'S IMPORTANT!

Best Regards,  
Winston

To Katya

(Note: This Russian translation was done by a computer program, and may contain mistakes and ambiguities. I have written the English version in a style that will minimize the translation errors.)

Hi Katya,

Kak dila? This is Winston. I am Julia's friend from America who visited her in August. Do you remember? I hope you do. I miss you, and I often look at our photo together. I met you when you came to visit Julia. I definitely have not forgotten you. You made an impression on me. You gave me one of the best kisses I ever had! I wish we had kissed like that again! I will never forget it. Your lips tasted like cherry candy :) It was a pity that you could not speak English and we could not communicate. I liked your attitude. You seemed very open and easy going and was very flirty toward me. I felt that you liked me a little. Was I right? I hope you liked me for more than just money. Yulia told me that you said you enjoyed kissing me, but I do not know whether to believe Yulia or not. It was a pity that I did not see you again after the day we met. I did not know where you were, or how to find you. When I asked Yulia, she did not want to even answer. I felt regret that I did not ask you for your address or phone number before you left. It was also a pity that you did not come to Moscow with me after I left Cherepovets. Why did you not come back to tell me whether you wanted to go or not?

Anyway, the reason I am writing you now is because you said that you wanted to come with me to America. I do not know if you were serious or joking. If you were serious and interested, please tell me. I would like to know. Yulia was not serious about me, and we did not have the right chemistry together, so I would like to check your interest and availability. You may write me back a letter to my address:

(address omitted)

Or you may send me an email at [WWu777us@yahoo.com](mailto:WWu777us@yahoo.com) Yulia's friend Vitaly has a computer and email that you can use. Yulia has used it to send me email before. I hope to hear from you. Please also

give me your address and telephone number as well. You may write me in Russian. I have a way to translate Russian letters.

If you decide that you are not interested in me, or you feel that I do not fit your standards for a boyfriend, then you may tell me so I can try to help you find the right American boyfriend for you. You will have to describe the kind of man you are looking for, so I can help you. Either way, I would love to hear from you. And do you have any photos you can send me by mail? If so, that would be fantastic! I hope to hear from you soon. You are very interesting to me, and I hope we can be friends at the very least. I have also included a Russian translation of this letter and my photo as well.

Best Regards,  
Winston

### **To Elena of Mariupol**

Dear Elena,

Hello! This is Winston. How are you? As promised, here is the video tape of my trip that I said I would make a copy of for you. Regarding the video tape, it is in American NTSC format. I have learned that VCR's in your country are all PAL format. PAL is incompatible with NTSC. I have investigated the possible solutions to this problem. I have learned that it is very expensive for me to convert my tape to PAL here in America. I have also learned that it is easier and inexpensive to convert NTSC tapes to PAL in your country. To view the tape, you must go to a video electronics store. Tell them that you need to convert the tape from NTSC to PAL and they will understand what to do. However, I have also heard that some of the VCR's in your country will have a toggle switch to let you view NTSC tapes. You can check your VCR to see if it has this ability, by searching for such a toggle switch for NTSC and PAL. I hope you will find a way to view it.

I am not going to send you my journal entries though, because it is very long and contains some things you may not approve of. But perhaps I will send you the complete story that I will write of it in the future.

Thank you for your hospitality and kindness to me. You are a wonderful person, and I sometimes wonder if I messed up with you or if I should have done anything different. To tell you the truth, you were the best girl out of the three I came to meet. You were the most serious, intelligent and sincere. You know, after my failures with the first two I came to meet, I thought "Oh well. It looks like Elena Motorina is my last hope. And that's good because she is the best prospect so I saved the best for last." Also, people who saw you on my video tape said that you seemed very sweet and sincere. My dad also said that he could tell that you were a quality person on the video tape as well, because of how you spoke and your behavior.

I have also included some coins you don't have in your collection yet that I forgot to give you when I was visiting you, which are an American quarter and a Canadian dollar coin. I hope you like them. And I have included a copy of our photo as well.

I wish you well and I hope we will stay in touch. My plans are to return to Russia soon and find some way to live, like perhaps teaching English. I think I will be happier there for a while, because it is much easier to meet people and people's attitudes toward me are much more friendly and open and interesting.

I hope all is well. My email is WWu777us@yahoo.com

Regards,  
Winston

### **To Evgeniya of Dnepropetrovsk**

Dear Evgeniya,

Hello. This is Winston. How are you? Kak dila? I miss you. Yas coo cha yo! I have returned to the USA. Thank you for allowing me to visit you and letting me stay in your home. Tell your mom thank you for her hospitality. I had a very good time with you. Thank you for showing me your city of Dnepropetrovsk and all the beautiful parks there. I enjoyed it very much. You gave a great tour. I have missed you very much and often thought of how cute you were when you said "Da" and "Ya ni panila". No one says those two phrases cuter than you! :) As I promised, I have included with this letter copies of our photos together, and a video tape of the film I took of my visit with you. I hope you enjoy them.

Regarding the video tape I sent you, it is in American NTSC format. I have learned that VCR's in your country are all PAL format. PAL is incompatible with NTSC. I have investigated the possible solutions to this problem. I have learned that it is very expensive for me to convert my tape to PAL here in America. I have also learned that it is easier and inexpensive to convert NTSC tapes to PAL in your country. To view the tape, you must go to a video electronics store. Tell them that you need to convert the tape from NTSC to PAL and they will understand what to do. However, I have also heard that some of the VCR's in your country will have a toggle switch to let you view NTSC tapes. You can check your VCR to see if it has this ability, by searching for such a toggle switch for NTSC and PAL.

Also, tell Oleg that I do not need him to send me the software program to translate Russian to English anymore, because I have found one already on the internet. But tell him thank you anyway. Also, if you do not know how to convert my video tape here, please ask him for help and show him the instructions above.

I must say that the first night I arrived in your city, things were very awkward. We could not understand each other in the smallest things, and I was wondering if my visit was a bad idea. However, things got better the next day and we seemed to gradually understand each other. I felt a lot more comfortable with you the next day and you seemed to as well. By then, I felt happy that I came to visit you. And I was also happy that you seemed to like me too. I felt very romantic when we walked and held hands :)

However, I did not know what your true feelings for me were. You seemed to like me, but I also got mixed messages. I did not know if you were attracted and had romantic feelings toward me, or if you were just being polite to not hurt me. It was difficult for me to sense it, but you seemed to enjoy our

time together. Can you tell me? What did you feel about me? Were you interested in a relationship or just a friendship?

I also have an important question for you. Why did your mom suddenly decide to take you to Russia and stop our time together? We seemed to be getting along great, and I wanted to spend a few more days with you. I thought it was very strange that she would do that. Didn't she know that my visit to you was a rare and precious occurrence? It was very expensive for me to come visit Russia and Ukraine, and therefore my visit to you was precious. But she acted as if I could just come next week again. Why did she not realize this? Was your mom against our relations? Did she dislike me? Or did she think that she was saving me time to go to Crimea? (To tell you the truth, I did not enjoy my time in Crimea as much as our time in Dnepropetrovsk.) I wish we had been together on August 24th when the Independence Day festivities were happening.

Recently, something you did made me feel very sad and hurt. I called you twice to say hello and to tell you that I am back safe in America and that I was going to send you letter and photos and video tape. But you just said a few words that were not even friendly, and then you hung up the phone. That was a total surprise and shock to me. Usually, someone who hangs up the phone abruptly like that hates the other person. I did not do anything wrong to deserve such treatment. Not in the slightest. I felt extremely confused and baffled by your action. Do you really hate me so much? Why? Do you not know that hanging up the phone in such a way is very rude and impolite?

I would really really like to know the reason for this action and behavior. I had the impression that you liked me and had positive feelings for me. And you seemed like a nice sweet proper girl. You do not seem like the type of person who would act so rudely. This weird incident destroyed the great impression I had of you. Have you suddenly become apathetic? Did you never like me when I visited you? Were you just pretending to like me to be polite? (If so, you are an extremely good actor) Or did you change your mind about me? Or did you feel I do something to offend you? What has happened?

You know, most of my experiences during my trip were not successful. You were one of the few good experiences I had. I told everyone many good things about you. Now I feel very embarrassed that I may have made a mistake. I would hate to tell everyone that I was wrong and that my rare good experience with you was a lie. That would be such a pity. It really made me sad to think about it.

In fact, I should tell you something else. I do not know if your trip to Russia after my visit was genuine. I sensed something very odd about it. I felt an aura of deception. The way it happened was very strange. My intuition told me that something was wrong at the time. The incident was very suspicious. It was also very strange that the three of you (you, momma, and Yulia) all packed only one bag for a one week trip. It was also very strange that Yulia seemed to insist that I leave at 7pm rather than at 9:30pm. She acted like she did not want me to discover that you had no tickets to Russia at 9:30pm. It seemed like a conspiracy to create a reason for me to leave. Is this correct? If so, why? We seemed to be having a good time together. Why was it necessary? What was the problem?

On the boat cruise, you and Yulia went below to the bathroom and talked below for a long time. I suspect that at that time, you formulated the plan to make me leave by pretending to have to go to Russia. It was unusual to be down there for so long. Is my suspicion correct? I feel like you made me become a detective.

Before I left, you told me to write you. I thought you still wanted to keep in contact with me. So why did you hang up the phone when I called? That hurt me very much and doesn't make any sense. I do not feel I deserve such treatment. I had other Russians look at our video tape together and translate what you said. When you filmed me riding the horse, you said that I am very kind and that you hope you will meet me again. Is that right? Was it all a lie? If you said good things about me on video camera, why then did you want me to leave early?

Evgeniya, I hope you will not forget about me. Please write me back and tell me what has happened. I very much want to know the answers to these questions. I feel like it is all a big mystery that does not make any sense. I hope to hear from you. And I hope all is well with you.

Regards,  
Winston

Note: In response to the letter to Evgeniya, I received this letter from her sister Yulia. It was in Russian, but I translated it with an online program into English. Although the translation is choppy, it is understandable.

Greetings, Winston.

Sister Evgeniya, Yulia writes to you. Excuse, that I write in Russian. At me the possibility of access to Internet now has appeared. I shall not manage to transfer(translate) it(him) in due form as I do not know the English language reasonably well.

We have received your parcel(sending) with a videocassette and photos. It was very pleasant for us. I and Evgeniya are very grateful to you, that you have constrained the promise. A videocassette we did not look yet owing to absence of the videorecorder, but we necessarily shall make it in the near future.

I'm very sorry, that we have left about ourselves such impression about which you write in the letter. We have really left in Matveev-Kurgan (Russia) because this trip scheduled in the beginning of a summer(years) that our mum and its(her) sister solved the problem on the inheritance. Evgeniya very much wanted to see the cousins and friends of the childhood who were not seen with many years. She(it) did not expect, that you will come to Ukraine at this time, therefore she(it) could not solve, that to it(her) to do(make) and to tell you about it to it(her) it was very inconvenient, and for me it was difficult for translating into on the English language.

Winston, you do not take offence, but you the same detective, as Evgeniya a kangaroo. Evgeniya did not build any plans concerning you. If you have taken offence that I have taken away Evgeniya on a boat on a lower deck understand me please properly, I did not see the sister about one month, and the house at me was not possibilities with it(her) to talk, and at us much that has collected to tell each other. I wanted to hear, as wedding at its(her) best girlfriend on whom we together chose a gift has passed, and she(it) was the witness to the bride. You very badly understand psychology of Russian people. We do not travel with very big luggage, as you, Americans. Our mum very much was surprised to quantity(amount) of your luggage on one person. At us it is not accepted, as we went for one week.

Evgeniya has acted(arrived) very badly, that has hanged up, when you have telephoned. Then it was very a shame to it(her) from for it. Evgeniya was then very malicious because we very seriously

quarreled with it(her), but it does not give it(her) the right so to address with other people. Evgeniya very changeable person, at it(her) frequently changes mood. At it(her) such character.

It was very pleasant for me to get acquainted and communicate to you. I have understood, as far as badly I know the English language. I would like to know it(him) in perfection, but I think, that, hardly such possibility will sometime be presented me. Excuse, if something has turned out a little not how it was necessary, for example, when we bought tickets. Simply Evgeniya very much frequently nonplused me the requirements to transfer(translate) something, and I did not have not enough knowledge of the English language.

Oleg also sends the regards to you. It(he) will give us viewing a videocassette which you have sent. Too it was very interesting to it(him) to get acquainted with you. I hope, that at you all properly, I wish good luck in all.

Your sincerely  
Yulia.

### **To Irina of Perenalvov village**

Dear Irina,

Hello, this is Winston. Here is a copy of our photos from my visit with you. You look very good in these photos. You seem to be photogenic. Thank you for allowing me to visit you and your family in Simferopol and your village.

I must say though, that after my visit with you, I was very confused. You did not seem to like me. And you acted like a stranger to me during the last 2 days of my visit with you. If you were disinterested in me, I do not understand why you invited me to stay in your home. It seemed nonsensical. If you were not interested in me, you should have told me or the agency after our first day together. You seemed very nice and cute during our first day together. So I do not understand what happened. Did I offend you in some way, or do something wrong?

Furthermore, I also do not understand another thing. If you have no intention of living abroad and you have no intention of leaving your country, then why did you join a marriage agency for foreigners??? When I asked you this in person, you said "I don't know." (Niez Nayu) I know that is not true. I think you were not being honest with me. If you were not interested in me, you should have told me, rather than telling such a strange excuse such as you never want to leave your country. Vika from the agency told me that you told her that you wanted to go to America. Therefore, you must have lied to one of us, or you changed your mind later. Which is it?

I think it does not matter though. You were disinterested in me, and we did not seem to have much chemistry. After I left your town, I felt a little hurt inside. But do not feel guilty about this. Before my trip, I had already anticipated and expected that these kind of experiences may happen. That is why I made the wise decision to visit several women during my trip. My experiences during my 6 week trip were a mixture of good and bad. Such is real life and I expected this. Therefore, do not feel bad or guilty. Everything happens through destiny for a good reason.

Nevertheless, if I am mistaken in any of my assessments or interpretations, you may inform me by writing me back. If you wish, you may write me back by regular mail, or email at WWu777us@yahoo.com. My postal address is:

(address omitted)

You may write in Russian. I have the ability to translate Russian letters. I have also included a Russian translation of my letter here. It was translated by a computer program, and therefore may have mistakes and ambiguities. Anyway, I wish you well, and I hope that you do not see me as a bad experience. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Winston

### **To Natasha E. of Tula**

Dear Natasha!

Hello! Kiss! This is Winston. I am sorry for the delay in writing to you. I miss you so much. More than can be expressed in words. I was very happy to hear your voice on my answering machine! You must have known that I have been trying to call you for nine days already. Perhaps you sensed it telepathically. :) I had been trying to call you all week to give you instructions to retrieve the money I sent through Western Union. I was very worried when your mobile telephone did not work for so long. I hope it was not too expensive for you to call me. In the future, if you want to send a message to me, you may try one of two options. I have heard that you can call internationally through the internet cafe and it will be much cheaper, but I do not know if that applies to the Tula internet cafe. Another option is to write a message in Russian, then give it to the internet cafe staff to email to me at WWu777us@yahoo.com. You may tell them to write the message in Russian to me, because I can translate Russian emails using my computer program.

Recently I watched a TV program on "The History Channel." (I am a fan of history) It was about the Russian Red Army and their weapons. The program showed scenes from St. Petersburg, the Neva River, and the Winter Palace where we met. Then it showed a museum in Tula called "The Rifle Museum". It explained that the factory in Tula still makes the weapons for the Russian army. When it showed Tula, I jumped with excitement and said "That's the city of Natasha!" I felt excited because it all brought back the wonderful memories of my trip and of meeting you! It was such a good sign to see St. Petersburg and Tula together on the TV program.

I also felt extremely happy and ecstatic to hear your voice when I called you last time. It brought back wonderful memories, and I felt very nostalgic. I felt even more happy that you sounded happy too. I often reminisce about how we met and the time we spent together and how thoughtful you were. I am sorry that I seldom call. Sometimes I feel shy to call you because I am not sure what to say. Please do not think that I have forgotten you. I think of you often and still remember you very vividly. The sound of your voice is still very much alive in my memory. I like you very much :)



Thank you very much for our time together and your hospitality. I very much appreciated the opportunity to visit you in Tulah. I was extremely happy to see you again. I was very touched by your kindness and thoughtfulness. It was very special to me. I felt that our meeting was a miracle and blessing to me. I have never met anyone in such a manner as we did.

Our goodbye scene when I left was the most sad I ever experienced. It was more difficult than I had expected. I was very touched that you had tears on your face when we were in the hotel restaurant. Let me tell you a secret. When you left me in the train, I ran back to the train door and stood on the steps to look out the door to see you again. I watched as you walked away into the crowd. As you went farther and farther away, I felt my heart sank. I thought in my mind "No! Don't disappear!" I wanted to see your image as long as possible. I felt like I watched you for a long time. Time seemed to stop for a while. When I saw you carrying the rose bouquet I bought for you, it seemed like you were carrying my heart away with you. I watched as you became farther and farther away. When you became so small that I knew that you were about to disappear, I knew I would only see you for a few more seconds. At that moment, I whispered to myself "Oh my God, no!" Then a few people walked behind you and when they passed, you vanished! I could not believe it. I felt numb inside and in denial. I slowly walked back to my seat not knowing how to accept it and take it all in.

To make things worse, the tune of the sad music from the restaurant we just went to was still playing in my head. After the train started moving, I stood by the window and recalled all the memories with you like a movie, from the first time we met in the museum, then in front of the Neva River, and then in Tulah. The images continued in my mind like a fast movie. I felt overcome with emotion. When the stewardess came to ask me to pay for the bedsheets, I said "Later. Leave me alone." I was very distracted throughout the whole 20 hour train ride. When I was in my hotel room in Mariupol, Ukraine, I suddenly released my emotion and cried a little about leaving you. I still recall that day often. It was very sad, but part of me was glad that it seemed very poetic as well. It is a very special memory for me that I will never forget. What was your experience like that day? How did you feel at that time?

Also, the night we slow danced at the outdoor cafe was also very special and romantic to me as well. Anyway, I did not enjoy Ukraine as much as Russia. I found the Russians much more lively. The Ukrainians seemed more reserved.

Now I want to ask you an important question. It is a question I have been thinking about for a long time. How do you feel about me? Was I an infatuation to you, or were you genuinely interested in me? To tell you the truth, during the time we were together I was wondering whether you were flirting with me, or if you had real feelings for me. I felt like it was somewhere in the middle. I realize that we do not know each other well enough to know if we are compatible or not. Therefore, if you do not feel ready to answer these questions, that is ok. I would understand. I am just so curious about everything. My intuition tells me that you like me but are not sure what the future is or how serious it is, so you are undecided and wish to wait. Am I right?

I think you know that to have serious relations with a foreigner, means that one person would have to move to the other country. Same with you and me. Are you willing to live in the USA? I do not know what the future holds for us. The future is always unpredictable. But I want you to know that whatever our future is, you will always be the person who made my trip special. You will always be the special person from my first trip in Russia. It is more than you think though. You see, before we met again I had a bad experience. After we met again, I realized that someone can like me for the real me, so it was

a special experience for me, like from an angel. Our meeting was very incredible, like it was part of destiny. I have never met anyone in such a way before. I wonder what the meaning to it is. Do you remember why you first spoke to me in the museum? There is still so much we do not know about each other. I know that our different languages made it difficult to communicate. Fortunately, we were both very resourceful in finding ways to communicate. I appreciated that you were skillful in that area as well. You made good use of paper and pen to illustrate your meaning. It was a challenge for me to communicate with you too, but I know I found many ways to do so, including dictionary, paper, acting, pantomimes, etc.

Let me tell you something. I know this may seem crazy, but I have been seriously considering living in Russia for a while. I felt like my soul was captured by the culture and people in Russia, and I felt very good chemistry there, despite the economic problems. My mentality has never been compatible with the American way of life. It is too materialistic for me, and bland as well. Most people in my country have no depth either. I feel that people in my country do not understand me, and I don't understand most people either. I have often felt like a fish in the wrong water. I feel like I am around people of a different species here. I think I would be much happier in Russia, at least for a while. The attitude and sociality of the Russians is much more compatible. There are many more reasons for my decision, but those are the highlights of it. I hope you do not think this is a crazy idea. But it is where my heart is. And of course, my heart is with you too :) I am considering teaching English there or finding a job there, but I'm not sure yet. If I live in Moscow, I would only be three hours north of you :)

Here are my plans right now. I am saving up money for my next trip. I do not like the cold weather in Russia now, but I do not want to wait until Spring either. I feel like I am wasting my time here. Therefore, I would like to come to Russia again in January or February. This time, I would like to stay for a few months at least. I am considering two options. One is teaching English at a school, university, or private home. The other is find a job with an American company there. I am currently investigating both options to see which is better for me. And of course, there are people helping me with this too.

I am saving up money now from work to return and live longer. I think of you often, and I hope you have not forgotten me. I have a question for you. You know, I did not really visit anywhere in Moscow. I had no time or opportunity. On my next trip, do you want to visit Moscow together with me? Are you familiar with all the good sites and activities in Moscow? Could you get the time off your business? What if I gave you the salary you would lose from taking time off from your business? Would that help solve the problem? But of course, if I came when your business is closed, then you will have time to travel with me. Yes? I would love to go to all the interesting sites of Moscow with you, such as shopping, museums, Kremlin, nice restaurants, nightlife, clubs, ballet (your favorite), etc.

You told me on the phone a few times that your business is closed for winter. What do you do during the day when you have no business then? Perhaps you can use the time to start learning English. :) Also, the translator Lenny who called you for me, said that when I come back, you will explain everything to me and show me everything. What does that mean exactly?

I hope the money I sent you by Western Union helped you. Please do not think I am trying to buy your love. It's just that I like to share what I earn with someone I care about. And also, I felt a little guilty that you took time off your business for me when I was in Tulah, because I think maybe you lost some money during that time. And I also want to give something back to you for making my trip very special.

Please tell me more about yourself. There is so little I really know about you. Tell me about your dreams, hobbies, interests, personality, goals for the future, etc. My impression of you is that you are very practical, considerate, and you are fond of Asian culture.

To be honest, when I called you a few days ago, a man in your house kept interfering with our conversation, and said things like "Winston, I love Natasha. Winston, I am Natasha's boyfriend" etc., it made me feel very awkward. Who was he? Why did he say those things? Was he joking or serious? Can you tell me something? Are you involved with any other men? If so, does that affect the limit or potential of our relationship?

I have included with this letter copies of our photos together. I hope you like them as much I do. I have also included my favorite photo of me as well. I will also include a copy of this letter translated into Russian. I would like to know what your thoughts and feelings are regarding all that I've said. You may write me in Russian. I have a method of translating Russian letters. My address is:

(address omitted)

Or you may write me by email at WWu777us@yahoo.com. If you do not know how to use computer or internet, you can give your message to the internet cafe staff and ask them to email me for you. I hope to hear from you soon. I miss you very much!

Many Kisses,  
Winston

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