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## A Drunken Sailor...

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## A DRUNKEN SAILOR...

All I can think when I hear this Linda from the Montessori school in California shouting in a whisper outside my door,

*Danguolė! Danguolė!*

is—

What can she want now?

Last week I had to have the Key Keeper in the lobby of the Viesbutis Vetrungė fired because when Linda asked him to find a toilet seat for her room, he used the word “svoloch” in his reply—“dirty swine” in Russian. Now, people who use Russian here in Lithuania after Liberation are, how shall I say, “frowned upon”—but I am not sure I can blame this Key Keeper. There is no equivalent to “svoloch,” with all its vulgar imaginative force, in my native Lithuanian tongue. And though this Montessori woman from America happened to know that one word in Russian and English, she could not have possibly understood the context this Key Keeper (who was stinking of Stakliskes mead, I might add...) used this Russian word, “svoloch.” The Key Keeper explained to me that he had simply told this Linda, in Russian,

“You want a toilet seat? Be grateful you have a water closet. Some dirty swine are not so fortunate.”

This is all beyond my capability to translate precisely, to convey the nuances, allusions, history of this Key Keeper’s expression. It was easier for me to get him fired—for being drunk on duty, I told him, so he would understand and not take it personally. Still, he did not like me having him fired; he did not like the idea of a woman firing him. Key Keepers. They find

excuses for everything—even when you try to show them a little sympathy.

*Danguolé! Danguolé!*

All right! Just give me a moment to check my peroxide treatment. Good. White. Platinum. All the way to the roots. Wipe a little sleep from my eyes. Excellent.

I open my door and this Linda stands in her Care Bears, sky-blue, felt pajamas with her bunny slippers, bunny ears flopping out the sides of the slippers. I do not know how she keeps from falling over herself. And she is hugging that monstrous purple Gucci purse to her chest.

“What do you want?” I say. “Have you tripped on your bunny ears and injured yourself?”

“There’s a man in my room!” she squeaks.

Her big brown Montessori, cut-and-paste, non-toxic, finger-painted eyes bug out behind the lenses of her eyeglasses.

“A man?” I say. “What kind of man?” And I am thinking, what kind of man wants this Montessori bunny anyway?

But I do not want to upset this Montessori bunny or any of the others, so I say,

“Well, how did this man get into your room? Do you know it is three in the morning?”

“I just went down the hall to the kitchen to make a nice glass of warm milk before going to bed—and he was in my room when I got back!”

So we go to her room. I put a finger to her door; I push it open.... This man sits in the armchair by the window; I can see him in the purple light from the fluorescent lamps reflecting off the glass of the building where the all-night *mugé* is held. The white lace curtains flap all around his head, and his eyes are half-

shut; his beard is gray, like a stubble-field, and his hair is long, pulled back in a ponytail.

“Yes,” I say to Linda, “you are right. This is a man.”

“Well, what’s he doing in my room?”

I want to say, How should I know? Maybe he is a fan of Care Bears or would like some lessons in advanced leap frog.... But I am biting my tongue. By the looks of him, this man is a Russian sailor, out of work: filthy jeans and work shoes; denim shirt; sleeves torn off at the shoulders; and hammer and sickle tattoo on one of those shoulders. Brave man to show that tattoo these days. Or crazy.

At last this man lurches forward, out a little from the armchair, and this Linda jumps back about a meter; he gathers the curtains flying around his head with one arm and tosses them aside.

“What do you want?” I ask him in Russian. Good guess. He understands. He says, but in English, for this Linda Bunny’s benefit,

“I would like...” his eyelids droop and close a moment; he is stinking drunk, and I notice a half-filled bottle of Stolichnaya on the floor next to the armchair. “I would like good American woman... for sex.”

I look at Linda. Is it possible to laugh at this situation? Linda is biting her nails and rubbing one floppy bunny ear against her other leg. And then this man in her room adds,

“I have hard currency.”

I am looking at Linda again; I am thinking, typical Russian; even since Perestroika, these Russians do not know how to spend their money wisely.

“Danguolé!” this Linda chirps.

“All right!” I say. I think. I should get the police. But it is so late, and I was told not to create any

'incidents' with these Americans. I think, okay, I am responsible for these American Montessori school teachers; just my luck I was elected to the District School Council last winter—the first elections ever in our city. I told them I am an attorney and I have other obligations—children; a husband in the new Lithuanian merchant service, whom I seldom see, but who needs a great deal of attention when he is around; a flat to clean; my hobbies—

“My garden!” I said to them.

But they said,

“You must serve, Danguolė—it is the will of the people, the new democracy—we want *you!*—besides, no one here knows English.”

And who can argue with the new democracy?—they even convinced me to stay at the Viesbutis Vetrungė with these Americans to be sure they were comfortable—and to take care of incidents such as this one. But how was I to guess I would have a den full of Montessori bunnies in this Vetrungė, former-Russian sailors' hotel, the best place I could find on short notice to rest their bunny-heads—with Lithuanian Mafia and prostitutes coming and going from cars parked on Taikos Street in front, like this was a national clearing house for vice... and I should call the police? These bunnies will wind up in the jail! Bunny prostitutes. Just what I need. A scandal.

So I think, there is that American professor, Paul Rood, from New Jersey, who reads American poetry to Lithuanian children in the Montessori classes... Maybe he can help. But poetry—? What good is poetry at a time like this? And who can argue with democracy, the will of the people....

So I go over to this man in Linda's room—whew! He is really stinking. I stand over him, and

think, how can I get him up and out of this bunny's hole? I muster my Russian (a little rusty from neglect) and say to his yellow eyes under his red eyelids,

"You should be ashamed of yourself!"

No reaction. I knew as much. I look at Linda who backs up—shish, shish—all the way into the hallway.... God, help me. I kneel in front of this man so he can see me good, and look straight into his yellow eyes.

"You shame your country!" I say.

He mumbles,

"I have no country."

Who can argue with that? He is right.

"All right," I say under my breath, "you shame your mother!" (I say this a little louder so the Montessori Linda can hear me in the hallway—I glance behind and see her precious chin bobbing up and down in approval.)

Then this man's apple-red eyelids raise a millimeter or two; the veins in his eyes are ghastly.

"I have no mother," he grumbles.

"You must have a mother," I say, and think I had better be getting to the point while I have his attention.

"I have no mother," he repeats. "I have hard American currency."

"I do not care what you have, or where you are from, or if you were conceived immaculately in Lenin's mother's womb! Get out of this room!"

His eyelids drop, he mumbles,

"American... for sex... I have hard..."

I go out in the hallway with Linda.

"Look," I say to Linda, "you better not go back in there."

"What am I going to do?" Her eyes are popping out like a pack of beagles are chasing her. "Maybe you

should call the police?"

"No," I say, "they will take forever to get here. I will get Romas—he is just downstairs in the lobby. Go to my room and lock yourself in."

I take the lift downstairs and walk past the vacant Key Keeper's desk (now, why did I have to bloody get him fired?) to the money exchange booth where I will find my Mafia friend, Romas. He is in there with his pea-green Adidas athletic suit and his white Italian alligator shoes. He looks ridiculous, especially this late at night, like some big Batman toy a child forgot to put away. But I guess he thinks I am his friend because last week he walked up to me and said,

"Good day. My name is Romas. I hear you are responsible for these American teachers on the eighth floor. I would like to offer my services. There are thieves or worse in this viesbutis and I can protect these Americans. Would you like to hire me and my associates?"

I was thinking, good God. The Mafia. Just one more thing to worry about. This is too much. And that green suit is making me sick. And his friends? God knows what they are wearing. Just think of these Batmen together with those American bunnies. Did I want to see this grotesque fashion show all day, all night on the eighth floor?

"Look, Romas," I said sweetly. "You are very generous to offer your protection. But you would be surprised how little these American teachers have. Like our teachers in Lithuania. Look at them! Their clothes. Have you seen them? They dress like children—you should know; you are a man of taste and refinement—" I brushed the tip of my finger over his sickening green collar. "Clothes say a lot about a person." Romas, whom I heard had been a teacher himself before Liberation,

then police officer, then black-market small businessman, and finally had worked himself into the higher pay brackets of Lithuanian Mafia movers and shakers, as they say, smiled. "Besides," I added, "why should the Mafia waste its valuable time on these teachers—you must have more important matters that need your attention."

Romas seemed satisfied.

And I had done my civic duty....

So now I see Romas again, asleep, still wearing that ghastly green tent in the money exchange booth.... I think, I can reason with this man. I have done it before.

"Romas," I say sweetly. He wakes up, clutching his chest where he wants everyone to think has some snazzy gun hidden. "There is a man in room 804. I do not think he has anyone's permission, including the Mafia's, to be there." I pat and fluff my peroxide perm a little. "Could you remove him?"

"Oh," he says, and he wipes a little bit of drool from the side of his mouth with his hand, "so now you would like to hire me and my associates?"

"No," I reply, "I just want a favor—person to person, *mano a mano*, if you will—just be a good guy and help me this

once.... I will buy you a cappuccino or something Italian at the mugé tomorrow."

"Small potatoes," he mumbles in English, and goes back to sleep!

Where did he learn to say that?

Small potatoes!

I can hardly keep up with all these new Western business expressions.

Small potatoes?

When I get back up on the eighth floor, I look



in on the man in Linda's room. He is still there and more of the Stolichnaya is gone from the bottle at his feet. I take him by his dirty hands and try to haul him up, out of the armchair, but he only groans,

“Mother Russia...”

This man does not need American sex. I am thinking he needs Freud. Then I think, that is it. Enough. This is getting to be too psychological for these times—I am calling the police. Then I think, no, I am trusted with the comfort of these bunnies.

And—what? It is three in the morning. Police scare people, as things are in my country—as things were, too; they will scare the whiskers off these bunnies!

The sailor slumps back into the chair. Then I try to lift the whole chair with him in it and drag him to the door, but the chair barely budes.

So I am thinking about getting Linda to help me with this impossible weight; then I worry; maybe she will strain or rupture something in her delicate bunny constitution?

So I use my floor key to double-lock this drunk Russian sailor into Linda's room—I do not want him waking up and taking any of her precious things... her teddy “Roosevelt”... her collection of stuffed dolls, little blue people with white caps she calls “Smurfs.” God only knows to what depths a drunken sailor will sink!

Then I go back to my door. I knock.

No answer.

I knock on my door again. I say,

“It is me—Danguolé.”

“Who?” Linda asks.

“Danguolé!” I say.

She opens the door.

“Oh... it's you.”

Who else?

This Montessori Linda drags her slippers feet to the other side of my room, shish, shish, shish, and stands in front of my mirror next to the water closet. Then I see it—she has tied a pink ribbon around her head and apparently found herself a pigeon feather and stuck it between the ribbon and her forehead. She holds a small piece of paper in front of her face, and looks from the paper to the mirror and back, reading aloud,

*“Children, my name is Sacagawea. Long ago, I helped to guide Lewis and Clark on their historic journey through the Northwest Territory of the United States. We suffered many hardships on the way. If it had not been for my excellent knowledge of the American wilderness the expedition would not have been such a great success. I...”*

“What are you doing?” I say.

“I’m practicing my lecture for the children Monday... ‘My name is Sacagawea...’” She smiles broadly and lifts her eyes to try to see that filthy pigeon feather poking out the pink ribbon on her forehead. She points at the feather. “See?... Hey, you want to see Daniel Boone?”

“Whomever,” I say. “Sacagawea, Daniel Boone... I am going to bed. Put out the light.”

“I’m going to bed with you?” she asks.

“Yes. With me. Or you can sleep on this filthy floor or with that Russian Romeo in your room... I locked him in there. In the morning, we will get Professor Rood at the bendrabutis near Klaipėda University and get that man out of there.”

Morning. I go down to the lobby and ring up the University. But they don’t know where the American Rood has gone. They say this Rood has been talking about going to Nida to view the Thomas Mann Haus. Well, that is very nice for him! But how am I supposed

to move *this* Magic Mountain from this Linda Montessori's room?

I think about begging the receptionist at the University for help. Maybe a custodian could come over? All right, I think, now I will get the police. They will make less trouble in the daylight. Then again, maybe this Russian is ready to leave? Maybe after so long in the stupor of the Stolichnaya this Russian will leave of his own free will—? Maybe he wants out? Maybe he is banging at that double-locked door right now!—waking up all those sleeping bunnies on the eighth floor?

So I go back up there fast, double-unlock the door—but he is still there, his head resting on his shoulder next to his hammer and sickle tattoo, in the deepest slumber I have ever seen; he snores like a great bear in hibernation; God help anyone who wakes him!

But I have had enough. I go to my room. I pass the mirror by the water closet. I cannot believe my eyes. My platinum peroxide treatment is graying at the edges—and it lays in clumps to one side of my head, like slouching haystacks—and I do not mean those Van Goghs!

Enough is enough, I think. I wake up Pocahontas, whatever her name is. I say,

“What do you have in that big purple Gucci bag of yours?”

She rolls over in bed. Her eyes are closed.

So I take the purple Gucci anyway, open it, and pull out a large black leather case. There is a camcorder inside, so I take it out.

Now this bunny's eyes are open.

“My Magnavox thing!” she says.

I go out my room with her Magnavox thing. She follows, her bunny feet flopping and shishing.

“What are you going to do?” she asks.

I have to think a few seconds for just the right way to respond in English:

“I am going to film a documentary,” I say, “of the sudden economic and social changes in former Soviet-bloc countries.”

Pretty good translation, I think. Almost perfect.

“Oh... neat,” Linda says.

Then I go into this Montessori bunny’s room with the drunken Magic Mountain Russian sailor sleeping and stinking it up with Stolichnaya.

I walk up to him and hit him over the head with her Magnavox thing.

Clunk.

He likes hard currency, I think, so let him have some.

The Montessori woman is speechless. At last.

Then I check to see if this sailor is breathing, but because of his stench I cannot get close enough to see if his foul breath is working; finally, I hear him groan.

“Get over here,” I say to Linda.

She comes. Shish. Shish-shish.

And I am thinking, to hell with her bunny constitution.

“Now. Help me get him up.”

So we each take one hairy, dirty, tattooed arm, haul him up and drag him into the lift. Down eight floors. Linda is holding her breath the whole way down. At the bottom, she is blue in her face, so I prop this drunken sailor against the door of the lift.

“Go over there,” I point to the former Key Keeper’s desk, “and catch your breath—then help me get him outside!”

She goes, comes back, and we drag him past the

Key Keeper's desk, past Romas, who is snoring and drooling like a swine in his green tent clothes in his money exchange booth. We drag him through the front doors, to the viesbutis steps, and set him there. He slumps over in a lump. Then he wakes up a little and holds his head with one hand.

Shish. Shish. Linda bunny backs away.

"There," I say to him in Russian. "I know you do not have a country. But I know you have a mother. Maybe she is dead. Maybe she is alive. Either way, go back to her and try to show some respect."

Now that bunny will be back in her room for awhile. There will be some peace around this viesbutis for a change. All this upheaval can wear a body down!

On the way up to the eighth floor, I stop in my room, look into my mirror, drag a comb through this disaster I call "Haystacks with Peroxide, 1994."

Well, now, we can fix that...

Then I go back to Linda's room. I guess I want to gloat. And I am wondering if any of that Stolichnaya is left. I could use a swallow.

So I'm back again in Linda's room. And this American, Paul Rood, is sitting by the window in the armchair where we have just excavated this Russian sailor! This Rood's eyes are clear and bright. He is cleanly shaven, and a copy of *The Magic Mountain* rests neatly on his lap. He looks so rested and cheerful. I am happy someone is!

"Paul," this Linda is saying, "how was the Thomas Mann house?"

"Oh, I didn't go," he replies. "I went to view the statue of Annchen von Tharau. The legend is that the Seventeenth Century poet, Simon Dach wrote the famous German folk song, *Annchen*, on the occasion of

her marriage—but he fell in love with her himself!”

“Ohhh,” this Linda says, “how romantic.”

“Anyway, the square on which her statue was erected is the same one Hitler used in 1939 to proclaim this whole region as part of the Third Reich.”

“Not so romantic,” Linda says.

“But times change,” this Rood says, smiling.

“Last night there was a concert on the square—  
American country and western music!”

Then this Paul Rood turns to me.

“Labas rytas!” he says with his painted-on smile in his bad Lithuanian. “I’d like to take you both to breakfast—I’m famished!”

Linda says,

“Oh, that would be really nice!”

I say,

“No, I am a mess. I will pass.”

“Oh, come on,” the American, Rood, says. “I’m not budging until you agree to go.”

What is a body to do?

The minute you move one man out, another comes in; anyway, this Rood fellow, he has Scope mouthwash breath—American breath—perhaps his breath is even a little like Stolichnaya, but for the time being a little more tolerable in some circumstances, such as breakfast. Who really knows?

*Danguolé!*

That bunny bell goes off. Ding-dong.

If I could just have a minute to myself—to get myself together... this mirror needs a good cleaning... and just a little more curl on the right side... some Maybelline (right off the boat from Chicago last week!)... smack those lips... Another perfect job? I do not know... something is missing...

Another bunny bell,

*Are you coming!*

What can she want now?

I already said I am going to breakfast with that  
American Rood. I can change my mind. Why not?  
The sacrifices I make. Sometimes I am amazed....  
God, this platinum tint is blinding me!

*Danguolé!*

Red, no... white, no; with just a hint of blue,  
no; black, yes... tomorrow I will make these old  
haystacks black to the roots. This democracy is really  
quite bizarre.... Purple? Which one?... God knows, I  
could make them any color I want.

*Dan—goulé!*

Listen, that Montessori bunny and that Magic  
Mountain Man want me. Imagine it. I guess these  
haystacks will have to do for now.

“I am coming!”

—but first, swish, swish, just a little Stolichnaya  
to freshen my breath—a little something for my delicate  
constitution, you know?