

Yalta Pas de Deux

by Andrew Stancek

"Another serving of caviar, Sergei," the Count called out. "And leave the bottle of vodka on the table. I will serve myself."

The Count was used to boredom but he had reached the point where he was even bored with boredom. He wondered if the French *ennui* had a deeper layer than the plain Russian *skuka*. That's what he supposed he was, *ennuye*, bored in a thoroughly French way. He always spent three months in Yalta, but perhaps if he was going to be bored in a French way, he should go to Paris. No doubt it would be equally boring there.

Sitting on his usual bench, he watched the women walking their dogs along the promenade. The dogs yapped as they passed each other, strained their leashes, wagged their stubby tails, lunged, baring teeth, but if their mistresses ever allowed them close enough for a bite, they would run from each other in fright. Pretense, even with dogs. The women nodded as they passed each other, fans fluttering. Every morning for six weeks, fans and parasols.

Now, that one there, she was new. The hair, dress, walk, dog, all told him she had been to Yalta before, even though he did not recall seeing her. Married, of course, even though no husband was in sight. But bored, that was clear.

He snapped his fingers as the dog pranced by; it glanced at him, sniffed at a bush. He inclined his head, smiled at the woman; she looked and lowered her eyes. Lovely neck, eyes like cornflowers. He did not know her name; a quick affair would do him a world of good, he thought.

He saw her twice in restaurants in the next week. Then on Saturday the sudden shower made everyone rush for cover, the

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restaurant filled quickly and as he was spreading the mushroom puree on his Veal Orlov, they seated her at the table next to his. He nodded as at an old acquaintance; the dog barked; she blushed. "Enjoying Yalta?" the Count asked.

"Assez," she answered.

A cultured woman, one who no doubt spurned plain Russian fare. "Your husband will be joining you soon?"

"Tomorrow," she breathed.

He looked into the pouring rain, the filth being washed off the sidewalks. He would inquire into trains to Paris, he decided. He'd stayed in Yalta long enough.

