

## OLGA'S DREAM

By  
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'Open your eyes look around you. This is it. Ten hours on the production line, fourteen hours stuck in cramped cold flats. This is our future.' Olga said to Tatiana, her younger sister, sat on the threadbare sofa.

'Yes, but Russia is our country, where we belong.' Tatiana was an easy-going optimistic girl. She gave Olga a hug, wishing their father was still alive. He had recently become another victim of lung cancer. Their mother was always working, trying to make enough to survive and pay the bills. Things were more difficult since communism had failed.

Olga gently pulled away, 'When you are older, you will understand. I want to see life, meet people, and have fun, before I am too old and wrinkled.'

Tatiana looked anxious, 'I want you to be happy. But going away is a big decision.' She secretly prayed her older sister would forget all about it.

However, Olga's mind was made up. Since her father's death Viktor had helped their mother with a little money and food treats. Recently he had been telling Olga how girls were moving abroad and leading new exciting lives in the west. Living in luxurious apartments, going on the beach and shopping whenever they liked.

There was only one problem, Viktor explained, to arrange passports and travel papers took money, and they were not cheap.

'You will find a way, Olga. Your father must have left something.'

'I will find the money somehow, Viktor. Now I have finished school I want to go as soon as I can.'

Viktor smiled and kissed her young cheek.

Olga frantically searched the tiny apartment; her father must have had something of value. She discovered a box, hidden at the back of her mother's drawer, inside was a heavy ornate watch. She had seen the name 'Rolex' in magazines, thought it might have some value and placed it in her jacket pocket. Then went out to find Viktor.

She found him at one of his usual haunts, 'Hey Viktor, look at this for me.' She handed him the watch.

'I recognise this.' He laughed, 'It was your father's. I was with him when he took it from a Ukrainian. Is this the payment for your trip?'

'It's all I have. Is it enough?' Olga nervously asked, hoping it was her way out.

'Yes, just about,' Viktor lied. He knew where to trade it for cash, pay for Olga's papers, and make a fat profit.

Olga kissed him, as a niece would kiss an uncle, which was how she thought of him.

He visited Olga few days later. 'Be at the station 8am Tuesday morning with your case. You will be met and taken care of.' Viktor announced.

Olga panicked, 'So soon?' she stammered.

'Well do you want to go or not, I have arranged it. But it's your decision. The watch cannot be returned.'

'Yes I want to go. I just didn't expect it to happen so quickly.' Olga pictured the sunny beaches, big shops, also the freedom they had in the west. No more struggling to survive or dingy cold flats.

Tuesday dawned, she said goodbye to Tatiana, who begged her to change her mind. Again, she explained this was her opportunity to make a new life and escape the factory lines monotony. Olga told her sister not too worry and promised to send a postcard with a photo of the beach.

She walked to the station, simultaneously feeling excited but anxious. A tall broad-chested man, wearing an expensive leather jacket with rings on his fingers, was speaking to some other girls.

He had Olga's passport, 'Come on, you are late,' he called to her, 'We are leaving now.'

Hurriedly she got onboard the bus and it pulled away. Olga turned to take a last look at her birthplace, she had not said goodbye to her mother, she would write later.

The girls chatted excitedly about what they expected to find. Suddenly it dawned on her she was not exactly sure where they were going. Someone asked the tall man but he answered curtly 'Get some sleep, there is a long journey ahead of you.' They knew better than to press him.

During the night, they stopped and instructed to change buses quickly. Then they set off with a different driver with cold staring eyes. A middle-aged woman stood up 'My name is Elena. I am in charge of you. We will arrive in Spain tomorrow.'

Elena's hard face and tone scared Olga. She turned to her new friend for reassurance, but she was already settling down to sleep again. Olga decided it wise to do the same.

In the morning, the girls stared wide eyed out of the bus windows. They had never seen so many new cars hurtling along a wide motorway before, such a contrast to home. Olga felt pleased she had come and was looking forward to her future.

Finally, they arrived exhausted, despite all the sleeping, at what seemed like a hotel. There were views across some rocks to a pebbly beach. Not quite the paradise Olga had expected. However, it was sunny and she noticed people happily walking to the seaside carrying sun-umbrellas and chairs.

'You will be shown your rooms. Change your clothes, and then return downstairs,' Elena ordered.

In her room, she found some new shorts, t-shirts and stilettos. She had never worn clothes or shoes like that before. Perhaps they were for someone else she decided.

Olga went downstairs. The other girls were wearing new skimpy clothes and high heels.

'Olga, why have you not changed?' demanded Elena. 'How do you expect to attract clients dressed in your old clothes, you stupid girl,' she walked over and gave her a hard slap across her face. 'Now go and do as you were told. You are going to be working on the San Miguel road. So hurry up, or you will be left behind. If you don't earn you don't eat.'