



Getting Gonta

By Alex Frishberg

(based on a true story)



It was nearly midnight, and Nikolai was in the later stages of getting smashed on cheap vodka with his best buddy, Alexei. They were in a blue-collar pub called *Matrosskaya Tishina*, in a rough part of town, the notorious *Troeschina*. That's when an old, gnawing feeling began to haunt him again. Staring into space, Nikolai said longingly with tears in his voice, "she's somewhere out there. So what am I doing here? Hell, what are we *both* doing in life, besides getting pissed drunk after work, night after night?"

"Why do you always have to start with that old same shit?" Alexei replied, slurring his words. "You've got to learn to look at life realistically. She's way over there and you're right here." Alexei pointed in opposite directions and slowly finished his thought, "so let's just order another round and leave it at that." Even when tipsy, Alexei was the more reasonable of the two.

"But we built her from scratch with our own two hands," Nikolai sobbed quietly, so that the other patrons would not hear him. They could be a violent lot once everyone got truly loaded. "God damn it, Alyosha, she's ours by all logic and reason!" Nikolai pleaded hoarsely. "You've got to admit that much..."



Troeschina, on the outskirts of Kiev



Alexei and Nikolai

But Alexei knew better than to give his buddy even an inch in this increasingly dangerous argument. With each passing month it was getting more difficult to persuade Nikolai to stay put. "Look, she's somewhere on the other side of the world," Alexei tried to reason with his old friend once again, "and we have no money to get there. Even if we did, how would we ever bring her home? We don't even have the title documents!"

Nikolai looked away from the communal plate of *salo*, salty sauerkraut and pickled

tomatoes. Though he had trouble focusing on Alexei's face, Nikolai continued to press his case. "Fact number one: she's sitting over there, in a place called Perth, somewhere in Australia. Fact number two: Yatsenko has forgotten all about her. Logical conclusion: it's fate, knocking on our door! And you keep refusing!"

"Let's order another round," Alexei skillfully avoided the question, raising an empty vodka bottle towards the waitress. "I'm with you on that one."

"No, you don't get it," Nikolai insisted with a hint of accusation in his voice, "I'm talking about our baby. Remember her, or did you forget already?"

"You're joking," came back an honest response. "See these two hands? I built her with them."

"And these are *my* two hands!" Nikolai shouted back, raising his powerful, calloused fingers in the air, as if to prove his point. Then he grasped Alexei's cracked hands with his own and broke down. "I'm begging you, Alyosha," Nikolai pleaded, "we have to get her! We made her! She belongs to us! Who else will look after her like we would?"

This scene began to draw unwelcome stares from the other patrons, but Nikolai didn't notice. "Do it for me, Alyosha, just this one time, or we'll both regret it for the rest of our lives," he begged. "Instead of sitting here, night after night, we'll get to see the whole wide world! Just picture us, fishing off our own luxury sailboat in the middle of an ocean, think of the sunsets, the coconuts, and those sandy beaches! That's real life, my friend! We'll see it all, and bring back our *Gonta*, too!"

The way Nikolai put it, Alexei paused to visualize tall palm trees and endless beaches in emerald waters. For a brief second he saw topless natives with almond skin, too. Sensing his hesitation, Nikolai added menacingly, "and if you say no, we'll simply rot away in our crummy old apartments, like everyone else around us. Just look around you. Is this what you really want?"



Alexei pauses to consider Nikolai's suggestion

Alexei looked around the dark room, and he did not like what his eyes saw: mean old drunkards, always sporting for a fight. Nikolai continued, "so what do you say, Alyosha?"

Please don't let me down. I'm begging you, buddy... Just this once?"

It was a pitiful sight, to see a proud man humbling himself in such a way, but it worked. By the end of their last bottle of vodka that evening, Nikolai finally managed to wear Alexei down. "Well, she *is* ours," Alexei's mumbled the words that Nikolai had been waiting for. "What the hell, let's go get her."

"You won't regret it," Nikolai nodded, offering his hand. He was quite drunk, and equally excited. "Put it there, pal!"

That's how the whole deal was sealed, with a handshake.

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Comrade Yatsenko, a true yachtsman

Once upon a time, in a country that no longer exists, there lived a successful director of a very large cement factory. His name was Comrade Dmitry Sergeevich Yatsenko. Like many other Soviet factory directors of his time, Comrade Yatsenko was well-connected, wealthy and powerful. Unlike his other colleagues, however, who regularly gorged on fatty sausages, potatoes and vodka, Comrade Yatsenko was an avid sportsman, a true sailor at heart. And yachting was his greatest

passion, followed by beautiful women and the finest champagne.

In October 1991, shortly after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Comrade Yatsenko had decided that it was a perfect opportunity to enjoy the life of luxury as a multi-millionaire in sun-drenched Australia. To fulfill his life-long dream of having "open seas and wind in your face," the director instructed two of his factory's finest masters, Nikolai and Alexei, to build for him "a yacht that can cross the ocean from here to Australia." This was not a frivolous request, either.

While nobody at the local cement factory had ever constructed a sailboat before, it was equally true that Comrade Yatsenko's direct orders had never been denied before. And so it was done. The finest hands in Kiev, supplied with unlimited financial resources of the cement factory and blueprints for the latest yacht designs, hand-crafted a 32-foot miracle called *Gonta*, a sailboat

equivalent of Rolls Royce -- not in luxury, but in her sleek style, speed, and basic sea-worthiness.

Since no spare parts were available anywhere in the former Soviet Union at any price, everything on this boat (in fact, the boat itself) was hand-made. Upon completion, a crew consisting of very nervous factory staff tested *Gonta* on the Dniepr River during a mild thunderstorm. The boat was a wonder, everyone agreed, even those who became seasick and vomited overboard.

Shortly after that successful test run, Comrade Yatsenko arranged for the boat to be sealed in a container of grain (so that nobody would notice it) and had the container shipped off to Perth, Australia. As life would have it, however, Comrade Yatsenko briefly vacationed in America.

After seeing some of the mega-yachts in Los Angeles and San



Mr. Yatsenko's new yacht: elegant lines, spacious accommodation and superb sailing performance. Plus state-of-the-art entertainment system.



Mr. Yatsenko on his new yacht off the coast of Santa Barbara

Diego harbors, and salivating over young ladies with hard bodies on the sunny beaches, he impulsively decided to view several beach-front mansions that were for sale in the neighborhood.

That is how Comrade Yatsenko came to settle down in Southern California instead of Australia. Naturally, *Gonta* was quickly replaced by a 72-foot Bavaria, which contained the latest equipment that money could buy.

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