

Agrippina Bitar
Flying in the cloud



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«Издательские решения»

Bitar A.

Flying in the cloud / A. Bitar — «Издательские решения»,

ISBN 978-5-44-900621-9

Can love between a woman who's over fifty and an eighteen-year-old young man be possible? Everything is in the global network! Can a guy fall in love with the same girl his grandfather used to love? Everything is possible in this incredible world! Why do we fall in love with those who hurt us, and why does this love, just like a tidal wave, sweeps away all barriers of reason? This book contains true love stories of different people who found each other online and in real life.

ISBN 978-5-44-900621-9

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Agrippina Bitar

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ISBN 978-5-4490-0621-9

Created with Ridero smart publishing system

Preamble

As Teresa of Calcutta once said: “People lack love much more than bread, and this hunger is the strongest hunger”.

But at the same time we are afraid to love, because love makes us vulnerable and defenceless.

We are afraid to be rejected, to feel the pain, to have our hearts broken.

In the era of lives on display in social networks, we want to be successful at any cost.

Our greatest fear is to fail, so we disguise ourselves in the clothes of success and upload photos of artificial celebrations of life on our pages with nothing but emptiness behind them.

It’s so easy to pretend to be strong and have a meaningful life online while hiding behind a beautiful mask.

Love, however, is always about your soul being open and even naked. Love brings pain and pleasure all at the same time.

It’s like flying in the clouds, when you can’t see where you’re going and don’t know where the wind will take you.

You can either go to heaven, or fall back down to earth. Even the clouds themselves come in different kinds. There are thunderclouds, cirrus clouds and heap clouds.

Some of them are softer than feathers, other are heavy and leaden.

And they can, like a tornado, sweep away everything that’s in their path. Everyone has his own love and his cloud.

In our times, the whole world is entangled in the global web of the Internet, which, like a huge cloud of chaos, gives birth to many things.

Some of them unite and divide people at the same time. However, in the same chaos, in the same cloud, like Aphrodite from the foam, love is born.

This online love can connect people from the most remote parts of the world. It connects people of different races, religions, cultures and ages.

A few decades ago these people would have never been able to communicate and wouldn’t even know about each other, and now they chat, cheer, suffer, wait and love together.

Moreover, that love is absolutely real. It’s the same as before, it’s as old as the world, and at the same time, it’s brand new! And most importantly, it’s true love!

After all, it doesn’t matter where it’s born, online or in real life, it will always remain the jewel of human life.

When I say: “I love you”,
I’ll be the book you’ve never read,
The song you’ve never sung,
The kiss you’ve never tasted...¹

¹ Board of Wisdom

The beginning

It was the voice of the stewardess that pulled her away from her thoughts: “Can I help you?”. Nina turned her head and saw a man sitting beside her, trying to fasten the belt, which didn’t want to wrap around his plump stomach.

The flight attendant helped the man, flicking the extending strap with a professional gesture. Nina thought about the inconveniences that this neighbour may cause, when she, for example, would need to go to the WC and would ask the man to let her pass by.

She quickly glanced over his oversized belly and thought that she’d never been with a large man before, but didn’t let this thought develop, turned away and stared in the window again.

The plane entered dense clouds, and nothing else was visible apart from a thick milky fog outside the window. What a troubling state of uncertainty!

Her land with its towns, forests and rivers was left far below the plane, while above it there was a bright blue sky with a shining sun!

Yet now there was only fog and uncertainty outside and so in her life.

“Will he show up this time?” thought Nina and remembered the previous two times when he didn’t...

In fact, the idea to meet in real life came up in one of their conversations after a year of chatting online.

After a year, which Nina had lived like in fever from the constant with him through pictures, messages and calls.

Love hit her like a tsunami, and it was even more powerful than her old real first love.

It was about sleepless nights of chatting, and then, offline, music, music, music... and trembling from thoughts and fantasies.

It was so real that it seemed that the air around became thicker and more, so to speak, velvety and it was all love!

And it was suffocating her so that she almost couldn’t breathe anymore. It seemed to her that she suddenly had wings and that even if she jumped from the top of some high tower, she wouldn’t fall, but fly...

Moreover, while at work, Nina was constantly thinking about him.

He also sent her short messages during the day saying: “How are you? Where are you? What are you doing? I love you”

These simple primitive messages in English which was native neither to him nor her drove her crazy. They pierced her like a lightning, down to the toe, she was trembling when she saw the cherished avatar with a green light of activity in the chat, and she felt butterflies in her stomach.

His name “Ismael” sounded like sweet music to her. And his full name was Ismael Aziz.

She once asked what his childhood short name was. He said: “Soma”.

“May I call you Soma?” asked Nina. She wanted to caress him somehow despite of the distance between them! As she couldn’t touch him with her hands, she could at least caress him with words, intonation, with the name his mother called him.

It was a maternal feeling in Nina, because he was a very young boy of eighteen years, and she was more than mature...it was even scary to say it out loud, she was fifty-four.

In addition, this void that divided them, this abyss of time seemed to her to be an irreparable misfortune, a black hole into which she was slowly and steadily falling.

Until then Nina was proud of her age, the fact that she was already a mother and even a grandmother, that she had succeeded in life and had a lot of victories in her artistic and professional lives, and, most importantly, the way she looked (forty years, no one could have given more).

However, now her age seemed to be a curse. She actually deleted her age from all her social media pages leaving only the day and the month.

How did that happen to her? Was it due to loneliness that she fell in love like a girl? No! There was someone beside her.

It was a man with whom she lived together for nine years. He was also younger than her, but the gap wasn't that huge.

Their common friend have never even noticed the difference. Lately, Nina even started looking younger. She noticed it while looking through their photos. It was just that he became bald with years, and had a beer belly, though he was still full of energy and, like all southern men, was a great lover.

So how did this boy appear in her life?

"...So much time has passed. Aladdin has turned fifteen. And once, when he was playing with other boys, as usual, a dervish, a wandering monk, approached them. He looked at Aladdin and said to himself: "He's the one I'm looking for. I've been through a lot of misery, before finally finding him."

This dervish was maghribian of the Maghreb. He called one of the boys with the gesture of his hand and asked him who Aladdin was and who was his father. He then approached Aladdin and said to him: "Aren't you the son of Hassan?"

"I am," replied Aladdin..."

"The magic lamp of Aladdin". It was Nina's favourite fairy tale. The name of this tale always made her heart beat faster and awakened her imagination, and she started feeling somewhat hot in her chest... Nina even wrote a poem about the feeling.

It's worth mentioning that she wrote poems from time to time about the most powerful and important feelings, since she was used to writing for a newspaper, when she studied in an art college.

*In the land of winds and snow
Where nights are dark and damp
My heart warms up with the glow
Of Aladdin's magic lamp
As the Genie waits to serve me,
Make my wishes come alive
Eastern winds are gently blowing
And the land begins to thrive,
And to touch the flow of cashmere
You just need to make a step.
All the happiness is near
With Aladdin's magic lamp.*

And this "happiness" suddenly fell on her head, and Aladdin appeared in her life, though under a different name, but very close to this fabulous character in age. An eastern boy from a distant Arab country... As if on a magic carpet, he flew into her calm and measured world.

Nina had never enjoyed hanging out in social networks, although she did have several accounts there. She visited them from time to time to chat with family and friends and strictly for business matters.

However, the time had come and the issue of the increase of sales was raised in her company, so it was decided that all employees had to create personal business groups in popular social networks for product promotion.

Nina decided to go for Facebook. To do this, she started a personal page there and created a business group. In her profile she posted several photos of her and interesting posts. Then it began!

As if from the Horn of plenty, a lot of friend requests started coming to her page, mostly from men Arab and Turk.

At the beginning, Nina welcomed all, remembering her goal: to fill the group with subscribers.

She soon noticed, however, that among those men who had sent her requests, were a lot of anxious youngsters with hormones “blowing the roof” and explicit maniacs with improper proposals and photos, as well as Internet scammers trying to involve mature women into emotional relationships and then stealing their money.

Nina quickly figured out “Who is who” and ignored such proposals, blocking the most shameless and pushy of them.

The boy had also sent her a friend request and Nina pressed the “confirm” button without even looking. After some time, she received a saucy message from him. Nina did not respond. When he sent improper messages several more times, she automatically removed him from the friends list.

But the boy didn't give up and continued sending her provocative photos and messages. Before finally blocking him, Nina decided to look through his profile.

She attentively examined the young face on his avatar photo. His big sad eyes were as if looking into her soul. Nina was somewhat hurt by his look. In his eyes there was purity and pain.

Yes, indeed, there was purity, in spite of his indecent messages. But the pain-why? How can there be pain at such a young age?

Nina read his personal info: eighteen years old, studies in college, lives in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. Nina somehow didn't expect him to be from Egypt.

It immediately reminded her of the Golden mask of Tutankhamun, which she saw in reality, many years ago in St. Petersburg (then called Leningrad), where an exhibition of art objects from the tomb of this pharaoh was hosted, brought from Cairo Museum.

Nina, then being a schoolgirl, stood in front of the mask and was amazed by the beauty and detachment of the boy-pharaoh's face. She suddenly felt as if his face became alive and started changing its expression in the blinding glare of gold.

His almond eyes were staring at her...

Then she read about him all that she could find.

It struck her that he had died at the age of nineteen, a wreath of field-flowers was found in his tomb, and then almost all the scientists involved in the opening of the tomb died shortly afterwards...

What amused Nina the most were the details of the wreath: it was a small wreath laid on the forehead of the golden funerary mask of the pharaoh.

It consisted of leaves and flowers of cornflower, fruits of poppy, and fruit of the mandragora, all of which contributed to the pharaoh's libido during his lifetime.

They were the flowers of love, laid on the coffin by his young widow, Ankhesenamun, who, by the way, was the daughter of Nefertiti.

Ankhesenamun believed that she will meet her husband again in the afterlife and therefore she wanted him to want her alone even there...

While Nina was thinking about Tutankhamun, she continued looking through the photos on the boy's page. His name Ismael was of Muslim origin, he had a beautiful white face, dark curly hair and expressive brown eyes.

And one more detail: a small mole above his upper lip. It made his face look more tender and Nina had never seen a young man with such moles.

There were a lot of photos where he was depicted both alone and with his friends, dark-skinned Egyptian teens, in his profile. Nevertheless, he was so different from them! His whole appearance was full of some nobility and depth.

All the innocence and purity was mixed with maturity and pain in his appearance.

Apart from his personal ones, there were many photos of famous football players and football teams in his profile. Remembering his horny messages, Nina decided that this boy was only interested in football and sex.

She was ready to press the “block” button, but changed her mind and wrote him a message.

She asked about his family, wondering, if he had brothers or sisters, where he was studying and what kinds of interests he had. A reply message came shortly afterwards.

He replied in a serious and simple manner, without any vulgarity. So that’s how their communication began.

Nina told him about her work and the fact that she had a civil husband. In his response, he told her that he was the youngest child in the family and that after finishing school, which he already had finished; he planned to help his father with his business.

In paradise of love

They began to chat every day. They have talked about everything: about their countries, customs and traditions, about sports, about presidents, about religions, Islam and Christianity, about the expedition to Mars... and of course, about the relations between men and women.

Nina felt and understood that it was the topic of his greatest interest. Well, that was logical, since at his age, when puberty hits the most, boys tend to think about sex all the time.

He asked her questions in a delicate way, he wanted to get information from an experienced adult woman. He was still innocent. Girls wouldn't hang out with boys before marriage in his country.

Nina provided him with answers and insensibly fell for him. She was looking forward to their dialogs. She was glad when he appeared in the chat and greeted her with a short "Hey!".

"Let's talk?" he asked, and Nina felt like her heart had skipped a beat and happiness was growing inside it.

"Yes!" she used to answer and the conversation would begin. Though their chats were very simple, they meant a lot to Nina.

It was interesting to her to study an international internet language of the youth, which the boy used, as well as all these English acronyms and abbreviations.

For her, a mature woman who grew up in the pre-Internet era, all of this would never have been possible to learn if he wouldn't appear in her life.

She received this knowledge from him and was proud of that. Despite of her mature age she managed to keep up with modern trends. That made her feel younger.

The boy also received the information which he wanted.

What was more important, of course, wasn't that information, but what was growing between them, the bond connecting their hearts across thousands of kilometres.

What was that bond? Was it love? When was that word said aloud in their conversations for the first time? And how did it happen?

One day, while chatting with the boy long past the midnight, Nina suddenly remembered that the next day she had to wake up early to a busy day, so she needed to go to sleep urgently!

Her civil husband would already be sleeping peacefully behind a cupboard in their rented one-room flat. He didn't pay attention to Nina's stays by the laptop.

He didn't even know about raging passions that took place there. She tried not to disturb him and lit the room with the dim light of the table lamp. When they had audio-calls in the messenger, she would go to the kitchen and firmly close the door.

Nina tried to say goodbye to Ismael, explaining why she needed to go to sleep. After a long argument, he had finally agreed with her "Good night".

She wrote: "Bye, kiss you on the cheek".

"But I kiss you on the lips," he answered with a kiss emoji. Nina sat motionless and sent him a question mark.

"I love you," said Ismael.

Nina couldn't type anything. She felt confused, happy, delighted and terrified at the same time. She felt him by her side so realistically, as if he was touching her with his fingers. Her throat immediately dried up.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

Nina began to type something with her shaking hands. Her fingers became sweaty and wouldn't respond. She was typing and deleting her message, again and again... He was waiting patiently. Later on, he sent her a question mark, demanding immediate answer.

“Give it to me straight. Do you love me?”

For whatever reason, Nina sent him a line from a song by the Russian singer Maxim: “My gentle boy, forgive my trembling...”, translated into English by Google.

“Do you love me????” he asked impatiently.

“Yes,” wrote Nina, as if whispering that word.

“Tell me that you love me!”

“I love you,” she wrote. It seemed to her that those letters were on fire. They were burning her, flaming on the laptop screen.

“I love you very much!” Ismael wrote in response, “and I will love you until the last day of my life!”

In reality, after this kind of confession, people would hug and kiss. However, there were only words written on the screen...

Nina felt dizzy, everything was floating before her eyes and it was impossible to breathe. She was shaking. It was even more intense and brighter than the real confession of her first true love.

She didn't sleep that night. She had been chatting with the boy the whole night through. Then he called her and she took the laptop to the kitchen and spoke to him, until her alarm clock went off, marking the time to get up.

During their conversation, Nina heard noises in his house and outside his window in Egypt, such as a baby crying, birds singing, dogs barking.

It was so weird, as if there weren't thousands of miles separating them. It was spring, mid-May. It seemed to her as if they were sitting side by side, embracing each other and greeting the dawn...

After that the intoxication of love began. They spoke every night and sent each other romantic pictures and music: Arabic, Russian and Western love songs. They taught each other their native languages, he taught her Arab and she Russian to him.

They learned to pronounce the words of love in each other's native languages.

He wrote her every day, over and over again, that he loved and missed her, that they love each other and should be together. He promised to come to Moscow to meet her...

He then began to ask her about her husband. When they were finishing their chats at nights, he would say to her how jealous he was when she went to bed with him. Nina told him that when she was sleeping with her husband, she imagined her beloved boy in his place...

One day, Nina complained that her husband was drunk and tortured her with his demands.

“I will come and kill him!” he wrote quickly, and Nina felt frantic energy of jealousy and anger that came through the laptop screen and thought: “This Arab boy, like a little beast, will show his teeth!” Yet at the same time, she liked his fervour.

Nina often wondered why that boy loved her, an adult woman who is old enough to be his mother? She read a lot of psychological articles on the subject, which stated that that kind of attraction to adult women existed mostly in two cases: either the boy had a difficult relationship with his mother, or a very low self-esteem. That was odd... However, he never said anything about his parents, about his mother. Nina asked him to send a photo of his parents once, but he simply ignored that request.

Why did she, Nina, fall in love with that boy? After all, she had a husband and sex and male attention.

Was it a maternal feeling? No, Nina knew that she didn't perceive him as a son. She looks at him as at a very romantic young man... That was it! She was lacking that romance in her life! She wanted all the beautiful words, poems, colours, the sensation of the flight! What she doesn't have with her husband. And had never had...

And yet, even if everything can be explained from a psychological point of view, one thing still remained a mystery: why him?

Nina had over a thousand friends on Facebook, both young and of a more mature age. Moreover, almost all of them started chats with her. However, as a rule, after the initial several phrases Nina didn't support further communication with anyone.

She was just not interested. Nina believed that the boy was sent to her from Heaven. However, the reason was yet unknown.

At the moment, they have been simply enjoying each other and couldn't break away from each other. It was the best period of their relationship, it was absolute happiness!

However, his constant presence in Nina's life soon became a great inconvenience for her.

Firstly, she wanted to be alone sometimes, just listen to music, read the news online, chat with friends, and secondly, her husband was completely abandoned, she almost didn't talk to him at all. If they did talk, it was only something about everyday things, and Nina was thinking about the boy at the same time.

The boy caught her online as soon as she came on. Nina soon realized that this couldn't go on anymore. She told him that they needed to cut down on their communication, due to how her constant presence on the Internet aggravated her relationship with her husband.

All in all, they can't be together because of a significant age gap, so it's better not to get used to each other.

He was surprised and offended. It was the first stumbling stone between them, which triggered an avalanche of rapid deterioration of their relationship.

Cloudless happiness, openness and sincerity ended forever. Their paradise of love collapsed. What started was a period of alienation, pain, insults and then forgiveness, rapprochement and a short happiness of love, yet now with a touch of resentment and tears. It went on and on in a new round of tormenting each other.

They both were in constant tension. However, without this voltage, all of that would have probably stopped long ago, being boring and monotonous. The tension arose from the detachment and subsequent rapprochement. It was a long cycle of alienation and a short one of happiness of being together again.

Then the cycle repeated itself. It was only that the detachment was growing longer with each cycle, and happiness would shorten...

What was that detachment, and why did it occur?

Boris

Nina had a long-time friend Boris, her former colleague. They'd met fifteen years ago at the school where he worked as a teacher of the Russian language, and Nina then organized children's holidays. Their paths have been different since those times.

Nina started working in a different field, and Boris stayed. However, despite this, they kept in touch in social networks and their communication has recently become more active because of the theme of detachment, which worried them both.

Boris had been long married and had a teenage daughter. Nina was familiar with his wife and believed their alliance to be very strong. Yet recently, she was surprised to find out that he had divorced.

Nina wanted to express sympathy, but Boris told her that he was happy and had found new love. He gave Nina a hint that she'll be among one of the first to be invited to his wedding. So little by little, they started talking and their chats became more frequent and trustful.

Boris was a very interesting and enthusiastic person. He enjoyed "living history" and was a member of a historical reconstruction club, which focused on the Medieval Russia of X – XIII centuries. The members of this club reconstructed the lifestyle, art, and craft of Medieval Russia.

They were crafting leather, fabric, making authentic costumes and decorations, and utensils, weapons, musical instruments. They were learning ancient languages, sang hymns and epics.

They went to different places and festivals, where members of similar clubs from other cities and even other countries gathered. They lived in tents there, cooked over a fire, danced and sang.

In this club, Boris met his new love, Nadia. She was an accountant, and used to sing old songs in a vocal ensemble in the club. She was forty years old; she was the same age as Boris.

Nevertheless, if Boris had already been experienced in family life, Nadia had never been married. She had plenty of unsuccessful love affairs in her life, as well as no children. A spark ran between Nadia and Boris immediately, and they fell in love with each other.

They started dating, spent time together in the club and outside of it, and couldn't live without each other. Boris was in seventh heaven, it seemed to him that he had found his destiny and he soon proposed to Nadia.

However, Nadia rejected his proposal and suddenly distanced herself from him. She didn't explain anything, just stopped talking to him, didn't respond to his messages and calls. If they had been inseparable before, they now went home separately, not even looking at each other.

Boris didn't know what to think. He couldn't talk to Nadia, since she avoided him and didn't even let him near. Darkness came into his life, as if black clouds had covered the sun forever.

A week had passed, another one, and Nadia suddenly smiled at him when they met and was the first to speak to him. Then it went on as if there had not been such alienation. She was, just as before, laughing at his jokes, taking his hand, and they were walking home together after the rehearsal at the club.

Boris decided not to try talking about it again, he was too afraid to frighten off this state of happiness, as a patient, who just got rid of his sharp pain, tries not to make any sudden moves and walks with caution, fearing that the pain may return again.

They soon went with the club to a festival of martial arts. There Nadia was inseparable with Boris, looked after him and literally fed him with her hands. Boris was happy. In that manner, two months of non-stop communication had passed.

In the days when they didn't see each other, they were like teenagers, constantly exchanging messages. Nadia was indeed like a little girl, and Boris protected her and took care of her.

She could call him late in the evening and say: "Tell me a story!" And he wrote her fairy tales until she fell asleep...

However, that happiness didn't last long. For no reason, Nadia distanced herself once more from him. And the avoidance and his despair began again.

Therefore, two years passed with periods of flaming passion and then of chilling cold.

Nadia used to distance herself about once in two or three months, suddenly ceasing to speak, write, call, and pushed Boris away. He used to wonder, why? Even she couldn't explain her behaviour at that time.

"I don't know," she said. Boris reacted in different ways, depending on how she did it. He either tried to be near, or kept his distance and endured.

"I know now," he told Nina, "that, in the end, it will be over... But I'm bloody afraid that one day she may never come back..."

"Have you asked her how she feels in such moments?" asked Nina. She was worried about this topic because, she too, had a similar experience with the boy and wanted to know at least something about it, even though another person's experience.

"Nadia feels deep loneliness," replied Boris, "and I become a stranger to her. It's painful for her. She suffers and cries into the pillow at night..."

"What do you think, why is she doing this?" Nina asked.

"Try to understand, people used to hurt her a lot..." began Boris, "this is understandable, she's scared, she's scared that I'll leave her. Besides, she was used to living alone..."

"It's clear that nothing is clear," thought Nina.

"But I don't lose hope... After all, she's my hope!" he finished.

The Hell of love

“No, my boy has something else,” thought Nina. “Some inner pain gnaws at him and he splashes it out on me, hurting me”.

Nina didn't understand what was wrong with her boy, what was going on in his life. Why was he experiencing such pain, that to reduce it, he had to hurt others?

He cruelly insulted her a few times. Once, during one of the next intimacy and happiness periods, when they were caressing each other with words of love and when their conversation took an erotic turn, the boy asked Nina to send him photos of her naked breasts.

Nina was furious and exploded with anger. However, he was asking for it, like a man, dying of thirst in the desert, asks for a sip of water, and Nina gave up.

She took a picture in front of the mirror, covering herself with a flowing sheer fabric and revealing a part of her breast. He liked the photo; he complimented her and calmed down for some time.

But then he started asking and then demanding more and more of them. Nina had to uncover larger areas of her body. However, he had never sent his intimate photos. Nina decided to end that injustice. She told him that either she would stop sending him photos, or he had to send his in return.

He protested, saying that he couldn't take that kind of pictures because his parents could enter the room at any moment. Then Nina refused to send her photos and ceased to answer his calls and messages.

After a pause, that took a couple of days, she entered the chat and found a very offensive message from him. He called her an old whore and wrote many other offensive words. Nina thought she was blind when she read the message.

A black dagger of betrayal pierced her back, and the earth opened up under her feet, as she fell into the abyss. She felt like a candle burning under an open sky and an evil wind had put its flames out, so that there was only darkness.

It felt like death... If even such a close and beloved man could betray, who and what could she believe? What could she rely on? She wanted to write him something in response, not knowing what to say yet, but was unable to open the page. He had blocked her!

It was another knife in her back. She had read or heard somewhere about how eastern men could betray, that it was okay to give a rose with one hand and keep a dagger in the other one behind the back. However, Nina couldn't associate that with him, her little boy, her little birdy, as she liked to gently call him...

When the initial shock had passed, Nina began to wonder what made him do that to her. Oddly enough, the word “old” hurt her the most, since she knew that it was true. Indeed, she was a mature woman to him.

Although in her nude photos she could give odds to many young girls, her body was gorgeous and was glowing with mature beauty. However, the abyss of time, which divided them, was still present.

Nevertheless, why did he never show her his body? Due to his virginity and modesty? He wasn't shy, however, and his sexual fantasies could have easily been a part of any contemporary erotic novel.

Sometimes Nina was surprised, how she as a grown woman and not a nun, indeed, didn't know the many things that her boy told her. Of course, this awareness was due to the Internet and porn sites, which become part of modern boys' life pretty early...

Trying to unravel the cause of such aggressive behaviour, Nina started to look through all his pictures that she had. She noticed that in all the photos (and basically they were all selfies), there was only his face or he was captured from the waist up. There were no full-sized photos or photos with his legs. Why? After all, if he loved football and played it with his friends, as he claimed, it

would be logical to see him in photos in sports gear, cleats and ball. All the boys, who play football, have such pictures.

“What if he’s disabled or has a problem with legs?!” a horrifying thought came across Nina’s mind. “And football is just his fantasy, the impossible dream...”

That would explain a lot: this pain in his eyes and that inexplicable anger, because he didn’t want to show her his body, and she kept putting pressure on him...

Nina then looked at their relationship from a different angle... Truly, she had never seen him. She only had photos and had heard his voice. He never asked her to chat via Skype or video. However, Nina herself didn’t want to.

She believed that the camera, firstly, distorted the image, and secondly, emphasized all the imperfections and wrinkles. She could see it clearly when skypeing with her daughter. But if he had some physical imperfection, would she love him as before, is she knew about it?

Nina imagined different scenarios and thought about how she would react. Would she want to continue their relationship if it was true. Her heart ached with pity for him, but the offense was stronger. Nina decided that no matter what he had no right to insult her, and he couldn’t be forgiven.

Meanwhile, the time went on and she still couldn’t access his profile. The second week of their alienation came to an end... Nina was going crazy from longing and uncertainty. She knew that she just longs for communication that she was used to.

Nevertheless, she had almost forgiven him. His painful words had almost erased from her memory, especially since she immediately deleted the offensive message and had never had the opportunity to read it again.

Nina had nothing that she could do, she didn’t know how to get in touch with him, and his Facebook profile was closed to her. However, at the same time it had positive aspects, because it didn’t let her do anything stupid in the moments of severe depression.

A few more days passed by and suddenly an anticipated message from Ismael came to her account. It sounded just like before, as if there had been no insults, blocking or silence.

“Hey, how are you?” he wrote, “My account wasn’t working and I couldn’t text you. I’ve finally fixed it now.” And no regret for the insulting words.

It was strange for Nina to read that... How could he speak just like before, when she went through so much pain and such a betrayal? When her stable world had fallen into pieces?

She asked him: “Why did you write such words to me?”

“Don’t bear that in mind!” was all that he answered.

Nina tried to explain him her offense and said that she could only forgive him once, and if he would offend her again, she would break all connections with him. However, his only answer was: “Don’t worry!”

And somehow, unexpectedly for Nina, everything went back to normal. He was gentle again and spoke of love. Nina remained silent, yet her heart started melting away, after all, she loved him, and blamed his age for his offensive message, as he was still a child and had no experience with women. And the thought of his possible disability was tearing her apart...

They were back again in the happy times of love, but this case became a precedent of any such future insults and blocking from his side.

Their next major argument took place soon afterwards. The boy once went online on a Saturday night, when Nina wasn’t alone, as her husband’s nephew with his wife came to visit them, and Nina was working in the kitchen.

She told him that she couldn’t talk at the moment and offered him to continue the conversation later. But he asked her to take photos with the guests and send them to him. The boy was very curious and wanted to know how and with whom Nina was spending time.

Nina took a moment and photographed the guests. The guests and her husband were smiling into the camera. She sent the photo to Ismael. After some time he wrote a mean message.

He asked about husband's nephew and asked why this guy was looking at her.

“There can't be any doubt, you are sleeping with him!”

Nina was offended; she said that his jealousy knew no bounds. To which he responded offensively, and blocked her again.

Nina was offended and hurt. Now there was another, new feeling of rage and anger. She decided that she would never return to him, even if he begged on his knees!

Nina was in this state of anger for a few more days. She decided to spend less time on social networks. And if it wasn't for her business page, she would never return there. Still, she had to do it, and when she went there, she automatically read the messages from new and old friends and answered them.

Yasser

It's been a few days. Nina once went online to check her page and saw a new friend request. It was someone under the name of Yasser Abdullah from Algeria.

She paid attention to the profile. There were no personal photos, just a picture of a white galloping horse without a rider, the same photo that she sent the boy. In their conversations it was a photo of a girl-rider that represented the "girl-rider" sex-pose.

The background of the profile was a photo of a key-wallet with pendants in shapes of a man and a woman, but the female one was missing. There were no personal photos, only some of nature and some romantic pictures with flowers, candles, kissing couples...

A red bulb with a "Caution!" sign immediately appeared in Nina's mind. She accepted the request and remained waiting for something to happen. It started off with tender, romantic messages. This Yasser was an interesting person, and they had discussed plenty of themes. They had talked about politics and religion, art, fashion, perfumes, colours.

He surrounded Nina with a cloud of love and adoration. He sent her beautiful songs in Arabic and French. He wished her a good day each morning and good night each evening. He sent her romantic pictures and photographs.

He only wouldn't send his photos. Moreover, had never called her. He explained that he wanted to be Mr. Incognito for Nina, as it would be so mystical and romantic! Nina long had an idea of who Yasser Abdullah was, but pretended to trust everything he wrote.

She was also intrigued by the game, especially since the profile of Ismael was closed to her. She told Yasser her love story with the boy, and that they broke up.

Yasser showed deep understanding and psychologically went through the whole situation. He tried to comfort her. For Nina, it was consoling and explained her what had happened.

They kept on talking every day about some very intimate things. In addition, although he wrote very differently, in a different manner and style, in other words, but Nina still noticed from time to time that he used some familiar figures of speech. He even sometimes touched the issues that they had discussed with the boy only, and that no one else could have known. All that convinced Nina about the truth her guesses. So one day, she forced him to reveal himself.

They have been chatting, as always. He suddenly asked: "What is the colour of your underwear right now?"

"Try to guess!" answered Nina.

"Black, white, pink..." he started guessing.

"It's pink," said Nina.

"Really? I won't believe until I see it myself! Send me a photo of your pink panties!" Yasser asked.

"Don't you even dream about it!" wrote Nina and sent a laughing smiley.

"Please, please, please!" he started to beg.

"You know, if you were Ishmael, I would've sent you this photo," wrote Nina. And immediately added: "Ismael, I know it's you! Ismaeel!"

That was followed by silence, apparently these words surprised him. Then he wrote:

"Yes, it's me. Now we're together again!"

Nina was overjoyed, her heart was madly beating and she asked him a lot of questions about why he was doing it, blocking her from his profile and writing under another name. He told her that his account wasn't working, but he missed her a lot, so he wanted to be with her. He suddenly suggested:

"I want to meet you in real life. Let's meet, for example, in Turkey or Tunisia, and we'll have a week of happiness!"

“Why not in Egypt?” Nina was surprised, “or are you afraid that we’ll come across any of your friends?!”

“No, I’m not afraid,” he said, “I just want to meet you in another country.”

“OK, but how will it happen?” Nina asked. She didn’t expect such a twist.

“Pick a hotel, buy a tour for yourself, and I, too, will come to this hotel at the same time...”

They were texting all night and couldn’t keep their hands off each other. They were imagining the meeting. Nina had thousands of questions. What would he tell his parents? Could he book himself a room? After all, considering the law of Egypt and some other countries, he was still underage! Where would he get the money from, since he was not yet working?

He reassured her and said that he would solve everything! For example, he could come with an adult friend. And they would meet officially as friends, and at nights he would secretly come to her room. He would tell his parents that he would go on a vacation with friends. His friends would support him and serve as a cover-up for his parents. Concerning the money, he could borrow it from his friends or his father.

“Yes, you can borrow some, and when we meet, I’ll give you the money, so that you can return it back to them!” suggested Nina.

They had never talked about money until this moment. Nina had heard that many men ask women for money on the Internet, feeding them with different sad stories. She was always attentive to this issue and would never send money to a stranger on the Internet.

However, her boy was an exception. He had never asked her money before. Although she wasn’t aware of the level of prosperity of his family, she thought: “How can a child have money?”. She was ready for everything for him!

“What are you gonna tell your husband?” he asked her in response.

“I don’t know,” Nina replied, “I’ll deal with it. Perhaps, I can tell him I’m visiting my daughter...”

What she would tell her husband was the last thing that bothered Nina, she preferred not to look that far ahead and solve problems on the go. Nina began searching for a hotel enthusiastically and started sending him the options. They had finally finished their conversation in the morning, sending each other a string of hearts and emoticons with kisses. However, the next day everything changed.

When they started chatting again and Nina began to address him by the name Ismael, he started denying everything and insisted that he wasn’t Ismael, he was Yasser. He said that what made him call himself Ismael was his strong love for Nina and the desire to get her intimate photos behind this disguise.

Nina got angry and stopped responding. Everything mixed up in her mind and she didn’t understand her boy. Why would he play this game, if they felt so good with each other? Why would he impersonate someone else?

Nina didn’t respond to his messages for five days. She just kept on reading them with no response, but didn’t block his profile. She wanted to figure out what he wanted and why he played this way. Meanwhile, Yasser, to prove that he wasn’t Ismael, had sent her a photo of his passport.

Indeed, in it there was the name of Yasser Abdullah, the country was Algeria, and he was forty years old. In the photo she saw a handsome thin man with dark hair, white face and European features.

It wasn’t Ismael. Nina read on the Internet that some part of the Algerian population comes from the Berber nation, a unique nation with a European genotype.

Such metamorphosis disappointed Nina very much, and she retreated into silence. Yasser, however, didn’t stop sending her sweet messages and romantic pictures. He told her a little about himself: that he had a small business, a little grocery shop.

He also sent Nina a few of his photos. He soon began to talk about their meeting. Yasser tried to convince Nina that they would spend a perfect romantic holiday, filled with love and tenderness.

Nina thought day and night about what it meant and who had wrote it. Maybe, that was her boy, who continued to play hide and seek with her? She began to respond, at first with short and emotionless messages, and then decided to continue the game and to expose him again. They continued to discuss the meeting and choose the country.

Nina hadn't been by the sea for a long time and, actually, was already planning on going somewhere to relax in near future. She already had been to Turkey, but never to Tunisia.

She found some information about Tunisia and decided that this country should be very interesting to visit. Firstly, being in North Arica, it was warmer than Turkey and secondly, there was a very diverse nature there: the sea and the Sahara Desert, where you can go on Safari.

Its culture was also very intriguing. In addition, Tunisia is a former French colony, where people from France and Germany love to spend their vacations, which was much better than the dominance of Nina's compatriots on Turkish resorts.

So, Nina opted for Tunisia and reported it to Yasser. He was very happy and wrote that he would fly even to Mars with her! And again, a red "Caution!" sign appeared in her mind. They spoke with the boy about Mars at the beginning of their relationship.

Nina once told him that an international expedition to Mars was gathering, however, it was only planned to go one way. Those who would go would never return to Earth.

They would have to build a colony on the red planet, to live there for the rest of their lives and die in this far alien world. Most applications from those wishing to participate in this expedition came from the United States, plenty

from India, there were volunteers from China and even some people from Russia. No one from Egypt.

Nina asked Ismael, if he would like to go to Mars forever. He immediately responded: "No! No way! I love my country, my Egypt!" Then he thought, and wrote: "With you I would fly even to Mars!"

Now, after reading that message from Yasser, Nina became convinced that was him, her boy. Then Nina suddenly realized, she suddenly saw the whole situation. Yes, of course, that was him, Ismael, writing on behalf of Yasser.

He wanted to meet her, but secretly. He was protecting their conversations from possible hacking, so he found a way which doesn't raise any suspicions. He might come with this Yasser. After all, if he was underage, then it would be easier to arrange the trip and hotel accommodation with an adult friend.

"I have revealed your secret plan!" thought Nina and started chatting with Yasser, pretending to believe him, however, she was happy inside, knowing that there was her beloved boy underneath that mask.

She vividly imagined their meeting in the hotel in Tunisia and how she would depict the joyful surprise at first, and then would tell him that she had already figured out everything long ago!

They set up their meeting for mid-September.

Nina bought a package tour for that time in the city of Sousse, in a four-star hotel on the beach. She sent all the info about the hotel to Yasser.

He wrote that he would wait for her on her arrival day in the lobby of the hotel, since he would be coming from Algeria directly to the hotel by car, as his country is bordering Tunisia.

"What about Ismael?" thought Nina, "will he fly from Cairo by plane?... But, in the end, that's his problem!" she finally concluded. Whatever happens, the main thing is that they, Ismael and Nina, will meet, because they both want this so desperately!

There was not much time before the trip, a little more than three weeks. Nina was nervous that she didn't have time to do anything before leaving, as her job was a full time trouble.

Then there was the boy, or rather, Yasser, who was sending his messages actively. They had once again discussed the meeting at the hotel: where to meet, what to say to each other, what Nina and Yasser would be wearing.

Yasser asked Nina to send her photos in all the outfits that she planned to take with her. Nina had a photo session in front of the mirror, as if for a fashion show, and sent the photos to Yasser.

He chose a black shirt with an orange long skirt. He said that that outfit fits a very stylish and sophisticated lady, and he wanted to see her for the first time in these particular clothes.

He sent his photo in a white Adidas t-shirt and blue jeans. That, again, was a photo of man from Algeria, whose passport Nina had seen before. She felt annoyed again and she wrote:

“Don’t worry; I’ll recognize you because of your special feature, even if you’re going to wear different clothes!” (Nina was referring to the mole on his upper lip, but didn’t explain anything in order to pretend that she had not found out his disguise!) He responded with a cunning smiley, and Nina calmed down. Everything was going as planned.

Virtual games

At the same time, along with the intensification of Yasser's messages, new friend requests from many men of different ages and nationalities suddenly appeared on her profile. They were mainly Turks and Arabs from Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt, as well as white men from European countries and the USA.

Every time Nina was looking through a profile of a new friend, something signaled her that it was another mask of the boy.

She became even more convinced of this, when a new friend had started to write her about love and send romantic or erotic pictures right off the bat. In fact, these strange new friends had been falling on her head for a long time already, almost right after the first serious quarrel with the boy.

It was that they had suddenly started to multiply in even larger quantities. Nina knew that all these friends were part of the boys' virtual games. And each time the profiles of these "masks" became more and more plausible.

These accounts already had had a long history with friends and photos. There were new posts on their pages regularly. How did he do it?

Nina was interested in this issue and soon found out that on the Internet you can buy ready-made accounts for any social networks, of a male person, female, of any country, absolutely real ones, with friends and full of personal info.

You can also copy the accounts of existing people, take their photos and information and create a complete copy of a page of a real person.

Nina even tried to make a couple of fake accounts herself, one of a female and one of a male to visit the page of the boy, since he had blocked her and she couldn't visit it from her real page.

She got the hang of creating such pages easily, but soon got bored, as it took a lot of time! How was he making hundreds of fake accounts? When she blocked one, he created another!

"God!" thought Nina, "when does he study? When does he sleep?"

Often, when Nina couldn't sleep at night, she went online and saw one or more of his accounts active. She realized that it was all under his supervision, as prey is with flags during the hunt.

She was no longer capable of erasing all those false friends from her profile, because there were too many of them so that it actually was easier to completely delete her entire page!

Nina sometimes felt uncomfortable from such unceremonious and total invasion into her life. It seemed to her that the boy was watching her every move. Moreover, he even entered the Russian social network where Nina also had a page. There was she, all her relatives and close friends. He was already there and was sending friend requests from fake accounts to Nina! Nina suddenly remembered his words:

"I love you and won't let you leave," he said once in response to her another try to speak about the age difference and the necessity to break up.

"Little fool!" thought Nina. "He wants to control me and know what I'm doing in social networks, how I chat with my friends, whether or not I cheat on him!"

He would often write and call her from several accounts, creating somewhat a simultaneous game! Keeping this in mind, Nina behaved in a very restrained manner and if anyone would cross the boundaries, immediately blocked these so-called "friends".

She couldn't start new relationships because of this. It was due to the fact that even if it could be a real person, she was afraid to face the fake account, created by the boy.

Yes, indeed, she did not want to chat with anyone. She was so into Ismael! He created truly fantastic worlds for her.

He was at the same time a black African Catholic teenager, volunteering for an international African children aid organization, who had found an abandoned baby girl under the bridge and his

older brother was raising her, while he was buying her baby food in a pharmacy; a teacher of Arabic at the school for girls, from Tunisia, who was eager to teach Nina Arabic; an Indian Hindu boy, who had a degree in arts, but couldn't find a job to support his elderly parents in the province. He would paint their hut in different colours, turning it into a palace and then would go to work in Delhi...

Moreover many, many other different people and stories. And they all liked Nina and opened up their hearts to her, surrounding her with love.

Often Nina didn't even exchange a word with some of her newfound friends. They only communicated using pictures, photographs, emoticons and stickers. It looked like comics books sometimes. It was fun, actually...

However, among those fake friends were some who terrorized Nina with obscene images and suggestions. When they made her really mad, Nina would block them, although she was sure that under those masks was her boy, too! He wanted to control her and see how she would behave with different people.

He was doing all of that, blocking her from his real account. Though he called from time to time from his real page, he would always block her again. Nina was very offended and didn't understand why he kept on doing that, but at the same time, her life had never been as exciting as with this Egyptian boy.

And now there was this Yasser, with whom she had a long and confidential conversation... Nina was sure that even if Yasser existed in reality, these chats were still with Ismael, who was writing from Yasser's page!

"Who will meet me in Tunisia?" thought Nina and her heart froze with uncertainty. It was so mysterious and so intriguing!

A journey to Tunisia

And the day had come. Nina had a departure from Vnukovo airport at ten in the morning. When she was packing her suitcase, she told her husband that he was going to visit her daughter.

The husband didn't worry about that, as Nina was visiting her daughter who lived with her family near St. Petersburg several times a year. A couple of times they went there together. The only thing Nina was afraid of was the fact that her husband could escort her with a taxi and hear what she would tell the taxi driver to go not to the Leningrad station, but to Vnukovo airport.

She made sure her taxi would come at 7 AM. She wanted to arrive at the airport early. Everything went great; her husband was still asleep, she kissed him on the cheek and said: "The taxi's here. Don't bother escorting me, I'll take the elevator!"

He obediently kissed her in response and turned to the other side.

"To Vnukovo!" Nina said to the taxi driver and rushed towards her love.

Nina tried not to think about the upcoming meeting, and focused her mind on the current moments of the trip; otherwise, she'd just go mad from the anticipation, excitement and happiness.

She arrived at the airport very early; check-in hadn't even started yet. Nina decided to get a cup of coffee and sat at a table in one of the airport cafes. "Whom will I meet in Tunisia, Yasser or Ismael? Or both? Is Ismael coming?"

"How will their first meeting go?" that thought kept revolving in her head as Nina tried to push it away. She had already forgotten all her fears of the possible physical disability of the boy. She was hoping for a happy ending and couldn't wait to see her beloved!

The flight was delayed for seven hours due to the malfunction of the plane. Nina couldn't find rest and was so tired that she no longer cared, who was going to meet her in Tunisia. She couldn't get in touch with anybody. The boys' account was still blocked and Yasser didn't answer.

She wrote him that she was in an airport and would arrive in Tunisia, probably, late in the evening (though they had agreed to meet in the hotel lobby at twelve o'clock, local time). However, her message wasn't read. Yasser had warned her beforehand that he was already in his car on the way to Tunisia would have to be without Internet for some time.

Finally, the plane was fixed. Nina, who had a sleepless night and had spent nine hours stuck at the airport, sat down in her chair, closed her eyes and thought that the best option would be if nobody would meet her at the hotel. She then could quietly go to her room, take a shower and go to bed...

When the plane landed in Tunisia, it was already late in the evening. The transfer to the hotel took more than an hour because the bus from the tour company had to bring people to many other hotels. Nina had rested a little during the flight, drank a cup of coffee, fixed her makeup and her fatigue was finally gone and the even stronger excitement came back to her.

It seemed to her that everybody on the bus could hear her heart pounding. Finally, that was her hotel. When Nina went to the front desk, it was already more than 11 PM Tunisian time.

Another Russian couple arrived to this hotel together with her. While they were checking in, Nina carefully looked around. The lobby was small and the light was already dim. It was quite empty inside with only three girls sitting in the corner and looking at their phones. Nobody was meeting her...

Nina gave her documents to the receptionist for registration. He looked into her passport and said:

"Madam, Mr. Yasser Abdullah from Algeria has been waiting for you here since the very morning. His room number is 303; it's on the third floor".

Nina startled in surprise. She murmured:

"Thank you," she took her room key and headed toward the elevator after the receptionist, who was carrying her luggage. Elevators were around the corner at the end of the hall and were invisible

from the front desk. Nina saw a man with dark hair in a white t-shirt with the label “Adidas” and blue jeans, who was standing there.

He offered her his hand, and then quickly kissed her cheek and said:

“Glad to meet you, Nina! I’m Yasser!”

Nina looked at his face in the darkness of the hall. It was exactly the same as in the pictures he had sent her.

“Hello, Yasser,” she answered on the go, looking around, hoping to see someone for whom she had come here.

However, she didn’t see anyone. The elevator doors opened, and the bellboy carried her suitcase inside.

“Leave all your stuff in your room and come to mine. My room number is 303, it’s on the third floor,” said Yasser. Nina nodded and followed the bellboy.

Upon entering her room and closing the door, Nina cheered up and started running around the room, not knowing what to grab.

“How clever of them to come up with such an idea!” she suddenly thought, “Yasser met me in the lobby, and Ismael is waiting in the room to surprise me!”

She quickly took a shower, fixed her hair, refreshed makeup and grabbed the souvenirs for Yasser and Ismael, which she had bought in duty free in Moscow: some chocolate and bergamot tea.

When Nina knocked on the door of room 303, it seemed to her that she was going to faint.

Yasser opened the door and invited her in. Nina entered the room timidly. There was no one inside. Yasser was alone.

She hoped that the boy was playing hide and seek with her. She even went to the balcony and glanced in the bathroom, pretending to be estimating the comfort. No one. At one point, Nina finally lost her temper and asked: “Where’s Ismael?”

“Who’s Ismael?” asked Yasser with a surprised face.

“Isn’t he here with you?” Nina asked, and she was broken inside, because she already knew the answer.

“I don’t know any Ismael!” Yasser replied.

Nina felt the world crashing, and her heart was filled with icy emptiness. She placed both gifts on the table and headed to the door. Yasser also got a gift for her, it was some French perfume, and tried to hug her, but Nina stepped away and said: “I’m very tired and want to sleep!”

She spent the whole night crying. She was walking around her room like an angry tiger in a cage. Her first thought was to fly back to Moscow tomorrow. But Nina knew it was impossible, she had a return ticket and the flight was in seven days, as she had purchased the tour through an agency.

Nina couldn’t even imagine such a monstrous deceit and betrayal!

When the initial shock had passed, Nina realized that she was the one to blame. After all, she had fantasies about the boy and his cunning plan. Actually, he didn’t tell her about it personally, from his real account.

Nina felt lost. She was sure that that was Ismael, who wrote her from Yasser’s account. However, if so, how could he be so cruel to do that to her? Why did he give her away to another man?!

Maybe he just sold her to that Yasser? Maybe he had some sort of a business, writing to women on behalf of the clients and organizing their meetings?

The thought of his physical disability came up in her mind again.

Nina became totally confused and couldn’t think any longer. She fell asleep early in the morning without any thoughts and in the state of extreme emotional and physical exhaustion.

The next day Nina didn’t go to breakfast, partly because her eyes were swollen from a night of tears, partly in order not to see Yasser, as his looks were unbearable to her.

She was lying in bed without the strength to move. Suddenly, the hotel phone rang. It was her tour agent, who invited her to the meeting in the lobby, where they were choosing excursions. She somehow got herself ready and went downstairs.

Some people were sitting in the centre of the hall. She saw the couple that came with her last night to the hotel among them. A guide-girl was offering several excursions and showing colourful brochures. Nina was interested in a two-day safari to the Sahara Desert.

“At least I’ll escape from here for two days!” Nina was delighted and without any hesitation paid the money for this tour and took the information brochure. The tour was set for the early morning the next day.

“I have to survive in this hotel for today,” thought Nina and decided to make friends with other Russian tourists. Two of them, a mother and a daughter, were from Moscow, and the couple which came with her were from Yaroslavl.

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