

## Wilderness House Literary Review 12/4

*Maria Odessky Rosen*

### **Brighton Beach Daydreams**

The usually pure solid tones of Deep Forest are adulterated in this 13<sup>th</sup> floor apartment of the Trump Village projects in Brighton Beach.

The music is polluted, and so are my thoughts. The lyrics of "Martha's Song" are distorted by the cacophonous clattering of a passing D train. I push in earplugs and raise the volume to no avail. I have lost the wonderful feeling this particular song usually gives me. When the train leaves the station below our window, I quickly lower the volume because Papa is sleeping. Papa is always sleeping.

Papa moved with Mama to Brighton Beach right after I left for college. They had entered the lottery for these Trump-built, rent-controlled co-ops years before, and finally their number came up. The choice was between this tiny one-bedroom closet and an even more miniature studio. The rent is very cheap, and because Mama can't work anymore, this is what SSI buys. There was never going to be a room for me. When I left for college, I was on my own. I consider myself lucky to have a couch to sleep on when I return home on breaks. Where I will be living after college is a problem for the future. No use worrying about tomorrow.

Mama doesn't want me to become a writer. "This is not why we sacrificed everything and left everyone behind to come here," she reminds me. We have relatives to support back home. I have to make money to send them. It is all up to me. There is no chance for me to pursue my dreams. Dreams are not for immigrants. Dreams are only for people who can afford to have them. Immigrants must be practical. Writing is not practical.

"Mama, I am not practical. I don't want to do anything but write. I can't do anything else. Mama, if I can't write, I ...."

I try to imagine that I'm someplace else, but it's impossible to day-dream with so many car alarms going off. Searching for serenity is a hopeless undertaking in this apartment. Coherent thoughts stay long enough for me to sense them, but they quickly vanish. Just when I begin to attain clarity, I lose it in the passing of another D train. Sometimes, I jam the earplugs in just to get away from my own thoughts.

It's amazing how one moment you think you have found the perfect set of words to describe your feelings, but in an instant, they're gone. Kind of like when you're sure you're going to sneeze, but you don't, so you never get relief.

Papa is up and wants to know if I heard that *Rasputin*, a local supper club he loved, closed. No, I didn't know. He often says, "Americans don't know how to party. They go to a restaurant and gorge themselves until they're sleepy. Where is the show? The dancing? The *wodka*?"

"Goodbye, Mama. Goodbye, Papa," I whisper, grabbing my old school notebook and marching down to the boardwalk, under the elevated train line, past the *Skovorodka* restaurant on my left. "Not like *Rasputin*, but still better than any American restaurant," I imagine Papa saying.

I head straight for the rocks breaking the waves. Someone is always

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fishing or sunbathing around Brighton Beach. Temperature is irrelevant. And this is a particularly warm October day which has brought out so many different people.

I lower myself on a deserted island of rocks and meet the gaze of a fisherman stationed a few feet in front. His eyes follow me as I take out my journal and pen. I give him a quick nod. He smiles and turns back to his fishing, not forgetting me because he continuously turns, looking quizzically at my notepad. Probably thinks I'm an artist. Lots of budding artists come here to develop their talents. Poor old bastard – if he only knew that I'm a writer, not an artist.

He turns again and displays a big toothless grin. "Look," I want to say. "Save it! I'm not drawing you." Suddenly, I visualize my mother staring at me over his shoulder: "What are you doing? Get up! You know you can't sit on damp, cold rocks. Do you want to give your ovaries a cold?" Even though I know you can't give your ovaries a cold, I get up anyway. I can't write with Captain Ahab and Mama staring at me. Moving to a boardwalk bench will be more helpful for my writing and healthier for my ovaries, just in case Mama is right.

I came to the beach to be alone, to think. But you can never be alone at Brighton Beach. I approach the boardwalk and grab the first available empty bench. Families with strollers meander behind me. A walker approaches and stares. Maybe he, too, thinks I am an artist and wants to peek at my masterpiece.

"I am not an artist!" I want to scream to the world.

I look out at the water. Sand and ocean beckon me. I oblige, remove my motorcycle boots, and trudge onto the sand. It feels cold and silky as I head for the water. I step in and am pierced by freezing needles. The pain makes me gasp. Despite the frigid water, my body feels as if on fire. It feels good.

I take another step into the ocean looking for a panacea, my daydreams come true. I stare at my numb feet slowly sinking into the sand and wonder if I will be swallowed up by it. I envision tenacious beachcombers, scouring the sand with their mine sweepers, searching for long-buried treasures - like curious astronauts looking for evidence of life on other planets. Their detectors will go crazy over the spot where I will have sunk. They will find my hamsa ring, by then dislodged from my bony finger. Will they ever find me in the waters of Brighton Beach?

Now I have something to write about.