



Madlena Khaidarova

Songs in the Night

«Scribe Wizard LP»

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Khaidarova M.

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"Songs in the night" – the book is about young lady who was heavily addicted to drags and yet she tried to search for freedom and meaning in her life. Can someone who is broken, disappointed, lonely, addicted and depressed rise from the bottom and gain back the dignity and a place in life? Well yes and sky is the limit! Believes the author who happens to have grounds to say so.

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Songs in the Night

...There is hope for the hopeless

*Letting go as a bird from the hand
Everything in my life that went bad
Breaking the chains of my failures and faults
May it all be forever gone...
This will be my last bitter cry
Over my broken and empty life
I'm not going to stay in misery
I'm going to fight and finally break free
I will never look back again
I walk down the light alley...*

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About author

Madlena Khaidarova is a wife and mother of two beautiful girls. Journalist, counselor, dynamic speaker, singer and songwriter of deep and touching songs. She has big experience in helping addicted people and their families.

Concert for the «men in black»

Our car stopped near the big, blue fence. We finally arrive. There are five of us. Slowly we get out of the car and stretch after the long trip. I look around. I see the high walls painted a dirty, white colour, and the barbed wire, wound in spirals, stretched around the perimeter. I look dismally at the crowd of police and armoured military people. Uneasiness creeps in.

At the gate entrance a sullen policeman with a big, round belly is attentively checking our documents and permission papers. His bushy eyebrows move up and down slightly revealing his dark, narrow eyes. He is obviously displeased. He looks down at us, letting us know quite clearly he doesn't like us at all. He turns around and silently leaves. We wait.

“Why am I here?” I think sadly, looking at policeman's disappearing silhouette. An hour passes by. A piercing wind is blowing. We constantly move around, trying to escape the widening shadows and catch the lukewarm rays of the autumn sun. From time to time different policemen appear and look at us out of idle curiosity. The arrow is stuck to the clock-face. Another hour passes.

After two whole hours we are finally allowed to enter. We pass through the checkpoint and face yet another review of our documents. Now military people are checking us. «Who are you?» they ask. «Musicians from Almaty,» we reply. «Why are you here?» they ask in a strictly official tone. «To do a concert.»... The woman in police uniform glances at me suspiciously and then carefully searches me. Her hands glide over my body. «Thank God! At least it is woman!» I thought angrily. “How difficult is it to work here?” I ask. “Very difficult,” she says without hesitation.

«Why am I here?» Again and again I ask myself, getting more and more irritated. As far as I know, none of my friends or others close to me will be here today. “I do not need to endure this humiliating search procedure... Who do they think I am?” Sometimes I work abroad, and despite my «Arab-like» appearance, all the same, never get searched like here. What are they looking for? I don't feel comfortable at all. The atmosphere is oppressive. I feel sick in my stomach. It seems it was a silly idea to come here... I'm really agitated. Who would voluntarily come to a prison, especially a men's high security prison?!

The search is over. I frantically repair my hair and clothes, and move on as if in a dream, my face aflame with indignation. Our turn finally comes. We leave and proceed down an asphalt pathway, leading us further and further away from our freedom. Everything is spotlessly clean and you could hear a pin drop. An anxious heaviness comes over me. My legs turn to rubber. I see everything going past me in slow motion, as if in a dream. All of a sudden we are there. I look around. I see people everywhere, sitting, standing, scurrying. “Men in black” overalls and hats moving to and fro – like bees in a hive... And here am I, rather out of place, catching their surprised looks. Our guys set up and install the musical equipment... We have come to do a concert. I have been writing and singing songs for many years, but for the first time I have come to do a concert in a men's prison. From time to time I start to panic and then look at my «oversized» husband. He looks calm. Even more reassuring is the silent presence of the grey-haired man in a white shirt, covered with tattoos: the prison chaplain. He spent more than 25 years behind bars himself, truly a fish “in water” here.

I try to gather my thoughts, tune the guitar, and I try not to make an eye contact with anyone. Men in black surround me on three sides and there is a wall behind me. There is nowhere to retreat... The question «Why am I here?» continues to invade my heart time and again... Around 200 people squat down in a semi-circle under the scorching sun while 300 others stand around them. A little further away near the building sitting another hundred. A hundred more stare through the windows. I feel dizzy. Military and police personnel are also here. I see an old man struggling forward through the crowd closer to the «stage». He can barely drag his own feet. He lays down his mat and lies

down on his side. He is maybe 70 years old. It seems to me he won't be with us much longer. My heart breaks. I quickly look away. In the distance I see a two storey white building. Here people don't live. They merely serve time. There are about 2,000 inmates. The place is so packed that there is not enough space or beds for everyone, so people sleep in three shifts. Here, some people spend half of their lives without freedom, love and warmth. They have to constantly and intently watch their every word and step. Mistakes can cost you your life. In this place, people are paying by years of their life for the crimes and mistakes that they (or someone else) have made. Horrific numbers: seven, ten, twelve, nineteen years... A young, red-headed man about 23 years old said to me that he is in prison for six years already. I tried to cheer him up saying,

«You'll probably be out soon».

With tears in his eyes he replied, «Another 12 years left...»

Shell-shocked, I have nothing to say. The thought runs through my head:

«What could you do to get such a punishment?»

Nervously I ask a dumb question,

«What did you do?»

«I'm here for nothing!» came the reply..

Apparently that is a common reply when you ask prisoners why they are in prison.

What strikes me as truly meaningless is that this place cannot change a person, let alone fix what he did to other people or himself. The story is repeated again and again, in and out of prison. I look into the eyes of these people and I want to run away as far and as fast as possible to forget about the existence of this sad place, but something holds me back. Maybe I cannot leave because I understand today I'm a "voluntary visitor" and not an "involuntary resident" of this place, for just one reason: A miracle. If the miracle hadn't happened, I would be in a place like this – at best. At worst I would be pushing up daisies, already for a long time, in one of city cemeteries...

Everything is ready. The equipment is connected. I feel myself shaking a little. «Hello," I start quietly, "My name is Madeleine. I'm a former drug addict from Almaty. I want to sing my songs for you. I hope someone here today will be touched and that you find hope.»... I run my fingers over the strings. My fear has gone. I start singing:

*"When you can't believe anything and anyone,
When all your dreams are broken into smithereens
When all the doors are closed before you
And all the bridges burned behind your back
When there is no one who can hear you
And you are lonely in the crowd..."*

I alternate songs with a story «based on true events». They listen to my words but most of all they listen to my heart. You can't lie in a place like this – they see straight through you. In tense silence these precious souls carefully and seriously listen to my own real-life account of how once I was a prisoner too...

Sukhumi

«Sukhumi». Immediately it conjures up images of the Black Sea, palm trees and dolphins in my mind. It was here, in a picturesque village on the outskirts of this resort-style town, where we lived. Our house stood on a hill, the panorama below, breath-taking.

Every morning it was as if the sun magically floated in from the sea, and every evening, majestically returned to somewhere far beyond the horizon, leaving a slowly dissolving golden trail, upon the velvet surface of the sea. Vineyards and orchards, the fragrant scent of citrus, hills, lush greenery, all overflowed my senses. Eucalyptus, magnolia, cypress, acacia, mimosa... wonderful aromas!

Almost an entire street in the village was occupied by my relatives, distant relatives or almost relatives. People there were very open and friendly. Without invitation they would visit one another, just for a cup, two or three, of really, really, strong coffee. I don't remember much from those years, but all my memories are warm and soft, bringing a slight ache to my heart.

One of the most vivid memories is the day I first went to school. I was so happy I couldn't sleep the night before. I remember my first teacher, a kind, smiley, mature woman with large-framed glasses. I was her favourite student (this was the first and last time that was the case). After school, we scurried around the village barefoot, catching fish in the river with our bare hands, or building cubby houses. I was six.

Then came Easter... At that time I had no idea what the real reason was for this holiday. Then again, neither did most adults. However, the celebration was always memorable: cakes of various sizes and shapes with sultanas and icing, and of course, coloured eggs. We, the kids, competed knocking our eggs against those of another to see whose was the strongest. Some kids were very sneaky.

They would buy coloured, wooden eggs in advance and beat those of us who were more naïve! It was fun. According to culture and tradition, at this time of year we were also supposed to honour the memory of relatives who had passed away. My family, along with some other close relatives, had gathered. We proceeded in two cars to the local cemetery. I remember we had to persuade my mother to come with us because, for some reason, she didn't want to. It was as if she sensed something bad was about to happen...

Turning down a narrow, country road, we stopped to open the wooden gate blocking the path. Then, going up a slight incline, we drove towards an oncoming, yellow car. Then, from that moment, everything happened as if it was straight out of an action movie. My father gets out of the car and opens the door of the yellow Lada. He waved his hands and was saying something to someone in the car. I later learned that there in the car sat my cousin, my uncle's son, who disappeared from home about a month ago. His parents were by this time already desperate in their quest to find him.

My dad tried to convince my cousin to go with us and then home to his parents. I then saw the other doors of the car fly open and four men jumped out. They started beating my father. There was only one man still with us. He ran to the rescue and there, practically in the middle of nowhere, a fierce fight broke out – two middle-aged men against five, burly young guys. The noise, the cries of women and children, the sight of faces, fists, violence – it was horrifying. I threw my Easter eggs and lollies at the enemy...

Suddenly one of the passengers of the yellow Lada, took out a rifle and began shooting. One shot fired into the air and people panicked and fled in all directions. In the end there were only the raging youths and my parents left centre-stage. The armed guy pointed the rifle at my father. My mum rushed over to his aid. A shot rang out. My mother stumbled a few steps towards our car and then sank to the ground in a crumpled heap. Clouds of dust rose as the wheels spun and the

car sped away, taking my parents away to find emergency medical assistance. The “yellow Lada people” left in a hurry. I gazed around and saw the stunned expressions on everyone’s faces. I was shaken out of my shock by the overwhelming reality of continuing screams and the non-stop, ear-piercing cry of my two-year-old brother, and the monotonous wailing of my grandmother, “Oh... Astvats, Astvats...” (“Oh... Lord, Lord”) she moaned.

For four months my mother was in hospital in very serious condition. She endured four operations, and miraculously, survived. As soon as she was discharged from hospital we sold our cosy home on the hill, and drove as far away as possible...

This was the first time I experienced fear. My childhood ended abruptly.

«I do not like your fogs, big foreign city».

I was 7 years old when we arrived in a big city, surrounded by beautiful, majestic mountains, clad in white hats. The city seemed huge and grey. It greeted me with a cold shoulder. Already, it seemed we didn't like each other. Later, I wrote a poem:

*I do not like your fogs big foreign city
I do not like grey houses and streets
Though you are beautiful – yes, you are very pretty
Your mountains, alleys, parks and rushing winds
Yes, you are beautiful, with a very special beauty
And I should have felt at home here long ago
But memories of another city
Disturb me and won't let me go
Another city's beauty, smell and splendour
Another people and my childhood dreams
The majestic sea, so gentle and so crazy
And fragrances of juicy fruits and trees ...*

It was winter. It smelled strange – chimney smoke, frost and snow. There was no sea, and I missed it... I thought that I was different from other people, both in appearance and expression. I was too open, too noisy and too alive. I was embarrassed of my appearance. Most likely the whole thing was about my “great nose”... I was too aggressive. I pretended as if I wasn't afraid of anyone. I fought with the boys and bossed people around with my sharp tongue. Of course, the boys gave me the same back. They teased me – the “Armenian”, the «witch», «fighting for justice» and «Caucasian prisoner»!

There wasn't much at all to build my self-esteem... Dad was always away on business trips and came back weary. He couldn't ever seem to muster up enough energy to deal with me. He read the newspaper «Soviet Sport», and I sat beside him on the floor by the couch and watched the rings of smoke from his “Medeo” cigarettes float towards the ceiling. I learned to play guitar at a summer camp – it upset my dad – and he promptly bought me a sewing machine. A sad fate awaited that sewing machine! For years it turned into a TV stand. Becoming a seamstress was not for me...

I was growing up and I needed to know if I looked okay. One day I asked my father what he thought about my appearance. “Do I look good?” I asked. He got angry for some reason. «What are you talking about? A woman's beauty is to be humble and hardworking.” I decided I was probably ugly...

When I was about 10 years old, my father took my brother and I to a kids' Christmas-party event. There we met a girl about 12 years old. After the party we went to our house, and the girl told me that she, too, is the daughter of our father. She just had a different mother. I was confused, but happy. We looked quite similar. We became very close. Years later, our family began having trouble. It came out that my dad was unfaithful to my mother. Back then, one of the happiest days I remember was the day my parents reconciled after a long quarrel, and a long silence. We boiled corn on the cob, and we enjoyed feasting on it together like a real family, sitting on the floor watching television. This was our last pleasant memory. Scandals became more frequent – accusations, insults, tears, fights – all this lasted about a year.

Finally, when I was about 12 years old, and my little brother, eight, my parents divorced.

I remember the day of their divorce. It was January 19, 1983. They returned from the court and entered the house in silence. My mother went into the back room, and I whispered, «What's

wrong?» «Divorced,» she answered quietly. Dad threw a packet of “Squirrel” lollies on the table – I still can’t stand these lollies. I prayed and hoped that they would come to their senses and make peace. I asked my father, “How will we live without you? How will you live without us?” He answered me, «You will grow up and you will understand. Don’t worry, everything will stay the same. I’m still your father...» I raided the first aid kit and swallowed 20 pills. I also scribbled down the name of them just in case the doctors needed to save me! I didn’t want to die but just hoped to scare my parents enough, to get their attention, to get them to work things out. I wished we could stay together as a family.

I couldn’t believe it was really happening. Surely it was just a horrible dream and I will wake up and discover everything is as it was before. That day I went to school, and it seemed to me that the city had become even more grey. I walked around the school, looking blankly at the toes of my boots and at the black footprints I left behind in the snow. I was surprised inside me there was such a wild pain and chilling fear, yet I wasn’t dying. I found it strange that life goes on, everything was okay, and I had to go to class as if nothing had happened. I found it strange that no one could see, understand or perceive that the world had come to an end – at least my world. I felt an infinite loneliness, piercing pain, despair and helplessness, “How are we going to live? How is it even possible to live if your heart is broken into two parts?” I struggled within myself.

During the second period I fell sound asleep. That was it?! The pills didn’t do their job very well. The teacher thought I was seriously ill, shook me and smartly sent me home. Staggering off, I went home, with hot tears streaming down my frozen cheeks. Nobody knew, nobody was scared, no one changed their mind. I was not able to influence the situation. For the first time in my life I felt completely helpless. The next morning I woke up, but my nightmare continued.

*I see a glorious picture – a father leads his daughter by the hand
So big, so confident, so manly – he’ll never leave her – he will not
forsake
But you would say to me – “be modest”, and would persuade me to
“be still”
But I would wear worn out jeans and carry my guitar with me
You used to say that women’s power is not her beauty, but hard work
But you yourself in love with many . . .so why did you have to waste
your words?
I always wanted to be a worthy, beloved daughter
All in vain
I still don’t feel I’m worthy of daddy’s love today...oh well
I see a glorious picture – a father leads his daughter home
He is big, and confident and faithful – He’ll never leave her – she
is secure*

Life after divorce

My father moved out of the house. My mother refused to divide us kids. We stayed with mum. My father had always been the main bread-winner in our family. Things changed. We began to struggle constantly with finances. I was growing up and, of course, wanted to be trendy. This was a challenge since I found myself continually having to wear the things my older cousin grew out of. She was much taller than me, and also unlike me, was blonde. Her things didn't look good on me at all. Soon my father remarried, bought a new car, and to his great joy, his new wife bore him a son. His life was coming together. My brother and I missed our dad big time and we continued from time to time to visit him in his new apartment.

Once it was winter and I desperately needed new fur-lined, winter boots. I came to my father for help. He didn't give me a cent. Instead he told me, «Learn to live frugally. Don't count on me, you have a mother!»... I went through a whole winter in thin, autumn boots. Anger, resentment, helplessness, shame and disgust, hatred of life and self-hatred, a revolt against everyone and everything – these were the usual feelings that overflowed me at that time.

My mother barely spoke to us. Sometimes she just poured out her anger on me. I often met her hot hand, and there would always be good reason, with my temperament... My mother was always angry, annoyed or depressed. Sometimes she would sit down on the couch, silently fixated on something. She could not cope with the betrayal of the man whose life she once saved, for whom she bore two children, and with whom she lived for more than 12 years.

Little by little, she began to drink more and more often. From Monday to Friday she would work from morning till late, and from Friday to Sunday – went into oblivion. Neither at her work, our school, the neighbours – no one suspected our family secret. My mother never missed work, was neat, hardworking and responsible. The house was clean, there was food, and we had cheap, but clean clothes and footwear. But my mother had no warmth, tenderness, time, strength, or encouragement for me or my brother. Only much later Mum admitted that one day, she had brought home poison, and was going to drink it after we had fallen asleep. After realizing that she couldn't leave us completely alone, weeping, she poured it down the kitchen sink. To see the pain and loneliness of my mother was unbearable. I loved and respected her very much and I wanted to help her. But how? I told her, «Mum, please, get married. I really want you to be happy.» She answered, «Who needs me, a woman with two children?» She never married again.

My brother started to grow up and get into trouble on the streets. I was doing worse and worse at school. I rebelled against all the teachers and against life itself, not recognizing or respecting any authority. I remember how I once fought to defend my brother from older guys troubling him. On another occasion, I tried to gather a bunch together to protect us from youth from another region who stole my brother's gold chain and cross. All in all none of them would be willing to stand up for us. Not one. Gradually, I began to be more and more aware of my weakness and vulnerability. I hated the fact that I was born a weak, defenceless woman. This world is not a place for the weak. I looked around, wondering, trying to find out, «Who will help us? Who will protect us? Who do we have in this vast and indifferent city?» The answer was obvious: Nobody. Absolutely nobody. We were completely alone, hopeless and helpless. My Mum was suffering a breakdown and my little brother was still so young... Me? No matter how much I tried, I could not please my mother or lift her above the burden she carried. I couldn't help either of them...

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