

# In the Shadow of the Rooster

by Stephen DeVoy

Boris boarded the bus in Miami Beach. He was drunk again. His shift as a bellhop ended just hours before, but the misery that was his life compelled him to waste away on the beach throughout the early evening. A pile of empty beer bottles surrounded the dent in the sand that he vacated. He staggered down the aisle of bus 51 just long enough to reach the bench of seats reserved for the elderly and infirm, whereupon he collapsed, one arm over a metal divider, only to be roused by a Cuban woman ranting on and on about being older than he and thus more deserving of the seat. He raised a middle finger in protest, for there were plenty of seats available, and promptly passed out.

Roused into a half awake / half asleep semi-consciousness by the convulsions of the bus as it lurched forward and backward on the causeway over Biscayne Bay, Boris' dream took him back sixty years to when he was a small child in the arms of his mother riding a streetcar through the streets of Kiev. It was the last time he remembered being happy. He could hear the voice of his mother humming *Ljuli Ljuli Ljuli Naletily Huli* sweetly into his ear. It was the last memory he had of his mother.

After his mother's death, his father, a Russian, was stationed in Cuba. His father loved Cuba and decided that he and Boris would settle permanently in Cuba, where they became citizens. Boris was sent to a Russian school. Russian was spoken at home. His Spanish developed slowly. It was passable Spanish but Spanish did not become his native language. He remained a Russian/Ukrainian boy stranded in a foreign land. As his memories of Kiev faded, Cuba became all that he really knew. He grew to love Cuba but Cuba never grew to love him.

Boris went to the Universidad de Oriente Santiago de Cuba and earned a degree in mechanical engineering. The government found him a post and his career began to take off.

Many Cubans resented the Russians and, by extension, resented Boris as well. However, all occupiers have a certain status and wherever there is status there are women who seek to marry into it and thus Boris became the target of the affections of a Cuban woman. Ximena was a beautiful woman, but she was a social climber. She set her hooks into Boris. After all, he had fair skin, was a foreigner, and had a position as an engineer.

Some people are good at judging character. It is a sense that some have and some do not have. Boris did not have this sense. The absence of this sense is often accompanied by an inability to correctly project one's inner feelings upon the outer persona. It is the other edge of the same double edged sword. Boris could not see Ximena for what she really was and interpreted her outer facade of love with true

love. He fell for her, but did not know how to express it.

Boris shared with Ximena the intimacies of his life. Those who cannot express well with their persona rely upon their words and Boris relied upon his words. He piled onto Ximena mountains of words spoken words written words words and more words. He shared with her his most loving of thoughts and his darkest of thoughts. He expressed his disdain for Fidel, his hatred for the communist system, and his longing to leave Cuba. He told her things he had never told anyone else. It was as if a hole had been made in a dam, so profound was his sense of isolation.

Somewhere along the way, Boris did or said something that upon interpretation by Ximena caused Ximena to go her separate way. Boris never understood what happened. All he knew was that Ximena left his life and would not communicate with him. He fell into a deep depression. He struggled to win her back. His efforts failed. He was devastated.

Ximena, however, had not left Boris' life. She was a climber. If she had grown up in California, she would have sucked up to corporate society. If she had been a child in Nazi Germany, she would have joined the party and shoveled Jews into the ovens. Had she lived in ancient Rome, she would have thrilled to Christians being eaten by Lions. That was the kind of person she was. Boris was just what she needed to ingratiate herself with the communist party. She turned Boris in.

One Spring day in 1975, Boris was arrested by the secret police and interned at Combinado del Este. Charged with counterrevolutionary activities, he was sentenced to life in prison. Ximena had exaggerated Boris' intimations. He was left to rot in the Rectangle of Death, the worst section of the prison, where he baked in the heat of the day, shivered through the cold nights, and received regular beatings. For five years he got thinner and thinner. He lost his desire to live and he lost his mind.

Boris had no living relatives left in Cuba and no known relatives outside of Cuba. This left him in an interesting position, for no one was sending aid to Boris. The guards and prison officials regularly received bribes and funds from the relatives of prisoners. The intent of the relatives was to win favorable treatment for their loved ones. However, the side effect was that there was a financial incentive to keep these well funded prisoners in prison. There was no incentive to keep Boris in prison and so it happened in October of 1980 that Fidel had thousands of prisoners released for the purpose of expelling them to the United States in what became known as the Mariel Boatlift. Boris became a Marielito. Boris arrived in Miami.

Boris was happy to have left Cuba, but Boris was not well. Years of beatings within the Rectangle of Death damaged Boris' mind. He was unable to find work as an engineer in Miami and supported himself by doing unskilled work. He slept where he could and quickly descended into alcoholism. With the damage that Ximena had done to his soul, Boris could not relearn to trust. Nevertheless, Cubans were all he really knew and though they did not like him, he settled in Little Havana. The years

passed by and his life progressively worsened. He was now a broken man, drunk and passed out on a public bus dreaming of being held by his mother on a streetcar in Kiev.

As the bus reached downtown Miami, a nightly deserted concrete wasteland of newspaper tumbleweeds and trash whirlwinds, Boris awoke. He began mumbling in Russian. To his surprise a gringo on the bus understood him and began speaking with him in Russian. Boris, excited to speak Russian once again, blurted out his life's story to the curly haired gringo with green eyes. When the bus passed its closest point to Little Havana, Boris got up, said *dosvidanya* and stumbled onto Flagler.

The night was humid and one of those ubiquitous storms broke out, raining buckets of water onto the trashy streets of Miami. Boris dragged himself southward heading towards the general direction of Little Havana. A Cuban saw what appeared to be a gringo stumbling down the sidewalk, swerved intentionally into a nearby puddle, and drenched Boris with the grimy runoff of dirt, trash, piss, and palm prongs.

Boris turned left onto Calle Ocho. As he staggered by a bus stop in front of a Pollo Tropical a group of teenage boys harassed him.

Gringo pendejo, what the fuck are you doing here, hijo boracho de una puta! Go back to your own bario, cabron! yelled one of the Cuban boys. The others laughed at him. Boris said, No soy gringo, soy... , but before he could finish, he was pushed into the street in front of a passing pickup truck. The truck slammed into him. He was tossed into the middle of the street where another car ran him over.

Get out of the street, you fucking gringo! yelled the driver. No one stopped to help. Boris pulled himself, as best he could, towards the curb, dragging his broken body and leaving a stream of blood which intermingled with the rain, piss, pollution, and palm prongs.

At the curb, Boris managed to get onto the sidewalk and rolled over onto his back. He looked up and saw, standing above him, the statue of a painted rooster. As the life ran out of him, a drunken man walked over and pissed on him.

All sensation stopped. He saw darkness about him. A sense of peace filled his soul.

After what seemed like an eternity, he saw a light in the distance. Boris moved towards the light. The light grew larger and larger until he could see clearly the source of the light - a flashlight in the hand of a woman. She was shining the light upon herself. Her hand was as white as death. A noose was around the woman's head. He looked at her face and saw the face of Ayn Rand.

He looked away and rubbed his eyes. This is peculiar, he thought. What is Ayn Rand doing here?

He turned to look again and, this time, with his eyes adjusted to the light, he could see the entirety of the scene. Ayn Rand was hanging from a noose. She was completely naked except for large wads of cash stuffed into all of her orifices. A sign was nailed to her head which read, Queen of the Selfish . Despite all of this, Ayn was not dead. Indeed, she was intentionally shining the flashlight upon herself.

Boris pulled a wad of cash out of Ayn Rand's mouth and asked her, Why are you shining a light upon yourself? You're naked! Aren't you ashamed?

Yes, mumbled Ayn Rand, but remember the first rule of marketing, even bad publicity is good publicity. Think of how many books I will sell!

Jesus Christ! said Boris. Where the hell am I?

Correct said a sweet voice.

Boris turned and found Jesus standing beside him. You're in Hell, Boris.

Indignantly, Boris asked, Why am I in Hell?

More on that later, Jesus replied.

Tell me, if you don't mind, Jesus, why is Ayn Rand hanged by a noose? asked Boris.

Well, there are many reasons, Jesus shrugged. But chief-most among them, leaps and bounds beyond the fact that she was completely wrong, is the fact that she willingly acted as a witness for the House Committee on Un-American Activities. She willingly played a role in a reign of terror against her fellow human beings. For this she has been sent to Hell. I offered her any punishment available and she chose this one.

Is she the only one in Hell? queried Boris. As best I can tell, we're alone here.

We're not alone, Jesus said. Hell is a pretty crowded place. Let's take a stroll!

Together Boris and Jesus walked through the darkness. Jesus held an oil lamp in his hand and as they approached a pit, Jesus bent over and exposed the pit to the light. At the bottom of the pit was Judas, snakes nipping at him and coiling their bodies around his body. Jesus giggled, This one is my favorite, aren't you Judas?

Next they walked over to a tree where the light revealed J. Edgar Hoover tied to a crucifix. He was dressed in a tutu and his hands were tied to the cross with pink panties purchased from Victoria Secret. Jesus spat at J Edgar. They continued their walk.

A red glow could be seen casting the shadows of rocks upon the walls of Hell. The

pair approached the source of the red glow. Boris could feel the burning heat upon his face. A pond of magma pooled before him. Waste deep in the magma was Ximena, screaming in agony. Immediately and without hesitation, Boris ran into the pool of magma and dragged Ximena from the hellfire. Indignantly, he looked Jesus in the eye and demanded, "Why have you done this to Ximena? What kind of 'god' are you?"

Well, Boris, said Jesus, this is her punishment for betraying you. She destroyed your life on a misunderstanding. She used you to advance herself at your expense. I've sentenced her to an eternity in Hell.

Boris cradled Ximena in his arms. "I'm taking her out of here," he insisted. "We're leaving."

Wait! said Jesus. She has earned this punishment.

No, she hasn't! the anger in Boris' voice exploded. "Anyone that could do the things this woman has done is not well. There is something wrong with her. She is missing half of what it takes to be fully human. She is missing compassion. She is defective. We should pity her. She will never know the joy of putting another before herself. She will never know what it is like to be a complete human being."

Poor Boris, chided Jesus, it began with caring for birds with broken wings and now you're caring for humans with broken souls. What will I do with you?"

With that, Hell and everything in it disappeared and a warm white light caressed their souls. Jesus smiled and said, "Boris, there is no Hell. There is no Heaven. You've passed the test. Not that it really matters. It's not like you get something for passing the test."

Where do I go from here? asked Boris.

Wherever you want, Boris. Ximena is that way! Jesus pointed to the right.

No thanks, said Boris. I'll go the other way.

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