

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Moscow 1990

by Sue Hitchcock

Aralia Larionova had eaten her late breakfast and was heading off to the city centre to work. Before leaving she had to make up. As a blonde she needed to cover her cheeks and nose, which would redden if the wind was cold. Mascara and eyeliner were essentials as her lashes were as blonde as her hair and lastly some nice red on her lips completed the picture. Now that the snow had gone, she could wear her high-heeled shoes again, though stockings and tights were scarce, so she coloured her legs a bit with tea. Fortunately her long winter coat would keep her warm. The final touch was the knitted beret her mother had sent her, which looked really cute.

She emerged from the metro near the hotel by the river where her boyfriend, Grig, worked on the reception desk. He would recommend Aralia's services to solitary visitors, but took half of her earnings. Sometimes, when business was slow, he'd let her stay in an empty room and visit her himself.

It was like being married when they snuggled up there and also occasionally at her flat, when he had time off. Today though she noticed a queue before she got there. She joined it, as you do in Moscow, There was bound to be something useful to buy.

In front of her was a rather smartly dressed, middle-aged woman. Aralia tapped her shoulder. "Do you know what they're selling?"

"I believe it's pickled herring."

"They have them coming out of their ears in Leningrad, I'm told, but they don't often send them to us!"

“I love them!”

“You don't come from here, do you?” Aralia couldn't define the accent and was curious.

“No, I'm from London.”

Aralia's heart started to beat faster. “I am learn English!” she announced proudly. “Pliss speak to me in English!”

“O.K.!” The girl was very pretty and she could probably pick up some idiomatic phrases from her. “What do you do?”

“I am entertainer, hospitality in hotel. What you do in England? Do you holiday here?”

“No, I am a translator. I'm here with some businessmen. They need to set up deals.”

Aralia nodded. A plan had come into her head, but she needed to go slowly. “My name is Aralia Larionova, but you can call me 'Liala' What is your name?”

“I'm Ruth – you can't shorten it, can you!”

Aralia laughed politely, but there conversation got warmer in the time it took to get to the front of the queue, finally leading to an exchange of addresses.

Ruth had some qualms about marking Aralia's English letter-homework, but as she expected, the frequency of the letters became less. Then two years after their first meeting, there was Aralia on her doorstep with a huge suitcase. She had come to further her career with richer clients.