

## The Contact

The bell button was round, black and glossy. I pushed it but there was no sound. It might have been swallowed by the music, the hollow sound of which was forcing its way to the staircase through the door's upholstery. I didn't want to ring again, so I decided to wait, in hope that somebody would hear my call. A minute later the door finally opened, and a friend of mine appeared on the threshold – he was the reason I came here, it was his Birthday. As he was coming out and closing the door behind him, the music managed to escape the flat and slashed my ears. He was smiling while we greeted each other and I was glad to see him. I gave him the presents. I really did like them, and though you can never be sure if the presents are appreciated by the one they are meant to, my friend seemed to like them, and I had a pleasant feeling because of that. I was thanked and led inside the flat.

It was huge, with extremely high ceilings and uncountable number of rooms. It was difficult to breathe here, and soon enough it was almost impossible to open your eyes because of the cigarette smoke. There were numerous guests – the throng began from the hallway. It seemed to be a place for them to have some rest and to puff on a cigarette. I threw my own jacket into the pile of other jackets and did my best to find a suitable place for my boots to fish them out of plenty other pairs of footwear later; though I didn't really expect to succeed. By this time my friend had already vanished in the crowd of his guests. I realized that apparently I knew no one there at all as my circle of acquaintance was completely different.

I examined the crowd around me. It mostly consisted of girls in tight jeans wearing tons of make-up and fellows with a huge amount of spangles on their clothes. I had a feeling that by chance I turned out to be in a youngsters-oriented commercial shooting. The majority of corridor-smokers must have been dancing quite actively as they were all of a sweat and looked exhausted. But actually it was awfully stifling in the place, and one was likely to look like them even without much physical effort. Mini-companies were already formed and nobody paid attention to me. Trying to find my friend I passed by various groups and heard their themes of discussion. They talked about drum-n-bass parties, movies which I preferred not to remember or was getting sick because of the single thought I could possibly watch them, journeys to the sea-side popular resorts, cars, fashionable clothes. Our interests were quite different.

I felt a little dizzy and realized I should find a room where it was possible to open the window. I chose the one which was the farthest from the main source of music. The choice was optimal – it was rather quiet in that room; the people were talking, sipping alcohol and as for the smokers – there were only few of them. The topics of discussion were practically the same, but I just decided to concentrate on something else. There was a huge table in the center of the room, which occupied almost all the free space. I said hello to my new roommates – a few of them responded inertly, mumbling their hellos, but the majority preferred to ignore me. I came to the window and opened it slightly, trying as much as I could not to draw attention to myself. Then I landed into a wide comfortable armchair in the corner. It was practically a blind spot of the room but on the other hand it was not far

from the table. I started to wait for the fresh air to reach me and a couple of minutes later I felt perceptibly better.

I began to think over my retreat plan. Unfortunately, everything was against me that evening. It happened so, that the party was to begin very late and the subway was already closed. I didn't have any money to take a taxi and there was no one except my friend to borrow from. And it wouldn't be very polite to ask him for money in order to leave his party as soon as I could. But on the other hand – how dared he leave me all alone there? Where the hell was he? I had to stay there for the night and leave as early in the morning as it was possible. In that case there was only one way to survive that night. I took a bottle of beer from the table and began the process of adaptation.

In moments like these, the only desire a person has is to pretend he is watching Animal Planet channel – just observing, without any interference into the process. But no matter how much I wanted to abstract away, I still was the participant just as the others. And I still was a part of this, just like everybody else in here. And no matter how strongly I wanted the opposite, I was afraid of them.

The bottle became empty and I took the next one. The beer was good. The second bottle was easier to drink. The music was less audible than in the other parts of the apartment, but however it was still loud. The time passed by, some people left the room and the others entered, but all I've noticed was the change in the whole color range of shirts and T-shirts. I wondered if they really felt something pleasant at the moment or they just pretended to be pleased.

I was through with the second bottle and switched over to wine. It was white demi-doux. Usually I don't drink it, but this night it was irrelevant. Up to that moment I felt some uneasiness; you can experience it wearing something you consider to be absurd when everybody in the street gives you contemptuous looks. When this happens you try to look as you, having no idea of it, feel quite comfortable. But the thing is that hardly anyone really even thought of looking at you like this. So speaking about that feeling – it left me and I felt more relaxed. I could finally straighten my shoulders and settle more comfortable in my armchair. The first glass was over and I filled it again. When drinking wine one of the most pleasant moments is to pour it into an empty glass.

Suddenly I heard woman's moans from behind the wall (where according to my imaginary map the bathroom was); they quietened as rapidly, as they appeared. But as the people in the room didn't react at all, I couldn't be confident whether it seemed to me or not. The second glass of wine also tasted much better than the first one.

My friend entered the room. Finally. I wasn't angry with him anymore. Actually I could understand him — there were so many people to pay attention to. He apologized and said that it took him a long time to find me. I told him not to worry about it, and that it was great that he managed to find me after all. We chatted a little and then he left. This time I didn't hope to see him again until the morning came. Hello, the third glass.

Usually it is the third glass that brings you the effect. However the more you concentrate on the idea, the slower you get the feeling you're trying to obtain by absorbing this narcotic

liquid. I don't think people really admire the taste of the drink or its bouquet or anything else - everybody wants to get some effect as the result. Somebody wants to relax, somebody – to distract oneself from something; somebody wants to do something he or she can't in his normal condition, and somebody wants to justify the things that he or she is going to do. So many goals and the single tool to achieve them. That's interesting.

I left for the toilet, where several people were already queuing up. There was a couple near the opposite wall — the tanned-faced guy wearing a pink shirt, and a girl in tight jeans and a low-necked white top. I had seen this girl just right after my arrival, when I was looking for a room; and the guy certainly didn't belong to the company she had been with by that time. So they were likely to get acquainted only here, at the party. They were kissing. The girl was embracing him by the neck and the guy was keeping one of his hands on her waist, while his other hand was grabbing her ass. They were kissing with the intensity of a hungry vampire sucking blood of a young virgin. Sometimes I saw their tongues. It was disgusting but I couldn't help watching them. The girls hardly covered breasts and the vulgarity of her behavior fascinated me. A dark loathsome feeling suddenly appeared and was growing inside me. Maybe it was envy. Luckily the queue ended and I could walk away from them.

When I came out, the couple was gone. But rather a beautiful girl with no company to be seen around appeared on their place. It seemed strange as I was sure that everybody except myself had found somebody to keep company with. She might have been waiting for someone. It could be her boyfriend and I was risking while doing it, but something inside had already been turned on and I decided to start a conversation with her. When I came close enough to begin a dialogue, the girl shifted her gaze to me. There wasn't any aggression or contempt in her look, but she was slightly surprised and obviously expected me to come up with something interesting to begin the talk with. The music was so loud that one should speak very close to his interlocutor's ear. Besides, I had to speak loud and clearly using no more than a few words, which seriously limited my chances to interest her.

I introduced myself and hoped that the talk will go of itself, but despite the girl's relatively friendly mood, it didn't happen. I asked her several common questions, got short uninteresting answers, then made up an improbable pretext for ending our conversation, and saying that it was very nice to meet her, left back for the room where my glass had been waiting for me.

I filled it up once again. It was really unpleasant. Why it is always so difficult to understand a stranger? How does the contact between two people appear? This kind of contact is rarely talked about, but surely many people think about it. It is so easy to feel it when you have it. And also when you don't have it. Is it really so difficult to control?

The glass was already half-empty and I put it on the table. It was getting more and more difficult to sip. I threw head back and closed my eyes. My head began to swim just as it always happens after drinking sweet wine; I felt sick almost right away. This feeling is awful if you have to go to bed, and this was still in prospect for me. I decided to quit drinking for that night.

I had eaten very little and tried to compensate it. I took some sandwiches and some fruit; ate everything and washed it down with some juice; after it I settled back in my armchair and started to think over my plans for the next few days. And then I noticed the door opening slightly.

A cat entered the room. I had no idea my friend kept one; poor thing, she must have gone through a lot that day. She was rather slim, very pretty with her smooth platinum hair. I have always been a man who doesn't prefer cats or dogs in general — I liked the particular representatives, but this cat was definitely special. All the people in the room immediately took notice of her, the girls became over-sweet and called her up. I watched the cat attentively while she was moving gracefully across the room; and then all of a sudden she jumped on my chair and sat beside me, snuggling up to my thigh. I thought she was just hungry and wanted me to feed her, but she was absolutely indifferent to food. She had chosen me and I was greatly flattered. Having realized they had lost the battle, the people reverted to their occupations, though some girls continued to give me looks full of pure envy.

I put my hand on her back near the neck and began to stroke her carefully. The cat didn't make a sound but she closed her eyes while I was doing it and it was obvious that she liked it. When she was looking at me, I felt she was reading my mind — all my thoughts and worries, and I knew that she understood me. This was the Contact — I understood her and she understood me, even though she couldn't speak. If there was this kind of understanding between people, there wouldn't be any place for anger, jealousy, most of the fears, irritation, offense. There wouldn't be humiliation, violence, scandals, intolerance, children complexes. And it's not even that difficult. It happens that you even needn't talk.

I don't know, how long did we sit like that. At some moment there were quite a few people remaining in the room. It was not the best option for sleeping, and the rest of them decided to find a more comfortable place. I couldn't find the clock in the room, as for me I didn't wear watch either; but it was obvious that it was very late. I realized that I was terribly tired, but had no desire to make a special sleeping place for myself, so we remained in the same place. My eyes were closing on their own. The nausea and dizziness were gone. Soon I fell asleep.

When I woke up it had already become light. The cat was no longer beside me. I felt surprisingly well. I came out of the room and looked at the big clock in the corridor. Definitely, the subway was already open, and this fact made me glad. I had to leave this place as soon as possible. The majority of the guests was still sleeping, but there was a noise of metal covers clinking upon each other and talks from the kitchen. I went there and saw my friend who was keeping the company with some guy and some girl, and the cat, who was lying on a chair. She looked at me - evidently she remembered me well. I took an apple from the table, ate it and then asked the girl for a chewing gum. For some reason, girls almost always have it. After it I felt nearly comfortable. We talked a little, I thanked my friend for the invitation, and he thanked me for coming. I patted the cat once more and my friend accompanied me to the door. We shook hands, he closed the door and I used the elevator to go down.

When I opened the front door and came outside, I felt free at last. I made a deep breath — the air was fresh and pure. The snow was all around me, I took a handful of it from the nearest car. The snow was totally dry, it was even impossible to make a snowball.

While I was standing and thinking it all over, a girl passed me by. The movement in front of my eyes returned me to the present and I realized that it was very cold outside and I should get to the subway as soon as I could. Initially that girl walked in front of me, but soon I shortened the distance between us and caught up with her. Suddenly she slipped on the ice and began to fall back. I caught her. When she was in my arms, I managed to take a good look at her face.

Her appearance was not common, but she seemed very beautiful to me. She smiled and thanked me. I smiled back and said «you're welcome». The Contact. She stood up and we went together as she also needed the subway. I didn't yet know her name and occupation why she was in the street so early, what music did she listen to, but it is really not that important.