

PANIC
by Desa Muck
(extract)

“What about love?” I asked and peered into the fortune-teller’s eyes. They showed surprise. Understandable, as until then I had asked only about my health and my husband’s, and about whether he would shift his arse and finish his medical studies or be run over and killed by an ambulance, and about the health of our dear Marinka and how she would do in school.

“Love?”

“Yes, love,” I said determinedly. I’m thirty-eight years old already and it’s at least ten years since any man looked at me like... Well, like that. The fortune-teller stared long and hard at the cards, then said cautiously:

“There are signs of marital problems, as we said, but it seems they are not insurmountable. Here you have an official person, but here you’re going into the sun, so it looks pretty promising...”

“I wasn’t thinking of my husband!” I said and looked closely at his bowed head. Beneath his black hair, stiff with gel, his bald patch was shining. He shuffled the cards once more and laid them out again. He exclaimed with satisfaction:

“Yes, it’s true! Here he is! A man! You’ve already met a number of times. You’ve actually known each other for quite some time. He’s had his eye on you for a while and has been thinking about you, but daren’t approach you. Probably because you’re married.”

“Probably.”

“Here, have a look for yourself!”

He shoved towards me a card on which, among exotic vegetation, there was a naked man with long dark curls, a lion crouched at his feet and some other wild animals rolling about. Like Tarzan beneath the Tree of Knowledge. But without a shadow of a doubt, a man.

“This man is divorced or is intending to divorce soon. In any case, he’s very unhappy and you would need to tread carefully because women have already hurt him terribly.”

“But he’s still thinking about me?”

“Yes. He’s being drawn directly towards you. See, he’s facing here. That’s you.”

He pointed to the card next to Tarzan on which was an equally naked woman with heavy red tresses to her waist. Birds flew around her, deer leaned against her attractive hips and the sun and the moon were flattering her. She was not like me at all.

Then I met Tamara for a coffee.

“And you believe all this nonsense?”

“I don’t know. I’ve been thinking about it. He said this man was a more artistic type, that he loved the countryside... I don’t know anyone like that. It’d suit me though,” I replied.

“Don’t talk crap! Even your Rudi’s too much for you! You’re surely not going to land yourself with yet another bloke!” retorted the twice-divorced Tamara, horrified.

“You know what,” I said with a dramatic voice that coming from me sounds like a tremulous whistle: “I’ve been sick of everything for ages! Rudi’s laziness, Marinka’s puberty, pans, holidays in the caravan with stuffed peppers and tomato sauce the whole week, all the bloody birthdays and Christmases! On every family photo on which I appear I’m carrying stuff to the table with a flushed face. I feel as if there’s an enormous emptiness inside me. [...] I’m tired. I was thinking that if I was in love my life would at least have some meaning. It wouldn’t be so confused and washed out. I’m convinced I’d be full of energy again. I remember how it was when I was still in love with Rudi. I could study, get work through the agency, I knew how to have a good time. I did everything with such ease and pleasure. I miss that feeling. I’d just like to be in love once more. My life can’t be over already!”

I was very worked up. Tamara said:

“You’re asking for trouble!”

And that’s how it all began.