
Face Me When Face Me When You Walk Away You Walk Away

Brian Freemantle

For my parents

in small repayment

As the Russian saying goes, 'Trust not your brother: trust your own eye, even if it's crooked.' This is the soundest basis for understanding one's Face Me When You Walk Away environment and for determining one's behaviour Face Me When You Walk Away within that environment.

ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN

Nobel Prize Speech

Prologue

Josef Bultova prepared his death with the utmost care. For the camp authorities to find out would mean hardship even greater than that which he was committing suicide to avoid.

It had taken him a long time to reach his decision, because he was a survivor. Certainly he had begun his imprisonment as such. On the train of prison cages taking him to the labour-camp complex at Potma, 230 miles from Moscow, he had sold his expensive, Zurich-purchased wrist-watch for just two roubles. And then he had blackmailed the incriminated soldier into buying fifty-kopek bags of tea for prisoners to boil, complete, in minuscule amounts of water, to make a near-narcotic mixture of tannin with which they washed out their surroundings in just thirty minutes of blissful intoxication. Each bag sold for one rouble, so within six months he was rich by the standards of the camp.

But gradually the realization had enveloped him, insidiously, like the consumptive mist which always clung to the camp.

No limit had been imposed upon his sentence. Or on the exile to follow. And slowly Josef accepted he would spend the rest of his life on a starvation diet of cabbage soup and sour fish, horsewhipped to drag a brick truck from loading Face Me When You Walk Away point to delivery bay in a perpetual, mind-numbing circle.

So he decided to die.

The camp commandant was harsh on suicides. As an example to others, anyone interrupted was punished to the point of the death they sought before being carefully coaxed back not to life, but to bare existence. From the moment of discovery, the would-be suicide was marked by a specially striped uniform, as in the Nazi concentration camps at Dachau or Bergen Belsen. And they were subjected to the grossest humiliations, cleaning quarters where prisoners Face Me When You Walk Away lived like animals, eating food that even the prisoners had rejected as inedible, becoming pathetic male prostitutes in a camp that had forgotten women.

So Josef was cautious, planning his act meticulously, telling no one.

His tame guard, to Face Me When You Walk Away whom he paid twelve roubles for the thin rope, may have guessed, but his knowledge involved him. And Josef never let the man forget he could become a prisoner in his own camp if the authorities discovered their association.

It was a Sunday night, exactly Face Me When You Walk Away seven years after his sentence, when he made the attempt. He stood on the lavatory stall, the rope looped around a rafter, and stayed for several minutes trying to inhale courage with each breath. Finally, he fitted the noose around his neck and lowered himself gently until his legs swung Face Me When You Walk Away just above the floor.

As soon as the rope tightened and he began to choke, he panicked. He groped out for support and twisted wildly until his feet regained the stall.

Back on the bare shelf upon which he slept, Josef twitched with fear, weeping at his own cowardice. Tomorrow. He would definitely do it the following day.

Early in the morning, the guards came, Face Me When You Walk Away shouting for him by name. Josef stood mute. An informer had witnessed the attempt and exposed him, he decided. Or perhaps the guard *had* talked.

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'Josef Ivanovitch Bultova?'

Josef nodded. Why his name? Usually it Face Me When You Walk Away was just the number.

'Seems you're a lucky man.'

'Lucky?'

Just one word was difficult. He kept his head down in case the twine had burned his throat.

'Someone has decided it's not a crime after all to have so Face Me When You Walk Away many friends in the West. They're setting you free. With a pardon.'

Josef Bultova bequeathed the rope to the man Face Me When You Walk Away next to him in the barrack Face Me When You Walk Away block, the only friend he had made in the camp. His name was Asher Medev. He was a Jew who had tried to hijack a plane to get out of the country, consumed with the thought of getting to Face Me When You Walk Away Israel.

Often Josef wondered what had happened to Medev.

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One of the Czar's favourite archdukes, a man of confused tastes but great wealth, had built the dacha for his mistress. And around it the opulent atmosphere of a whore's boudoir still clung, like perfume gone just slightly stale. The villa was surmounted by four bonnet-shaped towers, ornately carved and castellated, each containing observation rooms from which the plump hills around Moscow could be surveyed. It was fussy and vulgar and reminded Josef of the cardboard castles that sprang up upon opening those illustrated fairy-tale books in the West.

The building represented an era most despised and vilified in modern Russia, which was why Josef had insisted upon it when he had been rehabilitated. Having to accede to his demands had been humiliating for those who had jailed him, and it remained a wedding-cake monument to a mistake they had publicly made and Face Me When You Walk Away of which they were constantly, publicly, reminded.

He well knew it was a dangerous, even stupid gesture. And made for such a small circle of people that it was largely meaningless. But Josef was an overwhelmingly vindictive man, which made him so successful in the vocation he pursued.

Josef enjoyed the privileges he exacted, yet was cautious of them, like a starving man who hesitates to accept bread from his rescuers because he fears a trick and can't believe it won't be snatched away at the last minute. He was, in fact, plump with good food, yet fit from the saunas and the gymnasium equipment installed both here and in the Face Me When You Walk Away Moscow apartment, for fitness was important to a man who flew 200,000 miles a year for discussions in any of five languages on subjects too delicate for direct government involvement,

yet important enough for him to be accorded treatment at ambassadorial level at home and abroad.

He stretched, a short man with a weight problem badly concealed by shorts and singlet, the rimless spectacles giving his chubby, round face the look of an owl that has discovered where the mice live. He felt blown up with contentment, tight and about to burst, like a balloon at a child's birthday party.

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She came up alone from the lake, the sunhat he had insisted she wear trailing from her hand, so that the early summer sun faded the bloneness of her hair almost white, her scrubbed face shining with perspiration. She was walking too fast for the heat, with head-down determination, as if to slow and admire Face Me When You Walk Away the odd attraction of the villa would betray the revolutionaries she admired. He knew she was embarrassed by the house and his privileges, and smiled, indulgently, wondering how long it would take for her idealism to become bruised. Perhaps it never would, he conceded. Being his wife, with the dacha and the Moscow apartment shared by no one, with cars always available and foreign travel rarely denied, would mean she was cosseted against the harshness of a life she had chosen to adopt.

'Hello, wife,' he said.

'Hello, husband.'

It was becoming their secret intimacy, the way they used the new titles like foreigners encountering a strange word.

'You promised to speak Russian,' she complained. 'I'll never become fluent if Face Me When You Walk Away we keep using English.'

She had still been reading modern languages when they had first met, when she visited Moscow two years before with the Oxford University party, and she retained the anxiety of a student who must learn every word of the lesson to please her tutor.

'My apologies,' he said, mock serious. Josef was ten years older than his wife. He supposed she had transferred the tutorial respect.

She came lightly up the steps and sat down in the creaking wicker chair. She was wearing Western-style jeans and a shirt knotted around her waist, so that her flat, hard stomach was bare. Her modest breasts did not need the support of a bra.

She stared out over the spectacular view towards the lake and the rolling meadows of the estate. Nudged by a bossy wind, formal gatherings of polite daffodils bowed and curtsied to each other. Soon it would Face Me When You Walk Away be night, and a muslin of flying things swirled over the lake, unsure whether to absorb the last of the heat or seek shelter in the eaves of the boathouse. It was growing cold at night now.

'It's lovely,' she conceded, begrudgingly.

'Then try to enjoy it more.'

He bit off the sentence, aware of the ambiguity. She looked down at her bare feet, nipping her lower lip between her teeth, and he knew she had felt it.

'I'm Face Me When You Walk Away sorry,' she said, hesitantly.

'Pamela, darling. Don't. It was a clumsy expression. I am sorry.'

He knelt beside her but she refused to look at him.

'It's so bloody stupid,' she protested. 'I mean, there's no reason. I love you. I really do.'

Now she turned to him, as if the reassurance needed the emphasis of a direct look.

'I know,' he placated, softly. 'Look, we've been married exactly five Face Me When You Walk Away days. You're two and a half thousand miles from home, trying to adjust to a whole new way of life. And being treated in that ridiculous way by your parents was bound to upset you.'

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