

Milka Ilieva



The picture was taken at the time [1947] when I was already divorced from Sason Panizhel and came back to Sofia from Ruse.

Shortly after 9th September 1944 I got married. It happened that I had an arranged marriage with an ex-political prisoner; his name was Sason Panizhel. He was a nephew of my sister's mother-in-law. Once he went to visit his aunt and then he happened to see me there. They arranged a marriage for us and I accepted only because I wanted to get rid of that poverty. My co-existence

with him lasted for three years and it turned out to be real hell.

He took me to Ruse. Yet during the first week, I realized what I was in. But I was still an innocent child brought up with books. I idealized everything. I cried all the time; I just couldn't stop. Soon my daughter Tinka was born in 1947, and because of her I managed to put up with this nightmare for three years. Our house in Ruse shared the same yard with Dragomir Assenov. Besides, we lived with my husband's mother, Estel Panizhel, who was close to my mother. His sister was a friend of my sister's; in Sofia we lived near each other. I lived with him and was in incessant fear. He had acquired some habits in prison that I couldn't stand.

Sason's mother was a martyr. And his father wasn't a good man. I remember him as a very perverted person. And he had passed his perversion to his son. For him, a woman was just a tool for satisfying primary instincts. I was disgusted. Besides, he even reached out his hands to harm me. During that time his cousin, Luna Djain, and I became friends. She often told me, 'How can you put up with him?' and I answered, 'What can I do? Where can I go?' My parents and my sisters and brothers had all immigrated to Israel by then. And I had nobody in Sofia. Where could I go? Then Luna said to me, 'You can come and stay with me.' We lived close to her place then. And one evening when the situation became extremely unbearable, I decided to run away. Just as I was: in a nightgown.

Of course, the situation worsened. At first, he didn't want to get divorced. He used to go to the kindergarten to pick up our kid. He used it as a lure to make me come back. I was terrified and I let my daughter stay at their place, but I tormented myself with this. I would go to him to ask for my kid, he would let me in, lock the door, beat me, and then chase me away bleeding. Of course, the kid witnessed these scenes and also got disgusted with her father. Luna asked me, 'Leave him, leave him alone for three days and you'll see, he can't handle it with this kid. Why are you going there? Want to get beaten again?' I was obstinate, though. And everything happened again and again. One day I decided to listen to Luna's advice. I went there neither the first day, nor the second, and on the third day he came shouting, 'Take this tag with you, it's yours!' That's what I wanted to hear. And it was over. Afterwards I lived in an even worse condition with my daughter, in complete poverty. We had only my salary as a typist for a living, which was not high at all. At least, I always had some butter to spread on a slice of bread for her.