

Alma
The Rivers of Hades
PART IV
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Prologue

"The Rivers of Hades were born out of necessity; the book is the result of the countless years that I spent in various psychiatric hospitals and clinics, the result of direct observation of the daily life and structure of the hospital, of the patients as well as of the treatment during hospitalization and post-hospitalization. The idea of crossing the rivers of Hades represents the break between the two worlds, the world in which we live and the separate world in which those who are affected by mental illnesses live. Being a book based on reality, it was necessary to make some changes to protect the identity of patients and medical staff." Adrian Șinca

Alma

Romania Bucharest, 1970.

Monica stands in front of my apartment door:

"?What is your schedule-

?"Nothing special why -

."We were invited by one of my friends, who is giving a party"

I nodded affirmatively and two hours later we were getting off the fast train at the Ploiesti Sud station. At the station, I slipped into the pub on the platform that once belonged to Caragiale. I didn't find Caragiale's hat, instead, I found a bottle of Zarea cognac, which I grabbed. We headed towards the city center. Soon we were in front of an interwar villa. The door opens and we are greeted by a gorgeous but huge brunette, a head taller than me. He rushes and hugs Monica. Patiently, I wait for my turn, although the prospect of having a rib broken by the bear does not delight me.

-Hi, my name is Alma. I study her carefully. She is a very beautiful girl in her gigantism, despite an impossible-to-ignore mustache.

After two hours, the party was in full swing, when the door opens and an angry individual enters. It was Alma's father who emptied the guest house in three minutes.

Monica and I are on the train again, this time in the opposite direction.

The terrible scene that unfolded left Alma shaking with nerves. His eyes flashed and his upper lip quivered uncontrollably like a rabbit. After hearing us close the front door, Alma steps into the library, where her father was lounging in a massive red leather armchair with gold staples.

-You must have ruined my party?

Her father places the book on his knee, defying her with blue eyes as sharp as a shattered crystal vase. Alma, without being impressed, continues her tirade with a flat, emotionless tone.

- I know you hate me, for no reason, but this leaves me cold. You hate me because I don't have a boyfriend, you hate me because I look like my mother, you hate me because I like girls! You can say goodbye to the idea of having a grandson!!!

Alma pivots and exits, leaving the front door wide open...



Three years have passed, and Alma now lives in Bucharest with a friend. He works at ICSIM as a sub-engineer. Today she was informed by the PCR secretary that she will be leaving with a construction team for Iraq. Very good. For a second Alma thought about what kind of life she would have as a woman, in a Muslim country... What else is preferable to life here? ... And he started to prepare his suitcases.

In Baghdad, he met Jimmy. Jimmy is a sergeant in the US Army stationed in Saudi Arabia but is in Baghdad on a trip.

After three months Alma and Jimmy were married. Jimmy's contract with the army expires in six months, but Alma convinces him to send her ahead to the USA. Only two weeks after the wedding, Alma landed in LAX, she had \$10,000 (part of Jimmy's savings. During the flight across the ocean, Alma decided to break up with Jimmy, simple, no explanation, no drama.

Everything was as he had planned. Everything was not OK, Alma did not want to lie to herself... She had nightmares followed by periods of insomnia, and chronic migraines that often closed her right eye... In addition, she felt the acute, organic need for a woman... what a woman!

After a month in Los Angeles, Alma was in Dr. Goldenburg's waiting room...hormonal, psychological treatment with Dr. Gray, the whole set. After five months, the sex change operation.

Alma entered and Vasile exited. Alma aka Vasile was careful to avoid the mirror for about two weeks. Bunn, so far...Alma...alias VASILE, had reason to be happy. When she was Alma (a century ago), Alma had become a "company lady".

In one of the escapades, he took his heart in his teeth and stole the wallet and Rolex watch from one of the Jonis. He was afraid, but the prey was too tempting to risk. He had money, he had a new identity, and new sex, not bad. Suddenly he realized he had new problems. All the documents, the birth certificate, the passport, the marriage certificate, and the Green Card all were in Alma's name. Now Alma was a man!!! In Los Angeles, Vasile frequented gay bars.



In one of the escapades, he met a Puerto Rican, Jose. Through Jose, he connects with a guy in New York who could get him fake documents for a hefty fee. Vasile sold the watch, the wedding ring, and all the jewelry...but he sold them for a quarter of their real value.

From an Orthodox cemetery, he copied the name and date of birth of a man of the same age. After two hours, Vasile was sitting comfortably in a seat on the plane from New York. The plane lands in LaGuardia. Vasile stops at a public phone at the airport and dials the number of Jose's friend. After a short conversation, they arrange to meet at the Jamaica subway station. Vasile knew only a few words in English, but in Romania, he had learned Spanish at school and at a house of culture. Being in New York for the first time, Vasile managed to get lost. He decides to cross a park to shorten the distance... Suddenly he feels a blow to the soft part of his head and... darkness. When he woke up, Vasile realized that he was in a hospital room. Everyone around him spoke a language he did not understand. To be in some kind of hinge? Vasile had no doubts...He decided not to make a sound for a while.

Months have passed, maybe even years, since Vasile Bunaveste first went to the hangar. Since he had decided not to say a word, he had chosen a new name, Jhon Doe, JD for short. It seems that the doctors thought that Vasile was Spanish. As such, he was moved to a salon where all the patients were Spanish. Vasile still did not speak but had begun improving his Spanish skills. The

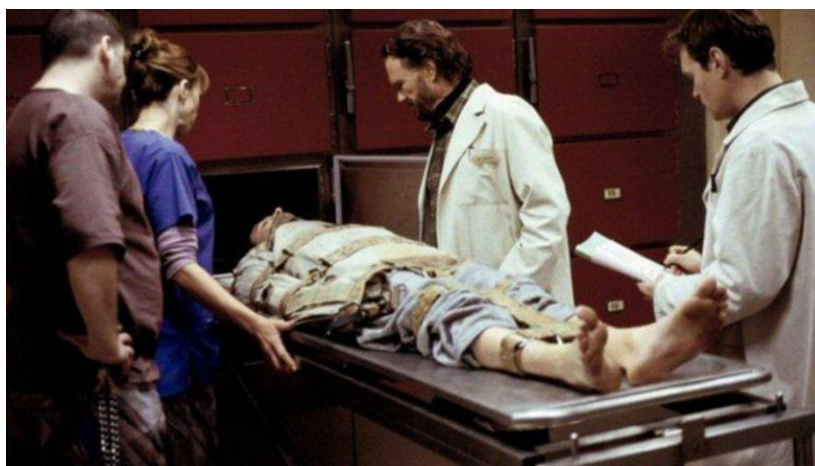
hospital where he was closed for budgetary reasons and Vasile was moved to my hospital.

A month passed, and the new patient, "Athlete of Christos", Jhon Doe showed no signs of adaptation. He spent his time only stepping on the black squares of cement. A kind of absurd joke.

But I notice a change with JD. Nothing special but when JD sees me he blinks quickly for a few moments. I admit I find myself fascinated by this character.

This week, after the medical check-up, psychiatrist Sing decided to administer electric shock therapy (EST) to JD. I decided that Greg and I would escort JD. It's not morbid curiosity on my part, I simply feel that he would be calmer if I were present. Yes, EST is an accepted therapy but it is administered much differently than in the past. Now the patient is under general anesthesia. This therapy has undeniable merits. In fact, more and more neurologists are of the opinion that most mental illnesses are based on a chemical or electrical disorder. Nerve cells produce electrical discharges normally, so a structural change in these synapses is possible, an improvement in the way information is transmitted between neurons, or something like that (I know, the explanation is extremely simplistic, but I'm not an expert). I have spoken to many patients who have received EST and they have told me that they really feel an improvement after the treatment.

For me, this is enough, since our patients no longer need long-term hospitalization.



Anyway, today it's JD's turn to be "plugged in". It's been years since the "straitjacket" was used, today the four points of immobilization are used. This consists of four straps (at the wrists of the hands and feet), which immobilize the patient. Whatever we say is a humane method that eliminates accidental death.

The EST session went smoothly and now JD is in the salon stepping on the black cement squares. Something curious, almost familiar surprises me about him...Greg decides to give him a shower to freshen him up after EST. I have no idea why but I decide to follow them. Seeing him "empty rifle," I notice a lot of scars on his chest, as well as in other regions of his body. Naturally, I mark this in his medical record. After the meal, I feel homesick for my native country and I wake up singing in Romanian at the top of my lungs:

:-Who made you, Tudorițo neneeee?"... instantly I hear JD continue

"!I know you're not going to do well, Tudorițo neneee-

I thought I was having a heart attack... JD IS NOT MUTE !!! He simply does not speak English!!!

Then...he approaches slowly, looks at me intensely, and I hear:

- NOW I remember where I know you from...does the name Alma mean something to you? And shut your mouth, it doesn't match your pale face as if dead!!!

In the following days, he told me about the odyssey that finally brought us HERE...AND THE END?

After a week he was found in bed, cold. The last time he fell asleep he forgot to wake up. After a few days, I received the autopsy results of the former Vasile... the former Alma. It appears that post-surgery medication combined with anti-psychotic medication and the concussion caused the heart attack.