

**HIS FIRST IMPULSE**  
**by Zdravka Evtimova**

Vlado had decided to let himself go, all the way. He had spent last night with a blonde again and had not even bothered to remember her name. She had told him she had died and been regenerated seven times, and Vlado had pretended to believe her, but the superficial black stripes on her shoulders and head, when you parted her hair, told a different story. Especially the ones on her head. They were so close together they gave him chills up and down his spine - she must have been in the regenerating rooms at least a dozen times, probably in the "deluxe" accommodations, the treatment followed by a lavish and costly procedure - the colour of her skin summoned thoughts of fabulously expensive balm. Vlado had erased her face from his videotheque, but he was still in the throes of last night's excitement, so he decided to indulge himself with another blonde tonight. He knew that pleasures of this sort cost approximately three times his salary, but he was sure he would fail the physical exam this month and then would be forced into the standard regenerating rooms. The treatment left such deep and visible dark grey lined all over the body that afterwards one looked like a quilt sewn together from differently coloured rags and bits of fabric. He considered himself born under a lucky star, because the computer for initiating intimate contacts had paired him with such a charming creature - flaxen-haired, with green eyes that moved about in a distracted way, and an appearance that, at first glance, revealed no signs of her ever having set foot in a standard regenerating room. Impatient, Vlado wanted to proceed to the dark hotel room, for which he had paid a fat bundle, but when the woman said a few words he felt goose-bumps up and down his back and slowed his steps.

"You know, death looks quite becoming on you, dummy. Don't try to fight it! Don't try to hide the lines on your skin! They give a fierce expression to your face. You know, I sometimes envy those who go through the standard procedure."

Vlado hesitated. He could get rid of her - the woman was obviously crazy. But after a moment's thought he remembered that the computer for initiating intimate contacts had already charged him for the room, so he decided against it. The blonde woman had already started to caress him, and that switched on a pleasant sensation. "Crazy or not, at least she does it well," he thought. "Besides, I'll never see her again." Actually, the rules for intimate contacts did allow partners to meet repeatedly, but no one ever did. It would have been much too boring. The woman went on with her chatter.

"Just imagine, dummy. Sometimes I spend a whole six months without having to use the regenerating rooms"

Though he was generally regarded as a stable, well-composed person who could control himself, Vlado trembled visibly. This one was definitely off her rocker. Not that all the ones he had met before had been sane. Actually Seva, the only woman whose name he could remember and about whom he kept inquiring among his colleagues, was also mad. So mad, in fact, that he couldn't think about her without ending up dead drunk, thus using up his next two or three paychecks before he had even received them. Seva - an unusual name. When he had heard it for the first time he had made fun of it. He knew he would never see her again.

"Six months and not a single viral infection in my blood! No rheumatism, no diabetes, nothing. I'm completely healthy."

Vlado decided to ignore her rambling and babbling. he knew for a fact that it was impossible to survive on earth for more than a month without resorting to the regenerating rooms. The atmosphere was so filled with poisons and toxins that your lungs fell apart in forty days. Contact with the soil turned your skin into dust within a week. Water discoloured and decomposed your blood in a month or so, provided you drank it in small doses. At least that's what he had been told; he himself had never stayed away from the regenerating room for more than fifteen days.

"Six months without regeneration!" He grunted, trying to humour her. "Where do you work, honey?"

"At the Resurrection Laboratory," she chimed in. "Everything there is so sterile, so boring, that---"

Vlado whistled. "The Resurrection laboratory!" Some of the people who worked there could be quite refined... But sometimes they felt drawn to brutal, primitive characters, and put their numbers in a regular computer for initiating intimate contacts. But who cared? People got tired of always being among the elite. Vlado had chanced upon just such a woman. Maybe he could ask her. He was wary. Still, he could ask... It was too soon, though. Perhaps a little later. Vlado swore under his breath. The week after they dragged Seva away in a police van he and two colleagues had tried to die permanently. Naturally, they had been regenerated once more and sent back to work. Society needed their golden hands, their invaluable experience - that's what the television commentator had said. Vlado had even received a pay-raise. Still, he had little tolerance for this society, this horde of dreary characters who had been regenerated a million times. Sometimes he

wished he would never be resurrected again, would never have to go back to his dingy office and dreary job as a wholesale distributor of soap and cosmetics. But there was nothing he could do about it. It was much cheaper to regenerate the sickly and diseased and let them loose on the hazards of life fit and healthy than it was to purify the sludge-like soil or the brownish muck they called water by force of habit. The need to have children born had disappeared, and so had the need to squander money on hospitals, schools, kindergartens and nursery schools. People came back regenerated, their experience intact, their health fully restored, bragging about this disease or that they had had earlier but had been cured of. And so on until the next dying time. Women didn't lose their sexual savvy - like this doll here. She was okay. Real death simply ceased to exist. And yet Vssil hated his job as a wholesale soap distributor with a passion.

"You know, dummy", blurted the blonde excitedly, "once they nearly threw me out of the Laboratory. Do you know why?"

"Why?" Vlado echoed listlessly.

"I absentmindedly left a patient's blood plasma out in the sun. You have no idea what happened to this man after we regenerated him! The poor idiot had a horn growing right out of his chest! he went berserk - he gutted the chief surgeon, ripped open the faces of a couple of nurses... What excitement! Naturally, we had to regenerate all of them.'

Vlado felt himself getting tense. He licked his lips with a gravelly tongue. His blood pounded away in his temples.

"And what ever happened to that character, the one with the horn?"

"We had to liquidate him, of course," laughed the blonde.

"And then you ran him through the regenerators again?"

"Absolutely not! We liquidated him forever."

Vlado let out a groan. The blonde kissed him and resumed her numbing prattle. But he was thinking of Seva - that mad woman. "I want a child" she had said to Vlado. "A real child. Mine and yours. I'll take care of it. Please, hide me somewhere. At your office" At first Vlado had said no. Then he thought, "Why not?" and had taken Seva to his squalid hole of a place. At least that way they would not withhold money from his sex account until the police inspectors found her. And then the child was born. At first Vlado thought he would kill it himself; he had never heard of a child being born, and couldn't even start guessing what kind of fine they would impose on him for it. He had hidden Seva and taken her through the regenerating rooms illegally. This was going to

cost him a fine of a quarter of a million.! He had to get rid both of Seva and the baby. But he couldn't do it; from the moment the boy was born everything had changed. He would hurry like mad to get home. he would lean over his old clothes where the little one lay cuddled. He would pay outrageous sums of money for clean, filtered water. Eventually, however. the police had found Seva. Vlado couldn't find out who had betrayed him; probably some friend who sincerely felt for him and wanted to spare him the disgrace and the huge fine.

"My colleagues will never believe me I ever came into contact with a person like you" said Vlado. The blonde laughed.

"Take this," she said, thrusting a bundle of cash into his hand. "Now they will believe you."

"The word was going around that you had regenerated some baby in your laboratory," Vlado ventured. The blonde tensed up nervously in his grasp, so he added quickly, "maybe we shouldn't talk of such things?"

"No, we shouldn't," the woman smiled, calming down. "Apparently, some perverse character had wanted something stupid like that around. The woman with the baby refused to give his name."

Seva! It dawned on him like a huge submarine suddenly emerging from the depths of the ocean. Seva. She had not betrayed him. Of course she hadn't. If she had told on him they would have sent him to Seycard; there the regenerating rooms were set up so that when you came out your eyes popped out and glazed over, and you went mute. But there is even a use for idiots; doctors have to have material to experiment on, after all. So Seva had not betrayed him. Mad, stark raving mad. She could have accused him of rape and coercion - but she hadn't. he had promised his annual salary as a reward for any information on her. maybe someone had run into her in some intimate contact... Yet no one had ever responded. He was going crazy with fear that they had sent her to Seycard, so he signed on as a volunteer to go and repair the facilities there, but he didn't find her. The thought of her being with someone else drove him insane with jealousy. But at least that was preferable to knowing with certainty that they had not regenerated her, that she had disappeared from the face of the earth. "Seva. My dear..."

"What?" the blonde shrieked in delight. "My dear? Is that what you just called me? You're incredible sweetie."

"Dear?" Where had he picked up the word? No one had used it in years. Seva. Seva. Seva...

"Did you really regenerate that baby?" Vlado threw in gingerly.

"Why in the world would we do that? No, we left it to its own end."

"To its end? To... die?" he froze with fear at the sound of the word. "To die forever?"

"Of course, dummy." The blonde woman smiled and started stroking his hair. "Both the baby and his hare-brained mother, who, come to think of it, wasn't bad looking at all. Will anybody believe that you called me "My dear"? I really liked it, though it did sound kind of loony, didn't it?"

If only he had tried to stop the paramedics when they took the baby away! Vlado hadn't shown his face at all. That would have meant regeneration at Seycard for sure. He remembered how the day before he had taken the little one's fingers and put them to his own cheek. Loony, true, but nice. It had felt so nice! Somehow he had hoped that at some point in his life he would see a boy and say to himself, "That's my boy." He had hoped, yet... But they would see! He would show them! Maybe it would have been better if Seva had betrayed him back then.

"They'll see, all of them!" he kept repeating after the blonde beauty had departed. His joints hurt, his heart had been rattling irregularly for quite some time. He was definitely due for another regeneration. As usual Vlado prepared his blood plasma carefully. But this time, contrary to all instructions, he left the transparent container out in the sun for more than an hour. "They'll see, Seva!" Vlado hated his job at the soap office more than ever before.

His first impulse when he emerged from the next dying and regeneration routine was to reach out and feel his chest "Seva, my dear!" he whispered. Those forgotten, silly words. In the middle of his chest cavity his shaking fingers touched a crusty, sharp-edged protrusion.

It was a huge, heavy horn.

**They didn't know!**