

The woman in the window

New York, immigration lawyer's office, September 15th, 2013

6:00pm

“It’s simple.” He said, reclining fully in his expensive leather chair. He was a nice guy, I didn’t mind his ego, he gave me a great price and even an installment plan.

“If you want to leave the US with this visa, your first stop is Israel. If approved, which isn’t guaranteed, you get the stamp. If not, your visa’s voided. As long as you don’t leave the States, you’re safe. Just don’t leave.”

New York, UES 1-bedroom apartment, December 4th, 2013

10:00am

“She can’t stop crying.”

“She’s always crying.”

“She hasn’t slept in two weeks.”

“She never sleeps.”

“Do what you feel is best. But it would be a selfless act. Please, reconsider.”

When I was growing up, I never had a relationship with either of my parents. My mother spent her days cleaning, sighing and ignoring me, and my dad worked countless hours and was either beating me up or calling me “selfish”. The word followed like my sister when she was little. Sneaky, ever-present. I didn’t want to be selfish, the way he said it made it sound like the worst aspect of humanity.

In my early 20's a shift occurred, and my father started to change, I don't know why. He started calling me on the phone, sending me money, asking about my art. It was a long process, but he eventually became my best friend, my confidant.

He had never asked me for anything before that December day, and all because of fucking Passover and my mother's panic that if I miss it, I will go to the Jewish version of hell. She just had to have me there, despite the fact that I've been missing Passover since I was 14.

When my father used the word "selfless", my love was triggered. I never say, "I love you" because I believe in actions, not platitudes. This was an action I could take to show my father how I too have changed, my gratitude, my devotion.

JFK Airport, NY – BG Airport, Tel Aviv, April 11th, 2014

3am US time – 6pm IL time

With only a backpack, I got on a plane, and took a handful of 2mg Clonazepam pills, the only thing that allows me to fly. I planned to stay for 48 hours, so I brought another handful with me.

That evening Passover happened, which I have no memory of.

Tel Aviv, US Embassy, April 12th, 2014

10:30am

I had been standing at the stamping booth for over an hour.

"...I'm talking about your previous F-1 student visa, this one."

He flung my passport open against the 2 inches of clear plastic that separated us.

"I studied at The Stella Adler Studio till 2012. Sir."

"In a span of 9 years, you were issued 5 different visas?"

“Yes, sir, tourist, student, OPT, work, and now the artist visa.”

He flipped through my documents and checked his computer.

“Troubling.”

I felt selfish in front of that officer. Taking up all the visas.

“As you can see from my O-1 artist approval letter – “

“I can read, Ms. Segal. Wait here.”

The officer walked away revealing a giant bald spot on the back of his head. I opened my mouth to call out his name, but there were no names at the Embassy. Michael? Roger? Azazel? I took a seat at the back and waited. It was early in the morning, and the place was open until 3pm, so I wasn't worried. My US lawyer warned me that they'd ask questions, that I'd be there a while.

12pm

I approached one of the security guards.

“Excuse me, the man from that booth left with my passport a few hours ago, he hasn't come back.”

“Oh *motek* (sweetie), that's perfectly normal. I'm sure someone will be out soon.”

In her 50's, hair bleached blonde/white, layers of makeup, thick lip liner (purple), fake eyelashes, and a beautiful smile, she calmed me. I took her soothing, cigarette-gravel voice at face value. This nice lady I've never met wouldn't steer me wrong.

3pm

They're locking up.

“Hey, wait, the guy still has my passport!”

I was the only one left in the room, moments ago occupied by dozens of people. A different officer came and placed a hand on my shoulder. He was in his early 30’s, wearing a similar white button-down, paired with a tie that had a red background and smiling oranges on it.

“Miss, don’t worry, you’ll get an email or call from us very soon. Hold on a sec.”

All the stories my lawyer told me of those that were blacklisted, shunned from the American dream because they lied on a form, or just had bad luck, rolled into a single deluge of horror. Panic came so quickly I didn’t have time to take a pill. Do my breathing exercises.

The poor officer, having returned from checking on my situation with the people in the back, tried to catch me as I burst into tears and dropped down, lay on my back, hyperventilating, legs splayed out on the freezing cold marble. He squatted, scared to touch me.

“Um, miss, I’m very sorry, but the officer you talked to isn’t here, he left several hours ago. I promise, there’s nothing to worry about, it happens all the time. You’ll hear from us soon.”

I was there for about 30 minutes till I was able to stand back up. He called me an Uber and I entered it, my giant folder full of approvals that Azazel took, missing from my arms. I stared at my phone. It had a picture of the Empire State Building, tilted.

My chest shivered. My palms were sweating. My thighs stuck together. My neck itched like crazy. I could see five cab drivers, but there was only one.

I was in trouble.

I arrived at my parents’ house, the last place I wanted to be. The three-bedroom apartment always felt small but now it felt miniature, I was a giant, a balloon the size of a country, and I knew that one wrong word would pop me.

I told the story of Azazel, the visa, the officer with the oranges tie, weeping uncontrollably. They sat and stared. My mother told me I'd hear from them soon.

My father was silent and looked at the ground.

The next 4 months went by in a haze, each day duplicated. My childhood room that was given to my baby sister with white walls, had turned pink (ick). Phone calls. Emails. Crying, shaking, panic attacks. Stuffing my face with anything I could get my hands on. Ulcers. No sleep.

No word from the motherfucking Embassy.

Nesher, parent's apartment, August 16th, 2014

4:30pm

Four months in, and I had used up every dime to keep paying my rent back in the US. I even got a friend who needed extra cash to temporarily replace me at my day job on 5th avenue. I was still on the roster of actors to perform in my favorite Shakespeare play (Titus Andronicus), assuring my director via email/text/WhatsApp that I'd be home "any day now".

The outpouring of love and support from my NY chosen family was wasted on me. From an Israeli youth that used to be "too fucking much" for most people, I had become a female character from a Victorian crime novel. Colorless, restless, hand over the head while fitfully sleeping on a velvet settee. The opposite of the woman in the window.

On a Thursday, marking 4 months from the day that I met the officer with the bald spot, I received an email from the American government.

Strange to receive such a devastating message from an institution I thought of with such reverence: *Based on the recommendation of the Embassy officer a decision has been made to revoke your O-1 visa.* My tourist visa was revoked as well, for shits and giggles.

The email was a nail on a coffin made of Feta. It crumbled, melted, sunk into the hot, disgusting ground I was forced to walk each day, clothes borrowed from my sister that made me look like I was constantly playing golf.

Tel Aviv, studio apartment, October 21st, 2014

11:30pm

I got my ID, a new blank passport, an apartment, and a shitty job. Hebrew was my kryptonite and it assaulted me like a hurricane of consonants. “*Techaychi motek, ha’olam yafe!*” yelled a male stranger on the street. Translation: Smile sweetie, the world is beautiful.

Ramat Gan, 2.5-bedroom apartment, August 19th, 2021

2:00pm

It was time to return to the Embassy. In the previous five attempts, I had worn what my lawyer told me to: White formal top, black pants, black kitten heels, dainty earrings, no makeup.

But this was my last try before I had to wait an entire year, so what did I have to lose? I opened up my very full closet that I had been cultivating for 7 years with cheap Chinese clothes, and selected a bomb outfit. Lime-green cigarette pants, almost neon, a poofy top that made my arms look like marshmallows, 3 thick chains of gold and silver around my neck, a black skull ring, my hair gelled back, and a banging red lip.

I used my Elizabeth Taylor Gardenia perfume, wore nude ballet flats, and painted my nails black. If I was going out, I was gonna go out like a character from Beetlejuice on acid.

I walked into the Embassy, surrounded by the regular Israeli sheep/crowd. All wearing what I used to wear to previous appointments. They gave me looks I had been getting from Israelis

all my life, which I was now completely immune to. Scratch that, I delighted in them. Fuck you dickheads, I'm outta here.

All this hard-earned attitude and speeches given to myself (by myself), were deflated quicker than sound, light, loss; there was Azazel, and four others in their plastic booths.

I took off my skull ring.

In a long line of people, I was sweating like I was getting paid per bead. When my turn came, I was ushered to a booth, and in it sat the nice man with the oranges tie. He didn't remember me. This time, white poodles with mustaches were his tie of choice. I smiled wide and forgot my script.

After I gave my little speech about studying, its importance, my future and all that jazz, he didn't even ask me any questions. He smiled, stamped my passport, and said: "Good luck."

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Baltimore, 1 bedroom apartment, October 31st, 2021

8:00pm

I was watching people from my window, standing on tiptoes to see them walk around in costumes with children and pets. They were smiling, carrying small plastic pumpkin buckets full of sugar. An unusually warm October night allowed them to wear short shorts and tube tops, showing off thighs and chests. Tattoos, wigs, bonkers platform heels. I didn't have a costume, but I wanted to join in. I grabbed a shiny red bra that barely covered my nipples, a short faux leather skirt, a Santa hat I found in my apartment lobby the day I moved in, and walked toward a group of strangers that seemed around my age.

"Fuck yeah!" One person said and did the "metal" sign with his fingers.

"Girl you better stop with them titties. They gon' fall out!" A gorgeous creature remarked.

“Um, I don’t know you, and I didn’t know how to say hi, so, I thought I could say it with my boobs?” I didn’t mean it to sound like a question.

The group chuckled, and the couple holding hands took out glitter from their plastic pumpkin, sprinkling it all over me as I gasped.

“Ah!”

The laughter was uproarious. As I looked around, I saw that everyone had the same yellow glitter on them, the pair must have “initiated” them all for Halloween.

“Who needs words, bitch? Lick that glitter off!”

Never one to disappoint a crowd, I grabbed my right boob out of my bra and licked the glitter.

“Pineapple?” I mused. I didn’t mean to say it out loud.

“Pineapple!!” They all screamed in unison, and jumped up and down. Myself, and my happy boobs, jumped up and down with them.