

Emilia Nowak  
MAGNIFICA

PAPARAZZI

“And those who fight for freedom are right.”

– U.S. Marine

Dedicated to all my enemies.  
You lost; **I won.**



# ☆ 1 ☆

Once upon a time, beyond the infinite blue ocean and Hollywood hills, a King who was so unique that he was singular in the entire epoch and the whole world, said, “It is important for the artist to maintain a decisive influence on his own life and his own creation.” Therefore, the artist must be able to remain strong and independent. It’s a fact. I’m a paparazzo—they call me that. I work solo.

I’ll tell you one thing: nobody likes me, and I don’t give a shit. I just like watching things happen. And there was a lot going on. It was 1964. It looked like we were heading into the beginning of the Vietnam War.

At that time, I was troubled by weird dreams. What can I say? They were like heavy confectioners’ dreams. I remember one:

I feel whiteness. I see blackness. From the depths of space, dark brown emerges—and from it a large, wooden table, square one. A library appears on the left. A number of shelves are filled with colorful books.

MJ, the world’s greatest pop star, goes to the table. He is dressed in a white jacket and bell-shaped trousers,

which are cut in the back, on the calves, along the entire length. He also wears a white hat with a fussy violet feather. The strange thing: MJ is small, as if he's been reduced, and the table is giant. On the tabletop, opposite each other, are two round bowls—aquariums filled with clear turquoise water to the very brims.

MJ is coming. He goes boldly between the two bowls. Then, suddenly, from one of them a fluorescent, animated fish pops up in technicolor: Mo! It speedily goes to the second aquarium for a cup of cappuccino. The fish dances to the music. Its swinging tail fins are going crazy, and the small tip of its dorsal fin also.

Mo! reaches the place and takes his cappuccino from the depths of the water. He inhales the aroma and returns to his aquarium. One of his pectoral fins settles on his waist, and the other holds the cup. He passes just before Jacko. MJ is surprised—he splits like a film frame, in half, then in three. However, in a moment he comes back to himself and completes his path to the end. From the edge of the table he throws himself into the depths, straight ahead, toward the library. The power of his drive scatters the shelves. A radial, penetrating white light is coming out—

It turned out that I was experiencing this dream while sitting in a tree in New York's Central Park. Before long, a sound came to my ears.

“Excuse me! Excuse me, sir!”

I started to wake up and noticed a little boy standing under the tree.

“Do you have the latest Bradley chewing gum?”

“Huh?!” I was still sleeping.

The brat intrusively repeated, “I’m asking, do you have the chewing—”

“Fuck off, whipster!”

I wasn’t asleep anymore. The kid escaped from the place as if he were on fire. I hoped his mother wouldn’t appear below me in a minute.

I jumped down from the tree. As the Italians say, *È ora di togliersi i guanti bianchi*—it was time to take off the white gloves.

I remember how damned windy it was then. I started to follow the shortest street to get out of there. I was passing local people. I left the park pretty quickly and made it to the street.

I entered the city, New York. I was rushing ahead. I involuntarily imbibed the colorful views of the people on the streets—original, but tendentiously massive. Every now and then, I came across the likenesses of the stars—gleaming photos and paintings on walls, streetlamps, concrete walls of houses—literally e-v-e-r-y-w-h-e-r-e.

The 1960s definitely belonged to MM and MJ. There were quite a lot of images of them . . . or rather, immature false images of all those stars or just pieces imitating the King of Pop. Years of ubiquitous music, ubiquitous pop culture, and colorful style.

I was making my way through a large city street rapidly. On the right I saw a wall in vertical white and

blue stripes with great posters bearing the face of one of the stars: Latakia.

Workaholics, unlike alcoholics, are proud of their addiction. I must admit that I'm a fanatic in my work. Information is power.

I've always been interested in such photos. I remember it like it was yesterday: as a newbie, I went to the camera store. Among the big, heavy, and expensive cameras, I noticed one looking sympathetically at me. A bit amateur, but it was mine already. It was love at first sight. The guy behind the counter packed it ably, and I bought the first set of equipment in my life. Yeah, I was shooting everything that moved then . . . literally everything. Butterflies, park benches, garbage floating in the gutter.

And now, now that I'm so old—if you could only see me, a good thirty years later—in the viewfinder, I focus on beautiful ladies. Snap! I just took a photo of one pretty lady and continued walking down the street.

A normal man doesn't notice true celebrities when he crosses the street, but a paparazzo sees three or four. And just then, I saw a woman wrapped too tightly in a shawl. The wind blew stronger and stronger, and it carried away the scarf. The beauty of MM appeared to God's world. I had already prepared my equipment: Snap! Snap! Snap! Snap! Snap! I fired my shots straight at MM, while the people on the street were just waking up. The star tried to escape, but she was well blocked. At once, I left the assembly. I had first-class material.



## ☆ 2 ☆

**S**ilent white space embraces figures from everywhere. As its habitué, I'm standing in front of the Insane Knight. I accept anything that comes.

"Who are you?" I ask what I think is a man who seems to be dressed in a blue and pink suit—a tailcoat.

"I am the Insane Knight," responds the persona with the blue face.

"Are you mad?"

"Insane! Oh! Oh! Oh!" He circles me.

Suddenly he approaches my eyes. "Doesn't the blue suit my face?" He circles again.

I ask, "Why are you dancing?"

"Dancing is joy, dancing is singing, dancing is life!" He's circling again. He encourages me. "Come on, Gracious, dance with me now!"

He takes me to the dance. We are dancing.

"Oh, well, my love, you're not doing it as well as I am. Look at me." He demonstrates how I should do it. "Come on, Gracious. One more time, please!"

He takes me one more time and we continue dancing.

“More subtlety, more delicacy, more nuance! Oh! Oh! Oh!”

I woke up in bed, in my room. I was drenched in sweat. Those goddamn dreams wouldn't leave me for a step. I threw the bedding aside. What could these dreams mean? I went to the bathroom as soon as possible.

## ☆ 3 ☆

I slipped between the streets of Manhattan. I had finally arrived, so I stopped and looked up: modern skyscrapers all around. I noticed the rock sign: CITY JUNGLE.

I entered the skyscraper that bore the signboard.

When I left the elevator, it was immediately apparent that I was in the editorial office. Hurried movement spread from one person to another. Generally, it was one big mass of confusion. I liked it here. A lot. In addition, after a while I liked it even more because my friend Mito came to see me.

I said, “Thanks for getting me this job.”

“Well, we’ll see what happens. Come with me. I’ll show you around.”

We moved eagerly to tour the editorial office. This place looked like a real glass cage. Glass walls, glass doors. The flow of information was crazy and clean there. It probably happened through the glass.

As always, Mito gave me some helpful guidance: “Contacts are key. You must have a lot of friends, more

or less specific ones. But generally, count on yourself. You must be independent.”

“Sure.”

“You need to know where you can accidentally run into people. Good advice: pay waitresses, florists, and clerks to get tips about where the celebrities go for fun.”

He paused and showed me a window to the left. “There’s Vladimir’s cash register. If you have a hot topic, that is, a firsthand story, hit him up right away. He’ll take your pictures, and you’ll get the cash.”

“Can you survive on this somehow?”

“Are you kidding?” He smiled with pity. “It’s clear that you’re fresh. So green, my old friend. You can, but only if, of course, you’re smart enough. Let’s move on to the conference room.”

We moved, and he continued: “For a special topic, a photo series, you can get up to one hundred dollars. Newspapers like *Stylo* and *Hot Girl* pay fifteen to twenty-five hundred for the right subjects.”

He hastily approached a corkboard and pinned the paper he had in his hand. We went further.

He continued. “A little more serious periodicals like *Eye*, *On Top*, or just *City Jungle* pay about three thousand. However, for a super theme, ten and up.”

“I guess it all depends on luck. What do you think?”

“That’s not true. Luck is about thirty percent. The rest is skills developed over the years.”

“And the topics?”

“There you go. Typical tabloids are when stars burn the rubber, get a ticket, break a heel on the sidewalk, or buy a purse for five thousand.”

He smiled happily at my next thought: “Of course, life can’t be too sweet: alcoholic excesses are also selling great. Lately we can count on Lubango. He always does something nice. And funny pictures, like someone making a silly face.”

“What about the privacy of these people?”

“Listen, Jeff, you want to do it or not? Work is work. You need to live on something. Nobody accuses models for showing their full ass in their skimpy pants.”

“Yeah, that’s true, but—”

I wanted to defend myself, but Mito was determined to finish his thought.

“Or fake actresses—God only knows what they do in movies. But, of course, the paparazzi are such bad people. Listen, if something is too controversial, ninety percent chance it won’t show up anywhere.”

“Really?”

“Take, for example, betrayals: it’s not worth it, because they’ll most likely land in a drawer.”

“Why?”

“Simple: people sue, and the law is on their side.”

“Oh. And what does it mean that someone took a topic off the table?”

“Also simple: the material is never published. It sits in the editorial drawer, maybe even after being bought

for fifteen thousand. We buy this stuff so no one else can publish it.”

“And not to read,” I added.

“Exactly. However, if there’s a politician in the photos who is friendly with our editorial team, we simply hide the pictures in a drawer. That’s all.”

“And if the editorial staff doesn’t like someone?”

“Naturally, we can blackmail them with photos, proposing a tradeoff: we won’t publish if you work with us.”

“Nice.”

“Two weeks ago, we had pictures of a New York senator kissing a woman who wasn’t his wife.”

I gasped.

“It’s cool. The photos didn’t go to print, but in the next few issues, we printed news that he sold us exclusively. We had him in our grip, but he was furious.” Mito laughed.

We finally settled into the conference room. I looked around the spacious interior, in the middle of which stood a long wooden table. Two journalists were sitting behind it.

Mito turned to me. “Please meet these two fantastic journalists.”

To them, he said, “Jefferson Lee, our new paparazzo.”

They rose and walked in our direction.

Mito introduced me to the two guys. “Exeter here on the right.”

I looked at the first journalist, who looked completely as if he had swallowed a standing microphone. We exchanged a hard handshake.

"I'm very pleased to meet you," I said. It was less nice for my flattened hand.

"And Jinxi."

This stupid name was perfect for this kid-looking guy.

"I'm very pleased," I said again. For a change, his hand didn't crush mine, but gave it a warm sweat.

Mito spoke to the stiff man: "Has the Kate-Ford case finally been solved?"

"Oh, it was just a lame duck."

"Well, that's what I was betting on."

I tried to guess what was going on.

Exeter explained it to me. "Someone lost their journalistic shit. As always."

"And the public likes to eat that shit up," Jinxi added.

Mito spoke to me. "You're lucky. This is where the lives of the best New York journalists and photojournalists are going on. *Jungle* also manages two smaller illustrated magazines."

"And three popular tabloids," the stiff man added.

Jinxi cut in. "Where's our editor?"

"Muram?"

Just then, the editor-in-chief came into the conference room.

"Speak of the devil," the stiff man summed up.

This was where I saw him for the first time. Muram looked . . . young, fresh, and inviting. From his very entrance, he was watching everyone with his inquisitive eyes. He opened his mouth: "I see a new face."

"Yes, he'll be here from time to time."

"Yes, I know, Mito, considering I hired him myself. I'm the editor-in-chief here, remember?"

It took all my strength to break free of the chief's mesmerizing gaze.

He finally said to me, "Young one, bring something and we'll talk. Take any photos of people you want, so long as they don't look like deer in the headlights."

Was that supposed to be a joke? Somehow I didn't laugh, but the other three burst out playfully.

Muram walked to the table and collected a few sheets of paper. "Always gathering reports. I'll wait until four o'clock. See you later!" He headed for the exit.

I looked at Mito. "That's it?"

"Welcome to the *City Jungle*."

I began to worry. "Is he too young to be the chief?"

Exeter filled me in. "He got this office from his mommy. He has another small one in LA."

And everything was clear.



***Thank you for reading!***

The book will be published by Kindle Direct Publishing, available on **AMAZON** in both a Paperback and an eBook.