

There was once an Estonian girl who was drawn to the lights of the big city; to the palpable energy of a million people breathing as one. She wanted to assuage her longing for new smells, new flavours and new customs; to lose herself in the crowd and steal glances at what everyone else was doing; to throw herself into her new situation and put herself to the test.

Actually, you couldn't call her a girl any more. She was married, to a huntsman, and had two sons, making her every bit the wife and mother. But she was more than that – she ran her own business, too, which was growing at a rate of knots and for which she was constantly searching out new markets. She often worked without days off, getting up early and still firing off e-mails to her staff and partners at the stroke of midnight. She was one of those typical Nordic women who "follows a feverish path and whose song belongs to no man"*. She lived for speed, and burnt with passion. She didn't know any other way of being.

And although things were going well for her – better than well: fantastically – the restlessness crept in. Maybe things would be even better somewhere else? Maybe she could make even more of her talents and her drive somewhere else? She wanted to change the world. The only thing was, she didn't know how to.

But one day she simply packed up her bags and left. She set her sights on the other side of the world – a place described as one of the most rapidly developing on the planet, with an excellent standard of living, affluent and influential. Its ancient culture imbued it with a dignified history, while the high-tech realities of everyday life represented the Estonian dream: a dream of a place where there was no more poverty, and no more problems; where it was as if every child was the highest authority, their emotional and educational needs dictating the flow and tempo of life throughout the country. In this dream place all disease and dependency had been long since eradicated through the use of personal gene cards, and all of the services that people needed – whether they be in the city, at sea or deep in the ancient forest – were but the click of a mouse away. Everything worked. Everything flourished. Everything prospered. It was a dream of a place that was wild and frenzied and yet distinguished and educated and, above all else, beautiful...

The luring lights of the metropolis in that endless seaside sky through which the girl flew promised to make that dream – or one very much like it – come true.

No sooner had she boarded the plane that would fly her away to that far-off place than she was enjoying an unprecedented level of quality. She had never had so much space travelling in economy class: she could properly stretch her legs, and prop herself up on the armrests without elbowing the passengers beside her. She had a choice of meals, none of which she had to pay any extra for, and it seemed as though there was a member of cabin crew for every dozen or so passengers. And when she finally arrived in that place on the other side of the world, the miracles continued. Although enormous, the airport somehow managed to get people to where they needed to go in the blink of an eye. Her luggage materialised with the same unexpected alacrity, and she soon found herself on a gleaming, streamlined high-speed train. Barely half an hour had passed before she arrived in the heart of the metropolis she had longed to be in for so long. Everything ticked by like clockwork. Escalators streamed silently up and down, trains took people in every direction and the Internet connection on her computer switched to super-rapid. She was used to living a fast-paced life, but not to the kind of tempo that governed all things and put even the most keenly honed reaction speed to the test.

Every building in the city disappeared among the clouds. There were people everywhere – so many people. Tens of millions of them lived there, in this tiny space by the sea. When the girl realised that there were too many to all come out of the buildings at once, purely because there wasn't enough space, the dark side of this ideal life was revealed to her. She noticed that the streets, the subways, the restaurants, all were packed with people glued to their smart phones. Even a young family who got on the train were ensconced in their phones, notwithstanding the close embrace of the mother and father, or the fact that the little boy in the stroller was barely old enough to comprehend what he was holding. The girl didn't see any land, any real land, anywhere: everything was submerged in concrete. The sun, though it was almost at its zenith, shone through a thin film of fog; the sky was obscured day and night by the breath of the city. There were flowers and shrubs dotted about, of course, but only in pots and flower beds. When she came across an actual tree – several hundred years old, its meandering roots encased in asphalt – she experienced a bittersweet pang of recognition. She wanted to go up to it and say hello, because it reminded her of the world she was from.

While she was eating lunch, the girl heard someone say that the place owed its wealth to rationalism and deliberation. Everything there was recalculated into time and money, and the ratio between them. Everyone's aim seemed to be as much money and as little time as possible. Speed and prosperity. In restaurants, your food would arrive almost before you'd ordered it, and the bill shortly thereafter; tailors would make a suit from scratch in just a few hours; and children would start learning things while they were still clinging to your breast. The girl noticed that the people in that place didn't smile. Perhaps it wasn't necessary in order to become rich, or perhaps there wasn't time. She pondered to herself.

So the girl arranged some things that saved her a lot of time, too, and made her and her

company a lot richer. But little by little another longing overtook her: she wanted to see the stars and the moon again; she missed the smell of freshly tilled soil and the scents of the forest; she wanted to plant her own flowers and pick strawberries. The feeling was overwhelming. She realised she was hankering for a slow pace of life, for diffident smiles and well-spaced houses. In order to grasp just how valuable land and space and silence were she'd had to travel to a place where people lived on top of one another, in their millions, like tinned sardines. And then it dawned on her: the true nature of luxury, and that it didn't have to come with an exorbitant price tag.

When the dark eyes that booked the girl her flight home asked which corner of the world this 'Estonia' was found in, she was filled with an inexplicable sense of happiness. It was good to be in on such a secret. So she said that Estonia was in a place where there was more time than money and where there was more space and more animals than there were people. She said it was at the end of the rainbow; a place where people smiled with their eyes – even when the world around them was cold.

As she walked away she knew she'd seen the spark of an eternal longing in those dark eyes: a longing to see her country. Their souls had come together, and it had changed the world.

* to paraphrase Estonian poet Artur Alliksaar