

Ashes

by

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Masha was interested to know if, when a fat person dies, she produces more ashes than a thin person. This was not an excuse for her weight, although lately that was a little out of control. Masha had four children and she thought that if they had more ashes when she died they would not fight in sharing them.

She had written in her Will that her ashes should be divided and placed in the four identical boxes that she had purchased, made by an artisan in Florence. She had always had an obsession for justice and had trained herself to love each of her children in the same way. In this way Masha was sure that each child could have the same “*souvenir*” of its mother. Of course that was what she had in mind, but she could not control what her children would do with her ashes. Maybe they would not keep them in the boxes and would scatter them in the garden, in the woods or in the lake.

Some time before she had decided not to be buried in the conventional way. She had her own view of human destiny and she was almost sure that there was no God and that there was no life after death. Once you were born you had to go through life as well as possible and accept age, sickness, and death - unless you had a premature accident or were killed in a war. But what she was sure of was that once you were dead nothing existed any more. Only your memory. In other words, she felt that she was an aging body that needed more and more care, repair and maintenance, like an engine or a car or a washing machine. That was the obvious destiny of humans, animals and plants and the last part of the journey that we call life was for sure the harder. You had to endure all sorts of different illnesses and tests and spend more and more money on doctors, labs, hospitals and medicines. You would feel weaker and weaker as the end, death, was getting closer and closer and the way you would spend your time was different because your time was becoming more limited.

It can safely be said that Masha had led a very full life. She was a tremendously beautiful girl who became a terribly attractive woman, she was financially independent because of some inherited

money from her family, and she was married four times to interesting and wealthy men. She had four children, three girls with her first husband and a boy with her third husband. She was a talented woman but she was not really interested in a professional career. For years she had been excellent at sports, she played the piano with some skill, and she was quite good at investing her money in real estate and on the stock market. She liked money because she was afraid of being poor when she became old. She liked to be safe, comfortable and independent. She liked making money in various different jobs and she would rather not have one proper job because it would suck up all her energy and she would not have enough time for her private life. Her private life was extremely important to her and she spent much time on the phone with her friends or with her children.

Masha was a good woman, not too interested in sex due to some unpleasant and disappointing experiences in her past. She had an instinctive intelligence and held some strong values. She was raised in the Christian faith but she disliked religions in general because they all preached something false. She was also stubborn and could be rough and even cold, but she had a warm heart. Was she loved? Some people loved her, others feared her. Even if she was charming and polite, sometimes she could seem distant. She was difficult, especially over food matters, because she was herself an excellent, almost an exceptional, cook and therefore a harsh critic.

Lately she had got fatter because she was drinking lots of Coca-Cola and had stopped doing exercise, plus she always over-indulged on sweets. Since she had got an iPad she spent hours in bed, searching, reading and watching movies. Her boyfriend Jacob was a Romanian dancer, but now he was too old to perform and therefore retired. Masha loved to cook for him and he adored her cuisine and her body and they loved being lazy together. Jacob liked the “*odalisca*” type of woman, the oriental woman, but Masha was not like that. Jacob was in love with Masha's smile, which he found irresistible.

At night, whenever they had tickets, they went out to the theatre to watch a ballet performance. Masha was not particularly keen on ballet but she knew how important it was to Jacob. Several times he tried to take her to some ballroom dancing places he knew. He loved to dance, especially in the late afternoon. Tango was his favourite, because it reminded him of his years in Buenos Aires. His parents were holocaust survivors from Poland who went to Argentina after the war. Masha knew some Spanish, and in certain intimate circumstances they liked to speak Spanish together. Masha was not good at Tango and disliked the idea of ballroom dancing. She had gone to nightclubs when she was young and

enjoyed jazz, pop or rock music. She loved to dance rock and roll, especially with French men, who she personally considered the best rock and roll dancers. But she never confessed that to Jacob. They used to go to the cinema together in the afternoon and then have an early dinner in an Italian restaurant, even though Masha was not keen on pasta and Italian food in general.

They chose to spend their winter holidays on a Caribbean island, doing nothing but swimming and eating local fish. Masha wanted to have a simple life, and in a place where most people were millionaires or billionaires she tried to avoid them. She knew some of them but did not feel comfortable in that sort of social life, where she did not feel free.

One day Masha changed her mind. She decided that her ashes had to be scattered on the beach, one of those enchanting white coral beaches where she had spent so much happy time with Jacob. Her ashes and the sand would become intermingled, confused. Her ashes would dissolve and become part of the beach. In that case the children would not fight over her ashes. After all she hated the idea, even if she had to become ashes, of being closed inside four boxes forever.

She would rather breathe fresh air, the breezy salty air of her beloved island.

She would be there forever, in peace.

April 6th 2014, New York