

# Be My Valentina

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The St. Petersburg International Economic Forum was a blur. The night before, too many glasses of the bubbly at my favorite Second City French restaurant, Le Pissior, and I lost the plot a bit. Management discreetly intervened by calling me a cab after I tried to seduce the proprietor's wife, thinking she was Valentina Matviyenko. Luck had it that the cab driver also looked like Matviyenko, and he coyly blushed when I asked him to marry me.

Predictably, I overslept and missed much of the first day, not feeling very well. Nevertheless, some late-afternoon restorative glasses of Perrier-Jouët '99, and I was good as new, sparkling like only the old Chronicler knows how. But there was one event I sure wasn't going to miss: the forum's opening evening concert that night on Palace Square! I grabbed my forum VIP pass ("Package No. 1") and headed into the beautiful bright St. Petersburg night.

The guest star this year was Sting, worth the price of the Package No. 1 ticket right there. You know, that guy can do and sing anything! I mean, what a talent! He can do jazz, and soul, and Celtic-whatever, and he writes all those great songs himself! To be honest, I practically lost it when he sang "If You Love Someone Set Them Free." It's such a soulful song,

and watching all of those oligarchs and other Package No. 1's dancing and grooving in the glorious St. Petersburg summer light really made me emotional. It was like our Woodstock. And then I saw the real Valentina Matviyenko up by the stage, shaking it and looking every bit as gorgeous as she always does. Security kept me at a distance, but I realized that even I couldn't compete for that saucy cougar's affections against someone as handsome and talented as Sting. "If you love someone," I said to myself, "set her free ... for now!"

Afterward I went to a VIP reception in the Winter Palace itself and watched a hilarious take-off of 1905's Bloody Sunday massacre by Moscow's Comedy Club.

The following day, I took part in a one-hour round table, "St. Petersburg, the Next Hong Kong?" It was great fun, but again, I had had a bit of the bubbly and couldn't keep any of my notes straight. I asked the others at the round table if Hong Kong had a really saucy cougar for a governor. They weren't sure. I rested my case. An hour later, I was yucking it up with my oligarch friends back at Le Pissoir.

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