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American's Odd Tale of Love Lost in Ukraine

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Many come to the East following a dream, but some — like Cary Dolego — get seriously lost along the way.

The 53-year-old divorced father of three, who ran for governor in the U.S. state of Arizona in 2010, came to Ukraine looking for love and with a plan to save lives — but eight months later found himself homeless and living in a shed outside a railway station on the Romanian border.

"I think it's safe to say that things didn't turn out exactly as I'd planned," he told The Moscow Times by phone Wednesday from the Chernovtsy regional hospital where he is recovering from pneumonia.

But despite being cut off from his money and facing likely deportation, he said he does not want to leave the country he lovingly — and repeatedly — referred to as "Yoo-Cane."

"I've absolutely fallen in love with the 'Yoo-Cane,' and I hope I can continue pursuing my goals here," he said earnestly.

His strange story was first reported after homeless outreach workers found him shivering outdoors earlier this week. In his rambling interview with The Moscow Times, Dolego elaborated on several points, but his tale — particularly about a mysterious, reappearing character named "Julia" — begged more questions than it provided answers.

Dolego's odyssey began in March, when the former state welfare worker and Wells Fargo customer service rep left his home in Gilbert, Arizona, and flew to Kiev to try to find a bride through an American online dating service called "A Foreign Affair."

"I was here meeting marriage-minded females," said the one-time Green Party write-in candidate. "I had never been out of the country except for Mexico, and I loved what I saw. And it coincided perfectly with my work and everything that was happening in my life, so I decided to stay."

Earlier this year, Dolego's feel-good tale was featured on the American news program Nightline and showed the toupee-wearing lovebird packing his bags inside his sprawling desert home and gushing about his romantic prospects.

"To me, it is just like a fairy tale — the closest thing to it," he said.

The air was taken out of his fantasy somewhat upon arrival when a woman named Julia, who was supposed to meet him at the airport, failed to appear. Still, he continued going on dates with dozens of other women, the news program showed.

But this is where Dolego's story takes a turn for the bizarre. His work, he explained, involves a secretive structural engineering project — which he claims will prevent ships from sinking and planes from breaking apart.

"These solutions can save hundreds of thousands of lives a year," he explained. "No one in the States would take me seriously, and I have been trying to find a legitimate audience to hear my solutions."

His account of how exactly he ended up living on the streets is also less than clear. He said he spent several months traveling to towns along the Black Sea coast in an effort to meet with the admiral in charge of Russia's fleet there, but was willing to share his ideas with anyone who might listen.

"I met a postal worker in Mykolaiv whose daughter, Julia, was going to help me translate my ideas to show to professors at the local university," he said. "But he didn't seem like he was going to take me seriously, so I thought it would be ineffective in advancing my cause so I backed away from the introduction and moved on."

After that, Dolego said his bank card was frozen and his landlord threw him out, and he eventually ended up at the eastern Ukraine train station.

But in interviews he gave to local television reporters in Chernovtsy, Dolego suggested that he had been led to the town by a woman — also named Julia — he had met online, in what likely

turned out to be a scam.

"It was evidently a man sending me e-mails on her behalf," he told reporters from his hospital bed, appearing disheveled but resolute with his strange hairpiece lying askew atop his head. "I don't exactly know how it works."

He said he had kept his grown children informed about what he had been up to all along, but they had been unsupportive.

"Sometimes, from an American perspective, when Americans say they are going overseas, there is kind of a negative view of it — I don't know why," he said. "My kids are no exception to that. They know where I am at."

Numbers listed for his relatives in Arizona had been disconnected, and messages sent to his children via Facebook were not returned.

Dolego said he was unsure what his future would hold, although he expected that he would have to leave Ukraine at least temporarily as he had overstayed his visa. Messages left with Ukraine's Foreign Ministry and the U.S. Embassy in Kiev were not returned.

He said if he were allowed to return to Ukraine, he would continue looking for a wife and would prefer to settle there.

"American men come over and they like to take the women away from the country, but I would want to stay," he said.

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