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How Yevgeny Roizman Became Mayor

By Yulia Latynina

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The story of how opposition figure and social activist Yevgeny Roizman beat the authoritarian system and won the mayoral race in Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, is truly amazing. It's a story about raw courage and what it means to be a man.

The story begins with Yevgeny Kuivashev. who was appointed presidential envoy to Urals Federal District in September 2011.

After his arrival in Yekaterinburg, Kuivashev expressed the desire to get personally acquainted

with Aksana Panova, the editor-in-chief of the Ura.ru site and the most influential media professional in the region. She arrived at the meeting along with Roizman, who headed the City Without Drugs movement and was the most charismatic activist in town. The two were romantically involved and Kuivashev was well aware of that fact.

But that didn't stop Kuivashev. He began calling Panova up to 10 times a day and sending her text messages such as "Love you." He later explained that he had meant to answer his son's question, "Do you love pizza?" with "Love it," but accidentally sent his missive to the wrong number.

In May 2012, only a few days before the new law reinstating the election of governors went into effect, Kuivashev was appointed the region's new governor. Flying from Moscow to Yekaterinburg, he drove directly from the airport to Panova's home to tell her the news. She came out wearing a bathrobe and he said: "You'll be the first to know. I was appointed governor." She snapped back: "What have you done? You've stolen our election. We'll rally the people in protest."

That did it. He had flown all the way from the capital to tell her — in excitement that he fully expected her to share — that he was now the alpha male in town. And what did she do? She poked a big fat hole in his overinflated bureaucratic ego.

Kuivashev struck back. No sooner was he officially appointed governor than the authorities brought charges against Roizman's City Without Drugs organization. Then, Kuivashev began sporting exactly the same type of trademark red shirt for which Roizman is known. He also founded The Urals without Drugs, and used a carbon copy of the original organization's design as the logo.

Perhaps Kuivashev actually believed that Aksana Panova had a weak spot for men who wore red shirts and battled drug abuse, but something in his subtle psychological calculations apparently went wrong because Panova soon turned out to be pregnant — and not by him. When Kuivashev learned who the father was, he immediately had his beloved Panova charged with extortion.

What happened next was both criminal and tragic. A team of 21 investigators descended on Panova and interrogated her around the clock, relieving each other in shifts but giving no rest to their beleaguered victim. The result: Panova lost her child. Such behavior can only be called deviant. It goes beyond sadomasochism and is worthy of its own twisted name: Kuivashism.

The Panova case is now in court, and she is threatened with a 10-year prison sentence. That, in short, is why Roizman was elected mayor.

Roizman ran for mayor because he would not have considered himself a man otherwise. It was the only way he could protect the woman whom the authorities are harassing because of him. Every man has a different standard of what it takes to be a man. For Kuivashev, it means one thing. For Roizman, it means something else altogether.

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