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Weekly Wrap: Forbidden Love, Russian Style

By Unfair Observer

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The event of the week was technically Victory Day on May 9, celebrated with all the reserve of a royal wedding. But there is frankly not much to say about it: The new Armata tank did not break down in Red Square this time, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe swore fealty to Putin in the Kremlin (or somesuch), and thousands of Muscovites watched fireworks — that cost about as much as a Moscow apartment each, so "wow, there goes my kitchen."

But the best news of the week had to do with baser passions than patriotism or the urge for questionable geopolitical alliances.

Forbidden Love

Yevgenia Vasilyeva, the right-hand woman and alleged mistress of ousted Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, got five years in jail for embezzlement. (Serdyukov got nothing.)

The court, mercifully, took into account the two years she spent under house arrest in her

apartment in the most expensive district in the entire country, equating it with time spent in a Russian slammer.

But she already began suffering for her crimes, reportedly complaining that her prison mattress is too thin and she has no nail file. Lucky that she will be eligible for parole in a mere couple of weeks.

A lesser man, a more cynical man, might have alleged that Vasilyeva was used as a scapegoat — a scape she-goat — sacrificed to the mob to quell their demand for the rotten elite to be brought to justice.

Ugly, lying, distasteful rumors were circulating that Serdyukov was being punished for ditching his wife, a daughter of one of Putin's affiliates (the former minister has since returned to the bosom of the family).

A case could be argued that the whole of Russia's bureaucracy — most of it men — have collectively hidden behind one woman's arguably rather broad back.

But this is all far from the truth, of course. Vasilyeva clearly abused the poor innocent minister, toyed with him while ruining his good name behind his back — she was a real wolf in female flesh.

Thank God that — judging by the number of similar corruption cases against top bureaucrats, which is zero — nothing of the kind happens in Russia anymore.

More Forbidden Love

Meanwhile in Chechnya, a district police chief was reported to be planning a wedding to a 17-year-old girl, who was to be his second wife.

A flurry of denials followed; Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov gave the man a glowing recommendation, while Russia's children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov — the valiant defender of Russian orphans from American adoptions — said there was no need to meddle.

The policeman himself said he was happy with one wife, but the girl said she was looking forward to the wedding. There is, of course, a grave injustice done here, and it is to Serdyukov.

Why can a police chief in Chechnya have two women, while a minister had to go with just one?

Of course, there is the Islamic custom of polygamy, but mainland Russia had its own rich traditions here.

Until the mid-19th century, Russian nobles were known to possess harems of peasant girls trained, as the "Game of Thrones" might put it, in the ways of the seven sighs.

We say that it is vital that the federal government legally sanction polygamy for Russian officials, at least from district level upward.

That demographic gap won't close itself, after all. Hopefully the nation will soon be full of little bastards with blue blood in their veins.

The Forbidden Fruit

As the law was looking into love (with mixed results), the U.S. was looking into the bear.

U.S. State Secretary John Kerry dropped by Sochi to meet his Russian counterpart Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who presented Kerry with local potatoes and tomatoes, and a Victory Day T-shirt — which sums up the visible results of the meeting.

However, a grave diplomatic faux pas was made at the meeting and it was made by Lavrov.

Everyone knows how the U.S. suffers without Russian foodstuffs, banned for export by Putin; and it is clear that Kerry came for some of those. But did Lavrov oblige?

Potatoes are good, sure, but those go with vodka and require not tomatoes but pickles, which were cruelly denied to Kerry.

And what's with the T-shirt instead of a vatnik, that padded winter coat worn by Soviet soldiers and prisoners that came recently to symbolize the patriotic-minded Russian citizenry?

The Moscow Times expresses its condolences to both John Kerry and Barack Obama and offers to smuggle them a jar of pickles and a bottle of vodka. We're not as flint-hearted as Lavrov.

Unfair Observer is the pen name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

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