



Sabine Richling

# An Igloo for Two

Romance Novel

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## **Persuasion doesn't work**

"I really don't want to go there," I respond to Lucy. "I don't know this singer and, now that I think about it, I have something else planned."

At least, if you look at it hypothetically.

I don't think my excuse is very convincing but you can always try.

"Yes, you are going!"

Lucy puts the invitation in front of me on the table. Again, I am being persuaded, as so often. It happens to me all the time. So my fate seems sealed.

Lucy had taken part in a competition, for which this singer was the main prize. More exactly, the prize is a meal with him. She actually did win, but doesn't have the time to keep the appointment. Her boss is sending her to Germany. There she is to give a talk on the methods of archaeology at the Archaeological Institute in Hamburg. Lucy is an archaeologist. She has done a good bit of excavation. It's a really interesting profession. It's a bit related to mine. I am an ethnologist.

Viewed genetically, I am half Inuit. Other people say Eskimo. My father is an Inuit but, as far as appearance is concerned, I am the image of my Swedish mother. Her azure eyes and almost silver hair have completely dominated with me. I turned out to be a cross-breed, who does not look "blended" at all. Only the dark chocolate coloring of my father somehow transformed my skin tone into a whole milk complexion. So I am a whole milk Swede. Yet I inherited the temperament of my father. I am about as entertaining as a sleeping pill. You could say calm and introverted. Most of all, I like to sit on a block of ice and stare into the Arctic Ocean.

Since I've been living in New York, I occasionally look out the window. My computer is my best friend. I write a lot.

And I'll be publishing another book in September. It will be the fifth one. My work as an ethnologist suggests what I write about. Four times, I have joined an Indian tribe for a while, observing their culture and lifestyle, actually living together with the people of a tribe. For a shy person like me, this was a challenge and a conquest.

The original inhabitants of Australia fascinate me. Unfortunately, like the Indians of North America, they live on reservations. I joined a small tribe of the Aranda and lived with them for five months in the Australian desert. It was an exciting time. Unforgettable. I wrote down my experiences in my last book. It will be on the market in two months. With my books, I want to make the public aware of abuses. I want to inform and gain the understanding of all peoples for other peoples. That is my goal.

Why am I expressing myself like this? Perhaps because I grew up in a world which was different, in which the color of my skin became a problem.

"Listen, Malina," Lucy asserts. "Isn't it clear to you who this Danny is?"

*Actually not.*

Innocently, I look Lucy in the eye.

"He could be the reincarnation of John Lennon and you wouldn't know it, right?"

*Could be.*

"Whatever. Somebody has to go. And, since I have something else to do on that day, you are the one left. He is really a dreamboat, Malina."

She holds the picture of Mr. Greyeyes to her breast and dances dreamily around the room.

I wish that I could share her joy. But you can't exactly say that I am loaded with enthusiasm. I would compare Lucy to a raging river, while I am more like a quiet, stark lake. I tend to keep my enthusiasm within limits. Especially when

it concerns rock stars that I don't know and with whom I have to go eat against my expressed will.

The small village where I grew up in Greenland was so remote that half of the western world was foreign to me. After I left Greenland, something continued that had started in my childhood. It was the feeling of being strange or exotic. Since I was born, the problem has been that I am a cross-breed. I never looked like one, but rather like somebody from another planet. Fate granted my older brother Namid more luck. Our father had given it all for his bequeathing and produced an almost complete image of himself.

So much for my problem. And why was that a problem?

Children can be so cruel. Namid took his role as an older brother very seriously and regularly beat up our schoolmates to protect me from their teasing. My European appearance just didn't fit this area. Somehow I didn't fit in. At least it felt that way.

Fortunately, I didn't have to go to school forever, at least not to this one.

When my brother and I were old enough, my father showed us some important survival tricks, tied our dogs in front of the sleighs and traversed the Arctic icy wilderness with us. We learned how to build igloos and to hunt seals.

The excursions into the eternal snow and the icy world of glaciers with my father remain indelible in my memory. The loneliness, the wind, the sun; even today, I sense the solidarity with the untamed nature of the north.

Early in the game, I learned to find my way alone in the raw landscape. At the same time, the weaknesses in my character had all the time in the world to multiply. The loneliness gave me a feeling of isolation and belonged to me like a part of my body.

After seven years, the only girlfriend I had acquired snatched up my only friend. Today they are married to each

other.

Shortly after the disgrace of having lost my first and only friend to date to my best girlfriend, I left my native country. I wanted to study and I wanted to see the big, wide world. So I went to New York.

While in school, I met Lucy, who is my best friend today. Although I had developed a sort of “best friend trauma”, I dared to take the “friend risk” again. Up until now, everything has gone well with Lucy. But then I didn’t have any new boyfriend either. For the last five years, I have been without any male companionship worth mentioning.

But then there is still Lucy. We live together. Or, should I say, we share an apartment. She is always on the go. She visits conventions or goes on excavations.

Why is she forcing me to go on this date with a rock star or whatever kind of star, when the guy is absolutely unknown to me? My taste in music lags behind the spirit of the times. Do I even have one? If I am honest, I hardly know what is “in” as far as music is concerned. I don’t listen to music. What is music? If Lucy is at home, I listen to her racket against my will. It might be that this singer did one of the songs she played. What was his name? Was it Danny Greyeyes? I’m supposed to meet with Danny Greyeyes. I’d prefer Brown Eyes.

“Malina, you simply have to tell me everything, you hear? You’d better bring a camera and take notes, so you don’t forget anything!”

“I’m supposed to take his picture? That is really too silly.”

“Naturally you’ll take some pictures. Every fan would do that.”

*Am I a fan?*

“Besides, you should definitely listen to a few of his songs so that you know what he is about.”

Lucy runs to her CD rack and pulls three discs from the shelf. She comes and shoves them in my stomach.

"Here, listen and learn the titles by heart! Is that clear?"

*Clear.*

"Do I really have to go? I mean, don't you know anyone else who would enjoy this? Why only me?"

Lucy laughs her refreshing laugh and strokes my hair.

"Of course. But you are just the right one."

*Me. How so?*

"Besides, you hang out much too much with any old bush men instead of learning about real life."

*So real life takes place on the stage of a rock star?*



## Voluntary Force

Lucy is in Hamburg. She worked on me for another day and half a night, before she left the apartment with her suitcase. But, ultimately, that wouldn't have been necessary. I would not have dared to defy her will. If Lucy decides that I should meet Mr. Greyeyes, then I will do it. Whether I want to or not.

I'm sitting on the sofa and listening to Danny's music. I like it. A little rock-like and yet gentle. My index finger is stirring around in my hair and looking for a suitable strand to wrap around it. The finger is too short. The hair rolls around the finger, twice and three times, until there is nothing more to see. I must need to shorten the hair again. Or how about longer fingers ...?

The telephone startles me out of my lethargy.

"Hello, are you Miss Lucy Atkinson?" A hollow voice echoes from the receiver directly into my ear canal.

"No, she is not here. My name is Malina Bergstroem. Maybe I can help you?"

Quiet. Crackle. Rustle. Whispering.

"Do you know when she can be reached?"

"Not for three days," I reply. "What is this about and with whom am I speaking?"

Quiet. Crackle. Rustle. Whispering.

"My name is Adam Fox. I am Danny Greyeyes' manager. To our knowledge, Miss Atkinson won the main prize. A dinner with Danny. Do you know anything about that? I wanted to arrange the formalities with her."

"Well. You will have to arrange those with me. Miss Atkinson transferred her prize to me."

Quiet. Crackle. Rustle. Whispering.

"Good. Then will you reveal your name?"

"My name is Malina Bergstroem."

I feel my pulse everywhere. I really don't want to do that. But could I disappoint Lucy? Could I willfully disappoint

any person at all? Besides myself. I disappoint myself continuously. Because I never manage to assert my own will. I'd rather give in to another person's will. It's easier.

Mr. Adam Fox explains the course of the meeting with Danny Greyeyes to me. When I have to say what and how I have to look into the camera. Which answers I must give the Star Magazine and the clothing I should best wear.

"Be punctual, Miss Bergstroem. Tomorrow at 5 o'clock in the studios of the Megastar record company."

Is it really tomorrow? Can't we postpone the whole thing until next week? Or next year?

"Yes," I hear myself mutter into the receiver.

Great!

I start the next day with restless running around the apartment. I can't even think about breakfast. Where would I put it? My stomach is gone. It has slipped to my knees. And my closet is not coughing up any suitable clothes. Since when am I a normal woman? I plod into Lucy's room and rifle through her wardrobe. A dress. Black. Short. Spaghetti straps. Decent but stylish. I'll take it.

The telephone rings. Lucy!

"Hi, Malina. Don't even think about missing the appointment. And don't forget the camera! I envy you so much."

*I'm fine, thanks, and you?*

"Then come on and go yourself! I'll fill in for you in Hamburg."

"Oh, Malina, if that would only work. But if there is anybody I don't begrudge getting this chance, it is you."

*Oh, how touching. Why don't I feel like I am indulging myself?*

I explain to Lucy about the conversation with Mr. Adam Fox and the planned order of events. Photo-shootings, interviews, posing for the camera with Danny Greyeyes, and finally the long-desired dinner in cozy togetherness,

without cameras and witnesses. What will I talk about with him? I hope my mouth will open up and say something. I ask Lucy what sort of conversation would work for a rock star. Lucy laughs.

“Why don’t you take it as it comes? Some kind of conversation will result.”

Good tip. Why didn’t I think of it myself?

After the phone conversation with Lucy, I don’t feel any better. The hands of the clock seem to be competing against each other. Time is racing at a breakneck speed. It’s always when you don’t need it. At the last minute I rush into the bathroom and throw myself under the shower. Fresh but unfortunately not a new person, I get out and occupy myself with Lucy’s dress. It seems to fit. I blow dry my stubborn hair as I keep looking at the clock. Damn, I have to get going. I don’t want to go. I don’t want to!

The hair I just dried flies through the air in an arc over my head, landing in light waves on my back. Shoes. Where are the shoes? Grab for the purse. Don’t need a jacket. Warm outside. Whizz down the stairs. Find the car. Drive off with squeaking tires. Pulse at 180.

Without even noticing, I arrive. At Megastar. My thoughts are all jumbled up and I cannot concentrate on the here and now. So I don’t notice that I am driving by the place. By Megastar. Darn, where am I? Oops. The light was red. What am I saying? How am I reacting? What if they get wise that I have no idea about Danny and his Greyeyes? Wait a minute, wasn’t that the building? Of Megastar? U-turn. Please let me in! I’m in a hurry. Somebody honks. The driver of the honking vehicle waves at me. I wave back. Looked like a long finger. Jerk!

A parking place. Right in front of the building. Thank God!

I get out of my car and just notice an uncontrollable crowd of people in front of the entrance. Where are they headed? Apparently there’s no getting through this gathering. I

linger briefly with the crowd and consider a plan for getting into the building quickly. The door is blocked by two athletic guards. Then I have the idea of brutally attacking the entrance, clearing out the people with a punch, and knocking down the guards. Maybe something better will occur to me. Maybe there is a back entrance. But where? Doubtfully, I look around. An entrance. To a courtyard behind the building. The conditions are good for a back entrance. Unnoticed, I break away from the mutiny and, invisible, stroll the “back way to the back courtyard” so as to reach the expected back entrance. There! I was right. Just found the courtyard door. If there is no blood hound with baring teeth and huge jaws awaiting me, I could succeed in continuing my way into the building to Mr. Greyeyes. When I open it, the door squeaks like a piece of chalk being pulled over the surface of a blackboard. I have to shake myself.

I step through the door, which is like a portal to a cave, and find myself in a pitch dark stairwell. No dog in the vicinity.

The way to my destination is paved by metal steps. I can't see them, but the lingering echo of my steps gives it away.

I hear somebody tramping down from above. The steps are gaining in speed. And suddenly I see it. The shapeless figure comes at me like a freight train. Helpless, I sense that it is not possible to get out of the way. The figure doesn't notice me and does not reduce its speed. Motionless like a statue, I hold on to the railing in the hope of thwarting a fall. Through squinting eyes, I sense the shock of the inevitable collision. A severe pain in my head suggests what has just happened. At the same time, my hand is torn from the railing. The figure and I fall a few metal steps downward.

“For God's sakes!” the figure, lying on me with all his weight, calls out. I feel like I've been ironed against my

will. Like a dried fig leaf between the pages of a thick book. My left foot is caught in a trouser leg. It can't be my own. I have a dress on. My right arm seems twisted like a cord and is touching a strange arm, which is lingering below my back and touching my backside. If there was a way to untie this knot, I would like to have known it.

My lips cannot utter even a word. The warm breath of the figure wanders through my cleavage and releases the aroma of pizza and garlic. Long hair is tickling my face. And it is not mine. Now the figure pulls out its warm arm from behind my back and speaks to me.

"Is everything okay with you?"

"I think so."

Aha, the form seems to be of male origin. The voice gave it away.

"Damn, that is just typical for this day!" he says in a disgruntled way.

Concerned, I try to concentrate on my arms as the male figure slowly moves away from me. I find the one arm but not the other one. In the dim light, I discern a right hand being extended to me and I consider grabbing it. Where is my right arm? Alternatively, I hold my left arm toward the hand, which grabs it right off and lifts me on my feet. Shortly thereafter I find the right arm. Slowly the feeling comes back. I sense a tingling.

"Sorry but I simply didn't see you. But it's damned dark in this place. Isn't there any damned light here?"

"Damned" seems to be his favorite word.

"Sorry, but I desperately need to get going. Have a silly meeting with a broad I don't know. Is everything really all right with you?"

"Yes, thank you."

The male figure nods and continues his way downstairs, then suddenly pauses and turns to me. As if somebody had pulled the plug from the power supply, he stands there motionless and looks at me. Why he is looking so

mysteriously? In this “damned” darkness, he can’t tell anything about me anyway. My fingers are fidgeting nervously. Should I say something else? No, now he is going on.

After the intense mishap, I climb the stairs, hesitating and at a snail’s pace so as to avoid another fall. In the case of another incident, I am gaining time to figure how to get out of the way. Finally I reach a bright hallway. From afar, I hear a lot of hubbub with different sounds. It is like a tree full of little bickering sparrows. The sound of steps being taken comes toward me. Suspicious of what could be awaiting me, I keep myself close to the wall. A woman, elegantly dressed, enters my field of vision and prances toward me in her high heeled shoes.

“Oh, there you are, finally!” she calls out.

I turn around, look at her again and point to myself with my index finger.

“But you are the girl who gets to meet her great heartthrob today? Miss Bergstroem?”

The girl! Does she think I’m a teenager?

“Yes, that is me.”

“Then come quickly! Shoo! We still have to have you styled for the photo-shoot with Danny.”

My goodness! What are they doing with me?

She grabs my strained arm and drags me down the hall. We remain standing at room number 21. Energetically, she pushes on the door, which is ajar, and a team of stylists and hairdressers storms toward me. They are all babbling wildly and pulling on me. Each knows exactly what sort of manual dexterity he must use on me. They pull me onto a chair and, before I can even make a sound, the soft bristles of a large brush dust off my face and tickle my nose. One hand applies mascara to my eyelids and another backcombs my hair. The next one paints my fingernails. A little here, a little there. Just don’t look in the mirror. Who knows what will come of it? Can’t they just leave me like I am? What

can they object to about my appearance? It's completely okay. The high heel lady rushes back into the room.

"Hurry, people! Time is short. Aren't you finished with her yet?"

Exactly, what are you doing with me for so long? They act as if I needed a complete makeover. Now they're applying lipstick. Yuck!

I'm asked to look in the mirror. The overhaul seems to be complete. Why do they look so delighted, as if I were the mother of a new born baby? For God's sake, what have they done to me? Astounded, I look in the mirror with my mouth wide open. Good, I have to admit, it's not bad at all. But ... where am I? I mean ME!

The high heels come at me again. She lifts her hands to her face.

"Wow, girl! You are a real beauty."

They all look at me as if I were the all-time masterpiece of their work.

"Come on! Let's get going."

High heel lady grabs me by the arm and pulls me out of the chair. Be careful, that is the injured arm. I could say it out loud. But that won't work. My mouth is sticky with lipstick.

We go along the hall to room 13. The door opens and – people again. Too many for my taste. I wish I were on a lonely ice floe. But that isn't possible. I'm still in room 13.

"I haven't even introduced myself. You can call me Helen. I'll be coaching you today. What was your name?"

"Malina," I answer quietly.

"Oh, right. So, people. Listen up. This is Malina. First you'll take a few pictures of her. And – where is Danny?"

"Here I am!"

The sentence came without any warning.

Helen and I turn around and see what I must admit is a scrumptious man coming through the door; with him is the pizza-garlic breath. There is a question mark in my mind.

The figure from the stairwell? Danny Greyeyes, the pizza figure?

"Hey, Malina, how's it going?"

He comes directly to me and reaches out his arms. I turn around anxiously and check whether I should get out of the way for someone else. But there is nobody. Only me. For the cameras, he briefly takes me in his arms. There is flashing and clicking from all sides. He smiles a few times into the camera before, cool as can be, he turns away from me.

He didn't recognize me. It would have been the same for me, had he not just inhaled a pizza with an extra measure of garlic.

I look at him more carefully. His dark, shoulder-length hair is restrained by the sunglasses he is wearing. His jeans emphasize his sexy backside, while the blue shirt hangs casually over his pants. His eyes seem as dark as the stairwell, in which we got knotted together. He is definitely of Indian ancestry. Is that the reason why Lucy appointed me for this meeting?

He whispers something to "High Heels Helen". Doubtlessly nothing pleasant. You might think he was somewhat irritated. Be quieter there in the background. I would like to understand some of this. Intensely, I try to read lips. That could have been "not in the mood". It's the same for me. So then I can go now. Excuse me, where is the exit here? I'm not in the mood either. Carefully, I sneak to the door and turn inconspicuously to all sides. Nobody notices me. They are all looking at Mr. Greyeyes. Soon I will have reached the door and then I am free again.

"Stop! Where do you want to go?"

Helen has discovered me and immediately detached herself from Danny. How many eyes does this woman have?

"Please take care of Malina! You can take the first pictures of her."

Danny looks over to me and examines me from top to bottom. I try to avoid his gaze and think of an ice floe. But



even the little man, who is moving toward me with a swing of the hips, cannot separate me from this gaze. Can't Mr. Greyeyes look somewhere else? Just don't pay any attention to him. Think of a bluish white iceberg, which is peacefully rolling by you. The little man places me on a cold chair in front of a screen. Danny is not looking any more. Puh!

"Oh, your mascara is crumbling," the man says indignantly with a feminine tone of voice. He wiggles off, waving his hands, only to return with a soft cloth.

"So, Malinachen, stretch out your little nose!"

Bravely, I do what he says. This place is swarming with crazy people. I must see that I can get out of here in good shape.

I get instructions on how I need to place myself on the chair from all sides. The head up and then the head down again. The back straight. Put hair to the side and then to the other side. Click. Flash. Flash. Klick. Flash. Put your arms on your hips. Now the hair to the back. Flash. Click. Flash. Flash. And smile again. Flash. Flash.

I think of my parents. It's time that I call them. I miss them. My brother is also living in New York but we have no regular contact. He strays from one part of the city to the next and has been studying something new for years.

I don't want to commit myself, he had once answered, when I anxiously addressed the subject.

"Malinalein, please look into the camera!" the little man reprimands me.

My attention wanders to Danny Greyeyes. He is staying at the other end of the room, surrounded by some people. What kind of strange second encounter was that with him? He doesn't think much of his fans. Well, I am no fan, but you don't see that at a glance. Or do you?

"Here is the little bird. Hey, come here, cooee!"

I don't know into which lens I should first look. It's flashing from all sides.

"Little mouse, if you are posing for a camera, you must also look into it."

One?

"Being a photo model means thinking, feeling and being on the ball, dear."

Blankly, the little man shakes his head.

"But I'm not a photo model," I protest.

"Oh, little one. Certainly you are one, at least from now on. Do you seriously believe I would let a face like yours go away? By the way, I am Charles. My friends call me Charley."

The little man extends his delicate hand.

Model – me? What an abstruse idea! Where is my ice floe?

"So, people ...", "High Heels Helen" claps her hands to get it quiet, "now we will take a few pictures with the two of them together. Danny, please come on."

Danny Greyeyes looks through the circle of people surrounding him and curls one eyebrow.

"OK, boss, be right there."

He proceeds over to me and places himself directly next to me. Together we blink into the cameras. Once into the one and then into the other. Danny's hand grasps my shoulder. Flash. Flash. Click.

"Look each other in the eyes!" Charley directs us.

Honestly, I would rather go now. Thank you, it was nice. Look in his eyes. How is that supposed to work? I am already agitated enough and just manage to hold my head in an upright position. Otherwise, I am as stiff as the parquet floor in this room. Ever tried to move a stiff neck? Simply nothing happens. However much you try. Mr. Greyeyes is looking at me. I can sense it. But my head doesn't move.

"But, Malinchen, don't make such a fuss! Look your heartthrob in the eye!"

Heartthrob? Could my heartthrob take his hand from my shoulder? Maybe then I could succeed in swinging around

with my upper body. Hand still resting on shoulder.

"Malina, dear, what is it?"

All at once, Danny Greyeyes' hands grab me by the shoulder and turn me around to him.

Thanks. I couldn't have done that on my own, Numb, I look from one Browneye into the other. Back and forth. I can't decide on either one. This expression. It's running hot and cold down my back. His mouth changes to a deep smile. I can't smile. I'm still completely thunderstruck. A glass of water would be useful. I feel so different. I sense how my empty stomach is contracting in pain. It won't digest itself? It wasn't a good idea not to have breakfast and leave out lunch.

"Smile, you two." Charley is relentless.

Click. Flash. Click. Flash.

"Danny, put your arms around Malina's hips and keep looking into her eyes, all right?"

No, I can't take this. I don't like to be embraced by strange men. Even if their name is Greyeyes. I feel sick.

How about something edible? Oh, what wonderful shapes are appearing before my eyes! A white haze adorns my field of vision with the most diverse patterns and is gradually transformed into darkness.

After a while, I perceive excited voices. Where am I? Where is the dissonant chanting coming from? Am I at home? Thousands of tiny fire ants are crawling on my legs and arms. I open my eyes. Slowly an image is formed. I sense what has just happened. My sight gets clearer. Soon I recognize the face with the Browneyes above me.

"She's coming to again."

"Oh, thank God!" Charley is scrambling. "Child, what are you doing? A glass of water! Fast!"

Charley lifts up my head and puts a glass of water to my mouth. The cool liquid runs down my esophagus and revives my senses.