

**Mother Michael goes to heaven**

Lilla Szász

*Happy families are all alike; every  
unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.*

Lev Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*



Monica comes from a family from the countryside. Until the age of 23 she lived an “absolutely normal life” with her alcoholic father, brother and grandmother. Her mother died when she was young. Her father regularly abused her and spent the family’s money on alcohol.

The year when she became 23 was the turn point in her life. Until that year Monica had a long term relationship, which - she wished could have ended up in a marriage with children. She got to know by chance that her boyfriend was regularly visiting whores and making contact with other girls through chat. Once she could read a mail where he made an appointment of a date with a girl. Monica went to the place and she got her man with the girl there. The relationship ended as well as Monica’s faith in “good life”.





Becoming a prostitute was her revenge. When Michael, the gay prostitute picked her up in a bar out of pity, Monica was already a heavy drinker making love with every man who paid her a drink. She made everything for a drink or a cigarette. She said she loved sex; her “job” didn’t bother her. At that time Michael lived with Small-Michael, another gay prostitute and also a drunkard. Michael picked them up in nearby bars; after a while he did not let them out on the street, as they were too conspicuous. The three of them covered the whole sexual market: they could receive clients with all needs and sexual orientation. Finally Michael could not cope with his own jealousy and Small-Michael’s excessive drinking and they split. Monica stayed in the flat with Michael. By that time Michael had enough of sex and quit. He continued to “advertise” Monica but he has never worn women’s clothes, and never received clients again. He looked for a civil job. Monica was in love with him for a while. Michael never loved her as a woman; they only had a sexual affair once; they are more like a brother and sister.





Michael called me on Saturday and told me that Monica is 17-week pregnant. She didn't notice that she was pregnant. She didn't even pay attention to the fact that 4 months passed without having a period. She had aches in her stomach, so she went to the doctor. The doctor told her the bad news.

"Do you have children Lilly?" – Michael asked me.

"No, I don't" – I answered.

"Don't you want one?" – he asked.

Finally they could arrange to have the baby aborted with a special permission regarding the fact that Monica's pregnancy was too advanced. She had to stay in a hospital for a week while Michael was desperate about her missing income.



The two of them had many scandals in the house. The old ladies were bribing them, told that unless they give money or cigarette they will call the police. Finally they decided to sell the flat and they had to move to another. They moved to a worse district but a bigger flat. It was an ugly block of flats in Budapest slums, but as the house was bigger nobody cared what the neighbours were doing. Katherine, an overweight widower was working in the small tobacco shop in the corner of the house. This is where Michael met her and they started a relationship. Michael never loved her, never desired her, but Katherine cared about him. She paid all their bills, the mortgage, with one condition: Monica should leave. Michael promised her everything, but he didn't have the heart to put Monica out on the street, even when Monica was almost always drunk and had no work at all. Michael was begging her to stop, he was breathalysing her every day but it had no use. Finally he decided to lock Monica in the flat, forbid Katherine to visit him; he decided to visit her instead whenever she wanted. Monica was crying and drinking all day long, she tried to make contact with her family but nobody cared about her.

During this time Michael took in the flat three other guys "purely with business purpose" – as he said. John, the drag queen, Alexander, a gay boy who escaped from the orphanage and making big money from gay prostitution in a park of Budapest and George, a boy who split with his man and had neither flat nor job. The flat looked like a disaster: bottles, butts, clothes were lying all around. Nobody wanted to work, finally there wasn't enough money for food. Michael regularly visited Katherine to get money from her, but somehow she got to know what was going on in the flat and she threatened Michael that unless he gets rid of the guests she will not pay anymore. Meanwhile Michael got together with Alexander and he sent away the other two guys. He sent Monica away to Germany to work in a brothel where she could earn 100 EUR a day regardless of the number of her clients. She was still drinking and Monica was worried she would get home with no money. So Monica went to the brothel and as Michael felt, she drank all her money away and she didn't pick up their phone. Michael and Alexander had no money to pay the bills.







Monica came back from Germany and by the time she arrived Michael was so angry on her that he had all the door locks changed so that Monica could not get in. Monica was calling her but he would not pick the phone up, he called Monica's only relative to care about her – the grandmother and said: "take this beauty and admire her". The poor grandma was so upset she nearly got a heart attack. Michael also gave away Monica's favourite pet dog. When Monica got to know the news she went to a brothel first and then to a client where she left all her belongings and personal papers. She hasn't found her things since then. She was again worried that she was pregnant; in Germany the condom was torn many times, the Germans always bought the cheapest condoms.

At last the grandma took her to her flat but with a condition that she doesn't stay too long. She was worried because she lived in a communal flat where the number of people living in one flat was limited. Soon one of the neighbours reported that there was an extra person in the flat and the grandma got the notice that Monica had to move. Monica was lying in bed smoking and wasn't willing to speak to anyone. Whenever I called her she was crying and repeating the same things, she felt that what Michael was doing was unfair, she had much money in the flat the flat was theirs and not his. The grandma got tenser from the situation, she and the aunt (who also lived there) were hollering with Monica. The aunt was also an ex-whore, at present she worked in a public toilet as a toilet Madame. She offered a similar job to Monica – she had had to give toilet paper to toilet visitors – but Monica rejected her offer.

Meanwhile, Michael and Alexander experienced that joy was not joy; Alexander cheated on Michael, he was visiting the park he worked before and he made businesses without condom. He spent all the earned money on weed and alcohol. Michael was shouting at him, but no use.

Finally Michael changed his mind and took Monica back, who went back drunk and Michael dragged her hair and pulled her through the whole flat, he kicked her wherever he could; Monica could barely move after. The two “excluded” – Alexander and Monica made their match; while Michael was away they drank and smoked weed and planned how they would mess up with Michael. Michael's thirtieth birthday ended bloodily, Alexander threw a chair at him, the chair broke the window, Michael stepped in the glass, injured his sole and everything was bloody. He broke Alexander's nose, Alexander called the police and reported the case. A week later Michael escaped to the Netherlands. He said his brother could get a job for him. He came back less than a month later.

Alexander and Michael's relationship got even worse; Alexander continuously made sex without condom. Once Michael hit Alexander so hard that he ended up in hospital; Monica stung Michael in the eyes and Alexander broke Michael's nose. When I asked the reason for the fight they were smiling mysteriously and said nothing. Michael decided to go back to the Netherlands; Alexander couldn't work for a while. Monica was worried that she is pregnant again.



Michael went to Netherlands to work in a meat producing plant. He went there with Katharine's daughter, Barbara. Nobody knew they would go together. Katharine had to look after Monica and Alexander. By that time she knew everything from Michael. They hated each other so much; Monica and Alexander couldn't bear the sight of her. They both went to an AIDS test and they were happy to see that none of them has Hepatitis or AIDS. They were pledging they would never do sex without condom again.

Alexander went to work in Vienna. "Now I can work as a man. I don't have to wear women's clothes there" -he told me happily. Monica stayed in the flat alone. She was drunk as usual and worried that she was pregnant. Michael thought she was pregnant from Alexander.





Monica showed me her phone the other day. Her regular guests were saved in her phone as *Michaels*. *Strangling Michael*: who strangles Monica with her own bra: this is how he can have orgasm. *Head standing Michael*: who fucks Monica while she is standing on her head. *Big gipsy Michael*: “he is really smoky” – says Monica. There was a funny story when Monica was in Germany. Big gipsy Michael was so desperate she wasn’t in Hungary that Michael decided to replace her and put on her clothes. He fucked with *big gipsy Michael* instead of Monica and even this illusion was better for *big gipsy Michael* than nothing. *Small dick Michael*: who gave Monica photocopied money. Monica nearly cried when she noticed the fake banknote. *Deep throat Michael*: who pushes his dick so deep in Monica’s throat that Monica can’t swallow for a while after. *Flower Michael*: a nice old man who always brings flowers to Monica whenever he visits her. *Capital red letter Michael*: a rich diplomat who works in the Ukraine and who always brings presents to Monica. She already got a kimono, a perfume, and an earring from him.





Alexander only mentioned one case when he had to drink beer and pee in the client's mouth. He looked at me sadly and said: "you can not imagine Lilly how sick people you can meet in this industry" "sometimes I have no erection and the clients want the money back. I give the half of the money back I never give back the full amount. Of course Viagra can help but not always."

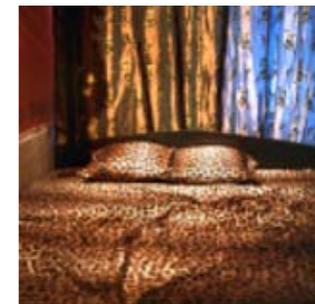
Alexander has nine brothers and sisters. All of them grew up in orphanage; five of them are in prison. His father is very ill "you can look in his throat Lilly". He knows his parents but he hasn't been at home for three years now. He feels sorry for them; his living standard is much better than theirs. "At least we have a bathroom here Lilly, even if the toilet doesn't work".













Michael realised that he can not live without Alexander and Alexander realised he can not live without Michael and both came back. Alexander made a lot of money in Vienna, he bought a bracelet to Monica, a thick golden necklace to Michael. Meanwhile Monica had been kicked out from the flat again, Barbara and Katherine were the ones to kick her out while the boys were away. She went to the grandma again where she couldn't stay but fortunately Michael and Alexander came back home and took her back with the condition that she stops drinking. She went back and she fell in love with the shop assistant, who –according to Michael – had no teeth and was really smelly. But Monica was in love; she was flying three meters above the earth. She looked much better than before. She put on some weight and laughed a lot.





Michael found a “good civil job”; he became a servant in a university canteen. He serves the students. He can bring much food home, they needn’t have to worry about food anymore. But he is really jealous on Alexander. Sometimes he enters the room while Alexander is working and makes a scandal and kicks out the client from the flat. He can’t stand seeing Alexander making love with others; he can’t stand the feeling that Alexander can have orgasm with others even if Alexander can’t have orgasm with anybody except him. “God, give him AIDS!”- he often shouts. But they need the money and everybody knows that they can’t stop now. They even take upon clients they wouldn’t Monica for example had to sniff cocaine with a client; the client would not pay her otherwise.

Monica has a new boyfriend. Since Michael works in the canteen they have so much food that they can give food to others in the house. Monica often takes food to an old man who became her lover. He likes her, Monica doesn’t care.

Alexander wants to start a new life and quit his present “job”. He wants to become a singer. He sits in front of the computer the whole day and plays karaoke. He wants to forget forever that once he had to dress in women’s clothes. He hates dressing up as a woman. “I am a normal man Lilly” – he tells me. He tells me a lot about his life. Since the age of 13 he knows that he is gay. He had girlfriends but “it didn’t work as it should have”. He can’t stand the sight of women’s breasts but he adores women’s vaginas.



Michael also had girlfriends. He had a “beautiful blond” police woman. They ran a brothel together with her. The woman had a car accident and died. Monica says Michael even has a child from this woman.

Alexander found a gipsy band where he could become a singer. He is really happy. He promised he would not smoke weed and will move more if he succeeds. They all prepare for Xmas. Michael’s mother will join them for Xmas.

I visited them after Xmas. Two new people moved there: Andrea and her six year old son Alex. Andrea lived in a flat-brothel with six other sexual workers but four of them moved abroad and the rental fee would have been too high for her so she moved to Michael’s flat. Alex is a nice silent boy; he was playing with his sword he got for Xmas.







At Xmas Eve Michael and Alexander had a huge fight. Jealousy was the reason of course. Alexander left him, he went to the park where he worked previously, he smoked some weed, drank and finally he ended up in a shelter house for homeless people where he lost all his papers. Michael found him the next day and he took him back home. They seemed to be in peace now. Monica hasn't drunk for two weeks (she smokes weed instead). We were talking about sex and Andrea's breasts (according to Michael it weighs six kilos). I got a nice Playboy pen set from them and I wished them a much better and peaceful year then the previous one was.

Michael died on 24 February 2010. He committed suicide. He couldn't live the life he had lived. It turned out that he carefully planned his act. Nothing or nobody could bring him back from that decision -it became the answer and the relief from everything – and perhaps for him it was. But for those left behind apart from the loss it leaves a series of unanswerable questions. My friend David wrote me these lines when I told him about Michael's death: "Your duty now is to show the work and go on doing what you do - again my old friend Sam says it all 'I can't go on, I'll go on" - there is hopefully no other choice."





I met Michael, Monica and Alexander when I started photographing prostitutes. They were the only ones in this much closed community with whom we became friends; by time very good ones.

They lived and worked together in a flat and this was the place where Michael committed suicide on 24 February, 2010. His death was not because of or linked to the life they lived. Not at all. He loved Alexander. He loved him and wished to live happily with him.

Unfortunately Alexander – a boy, who lived the majority of his life in an orphanage and after as a gay prostitute – has never been capable to love. Never knew about intimacy. He used Michael but never loved him. Michael was the chaser and Alexander always wanted to escape.

Michael depended on his love, all his life depended on it; Alexander couldn't stop playing his small games.

Michael's act seems very logical to me now. He carefully planned his act. Nobody or nothing could bring him back from that decision -it became the answer and the relief from everything – and perhaps for him it was.

Vronsky broke spine of his beloved horse as he broke the spine of Anna. Pietro Crespi committed suicide when Amaranta refused to marry him. Amaranta, whose name, ironically, contains the Spanish verb amar, herself is incapable of love, wanting only those men she cannot have while rejecting those whom she can.

The life of Michael and his family is not usual. But the problem that finally led to Michael's death is. The ques-

tions that came up because and after the death of Michael to me were: "could it happen to anybody?" And I realised that similar situations were and have been in my private and in my friends' lives.

What I can do now is to go on, and there is no other choice than learning from Michael and his meaningless death.

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