

A stylized illustration of a woman with long, dark red hair, wearing a green sequined dress, a large white necklace, and a bracelet. She is holding a martini glass with a green olive. The background is dark green with bokeh light effects.

NATALIYA LANG

Who Can Make
Me Happy?

An illustration of a woman with long, dark red hair, wearing a green sequined dress, a pearl necklace, and a pearl bracelet. She is holding a martini glass with a green olive. The background is dark green with bokeh light effects.

NATALIYA LANG

Who Can Make
Me Happy?



Nataliya Lang

Who Can Make Me Happy?

BookRix GmbH & Co. KG
81371 Munich

Chapter 1

One night, Annett and her friends were coming back from a disco. It was already past four o'clock in the morning and the sleeping city streets appeared bleak and pale to her. The street lights were slowly fading in the veil of dawn, quietly giving way to the relentless dullness of everyday life. Unashamedly, it fought for and gained a greater foothold with every passing minute, just as though it was proud of being able to immerse the streets in a grey light.

Annett didn't like this time of day. She thought it was the time of suicidal people and those unlucky ones who had somehow gone astray in their life. They were the only ones roaming the streets now, tormented by the pain of bitter disappointment, while all the others were at home, happily dreaming in their soft beds.

"If you constantly replace your own wishes with those of others, you're killing yourself, whether you know it or not," Annett thought. "You can't deceive your own soul by pretending; this will only soothe it for a little while. Like a mirror, the soul displays all of our most personal goals, and when we ignore them, the soul begins to suffer. That's why suicidal people are wandering about, trying to get a grip on the torment in their souls. But there is no cure other than to stop living by other people's rules."

She had found this idea in a women's magazine where experienced psychologists were looking at the main reasons for being unhappy with one's life. As it turned out, the main reasons were not poverty, illness, or unemployment - the main culprit was "strange" patterns of behaviour, imposed on people by their immediate surroundings during childhood, causing a kind of dependency.

It is hard to defend your point of view when all those around you maintain the contrary, judge you exclusively by

their own preferences, and insist on their own idea of what the future should hold.

Those who are particularly accommodating will try to please everybody; and when the wish to be liked is greater than the wish to be authentic, they become dependent upon other people's opinions. This is not just their own fault, though, but also that of their parents who forced them to obey too much as children. Even as adults, such people subconsciously still live according to other people's opinions, the only small difference being that these opinions no longer come from their parents but from the society in which they live.

And then, out of the blue, discontentment sneaks up, becomes a long-term companion, and totally blocks out all the other feelings. But in actual fact, it doesn't really arrive out of the blue. It's been around forever, lying dormant somewhere within, not making itself known.

There is a price to be paid for everything in life, and discontentment is the price you pay for a weakness of character, so to speak. It's the price you pay for a life lived not by your own rules, but those of other people.

Annett wasn't like that. She didn't want to concern herself with things that didn't suit her, just to please others. She wanted to fight for her right to be happy; she wanted to follow her own path and not some path that others were trying to prescribe for her.

"I am young, pretty, and smart," Annett thought, gazing out into the translucent darkness through the taxicab window. "I wasn't born to let pointless office work ruin my life every week from Monday to Friday. I want to live a carefree life and really enjoy every minute of it, but having to earn a living doesn't leave much room for lightheartedness."

Annett had been working for several years as a junior assistant in the accounts department of a small company but every day, she had to force herself to go there again. A

never-ending stack of invoices to be written and sent out, small bills to be paid, documents to be copied and prepared for archiving - it all seemed so pointless and unnecessary to her. This work didn't provide even the slightest satisfaction; its dullness just tired her out.

The days were all alike: nothing happened, nothing changed, no conversations and no encounters. The one thing that varied was the size of the pile of papers on her desk, which was sometimes smaller, sometimes larger. Annett used the size of the pile to gauge how successful business was that month. If her desk was overflowing, she put the invoices on the floor, where she stacked them against the wall according to their priority.

The accounts department didn't have room for her, and so she had been forced to accept that, temporarily, she would have to work in the storeroom, which had been furnished with a desk, a chair, a computer, and a printer. "Temporarily", as it turned out, appeared to be a flexible concept, since this was Annett's third year in there.

The room had neither window nor daylight; there was just a big hot desk light. By the end of the working day, this was so hot that it would burn your fingers. Plants couldn't thrive here, either, and after some unsuccessful attempts at making her workplace look more cheerful by providing fresh flowers, Annett gave up and instead tacked a full-size poster of a brightly decorated Christmas tree on the wall.

Annett had loved Christmas ever since she was a little girl, and like a little girl she believed with all her heart that Christmas had the power to make even the most secret of wishes come true.

Annett had an abundance of those wishes!

* * *

After working for some time as an assistant, Annett realized that she would never earn much money in this kind

of job. Her salary was much too low to take her even one step closer to the lifestyle she had always dreamt of. To get there, she would need three or four of those salaries, and she was looking at gross earnings here, not even allowing for all the deductions such as pension insurance and the like.

Annett was not content with driving a used car, living in a small flat, and going on holiday to the seaside just once a year, which seemed to be the norm.

Annett regarded these as mere trifles - she dreamt of a fairytale life with fireworks of pleasant surprises and experiences. Naturally, work did not really fit into this concept!

All those incomparable Hollywood movies provided Annett's imagination with quite another way of attaining the happiness that was waiting for her. She pictured an admirer who, in exchange for the gifts of youth, beauty, and tenderness that she would give him, would immerse her in a world of sensuousness and passion, full of pleasure and luxury, where all her wishes, representing her life's purpose, would indeed come true.

Annett had no intention of being one of those hapless individuals who spend their entire life playing some kind of role to suit someone else; and so she decided that, come what may, she would not relinquish her dreams regardless of however unattainable they might seem. She had long lost interest in anything that had no immediate connection to her future happiness, and she preferred her fantasy life to her real life. In her imagination, even her little old Citroen, purchased five years before from a used-car dealer, transformed into an expensive open-top convertible, given to her as a present by an admirer on the anniversary of their first meeting.

Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if all our wishes would come true...

Annett decided to look for a wealthy admirer in her favourite haunts. Mostly nightclubs and discos, these were places where she could present herself in all her glory and without having to worry about the weather.

Usually, Annett went out to have a good time by herself, rarely with friends. She tried to stay clear of boisterous company, since those evenings always ended in the same way. In the morning, a headache and dark rings under the eyes tended to bear testimony to the great quantity of alcoholic beverages that had flown so generously the night before. She did not want to waste her time with these kinds of pointless encounters that only depleted her energy and did nothing to bring her closer to her secret goals.

Annett was also quite disinterested in "generally held opinions"; she felt that they not only put her under duress but also destroyed her individuality. She didn't want to sink without a trace in the midst of the great mass of people, thinking and behaving just like everybody else. She wanted to emphasize her individuality and her brilliance at all costs because she assumed that those would open up for her a way of accessing the magical world of her dreams.

If Annett had been solely interested in an admirer's financial status, she could have long fulfilled her wish for a life of luxury. But money alone was not enough for her. After spending some time pondering her idea of an ideal man, she added some more criteria to complement his good financial standing.

A man should be generous (how else could he give her all those presents?), attractive (after all, she herself was pretty, too), considerate (that's important for a family life), good in bed (doesn't every woman dream of this?), and, most importantly, he had to be smart (so that he would understand that all of the above were simply essential).

However, Annett was disappointed to have to reject a lot of men lately. Most of those she had met along the way didn't even fulfil one half of her criteria. Either the admirer's

financial limits were quickly reached or there was nothing they could have a conversation about, or by morning, the guy didn't seem attractive anymore, or he'd been really selfish in bed.

Annett had considered her criteria thoroughly and for a long time, and she'd reached the conclusion that she couldn't really do without any of them. She wanted a man who incorporated all of those, without exception, and was not prepared to settle for less. Otherwise, what was the point of all this talk about leading a happy life by one's own rules?

* * *

Annett spent practically every Friday and Saturday evening at various clubs and discos and totally immersed herself in the glittery nightlife.

Although she frequented a variety of places, she didn't really have a particular preference for any one of the clubs. The ever-changing audience and the similarity of the music made all of those places practically interchangeable, which is why she usually didn't decide until the last minute where to go.

She knew quite a few people on the club circuit; people with whom she could exchange empty phrases, crack jokes, and drink cocktails. She couldn't call them friends though, since they were all just out for themselves.

Men looked at her with desire, wishing for a fleeting conquest. Women regarded her as a rival and envied her pretty much everything. They were most of all put out by Annett's effortless ability to attract men who, as though in a state of hypnosis, were unable to take their eyes off of her.

Whenever another admirer started to prowl around Annett, the women standing at the bar would whisper: "Is she covered in honey? Is that why they are all so stuck on her?"

Secretly, they all wished that Annett wouldn't even come to the club. They wished she would suddenly lose her job and so wouldn't feel like going out celebrating for a while; or that her taxi had a crash, and she would be forced to spend weeks in hospital.

But those wishes were just the product of her rivals' exuberant imagination; they had nothing to do with reality. In real life, it was quite sufficient when someone accidentally tipped a glass of red wine on Annett's dress, or when the hairdresser had been somewhat overenthusiastic and had cut her fringe too short.

The women in the club thought that without Annett being around, they would have more choice, allowing them to choose from amongst the men instead of the men choosing them. But when Annett was there they felt that the men paid less attention to them, which is why they gave Annett the blame for their lack of success.

Annett, on the other hand, didn't blame any lack of success on anyone else; in fact, she never made such a connection. She simply followed her idea of happiness and hoped she would recognize it when it appeared in front her.

In her quest for financial ease, she had no intention of scattering her efforts in all directions, as some of her acquaintances were doing. They cut themselves off from normal day-to-day life and thought only of the distant future. They took out all manner of insurance policies to ward off future disasters or ensure a better pension; took out loans to purchase a flat so that they wouldn't have to pay rent; or bought up shares that were in free-fall in the hope that, one day soon, they would increase in value again.

Annett felt that such investments would only tie her down. All she needed was a life partner who would provide her with all of the above and, by doing so, would become the happiness she so greatly desired. This seemed to her to be the most simple and effective solution. Why waste your

time on insignificant details when you can obtain the lot in one go?

* * *

Putting her plan into operation, Annett didn't realize that, quite often, she went overboard with her flirting. She tried to check out every man to see how he would measure up in respect of her criteria, and she often got in other women's way, which clearly made her a rival. And so the other women, while putting up with her in their clubs and pretending to get along with her, didn't like her at all and tried their best to keep her at bay.

Some of them kept trying to find fault with Annett and would endeavour to mention any flaws at the most "unsuitable" moments possible. Others tried to imitate her dress style in the hopes of adopting the fashion sense of a winner. However, when this did not work due to their own inherent lack of style, they grew even more angry and resentful.

The only thing no one tried to imitate was her style of dancing, even though Annett felt that this, in particular, was what made her attractive to men. Dancing was her great passion, her outlet, enabling her to express her innermost being through movement.

Annett had never learned to dance because she considered dancing lessons a waste of time.

"I dance with my heart and soul," she used to say all the time. "I don't need to learn any moves; they would only limit me."

While dancing, Annett was entirely unselfconscious and paid no attention to anyone else. The music seemed to engulf her and become one with her before, in the truest sense of the word, moving her. The movements seemed to happen spontaneously and without effort, just as though each melody would set off a particular stored program.

Every time she stepped onto the dance floor, a crowd would assemble to watch her. Her eccentric and unpredictable way of dancing shocked the entire club.

"I guess I must look like a star," she thought, full of admiration for herself. "They simply can't take their eyes off of me!"

Which was quite true: everyone watched Annett when she was dancing; no one ignored her. One or two admired the way she looked and her well-proportioned body, others admired her self-confidence and natural skill. But some just shook their head and fell about laughing at the way she danced.

In fact, one could only call it dancing because it happened to music and followed a rhythm. The movements themselves were reminiscent of morning exercises, a fitness studio workout, or even a Russian folk dance called casatchok: an endless sequence of squats, sidesteps, and leaps (up as well as sideways), all accompanied by a skilfully executed variety of facial expressions.

No one else at the club ever danced with such abandon. All the others kind of jerked along with the music, vaguely moving their legs or shrugging their shoulders. Annett, on the other hand, gave a veritable theatrical performance that, had it been part of the act of a famous comedian, would have been a good source of revenue.

Often, men stepped onto the dance floor to dance near Annett, inspired by her spontaneity and joyfulness. Thrilled to be surrounded by the smiles on their faces and the excited looks they gave her, she was reassured time and again of her own irresistibility.

The men themselves hoped that they would be able to avoid the verbal barrier that usually made them bashful, and that, by acting this way, they would playfully manage to get closer to the most beautiful and extravagant young woman at the disco.