



IRENE ROZDOBUDKO

THE LOST
BUTTON

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Glagoslav Publications

The Lost Button
By Irene Rozdobudko

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*The translator dedicates this translation to
George and Nina Woskob, great friends and ardent
supporters of all things Ukrainian*

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A NOTE ON IRENE ROZDOBUDKO

Journalist, poet, translator, and novelist Irene Rozdobudko was born in 1962 in Donetsk in the Eastern and mostly Russian-speaking part of Ukraine. She completed her education as a journalist at Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University. One should note that journalists in Ukraine take a considerable number of classes in literature as part of their curriculum. She worked first at a journalist in Donetsk after completing her studies and moved to Kyiv in 1988 where she took a position at the newspaper Rodoslav, as a copy editor of the scholarly and literary journal Suchasnist, as a reviewer for channels 1 and 3 of the National Ukrainian Radio Company, as a reviewer for the newspaper The Ukrainian News, as Deputy Editor of the glossy magazine Natali, as the editor-in-chief of the journal Caravan of History: Ukraine, and as a journalist for the magazine The Academy. She turned to writing prose fiction in her late thirties. Her first book, a detective novel, *A Trap for the Firebird* (2000), was initially published under the title *The Corpses* and republished later under its original title in 2007. It received second place in the national Coronation of the Word competition in Ukraine and was an immediate popular success. This launched her amazingly productive career as a fiction writer. That was followed by a flurry of publishing activity over the next twelve years, including the novels *He: The Morning Cleaning Man* (2005), *The Lost Button* (2005), *Twelve, or the Upbringing of a Woman in Conditions Not Suitable for Life* (2006), *Withered Flowers Get Tossed Out* (2006), *The Last Diamond of Milady* (2006), *Pascal's Amulet* (2007), *The Lives of Prominent Children* (2007), *When Dolls Come to Life* (2007), *Olenium* (2007), *Escort to Death* (2007), *Reformulation* (2007), *Two Minutes of Truth* (2008), *Everything I Wanted Today* (2008), *Playing with Beads* (2009), *Crossing the Darkness* (2010), *I Know That You Know that I Know* (2011), and *If* (2012). Her recent book *Travels without Sense and Moralizing* (2011)

returns to her roots as a journalist and is a hybrid work in the style of New Journalism. Ms. Rozdobudko is a master of the detective novel and psychological thriller. She is one of the most popular writers in Ukraine today and writes in a lively, engaging style that makes her works accessible to a wide reading audience. She has also published two books of poetry in Russian, and several of her novels have been translated into Russian. The novel *The Lost Button* is appearing here in its entirety in English translation for the first time. A taut psychological thriller that keeps the reader transfixed, it received first place in the Coronation of the Word competition in 2005 and subsequently was made into a feature film.

The Lost Button begins with the story of a young student scriptwriter's encounter with a mysterious femme fatale actress by the name of Liza at a vacation resort in the Carpathian Mountains in Soviet Ukraine in the 1970s. Unable to let go of his love after getting lost with her during a storm in the woods for one beautiful and memorable night, the young man's fascination with the actress becomes an obsession for him after the end of their brief liaison. It nearly leads to his destruction. She coolly rebuffs him when fate places him in her class as one of her students, but he does meet her again many years later, at a point in time when he is a successful screenwriter and she has a grown daughter. The novel is unique in the way that with palpable psychological tension it traces the story over three decades of three intertwined fates from the diaristic perspective of each character at different stages of their lives.

The liner notes to the original edition of the novel put it aptly: "...great happiness or great tragedy can begin from the smallest detail, from a button, that is so easy to lose, but which you can search for your entire life... *The Lost Button* is a novel about love, devotion, and betrayal. It is about not looking back, but always valuing what you have – now and forever."

-- Michael M. Naydan

The last day of August 2005

...I don't even remember coming home without being slightly tipsy. And probably not just slightly... Since yesterday I felt like someone had sewn a firecracker under my shoulder blade and that I'd just die if I looked at a glass of vodka or cognac. I had no way of quelling my anxiety. I had somehow to drag things out to the end of the workday. On the other hand, I wanted it to last forever. I was afraid to go home. I was afraid to sit at the computer. That's why after two not very onerous lectures in the Institute of Cinematography I went back to my office. I didn't have anything to do there. I could have even worked at home, thinking up endless scenes for advertising videos, but as I already noticed, I was afraid to go home. So I just sat for a while in my office, putting my feet on the desk, and from time to time obliging our office manager Tetyana Mykolaivna to bring me the strongest cup of coffee she could make. I looked out through the window. My stare was so sharp and focused that I saw the tiniest interlacing and furrows on the bark of an old tree that was growing on the other side of the street. I didn't tear my gaze away from those furrows, stuffed with gray cobwebs, and they reminded me of the deep furrows of an old man's face.

Summer was coming to a close. The year was racing to an end. I don't know about other people, but the year ends with the last day of August for me. Maybe because everything in my life seemed to begin in the fall....

I made every effort to turn off my brain, not to get lost in thought. But mentally I had already been in my apartment a

hundred times and made several of my customary movements: I opened the door, took off my sport coat, sat down at the computer, settled myself into a deep black armchair, and clicked the mouse.

Why in truth am I so afraid of doing all this? What's stopping me right now from taking my feet off the table, snatching up my briefcase, jumping into the street, sitting behind the wheel and in about ten minutes firmly pushing open the door of my own apartment? What kind of weights had been strapped to my feet? In time I understood that these "weights" were the fear of not finding anything on the monitor screen. NOTHING at all.

But with considerable fear I thought about a little yellow email icon folder lighting up in the corner of the screen.

And I didn't know what was better: that nothing or the icon folder....

Close to eight o'clock Tetyana Mykolaivna began to cough pathetically at my door. And then, opening it slightly, asked:

"More coffee?"

I knew it was time to go. I stepped out into the street and at first didn't go in the direction of my favorite restaurant, Suok,¹ though I could have... But the urge overwhelmed me on the street, I felt its fever and barely came rushing to my building entryway. Then I was afraid the elevator would suddenly get stuck and I would have to be bored stiff in it for a few endlessly long hours, wondering whether the icon folder was there?...

Thank God that didn't happen, and I tore into the apartment while I was still in motion taking off my sport coat, tossing my shoes and tie every which way. I fell into my black armchair, having more than enough of a fiery look on my face. It would have been interesting what my students who have gotten used to my complete "buttoned down" straight-laced nature would have said?

I held my breath....

...At that time the weather was almost the same. Watermelons rested on the balcony.

¹ Suok is the name of a character in Yuri Olesha's fairytale "Three Fat Men." She is a girl who takes the place of a mechanical doll for a boy.

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Right now there's a thick layer of street dust.

I clicked the button. In the corner a little yellow folder appeared. Everything was the way I had imagined it – and I didn't believe it myself. Really? I clicked it with the mouse. Then I shut my eyes and opened it up.

"I died on the 25th of September 1997....," the first line flashed on the blue background of the monitor.

I shut my eyes again. The cold and darkness shackled me....

PART ONE
DENYS

1.

It happened at the end of August 1977... I had just turned eighteen then. I was dreaming about fame. And I knew it would come. It wasn't about some kind of temporary ascent onto a pedestal in the small space where I lived then. It wasn't about the applause of the audience that forgets you the next day. No. I sensed that some kind of mission was there for me, the mystery of which I needed to solve. But for the time being it was being generated somewhere deep inside me, as though beans had germinated in a damp cheesecloth – we did that kind of experiment in biology classes in school. All thirty-five students grew beans on their window sills, and after a few weeks brought the results to school. I remember well that my sprout was larger than the other ones. It happened a long time ago in the sixth grade. But after my experiments, I understood what and how things develop inside me. And I patiently waited. So patiently that I tried not to call unnecessary attention to myself – while I couldn't care less. For the time being.

I finished school, quite easily got into the scriptwriting program of the Department of Film (my exam film script turned out to be better than the opuses of already experienced and much older prospective students, and they kept it for a long time in the department as a particularly successful sample). After learning the admission test results, I went for a small vacation to the mountains, to a

tourist hostel at the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. In fact, this was a cinematographer's hostel to which all my future classmates went – an announcement about unused student passes hung in the hall of the Institute. We didn't know each other well yet. We were united by the common spirit of the recent exams, during which we all crowded around jovially by the doors of the classrooms, clamorously saluting each lucky individual.

All this was behind us. We arrived at the tourist hostel little by little, without making any arrangements beforehand with each other, and ardently reveled at each familiar face. They put us up in small wooden buildings, and we immediately began to explore the territory, finding out where the dining room, swimming pool, and movie hall were along with the closest *Silpo* general store, where you could buy the cheapest port wine.²

We felt we were grown up and experienced. We tried to communicate with each other in a loosey-goosey way and uttered the names of our idols like good buddies. We gave each other a Western name, that's why I was immediately christened "Dan." My roommate, accordingly, was called Max.

Dan and Max – two cool guys, the future geniuses quickly ran over to the *Silpo* general store and loaded up on several bottles of strong "ink." We drank like fish since our grade school days and... like juveniles – nothing more expensive than cheap port wine. To be truthful, a little later I was sorry I had gone there....

The mountains turned deep blue in the distance, and it seems they were glimmering, enveloped by the torn white silk of an evening veil. And I was forced to sit on a hard bed, chugging the port wine and listening to the chitchat of my acquaintances. When we all started to get sick (no one, of course, complained and we tried our best to maintain our dignity), we began to take our turns going out "for a

2 "777" wine. An inexpensive high alcohol content (18%) wine made in the former USSR and now in Russia and Ukraine.

breath of fresh air." I finally managed to tear myself away from the smoky room and, already no longer in a hurry, to stroll along the grounds of the camp.

This was quite a quiet little spot. Or else it appeared that way at the end of the summer. Behind the curtains of the cottages a dusky light shimmered, vacationers were sitting in spots on the verandas, from an open "green" movie hall the sound of the music from a film echoed. It seems like it was the movie *Yesenia*.³ Altogether it was disorder and havoc. Just beyond an old-fashioned fence in pseudo-baroque style, the shaggy black forest murmured alluringly, and from it a powerful wave of freshness and anxiety rolled onto me. It was already quite dark. Simple sculptures of girls with oars and other body builders snowily-whitely shone on both sides of the alleys like ghosts. Almost all the benches were "toothless," and all the lamps "blind." I walked up to the end of the alley, sat down on a bench, and pulled out my cigarettes from my pocket. And nearly right away I noticed the flash of a red glow across from me... If I had not been drunk then, and if, like the wine, the drunken feeling of the euphoria of an entry into a new life had not been playing inside me – nothing would have happened and would not have caused a chain of events that would pursue me my entire life.

But I was drunk. That's why I saw *something*... A silhouette, etched by the light of the moon resembling an incorporeal, empty outline in the total darkness. A woman was smoking a cigarette in a long mouthpiece. She slowly raised the small red glow to her invisible lips, inhaled, and for an instant the silvery smoke filled her entire outline, as though it were sketching her body from the inside.

And then, with the last small cloud of smoke, it, this body, once again melted into the darkness.

Jeez!

³ A Mexican melodramatic film from 1974 that was very popular as a rental video in Soviet times. See: http://www.videoguide.ru/card_film.asp?idFilm=17763.

I strained my eyes and comically waved my hand before my nose, chasing away the apparition.

“What, you got scared?”

The voice was husky, but so sensuous that I got goose bumps over my entire body, as though the woman had uttered something obscene (even later I couldn't get used to her voice: whatever she talked about – the weather, books, movies, food – everything sounded sweetly-obscene, like candor).

“Well no... I'm fine...,” I mumbled.

However, the damp night and the appearance of the mountain summits that were blackening in the distance, and this little red light, and the wind – so saturated and fresh – sobered me up. I tried to get a good look at the woman who was sitting across from me. No use. Maybe at that moment I was already completely blinded by her. A similar thing happens, for example, with mothers who aren't able to honestly judge the beauty of their own child, or with an artist, for whom the most recent canvas seems to be a work of genius.

“Are you staying at this resort house?”

I couldn't have thought up anything more idiotic to say! It's the same as if you were to ask a passenger after the plane takes off, “Are you also flying in this plane?” But I itched to hear that voice again.

“Do you like it here?” I continued.

The glow flashed even brighter (she took a drag) and slid down (she lowered her hand).

“Do you know where I like it?” I heard (goose bumps! goose bumps!) after quite a long pause. “There.”

The tiny glow of her cigarette flicked in the direction of the forest.

“I haven't been there yet...,” I said. “I arrived just today....”

“Strange!” The fire in an instant flew into a bush and went out. “Let's go! There's a hole here in the fence....”

By the rustle of her clothing I understood that she had gotten up and took a step in my direction.

“Give me your hand!”

I stretched into the darkness and stumbled on a chilly palm. I got goose bumps again. Her hand was hearty, not soft.

“E-eh, you’re completely drunk!” She started to laugh.

I got up, trying to keep steady. We were the same height. I was able to discern something more or less definite: an elongated figure, a dark, possibly black shawl that covered her shoulders... But nothing more. And I also could smell her scent.

Back then I still didn’t know the scent of expensive perfumes – they got them from under their skirt on the sly, girls I knew for the most part used the overwhelming Scheherazade or the highly concentrated Lily of the Valley brands. And here suddenly a wave of a fragrant aroma – bitter and dizzying – wafted in on me. Involuntarily I clenched my teeth and pressed her hand more tightly. Giving in to her will, I swiftly moved toward a dead end where the fence stopped. There really was a big black hole in it, which I didn’t notice right away. Without letting go of her hand, walking after her, I bent my head down sharply, and we ended up on the other side of the tourist hostel on a wide plain that was overgrown with tall grass. We walked, buried in it up to our knees. Again I tried to look over the woman who had commandingly led me by the hand like a little boy. Her long black shawl covered her from head to toe, the length of her hair was also unclear to me – it flowed with her shawl and in full sight was just as black and long. Not even once did she turn back toward me. It seemed she was completely indifferent to whomever she was dragging behind her.

I strove not to fall and not to lag behind, so I began to look beneath my feet more often, and the wild vegetation reminded me of the sea that rolls powerful, fragrant

waves and just about drags you to a depth, from which you can't swim away.

My head was topsy-turvy. The night, a thin crescent of the moon above clouds, mountains, goose bumps all over my body, intoxication, this unknown woman... Everything seemed to be phantasmagoric. I cherished these kinds of adventures. I couldn't imagine what would happen further! Maybe wild sex in a clearing in the forest? Who was this woman? Why and where was she taking me? How old was she, what does she look like? What does she want? We walked up to the slope of the mountain covered in trees that rose above the clearing like columns next to the entrance of a pagan temple. The gloom again swallowed her, and from the forest the particular thick scent of resin wafted. The woman led me beyond the fence of the first stand of large pine trees, from which the forest began, and leaned up with her back against one of the trees.

"Wonderful, isn't it?"

I barely caught my breath and looked around. Really, it was wonderful! It was as if we had ended up in the bowels of some great living organism, some fairytale fish. The trees were its twisted muscles, it breathed through the treetops, and somewhere inside, in the depth, slowly, its heart beat. I even could hear this rhythmic, uneasy sound.

"It's alive. Do you sense it? During the day it's all not quite like this..."

She clicked her cigarette lighter and for an instant I saw the semicircle of her cheek and the flash of her black pupil. Then once again the red glow began to dance in front of me.

"What's your name?" I asked, persistently thinking how this strange adventure might end.

"What's the difference? Especially now..."

The red glow traced an arc and disappeared. And again I sensed that I had been taken by the hand and dragged somewhere higher. We walked so quickly, as though we were escaping after being chased. I heard her intermittent

breathing. At a certain moment things got uncomfortable for me. Branches of trees that I didn't manage to brush aside from time to time smacked me in the face.

Finally, we made our way even higher and stopped. Everything repeated – her merging with the tree, the red glow.

This time with wonder I looked below: we had come out of the maw of the beast, and in the distance the outlines of the closest village were being painted by vague little lights, intersected by the golden line of the river. From here, the thick tops of trees that grew below seemed like clustered storm clouds, along which you could walk as though on dry land. I completely came to my senses and breathed avariciously, enjoying the strange taste of the air, which I was able to appreciate just now. Together with this air, rapture filled me. How good it was that I had torn myself away from the stifling room, stumbled upon this woman, and she led me on such a wonderful stroll! I understood that two weeks of my vacation would be wonderful. I turned back, I wanted to thank her....

The glow disappeared. I walked up to the tree where she had just been standing. I had even touched it with my palm. No one there!

“Halloo,” I hailed quietly, “where are you?”

My voice echoed unusually in the darkness. Somewhere not far away a night bird began to flap its wings. I walked around each tree, each bush. A mad thought entered my brain that somewhere she had spread out her shawl, had lain on it and was waiting, so that I'd stumble on her body more quickly.

Then I became angry: what kind of idiotic prank was this?! Then I began to worry whether I could find the way back. And then a little later I inopportunistically recalled that this place was swarming with legends about mermaids, *niavka* river nymphs, *mavka* forest nymphs, *molfar* wizards, and witches....

It was unpleasant enough to go down the mountain myself. The entire time I listened attentively to try to hear the sound of her footsteps nearby. But the forest only breathed deeply and grabbed at me with its stiff fingers. I even fell twice.

Coming out onto a flat clearing, I took a breath and again looked around at the forest. It seemed to me that up above once again the red little glow of her cigarette was breathing. It was observing me like an eye. And maybe, it was laughing....

2.

Confused and dirty I returned to my room where my roommate was already snoring loudly. I fell onto the bed on top of the covers. I took my clothes off and pulled the covers over myself just before dawn when clouds were already turning pink outside the window. I quickly glanced at the mountain. Now it seemed to be brown, as though it were covered in multi-colored patches. We were late for breakfast. I took a long time to clean off my slacks. Max wasn't able to come to his senses after yesterday's drinking bout.

"Where'd you go?" He asked.

"Well, I decided to go for a walk," I waved my hand timidly. I didn't feel like telling anyone at all about my evening adventure on the mountain. I decided to look for last night's companion today. It's true I remembered very little: dark hair, a shawl that blazed behind her shoulders, the outline of a dark-complexioned cheek in the flash of a lighter, a tiny red glow... But there was also the scent – the special scent of her perfume.

In the dining hall I furtively looked over those who were there. Half of the vacationers had already left, each one doing his or her thing – some made their way to the forest for mushrooms, others went to take in the local museums and views. She, in all likelihood, also had already had breakfast and left.

"Who's still here from our group?" I asked Max.

"You already saw everyone!" He was surprised.

"I have in mind in general – from among the film students?" I explained. For some reason, I thought she might be a student from the acting department. Max named several more or less well-known names for me. But all this was not right. We lazily picked at our plates: vermicelli with a moldy sour gherkin, cottage cheese with crème fraîche... The half-empty dining hall that reeked of lime and its blue walls didn't rouse our appetite. Several people were sitting at two neighboring tables. I recognized one gray-haired documentary filmmaker in a tattered jeans jacket (how we used to dream back then of having a foreign rag like that!). He was with his daughter and wife. Three girls were sitting a bit further away. They were exchanging remarks loudly, chortling, and casting a glance first at Max and me, then in the direction of the dour documentary filmmaker. One of the women was smoking. She was quite stout with short hair.

"It looks like we're going to die of boredom here!" Max noted. Though you could go on a three-day trek to the mountains. I saw an ad on a notice board. What do you think about that?"

"I'm not sure yet...."

We somehow sloughed through the vermicelli, and with a certain amount of satisfaction drank up two glasses of cold kefir and stepped out into the sun. I still didn't know Max well enough and I felt like breaking away to go for a walk alone.

"Well, where are you going?" I asked involuntarily.

"I'll take a little snooze," he answered. "And you?"

"I'll go for a walk."

In the morning the grounds of the tourist camp had a completely uninviting look. The sculptures were awful and the gazebos broken. Just unclipped bushes, the tall trees

on both sides of alleys and flowerbeds in various-colored caps of roses were natural and weren't annoying. Despite it all I liked this desolation. I went over to the swimming pool. Several people were walking near it, but no one dared to dive into the greenish water that was covered in duckweed. Most likely it was rainwater and had stood in this concrete trough the entire summer. Along the dark, opaque surface, maple leaves glided along like little boats. I saw her right away. I was worried for no reason that I wouldn't recognize her! She was lying on a striped towel and reading a book. Her hair was really dark and thick – it was gathered into a long ponytail. She was in an open tank suit. Nothing in common with yesterday's nocturnal image of her. And I was sure it was her. I sat down on the opposite end of the swimming pool and began to look her over. To no avail! Again I felt a strange blurriness in my eye – as much as I stared, I couldn't gather a complete image of her. It fell apart like children's blocks. Did she have a nice figure? I contemplated her delicately pink heels that shone in the sun. They seemed like the apples of paradise. Maybe she was just like everyone else. But certainly the meaning of human relations consists of the fact that at some moment "one of everyone" seemingly ends up at the intersection of heavenly rays and becomes the first, the only one of everyone... I saw her in just such a perspective – as though she were an airplane led by two spotlights. The rest of space became dark and uninteresting for me. It made no sense to stare at her so intently anymore. I walked over to her. I made room for myself next to her on the grass and immediately sensed that tart, foreign aroma, except it was much weaker and softer in the morning. She tore her gaze away from the book and looked in my direction. I was not sure if she recognized me, but I understood that the usual manner of getting acquainted won't work here. Should I ask her what she's reading or whether she believes in love at first sight? No, too trite... Quote her a few lines from Baudelaire? Makes no sense... Talk about the weather? No way....

“Don’t get worked up,” she suddenly said to me. “My name is Liza.⁴ Didn’t you want to know that?”

Her voice bared me completely! She turned on her side, propped her chin on her hand, and looked me right in the eyes. The sun shone on her swarthy shoulder, blinding me.

“Where did you disappear?” I asked.

“In general I like to disappear,” she answered and again concentrated on the book. But I already couldn’t live without her voice!

“Maybe we can climb up the mountain?” I suggested. “Or take a trip to town to sit for a bit in a café?”

“Don’t think so. I have enough cafes at home. And it’s too hot on the mountain right now.”

I sat next to her till lunchtime. My friends shouted for me to come to the volleyball court a hundred times, then to the woods, some of the “old-timers” said “hello” to her. From time to time we exchanged a few pleasantries. In general, nothing special. But she comported herself in a regal way. When she tired of my presence, she said:

“That’s it, enough. Go to your friends. Why are you sitting here languishing next to me?”

“Can we see each other in the evening?” I asked her hopefully.

“Where can we escape to from here....”

She didn’t understand me! If I were making a movie, with contentment I’d cut out a couple or three days from this tape to move to the main action right away. I already understood that I’ll be attempting to be worthy of her attention, that we definitely will go up the mountain again and that I’ll try and give her a warm embrace. But what will she do? That wasn’t in my script....

4 Pronounced “Leeza.”

3.

“Do you know who you were watching over all morning?” Max asked after we met in the room before lunch.

I was embarrassed. I didn’t feel like chit-chatting about her. That is – at all.

“That was Elyzaveta Tenetska!”

The name was familiar to me, but I couldn’t remember where I had heard it.

“Really!” Max got more excited. “Remember last year’s Film of the Year youth festival? She got first place for the short *Madness*!”

That’s it! Of course, since ninth grade I’ve been going to that all-night vigil, I gate-crashed it without any invitation with every truth and lie until after I got into prep courses, I finally got the proper admission ticket to go there without any problems. Back then it was tough: at the entrance they checked your pockets for bottles of alcohol (we used to bring port wine in thermoses). Additionally, you needed to have your Communist Youth League ticket with you.

The festival lasted from morning till midnight with short breaks for the jury’s deliberation, during which the tired audience had the opportunity to eat dried sandwiches at the buffet counter of the Palace of Culture and to gulp “nourishing moisture” from our thermoses.

I really liked the movie. It even dazzled me. It was filmed very simply without pretense, without the least hint of any kind of ideology. This was strange, unusual. Discussion of it dragged on for two or three hours. But no one left until the members of the jury heated in debates announced their winners, and the representatives of the cultural sections of the regional committee, the *oblast* committee and the rest of the observers ingloriously abandoned the field of battle, calling out this assemblage “a bacchanalia on the bones of true art.”



Irene Rozdobudko

Called “The Lady Detective of the Ukrainian literature” by the media for her splendid earlier detective books, Irene Rozdobudko has recently burst into book market with a dozen award winning titles ranging from a light absurd comedy to a heavy psychological thriller and quickly claimed her rightful place among masters of modern literature in her native Ukraine.

A graduate of Kyiv National University in journalism, Irene started small, from modest occasional jobs. Her talent for the written word eventually came into fruition when she landed a gig right up her professional alley in one of Kyiv’s major newspapers. At the present time Rozdobudko is an editor-in-chief of a competitive modern magazine. Irene’s artistic brilliance won the author a national prize in literature Coronation of the Word three times. Irene points very skillfully those aspects of human nature that drive decisions and give direction to a person’s life, as well as other people’s destiny. Her cinematographic vision of action and psychologically complicated, delicately worked out characters who have firsthand knowledge of life’s irony and wisdom make her novels perfect for the big screen adaptation as well as for the honourable place on a book shelf of a top quality modern literature devotee.



The taut psychological thriller *The Lost Button* keeps the reader transfixed. It received first place in the Coronation of the Word competition in 2005 and subsequently was made into a feature film. The novel tells the story of young student scriptwriter’s encounter with a mysterious, femme fatale actress named Liza at a vacation resort in the Carpathian Mountains in Soviet Ukraine in the 1970s. Unable to let go of his love after getting lost with her in the woods for one beautiful night, the young man’s fascination with the actress turns into an obsession that changes his life dramatically.

Great happiness or great tragedy can begin from the smallest detail, from a button, that is so easy to lose, but which you can search for your entire life. *The Lost Button*, a drama that ranges in geography from Central Europe to the United States of America, is a novel about love, devotion, and betrayal. It is about not looking back, but always valuing what you have – today and forever.

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