


That was a month ago.

I don't understand what I've done wrong, she said, I try not to take all this personally — I really do — but I don't know how I'm supposed to take it when all a person really wants is to travel to the U.S. for tourist purposes and in order to do that you need to have a visa, which is fine, but then when you come to the embassy with all your documents and wait and wait and wait and then when you finally get to see the counselor all he does is ask you personal questions that have nothing to do with anything at all, I mean, is it any of his business who I live with? — I would say not! — and how would *you* feel if someone that you've never met before just out-of-nowhere asks you if you're married? Can you imagine — “Are you married?” I mean how would *you* answer that question if I asked you, not, of course, that I would ever ask you because I realize that it's none of my business and even if it were my business I still wouldn't ask because...


Actually, I told her, I'm not married. I'm not married at all.

“Caution — the doors are closing! Next stop, Ploschad Nogina. Exit right side...”

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And then I noticed a strange thing: suddenly my life had become inextricably linked to my lessons. My failures became confused grammar. My betrayed hopes became forgotten articles. I lost track of where my own life ended and when the lessons were beginning. I explained grammar using incidents from my childhood: “...*But the glass was so tall. The milk was so high...*!” To show future tense I spoke of weddings; to illustrate the past I described my mother. And as for the present, I explained, condoms were *uncomfortable* whereas love was *inconvenient*. To my surprise I began to laugh sincerely. I stopped not thinking. I drank vodka to wash down the vodka; and still, even in the face of all this, I couldn't make myself throw up....



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“Kitai-Gorod. Exit right side. Change to the Kaluzhsko-Rizhskaya line.”

What was that? People look at each other, confused. Is it some sort of mistake? Where are they? Where are they going? The passengers are at