

Book 6¹/₂. Epilogue

(1)

But I didn't leave.

Even now I don't know why. It had something to do, I suppose, with words. And vodka. And a coin that was still in my wallet. Or maybe it was in answer to the questions that I could not answer: *Could it really be that I was nowhere? And would I really leave without understanding what the Russian Soul was all about? Could I abandon my journey without finding the word that changes and is changed? And besides, even if I did leave, where would I go? Who would receive me?*

But maybe the real reason I stayed was something more logical, yet more difficult to explain: Standing in the metro, the women are lifting their bags away from me. And now I can breathe easier. Easier, even, than before the bags were there. I am almost home. And, as life here has already taught me, in this world good fortune can be as inevitable as anything else.

Sooner or later, I lied to myself, I would find some meaning...

(2)

The metro had taken me to where I needed to be. From south to north. From darkness to light. From past to present tense. Countless times it has taken me from here to there and back again. And for that, despite everything, I will be forever grateful.

(3)

...I open the door.

A man is standing in front of me. He is dressed in an expensive black leather jacket; his boots are well-shined; his hair is not red. I expect that he will say something but he does not. He just stands in the doorway regarding me curiously. I wait for him to speak but once again he does not. Finally it is I who speaks up:

Can I help you? I ask, holding the door between us with my knuckles.
You don't recognize me? says the man.

A strange question!

No. I'm sorry I don't. Should I?

The man is still regarding me:

I guess not, he says and pauses. Then he continues:

But I do have a score to settle with you. May I come in?

A knot is forming in my throat. My heart begins to beat suspiciously. Against all my better instincts, I open the door to let him in. As the man walks past me I do not smell the sweet scent of swallowed vodka:

No I guess you wouldn't remember me, says the man, But for the last year your face has haunted me.

The man looks around my apartment without interest and then turns around to look at me. His words are weighty:

You see, he says, We've met before. Four years ago.

I'm sorry, I say, I don't remember you. What is your name?

When he tells me, it all sinks in and I gasp yet again.

My heart beats steadily. My mind tumbles over itself trying to understand. It's him, all right. It's the man that I met over four years ago. *But why is he here? What has he come for...?*

And that's how I met the man who would teach me to believe in gravity. That's how I re-meet Vadim.

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