

Book II. How I Made the Decision to Leave Russia Forever

(109)

In this world there are things that should never happen and therefore don't, and things that should happen but do anyway. The former we call hopeless. The latter we call inevitable.

Or maybe it's like this: there are things that shouldn't happen but do, and things that have to happen and therefore do. The first, we call danger. Or luck. The second we call fate. All three of which, if you get right down to it, are irreversible, and beautiful, and, when you have swallowed something that doesn't agree with you, intricately unconditional.

Or maybe it's...

...But no. It's too late. Any way you look at it, it's night. It's night and over the last six and a half hours I have drunk far too much vodka.

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And so it begins deep in my stomach... in my soul... so deep that I can feel it with all my heart... For six and a half years my vodka has been going down one way. For six and a half years I was able to drink without regret. For six and a half years I have been extremely extremely lucky.

But not tonight. Tonight I can feel something deep in my stomach that I have never felt before. The dry bitterness that has been balancing in my throat for the last six and a half years is finally bubbling to the surface. The sickening feeling that rested so stubbornly between here and there is finally coming up.

up.....up.....up.....

Hours and hours of swallowed vodka is now coming up my throat like an escalator. Like the fastest escalator in the world it is rising higher and higher. Along the trails of my insides. Over the back of my throat and past my teeth. And when I open my mouth it explodes out in one mass of regurgitated orange, pink and yellow. Like a water cannon it is shooting out of my mouth: vodka and cheese and beets and mushrooms... chunks and scraps of my past are spurting out of my mouth onto the table, onto my plate, onto the surprised guests...

Hopelessly, I am vomiting. Relentlessly I am throwing up. And relentlessly, hopelessly, and violently I am feeling things come out of my mouth that I've never seen before: black bread and butter... red salads and sauces... liquid pork. Bits of garlic. Pickles. For the first time ever the dry bitterness has pushed its way out and now it is exploding past the back of my throat with a vengeance.

out.....out.....out.....

With a vengeance it is coming out, first in gritty chunks, then in chewed bits, then finally in waves of hot bilious fluid. Spurting and coughing I choke it all out. Bits and pieces. Chunks and slivers. Articles and gerunds and prepositions. Gagging and lunging I cough out words that have been resting sickeningly between my stomach and my throat. Underlined phrases that have been swallowed only to be forgotten. Consumed only to be ignored. Digested only to be finally and painfully undigested.

By now I am puking hopelessly and naively. Relentlessly and sincerely. Finally and unconditionally. I am vomiting and vomiting and vomiting... and when I press my hands to my mouth to stop the liquid streaming from my mouth, it only comes out even faster, forcing its way through my fingers in a concerted spray that is showering the table, my plate, the screaming guests...

(111)

“...Jeeezus Christ!...”

(112)

...And then, finally, the floor.

Hopelessly, I am coughing up years and years of rhyme and reason. Verse and vodka. Vanilla, lactose, and tequila. Now I am on my hands and knees coughing up nouns and adjectives and both perfective and imperfective verbs....

(113)

“...Do something with him...!”

(114)

And as I hover over the floor, my mouth open, I can feel a stream of food pouring out onto the carpet. From my mouth oozes a cascade of stereotypes, a river of misunderstandings. Percentages and prices. Visas and metro tokens. Fish soup. Poetry. Kopeck coins. Marlboro cigarettes. Chunks of oily *seledka* mixed with bits and pieces of unheeded advice.

Like a puddle of mud it collects and mixes with the chunks, forming a pool of my past. There it is! *There's everything that seemed so beautiful just minutes ago... everything that has kept me! There it is on the floor in front of me... here it is before the tip of my nose! There it all is in the fibers of the carpet! But can this be it? Surely there must be something else to keep me? Surely there has to be something more, right?*

...*Right?!*

(115)

Wrong: ...From the other side, this night is *not* like any other!

(?)

And so I am throwing up. And out. And from. And onto. I am throwing up and up and up....

(??)

“...Is he finished...?”

(2)

Okay. Calm down! It's not so bad. They put me here. I certainly wouldn't have insisted on it. Not in my condition. They put me here first. They did it. And the fact that they're sleeping here with me just means that... it just means that... I don't know what it means! But I know that I was here first. And that I need to sleep because I'm very very sick. Just stay still and try to go back to sleep. Sleep, and when you wake up it will all be over.

It will all be over when you wake up.

When you wake up everything will be finished.

But that will be then... for now, just close your eyes and sleep....

(3)

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