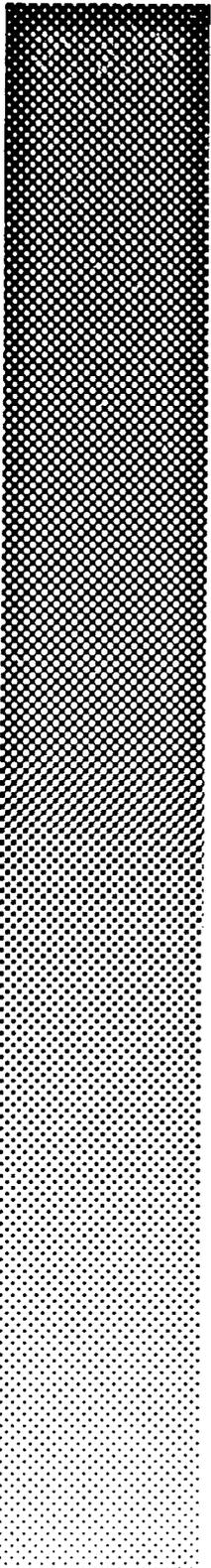


**IT'S ME,  
EDDIE**





**EDWARD  
LIMONOV**

**IT'S ME,  
EDDIE**

**A FICTIONAL MEMOIR TRANSLATED  
FROM THE RUSSIAN BY S. L. CAMPBELL**



**RANDOM HOUSE NEW YORK**

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FIRST EDITION

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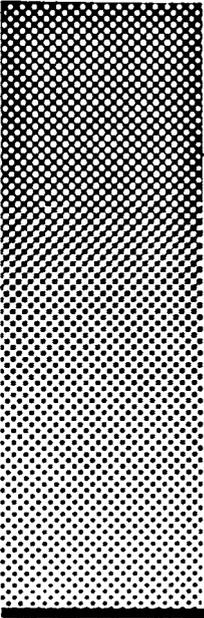
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**IT'S ME,  
EDDIE**





# THE HOTEL WINSLOW AND ITS DENIZENS

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If you're walking past the corner of Madison Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street between one and three in the afternoon, take the trouble to tip back your head and look up—at the unwashed windows of the black Hotel Winslow. There on the topmost, sixteenth floor, on the center-most of the hotel's three balconies, I sit half naked. Usually I am eating shchi and at the same time working on my tan, I'm a great sun lover. Shchi, or sauerkraut soup, is my usual fare; I eat pot after pot of it, day after day, and eat almost nothing else. The spoon I eat the shchi with is wooden and was brought from Russia. It is decorated with flowers of scarlet, gold, and black.

The surrounding office buildings gawk at me with their smoky glass walls, with the thousand eyes of the clerks, secretaries, and managers. A nearly, sometimes entirely naked man, eating shchi from a pot. They don't know it's shchi, though. What they see is that every other day, on a hot plate there on the balcony, a man cooks a huge steaming pot of something barbaric. At one time I also ate chicken, but then I stopped. There are five advantages to shchi: (1) It's very cheap, two or three dollars a pot, and a pot is enough for two days! (2) It doesn't spoil out of the refrigerator, even in very hot weather. (3) It's quick to make, only an hour and a half. (4) It can and should be eaten cold. (5) There's no better food for summer, because it's tart.

I choke and gobble, naked on the balcony. I'm not ashamed before those unknown people in the offices or their eyes. Sometimes I also have

with me, hanging on a nail driven into the window frame, a small green battery transistor given to me by Alyoshka Slavkov, a poet who plans to become a Jesuit. I enliven the taking of shchi with music. My preference is a Spanish station. I'm not inhibited. I am often to be found bare-assed in my shallow little room, my member pale against the background of the rest of my body, and I do not give a damn whether they see me or don't, the clerks, secretaries, and managers. I'd rather they did see me. They're probably used to me by now, and perhaps they miss me on days when I don't crawl out on my balcony. I suppose they call me "that crazy across the way."

My little room is four paces long and three paces wide. On the walls, covering the marks left by previous occupants, there hang: a large portrait of Mao Tse-tung, an object of horror to all the people who drop by to see me; a portrait of Patricia Hearst; my own photograph against a background of icons and a brick wall, with me holding a thick volume, perhaps a dictionary or a Bible, and wearing a 114-patch blazer tailored by me, Limonov, monster out of the past; a portrait of André Breton, founder of the surrealist school, which portrait I have carried with me for many years, and which André Breton is usually unknown to those who come to see me; a call to support gay rights; other posters, among them one for Workers Party candidates; paintings by my friend the artist Khachaturian; numerous lesser papers. At the head of my bed is the poster "For Your Freedom and Ours," left from a demonstration in front of the *New York Times*. Completing the wall decor are two shelves of books. Mainly poetry.

I think it's clear to you by now what a character I am, even though I forgot to introduce myself. I started running on without announcing who I was; I forgot. Overjoyed at the opportunity to drown you in my voice at last, I got carried away and never announced whose voice it was. My fault, forgive me, we'll straighten it out right now.

I am on welfare. I live at your expense, you pay taxes and I don't do a fucking thing. Twice a month I go to the clean, spacious welfare office at 1515 Broadway and receive my checks. I consider myself to be scum, the dregs of society, I have no shame or conscience, therefore my conscience doesn't bother me and I don't plan to look for work, I want to receive your money to the end of my days. And my name is Edichka, "Eddie-baby."

And you, gentlemen, can figure you're getting off cheap. Early in the

morning you crawl out of your warm beds and hurry—some by car, some by subway or bus—to work. I hate work. I gobble my shchi, drink, sometimes drink myself into oblivion, seek adventure in dark city blocks; I have a magnificent, expensive white suit and an exquisite nervous system; I wince at your belly laugh in the movie theater and wrinkle my nose.

You don't like me? You don't want to pay? It's precious little—\$278 a month. You don't want to pay. Then why the fuck did you invite me, entice me here from Russia, along with a horde of Jews? Present your complaints to your own propaganda, it's too effective. That's what's emptying your pockets, not I.

Who was I over there? What's the difference, what would it change? I hate the past, as I always have, in the name of the present. Well, I was a poet, if you must know, a poet was I, an unofficial, underground poet. That's over forever, and now I am one of yours, I am scum, I'm the one to whom you feed shchi and rotten cheap California wine—\$3.59 a gallon—and yet I scorn you. Not all of you, but many. Because you lead dull lives, sell yourselves into the slavery of work, because of your vulgar plaid pants, because you make money and have never seen the world. You're shit!

I've gone a little too far, lost my temper, forgive me. But objectivity is not among my attributes; besides, the weather is fucking lousy today, it's drizzling, New York is gray and boring—empty weekend days, I have nowhere to go. Perhaps this is why I switched out of my usual mode and started calling you names. I apologize. Go on living for now, and pray God to keep me from mastering correct English as long as possible.

The Hotel Winslow is a gloomy black sixteen-story building, probably the blackest on Madison Avenue. A sign running from the top to the bottom of the façade proclaims WINSLOW—the letter O fell out. When? Perhaps fifty years ago. I moved into the hotel by chance, in March, after my tragedy, my wife Elena had left me. Exhausted, footsore, and bloody from wandering around New York spending each night in a new spot, sometimes on the street, I was finally picked up by a former dissident and former groom at the Moscow race track, the very first recipient of the Welfare Prize (he prides himself on having been the first Russian to master welfare), stout, slovenly, wheezing Alyoshka Shneerson, my Savior, who led me by the hand to the Welfare Center on Thirty-first Street, and inside of a day I received emergency aid, which

has dropped me to the bottom of life, made me a man scorned and without rights—but fuck your rights, I don't have to earn my own board and room, and I'm free to write my poems, which are not fucking needed, either here in your America or there in the USSR.

So then how did I end up at the Winslow?

Shneerson's friend Edik Brutt lived at the Winslow, and that was where I came to live too, three doors down from him. The sixteenth floor consists entirely of cubicles, as do many other floors. When I meet people and mention where I live they look at me with respect. Few realize that such a neighborhood still has a dirty old hotel populated by poor old men and women and lonely Jews from Russia, where scarcely half the rooms have a shower or toilet.

Misfortune and failure hover invisibly over our hotel. During the time I have lived here two older women have thrown themselves out the window. One of them, a Frenchwoman I was told, with a face that still preserved traces of beauty, had always paced the corridor inconsolably; she threw herself from her fourteenth-floor window into the courtyard, the light-well. In addition to these two victims God very recently took the proprietress, or rather the mother of the proprietor, who is a huge, elephantine Jew in a yarmulke, I met him once at a party given by my American girl friend Roseanne. The proprietor's mother, like all old women, loved to give orders at the hotel, although the proprietor of our dirty little establishment owns forty-five other buildings in New York. Why she enjoyed hanging around all day and pointing out things for the hotel employees to do I don't know. Perhaps she was a sadist. Recently she disappeared. They found her later that day, a crumpled and mutilated corpse in the elevator shaft. The devil lives alongside us. Having seen a lot of films about exorcists, I am beginning to think it's the devil. From my window I can see the St. Regis Sheraton. I think about that hotel with envy. And, without prospect, dream of moving there if I get rich.

We Russians are treated by the hotel the way blacks were treated before Emancipation. Our sheets are changed much less often than the Americans', the carpet on our floor hasn't been cleaned once the whole time I've lived here, it's horrifyingly dirty and dusty. Sometimes an American from across the hall, an old hack who is always pounding his typewriter, comes out in his underpants, takes a broom, and sweeps the carpet vigorously as a form of calisthenics. I keep wanting to tell him

not to do it, since he only raises the dust and the carpet stays just as dirty, but I hate to deprive him of the exercise. Sometimes when I get drunk I think the American is an FBI agent assigned to watch me.

They give us the oldest sheets and towels, I clean my own toilet. In brief, we rate at the very bottom.

The hotel staff, I think, considers us useless freeloaders who have come to America—land of honest laborers with crewcuts—to eat them out of house and home. I know all about this. Everyone bitched about parasites in the USSR too, bullshitted about how you had to be useful to society. In Russia the people who bitched were the ones who worked least. I've been a writer for ten years now. It's not my fault that neither state needs my labor. I do my work—where's my money? Both states bullshit about the justice of their systems, but where's my money?

The hotel manager cannot stand me. A benighted lady in glasses, with the Russo-Polish name of Rogoff, she accepted me into the hotel under Edik Brutt's sponsorship. Like shit I needed his sponsorship, when there were plenty of empty rooms in the hotel, God knows who would live in cubicles like these. Mrs. Rogoff has trouble finding fault with me, but she very much wants to. Sometimes she gets a chance. Thus, in the early months I paid for my room twice a month, but after a while she suddenly demanded that I pay a month in advance. Technically she was right, but it was much more convenient for me to pay twice a month, on the days when I got my welfare check. I told her so. "But you can buy white suits and drink champagne, you do have money for that," she said.

I kept trying to think what champagne, what kind of champagne did she have in mind. Sometimes I drank California champagne, most often I did it with my friend Kirill, a young fellow from Leningrad, but how could she know that? We usually drank the champagne in Central Park. Only somewhat later did I recall that when planning for the birthday of my old friend, the artist Khachaturian—the one whose paintings hang in my cubicle—I really had bought a \$10 bottle of Soviet champagne and put it in the refrigerator, so that I could take it to the celebration that night. Mrs. Rogoff must have personally checked my refrigerator every day, or else this was done on her instructions by the maid who cleaned (did not clean) my room. "And you're on welfare," Mrs. Rogoff said. "Poor America!" she exclaimed passionately. "I'm the one who's poor, not America," I replied.

The reasons for her hostility to me became fully clear only later.

When she took me into the hotel she thought I was a Jew. Then when she got a good look at my chipped blue enamel cross, my only property and adornment, she realized I was not a Jew. A certain Marat Bagrov, formerly of Moscow television, who was still living at the Winslow then, told me Mrs. Rogoff had complained to him about Edik Brutt: He had deceived her and brought in a Russian. Thus, gentlemen, I know firsthand what discrimination is. I'm kidding—the Jews in our hotel live no better than I do. Far more than the fact that I'm not a Jew, I think, Mrs. Rogoff dislikes the fact that I don't look unhappy. Only one thing is required of me—to look unhappy, know my place, and not go around wearing first one suit and then another in sight of astonished spectators. I think she would take great pleasure in looking at me if I were dirty, hunchbacked, and old. It would comfort her. But a welfare recipient in lace shirts and white vests! In the summer, however, I wore white slacks, wooden platform sandals, and a little close-fitting shirt—the absolute minimum. This, too, irritated Mrs. Rogoff. Encountering me once in the elevator she said to me, staring with suspicion at my sandals and bare tanned feet, “You . . . like . . . heppy. Rahssian heppy,” she added without a smile.

“*Nyet*,” I said.

“*Da, da*,” she said firmly.

The rest of the hotel staff treat me passably. The only good relationship I have is with a Japanese, or maybe he's Chinese, I can't tell, but he always smiles at me. I also say hello to an Indian in a turban, he too is attractive in my eyes. All the rest, in varying degrees, have wronged me, and I talk to them only if I am paying a bill or asking for a letter or phone message.

That is how I live. The days roll by one after another; opposite the hotel, on Madison, a whole block of buildings has been almost completely demolished, and an American skyscraper is about to go up. Some of the Jews and half Jews and fake Jews have moved out of the hotel, others have come in their stead. Like the blacks in their Harlem, they find support in communal living; in the evening they pour out on the street and sit by the hotel in the window bays, some swig from bottles in paper bags; they talk about life. If it's cold they gather in the lobby, occupying all the benches, and then the lobby is filled with the buzz and stir of voices. The hotel administration struggles against the communal habits of Soviet émigrés, their predilection for gypsy campfires, but

without success. It's impossible to force them not to gather, not to sit in front of the hotel. And although their rustic habit of sitting around must scare off potential victims who might suddenly wander into the hotel, the administration seems to have given up on them—what can you do.

I have very few dealings with them. I never stop and visit, confining myself to the words "Good evening!" or "Hi, everybody!" This doesn't mean I think ill of them. But in my lifetime of wandering I have seen such a variety of Russians and Russian Jews—in my view they're one and the same—that they no longer interest me. At times the "Russian" shows through more plainly in Jews than in real Russians.

So I don't stop to visit with them in front of the hotel, I go to my room. What would we talk about—about their misfortunes, about how tired they are, working as cab drivers or whatever. Recently I gave them a "Hi, everybody!" and walked past them, out into New York. Some new fellow, a Georgian Jew by his appearance, or more likely an ethnic Georgian who had masqueraded as a Jew in order to emigrate, shouted after me, "Hey, are you Russian too?"

"By now I've forgotten what I really am," I said, without stopping.

On my way back about two hours later, I passed them again, this time coming in from New York. The same mustachioed, swarthy fellow spotted me and said with an aggrieved air, "Hey, did you get rich or what, that you don't want to stop and talk?" This struck me funny, I had to laugh, but even so I didn't stop, to avoid getting acquainted. I have too many Russian acquaintances as it is. When you yourself are in a lousy fucking situation, you don't much feel like having unfortunate friends and acquaintances. And almost all Russians bear the imprint of misfortune.

You can recognize them from the back, by a sort of anguished depression in their posture. Although I hardly associate with them, I always recognize them in the elevator. Depression is their distinguishing mark. Between the first and the sixteenth floors they manage to start a conversation with you, inquire whether the new émigrés, one and all, will be given American citizenship in honor of the American Bicentennial; perhaps they will ask you to compose a petition to the President in this connection. What the fuck do they want with citizenship? They themselves don't know.

Or the conversation may take the opposite tack:

“Did you hear? In October they’re going to let us in!”

“Let us in where?” I asked.

“What do you mean, where? Russia. A pilot defected from the USSR in a fighter plane, now they’re going to let us back, to compensate, understand? One defected, and they let two thousand back. Two thousand want to go back. And half the applicants begin by asking to be sent straight from the airplane to prison camp, they want to do time for their crime, for having left the Motherland. But aren’t you planning to go back? If they took anybody it would be you. Didn’t I hear that you had been published again in both *Pravda* and *Izvestia*?”

“Oh, that was a long time ago, back in June,” I said. “They translated an excerpt from the *Times* of London, and even that got distorted. No, I’m not planning on it, what the fuck would I do there? And besides, I’d be ashamed to go back. They’d laugh. I’m not going, I’ll never go back.”

“You’re still young,” the man said. “Give it a try, maybe you’ll make it here.

“But I’m going,” he continued quietly. “I had big ideas over there, you know, I thought much too highly of myself, but when I got here I saw there wasn’t a thing I could do. I want peace. Somewhere south of Moscow, a little cabin in the Tula region; catch a few fish, do some hunting, get myself a job teaching in the village school. This is hell,” he said. “New York is a city for madmen. I’m going back, I’ve been knocking around here long enough. They’ve got no fucking freedom here, just try and say anything bold at work. No fuss, no muss, but you’re out on your ear.”

He had worked various places, mainly washing dishes. He is getting unemployment, \$47 a week. He lives on the West Side in the Eighties, and had come to the hotel to see a friend.

“Do you play chess?” he asked as we said good-bye.

“Can’t stand it,” I replied.

“Do you drink vodka?”

“That I do,” I said, “but not very often anymore.”

“You can’t drink here,” he complained. “In Leningrad, if you had seven hundred grams with a nice snack, you’d be flying around town like you had wings, you’d be on top of the world. Drink here and it just deadens you, or worse. Drop in,” he said, “I’ll treat you to borscht.”

In contrast to me, he makes borscht, using special beets of some sort.

They are always complaining that you can't drink here. You can, but it's not the same, the liquor depresses you—I'm thinking of quitting soon.

I used to work for the newspaper *Russkoe Delo* here in New York, and at that time I was interested in the problems of "the emigration." After my article entitled "Disillusionment," they fired me from the paper, away from temptation. My family was breaking up; my love, which I had considered a Great Love, was in its death throes; I myself was barely alive. All these events were crowned by the bloody twenty-second of February, my veins slashed in the doorway of the fashionable Zoli model agency, where Elena was living at the time, and then a week of life as a bum in downtown Manhattan. When I found myself at the hotel, however, or rather when I woke up there, I suddenly saw that my bad reputation had not died, people were phoning and coming to see me, still firm in their Soviet habit of believing that a journalist could help them. "Come now, folks, I'm no journalist—without a newspaper, without friends or connections." I made every possible effort to wriggle out of these meetings, I told people I couldn't even help myself, but there were still some meetings that I did not succeed in avoiding. Thus, for example, I had to meet with "Uncle Sasha," my acquaintances insisted on it. "You must help him, he's an old man, just talk to him and he'll feel better."

I went to see him in his room. It looked as if he lived with a dog. I glanced around for the dog, but there was none.

"I guess you had a dog?" I asked him.

"No, never," he said, frightened. "You've got me mixed up with someone else."

Mixed up, indeed. Bones, dry biscuits, crusts, food scraps lay on the floor in a solid hard layer, like pebbles on the seashore. The same layer of petrified leftovers lay on the table, the dresser, the windowsill, all horizontal surfaces, even the chair seats. He was an ordinary, plump, pathetic old man with a wrinkled face. I knew that all his life he had written about the sea and sailors. His sea stories had been published in *Around the World* and other Soviet magazines.

"I've been wanting to meet with you," he said, sighing. "My situation is desperate, I don't know what to do—I miss my wife so much. She's Russian." He indicated a photograph framed under glass; a tired woman gazed out at me.

"Whatever made me come here?" he went on. "I'm not up to learn-

ing the language. I live very badly. I was on welfare, two hundred and eighty dollars a month, then I reached pension age and they gave me a pension, only two hundred and eighteen dollars. I received two checks, and as an honest man I went to my Welfare Center and told them, 'Here are the two checks, I don't want the pension, I want welfare. My room costs a hundred and thirty dollars a month, that leaves me only eighty-eight a month for food, I can't get by on that, I'll die of hunger, I have a bad stomach.' I went there in good faith, told them, returned the check. They said, 'There's nothing we can do. By law you have to receive a pension.' " He was practically weeping.

"Why did you come here?" I asked maliciously.

"I always wrote about the sea, you know. The minute a ship came in, I went right down to the ship. The sailors loved me. They told me about all the countries. I wanted to see them. What am I to do?" He glanced into my eyes. "I want to go back to my wife, she's so good." He wept.

"Go to the Soviet embassy in Washington," I told him. "Maybe they'll let you back. But it's impossible to say. Beg, weep. You haven't written anything against them here, have you?"

"No," he said, "just this story about the sea, it's coming out soon in an English-language magazine, but not anti-Soviet, it's about the sea. Listen here, they wouldn't put me away, would they?" he said, taking me by the sleeve.

"Listen, why would they put you away . . ."

Who the fuck needed him, I wanted to add, and other caustic remarks, but I restrained myself. I had no pity for him. I sat before him on his dirty chair, from which he had wiped the crumbs and dust with his hand. He sat on the bed; his old feet in their blue slippers stuck up in front of me. I found him distasteful—a slovenly, silly old man. I was a man of another generation, and although I myself often sobbed into my own pillow, I wouldn't have given a shit about the emigration if it hadn't been for Elena. The murder of love, a world without love, was terrible to me. But I sat before him thin, mean, and tanned, in jeans and a close-fitting jacket, my little thighs curving out as I sat—a bundle of malice. I might wish for him to become like me and exchange his fears for my malicious horrors, but he could not be like me.

"You think they'll let me in?" he said ingratiatingly.

I was sure they would not, but I had to comfort him. I knew nothing

about him except what he himself had told me; he might not be so innocuous as he seemed in his present situation.

"I want to ask you," he said, seeing me get up from the chair, "not to tell anyone about our conversation. Please."

"I won't," I said. "You'll excuse me, but someone's expecting me."

The blue slippers moved with me beyond the door. In the elevator I heaved a sigh of relief. Motherfucking fool.

I told Levin about our conversation anyway. Out of mischief.

Outwardly David Levin resembles a spy or an *agent provocateur* from a Soviet popular film. I'm no master at portraits, the most distinctive thing about his physiognomy is his bald spot; only the sides of his head are edged with fuzz. I was not acquainted with him, but I had been told that he was saying filthy things about me behind my back. He's the greatest rumormonger, this Levin. It was Lenya Kosogor, from Volume II of the *Gulag*, who told me. I was so profoundly indifferent to the whole Russian emigration, old, new, and future, that all I did was laugh. But, to my surprise, when I moved into the hotel Levin stopped me one day and said reproachfully that I was arrogant and didn't want to converse with him. I said that I wasn't arrogant but I was in a hurry now, I would be back in a couple of hours and drop in to see him. I did.

For any Russian with the slightest degree of intelligence, no one else from Russia is an enigma. Thousands of signs show at once *what* this man is and *who* he is. Levin gives me the impression of a man who is about to burst into hysterics and start yelling. I know in advance what he'll yell. The next line will go something like this: "Fuck off, bug-eyes, what are you staring at? How would you like to have your peepers pushed out, you goddamn filthy oyster!" This line from the underworld embodies my whole impression of Levin. I don't know the details of his life, but I suspect that he may have done time in the USSR for criminal activity. Or maybe not.

Levin says of himself that he is a journalist. But the articles Levin has published in that same *Russkoe Delo* are full of shit—statements that in the USSR only KGB agents live in nice new houses, and other fables. Now he says he's a journalist from Moscow, but when I saw him briefly one time in Rome he said he was a journalist from Arkhangelsk. Everything he says about himself is ambiguous. He says, on one hand, that he lived very well in the USSR and when he went on assignment he

“flew on Central Committee planes”; on the other, that he suffered from anti-Semitism in the USSR. Now he lives exclusively on money that he gets from Jewish organizations or directly from the synagogue. Which is also welfare, in its way. Once he had an abdominal operation; I think he used his misfortune as a means to pump money from American Jews. I need him like a cunt needs a door. What could be interesting in a fifty-year-old man with bad health, living in a crappy hotel and writing a drama called *Adam and Eve*, which he bashfully read to me. I told him—also bashfully, I hated to offend even Levin—that this literary form was not congenial to me, and therefore I could not comment on his work. I couldn’t tell him that his *Adam and Eve* was not a literary form but a form of the fucking craziness caused by Western life, which he, like all of us, had entered into when he arrived here. He’s still bearing up, others go out of their minds.

In our first conversation Levin slung mud at the whole hotel, all its inhabitants, but it was plain that he felt lousy being alone, and from time to time he attached himself to someone. He attached himself to me too, took me with him to a concert at a synagogue, introduced me to a little Jewish woman who spoke Russian. It was the first time I had attended a service in a synagogue, and I sat through the whole service with interest and reverence, behaved decorously and attentively, whereas Levin jabbered incessantly with a little old lady. I might have entered that world, thanks to Levin, but it was boring to me; the Jewish family dinners to which I would have been invited did not suit my mood. I love gefilte fish and stuffed herring, but I am more drawn to stuffed explosives, to congresses and slogans, as you will presently see. Normality is boring to little Eddie; I shied away from it in Russia, and you won’t lure me into a life of sleep and work here. Hell no.

Even after that, Levin came to see me several times. Although I had earnestly implanted in myself a love of my fellow man and believed that all unfortunates must be pitied, although Levin fitted my conception of the “unfortunate man” and I really was sorry for him despite his malice, even so, I had to break off my acquaintance with him. Everything he saw in my room and everything I told him (calculating in advance that he would take it all and multiply and inflate and distort) he managed to exaggerate hyperbolically and foolishly. The portrait of Mao Tse-tung on the wall became my joining the Chinese Party. What the Chinese Party might be I did not know, but I had to curtail the number of

Russians, and Levin fell to the curtailment, a poor malicious victim. I say hello to him and sometimes spend half a minute telling him lies. He doesn't believe me, but he listens, and then I go away. "Business," I say, "I've got things to do."

People look pathetic, uprooted from their places, without their accustomed surroundings, without their normal work, dropped to the bottom of life. Once I drove to Long Beach for a swim with the savage Jew Marat Bagrov. He's the man who contrived to hold a counterdemonstration against a demonstration on Fifth Avenue on behalf of the free exit of Jews from the USSR. He came out with the slogans "Stop demagoguery!" and "Help us here!" Well, we went to Long Beach. Marat Bagrov drove a car that was stolen from him the next day, and a former Soviet cycling champion named Nahum and I were the passengers. Our group was to visit two dishwashers who were working there at Long Beach in a home for senior citizens. With hardly a glance into the semibasement rooms where the dishwashers lived—one of them an ex-musician, the other an ex-wheeler-dealer, an expert in smoking fish—I climbed over the fence to the beach to avoid paying the two dollars.

Seagulls, the ocean, a salty fog, hangover. I lay for a long time alone, unaware what world I was in. Later Bagrov and Nahum came down.

"Fucking emigration!" The thirty-four-year-old ex-champion said it over and over. "When I first arrived in New York I went out to buy a newspaper, I bought *Russkoe Delo*, and there was your article. It hit me like a hammer. What have I done, I thought, why the fuck did I come here."

He talked and dug a hole in the sand. "Fucking emigration" was his constant refrain. He had already worked at several places. At his last job he had repaired bicycles; along with two other workers, a Puerto Rican and a black, he had organized a strike, demanding equal pay for their work. One of them was paid \$2.50 an hour, the second \$3.00, and the third \$3.50.

"The boss summoned the black, and when he came in, the boss said, 'Why aren't you working, these are working hours,'" Nahum said, still mechanically digging the hole. "The black told the boss he had a doctor's appointment, that was why he had left early today. Then he asked the Puerto Rican why he'd left work early. He got scared too and said he had to go to Social Security today. But I asked the boss why didn't he pay us all equally, when we did the same work . . ." Nahum

was becoming impassioned. “He fired the black, he said, ‘You may go.’ But I left on my own, I’m working as a welder now—I weld beds, these are very expensive, stylish beds. I weld once, then grind down the joints; if there aren’t any holes or blisters, fine, if there are I weld them again and grind them down again. I come home and my hair is full of grit . . .”

Nahum lives on Broadway, on the West Side; they have a hotel there like ours, where they put Jews. I don’t know what the rooms are like but the neighborhood is worse, much tougher.

“Are you fucking your black woman?” Bagrov asked him matter-of-factly.

“Not that one, not anymore,” Nahum replied. “She got too brassy. She used to take a five, now it’s seven-fifty. That wouldn’t matter, but once she knocked at two in the morning, I let her in, ‘Let’s fuck,’ she says. I say let’s, but free. ‘Free?’ she says, ‘no way.’ So I say, ‘I’ve only got a ten, that’s all the money I have.’ ‘Give me the ten,’ she says, ‘I’ll bring you the change tomorrow and give it to you free.’ We fucked and she totally disappeared for a week. And I didn’t have any more money. She came back a week later and demanded money in advance, and not a word about the change. ‘Get your ass out of here,’ I said. And she wails, ‘Give me two dollars, I came up here to see you, the doorman opened the door for me and brought me up in the elevator, I promised him two dollars for letting me in.’”

“Did you give it to her?” Bagrov asked with interest.

“I did,” Nahum said, “but I’ll be damned if I’ll get involved with her, she has a pimp.”

“No, better not,” Bagrov said.

“Fucking emigration!” Nahum said.

“We have to steal, rob, kill,” I said. “Organize a Russian mafia.”

“If I write them a letter,” Bagrov said, not listening to me, “the guys back in the Soviet Union, they won’t understand a fucking thing. I have this friend, a real sport, he’s always dreamed of going to the Olympic games. I’m going to write him that I drove my car to the Montreal Olympics—he’ll be so envious. What’s more, I wasn’t working, I went to Montreal on unemployment.”

“You’ll never explain it to him—that for all your car and your Montreal you can be up to your ears in shit here. It’s impossible to explain,” Nahum said. “Fucking emigration!”

“No, you can’t explain. And if he came he wouldn’t care about Montreal, he’d be sitting in shit too. As for the car, I paid a hundred and fifty for it. A shitbox.”

When we finished our swim—they, grown men, turned somersaults in the waves like children, something I, little Eddie, could not stand for long—the sun was already setting and we were the last to leave the beach. We talked about how few people in America go in the water and swim. Most just sit on the beach, or go in up to their knees and splash, whereas in the USSR everyone tries to see who can swim farthest, and overzealous swimmers are fished out by the lifeboats and forced to swim ashore.

“That’s the fundamental difference between the Russian character and the American. Maximalism,” I said, laughing.

We walked to the dishwashers’ house and had a feast in one of their rooms. A feast of two dishwashers, a welder, a man on unemployment, and a man on welfare. A few years ago, had we forgathered in the USSR, we would have been: a poet, a musician, a champion Soviet athlete, a millionaire (one of the dishwashers, Semyon, had had about a million in Russia), and a nationally known television journalist.

“The manager kept an eye on us all day today, he knew we were having company, that’s why we couldn’t filch as much food as usual,” the dishwashers explained. We devoured pressed chicken, talked vivaciously, poured from a half-gallon bottle of whiskey—all in haste, it was already dark and we still had to drive to Manhattan.

The musician was working here to accumulate the money for a ticket to Germany; he wanted to try yet another variant, it might be better there. His violin stood in a corner, carefully wrapped in rags, on top of the case. Washing dishes was hardly contributing to the improvement of his violin technique. Actually, the musician was not entirely sure he wanted to go to Germany. He had a parallel desire to get himself a job as a sailor on a Liberian ship, and for another thing he’d like to go to California.

As a colorful portrayal of what awaited us in the future, one of the dishwashers’ colleagues appeared—an old Ukrainian. He received \$66 cash a week for the same work. “He’s meek, the boss is bleeding him white. Besides, he’s already old, he can’t work as fast as we can,” the dishwashers said, right in front of the old man, not in the least ashamed. He smiled in embarrassment.

We left the hospitable dishwashers and, with the air temperature dropping all the time, set off for New York along the lovely American roads. We drove, raged, cursed, blustered, but soon we would part and each would wake alone with himself.

The Hotel Winslow. I moved in here, supposedly for a month, in order to regain my composure and look around; later on I planned to rent an apartment in the Village or a loft in SoHo. Now I find my own naïveté touching. A hundred and thirty—that's all I can pay. For that kind of money the only place I could move to is Avenue C or D. In this respect the Hotel Winslow is a godsend. At least it's central, a saving on transportation; I go everywhere on foot. As for its denizens, well, I don't have to associate with them.

We do have some cultured people in the hotel. Edik Brutt, for example, is a vegetarian and reads all the time, supplements his education. He reads Greek and Latin lyrics and Omar Khayyám, he reads Shakespeare's works and Chinese philosophy, in Russian of course. A kind, quiet little fellow with a mustache, Edik has an American friend, a tall man of about forty who knows many languages. Otherwise he resembles Edik—he does not consort with women, at the age of forty he lives with his mama. This American, by the name of Bant, often takes Edik somewhere to listen to the organ. Cultural entertainment. I wouldn't last five minutes. Edik likes it. I respect him.

Edik was a cameraman in Moscow, or an assistant cameraman. He lives quietly, feeds everyone who comes to see him, lends money—he'd give you his last dollar—and he's on welfare.

Another of our hotel's intellectuals, a tall, fair man of thirty-three, is the poet Zhenya Knikich. That's a typical Leningrad surname—refined. By training he is a philologist, he defended a dissertation on the topic "*Dostoevsky's Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Denizens, from the Standpoint of Eccentricity.*" He cooks kidneys and sausages in his cubicle, which looks out on a dark light-well; on his bed sits the homely American girl who teaches him English; all over the walls there are pieces of paper with expressions written in English, like "I want to work." That statement does not fit the facts, Zhenya doesn't much want to work; at present he is trying to get on welfare. "I am a serious scholar," he tells me. He is, I think; why not? But he and I both understand that his profession as a serious scholar—an expert on Gogol and Dostoevsky, a teacher of aesthetics—is not fucking needed here. What's needed here

is serious dishwashers, people who will do the dirty work without any literary reflections. Literature here has its own mafia, art has its own mafia, any form of business has its own mafia.

The Russian emigration has its own mafiosi. Fair-haired Zhenya was unprepared for this, as was I. He worked at *Russkoe Delo*, as did I in my time, for one of the chief mafiosi of the Russian emigration, Moses Yakovlevich Borodatykh. Mafiosi will never let anyone else get at the feed trough. Fuck no. It's a question of bread, of meat and life, of women. We know all about this: try and break into the Soviet Writers' Union. They'll crush everything. Because it's a question of bread, meat, and cunt. A struggle to the death. For the cunts of the Elenas. It's no joke.

Sometimes I am seized with a cold anger. I look out of my little room at the high-rise walls of the neighboring buildings, at this great and terrible city, and I understand that this is all very serious. It's either the city or me. Either I become that pathetic old Ukrainian who visited my dishwasher friends at our feast—as humiliated and pathetic as we are, he is even more humiliated and pathetic—or else . . . “Or else” means “win.” How? Who the fuck knows—by destroying the city, even. Why should I pity it? It doesn't pity me. Jointly with others, I'm not the only one like this. In any case, my corpse will never be carried out of the Hotel Winslow like a stupid board.

The terrible seriousness, the poignancy, of my position seizes me when I first wake up in the morning. I jump up, drink coffee, wash out of my head the sleepy snatches of pathetic Russian songs and poems and other fragments of a Russian delirium, and sit down to my papers—either my English or something I'm trying to write. I keep glancing out the window. Those buildings make my gorge rise. Cocksuckers! I've taken to swearing a lot here. I'll never make it in this system, I think with anguish, looking down the long and difficult road ahead. But I must give it a try.

The cheapest food, not always enough of it; dirty little rooms, wretched poor clothes, cold, vodka, nerves—my second wife went out of her mind. Ten years of that life in Russia, and now the whole thing over again. “Where's your motherfucking justice, world?” I feel like asking. I worked ten years there, day after day, wrote so many collections of poetry, so many poems and stories, I accomplished a lot, I was able to create in my books a well-defined image of the Russian man. And the

Russian people read me, they bought the eight thousand collections that I typed and distributed all those years, they knew them, recited them by heart.

But I saw one day that I would rise no higher there. Moscow was reading me, Leningrad was reading me, and my collections had found their way to a dozen other major cities, people accepted me, but the state did not. Try as I might with my primitive distribution methods, what I did would never reach the masses. My heart was bitter that for someone like Rozhdestvensky they ran off millions of copies, but they had not printed a single poem of mine. You can go fuck yourselves, I thought, you and your system. I haven't worked for you since I quit peddling books in 1964. I'll get the hell out of here with my beloved wife, I'll go to the other world. Writers breathe freer there, they say.

And so I came here. Now I see it makes no fucking difference, here or there. The same gangs in either sphere. But here I have something more to lose, because I am a Russian writer, I write in Russian words. And as a man, I found I had been spoiled by the praise of the underground, the attention of underground Moscow, of artistic Russia, where a poet is not what a poet is in New York. From time immemorial a poet in Russia has always been something of a spiritual leader. To make the acquaintance of a poet, for example, is a great honor there. Here a poet is shit, which is why even Joseph Brodsky is miserable here in your country. Once when he came to see me on Lexington Avenue he said, as he drank his vodka, "One has to have the hide of an elephant here in this country. I do, but you don't." There was anguish in these words, because Joseph Brodsky has succumbed to the system of this world, though he had not succumbed to the system of the other. I understood his misery. In Leningrad, after all, apart from his troubles, he had had tens of thousands of admirers, he would have been received with delight in any house on any evening, the beautiful Russian maidens, the Natashas and Tanyas, were all his—because he, a red-haired Jewish youth, was a Russian poet. The best place for a poet is Russia. There, even the authorities fear our kind. They have from time immemorial.

And other friends of mine, those who went to Israel, what nationalists they were! They emigrated expecting to find in Israel an application for their minds, talents, ideas; they believed it was their state. Like hell!

It is not their state. Israel does not need their ideas, their talent, their ability to think, not at all. Israel needs soldiers, just like the USSR—hup, two, and obey! You're a Jew, you must defend your country. But we're sick of defending your faded old banners, your values, which long ago ceased to be values; sick of defending what's "yours." We're tired of "yours," old men, we ourselves will soon be old men, we doubt that we should, that we must. You can all go fuck yourselves . . .

"We." Although I think of myself as separate, I keep returning to this concept "we." By now there are a great many of us here. And I must confess, we have among us quite a few madmen. This is normal.

There's a certain Lenya Chaplin who constantly makes the rounds of the émigrés. Properly he is not a Chaplin, he has a complicated Jewish surname, but back in Moscow he was in love with Chaplin's younger daughter *in absentia* and took himself a pseudonym in her honor. When said daughter got married, Lenya mourned, he tried to poison himself. I knew him in Moscow and once attended a birthday party of his where, besides me, there was only one other man, the seminormal philosopher Bondarenko, the ideologue of Russian fascism, stock boy in a liquor store. I was astounded by Lenya's narrow streetcar of a room. All its walls were papered over with the great men of our world, large and small, in several layers. There were Oswald and Kennedy, Mao and Nixon, Che Guevara and Hitler . . . Never have I seen a crazier room. Only the ceiling was free of great men. Some great heads were glued on top of others, the paper was layered as thick as my finger.

Now, after spending time in various American states—and, as evil tongues say, in several state mental hospitals—Lenya lives in New York on welfare. He makes peculiar use of public assistance. He sets aside the whole sum, about \$250. He plans to travel in the future, or maybe join the American army. He spends the night with friends and eats . . . what he takes from garbage cans on the street, first a slice of pizza, then some other filth. So doing, he invariably makes one and the same pronouncement: "Grain by grain, and the hen fills her belly."

This madman Lenya—who is nevertheless a cultured youth, he's read Nietzsche, and written some Buddhist parables about three elephants—is a relative of sorts. My second wife, Anna Rubinstein, had a niece who was Lenya's first woman. Lecherous Stella, who, in the expression of a longtime acquaintance of mine, had a cunt like Finland Station, fucked

the tall schizoid Lenya. My “relative” also lived in Israel for a while, before America.

Lenya is always sitting at somebody else’s, chewing something. Sometimes he drops in on my neighbor Edik Brutt.

“Motherfucker,” I say to him, “what are you doing, spreading rumors again? Always hanging around, you shitass! You ought to stay home, you big slob, write something, work,” I say.

“How vulgar you’ve become, Limonov,” says Lenya. Bearded, bald-pated, dressed in torn jeans, he is a little afraid of me. Even the shape of his head and the stoop of his tall figure testify that he has been mad since birth. I see no special sin or misfortune in this, I merely enjoy establishing the fact.

A completely different form of madness has taken hold in little Sasha Zelensky. This mustachioed prig is notorious among us for owing a gigantic amount in debts, for an émigré. He works nowhere, receives no public assistance, and lives exclusively on credit. On the wall of his studio, which he rents on none other than Fifty-eighth Street, for \$300 a month, is emblazoned the proud inscription: “World—I owe you money!”

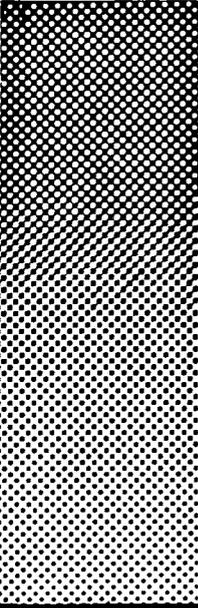
Zelensky graduated from the Institute of International Relations in Moscow. His papa was a big wheel at *Krokodil*. When he first arrived in America Sasha worked as an economist in marine transportation; this was his profession, and since he knew English, they took him in his specialty. He made quite a decent salary, but naturally his madness stirred within him and demanded sacrifices, an incarnation. Sasha decided that he was a great photographer, although he had never taken pictures in the USSR. An emaciated man who looks like a cross between two Russian writers, Belinsky and Gogol, Sasha chose photography, I think, in the belief that there was easy money in this “chic” profession. Had he decided he was a photographer and then taken pictures, labored, striven, sought, that would have been all right; it would simply have been called fanaticism. But this is serious: he takes no pictures, knows how to do nothing, and has developed a frenetic business borrowing more and more money. New loans crawl over old . . . It’s the only thing he knows how to do. How does he manage? I don’t know. Maybe he puts on a yarmulke and goes to the synagogue. That’s what many do . . .

How much does he owe? I don’t know. Perhaps twenty thousand. He calls up people he has seen once in his life and asks for money, and is

very offended when they refuse him. It has been a colossally long time since he paid for his studio, I don't know why they haven't thrown him out by now. He lives on bread and water, thin as a skeleton, but for some reason he doesn't go to work. At one time he worked as a waiter at a coffee shop on Forty-third Street, but after a short time they threw him out.

He has a thin little voice, worn-down shoes, and holey jeans. He and Zhigulin, another boy photographer who lives downstairs, used to have the lousy habit of comforting themselves by loudly cussing out famous photographers: "Hiro? Shit. Avedon? An old hack . . ." The names flashed by. Zelensky and Zhigulin knew how to make masterpieces, but for some reason they didn't do it. Now they've piped down a bit.

At present Sasha Zelensky is waiting for his mummy, whom he dearly loves, to arrive from Moscow. The wild mood he was in a while ago, when Zhigulin said to me, "Mark my words, he's bound to hang himself"—he wouldn't let anyone in and sat locked in the eternal semidarkness of his ragged studio (all there was about him of the photographer was the studio)—that mood has passed. Soon his mummy will arrive, and perhaps mustachioed Sasha with the evil eye (there is something equine about his eye, always rolled back at you with such suspicion, he's always suspicious, Zelensky is) will force his mummy to work, while he himself devises his next project, a design for a ring, a project that he will carry around and propose to the jewelry stores. From time to time Zelensky comes to me—to a man who has done a great deal of tailoring in his life to earn his bread and butter—with the request that I make a designer shirt of his own design, which he painstakingly conceals. I tell him to buy the fabric and bring his design, I'll make it for him immediately. This has been dragging on for two years now, and he will never buy the material or bring the design because there is but one name for all his unfinished schemes—madness. Not the kind where people rattle the bars, yell, and spatter spittle. No, the quiet, apologetic, thin-voiced madness where they try to print color photographs, they conceive designs for rings or invent solar batteries or suddenly decide to devote themselves seriously to classical music. Man has no peace in this world. He is harassed on all sides and forced to make money. Why money? So that seedy down-at-heel Zelensky can turn into handsome Zelensky in a Rolls-Royce, with a beautiful smiling fair lady beside him. All beggars dream of fair ladies. I have already had my fair lady.



# I AM A BUSBOY

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Early March found me working at the Old Bourbon Steakhouse in the Hilton Hotel. The Hilton was an easy walk from the Winslow, two blocks west and one street down.

I came to the Hilton through the influence of a Crimean Tatar named Gaydar, who had been a porter at the Hilton for ten years, one of the family; otherwise they wouldn't have taken me. I must confess I committed a crime: I started at the Hilton several days after going on welfare. I wanted to try it a while and then choose. Once when extremely young I had studied at a special school for waiters, but only briefly; I had no proper education in waitering. I had gone to the school purely by chance.

I had never dreamed that necessity and chance would force me to turn again to this profession. But here I was at the Old Bourbon—a large red room with two balconies and no windows, absolutely no windows, as I presently discovered—working as a busboy. The young Armenian woman who signed me up in the Hilton personnel office said that if I'd had even a mediocre knowledge of the language they would have taken me as a waiter, not a busboy. I lost money by not knowing the language.

The Hilton had a staff of two thousand. The huge hotel worked like a gigantic conveyor belt, never stopping for even a minute. Our restaurant worked at the same pace. The first customers would appear by seven in the morning, mainly snappy, gray-haired, middle-aged men who had arrived from the provinces for a trade convention. They hurried to eat

their breakfasts and get down to business. I remember that now and then we all wore cardboard signs pinned to the lapels of our red uniform jackets, such as: WELCOME, PULP AND PAPER CONVENTION! THE HILTON STAFF GREET'S YOU AND INVITES YOU TO THE TRADITIONAL BITE OF THE RED APPLE. MY NAME IS EDWARD.

If it wasn't pulp and paper, it was some other equally glorious convention. The gentlemen from the provinces had their way paid at the hotel; they all carried identical cards on which the waiter filled in the total for their food and drink.

The gentlemen did not tarry long at the tables. Business was waiting, and after they had bolted down the expensive and in my view none too tasty wares of our kitchen, they lit out for their meetings. The mad rush began at seven, as I have said, and was over for me at three o'clock.

I was subdued and broken then. I could not stop thinking about what had happened to me. Elena's betrayal, her leaving me—the last six months had been a quick slide into tragedy. So I did not feel very good when I got up at half-past five, put a turtleneck sweater on my naked body, then a gray suit, and a scarf at my neck . . . walked the six minutes to the hotel, went down the steps . . . saw a sign that faded with every day, HAVE A NICE DAY AT THE HILTON, as the smell of garbage hit me in the face . . . took the elevator up to my restaurant . . . greeted the Cuban and Greek cooks. I greeted these people from the bottom of my heart, they appealed to me. The entire kitchen and all our busboys, waiters, dishwashers, cleaning women were aliens, not Americans, *metecos*. Their lives were not very settled, their faces were not stonily calm like those of our customers, who controlled the great affairs of pulp and paper in all quarters of America. Many of them—for example, those who took from me the tubs of dirty dishes that I lugged out from the dining room—got even less money than I did. Since I was still caught up in the atmosphere of my tragedy, I felt these people from the kitchen were my comrades in misfortune. And so they were, of course.

Well, every morning I walked through the kitchen, took a little table on casters, covered the top with a white tablecloth and the two lower shelves with red napkins. On the napkins I placed some special long, deep little bowls for butter, sometimes a few forks and knives or a stack of cups and saucers, in case the two waiters I served should lack dishes. On top, on the white tablecloth, I usually placed four imitation-silver pitchers, having first filled them with ice cubes and water, and a big bowl

of butter pats, which I took from the refrigerator and sprinkled with fresh fine ice. On a second such cart I put several empty tubs, also of imitation silver, which I would use all day to lug dirty dishes to the kitchen. Then I went to the board, which indicated the busboys' stations for each day of the week. We changed places so that no one would have a constant advantage, since the customers, for some reason, were more eager to sit in certain spots in the restaurant, and even the manager or the headwaiter, who seated them, often could not keep them from it. Having looked to see which tables I was serving today, I rolled my carts into the dining room and stationed them in the proper place, usually in such a way that they did not strike the customer's eye. And then, as I have said, the mad rush began . . .

The customers appeared. I ran over and greeted them even before the waiter, filled their glasses with ice water, and put butter on their table. At lunch I was also supposed to dash each time to the warming oven—it was located between the kitchen and dining room, in a passageway—take out a hot loaf of bread, slice it, and bring it to the customers, covering it with a napkin to keep it from getting cold. Imagine you have fifteen tables, and you're also supposed to remove the dirty dishes—pronto—change the tablecloths, see that your customers have coffee, butter, and water, and set the table after changing the cloth, lay out silver and napkins. The sweat never dried on my brow; not for nothing did I get my tips. Far from it.

At first, however, I was glad for all that running around. In the beginning it distracted me from thoughts of Elena. Especially at first, when I knew nothing, when I was learning, our restaurant seemed interesting to me. Only occasionally, as I ran frantically with the dirty dishes, almost skidding on the turns, would I recall with anguish that my wife had left for a world much more beautiful than mine, that she was smoking, drinking, and fucking, going to parties well-dressed and fragrant every night, that those making love with her were our customers, their world had stolen Elena away from me. It wasn't all that simple, of course, but they, our slicked-down, smoothed-out American customers, our gentlemen—America forgive me, but they had swiped, ripped off, forcibly taken from me my dearest possession, my little Russian maiden.

I would be carrying out the dirty dishes, walking down the aisle between the tables with a tray of soiled plates held out in front of me,

and these visions of Elena betraying me would appear. I would break out in hot and cold sweat, cast glances full of hatred at our customers. I was not a waiter, I did not spit in their food, I was a poet pretending to be a waiter: I would have blasted them all to hell, but I could not play dirty little tricks on them, was not capable of it.

I'll blow up your world! I thought. I clear away your leavings while my wife fucks and you amuse yourselves with her, for the sole reason that there's an inequality: she has a cunt, for which there are buyers—you—and I don't have a cunt. I'll blow up your world, and these lads will do it with me—the underlings of this world! I thought passionately, my glance resting on one of my fellow busboys—the Chinaman Wong, or the dark-browed, criminal Patricio, or the Argentinian Carlos.

What else was I supposed to feel for this world, for those men? I was no idiot, comparisons with the USSR held no comfort for me. I did not live in the world of statistics and living standards and purchasing power. My pain forced me to hate our customers and to love the kitchen staff and my friends in misfortune. A normal position, you must agree. Strictly normal, unobjective but strictly normal. To my credit it should be said that I was consistent: I had likewise hated the masters of life in the USSR, the party apparatus and the numerous ruling elite. In my hatred for the strong of this world I did not want to be reasonable, did not want to consider assorted explanatory causes, or responses such as these:

“But you've just arrived in America—”

“You have to understand, poetry-writing isn't a profession here—”

And so on.

Fuck your world where there's no place for me, I thought in despair. If I can't destroy it, at least I'll die a fine death in the attempt, along with others like me. I had no concrete image of how this would come about, but from past experience I knew that he who seeks fate is always provided an opportunity; I would not remain without one.

Wong, a young Chinese who came from Hong Kong, had a special appeal for me. He always smiled at me, and although I had trouble understanding him, we managed to communicate somehow. He was my first teacher in the sphere of my uncomplicated profession—he spent a lot of time with me the first week, since I didn't know anything: I didn't know where to get the butter, I didn't know where I was supposed to go for linen. He helped me patiently. On our short break we would go

down to the basement cafeteria for the hotel workers and eat lunch together, I would ask him about his life. He was a typical Chinese—lived in Chinatown, of course, and was mad about karate, took a class from a master twice a week.

Once we had some time left after eating, and went up to the coat-room. He laughingly showed me a pornographic magazine with Chinese girls in it, although he claimed they were Japanese: Chinese women were decent and wouldn't have their pictures in such magazines. I made some coarse jokes about the magazine and Chinese women; Wong had a good laugh. I liked this magazine better than similar ones with Western women, this one did not cause me the pain that I felt when I happened to see magazines with obscenely sprawling blondes. Blondes were associated with Elena, and I would shake with agitation over the inside-out peepkas, the show of internal organs and labial epidermis. The Chinese magazine was comforting. It held no pain for me.

The waiters were dressed differently from us busboys, much more impressively, I envied their uniform. The short red coat with epaulettes and the high-waisted black trousers made them look like toreadors. Tall, handsome Nicholas the Greek, with his broad shoulders; thick-lipped, wisecracking Johnny, almost as tall as Nicholas, but big and heavy; Luciano the Italian, who looked like a pimp, with his narrow forehead and agile narrow frame—I worked with them all, received my 15 percent of the tips from them at the end of breakfast and lunch. Every day I took home \$10 to \$20 in tips.

The waiters were all different. Al, for example, a tall, jolly black guy who was always late—he arrived after all the other waiters, and I often helped him set the tables—gave me more tips than anyone else. A certain Tommy, a guy in glasses and tight short pants, gave me less than anyone.

Two old Chinese waiters—they always worked together, I don't remember their names—were stingy and not at all like Wong, who was a Chinaman of another generation. The gloomy Spaniard Luis did his job with a totally estranged expression, but the Chinese worried a lot about their work and kept trying to teach me things, although it was ten days before I happened to work with them, and by that time I had fully mastered my simple-minded profession. I liked working with Al and Nicholas best; they were jolly and talked to me more than anyone else. Nicholas often encouraged me with exclamations like "Good boy! Good

boy!" I was in love with Nicholas. He was a hot-tempered man, though, and was capable of shouting at me sometimes. What with the rush and the everlasting flying from kitchen to dining room and back, I had lapses like everyone else, and I never took offense at him. Once I saw Nicholas crossly hurl away a heap of pennies that had been given him as a tip; as I say, he was a hot-tempered fellow. In my ignorance of the language I missed a lot in his conversation, but once, sitting in the cafeteria with Nicholas, Johnny, and Tommy, I heard him say hotly, "Public opinion holds that people who become waiters are looking for easy money and therefore shove their dollar . . ." I didn't understand the rest, but it was clear that Nicholas was offended by public opinion. Our work, both theirs and mine, was really very tense, tedious, and nerve-racking.

I am not a slave by nature, waiting on people is hard for me. This came out when our manager, Fred, and headwaiters Bob and Ricardo had lunch on the side balcony, as they liked to do. I got very irritated whenever I happened to be serving the side tables nearest the balcony—they never failed to send me on some errand, although this was not part of my duties. When I served a glass of milk to plump young Bob, my insides would get all knotted up: I did not like to be, could not be, a servant. Sometimes a woman or a girl would lunch with our bosses. Who would ever notice me—a servant is just a servant—yet it would seem to me that she was looking at me and scorning me. And I could not tell her that only a year ago I had been friends with the ambassadors of several countries, I had had good times with them at private parties. I remember one party where there were twelve ambassadors, not secretaries but genuine ambassadors, among them the ambassadors of Sweden and Mexico, Iran and Laos, and the host himself was my friend the Venezuelan ambassador Burelli, a poet and a very fine man. His embassy on Yermolova Street was like home to Elena and me. Nor could I explain to her that in my country I had been one of the best poets. Everyone would have laughed had I said so. When I came to work at the hotel I put down all sorts of foolishness about my past on the application, said I had always worked as a waiter in Kharkov and Moscow restaurants. That was bullshit.

Actually I was leading a double life. The manager was pleased with me, the waiters too. Sometimes Bob the headwaiter taught me something; I would summon up all my acting talent and listen, assiduously wide-eyed, as he advised me to fill the glasses as well as the pitchers with

water and ice before work, so that I could serve the water right in the glasses without delay when there was a great influx of customers. I would look Bob in the eye and say “Yes, sir!” every couple of minutes. He did not know what was in my heart and mind. “Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!” Bob was pleased. But I was leading a double life. And hating the customers more and more. Not merely because of Elena, but mainly because of her. When we happened to have a few minutes’ respite I would fold and stack napkins—to have them ready at hand—and I would recall involuntarily, with pain, I could not help recalling, the events of the last months . . .

She informed me that she had a lover on the nineteenth of December, in the terrible cold and the dim evening light of our tragic Lexington Avenue apartment. Shaken and humiliated, I told her, “Sleep with whomever you wish, I love you madly, I want only to live with you and care for you,” and I kissed the knee uncovered by her robe. And that was how we lived.

Even this decision she attributed to my weakness, not to love. At the beginning, after the nineteenth of December, she was still forcing herself not to refuse me in love, trying to make love with me. From some quirk of my constitution I wanted her every day then, I had a constant hard-on. In my diary, if I summon the courage to look in it, I discover joyful short notes: I had made love with her four times, or twice, or once. But she grew more and more insolent, and gradually our coitions—no other word will do, so solemn were they for me—became very infrequent.

At last she completely stopped making love with me and said openly aloud that she wanted to leave me. I wandered in the twilight of my unconscious, masturbated at night in the bathroom after donning Elena’s—she had just come home and was already asleep—still-warm pantyhose and panties; often both the one and the other were spotted with semen, someone else’s of course, and I wanted but one happiness, to fuck my very own wife. Thus a delirious idea gradually took hold in me—to rape Elena.

One sunny, very sunny, frosty day, from a cultured salesman with a little beard, in a store on Broadway, I bought a pair of handcuffs. They were . . . well, everyone knows what kind of handcuffs you buy on Broadway for seven dollars. By the time I got home I was in complete hysterics over this purchase. After testing and closely examining the

handcuffs, I had discovered with horror that there was a button to open them without the aid of a key, that is, they were steel and apparently strong, but for play, for children. There was even a notice that children over three could play with the handcuffs. A pitiful story, very pitiful.

I burst into sobs of pity for myself and my body, which was forced to resort to such nightmarish methods to get a caress. Even my attempt at rape was a failure. I howled, I wept a very long time, and then, gasping and weeping, found a remedy after all. I took a serrated kitchen knife and in half an hour, never ceasing to weep, sawed the release buttons off the handcuffs and made them real, they would open now only with the aid of a key. As I did this I saw myself from outside and decided, as a writer, that this gruesome scene was fit for Hollywood: Limonov weeping with grief *over a pair of handcuffs for his beloved* and filing off the safety button with a kitchen knife.

I never did put the handcuffs to use, or the rope either. The dream of raping Elena went hand in hand with the dream of killing her. Already insane, two weeks before buying the handcuffs, I had taken up the rug, the preposterous pink rug in our bedroom, and installed a rope snare under it. I fastened one end of the rope to a pipe in the corner of the room; from the other end I made a slip noose, so that as a last resort, when it became more than I could bear, I could strangle her easily and noiselessly. Then I thought of killing myself by means of . . . the means of killing myself kept changing in my imagination. The rope lay there quite a long time, sometimes I think it was what saved Elena and me from death. Lying there beside Elena at night, strangers, neighbors, she under her blanket and I under mine, breathing the smell of alcohol and smoke that emanated from her—she had taken a liking to marijuana, cocaine, and other delights—lying there, she snored faintly in her sleep, exhausted from orgasms with hateful American men (this is why I can never love you again, America!), despite all, I was comforted to remember the rope. Despite all, I knew that if I reached under my pillow the end of the rope would be in my hands; it would be nothing to throw the noose over the head of the little tormentress lying beside me. The possibility, the ease, of ending it all comforted me, and perhaps that is why I escaped the outbursts that could have led to murder: I was sure I could always kill her, I could do it at any time. Thanks to the rope, some part of the malice and madness gradually left me . . .

All these horrors came to mind while I folded napkins. Nicholas

returned me to reality—he thrust an empty coffeepot into my hands and I flew to the kitchen, noticing along the way that the young woman and the corpulent man who looked like a gangster had finished their breakfast and left, and that Fred, the manager himself, was clearing the table and spreading a clean tablecloth, when I was the one who was supposed to do that. My blunder sobered me up completely; I ran to the kitchen so fast that on the turns I had to grab at the wall to keep from falling. I wonder what she is to him, I thought as I ran. Certainly not his daughter—either his wife or his mistress. He doesn't look like someone from a pulp and paper convention, but then why the fuck is he up so early? With such a beautiful woman I personally could not be dragged out of bed before dinner . . .

As you see, our restaurant was also frequented by women. They were many fewer than the men, I stared at them with caution, disbelief, and forgive me . . . with delight. Alas. I stared at them in a peculiar way—I scorned them, hated them, simultaneously realizing that their pastimes would never be open to me. They had an advantage over me, the advantage of birth. I had everlastingly served them in this life, invited them places, undressed them, fucked them, and they had lain silent, or cried out, or lied and pretended.

Even in the past I had sometimes suffered acute attacks of hostility to women, genuine malicious hostility. Then came Elena, and the hostility subsided, hid. Now, after everything, I was suffering acute envy toward Elena, and since she embodied for me the whole female sex, envy toward women in general. The biological injustice roused my indignation. Why must I love, seek, fuck, preserve—so many more verbs could be piled on—while *she* must only *use*. I think my hatred proceeded from envy that I had no cunt. For some reason it seemed to me that a cunt was more perfect than a prick.

Bitches, I thought, staring at the well-cared-for girls and women arriving in our restaurant. Once my fellow busboys caught one of those stares. The busboy Patricio, a dark-browed criminal type with false teeth, pointed to the woman I had stared at and asked sarcastically, “Do you like ladies?” I said yes, I had been married three times. Patricio and Carlos looked at me in disbelief. “Maybe you like men?” Patricio asked with interest, breathing alcohol at me. He used to finish off the liquor the customers left in their glasses. Later I began doing it too, usually going behind a sort of screen. Now and then I also finished off the food

the customers hadn't eaten. Being an Oriental, I'm very fond of fatty meat, for example. The customers left the fat, but I wasn't so picky.

The conversation about women and men ended with a retort that delighted Carlos and Patricio: that in general I liked women, but I might also change the object of my love and in the future love men. Then Ricardo the headwaiter appeared and dispersed us; one of us ran for butter, one for napkins, one to clear empty dirty plates from under the customers' noses.

When I started at the restaurant, I am ashamed to say I had the fleeting thought that I would be in society here and could make some contacts. Oh, how stupid I was! The waiter—never mind the waiter, even the headwaiter himself—is separated from the customers as if by an iron wall. No intimacy occurred. The first few days I tried to use my face and figure to attract the attention of the customers, of all the beautiful women and the men I found appealing. I thought they would have to notice me. Only later did I realize that they had no fucking need of me. The notion of intimacy, contacts, was sheer nonsense, gentlemen, and it had occurred to me only because I was not yet quite well from my tragedy.

My fellow workers didn't treat me badly. The Latin-Americans called me "Russia." Why they conferred on me the name of the country I had fled I don't know. Perhaps they found that name more pleasing than my own, which I had brought from Russia but which was quite common in America—Edvard, or Edward. My Chinese friend Wong generally doted on me, especially after I helped him with the linen. Each of the busboys had linen duty every third day: we would bring up from the basement, from the laundry, a huge box of clean linen and unload it in the storeroom, where we kept all sorts of things in addition to linen—candles, sugar, pepper, and other necessities. I loved the storeroom, loved its smell of clean linen and spices. Sometimes I ran in there in the middle of work, to change a towel or quickly finish chewing a piece of meat left on the plate of some surfeited customer, and then ran on. Well, so once I helped Wong unload the linen after work and put it away on the storeroom shelves—this goes much faster with two people, but for some reason they didn't do it that way there. Wong thanked me so profusely that I felt uncomfortable.

Another day he took my little Collins dictionary and looked up the word "good," then showed it to me and said with a broad smile, "That's

you.” I am much prouder of this lad’s praise than of all the compliments paid to me and my poetry at various times in my life. “I’m good!” Wong had acknowledged it, probably I really wasn’t too bad. I would have liked to be friends with Wong, but unfortunately it didn’t work out, gentlemen, I had to forsake the Old Bourbon.

On my way home from work I sometimes dropped in to see the other Russians who worked at the Hilton. After going out through a passageway and punching my time card, I could come up from the basement, turn left, and see the guard, Mr. Andrianov, a former Soviet navy captain. Tall and solid, he writes down the numbers of the trucks that arrive at the loading ramp to load and unload, and keeps order. He’s easy to talk to, an enthusiastic conversationalist. Sometimes Andrianov stands in the vestibule by the main entrance to the hotel, and he’s so solid and impressive, gray temples under his cap, that rich women passing by sometimes start conversations with him.

An interesting thing happened to Andrianov, which I took a malicious delight in because it confirmed some theories of mine. Andrianov lives in a suburb in a pretty good neighborhood, the people are quite well-to-do. One time he received a letter from the local police department, which said: “Knowing that you have great experience in police work [in the USSR Andrianov had served as a paratroop officer, then a navy captain, and so on], we invite you to take part in our voluntary neighborhood security program.” They made no distinction between the USSR and the U.S.A., these gentlemen from the police. Theirs is the most sober world view I have ever encountered. To them, a KGB agent arriving in America would be a much more desirable gentleman than people like me. Someone who has service experience is naturally preferable to someone who does not have such experience and moreover does not wish to serve. Andrianov refused to take part in their program. A pity.

In addition to Andrianov, I used to stop and chat with Gaydar, if there was no urgent call for him to lug someone’s suitcases upstairs. I would gawk at the lanky red-coated doorman, who was well known to the whole hotel as Fidel Castro’s schoolmate; he opened the doors of the automobiles that drove up to the hotel. Because of Fidel he had lost his lands and family wealth and now served the Hilton. His wages were small, but he made a lot in tips. “A lot,” said Gaydar, who also made quite a bit in tips. It’s very hard to land the profitable job of doorman.

Deep in the hotel, near its linens, food, garbage, furniture, electricity, water, and all that, there are quite a few other Russians to be found. Lenya Kosogor, a tall, stooped man, over fifty, who was mentioned in Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, works here as an electrician—they go around in baggy light green work clothes—sometimes I dropped by to see Lenya, too. So far, this flight to an alien land has done me no good: if in the USSR I associated with poets, artists, academicians, ambassadors, and the enchanting Russian women, then here, as you see, my friends are porters, busboys, electricians, guards, and dishwashers. My fucking past no longer bugs me, though. I'm trying so hard to forget it that I think I eventually will. You have to forget, otherwise you'll always be warped.

Sometimes I brought something home from the hotel. Some little trifle. I stole. What the hell. My bare prison cell at the Winslow became just a shade more cheerful when I brought home a red-and-white checked cloth and put it on the table. Several days later a second tablecloth appeared, then a red napkin. That was all I needed to set up housekeeping. I stole a few knives, forks, and spoons from the restaurant as well, and that was it, I needed no more things. You must agree this was reasonable. The Hilton shared a tiny bit with the Winslow.

When I returned from work I studied English, at least that was my schedule. Or I went to a movie theater, most often the Playboy, which was cheap and close, on Fifty-seventh Street, and saw two films for a dollar. Coming home through the New York night, I raged and dreamed, I thought about the world, about sex, about women and men, about rich and poor, why one child is born into a rich family and has everything he desires from childhood on, while others . . . Those others in my imagination were people like me, those to whom the world was unjust.

When I came home, I lay down on the bed and, I confess, gentlemen (after all, the living debauched Elena still roamed within me), I confess I lay there sighing and sighing, pitying my body that no one needed though it was young and beautiful (I had already been out getting a tan, shivering with cold on the splendid roof of the unsplendid Winslow), truly young and beautiful, boys, and the fact that Elena did not need me hurt so much, it was so terrifying, that instead of running away from my fears, memories, and imaginings I tried to gain pleasure from them. I used them, the memories and fears, as I languorously kneaded my

member. Not on purpose, it happened automatically, as in wild animals; when I lay down on the bed I invariably thought of Elena, felt agitated because she was not beside me, after all she had lain with me for years, why wasn't she here now? In short, I ended by copulating with her shade. Ordinarily these were group copulations, that is, she fucked someone while I watched, and then I fucked her. I imagined all this with my eyes shut, and at times constructed very elaborate scenes. During these séances my eyes were full of tears, I sobbed, but what else could I do, I sobbed and I came, and semen spilled on my already tan belly. Ah, what a nice belly I have, you should see it—lovely. Eddie-baby's poor little body, what has it been driven to by that lousy Russian tart? "My sister, little sister!" My little fool!

Long before, she had forced me out into the world of masturbation to her themes—back in the fall, when she took a lover and began to do it less often with me. I sensed something wrong and asked, "Elena, confess, you have a lover, don't you?" She didn't really deny it, but she didn't say yes or no, languidly she whispered something passionate and exciting, and I wanted her endlessly. The recollection of that passionate whisper makes me want her to this day, gives me a shameful hard-on.

She forced me out. I had a live, beautiful, twenty-five-year-old wife with a sweet peepka, yet I was obliged to hide like a thief, dressed up in her things—for some reason that gave me special pleasure—and spill my semen in her sweet-smelling panties. She had bought herself a pungently fragrant raspberry-colored oil and was smearing it on her peepka, so that all her panties smelled of the oil.

My friends, if you ask why I didn't find myself another woman, the truth is, Elena was too splendid, and anything else would have seemed squalid to me in comparison with her little peepka. I'd rather fuck a fantasy than a vulgar woman. Besides, I had no women handy at that time. When some turned up, I tried to fuck them, as you will see, I did fuck them, but then retired into my world of fantasy. They were uninteresting to me and therefore unneeded. My solitary intellectual diversions with Elena's shade had a criminal aura and were much more enjoyable. Elena's voice rings in my ears to this day, I can thank this sentence, this thin little voice, for a good fifty orgasms: "I put my fingeer there, I press down and lightly stroke my peepka and look in the mirror, and gradually I see a white juice ooze out of me, a white drop appear in my rosy peepka." This little tale was the accompaniment to one of my last

coitions with her. Besides everything else, you see—that is, besides me, Jean, Susanna, and company, she also masturbated. All of us together, you see, were not enough for her. The pig.

I remember a row, it was the day she first met Susanna the lesbian, she had spent the whole evening hugging and kissing her. I hauled her home almost by force, she hissed and dragged her heels. At home the row flared up worse than ever. Elena had already undressed for bed. She was screaming at me, shrilly and drunkenly, slurring her sibilants as she usually did when drunk. And now I felt descending upon me a certain masochistic ecstasy. I loved her, this pale, gaunt, small-breasted creature in her whorish scrap of panties, who had donned my socks to sleep in. I was ready to cut off my own head, my own unhappy refined noggin, and throw myself face down before her. For what? She was a sleaze, a pig, an egoist, a stinker, an animal, but I loved her, and this love was higher than my consciousness. She humiliated me in everything, she had humiliated my flesh, killed, crippled my mind, my nerves, everything I clung to in this world, but I loved her with those panties round on her neat little poopka, loved her pale, with her froggy thighs, sweet thighs, loved her standing with her feet on our foul bed. I loved her! It was horrible, I loved her worse and worse.

Such were the memories that saw me off to sleep with semen smeared on my belly. At five-thirty I woke up from nightmares that were more of the same. Shaking them off, I turned on the light and started my coffee, shaved (to this day I have nothing to shave on my Mongol puss), tied a funereal black kerchief around my neck, and dragged my ass over to the Hilton. The street was deserted, I headed west on Fifty-fifth, hunching against the cold. Had I ever thought such experiences would fall to my share in life? To be perfectly honest, I had never expected any of this. A Russian lad brought up in a bohemian milieu. "Poetry, art, these are the highest occupations one can have on this earth. The poet is the most important person in the world." These truths had been impressed upon me from childhood. And now, while still a Russian poet, I was a most unimportant person. Life had smashed me in the face . . .

The days passed, and the Hilton Hotel with all its stinking dungeons was no longer a mystery to me. Half a hundred professional terms tripped lightly from my tongue, I had no time to converse, I was supposed to work, that was what I was being paid for, not to converse. The whole kitchen spoke Spanish, the Italians spoke Italian among

themselves, all languages were heard in the “servants’ hall” (as it was called in olden times) except correct English. Even our manager, Fred, was Austrian. Some time ago the manager had suddenly taken to calling me Alexander. Perhaps in his conception all Russians were Alexanders. That was no surprise; the Thracian slaves in Rome were all addressed simply as “Thracian,” why the fuck stand on ceremony with them, they were slaves. Having had an eyeful of the Hilton’s multinational slaves, I already knew what supported America. I cautiously told Fred that I was Edward, not Alexander; he corrected himself, but the next day I became Alexander again. I did not correct Fred anymore, I reconciled myself. What difference does it make what your name is?

The restaurant began to get on my nerves. The only thing it had brought me was a little money. With that money I had been able to realize some of my trivial desires; for example, I had bought a black lace shirt at the Arcadia shop on Broadway, and made the acquaintance of the owner while I was at it. As a souvenir of the Hilton and the Old Bourbon I have a white suit hanging in my closet, bought at Cromwell on Lexington Avenue. But the restaurant itself got on my nerves, I was tired. Thoughts of Elena were not disappearing. Sometimes they suddenly surfaced in the midst of work and covered me with a cold sweat; on several occasions, although I’m a robust fellow, I nearly collapsed in a faint. But the worst of it was that I constantly saw my enemies, those who had stolen Elena away from me—our customers, men who had money. I realized that I was being unjust, but could not help myself. Is the world just to me?

I was penetrated ever more deeply by a feeling that I arbitrarily defined to myself as class hatred. I didn’t so much hate our customers as individuals; no, essentially I hated all gentlemen of this type, gray and sleek. I knew that it was not we, the tattered, shaggy, and fucked-up, who had introduced the plague into this world, it was they. The plague of money, the disease of money, is their handiwork. The plague of buying and selling is their handiwork. The murder of love, the fact that love is something to be scorned—this too is their handiwork.

And most of all I hate this system, I realized when I tried to make sense of my feelings, the system that corrupts people from birth. I made no distinction between the USSR and America. Nor did I feel ashamed of myself because my hatred sprang from what was essentially such an understandable and personal cause, my wife’s betrayal. I hated this

world, which turned touching, poetry-writing Russian girl-children into creatures fucked up by drink and narcotics, to serve as bedding for millionaires who would wear out but not marry the silly Russian girls, who were also trying to do their business. Country gentlemen have always had a weakness for Frenchwomen, have sent for them in their Klondikes, but have kept them as whores and married pure farmers' daughters. I could no longer look at our customers.

At about this time I was supposed to go to Bennington, get acquainted with its women's college and its Professor Horowitz. I had sent them a letter about myself, and they evidently wanted to hire me. I don't know what the job title was, something trivial, but connected with the Russian language. At the time I wrote the letter I was so fucking crazy I just wanted to hide somewhere, but when Professor Horowitz, after several phone calls, finally caught me at the Winslow, I realized that no Bennington or its American girls from good families could save me, I would flee from Bennington to New York inside of a week. I knew myself all too well. I did not want to play their game. I wanted, as in Russia, to be outside the game, or if possible, if I could, to play against them. "If I could" implied a temporary condition: I meant that for the time being I knew very little about the world I had come to. They had robbed me, fucked me, and damn near killed me, but I did not yet know how to get my revenge. That I would get it I had no doubt. I did not want to be calm and just. Fuck justice—you can have it; I'll take injustice . . .

Sitting with Wong in the cafeteria, I explained to him why I didn't like rich people. Wong didn't like rich people either, I did not have to persuade him on this point; in this world the poor are all revolutionaries and criminals, only not everyone finds the way, not everyone has the resolve. The laws were devised by the rich. But, as one of the proudest slogans of our unsuccessful Russian Revolution proclaims, "The right to life is higher than the right to private property!"

I have said that I did not hate the specific bearers of evil, the rich. I have even admitted that there might be among them victims of the world order. What I hated was the system, in which one man goes out of his fucking mind from boredom and idleness, or from the daily production of fresh hundreds of thousands, while another man barely earns a living at hard labor. I wanted to be an equal among equals.

Now try and say that I was unjust. I was not.

My last days at the Hilton were spent in terrible agitation. One day I would feel like quitting work and decide to do it, basing my decision on numerous considerations. Why the fuck am I living this way? I thought irritably. I still don't have any money, not even enough to rent a normal apartment. I'm dreadfully tired, sometimes I go to bed at eight. I haven't made any contacts at the restaurant, I've hardly made any progress with the language, so what's the point of working here? I'll leave. I'll leave, and I won't feel any pangs in front of Gaydar, why the fuck should I be ashamed in front of Gaydar? A man looks for where it's best, the best thing for me is to leave and be on welfare. We are not slaves—no slaves are we. It's either all, or if nothing, welfare.

The next day, my day off, when I had nothing to do and my devil Elena appeared to me again in all her glory, I would feel tormented by the free time; hoping again that work would kill my torment, I would decide to stay on at the Hilton. But, after working another day or two and falling asleep again at practically eight, I was exasperated. Walking from work through the seething crowds to Sixth, Fifth, and Madison avenues, I thought again, I'll leave, I'll leave tomorrow, enough of killing myself—though I really could do the work, if I wanted to be a waiter and conceived of my future as that of a waiter or porter.

In the morning, walking to work in the dark, I would make a six-minute excursus through all of world literature—that many lines came to my mind every time. Some fucking waiter! The poem I remembered most often, for some reason, nearly every day, was "Factory," by our great Russian poet Alexander Blok. "Yellow the windows next door . . ." Then I skipped the lines I didn't need and recited the last stanza in full:

*They enter and straggle off,  
Under heavy sacks they stoop,  
And the yellow windows laugh—  
Beggars are easy to dupe . . .*

Walking to work, coming home from work, I felt myself to be one of those beggars, I had been duped. My native literature would not let me become an ordinary man and live in peace, shit no, it tweaked me for my red busboy jacket and preached at me, arrogantly and justly: "Shame on you, Edichka! You are a Russian poet, that is your caste, my dear, that is your uniform. You have discredited your uniform, you must leave

this place. Better a beggar, better to live as you did at the end of February—a beggar and bum.”

Oh, I didn't fully trust my Russian literature, but I hearkened to her voice, and she wore me down in the end. Her constant “The yellow windows laugh—Beggars are easy to dupe” (I took the yellow windows to mean Park Avenue, Fifth, and their denizens) forced me one day to approach Fred, the manager, and tell him, “Excuse me, sir, but after looking at this work I have come to the conclusion that it's not for me. I'm very tired and I need to learn English, I want to leave. You've seen that I'm a good worker, if you need me I'll come another day or two, but no more than that.”

I wanted to tell him, but did not, that I was incapable, constitutionally incapable, of playing the servant and I found his customers disagreeable. “I do not wish to serve the bourgeoisie,” I wanted to tell him, but did not—for fear of sounding too pompous, for that reason alone.

In the Hilton period, in the last days of my stay there, I accomplished several other things—wrote a letter to a “Very Attractive Lady” and sent eleven of my poems to Moscow, to the journal *Novy Mir*.

The “Very Attractive Lady” had placed an ad in the *Village Voice*. Lady, 39, desired companion for trip to “Paris, Amsterdam, Santa Fe, etc.” The itinerary suited me, as I wrote the lady, 39. Now I recall this with irony; at the time it seemed to be my only chance, and I was sure she would jump at a Russian poet. Besides, in February, in a *New York Review of Books* article about Russian literature today, Carl Proffer had devoted several lines to me, as I also wrote the very attractive lady, without a twinge of conscience, like a salesman touting his wares. I am still waiting for her answer. Well, it would have been a chance to come up to the surface, out of the artificial life that I am living to this day, and get into the real world. No matter, I might have knifed the very attractive lady on the third day of her “favorite trip,” as she called it. To her good fortune, she turned out to have little imagination. Recalling my shameless brags in that letter, I am even somewhat embarrassed.

The letter to the editors of *Novy Mir* was written out of mischief and my love of scandal. Although I was almost positive they would not print my poems, I did not deny myself the pleasure of having some fun at the expense of both camps. My conscience was clear. Solzhenitsyn, while living in the USSR, had published his books here in the West; his conscience hadn't bothered him, in point of fact he had thought only

of his own career as a writer, not of the consequences or influence of his books. So why couldn't I, while living here, publish my poems over there in the USSR? Both governments had made good use of me, at last I could use them too. I had some chance of getting published. After all, a whole page had been devoted to me and my article "Disillusionment" (which, as I have already mentioned, got me fired from *Russkoe Delo*) in the Moscow weekly *Nedelya* for the week of February 23. By divine coincidence, those were the very days when I was out of my fucking mind. Wrapped in a filthy overcoat I had found in the trash, my arm oozing pus, I was roaming through the New York February, picking scraps out of garbage cans and drinking the last drops from wine and liquor bottles. I wandered a good deal in Chinatown during those days, spent the nights with bums. I endured six days of that life, on the seventh I returned warily to the apartment on Lexington and saw again my gruesome exhibit of Elena's things, which I had hung on the walls, with a label under each item, such as:

Elena's wee little stocking—white  
 Whereabouts of the other, unknown  
 She bought little white stockings when she had come  
 to know her lover, and at the same time bought  
 two slender belts . . . she and her lover wore them  
 to fuck . . . for Eddie Limonov, sorrow and  
 a martyr's torment.

Or:

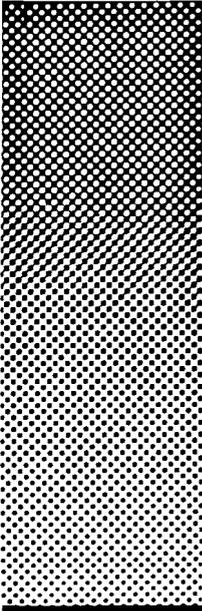
Tampax  
 Elena Sergeevna's  
 unused,  
 my girl-child could insert it  
 in her peepka—comically  
 it used to stick out, hang out of  
 her peepka, the string.

The objects were hung on nails and coat hangers, or taped to the walls. Jolly little exhibit, wasn't it? How would you like to be invited to such an exhibit? But I had invited people, on February twenty-first. About

ten people saw the exhibit, and Sashka Zhigulin came and got it down on film, so that I have it on three rolls.

I was out of my mind, I confess; the exhibit was called "Diary of Saint Elena." When I returned from being a bum, I tore all those things down from the walls, with my eyes narrowed and face averted, and began a new life, which is what led me to the Hilton and welfare and the Hotel Winslow. Fuck it—so many events rolled over me in that period, and I seem to be getting slowly stronger day by day, I can tell.

When I forsook the Hilton, when I shag-assed out of there the last day, I laughed like a silly baby: I had shed one more burden, one more stage. I was sorry only about Wong, but I hoped to find him when I needed him. I could not be useful to him yet.



# OTHERS AND RAYMOND

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I really got over my tragedy very fast, all things considered. Granted, I'm not quite over it even yet, but all the same the pace has been startling. I've known of other such tragedies, and people have recovered slowly, if at all. It was March when I made my first attempts at intimacy with men, and by April I had my first lover.

One day in March, Kirill, the young aristocrat from Leningrad, mentioned that he was acquainted with a fellow a little over fifty, and that he was a homosexual.

For some reason this stuck in my mind. "Kirill, old buddy," I said finally, "women rouse me to disgust, my wife has made intercourse with women impossible for me, I can't deal with them. They're always having to be serviced, undressed, fucked. They're panhandlers and parasites by nature, in everything from intimate relations to the economics of the normal joint household in society. I can't live with them anymore. The main thing is, I can't service them—take the initiative, make the first move. What I need now is someone to service me—caress, kiss, want me—rather than wanting and being ingratiating myself. Only from men can I get all this. You'd never guess I'm thirty fucking years old, I'm nice and trim, my figure is faultless, more like a boy's than a man's, even. Introduce me to this fellow," I begged. "Please, Kirill, I'll be eternally grateful!"

"Limonov, are you serious?" Kirill asked.

"You think I'm joking?" I replied. "Look at me, I'm alone now, I'm

at the very bottom of this society—the bottom of it, hell, I'm simply outside it, outside of life. Sexually I'm totally freaked out, women don't arouse me, my dick is faint with incomprehension, it just dangles because it doesn't know what to want and its master is sick. If things go on like this, I'll end up impotent. I need a friend. There's no question in my mind, men have always liked me, always, they've liked me since I was thirteen. I need a solicitous friend to help me return to the world, a man to love me. I'm weary, no one has worried about me for a long time, I want attention, I want to be loved and fussed over. Introduce me, and I'll take care of the rest, really, he'll like me."

I wasn't lying to Kirill; it was a fact. I had even had some long-term admirers, I had snickered at their advances, but somehow I had enjoyed their attention. Now and then I had even allowed myself to go to a restaurant with them; once in a while, for the fun of it or maybe the stimulation, I had allowed them to kiss me, but we never fucked. Among ordinary people same-sex love was considered impure, dirty. In my country pederasts are very unfortunate. At the whim of the authorities they can be entrapped and put in prison for what in the opinion of Soviet law is an unnatural love. I knew a pianist who did two years for pederasty; the film director Paradzhanov is doing time now. But that is the attitude of ordinary people, the authorities, the law. I was a poet, and I had been intoxicated by Mikhail Kuzmin's "Alexandrian Songs" and other poems, where he sings the praises of his male lover and tells about love between men.

My most persistent admirer was a red-haired singer named Avdeev from the Teatralny Restaurant. The restaurant was directly across from my apartment windows. Every evening, if I was home, I could hear his voice belting out "Mama's Poor Heart" and other semiunderworld songs. The restaurant was small and on the dirty side; every night they had almost exclusively the same crowd. Among the habitués were thieves, gypsies from the outskirts of Kharkov, and other shady characters. In summer I heard my singer's voice loudly, at its natural volume; in winter, muffled by the closed windows.

I had just moved in with Anna, a beautiful gray-haired Jewish woman. We lived together as man and wife, it was a happy time for me, my poetry went well, life was gay, I drank a lot, I had a good coffee-colored English suit (which I hadn't come by quite honestly), I spent a lot of time hanging out on the main street of our city with my dear friend

Gennady, handsome Gena, son of the manager of the largest restaurant in town.

Gena was a sheer joy. An idler, he saw his calling in drinking sprees and parties, but sumptuous ones. Strange as it may seem, his attitude toward women was almost indifferent. Even though he appeared to love Nona, who came on the scene later, he could give up a date with her for an excursion with me to a little out-of-town restaurant that we called the Monte Carlo, where they made sumptuous chicken *tabaka*. My friendship with Gena lasted several years, until I went away to Moscow. Gena and I were rakehells, like Fellini's provincial city boys.

The relationship with Gena, I think, was one facet of my innate homosexuality. For the sake of a date with him I used to escape my wife and mother-in-law by jumping from a second-story window. I loved him very much, although we didn't even embrace. As I now see, I was all entangled in homosexual liaisons, only I didn't understand that. When I said good-bye to Gena at the corner—I lived on Sumskaya Street, our main street, where the Teatralny Restaurant also was—Avdeev would come out of the restaurant, he had dark circles under his eyes, his lightly made-up lips glistened, he would walk over and say in a hollow, languid voice, "Good evening!" Sometimes he had to cross the street to do it. I believe he even interrupted his songs for the sake of this "Good evening"; I mean, he rushed right off the stage. He had a clear view of the street through the big windows. Often I was very drunk, and my friends recall that Avdeev sometimes helped me to my house, walked me into the entrance, and started me up the stairs.

Back before Gena and the nightly scene of Avdeev's figure bowed in greeting, back when I was in school, I had a butcher friend, Sanya the Red, a huge man of German descent with a florid complexion, which was why he was nicknamed "the Red." He was six or eight years older than I. I showed up at the butcher shop first thing in the morning, I went everywhere with him, I even accompanied him on dates with girls, and besides we had a more solid tie—we worked together. We stole. I played the role of a cherubic poet, usually this was at the dance pavilion or out in the park, I recited poems to the astonished, open-mouthed girls, and meanwhile Sanya the Red, with his stubby, clumsy-looking fingers, would lightly and unnoticeably—he was a great artist at this business—remove the girls' watches and pick their purses. It was all beautifully thought out, we never once got caught. As you see, my art

then went side by side with crime. Afterward we either headed for a restaurant or bought a couple of bottles of wine, drank them right from the bottle in the park or in a doorway, and went for a walk.

I very much enjoyed appearing with him on the streets and in crowded places. He dressed brightly, wore gold rings—one had a skull, I remember, that captured my fancy. He had the taste of a gangster, as they are depicted in the movies. On a summer evening, for example, he liked to wear white pants, a black shirt, and rakish white suspenders; he had a predilection for suspenders. A huge man—he even had a paunch, which got bigger and bigger with the years—he in no way resembled the ordinary, in those years rather drab inhabitants of our city, which is a provincial industrial center with the most numerous proletariat in the Ukraine.

He got sent up without me—went to prison for attempting to rape a woman with whom he had had sex many times before. In prison he worked in the kitchen and . . . wrote poetry. When he got out, someone gave him a good deep dig with a knife. “Even my fat didn’t help!” he complained, when I visited him in the hospital.

He was kind to me, he encouraged me in writing poetry and very much enjoyed listening to poetry. Several summers in a row, at his request, I read to an astonished crowd at the city beach lines that went something like this:

*My girl they will snatch  
From the car by the nape  
And I will then watch  
The men commit rape*

*Men with pates jutting  
With cigarettes vile  
Will run like dogs rutting  
Round the scam of your thighs . . .*

It is funny and sad to read these lines, written by a sixteen-year-old, but I am forced to confess to myself that they strike an unpleasantly prophetic note. The world has fucked my love, and the men with jutting pates—the businessmen and merchants—are the ones who now fuck her, my little Elena . . .

I was devoted to Sanya, body and soul. Had he wished it, I probably would have slept with him. But evidently he didn’t know he could use

me in this way, or had no inclination to, or wasn't sophisticated enough. Russia's mass culture didn't serve this to him on a platter the way American culture does.

Such is my history. A love for strong men. I confess, and I see it now. Sanya the Red was so strong that he used to break the bars in the fence around the outdoor dance pavilion, the bars were as thick as a big man's arm. True, he did this only when we didn't have the fifty kopecks for admission.

Gena was tall, well built, and looked like a young Nazi. Dark blue eyes. I never met a more handsome man.

My friendships are intelligible to me now. Those were but two, the most memorable; there were others, but for many years I lived as if in a fog, and only when my tragedy opened my eyes did I suddenly see my life from a new perspective.

Well, I somehow convinced Kirill, who was listening with awe, that my desire was sincere. He listens that way to the stories of all his companions, not just to mine, with a great show of interest, as if this were his main business in life; but it's only show. He's a young man who promises much but does little. In this case, thank God, I knew he wasn't stretching the truth to make himself look good, he really was living temporarily in the apartment of some homosexual who was out of town. I had visited him there and seen the special magazines for men, and all the rest of it. What the hell, maybe Kirill really would introduce me. I was forced to grasp at anything, I had nothing, we were alien to this world. Ignorance of the language, especially conversation; prostration after my tragedy; prolonged isolation from society—for all these reasons I was unutterably lonely. All I was doing was bumming around New York on foot, sometimes walking two hundred and fifty blocks a day, bumming around in neighborhoods both dangerous and safe, sitting, lying, smoking, drinking from a bottle in a paper bag, sleeping in the street. I would go two or three weeks without talking to anyone.

Time passed. I called Kirill once or twice and asked how were things, when would he keep his promise and introduce me to this fellow. He muttered something incomprehensible, justifying himself and obviously inventing excuses. I had completely given up hope in him, when suddenly he called me and said in an unnaturally theatrical voice, "Listen, remember our conversation? I'm here with a friend, he's French, his

name is Raymond, he'd like to see you. Come on over, we'll have a drink and talk awhile—it's next door to your hotel."

I said, "Kirill, is it that fellow, the pederast?"

"Yes," he said, "but not that one."

I said, "All right, I'll be there in an hour."

"Make it quick," he said.

I am not going to lie and say that I rushed over there with flaming eyes and fire in my loins. No. I vacillated and was somewhat scared. For perhaps a minute or two I didn't even want to go. Then I spent a long time wondering what to wear. In the end I dressed very strangely, in torn French blue jeans and a fine new Italian denim blazer; I put on a yellow Italian shirt, a vest, multicolored Italian boots, wrapped my neck in a black scarf, and started off, nervous—of course I was nervous. Live all those years with women, and then try and switch to men. You'll be nervous.

He lived at—but I don't want to hurt the man. On the whole he's a nice old fellow. An apartment "done in antique-shop," as we used to say in Russia. On the wall, a Chagall with a dedicatory inscription; knickknacks; paintings depicting, as I later learned, our host himself in a tutu; photographs and portraits of male and female dancers, including Nureyev and Baryshnikov. An elegant, well-regulated bachelor life. Three, perhaps four rooms, with a nice smell, something that always distinguishes the apartments of society people and bohemians from the quarters of philistines and bourgeois families. The latter always stink of either food or cigarette smoke or something moldy. I am very sensitive to smells. Good perfume is a joy to me, a fact that my plebeian schoolmates used to laugh at. I liked the apartment for its smell.

Now our host wrenched himself from his armchair to meet me. Fairly long red hair; heavysset, not very tall; a little bit free-and-easy, like an artist; well-dressed even around the house. On his neck, a dense mass of beads and nice little chains. On his fingers, diamond rings. How old he was I didn't know, he looked to be more than fifty. In fact, he must have been over sixty.

Kirill and he were on friendly footing. They were squabbling in a friendly way. The conversation began. About this, about that, or, as Kuzmin wrote, "Now Heinrich Mann, now Thomas Mann, and into your pocket with his hand." Not really, no hands in the pocket for the

time being, it was all very proper, three artistic individuals conversing, an ex-dancer, a poet, and an aristocratic young rakehell. The conversation was interrupted by the proposal that we have some cold vodka with caviar and cucumbers. Our host went to the kitchen, took Kirill with him. "I'll use him to cut the cucumbers." He wouldn't let me help. "You're a guest."

Lord in heaven, what bliss! The last time I had eaten caviar must have been in Vienna—I had brought several cans out of Russia. Elena was still with me . . .

How nice that he didn't start in by flinging himself on me . . . , I thought. After I've had some vodka I'll feel a little bolder, and while it's taking effect I'll be getting my bearings.

How very nice, vodka and caviar. I was so out of the habit of normal life that it all seemed a marvelous dream. We drank from elegant silver-rimmed crystal, not from crappy plastic, and although we were only having hors d'oeuvres, a delicate nice plate lay before each of us. This place was so spacious after my hotel prison cell, I could stand up, walk around, examine things. The bread was spread with real butter, on top was real caviar, the vodka was ice-cold, and the cucumbers were cut in strips, I noticed, glancing over the table again.

He still hadn't fallen upon me. In a peaceful and sympathetic way he inquired about my relationship with my wife, not to reopen my wounds, he just asked, as if in passing. He said that he too had had a wife, before he knew that women were so horrible. She had fled to Mexico ages ago with a policeman, or a fireman, I don't remember exactly; she was very rich, and she had two children by him. One son had died tragically.

When we finished the bottle, and we did so rather quickly—we all drank easily and were experts, men who drank constantly, every day and heavily—he shook himself off, went into the bathroom, and started getting ready for the ballet.

He put on very elegant clothes, a black velvet jacket from Yves Saint Laurent with a chic handkerchief in the pocket. When he came out he asked if we liked what he was wearing, and was very pleased to receive an affirmative from me and "Raymond, you're a charmer" from Kirill.

At this point the bell rang. Raymond was being called for by a certain Luis (his lover, Kirill whispered to me), but Raymond called him Sebastian, after the well-known saint who was executed by arrows. Sebastian was Mexican. He did not strike me as interesting, he was dressed very

conservatively, the same height as Raymond, had a pleasant face but no outstanding features. He owned an art gallery. He was thirty-five or forty, and Raymond considered him young.

They went out, but Raymond had asked Kirill and me to stay and wait till he came back. Kirill, enjoying the fact that he had lived up to my expectations and kept his promise, asked patronizingly, "Well, Edichka, how do you like *cher* Raymond? Isn't he a charmer?" Here, I think, he was imitating the jargon of his renowned aristocratic grandmother, about whom he told a great many stories. The grandmother lived to be a hundred and four, and had what in my opinion was the bad habit of dashing cracked antique plates against the wall.

I said I thought he was okay, not a bad fellow.

"He's in love with Luis now, but when we were in the kitchen he said that he liked you very much."

How could he not like me? This sounds implausible, but he was the spit and image of Avdeev—the singer from the Teatralny Restaurant, admirer of my early youth. It's a strange world!

Kirill lavished praise on Raymond as if he were a commodity that he was planning to sell. Raymond was clever, he was cultured, he wore sumptuous clothes—so saying, Kirill led me into the bedroom, where Raymond's many things hung in the closet. "Look at this!" He proudly flung open the closet door. "So much of everything!"

Kirill himself went around in dreadful worn-down shoes. Although he suffered over this, he did not have the willpower—even when he had the money, which was very rare, but sometimes he did—to go out and buy shoes.

Raymond and Luis, Kirill continued in the tone of an affectionate mother recounting the escapades of her fervently loved son, were having tailcoats made specifically for the theater, special identical tailcoats. "You know, Limonov"—in the seriousness of the moment he even switched from Edichka to Limonov—"Raymond has known many great men, from Nijinsky to . . . And besides, Raymond has . . ."

Kirill had probably touted me to Raymond in exactly the same way. A poet, and clever, and so refined, the poor fellow has suffered horribly from his wife's treachery . . .

Soon Kirill turned melancholy. The excitement of having lived up to my expectations and fulfilled his promise was over. Evidently fighting off the emptiness, he went to the next room and began making phone

calls. He called his mistress, Jannetta, and apparently got up the nerve to quarrel with her. Unsettled, he returned to the living room, took another bottle of vodka from Raymond's icebox, and we drank it, hardly noticing what we were doing. He withdrew to the telephone again, made several more calls, this time whispering stealthily in English, but did not hear what he wanted to from the receiver. Then, since I was the only available target, he began to badger me.

"Limonov, hey Limonov, remember you pointed out a woman you knew at the hotel, a Russian émigrée? Call her up, have her come over, I'll fuck her."

"Shit, Kirill, you don't need her, and anyway she hardly says hello to me. Besides, it's twelve o'clock. The night is young for you and me, but it would be an insult to go calling up an ordinary person like that girl. She's been asleep for hours. And if I did call her, what would I say?"

"Can't you even do me one little favor, can't you call that tart? I'm miserable, I quarreled with Jannetta, I need somebody to fuck. I do everything for you—I introduced you to Raymond—but you don't want to do anything for me. What an egoist you are, Limonov," he said furiously.

"If I were an egoist," I replied calmly, "other people's actions wouldn't fuck me up and I wouldn't give a shit what my ex-wife did. It's precisely because I'm not an egoist that I lay dying on Lexington Avenue. What more can I say, you saw me dying there, saw the shape I was in. The reason I was in such bad shape was that I had suddenly lost my reason for living—Elena. I had no one to take care of, and I don't know how to live for myself. What kind of egoist am I?"

I said all this very seriously, very, very seriously.

"Take care of me," he said, "and yourself too—we'll fuck her together, want to? Come on, Edichka, call her, please?"

Maybe he wanted to compensate himself for his failure with Jannetta, vent his malice on someone else's cunt. Such things happen. But I could not have some tart present at my first experiment.

"I don't want to fuck dirty tarts," I said. "Women disgust me, they're vulgar. I want to start a new life, I want to sleep with Raymond this very day, if I can manage it. Anyway, don't hassle me, fuck off. We'd better have something to eat, I'm already hungry."

By reminding him of food I succeeded in turning him to another path. He was hungry too, and we went into the kitchen. "Raymond hardly

ever eats at home," Kirill said cheerlessly. We raided the refrigerator—of what he had there, very little was edible. We settled on apples, ate two apiece, but the apples didn't satisfy us. In the freezer we found some cutlets that must have been there a hundred years, took them out, and began frying them in mayonnaise—we couldn't find the butter, although Raymond had served some with the caviar. There was caviar in the refrigerator, too, but we were shy about touching it.

We made a terrible stink—had to open all the windows—and at that moment, in walked Luis-Sebastian and Raymond.

"Phew, what did you burn? What a stink!" Raymond said prissily.

"We got hungry and fried some cutlets," Kirill answered, abashed.

"Couldn't you have gone down to the restaurant?"

"We don't have any money today," Kirill said modestly.

"I'll give you some money, go and eat, young men must be well nourished," Raymond said. He gave Kirill some money and came to see us off.

"Excuse me," he said to me intimately, at the door, "I want you, but Luis often stays with me to make love and sleeps here, he loves me very much." Suddenly he kissed me, an unexpectedly firm and long-drawn-out kiss, his big lips enveloping my little lips. What did I feel? The sensation was strange, and I felt a sort of force. But this didn't go on long; after all, Sebastian-Luis was stirring around in the living room. Kirill and I went out.

"Call me tomorrow at twelve o'clock, at work—Kirill will give you the number. We'll have lunch together," Raymond said into the narrowing crack.

Downstairs in the restaurant we each bought ourselves a huge long chunk of meat—steak and potatoes. It was very expensive, but it was good and we ate our fill. Weighed down with food, we went out into the New York night, and Kirill saw me to the hotel.

"Kirill," I said jokingly, "Raymond's good-looking, but I like you better. You're big and tall, and what's more, you're young. If you had a little money too, we'd make a beautiful couple."

"Unfortunately, Edichka, I'm not attracted to men for now—maybe some day," he said.

It was 2:00 A.M. by the electronic clock on the IBM tower.

The next day I called Raymond and we met at his office. After making my way through a barricade of sleek and fat-free secretaries, I finally

found myself in the room—cold and light and spacious, of course, bigger than the lobby of our hotel—where he did his business. He looked like a *grand seigneur*: gray pinstripe suit, dotted necktie. We set off without delay for the very nearest restaurant, it was on Madison, not far from my hotel.

The restaurant was packed with gray-haired and very proper ladies; there were men too, but fewer. With regard to the ladies, my thought was that each of them had obviously dispatched a minimum of two husbands to the next world. We sat side by side; Raymond ordered me an avocado-and-shrimp salad.

“I can’t eat that dish, it’s fattening,” he said. “But you can, you’re a boy.”

The boy thought to himself that yes, no doubt he was a boy, but if you made a hole in his head, took out the part of the brain that controlled the memory, washed and cleaned it properly, that would be luxury. *Then* you’d have a boy.

“What shall we have to drink?” Raymond inquired.

“Vodka, if I may,” I said modestly, and adjusted the black scarf at my neck.

He ordered vodka for both himself and me, but they served it with ice, and it wasn’t all I had expected.

We ate and talked. The salad was sophisticated and subtle in flavor, a gourmet dish; I was eating with a knife and fork again—I eat very adeptly, like a European, and I am proud of it.

To a stranger, of course, we looked like two pederasts, although he behaved very respectably except for stroking my hand. Several old ladies were obviously shocked, and on our banquette we felt as if we were on stage, sitting in a crossfire of stares. As a poet I enjoyed shocking these old ladies. I love attention of any sort. I was in my element.

Raymond began telling me about the death of his fifteen-year-old son. The boy had smashed up on a motorcycle, which he had bought without his father’s knowledge. “He was in school in Boston, and I had no control over the purchase,” Raymond said with a sigh. “After his death I went to Boston and saw the man who had sold him the motorcycle. He was black, and he said to me, ‘Sir, you have my deepest sympathy in your grief. If I’d known this would happen, I never would have sold the boy the motorcycle, I would have demanded that he get his father’s permission.’ A very good man, that black,” Raymond said.

Trying to distract him from his sad memories, I asked about his ex-wife. He brightened up—this was obviously a topic of interest to him.

“Women are much coarser than men, although that’s the reverse of generally received opinion. They’re greedy, egoistic, and repulsive. I hadn’t had anything to do with them in ever so long, but recently I went to Washington and after an interval of many years, happened to fuck some woman. And you know, she struck me as dirty, although she was a very pretty thirty-five-year-old, feminine and clean. Their very physiology, their menstruation, harbors dirt.—Kirill told me that you loved your wife very much, and that she’s a very pretty woman. You’re still suffering now, of course, but you can’t imagine how lucky you are that you escaped from her, you’ll realize it later. A man’s love is much more solid, and often a couple will spend their whole lives together.” Here he sighed and took a sip of vodka. He was pensive a little while.

“True, such love is encountered more and more rarely nowadays. Before, twenty or thirty years ago, homosexuals lived very differently. The young lived with the old, learned from them; this is noble, when a young man and an old one love each other and live together. A young man often needs backing, the support of a mature, experienced mind. This was a good tradition. Unfortunately, it’s very different now. The young prefer to live with the young now, and all that comes of it is bestial fucking. What can one young man learn from another . . . ? There aren’t any solid couples now, they keep switching partners.” He sighed again.

Then he went on. “I like you. But I’ve been having a romance with Sebastian for a month now. I met him at a restaurant; we have special restaurants where women don’t come, you know, only men like me. I was sitting with a whole group, and he was with a group too. I noticed him right off, he was sitting in a corner and being very enigmatic. He, Sebastian, took the first step—he sent me a glass of champagne, I replied with a bottle. I thought at first that he liked my friend, a handsome young Italian. No, it turned out he liked me, the old one. He came over to our table to introduce himself. That’s how we met.

“He loves me very much,” Raymond went on. “And he has a very good cock. Do you think I’m being vulgar? No, the subject is love, after all, and in love this matters—he has a very good cock. Yet he doesn’t arouse me, and when I kissed you at the door last night, my cock stood up right away . . .”

In response to so frank an outpouring, I cut a morsel of avocado with

exaggerated care, then laid down my knife and fork and picked up my glass, took a drink, and swished the ice cubes in the vodka.

Raymond did not notice my embarrassment.

He went on, "Sebastian had a terrible tragedy, you know. He was close to suicide. He had lived for six years with a certain man, I don't want to mention his name, he's a famous man, very, very rich. Sebastian loved him and never left his side the whole six years. They went to Europe together, traveled around the world on a yacht. And suddenly this man fell in love with someone else. Sebastian didn't recover for a year. He tells me that if I leave him he won't survive it. He treats me very well, he gives me gifts—he gave me this ring, and perhaps you saw the huge vase in the living room, he gave me that too.

"Yesterday, you noticed, he was a bit gloomy. A deal of his fell through, there was big money involved," Raymond went on. "Sebastian wanted to sell, but couldn't, some beakers that had belonged to a King George, I don't remember which one; he's very upset. He loves his work at the gallery, on the whole, but he gets very tired. He comes to me to make love, but he's apt to fall asleep from fatigue; I kiss him, trying to wake him up, I want sex, but he gets tired at work. Besides, he has to do a lot of driving, and it's a long ride for him to my place from work. We'd like to make our home together, but his work prevents it. The difficulty is that while men like us aren't persecuted in this country, it still wouldn't be a good idea for his rich clients, especially the women, to find out he's a pederast. They'd probably stop buying from him at the gallery. Not all of them, perhaps, but many. That's why we can't make our home together—inevitably, rumors would reach them. But for economic reasons too, it would be more convenient to live together. He's—oh, not stingy, but you know, thrifty, which is good, because I spend money too freely. He says we could eat at home sometimes, he likes to cook. I used to be able to afford a lot in my job, my restaurant expenses were paid by the company too, I enjoyed great privileges, I was a friend and partner to my boss. Now that my friend and partner has died—we created the business together—I no longer have such great privileges. The financial constraints irritate me. I'm used to living on a grand scale.

"What do you think?" He turned to me suddenly, breaking off his monologue. "Does Sebastian really love me, as he says? I often tell him,

'You're young, I'm old, why do you love me?' He answers that I am his love.

"I don't know what to do," Raymond went on pensively. "I like him, but as I told you—you made my cock stand right up, he doesn't make it happen that way, yet he says he loves me. Can I believe him? What do you think?" He looked at me expectantly.

"I don't know," I said. What else could I say.

"I'm afraid to fall in love," Raymond said. "By now I'm the wrong age. I'm afraid to fall in love. And then if I'm deserted, it will be a tragedy. I don't want suffering. I'm afraid to fall in love."

He looked at me expectantly and stroked my hand with his fingers, red hairs sticking up here and there from under his rings. His hand was heavy. Dully, as if in a dream, I looked at that hand. I understood that he wanted to know whether I would love him if he left Luis. He was asking for guarantees. What guarantees could I give him? I had no way of knowing. He was nice, but it was hard for me to tell whether I had any sexual affinity for him. I would be able to tell only after making love with him.

"Advise me what to do," he said.

"He probably does love you," I said, half lying, just for the sake of something to say. I wanted to be honest with him, as with the whole world; I couldn't tell him, "Desert Luis, I will love you devotedly and tenderly." I didn't know that I would. Moreover, I was suddenly struck by the thought, He's seeking love, care, and kindness, but I seek the very same thing—that's why I'm sitting with him, I came for love, care, and kindness. But how can we part? I was distraught. If I'm supposed to give him love, I don't want to—I don't, that's all. I want to be loved, otherwise I don't need any of it. In return for his loving me, if he does, I will come to love him later. I know myself, that's the way it will be. But to begin with, let him love me.

Then we walked away from this potentially explosive moment. We didn't walk away—we crawled away with difficulty. He asked me about my life in Moscow, and I patiently told the same story that I had had to tell maybe a hundred times, here in America, to polite but basically indifferent people. I repeated it all to him, only he was not indifferent. He was choosing me.

"My works were not printed by the magazines or publishing houses.

I typed them myself, put them in primitive cardboard covers, stapled them together, and sold them for five rubles apiece. I sold these collections wholesale, in lots of five to ten, to my closest admirers, who served as distributors. The distributors, each of whom was the center of a circle of intellectuals, paid me at once, and then retailed the collections in their circles. Usually *samizdat* goes for free, I'm the only one ever to sell my books this way. By my calculations, they distributed about eight thousand collections for me."

I delivered this patter to Raymond in a studied monotone, the way one reads aloud a text he is sick and tired of.

"I also knew how to sew and made trousers to order. I got twenty rubles a pair. I made handbags too, and my previous wife Anna, I remember, used to go and sell them at GUM, the main department store on Red Square, for three rubles apiece. All these ways of making money were banned, persecuted in the USSR. I was taking a conscious risk every day."

He was no longer listening very closely. My Russian arithmetic held little interest for him. Three rubles, twenty rubles, eight thousand . . . He had his own worries. I had come for love, and I saw that love was wanted from me. He was estimating whether I was capable of it. I didn't like this. In this role, the role of the one who loves, I had already suffered defeat. I too wanted guarantees. I had absolutely no desire to return to my old situation.

We paid the bill—he paid, of course, I had nothing to pay it with, later I got used to the girl's role—and decided to take the elevator up. Raymond wanted to look at some china, he was planning to buy a new dinner service, and there was a gallery on the top floor.

We were received at the gallery by a homely girl, and later an old lady. I enjoyed having them see us—the imposing Raymond and me—and understand all. Raymond fingered the dishes, examined plates and goblets, offered old porcelain to me to admire, we passed the time intellectually, usefully. I love the beautiful, I shared his delight in the creations of the masters of the comfortable old world, where there were families, where there was no cocaine, where there were no Elenas fucking in a narcotic sweat, where the obscene world of photography did not exist, nor its dirty backstage milieu. Family dinners, an orderly life, that was what this porcelain embodied for me. Unfortunately, I was destined for something else, I thought.

But the inspection and pricing ended, we took the elevator down, he kissed me in sight of the elevator boy, and we went out on the street, which was full of automobiles. It was spring, 1976, twentieth century, the great city of New York at lunch hour.

"I'd like to make love with you, but Luis almost always stays now to spend the night. Besides, he'll be wary of you now, you saw how he watched you yesterday?" I remembered only Luis-Sebastian's tired look and my halting conversation with him.

"You might come to my place today at five—we'll spend a little time together, have a drink," Raymond said.

"All right, I'd be glad to," I said, and in fact I was glad, for I had again developed an adamant determination to sleep with him at all costs. I shall venture to use a bureaucratic expression: I wanted officially to become a pederast—inwardly I had already become one—and henceforth to be such and consider myself such. I wanted to finalize it. Perhaps girls feel this way about wanting to lose their virginity. There was even something abnormal about this desire of mine; I felt it.

We said good-bye on Madison. I did not go to the hotel right away but walked the streets a while longer, considering his words. In the world of pederasts too there are love and unlove, tears and tragedies, nor is there any refuge from fate, blind chance, I thought. And true love is just as rare.

I showered and was at his apartment by five. Kirill was there too. Raymond was sitting in the bedroom in an armchair. He had loosened the knot of his necktie and was having a drink, sipping from a tall glass. "Make him a drink!" he ordered Kirill. The young procurer gave me a conspiratorial wink and said, "Come on, Edichka, I'll make you a drink."

"What, can't you do it without company?" Raymond said in mock anger.

"It's just that I don't know what he wants, I'll show him what we have. Let him choose."

I went to the kitchen with Kirill. Luckily the phone rang and Raymond did not detain us, being occupied with his phone conversation.

"Before you came," Kirill whispered, making me a vodka and orange juice, "before you came, Raymond asked me to tell you he'll take you to restaurants very often, he'll buy you a suit, but just don't live with anyone for now. Raymond has to decide what he should do, stay with Luis or be with you. He says, 'Sebastian loves me very much, but I can't

get it up with him. Eddie doesn't love me but perhaps he will yet; after all, we've only just met.'

"Actually," Kirill continued in a hissing whisper, "he doesn't believe you've never tried men. He says, 'I have the impression he's slept with men.'"

"That's how good my masquerade was," I said dully, thinking my own thoughts. I could have pretended, this afternoon in the restaurant, could have said I loved him, begged him to desert Luis and live with me, God knows what-all I might have said to him; I could have acted the part, leaned on his shoulder, stroked his red neck, kissed his ear, played the petit-bourgeois cocotte, the decadent woman, and laid it on thick with mannerisms, trivial whims, eccentricities and endearing little ways from which he would not have extricated himself, of course. I knew how to do that. The riddle for me would have been how to conduct myself in bed, but this, too, I hoped to master very quickly. I had acted unwisely but honorably, I had not started lying to him, and had not said I loved him.

We went out to the living room. In the bedroom Raymond was communing with the telephone receiver in French. We therefore remained in the living room.

"I encountered your ex-wife today on Fifth Avenue, Edichka," Kirill said. He looked at me attentively, anticipating an effect. I drank my vodka and merely said, after a faint pause, "And?"

"She was flying along Fifth Avenue, not seeing anyone, in a sort of red jacket, her pupils were dilated—she's probably shooting up heroin or sniffing cocaine—all keyed up, excited. She's going to Italy, she says, for a month of shooting, Zoli is sending her. 'How's Limonov, do you ever see him?' she asked. When she learned I had found you a 'friend'—Kirill lowered his voice—"she was very pleased and said, 'I hate men, find me a rich old lesbian to caress me, fuck me, fuck me, fuck me with an artificial member . . .'" Kirill repeated this "fuck me" several times. Elena, too, must have said it that way, several times and with raised voice. I remembered the long and almost bestial orgasms that I myself had given her with an artificial member, and it set my head spinning, a nether warmth flowing: after those orgasms I had especially enjoyed fucking her. I took a big gulp of vodka, and while remaining aware of my sensations, aware of my filling prick, I shook off my torpor and listened, forced myself to listen to Kirill's words. He finished the sen-

tence. After the artificial member came: "... and then our family will be complete," she said."

Next Kirill launched into a discourse on the fact that Elena was not to his taste and what did I see in her. I kept smiling at him automatically, mockingly, meanwhile hardly able to get myself out of our bed, get myself out of the "conjugal" bed.

Thank God, Raymond came in—a real person from the real world—and my torture ended. We had drink after drink. After a half hour spent in sophisticated conversation Raymond began fondling my member through my pants, completely unashamed before Kirill. I smiled and pretended nothing special was happening.

Raymond was not sitting beside me, he was reaching for my prick from an armchair, but I was on the couch. This heightened the absurdity of the situation. I felt nothing at Raymond's touch, absolutely nothing. Kirill was here, and I was not a healthy peasant lad from some place like Arizona, with normal instincts and a prick that would naturally stand up if a stranger touched it. I was a ridiculous European with unnatural connections inside my body, I was a good actor, but this was something I couldn't control. Tears I could squeeze out any old day, but get my dick up in such a situation? Then again, I didn't know whether I had to. My only thought was that a dick without an erection might frighten him off. But no, it didn't; rather the opposite.

After a while I went out through Raymond's bedroom to a vast bathroom, artistically decorated with portraits and photographs. I made peepee, wiped my member with a tissue, and was on my way back when Raymond met me in the bedroom. His eyes were weird, his lips the color of strawberries that have spoiled in the sun, and he was muttering. Still muttering, he nestled up to me. I was much taller than he, I had to put my arms around his back and shoulders. We shifted from foot to foot, he continued to mutter and massaged my member through my slacks—why, I could not understand. We must have looked like Japanese wrestlers. Finally he began nudging me toward the bed. Well, I went, what else could I do, although I felt a growing dissatisfaction that he was managing it all so absurdly.

He put me on the bed, I lay on my back, and he lay on top, making motions such as you make when fucking a woman. He devoted himself to this travesty for some time, panted heavily and breathed in my ear, kissed my neck. I threw back my head and rolled it from side to side

exactly as my last wife had, I caught myself doing it; I must have had the same expression on my face too. These things are contagious.

Raymond was heavy and awkward. For all my irritation I sympathized with him, acknowledging myself to be an inept virgin. "He'll have a hard time with me," I thought. But my dissatisfaction that he was making it all so foolish and awkward did not leave me.

In the next room Kirill was talking on the phone, and the door wasn't shut. Ah, that's why he muttered something inarticulate instead of speaking normally, I realized. I was thinking altogether too much at that moment. I won't think, I decided, and returned to reality. A heavy red-haired old fellow was wriggling on top of me. A fine situation, little Eddie, you're lying down and about to get fucked, it seems. But that's what you wanted. Well, put it this way, what I had wanted was not specifically a fuck but love, kindness—I was so weary of being without caressing kindness—and, as a natural extension, a caress for my prick as well. But what was happening was some kind of nonsense. Did he really lack the subtlety to realize that this was the wrong way to go about it with me? Or was he not concerned about frightening me, did he not value me?

He slithered down, unzipped my pants, but could not unbuckle the belt, didn't know how it worked. I smiled inwardly. In exactly the same way, my first woman had fallen afoul of my belt—that one was my papa's Soviet Army belt—she couldn't unbuckle the little kid's belt. This belt was Italian. My first man. "No, you won't get the fucking thing unbuckled, you don't know how it works. Fuck it—I'll help." Without changing the languid expression on my face, I lowered my hands from behind my head, where they had been the whole time, and unbuckled the belt.

In a fever he pulled open my red panties and took it out—my member. Good Lord, it was scrunched and little like a boy's, and at the touch of his grabby hand a droplet of urine came out, rolled out like a tear. No matter how much you wipe with tissues, that little drop always lurks deep inside, to come rolling out at the first opportunity. I wondered how Raymond would deal with it. "Did you think it would be easy to fuck the wounded?" I wanted to ask. He jerked and kneaded my member. A trifle coarse and hasty, I thought.

In the next room Kirill was reproaching his Jannetta for something. Without meaning to, I listened to Kirill's voice, picked out individual words. Raymond jerked and kneaded. I was uncomfortable, one of his

knees was crushing my leg. Suddenly I realized that he didn't have a fucking chance of getting anywhere and that I was about to get up and flee. To avoid injuring myself or offending him, I promptly said in a languid whisper, "Kirill will hear!"

He understood and got up, or maybe he had despaired of doing anything with my member, but anyway he got up and went into the bathroom in a somnambulistic state.

When he returned I was already strolling around the bedroom, looking out the windows at the street below, with my pants zipped up and my shirt tucked in. We rejoined Kirill and picked up our drinks. Then I took from my vest pocket some poems I had brought, read them to Raymond and Kirill, with Kirill gravely expressing his opinion on each poem.

The poems restored my lost composure. In this business I am superior to everyone; here, only in poetry am I who I am. In reading my poems I found composure, as I say, although these men, Raymond and Kirill, were not right for my poetry. Raymond politely understood that this was art, and as art it must be appreciated and admired, but he scarcely had any real feeling for who was sitting before him or what was being read. Even though he was more European than American, he had lived in this country so many years that he had unthinkingly assigned to art the modest role of a knickknack ornamenting life. It was nice, of course, that his potential lover was a poet, it was interesting, romantic, but that was all. To him my poems were small, and he, Raymond, was big, while in fact little Eddie's sufferings were much bigger than Raymond, bigger even than the whole city of New York, precisely because Eddie was visible, could be seen, through the poems. Or so I flattered myself; however, I am fully convinced of it to this day.

It wasn't much of a treat for them, so I read maybe five to seven poems and put the manuscript away in my vest pocket. Enough. Especially since Raymond had been distracted by the telephone, and Kirill, of course, was trying to explain to me his own Petersburg-Leningrad attitude toward poetry. Leningrad people love pomposity and pathos, affectation and pseudoclassicism; my poems and I are too simple for them.

A guest appeared—a certain Frenchman, the owner of a chain of stores selling ready-made luxury clothes from Yves Saint Laurent, Cardin, and other French celebrities. These beautifully resonant names had

been familiar to me back in Moscow. Louis Aragon, for example, member of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party and one of France's greatest poets, got his things from Yves Saint Laurent. How do I know? Oh, little Eddie has heaps of society connections, although he keeps quiet about them, doesn't drop many names. I was told about Aragon's penchant for Yves Saint Laurent by Lily Brik, the celebrated Lily, my friend, the woman who went down in history as the mistress of the great poet Mayakovsky—a great poet no matter what you may hear from various Soviet and anti-Soviet scum.

Oh yes, I'm forgetting the Frenchman. He wore his fine little threads of hair slicked down on both sides of his skull; bony and tall, with rather a large butt, considering his overall leanness; he had narrow, tight trousers and a face just as narrow, tapering to the nose. He looked like some kind of fish.

Breaking out in blotches—he was shy—Kirill began to speak French with the Frenchman. I must confess the young idler succeeded pretty well. The grandmother that he mentioned so often not only had known how to dash cracked Kuznetsov porcelain against the walls, but also had taught her grandson to speak French and English. The same cannot be said of my own grandmother, unfortunately.

At a request from Raymond, who was boasting about my figure, I was obliged to twirl before the Frenchman, displaying myself. I felt as if I were fifteen and my parents were displaying me to their friends. Not fifteen, younger. Ten, eight.

The Frenchman obviously liked me. He was an inveterate old pederast, I don't know how old; he was preserved like antique ivory, shone as if polished. He smiled all the time and spoke in a thin, despairing, sophisticated voice, the way ridiculous society people speak in operetta—dukes and princes, ridiculous people, but he was not without charm. I liked the Frenchman too, and much better than Raymond, but I didn't dare tell him so. I found him agreeable, for some reason, from his tight, deliberately unstylish trousers to the little threads of hair on his head.

Raymond had more fat to him, more blood, more meat; naturally I liked the Frenchman better.

Out of courtesy, although he did not have a kopeck, Kirill was negotiating a purchase of suits for himself. It was clear to everyone that he wasn't going to buy a fucking thing, but this was his way of doing something nice for everyone, somehow participating in their lives. I

imagine he was in utter ecstasy over the fact that he was sitting in the company of pederasts. A kind soul, he loved his friends, loved their titles, or absence of titles. I bet he always exaggerated Raymond's prosperity to me and to other people as well; he generally exaggerated everything about his friends, in the direction of bigger and better. It was an innocent childish amusement, but he did not thereby forget himself, either: he, Kirill, by having such friends seemed to grow in his own and others' eyes.

The Frenchman very soon left, unfortunately. In parting he gave me a spank on the poopka and said, "I think you're better off that your wife deserted you." On his lips this sounded convincing. I thought, No doubt it is better, maybe it really is. And his spank had me in ecstasy—for some reason I liked it.

After the Frenchman came an Italian. "He was once my lover," Raymond said, after the Italian left to eat in the restaurant. "He never let me sleep; a very strong cock that young man has. Oh, what he can do!" Raymond said ecstatically. I heard a tinge of reproach in his words. It's your own fault, I thought, you don't have the technique.

The Italian had come to spend the night. When I inquired of Raymond why he didn't stay in a hotel, it became clear that he was also a millionaire. The millionaire was thirty-five, no more, and very appealing. His name was Mario.

Homosexuals of all nationalities came to Raymond's that night. True, they did not congregate, they sat awhile and went away, others appeared in their stead. Only Mario stayed, but he soon went off to the guest room assigned to him and remained there.

Sometimes Raymond resumed touching my dick, but gradually it became apparent that he was tired. In his fatigue, no longer checking himself, he turned rather vulgar and told some clumsy, dirty jokes, which would not have happened in his normal state. In the end he informed Kirill and me that he was sorry but he wanted to get to sleep. I was disappointed. My face must have showed it because Raymond said, "Go to Mario, why don't you?" Then he went on jokingly, "The only thing is, he won't let you sleep. Personally, I'm a little afraid of Mario, although we haven't slept together for many years and don't arouse each other." He led us to Mario's room, walking a little unsteadily. This was understandable; he had worked all day at the office, after all, and then drunk with us all evening, glass for glass.

Mario was sitting with his shirt unbuttoned, going through some papers. A man of affairs, he truly was handsome, and given my desire to lose my virginity today—now—I probably would have stayed with him had I not perceived that Raymond didn't want me to: if he hadn't been disenchanted at the sight of my wrinkled appendage, he must not want me to stay. And I didn't, although Mario's jesting words and sidelong glance at me—he really gave me the once-over—convinced me immediately that Raymond was right about him, Raymond was not fabricating.

I should have left, but a stupid conversation got started, which was the fault of Kirill and the tired, suddenly flaccid Raymond. Tomorrow Raymond was supposed to have a party, a very important one because his boss was supposed to come, the owner of the business, who was not a pederast, and Kirill had volunteered to get a beautiful girl for the boss. Where he planned to get her I don't know, but the absurd conversation dragged on and on. Raymond kept complaining of his lack of china, but later recalled that Sebastian-Luis was going to bring him some lovely china.

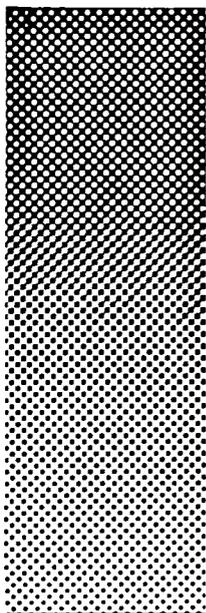
"He called today, I completely forgot. All my sets are partly broken, I haven't entertained at home in ages, I always take people to restaurants," Raymond pouted, in the tone of the man who has everything. The vile bourgeois within him had awakened, the bourgeois who in return for his money laid claim to the whole world, with all its material and spiritual valuables. One of those who had bought my silly girl-child. My hackles rose.

Outwardly I was sitting in his arms, he was mechanically stroking my shoulder. But had you been able to peep within me, gentlemen, what would you have seen? Hatred. Hatred for this man obtunded by wine and fatigue. And suddenly I realized that I would gladly have taken a knife or a razor and slit this Raymond's throat, although it was not he who had raped me, I had raped myself. Here I sat, but I could have slit his throat, stripped off his diamond rings, headed home from the expensive apartment with the Chagall, and bought myself a prostitute for the whole night, the girl of Chinese-Malayan descent, the small and elegant one who always stands on the corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-fifth Street, but female, a girl. I would have kissed her all night, I would have made it nice for her, I'd have kissed her peepka and her pretty little heels.

And with the rest of the money I would have bought the most expensive suit at Ted Lapidus for this booby Kirill, because who else would buy it for him, and I was older and more experienced. The whole fantasy was so vivid that I involuntarily started, and thereby dispelled the fog before my eyes. Kirill and the businessman Mario materialized, and beside me Raymond's meaty puss. "Time to go," I said. "You wanted to get to sleep, Raymond."

And we left. Kirill and I.

I called it quits with Raymond, although someone was supposed to phone someone, and once, as I came out of my hotel beautifully dressed, I encountered this same Raymond, and with him Sebastian in a black suit and a silly white straw hat, a "very expensive" one, in the opinion of the omnipresent Kirill, for whom I was waiting and who promptly walked up. There was a Mexican boy with them too. They looked like relatives from the Caucasus who had come to visit their Uncle Raymond in Moscow. The whole group was preoccupied with worry, they were looking for some new place to have lunch. "We should have their worries!" Kirill said enviously. Having spotted a Mexican restaurant on the other side of the street, Raymond and his Caucasian relatives hurried across. Halfway there, Raymond turned and looked at me. I smiled and waved to him. By then I had slept with Chris, I already had Chris.



## CHRIS

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As I say, I grasped at everything in my search for salvation. I even resumed my journalistic career, or rather, I tried to resurrect it.

My closest friend, Alexander—prostrated, like me, by his wife's betrayal and his own absolute nothingness in this world—was living in a studio apartment on Forty-fifth Street between Eighth and Ninth avenues, in a fine building located in a neighborhood of warehouses and vice dens. He was a trifle afraid of his neighborhood at first, being a bespectacled intellectual, a cautious Jewish youth, but later grew used to it and began to feel at home.

We often got together at his place, trying to find ways to publish our articles in America. They ran counter to the politics of America's ruling circles, and we did not know which papers to try. The *New York Times* had refused to notice us. We had gone there in the fall, when I was a proofreader at *Russkoe Delo*, as was Alexander—we had sat across from each other there and quickly found much in common. We went to the *Times* with our "Open Letter to Academician Sakharov," and the *Times* cut us dead, they didn't even deign to answer us. Actually, it was a far from stupid letter and the first sober Russian voice in the West. An interview with us and an account of the letter did get printed, not in America, but in England, in the *Times* of London. The letter was about the idealization of the Western world by Russian intellectuals. In reality, we wrote, the West had plenty of problems and contradictions, no less acute than those of the USSR. In short, the letter was a call to cease

destroying the Soviet intelligentsia—who don't know a fucking thing about this world—by inciting them to emigrate. That was why the *New York Times* didn't print it. Or maybe they considered us incompetent, or didn't react to the unfamiliar names.

The fact remains that in America, just as in Russia, we were unable to publish our articles, that is, to express our views. Here we were forbidden another thing: to write critically about the Western world.

So Alexander and I got together at 330 West Forty-fifth Street and tried to decide what to do. Man is weak; the effort was often accompanied by beer and vodka. But, although a stuffed-shirt statesman may be afraid to admit he has formulated one or another state decision in the interval between two glasses of vodka or whiskey or while sitting on the toilet, I have always been delighted by the apparent incongruity, the inopportuneness, of manifestations of human talent and genius. And I do not intend to hide it. To hide it would be to distort, or facilitate the distortion of, human nature.

In short, Alexander and I drank and worked and discussed. We drank vodka, and along with the vodka we drank ale—for some reason I had taken a liking to it—and everything else we could get our hands on. Then we would set out to cruise the streets. As we walked to Eighth Avenue the girls said hello to us, and not merely in the line of duty—we were a familiar sight, they knew us. The two men in glasses were also known to the people who handed out flyers advertising the bordello, and to the kinky-haired man who issued them their flyers and paid them their money. After passing number 300, where the steep lighted staircase led to the cheapest bordello in New York, one of the cheapest, at least, we turned on Eighth Avenue, down or up, according to our own whim. The cruise began . . .

Everything had been as usual that April day. Attacks of anguish were coming over me several times a week then, or perhaps even oftener. I don't remember how the day began—no, wait, I wrote the scene where Elena is executed in “The New York Radio Broadcast,” and was very weary from always returning to the same painful theme, Elena's betrayal of me. There were swarms of people in the corridor outside my door. They were filming Marat Bagrov in his room, filming him on assignment for Israeli propagandists: Look how hard life is for those who leave Israel. Actually, at least three countries have an interest in our émigré souls—they harass us constantly, swear by us, use us, all three of them. So at

that moment Marat Bagrov, former Moscow TV journalist, was being exploited by a man from Israel—former Soviet writer Ephraim Vesoly—and his American friends. Cables, accessories, lenses, and cameras crowded my door. I went out into New York, wandered, as if aimlessly, to Lexington Avenue, and twice found myself at *her* place, that is, the Zoli agency, where Elena was living then. I felt sad and disgusted. Suddenly I caught myself on the point of passing out. I had to save myself. I went back to the hotel.

The fucking exploitation scene was still going on. The Moscow TV figure, long unaccustomed to attention, was carried away with the sound of his own voice. The villain Vesoly was serene. I knocked at Edik Brutt's door and asked for a \$5 loan. Edik, kind soul, even consented to go and get the wine with me because I was afraid of passing out from anguish.

We went. Edik, mustachioed and somnolent, and I. I bought a gallon of California red for \$3.49 and we started back. We encountered a strange man with a Russian face, who glanced at me, then grinned and said suddenly, "Faggot," and turned on Park Avenue. "An odd encounter," I said to Edik. "I don't think he's staying at our hotel."

We returned to the hotel, and the sacrament was still going on. Another denizen of our dormitory, Mr. Levin, was now angrily gritting out something about the Soviet regime and anti-Semitism in Russia. We shut ourselves in my room, and I prevailed on Edik to have a symbolic drink with me, at least one. And I set myself to soaking up my gallon . . .

Gradually I recovered and brightened up. Somebody summoned Edik, perhaps His Majesty the Interviewer, I don't remember who, but somebody. Then they summoned me, I went—they gave me a table. I took it, and a bookshelf as well. Marat Bagrov had timed the interview for the day he was to move out of the hotel. An ex-furrier named Borya, one of the most worthwhile people in the hotel, helped me move the table into my room. I treated him to a glass. I drank two or three myself. Marat Bagrov was invited too. Ephraim Vesoly and the crew would have been invited, but they had decamped with their fiendish gear.

When Marat Bagrov and I had knocked back our glasses, the telephone rang. "What are you doing?" asked Alexander's animated voice.

"Drinking a gallon of wine. I've hardly drunk a third of it," I said,

"but I want to drink it all." A gallon of California burgundy usually calms me right down.

"Listen, come on over," Alexander said. "Come and bring the jug with you. We'll both drink; I have ale and vodka too. I feel like getting drunk," he added. With that, he probably straightened his glasses. He's a very quiet fellow, but capable of recklessness.

"Okay," I said, "I'll stick the jug in a bag and be right over."

I was wearing a nice tight denim jacket, and jeans tucked in—no, rolled way high, to reveal my very beautiful high-heeled boots of tricolor leather. For my own pleasure I thrust an excellent German knife from Solingen into my boot, then put the jug in a bag and went out.

Downstairs, from the pickup truck containing the migrant Bagrov's things, I was hailed by Bagrov himself, Edik Brutt, and some other extra. "Where are you going?" they said. "To Forty-fifth Street," I said, "between Eighth and Ninth avenues." "Get in," Bagrov said, "that's practically on the way, I'm moving to Fiftieth and Tenth Avenue."

I got in, we started off. Past columns of pedestrians, past gilded Broadway reeking of urine, past a solid wall of strolling people. My glance lovingly picked out of the crowd the long-limbed figures of whimsically dressed young black men and women. I have a weakness for eccentric circus clothes. Although I cannot afford much of anything because of my extreme poverty, still, all my shirts are lace, one of my blazers is lilac velvet, and the white suit is a beauty, my pride and joy. My shoes always have very high heels, I even own some pink ones, and I buy them where all the blacks buy theirs, in the two best stores on Broadway, at the corner of Forty-fifth and the corner of Forty-sixth, lovely little far-out shops where it's all high heels and all provocative and preposterous to squares. I want even my shoes to be a festival. Why not?

The truck moved west along Forty-fifth, past theaters and mounted policemen. In front of one building we had the honor of beholding with our own eyes our Lilliputian mayor. All the émigrés recognized him joyfully. He got out of a car with some other puffy-faced characters, and several reporters took pictures of the mayor with professional adeptness but no special enthusiasm. There was no great security force in evidence. Everyone in the truck went on and on about how there was no point shooting at the mayor in such a crush, and we had trouble making progress, moving barely a meter or two at each change of the light. The

driver, Bagrov, and I applied ourselves to my gallon jug a few times. I got out my knife and started toying with it.

The love of weapons is in my blood. As far back as I can remember, when I was a little boy, I used to swoon at the mere sight of my father's pistol. I saw something holy in the dark metal. Even now I consider a weapon a holy and mysterious symbol: an object used to take a man's life cannot but be holy and mysterious. The very profile of a revolver, of all its parts, holds a Wagnerian horror. Cold steel, with its different profiles, is no exception. My knife looked somnolent and lazy. Plainly, it knew that nothing of interest awaited it, there was no good job coming up in the near future, so it was bored and indifferent.

"Put your knife away," Bagrov said. "Here we are." I climbed out, said good-bye, and charged into the entrance with my gallon jug, but the knife took its place in my boot, went off to bed.

Alexander has a habit—you ring him from downstairs, he presses the buzzer to open the door. But when you go up, he never opens his door ahead of time, never meets you on the threshold, you have to ring again at the door, and he still doesn't open it promptly even if he's expecting you. I keep waiting for him to deviate from his habit. No, today everything was the same as ever, with the obligatory pauses.

We have a division of labor when we're drinking: I cook, he washes the dishes. I boiled up some sort of pasta, then stuck a package of sausages into it, and we went to work in earnest on the gallon jug. The meal was at a table that stood arbitrarily in the corner of the room, we sat under a table lamp. We always talk about news and events, Alexander brings Russian émigré gossip from the newspaper. Often there aren't any events, so much the worse. Once in a great while I get off on the subject of my wife. But only once in a while, and if I do say anything about her, I immediately catch myself and change the subject.

"You were a fool not to kill her," Alexander told me once with the artlessness and clarity of King Solomon or a secret police tribunal. "You strangled her, you should've finished her off. I at least have a baby, or I'd kill my own wife. It wouldn't be good for the baby, she'd be left alone, but you should've killed Elena."

By May, as you will see, he and I would revive, write several articles that no one would publish, hold our May 27 demonstration against the *New York Times*, and get another interview printed in the *Times* of London. In May we would try various other gambits as well, dig up all

kinds of possibilities in life, but back then, in April, we often just ruminated and got drunk. Besides, he had a weakness for sleeping with his own wife. Either his phone would be out of order and I couldn't get through to him, or he'd disappear over Saturday and Sunday.

That evening was probably as usual. Alexander undoubtedly told me that the paper had received a letter from some dissident, maybe from Krasnov-Levitin, or maybe the wily Maksimov had sent his routine appeal, directed less to the Soviet regime than to the Western left-wing intelligentsia, "deadened with surfeit and idleness," or the bearded Solzhenitsyn had amazed the world with his next deep thought on the world order, or some person had proposed detaching something else from the USSR, some other territory. The names of these "national heroes" of ours were always on our lips.

In our desire to kill the hateful gallon we were already behaving like athletes straining toward victory. I was also in the bad habit of mixing drinks. To revive myself, as I drank, I had a couple of cans of ale and several shots of vodka in the intervals between red burgundy. No wonder, then, that time became a dark sack, and the next illumination, opening of the eyes, call it what you will, found Alexander and me in some sort of temple. A service was going on. One thing I could not understand—whether it was a synagogue or some other kind of temple. I was more inclined to think it was a synagogue. We were sitting on a bench, and for some reason Alexander kept smiling all the time, his face was very joyful. Maybe he had just been given a gift. Money, maybe.

For that reason I turned to myself. Let's go on with our games. I pulled my beloved knife from my boot and stuck it into the floor, or rather, into some boards that constituted a footrest. Next to me a whole family of believers exchanged wild glances. I'm not planning to kill anyone, Messrs. Jews or Catholics or Protestants, I'm just madly in love with weapons, and I have no temple of my own where I can pray to the Great Knife or the Great Revolver. No, so that's why I pray to Him here, I thought. Then I went into a sort of delirium, several times tore the knife from the board and kissed it, stuck it back into the footrest. Once I dropped His Majesty the Knife, and his thunder reverberated throughout the temple because my German friend from Solingen had a heavy metal handle. The service ended with the priest's offering his hand to everyone, even to the foolishly smiling Alexander, but not to me. I was on the point of taking offense but then forgot about it, rightly decid-

ing that I should not take offense at a priest of an unknown religion.

Again there was a dark pit, and the onset of a new illumination, revealing the smiling faces of some priestesses of love, who out of a special susceptibility to us—two stinking drunk, but, I think, very appealing bespectacled characters—had agreed to make love with us for \$5. They were very sweet, these girls. Alexander would not have stopped any disagreeable ones, nor would they have stopped him. These were a light chocolate color, there were two of them, they were much more beautiful than proper women. Eighth Avenue has many beautiful and even touching prostitutes, Lexington has many beautiful ones too; when I lived there I exchanged greetings with them every evening.

Murmuring agreeably, the girls put their arms around us and pulled us along with them. They had a trained eye, they knew, exactly and definitely, that we had \$5 between us and no more. You can't fool them. Money is their main interest, of course, but they're obviously no strangers to human feeling. They smelled nice, they had provocative long legs; these girls were much better than any ordinary secretary or pimply American coed. I had nothing against them. Why I didn't go with them, but sent Alexander off to enjoy one and promised to wait for him, I do not know. I believe there was some deep-seated force within me that made me think: All women are disagreeable. Prostitutes are much better than all the rest, they have almost no falsehood in them, they're natural women, and if they've undertaken to make love with the two of us for \$5 when it's not even raining, not the kind of weather when they don't have clients, then that is obviously their pleasure. But even so, I'm not going with them.

I didn't want to think it through, but I knew that I would not go with them today—some other time. Why not? Was I afraid, perhaps? Not true. They were so sincere and homey, they might have been in my class in grade school. And in that April mood of mine I had essentially lost the instinct for self-preservation; I feared no one and nothing at all in this world because I was prepared to die at any moment. I believe I was seeking death—unconsciously, but I was. Then why would I be afraid of two beautiful minks? Afraid they were decoys? Afraid of pimps? You know I don't give a damn, I don't own a thing. That wasn't it. Women no longer existed for me. I was thoroughly drunk, yet I rejected them, almost involuntarily, which especially means that what happened a little later that night was no accident, my body wanted it.

I left Alexander; he went off with one of the girls to her place to make love, and I went into the gaping dark of the West Side streets, somewhere around Tenth or Eleventh Avenue. I remember myself walking away, as if I had been staring at my own back through the eyes of a bystander.

The light flared next when I entered some sort of walled-in area, apparently a playground for children. Dark corners have always attracted me. I remember even in Moscow I loved to go into boarded-up houses, which everyone feared and where bandits supposedly lived. When I was good and drunk I would remember those houses and set out for one. After climbing in through a broken window or door, stepping over piles of petrified shit and puddles of urine, cursing and singing Russian folksongs, I would discover some poor unfortunates in the house, alcoholics or tramps, with whom, after making their acquaintance, I would have a long and incoherent conversation. In one of those places someone conked me with a bottle and appropriated two rubles. But the habit stayed with me.

So, I entered an area where there were swings and other attractions for children. A light burned in the middle, but all the corners were alluringly dark. I went, of course, to the largest dark spot. Squeezing between some iron girders, on which rested a scaffold of unknown purpose, I let out an oath—my high heels were sinking in sand. To this day I don't know why the sand was there. Was it a sandbox for the children to play in? But then why all these iron girders? Or was it a parking place for cars, and the second tier raised on the scaffold? I don't know. This will forever remain a mystery, for not long ago I tried to find the place, but without success. Maybe they've built something there, which is improbable in such a short time, or more likely I mixed up the streets. I'll go look again sometime, if I find it I'll let you know.

I climbed a short iron ladder to the wooden scaffold, let down my legs, and sat on the very edge of the scaffold dangling my feet. Not a fucking thing to do. Night. I waited for adventure and glanced around. It was quiet, although somewhere far away I heard cries, footsteps—someone was chasing someone—music, the shuffle of feet. I sat and dangled my legs. A free personality in the free world. I could do anything I wanted. Kill somebody, for instance. Everything was available and easy. The alcoholic fog was beginning to clear. The free personality got sick of sitting on the scaffold. It jumped down. I jumped down, into the sand.

And then I saw Chris. That is, of course, it was only later I found out his name was Chris. He sat leaning against the brick wall, a young black man. A wide black hat lay beside him on the sand. Later I had time to examine it; it was decorated with a dark green ribbon embroidered with gold thread. As I later saw, he was dressed all in these three colors—black, dark green, and gold. He had these colors in his vest, his slacks, shoes, and shirt. But when I jumped down and saw him directly in front of me, what I saw was a black man dressed in black, his eyes meeting mine with a cold and mysterious glitter.

“Hi!” I said.

“Hi,” he replied indifferently.

“My name is Edward,” I said, taking a couple of steps toward him. He let out a meaningless, scornful sound.

“Got anything to drink?” I asked him.

“Fuck off!” he said.

I thought, Wonder why he’s sitting here, he’s not a drunk or a druggie, doesn’t seem out of it; if he meant to sleep here, he doesn’t look like a bum. Maybe hiding from the police? I’m not one to betray anybody. I’d even help him hide. Only he looks real mean. I stared at him, then took several steps toward him and squatted beside him. He watched coldly and didn’t move. I sat on my heels, peering into his face.

A broad hawklike nose, deeply flaring nostrils, lips unusual for a black—austere, not plump—a strong chest. A big guy: if he stood up he’d probably be a head taller than I. Young, twenty-five or thirty, no more. The wide legs of his black slacks lay on the sand.

“Say, what’s your name?” I said.

Then he snapped, he had had it with my staring and questioning. Silently and swiftly he lunged at me. He hurled himself straight from a sitting position and pinned me instantly; a second later I was lying underneath him, and by all indications he meant to choke me to death.

I gave up the struggle at once, I was at too great a disadvantage. All I had time to do when he hurled himself on me was to tuck my right arm down under my right thigh, and simultaneously curl my right leg up under me. This way, when crushed under him I lay on my right side. It was a good strategy because my hidden hand was free to reach into my boot and grab the knife handle. If he intends to strangle me, I’ll kill him, I thought coldly. He weighed me down all over, but my right hand could move freely. He had not allowed for that.

I was not terrified. Word of honor, absolutely not. As I say, I had some unconscious instinct at the time, a craving for death. The world had become empty without love. That is merely a pat formula, but behind it lie tears, humiliated ambition, the squalid hotel, lust unsatisfied to the point of giddiness, a grudge against Elena and the whole world (a world that only now, laughing openly and mockingly, had shown me how unneeded I was and always had been), hours not empty but filled with despair and horror, terrible dreams and terrible dawns.

The man was strangling me; this was fair because two months ago I had strangled Elena, nothing should go unpunished. He was strangling me, but I did not hurry with my knife. Maybe I didn't even pull it, or maybe I did, I don't know, but suddenly he relaxed his grip, perhaps his anger had passed. We lay gasping for breath, he was gasping too, from his exertions. It's not easy to strangle someone; I know from experience, it's not so easy as it looks.

There was a smell of damp sand, a shuffle of feet on the other side of the wall, lonely night people were passing by in the street. Suddenly I wrenched my arms free and put them around his back. "I want you," I said to him, "let's make love."

I did not thrust myself on him, it all happened of itself. It wasn't my fault, I got a hard-on from the scuffle and the weight of his body. This was not the dead weight of a Raymond, this man's weight was of a different nature. I did say "Let's make love," but he himself could probably tell that I wanted him—my cock must have poked into his belly, he couldn't help but feel it. He smiled.

"Baby," he said.

"Darling," I said.

I rolled over and sat up. We began to kiss. I think he was about my age or even younger, but the simple fact that he was considerably bigger and more virile somehow determined our roles. His kisses were not the senile slobbering of a Raymond; now I knew the difference. The firm kisses of a strong man, probably a criminal. There was a scar across his upper lip. Cautiously I stroked his scar with my fingers. He caught my hand in his lips and kissed it finger by finger, as I had done with Elena. I unbuttoned his shirt and began kissing his chest, his neck. I especially like to hug as children do, flinging my arms way round the neck, hugging the neck, not the shoulders. I hugged him, he smelled of a strong cologne and some kind of acrid alcohol, or maybe that was the smell of

his young body. He was giving me pleasure. After all, I loved the beautiful and the healthy in this world. He was beautiful, tall, strong, and well-built, and a criminal for sure. That added to my enjoyment. Unceasingly kissing his chest, I worked my way down to where the unbuttoned shirt went into his slacks and disappeared under the belt. My lips came up against the buckle. My chin felt his engorged member under the thin fabric of the slacks. I undid his zipper, turned back the edge of his panties, and drew out his member.

In Russia people had often talked about the sexual advantages blacks had over whites. Legend told of the size of their member. And here before me was this legendary tool. Despite my very sincere desire for love with him, curiosity too sprang from somewhere within me and gawked. "Look at that, black all over, or with a tinge of . . ." But it was rather hard to see, even though my eyes were used to the dark. His member was big. But hardly bigger than mine. Thicker, maybe. Hard to tell, though. Curiosity hid within me. Desire emerged.

Psychologically I was very pleased by what was happening to me. For the first time in several months I was in a situation that I liked, utterly and completely. I wanted his cock in my mouth. I sensed that this would give me enjoyment, I was drawn to take his cock in my mouth, and most of all I wanted to taste his semen, to see him twitch, to feel this as I embraced his body. And I took his cock and for the first time ran my tongue around its engorged head. Chris shuddered.

This is something I do well, I think, very well, because by nature I am a subtle person and not lazy, and moreover I am not a hedonist, that is, I'm not someone who seeks enjoyment only for himself, seeks to come no matter what, achieve his own orgasm and that's all. I am a good partner—I derive enjoyment from the moans, cries, and pleasure of the other man or woman. That is why I devoted myself to his member without a second thought, completely giving myself over to sensation and obeying desire. With my left hand, gathering them from below, I fondled his balls. He kept moaning, he leaned back on his hands and moaned softly, with a sob. He may have said, "Oh, my God!"

Gradually he began rocking hard and playing up to me with his hips, sending his cock deeper into my throat. He lay slightly sideways in the sand, on his right elbow, with his left hand just barely stroking my neck and hair. I slid my tongue and lips over his member, deftly tracing out intricate designs, alternating between touching his member lightly and

swallowing it deep. Once I almost gagged. But I was even glad of that.

What was happening to my member? I was lying with my belly and my member in the sand, and at every move I rubbed it against the sand through my thin jeans. My cock responded to what was happening with a delightful itching, I scarcely wanted anything more at that moment. I was utterly happy. I had a relationship. Another man had condescended to me, and I had a relationship. How humiliated and unhappy I had been for two whole months. At last. I was terribly grateful to him, I wanted it to be very good for him, and I think it was. I did not merely accommodate his strong thick cock in my mouth, no, this love we were engaged in, these actions, symbolized much more—to me they symbolized life, the triumph of life, a return to life. I was receiving communion from his cock, the strong cock of a lad from Eighth Avenue and Forty-second Street, doubtless a criminal. To me it was life's tool, life itself. And when I brought off his orgasm, when that fountain hurtled into me, into my mouth, I was utterly happy. Do you know the taste of semen? It is the taste of the alive. I know nothing more alive to the taste than semen.

In ecstasy I licked all the semen off his cock and balls, I gathered up what had spilled, licked it up and swallowed it. I found the droplets of semen among his hairs, tracked down the last little drops.

Chris was astounded, I think. He hardly understood, of course he did not, could not, understand what he meant to me, and he was astounded by the enthusiasm with which I did all this. He was grateful to me, stroked my neck and hair with all the tenderness he was capable of, I buried my face in his groin and lay without moving, and he stroked me with his hands and murmured, "My baby, my baby!"

Listen here, there are morals, there are decent people in the world, there are offices and banks, there are beds; sleeping in them are men and women, also very decent. It was all happening at once, and still is. And there were Chris and I, who had accidentally met there in the dirty sand, in a vacant lot in the vast Great City, a Babylon, God help me, a Babylon. There we lay, and he stroked my hair. Homeless children of the world.

No one needed me, no one had even touched a hand to me in over two months, and there he was, stroking me and saying, "My baby, my baby!" I nearly cried. Despite my everlasting honor and ironic mockery I was a hunted creature, cornered and exhausted, and this was precisely what I needed—another man's hand stroking my head, caressing me.

The tears welled up in me, welled up and started to flow. His groin gave off a characteristic musky smell; I cried, my face burrowing deeper into the warm jumble of his balls, hair, and prick. I don't think he was a sentimental creature, but he felt that I was crying and asked me why, forcibly lifted my face and began to wipe it with his hands. Chris had big strong hands.

Fucking life, it makes us into beasts. We had come together here in the dirt, and there was nothing for us to share. He hugged me and began to soothe me. He did it all the way I wanted, I had not expected that. When I'm excited, all the hairs on my body lift, as if tiny jabs, hundreds and thousands of very tiny jabs, were lifting my hairs; I get cold, and I shiver. It was the first time in a long time that I had not viewed myself with pity. I put my arms around his neck, he put his around me, and I said to him, "I . . . am . . . Eddie. I have no one. You will love me? Yes? And we always will be together? Yes?"

He said, "Yes, baby, yes . . . take it easy."

Then I broke away from him, my right hand dove into my boot and pulled out my knife. "If you betray me," I told him, the tears in my eyes not yet dry, "I will kill you!" My English being very poor, this all sounded like gibberish, but he understood. He said he would not betray me.

I said to him, "Darling!"

He said, "My baby!"

"You and I always will go together and never part, yes?" I said.

"Yes, baby, always together," he said seriously.

I don't think he was lying. He had things to do, but I was so fucking crazy with loneliness, I suited him. This did not mean our relationship was forever. It was simply that he needed me just now, I could meet with him, he would wait for me in bars or simply on the street; I could, and surely would, have some part in the things he did, possibly criminal things. I didn't care what he did, this was what I wanted—it was life, life needed me, that kind of life or any kind at all, but I was needed. He accepted me, I was utterly happy, he accepted me. We talked. It was then I learned his name was Chris. He said that in the morning we would go home to where he lived, but we had to sit here for the night. I didn't ask why; to me it was enough that he had invited me to live with him. I was like a dog that had found its master again; I would have bitten the throat of a policeman or anyone else for him.

We were conversing under our breath, in that same pidgin English. Sometimes I forgot and began speaking Russian. He laughed softly, and then and there I taught him a few words of Russian. They were not nice words from the standpoint of a respectable person, no, they were bad words—prick, love, and others in the same spirit.

In the middle of this conversation I wanted him. I completely let go, God only knows what I did. I pulled off my jeans, I wanted him to fuck me, I pulled off my jeans, pulled off my boots. I ordered him to tear my underpants off me, I wanted him to tear them up, and he obediently tore my red panties off me. I hurled them far away.

At that moment I was really a woman, capricious, demanding, and probably seductive, because I remember myself playfully wiggling my poopka as I leaned on my hands in the sand. My neat round poopka, whose neatness even Elena had envied—it did something unbeknownst to me, it arched sweetly, and I remember that its nakedness, whiteness, and defenselessness gave me the greatest of pleasure. These were purely feminine feelings, I think. I whispered to him, “Fuck me, fuck me, fuck me!”

Chris was breathing heavily. I think I had aroused him in the extreme. I don't know what he did, maybe he wetted his cock with his own spit, but gradually it entered me, his cock did. I shall never forget that feeling of fullness. Pain? Since childhood I had been a lover of every possible savage sensation. Even before women, as a masturbating teenager, a pale onanist, I had invented a certain homemade method: I had put all kinds of objects into my anal orifice, from a pencil to a candle, sometimes rather thick objects. This double onanism—of the cock and through the anal orifice—was very bestial, I remember, very strong and deep. So his cock in my poopka did not frighten me, and it didn't hurt much, even in the first moment; I had obviously stretched my little hole long ago. But the ravishing feeling of fullness—that was new.

He fucked me, and I began to moan. He fucked me, and with one hand caressed my member, I whimpered, moaned, arched, and moaned louder and sweeter. Finally he said to me, “Take it easy, baby, somebody will hear!” I replied that I was not afraid of anything, but nevertheless, out of consideration for him, I made my moans and cries softer.

I was behaving now exactly as my wife had when I fucked her. I caught myself feeling this, and I thought, So this is how she is, this is how they are! Exultation surged through my body. In a last convulsive

movement we dug into the sand and I downed my orgasm in the sand, simultaneously feeling inside me a hot burning. He came inside me. We sprawled exhausted in the sand. My cock dug into the sand, the sand grains pricked it pleasantly, it stood up again almost immediately.

Then we got dressed and settled ourselves comfortably to go to sleep. He took his old place by the wall, and I settled myself beside him, with my head on his chest and my arms around his neck—I'm very fond of that position. He hugged me and we fell asleep . . .

I don't know how long I slept, but I woke up. Maybe an hour had passed, maybe a few minutes. It was as dark as ever. He was asleep, breathing evenly. I woke up and could not get back to sleep. I sniffed him, scrutinized him, and thought.

No doubt about it, I'm incorrigible, I thought. If my first woman was a drunken Yalta prostitute, then my first man, of course, had to be someone I found in a vacant lot. I remember that girl distinctly. She picked me up one summer night at the bus station in Yalta. She liked the pretty kid dozing on the bench with his friend. She walked over, woke me up, and brazenly led me away to a little public garden behind the bus station. There she calmly lay down on a bench, she was completely naked under her dress. I remember the salty taste of her skin, and her still-wet hair—she had just been for a swim in the sea. I remember her very big, mature cunt with its many folds; I was stunned, it was all streaming with mucus, she wanted this kid, she fucked me not for money but out of desire. Southern scents, the rich southern night accompanied my first love. Next morning my friend and I left Yalta.

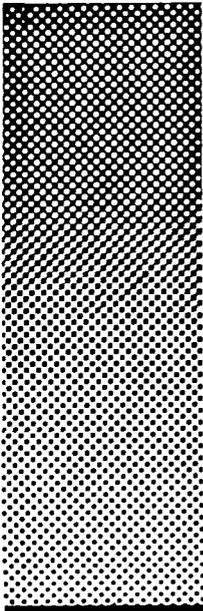
Fate is mocking me. Now I lie with a man of the streets. The years have made no essential change in me. A bum, nothing but a bum, I thought contentedly, meaning myself. I turned to scrutinize Chris again. He stirred, as if sensing my gaze, but then was still again.

Slanting patches of light from the nearby street lamp penetrated here and there through the crisscrossed iron of the scaffolding. There was a smell of gasoline, I was calm and content. Added to the sense of contentment and calm was the sense of a goal achieved. Well, here I am, a real pederast, I thought with a little giggle. You didn't back off, you outdid yourself, you knew how, good for you, Eddie boy! And although I knew in my heart that I was not entirely free in this life, that I was still a long way from absolute freedom, I had nevertheless taken a step, and a huge one, down that path.

I left him at five-twenty. That was the time on a clock that I saw when I got out to the street. I double-crossed him, left quietly as a thief, slid from his chest without waking him. Why did I do it? I don't know, maybe I feared my future life with him—not the sexual relationship, no, maybe I feared someone else's will, someone else's influence, being subject to him. Maybe. It was an unfathomed but quite powerful feeling that moved me to double-cross him and crawl out of his embrace. Glancing at him over my shoulder, I looked for my metal-rimmed glasses and the key to my hotel room. Once or twice I thought he was watching, but he slept on. Miraculously, I found my glasses in the sand. I was still wearing glasses then, but they didn't spoil my looks much, I looked like a wild man anyway, fucking crazy Eddie. I hunted down my glasses, somehow crawled out to the street, and strode away with a strange satisfaction that I had never before known, abandoning Chris and our future relationship, which might have been one variant of my fate.

I walked along dusting myself off. I had sand in my hair, sand in my ears, sand in my boots, sand everywhere. A whore returning from the night's escapades. I smiled, I wanted to shout to life, "Well, who's next!" I was free. Why I needed my freedom I do not know. I needed Chris much more, but contrary to common sense I left him. When I came out on Broadway I nearly wavered. But only for an instant, and I decisively strode on again toward the East Side.

A couple of weeks later I would be cursing myself for having left him, the loneliness and troubled silence would move in again, Elena's villainous image would again torment me, and by the end of April I would have an attack, a very violent, terrible attack of horror and loneliness. But back then, arriving at the hotel, asking for another key, riding up to my floor, and flinging myself wearily on the bed, I was happy and pleased with myself. I was still happy when I woke up the next morning. I lay there smiling and thought how I must be the only Russian poet who had ever been smart enough to fuck a black man in a New York vacant lot. Lascivious recollections of Chris clasp my poopka and whispering to quiet my moans—"Take it easy, baby, take it easy"—made me roar with joyous laughter.



## CAROL

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I met her in Queens, one evening in May. We had much in common—my father was a Communist, her parents were Protestant farmers. To her parents she was an *enfant terrible*, and to mine I was likewise a prodigal son and *enfant terrible*.

She was a pupil of an acquaintance of mine; he gave Russian lessons and Carol was his pupil. Once he told me, “I have a new pupil, a leftist, she’s in the Workers Party.” I said, “Please be so kind as to introduce me.” He and I are quite formal.

I had long wanted to meet people in the leftist parties. From my rough calculations of the future I understood that I could not get by without the leftists; sooner or later I would go over to them. I was not suited for this world. Where else could I go? Before meeting Carol I did have one experience—I went to the Free Space Center, in a dilapidated building on Lafayette Street, where a lecture on anarchism was supposed to take place. This must have been in March. Having seen an ad in the *Village Voice*, I went over there and walked up to the second floor—the whole place was hung with posters and flyers. Posters and flyers lay around in stacks, they were all different sizes, from handbills to newspapers.

In the room—whose decor recalled a revolutionary committee somewhere in the Russian provinces during the civil war, the same tin mugs, cigarette ashes, and dirt, scarred walls screaming with slogans—there were three people. Turning to them, I asked if this was where the lecture

on anarchism would be, said I was Russian and would like to hear the lecture, I was interested. They replied yes, the lecture would take place in this room, and they asked something in their turn. When I didn't understand the question, the man who had asked it repeated it in Russian. He turned out to be a Russian, he had left Russia in the twenties, and it was he who had been advertised in the paper as the lecturer who was supposed to speak.

He soon began. Only one more person came. I was touched by the size and composition of the audience. Five people, two of them Russian. The action took place on Lafayette Street in New York. As is evident, Americans are not much interested in anarchism.

They were taping the lecture, my countryman was spewing words into a hand-held mike, but I walked around and studied the posters on the walls. I understood colloquial speech poorly then—for that matter, my English isn't brilliant even now—but I had, and still have, an enormous curiosity about life. This curiosity has pulled me all over Manhattan, on foot, down the terrible avenues C and D, anywhere at all, any hour of the day and night. And it has forced me to go to poetry readings, where I understood nothing but meticulously paid my contribution and listened to the unfamiliar words more attentively than anyone else. I remember one such reading at the Noho Gallery, where I sat on the floor with everyone else, and in their indifference they didn't so much as ask who I was. I drank wine, smiled, applauded, and was a full-fledged member of the audience. There was a nice little humpbacked poet at the gallery with whom I exchanged a few words. In general the composition of the group recalled a Moscow audience. Roughly the same types of people. Except that the New Yorkers were a little less pretentious.

I used to go both to musical and theatrical performances, make the rounds of all the SoHo galleries twice a week. I went to a theatrical performance in the Village by a certain Susanna Russell, during a terrible rainstorm; I was wet to the skin despite my umbrella, but I didn't care. I was in such a state that nothing could make me get sick; that was ruled out.

After every such contact with life I returned satisfied and stimulated. I was with life after all, I was not alone. I came to know New York, the life of New York, and the nuances of its life rather rapidly, much more rapidly than I learned English.

Oh yes—so I walked around in this little room and studied the

posters. I left before the end of the lecture, collecting as many posters as I could in the corridor. Some of them lie in my hotel room to this day, and one, in support of gay rights, I hung on the door. It's still there, in color, with underlining under the words in the text that I didn't know. Now I know them.

Several pictures on the poster show happy homosexuals embracing; others, people with slogans demanding civil rights for gays. I too feel that they—I mean we—should be given full civil rights, and without any fucking delay. Only I don't think this will change anything in a state as depraved as America. Well, isolated advances maybe, but insincerity and hypocrisy will not permit, for example, putting an open pederast in any important position.

All right then—Carol. We had been meaning to get together for a long time, my friend was in no hurry and very cautious. His caution he had brought from the USSR. At long last, one evening in May, I walked into my friend's place and saw a little blonde. Thin; she had a cigarette of course, she smoked all the time. She would smoke only half of a cigarette, the remainder she stubbed in an ashtray, and these remainders of hers gave off a lot of smoke. She spoke tolerable Russian, stubbornly called her cigarettes *papirosy* (which really means a Russian-style filter tip), and after a few introductory sentences plunged me immediately into the question of the need for Russians to acknowledge Ukrainian independence. Oof! At that moment I was much more interested in another problem: I needed people, lots of contacts, connections, people and more people. I dreamed about relationships with people in my sleep, I was languishing without people, but I had not turned to the Russians because they had nothing to give me. I was spoiling to get into this world, but I knew the Russians in minute detail and was repelled by their inadequacy here. I was strong in my weakness, I did not want to submit to the unjust system of this world, any more than I had submitted to the unjust system of the Soviet world. But the Russians almost all submitted, they accepted this world order.

Face on, Carol was completely without flaws, even beautiful. But in profile there was something wrong with her face, some sort of mischance between her lips and nose. This is merely a cavil, after my beautiful wife. At the time, and that evening in particular, I was obsessed with Alexander's and my next article: we urgently needed it translated and no one wanted to do it because the few people capable of it, having done us the

favor once and not having received any money for it, did not want to do it a second or third time.

Carol volunteered to translate it herself. This fact alone made me like her already. On the question of granting independence to the Ukraine, I supported her but expressed doubt as to the expediency of dividing up the bearskin before the bear was shot, especially right now, when the Soviet government was stronger than ever. I did not say that it was absurd. But that's what I thought. Besides, I added, right now the ties between the Russians and Ukrainians in the Ukraine were far stronger than they appeared to Ukrainian émigrés; suffice it to say that there were nine million Russians living on Ukrainian territory . . .

Our host and his wife joined the conversation. Really a writer, not just a language tutor, our host was becoming day by day an ever greater admirer of Russia and patriot of his people, although he had been bursting to get out of Russia and had finally done it. This phenomenon is natural in a Russian. The writer felt that the Russian and Ukrainian peoples were so closely related in both language and culture that there was no need to divide them artificially. Practically and realistically, independence might be necessary, for example, to the Baltic peoples—the Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians, who had little in common with Russian language or Russian culture—but for the Ukrainians, White Russians, and Russians it was better and more natural to live together than to be split up and isolated.

I think the writer was nearer the truth than Carol, member of the Workers Party, daughter of Protestant farmers, for he was proceeding from the actual state of affairs, she from the party program and current opinion, according to which all peoples and ethnic groups—be they nothing at all, a man and a half—were deserving of independence and self-determination.

I didn't express my secret opinion that national groups should be not segregated but united, only not on the basis of a state in which a small group from a provincial ethnic intelligentsia would again make themselves into great rulers, propagating a new backwardness and barbarism in the world. No. All nationalities must be totally mixed, must renounce ethnic prejudices, "blood" and that sort of nonsense, in the name of world unity, even in the name of stopping nationalistic wars—even for that alone it would be worth being mixed. Mixed biologically, acknowledging the danger of ethnic groupings. Jews and Arabs,

Armenians and Turks—enough of all that. It must stop, at long last.

Neither Carol nor the writer was ready for these ideas, I thought—too abrupt. I therefore held my peace and merely asked what would happen to me. My father was Ukrainian, my mother Russian, what was I supposed to do? Which state should I resettle in, Ukrainian or Russian? With whom should I sympathize, whose side should I be on? Besides, I knew both languages equally well, and had been raised on Russian culture.

They did not know what to say. “Independence is necessary!” said the confident Carol. Okay, let there be independence. But would it be any easier for a Ukrainian Limonov in a Ukrainian state? Here I had lived in the Russian state, a Russian writer, and what did I have to show? Not one published work in ten years. The real issue is not the attainment of independence for all nationalities, but something else—how to rebuild the foundations of human life so as to deliver the world at least from war, deliver it from inequality of property, deliver it from the universal killing of life by work, teach the world love, not anger and hatred, which are the inevitable result of national isolation.

I did not say all that. They would have thought I was crazy. What’s this about “delivering the world from work”? Better to keep silent, or else first acquaintance would make this leftist young lady turn away, she would not want my company. And oh, how I needed company.

We ate fried eggs and cutlets, drank wine, and finished our vodka. The conversation moved on from Ukrainian self-determination to something Eddie-baby was fucking bored with, his article “Disillusionment.” Eddie had written and published a shitload of articles in the sleazy émigré rag. But this was the one that got noticed, because here I wrote for the first time that the Western world had not justified the hopes placed in it by the Jews and non-Jews who had left Russia; in many ways it had turned out to be even worse than the Soviet world. After this wretched article little Eddie acquired a reputation as a KGB agent and leftist, but the article was what automatically enabled me, thank God, to break with the quagmire of the Russian emigration. Quickly and painlessly.

The Godfather of the Russian emigration, Moses Yakovlevich Borodatykh himself—editor and owner of the paper—had allowed the article to be printed. He acted rashly: the desire for a pointed article to stir up interest in the paper, the search for commercial advantage, his

own business sense got Moses Yakovlevich into trouble. Later he kicked himself, but it was too late.

Things got especially awkward for the Godfather on February 29, when *Nedelya*, the Moscow Sunday supplement to *Izvestia*, the USSR's government newspaper, in an anniversary issue dedicated to the Twenty-fifth Party Congress, came out with a full-page article called "The Bitter Word 'Disillusionment'"—about my article, and about me in particular. There was even a montage by V. Metchenko, with skyscrapers in the background and against them the head of a young man in glasses, homologous with the head of Eddie Limonov.

They were using my article over there for their own purposes, naturally, but that's to be expected, they all use us for their own purposes. The only thing is, we the people do not use them, the government. God knows what we need them for, the governments, if they not only fail to serve the people but also go against the people.

We talked for a while about the ill-fated article. The writer was cautious and did not get involved in political issues; party comrade Carol agreed with me, of course, in my critical outlook on America and the whole Western world, but overestimated the dissident movement in the USSR, considering it far more powerful and numerous than it really was.

It was boring for me to explain Russia's misfortunes, I was sick to death of them, but I had to. I halfheartedly observed to Carol that dissidence was a phenomenon exclusively of the intelligentsia and had no ties with the people; the movement was very small—all the protests were signed by the same few, twenty to fifty people. "And by now," I said, "most of the movement's more distinguished members are abroad."

I went on to say that I considered the dissident movement very right-wing, and that if the single aim of their struggle was to replace the current leaders of the Soviet state with others, the Sakharovs and Solzhenitsyns, then they'd better not, for although the views of said persons were muddled and unrealistic, they had any amount of imagination and energy and would obviously pose a danger should they come to power. Their potential political and social experiments would be dangerous for the populace of the Soviet Union, and the more imagination and energy they had the more dangerous it would be. The USSR's current leaders, thank God, were too mediocre to conduct drastic experiments, but at the same time they had bureaucratic know-how in leadership, they were

pretty good at their business; and that, at present, was far more necessary to Russia than all this unrealistic nonsense, these schemes for returning to the February Revolution or to capitalism.

That was roughly the scope of our conversation. Masha, the writer's wife, suggested we have some more vodka, tried to get us organized, but we were too carried away. We stayed until almost two, although the next morning Carol the revolutionary would have to go from Brooklyn to her office in Manhattan, where she worked as a secretary. We left together.

"This is the first time I've met a Russian with such leftist views," Carol said.

"I'm not alone, I have friends who share my views. Not many, but some. Besides, everyone who comes over from Russia moves to the left here, without fail, especially the young people," I said.

"If you're interested in the leftist movement," Carol said, "I can invite you when we have our Workers Party meetings."

"Unfortunately I have a lot of trouble with the language, Carol, I won't understand it all; but I'll be happy to come, I need this very much, my whole life is bound up with the Revolution."

Then we got on the subway and she told me about her party, trying to shout over the roar. After digging in two bulky tote bags filled with magazines, newspapers, reprints, copies, and other papers—the bags of a genuine agitator and propagandist—she pulled out a newspaper, their party paper, and their party magazine, and gave them to me. Both the paper and the magazine told about the struggles of the different ethnic and party groups, both here in America and all over the world—in South Africa and Latin America, the USSR and Asia. I rode as far as Grand Central and got off, after arranging for her to call me the next day and tell me how things were going with the translation of the article, which she would try to do at work if her boss wasn't there.

She had the translation done in a day. I met her at her office; she worked for some prominent lawyer, the office was on Fifth Avenue. Luxurious chairs upholstered in genuine leather betrayed the wealth of their owner. Carol sat in a little pen enclosed by a fence, as is customary, behind a desk with an IBM typewriter and a bank of telephones. She handed me the translation; I offered her money, which she refused. I thanked her.

"Do you want to go to a meeting in support of the rights of the Palestinian people?" Carol asked. "Admittedly, it's a very dangerous

meeting. I don't even think many of our own comrades will come to it. It will be at Brooklyn College."

"Of course I want to," I said with genuine pleasure. A dangerous meeting was just what I needed. Admittedly, if she had said, Come tomorrow to such-and-such a place, you'll receive a submachine gun and cartridges, you'll participate in an action, an airplane hijacking, for example, I'd have been a lot happier. I mean it, only revolution would have fully suited my mood. But I could begin with a meeting.

"I'll bring a friend," I said, with Alexander in mind. "May I?"

"Yes, of course," Carol said. "If your friend's not afraid. They usually watch us, we're all on their books. You've probably read in the papers that our party is suing the FBI because they've eavesdropped on us for years, smashed the locks on party premises, monitored our papers, planted *agents provocateurs*—"

"Yes, I've read about it in the papers."

"You know, when I became a member of the Workers Party, the FBI sent my parents a letter—they live in Illinois, my parents—informing them that I had become a member of the Workers Party. They always play mean tricks like that to sow dissension in families. My parents are Protestants, they're plain people, they don't like blacks, they don't like outsiders, they're racists, my brother is a rightist, this was a terrible blow to them. We were out of touch for a long time," Carol said.

"Your FBI has the same methods as the KGB," I said. "That's how the KGB behaves in Russia."

"And you know, the FBI has a list of twenty-eight thousand names all over America. These people will be arrested immediately, in one day, if any danger arises for the regime. They're the ones who are deemed to be personally dangerous, oh, for example, they have influence, can lead people. One of the names near the top is Norman Mailer's," Carol went on. "Do you know him?"

"I read him in Russia," I said, "he's been translated."

Carol's remarks did not surprise me. Back in the Soviet Union I had met and maintained close relationships with Austrian leftists; I had had several such acquaintances, and I knew better than other Russians how things stood in the West. They had told me a lot. Walking with me at the Novodevichy Convent, I remember, Lisa Oivari had said, "You should leave the USSR only if there is an immediate threat to your life." My Elena had always drawn me to the right, now Elena

was gone. And by now I knew this world well, I had no illusions.

The Soviet Union was left behind, and its problems too; I would have to live here and die here. The question arose, How to live and how to die? As shit, subject to the laws of this world, or as a proud man insisting on his right to life?

I had no choice, I didn't even need to make a choice. For me, with my temperament, there was nothing to choose. I automatically found myself among the protesters and the dissatisfied, among the insurgents, partisans, rebels, the Reds and the gays, the Arabs and Communists, the blacks and the Puerto Ricans.

The next day we met—she, Alexander, and I—and went to Brooklyn. There was still time before the meeting so we stopped at Blimpie's for something to eat. When she was eating, taking a sandwich in her hands, I noticed that Carol's fingernails were rough and broken. One mutilated nail turned down, almost under the finger. But there was nothing unpleasant about her hands, they were the plain hands of a thin little blonde. It was like looking at the mutilated fingers of a carpenter, steadily and calmly, knowing that this is clean, dry, and good, it's from work, it's as it should be.

Near the building where the meeting was supposed to take place, we saw a multitude of police and cars; young people stood here and there in separate little groups, animatedly conversing and discussing something. I sniffed the air with satisfaction. It smelled of alarm. It smelled good.

“Our comrades have been warned that the Jewish Defense League wants to start a riot, they're going to try and break up the meeting,” Carol said with a grin, glancing searchingly at Alexander and me. What did I care, I was a rolling stone, a Russian Ukrainian; I had both Ossetian and Tatar blood in me, all I sought was adventure. But Alexander was a Jew; for him to participate in a meeting in support of the Palestinian people was very likely to be considered unnatural. So it seemed to me until we went up to the hall. Among those sitting in the hall were many Jews. I ceased to worry about Alexander.

But before going through the solid wall of police and guards up to the hall, we waited awhile longer, until a young man brought us the leaflets that served as passes to the meeting.

“He's in our party youth organization,” Carol said. “He's been helping us since he was sixteen, his father is a member of our party.”

We went upstairs and found ourselves in a large room, where, after paying a contribution of a dollar, we took our seats on either side of Carol, so that she could help us if necessary—translate whatever was unclear in the orators' speeches. Since this was the first time I had been to such an event, I looked around curiously.

There were several Arab youths in the hall who were selling leftist literature. There was also a stand with literature. They carried *Révolution* and other leftist journals as well. There weren't many people.

The meeting gradually got under way. There were six people on the podium, including two blacks, representatives of black organizations. The first to speak was a Lebanese student who talked about the civil war in Lebanon. I remember one place in his speech where he said that the goal of his comrades in the Lebanese leftist groups was not the acquisition of power in Lebanon, not the struggle with Israel, but world revolution! I liked that, I applauded him heartily. In those days I was just finishing "The New York Daily Radio Broadcast," a work in which I described some events of the future world revolution. I took a personal attitude toward the revolution. I did not seek refuge in lofty words. I deduced my love for world revolution naturally from my own personal tragedy—a tragedy in which both countries were involved, both the USSR and America, and in which civilization was to blame. This civilization did not acknowledge me, it ignored my labor, it denied me my legitimate place in the sun, it had destroyed my love, it would have killed me too, but for some reason I stood my ground. And I live on, reeling and taking risks. My craving for revolution, being built on the personal, is far more powerful and natural than any artificial revolutionary principle.

The speaker after the Lebanese was a smallish man of indeterminate nationality. He might have been Mexican or Latin-American. This was a professional orator, his address was concise, polished, clever, and convincing.

"That's Peter, the leader of our regional organization," Carol whispered to me in Russian.

"He's a real pro, has a good rap," I said with envy, wondering when I would be able to speak like him. I very much wanted to get up and say, in the name of present-day Russians, that not all of us were shit for sale, not all of us would go to work for Radio Liberty and support their deceitful regime.

“What does ‘rap’ mean?” Carol asked.

“Talk,” I said. I had forgotten that Carol couldn’t know Russian slang.

Peter turned out to be not Latin-American but Jewish, a fact that he also made use of at the end of the meeting, in a very clever and deft reply to some questions from a lad in a yarmulke. The lad appeared to be a very good and honorable Jew, judging by how agitated and fidgety he was in speaking about the Palestinian question. Peter answered him patiently, and, at the end, inflicted the decisive blow lightly and abruptly, by saying suddenly that one should not confuse Zionism and Jews, and that he, Peter, was also a Jew, by the way. I appreciated the elegance of his speech, as did those present, who rewarded Peter with applause.

The speeches by the two blacks were simple, not so elegant and professional as Peter’s but weighty and convincing. I liked the blacks very much. Militants. With lads like these I’d join in any venture.

All during the meeting there were suspicious characters hanging around outside the glass walls of the hall. The guards and police made their rounds every few minutes. A sort of whisper of alarm was audible in the air. At the door to the hall there was a constant small group of Jewish young people without identifying marks, of unknown political affiliation. But, finally, the meeting came to an end, apparently a happy one. People did not hurry to break up. A note of alarm echoed afresh in the words of a guard, who said we should use a certain exit because it was guarded by the police, they did not recommend that we use the other exits.

None of this mattered much to me, of course. I had my knife in my boot as usual, I felt like a fight. I had nothing against the members of the JDL, nationalists of all nations are alike. But I was closer to Alexander, and closer to Leib Davidovich Trotsky, than to doubtful nationalist dogmas.

To my disappointment, however, nothing happened. Criminal Eddie got no chance. On the way back Carol introduced me to her comrades, among whom were several homely young Jewish women in rumped slacks and an open-faced fellow in khaki work clothes. “He works at our press,” Carol said. All of them, each in different degree, spoke Russian. The man was even a translator. Their press was putting out Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*, in Russian. Subsequently, a month

later, I was to receive this book and be the first Russian to read it. The first, not counting those who had read it in Trotsky's manuscript.

The book was to leave me with mixed emotions. Over certain pages, which described the great armed popular processions, I would sob, and whisper in my little room, "Can it be that I shall never have this!" I would weep in ecstasies of envy and hope over this thick, three-volume history, over our Russian Revolution. "Can it be that I shall never have this!"

Other pages stirred me to malice—especially those where Trotsky writes with indignation about how the Provisional Government, after the February Revolution, herded the workers back to work, demanded that they carry on as usual at the plants and factories. The workers were indignant: "We made the revolution, and they're herding us back to the factories!"

Trotsky the prostitute! I thought. What you forced the workers to do after your October Revolution was just the same: you demanded that the workers return to work. For you—the provincial journalists and half-educated students who, thanks to the revolution, rocketed to leadership in a huge state—the revolution really took place, but what about the workers? For the workers it didn't exist. In every regime the worker is forced to work. You had nothing else to offer them. The class that made the revolution made it not for itself but for you. To this day no one has offered anything else, no one knows how to abolish the very concept of work, make an attempt on the foundation. That will be the real revolution, when the concept of work—I mean work for money, for a living—disappears.

By a strange coincidence, party comrades were to bring me this book right in the middle of our demonstration against the *New York Times*. Several of them observed for quite a while, even helping us hand out leaflets.

After that meeting, Carol invited us to her place; she lives in Brooklyn, six or eight other members of her party live in the same building—it's like a party cell. We went by subway, then on foot. Alexander, suspicious Alexander, hooked on Freudianism, dropped behind the rest of the company and said to me in a whisper, "Listen, why are they all so flawed, don't you see it? Look at those girls—there's something wrong with them. Carol herself is normal, but even at that, she seems to me to have some sexual problem."

“Listen, Alya, what do you want?” I said. “Revolutionaries have always been like this, in my observation. You can find flaws in Lenin or anyone you please. Does that matter to you and me? What we need is a clique; you know you have to belong to some clique in this world. Who else accepts you, who’s interested in you? But they accept you and me, they need us, they invited us. We have one way out: go to them. Aren’t we flawed, you and I? You must agree we are, to some extent.”

I was right. We seemed to have every reason to be drifting, not necessarily toward the Workers Party, but toward the dissatisfied of this world. The satisfied had no fucking need of us. Why we would not go to them, to the satisfied, was another question.

We arrived at Carol’s roomy apartment, which she shared with a girl friend. Her roommate was asleep somewhere in back. We settled in the living room, Carol made some sandwiches, we drank the beer we had bought, and talked. Later the orator came, Peter. They asked us a lot of questions, we asked a lot of questions, the evening dragged on till after two in the morning. I had some sexual hopes for Carol, as for every person at that time. Despite her sex, I found her agreeable for some reason. Roughly speaking, I wanted to make love with her, but people kept coming and going, all the neighbors were at Carol’s, and I couldn’t even get a word with her—except that she sat on her heels by the couch where I had found room, and sometimes translated what I didn’t understand, without letting me yield my place on the couch to her. That was as intimate as we got.

Finally everyone left. Alexander and I were the last to leave. Why the last? She would not let us go with everyone else. “Don’t all leave at once,” she said. In company, with other people, she was gay and evidently very witty, since people laughed at her words from time to time—unfortunately, I understood almost none of her jokes. She crawled around on the floor, there weren’t many chairs, all the guests preferred to sit on the floor, Carol preferred it too.

She came out and saw us to the subway. Outdoors it proved to be very chilly, it had suddenly turned much colder. We got to the subway entrance; she was about to take leave of us, but I said to her, “Carol, excuse me, I need a word with you in private.

“Excuse me,” I said to Alexander, “one moment.”

“No problem,” Alexander said.

We walked away. I took her by the arms and said, "Do you want me to stay with you, Carol?"

She put her arms around me and said, "You're so nice, but perhaps your friend wants to talk with you?"

I didn't quite understand her, we stood in the cold, I was practically shaking with cold, we kissed and stood with our arms around each other. She was thin all over, nothing to her, and yet she had a daughter thirteen years old. The daughter lived with her parents in Illinois.

"You're very nice," Carol said softly. "Tomorrow, on Sunday, I'll be in Manhattan, I have to stop by the office. I forgot my new hat there, I bought it yesterday. I'm leaving for three days to see my parents in Illinois, and I wanted to show them my hat. I'll call you tomorrow and we'll get together."

I was very cold and tired, and I didn't insist. Perhaps I should have. But I was freezing. We hugged again and kissed, and she left. "Go along," I told her, "you'll freeze."

While Alexander and I rode the subway we had a lively discussion of our new party comrades. Alexander said it was all clear to him. I called on him to abstain from conclusions for the time being; it was too early to decide, on the basis of one meeting, how we should view them. We got off at Broadway. Its sidewalks and pavements, as usual in the cold, were belching clouds of steam. Alexander turned left toward his Forty-fifth Street, I went up and to the right. In the all-night eateries people sat and chewed.

She did not call the next day; I waited for her call till two. This upset me greatly, I was already thinking of her as my beloved; such is my nature. I had much more in common with her than with any of the rest. In addition to being a revolutionary she was also a journalist, and quite recently the *Worker*—the organ of the American Communist Party—had come down hard on her for her article on Leonid Plyushch, a Ukrainian dissident.

She did not call, but that morning and the night before, I had accustomed myself to the thought that she would be my beloved, I had even thought how I would dress her—and now this. I don't like it when things fall through. I was very upset and did not immediately regain my composure that day.

She turned up several days later. She apologized. She hadn't come in

for the hat on Sunday; first thing in the morning, she had headed straight to the airport and flown to Illinois; she hadn't had time to come in for the hat, the flight was very early, and she hadn't wanted to wake me. "After all, you went to bed very late the night before," she said. We arranged to go to lunch together. We met.

We sat across from each other and talked about what we were doing. Alexander and I were plotting our demonstration at the time, and I told her about our plans. Suddenly she said, "You know, I want to tell you that I have a friend. I feel very awkward, I like you, you're nice, but I've had this friend now for several years. He's not a member of our party, but he's a leftist and works in a leftist publishing house."

My face showed nothing. I was already so used to blows of fate that this wasn't even a blow. Never mind, I'll survive, I thought, although it's no fun when your dreams crumble to dust. In my imagination we had been living together and working jointly for the party.

"Okay," I said simply. That was the end of my romance with her, but our political relationship continues to this day, although I am disillusioned with the Workers Party as an effective party.

After lunch that day we walked along Fifth Avenue, heading for Madison; she had to buy coffee for the office. Across from St. Patrick's I asked her, "What do you think, Carol, will there be revolution in America in our lifetime?"

"Definitely," Carol said without a moment's thought. "Otherwise why would I work for the party?"

"I want to do some shooting, Carol," I told her. And I meant it.

"You will, Edward," she said, grinning.

You're thinking we were two bloodthirsty villains who dreamed of seeing America and the whole world bleed. Nothing of the kind: I was the son of a Communist officer—my father had served his whole life in the ranks of the NKVD; that's right, the secret police—and she was the daughter of a puritan Protestant from Illinois.

I repeat—what had I seen of this life? Eternal semistarvation, vodka, abominable little rooms. Why does a man who sells vodka, who has a liquor store, gain the acceptance of society, real acceptance, while a man who writes poetry comes all the way around the world simply to gain nothing, find nothing? And what's more they take away the last thing he clings to—love. Eddie has fantastic strength, how else would I hold on, with my constitution, how else?

Carol told me a lot about America and its system. She told me about the Boston racial conflicts—her party newspaper was writing about them at the time—about how the newspapers conceal information when whites attack blacks, or, vice versa, inflate it if blacks attack whites. She told me that it was mainly Latin-Americans and blacks who had fought in Vietnam. And there was lots more she told me.

I went to many meetings of the Workers Party, and although their methods of struggle struck me, and still do, as undynamic—they were mainly busy “supporting” everybody, they supported the rights of the Crimean Tatars in the USSR, demanded political independence for Puerto Rico, supported Brazilian political prisoners and the right of the Ukrainians to be separated from Russia, et cetera—still, I learned a lot at their meetings. They were a party of the old type, of course, there was much in their structure that was dogmatic and obsolete. They called themselves the “Workers” Party, for example, although I don’t think their membership included any workers at all. Peter himself, the regional leader, spoke of the workers as a reactionary force.

“You’re an extremist,” Carol said to me. “If I ever get to know any extremists, I’ll introduce you. You’re better suited to them.”

The Workers Party took a very suspicious stance vis-à-vis Alexander and me. Alexander, a very suspicious man himself, said to me, “They think we’re KGB agents. Some Russian dissident has planted this idea in them. Carol doesn’t think so, of course, she has very high regard for you. But the leadership—those guys certainly do. If not, why didn’t their press carry any report on our demonstration against the *New York Times*—why not? After all, they made a point of being there for two hours!”

Alexander was right in this instance, I think. They never reported that we existed, although they should have found us tempting material. In counterpoise to the usually very rightist Russians, suddenly here’s a leftist cell, here’s an “Open Letter to Sakharov,” criticizing him for idealizing the West. Even the *Times* of London printed an account of the letter—the leftists proved more rightist, or more suspicious, than the official bourgeois newspaper.

I do not believe this party has any future. They are very isolated, they fear the streets, they fear the suburbs, in my view they have no common language with those whom they support and in whose name they speak.

A typical incident: I was accompanying Carol to the Port Authority after work; her daughter was supposed to be arriving. We walked along

Fifth Avenue—at first she had wanted to go by bus or subway, but I foisted my pedestrian habit on her and we walked. It was still early, we sat awhile at the Public Library and then went over to Eighth Avenue, where the Port Authority is, via Forty-second Street. My girl-revolutionary was somewhat wary of Forty-second Street and huddled close to me in fright.

“Our comrades are afraid to walk here. There are lots of druggies and crazies here,” Carol said warily.

I started to laugh. *I wasn't afraid of Forty-second*, I felt at home there any hour of the day or night. I didn't say so at the time, but it crossed my mind that her party was nothing but a petit-bourgeois study group. If I were making a revolution I would lean first of all on the people among whom we were walking, people like me—the classless, the criminal, and the vicious. I would locate my headquarters in the toughest neighborhood, associate only with the have-nots—that is what I was thinking.

Carol said, laughing, “This is ridiculous, to have someone from Moscow take me around New York and know the way much better than I do.”

She had doubted that I would take her the right way. I did. Granted, I was afraid—I might encounter one of my boyfriends, Chris, for example, or other, lesser, acquaintances, but it turned out all right, thank God.

Carol is very sweet and very obliging, and very businesslike. In one way I am even content that we never became lovers. At least, I don't know what kind of problem she has, I don't believe she's altogether healthy. She can't be; but she doesn't need to be. In this world healthy people are needed for something else. The world hangs by the struggle between the healthy and the unhealthy. Fair Carol and I are in the same camp. If I wanted to, I could become a member of her party. But I'm sick of intellectual organizations, in my view the old parties are anemic. I am still seeking, I want something alive—not red tape, or money being collected in a little basket and the total announced, who gave more. I do not want to sit in meetings and then have people all scatter to their homes and calmly go to the office in the morning. I want people *not* to scatter. My interests lie somewhere in the sphere of semireligious Communist communes and sects, armed families and agricultural groups. As yet this is none too clear, the outlines are just beginning to take shape,

but never mind, all in good time. What I want is to live with Chris and have Carol there too, and others as well, all together. And I want the free and equal-people living with me to love me and caress me; I wouldn't be so terribly lonely, a lonely animal. If I don't perish somehow first—anything can happen in this world—I am determined to be happy.

The meetings with Carol are useful to me—I learn a lot about America from her and she learns a lot from me. We are friends, although, for example, she concealed the date of her trip to the USSR from me, apparently afraid that I really was a KGB agent. She told me only after she was back, when she gave me some Soviet chocolate and a twenty-kopeck coin as souvenirs. You fool! I thought. I could have given you addresses, and you'd have met people you can never meet, even if you go to the USSR a hundred times. But I'm not hurt.

Carol is an unfinished chapter, we constantly discover new ideas in common, she often waits for me near her office—fair, smiling, with or without her dark glasses, always burdened by party literature and two or three tote bags.

“Carol, all you need is a leather jacket and a red kerchief,” I tease. “A real commissar.”

The Workers Party, and in particular my friend Carol, organized a meeting in support of Mustafa Dzhemilev, who was in a Soviet prison camp. The meeting was very diverse. They had representatives of the Irish separatists there; they had the Iranian poet Reza Baraheni, a former political prisoner; they had Pyotr Livanov (God knows how he had decided on what for him was a very bold step, speaking at a meeting arranged by leftists—I think he and his friends have something to do with the fact that Alexander and I are considered KGB agents); they had Martin Sostre, a black who had spent eight years in an American prison for a political crime. I nearly howled with delight when Martin Sostre came right out and said, “I join, of course, in supporting Mustafa Dzhemilev, and in general I support the right of nations to self-determination, including of course the Crimean Tatars, but I protest the fact that when Sakharov sends an article to the *New York Times*, in which he writes about injustices and oppression, infringements of individual freedom in the USSR, the *Times* prints his article practically on the front page, whereas similar articles about injustices and infringements of human rights here in America the *Times* refuses to print.”

That was what he said, Martin Sostre. A strong man. He didn't hurry,

he spoke calmly, slowly, swaying slightly, and even I understood every last word he said.

I observed Livanov, he was all contorted with horror. He was in for it, poor guy, probably hadn't expected this. What would his hosts say to him, who had given him work, who had given him food and drink here, who had paid his English teachers; what would the American rightists say, who had given and were still giving him money? If you survive a prison or a mental hospital over there, you get money here. But what would they say to Livanov, the American rightists, when they learned he had taken part in such a meeting?

Carol had expended enormous effort in persuading Livanov to come and speak. It had taken her a long time. Now, as chair of the meeting, my friend was full of herself, exuberantly announcing and introducing the speakers. She was satisfied.

Alexander and I were sitting in the second row. We were serene because we knew that at the crucial moment all these girls, old men and women, philosophizers and orators, Oriental poets, and playboys from Amnesty International would scatter in all directions, and people like Martin Sostre, Carol, and ourselves would remain. So we thought, and we were hardly mistaken.

Carol calls me often now.

"Hello, Edward," Carol says on the phone. "It's me—Carol."

"Hi, Carol! Glad to hear from you," I reply.

"We're having a meeting today," Carol says. "Do you want to come?"

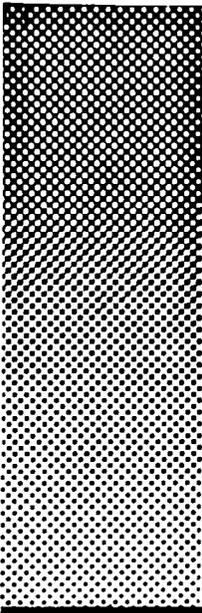
"Of course, Carol," I reply. "You know how I'm interested in everything."

"Then let's meet at six o'clock by the subway at Lexington and Fifty-first Street," she says.

"Yes, Carol—six o'clock," I say.

We meet at six, we kiss, I take one bag from her, that's all she allows, and we go down into the subway.

Once in a while, at lunchtime, you may find us on Fifty-third Street between Madison Avenue and Fifth, sitting by the waterfall.



## SONYA

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I rarely get invited anywhere, but I so love company. Once I went to a party given by the only person who still receives me—Sashka Zhigulin, photographer and troublemaker. I've already mentioned him, a real horse's ass, little kid and visionary, all his dreams and the dreams of his friends are focused on getting rich without especially working. There may be more to him, but this characterization also applies.

He lives in a big, semidark studio on East Fifty-eighth Street and goes to great lengths to pay his \$300 a month and hold on to it, because he can invite guests here and pose as a grown-up.

In keeping with my silly habit, a habit very odd in a Russian, I arrived precisely at eight. No other guests were there yet, of course, and I stood around foolishly in my lace shirt, white slacks, lilac velvet blazer, and splendid white vest, while Sashka's friends worked. They were moving furniture, opening jars and bottles, putting up posters, and I didn't want to do anything. From boredom and apathy, I left—went for cigarettes, observed the sky growing dark over the streets, inhaled the scent of green leaves; it was May, Central Park was nearby and it reeked of spring weather and excitement. I came back, and the helpers had left to change their clothes. The only ones there were Sashka, who shortly disappeared too, into the bathroom, and this girl, God knows what she was doing there, a short girl with bushy, typically Jewish hair and a strangely affected way of speaking, drawling out her sentences or, vice versa, saying them too rapidly, like a bad actress taking pains to enunciate her

lines clearly. As it later turned out, she had indeed attended a theatrical group in her native Odessa and was considered very talented. I have always been attracted to malformed specimens. Thus did Sonya enter my life.

We spent the whole evening together. One by one, as they showed up, I introduced her to my friends and acquaintances. Among the latter were both Jean-Pierre—an artist who lives in SoHo, my wife's first lover—and Susanna, also her lover. The fleet-winged Elena herself, with a wave of her hat, had flown off to Milan. All three of us had seen her off. She was still in Milan, flashing her brilliant plumage and driving the Italians out of their minds, I suppose, men and women alike. It doesn't take much to drive poor simple working folk—businessmen or artists—out of their minds.

I was still in a state of confusion, and Sonya was the first woman, if such she can be called, the term is hardly correct in respect to her, as you will see—more exactly, she was the first individual of feminine gender with whom I wanted, God knows why, to become intimate. The first after Elena.

Before this there had been lunatic encounters in an alcoholic haze, incomprehensible evening gatherings, infrequent parties. Women from Australia and women from Italy would come looming up, swivel their faces, say something about kangaroos or contemporary art, step back, disappear, and finally melt into the background, from which they had stepped forward for an instant with a swish of their skirts only to slip back again deep into chaos. I was almost always drunk, openly hostile toward them, and at the same time overflirtatious, lest I appear to be a homosexual. Body and soul together—unanimous for this once, having been cruelly insulted by Elena—I rejected the women, pushed them away, and I invariably woke up alone. I doubt I could have fucked a woman then or had any intimate relationship with her at all. Did I want to? Or did I feel I “had to”? I don't know. Sonya did not scare me. She was afraid of everything herself.

This first evening, the young lady from Odessa (she's very shy about that, of course) is shocked by the thoroughly proper introductions with which she is honored. “This is Jean-Pierre, my wife's ex-lover.” “This is Susanna, her lover.” The drunken but sweet-smelling Susanna kisses me almost with family feeling. I am not past caring, but I pity Susanna and scorn Jean; that gives me the strength to relate to them calmly. And

besides, I know how to play my hand, add fuel to the fire. Introducing my "family" to this little Jewish philistine, I know that essentially they differ very little from her. Nevertheless, I am inflicting a blow, I'm giving her a lesson in depravity, Moscow-style, and eccentricity, also big-city-style. I'm giving her a lesson in relationships among people of far more exalted rank than the relationships she has known up to now. "This is how perverted we were in our native Moscow, and still are, here in New York," I am saying.

Well, what of it. I am playing a primitive game, of course, but since she rather interests me, this provincial little Jewish girl, I utilize the second-rate resources of ordinary Moscow-style seduction.

Jean-Pierre and Susanna—I'm a depraved man, then, if I can be friends with them. Unobtrusively, as if by the way, I mention my publications, being translated in several countries around the world. I'm an important man, then. And third—I tell her about my liaisons with men. It's a shock, of course, a blow. But never mind, she will absorb it. I have yet to encounter the person who will give up what is interesting, even though it is "bad." Because so much has hit her tonight, Sonya leaves very early, at eleven o'clock (which will never happen with her again). She has to think; let her go and think. I see her to the bus, and I say that I like her very much, at the same time observing that her upper lip is very homely.

This evening I still have ahead of me a half-hearted attempt at intimacy—my first and last—with my "relative," Susanna. I make the attempt partly out of mischief and partly out of an awareness of a certain moral right to her. All evening, drunken Susanna is after blue-eyed Jannetta, who is also Russian. My chances are small, but I'll try. Miss Garcia cherishes a fondness for Russian girls. Garcia is as common a name as Ivanova is in Russia. And Susanna corresponds, in commonness, to Ludka. Ludka Ivanova.

Cherishes a fondness. She embraces Jannetta, gets a hand up under her skirt. Kirill and I—you remember, he's Jannetta's lover—clown around doing a homosexual dance, although neither of us has that kind of feeling for the other. I want to help Kirill and somehow dispel the awkwardness that has developed around the pair of "girls." Kirill is nothing but an overgrown kid. I see that he is distraught over Susanna's public attempts on his Jannetta and doesn't know what to do. He does not succeed in laughing it off. He may even cry. Jannetta is older than

he; it seems to me she's experiencing pleasure at the touch of the drunken but adamant Miss Garcia—Ludka Ivanova.

Then comes a lapse of an hour, hour and a half. By now everyone is gone and I am in Susanna's apartment, sitting on the very bed where the photograph was taken: naked Susanna and Elena, lying in one another's arms making love, or just having finished. It was taken, I suspect, by the naked Jean. He and Susanna are forever slouching around with cameras. I sit on this bed, I wait, I think, and in the bathroom Miss Garcia pukes uncontrollably. Good Lord, what bad luck! Why did she get so stinking drunk! I had thought it would be symbolic to fuck Susanna on this ill-fated bed. Later she comes in, still pale and contorted with pain from the spasmodic heavings of her stomach. It is hard to look at her—aging face, make-up streaked and runny, lashes and eyelids all messed up. All is futility: the night is over, the fires have burned out, Jannetta has escaped her. I feel very sorry for her. I, at least, have art, the desire to make a monument of myself, but what does she have? Even if she is a lesbian, her brief summer of pleasure is passing by.

She points out to me a photograph—on the wall, framed under glass—of Elena, her lover. To her, Elena is a light in the window. Time and again she says lovingly that Elena's crazy, she's . . .

Had it not been for Elena's culture-shock, of course, had she not been so blind—she didn't know a fucking thing about the new life, about classes and groups of people—then Susanna, the honest working-girl who sins evenings and weekends, the exemplary good daughter who supports an old mother, would never have laid eyes on the rare little bird with the beautiful plumage . . . Elena.

But Susanna is convulsed with a fresh spasm of vomiting. I leave. What else can I do? But never again will she be my enemy. I recall with shame the March night when I tried to open the door of her building and set fire to it. "Den of filth!" I cursed. The door did not open. I broke the heel of my shoe that night. Henceforth Susanna will never be my enemy and will be of no interest.

Sonya . . . The second time we met was in accordance with a phone call. I had invited her to a birthday party for my friend Khachaturian—an artist and a modernist writer, a man with a formal mind, an inventor of procedures and techniques, who is now buried in uncontrollable formal research under the patronage and leadership of a wicked,

sage little wife, who speaks English brilliantly and works at a company that makes scarves. We have come a long way together, they and I. They knew my previous wife, Anna, the one before Elena; they even spent their wedding night on the floor of Anna's and my apartment. We often fight, they understand me less and less, but that does not prevent us from preserving a semblance of friendship. We are friends.

In short, Sonya and I went. I took a bottle of champagne I had laid in ahead of time, a \$10 Soviet champagne, the very bottle Mrs. Rogoff screamed about. There were about ten guests. There's no point in listing them all, though each of them figures in my life and is part of it to some extent. Sonya talked a lot of bullshit that night, provincial nonsense; I let it go by. I was in a good mood, nothing could spoil that sturdy, rugged good mood. I was pleased with myself, people were giving me compliments, there was lots to drink; company always brings me to life, I enjoy it. "I am a man of the town," as our Pushkin used to say. "Pushkin, Pushkin, the Pushkin who lived before me," as Alexander Vvedensky wrote—a modernist poet of the thirties, a brilliant person, like me a native of Kharkov; he was flung under the wheels of a train. So am I a man of the town.

Later, when the festivities were over and we left, I suggested—or she did, I no longer remember—but we decided to keep going and hit the bars. I had some money, and we set off. We drank vodka with a Pole in a bar on the East Side, she made an effort to talk to him in English. She needn't have bothered, you could tell by looking that he was an obvious type, an aging little man with no place to go; here he was, sitting in a bar at two in the morning. To provoke him I dropped some remark about Great Poland and Kiev. As expected, he got mad. It made me laugh. "Why do that to him?" Sonya asked. "I like to offend national sensibilities," I replied.

About three o'clock in the morning I effected a change of clothes. Back at my hotel I put on a white blazer instead of the lilac one, and we walked west to Eighth Avenue, which, thank God, I love and have studied thoroughly. I pointed out the prostitutes to her, and then I pulled her pants down, right on the street, and started masturbating her, shoving my finger into her cunt. She was wet and soft there, like all of them.

I convinced myself nothing had happened to them during these months. They still had their thing where it belonged, and if I shut my

eyes it was just like Elena's to the touch—so I told myself, as I continued to run my finger over the genital lips of the young lady from Odessa. She arched foolishly and affectedly, and even when I penetrated her more deeply she was too frightened to come. How could she? She probably thought this was something unnatural. A Ukrainian woman in Kazakhstan killed her Latvian husband because in the second year of their marriage he finally forced her to take his cock in her mouth. She dropped him with an ax. And the artist Chicherin's wife, Marina, after many years of married life, simply would not let him fuck her from behind, on her knees. A woman who had read Teilhard de Chardin. The wife of an avant-garde Moscow artist.

I wanted very much for Sonya to come—in this ridiculous pose, with her slacks and underpants down around her ankles, a dark little clump of fuzz between her legs, her body contorted with inhibition and incomprehension—so I began to kiss her there. You know what she did? She managed to spoil it all—she began saying over and over in a rapid staccato whisper, “Edik, what are you doing, Edik, what are you doing, Edik, what are you doing?”

I can't stand it when people call me Edik. “What am I doing, nothing bad, I'm doing something good to you,” I said, “doing something nice to you . . .”

She stood there dully, leaning back against the wall, with her slacks and underpants down as before. Suddenly angry, but hiding it, I pulled up her clothes and dragged her on.

By now it was getting light and I very much wanted to eat. But it was about four o'clock; all the places on Eighth Avenue had just closed. Finally, after several unsuccessful attempts, I knocked at a little corner restaurant and winked to a young black. Where I learned to wink like that I don't know, but the black opened the door immediately and let us in. I ordered us each a helping of meat and potatoes. For the two of us it came to about ten dollars . . .

“Do you have enough money, Edik?” Sonya asked.

“Plenty, plenty, but don't call me Edik. I don't like it.”

I was slowly beginning to sober up—no, that's the wrong word, I hadn't been drunk all night. The fog around me had begun to lift, and I was seeing her—this homely little philistine with her face tired and old, if you like, at twenty-five—without the fog, which I had brought on myself. Eternal inhibition about sex, oh, there was a lot on that tired

yellow morning face. It all began to irritate me. What the hell was I sitting here for? If I needed her as a woman, then why was I wasting time play-acting?

"Let's go to my place," I said.

"I can't," she said, "I love Andrey."

Andrey was one of the guys who had been helping Sashka. Maybe he was studying to be a bookkeeper. I don't remember. What do I care.

"What do I care who you love, Andrey or anybody else. I said I wouldn't infringe on your freedom—love Andrey, but let's go to my place now."

She said nothing and went on gobbling her meat and potatoes, although she had told me she wasn't hungry. Even here she lied and felt inhibited. This was getting disgusting.

The young black brought drinks. He was very attractive and he smiled at me—I obviously appealed to him, half drunk, with my black lace shirt and elegant white suit, vest, dark skin, high-heeled shoes. Their style. Marat Bagrov, the spiteful Jew, once said to me with characteristic familiarity, "Of course they relate to you, the blacks and coloreds. You're just like them. You dress the same and you're every bit as flighty."

The black put the glasses down and I slowly stroked his arm, glancing at silly uptight Sonya. He smiled and walked off. "Let's get out of here," she said. "Let's," I said, and we got up. She was afraid I'd go fuck him. Maybe there behind the counter, maybe in the kitchen, who knows. She was obviously afraid.

I gave the black his money and he saw me off with a knowing smile. And another.

We trudged along Eighth Avenue. They were already delivering newspapers. People with early jobs were walking to work, several coffee shops had opened, the prostitutes were no longer around. The night girls had gone to bed, and it was still too early for the day girls.

"Let's hurry," she said suddenly. "I have to go to the bathroom."

If you can help it, never see unloved women in moments like this. There is nothing more disgusting and pathetic, especially the inhibited, uptight ones. And all is flooded with pitiless morning light. It's like an execution scene, pursuit and murder on deserted streets. We could make a film like that, where a woman is running and she defecates as she runs, it streams out of her, we record with the movie camera the excrement falling from her body. Anguish and horror. Worse than murder.

We ran down Forty-second Street at a pretty good trot all the way from Eighth to Broadway. But then she tore along blundering into every doorway, her face distorted. There was suffering, too much to bear, written all over her short though well-proportioned figure. She can't do a fucking thing, even piss or shit, I thought spitefully. How would I know which she had to do? *She* wouldn't tell.

I could no longer guide or control her. She didn't want to squat in the dark empty subway corridor that I pushed her into, she became demoniacal, gnawed her lips, looked like a cornered animal, she all but turned and bit me.

Finally, and this was where my darling Elena had worked, her first American agency, 1457 Broadway—don't be surprised, do you think I could forget that address? Those addresses are etched in my mind—it was near there, two, maybe three doors away, that I spotted an open door. She struggled, but I went and dragged her in. It was a mess, they were making repairs.

"Go here," I said. "I'll stand and wait by the door." I went out.

Whew! Outside it seemed to be a fresh spring morning, the kind of morning when it's nice to think about the future, calculate your chances of success, you're young and healthy; or you look at your sleeping wife and children. There was a fountain nearby, the water was flowing. I wetted my hands, neck, and face . . .

I waited quite some time for her and still she didn't come. I began to think something had happened to her. I began to understand what sort of person she was, and it occurred to me that misfortunes always cling to people like her. By now I had made the march from the falling waters to this ill-fated door several times, but she hadn't shown herself. Lost in conjecture—a woman like that might do anything—I opened the door. She was standing on the stairs with her hands over her eyes. I walked over and said, though not spitefully, "Let's go. Why the hell are you standing here?"

"I'm ashamed!" she said, keeping her hands over her eyes.

"You fool, let's go," I said. "Hey, how can something natural be shameful? Only you didn't need to make a fuss, you could have gone in the subway."

She didn't move. I pulled her by the hand. She resisted. I began to swear. At this slight racket a man emerged from the depths of the repair

equipment or from behind some door. An ordinary American man, perhaps fifty years old. In plaid pants, naturally.

"Do you know him?" he said to Sonya, in English, of course.

"Everything's okay," I told him. "Sorry."

I told her in Russian, "Don't raise a ruckus, you fool, half of Broadway will come running. Let's go to my place."

We left, thank God. We walked down the street and turned abruptly east, down Forty-second again. We could perfectly well have passed for a pimp and a Spanish prostitute who had had a little row and then made peace. We walked, and from time to time I hugged her around the waist and thought how unfortunate we all were in this world, how stupidly and disgustingly the world was arranged, how much excess there was in it. I thought that I ought not to get angry, it wasn't good, I ought to be kind to people, though I forgot all the time. You ought to pity them all, you ought to bring them your love, bring repose, and not think of Sonya as a homely Jewish woman playing at being a girl; there's no reason to scorn her . . . You disgusting squeamish aesthete! I cursed myself. To top it all off, I extravagantly called myself a horse's ass and a punk, then stopped Sonya and kissed her as tenderly as I could on the forehead—nonetheless noticing the wrinkles on it. Well, I can't help myself. Meanwhile, we had turned on Madison and were rapidly nearing the hotel.

Nothing special happened, except that I fucked her, of course. This was not my most gigantic sexual feat. An easy triumph over a person beneath me, nothing to be proud of. Besides, even considering my current aversion to women, I was still dissatisfied with myself, I didn't get a good hard-on with her. And I was dissatisfied with her in particular—nothing about her suited me.

It irritated me that she washed and did laundry for a long time in my shower—after all that, she evidently hadn't gotten her excrement to its destination because she laundered both her slacks and her pantyhose and her underpants.

Everything happening was kind of pathetic, which I can't stand. For the first time in my life I felt sorry for myself. She pattered in the bath, or rather the shower; I lay on my bed and felt irritated through my drowsiness. Fuck you, ordinary people! I thought. You do everything assbackwards. My Elena would have squatted easily and simply where

she had to, she would have laughed till she dropped, and many's the time she would have aroused me by flashing her poopka and peepka, and maybe, out of mischief, I'd have amused myself by holding my hands under her stream. Next I recalled with pleasure how in springtime, when I was a kid, I used to exhibit my red member to my future wife Anna from the bushes in the cemetery, and how she would go off to one side and piss, and then we'd fuck on a warm gravestone, and the light would slowly fade in the sky.

Whereas this woman . . . But I recalled again that I must love, even Sonya, and forgive. I forgave her everything, even her fussing with her clothes, but when she came to bed I was even more disenchanted, more and more disenchanted. She had too much hair on her. It was appropriate on her head—beautiful Jewish hair. But it was the same in her armpits, and the same barbed wire on her pubis, and several coarse hairs had found their way to her very large breasts, to her nipples. That's nothing, I thought, as I tried to get myself and her warmed up. On top of everything else, Eddie-baby, you seem to be anti-Semitic.

I penetrated rather quickly, although it was not the moist and burning place I had expected. Not to the degree I wanted. When I rolled over and lay between her legs in the usual position, she promptly hoisted her legs up on me, which hindered me no matter how I moved. Moreover, she acted the way she thought a woman burning with passion was supposed to act—she tried to clasp me to her as tight as possible, which did not send me into raptures, because it kept me from making love. It was the first time I had come up against such a clumsy person . . .

“Sonya, open up, don't clench, I'll hit you!” I hissed at her.

She didn't smell of perfume or even soap. Her natural smell was not unpleasant, but I so love perfume, and her smell for some reason reminded me of the smell of Jewish rooms hung with rugs, in the summer-time in Kharkov, rooms I had happened to visit. All that was lacking was the dusty ray of light and the crawling flies. Anyway, I somehow got her unclined from me and began to fuck her more freely. But when my cock stood up properly erect, and I began to thrust my tool into her vigorously, she suddenly writhed in pain. I'm no bawdy Russian epic hero; no Luka Mudishchev, I worship love, but I also know a lot about love—she was not writhing from the size of my member, it's average. The little idiot had some sort of disease inside.

“You came! I forgot to tell you, I don't take anything. Everyone says

that if you take those pills you can't have children," she whispered bleakly.

What made her think I had come? "If only I *could* come," I told her, "that would be happiness for me."

"So you didn't come!" she said, and began kissing me gratefully.

God! Again I noticed her upper lip. "Don't you dare scorn her!" someone said in my ear. "You ought to love everyone who's in trouble, everyone who's unhappy and has complexes, everyone . . ." But what could I do—I looked at her and saw a lip exactly like my neighbor Tolik's, a boy I used to go to school with. Poor kid, he was hunchbacked and stunted, his father was an alcoholic. "Quit it, you swine!" said the voice. "You should be ashamed—you're the filthy one, she's kind and good!"

She really was kind and good. Subsequently she often bought me wine and vodka, took me to the cinema and the theater; she would have given me all her money if I had asked her to, I think. That was fine, but she wasn't much good in bed.

I worked over her for a long time. Finally, by means of all kinds of manipulations I succeeded—having pulled out of her—in dirtying the hotel sheet with my semen. Squalid pleasure, I noted with ennui. She wanted desperately to sleep, but I wouldn't let her. I wanted to see how she would come. With a foolish grimace, obviously. By now it had turned into a sport. I worked over her until I asked venomously, "Sonya, tell me, have you ever come in your life?"

"Once," replied honest Sonya.

"I'm going to buy you an artificial member, and I'm going to fuck you with it until you fall off the bed, until you start to come over and over—until brute stimulation makes orgasm run into orgasm. I'll do it. And you have to understand that you need it. You need to fuck a lot. With any man, all men, not just me. Otherwise you'll never be a woman . . ."

I did not keep my promise, although I am confident that if I had, I would have made a person of her. I did not buy her an artificial member, I very quickly lost all interest in her. The reasons had to do with class, which may be surprising, but it's so. She proved to be an incorrigible plebeian, and that I could not forgive. What she liked to be in life was shit, dung. She had no illusions or hopes. She hated all the higher manifestations of man—hated the great men of history, hated history

itself, hated with the hatred of an ant. Perhaps this was a self-defense against me, I could easily have crushed her, but why would I?

She fell asleep, but I slept barely half an hour. I wanted to fuck, even with her. Later on she did not arouse me at all. One time I wanted so much not to fuck her that I began complaining of a pain in my prick and said I thought I had some sort of venereal disease. This was a couple of days after the night I spent with Johnny, a black guy from Eighth Avenue—to this day I remember his round poopka and beautiful figure under the baggy clothing of a street bum, a habitué of dark alleys. There was a grain of truth in the ailing prick. I think Johnny had overdone it, sucking off my cock; he may have been a little too zealous with his teeth. More about Johnny elsewhere. I told Sonya that I could not take the responsibility of making love to her without going to a doctor first. She left, thank God, and I spent the evening masturbating dreamily on some flowery celestial theme.

Whenever I made love with her it was like the first time, I couldn't fuck her deep. She demanded—imagine, demanded—that I kiss her on the neck, it was supposed to stimulate her. I couldn't see that it did. The whole thing was really lousy—she was like an old log, she didn't get soft. “Be soft,” I demanded. I finally had it, and once when I stayed the night with her at Alexander's I didn't listen to any of her claims of pain or anything else. I finger-fucked her rudely and grimly, spreading her cunt open to incredible size—I almost got my hand inside—and she came. And how!

Having started down this road, I might have made her into a convenient object, but as I say, her plebeianism killed me outright. I finished with her on her birthday. Toward the end she turned out to be pregnant by Andrey, she had fucked with him before me—poor guy. She was elated at being pregnant, even though she planned to have an abortion. “It means I can,” she said proudly, “I can have a baby!” “Not after the abortion, you can't,” I told her cynically.

All the same, on several occasions she did give me pleasure indirectly, in a purely human way. One occasion came at a time when I was worn out at last from my nocturnal rambles on the West Side. The day before I had smoked too much grass and had lain all day in the pond in Central Park, up to my waist in the water. The police came by several times to make sure I was alive. Seeing that I was, they walked on. It was only toward dark that I found the strength to get up and go to the hotel. So

I was lying in my room the next morning like a prisoner, dreaming about eating, when she called up and invited me to her parents' place. She was living there at the time, and she went there every evening, and went back in the night from my place, all the way across town, even though she had to get up at seven o'clock. She was working at some company, I wasn't very interested which one. In the end she got mugged, a black guy snatched her purse. From that time on she had a bad attitude toward all blacks.

I remember once we were riding on a bus, a stretch of the route lay through Harlem. There were several fire hydrants open—water was pouring noisily over the sidewalks, happy half-naked children were jumping around.

"Just look what your precious blacks are doing," she said. "Saves! They don't give a damn that water purification costs a lot of money. They don't give a damn about anything. They just consume what whites have created, they don't want to work!"

"You're a racist," I said.

"But you're not, you're a leftist. I'd like to see what you'd say if you got mugged. My knee still hurts to this day—"

"But why did you hang on to the purse? You should have handed it over, that's all. Besides, he could have been white. So far as that goes, if fifty percent of all muggers really are black, then fifty-five percent of the mugged are also black. You know I hang out wherever I want to at night, Sonya, I don't carry a thing, not even a dollar, I go on foot so I don't even carry a subway token. But even if I did get mugged by blacks, I wouldn't start howling and projecting my hatred for a bunch of muggers onto the whole race. Idiocy!"

"That's all theory," she said furiously. "When they take away money that you've earned, you won't talk like that."

"When the preelection meeting of the Workers Party was over, I got on a bus with a group of comrades. The meeting was in Brooklyn, in a dark and remote district populated mainly by blacks. While we were boarding the bus, threats and curses rang out from the benches in the shadow of the trees, where the local hooligans were sitting, black hooligans. Then they started throwing bottles at us. I got on last. A bottle hit the bus right by my head. What would you have me do, Sonya? Bear within me hatred toward all blacks? Those guys sitting there on their benches don't know a fucking thing about the world. I've been in their

shoes, I was a hooligan and a bandit myself—I know the psychology of these people. It's not their fault they're like that—”

“At work they get away with anything,” she went on hotly. “Just try being late if you're white—once, twice, and you're out. But it doesn't affect a black, they're afraid to touch him, he can accuse them of racial discrimination. They make life impossible—”

“You were indignant at anti-Semitism in Russia, how can you say such revolting things?” I said. “And it's not just you, that's what's so terrible. But you know that America was built mainly by the hands of their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers. They have just as much right to everything here as the whites. It's only been the last fifteen years that they've gotten anything. Do you think they're happy here in their Harlem? Many of them would rather live on the East Side, but they don't have the money. Anyway, quit bitching—you don't know a fucking thing, you talk like a philistine. You should be ashamed . . .”

This was only one of our skirmishes, and one of the facets of her world view.

Oh yes, I meant to tell about the pleasure she gave me. I arrived very late, had trouble finding their out-of-the-way neighborhood, green and quiet. I was ushered into an apartment that did not even remotely resemble an American one. The door closed behind me and I found myself in Odessa. She served me fried chicken, cucumber and tomato salad, bouillon—a typical south Ukrainian dinner. We ate the same sort of thing in Kharkov, too.

Her mama was like Yura Komissarov's mama, or the mother of any of my provincial friends. Her pajama-clad father occasionally popped out into the corridor—he was installing a newly purchased air conditioner. Her father was like a provincial Jewish father, all my friends had fathers like him. It's a safe bet he wore his big underpants around the apartment; his wife and daughter made him put on pajamas because daughter had a guest coming. Maybe he was a bookkeeper like Andrey. Mama solicitously served fruit—pears one minute, watermelon the next. Courteously and respectably, I refused vodka and wine.

Later her parents left to visit a sick aunt in the hospital, and I went and lay down on the couch—if you're going to rest, then really rest. The provinces . . . You have to do that, tie on some weight, as they said in the Ukraine. You can show off a bit once without being quite in your element. Sonya played me a record of some Odessa comedians, pupils

of the great Raykin; their names were not familiar to me, which genuinely amazed Sonya. "No," I said, "I don't know them, alas." The comedians were boring and were meant for people working in Soviet scientific research institutes. But I listened to them and did not get irritated. A day in Odessa. Never mind, we'll be patient. Only here in America did I see for myself the huge distance that separated Moscow from the Russian provinces.

"We might go for a walk in the park," she said. "There's a castle there. They brought it over from Europe by boat—took it apart brick by brick and reassembled it here."

"Let's go," I said. "Everything here was brought over from Europe."

We set off, and I felt quiet and calm. It was getting dark, for some reason we had to take an elevator up to the park. We took it. We walked along the deserted lanes, almost without speaking. I was grateful to her for being silent. Still in silence, we arrived at the castle and sat down on a bench.

The castle was not what mattered—it was far less interesting than, for example, Fra Diavolo's castle, which I had seen in Itri, in Italy. Nothing much, a boring American castle. I could not believe they had brought it over from Europe. Probably a fake.

But from every quarter came the smell of fresh forest and ocean; it was very nice. A quiet, spacious moment. Had I been even a tiny bit in love with her, I would have been completely happy. But even so, this was my first quiet evening mood. I had been running without looking, I'd been running, I was tired, I stopped, I reflected, and the world appeared soft, caressing, an all-forgiving, all-cleansing eternal world.

"Thank you, Sonya," I told her, softly and sincerely.

Then we rode into the city to my place. The wind was blowing through the bus, a little old black man who had had a drop too much changed a dollar for me, and Sonya didn't irritate me . . . I fucked her that night with gratitude, I even tried.

Another time she and I were hanging out in the Village—she fed me octopus on Sullivan Street. It was an Italian holiday, a bride and groom were riding to church, which gave me a little pang. I remembered my own wedding, the crowds of friends, and I hurried to get away from the church. Little Sonya was clicking away with her camera, taking pictures of me from all angles. I could very likely have made her a slave; all I had to do was hint that I hated slacks on women and loved dresses, and the

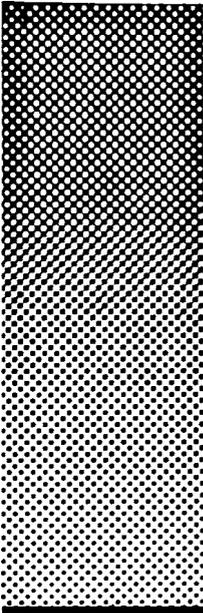
next day she came in a new, specially bought dress. Very likely I could have made her a slave, but I myself was seeking slavery, slave-girls were not what I needed.

Once she took me to a cinema on Bleeker Street to see some new French films. I was wildly pleased with one of them, about a killer who is commissioned to murder an ex-model, but he falls in love with her even though he's a homosexual. Sonya kept sighing; it was apparently of no interest to her, but I took it hard. I was enthralled with the man, who trusted the woman at first, but the woman wanted to be uncommitted, alone. I saw in this film a similarity to my own fate: I too loved and wanted to be loved, I did not want to live alone, just for myself, and what did I get—life cast me aside, the woman did not want me.

After that film I changed my hairstyle—I have bangs covering my forehead now. But she was bored in the movie theater; I don't know what sort of film she would have enjoyed. Perhaps art in general roused her indignation? She was a philistine, only her sexual inadequacy distinguished her from a philistine.

I say "was," because after her birthday party in a little restaurant in the Village—which continued with a smaller group in Chinatown and ended on the subway with an argument and cursing on political and ethnic themes, including Che Guevara and the Jewish question—after that I did not encounter her again. Toward the end I couldn't even keep my promise to let her lie down awhile in my room at the Winslow after the abortion. Bastard, I was at Roseanne's that day.

Roseanne had just appeared in my life—the next stage, the first American woman I fucked. I did not encounter Sonya again. Oh yes, once, coming out of my ex-wife's—Elena had moved in with Zhigulin by then, and I was bringing her something she had asked for—I caught a glimpse of my little Yid; she must have been eavesdropping. She quickly slunk away. It didn't even occur to me to follow her, and I turned in the opposite direction.



# WHERE SHE MADE LOVE

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I found myself there without him, without Jean-Pierre. It was easy, I never dreamed it would be so easy. I had imagined myself kicking the door open and running in, pale, holding a revolver out in front of me and shouting “Bitch!” They would be lying in bed and I would fire at them and blood would come through the blanket. Nothing remarkable; the fantasies of a deceived husband, a man who has been cuckolded. Normal fantasies, right? But in I walked, into Jean-Pierre’s studio, calmly, through the open door, without a revolver, and the characters on stage were not they.

This place is painful to me, this is where it all began, it was here that Elena first betrayed me, here that someone else’s cock destroyed my “I can do anything!” I had been powerless against unlove and chaos. And to experience powerlessness, even once, had been terrifying.

This was in Sonya’s time. Again Kirill was involved. He lives all over New York, first one place, then another, at random, the young idler has no apartment of his own. Jean-Pierre had gone to Paris for the month, leaving Kirill, in return for some favor, to live in his studio, whether for money or for nothing, no money, I don’t know. I feel some semblance of love for the young bastard, fatherly love perhaps. We are eight or nine years apart.

So one dull rainy day I showed up there in a three-piece denim suit—jeans, vest, blazer—a black kerchief at my neck, a walking-stick umbrella in my hand. It was the sixth of June, our poet Pushkin’s birthday.

and I had met Elena exactly five years before. I was all atremble with the presentiment of somber impressions awaiting me.

The characters on stage are three: myself, Kirill, and as a finishing touch a certain Slava-David, who is celebrated for the fact that after Elena and I left Russia he lived in our Moscow apartment, which he says my friend Dima had turned into a Limonov museum. Now, in keeping with all the best canons of the mysterious, Slava-David was living with Kirill in the atelier of my ex-wife's ex-lover, the atelier—sorry, the studio—it's the apartment, too—of the fisheyed, skewbald Frenchman Jean-Pierre. I realized at once that Slava-David was the instrument of higher forces, although he looked quite ordinary. I think he'll appear again in that capacity, more than once.

I throw back my head and yell up from the street, as I have promised, "Kirill! Kirill, you motherfucker!" Kirill sticks his shaggy head out the window. Then the aristocrat comes downstairs and opens the door for me, because you can't get into this building without your host's assistance. We take the elevator up and enter the studio, not quite by the route I imagined in my fruitless attempts to force my way in. The door that I impotently and tearfully tried to open from the stairway leads into an elevator corridor shared by two studios, not directly into Jean-Pierre's studio as I had thought. This plunges me into melancholy.

I walk into a large white-walled apartment. To the left the breeze is billowing the lightweight shades at the several windows. And there it stands, what to me is the terrible bed, the love arena, the place of my torment: Here she made love. I walk over, expecting to see my own corpse . . .

To the right of the door is the kitchen and, not walled off from it, in keeping with American custom, a sort of salon: a couch by the wall, a round table, and armchairs. These are encircled by several pillars.

With quickened heartbeat I walk over to the pillars and begin to examine them closely. Somewhere there have to be marks from the ropes with which she bound the fisheyed owner, beat him, and then fucked him in the anal orifice with a rubber dildo. Little silly, novice hustler, she told me all this herself in boast, while I was still her husband. Of course—she had to share it. Next she turned up with a mask, a black one sewn with feathers and bits of glass, it hid most of her little face. And next she turned up with a shiny studded dog collar. I tried it on my own neck, it barely went round, although my neck is 14½. That

meant she was wearing the collar herself, for greater chic. She boasted that she had a whip, too, but she didn't keep that or the dildo at home. She very much wanted to conform to the sexy films she had seen. She was doing things right, you see, the silly stringy child from Moscow's privileged Frunze Embankment. A Moscow girl. She probably affords her current lovers great pleasure, however. She tries hard. The provincial desire to outperform everyone. To be the mostest. But then, I'm the same way.

Yes, here are the marks, obviously rubbed by the rope, or perhaps by a chain, no, a rope for sure. Someone gently but forcefully squeezes my heart. I see them naked, frolicking around the pillars . . . She and I once hung a basket from the ceiling with ropes and took the bottom out of it; I lay down under it, inserted my cock into her peepka, the twisted ropes untwisted, and she was supposed to twirl around my member. She giggled enigmatically. But it didn't work very well, precise calculations were needed. Afterward we broke our bed in the usual way. I never had much need of artifice with her, she aroused me in the extreme. Even now, when she's just a friend, I occasionally go see her and the mere sound of her voice gives me a hard-on. Terrible.

Everything in the atelier is clean, large in scale, equipped to the last detail. Unlike me, the man who lives here respects his own life, values it.

A door off the first salon leads into a huge, clean, bare, light office with two or three of our host's huge paintings on the walls. A narrow corridor off the first salon leads into a third salon, you wouldn't call it a room, it's so huge. There, evidently, he paints, daubs his masterpieces. And there in the corner stands a bed, with Slava-David's clothes lying around, and a stack of pornographic magazines, belonging to Jean-Pierre, in which women copulate with pigs and horses. All things considered he is what is called in Russian a *yobar*, a cunt-chaser. The reason such men become artists is that a liberated profession makes it easier for them to drag a woman to bed.

No, his quarters in no way resemble the poor artist's studio she had told me about.

During all my further perambulations both Kirill and Slava-David are present, later it will be only Kirill, though Slava-David will come back again late at night, but in this instance there is no need to take note of them, for I am plunged into a mood that I have long awaited and feared,

I am on the spot where it happened, I am where she made love. I move from object to object, sniffing, and illuminating them with my terrible tension. I am waiting for them to answer.

At intervals I eat, drink a lot of beer, I smoke marijuana, but absolutely none of this plays any role; therefore I mention these “events” only lightly, in passing.

The pillars lead me to cruel and melancholy recollections of the traces of semen in her panties, which I discovered more and more often in the last months of our life together. There was semen even on her pantyhose. Once the whole inside of her black slacks was doused with semen, white by morning, crusted dry, so revolting that there was no longer any doubt, and then it was that I first raised a row with her. That was the end of my happy days, of the boundless happiness I had experienced for the four and a half years since the day I met her.

At the mention of my happy days, our love, our wedding, I am convulsed with disgust and shame. I was so stupid. I loved, trusted, but they fucked me over, smeared me with another man’s semen, bound me with the elastic from his underpants, daubed my shapely and delicate body with vulgarity.

I grimace wildly, remembering the pines in the yard at her dacha, and her in a translucent, angelic dress, a little girl with a crooked front tooth. Little squirrel, little silly, little bitch—I remember her swollen genital lips the time I flew in from California in a frenzy, trying to save it all. I flew in at night, she showed up in the morning. She sat in the bathtub, the skin on her back striped with cuts, fine little cuts, from what, a whip? And those rosy genital lips.

It was enough to make me push her head underwater, she had no idea how near she was to death. I urged her to come back and live, if only for a year, six months . . . She sat in the tub and overexcitedly discoursed on the fact that I did not know how to enjoy myself. She had absolutely no taste. She was incapable of understanding that I was all but dead and that right now it was ignoble, at the very least, to boast to me about how easily she could find a partner to fuck with . . . She discoursed, and I sat on the bathroom floor and stared dully at her swollen peepka. That I know about, it means she’s been fucking, she’s fucked all night . . . Okay, but why not me, why am I . . . I had hoped—had thought—as whores, adventurers, prostitutes, what you will, but together all our lives.

No, I do not remember my happy days, I don't remember a fucking thing, but when I do, I feel like vomiting, as if I'd gorged myself or something or had a stomach upset.

Meanwhile, I find myself near a shelf of his books. His books . . . Oh, he has everything, lovingly collected, in sets, he has Lautréamont, André Gide, Rimbaud—familiar great names—all in his native French. In much the same way you'll find whole sets of *The Poet's Library* or *World Literature* in the homes of Russian intellectuals.

I have never collected books in sets. I've had my individual favorite books, but there have been so many moves in my life, from apartment to apartment, city to city, country to country, and I have divided my books—my only valuables—with my wives so often, that nowadays I glance unkindly at the three dozen or so volumes remaining to me and think maybe I should chuck those too. Jean-Pierre is a cultured man. Converting to Russian norms, the ordinary library of the average intellectual.

On the whole, as I study his home, I come to the conclusion that the Frenchman is a very pedantic person. Follow me and you will see. First the paintings. They are very large oil canvases, most of them painstakingly ruled. Usually a black or a dark background, traversed by numerous, often pulsating lines. The art of a bookkeeper—straight lines, checks, squares. Not bad; it's a pleasant little world this man has—lines, rectangles, squares. But here are pictures of another sort.

By the bed and in the bathroom, pencil drawings. A girl licking somebody's cock, you can't see whose. She looks like my wife, which of course affords me no special pleasure. I twitch my shoulders convulsively. With this ordinary movement anguish is gone, anger is back. Try it.

Other drawings: two genital organs, a man's and a woman's, in waiting position. The woman has opened her cunt with her fingers and is carefully sitting down on someone's cock. Being somewhat knowledgeable about art, especially contemporary art and this brand of drawing, I can say that the Frenchman's drawings are dilettantish—too labored, no line at all. Far better are the similar drawings in public toilets. There, moved by the unconscious, submitting to Papa Freud's laws, anonymous artists easily and swiftly achieve expressiveness through exaggeration, hyperbolization, and simplification. Here, we have the details, but that makes the drawings far dirtier. They reek of intellectual long johns, there

is something senile about them, they reek of semen—that's obvious—and it is obviously the semen that was in my wife's panties.

I am a soldier from a defeated regiment. The army has marched on; the battlefield is deserted, and I have come to inspect it. I wander in the underbrush, climb to high ground, try to determine the cause of the defeat. Why, in the end, did they beat us?

Outwardly I am in complete contact with Slava-David and Kirill. I may be joking or telling some story. But only outwardly. In reality, I am trying to solve a problem that I can never solve: *Why?* I was looking for the answer long before I met Elena. In my poem-cycle "Three Long Songs," written in 1969, you can see this ominous, sullen *Why?* hanging over little Eddie's world.

On the sixth of June I wrestled all day and all night, like Jacob, with this enigmatic *Why?* And in the morning I left. And we did not vanquish one another . . .

Yes, after our grim and beggarly little apartment on Lexington this studio is a fairy-tale palace. A studio bathed in romance, in the Village, on Prince Street. I hate that word now, "prince." She phoned me from outer space at eleven o'clock, I sat in that Lexington Avenue squalor and said from my writing desk, "Little one, when will you be home? I've been worried!" "We're still shooting," she said, and I could hear music in the background.

And now I know where the music components are set up at Jean-Pierre's and where the telephone instrument is—the one and a second and a third.

A lover of the luxurious life, which she had never really seen, a poetess, a girl from the Frunze Embankment in Moscow, after a year of tears and failures, of wanderings through Austria, Italy, and America, through luxurious capitals where we lived on potatoes and onions and got one shower a week (she wept so much that year), Elena no doubt rested, here.

I found a poem in her notebook (her poems always delineated her mood to me more graphically than she could have imagined): "From the festive streets a scent . . ." I no longer remember it, but there was something about the romance of the Village streets and bars, about a man with a beard (Jean-Pierre), and her sexual feeling toward him was likened to a teenage girl's attitude toward a doctor—likened to childhood.

This was right; she had a right to rest, lie on this bed of his, relax, think of nothing and watch the shades flap . . . He fucked—no, it's crude to talk like that even in regard to your ex-wife's lover—he caressed her, she could hide here until she grew strong and insolent, hide from that apartment on Lexington and from me, who was for her a part of the world of destitution and tears. Alas! I believe she was happy here. I have a little wisdom, and I know: A thing that is likened to childhood cannot be a lie.

To her he was the doctor from her childhood, and she was drawn to him without shame. Bearded and half gray, he seemed to her a defense. "Into his tender hands," as they say. She took him into her and shared with him the shudders that had formerly belonged only to me.

And I? Come now, she considered herself far above me. She would not tolerate the idea that I was a more talented and prominent person than she. She felt she had the right to act according to her own whim. She suspected I loved her sincerely, she knew it would be unbearable to me, perhaps I would do away with myself—she knew that too, the possibility was there—but what was I to her?

A ridiculous little Ukrainian, silly little Eddie, hassling her with his love. I think she saw weakness even in my love for her and scorned me for it. Long ago, back in Moscow, I remember, I was supposed to go to Ivanovo and I couldn't tear myself away from her, couldn't get up and leave. How she yelled that time!

Here in America she considered me incapable of moving up. I remember how spitefully she screamed at me when we first visited the woman who was to become her lover, the lesbian Susanna, when I cautiously remarked that Susanna and her friends were uninteresting: "But I want pleasure! Even if it's with them! Through them I'll meet others. Play the aristocrat and you'll just keep on sitting there on Lexington Avenue in that filthy apartment! And die there!"

I memorized it all, my memory is revoltingly clear. And now, as I squeamishly poke at Jean-Pierre's blanket with the tip of my umbrella and peer under his bed in the hope of spotting something interesting, I remember her during our last days.

"Excuse me," I said to her, "but I'm the reason you're free. You took a lover because I shielded you from the necessity of working. I went to work at that dreadful absurd newspaper above all for you, and so that we could survive, you and I. But you—"

“Yes,” she said with hysterical challenge, “and so what if I’m free because you’re not! So what? That’s the way it’s supposed to be . . .”

I was ready to shoot her. If I had had any chance of buying a revolver then, I would never have had to see Jean-Pierre’s studio, never have had to walk the deserted battlefield. But I had almost no connections, I had no money, and no strength.

She treated me with no consideration, merely because by then she thought me capable of nothing. She developed for herself a life plan in which I was merely a stage: since she had outgrown her ex-husband Victor, moved on and left him behind, she calculated that it would be the same with me. Here she was mistaken, it’s always dangerous to develop plans. Real life is more complicated, and merely by existing I think I’ll provide her with considerable grounds for reflection. I don’t know about regret, but reflection, yes.

Once she had recovered a little and felt at home, she still looked up to Jean but also began looking around. By my calculations this happened several months later. She began inventing things with him—whips, binding—she was the initiator, of course. She was curious. I had taught her a few things too, not just fucking with the naked cock. These were revelations to her at the time—oh, I whipped her on the peepka with a thong, and . . . all sorts of things, we even made a half-joking attempt at group sex. Well, with him she wanted to go further. She did.

She lay on this bed, resting after the act, and smoked. She likes to smoke in the intervals. Sometimes she falls silent and looks off somewhere into emptiness, into the unknown. It’s a way of hers. I always asked her, “Little one, what are you thinking, where are you?” “Mmh?” she would say, coming to. Did he ask her what she was thinking? Her eyes would go glassy with abstraction.

Probably we all seem the same to her—I, Victor, Jean-Pierre, some other man. Does she make any distinction between me, the man who had sex with her for over four years, who loves her, and a man who fucks her once, on a drunk? I don’t know. She probably does, and I doubt it’s in my favor.

This grudge of mine. It is the melancholy grudge of one animal against another.

So, she did right. But what can Eddie do, Eddie-baby who loved her, Eddie with his very delicate sensibilities, his morbid reaction to the world, he who slashed his own veins three times in his rapture over that

world, he who, mad and passionate, was wedded to her in church, who snatched her from the world, who had sought her so many years and is convinced to this day that she is the one, yes, she, the only woman for him—what happens to him, little Eddie? The Eddie who wrote lyrics and poem-cycles about her, who has never been understood by her, what about him? Where has he disappeared to in this story?

What happened to Elena is clear enough, she escaped from the Lexington Avenue tragedy, fled, took off without a backward glance, but what about Eddie? She's a free woman, but weren't you always at one with each other?

"Both the woman and the man have the right to murder," proclaims Chapter One of the never-written code of man-woman relationships.

Eventually she tired of Jean-Pierre too, although she did not immediately leave him. The three of them went on living together—he, she, and Susanna. America had a bad influence on her. She filled up on *Flossy*, *The Story of O*, *The Story of Joanna*, and vulgar films of that ilk. Those syrupy sex concoctions with handsome gray rich men who don't know where to put their pricks, those castles and bedrooms, that cinematic beauty and bullshit—that was what drove her mad. She took the films seriously. And she tried hard to be like the sexy heroines. The young model in *The Story of O* served as her example, I think, she raved about that film many times.

Elena went to sex parties where you fucked whomever you pleased. In the photographers' and models' milieu where she found herself, partners for any sort of experiment were easy to come by. She had women lovers, and one who fucked her for a long time was Susanna, a frigid woman who derives satisfaction only from someone else's orgasm.

Elena . . . My Elena . . . Where is the tearstained Elena with the white poodle black with the mud of Moscow's February thaw, the Elena who came to live with me upon leaving Victor, her forty-seven-year-old husband. Came to me, who had nowhere to live, nothing to live on, but whom she apparently loved. How did it happen, the transition from that Elena, from the wedding candles to the dildo with which she fucked Jean, and with which, evidently, he more than once fucked her.

The spiral candles of the Orthodox wedding . . . I gave them back to her. Tossed them into her suitcase. I gave back the icons that had been our wedding gift. I don't want to look at the silly old mockeries. I gave back her dog collar, which I had stolen. What was I trying to

prevent by taking her dog collar? The mask, I confess, I had long since torn up. Along with his pictures.

I love her very much. I understand her provinciality, I see that here in America she had accepted the very worst—marijuana, underworld jargon, cocaine, the constant “fuckin’ mother” after every word, the bars, the sex accessories. Even so, I love her very much—she is typically Russian, throwing herself headlong into the very thick of life without reflection; I’m the same way myself, I love her daring, but I don’t love her stupidity. I forgave her betrayal of Eddie, but I will not forgive her betrayal of the hero. “As whores, prostitutes, adventurers, but we could have been together,” I whisper.

I am thinking all this as I move through Jean-Pierre’s studio, peering into his drawers and shelves. What else can I do? I realize this is bad, but since when have I done nothing but good? My curiosity is all from that sinister *Why*.

The kitchen. Hundreds of little boxes: spices of every variety and hue, tea, herbs, pepper, this and that. Every necessary kitchen appliance. Everything . . . They’re people . . . and what am I . . . down and out. At thirty I don’t have a thing, and never will. But that’s not what I was seeking. How many years has he lived on this street? Ten years? Twelve? The only place I’ve lived for more than a year is one apartment in Moscow.

My God! The past is so disgusting, and there’s so much of it. I have more of it than most—yet I haven’t amassed any things. And I do not foresee having things in the future. Shall I ever have all these little boxes, labels, tags . . . Never, I’m sure. I amass the immaterial . . .

The fact is, here in America she found me uninteresting. She meant what she told me that time, February 13; I have a revolting memory: I lay there wanting to starve myself, I wanted so badly to die, and she spoke the ghastly word to me over the telephone. “You’re a nobody.”

Sadly I swing a coffee can back and forth in my hand. A “nobody”—and I had thought I was a hero. Why a “nobody”? Because I had not become the lascivious, rich, gray owner of a castle, exactly like the men in sexy films. I was supposed to do it in six months—she was in a hurry—and I didn’t. I smile sadly.

Alas! I couldn’t. Unfortunately, my profession is to be a hero. I always thought of myself as a hero, and I never hid it from her. I even wrote a book by that name back in Moscow: *We Are the National Hero*.

But I'm a nobody because I don't even have a studio like Jean-Pierre's, all these little jars and boxes; I don't paint bookkeeperlike pictures. Logic did not interest her, it did not occur to her that Jean-Pierre had lived here all his life, while I had arrived yesterday. She didn't trouble herself with logic.

What was I here? Only a journalist who now had a scandalous reputation among the Russian émigrés of Europe and America as a leftist and a Red. Who gives a fuck about that! Who needs these Russian scandals here in America, where you have live Warhols and Dalis walking around. And who cares that I am one of Russia's greatest living poets, that I am writhing in agony as I live out my heroic fate. You have herds of rich men here, you have bars on every corner, and literature is reduced to the level of a professorial game. Shit if I'd go to your fucking Arlington or Bennington or whatever it is, to teach your zhlobby children Russian literature. I did not refuse to be bought in the USSR merely in order to sell myself cheap here. And please note—membership in the Soviet Writers' Union is a much better honor than a professorship, even at a university of yours.

The “nobody” walks slowly from object to object. He has already drunk many cans of beer, smoked a couple of joints with Kirill, and everything is therefore turning black in his world, turning dark, becoming harsh and extreme. Kirill has gone off to make phone calls. His world is much brighter and purer than mine. Like a child he wants a Rolls-Royce and money, but he cannot do anything to get them. A baby. In his case it's not even tragic. Suppose his dream does get smashed to smithereens? He's young, he'll think up a new one, there's no harm in that. When the conversation turns to my “leftist” views, Kirill yaps like a puppy and defends the system. He feels obliged to do that because he thinks he belongs with the people in this world who fuck the world and everyone in it, not with those who get fucked.

In some ways Kirill is like Elena. The same desire to jump, run, participate in the games of this world, go to parties, sleep till three in the afternoon, and not work. He is very lovable, although he has no character whatsoever. For all our dissimilarities he's a cultured young man, not a plebeian, I enjoy him more than any of the other Russians. Sometimes he and I go out for a stroll, or take a bottle of cheap California champagne and go to Central Park . . .

I slip into Jean-Pierre's office. Two desks placed back to back, as in

a business office or a Soviet institute. Some of the drawers are locked, others not. If Kirill weren't here, and if it were two or three hours from now, I would open the locked ones, the most interesting things are sure to be in those. Alas, I have to be satisfied with the open ones.

Unhurriedly I go through his things—unhurriedly, but not calmly. How could I be calm . . . Letters from Paris, from a girl or woman with a Czech or Polish surname, these letters I find in quantity in various desk drawers . . . but here's something more interesting—a little envelope of hair, little blond hairs obviously from the pubis, and these hairs have got to be my Elena's. The envelope of hair makes me break out in a cold sweat all over, a symptom of utmost agitation. Perhaps I should find comfort in the fact that she isn't living with him. He's the one who doesn't want it, however. So they tell me; I don't know.

The drawers hold nothing more interesting than the little envelope. Writing pads, notebooks, extra erasers, vast numbers of slides of his works. I patiently look through all his slides in the hope of seeing photographs of her. A secret little voice whispers, "in indecent poses." Indecent poses, hell! I merely want to know more than I do, and perhaps to overwhelm the *Why?* But the slides are only his—slides of his works. More letters, business cards from people and organizations. All this is diluted in a vast quantity of financial documents, a vast torrent of bank bills, all sorts of things; I can't tell what they are.

I open a little box. Lying in it are dark grains and fragments, and on top two fat, homestyle marijuana cigarettes, a far cry from the skimpy joints made to be sold for a dollar apiece on Forty-second Street or in Washington Square.

Then I poke around on the shelves, where his lithographs lie neatly interleaved with paper. They do not interest me. I am looking for something else. At last I see what I'm looking for—photographs of her. Enlargements, she didn't skimp, she was giving a present to her dear friend. Not to me—to him. Photographs done by little-known photographers, they are imitations of the works of well-known masters, or rather, imitations of their formal execution. They are not Avedon, of course, or Francesco Scavullo, or Horowitz, or . . . Imitative photographs. Elena smeared with something shiny, her hair slicked down; Elena in a highly improbable, unnatural pose; Elena with her face painted like an Indian mask . . .

Alas, it's all pretty feeble. The fact is, the photographs are all whorish

and no good. My darling isn't getting very far with her career. But her career was what she talked about, proud girl. "I love nobody, my career is all that interests me."

I look at photographs of this woman's body, now alien to me, and I see before me the whole system. The chic profession of the photographer. I know how photographers knock themselves out for decades trying to make it here. My friend Lyonka Lubenitsky, who recently had a photo on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine*, really feels beat when he comes to my hole at night. Hard times, can't make any money.

Thousands of photographers work in New York. Tens of thousands of people are involved in photography. They all dream of the glory and riches of an Avedon or a Eugene Smith, but few of them know how hellishly hard Avedon works. Lyonka Lubenitsky knows, he worked for over a year as an assistant at Avedon's for \$75 a week. The models all dream of the career of a Verushka or a Twiggy. Tens of thousands of girls report to their agencies every day, and then set off in taxis and on foot to different addresses, knock at studio doors. Elena is one of them. Her chances are slim.

I turn page after page. The photographers toy with her body like a ball, the body of the girl from the Frunze Embankment. Her little nipples, shoulders, poopka flip past, I remember one photograph she had, it was left behind in Moscow. Elena is four or five years old; she stands with her mother, making a face and looking away. It's already all there, in that photograph. All her life she has looked away.

I am seeking an answer, I have to kill the *Why*, kill it through understanding, otherwise it will kill me, may kill me, and therefore I peer at these photographs so hard it hurts. Part of the answer may be there. But what's there is a lie. The lie of the untalented, the third-rate. The only truthful thing in them, rising from their depths, bursting through their gloss, is the thirst to live, at the price of any mistake, to accept as life anything at all, anything that moves, and to live, to lie underneath someone, be photographed, ride someone else's horse, love someone else's house, someone else's studio, someone else's objects and books, but to live.

I was not life, in her understanding, not at all. I did not move, she detected no signs of movement in me. I was, in her opinion, an unmoving object. The squalid apartment on Lexington—she thought that was me. She wanted to live. Physical, material life, that was the only thing

she understood. She didn't give a damn about the values of civilization, history, religion, morals. She hardly knew of them. Instinct—I think she understood that. A poetess, besides; too powerful an imagination. Didn't I tell you she wrote poetry? Sorry, I forgot, but that is very important.

Presently she will sober up a little, Jean-Pierre's studio will no longer seem to her a fairy-tale palace, nor he the kindly doctor from her childhood. Presently he will demand the \$100 she borrowed for the trip to Milan. That's normal, they no longer sleep together—so pay back your debt.

Rummaging in his papers, I see some neat columns of figures. The purposes for which the money was spent are noted at the side. Too bad I can't read his writing, I might encounter Elena's name here too. He has complained several times to Kirill that Elena was bilking him, she cost too much.

I turn his list over and over in my hands. I am unused to this sort of thing, I don't condemn it but I'm unused to it. Their very method of keeping their earnings in a bank develops qualities in them that are negative from the viewpoint of a Russian, and especially a typical bohemian like me, I think as I continue to rummage through his papers. Thriftiness, a pedantic tidiness with money, isolation from other people . . .

I'm used to other foreigners, fun-loving and friendly people who throw currency around openhandedly, sometimes uproariously. In Moscow every one of us had an American acquaintance, not all of them were openhanded but many were. Perhaps because the dollar was actually worth a great deal in Moscow. Colonial, dependent Russia . . .

In New York I came up against normal Americans. "Them." Lately I've developed an inescapable feeling that I'm not Russian, was not fully Russian even in Russia, national traits are very approximate; still, I shall permit myself to speak of something I dislike. I often hear "them" use the expression, "That's your problem." It's just an expression, but it irritates me greatly. One time, God knows where, my butcher friend Sanya the Red picked up the expression *Tebe zhit*—"It's your life!" He used it apropos of everything, where it was necessary and unnecessary, uttering it with the gravity of a philosopher. Even so, "It's your life!" is much warmer. These words are used when another person has refused friendly advice: Well then, see for yourself, I tried to help you, you don't want advice, I yield, it's your life.

"That's your problem!" is used in order to dissociate oneself from other people's problems, set a boundary between oneself and bothersome people trying to worm into one's world. I heard this expression from Monsieur Jean-Pierre during the ghastly February days when, as I lay in bed dying, knowing that Elena had left him too, or so I thought, I called and asked him to meet me for a drink. So help me God, I had no evil in mind. But he said to me, "That's your problem, yours and Elena's. That's not my problem." Didn't say it maliciously; no, indifferently. And he was right, who am I to him? Foolish me, why did I bother him with my tribal, barbarian social habits?

Oh, he has so many financial papers! I can't tell whether all these are sums that he's supposed to pay or that someone is supposed to pay him. I'm sick of his papers, and I stuff them all back into the desks and up on the shelves, but neatly, not roughly, trying to put each one where it was before. No reason at all for the owner to know that someone has been checking on him.

Jean-Pierre, Jean-Pierre—for an artist he's extremely cautious. But weren't there some like him in Russia? There were. Why carp at him! Don't carp at your wife's lover, Limonov. You're compensating yourself for the insult he inflicted. All the same, he's a bit of a coward, cautious. Later this will be confirmed: when he learns about my demonstration against the *New York Times* he will warn me, with wary friendliness, that they can refuse citizenship, they can deport one from America. He is amazed at Elena's lively, extravagant, devil-may-care behavior, her lack of concern for the future; like Susanna, he says of her, half in delight, "Crazy!" My indifference toward citizenship likewise amazes him. American citizenship! Of course, in his eyes I too am crazy. He is rather tame.

He does not interest me. But for Elena, it would not occur to me to notice him if I met him at a party somewhere. He belongs to a definite caste of men, who are scattered throughout the world. I knew lots of them in Russia. They feel they were born to live to the fullest and enjoy themselves. Having "lived," that is, having slept with women to their hearts' content, they grow old and die without leaving a shadow or trace on the earth. A species of philistine, that's all. Back in Kharkov they were named Bruk or Kuligin, in Moscow they were named something else; they arrived and disappeared; now and then I took an interest in them, sometimes they became my friends for a short while, but I never

dreamed that Elena would leave for their world. In Russia she would not have left for these vulgarians, she had chosen Limonov. Was it because American cunt-chasers, with their much wider opportunities for a dissolute life, were of a better quality than Russian ones? Or did she not recognize them in their American aspect, did she decide that these men were different—loftier and more interesting? I don't know. The *Why?* would have vanished immediately had Elena left for an American Limonov. But for these men?

Jean . . . Jean received Elena for nothing, for free, as a gift of fate. A lucky man. In point of fact, he is far beneath her. But I had wrested her from fate, my Elena. True, he didn't get her for long . . . We all have pricks, they hang between our legs; and balls, these unlucky balls, whose touch to a woman's body is so glorified in cheap, sexy books; but, my sweet, we are not all alike . . .

I walk out of the office. Kirill is still making phone calls. I ask who he's talking to, he mutters something in my direction. He has firmly decided that what he and I lack for our complete happiness is a bottle of vodka, and he wants to get that bottle from someone. Today is Sunday, and the gambit of borrowing money and making a last-minute purchase at the liquor store is out. That means we have to go visiting. Everything is just as at my place in Moscow or his in Petersburg, except for the COFFEE SHOP sign burning outside the windows. But there's no need to look out the window. The usual situation—we haven't had enough to drink. The only difference is that we hardly know anybody here.

Tearing himself away from the telephone, Kirill requisitions a couple more cans of beer from Slava-David's supply—he is always well provided—and we polish them off immediately. There is already a whole bag of empties lying in the corner.

Meanwhile, between what I've drunk and what I've seen, I am slowly going into an ecstasy. In its physical routine this whole day has been an exact repetition of many another day after a binge, and a binge is what I had yesterday. Now at the stage of "ecstasy!" I request what is currently my favorite Beatles record, "Back in the USSR!"

The record is not in Jean-Pierre's collection. Without asking me, Kirill puts on his own records, which are lying there in the common heap. First comes Vertinsky.

The sense of rhythm characteristic of all poets awakens in me. It is

in our blood. I begin to dance around. I execute rhythmic figures. Kirill, although he carries on with his phone conversations, does not forget to change the records—according to his own whim, however. The Alexandrov soldiers' chorus is succeeded by "Dark Eyes," then come revolutionary songs, and "Dark Eyes" again . . .

I begin to experience the feelings of my people. My dance takes me past a mirror. It is large; they may have looked at themselves in it more than once, together and naked, but the thought slips by and disappears. The music drives it out. I dance insane dances, I dance away from the mirror toward the kitchen, pass close to the telephoning Kirill, and in an intricate rhythmic *pas* I dance around "those" pillars. As in Eliot, I think: "Here we go round the prickly pear Prickly pear prickly pear Here we go round the prickly pear At five o'clock in the morning." My erudition delights me. Then and there I repeat Eliot's lines in Ukrainian.

I leap and dance, and Kirill smiles. Oh that Eddie, that crazy Eddie! I love Kirill because he never acts surprised at me. If I do surprise him, he pretends that that's as it should be and that if he, Kirill, is not a pederast himself, he's a liberated man in any case and can understand everything. Even if he's only pretending, that's fine too.

Now he breaks off his conversation, and in the blinding light of all of Jean-Pierre's lamps we dance to "Dark Eyes." The music of our native Russia, it has made the rounds of all the taverns in the world. At one time danger-loving officers in uniform used to howl this wild piece in the taverns, weeping drunkenly, like me, Eddie. What anguish, and anguish-destroying exultation, there is in these doleful Asiatic sounds with their sudden outcries. Ah, but nothing binds me to humanity except Welfare, which I take from them. And my nationality is nagging me to death. "A machine gun, oy, give me a machine gun, my dears!" I scream hysterically, to Kirill's delight.

No doubt I am overplaying it a little. But didn't I want to embrace her fucking corpse? Didn't I write suicide notes and then try to strangle her? Or was that a fantasy? No, it happened, the "dark eyes" are not lying, and I am not lying about myself.

The pandemonium of the dance lasts a very long time. Russian records are succeeded by French ones. I dance to Brel, Piaf, and Aznavour. I dance in an ecstasy, and although I feel as if the whole world were watching, the "day after" is always like this by nighttime. In reality, even Kirill has left again, to torment the telephone receiver with his English

talk, not realizing that although he's a dear boy no one fucking needs either him or me, tonight or any other night.

With a wild dance on the spot where she betrayed me, with beer and marijuana—this is how I mark the fifth anniversary of our acquaintanceship. Like a tame member of society. I don't set any fires, don't smash everything, don't howl, don't even weep.

After a while I cool off. The "depression" stage begins, I go and collapse on the bed with my nose in the blanket and lie there for a while, sniffing the bed. Maybe it smells of her? No, it smells of Kirill. I turn over on my back and lie staring at the ceiling, not moving, for maybe a whole thirty minutes. I think about her, about him, about myself. Shadows chase across the ceiling, the shade flaps, and the world enters into night, in order then to enter into day.

A natural desire to make peepee forces me to get up. I walk into the bathroom, and there I continue to think, reason, and listen to myself. I examine afresh the pathetic drawings hung over the toilet. I peer into the drawers—again, hundreds of names of objects. I am struck by the staccato pettiness of his existence, surrounded as it is by such a quantity of details, and it hurts my eyes, they begin to hurt. There is cotton here too, she may have used it, and what they stick in the peepka during menstruation, Tampax. A well-provided monsieur.

In the first years of our love we invariably fucked when she was menstruating, we couldn't wait out those four days. We would begin as if in play, rub against each other and kiss, and then we would fuck after all, trying not to go too deep. When we came, and we almost always did together, I would pull out my member all bloody. That was gratifying both to me and to her, and we'd gaze at it a long time.

I look again at the woman opening her cunt as she sits down on the cock. I have just made peepee and am wiping my member with a tissue. At the touch of the toilet paper my delicate member shudders, something in me begins to stir, my member slowly grows into a cock. Almost unconsciously I begin to fondle the head of my cock, knead it and stroke it, all the while thinking that they fucked here too, in the bathroom—she and I fucked in all our bathrooms, that means she and he fucked here too—and I move my palm along my member and begin masturbating urgently.

Darling Eddie!

I simply cannot get anywhere. I stand up and sit down, my erection

does not go away, but I cannot come. I always have trouble the “day after,” even with a woman. But I want so much to be connected to this house and what they did here, to splash out my semen where his semen too has flowed, into the tub or into the toilet. His semen flowed there out of her, of course, out of her peepka.

Darling Eddie!

Forty minutes went by; someone had phoned Kirill, some other fan of late-night gab, and he was talking with renewed strength, briskly and joyfully. Perhaps he was getting somewhere. I was getting nowhere with my cock. At length I despaired, and lowered the curtain on my cock by hiding it in my pants.

I hid the yellow hell of the bathroom by extinguishing the obsessive light, shut the door, and went out to my drinking companion.

“We may be going to a party at twelve,” said the joyful young idler, “they’ll call us back. But now let’s go have coffee at the bar on the corner of Spring Street and West Broadway. It’s a very famous spot. They’ve always got very nice women artists and bohemians there. We might pick someone up,” Kirill said.

I wanted no one and nothing. I hadn’t even managed to come. Poor Eddie. I was tired and wanted to go home. If we couldn’t drink, I should take off. The party’s over, don’t overstay my welcome.

But the aristocrat had no wish to be alone. He needed me so that he wouldn’t have to sit in the bar alone, so that he would be seen by the young or not-so-young women artists not as a lonely, horny cunt-chaser but as a respectable man who had come with a friend. The jerk, he didn’t realize that together we would look like two pederasts, and he would be even less likely to achieve his goal . . .

He pestered the fuck out of me. I very much wanted to go home, but he grumbled and raged so much that I finally walked him the hundred meters to this establishment, and then there was no help for it, I went inside with him. A coffee-colored darkness reigned; every spot was taken, and people were standing in line waiting, too. Everyone wanted to mix, talk, and of course get acquainted and fuck. Women artists and women nonartists, pretty ones and dogs in homespun dresses and jeans, they were all there.

He had \$5 and that was it. All I had was a subway token. We might have gotten a table, but what we wanted was coffee. We trudged back and began making our farewells at the door of the Frenchman’s build-

ing. By dint of extravagant mutual compliments we had reached the point of parting, when I suddenly remembered the cigarettes in Jean-Pierre's drawer.

"If you were a good boy, I'd tell you where to find two marijuana cigarettes in Jean-Pierre's house," I announced brazenly.

"Edichka, what are you doing in other people's cupboards and desks?" he said.

"I have the right," I said gravely. "After all, he's my wife's ex-lover."

"I'm sorry, Edichka," he said.

We began haggling over the marijuana and decided we would each get a separate cigarette, although Kirill tried to insist on smoking them both together. I threatened not to show him where the cigarettes were if he didn't give in.

"We'll each do what we want with our own cigarette," I said. "You can throw it out or shove it up your ass."

After that we went up to the studio.

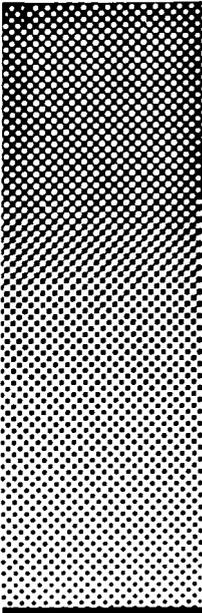
I went to the office and got the cigarettes from the box, and we returned to the kitchen. I gave him the cigarette that was due him, and my own I lit up right away. It turned out to be amazingly strong—I had never had anything like it, thick and fat. By the time I had sucked it down to the end, so that I could no longer hold it with my nails, all I could do was struggle the six or seven meters to the couch and collapse in hallucinations.

I heard all that went on in the studio, and at the same time I had dreams, fantastic ones made up of what was past and what had never been. A maniacal girl was trying to open a little box in which lived a thinking being. Her hair flying, she bent over the box, gnawed at it, but could not get it open. Finally, by some sort of trick, by turning a mechanical device, the maniac opened the box, and out poured a stinking brown liquid similar to semen—the being had been killed. I was horror-stricken, but the maniac bared her teeth in a grin.

I heard all that went on in the studio, and at the same time Kirill, who had smoked only half his cigarette, was making phone calls and debating whether or not he should go to the party, his pants were dirty and unpressed. Then Slava-David arrived. He asked what was the matter with me, and they hauled me up, laughingly hoisted me from the couch, then let go of me. I floated and swayed. "Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead, Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell"—Eliot's

lines surfaced and disappeared, succeeded by my Moscow friend the poet Heinrich Saggir wearing a yellow tiger face.

It was morning before I could stand up. Although I tried to get up twice in the night, it was eight in the morning before I could do it. Slava-David made me some toast in the toaster. The toast burned and scraped my throat. I took my umbrella and left.



# LUZ, ALYOSHKA, JOHNNY, AND OTHERS

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I took my umbrella that day and left. I was still reeling from the evil weed. But, to avoid returning to my garret and the routine third-day depression, I walked out Spring Street to Sixth Avenue, got on the subway, and went to my English class. It was a gift to me from my solicitous welfare office.

I had my class at the Community Center on Columbus Avenue near 100th Street. The Community Center was not of such ancient construction, but our classroom windows looked out on what were almost ruins—broken windows, fire-blackened walls, all sorts of mold and vermin, creeping right out to the street. New York is rotting around the edges. Its clean blocks are much smaller in area than the already boundless sea of uninhabitable and semihabitable neighborhoods, terrible in their state of near-wartime destruction.

There were about a dozen such buildings where I went to school, between Columbus and Central Park. The reason I mention this is that even the little book we used—“we” being ten women from the Dominican Republic, one from Cuba, one from Colombia, and the only man in the class, namely me—well, this book was entitled *Every Night There's No Hot Water*. The book told about people who lived in a neighborhood roughly like this one, and how they were surrounded by misfortunes of every description. There was no hot water, they were afraid to step outdoors at night because of crime, a father of two girls felt annoyed that their home had been taken over by a certain Bob, a

ne'er-do-well and dangerous character, leader of a youth gang. There was an open implication that the father of the two girls was simultaneously the father of this Bob. All the residents of the neighborhood described in the sentences and exercises of this book were linked to one another by nearly incestuous relationships, and watching over all was an old procuress and scandalmonger in a shawl (the illustrations showed her in a shawl and with a face like a fox). A jolly little book.

I was slightly late that day; they were already writing a composition based on the teacher's questions. The teacher had a surname of Slavic origin, Sirota, although she could not recall that anyone in the family had been a Slav. Women of various hues greeted me joyfully; they were sincerely disappointed when I didn't come. Luz threw me a smile. She very much liked to smile at me, arching like—forgive me this very vulgar and trite simile, but she arched like the stem of a rose. Luz was altogether white, the perfect Spaniard, though she too was from the Dominican Republic. Luz had a child, though she herself was still a child, small and thin; her earrings did not help, nor did her high heels. Her earrings were cheap little things, but she always changed them if she put on a new blouse. She and I were almost lovers, though we never once kissed, and I told her only once that I liked her very much. But we always watched each other all through the three hours of the lesson, and we smiled at each other. One time, in response to the teacher's questions, we were all pointing out on an atlas where we had been born, and I saw Luz hastily jot down in her notebook the name of my hometown, Kharkov. I am probably a modest and inhibited person at heart, and as I have said, I am a long way from total freedom. And Luz was a modest girl—woman. Therefore we simply couldn't clasp each other close, as we would have liked. I endlessly regret that we couldn't. She might have loved me. And that's the only thing I need.

They all had children, some as many as four. Candida's girls were lovely. So whimsical, so mannered, so unnaturally vivacious and elegant were the faces and figures of Candida's girls that when they came to class with their mother I thought of them as works of art. A blend of different bloods had produced this unexpected effect. An exquisite effect, ancient Egyptian I should say; they resembled Ikhnaton's daughters, although Candida herself was a shortish woman with ordinary light brown skin and a kind, simple face. The faces of her little girls, their hair, the shape of their eyes, held a sort of poesy . . . morning, daybreak, a fragrance

of delicacy. I shall allow myself a flourish: they were like coffee beans, like spices, her children were.

Anyway, when I came in they were writing a composition. They had never seen me so handsome and elegant. Usually I came to school in sandals and jeans—wooden platform sandals, my only ones, and blue or white jeans. But here the Russian fellow had arrived in colorful boots and denim suit, with neckerchief and umbrella. They discussed my appearance animatedly in Spanish. To judge by their tone I pleased them, they approved.

I told the teacher that I had had a job interview that morning, and then got busy on the composition. We were supposed to write about the neighborhood we lived in. I wrote that I lived in a neighborhood where there were mainly office buildings; the world's most expensive companies, perhaps, had their offices in my neighborhood. Next came the question of whether I was afraid to walk in my neighborhood at night. I wrote that I was afraid of nothing and walked all over the city. There was nothing to fear—I had nothing. As she read my composition and corrected the mistakes, the teacher laughed.

Many in my class wrote that they were not afraid to go out in the evening or late at night. They too had little, I think, and that was why they were unafraid.

The oldest person in our class was the gray-haired Lydia. She was gray-haired and black, but her face, her figure, her gait, her habits, reminded me of a neighbor we had in Kharkov, when I was still a little boy living with my papa and mama. English came harder to her and the two Candidas than to the rest of us. The two Candidas also reminded me of some of my neighbors in the Kharkov apartment house, only their skin was a little darker. I should mention that from walking one hundred and thirty to one hundred and forty blocks a day in the scorching sun with my shirt unceremoniously removed I had become so dark that I differed little from my classmates. Luz, in fact, was much lighter than I.

Luz always sat next to Rosa, an utterly black girl, tall and svelte. She had a stern and independent air, but I always felt she was unhappy for some reason. After having several conversations with her in our common pidgin English, or not even having conversations, simply consulting her and receiving answers, I saw that she was a benevolent and likable girl, she merely took a cautious attitude toward our world. Every recess Rosa

twisted the head off another little bottle that had something black in it. She did this very adeptly with the hem of one leg of her very wide-bottomed slacks. It was some special Latin-American drink. Rosa and I were considered the class alcoholics. When the teacher asked the class who liked what, I said jokingly that I liked vodka, and someone else, I think it was Luz, spoke up for Rosa: "Rosa likes drink!" I found Rosa agreeable, and her independence too. Sometimes she chewed gum and became totally unapproachable.

I sat next to yet another utterly black woman, Zobeida. As a well-read Russian, of course, I knew that one of Voltaire's heroines had borne this name. It is hardly likely that Zobeida herself knew this, but she was one of the best pupils in our class. She and I were often assigned to read a dialogue, usually between a husband and wife who constantly spilled things on themselves and on each other and then advised each other what cleaner to go to. These married couples in the book were complete idiots. Everything fell from their hands, they could not convey a morsel to their mouths; God knows how they managed to stay alive; their coffee spilled, the cups broke, greasy sandwiches fell butter-side-down on their new clothes. Things were grim.

When Zobeida and I went up to the teacher's desk and read this dialogue of two idiots, we gave it our best and were evidently funny. In any case, blond short-cropped Mrs. Sirota rolled with laughter as she listened to my menacing "Vot?" and the wife's no less stupid answer, which Zobeida read. "You're like a TV couple," she told us.

Zobeida was tall, and her rear end, as is sometimes true of black women, was very large and seemed to exist independently of the rest of her. She had a beautiful face, and like most blacks, delicate hands. I talked to her more than to anyone else. She too had a child. Her husband had been born here in America; she had tried to take him back to the Dominican Republic, but then they had returned; they found it hard to live there after the United States.

Once our conversation turned to education. Ana, a dried-up, bespectacled, sarcastic little creature of indeterminate age, from Colombia, began to talk about her brothers and sisters. She wrote their names on the blackboard, and then wrote how many children they each had. Ana herself had no children. But all in all her three brothers and two sisters had forty-four children. I asked Ana when they would all come from Colombia. Ana said that they might not all come, but that most of them,

as they grew up, wanted to have a higher education, and things were tight for her brothers and sisters—they had to work very hard so that the children could have more education.

“Is that the fashion in Colombia, to have a higher education?” I asked Ana.

She replied gravely that if you wanted to be somebody you needed a good education, and it cost a lot of money. Then she reported how much a higher education cost in Colombia and how much it cost in the Dominican Republic. Then I chimed in and said that in the USSR, where I came from, higher education was free, and all other education too. The effect was greater than I expected. They were staggered. Free! It was a good thing they didn’t ask why I had left such a wonderful country.

Mrs. Sirota smiled in embarrassment. Maybe she felt uncomfortable for her fat, rich country, where the level of education you can get depends on how much money you have. A lot of money—graduate from Princeton. Some—go study in Canada, it’s cheaper there. None—go uneducated; sometimes you might manage to get a scholarship. I took considerable malicious pleasure in listening to their lively discussion in Spanish, exulted maliciously over Mrs. Sirota and all the learned gentlemen who alleged that socialism was practically allied with the devil. To add fuel to the fire I told them that medical treatment was also free. That really started something. I exulted maliciously and was satisfied.

I liked my class. Margarita—a stout, dark-eyed woman with a lovely face, who had three boys from eleven on down and a little girl—smiled at me, showed me photographs of her children. Painstakingly-made color photographs, specially posed, they bore witness that the children had been photographed not by chance but in order to fix their image, reflect and preserve it. As in the Russian provinces. The little girl, the youngest, was all in laces and frills and stood in a self-important pose, like a celebrity. I said, “You have beautiful children, Margarita.” She was very pleased.

Sometimes it seemed to me that Margarita liked me. She smiled at me just as often as Luz did, and furthermore she gave me homemade treats now and then. But they all treated me frequently to their Dominican dishes: roast yams and roast bananas, and meatballs something like our *golubtsy*. Margarita treated all of the students, not just me, but I doubt I’m mistaken, she obviously liked me, it was plain to see. In that

period of my life I did not understand how anyone could like me. I held a very low opinion, an utterly scornful opinion, of myself as a man. She may have liked my green eyes or dark skin or abundantly scarred wrists—God only knows what a woman will like.

I was Russian; they liked that too. I doubt they knew there was such a thing as the Jewish emigration from Russia; it was pointless to explain that I was Russian by nationality but had come here on a visa fictitiously sent to me from Israel and with the consent of the Soviet authorities. Superfluous information. I was Russian, and that was that. As Mrs. Sirota explained to them and to me, Russia was located in Europe. Thus I became a man from Europe. They were from Central and Latin America. And we were all from the world.

I, a man who had fled here from the USSR in search of artistic freedom, that is, the opportunity to publish my works here—it was a rather frivolous act, my works being unneeded here, needed only there, in Russia—I was compelled against my will to be a representative of my country, the only representative of Russia, the USSR, that they had ever had in their lives.

As God is my witness, I tried to represent my country decently. I did not fuck around showing off to them or, first and foremost, to myself; I did not view the world from imaginary standpoints, I tried to view it honestly. It was no concern of these women whether I had been published or not; after all, there are hardly thousands like me.

What they did understand was something else. A land in which higher education was free, medical care was free, where rent amounted to an insignificant fraction of one's pay, where the difference between a worker's 150-ruble paycheck and the 500-ruble paycheck of an academician or even a KGB colonel was only 350 rubles—these, gentlemen, are not the astronomical sums at which the fortunes of America's wealthiest families are estimated, alongside the pitiful \$110 to \$120 a week that Eddie earned as a busboy at the Hilton—such a land could not be a bad one.

Unlike the Western intelligentsia, they had not been through the long journey of enchantment with the Russian Revolution and Russia, and disenchantment with it. They had been through none of this. Vague rumors circulated among them about a land where people like themselves led a good life. Always the rumors.

I did not go into details, and could not have explained to them the

last sixty years of Russian history—Stalinism, the victims, the prison camps—they would have turned a deaf ear to all that. Their own history, too, was rich in victims and atrocities. They were not proud and ambitious, they and their husbands did not write poetry and books, did not paint pictures; they had no rabid desire to squeeze their names, at all costs, into their country's history, or better yet the world's; therefore they wouldn't even have recognized the prohibitions and obstacles in this path, which they had no use for at all. They lived and were kind and treated a Russian to roast yams and loved their Josés and bore children and photographed them in their best clothes, and this was their life.

Much more natural than mine, I confess. I drifted around the world, because of ambition lost my love, and having lost it, realized that love was far dearer to me than ambition or life itself and began to seek love anew; and that is the state I am in now, searching for love. As regards love in this world, there is more of it in Russia, of course, than here. That is plain to the naked eye. Forgive me, but though they may say that Eddie-baby knows little of America, there is less love here, gentlemen, far less . . .

I gave myself over to all these thoughts as I returned from my class. I walked down Columbus. I always walked without hurrying, I read all the signs; if it was very hot I took off my shirt. That day, however, I was wearing a suit; when the sun came out it was scorching, and I took off my jacket. The Dominican women always hurried home when they got out of school, their children were waiting for them. Sometimes I walked with Luz, Colombian Ana, Margarita, or someone else—perhaps dark-eyed Maria with the face of a saint—to the subway, half a block from our Community Center, and elicited Spanish words from them on the way. I know perhaps two dozen words now and take pleasure in pronouncing them. I would much rather study Spanish, on the whole. It is richer and more congenial to me, just as all Spanish-speaking people are more congenial to me than buttoned-up clerks in neckties, or disciplined, skinny secretaries. I make an exception only for Carol, only for her.

When I lost my unhappy Russian maiden, who was driven out of her fucking mind by this country, I also lost interest in cultured white women. In my morbid view, many liberated ladies, or ladies in the process of liberation, are liberating themselves from the love of another

person, not from love of the self. Monsters of indifference. "My bread, my meat, my cunt, my apartment," the monsters say. I hate the civilization that has generated monsters of indifference, the civilization on whose banner I would write the most murderous expression since the origin of mankind: "That's your problem." Horror and evil are contained in this short formula, which unites all the Jean-Pierres, Susannas, and Elenas of the world. And I, little Eddie, am terrified: What if my soul finds no one here to devote itself to? Then it is doomed to eternal loneliness even beyond the grave. And that is hell.

Among the Spanish-speaking population of my great city I see much less indifference. Why? Only because they came later to this civilization, it hasn't yet corroded them so much. But it threatens even them. Admittedly, I don't think it will have time to destroy them. The civilization itself will die, strangled by the rebellion of human nature, which demands love.

"What about Russia?" you ask. But Russia and her social structure are also a product of this civilization, and although certain changes have been made there, they don't help much. Love is on the way out in Russia too. But the world needs love, cries out for love. I see that what the world needs is not national self-determination; not governments made up of one group or another; not a change from one bureaucracy to another, capitalistic or socialistic; not capitalists or Communists in power, the both of them in suits and ties. The world needs the collapse of the foundations of this man-hating civilization, new norms for behavior and social relations, the world needs real equality of property; equality at last, and not the lie that the French, in their time, wrote on the banners of their revolution. We need people to love one another so that we may all live loved by others and with peace and happiness in our hearts. And love will come to the world if the causes of unlove are annihilated. There will be no terrible Elenas then, because the Eddies will not expect anything from the Elenas, the nature of the Eddies will be different and that of the Elenas different, and no one will be able to buy any Elena, because there will be nothing to buy with, no one will have a material advantage over other people . . .

So I came away from my school with a happy smile. I walked along dirty Broadway. At every corner, bordello flyers were thrust on me: Take it, Eddie-baby, come and be comforted, get fifteen minutes of love. I turned on Forty-sixth Street, I knocked at a black door, and Alyoshka

Slavkov, poet, opened it to me. He stood in a cloud of steam. Hot water was flowing in the kitchen, and no one had been able to stop the water for a month. I walked into Alyoshka's, as usual saw the clown's black bowler hats and the musician's instrument—Alyoshka shared his black hole with a clown and a musician, also émigrés from Russia—saw the three mattresses and all sorts of rags and dirt, and demanded of Alyoshka something to eat.

Alyoshka was not yet a Catholic then, but he no longer wore a beard. He had just been laid off as a guard, he had surrendered his nightstick and uniform and become once more the mustachioed and dark-eyed Alyoshka Slavkov, cheerful despite a bad limp, lover of booze. Alyoshka fed me sauerkraut and sausages, his unvarying diet, and sat down to translate a document I had brought. Entitled "Memorandum," the document expressed the hopes and dreams of what we called "the creative intelligentsia"—of Alyoshka and myself and a great number of other artists, writers, filmmakers, and sculptors who had emigrated from the USSR and whom no one here needed one fucking bit.

Alyoshka translated, and I sat in an old chair, its upholstery worn shiny, and thought about our document and our intrigues. "A drowning man's effort not to drown," I thought. Two pages. To be sent to Jackson, Carey, and Beame. As if they would help us with our art. Those demagogues had needed us, however, while we were over there. Here they shoved us on welfare so we wouldn't bitch. Okay, Ivan, have a spree, enjoy your freedom.

Cold-blooded Americans, they're so fucking smart, they advise the likes of us to switch professions. Just one thing—why don't they switch professions themselves? When a businessman loses half his fortune he throws himself off the forty-fifth floor of his office building, he does not go to work as a guard. I could have conformed in the USSR, why the fuck come here to do it? That was all the Soviet regime wanted of me, to change my profession.

A fine emigration we are, I went on in my thoughts, the most frivolous one yet. Usually only the fear of starvation or death can force people to leave a place, abandon their homeland, knowing that they may not be able to return, ever. A Yugoslavian who leaves for a temporary job in America can return home to his country, we can not. Never again shall I see my father and mother; I, little Eddie, am firm and calm in this knowledge.

It all started with Messrs. Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, and company, who turned us against the Soviet world without ever having laid eyes on the Western world. They were prompted not only by specific purposes—the intelligentsia were demanding a part in governing the country, demanding their share—but also by pride, the desire to advertise themselves. As always in Russia, moderation was not observed. They may have been honestly deceived, Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, but they deceived us too. Whatever the case, they were “dominant influences.” So powerful was the intelligentsia’s movement against their country and its system that even the strong could not resist and were swept along. So we all shag-assed over to the Western world as soon as the opportunity presented itself. We shag-assed over here, and having seen what the life is like, many if not all would shag-ass right back, but it’s impossible. The Soviet government is not nice.

Fucking smart Americans, they advise men like Alyoshka and me to change professions. Where am I to hide all my thoughts, feelings, ten years of living, books of poetry? And me myself, where am I to hide refined little Eddie? Lock him up in the shell of a busboy. Bullshit. I tried it. I can no longer be an ordinary man. I am spoiled forever. Only the grave will reform me.

Eventually American security forces are going to have trouble with us. After all, not everyone conforms. In a couple of years look for Russians among the terrorists in liberation fronts of every description. That is my forecast.

Change our professions! Can the soul be changed? Knowing definitely what he is capable of, is it everyone who can suppress himself here and live the life of an ordinary man, laying no claim to anything, when he sees around him money, success, and fame, all of it largely undeserved, when he knows from experience both here and in the Soviet Union—and in this case the experience is identical—that he who is obedient and patient receives all from society, that he who sits on his butt all day and curries favor gets it all.

The brilliant inventors of vegetarian sandwiches for Wall Street secretaries can be counted on the fingers of one hand. For the most part, people arrive at success here just as they do in the USSR, by obedience, by wearing out the seat of their pants in their own or a government office, in boring daily labor. That is to say, civilization is constructed in such a way that the most restless, passionate, impatient—as a rule the

most talented, who seek new paths—break their necks. This civilization is paradise for the mediocre. We thought the USSR was a paradise for the mediocre, we thought it would be different here if you were talented. Fuck no!

Ideology there, business reasons here. That is roughly true. But what difference does it make to me exactly why the world doesn't want to give me what is mine by right of my birth and talent? The world calmly gives it—a place, I mean, a place in life, recognition—to the businessman here, to the party worker over there. But it has no place for me.

Fucking shit! I'm being patient, world, very patient, but some day I'll get fed up. If there's no place for me, and for many others, then who the fuck needs a civilization like this?

That last thought I expressed aloud to Alyoshka Slavkov, who is far from agreeing with me in everything. He is drawn to religion, inclined to seek salvation in religious tradition; on the whole he is calmer than Eddie, although he too has storms raging within him, I think. He dreams of becoming a Jesuit, and I mock his Jesuitism and predict that he will participate in the world revolution along with me, a revolution whose goal will be to destroy civilization.

"And what would you build in its place, you and your friends in the Workers Party?" Alyoshka said. For some reason he lumps me in with the Workers Party, to which I have never belonged. I have merely been interested in it, as in any other leftist movement. I did become more intimate with Carol and her friends than with members of the other parties, but that was pure chance.

"The hardest thing of all," I told Alyoshka, "is to overthrow this civilization, tear it out by the root so that it cannot revive as it did in the USSR. To overthrow it once and for all is to build something new."

"And what will you do about culture?" Alyoshka asked.

"This feudal culture," I said, "which inculcates wrong interpersonal relationships that originated in the distant past under a different social order—what will we do about it? We'll fucking annihilate it. It's unhealthy, it's dangerous with all its little tales of good millionaires, wonderful police who defend citizens from bestial criminals, magnanimous politicians who love flowers and children. Why is it that not one of these stinking authors—notice, Alyoshka, not one—will write that crimes, the majority of them, are generated by civilization itself? If a man kills another and takes his money, it's certainly not because he likes the color

and crunch of those scraps of paper enough to murder another. He knows from his society that among his fellow countrymen those scraps of paper are God, they'll bring him any woman he wants, and bring him his grub, and deliver him from exhausting physical labor. Or a man kills his wife for betraying him. But if there were other customs, a different ethic, and interpersonal relationships were measured only by love, then why would he kill for unlove? Unlove is a misfortune, it's to be regretted. Television always shows families, and gentlemen in suits. But that's already on the way out. The gentlemen in suits are on the way out, and the wild wind of new relationships, ignoring all police measures, all religious barriers, howls over America and the whole world. The gentleman in a suit, the gray-haired head of the family, is suffering defeat after defeat, and soon, very soon, he will no longer be able to govern the world. The husband and wife who joined together in order to have a more peaceful, economically more advantageous life—not for love, but at the decree of custom—theirs was always an artificial arrangement and engendered a host of tragedies. Why the fuck preserve an obsolete custom?"

I tried to persuade him, he raised objections, and then I went ahead with the sauerkraut, and he with the "Memorandum." His English is good, he translated the two pages quickly, but all the same we had to have the paper looked over and the mistakes corrected, so we gave it to Bant, the American who was a friend of Edik Brutt, my neighbor at the hotel. There weren't too many mistakes; he had mainly left out articles, the poet and Catholic Alyoshka. After that was accomplished, after his hard work, he wanted to rest. His idea of a rest is a few drinks.

I took him to my favorite store, on Fifty-third Street between First and Second avenues, and there we bought Jamaican rum—something I had been wanting for about a week. He too wanted rum, we both wanted to experience the taste sensation. We were not alcoholics—hell, no—although, as you will see, we did get drunk in the end. He also bought himself some soda, and we jointly acquired two lemons, then headed for my hotel.

We arrived. Sat down by the window. It was evening, the low five-o'clock sun illumined my garret. The rum was shot with yellow, it lay silvery and thick in the tawdry crude glasses, Eddie's glasses; God knows who had brought them or when. From time to time we dispatched it

down our gullets. Alyoshka lit up a cigar, stretched out his stiff leg; he was enjoying himself. In the process, he moved the chair, the chair brushed a plug, an extension cord that powered the refrigerator, and the result was invisible sabotage. A puddle of water was revealed a half hour later; we had to wipe it up when we had already grabbed the remains of the rum and were preparing to disappear, set out on our way. Alyoshka was insisting on it, he had a bug up his ass, all he wanted to do was go to the Public Library and buy some joints.

We left. On the way I discovered that Alyoshka, despite being an insolent Russian poet, did not know how to use a joint properly. It seems he bought joints that had been rolled into nice slim cigarettes, unrolled them, mixed them with ordinary cigar tobacco, and then smoked them. I laughed long and patronizingly at Alyoshka. Now it was clear, of course, why marijuana didn't affect him; he was always complaining about it.

"That's like buckshot to an elephant. You're supposed to smoke that nice slim ready-made cigarette without mixing it with anything. Ass-hole," I told him, "Ivan the Moscow provincial."

When we left we even took the soda with us. We bought joints at the Public Library on Forty-second Street, two from one guy and two from another, just in case—if one pair proved weak, the other might be better—and began trying to decide where to go. He wanted to drag me to the Latham Hotel. But I had shitty memories of that hotel, Elena and I had lived there when we arrived in America, in room 532, before the little apartment on Lexington, before the tragedy or in the very beginning of the tragedy, and I did not want to see my past.

I wanted to live as if I had acquired consciousness on March 4, 1976, the day I moved into the Hotel Winslow, as if there had been nothing before then—a dark hole and that was all, nothing else, nothing. But Alyoshka was dragging me over there, to show me. I had no desire to see his friend, a long-haired saxophonist named Andrey who had just arrived, I did not want to revive my past, but he was dragging me. Well, what could I do, he's a stubborn bastard.

I told him I had been happy there in the Latham Hotel, I had loved and fucked my Elena, we used to turn the whole bed inside out, and I remember we fucked during Solzhenitsyn's speech, with the TV turned on and his puss on the screen, we fucked and I wanted to come right then but couldn't, contemplating him in his military-style jacket, even

my girl-child's sweet peepka could not make me come. We fucked during Solzhenitsyn, of course, out of sheer mischief.

Whenever she got tired of fucking (this had already begun) and wanted to watch television I turned her around on our vast hotel bed—we had never had such a bed in our lives—I turned her around, put pillows under her, and she knelt on all fours, watched a TV program, usually some sort of horror show, she loves them, and I fucked her from behind. Even this, her incipient disregard for me, could not cool me. I wanted her very much, although she and I had been making love for four years now, and possibly it was time for me to stop and look around. I was a fool not to do it. I should have changed our lifestyle myself, without waiting for her to force the change. I could have brought somebody else, a man perhaps, or a woman, into our sex life, but I didn't think to do it. My inaction . . . What could I do, I had many cares: I was working at the newspaper for \$150 a week, I wrote articles in the evenings, hoped to do something more in the émigré field, and clung to my family in its traditional form. Little Eddie did not understand, yet she had already made it cautiously clear, asking, "What would you say if . . ." Then would come a proposition, a giggling proposition about a boy fucking her while I in turn fucked him in the poopka, and all sorts of other mind-boggling acrobatics. What a shithead I was, and I'm the one for whom there existed, to all intents and purposes, no prohibitions in sex. In return for whatever I might have allowed her she would have loved me more and more, but as it was I lost her, forever and irrevocably. Then again, I sometimes think there may be a form of life in which I could get her back; but not as a wife in the old sense of the word, that's impossible by now. A paradox. I myself, who want the new more than anyone, proved to be the victim of these new relationships between man and woman. "What we fought for has been our undoing."

Alyoshka wanted me to go, to see the site of my former happiness and compare it with my current insignificant status. What could I do? He insisted. And there was no way I wanted to be alone, when I had already been hit with almost half a liter of rum and something close to anguish. I had to go.

The saxophonist lived in the same wing we had lived in, of course, and even on the same floor; I had to walk right by the door of 532. He had this long, long hair, jeans, a beard—shit, you'd never say he came from the USSR. Shit, you'd never say it about me either. We finished

off the rum, one more guy arrived, a burly blond from Leningrad, a poet, the quiet type, writes poems about the KGB and boots, formalistic stuff. Who the fuck knows why he came to America. Those two preferred alcohol, and Alyoshka and I smoked the joints; they only took one drag apiece. Alyoshka tried to claim that the fucking marijuana wasn't affecting him, but his tongue began to get thick.

Then, like a lord on a spree, Alyoshka decided that his friends didn't have enough to drink, and we decided to go buy a bottle of vodka. The four of us set out, and after some delay on account of the lateness of the hour, found a store that had vodka. We bought a bottle, and in another little shop bought some sauerkraut and a can of an American meat product with a suspicious list of sodium and other salts on the label. We returned to the hotel. On the way up, there was the torture of the elevator doors: my mark, two little letters, "E&E," which I had scratched with a key, once when I was drunk. More torture. "Unhappy fetishist!" I whispered to myself, biting my lips. I had to stifle my feelings.

We disposed of the vodka rather quickly. Andrey had with him, in addition to his saxophone, a guitar; we sang some songs, and then he rather quickly got drunk and wanted to sleep. The fuzz-faced poet went off to his room, and Alyoshka and I, dissatisfied and insufficiently drunk, tumbled out of the hotel. Unhappy fetishist, I tried to do it with my eyes shut.

"Why in hell buy a bottle of vodka for a gang like that!" Alyoshka said dejectedly.

He had been paying all evening, though he didn't give a shit whether he paid or got his drinks paid for by someone else. To his credit, he had a weakly developed notion of private property.

"Let's go have another drink," he said.

"Let's," I said. "But you'll drink up your last kopeck if we go to a bar." The liquor stores were all closed by now on account of the lateness of the hour.

"I don't give a shit," Alyoshka said. "Who ever has money?"

"Listen," I told him, "let's go buy some beer, let's buy a six-pack. We've already had rum and vodka, we're high on grass. The beer will hit us just right, I think, it has to. And at most it will cost two-fifty."

He consented. We went looking for beer. Found the beer. He was

tired of walking, though he didn't let on. Proud Alyoshka. Say what you like, a stiff leg is not conducive to the practice of long and rapid walks. I suggested that we sit down somewhere on the street and have a drink.

We located a very dark yard in the wasteland behind a parking lot—business there was slow—and sat down on some railway ties or logs to drink the beer.

It really was pretty good. Not far off was Broadway, and somewhere nearby was Alyoshka's house; I was going to try and get my bearings, but then I ceased to care. We talked about the parking lot and its cars, I think. I don't remember now, and perhaps did not remember even then. The half-inebriated conversation of two poets, what could be more incoherent. I remember only that my mood was tranquil. The shuffle of feet from Broadway, the relative freshness of the night, the cold beer—a blessing of American civilization—all this created an atmosphere of belonging. Even we belonged to this world.

We sat there shooting the bull. I sprawled out and felt quite at home, such being my nature. Alyoshka was happy, or at any rate seemed so.

And now a man appeared, coming toward us from the parking lot. He walked up. A black, in scuzzy clothes, something baggy. Pale green trash-can trousers in a beam of light. He asked for a cigarette.

"We don't have any," Alyoshka said, "we ran out. If you want I'll give you the money, go buy some." And he gave him a dollar. Alyoshka loves to fart around showing off. He didn't begrudge the money, he'd give away his last dollar just to show off.

The black man took the dollar. "I'll be right back with the cigarettes," he said, and went off into the black gap of Broadway.

"Shithead," I said to Alyoshka, "why'd you give him the dollar? That's not even interesting, you should've given it to me instead."

"What the hell," Alyoshka laughed. "A psychological test."

"I've got nothing to eat tomorrow, my welfare check doesn't come for four days, but you're doing tests, you bastard! You're a shitty scholar, Sigmund Freud."

"If you come see me you'll eat," Alyoshka said.

We were still quarreling ten minutes later when the black reappeared.

"I'll be damned," I said, "an honest man in the neighborhood of Forty-sixth Street and Broadway. Something bad will happen soon. An omen."

"I told you so," Alyoshka laughed.

The black sat down, lighted a cigarette. Alyoshka thrust a can of beer at him. He and Alyoshka talked about serious subjects.

But by now I wasn't understanding a fucking thing. The beer had done its work. I glanced sideways at the black. A thick beard, a bum's rags. I don't know why, but what came back to me was the feeling of Chris. And it wasn't even the sexual feeling. What I wanted was to be in a relationship, to go somewhere, even do something shady, anything at all, but to latch on to this guy and crawl into the world behind him. "You left Chris, shithead, now correct your mistake!" I told myself.

Fucking was no problem for me at that time. Though it was dull and lousy, I was fucking Sonya. In anticipation of this dull act my pale prick just barely got up. Sonya was the Jewish girl, the Russian one, I knew her type: I needed to be tortured, but she didn't know how to do that, poor girl. I wanted a new world, I was sick of living an indeterminate life, being neither Russian nor anything else . . .

"What's your name?" I said, moving over to sit by the black.

"He introduced himself to you when he came up, you don't hear a fucking thing," Alyoshka said. "He said his name was Johnny."

Johnny smiled broadly. "You're a nice boy, Johnny," I said, and stroked his cheek. These were my whorish tricks. Alyoshka was not surprised. I had told him about Chris. He was merely curious, Alyoshka, he was not surprised.

We sat, talked. Alyoshka translated what I had forgotten in my drunken state or didn't know.

"He may be a bum or he may not, how the fuck should I know," Alyoshka said. "A shady character. Well, it's none of our business, we don't have to be buddies with him, let's shoot the bull in English, it's all practice. You should talk more yourself, Limonov, by the way. Why the hell use me as an interpreter? How long can you keep on asking your nanny?"

"It's fine for you," I told Alyoshka, "you studied ten years in the institutes, you didn't get wise but at least you learned the language. I just had high-school French."

"You don't even know French," Alyoshka said.

"I've forgotten it, you motherfucker, but in my time I did read French books, whole pages almost without a dictionary."

"Don't lie, don't lie, Limonov," Alyoshka said.

"I'm very sorry, Johnny," I said in English.

"It's okay, it's okay," Johnny nodded, smiling.

An infinite number of smiles. Alyoshka smiled, and Johnny, everyone was smiling in the dark and I could see it. Then something happened. It seems I laid my head on Johnny's shoulder. Why? God knows.

His clothes even smelled of something rotten. Theoretically I shouldn't have liked him. But there he was, sitting beside me, not planning to go away; that meant I had to do something with him. I had surprised him by touching him, or to put it plainly, feeling him up. But he had been educated, I don't know where or by whom. Maybe he thought this was done among Russians, they might all be like this. Had he seen many Russians in his life as a Broadway bum? Or whatever the fuck he was, maybe the lowliest little beast on Broadway, a flunky who ran to get ginger ale or hot dogs for the prostitutes—oh, I don't know if they eat hot dogs or if anyone runs to buy their hot dogs for them, I'm just guessing.

"Alyoshka, I want to fuck him," I said.

"You dirty homosexual, Limonov, I didn't think you were serious about all that, but you're turning out to be a real dirty pederast," Alyoshka said derisively.

This wasn't insulting, it was humor. I laughed and said, "Uh-huh, I'm a dirty pederast, and I joined the Chinese Communist Party. I did away with myself, hanged myself. I have two black prostitutes supporting me; they're standing here in the vicinity, on Broadway. Nice girls. And also, I'm a KGB agent with the rank of colonel."

These were all pernicious rumors about me that I was enumerating to Alyoshka. Some of the rumors came from Moscow, my friends had written to me; some were being spread here. In Russian books you often find it said of some poet or writer that he has been "run to earth"—a hunting term, you know, it's used to signify a long chase and the slaying of some wild animal. That trick won't work with me. I think very little of the Russian emigration, I consider them the lowest of the low, pathetic, absurd, worse than this Johnny. Therefore I find the rumors funny; what's more, I take a childish delight in them, following the dictum of contemporary Russia's cruelest poet, Igor Kholin, a scoundrel and a villain, but magnificent: "Let them talk as they will, so long as they talk."

"I'm a dirty pederast, Alyoshka," I said. "Listen, take us to your place,

you mentioned something about both your performing artists going to Philadelphia tonight.”

“Not quite,” Alyoshka said. “What are you planning to do, fuck him at my house?”

“House! You call that dirty, stinking, steamy hole a house? Yes, I want to fuck this guy on your fiddler’s bed, and then switch over to the clown’s bed.”

“Okay, let’s go,” Alyoshka said. “Only don’t fuck me afterward.”

“We won’t,” I said. “You don’t turn me on at all. I have little interest in fucking Russian poets.”

“Or maybe he’s not a pederast at all?” Alyoshka said, glancing doubtfully at Johnny.

“We’ll check it out right now,” I said. Hitching myself up from Johnny’s shoulder, I put my arms around him, whispered in his ear, “I vont you, Johnny!” and kissed him on the lips. His lips were big, and he responded to me, not the least bit embarrassed. He knew how to kiss, he did it much better than I did. True, that meant nothing, but if he’d gone this far, to the kiss, he was agreeable to going all the way.

“He’ll do,” I said to Alyoshka. “Let’s go.”

I told Johnny that he would come with us. He expressed not the slightest unwillingness, and I put my arm around him and walked on ahead with him. I was drawn into more and more kisses, especially since I was feeling the effects of what I had smoked and drunk more and more clearly. The incubation period was over and the disease had begun a rapid development. We walked and kissed, and Alyoshka limped behind. I got drunk and silly, switched from game-playing and humor into a state of genuine drugged relaxation. I just wanted somebody, not specifically Johnny, but he was nearby. From time to time Alyoshka commented on the pair of us, Johnny and me, with remarks like, “What a pederast you are, Limonov!”

Or, “If the guys in Moscow could only see you!”

“But Gubanov’s a pederast himself!” I said exultantly. “I once spent a whole evening smooching with him.”

Finally we arrived. It must have been one in the morning. We walked into those clouds of steam, and the first thing I saw was two pairs of eyes, frightened and puzzled as hell. The performing artists were lying on their beds, facing the door, and were stunned by the arrival of Limonov and his black lover. I decided to finish them off. I put my arms around

Johnny and entered into a long, agonizing kiss. The performing artists were petrified. They were both over forty, they were not prepared for this, neither the clown nor the musician.

I told Alyoshka, "This is a bummer, the sleep-in will not take place. If you'll just give us some beer, Johnny and I will go." Johnny and I sat down on a chair, or rather he did, and I settled on his lap within sight of the astonished spectators. Alyoshka gave us some beer.

The beer belonged to the musician, he always had a couple dozen beers in reserve, and Alyoshka asked him for the loan of a beer. He gave it, he would have given the world not to see Limonov endlessly kiss a black man. A terrible spectacle for a Russian musician or clown.

Then Johnny and I left. Alyoshka stayed, went to bed. I invited him to come with us, but he said, "You'll be fucking, and what will I do?" He was right, and we left alone.

Then began my long night of walking with Johnny along Broadway, Eighth Avenue, and neighboring streets, from the Thirties to the Fifties. I do not know, it remains a mystery to me even now, why he didn't get around to fucking me right away. Nor do I know what he was doing, sometimes stopping with people, talking with them, approaching prostitutes and people who worked in all sorts of night establishments. He was doing some sort of petty business of his own, he was busy with it right up to daybreak, people handed him something, maybe it was coins, I don't know. I could see that the faces of the people he talked to were scornful and squeamish. One time a young and handsome black man, brightly dressed, evidently a pimp, even pushed him. He was the lowest man in this world, my Johnny, and I was his buddy.

I understood at once that he was the lowest of the low. Another man in my place would have left, wouldn't have given a damn, especially since the excitement was gone, the sex drive had vanished, there was only a drugged, alcoholic state; but that was what another would have done. Not I. I felt I must walk with him everywhere in his strange dealings, wait for him, and be a friend to him, to this lowest man, this punk dressed in dirty rags. Once he even deserted me, and a huge, fat black guy, from a whorehouse on the corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-third Street I think, tried to beat me up for something. I don't remember—and besides I didn't understand—what the problem was or how I had irritated him. But I patiently heard out his seething speech, indistinct and vicious, and when he came after me with his fists I

realized there was no point fighting, and simply tried to push the big guy away without running afoul of his fists. I succeeded in this, but not quite. Repulsed by his bulk, I bounced back against the wall. I wasn't hurt, didn't fall; a shout went up around me. Only then did Johnny come over to me and furtively tell me I'd better leave. I don't give a shit about these amusements. I left calmly, but as I say, I didn't have a fucking thing to lose; as I say, why should I fear tight spots—I was even seeking death. Not very consciously, but I was.

Johnny deserted me for long periods that night, and more than once I developed a suspicion that he wanted to shake me off. Somewhere around four in the morning he squeezed himself into a group of black youths on Forty-second Street, between Broadway and Eighth, and tried to get something out of them. Someone chased him away.

I sat on my heels by the wall and observed the young people and Johnny. I felt sad. Even they did not accept me into their game. I would have given the world, at that moment, to have black skin and stand among them as one of their own.

I recalled my own provincial Kharkov, my hoodlum friends, our flashy dolled-up girls—not this dolled-up, of course; they didn't have the resources—but also provocative, young, and vulgar, like these nice little black girls. There in my own city I was in my right place. Everyone knew Ed. They knew what he could do. They knew I hawked stolen countermarks, which was what we called the free passes to the outdoor dance pavilion where the orchestra played. I sold them cheap and divided the profits with the cashier, a middle-aged German woman. It was a pretty good business. In one evening I would earn a third to a half of a good worker's monthly pay—it was a big dance pavilion. Everyone knew that I wasn't averse to stealing anything left lying around loose, and it was I who robbed the store near the entrance to the Hammer and Sickle Factory.

The people knew my girl Svetka; they would inform me at once, that very night, if they saw her at another dance pavilion with another guy. Then I would leave someone to hawk countermarks in my place, and go to the grocery store; a friend and I would each buy a bottle of strong red, drink it right on the street. On occasion we carried out this operation two or three times, and afterward, when I had sold all the countermarks, I would go to Svetka's apartment house and wait for her. I would sit in the courtyard, talk with some Tatar boxers, the brothers Epkin,

and wait for Svetka. When she appeared I would beat her and beat the guy who was with her. The brothers Epkin, who loved both Svetka and me, would butt in, and a hue and cry would go up. Then we would make peace and go to Svetka's. Her mother was a prostitute and a lover of literature. She valued highly the diary I kept as a seventeen-year-old, which at Svetka's request I had given her to read. She encouraged our romance and predicted for me a future as a man of letters. Unfortunately, she proved right.

Svetka was a very sweet girl, beautiful but sneaky. She loved the starched petticoats and fluffy dresses stylish at the time. She lived in apartment 14 and was fourteen years old. She had lived with men since the age of twelve; a friend of her late alcoholic father's had once raped her. Strange as it may seem, Svetka was proud of this circumstance; she was a romantic soul. In addition to her tallness, little doll face, long legs, and almost complete absence of breasts, Svetka possessed an amazing ability to drive me mad. My romance with her was rife with incidents—she ran to drown herself in the pond, I slashed her with a knife, fled from her to the Caucasus, wept in the entrance to her house, and so on . . . It was like a rehearsal of Elena.

Anyway, I felt wonderful out by our dance pavilion, in the crush of young people—mainly delinquent young people, our neighborhood being what it was. In our neighborhood there were buildings where the entire male population was in prison. The fathers went, then the older brothers, then the younger brothers, my agemates. I might be able to recall the names of about a dozen guys sentenced in their time to execution, the firing squad. And the number sentenced to ten and fifteen years was absolutely drastic.

The young blacks and nonblacks on Forty-second Street reminded me of my neighborhood, my dance pavilion, my friends, hoodlums, gangsters, and thieves. I use these words with no nuance of condemnation, none. Besides, most of that Kharkov crowd by the dance pavilion and most of this Forty-second Street crowd consisted not of hoodlums and gangsters, of course, but of normal teenagers, boys and girls at a transitional age who wanted to fuck around showing off. In Russia they were called *blatnye*, toughs. They were not real criminals, but their manners, behavior, habits, and dress aped the manners, behavior, habits, and dress of real criminals. It was the same here.

A sadness, as I say, came over me. I could not be one of this crowd

of busily scurrying, whispering boys and girls. Oh, this business of theirs! Whom to fuck tonight, and if there isn't anyone, then where to get a drink if you haven't a cent in your pocket, though you're wearing patent leather shoes and a wide black hat. You might hit Sam for a couple of bucks—he deals in marijuana. “Hi, Bob!” “Hi, Bill!” “Hello, Lizzy!”

Such, I think, were the thoughts and expressions that floated over this crowd. The kids perhaps found Johnny disgusting; filthy thirty-five-year-old punk Johnny, my friend, for whom I was waiting. Possibly they held their noses on his account. But I, my foolish brain, was thinking about everyone and for everyone, while they were merely making gestures and uttering words. I sat on my heels at the base of the wall, in my very wide trousers and the short white—no, not dead white, the off-white jacket that Alexander had given me, with pockets; I had tailored it to my figure, it fitted me as if I had been poured into it, at the moment it was completely unbuttoned, my chest was bare, with my cross exposed. That was all I had. I waited for Johnny.

Within me was the stubbornness of an all-forgiving love. I thought, “Of course he's a punk, a flunky. There's no one worse or less than he, even here. Everyone chases him away, and he's obviously begging for coins, but even he is ashamed of me, pretends that he doesn't know me, that I'm an outsider and he, Johnny, is on his own. Nevertheless, I must be here and wait for him, the lowest filth off New York's sidewalks, I must be with him.”

No one asked this of me, of course. God did not ask, “Be with Johnny,” no one asked it, but I was not waiting to be asked. Maybe it was nonsense, but something made me sit and wait for this bum and not go home to bed in the hotel. Something very powerful. I absolutely clung to him. Maybe I wanted to pity him, to give myself to him, this man chased away by all. Maybe this lofty idea had taken hold of me; it was in obedience to this idea, perhaps, that I waited for him by the wall, gazing sadly upon the garrulous elegant young people.

“You've found a shitass even worse off than you, and you're trying to build yourself up at his expense. Displaying your virtue,” a voice said to me.

“He's not lower at all, he holds a more advantageous position in this world than you do. His ties with this world are much stronger and he doesn't look unhappy,” said another voice.

“You just want to fuck, that's why you're sitting here,” said a third.

“Why no, he’s here to gather impressions—he’s a writer, you know!” a fourth pronounced maliciously.

“He wants to glom onto Johnny and get to know the other punks,” said a fifth.

“To practice his English!” a sixth voice shouted in utter idiocy.

“Fucking all-forgiver, he’s playing the saint, he’s come to save Johnny, bring him love!” a seventh voice screamed obscenely.

God knows what was happening within me, but my eyes were probably sad and almost weeping. No one wanted to take me into the game, into life. They were living, but I sat by the wall.

“Come on!” Johnny said, walking over. Perhaps he had been moved by my devotion and the fact that I’d been walking with him half the night, perhaps he had reached some decision about me. I followed him submissively. We started down Eighth Avenue. Forty-first, Fortieth, Thirty-ninth, Thirty-eighth.

At Thirty-eighth someone put a knife to my back. The sensation of a knife at my back was something I knew. They surrounded us and ordered us—me, and Johnny, too—to march. Forward.

I marched, and the knife and its owner marched with me as if glued to me. “Why is he trying so hard, the shithead, he’s young,” I thought with a giggle. I didn’t have a fucking thing, not a fucking thing, just some change in my pocket. Pack of fools—they’d found the right guy to rob. They were young kids, beginners, three blacks and a light one. Four of them . . .

Oh, Lord, more memories. There had been four of the others, too, four of us counting me. We went at night to the outskirts of Kharkov to rob with homemade pistols. We were more afraid than our victims. In addition to one pistol that really fired, we had two wooden models that I had fashioned after my father’s TT pistol, exactly like it, millimeter for millimeter, and painted a shiny black.

Our first victim was a fair-haired woman of about thirty. At the time she seemed like an old woman to us. We were seventeen and eighteen; one of us, Grishka, was only fifteen. We were so agonizingly clumsy about robbing her, so stupid, so ashamed, that I think even she realized it, despite her fright. She told us rather calmly, “Maybe you shouldn’t, boys!” At which the youngest and meanest of us, Grishka, shaking with cowardice, shouted, “Shut up, bitch!” Had she only known, she could have quietly walked away from us and we wouldn’t have done a thing.

Later we boasted to each other, sitting under the bridge. After taking 26 rubles and some kopecks from her purse, we threw the purse in the river and divided the money. We were very glad for the money, and probably even gladder that all this torture was over, thank God, and we could now go home, leaving the models and the homemade pistol hidden under the bridge. "We should have fucked her!" Grishka said. Indeed, we could have raped her, but for some reason we hadn't done it. In theory we could have. In practice, because of the fear we were suffering, we might not have been able to get our young pricks up. I at least couldn't have gotten mine up, I was too subtle a creature, and still am . . .

The kids took Johnny and me to a dark parking lot. "Holdup!" the eldest one said. I calmly folded my hands behind my head. The eldest, a rather sensible youth, pointed to my hands and said, "What's this?" "A professional habit," I lied, for some reason. "I was in prison in my homeland." My locked hands surprised him. This really is the way that old criminals who have been through the camps hold their hands when being frisked, so as not to get tired. It was a borrowed habit, I hadn't been in prison, fate had spared me. "Where's your homeland?" the eldest boy asked. He may not have been older than the others, but he gave the orders. "I'm from Russia," I replied.

Suddenly he burst out laughing. "And I've been in prison here!"

He patted my pockets, but the tension had already abated. Both they and I had relaxed. Aside from my notebook and a hotel key—without a name tag, however; our hotel had no such luxury—I had nothing in my pockets. Even the change had disappeared, I don't know where, maybe it had fallen out when I was sitting on my heels on Forty-second Street.

All of a sudden the eldest one reached for my cross. My eyes went dim. I could not hand this over. And God had nothing to do with it. To me, this rather large silver cross with chips here and there in its blue enamel was a keepsake of my homeland. "Only veeth my life!" I said quickly and softly in English. And covered the cross with my hand. "This is a symbol of my religion and my homeland," I added. The boy took his hand away.

They let us go. They did frisk Johnny, as an afterthought, but I think it was his doing, this robbery. It was no accident. Shit, to look at him you'd never say he was worth robbing. A real bum. I think he had set

it up. He had approached his acquaintances and asked them just to go through the motions of robbing him too. To see what I had.

They didn't touch the cross, didn't hit me or take the notebook. But they weren't noble robbers, by any means. They took an interest in what hotel the key was from. Even though I was all in a fog—the narcotics and alcohol had not dissipated—I caught on and told them some brazen lie. They realized I was lying, but what could they do.

No, they were a bit more experienced than the four in Kharkov, the four including me. Otherwise they wouldn't have thought of the key. This was not their first time at the business, absolutely not their first, although, had I been a plainclothesman, I would have handcuffed them easily and simply; their behavior was painfully amateurish. I know those tricks. My experience as a thief covered six years, from the age of sixteen to twenty-one. After twenty-one I became a poet and an intellectual.

Johnny and I left. I was infuriated with him. He had obviously set this up, the sneaky bastard! Apart from everything else, I was hungry, and I told him so. He continued to drag me down all sorts of dark alleys, where he held discussions with other equally shady characters, received something in his palm, and walked on. My requests for food were ignored.

“Stingy bum, loathsome zhlobby character!” Trudging along behind him, I cursed him in Russian and in English. He knew perfectly well that I was hungry. My barbaric English was understood everywhere, and almost nowhere was I asked to repeat myself. But he didn't want to buy me any food. I was really infuriated with him, fed up. It was beginning to grow light.

At last it appeared that he had finished his shady panhandling and could occupy himself with me now, or else he hadn't wanted me earlier but wanted me now, but anyway he suddenly began kissing me again, his lips seemed to want to swallow my lips and me myself. I didn't want him at all.

“Loathsome zhlob!” I said to him, shoving him away. “Loathsome zhlob, get away from me, go fuck yourself, get lost. I'm going home, skinflint, American zhlob!”

I said it in Russian and said it in English, what I knew of it in English. He laughed and would not let go of me. Near the corner of Forty-fifth Street and Broadway we began to wrestle; a joke is a joke, but he was strong and would not let go of me. We wrestled and wrestled, and

crashed down on the pavement. This was right at 1515 Broadway, on the side of the building that faces Forty-fifth Street. It's the building where I always get my welfare check. We went crashing down, he brought me down on top of him and began to kiss me.

"Blockhead," I screamed, "let go, fuck off, get lost!"

But he kept after me all the same with his beard and his lips. Already people were walking to work—admittedly, not many—and they gave us a wide berth. On seeing the people I came alive like an actor, but not only that, Johnny had loosened me up, excited me, I wanted to fuck, and at the same time I wanted to scare these people walking to work. I went for his cock.

He was a bit frightened. "What are you, crazy?" he asked me. "Do people do it in the street?"

I don't know whether they do or not, I couldn't care less. I wanted to get at his cock, right here on the filthy Broadway pavement. I tried again to unzip his pants. The women walking to work scuttled away from us in fright. He jumped up and grabbed my hand.

"Come with me!" He jerked me viciously, then smiled and added, "Russian crazy!"

I went, I forgave him for being a zhlob and a sneak; I can't stay angry very long.

I don't remember the building we went to. I remember only that the inside was very respectable and there was a doorman. Johnny tiptoed me past the doorman, who was sitting with his back to us, and we made a dash for the stairway and cautiously started up.

"If he's taking me to rip someone off, that suits me fine," I thought coolly. "Even if we land in jail, I'll learn both English and Spanish, I'll make contacts, and I'll come out dangerous and mean."

I wanted to know which apartment. We were panting but kept going up and up. There were not only apartments but also organizations of some sort, judging by the substantial signs. Suddenly the doors stopped. Ahead was the empty stairwell and a dead end. Johnny threw off his baggy dirty jacket and flung it on the floor. With the gesture of a cordial host, he pointed me to the floor and sat down himself, began to take off his T-shirt.

"Let's make love, you wanted to make love. It's okay here, not in the street," he said.

I was exasperated. I had already set up plans, and he . . .

"Afterward," I told him. "I want to do a robbery, I thought we were coming here to rip off an apartment. Why did you trick me?" I said.

"I didn't trick you," he said. "You wanted to make love."

Again he pulled me by the hand. Well, gentlemen, what else could I do? It may have been six in the morning. I went to him . . .

Under the baggy, dusty street-bum clothes he turned out to have a beautiful figure with a round, neat poopka. In his pants he had seemed fat-assed and awkward, but he was well-proportioned and had nothing to spare. This place in the stairwell was hot, we were both naked, and although I was very tanned except for the stripe from my panties, he was so black that my tan made no difference; I was practically white in comparison with him. Although he was much shorter than Chris, this bum and punk had a huge cock. One glance at his cock and all my disappointment and dissatisfaction vanished. Evidently I was, in fact, a pederast. I grabbed his cock, and it would be no exaggeration to say that I hastily rammed it down my throat. He was very ardent, this stingy Johnny, I didn't have to cajole his huge cock for long. He shortly flooded me, and to some extent himself, with a whole load of spurting semen. Such a huge cock! Look what nature hath wrought, I thought, slapping his cock against his belly, laughing and playing. He lay there, content.

Then he set me on his chest and began to kiss my member. He had fine large lips; their area, the area of the viscid surface with which he touched my delicate plaything, was large. He did his job very ably. Little by little he drove me out of my fucking mind, although it took him a great deal of time. He worked honestly and above the norm, more than making up for his stinginess with money.

He loved this work, he sucked my pale cock into him, and then my cock floated back out of him on waves sweet, soft, and warm, so warm—he had lips like waves in the southern seas, large and warm. I was so swept away that for the first time in many months I forgot convention, ceased to feel like an actor on stage, in brief, relaxed and luxuriated. And he didn't tire of it. He went on and on . . .

Fearing that I would nevertheless drop out of the game, lose my hard-on—I was still sick—I decided to concentrate and come. I summoned to my aid an Elena whom someone was fucking. I imagined her in all three dimensions, being fucked by someone repulsive, but despite

my best efforts it didn't help worth a damn. Then I returned to reality, began to enter into what Johnny and I were doing, but this didn't advance me on the path to orgasm either, for some reason it seemed natural and normal to me. And then I remembered a painting or photograph that showed a lonely masturbating woman of about thirty years old. May Johnny forgive me, but at the awareness of her inside-out cunt—when I saw, as if with my own eyes, the ill-polished red nail on her little finger, with which she was chafing the upper part of her genital slit, saw the small yellow stain in the crotch of the panties pulled down on her high laced boots, the pathetic little rag-scrap panties of a lonely aging woman, saw the wrinkle or two on her little breasts—I came.

I will not undertake to explain what the attraction was for me, why it took a masturbating woman in the autumn of life to arouse me to orgasm. I do not know, but I came very well. And may Johnny forgive me for having to resort to the help of this lady; he did it better than any woman, better than all of them. When he had my cock in his mouth I felt serene and happy. He alone—punk, filth of the streets, panhandler, least of the least—lovingly and tenderly kissed my cock, laughed with me, clasped me to him, kissed my poopka and shoulders.

Chris had been serious, Johnny was much more playful and funny. For the rest of the time that I spent with him in the attic, perhaps another hour, we laughed, turned somersaults, and lay on my clothes and his, acting out important personages in their boudoirs. "I am a lord!" he said, lying haughtily on his back, his dick hanging sideways, his black face shining. "It's my house!" he said, encompassing the stairwell in his gesture. I rolled with laughter.

"I am lord, too," I said in English. "My house ees all streets of New York!"

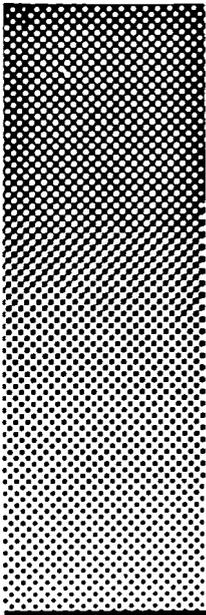
Now he laughed. Then the lord and I wrestled . . .

We had to leave. Voices sounded downstairs, doors slammed. The day was beginning, we might be seen naked and defenseless, and that we didn't need. We agreed to meet the next day at a coffee shop on the corner of Forty-fifth Street and Eighth Avenue. I suggested the place, I knew that coffee shop well; it was opposite a bordello and not far from where Alexander lived, my friend in the struggle, my party comrade.

I got dressed and left first. Still naked, he pulled me back at the last moment, but I kissed him and started down. At the next floor I got in

the elevator and rode down. On the way the elevator filled up with gentlemen in suits, off to do business. They looked suspiciously at my soiled white jacket and odd face.

When I walked up to my hotel the electronic clock on the IBM tower showed seven-thirty. The last thing I was aware of as I fell asleep was the smell of Johnny's cock and semen. I must have grinned in my sleep.



## ROSEANNE

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She was the first American woman I fucked. It sounds fantastic, but I fucked her on July 4, 1976—the day of America’s Bicentennial. Commit this symbolic event to memory, gentlemen, and let us go on to Roseanne herself.

Kirill again, solely Kirill. He was sick of his role as interpreter for Alexander and me. We needed to go to the *Village Voice*, where we had decided to take our open letter to the editor of the *New York Times*. We had written the letter apropos of our unnoticed demonstration against the *Times*. Kirill said, “I can’t go, go by yourselves, why can’t you go by yourselves?”

“Listen, Kirill,” I said, “this is a serious, delicate matter, and with our barbaric English it would be foolish to go alone. We’d just ruin everything.”

“But I can’t,” Kirill said, “I’m busy. Take someone else.”

“Who?” I said.

“Well, there’s Roseanne. You remember, I pointed her out to you at the exhibit at the Russian gallery. Over thirty, a bit of a weirdo.”

“All right, Kirill,” I said, “call her up and ask her to go to the *Village Voice* with us.”

“No,” Kirill said, “I’m afraid of her, I think she wants to fuck me. You’d better call her yourself, I’ll give you the number.”

“All right,” I said, “let’s have it.”

I reached her the next day, and she invited me over that same evening. She was having some friends, an out-of-work history instructor and his wife. I arrived there all charged up, I needed relationships in any shape or form, and any relationship made me glad. She lived, and still does, in a wonderful penthouse apartment. The windows of the long hallway and living room all look out on the Hudson River. On the other side of the living room there's a door out to the terrace—properly, a large fenced-off section of the roof. In addition she has a bedroom and a study. Next door there is another apartment that belongs to her, of smaller size, which she rents out. The whole apartment is as windswept as a sailing ship, and it recalls a sailing ship in its brightness and whiteness, the surge of the wind in it, and the Hudson River beyond the windows. The air is good, it's easy to breathe there. The only thing about the apartment that's a little hard to take is Roseanne herself.

A day or two later we met again and went to the *Village Voice* with the letter, which she had recast in her own style, cleaning up our excessively leftist political phraseology, making the letter more American. Alexander and I had consented to these revisions.

Even then I noticed her irritation at having to work, type, think, although at that time she was still controlling herself. The letter was practically nothing, less than a page; she agonized over it, while behind her back I scrutinized the piles of books in her study. But then, when she had typed the letter she was very proud of herself. Observing the smile that distorted her face, a strange smile, gentlemen, slightly degenerate, her good facial features notwithstanding, this grimace exposed a mental, psychical defectiveness—observing her face, I had a sudden clear insight. A schiz.

My associations to this word go way back, to my crazy second wife Anna, to the literary and artistic bohemia of Kharkov, the passion for abnormality and disease.

I was raised in the cult of madness. "Schiz," abbreviated from schizophrenic, was the name we gave eccentrics, and it was considered praise, the highest rating a person could have. Eccentricity was encouraged. To say that a man was normal was to insult him. We segregated ourselves sharply from the herd of "normals." How did this surrealistic cult of madness come to us, the boys and girls of the Russian provinces? Via art, of course. Anyone who had not spent time in a mental hospital was

considered unworthy. A suicide attempt in my past, practically in childhood, was the kind of credential with which I, for example, had arrived in this company. The very best recommendation.

Many of my friends, both in Kharkov and later in Moscow, received “Group” pensions, as they are called in the USSR. Group 1 was considered the height of praise. A Group 1 Schiz—that was the absolute limit. Many people went too far with this game, and a very dangerous game it was. The poet Arkady Besedin brought his life to an excruciating and atrocious end, the poet Vidchenko hanged himself, we were proud of ourselves. There were but a few hundred like us in the whole city. We had nothing to do with ordinary people. Boredom, despondency, and in the last analysis a joyless death—ordinary Russian people reeked of it. Americans reek of it now.

I understood that Roseanne was one of us. But she was and she wasn't. She easily made Group 1, but there was something unusual about her. A Jew, daughter of parents who had fled Hitler's Germany, the little girl had dreamed of being a pianist and had played professionally from age eleven to thirteen. But American life, the American provinces, the high school where they occasionally beat her up for being Jewish (the last time when she was eighteen, she says) gradually turned Roseanne away from an artistic upbringing too complex for America, away from the piano and her pianist mama—her grandmother was also a pianist—and reshaped her life. She began to be ashamed of her European upbringing, she quit the piano and started down another path in life. It led her to Russian language and literature, led her to work actively against the war in Vietnam while an instructor at a college in one of the boroughs of New York. And then came the event that made her a Group 1 Schiz. She lost her job.

“I'm almost Russian,” she says sometimes. But a Russian, in my observation, can go schizzy from just about anything, except from losing his job. She went schizzy. She was depressed for almost two years and still has her ups and downs. She wanted to expose the man who had fired her—unjustly, she said—but the *New York Times* refused to print her article about the man, and she went schizzier than ever. We are unanimous on the question of the *New York Times*.

“The students loved me so,” she says with a sigh. Perhaps. She's an unemployed instructor. Her terrific apartment must have been partly paid for, all these years, by her parents; her father is a wholesaler of

ready-made clothes. She does not consider her father rich. She has a rich uncle and aunt with whom she quarrels whenever they meet, but the uncle and aunt assert that her father and mother don't know how to live.

Roseanne . . . Once I asked her to check over a letter of mine to Allen Ginsberg. Yes, I wrote him a letter in English, very illiterate of course. One more attempt to find friends, a milieu. I asked an American poet to meet with a Russian poet. And sent him my book, *We Are the National Hero*, in English translation. No answer so far. He doesn't need me a fucking bit. One more alternative eliminated, that's all. Roseanne proved right, she knew better the men of her own country, even if they were poets. She savaged my letter when she read it. "The way it's written, you want to stick him with your problems." My problems again, they're all so horribly afraid of other people's problems. Allen Ginsberg is afraid too. They're tough, here in their America, but happiness is not enhanced by the absence of other people's problems . . .

I asked her to check the letter anyway. She began to do it, but suddenly, sitting at the typewriter, she turned preposterously nasty.

"I don't plan to waste the whole evening on this, I worked all day writing," she snorted.

I could not contain myself. "I'm not going to ask you for anything ever again," I told her. "Disgusting psychopath," I cursed inwardly, "you forget how many nights running I've typed the Russian texts you needed. Louse, ungrateful wretch, you're used to getting it all yourself," I thought, staring at her back. But this happened after I had fucked her.

Roseanne decided to have a Fourth of July party. "It's a long time since I invited people over, but I don't have the money, I'm poor, I have to tell them to bring something to drink, I can't buy wine and liquor for them. One of my friends will bring meat for shashlik."

On July third I went to the stores with her. She was wearing the sort of dress that American women always wear when shopping close to home, a cross between an apron and a Russian *sarafan*. It was a very sunny hot day, we bought wine in a liquor store, and I bought a bottle of vodka. Because of my white clothes the salesman took me for a Russian sailor from one of the tall ships that had arrived in New York for America's Bicentennial Celebration and lay in the Hudson River. Someone selected fruit for her; he was a Latin-American she had known for many years, and she exchanged friendly insults with him, something on the subject of smoking. Either they had both quit smoking, or he had

given up and begun smoking again, or she had, something in that vein.

Suddenly I felt good about this neighborhood, about Broadway streaming past flooded in sunlight—the produce store was right on Broadway—about the microcosm of salesmen and customers who had known each other for years, for decades. I envied her a bit, Roseanne. Then we trudged back, and her neighbors greeted her, and I felt good that I was so healthy and tan, in my open shirt, with my silver cross with the chipped blue enamel on my chest, with my green, bright eyes. And I was inwardly grateful to her for having brought me into this world as if I belonged here, walking with her, Roseanne. Although I had passed by this very spot on Broadway time and again, it had never seemed to me so congenial, as if I belonged, because today I was not a passerby.

That same day I cleaned up her terrace, which was no easy job, the wind had deposited a lot of grit on the green artificial grass rug. I cut up meat for shashlik and marinated it, washed windows, and left her late.

I was grateful to her, and she to me, we hung idiotic colored lanterns in all the penthouse windows, then had some whiskey and nearly fucked. I held back only out of mischief, having decided to fuck her exactly on the Fourth of July. I wanted the symbolism. She very much wanted to fuck, poor thing, and moaned pitifully when I stroked and hugged her. As she later confessed to me, she is supersensitive to being touched, while a kiss on the lips leaves her almost indifferent. She and I are alike in this; for me, too, the lips are the most insensitive part of the body. That evening was hard on her, but I held back, said good-bye anyway and left after telling her provocatively that we would make love tomorrow, the Fourth of July. She laughed.

What a fucking Fourth that was! The party was set for one o'clock, but since I knew American ways by now, I arrived at two, having bought her a dozen red roses, for which she seemed most sincerely glad. A great many people were already there, among them several Russians: a writer and instructor—already known to you, gentlemen, he's the one who brought me together with Carol the Trotskyite—and his wife Masha; the photographer Seva with his wife—he had worked about a year and a half for the well-known diver Cousteau. Seva came with his cameras, set them up and took pictures of the ships passing right under the windows. The Soviet *Kruzenshtern* was officially largest of all, the very largest sailing ship of the present day. "That's ours, largest of all!" I said with a laugh, nudging the writer.

After taking a turn through the crowd and quickly downing several glasses of wine, I began, along with a bearded man by the name of Karl, to make shashlik. Karl had brought a covered pot full of his own shashlik, made the Greek way, marinated in vegetable oil. Karl raised a storm of activity, slicing tomatoes and onions and putting them all on skewers. He knew a few words of Russian.

People are very fond of watching others work. Right away a smiling black girl from Jamaica came over; her father was a priest in his homeland, the girl spoke English very well, much better than Americans do. With many curious people scurrying around us, Karl and I had cleaned the peppers and were sitting there slicing them when Roseanne appeared, leading a very tall fat man in shorts.

"This is the proprietor of the hotel you live in," she said.

He started to laugh, I started to laugh, but inwardly recalling what she had told me about him, I thought, "In addition to our dismal Winslow he owns forty-five buildings in Manhattan; he hasn't got a million, he's got much more. He has a law office on the second floor of our hotel—his hotel—but they say he doesn't practice law at all. Why the fuck should he . . ."

The man in shorts withdrew into the crowd. "The elephant." Mentally I gave him the nickname, and it occurred to me that my life would be easier if, for the same \$130, he gave me a room that was a little bit bigger, a little bit more spacious than my prison cubicle. But why should he do this for me, I decided. What was I to him?

Roseanne says the elephant once wanted to sleep with her. She says this about everyone. She said it even about little Charles, dressed in the operatic smock of a Rimsky-Korsakov shepherd, Charles of the *Village Voice*, buried in work. This is not a very normal thing to say. It may seem so to her; I don't know. The truth may be that she slept with the elephant, not merely that he wanted her to, but what business is it of mine, I don't love Roseanne, what do I care.

I don't love Roseanne. I realized it almost at once, after I caught her a few times in that hysterical pose, with her head thrown back, the way a cornered rat looks at you. I don't love her because she doesn't love me, she doesn't love anyone . . . I am firm in the knowledge that I need someone, it makes no difference whether a man or a woman, so long as that someone loves me. I already knew clearly by then—I had become wiser, after all, more normal, and had recently been compelled to think

so much—I knew that my whole life had been a search for love, at times an unconscious search, at times a conscious one.

I had found love—Elena. But, innocent or guilty, in her savage will to destroy she had destroyed everything I had built. That is her custom, to destroy, she has never built anything, only destroyed. Now, for lack of another object, she is destroying herself. I am searching anew. How strange; but it may be that I have the strength for one more love.

I caught myself scanning the men and women in the group with identical interest. It was rather an odd feeling: I sat on Roseanne's soft, perhaps too soft, plastic couch, among her plants, conversed with her guests, all the while thinking about myself and seeking someone for myself. There was no one.

There were dried-up American women intellectuals, I knew all about them: they did not interest me, nor I them. Even crazy Roseanne, with the yellow skin of her broad face stretched in a tight smile, was much better. She at least had an interest in people. No love for them, but an interest in them. She had gathered around her a little knot of freaks, one of whom was me. I am under no delusions—of course I'm a freak. The dried-up thirty-year-old American ladies were not to my taste, they knew it all, and I thought they would be boring to fuck. They had no illusions, they no longer hoped for anything in this life but firmly and dryly went their uninteresting way. Where to? To nowhere, to death, of course, where we all go. Alternating this march with intellectual conversations, they were American-style intellectuals. Had I seen protest in the eyes of even one of them, protest and pain, I would have approached her. No, there was nothing of the sort.

The beefy, bull-like American men, showing the effects of at least three generations of good nutrition, did not interest me either. I grew bored. After exchanging a couple of jokes with the Russians I withdrew again to the penthouse terrace, under the open sky, and busied myself grilling shashlik with Karl. I brought along a bottle of vodka, I like it when I have the bottle handy. Since the place was packed, Roseanne could not enforce her zhlobby German-Jewish-American system of serving up the liquor in "decent" measures without handing a man the bottle, a system that always infuriates and insults me.

I stood the bottle in the shade of the shashlik pot and continued to work, talking back and forth with Karl and his wife and other people who approached the table, and at the same time helped myself to

vodka whenever I felt like it. We had already begun to hand out the shashliks as they got done; being the chef, of course, I was eating one of the first, washing down the meat with more of the same vodka, when suddenly . . .

Suddenly Roseanne led a woman over to me. Bear in mind, I was seeing her for the first and last time. *She . . .* She was a Chinese woman, her father was Chinese, as I later learned, and her mother Russian. She had an uncommonly luminous face. I scrutinized her later, but at the time the only thing that struck my eye was the light of her face, and I saw that she was beautiful. As they wrote in the old Chinese classics, not in the slightest embarrassed by clichés—and I have read quite a few Chinese classics in translation—“She was like the flower of the lotus.” A soft oriental smile played on her lips, and she was gay and sweet, open to the whole world and to me. “This is my best friend,” Roseanne said, “my former roommate.”

The roommate smiled in a way that made me want to embrace her then and there, kiss her, touch her, rub against her, and actually lie down with her right on the spot and caress her, which I did, about an hour later. I always have immediate reactions, they often get me in trouble. This was the second time it had happened to me during my stay in New York. The first time was when I encountered a very beautiful actress named Margot, whom I began to kiss and hug right at a party, in her husband's presence—by coincidence, he was Chinese—and almost went to bed with her. She had on a stunning object, a hat with a feather, hats have always done me in. I whispered wild Russian caresses and diminutives to Margot, words that exist in no other language, she was ashamed, she smiled, turned her face away and said helplessly, “This is scandalous, scandalous,” but plainly she herself liked all this, she saw what she was rousing within me; I did not look altogether like an ordinary cunt-chaser with a hard-on.

That time my wife and someone else dragged me away. Even though she had reached an agreement with me about a free life, Elena was far from delighted with my behavior. True, she attributed her displeasure to the fact that I was behaving indecently. Elena, of course, was the height of decency. If I liked a creature with honey eyes, in a feathered hat, and I showed it, why was it indecent?

This fascinating Chinese girl had a lightning effect on me. All my behavior that night, from then until early morning, was irrational and

subject solely to the unconscious, which, as has been shown by my numerous studies on myself, acts in concert with my conscious. Roseanne led the Chinese girl away to introduce her to others, but now I knew what I had to do. In my terrible agitation—“*She is here! She has come! She is found!*”—I began to drink, of course, and instantly drank off a huge quantity of vodka. I remember I brought out a second bottle and started in on it. Everything after that was told to me by others—Roseanne, and the photographer Seva. I’ll tell you later what they told me, but the night into which I then plunged came to a sudden end, and I beheld myself wet, sitting on the bed in Roseanne’s bedroom.

“What time is it?” I asked.

“Night,” she said.

“Where is everyone?” I asked.

“They all left long ago. You got so drunk you don’t remember anything. We held you under the shower, Karl tried to sober you up, you were in the shower for maybe three hours, but it was no use. How could you get so drunk! I was very ashamed for you, I even cried. True, that black man who makes amulets and necklaces was very drunk too, and your friend the writer was drunk. He and Masha got so drunk, when we dragged you into the shower Masha screamed: ‘Don’t touch him, he’s a great Russian poet! All of you together aren’t worth his fingernail, leave him alone! He does what he needs to! Get away from him, villains!’ She was crazy and drunk,” Roseanne concluded spitefully.

I grinned. Masha was one of us, she had been raised in the best traditions of Moscow’s bohemia, *she* knew what to scream. Masha was a baptized Uzbek. Here in New York she zealously attended church, sang in the choir, but the best traditions of Moscow’s free bohemia were firmly lodged within her. She knew that if your friend was being dragged off, then drunk or not you had to save him, even by screaming. Not for nothing had she been the lover of two consecutive Moscow celebrities, the sculptor Erast Provozvestny and the poet Heinrich Sapgir. Both were renowned for their scandalous alcoholic rows and even brawls. That sort of thing was accepted in the world I came from, it was not considered a disgrace; anyone had the right to relax, if he could and wanted to.

I recalled that today was the Fourth of July, and that I was supposed to fuck Roseanne. My head ached, I could hardly imagine where so many hours of my time had gone to, there wasn’t even a dark hole left

where they had been, those hours; but I was distracted from the discussion. I had to fuck her, otherwise I would cease to respect myself. Later I could try to reconstruct what I had done with those hours, but now I should carry out the promise I had made to myself.

“Come to bed,” I told her. “I want you.”

It was a lie, of course. Although I sometimes did want to fuck her, both before and after this, I didn't want her at all just now, when I was tired and drunk. Nevertheless I forcibly diverted my thoughts from my condition and became absorbed in her body, occupied myself with it.

I remember that after overcoming her halfhearted, nil, resistance, I very attentively undressed her, began to kiss and stroke her. I behaved as I usually did with women, stroked and caressed her, kissed her bosom. I must give her her due: she had a beautiful little bosom, it lay quite tranquil at her age, my new girl friend was past thirty, after all, but she had a beautiful bosom . . . you see, I don't take away what belongs to her. I did all that, and then climbed onto her. I threw one leg over, then the other, and lay down. I am very fond of stroking a woman's neck, chin, and bosom with my hand. I played with them all, and in Roseanne they were ever so slightly weary, autumn was in her body, autumn.

Taking my cock—which, because of my binge, was not obeying me any too well, first it stood up, then it didn't, it keeled over and fell—I touched it to her cunt. Again I give her her due: she had a good cunt, a sweet, succulent, ripe cunt . . . you see all those names. Running my cock along her cunt, which became even hotter at my touch and pleased my cock as it did me, I thrust it into this softness, flow, and succulence. It squeezed its way in there, into this mysterious place. Though taught by bitter experience, I still consider this place mysterious.

I fucked her for quite a while, stimulating and sliding open her sticky canal with my cock. This felt good to me, but even so, because of the six or seven hours I had spent unconscious, my cock did not fill to full strength, my mind and imagination were working much better than my poor flower.

I fucked her awhile, she came, and I hadn't even been properly aroused. But the cunt, I tell you, was all coated with mucus, soft, sucking my cock in. The cunt was not hysterical like Roseanne, it didn't get irritated, didn't shout, it was the cunt of a woman thirty-three or thirty-four years old, a good cunt, which seemed mildly to admonish and soothe. “We shall all die. Be here, here it is warm and moist, burning

and tranquil, and only here does a man feel he is where he belongs.” That was what her cunt said, her soft, plump, yielding cunt, and I agreed. What Roseanne herself said was worse. It would have been all right in English, but she said it in Russian; her Russian lovers and her frequent trips to the USSR were making themselves known.

“You can’t come,” she said in Russian, fucking, and panting a little from the rhythm of the fuck. “You’re too nervous, you’re hurrying, don’t hurry, don’t hurry, darling!”

I would have hit her, only she wouldn’t have understood what for. I could not explain to her that her accented Russian had a terrible effect on me, it made me feel as if I were not in bed but in the grim, squalid office of the Russian émigré newspaper with its peeling walls, dust, stink, and garbage. “You came,” she said—“*ty koncheel*.” At her last thin, misaccented *ee*-sound, an invisible icy hand gripped my cock, and it fell, it faded, my poor ardent flower, once my pride and often my misfortune. I couldn’t. Couldn’t do anything, anything at all . . . and didn’t want to.

Well, I whipped myself into a demoniacal frenzy. I can do that when I have to, I wanted her moans and cries and howls. I pulled my unneeded do-nothing out of her and crawled down, spread her legs, stuck out my tongue, now so essential to me, ran my tongue around my own lips, licked myself once, and then ran it around her genital lips. Oh, did her body appreciate this pleasure. It twitched and became quiet. Then I first checked out all the little corners and culs-de-sac of her cunt, this was essential to me, I knew my business, I needed to test where everything lay, and only then could I begin to act.

I tested. I advanced slowly, testing. I love the smell and taste of the cunt. I have no aversion to it, the cunt. I have love for it. But for Roseanne I had no love. In giving her cunt pleasure, I rejected Roseanne. As I ran my tongue ardently and hotly into the soft canal leading to her womb, listened with pleasure to the quiet sobs of another living being—I love this—I was thinking that this was a most perfect wrong thing.

I could not be happy with her, but since I was in the habit of being happy—the last four years I had been utterly happy with my Elena—I sought happiness out of habit, unmindful that most people simply live in the world without having happiness, men and women have the mutual relationship of a prostitute and her client, all is boring and unbear-

able, and perhaps, God forbid, I would simply find no replica of Elena, no duplicate of her, no, nor a new happiness.

Well, when I was fucking her with my tongue, even though I gave no thought to any of this, I conducted myself properly, of course, I immersed myself in what I was doing, immersed myself in her cunt. My mouth and nose and half my face were covered with sticky mucus, this is the compound they secrete for lubrication so that our cocks may enter, nature made them so. With my hands I stroked all the soft and silky forbidden places near her cunt, around it, in order to create an added ambience of tender lassitude and pleasure, accompanying this with powerful sensations from the constant stimulation of her canal by my tongue.

My friends, she came, giving me a certain pleasure with her moans and ahs, inexpressive though they were. But what a difference it makes, boys, whether the woman you fuck is loved or unloved! A world of difference. Here, if you please, was a good cunt, everything was good, she had good legs, maybe even better than Elena, and good hair; I sought out her virtues, she had them, but she was at least thirty-three, boys, she was a crazy hysteric, and upon her, in addition to the eternal sorrow of the Jewish people, lay the mark of her abnormal personal sorrow as well. I do not condemn her: I myself am not particularly normal, I confess, but I didn't love her, friends, what could I do?

Love turned out to have corrupted me. Love is a kind of sexual perversion, don't you think? It's a rare abnormality, and perhaps it belongs in the medical textbooks ahead of sadism and masochism. I am so alone in my perversion it's hard for me to find a partner.

She came, then I fucked her with my cock, then didn't fuck her, then fucked her again. That whole night left me with the sensation of a sort of fleshy turmoil. Well, I don't know, all men are different, someone else might have found it good. Both before my time and after and during, Roseanne had admirers, quite decent-looking fellows. I've probably been knocked fucking stupid by love, because several of them, whom I knew quite well, really coveted Roseanne.

At last we lay motionless, sprawled on her yellow sheets in a troubled, awkward, and brief morning slumber. You know what time she woke up? Guess! Six. Enough to drive you fucking crazy. She woke up and lay there, she was angry, then she started to get up.

"Do you know what you did yesterday?" she asked me. For some

reason, along with a tormenting desire to sleep, my sense of humor had returned to me. I had never thought the two could be coupled, humor and sleep.

"I don't remember anything," I said, wrapping myself up in the red-flowered yellow sheet, wrapping up just a little. To be exact, wrapping only my dick. Even for her, I was not averse to exhibiting my beautiful body once more in a beautiful pose. I loved my body; what do you expect.

"Don't you remember, you were hugging Lily," she said passionately. The Chinese girl, it turned out, was named Lily. She really was a lily.

"I hugged Lily!" I said in a shocked voice. "What, is that true, Roseanne? Oh God, how could it happen, how could I get that drunk! You know, there've been times in my life when I've had terrible pathological intoxications. A few times. Once when I was seeing off my friend Oleg Chikovani, he was leaving the USSR, I drank two glasses of dry wine and didn't wake up till the next morning. They even rubbed me with snow, but I didn't come to. And another time I got so drunk that for some reason I made a pass at my best friend's wife, got my hand up under her skirt," I went on in the remorseful voice of a great martyr and sufferer, "and I lost my friend forever."

Of what I told her, the first item was true and the second half true. I had gotten up under the skirt of a certain lady the first time we met, but the lady so loved poets, and her husband didn't give a damn who got under her skirt. Besides, her husband wasn't with her, it was my friend Dima, a handsome poet and at that time her lover. He was offended at me, but not for long.

"Don't be angry at me, Roseanne," I said passionately, "it's my misfortune, it's my disease. Everyone in our family was alcoholic," I said without a trace of embarrassment. "My uncle the doctor died under the wheels of a train. I hadn't told you, I'm ashamed to tell, but now I'm forced to. I'm holding my own, but it's a hereditary disease, sometimes I don't have the strength to fight it." Moved by the solemnity of the moment and the secret I was supposedly confiding, I even sat up in bed.

My brazen lie made an impression on her. She looked at me attentively, sighed, and said, "Yes, I thought you had something the matter with you. But I thought you were conscious and wanted to get back at me for not giving you enough attention. I saw you were nervous, but it was a party, there were so many people, one asking where's the salt,

another where's the pepper, a third where's something else, I got so tired.

"Lily should have left," she went on. "Everyone saw you in each other's arms, that's bad, why do Russians always get so drunk. We had interesting people, this poet, George, we planned to read some poetry, then we thought you'd read too. But why did your friend get drunk?" she said. "Why are you Russians forever getting drunk? Masha got drunk. We had a drunk Russian poet lying in one corner, a drunk Russian writer in the other."

"I've told you why I got drunk," I said ruefully. "It doesn't happen often, only when I'm very nervous. In a calm mood I'm perfectly normal. Often I don't have the strength to fight my disease," I concluded, and assumed a bleak, humble expression. "Forgive me, Roseanne," I added.

Sober Seva, the photographer, later told me that the Chinese girl was fucking terrific, that I had made no mistake, and that although he, Seva, was with his wife, he had nevertheless counted on getting something going with her, but when he was ready to make his move he saw that I was already lying down—lying down, you notice—with my arms around her, kissing her, and saying something, all but making love, in front of everyone.

"And how did she react to it?" I asked Seva.

"She lay there, she felt awkward, of course, there was a crowd of people around, but you could see she was enjoying it, she was giggling. Roseanne chased her out, Roseanne even cried, she was so furious. When you have a girl friend like that, don't invite her," Seva concluded philosophically.

Seva reported all this to me later. But even that morning it was clear to me what I had done with Lily. I knew myself well.

"Yes, you were nervous because I wasn't paying attention to you," Roseanne persuaded herself. I had begun sinking into a doze, which was about to turn into sweet slumber. You think I fell asleep? Fuck no. She wouldn't let me. The love of order that she had brought from Germany summoned her to clean the apartment. Since I was in the house, she had to make use of me. Subsequently I was amazed by her ability to use me and evidently everyone else. If I was going out, even after making love, even at two in the morning, she did not forget to hand me a bag of garbage, which I was supposed to stick in the garbage chute on my way. If I came to her penthouse to get a tan, she always thought up some job

for me—first I had to help her transplant flowers, then it was some other equally urgent matter . . .

Even that morning she wouldn't let me sleep. Instead of lying there, sleeping, waking up, and loving each other—despite all, we had become lovers that night—I was forced to crawl out to the living room, reeling with fatigue and barely propping up my eyelids with my hands to keep my eyes from closing. Then, like sleepy flies, she a spiteful and irritated fly and I an unhappy one submitting to someone else's will, we had breakfast on the veranda.

It was all in small quantities, but nicely served. I would have preferred to eat without plates, but more of it. She was muttering and practically weeping, kept going to the telephone, having long conversations, not forgetting to report that she had had a party yesterday and the Russians had been very drunk.

I drank from a big jug of wine, I had a splitting headache from the sun. A bright red tomato lay cut open on the table, a little breeze was blowing, there seemed to be all the makings of a good mood and happiness, if it weren't for Roseanne. I drank wine; people had brought so much that there was a month's supply left, she had told everyone to bring wine, everyone had obediently done so.

I drank three glasses of California chablis from a gallon jug, dreadful shit. I must say I would have preferred a bottle of beaujolais. I saw Roseanne had five or six bottles of good wine left; why drink shit if you can drink good wine? But she didn't offer it to me, and I didn't want to start a conversation about wine with her when she was irritated, she wouldn't have understood. Subsequently she always gave me bad wine, although she had good wine, French or Spanish, lying right next to it.

The general principle is correct, you know, thrifty. Why waste bad wine. She always asked me, "What, is the wine bad?" But she couldn't fight herself, she always invariably gave me the bad. Poor girl, what psychic torment I caused her. Sometimes I wanted to bawl, "Yes, the wine's bad! Bad! Shitty! Give me that one over there, Roseanne, the Spanish one! I know what's what in wine, why begrudge the good stuff, woman? You don't buy it, after all, people bring it. So let's have it! And not in a piddling glass, drag out the bottle!"

Oh, I never did say it. My mama had taught me, and so had my papa—Communist and political instructor, worked in the MVD's secret police force—they taught me while they could, my parents did: "Don't

throw people's weaknesses up to them, Edichka; pity them, don't hurt them. He who has a weakness is already hurt!"

I felt no malice toward her, toward Roseanne. Well, was it her fault if she was stingy by my standards? She had been born in this world, where children were not raised to be carefree idlers and wastrels. The gesture, the display, the overgenerosity that suited us barbarians, us Georgians and Russians—according to one anecdote, a Georgian leaves his overcoat as a tip for the doorman and instead of saying "Keep the change!" says "Keep the coat!"—this was hardly necessary in a young lady from a Jewish family that had emigrated from Germany.

"You've come to an alien land, be patient, they have different customs here," I told myself with anguish, watching the wine in my glass diminish at each swallow. Thank God, while she was on the phone I managed to drain my glass twice more, since it hardly showed on the gallon jug.

"Does she understand that I can view her this way, from such an unexpected angle?" I wondered. "She should have foreseen it; after all, she's been to Russia."

Oh, it may be petty, but this was what formed my image of her. I was open, so help me, I was open to people; I stopped at any word on the street; I sought love, wanted love, and could give it myself; but I couldn't give it when things were this way. All this stuck in my mind, you can't cast out your petty displeasures. Even when I fucked her I could not forget this pettiness, could not separate her sweet cunt from her stinginess—stinginess in my view, gentlemen, only in my view. To you, perhaps, it's the rule.

I didn't thrust my preference on her. But if she had good wine and we were lovers, I simply could not comprehend why she didn't give it to me. I, after all, begrudged nothing, gentlemen. Such feasts I put on for my guests in Russia, even though a poor man! To celebrate my birthday, for instance, I went to the bazaar with friends and bought fifty pounds of meat, gentlemen, and invited forty people, and bought liquor the Russian way, allowing a bottle of vodka per boy, a bottle of wine per girl. I spent all my money, to my last kopeck, and at times I also borrowed. I had no bank accounts, I cared little what the morrow would bring. "God will give the day, God will give us food," as my grandma Vera used to say.

Guests at my house ate, drank, and when in their cups often fought with their host. Now I am dirt, a beggar, in an alien land, but even so

I'm always having someone over to eat. And I am not the only such exceptional good fellow. My neighbor Edik Brutt feeds everyone too, if he has anything himself. First of all give a man food and drink. Then you're a friend to him.

In sum, I understood that we were from different worlds, yet I couldn't help myself. I was demanding that Roseanne fulfill barbarian customs of hospitality. But she was a civilized lady.

After breakfast that day I felt exhausted, sat there lazily sprawled in the chair, and naturally didn't want to take a cleaning compound to the floor, which had been trampled to mud the day before. I wanted to stare unblinkingly at the water of the Hudson River, and let the breeze cool my forehead, and fall asleep with my arms on the table in this bright apartment, and have Roseanne become the young Elena, the way she used to be.

Sleep, hell. The lady threw a fit of hysterics, as a result of which, almost with tears in her eyes, she darkly posed the issue point-blank: Either I cleaned the apartment or I had to go home. It was also said that if I was sleepy I could go and sleep in her bedroom, but given the tone of voice in which it was said, how could I possibly go and sleep! I didn't want to quarrel with her; moreover, I felt, despite all, that I was to blame. There was a large element of Russian swinishness in my Bicentennial Celebration behavior. There was, I confess. Since I was to blame, I confess, but I'm poor unlucky Eddie, put yourself in my place.

I washed the floor for her, I vacuumed her wonderful, brightest-in-the-world hallway, her bedroom, and all the other rooms. I did it all, to the ruin of my health. This was the greatest violence I had ever done to myself, the most inconvenient hangover. But for the shitty wine that I had drunk during her long, dreary phone conversations, I could not have coped with the cleaning, I'd have fallen by the wayside. Almost soaring above myself, rising above my own hangover thanks to Roseanne, I suddenly saw that there was strength even beyond the limits of strength.

After a while some neighbors visited her, they lived two floors below. The woman was a mixture of Jew and American Indian, I don't know which tribe. "They're like the Russians, their national disease is drunkenness!" Roseanne remarked to me in Russian. "Her father is an alcoholic!"

This exploiter had revived after my heroic feat and looked satisfied.

One thing remained unclear: Why hadn't she cleaned the apartment herself, instead of bitching on the telephone or trailing around with some object in her hands? Why did her apartment have to be cleaned by crazy drunken Eddie on welfare? Who the fuck knows, even now it's unclear to me. She and I had known each other six days, no more. She may have felt that I was guilty before her and should therefore expiate my guilt through chore duty. But what was I guilty of? I hadn't even told her I loved her, hadn't been able to wring the words out.

We sat on the balcony, I mean on her terrace, and she asked would these people have some sausages, and would I have sausages. I said yes. "How many?" she asked. "Two? Three?" She didn't say "four" or "five." I said three. I could have said not a one, but man is weak, I was hungry, couldn't resist, I said three. "He eats so much!" she told them, by way of a joke. After that occasion, proud and morbidly touchy Eddie ate at her house only when she had guests. I always refused to eat when we were alone; I felt uncomfortable for her, didn't want to put her in an awkward position. Moreover, her food didn't fill me up, yet I could not say that two or even three sausages (which was obviously the height of gluttony in her opinion) weren't enough for me, that I didn't even consider this to be food. I stopped eating at her house, and she doesn't suggest it anymore.

Everything I observed in her was extremely interesting to me. Thanks to her I became familiar with several definite, though not very vividly manifested, character traits of Western woman. I can't say that I studied her on purpose; in the beginning I thought that by making some concessions to myself I might even come to like her a little. To this end I imagined that she was unhappy, and began to pity her. The illusion of her unhappiness didn't last long. She was a schiz, yes, but she was a demanding and practical schiz.

As the sun went down that day, she read my book *We Are the National Hero* to the visiting couple, in English; since the manuscript consisted of short pieces, it could be read in one sitting. The book had been lying around her house for quite a while, and to judge by the interest with which she read, she was reading it for the first time. I listened, my face was indifferent and ironic, but inwardly I was very angry. "How can she be so incurious?" I thought. After all, she found me interesting, she was calling me two or three times a day, inviting me over, and in the end she had fucked me, and wanted to, until I presently

put a stop to it myself because of my obvious lack of need to do it with her. And she hadn't found the time to read my book. This was the whole thing, this was the solution to the calm riddle of this woman. She needed me, as she needed others in this world, only to the extent that I could be useful to her, to Roseanne. She couldn't give me even the small fraction of her time, even the thirty or forty minutes, required to read my book. Could she really have no interest in what he wrote, this Russian (or Japanese, Chinese, Indian) who was fucking her now?

No, she had no fucking interest. Everyone wants to be loved. We all want it, from the street bum who spends the night on benches to the holder of a huge fortune. And no one wants to do the loving himself. True, there is love in me, a useless love for a woman who does not need me, for Elena. But, frankly speaking, I sometimes have a suspicion even about myself. Were I not now a destitute man on welfare—suppose a wealthy lover were to show up tomorrow, a man or woman who would suddenly fall in love with me—in my new situation of love and wealth I might forget Elena. Not all at once, gentlemen, but gradually, might I not forget? But I have had no chance to test my suspicions, and never will have. Fate offers only one solution.

Sometimes Roseanne was rather sweet. When she looked at herself in the mirror, trying on a dress, she was always free of grimaces. Nearly all the rest of the time there was a nervous grimace present on her face, a kind of tic. It made her simply ugly. I have already said that I loved sitting in her living room at the table by the long glass wall, all the windows of the hallway and living room looked out on the Hudson River; I loved to sit and be silent. Darkness came on, and a little breeze blew on my face, and the lights burned in New Jersey on the other shore, and my heart felt so strange in my utter loneliness, and although Roseanne would say something sometimes about what good friends we were and how nice it was that we were friends, or she would complain, why had I forgotten that I was her friend . . . I heard little of it and looked at the water and was intimate with the breeze.

Ten days or so after the Fourth of July I fucked her again, this time with greater success, but also, as it were, in shame that I wasn't justifying her hopes, wasn't fucking her. In the line of duty, so to speak. I fucked her, and naturally went on lying in her bed; she was sleepy from her medicines but was still tossing and turning.

Suddenly I remembered a story of Slava-David's, about a certain New

York girl who had hysterically chased him out after passionate lovemaking, because, you see, she couldn't sleep with men, wasn't used to it. Love is love, but sleep must be sterile, deep, calm.

Remembering this, and respecting the freedom of the individual—I was not, after all, in the USSR—I asked sleepy, tossing Roseanne if she wouldn't like to be left alone; even though it was late I wouldn't mind going home. My ulterior motive was to escape from the morning, from her jumping up at six o'clock and the whole hysterical morning environment.

But now she rose to the occasion. Yes, she was unaccustomed to sleeping in the same bed with anybody, she had slept alone all her life, but it was already late, I would wait a long time for the subway, therefore I should stay.

I felt sincerely sorry for Roseanne for having lived all her life like this, in desultory fucking. She fucked rather a lot, I think, but had never known the incredible happiness of sleeping entwined in one mass with a loved one, of feeling, in the middle of the night, the sleepy breath of another living creature on one's own shoulder. Even when Elena and I no longer made love we slept together, and at times, in her sleep, she put her arm around me, and I would lie awake holding my breath all night, afraid to stir lest that little arm disappear, go away. Tears would flow down my cheeks, not from any fucking weakness but from love. Ah, poor crazy Roseanne. I felt sorry for her.

Morning came. The pale dawn of a cloudy day penetrated the bedroom, and I discovered myself fucking Roseanne from behind, having set her on her knees. Gripping her butt, I thought: Lord, how boring it all is this way, without love, the morning is boring and the dawn is gray, how uninteresting it all is, I've even lost my hard-on.

The people who gathered at her place were defective. Once a man came who was sick with an incurable venereal disease. The disease would go away temporarily but then reappear. I had never heard of such a case, but here before me sat a live specimen. Roseanne, like a good tour guide, told me about the details of his disease, about the fact that his wife had now left him. Despite my own inglorious situation, my habit of ridicule was so deeply entrenched that I guffawed inwardly, admiring our company. He, sick with this crud; I, sick with love; and she, too, sick with her own disease. The three sickies went to a film and then to a little

restaurant where, even though I was hungry, I did not eat, only drank a glass of rosé. The venereal paid, and I was obliged to thank him. "Thanks," I said to him, because I had no money. Roseanne told me to: "Thank him," she said. I thanked him.

Gradually I reached the conclusion that I had no fucking need of her. Except that I kept up the relationship with her for the sake of having at least some sort of involvement in American life, seeing at least some sort of people. This was soothing to me. It's not true that I thought ill of her, I thought well of her; that morning it was just that I thought I wanted a sweet young girl, naïve, touching, and beautiful, not a fully formed monster. But life didn't offer me any such girl, I had only two or three people to serve as my entrées into this world, and in order to find such a girl or man—as I have said, by now it was all the same to me—I had to meet her or him somewhere.

Where? My friends the Glickermans had obviously turned their backs on me because of my attempt to strangle Elena. A man like that, they thought, might do anything at all. I called Tatyana perhaps five times that spring, wanting to get together, but each time she postponed my visit under some pretext, until I understood clearly that I couldn't fight my way in there. And why should I! I spoke badly, wasn't a fascinating conversationalist, why should I go to their parties. I, a welfare recipient, ought to associate with people like myself, and not go social-climbing among artists and writers, not fill up the Glickermans' living room with my presence, not hobnob with Avedon and Dali. I stopped calling them.

My other acquaintances, too, obviously did not hold me in the highest repute because of my strangling Elena. That barbarian and scoundrel Eddie really had turned out to be an utter nobody in this world. As you see, I had no place to get appropriate acquaintances, I was stifling without a milieu, and that was another reason I didn't break off with Roseanne. I too was calculating to the best of my abilities.

I say "was," but I might as well say "am." This period is not over, I am in it, in this period, even at the present time. This period of my life is characterized by an unconscious new habit of mine, a completely unconscious saying. Often when in my room or walking along the street at night, I have caught myself maliciously pronouncing one and the same phrase, sometimes aloud, sometimes to myself or in a whisper: "You can all go straight to hell!" Sounds good, doesn't it? "You can all

go straight to hell!" Good. Very good. That applies to the whole world. And what would you say if you were in my shoes?

Roseanne was working on a dissertation, I think she wanted to get her Ph.D. in philology. My feeling was, and still is, that nobody fucking needs those dissertations except for the people who defend them, as I declared to Roseanne with all lack of ceremony back in the early days of our acquaintanceship, at which she took offense. She was obsessed with her dissertation, but she was doing it slowly and in my view spent more time bitching on the phone than writing the dissertation. Nevertheless, she always talked about her work, mentioned that she was working, and anyone who didn't know her might have thought she was a very businesslike person. Having lived here, I am convinced that people here generally work not more but less than in Russia, yet they are very fond of talking about their work and how much they work. In the USSR it's the other way around: the nation traditionally considers itself an unbusinesslike nation, but in reality many people work much harder and more productively than American gentlemen. Maybe I'm unjust. But of course I am, and I don't want to be just. I told Roseanne about it, told her that you Americans are very fond of making a big deal out of your work and how busy you are. Roseanne was offended on behalf of the American people and her dissertation, but it was so.

Whereas I could write in one morning, between eight and twelve or one o'clock, an average of five to ten pages, she barely eked out two, she said. I wrote my articles for *Russkoe Delo*, when I worked there, in two or three hours, and published more than twenty of them in six months. By now it's autumn, and to this day she has not been able to write, as that same Charles of the *Village Voice* requested, a background article on the open letter Alexander and I wrote to the editor of the *New York Times*. It has to be done well, she says, she can't hurry it, and she does nothing. But she and I are equally sick, I perhaps more so.

I stopped making love with her, I don't know how she felt about this, she didn't stop calling me. No, she considers me her friend, and I feel awkward telling her it's not so. I have nobody, I can't spit on her, turn around and leave. Especially since I'm beginning to think that she's the only person who for some reason needs me. She has already called me several times at moments when I was very low. I am needed, you see, but only by a crazy woman. She herself says, "I'm paranoid." On the

wall in her study hangs a saying of Bakunin's: "I shall remain an impossible person until such time as all possible persons cease to be so." This saying, on a poster, is a remnant of her stormy youth, her participation in the struggle against the Vietnam war, her college teaching, student meetings, little leftist newspapers.

As it happens she really is an impossible person in this world, but to what degree am I, then, an impossible person? I must be a *monstrously* impossible person. I was an impossible person even there, in the country that gave birth to Bakunin; here my nonconformism is merely more colorful, more shrill, and takes more loathsome forms.

Ah, fuck it. Once Roseanne was having company. She asked me to come a little late, as if I had dropped by accidentally. The whole group was sitting on the terrace when I burst in. There were her new lover, Joe; Joe's friend, a boastful photographer, with his wife; and some German guy that Roseanne, who spoke German fluently—it was the language of her childhood—had picked up on the street.

Joe was a very common-looking man in a red shirt. He talked very rapidly and somehow harshly. I thought he might have been in prison, he bore some imprint. In the USSR I had observed the same thing in Daniel—you've probably heard about the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel. Well, I once observed Daniel drunk. After spending six years in prison, when he got drunk he resembled a drunken criminal. Not that he behaved badly in any way, no, he was merely drunk, didn't insult anyone, didn't harass anyone. But his face, his manners, the way he gesticulated, the set of his body, made him a drunken criminal. Joe was the same way that night, he struck me as a drunken criminal. And it turned out he really was. Sometime later Roseanne called me and said Joe had confessed to her that he had done time for dealing in drugs. I was proud of my perspicacity, though the whole world lives by the same laws and it's not surprising that I, who was already thirty, knew those laws.

Roseanne and Joe were fucking; if I had felt even a flicker of displeasure over this fact . . . nothing of the kind, shit, I was glad for her that someone was fucking her. It was nice he was fucking her, why not? Now she seems to have gotten tired of Joe and parted company with him, she didn't want to go away with him for the weekend. "He'll get me upset," she said. She doesn't want to get upset, doesn't give a shit about other people's problems. Besides, he drinks all the time. He's a sculptor, this Joe; maybe I'll have to see his sculptures sometime. He had in mind a

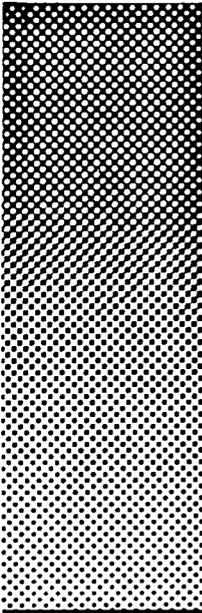
rather crazy scheme to show his slides on the surface of the World Trade Center downtown, only I don't know whether it was the first tower or the second.

I wasn't at all antagonized by them, I listened attentively to the conversation, but didn't find it interesting to sit with them. They didn't argue about anything, didn't focus critically on anything, they bypassed all the critical places, laughed without apparent reason, the whole conversation was built up out of little anecdotes, out of tiny particles—funny incidents or funny words. I find it hard to say whether it's only they, “the Americans,” who are uninteresting, or whether people in general have become uninteresting to me. I think it's that people in general have become uninteresting to Eddie, the ones who are only for themselves, about themselves, unto themselves. Russians are even more uninteresting to me than Americans. I'm in a lousy situation, really bad.

Roseanne is plain as day to me, so well defined that she irritates me. As you see, I can't even use her as a woman. I can't force myself even to that.

Sometimes I even seem proud of my satiety and the fact that I can calmly *not* use a sweet cunt. This circumstance, engendered of course by my tragedy, separates me from those who get for themselves, love themselves, live for themselves. If I knew that Roseanne needed me, that I could save her, help her, make her different, I would give myself; in essence, it doesn't matter to me now where I throw myself, if only I could give myself completely. But I can no longer help her. No one can.

She and I are drifting ever farther apart, chance acquaintances who met a few times on her yellow sheets. Eddie-baby carries away with him only the soft breeze from the Hudson River, the lights of New Jersey on the other shore, and a piece of Debussy's that she used to play.



# I MAKE MONEY

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One morning I was awakened by a call from John. “Come on down, Ed!” he said in English. Two minutes later I was downstairs and into the cab of the truck that stood by the entrance.

I was off to make myself some money. Anytime anyone offers me work, I don’t turn it down. These times are few, and in practice my sole source of work is John. He is my boss and the only person I know at the renowned Beautiful Moving Company.

John—formerly Ivan—is a fascinating person. A seaman who defected from a Soviet fishing vessel in the straits of Japan. In an inflatable rubber boat, riding the current off the Japanese coast, he survived a gale and was picked up by Japanese fishermen. From Japan he applied to go to the States.

John is a manly-looking guy, tall and strong, slightly snubnosed, the same age as Eddie. A Jack London character. He speaks English exclusively. The words are horribly mispronounced, with a dreadful wooden accent, but it’s English. He still condescends to speak Russian with me; he’s more severe with others. This version of the “man of the people” is very familiar to me; the desire not to be Russian, the scorn for Russia, for its people and language, are also familiar. My friend Paul, though with certain deviations, was almost the same type. His story is less successful than John’s but even more colorful.

God knows where Paul contracted his Francomania. Born Pavel Shemetov, the son of ordinary working parents, he lived in a small

private house on the outskirts of Kharkov. During his four years in the navy, where he served as a seaman (John was navy too!), Pavel learned the French language down to the last detail. At the time I became acquainted with him his French was very sophisticated, he could speak with a Marseilles, Paris, or Breton accent at will. The French tourists who now and then passed through Kharkov on their way south—we picked them up, on Paul's initiative, in order to drink vodka with them by the fence of the Metropolitan's house, on a hill overlooking Kharkov, and barter goods with them—honestly took him for a repatriate, there had been many repatriates to the USSR from France.

Paul was madly in love with France. He knew all the French chansonniers, among whom he was especially fond of Aznavour and Brel. On the wall of his room, in oil, Paul had painted a huge portrait of Aznavour that covered the whole wall. I remember he once sang "Amsterdam!" for us, in a narrow, piss-puddled gateway on Sumskaya Street, the main street of our native Kharkov. When he imitated Jacques Brel, he puffed up and turned all purple. He had less ability and skill than Brel, but probably no less enthusiasm.

From photographs, drawings, and plans of Paris, Paul learned all of its streets, lanes, and culs-de-sac. He painted watercolors of them in great number. I think he could have walked through Paris with his eyes closed and not gotten lost. Names like Place Pigalle, Café Blanche, Étoile, and Montmartre had for him the ring of unearthly music. He was frenchified to the point of pathology. He refused to talk to people in Russian, he did not enter into conversations on buses or streetcars. "I don't understand," he would say curtly. He still made an exception for us, his friends, but only for us. Even at that, I think he inwardly scorned us for not knowing French.

He was working then at a tannery. I don't know exactly what he did there, but he did heavy, nasty work for almost two years—he wanted clothes. Somewhere in the labyrinth of Moskalevka, the Jewish quarter, he found an old Jewish shoemaker, and the man made him some high boots, with high heels too, "like the Beatles." I forgot to mention that Paul loved the Beatles. With the help of the niece of the wife I had then, I made him a three-piece suit from a striped fabric, and a great many pairs of striped slacks. I remember that he liked his slacks very long, practically lying in folds at the bottom. It was an oddity of his.

Paul became frenchified to such a degree that even outwardly—I am

thinking particularly of his face—he ceased to look Russian and really did recall a Frenchman, most probably a resident of a small town in Brittany. Many times, back in Russia, when studying Western illustrated magazines, I encountered faces surprisingly reminiscent of my poor friend Paul's.

His fate is tragic. He matured too early, while it was still impossible to emigrate from the USSR: they were not yet letting the Jews out; the practice of exposing undesirable elements and ejecting them abroad did not yet exist. It was too early, but Paul was already ripe. He so wanted to leave that hated country for his beloved France, the paradise that he had created for himself in his imagination. I don't know whether he would have been happy in that paradise. He might have been. I do know of three attempts he made to escape from the Soviet Union.

The first went unnoticed. On leaving the tannery, Paul, who had accumulated a little money, began to spend a lot of time downtown, visiting the cafés and the not very numerous vice dens of Kharkov. Somewhere down there he became acquainted with Bunny, a large and rather cute girl whom the whole city knew as a prostitute; he married her and moved in with her. Her mother was a tradeswoman. By paying off a few policemen she had succeeded in getting around Soviet law and was making money buying hard-to-get goods in one city and selling them in another. She converted her son-in-law Paul to this business. One time she sent him to Armenia. There he learned of a high official who was taking huge sums for illegally sending people to Turkey. Ostensibly they were hired for the job of building a highway. Part of the highway was being built on Turkish territory. Paul was unlucky. When he arrived at the border the chief was already in prison.

The second attempt was the ruin of Paul's whole life. He was ready to burst, desperately seeking a way out. He would come to me in Moscow and say nothing, stare into space all day, distraught; in the evening he would disappear, starting out for suspicious addresses. Then he went away.

I later learned that he had gone south to Novorossisk, and there had managed to reach an agreement with some sailors from a French ship that they would hide him and take him out of the USSR. But Dame Fortune evidently did not favor Paul. One of the crew turned out to be a man who worked for Soviet customs. Such cases are said to be frequent—these are paid informers. On the basis of his denunciation, at the

outer roadstead at Batum, the last Soviet port on the Black Sea—beyond it lay Turkey—the ship was detained, a search was made, and they pulled Paul from his hideaway. They found on him political caricatures of Soviet heads of state. There was a trial, and . . . here, at least he had a small piece of luck, if you can call it that: he was judged insane.

I don't know whether he really was. I suppose he was. I don't think he was born insane, but there was something pathological about him, and it must have developed gradually. He hated Russia too much, immoderately. "Tribe of goats," "imbeciles," "queerstabulary," "Communists"—these were his usual words, spoken many times a day. He addressed them not only to Communists, but also to ordinary innocent philistines.

They kept him in the mental hospital for a year, and before long he was sitting again on a bench near the Shevchenko monument in Kharkov, smoking a cigarette and glancing occasionally at his daughter Fabiana, who played by his Beatles boots. He talked to no one. Then he suddenly disappeared.

No one knew where he was or what had happened to him, until an inquiry arrived at the mental hospital in Kharkov from the western border of the USSR, from the Carpathians, requesting them to forward the medical record of a Pavel Shemetov, who had been arrested while illegally crossing the western border of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the vicinity of city X.

A sad story, isn't it? I, little Eddie, remember yet another detail. Years ago, back before the navy, Paul got married. There was a wedding reception. All the guests got dead drunk, but even so there wasn't enough liquor. The bride, by now his wife, sent Paul for beer, she had an urge for beer. When Paul came back from the store with the case of beer, he discovered his bride in one of the rooms fucking his best friend . . . Nice . . . Perhaps it was then that he came to hate the filth and vileness of this world. The only thing he didn't know, poor guy, was that filth and vileness existed everywhere. And how could he know, poor guy, that it was not the Russian people who were at fault here, nor the Communist system.

Paul's further fate, after the letter from the Carpathians, is unknown to me.

But let us return to John. John had much less education than Paul. Paul was almost an intellectual. And he was straining toward France as

the world of art, as an Eden. John was guided by far more practical considerations. He came to America to get rich, become a millionaire. And I'm sure he will. I do not have a very clear idea who owns Beautiful Moving. John takes care of all the business. He's the driver, he's also a helper and an administrator. He hires us, the helpers, at his own discretion. And the orders come to his, John's, telephone. Evidently the owner merely gives him the money, or gave it to him, the original capital.

We move people from apartment to apartment. Sometimes people move within the confines of one neighborhood, sometimes from state to state. From New Jersey to Pennsylvania, from New York to Massachusetts. The long moves are more interesting. By now I've seen a number of small towns, all similar to one another, in five or six eastern states, mainly in New England. If we ride together, then either we are silent, in which case I study the landscape along the road, or else the taciturn John suddenly begins to tell stories about his life on the trawler. The Jack London hero can't hold out, he cracks, talks about himself a little, insofar as his frugal, stern nature allows.

Usually this happens in the middle of the day. In the morning he is silent as a statue. When I jump into the cab with him, he utters only a short "Hi!" I may address him after that, but you can be damn sure I don't get much of an answer. I'm used to him and remain silent too. Basically I like him, I like his face, figure, character. Among the spineless bellyaching intellectuals who have come to America, he is a pleasant exception—a simple, ordinary man. A curiosity. He's a tough guy. He doesn't argue, he works very hard and is saving money in order to open his own business. He's a genuine Russian, although he once said he didn't give a fuck about his nationality. Despite what he says, he can't escape it—he's Russian, like me. Russian even in that he doesn't want to be Russian.

As I said, he's a very tough guy. Doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, saves his money, lives in a bad neighborhood, and shares an apartment with someone else. He's very deft at handling his heavy truck. In some ways I envy him, my agemate, although little Eddie is a tough guy too, on the whole. I don't know whether he, John, associates with women. This question interests me to a certain degree; they say he fucks some woman from whom he supposedly rents the truck. Maybe she's his boss, too—one and the same person? I could easily find out about company affairs from John, but I don't want to appear curious. In the final analysis, I

need my \$4 an hour, which I earn by lugging other people's furniture up and down in elevators and stairways. Besides, I am interested to see other people's apartments—things tell me much about their owners.

I am John's chief helper now. Evidently he considers me a good one. He has had other helpers too. The dissident Yury Fein, a man of about forty-five, known mainly for being married to the sister of the first wife of our celebrity, our prophet, Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Then there's Shneerson, also a dissident, a man who arrived in Israel in Soviet prison garb, a professor's fat son. Shneerson quickly got out of Israel and is now on welfare. I have already mentioned that it was he who led me—half dead, my mind not functioning, my arm streaming pus—to the welfare center and got them to put me on welfare inside of a day. "Emergency situation!"

I remember how wide-eyed and astonished the Americans at the welfare center were when wheezing, fat, disheveled Shneerson pointed at me, a pale man with idiotically short-cropped hair, and explained to them that I had an emergency situation, I was in a terrible state, my wife had left me. They were astonished, perhaps even amused. Most of them, being aloof and self-involved, could hardly have loved another person so madly. But I must give them their due, they did not dispute my right to be the way I was. If the departure of a woman was an emergency situation for the Russians, so that they couldn't eat, drink, work, or keep an apartment—well, then that's the way they were, the Russians. What the hell, let's give the man welfare.

That may have been exactly how they thought. Or maybe, as many émigrés claim, Welfare has a secret order from the American government to give welfare to all Russians who want it, in order to avoid exasperating people and appearing ridiculous in front of world society with their much-vaunted system, which is supposed to have room for everyone. A great many Russians are on welfare. I think Soviet émigrés should be sent to the welfare center straight off the airplane. Having counted on mountains of gold here, they are utterly unable to assimilate the modest philosophy of the Western laborer. If they have to be like everyone else, then what was the point in coming? Here the ordinary man pronounces with pride: "I am like everyone else."

Yes, but John. I was talking about him. It's amusing that all of us—intellectuals, poets, and dissidents—are under an ordinary guy from a fishing trawler. He has proved to be much better adapted to this life than

we are. He does his business seriously and punctiliously. You should see the way he walks into the apartment of someone who is moving, records the place on the contract form, and demands the client's signature. All this is done very importantly. His file folder looks important, the clamp on his clipboard sparkles, and we stand at his back—some, like Fein, very rightist; others, like me, very leftist; still others, like Shneerson, undecided—holding in readiness the dollies for moving furniture, the straps and the packing quilts. We wait for a signal from our businessman, John.

I find all this to be terrible foolishness, both my participation in moving other people's belongings from one place to another, and this Fein, who is forever praising America and its wise government. He even considers the Bowery and its dirty, piss-soaked inhabitants to be the result of a government plan to concentrate all beggars, alcoholics, and drug addicts in one place, the more easily to help them. My participation is terrible foolishness, but my \$278 welfare is so inadequate for me that I participate in this foolishness anyway; I too am a man and need money. That is why the rightist Fein grabs the right side of the piano, and I, the extreme leftist, the left side—and here we go!

Admittedly, I need the money only for clothes, my single weakness. I have always found the acquisition of other things disgusting, and the experience of moving other people's belongings, the spectacle of the silly heavy sofas, the buffets, the thousands, the hundreds of thousands of petty objects, has strengthened my aversion to the world of things. The owner will die, and all this shit will remain. "Never!" I whisper to myself, as I lug some Patrick's buffet up the stairs to the fourth floor, without an elevator. "I don't give a flying fuck for this old junk. *No* to things!" I say to myself. The only thing I cannot resist, alas, is beautiful clothes.

The signature is affixed. The missus has signed. From this moment on, an invisible meter counts out our pennies. We begin to move like automated dolls. Pick up, place on the dolly, turn, roll, lift at the threshold or the step, roll again . . . move, unscrew mirrors, wrap them in special quilts . . . monotonous, rhythmic operations, varying only in the size of the object and the turns on the staircase, the approach to the elevator, the steps down to the street, and the weather.

We're rather a cheap company; some of our customers are émigrés, because we advertise in *Russkoe Delo* as well as the American papers. Émigrés most often live in poor neighborhoods, they have precious little

in the way of belongings. Sometimes we have to move crazy old ladies to the poorhouse and carry off their dirty odds and ends of trash.

Once we even moved iron beds with flat springs, beds for two girls of sixteen and twenty, beds they had brought from the USSR. But the girls were darling, with their neat little poopkas and high heels, Jewish girls bursting with their own juice; I feel like saying the banal, and I will: "girls with the eyes of little young lambs," bulging eyes, silly and trusting. I am not very fond of brunettes, but I feel a kind of gratitude toward Jewish girls. A Russian poet cannot help loving them—they are his main readers and admirers. "Ah, Tolya, who in Russia reads us but the Jewish girls?" the poet Yesenin once wrote from America to the poet Mariengof in Russia.

My working minutes tick by, bathed in sweat, amid self-abasement and the countless jostling memories awakened now by a ray of sun, now by a book that has fallen from a badly tied box . . . "I was reading it, then she came in—Elena—and we . . ." Hauling and carrying extensive Russian libraries is an especially strange pastime. Here in America, Russian books produce an unexpected effect. Carrying the dull green spines, the collected works of the Chekhovs, Leskovs, and other eulogizers and denizens of sleepy Russian noondays, I think vicious thoughts about the whole of my loathsome native Russian literature, which has been largely responsible for my life. Dull green bastards, Chekhov languishing in boredom, his eternal students, people who don't know how to get themselves going, who vegetate through this life, they lurk in these pages like diaphanous sunflower husks. Even the print, small and crowded, is repulsive to me. And I am repulsive to myself. It's much pleasanter to move the bright American books, not all of which, moreover, are intelligible to me, thank God.

We have moved a set of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* and are now moving boxes of loose papers stamped "Radio Liberty." Dirty dipshit operation . . . so that's where he works! The owner of the papers is an intellectual from Kiev, with a graying beard. For some reason they all unthinkingly begin to collaborate with the CIA. I, who received not a ruble from the Soviet regime, would seem to have more grounds for being embittered at my former homeland and going to work for an organization financed by the American intelligence service and aimed at the destruction of Russia. But I don't work for anyone. I did not

collaborate with the KGB there and am not about to collaborate with the CIA here—to me, they are two identical operations.

The owner of the library, with the little gray beard, enthusiastically tells Fein that an article of his has been accepted for the anniversary issue of *Posev*. Bonehead, he's found something to be proud of. In the USSR the graybeard was a screenwriter—worked for the Soviet regime. I did not encounter any free screenwriters in the USSR; naturally, he wrote what the authorities needed. Here he also writes exactly what the authorities need—such people work for the authorities under all regimes. They were born to serve, to carry out functions. They change masters without any special pangs of conscience. And why not?

Prostitute! I think, meaning the graybeard. The prostitute is also dragging chests around, breathing heavily; he is saving time and money. Evidently they don't pay him any too much at Radio Liberty. Or else it's greed. "How much is your Homeland today?" I feel like asking him . . . He keeps dragging. His son, a tanned athlete of about sixteen, is also carrying things. Mama, who looks younger than she is, does not carry furniture. "Mama can be fucked," says the ubiquitous Kirill, who is present with me as always. I brought him to earn a little money. It is probably the first time in his life he has worked as a mover. The big aristocrat finds it disgusting to carry furniture, he has little knowledge of the correct way to pick things up, he just barely holds on. But he does, although the job is hard for him to take and probably humiliating. Since I am actually from the lower classes and have seen all kinds of situations in this life, sweat is no novelty to me, though I haven't done any moving for ten years. But Kirill's face shows depression, loathing for the work, and boredom. His expression will change, giving place to a certain satisfaction, only after he gets his money, but as it turns out, John has had time to notice it. He will not invite the aristocrat to move furniture again, young men like this don't appeal to him. He does not understand the conventions of this world.

What the fuck does this prostitute want with the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*? I am still wondering about our client. It is clear that the only reason he needs the encyclopedia and his huge Russian *Orthographic Dictionary* is so that he can be more literate in selling out his Homeland. He has even brought over some paperbacks on patriotic heroes of World War II. Why? As possible material for his' scripts. For some sort of exposé. There was another writer like that, but from the Second Emigra-

tion; I think he's still writing. He reads a Soviet book, supposedly finds anti-Soviet tendencies in the author, and there's his article. That's how he lives, article after article. And there's another one, a former Soviet officer, who contrives to publish one and the same thing in two places, sends it to Radio Liberty and *Russkoe Delo*—changes the title, revises two paragraphs, and sends it off. Two fees. That's how he's lived his thirty years abroad. A good cook. Likes to eat. It's not their fault, poor fellows. They want to eat. But if you're going to work in your own way and measure this world—whether the USSR or America—by your own standards, then what will you eat? You can't feed on the Holy Spirit, can you?

When we move Americans—at present our customers are mostly all Americans—then my reflections are different. Recently we moved a couple from a house in Queens; they had been living together but were then separated, because we moved them to two different apartments. “What do you think, are they divorced?” I asked John.

“What do I care?” he said. “Do they pay money? They do. I make my money, I don't care about the rest.”

Well, John doesn't, but Eddie does. I observed them carefully, and their belongings too. They were both small. He was like all Americans and so was she. Very typical. He had on a T-shirt and so did she. He had on denim shorts, his legs were hairy and just a bit crooked; she had denim jeans, her ass was a little droopy. He could have been anything, I think he was Jewish. A mustache, of course, how could he not have a mustache, and she smoked one cigarette after another. Their names, of course, were Susan and Peter, how could they be anything else. Two bicycles. One box labeled “Peter's Kitchen,” another box “Susan's Kitchen.” One box “Peter's Shoes,” another “Susan's Shoes.” All their things had been thrown into the boxes, not properly packed, and as we lugged all these boxes down a narrow green stairway, and then down a gray stairway, and then down three brick steps, the things kept trying to pop out and fall. They had a lot of things, but it was all somehow petty. Tiny little boxes, more little boxes, small little things, and only a few big ones—an old wooden armchair and a chest of drawers, a pair of small dressers, and that was all.

We moved Susan to an apartment on East Eighty-sixth, where there was an elevator. She got the two bicycles and her share of the boxes with the bottle necks sticking out of them.

Peter got the television, the old wooden armchair, and the bricks, which evidently served as spacers for bookshelves. I observed this couple like a stern high judge, hoping to see something in them other than typicality, other than his shock of curly hair and his mustache—in New York, every other man has a mustache and a shock of hair. I saw nothing.

By the time we moved him it was dark, and he threatened not to pay us any money due after six hours. He had, he said, only six hours' worth of work, and we were doing everything slowly, he said—after we had worked like hell lugging his little boxes and chests to the fourth floor. I broke a slight hole in the bottom of one of them with my head. Nevertheless, he paid us.

His apartment was on West 106th Street, not a particularly good neighborhood. I had worked fourteen hours that day, we had had another job in the morning, we had moved a Greek, I was very tired, my legs were buckling, and when John and I were carrying the last thing, an air conditioner, my strength gave out and the air conditioner landed right on top of me, though without injuring me.

“What the fuck are you doing, you mother?” John said softly.

“I’ll just rest a minute,” I said. “I got very drunk yesterday,” I added, which was true.

At the sound of our voices a curious denizen of the third floor stuck her head out into the stairwell. “What’s happening?” she said.

“Nothing,” John replied lazily. “It’s just that this guy has worked over fourteen hours today. He’s tired,” and he started to laugh.

I was very ashamed that I hadn’t been able to hold out and had collapsed on the stairs. Ashamed before the seaman from the trawler.

“Never mind,” he said. “You’re not used to it yet. Weak hands.”

It was the first time God had made me aware there was a limit to my physical strength. If it hadn’t been for those stairs! This didn’t happen to me again, however; eventually I would become strong as a horse.

Ten minutes later, having received all the money—he would have tried to get out of paying John, but John wouldn’t have given him his fucking TV and lamp, which were still on the truck, boxed separately in quilts—we were on our way downtown in the truck, trying to pass some other shithead in a truck, like us . . .

John . . . I like him. The lousy thing is that he’s a racist, he doesn’t like blacks. “Black trash,” he calls them. His racism, that of an ordinary

peasant lad from Russia, has a rather primitive character. Driving through different provincial towns with me, he determines first of all whether they have many blacks. The highest praise he can give a town is the assessment, "There's no black trash here at all." John is delighted by the state of Maine, where there are no blacks, where the air and water are clean, unpolluted. John associates blacks with pollution. "Ordinary people" are full of shit too. It was the workers that beat up the students who demonstrated against the war in Vietnam. And the racial clashes in Boston—the capitalists are not to blame for them at all, it's the ordinary working gents who don't want their children to study with black children. Ordinary people too are full of shit in our time.

"I was driving along the New Jersey Turnpike once," John recounts, "and the blacks in the car ahead of me turned over. They yelled from the car, but I drove around them and calmly rolled on. I looked back and a bunch of Americans had already come running, they were pulling the black trash out of the car."

"What a racist you are!" I tell him.

He's not angry, he laughs. "Racist" is a swear word to a liberal American professor; to a man from the fields of Byelorussia, a seaman from a trawler, "racist" is not a swear word.

We often return from our trips via Lenox Avenue in Harlem. Calmly driving the heavy truck, he looks at the crowd and grits through his teeth, "Monkeys, monkeys!" With no special malice, however. He points out to me a guy who is totally drunk or stoned, staggering along waving his arms. John laughs contentedly.

I do not try to dissuade him, I do not suggest that he take thought and reject his racism. It's futile. And although we calmly ride in the same truck, although I approve of him in some ways, value his simple strength and vitality, and although it seems to me that he approves of me in some ways too, the possibility cannot be excluded that coming years will place us on different sides of the barricades. He will be defending this system and this regime, along with lads just like him from the fields of Texas, Iowa, or Missouri, and I will be with the hated black trash.

This is so clear to me that I smile calmly in the truck. Ah, John, little Eddie's a tough guy too, you'd better forgive him in advance, just in case. Life is too serious, I think.

He pays me my money and steps on the gas with his canvas shoe. As

he disappears around the corner I catch a fleeting glimpse of his head, his short American-style haircut. I walk to my hotel.

Lately John has warmed up to me. For one thing, he now works almost exclusively with me. For another, he occasionally calls me outside of working hours and invites me to do something with him. He begins in English but then, on my account, descends to Russian after all. Once he came over with Lenya, the former inmate of the Gulag Archipelago, in Lenya's car; it was late afternoon, but they were going to the beach. Lenya is a poor driver, but we finally reached the deserted beach on distant Coney Island. As always, in keeping with my childish, soldierly habit, I had brought nothing with me, but John of course proved to be well equipped. He had with him a mat, which he spread neatly on the sand; he had a transistor radio, which he turned on immediately; he had a first-rate volleyball, which as he put it had cost him twenty-five bucks; he had an expensive textbook of English. After a swim Mr. Businessman lay down on the mat, took his pen, opened the book, and began working the exercises.

Lenya Kosogor, thin and stooped, also had no things with him, like me. It's a prison-camp habit not to burden oneself with things—they will only be taken away. Lenya and I lay right on the sand. At first I laid my head, which was wet after my swim, on John's volleyball; then, thinking he would bawl me out for ruining the surface of the leather, I moved my head away and rested it on my own sandal.

We lay there for quite a long time in the sunshine—it was an evening sun, not hot. Lately I have grown accustomed to silence, and talkativeness irritates me at times. In this respect John is almost ideal. I kept my eyes closed. Lenya asked me a couple of questions and also fell silent. We lay there a long time.

"Let's go, Ed!" John said suddenly. He closed his notebook, took the ball, and went off a little distance from where we lay. A game of volleyball—it was possible, I thought, but I had on these fucking lenses; if I moved abruptly they might fly out. But I didn't want to appear ridiculous in front of my boss. I said only that I hadn't played volleyball in at least ten years. The game began.

At first I was cautious because of the lenses and because my hands weren't obeying me. Finally I remembered how to play, and things started to go better. John wasn't much of a player either, but gradually,

as I say, things got going, and later Kosogor joined in. We played quite a long time, then Kosogor lay down again on the sand and started singing Russian songs, while we kept chasing our ball around, with our eyes narrowed against the flying sand—the ball did get away from us fairly often and fall in the sand.

You know, it was like returning to my childhood. The Kharkov beach. My tireless sun-blackened friends, at once athletes and hoodlums. The endlessly flying ball. The svelte girls, who usually played very badly, but their presence inspired the young males of the species to incredible tricks and pirouettes. Admittedly, all the participants in this scene were much younger then, there were a great many of them; that scene also had a background filled with people we knew or half knew, and most importantly, it didn't have the feeling of aching sadness. Sadness surrounded both energetic John, and Lenya Kosogor, and me. Why? I asked myself. It wasn't nostalgia, was it? I don't know whether they sensed the sadness, but to me the gray ocean was sad, and the dirty sand, and the gulls, and the remote group of people on the sand—everything was filmed with sadness. The kind of sadness, you know, that makes a man take a machine gun and start shooting into the crowd, I wouldn't do it, but as an example, that's a good way to dispel sadness.

Actually I was feeling the lack of a lifework, solidly begun and just as steadfastly pursued. What this country offered me could not be my lifework. It could be John's, he made money; or Lenya Kosogor's, he wanted something definite and material; but with my thirst for love, you know, I had it tougher than anyone. Only a Great Idea could lend purpose to my life. Riding in a car, embracing a loved friend, walking on the grass, sitting on the steps of a city church—it all feels good when every hour of your life is subordinate to a great idea and a movement. But for now, there was never anything but sadness.

I cut short the volleyball session, went for a swim, swam thinking ceaselessly about how I might find love again in this world, so that it would bloom, take on color, blaze up, become the vibrant and happy world I used to live in. I swam way far out and then turned over in the water, lay there and thought about this, while over my head, scrawling across the water, glimmered the last ray of the setting sun.

I climbed out and strolled along the beach. The others, my simple, ordinary, generally good friends, were still lying there on the sand, but

I didn't feel like going over to them. I strolled in the opposite direction, where there were alien bodies and alien people, and an old man with a beard was doing calisthenic bows that smacked of prayer, directly toward the setting sun.

I walked quite a way along the tide-smoothed sand, gazing at the ocean, hoping for something, but did not encounter anything or anyone necessary for my purposes; only a few children and teenage girls arrested my attention. But between them and me there lay by now my insurmountable age, my head full of the past, my scarred arms, and always that sadness. I returned to my own people—to choose an arbitrary term, of course, an arbitrary term.

They greeted me with a piece of news. “Your friend is dead,” Lenya said. “Which one?” I asked indifferently. “The Great Helmsman,” Lenya said. “Get out the black paint, you’ll be putting a black border on the portrait in your room.”

So he’s dead, I thought. He was all muddled in recent years, he scuttled Trotskyism to ape the ancient Chinese emperors, founders of dynasties, he kept on living and now he’s dead. A man of the people, and muddled like the people. Why can’t *I* live without arrogance, why am I tormented by arrogance and love?

We played some more volleyball. A towheaded nurse from a nursing home came along, John invited her to play with us, and it developed that her parents were from Poltava. I jumped for the ball, everyone laughed; even in childhood I had excelled at the risky Brazilian game, as Sanya the Red called it.

The nurse from the nursing home, as Lenya observed, wanted John to fuck her, but when it comes to sex John has affairs of his own; I don’t know what kind. We left.

At a seedy roadside joint we ordered ourselves some roast beef; on the sly, Lenya and I each drank half a tumbler of brandy, bought at the liquor store next door. John turned it down. He took the wheel, and we started off to New York. The tipsy inmate of the Archipelago was expressing his opinions on something from the back seat, genially and loudly. I stared intently into the surrounding cars and said nothing . . .

Another time John took me to inspect an American submarine for some reason. God knows why I should want to see some fucking boat, but he

invited me, came for me in the truck, and I couldn't refuse John. I went along.

The boat lay in a little enclosure. It was huge. Everything on it was real, except that two good-sized holes had been cut in the sheathing and staircases soldered into them for the tourists. We clambered around in the boat's compartments for a good hour, listening to explanations from an old submariner, a clever guide who called the little girls "missy" and patiently answered both their questions and the naval questions of my friend John.

"The hell he says they had good air here, fuck it, you better not try the air here. There's no rolling in a sub, you don't feel it, that's true. But the air is shit," was John's commentary on the old submariner's stories.

John was interested in everything. He peered below, where there were batteries for power, peered into the holes of the diesels, turned a wheel and closed the hatches on our whole group so that we wouldn't hear the noise from another tour group following behind us.

I didn't give a fucking shit about that boat. I looked politely, but I would have had more interest in going to see an autopsy room, where I had also been invited recently, to watch them dissect the dead. But the boat—fuck it. Well, at least I wasn't at home, thanks to John.

After the boat he took me someplace else, without saying where. This was his usual trick. Like him, I don't crack under pressure; I kept silent, didn't ask where I was being taken, merely watched the road, trying to guess. Aha, now it was clear—this was the Tolstoy Farm. He took a right at the farm. Weaving among secondhand cars, we drove up to a single-story barracks for two families. Walked in.

"This is Ed." He presented me to a guy with gray temples. "His name is John, like mine," John said, rudely pointing at the man.

"Yes, some people call me John," the man said gently, "and some Vanya."

The apartment was wretchedly small, the host's small daughter was asleep in the small neighboring bedroom, and I was horribly bored and even depressed, until she woke up and came in. You will shortly understand why.

John had brought a Magnetophon with him, a crude popular model with a tinny sound; he switched it on, some American girl sang. This Vanya—mentally I called him "Vanechka," sweet Vanya, because he

was suffused with gentleness, both what he said and his whole figure, I definitely liked this fellow who worked at a plastics factory—this Vanya laughed at John's Magnetophon. John explained that he had bought the Magnetophon to practice his English. But they called the magnetophon a tape recorder, I forgot.

The girl on the tape sang words to the effect that what had been yesterday would never return and that this was terrible, and many other sad words besides. After the girl, John had recorded an old Russian man, a Kuzmich or Petrovich. "Whatever you want, Kuzmich. Talk or sing," said John on the tape recorder. John in the chair flinched. And when Kuzmich, getting the words wrong, started to sing the Russian folk song "When I Was a Coachman," I am sorry to say I got up and quietly went outdoors.

I had no fucking use for these tear-jerking Russian songs about loved ones found dead under the snow. They were too close to home. At that time even an English-Russian dictionary filled me with terror. The words "lover," "passionate," "intercourse," and others like them tormented me with the torments of hell. I writhed when I read them. Russian songs were all I needed.

I went outdoors; the trees were rustling, the grass showed green, night was falling, a Bulgarian youth from the family next door was sitting on the porch tapping his high heel on the threshold. I went over to the van in which we had arrived, leaned my forehead against its high yellow chassis, and quieted down. From the house I could hear the doleful song. Why all this? I thought. Was it really impossible to live our whole lives in love and happiness? Life is so short, so small. What is she seeking, Elena, what force drives her forward or back? Why must I suffer terrible moments like these, and much worse? We could have spent our whole lives together—as adventurers, whores, prostitutes, but together. The last phrase is my favorite: sex is sex, fuck whom you wish, but why betray my heart?

This passed quickly. After all, by now it was the end of summer, not March or April. I didn't settle down into a wonderful mood, but when I went into the house the old man had finished singing "The Peddlers" and little Katenka had appeared, a small sleepy creature about two years old, or even a little younger. The Bulgarian father dressed the creature, and she began moving around among us, mostly in my vicinity, uttering sounds and smiling at me. I caught myself watching only Katenka; the

conversation between John and sweet Vanya held no interest for me. They were saying something about the secondhand cars that stood along the road to the barracks. The cars were for sale, it seemed, and cheap. A white Pontiac cost only \$260. At the price of the Pontiac I turned off, because I had made up my mind: I picked up this Katenka and set her on my lap.

Good Lord, what did I know about children, poor unhappy frightened creature that I was? Not a fucking thing. The little plant had to be entertained. On my head was an old straw hat of John's; I kept taking it off and putting it on, trying to summon up a smile on the baby's face. Although at her age the little girl was closer to nature, to leaves and grass, than to people, she understood me. She didn't cry, she didn't want to frighten me in any way, she put her little wee hand on my chest—my shirt was unbuttoned—and stroked me. Her hand was hot, and from it there spread into my body a sense of animal comfort such as I had not felt since I slept with my arms around Elena.

Suddenly it occurred to me that once upon a time I had greatly disliked children, and how happy I was now with this creature on my lap. She would grow up, she'd be beautiful—sweet Vanya wasn't bad; I hadn't seen his wife. God grant you happiness, little animal, I thought. But if He does, let it be for your whole life. God forbid you should know happiness and then live all the rest of your life in unhappiness. The most terrible torment.

The little wild animal sat on my lap, and fool that I was, I didn't know what to do with it. All I did was carefully support its little back and make funny faces at it. I was awkward. I have never had children. How strong I would be now if I had such a Katenka, I would have an incentive to live. I wouldn't send the child to school, the hell with your schools. I would dress her in wonderful clothes, the most expensive; I'd buy her a big wise dog . . .

Such were my futile dreams as I gazed on someone else's child. Why futile, you say? Of course they were futile. I could no longer have a child by the woman I loved; I would not have loved a child by an unloved woman. I did not need an unloved child.

I shouldn't hold her so long on my lap. They might notice, I wouldn't want that. To John I was unprincipled, desperate Ed, a pretty good helper, for whom he intended a future as manager of his business. He's that way, John is, he'll have everything. Not for nothing does he live like

a Spartan: doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, and perhaps doesn't sleep with women, considers them to be too ruinous a pastime for him at present. He'll have everything he wants, John will. Only not for long, because this whole era is coming to an end. \

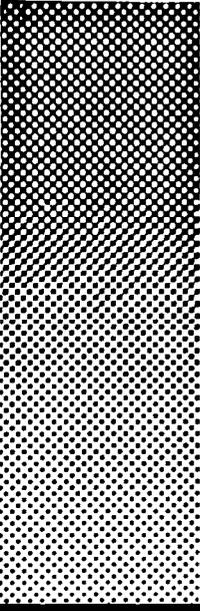
John made a tape of sweet Vanya singing a few excerpts from some Bulgarian songs and the famous "Moscow Nights." He sang them gently and touchingly. I let baby Katenka go, set her carefully on the floor, and thought with bitterness that I had no right to relax, I must keep a tight hold on myself. If you don't, you die, and I had learned from a conversation among Roseanne's guests—they were discussing the book *Life after Life*—that suicide changes nothing, the suffering remains, a dead man experiences the same feelings as the living. I wouldn't want to plunge into eternity in the state I'm in now. They had convinced me. That meant I must overcome. Therefore I took leave of my host with exaggerated distinctness, then gave Katenka, who sat in her papa's arms, a light touch on the shoulder and said, "Good-bye, baby!" I jumped up to my seat, and we drove off in the darkness, from time to time conversing, from time to time falling silent. Traffic was heavy, it was Sunday, people were driving from vacation areas, and therefore it took us a while to get to Manhattan.

"Look at that car ahead of us," John said as we crawled along the George Washington Bridge. "It costs eighteen thousand. My vehicle is for making money, his is for wasting money. I bet the guy driving it's a cheat, he got rich off fraud and drugs. How are you worse than him? But here you sit in my van, and you've got nothing."

John said it viciously, and I thought that he was far from being as simple as he seemed. And not very contented. He worked like a horse and got tired, his face was lined. Maybe I was wrong about the barricades. Maybe, God willing, we'd be on the same side? Something resembling class hatred had glinted in his words.

"What's the name of that car?" I asked.

"Mercedes-Benz!" he replied. Staring at the car, he added, "Fuckin' shit!"



# MY FRIEND NEW YORK

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I am a man of the street. I have to my credit very few people-friends and many friend-streets. They, the streets, see me at all hours of the day and night; I often sit on them, press my buns to their sidewalks, cast my shadow on their walls, prop my elbow or my back against their lampposts. I think they love me because I love them and pay attention to them like nobody else in New York. As a matter of fact, Manhattan ought to put up a monument to me, or a memorial plaque with the following inscription: "To Edward Limonov, New York's number one pedestrian, with love from Manhattan!"

I once covered more than three hundred blocks in one day, on foot. Why? I was out for a walk. I generally go almost everywhere on foot. Out of my \$278 a month I begrudge spending fifty cents to ride anywhere, especially since my sorties have no set destination, or the destination is indefinite. For example, a place to buy myself a notebook of a particular format. They don't have it at Woolworth's or at another Woolworth's or at Alexander's, and I march down to the sidewalk markets on Canal Street to scrounge up the right notebook. All other formats irritate me.

I am very fond of tramping around. Really, without exaggeration, I probably walk more than anybody else in New York. Unless there's some tramp who walks more than I do, but I doubt it. So far as I can see, bums are all immobile, more apt to lie still or putter sluggishly about in their rags.

I walked a great deal in March and April, my most terrible months. In the mornings my leg muscles were locked, every step caused me hellish pain, I would have to walk in this pain for half an hour before it wore off. The pain would have been less, of course, had I worn shoes with lower heels, but I would never consent to make that concession—I have always worn nothing but high heels, and I ask to be laid in my grave, if I have one, wearing incredible shoes of some kind, high heels without fail.

I was visiting the individual neighborhoods of New York in expectation of some sort of encounter. Sometimes I clearly sensed this and walked especially purposefully to seize the opportunity, to be favored with an encounter. Most of the time I walked as if just for fun, as if it were my heart's desire to take a stroll, yet in fact my goal was the same, to be honored with an encounter. In my faraway childhood, my now-remote past, I tramped the main street of my provincial hometown the same way, waiting to encounter someone who would take me and lead me into another life. Whom did I hope to meet? A man? A woman? A friend, or love? Oh, the image I had in mind was very nonspecific, but I waited, tremblingly waited. How many empty evenings there were, how many sad and lonely homecomings, how many terrible reflections before sleep, until I encountered Anna and from an ordinary lad, with her help, created a poet.

I walk that same way now. Again I have nothing. I have established my poetic fate, whether or not it will last is no longer the issue, it's done, it exists, in Russia my life is already legend, and now I walk free, empty, and terrible in the Great City, amusing, saving, and distracting myself with its streets, and I seek the encounter that will begin my new fate.

From Kierkegaard, who lived in the nineteenth century, I learned that only a man who has despaired can properly appreciate life. He is at once the unhappiest and the happiest of men. Oh, I have appreciated life, how I have appreciated it, I howl and weep over life and do not fear it. On every little street I peer attentively at the people: is it he, is it she, is it they? To hope is folly, but I hope. Again and again I go out on the streets, the streets of my great, boundless city—of course it is mine, since my life is happening here—I seek, watch, peer . . . and return to the hotel. Often I fall face down on the bed and weep, and only malice gives me the strength to get up every day at eight in the morning, clench my teeth, read the American newspapers. I curse and damn everything in

the world, but I live, and oh, although love has betrayed me, I shall never cease to seek love. But it will not be a love for one person, who would betray me again, no, no more, I want no more betrayals, it will be a different love.

What do I seek? Either a brotherhood of stern men, revolutionaries and terrorists, in love and devotion to whom my soul could rest at last; or I seek a religious sect preaching love, people's love for one another, love at all costs.

My darling, where will you find it, such love?

My darling, where will you find it, this sect where they will comfort and caress you, lay your head in their laps. Sleep, my weary darling, sleep. Nowhere in the world is there such a sect. Once it was in Elena's lap. Where is there such a sect now? Why am I not surrounded by its affectionate inmates? Mimi the ballerina will playfully stand on her head, Pascalino will tousele my hair, and George will kiss my knee. "You have come to us, you are weary, here are wine and bread, and we will wash your feet. Poor weary darling, be with us as long as you like, and we won't go off to work and leave you alone tomorrow like Papa and Mama, like a wife, or like children going to school. We'll be with you a long, happy time, and perhaps later—once in a while this happens—you will leave, when you want to, and the glint of our old buildings will be in your eye . . ."

Brotherhood and people's love—that is what I dreamed of, that is what I wanted to encounter.

None of it is easy to find. I've been walking for six months now, and how much longer will I walk? God knows . . .

I walk around New York—my great house—lightly clad, not much overburdened with clothes, and almost never carry anything with me, never encumber my hands. I know all the street people of New York. I know where they can be found, and the spot where each of them curls up to sleep, whether it's the stone floor under the arch of the boarded-up church at Third Avenue and Thirtieth Street, or in the revolving door of the bank at Lexington and Sixtieth. Certain bums prefer to sleep on the steps of Carnegie Hall, to be closer to art. I know the dirtiest, hairiest, fattest bum in New York. I think he's crazy because he always wears a weird smile. By day he usually makes himself comfortable on a bench in Central Park, not far from the entrance. In the evening he moves to Sixth Avenue in the Forties. Once I found him reading—guess

what—*Russkoe Delo*, the newspaper I used to work on. Moreover, he was holding it the right way, not upside down. Could he be Russian?

I know a place where, at various times of the day, you can see a red-bearded man in the costume of a Scottish highlander, playing the bagpipes.

I am familiar with all of New York's blind men and their dogs. The black man who sits on Fifth Avenue with his rabbit, usually across from St. Patrick's, gives me a friendly hello and a smile.

I am acquainted with a bearded artist and his wife who sell paintings of wild animals—lions, tigers, and other lovable beasts of prey. I say hello to them and they answer me. Admittedly I can't buy anything from them.

I know the man who sells shashlik in Central Park.

I know well the Italian drummer who often pounds a drum near Carnegie Hall.

I am acquainted with a black saxophonist and a fellow who plays the violin at the doors of Broadway theaters.

I know by sight the joint-sellers in Central Park, at the Public Library, and in Washington Square.

I know a young fellow with stubby legs and an athletic torso. In the summer he is always dressed in shorts and a weirdly cut undershirt. His time is divided between the Public Library and the distribution of advertising flyers near the arch in Washington Square.

If I wanted to enumerate them all, describe their clothes and faces, I could go on and on; it would take a lot of time.

I have in my memory knowledge of another type too.

I know, for example, where you can find, any place in New York, a liquor store that stays open late at night; or which way the tiniest little street in SoHo, the Village, or Chinatown turns.

I live in a neighborhood where the world's most expensive companies—General Motors, Mercedes-Benz, and others—have their offices, but I roam along the dirty Bowery, boring Lafayette Street, I dig up all sorts of shit in the sidewalk markets on Canal Street.

I know where you can take a leak, if need be, anywhere in New York. I know the safe places. Walking toward Chinatown along Canal Street, for example, you can go in the nearest entrance of the courthouse, and on the second floor, up the stairway to the left, you can take a wonderful leak in the stinking men's room.

I know where you can buy two huge fresh fish for a dollar, and where you can buy the same fish at three for a dollar. I know where there's cheap paper, and where, in the tangle of streets, there's a store with cheap five-cent pens. Oh, what I know! It would suffice for ten normal New Yorkers.

The best display window in New York, without question, is at Henri Bendel on Fifty-seventh Street. The most exquisite, the most sophisticated. Its gaggle of lesbians, girls grouped in weird poses, excites me to sexual arousal, the basest lust. I want to climb in there, into the window, and fuck them. Sometimes I go and watch three strange men change the clothes on them. This happens at night. Bendel's changes and rearranges its lesbians very frequently; one day it has them trampling dollars underfoot like fallen leaves, the next day whispering together, clustered in threes and fours.

I have secret relations with the mannequins. When I see them at night, slender, mystically naked or half undressed, flooded with the incredibly ghastly light of the display window, I am much more attracted to them than to live women, who have been no riddle to me for a long time now and who have but one solution. I spy on the undressed mannequins with voluptuous curiosity, much as when we placed a mirror under the school desk, as children, and tried to see the cunt of our teacher, our young little French instructor. I remember how frightened and shaken I was when I crawled under the desk in my turn and saw the dark folds and hairs (she went without underpants in summer). Now, when I feel like fucking all the time but don't arrange it for myself, the mannequins also frighten me. With pleasure and fright I think how I could tear aside their skirts, scarves, and other frippery to get at that place, and suddenly it would turn out they had a real live peepka. But forgive me these mystical sexual daydreams. It's because I'm not fucking much.

The most exquisite clothes in New York can be seen on Madison Avenue between Sixty-first and Sixty-second streets, at Julie, which is also called the Artisans Gallery. There is something weird and fantastical about the clothes in this shop, a fairytale quality and at the same time depravity. They drive me wild with delight. Nearly all the suits, dresses, and masks in this gallery are constructed, not sewn, constructed the way a building is constructed; or carved, like sculptures. I love a holiday mood, effect, surprise. This is the only shop that surprises me, these are

clothes for rare, strange natures, but unfortunately you have to be rich to buy them.

I dream of someday, somehow, getting some money and buying something from this shop for Elena, my former spouse, now my merry widow. She too is mad about clothes like these. A present from this shop would make her happy, I think. Such clothes would be becoming to no one else, only to Elena. Who else could wear a feather camisole, or the weird dresses, the wild play of fantasy.

I once got into the Diplomat Cabaret Theatre for a performance of *Le Bellybutton* and saw the sex star Marilyn Chambers. In one of her numbers Marilyn Chambers wore a feather bra from this shop. I recognized both the style and the execution at once. I don't suppose even Marilyn Chambers can afford to dress entirely in things from here. Too expensive.

I could live in this shop and never leave it. I often come and look at its small display windows, peer in, sometimes even go inside. I'm bashful about being here too much, I don't have any money, all I have is a taste for the unusual and strange, that's all. At times I feel like beginning to make, to construct, something similar; I did do tailoring in Russia, and I have to my credit several crazy self-made objects, among them the 114-patch "Blazer of the National Hero," and a jacket sewn of white filter cloth six millimeters thick. Perhaps I'll do it someday . . .

Another reason for my sorties around New York, apart from my abnormal desire to encounter someone or something, is the desire to distract myself from my eternally half-erect, nagging cock and from learning English. The two together cause me to fall into a terrible half sleep, a doze with nightmarish apparitions.

So I roll my trousers up to the knee, my white trousers with patches on the seat, which I'm forever washing in Tide in my hotel room; I put on my unvarying buskin sandals, which have already survived a summer and have lost half their straps; they are wooden and look like some Oriental structure, a bullock cart or well sweep, wood and leather; I take off my one and only summer shirt, white with blue checks, and I trudge downtown along Second Avenue in August. I walk on the sunny side of the street, of course, only the sunny side, never otherwise, the sunny side in any kind of heat, that's why I'm always so tanned. As I pass Fifty-third Street, I glance to my left. There's a very good wine shop down there, very pleasant and nice. It has bottles standing and lying in barrels, on

shelves, in carts, in the middle, on the walls, wherever you look. You can buy any wine in this store, any beverage, it has a pleasant smell, and a huge bottle of French champagne, which very likely stands as high as my waist, costs between \$162 and \$175. That bottle is another thing I want to buy, if I ever come into any money, and intend to present to Elena. She is capable of appreciating it—she loves champagne, and a bottle this big will delight her. She'll be glad, and I will too. Elena is an uncommon woman, our tastes coincide, that's why I feel so bad about her. She's very beautiful herself and used to love the beautiful, and though she is no longer what she was, though life has broken her, in my heart she is always the same.

I trudge on, thinking pleasant thoughts about this shop. It would be nice to go there, browse awhile, and finally buy a bottle of Jamaican rum and drink it from a small wineglass—which I don't have, but will—in the heat of the day. I know where I'll buy the glass: at the corner of Perry Street and Greenwich Avenue, in the Village. They always have a variety of good crystal for sale, and if I spend a little time, look around, I'll find a wineglass that satisfies me.

So I march on downtown, and some people smile at me because when I'm walking I try to look as though I'm reciting a prayer that I recently composed for myself, thought up in a difficult moment when I noticed that I was excessively angry at people. Here is the prayer:

*No anger has my soul  
 No anger has my soul  
 Though dead my hopes and cold  
 No anger has my soul*

Do you suppose the people around you don't know whether you have anger in your soul or not? They know perfectly well. That's why, on seeing that I have no anger in me, many people smile at me and many ask me the way. First a cheerful Latin-American behind the wheel of an old jalopy asks how to get to Avenue C. "Turn left, my friend, turn left," I tell him. "You'll come to First Avenue, then Avenue A, then B, and the next is C." "Thanks! Have a nice day!" he calls to me, and smiles. Then a gray grandpa with a mustache, sitting in the open door of a truck, stares in fascination at the blue-enameled Orthodox cross that sticks to my chest. Grandpa may be a Ukrainian, this is their neighbor-

hood. I stop at the fire hydrants, which are open, the water is flowing from them; I wash to the waist and walk on, without drying myself. This is natural, I get hot and I perform my ablutions.

Sometimes when I'm walking along Broadway, usually late at night—I used to walk this way from Roseanne's—someone will approach me, beg for money. I don't give it, I really can't. The man who is begging can certainly obtain money in New York more easily than I can. I am always willing to stop and explain that I don't have money, I'm on welfare, which means I'm on the same level as those who beg, if not lower. By this assertion I'm declaring that I'm a scorned individual. Everyone is satisfied. The only people I do not stop for are the ones who are very drunk or dulled out on drugs. Stopping for them is futile, it's hard to understand what they're mumbling. They're not actually seeing the world around them at that moment; to them, I, Eddie-baby, am a blob in the shape of a man. They are offended, but what can you do . . . I do give money to people who in my view are really unfortunate.

Often I go downtown for the whole day. I usually begin with Washington Square, where I lie in the fountain, if it's working. I put my feet in, my buns repose on the last step before water level, I lie back philosophically and contemplate my environment, or even more often I close my eyes and am merely aware, opening them infrequently. The sun, the water, the hum, and the shouts—to me it all makes up the melody of life. Often the fountain is spurting upward in a hard jet, the children throw various objects into it, beer cans, Coca-Cola cans, handkerchiefs. When thrown right, these things go flying up high, and the naked wet children squeal with delight. Other children try to sit their poopkas down on the jet so that the jet will lift them up. But either the children are very heavy, or they don't sit down right—it never happens, the jet doesn't lift them. One boy of about ten became very adept at aiming the fountain jet wherever he wanted by pressing his foot on the opening it spurted from. He hounded everyone else out of the fountain circle; a fat black woman and I proved to be the most stubborn. The black woman lay there and held out a long time, but the bad little boy overcame her in the end after squirting her with an ocean of water. She left. Things were more complex with me. It's hard with guys like me. He kept squirting water on me, but I had schooled myself from childhood, like a yogi, to endure both cold and hunger serenely. He squirted and squirted, and I just lay there. But the kid turned out to be every bit

as stubborn. He adapted. When he squirted my face, in particular my nose and mouth, with a whole barrage of water, I couldn't take it, there was nothing to breathe, I had to crawl out and change places. The spectators—idlers, students, guitarists, and drug addicts—applauded wildly for both him and me.

The dogs also join in the general joy by playing in the water. They run after sticks, cans, and balls and devotedly drag them to their masters. One dog will be swifter; one will be fatter and won't get to the thing thrown by his master in time, it is snapped up by the other, swifter person of the dog species, and then the one who has committed the offense looks guiltily at his master.

One fool of a boxer dragged his mistress into the fountain and spent half an hour in there, choking and probably taking a great many blows on the muzzle as he tried to bite the jet of water. Poor thing, he deemed it a most evil enemy. His eyes were bloodshot, his muzzle was flayed, he wheezed and choked, the jet kept lifting him up by the chest, beat him on the muzzle again and again. The mistress, a perfectly proper-looking woman—God knows what had brought her here, it was certainly her first time—was thoroughly soaked, and a preposterous bra and underpants of an almost Russian cut showed through the wet fabric of her dress. The philistines of the two countries are alike.

Washington Square is pointed out in guidebooks to New York as a place of note, and sometimes real Americans pass through, country men and country ladies, glancing over their shoulders. To us natives they look very funny; observing them, the guitarists, students, idlers, and joint-smokers laugh, and so do I. These people dressed in their bulky American country finery look especially funny in Washington Square. They have a great deal in common with Soviet philistines, dressed in their ample dusty suits in the terrible continental heat.

I have a whole complex of diversions in Washington Square. Sometimes, along with everyone else, I listen to the Poet. His name is unknown to me, I call him the Poet. I could easily find out his name, but for some reason I don't. A short little man with a beard and a balding head, wearing a black shirt over loose sateen pants, also black, and sandals on his bare feet, he clammers up on one of the elevated bumps in the fountain's low round wall and reads his poetry. Usually he stands on the exact same bump where I sat while Irina and Khachaturian—my friends, they consider themselves my friends—dressed the veins in my

arm, stuck a plaster on them. That was at the very beginning of March, the slashed veins were still barely closed; unattended, they were oozing pus. Irina and Khachaturian put iodine on my arm, then stuck an American plaster on it. The whole of Washington Square observed this operation.

The poet always heads for the exact same pedestal. That is why I haven't made the poet's acquaintance, he and I are linked by this pedestal as it is. The poet lays by his feet a shopping bag similar to the ones that elderly Soviet ladies used in the fifties—black, crude, made of oilcloth. He rummages unhurriedly in his bag, takes out a single page, and begins to read. He reads with expression, with gesticulation. His voice is hoarse, he has lots of enthusiasm, but he's a long way from Lyonka Gubanov's shrill, sobbing, lamenting delivery, a Moscow style that originated perhaps in the laments of northern Russia. Doesn't make the grade, I think with superiority.

The poet reads, some people even turn down their radios a little. Alternately rummaging in his bag and reading, the poet does ten or fifteen poems and then sits down. He swigs from a bottle of wine and talks with any listeners who wish to talk, occasionally letting them too have a swallow of wine. He's a nice guy, that's obvious, he's about forty-five, and to me Washington Square would be empty without him.

After lying here for three or four hours, listening to all the conversations around me, now and then being captivated by the girls who fall for my wonderful tanned figure (which girls, as you know, attract and repel me simultaneously; that is why I fear them and have failed in two or three intimate relationships. I was scared shitless, alas, though I had promised myself to take advantage of all opportunities, to enter into all contacts)—after lying here awhile, I get up and move to another spot, somewhere on the grass, under a bush, but again, nearly always in the sun, only occasionally in the shade. If the Ramakrishna chariot comes, I watch the members of that sect dancing to the tambourine. I know them all by sight, know which is better or worse at dancing and playing the drum or the tambourine. Their little boy, also robed in orange gauze, touches my heart. At one time I thought about going to live in their commune, I still think about it even now. Probably I am prevented by my ambition from carrying out this plan. It could still happen, however.

To me, even though they are inauthentic, the Ramakrishnas are redolent of my native East. I lie on the grass in a relaxed position, my

head pillowed only on my arm, often with my eyes closed, and then all that sounds in my ears is one of their rotating prayers:

*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna!*  
*Krishna, Krishna, Hare Hare!*  
*Hare Rama, Hare Rama!*  
*Rama Rama, Hare Hare!*

After spending perhaps an hour listening to the rhythmical din of the tambourines, I decide to change position and sit for a while on a bench. A fair-haired young mama, dressed in God knows what, clothes from Botticelli's time, asks me to guard a fair-haired and just as whimsically dressed child lying in a carriage. If only she wouldn't come back, I think, glancing at the baby with interest. I would sit and wait a while, then take the child for myself. I'd have someone to care for, someone to love, and someone to work for. Even though the child would grow up and abandon me—that's inevitable. The ones you love always leave you. But surely it would be fifteen years before he left, I would hear his ringing laughter, I'd cook for him, walk with him till I dropped, raise him myself, not send him to school, I'd play with him and run along the seashore, I think dreamily.

Despite all his ironic mockery and malice, Eddie-baby, like a lonely dog that has lost its master, dreams of dogging someone's footsteps, devoting himself to someone. The dreams are interrupted, as always in such cases, by harsh reality. The little mama comes back with papa.

He is a Christlike man in a ragged suit jacket, his feet bare in his shoes. I know him, he's always here, he paces up and down in the crowd with his hand thrust into the pocket of this very jacket, and offers joints to the strolling crowd. The really serious smokers have their own, however; purchased joints are skimpier and weaker. The family, evidently happy to be reunited, thanks me. I bow and scrape. It was nothing . . . Any time . . . What the hell . . .

The family wheels off with the carriage, and I wonder why I didn't think to make a baby with Elena. She would have left anyway, but the baby would have stayed, women like her do not take the children with them when they leave. I would have had a little baby, and it might have been beautiful like Elena—I'm not bad-looking, either—I would have had a little piece of Elena, a girl or a boy, and I would

have devoted myself to the baby. Asshole, I think. But what if . . .

Instantly a plan springs to mind. Not now, of course. I'm not in a position to engineer it now. But later, maybe a year from now, when I have good connections and friends here, I can find some remote dacha, equip it appropriately to care for a kidnapped person, and then steal Elena. I'll find a doctor, perhaps I can persuade Oleg Chikovani, my friend who lives in Davis, California—after all, he was my friend back in Moscow; he might not be afraid to risk his medical license, being a friend—and he'll pull out the coil that allows Elena to fuck and not get pregnant. Oleg is a neurosurgeon, a specialist in operations on the brain. An operation like this would be nothing to him. And I'll fuck my girl-child and keep her locked up till she delivers, nine months.

Among people who know her I can spread the rumor that she's gone to visit her sister, who has moved from the fucking ruins of Beirut to either Rome or Paris—I can always tell some lie. And for those nine months, not all of them, but the first six, I can still fuck Elena, what can she do? Nothing. She'll be furious, yell a bit, and calm down. I'll fuck her every day, many times; in point of fact we won't have anything else to do. At the thought of such happiness my head spins, and as at any thought of Elena my cock stands up.

It will be someplace in Connecticut. Mentally I transfer the scene of the action in my fictitious kidnapping to Alex and Tatyana Glickerman's dacha. I liked their dacha; Elena and I visited there a couple of times when we were still husband and wife. Nowadays it seems she occasionally visits them alone. The Glickermans have paintings by Dali hanging even in the bathroom there. Alexis is a friend of his, he's the director of a very fashionable fashion magazine, after all. As for Tatyana, the poet Mayakovsky was once in love with her, and if you recall, I have mentioned somewhere that in Moscow I was friends with Mayakovsky's mistress Lily Brik. It's odd how fate persistently links little Eddie with the sexual legends of another great poet.

Oh, my wife, even now we are not separated. How I love you, I think, horrified to discover once more the awful depth of the abyss of my love. I will, I'll do this, I tell myself with conviction. And though they will try me if they find me out, love is always in the right, always, and I'll do this. Shit if I'll submit to fate, to the fate that took Elena away from me. I have merely been temporarily in hiding, I am waiting . . .

The falling leaves at that dacha have slowly disappeared, but my cock

is still standing; I feel a certain inner contentment, as if I had just now fucked Elena and this mysterious process had begun within her. Mmh! . . .

I wake from my thoughts, store the idea away in my memory. I start toward a group of people, from whose midst I hear the rumble of a guitar, the rhythm of a percussion instrument, and hoarse voices.

Some fat-faced boys, grouped under a tree, their foreheads nearly touching, are singing a song, a rhythmic one. I can hardly understand their song, but they themselves, with their tattoos and their false teeth, are familiar to me. Their type emerged in Russia at the same time as here in America. There at home we didn't know that the whole world lived by the same laws. A vision of the Kharkov beach rises before me . . .

Vitka Kosoy, just as fat-pussed as these fat-pusses, a hefty boy with legs like tree trunks, is plucking the guitar. His face is turned toward my even more fat-pussed friend Sanya the Red, the butcher; their foreheads are nearly touching. Staring him in the eye, Vitka plucks the guitar and sings Russian rock:

*Ziganshin rock!*

*Ziganshin roll!*

*Ziganshin forty days in the snow!*

The melody of this song came to us via the radio, maybe from here, from America, but the words—which tell the story of four Soviet frontier guards who got caught in a blizzard and were picked up by the Americans—were composed by the Russian people.

Kosoy is just back from Moscow, where he served three years in the army, and has brought back this song and two or three dozen others like it.

They sing. People cluster around them. Here is a man in swimming trunks with palm trees. Everyone calls him Hollywood. He acquired this nickname because he speaks in quotes from foreign films. For example, we're walking in the park in the fall. Hollywood is bound to say: "These leaves rustle like American dollars."

The people in Washington Square are absolutely the same. There are small, purely American differences, the colored tattoos on their skin, for example, and the fact that some of the people, the singers and those

standing around them, are black. Nevertheless, I recognize in many of them my own faraway Kharkov friends, who by now have long since taken to drink. With the smile of a sage I also notice, sitting in an embrace on the parapet, two vulgar zonked blondes. In their puffy faces, their painted, smudged mouths and eyes, I recognize our unchanging girlfriends, girls from Tyura's dacha, Masya and Kokha, except that they're talking between themselves in English. Other spectators are also familiar. This man here with the black teeth is Yurka Bembel, who was shot in 1962 for raping a minor . . . And this is the exemplary technology student Fima . . .

Contenting myself with the song—having concluded it, the whole company of singers is sharing a marijuana cigarette—I march on. I go out of the park toward the Catholic student center and walk down Thompson Street, where, after passing a little Mexican restaurant, I briefly study the diverse and unusual chessmen, which never cease to astonish me, in the window of a chess shop. Occasionally I walk more to the left, down LaGuardia, where I drop into a clothing store. The proprietress, a large fair-haired Polish woman, talks with some of the customers in Polish. I invariably reject her help and look at the hats. The Pole does not get angry, though I've never bought anything from her, I always just look. I have a special predilection for white things. After leaving the Pole's, I cross Houston—a boring street, provincial as a street out of Gogol's *Mirgorod*, but with two-way traffic—and go down to SoHo.

The contents of the SoHo galleries have long since palled on me. I have frequented SoHo since the day I arrived in America. Bicycles of wood, typewriters of wood, shopping bags also of wood, or a wooden plant with slender leaves that sway in the wind, as well as the skeleton of a huge fish. I survey it all with indifference. The artist, a little Japanese, also looks to be made of wood, his cheekbones, his face, his gristly ears. I got used to contemporary art back in Moscow. A good hundred artists were friends of mine. I am not astonished at a photographic cycle depicting a hole being punched in a house. Cross-sections of the rooms, views from the right and left, from above and below, and to top it all off, a chunk of wall exhibited complete with plaster—these do not astonish me. Silky tulle bags at the Castelli gallery: Rauschenberg has entered his salon period. I much prefer his work in the Museum of

Modern Art on Fifty-third Street—cloth, iron, a used automobile tire, all crude and harsh—there is protest visible in the painting. Now Rauschenberg is a master, a luminary, rich people have bought him, his works cost big money, and naturally, though I doubt he realizes it himself, these tulle bags are his salon period, Puvis de Chavanne stuff; he has become a society painter, a decorator, “beautiful.” I miss the canvas cloth, the crude execution that has disappeared from his works. America gets even with its artists by other means than Russia does. Russia is also wising up, however. An exhibit at the board of the Soviet Artists’ Union by some friends of mine, artists of the extreme left, is a case in point: Russian administrators are learning from their American colleagues the more modern, humane means of killing art, namely, if you want to kill an artist, buy him.

Having visited all the galleries that are in the same building as Castelli, I usually go down to West Broadway. People are roaming around. I can always pick out the artists. Their faces are familiar to me, like the fat faces of the boys in Washington Square. These are the faces of my Moscow artist friends. Bearded, inspired-looking, or on the contrary unremarkable, whether worn out from work or fresh and impudent, they’re familiar down to the last little wrinkle. So are the faces of their girl friends—faithful women who have been with them through many years, or cheerful casual traveling companions to share a bed, a drink, and a smoke, who have not touched their hearts, who are here today and gone tomorrow. In April and March I wanted to live in SoHo, I was bursting to go there, I wanted to live in a small building, know all my artist neighbors, sit on the steps of the building at night, drink beer, gab with the neighbors, acquire solid connections. I wanted it so much, but lofts are extremely expensive and I did not realize my dream. Now that I have grown calmer, I no longer want to live in SoHo. I realize that I have changed greatly, that art alone no longer satisfies me, nor the people of art. That which once made me happy, the bohemian, light-hearted way of life, is already irretrievable, and if I succeeded in imitating it, it would soon turn out to be an unnecessary, irritating, and infuriating repetition of what I have already seen. They are selfish, I think as I trudge down the street looking at the denizens of SoHo. They seek success in this society, they are cynical and locked into their own circle of friends, they are hard to organize, and in the final analysis

they are merely part of this civilization. In youth they protest, seek, are indignant in their art, but later they become pillars of the system.

What has become of Salvador Dali? Once a talented artist he is now an old buffoon, capable only of adorning wealthy salons with his own mummy. It was in one such salon that I became acquainted with him. Elena and I had been taken there, as usual, by the Glickermans, Alex and Tatyana.

Dali was sitting in the place of honor, along with his male secretary and some girl. He turned out to be a short, bald old man with bad skin, who said to me in Russian: "Ladybug, ladybug, fly to the sky, Your babies are up there, eating meat pie . . ." This is what many generations of Russian children have said when the ladybug, with her little spotted winglets, lights on their hands. My Elena was in raptures over Dali, and he over her, it seemed; he called her Justine. Though her head was crammed with superficial knowledge picked up here, there, and everywhere, she was essentially an uneducated girl from the Frunze Embankment and did not get the point. Well, of course, I, big clever Eddie, told her that Justine was the heroine of one of the Marquis de Sade's novels. Dali called her "the little skeleton." "Thanks for the little skeleton," he told the Glickermans. His secretary, who spoke English worse than I do, wrote down our phone number and promised to call on a certain day.

Elena waited eagerly for the call. Although she unfortunately got sick, she constantly sniffed something to make her get well and said she would go to Dali's even if she were dying. But he didn't call. I felt sorry for the disappointed little girl, the old dotard had disappointed the child, and because of her despair and her cold and illness she and I fucked long and well that night, though it was already the era of the panties blotted with semen.

Everything is perverted by this civilization, the gentlemen in suits have fouled and besmirched everything. Lithographs and etchings by old dotards like Picasso, Miró, Dali, and others, which are sold in all the stores, have turned art into a huge unclean bazaar. The money they have is not enough, they want more and more. Paintings in oil, in tempera, are not enough; drawings, watercolors, and gouaches are not enough; to make even more money they do their hackwork on stone and put it on sale in hundreds and thousands of copies. They've devalued everything, the bastards. Many of them are burdened with wives and several fami-

lies, with relatives and friends; they need lots of money. Money, money and the greed for money, guides these wretched old men. Once rebels, they have turned into dirty operators. The same fate awaits the young men of today. This is why I have ceased to love art.

The only thing I fear in SoHo is Prince Street, where *he* lives, my wife's first lover. When I even glance at the signpost with the name PRINCE STREET it torments me, spots of light play before my eyes and I come close to vomiting. As I draw near Prince Street I try to avoid the signpost with the name, it exasperates me, it's such a substantive corroboration of my pain and torments, my defeat. But occasionally I fail to close my eyes in time, and then I am stabbed in the eye by this name. And more important, my heart: I am stabbed in the heart. The same thing happens when I'm riding the subway and all of a sudden the name of this station steps out of the darkness, bright and prominent, repeated perhaps fifteen times. It comes running after the train, running, running . . . Elena has apparently already left her Jean, but the terrible name will probably make me turn over even in my grave; before it I had known no defeats in life, or they had been immaterial.

Idle Washington Square and retiring, taciturn SoHo weary me at times, and I take to visiting Central Park, since it's right under my nose. Walk four streets up, turn off Madison onto Fifth Avenue, and there I am in Central Park. Usually I walk as far as Sixty-seventh or Sixty-eighth Street alongside the park and enter it near the playground. I climb uphill by a winding little path, go to the far end of it, take off my clothes, and lie down on the hot stones to tan. In my own geographical atlas this spot is called Children's Mountain. I lie there contemplating the sky and the posh penthouses on Fifth Avenue with plants sticking up from them, and I hypothesize about the kind of life that goes on there. The children run around near me. Usually these are good children. Bad ones turn up too—there was one savagely malicious boy, for example, who spent more than two hours breaking and tearing my favorite bush on Children's Mountain. There was nothing I could do but suffer in silence, for the cretin's father was sitting nearby smiling encouragingly. The father was also a cretin. When they left I got up and went to straighten the bush.

Back in Moscow the poet Sapgir told me that plants also suffer greatly, that special indicating devices had registered horror in a certain plant

when a man came into the room who the day before, in the presence of this plant, had killed another plant related to it. Plants do not fear me, but I had little success in putting things right after this fiendish boy.

Children's Mountain is where I am usually to be found in Central Park. I write poetry there, and while I do that my back, the rear half of me, is slowly turning black.

When I get tired of lying there I pull on my white trousers and set off to roam the park. Usually I go to the Alice in Wonderland sculpture and walk in her vicinity, or sit on a bench observing the children romping on the sculpture. She's never empty, this Alice, someone is forever romping on her. Usually I sit there until about four o'clock, and sometimes, looking at certain children, I am visited by strange desires, but sometimes I am totally normal and take pleasure in watching the shaggy-haired, freckly American boys boldly jump their skateboards down the five or six long steps near Alice. Some of them are remarkably adroit at this. There's one little kid I especially like, he's such a brat. He looks like a girl, even has curls, but his brashness and courage make him stand out among his other friends. They're too virile, he's a delicate boy.

I too was delicate as a child, for which my dogheaded friends always teased me. How could they understand that I was of a different breed? The boy by Alice is also of a different breed. Through his brashness, of course, he is trying to atone for his guilt before these little lowbrows. I too was desperately bold. On a bet I once went up to a woman hawking pastries at an outdoor festival and took one of her trays. Calmly bearing it over my head, I carried it off into the crowd and then into the bushes in the park. I was atoning for my girlish exterior. I was thirteen.

I smile. There's one good thing about my life. Measuring it against my childhood, I see that I haven't fucking betrayed it, my dear and fabulously distant childhood. All children are extremists. I have remained an extremist, have not become a grown-up. To this day I am a pilgrim, I have not sold myself, have not betrayed my soul, that's why I suffer such torments. These thoughts hearten me. And the princess I dreamed of encountering in life and always sought—I did encounter her, and it all came to pass, and now, thank God, I am behaving worthily, I have not betrayed my love. "Once, only once," I sigh . . .

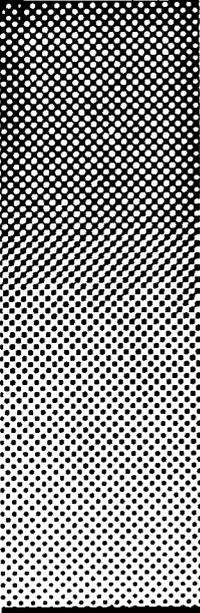
I forsake Alice, and the smile of the Cheshire Cat melts in the air.

Semipederast Red brat Eddie marches uphill in step to a gallant song from the Russian Civil War:

*Army White and Baron Black,  
They're fixing to bring the old Czar back,  
But from the taiga to the British seas  
The Red Army scatters its enemies . . .  
So be it the Red, with bayonet  
In calloused hand gripped fast.  
None can halt us! Into the battle!  
March and fight to the last!*

And all I want, gentlemen, at this moment, is a bullet in the head because I'm tired of holding on, to tell the truth, and scared I will not die a hero.

Beyond the park fence, New York picks me up in its arms. I sink into its warmth and summer—a summer coming to an end, gentlemen—and my New York carries me past the doors of its shops, past the subway stations, past the buses and the liquor store windows. “None can halt us! Into the battle! March and fight to the last!” resounds within me.



# THE NEW ELENA

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What has been happening to Elena, you will ask, while Eddie-baby has been sleeping with black guys, chasing after girl-revolutionaries, raging at Roseanne, and strolling around New York? How is she, Elena, and does Eddie encounter her, at least once in a while, in the jungles of the huge city—nose to nose, two animals who snort in recognition?

He does encounter her, yes. And oh, he remembers those encounters. They began slowly some time ago, but only in August did they become common and stick in my memory. Mild, all-smoothing August . . . it lay over my city in a dull, thready cloud, preparing the way for nasty autumn and harsh, leaden winter. A transition period, gentlemen. The rains kept trying to come, testing their influence over me. Nature convinced herself that I could take it, although rain does make me more gloomy and depressed—since earliest times, the Russian has been susceptible to the influence of the weather. “He can take it,” Nature said, and turned on the sun again.

There had been trivial interactions between Elena and me since April. We had found it necessary to meet from time to time in order to bring each other things or books, generally it was a matter of trivial objects changing hands. The normal interactions between a divorced husband and wife.

This time it was a lousy overcast day. I picked up my check at 1515 Broadway, then went to a bank on Eighth Avenue and cashed the check, then trudged to Fourteenth Street, spent a long time prying things and

finally bought myself a pair of panties (blue and yellow, the colors of the Ukrainian national flag), wanted to buy some strawberries and eat them but begrudged the eighty-nine cents, bought an ice cream, and went to the hotel.

When I arrived Alexander called and said there was going to be a hurricane.

I replied, "Only a hurricane? Not an earthquake simultaneously with a worldwide flood and a conflagration in the six New England states as well as the state of New York?"

"No," Alexander said, "only a hurricane, alas." Alexander too wished the world safe in hell.

Later Elena called. "I'll be home," she said. "You can come get your book."

By my "book" she meant that same long-suffering *National Hero*, the manuscript in English, which had been translated two years before and published nowhere. Elena was perfectly familiar with this piece of mine in Russian. The reason she needed *National Hero* was to give it to her new lover to read, George the economist, as she calls him. The "economist" does something in the stock market, and he's a millionaire. So Elena says; I don't know whether it's true. Let's suppose it is. He has a dacha in Southampton, where other such millionaires live. As Elena tells it, they don't do a fucking thing, they just smoke, sniff cocaine, drink, give parties, and fuck, for which she, Elena, is very glad. I don't know whether that's true either. At any rate, that's what she says.

How did my *National Hero* fit in here? Well, I think she wanted to brag to her economist about her clever ex-husband. In the process, part of the intellect and talent would automatically accrue to her, Elena. The economist could not have cared less about Elena's ex-husband's literary works and took three weekends reading my manuscript, although it's forty minutes' worth, and I think he preferred to fuck Elena rather than read her husband's literary works. People who have things behave very cautiously in this world, for they are afraid that somebody will lop off part of what they have. They need literature like a cunt needs a door.

I went to get the book. Since returning from Italy she no longer lived at Zoli's but rented half of Sashka Zhigulin's studio—this was where I had met the little Jewish bourgeoisie, if you recall—and her fucking economist had more or less promised to pay for the studio.

When I go to see her I am always nervous; I can't help myself, I'm

nervous like a child before an exam. I wore a little checked shirt, a denim vest, denim jeans, white socks, two-color shoes—very lovely shoes, though I had found them on the street—and a black scarf at my neck. I arrived.

She met me looking extraordinarily fine, in a billowing floor-length white summer dress, a red cord across her brow and neck. So beautiful I could kill her, the whore. What a weakling; how could I let her be fucked by anyone else?

Such were my thoughts, and to stay out of trouble I said, “Want me to buy some wine?”—and instantly fled to the store, almost before she could say, “Go ahead, if you want to.”

It seems I bought some good wine. I myself always drink just any old shit, but that’s me, I’ve always been a sensible mutt; she is a fair lady, it does not befit her to drink shitty wine. We each took a seat at the table. We sat, drank wine. Talked. Then Zhigulin arrived with his father, who had flown in from the country, from Israel. The father took a seat too, and so did Zhigulin. We talked about mutual acquaintances. Talked about Starsky. Formerly a rich and famous Moscow artist, Starsky had been a typical representative of, and in a way the idol of, Moscow’s privileged “golden youth.” Elena and he had moved in the same set; Elena’s ex-husband, Victor, was a friend of his. Elena was even in love with Starsky, and as she subsequently confessed, had dreamed of fucking him. But he didn’t get around to it, delayed for some reason, and then I forcibly burst into her life, and stayed in her life until she just as forcibly drove me out.

Elena wondered what life was like for Starsky.

“Bad,” replied Zhigulin Senior. “Sometimes I think he’ll do away with himself. He has no work, there’s almost no market for his paintings, he’s even been forced to sell his car.”

Starsky so loved cars, it was hard to imagine him without one; he had had one since childhood. “If Lyoka has sold his car, I can imagine what his life is like,” Elena said. “But why is he staying there and not leaving?”

“Life in Israel isn’t for him, of course,” Zhigulin Senior continued. “There, everyone goes to bed by eleven, but Lyoka—you remember Lyoka—that’s when his day is just beginning. He may come here; he’s apparently planning on America.”

"He'll be better off here," Elena said.

I thought, Now that you've broken loose from your chains, little one, you want to compensate yourself by fucking mustachioed, wrinkled Starsky, don't you? Anger flared within me. But instantly died out.

What can you do, Eddie? She's a free person, you can't do a fucking thing, she'll sleep with Starsky. You don't live by the Novodevichy Convent any more, Eddie. Times are different. Really, Eddie, are you sure she isn't fucking Zhigulin Junior? After all, they live in the same studio and their beds are ten paces apart. How could they not fuck, in a neighborly way?

My powerlessness gave me an unpleasant feeling. All I could do was observe her life, I couldn't even give her advice, she wouldn't accept advice from me. I am the ex-husband; that should not be forgotten. I am the past, the past cannot give advice to the present. Furthermore, all are free to mess up their own lives as they wish, and people like Elena and me are especially capable of messing up our own lives.

She is. I remember her first and last trip to Kharkov: Touched by the spectacle of my fat, gray, and crazy ex-wife Anna, she removed a diamond ring from her own finger and put it on Anna's. Anna, also a person given to excess in her hereditary madness (not without reason were her paintings so terrible and bright), rolled up her eyes and fell upon Elena's hand with kisses.

My thoughts flew back to Kharkov; I saw that scene vividly, and all my anger, which had been about to flare up, passed off. It may be worth living just for the sake of such scenes. Not to yourself, but from yourself—that's beautiful. That's why I so hate miserliness and do not love Roseanne. Elena Sergeevna is a little bitch, a whore, what you will, but she's capable of impulses, or was. Oh, I am proud of her now, from afar. What else do I have left?

The Zhigulins, both Senior and Junior, went up to see crazy Sasha Zelensky, who lived upstairs. Elena and I were left alone. She was in a quiet mood today and began to tell me how she had spent last weekend in Southampton.

She's ambitious, there's no help for it. "And the daughter of a certain multimillionaire was there too, you must know—," and she mentioned some name. I couldn't imagine how I, a welfare recipient, a moving man, John's helper, would know a multimillionaire's daughter's name,

or the daughter herself. “Well,” Elena went on, “so this girl came with a handsome guy. Later someone told me he was a gigolo, a man she had bought in order to have him make out he was her boyfriend.”

Elena was swaying on Zhigulin’s high stool, holding at some distance from her the very long cigarette holder that she had brought from Italy, a telescoping black lacquer tube.

“So this guy kept hovering around me, and the multimillionaire’s daughter was furious. She actually came in a T-shirt, dirty jeans . . .”

I had the cheerless thought that the poor multimillionaire’s daughter might be ugly, and . . . I had a shitload of thoughts, listening to her stories.

“But I’m sick of them all by now,” Elena went on. “Sunday was horribly rainy, you know, I put on a raincoat and walked along the seashore alone. It was so nice.”

I, Eddie-baby, by strange coincidence, having spent the night at Alexander’s, on that same Sunday morning had walked in the rain along the ocean to the Coney Island subway station. Not a single living creature was there. I rolled my trousers up to the knees so that the wet white duck wouldn’t lash against my legs, and walked, at times knee-deep in the water. There were seagull-pecked crabs and their parts on the sand, mussels, things of man that had fallen under the sea’s jurisdiction. Rain and more rain. A confused melody trembled within me. In this melody, perhaps, lay the sad implication that the world was worth nothing, that everything in this world was nonsense and decay and the eternal comings and goings of the gray waves, and only the indwelling love in my body distinguished me in any way from the landscape . . .

I told Elena, sparingly and simply, that I too had walked along the seashore alone that Sunday.

“Yes,” she said.

Then I went with her to buy hair coloring. She put on some gray old jeans we had bought her when she still lived with me. On the whole, as you will see later, she hadn’t acquired many new things. Either her lovers weren’t noted for generosity or she didn’t know how to squeeze money out of them or she made love with them just for the pleasure of making love; I don’t know.

She put on these little jeans and also a little black turtleneck, took an umbrella, and we set off. Like the good old days. The fucking rain was

coming down in buckets, but my heart was gay. I was walking with *her*. Our umbrellas touched now and then.

In the shop on Madison, everyone gawked at us—a slightly rumped pair of little kids had come to buy something. She chose hair coloring, and she then took half an hour choosing a cosmetics case, and during that time, gentlemen, I was enjoying myself. God had sent me pleasure. At length she finished choosing the case. Then she bought soap, some sort of cap for the bath, and something else. She asked if I had any money with me. I said, “I do, I do!”

“Give me a ten, I’ll pay you back later.”

I said she didn’t need to pay anything back; she didn’t have money now and I did. Several jobs in succession with John really had brought me some dollars.

I always loved to watch her browse in stores. She knew what was what, she knew what she needed, but always, here in America, the poor little girl had no money at all. It occurred to me, as I watched her, how nice it was that I hadn’t been able to strangle her, she was alive, and I wanted her to be warm and dry in this world—that was the main thing. As for the fact that all sorts of sleazebags were poking their cocks into her little peepka, well, all right, it was what she wanted. It hurt me, but she was getting pleasure. You think I’m farting around showing off, making myself out to be an all-forgiving Christ? Fuck no, this is honest, I wouldn’t lie, I’m too proud. It hurts me, it hurts, but every day I tell myself and instill in myself:

“Treat Elena, Eddie-baby, as Christ treated Mary Magdalene and all women who sinned. No, treat her better. Forgive her both today’s whoredom and her adventures. All right, it’s the way she is,” I exhorted myself. “If you love her, this long, thin creature in faded little jeans who is browsing now among the perfumes, sniffing them with an important air and unscrewing the stoppers—if you love her, love is above personal grudge. She’s unwise and evil and unhappy. But you feel that you’re wise and good: love her, don’t scorn her. Keep an eye on her life. She doesn’t want you to, don’t pry into her life, but help when you can and must. Help, and expect nothing in return—don’t demand that she come back to you in return for whatever you’re able to do. Love does not demand gratitude and gratification. Love itself is gratification.”

That is what I taught myself in the perfumery on Madison Avenue. Oh, I haven’t always succeeded, of course, but with interruptions for

malice and loathing, I have disposed myself more and more in that direction, and I think I do love her that way now.

To me her wash-faded jeans are dearer than all the blessings of this earth, and I would betray any cause for those slim little legs with their complete absence of calves, I thought in the perfumery, while this interested creature bent down and straightened up over objects and scents.

We returned to the eternally dark studio. Had it been light, Zhigulin would have paid a lot more than three hundred for it. To Elena there was nothing good about living in the dirty studio. After the wonderful Zoli Agency building, Zhigulin's studio was a come-down for Elena. What it was that she and Mr. Zoli did not share, what the reason was for her eviction, I don't know. Elena attributed his displeasure to the fact that she had left Milan without waiting for a show in which she was supposed to participate. Her trip to Milan had been totally unproductive for her career, and to all appearances Zoli was no longer betting on her at all, nor predicting a brilliant future for her as a model. Elena's friends, or enemies, told me in secret that Zoli was dreaming of getting rid of the eccentric Russian girl altogether; that was why he had packed her off to Milan. When she returned from Milan the room she had lived in was allegedly occupied. I don't know, that's what they say.

At Zhigulin's she occupied the left half of the studio, in theory at least. Her bed was located in an alcove, the mattress lay right on the floor, next came the pillows, and sometimes I noticed on the bed our linens, which she had had custom-made in Moscow, and which she had brought over with her. I have to turn aside when I see these linens—after all, they were witness to numerous love sessions with her. She is not a fetishist, but I am: vile fetishist, I throw away things of the past to keep from crying over them. So I turn aside. In many ways Zhigulin's studio is a museum because both my writing desk from Lexington Avenue and my armchair are there; Elena bought these when I began working at the newspaper. And our damn cat, white and deaf, filthy dirty or freshly washed, comes creeping out from time to time. She's still just as gluttonous and just as stupid. Zhigulin's whole studio—he has somehow wormed his way unnoticed into my life, a pretty good guy, by and large—his whole studio is strung with power lines, everything in it collides, crisscrosses, squeals, sparks. Sometimes the thought occurs to me, What if it's this way only to me, and not to Elena? What if, to her,

the studio is calmer and quieter? Or always a deathly silence? Then I really feel shitty. We're all automatically inclined to liken others to ourselves, and later it turns out we are far from the truth. I had already likened Elena to myself, had already been punished for it. To the end of my days the scars on my left arm, red from sunburn, will remind me of the un wisdom of likening.

We returned with several fruits of the perfumery paradise. I regretted not having much money with me. My girl, it appeared, was living on bread and water; a model's earnings, if she's not a big-time model, just rank and file, are paltry.

We got hungry. She took some fish sandwiches out of the refrigerator; she has always hated to cook. In our family I did the cooking, I was the waiter too; what's more I was secretary to her, my beloved poetess, retyped her poems; I made and remade clothes for her; I was also . . . in our family I had many trades. "Fool," you will say, "you spoiled the woman. Now you have only yourself to blame!"

No, I didn't spoil the woman, she was that way with Victor, the rich husband twice as old as she, whom she married at seventeen; she lived just the same way. Victor made the soup, drove a Mercedes, he was a private chauffeur—the poor artist was earning money, while Elena Sergeevna went out in an ostrich feather dress to walk her dog. And when passing by the Novodevichy Convent, she and the white poodle stopped in at a poverty-stricken, blindingly sunny little room to see the poet Eddie. It was I, gentlemen. I undressed this creature, and having drunk a bottle of champagne or even two—the poverty-stricken poet drank only champagne in the land of the Gulag Archipelago—having drunk some champagne, we gave ourselves over to such love, gentlemen, as you have never fucking dreamed of. The regal poodle—a girl, named Dvo-sya, who passed away prematurely in 1974—watched us enviously from the floor and let out an occasional yelp . . .

Oh, I don't want to remember. Presently on our agenda is New York, as I myself used to say when I was council chairman of a Young Pioneer detachment, a Pioneer and an honest child. On our agenda is New York. And that's all.

We gulped down the fish sandwiches. They weren't enough, of course, for the former husband and wife. The thin young man and woman had healthy appetites. I said I was hungry: "Shall we go eat somewhere?" "Let's," she said, "let's go to the Italian restaurant, it's

right close by, the Pronto. I'll call Carlos." Why she had to call Carlos in order to go to an Italian restaurant I didn't understand, but I didn't protest. I would have endured a hundred Carloses for the pleasure of sitting with her in a restaurant. Who knows, she may have been afraid to go alone with me to a restaurant. I had nearly killed her; she had her reasons.

The not-quite-strangled girl began dialing Carlos. He was a rather dim character, in my view. I had seen him once here at the studio, an ordinary person, nothing special, nothing interesting. He didn't do a fucking thing, but he had plenty of money, Elena said. Where from? His parents. That's the state of affairs the world revolution will be aimed against. Working men—poets and busboys, porters and electricians—must not be in an unequal position vis-à-vis shitasses like him. Hence my indignation.

She did not dress up at all, merely put on a little powder and wound the twisted red cord around her forehead and neck again, and went as she was in her little jeans and black turtleneck. He wasn't there yet, thank God. We sat on a raised floor to the right of the entrance, took a table for four, ordered red wine, and she looked around for him. She had developed this silly habit of waiting and looking around for someone. She didn't use to look around for anyone.

"I forgot to tell you," she said suddenly, a little embarrassed, as it seemed to me, "this is a very expensive restaurant. Do you have money?"

I had \$150 in my pocket; if I was out with her, I knew her habits. A hundred and fifty—it would be enough.

"I have money, don't worry," I said.

Then this character appeared. I wouldn't be hostile to him if it weren't for Elena, I have no fucking need of him, a dim character with a checkbook. Those who themselves have wrung money out of this life you can at least respect for something; what could you respect him for, dependent as he was on his parents? Why the fuck had he crossed my path!

He arrived. Short hair, conservatively dressed—that's not my expression, I swiped it from Elena and the lesbian Susanna. He sat down beside her, kept squeezing my darling's little hand. I found this disagreeable, but what could I do. An expression of Chris's rose to the surface of my mind: "Take it easy, baby, take it easy!" And I grew calmer. He squeezed

her little hand, kept putting his arm around her shoulders and taking it away. An open-and-shut case: she isn't letting him fuck much, or she let him just a little and isn't anymore, I thought with monstrous coolness, gazing at this woman to whom I had been married according to the royal rite in a brilliantly illumined church. I recalled the priest's farewell counsel: "Evil men will try to part you."

The evil man kept grabbing her hand. I could have shot him without a qualm. It's for men like him that the laws have been created, to preserve their property and their dubious rights, so that men like me will not achieve (without a qualm) the right to justice. I sat opposite him, even in my misfortune spirited and mean, with much more breadth and talent than he. All my misfortune lay in my virtues. I was able to love, knew how to love. But he was an indifferent cork bobbing on the waves of the sea of life, all he had was a cock, and he kept after her, touching her hand, seeking to insert his itching cock into her peepka.

They didn't talk about anything interesting. Oh, for propriety I asked him some questions, somehow participated in the conversation. My goal was to sit beside her.

Later, after we—mainly Elena and I, of course—had drunk several carafes of wine, we abandoned the rich people dining in warmth and light and went to the Playboy Club on Fifty-ninth Street. It had been there all the time, I could have walked out of the Winslow in my slippers and found myself in another world. Carlos had a Playboy card—of course he was a playboy, how could he not be. A bunny stood at the entrance, Carlos showed her his card. The bunnies wore ears and pantyhose, that was practically all they had on. Inside, in the semidarkness, other bunnies walked around serving drinks. Elena and Carlos led me through all the floors of the club, showed provincial Eddie the den of vice. Each floor had its own bar or restaurant, waiters in different uniforms, paintings and photographs, semidarkness, as I have already noted, and suchlike splendors. Amidst mild music, sipping my vodka from a huge glass, I remembered by contrast some friends of a week's standing, Brooklyn Bridge bums, and burst out laughing. Shit, and this is civilization. Why aren't they afraid of the gigantic waves that will some day rise up from the slums of Brooklyn and the Lower East Side and fucking submerge the little islets where the feast goes on in time of plague, where the sounds of hollow music flow, bunny asses flit around

practically bare, and my Elena walks accessible to all? And no provincial one-story America can fucking save anybody, all shall be as New York wants, my great and flaming city . . .

We were sitting near the dance floor, I was sipping my vodka, when suddenly Elena invited me to dance. We were off. Oh, she dances brilliantly, my angel fucker, as Eddie-baby once called her when drunk, while still her beloved husband. She liked the nickname then. Angel fucker.

During the first dance there were other couples on the stage, and the celebrated bunnies danced alongside us. Then for some reason we danced alone—who the fuck knows how we happened to be alone—and there was a flashing light that kept suddenly fixing our poses. It was delicious. She was near, and it seemed to me that nothing had changed. There had been no blood or tears, and now we would dance awhile longer, and start home with our arms around each other, and lie down together.

Shit, no way. We weren't there long. Carlos dragged us to the home of some friends of his to watch pornographic films. Our host was about fifty, in appearance he was like Tosik, a mutual acquaintance of Elena's and mine, a sharp operator from Tbilisi; his tart was young. During the porn films, in which disgusting and vulgar women joyfully swallowed the semen of a pimply cretin, my darling sat in the same chair with Carlos for some reason, and in my opinion he spent the whole time trying to grab or embrace her. They were sitting behind me, but even from the kind of noise they were making I understood that she was ashamed before me, and that he, Carlos, held none too high an opinion of her.

He sees her as a tart, I thought, and she keeps playing the queen and starting adoration games. I had taught her, Moscow had taught her: she was Fair Helen of Troy, the best woman in Moscow, and if in Moscow, in all of Russia. A Nathalie Pushkin. But she didn't see how he looked at her. The simple little idiot Sasha Zelensky, who is secretly in love with Elena, had said—not to me, of course, but to one of our friends—that he had encountered Elena taking a man to her place: "Do you know how he looked at her? We always made such a fuss over her: 'Elena, our Helen!' But *he* knew her price, our Helen's price, he knew perfectly well." That may have been Carlos, how should I know—Eddie-baby doesn't know a fucking thing. I have only pain, only pain.

Elena came over to me after the porn filth and said, as if in self-

justification, “Carlos wanted to see what my face would be like, how I’d react to those films. Well, how are you?” she said, and suddenly stroked my hair. Oh!

How was I? Picture a bandit at large, who is accustomed to react to everything simply and clearly: I felt like shooting everyone in the house and riding off with her into the night. But after all, this was her evil will—she and I had to live this way. And I endured it.

Then we left. He tried to get a taxi, I stood with her under the pillars of the building, and she said that I looked good, that I had found my own style in dress. I thanked her for the evening and for the Playboy Club.

“Have you been to the Infinite? It’s a discotheque,” she asked.

“No,” I said, “I haven’t.”

“I’ll take you, I have a membership card,” she said. “Or rather, it’s George’s card, but that’s all right.”

It was pouring rain. He finally flagged a cab. We started off, she demanded to be taken home first. We took her home; getting out, she kissed me on the lips. When I glanced in the mirror at the hotel, my lips were all lipstick. I wiped it off, and then was sorry I had.

A bit later there was another encounter, when a strange intimacy occurred between us, we embraced and kissed drunkenly, she was tender and quiet. This was on a boat, where we had gone in a group: Zhigulin and some fluffy girl, and the dried herring Zelensky, and us, ex-spouses.

The boat lay in a shallow little bay. Later the man who owned or rented it—he had arranged the party too, a certain Red—guided his old tub into a broader puddle, set it there in the middle of the puddle, and we all got drunk and stoned. Why we did this nobody knew.

Did I feel good? Not very, at first. To my good fortune, there wasn’t one man in the whole company who could have made advances to Elena. Two homosexuals, Mark and Paul, an old married couple, had more of a brotherly feeling for her. Still wearing the same little jeans and a wide lilac blouse, she paced among us, told bawdy anecdotes, served an ether-type drug to everyone in turn, held our nostrils herself and made us inhale. The mere pressure of her fingers on my nose was enough to put me in a faint. She was altogether the merry wench, thoroughly at ease with us, the life of our small party. My beauty paced among us a bit round-shouldered and ridiculous, and I was happy that there was no real man among us, no one was courting her in my sight. I was ready

to shower kisses on Red, who was a man of indeterminate sex, and a friend of his who had no reaction to either women or men and who turned out to be an expert on the leaders of revolutionary movements. At first Elena didn't talk to me very much. In the middle of the happening, when I was standing on the bow staring into the water, she came up and said, "This boat reminds me of that jazz boat, remember? We traveled down the Moscow River, and you and I got drunk and came up to blows, and then in the morning we crawled out the cabin window."

That was her first reminder of our past.

What followed happened as if in a haze and fog. No wonder I laid into the liquor and kept sniffing, with her help, though she served the drug to everyone. In the end, the moment when she and I embraced—I don't know how long it lasted—slipped away from me. I'm so vexed and angry now at my drunken self. I did not drink that moment to the last drop, did not feel it deeply, I remember only that it was tender and very quiet. I sat and she stood, I think, and I stroked her little bosom under the blouse. Then fate, in the form of Zhigulin, led us off in different cars, we went home separately, I remember my terrible anguish over this.

Well, of course I called her after that, groping to find what I had forfeited. In hopes of a meeting with her I went out and bought some shoes, dreamed of a carnation in the lapel of my white suit. She was busy, or more likely had recovered from her momentary weakness, and I, too, after suffering awhile, thought it was better this way, I mustn't hope for anything, otherwise little Eddie's life would again become hell, and this way it was only half hell.

After a time she called, though I no longer remember, maybe I called; nor do I remember whether our meetings were in the chronological sequence in which I've enumerated them or in some other order. I called, I think, and it turned out she was sick. She lay in the studio alone, Zhigulin was in Montreal at the time, and she was hungry. I bought her some groceries, I don't remember what, took some books, which she hadn't especially asked for, it was merely that the sight of these books evoked memories, and I didn't want memories, that was why I took her the books. I arrived—the door was open.

"Why don't you close it?" I said to her.

"Anh!" She merely waved a hand, sat down on the bed. She had on tight-fitting striped knit pajamas. I made her a sandwich, she snorted,

was dissatisfied with the kind of bread, I had bought the wrong bread. "A baby, a fucking baby, a rubber doll," I thought, looking at her.

Having eaten, she began to boast. Some lover of hers had offered her five million to go away and live with him. "Oh, Nastasya Filipovna," I thought, "you incorrigible eccentric!"

"He was poor when he met me," Elena went on. "I told him that so long as he was poor we had nothing to discuss. He went away somewhere, and now he's back and he's offered me five million. He made it on cocaine."

The woman who had been offered five million lay in her alcove, the mattress lay right on the floor, the refrigerator was empty and not even turned on, dirt and eternal semidarkness filled the studio, and for some reason there was no one but me to bring her anything to eat. Probably a coincidence.

She went on boasting to little Eddie. "I refused!"

"Why?" Eddie asked. "You've always wanted money, haven't you?"

"To hell with him. You always have to be on drugs around him. He's strong but I'm not, I don't want to turn into an old woman in a couple of years. And besides, they could always put him in prison, confiscate his property. And I didn't want to leave New York with him, I don't like him."

He made money on cocaine the way Shurik did on oranges and *anasha*, I thought with melancholy. Shurik went from Kharkov to the port of Baku, and there bought oranges and *anasha*. Not cocaine, a narcotic. He flew to Moscow and sold it all at many times what he had paid. Took the money, returned to Kharkov, and brought the money to Vika Kuligina, a whore. Now, there was a good woman. Must be old by this time. Had some talent. Wrote poetry. Took to drink.

Here's a parallel. Elena, Vika. But she doesn't know. I was the one who saw Vika. She's scrambled my whole world. The Shuriks, the Carloses. Cocaine. All is chaos, life chaos . . .

My last encounter with her earned me a gruesome attack of nerves. It was my own fault; she had nothing to do with it, she behaved in her normal fashion, did nothing to bring on an attack.

She called me in the morning and said, "Ed, do you want to go to my show? It's today at three o'clock." Her little voice, thin enough as it is, always becomes tiny when she's nervous.

I said, "Of course, Elena, I'll be very happy to!"

“Write down the address,” she said. “Between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets, on Seventh Avenue, the Fashion Institute of Technology, second floor, Editorial.”

I went. I was nervous. I had specially bought new perfume, put on my best white suit and black lace shirt, pulled my cross up under my throat. The bus moved terribly slowly, and I was already jittery in advance, afraid of being late.

I wasn't late. I found the hall in the Institute's huge building. All the front seats were taken. I located an empty seat somewhere in back and settled down to wait. On the stage a little garden or park had been created, plants set out in a special way, lighting set up in a special way. Electricians and photographers bustled around near the stage creating an atmosphere of anxious expectation. I waited.

Finally the sound came on, piercing music, strange to my ear. Perhaps the music struck me as strange only because it was so very long since I had been in any similar large gathering with people, so long since I had seen any kind of performance; except for the cinema I haven't gone anywhere, I've become unsociable.

They came out, they froze in assorted poses, and then set up a din, an uproar, depicting autumnal animation. Little girls. Hobby-horses, starlets, models—they all looked alike at first glance, and only later, straining my eyes, did I learn by great effort to distinguish among them. Children of the female sex, thin, harried, trained to special tricks, they crossed the stage in time to the music, walked down the tonguelike runway, twirled at its tip, threw the spectators a smile or a grimace or a deliberately sulky look, and withdrew as they had come. For some reason I felt sorry for them, and my heart contracted every time I looked at them. I felt especially sorry for the ones with short haircuts. Perhaps because their little faces, without exaggeration, were the faces of children who had just endured a grave illness. Good Lord, and loutish men mauled these children, mauled, fucked, lay heavy, forced their cocks into them. I felt miserable, and only by an effort of will pulled myself together and looked at the stage.

Meanwhile, Elena too had appeared. She was excessively fidgety and jittery. I don't remember her first costume because I didn't make her out immediately under the hat. By the time I realized that this was my darling, her little face had already flashed past and disappeared into the wings. Her second costume was something lilac, long and draped, it

might have been called a dress, but then again it might not have. Her eyes flashing under the hat, Elena drew applause from the audience.

But on the whole she performed worse than the other girls. Though I don't like to admit it, she jittered excessively; excitement made her overfamiliar and undisciplined. Among her girl friends there were several very high-class professionals. They worked precisely and mechanically, their movements were spare and honed, no unnecessary little added wrinkles appeared in their clothes, they exhibited a purity of style and purity in every movement. There was nothing extra: at the right time an abrupt movement of the face, up with the chin, all in time and precise.

But Elena pranced too much, flirted, took too much initiative, acted and overacted, bustled, her movements were impure.

If it were a question of beauty, in my view, Eddie's unobjective view, she was much more attractive as a woman than all the other models, all the rest of the corps de ballet. But her work was amateurish, that was obvious.

Judge for yourselves: She appears in a little white duck outfit with a hood, and white boots; you know, a nice kind of outfit for a young and idle woman to wear when she emerges from the door of her villa somewhere in Connecticut to gather mushrooms after the rain. So she appears in this little outfit, dances onstage to the music as if gathering mushrooms, or berries, if you don't gather mushrooms in America, and it comes off pretty well, some people applaud. But then when she has moved to the tongue, is already at the tip of it, precisely where she ought to display herself in large, Elena makes a sudden quick spin, her movements are jumbled, lose precision, so that we, the spectators, don't even have time to make out her face. Elena's smudged features flash by—hers? not hers? you can't tell—and she's gone from the tongue. She didn't fix the image of her face even for an instant, didn't know how to display it, stop it temporarily and present it. No, her performance was amateurish. The applause died out before it could begin.

At the end there were balloons, a procession, music, noise, tangled ribbons—here she was within her repertoire. Circus art is for her. She became entangled in the balloons, waved her hat and so on, she did this well. I was dissatisfied with her, I wanted her to be first in everything.

I hung around in the hall awhile and then went out to wait for her. By now many girls had walked by, they were being met by either lovers

or friends, or were leaving alone—there were, it seemed, thin and brash girls like that—but there was still no Elena. Finally she came in sight. She was wearing a white hat and a light, flowery outfit of some sort, a blouse and skirt—later I saw that they were old—and brown shoes, also old; her little legs were covered in dull pantyhose. I went over and kissed her (cowardly Eddie had resolved to kiss her), congratulated her, noting that the makeup on her cheeks was somehow stale, caked. She looked tired.

“Thank you,” I said, “I liked it, only you hurried excessively. It was clear they didn’t give you much time.”

That was what I said. I could not say I hadn’t liked the way she performed; I didn’t want to hurt her. Zhigulin was also standing there with his camera, absent-minded, distraught Zhigulin, who of course had just arrived and had seen nothing.

“I can’t understand where George is,” Elena was saying, irritably glancing around. “He was in the hall, but where is he now?”

She was very edgy, she had no fucking need of her faithful dog Eddie, who would have come crawling all covered with blood if she had called. She needed George, who was not there. Eddie was a noble knight: he did not remind Elena of her remark that she didn’t love anyone, all men were the same to her. Eddie well knew, from Elena’s friends, that George had not invited Elena to Southampton last weekend; that Elena had found in his house some Tampax, obviously another woman’s; that George, who had earlier promised to buy Elena a fur coat, was by now planning to buy her just a cloth coat. And that to this day he had never yet paid, even once, for Zhigulin’s studio, as he had promised to do. The lame-legged cynic and zhlob, he was toying with her like a mouse.

Eddie held his tongue and only said sympathetically, “Maybe he’s in the lobby, shall we go look?”—and went with Elena to the lobby.

Of course, there was no George in the lobby or in prospect. She did not cry, maybe she can’t cry, I don’t know; the last time I saw her tears was when I strangled her, or tried to. Now she was edgy. Turning to Zhigulin, she said she would go home, perhaps George would call home; after all, they were supposed to go to the theater that evening.

I said that it would be nice to celebrate Elena’s performance in the Russian manner and that I proposed going somewhere for a drink, it was my treat. Simultaneously Eddie-baby apologized for not bringing Elena flowers, I had been in such a rush to see her that I hadn’t had time, and

then I had wondered whether she wouldn't be angry—it might be preposterous, by local standards, to give flowers to a model who had taken part in a show. It might be provincial.

In the end the two of us went to a bar. Zhigulin didn't go. We sat, drank, and she explained to me a rather crazy idea of hers about some bolts of fabric in which she wanted to wrap herself up, thereby making a dress. She had some other wild designs for this same fabric; I was supposed to do the sewing. Although I myself am not a particularly normal guy, I understood that this too—Elena's desire to bypass money, have dresses in this way, simply and easily, and to play designer besides—was a form of the fucking craziness caused by Western life. I understood that this childish venture was crazy, not a fucking thing would come of it, but I consented. I was afraid of hurting her or provoking her anger.

"Now let's go and I'll show you the fabrics, I have them at the studio," Elena said. "You'll help me wrap myself up. I have to go to the theater with George tonight, and I'm so sick of my old dresses."

"Look, let me give you some money, and you buy yourself a dress," I said.

"Oh, no . . ." she said uncertainly.

"Why not, Elena," I said. "We're old friends. When you become a great model, you'll help me."

"But how much money do you have with you?" she asked with interest.

"Oh, about a hundred dollars," I said.

She thought for a second.

"Finish your drink," she said. "Let's go to Bloomingdale's and see what they have."

She knocked back her drink in one motion. At that moment we were served with little sausages and some meatballs something like *tefteli*, on a little dish. Perhaps this is the custom. She tried one, then took another by the little stick on which it was impaled and popped it into my mouth. Attention of a special sort, a caress. I paid, gave the barman such a big tip that he grinned with pleasure, and we left.

The taxi ride took a very long time, traffic was heavy. We could almost have gotten there faster on foot. She was very edgy, tried to get out too soon, I kept soothing her.

"No, I'll buy myself some shoes," she said when we got out of the cab.

"I can adapt that fabric somehow, but I still don't have any shoes." I said that it was up to her, and that I personally advised her to buy a big item, "something that will look important, be noticeable," I said.

This time, strangely enough, the shoes that she bought thirty minutes later were ones I had pointed out to her. They were black shoes on a high, thin heel with a little gold trim. She tried on these shoes, then dragged the saleswoman to another department, tried on something there, then returned, put two mismatched shoes on her feet, walked up and down, looked, and settled after all on the ones I had pointed out to her. Having completed the tedious payment procedure—at Bloomingdale's they don't hurry, the shoes cost \$57—we left and walked up and down through other departments. I don't know how we ended up in lingerie, she was already examining panties with ruches, frills, and flowers. "Do you like them?" she kept turning to ask me. "I've been terrified to look at women's underwear for some time," I told her. She let my remark pass. Why should she listen to me, she had no fucking need of my problems. I shut up again, although I so wanted to finish what I had to say.

We bought her a considerable number of panties and some other trifles, then went to the studio.

There she immediately undressed in the bathroom and came out wearing just her pantyhose, right on her naked body, without panties, as models do at shows to avoid having a panty-line on the hips. The triangle of hair at her peepka stared ironically at little Eddie. Bare-breasted and bare-pooed under the pantyhose, Elena walked out in the new shoes.

I don't think she was tormenting poor Eddie on purpose, she simply wasn't thinking about him. She was used to going around that way among photographers, among the staff, and did not intend to change her habits. Little Eddie would see her naked and be miserable? To hell with him!

"You're a nobody!" The words she had spoken to me over the telephone in February came back to me now. "No anger has my soul!" I told myself. "Like Christ with Mary Magdalene!" I went on, to calm myself. It helped.

Suddenly it dawned on me: Good Lord, she doesn't know what she's supposed to do with us all, with men, with the Victors, the Eddies, the Jeans . . . Use us in sex, get our money, have us take her to a restaurant.

That's all she can do with us. She's innocent as a baby, for she doesn't know how else she can use us. No one ever taught her. For the rest, we get in her way. She was dreaming when she lived with Victor, she was dreaming with me, she's dreaming now. She doesn't care who's with her. *She doesn't see.* The discovery terrified me.

*She doesn't know about love.* Doesn't know that it's possible to love someone, pity him, save him, snatch him from prison, from illness, stroke his head, wrap his throat in a scarf, or, as in the gospel, wash his feet and dry them with her own hair. No one has told her about love, God's gift to man. Reading books, she missed it. Brute love is accessible to her, there's nothing complicated about that. She thinks it's all there is. This is why she's always so depressed in her notebooks (I've always read them), so helpless and dull in her perception of the world.

Maybe she'll be lucky yet and fall in love. It will be hard for her, and wonderful. I envy the man with whom the love of this unfortunate creature at last finds expression. He will inherit a lot. So much love must have accumulated within her. But most likely she will never experience the happiness of giving her whole self, her soul, to another creature, never experience the sweet pain of this act, so unnatural in an animal, which is what man is.

Many of you in this world, like her, are unhappy, but only by reason of your inability to love, to love another creature. Poor, poor you! When Eddie fell apart he was nevertheless happy; though sick, he has within him *Love*. Envy him, gentlemen!

Such were my reflections while she twirled her poopka, and at that moment Zhigulin arrived.

"Eddie bought me some shoes," she said.

"Would you buy some for me?" Zhigulin asked with interest.

"Elena, you're supposed to go out, and you also promised to go to the bar with me," I said, not answering Zhigulin.

"We'll make it," she said. "I'll shower now and we'll go to the bar."

She showered and we began the wrap job. It was horribly silly: she with nothing on, as before, and I with trembling hands wrapping her in transparent fabrics, first lilac, then black and yellow. This was crap, she realized it, but she said we didn't know how to wrap, neither I nor she. Of course not, how could we, we weren't Indians.

She decided to wear the lilac dress. I was put to work hemming up the dress for her. I hemmed it, what else! I can do everything, it's really

lousy. Finally, after ordering Zhigulin to send the lame “economist” downstairs to the bar, she went down with me. My white suit jacket was unbuttoned, she wore the weird lilac dress and the shoes I had bought her, with the long cigarette holder in her hand—beautiful, seductive. You might have thought we were rich people, a husband and wife, or lovers, prosperous Eddie and the beauty Elena whom prosperous Eddie had bought, going down to the bar.

She ordered cognac, I whiskey, J&B. We drank. Striking people. I had already begun to enter into the role, but she kept distracting me, the whole time she kept looking out the window at the street, and suddenly she broke loose. She walked out—walked out, hell, she ran out—and returned with someone wrinkled and mustachioed, I briefly saw something yellow. She introduced us and they left at once, my lilac vision withdrew. “His name is George.” We know he’s George.

The Japanese barman saw, the barman understood. They had stabbed me in the heart, and at that moment everything burst into flames, everything!

And how would you have felt in that bar on East Fifty-fourth, Fifty-eighth Street, if a rich man had stolen your love merely because he was rich, and you were left on the stool to drink your J&B and pose as a visiting foreigner? Fucking shit! All my hatred for this world—the personal hatred of talented brave Eddie, musky little wild beast—a bitter and miserable hatred, unable to vent itself, was instantly in my eyes.

Do not forget the milieu in which I grew up and was formed. A milieu where love and blood stood side by side, betrayal was barely a step ahead of the word knife. I sat on the stool and reflected that the boys back home, my friends rotting in prison camps for their crimes, the gangsters and thieves of Kharkov, now scorned me as a pathetic rag. “They stole her, you shitass, and you didn’t even put a knife in the chump’s ribs. Everyone who feels like it fucks her, she sucks them all off, you shitass, and you let them mess on your soul. Asshole, coward, lousy fucking intellectual!”

So said the boys, they spoke terrifyingly and frankly. From their own parochial viewpoint they were right, yes, they were definitely right, by their code and mine I should have knifed her if I loved her. And I did love her.

Little Eddie was silent. What could he say to the boys? That this

was her own evil will, that lame George had nothing to do with it, or Jean . . .

When Kirill walked into the bar—this was half an hour later, Zhigulin had told him I was sitting here with Elena—he told me afterward, “From the look in your eyes, you’d just seen someone run a red-hot poker through the head of your beloved child.” Kirill loves to express himself ornately, but evidently it was true.

When he came in I was on my sixth or seventh J&B, I ordered the same for him, it may have been White Label, I don’t know, but we drank it and went from there to another place, and I remember almost nothing further. Kirill said afterward that we were in several bars, that we got thrown out of one, that I undressed and swam in a fountain, that I climbed up on some sort of sculpture and jumped down, that I posed as a mobster, a godfather. Of course this was all my subconscious.

He spent the night at the hotel, and in the morning he and I had a row. When I tried to take my contact lenses out of my eyes, I discovered they weren’t in my eyes. “Fuck the lenses, fuck the two hundred and twenty dollars, so much is already lost that this isn’t even a loss,” I told Kirill. He evidently caught my inner hysteria because he began to torture me with stories about how I had behaved.

“You were repulsive,” Kirill said in a sort of malicious ecstasy. “You hurled yourself under cars, you took off your shoes and went barefoot, your face was vile.”

Kirill said all this standing over me as I lay on the bed with my face to the wall. A pleasure, when they get to you at fucking eight in the morning. Your world’s a filthy garbage pit as it is, and now they have to denounce you too.

“Leave me alone,” I said wearily. “What do you want from a sick old man, why are you telling me all this?”

He screamed, “I’ll smash that prostitute’s face! Why does she take money from you? Let her get money from the guys she sucks off! You bought her panties, you fool, you shitass! George, Jean, some other photographer, and Zhigulin are all wiping their dicks on your panties, she’s fucking all of them now! Jean called me, boasted he’d fucked Elena again, twice!”

He kept yelling like that and I drove him out. He went away, and I plunged into a terrible idiotic state, now floating up from the gloom, now

plunging back in. When I floated up, I got a drink of water, lay down again, thought interminably about Elena, about the fact that I, Eddie-baby, had no fucking reason to live in the world the way I was.

I lay there until twelve o'clock and then went to the shower, thinking I would go out to Eighth Avenue and *get* a prostitute. That ought to calm me. You can't die—you have to live. I had already collected myself completely, I even knew exactly who I would get on Eighth Avenue, which girl, when suddenly the phone rang. This happened when I had just put a ten in one pocket and another ten in the other—that's my way. After love I planned to take the prostitute to a bar, I needed to have a drink with someone.

The phone rang, and from the receiver poured forth the voice of my beloved. My beloved ordered me to report to her without delay for implementation of her crazy designs. Since she demanded it, I had to go. Eddie's cock would have to wait. I could put off the prostitute. Suicide too. I had to cut out little Elena's transparent fabrics for her. Picking up a hardly touched bottle of whiskey of unknown provenance, I set out to see my ladylove.

My ladylove, before cutting the fabric, was planning an expedition to Bloomingdale's to purchase thread, belts, pins, zippers, and other frippery. I went with her. I bought her some fur slippers she liked; panties were purchased again, and other items. When we left I didn't have a cent, and she had nothing left of her \$20 either, we had pooled our dimes and quarters for the last panties. The panties were red. I thought with anguish about the prostitute; I had no more money. You think I regretted anything? Far from it. I always act on my whims, the little girl was glad for the panties. I enjoyed it.

Zhigulin and his guest, who met us in the studio, did not appreciate the panties. Lowbrows, what did they know about red panties. Only with me could Elena talk about them, only with me. We also drank, shot the bull about this and that. After several good slugs of whiskey I completely lost any desire to cut or sew. But, fucked out and drenched in sweat, I got busy with it anyway.

I cleared their things off the table, spread out the fabric, and began to puzzle over it. I was very tempted to lie down and take a nap. She was walking around here, Zhigulin was here, the cat was here, I would have fallen asleep calmly and without nightmares in her bed, for example. But I didn't have the guts to ask. Quite possibly she would have

consented. I would have asked to sleep without her, not with her.

I was busy over by the fabric, she was bullshitting on the phone in Zhigulin's sector, and gradually that began to irritate me. She might at least have the decency to sit with me while I work, I thought. Sit with me, hell—she soon donned a red hat and took off completely. "I'm going to work," she said. All her work, what was it worth? She didn't have a cent.

She left, Zhigulin fiddled with his lights, and little Eddie, rejoicing that there was no supervision, immediately abandoned the cutting and quickly reoriented himself, found something to do. He pinched from her bookshelf a suspicious black notebook, opened it, and saw Elena's notes. Eddie knew these notebooks of hers, he himself had once given her such notebooks. This one was hardly filled in, almost clean. Eddie thrust the notebook under his jacket and walked past Zhigulin into the bathroom, then closed the door behind him, settled down on the edge of the tub, and with sinking heart began to read.

What was in it was murk. That's a good word, I love it—it expresses her notes well. Isolated expressions apparently pertaining to me: "Why do you love me?" "What forces drive me?" There were grass, trees. George was mentioned. "George came, George went," and did some other things.

Murk, murk, and more murk. Breakfasts with a king. Everything much worse than it used to be, not poetry but a hash of semicoherent sentences, the theme of which was primarily self-adoration. Something about the hotel in Milan, where she had had no money; thoughts of death in this connection; and again murk, turbidity, the heavy vapors of a loveless soul.

But suddenly I stumbled upon this note: ". . . and Eddie, I am guilty before you. My poor, poor baby! And God will punish me; when I was a child I read a story that had the words, 'You are responsible in life for all whom you have tamed . . .'"

I read this and felt so sorry for my girl that I could have cried. When had she written this, evidently in Milan? Poor creature, you feel bad because you don't know that love exists. My unhappy girl who made me unhappy, how can I blame you! The loathsome loveless world is to blame, not you.

Zhigulin asked to come into the bathroom. I summoned my strength, walked out of the bathroom, talked with Zhigulin, drank more whiskey,

and thought about her. She understood almost everything, it turned out. But what had made her kill her poor baby? Nature's blind imperative to have many males? I did not know. All the same, I cut out some slacks from her crazy fabric for her, then took what I had cut and went to my hotel . . .

One of my most recent encounters with Elena was poetic and sad. I called, she said in a strange dark voice, "Come, but hurry." We had made prior arrangements to meet; I was supposed to get the rest of the crazy fabric from her. I arrived, she was tearstained, barely restraining fresh tears. She was sitting on the bed studying a heap of old photographs of her childhood; her father had just sent them to her from Moscow. She was sobbing, tightly buttoned into black slacks and a red blouse, this was the same red blouse in which she had brazenly and self-assuredly, in February—she had spent the night away from home—when she showed up in the morning she had proddingly told me that I didn't know how to enjoy myself. Me, a man out of his mind with grief. Now, six months later, she was bawling in front of me in this same blouse. "Not yet has she worn out the blouse"—the poetic image flashed through my mind. She doesn't notice these details, of course. Only I—close observer, attentive scholar, self-mocking subtle Eddie—remember all these rags, blouses, bagatelles, and photographs.

"Do you want to look?" she said through her tears.

"Yes," I said, "only don't cry. Why are you crying, is there some reason?"

"What's new?" she sobbed. "Everything's fucking lousy—work, work, work. If I'd been born here, it would be easier for me. But I'm a woman, not a man," she moaned. "I'm tired!"

I reflected that in terms of sexual characteristics I was a man, but fucking shit, I was sure that no woman had ever experienced such torment as mine. As you know, my considerable scorn for women had by now spread to Elena too. I pitied her, however; I did not see her as an unsuccessful model, a woman embroiled in difficulties, as she was in reality. I saw the little girl from the wooden house in Tomilino, a sly, mysterious little girl. And of this little girl only I in all the world—no one else, gentlemen, I am sure of it—was worthy.

Of the Russian model Elena, George was fully worthy. Jean was a bit lower, yet he too was worthy of her. But of this little girl, with her braid, in her little white stockings, standing in her garden, and behind her, like

scenery in a pastoral opera, birches, shrubs, a segment of a wooden house—only I was worthy. The little girl had dreamed of a prince, as does many a little girl in Russia and probably here too. But when Prince Eddie arrives, evil intervenes. Chaos hates love, it whispers to the little girl that this is not a prince: “Princes do not live in Lexington Avenue apartments, nor go to work in the morning at émigré newspapers,” whispers Chaos. “This is not he!” whispers Chaos.

Eddie is driven out, and they go debase themselves before the Georges and the gentlemen who follow in their turn. Such were my reflections as I studied her photographs. This too was a painful pastime, gentlemen, no good at all.

“Only don’t steal the photos,” she said through her tears, holding the next packet out to me.

“Why not?” I said. “You’ll lose them anyway, or you’ll get ripped off. Don’t be afraid, though, I’m not about to steal them.”

She had stood up, meanwhile, and set about looking for something. Suddenly she let out a loud wail. “Fucking shit,” she said, “why do I live in this abominable dirty place, where’s my little book? Some mother-fucker’s already pinched it, everyone here steals and swipes things. Why am I so unhappy?”

Weeping, she undertook to wash the dishes. I went and tried to touch her shoulder. “Take it easy!” I said. She shook off my hand. She’s afraid of intimacy. Fool! I had wanted to soothe her. She thinks I enjoy watching her weep! Unhappy beast! Lonely beast, thinking to build happiness for herself out of casual caresses. But why wail now? After all, she had wanted to be a lonely beast.

“Quit crying,” I told her distractedly. “Everything’s going to be all right.”

“You always say everything’s going to be all right!” she said spitefully through her tears.

Oh, once I had known how to soothe her. Both her anger and her tears. Nowadays I couldn’t use those means. I merely said, “If you want we can go down to the bar and have a drink. It’ll relax you, make you feel better.”

“I can’t,” she said, “I have to go out. George is picking me up, we have to go see a famous designer.” She mentioned a name. “Zhigulin didn’t want to go, the bastard. He said, ‘I don’t have anybody to fuck there. You’ll be fucking George, but there’s no woman there for me.’”

We aren't going there to fuck, I have to work, we're going there to shoot."

It was quite absurd, but she was sobbing. She was sobbing.

The phone rang. It was her economist calling. I heard her keep repeating to him through her tears: "It's horrible, it's horrible!"

I thought, What kind of a bastard is he, that he can't do it, even seeing how she suffers without an apartment, living in this passageway? What kind of a bastard is he? A millionaire, and he can't rent her an apartment so that she can live there awhile, rest, have a normal good sleep. That, for him, would be like me throwing away a penny on the sidewalk. "He's cynical and clever," Zhigulin had said of him; others said so too. Cynical and clever man, where's your kindness? What the fuck is anything worth in this world without kindness?

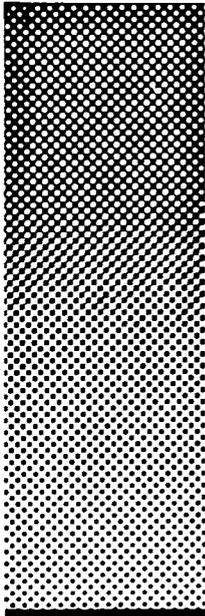
To me he was an intolerable shit because he didn't help her live, he used her. She was alone in this city—what did I count for, to her I didn't exist, therefore I couldn't help in any way—she was alone, she was cold, she felt lousy, and she didn't even have a coat, but he limped on his lame leg and said nothing.

Brute, I thought, petty animal! If she made me a sign, my lady did, I'd slit his throat in a matter of seconds. I was, after all, a sound, spare, thirty-year-old man who had never had any sickness, my muscles were rock-hard from lugging other people's furniture, and in my boot I always had my Solingen friend. He wouldn't have had time to let out a peep. But she had wanted all this herself, and to me her will was law. By habit.

On the other hand, if he'd taken care of her I would have respected him and thought well of him. This proposition was tested on Victor, Elena's previous husband. He loved her, fussed over her as if she were a baby; it always disarmed me. As you see, little Eddie is just.

He crawled into the studio about ten minutes later, he had been somewhere nearby. We greeted each other wanly. Elena put on a little black hat and left with her tears undried, asking me to stay awhile at the studio, wait for some girl friend of hers. I sat, smoked, waited for a slender girl friend who looked like an aging page boy, shot the bull a while with Zhigulin when he came in. Then, taking the lilac and the red fabrics—through the semitransparent wrapper they shimmered with all the colors of the rainbow—I went to my hotel, discoursing to myself on the injustice of a world in which one who loves is not fucking needed, but one who does not love is needed and impatiently awaited.

Downstairs at the hotel a phone message was waiting for me, a square of paper on which was written, in the switchboard girl's uncouth handwriting, "Call Carol," and a phone number. Going up in the elevator, I smiled. We'll talk again sometime with these Georges. Under other circumstances.



## EPILOGUE

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I'm sitting on my balcony on a banged-up chair in the sleepy October sunlight, studying an already old summer magazine that I fished out of a trash can and brought back to my room to practice my English.

Here they are, those who have behaved in exemplary fashion in this world, its A and B students. Here they are, those who have earned their own money. He has seated his overnourished ass on the edge of a swimming pool, the pool is streaked with blue. She, wearing a swimsuit, thin, her face just horsey enough to be chic, holds in her hand a glass of Campari. His glass stands beside him on the edge of the pool.

The caption reads:

"You're having a long hot day around the pool and you're ready to have your usual favorite summer drink.

"But today you feel like a change. So you do something different. You have Campari and orange juice instead . . ."

I've never had a long hot day around the pool. I confess to never having swum in a pool in my life. Yesterday I had a cold disgusting morning at the welfare center on Fourteenth Street. When I got there it was half-past seven. Outside the closed doors welfare recipients stood in line in both directions, hunched against the morning cold.

They don't take many pains with their appearance, these fellows. Some have a growth of stubble, some are dressed in shapeless overalls, hand-me-downs. Many are hung over, some already drunk. One guy, who has obviously been smoking or shooting up since early morning,

keeps dropping his papers. I help him pick them up a few times, but after half an hour he starts falling down periodically himself. Fortunately he has some friends in line, they arrange him, prop him up somehow so that he won't fall. People on their way to work try to give our line a wide berth, our people throw them grim and challenging glances. We stand, say nothing, wait. We're cold. After more than an hour they let us in. The policeman jokes with us. Since we are assumed to be slow-witted and obtuse, we all hold slips of paper in hand, and a man standing at the door glances at them and reshuffles our line accordingly.

"To the railing," the policeman says, and moves us along to the railing. He has to make room for yet another line beside us. In exchange for our white slips we receive red ones with numbers. Mine is number 19. This is not a very lucky number for me. But what the hell, I think, and in the company of my fellows I cross over to the next line, leading to the elevator, to which we are also admitted in groups. Although the group is large, everyone tries to crowd into the elevator at once so as not to get left behind. God knows what might happen if you got left behind.

Casual visitors going up in the elevator without any number slips huddle fearfully in our midst. We are going to the fifth floor. Jokes and oaths aimed at the chance visitors are heard. The atmosphere reminds me of being drafted into the Soviet army; the draftees too had a psychology nicely summed up in the words "I'm a goner," and a sense of isolation from the rest of society.

The elevator delivers us to an enormous hall with rows of desks, we put our red slips in a basket by the railing and sit down to wait. A hall like a field, except that the desks and chairs make it different from a field. The whole place is painted the unforgettable color of bureaucracy. And it has that same smell, the smell of a barracks, a prison camp, a railroad station, any place where many poor people are congregated.

A black boy sits down beside me. Judging by the white band on his forehead, his hairstyle and distinctive clothing, he is a homosexual. We look at each other appraisingly for a while, then avert our eyes. We're here on business, the need to listen keeps distracting us. The staff workers call out a name from time to time, and names are hard to hear in a hall like a field. For this reason an incipient excitement stirred by my neighbor's languid eyes quickly fades. A welfare center is not the best place for generating love.

We have to wait a long time. People get irritable. A certain Mr. Acosta, wearing a cape and a straw hat, a small man with a little Mexican mustache, gets irritable and shouts why aren't they calling him, Acosta, when people who arrived after him are already sitting discussing their needs with the staff. He's very funny and at the same time villainous, this Acosta. If I were a film director I'd make an actor out of him.

A tidy black boy in glasses, from Trinidad, is telling his story to a girl with an exhausted face and a hoarse voice. The girl has evidently been through so much in this life that she's not afraid of a fucking thing, and for that reason she's a kind and simple person. When the boy from Trinidad is summoned and walks away, the girl starts a friendly conversation with an indignant fat man in overalls who has a Burger King bag in his hands. The girl is open to the world, I have fleeting thoughts about them all, I want her to rest, this exhausted thin little girl in her black jacket, in her slacks and her high-heeled boots.

The little cripple with the short legs I know from somewhere, she even greets me. And here's a hooknosed, very ugly girl, ugly to the point of exotic charm, tall and neat in her denim outfit, evidently here for the first time. Sitting in front of me, she fidgets, keeps jerking her knee and constantly glancing around at me. I try to give her a level gaze. I must not deceive her by making any overture, I'm not courageous today. Gradually, after considering the way my slacks cut into my poopka and the way I'm poured into my short little jacket, the girl begins to realize that I'm an odd duck, and she turns her attention to me less and less often.

If I had my way, I would want to comfort them all. If, in order to do it, I had to fondle the hooknosed girl, fuck her, take her to live with me, then that's what I'd want. And the exhausted girl, too. And the boy with the headband. And Mr. Acosta, he's a good fellow. And this one, with the amulets and the hat. And the drug addict. We'd have a ranch with room for them all. And for Carol. And Chris. And Johnny. We should even take Roseanne—I've been unjust to her.

I spent six hours at the welfare center that day.

Swimming pool. It would be nice sometime to have the honor of a swim in a pool. Some long hot day I will. And I'll have Campari and orange juice.

I tear myself away from the magazine and look down. All summer they were wrecking the buildings under my window, the din was insuff-

erable. No buildings now—a level area covered with brick dust. Autumn. Time for me to move on, the Hotel Winslow has outlived its usefulness. Time to move on.

You think I never yearn for slavery? I too yearn sometimes. For a white house under the trees, for a large family, for a grandmother, grandfather, father, and mother, for a wife and children. For work, which would buy all of me, including my mind, but in return I would have a fabulous house with a lawn, with flowers, with a wealth of household appliances, a clean little smiling American wife, a freckled, jam-smearing son in football cleats . . .

But why dream—it's futile. Fate is fate, I've already gone too far. I'll never have any of that. The family will not sit down around the evening table; nor will I, a lawyer or doctor, tell what a complex case I had today, or what a difficult but interesting operation.

I'm a punk. I'm on welfare. I have to cook for myself now, eat shchi. I'm alone, I have to think of myself. Who else will take care of me? The wind of chaos, harsh and terrible, has destroyed my family. I also have parents, far away, halfway round the globe from here, on a green little street in the Ukraine. Papa and Mama. Mama's always writing me about nature: when the cherries bloomed under the window, and what good jam she's made from the apricots that she and Papa once planted under the windows, good jam, your favorite, Son, but there's nobody to eat it. I, little Eddie, have no other relatives. My uncle and grandfathers died in the war. At the Leningrads and Pskovs. For the interests of the people. For Russia. Shit.

From my wives and girl friends I have picked up certain habits to live with. In the morning I drink coffee and smoke a cigarette at the same time. A plebeian boy in essence, a mongrel, I picked up this bohemian habit from Elena. I live.

Life in itself is a meaningless process. This is why I have always sought a lofty occupation in life. I wanted to love selflessly, I was always bored alone with myself. I loved, as I now see, extraordinarily, powerfully, and terribly, but it turned out that I wanted an answering love. It's not good when you want something in return.

A man who has lost all but has not surrendered a fucking thing, I sit on the balcony and look down. Today is Saturday, the streets are deserted. I look at the streets and am not in a hurry. I have lots of time ahead of me.

What, specifically, will happen to me? Tomorrow, the day after, a year from now?

Who knows! Great is New York, long are its streets, homes and apartments has New York of every sort. Whom I shall meet, what lies ahead, none can guess. I may happen upon a group of armed extremists, renegades like myself, and perish in an airplane hijacking or a bank robbery. I may not, and I'll go away somewhere, to the Palestinians, if they survive, or to Colonel Qaddafi in Libya, or someplace else—to lay down Eddie-baby's life for a people, for a nation.

I'm a man who is ready for anything, you know. I will try to give them some gift. My heroic deed. My senseless death. But why say try! I have tried for thirty years. I'll do it.

Tears of agitation well up in my eyes, as always when I am agitated, and I no longer see Madison Avenue below. It dissolves and runs.

"Fuck you, cocksucking bastards," I say, and wipe away tears with my fist. Perhaps I'm addressing these words to the buildings around me. I don't know.

"Fuck you, cocksucking bastards! You can all go straight to hell!" I whisper.



## About the Author

EDWARD LIMONOV was born on February 22, 1941, in Gorky, USSR. His father was a member of the secret police. Eddie spent his childhood and adolescence in Harkov, that Detroit of contemporary Russia. He attended high school, mastering the art of the petty crook. Between 1967 and 1974 Limonov published eight volumes of *samizdat* poetry in the USSR. His poems have appeared in translation in Spain, Austria, Italy and Switzerland. In 1974 Eddie emigrated to the West and in 1975 he settled in New York City.

Edward Limonov has been a construction worker, a waiter, a tailor, a painter, a steelworker, a mover and a caretaker of an elegant New York town house. Among his other works are *Diary of a Loser*.

Edward Limonov currently resides in Paris, that is Paris, France.