

Konstantin Usov

# A BOOK

**FOR** PRINCESSES  
AND SUFIS



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*Illustrations by Evgeny Solodky*

This book tells the story of how at the age of fifteen the author became aware of a need for something more than what ordinary life could provide and began his search for the meaning of existence.

Having passed through a number of trials, privations and hardships in the course of his search, he came upon a Sufi Master and set out on the path of a spiritual and mystical quest.

At the age of forty-six the author became a Master of the Sufi path and opened The Spiritual and Mystical Practices School of Sufism, where he conducts training for those who seek to understand their own nature and to learn the Truth.

A separate section is devoted to practices within the Sufi path, and inner obstacles that may impede the student's progress.

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# CHILDHOOD

I was born on May 14, 1971 in the city of Irkutsk. I don't remember anything about my father, like he never even existed, since my mother divorced him when I was a year old. When I turned five my mother went to the North to earn money while I stayed behind, living with my grandpa and the old lady. In their past lives both the old lady and my grandpa had worked for the KGB, and so from the very start the direction of my upbringing was predetermined.

The old lady was no shrinking violet either, she was tough: she worked in a department of the military counter-espionage service called SMERSH and received the medal "For Valor" during the Second World War. There was discipline in everything: breakfast, lunch, dinner and bedtime all to a strict schedule. If I did anything wrong, I'd immediately get the belt.

Grandpa was retired and worked as housekeeping manager at the resort where we lived, twenty-three kilometers from Irkutsk on the way to Baikal.

When I turned seven I was sent to a residential school. This was a kind of student dorm you had to live at from Monday to Saturday. I would be taken home for Saturday evening and Sunday.

The resort was in a forest, a picturesque spot on the banks of an inlet from the Angara River. The summers meant bike rides, fishing, mushrooms and berries, while in winters it was toboggans and skis. Out of the children there were two

girls from my class and the brother of one of the girls who was four years older than us. He would listen to pop music on a reel-to-reel tape recorder, he was an amateur photographer and had soldered together his own light organ.

Through him I learned how to take photographs and became a life-long music fan. I later attempted to solder something of my own, but as electronics developed it was a hobby that soon became obsolete.

Sometimes important guests would fly in to see Lake Baikal and stayed with us at the resort. The King of some African country came, the Prime Minister of Finland and other important people. I remember the pop group ABBA very well, because there was a banquet organized for them one evening, and I went out on my bike and hid in the bushes to see them. They gave grandpa some colored tie pins and he gave them to me. I did not know then that I would never live in such picturesque surroundings again.

The old lady filled me with a constant sense of dread. She was the size of an elephant and would take me out by the collar from under the bed, where I would hide from her, to thrash me with her belt. She hammered a number of ideas into me that would go on to influence my entire life. Maybe the ideas themselves were right, but what difference did it make if they were right or wrong, when because of them I wasn't free? They were drummed into me automatically: there's no such thing as "I can't," there is only "you have to"; without a struggle, you'll never get the fish out of its puddle; cry little cry-baby if it makes your bum feel better; the bottom line would always be that I was nothing but a piece shit.

Grandpa taught me how to fish, how to build a fire, how to identify different mushrooms and berries, how to work

with a hacksaw and hammer, he drove me around our homeland, to Nakhodka, Volgograd, and Chernigov, and implanted in me a couple of his own idealistic notions: one had to be honest with oneself and with others, and to always act decently; and all women were goddesses.

Life at the residential school flowed by monotonously. After breakfast came study, then lunch, independent study, afternoon tea, recess, dinner and lights out. Many of the children came from broken homes (the mother drank, the father was in prison), we lived ten to a room, and for dinner they gave us herring speckled with blood, which I physically could not eat. I studied in the first grade, and there were no more than twenty children. I had no friends at school. During recess, all the normal guys played football or elephant, in which a group of kids lines up, holding each other round the waist, and another group hops onto their backs to form a giant "elephant," while I wandered around the school or watched the girls jump rope and elastic. Once a week we were taken to the Rodina movie theater for our cultural enlightenment.

I signed up for judo but soon dropped out because I was taller than everyone else in the class and it was impossible for them to throw me over their shoulder. I spent a month in the young naturalists' society but gave that up too, because while it was interesting to me at first—they had a lot of different animals—what was I ever going to do there, clean up their shit? In the third year of school I joined the choir and, I thought, sang second voice pretty well. So went the first three years of my education and my first ten years of life. Before the fourth year of school began, my mother came and took me back north with her, and that was where I started the fourth year.



In 1981 Novy Urengoy was a building site. Plants were being built and they were developing an enormous gas field there. In the center of the city hung a red poster that read: "We will deliver a billion cubic meters of gas a day." Several nine- and five-story buildings, two-story wooden houses made with plywood panels, one-story hutments, trailers, cabins and *balki* (stress on the final syllable; from the Russian word for 'beam', in this case self-built homes).

I lived with my mother in a hutment, in a square room measuring three meters by three meters. Hot water came by pipe, while for drinking water one either had to go to the boiler room or wait for the water cart. The water cart came at irregular hours, so several times a week I would take two buckets and walk to the boiler room, a distance of some three hundred meters. The toilet, an outhouse, was outside, some fifty meters from the hutment, and there was a huge heap there into which everyone would throw their rubbish. To reach the baths one had to walk a good two kilometers before waiting over an hour in a queue, and I would go there once a week. As you walked back your hair would freeze, sticking out from under your cap like icicles, while the most beautiful fluffy snowflakes turned silver on your lashes.

In the winter there was minus-40-degree frost and winds, while in the summer there was 40-degree heat and mosquitoes by the billions. In the spring, when the snow had melted, huge puddles would spread through the entire city and it was my favorite thing to do to wade through them in water boots or sail on them by raft. My mother was at work from morning to late evening, and I was left to myself.

It was around a kilometer to the school and I would walk there on foot. School was like some other world to me then,

large and dangerous. Bright, noisy, lots of children, classes of forty, and there were several such classes, at least up to the letter "D." The underlying notion that I was nothing but a piece of shit began to work away within me. This idea determined my inner disposition and engendered fear in the teachers and the other children. The teachers were important, and the children were right. And I was wrong. I detested that school and that crowd from the very first day. I would walk there as if to a labor camp, with an inner sense of dread, and waited anxiously for the lessons to end. I could not yet skip school from that same sense of dread. I absorbed nothing of the humanities, history and literature, and did not even try, while with careful evening reading I could understand mathematics.

There was a boy in my class, Danil, who came from Leningrad, and we would compete at math tests over who could solve the problems faster. I was in love with two twins from Leningrad, too. I could not tell which of them I was more in love with, I looked at them and dreamed of something all my own, something beautiful and bright. I never even tried approaching them, and they never knew of my great and pure love.

I signed up to join the modern dance group, to be where they were, but quit after the first class as I felt uncomfortable in the company of all these beautiful girls and boys. I went weightlifting a few times and wrestling a few times, but I quickly discovered that they were not for me. I couldn't lift the same weights all the others were lifting, while in wrestling you had to embrace your partner, and I didn't find that very pleasant. I left the chess group because I always had to hang around such a long time waiting for my turn. I went along to

the radio-electronics group once, but the older guys there began bullying me, like getting me to say "Heil Gulik!" (I think that was one of their names). I tried to ease the tension and said "Gulik kaput," everyone laughed, and I never went there again.

My mother sent me to a pioneer camp in Georgia, in the town of Kobuleti. There, in our detachment, we each had to fight one another in turn in the first few days to determine which of us was the strongest. I ended up in the middle and for a long time after I was angry at myself and everyone else; what sort of rules did this society have? And you couldn't opt out, because that would make you an outcast and a coward. I tried out solo singing and at a concert I sang *Along the Hills and Valleys*. Igor from the senior squadron later said he had never heard such lousy singing. So that was it for my singing career, although deep down I was convinced that the organizers of the concert had treated me unfairly. At rehearsals there had been no microphone, then they put one in front of me for the concert and I had no idea how to use it.

In winter I went sledding on an aluminum sheet. The sheet was five meters long and one and a half wide. We would bend back one end of the sheet like a sail, choose a flat surface like a field and ride it as fast as the wind would carry us. Once when I was sledding like this, the sheet flew up into my face and split open my bottom lip. I ran home covered in blood. My mother said I needed to get to hospital right away. It was three kilometers to the hospital, and the wind outside was blowing at twenty meters per second. There was a truck parked up outside the house and mother asked the driver to give us a lift. He asked for a bottle of booze in exchange for the ride. We had no booze and ended up having to walk.

After the fifth year, my mother sent me to a pioneer camp in Crimea, and that's where I met Dmitri. We started talking and Dmitri asked, "Do you smoke?" I said, "Of course I smoke," although in actual fact I had never tried it. "Shall we go for a smoke then?" We sat at the far corner of the camp, near the fence, and smoked. After the first two cigarettes I began feeling really unwell, but I didn't give up and went on choking on the smoke. After some sleep and a few more cigarettes I didn't feel so bad. I smoked and was proud of how cool I was. Dmitri asked if I drank. I said, "Of course I drink!" After the first ever bottle of beer in my life, I was roaring drunk. It wasn't that I particularly liked smoking and drinking, but it gave me a new sensation. I was there drinking and smoking while all around me were all these mama's boys, afraid of their parents, afraid of the teachers, and there was no way in hell they could do it. But I wasn't afraid of anyone and I'd show them all.

I soon became leader and would come up with all sorts of adventures specifically directed against the social order. We drank, smoked, spit on all decorum, went out in Yalta, robbed one of the school warehouses, stole apricots from some guy's summer house, went off swimming on our own, away from all the others. They wanted to expel us from the camp and send us home but didn't bother in the end.

When I got home, I mixed seamlessly into Dmitri's group of friends and immediately came into my own. We walked along the street with a ghetto blaster and skipped school. And so went the sixth year, the seventh year and almost the whole of the eighth year. Dmitri was a year older than me and managed to get an incomplete secondary education (they used to take exams in the eighth year), but I

never did.

Our class tutor was Cockroach, who taught history and led part of the aikido classes at the same time. He grabbed me so sharply, so roughly by the jacket, right near the throat, when he caught me smoking in the toilet, and tried to set me straight.

Pyotr was our so-called “class commander,” and did boxing and weightlifting. One day, he was trying to get something through to me about the rules of behavior at school, and I told him to go to hell: “One day I’ll see you in the street with my buddies and I’m going to pound you,” I said, and he gave me one in the chops.

After the showdown with Cockroach and Pyotr, I stopped going to school altogether.

The first time we stole money and went to Pyatigorsk, there were five of us. The cops caught us at Tyumen station and put us in the juvenile detention center. This one screw there divided us into groups and forced us to play rugby, moving along on our knees across this huge hall. The hall was covered in this scratchy carpet that cut and grazed our knees. If we did anything wrong, the screw would give us a hard flick on the head with a middle finger like they used to do in school. My mother picked me up from the detention center after a few days. The second time we stole money and went to Pyatigorsk, there were four of us. We drove through Moscow and that was where we found ourselves on May 1, 1986. I really liked Moscow, and I was enraptured by it. We drank Pepsi-Cola on the Arbat and ate sausages at Sokolniki while drinking beer. The cops caught us a few days later in Pyatigorsk and put us in the juvenile detention center. They caught us because Dmitri had decided to blab to his sister and

she told on us to her uncle, who turned us in to the cops. We spent two weeks at the detention center before being taken to a second detention center in Rostov-on-Don, where they shaved us completely—because apparently we looked like punks. We were then sent to a third detention center in Novosibirsk, where in huge round caps we dug a garden the size of a football field. As a result of all these wanderings from school, I was expelled and forbidden from taking the exams. I was glad that I would never again see Pyotr, Cockroach or any of those other shitheads.

My mother would try to get through to me, explain things to me, but it was useless. My motto was “I don’t give a damn,” and I stuck to it rigidly. I hung around drunk about the town, in basements and in the catacombs (a great big square well with pipes inside).

An inspector for the affairs of minors came to my home and explained in layman’s terms my two options. Either I would start working and study at night school, or I would go to a special school, which I would not be able to leave for the next several years. This prospect did not appeal to me, and so I got a job as an apprentice steel and reinforced concrete installer and went to study at night school.

“Apprentice installer” meant digging, chiseling, lugging and kneading things. A month later, I was moved on to the second stage and received a salary of 525 rubles. I didn’t know what to do with the money; I left myself enough for wine and cigarettes and gave the rest to my mother. Occasionally I went to the night school.

I once read an article in *Student Meridian* magazine about the idle talk that people engage in. It went on to suggest a practice whereby you attempt to stay silent all day in order to

see this idle talk for yourself. I practiced this and decided to listen more and talk less.

Rumi defines five stages in the evolution of Man: Mineral, Plant, Animal, Man and Angel. I suspect that at that moment I was at the Mineral stage. Of course, I didn't know anything about the existence of a Mineral stage at that time, but I had started thinking about the meaning of life and I couldn't find it anywhere or in anything.

I truly wanted to find the meaning of life. God heard my request and led me through a thousand scenarios to help me find that meaning, to discern it and, crucially, to live by it.

Dmitri had left school after the eighth year and got a job as a carpenter. We worked from Monday to Saturday, then on Sundays we tried to make the most of our time by robbing something. It was normally a warehouse or a vegetable store. It was interesting, busting the ventilation or smashing the roof in then climbing down on a rope. Sometimes we had to make a tunnel or climb through a window. I worked out a detailed plan, tried to take all the little details into account so that the theft would go smoothly and we wouldn't leave fingerprints anywhere.

On 1 December 1986, the cops came to my work, handcuffed me in silence, took me away and put me in a cell. Two weeks later I flew by prison transport to Tyumen, to a so-called temporary detention facility. In the first few minutes of my arrival at the detention center, I carefully read the inscriptions on the door and on the walls and examined the drawings, of which there were many.

I sat down on the bench, took a drag on a cigarette, and realized that my childhood was over.





# PRISON

In the center of Tyumen is a prison. Next to it is the city park, where in the evenings music plays and people go walking. The prison building is grim, with thick walls befitting of such an institution. It is guarded by the entirely faceless soldiers of the interior forces. One could not comprehend or get a real feeling for this world simply by reading a book. The inner experiences of a prison inmate are very subtle. Only those who have been to prison can comprehend it, and only then if their senses have not yet been completely deadened. If we simply take and say for example that prison destroys lives, that one has to fight to survive there, that grief lives there, then there is almost nothing to say.

On the fourth floor of the prison is a so-called hospital, where tuberculosis sufferers go to die. On the third floor are the women. It is said that the women's rules and codes of honor are determined purely by physical strength. The girls in orange vests with their sledgehammers, who worked on the railways, would probably wield authority there. On the second floor are the youths, the wickedest creatures on earth, especially those of them who come from so-called well-off families. In 1986, the death penalty was still in effect and there were special cells for death row inmates. A prisoner would remain on death row for one year after his trial and await a pardon or execution. The pardon of a death row inmate meant that from the beginning of his sentence they would give him another five years of covered, where he would most likely

catch tuberculosis, and then ten years of special, where he would most likely die. Then there were the isolation cells. These were cells for those who went against the regime or expressed their discontent with the regime to the prison staff. Mealtimes were hit and miss. Today they might give you boiled water and half a bread roll for breakfast, cabbage soup for lunch, then boiled water again for dinner. Tomorrow would be the same, only without the soup, because they'd miss lunch.

In prison, everything is thought out methodically and to the tiniest detail, so that anyone who ends up there should be in no doubt but that he has arrived in hell.

We brewed chifir in half-liter aluminum mugs. The mug is moistened from the outside and laced with tooth powder, otherwise you can't wash it off after. You tie string to the top of the mug, giving you a pot, called the chifirbak. The string is dipped in the water to keep it from burning. You then pour in cold water and hang the chifirbak in a convenient place. An aluminum plate of cold water is placed on the floor nearby, just below the right hand. You then tear a strip of cloth about fifteen centimeters wide from a sheet or a piece of clothing and fold it into four layers. You set fire to the cloth and hold the flame under the chifirbak. Once a part of the cloth has burned up, you lower the fingers of your right hand into the plate of cold water to avoid burning, tear off the burnt cloth with the same hand and then throw it into the plate, where it will hiss and fizzle out. Once the water is boiling, you throw a tablespoon of tea leaves into the chifirbak before once again bringing the water almost to the boil, but without boiling it, waiting until a head begins to rise. You conduct the flame along the base of the chifirbak so that the head turns over and

sinks. If you want to make the chifir stronger, you add one or two tablespoons of cold water and repeat the whole process with the head; you might call it a matter of taste. Then you give your chifir a few minutes. Pour it bit by bit into another mug and drink with your cellmates, taking turns, three small sips each at a time. And then enjoy heartfelt conversation until morning.

This was how I passed eight months, on the juvenile floor one moment, in the isolation cell the next, with trips to Novy Urengoy for the investigation, pre-investigation, investigative experimentation and face-to-face interrogation. After eight months I was brought before the investigator, who cunningly, suspiciously began to smile. I did not believe in miracles, but a miracle had taken place this time. The investigator slipped me a written undertaking not to leave town, I signed it, and he opened the door to my freedom.

When it suddenly seems that a miracle has happened, it's just some ordinary bullshit disguised as a miracle. I went out to work, to give me the right sort of character for the court case: I was a patriot and a hard-working Stakhanovite. On my fourth day out, the cops came and put me in handcuffs. It was all very simple, like everything ingenious in this world. The sanction for my imprisonment needed to be renewed by the office of the prosecutor of the republic, but this would have raised too many questions. It was much easier to release me for four days and then shut me up again. Somewhere around this time, my last ounce of faith in humanity died.

I came to the prison, told all the staff to go to hell and went to the isolation cell. Had I known then that there were such things as spiritual and mystical practices, I would have practiced them twenty hours a day. But I didn't know

anything back then, and simply sat in that isolation cell, shivering from the cold, and from anger at the rest of the world.

I was brought into court and, oddly enough, given a suspended sentence. I was free to go. I knew very well that this was just someone's nasty game, but I had no idea of its meaning. Human meanness knows no bounds. And there it was – six days later the prosecutor issued a notice of appeal. I was free for three months before I went back to court again. This time Dmitri and I were tried together. It turned out he had been on the run the whole time and had only been taken into custody in the last month.

They sent us down for five years and we went off to Tyumen. Six months passed while we wrote our appeals and waited for answers. The appeals didn't help.

# PEN

**K**rasnoturinsk is a city in the Sverdlovsk region of Russia. There is an aluminum plant there. They say the wealthiest women of fashion used to wear aluminum buttons and that everyone was jealous of them as they were even more expensive than those made of gold. In 1988, Krasnoturinsk was clean, peaceful and cultured. Either the city was built by German prisoners or the Germans were exiled there and they built the city. Either way, all of the officers in my detachment were Germans. They reminded me of my grandfather: regulation, honesty, conscience, decency and an officer's word.

The penitentiary for juvenile offenders was like the overcrowded Komsomolskaya subway station, where there are three railway stations. How you presented yourself at this station was who you were. The newcomer was called a "tram" as you didn't know yet what sort of person he would turn out to be. One might become the boss of his detachment, another a hard worker, while another would end up washing other people's socks by the end of his sentence.

I would go on to study welding at the school there, one month of theory, one month of practice, and so on for nine months. In theory I made notes, while in practice I lugged angle irons to the cutting machine—this was called "feeding"—or I turned the wheel of the pipe bender, which in fact was called "the wheel," or carried the various bits of iron out of the workshop, which was called "transportation."

Sometimes these bits of iron weighed over a hundred kilos and you would have to carry them between two people. But I would go on lugging them without a word, sensing intuitively that were I to show any kind weakness in front of anyone I'd get stomped immediately, and there was no way in hell you could come back from that. I got five rubles a month for that job.

There were those provocateurs who tried to knock me down, but I resisted them aggressively, hurled angle irons about and played the fool. Finally, one day during evening construction, the detachment boss told everyone they ought to get rid of me as there hadn't been enough murders in our detachment. Everything became suddenly very quiet for me.

I enrolled at school, in the seventh year, and put my head into reading books. I would choose the thick books that were more dog-eared than the rest. After a few months, I began getting A's, especially in geometry.

After graduating, I became a grade three welder, I started welding the bits of iron, and my salary rose to forty rubles. I suddenly had all these friends, a so-called family of five.

My friend Dmitri was shoved into another detachment, and soon he went off to the adult prison. I was due to go there myself, but before my eighteenth birthday the head of the detachment called me over and suggested that I stay at the juvie. He said they needed me to help all the struggling students pass their exams. He gave me his officer's word that after at most two-thirds of my sentence I could go home on parole.

When I began working with the students, I was shocked by all these fifteen-, sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds who

didn't know a single letter of the alphabet, didn't know how to write, and had no idea that two times two was four. Shita told me he lived in a cemetery and helped his father dig graves. He had not been to school a single day in his life. He was almost eighteen at the time, he never passed the math exam, and then he went off to the adult prison. How could I explain Pythagoras' theorem to him when he didn't even know one number? Several of the students were able to describe the theorem and got their certificate of incomplete secondary education.

The female math teacher spoke about the different temperamental types among the students. The Sanguine—more or less normal; the Choleric—who would yell and wave their hands about; the Melancholic—who were always sad and crying; and the Phlegmatic—the devil-may-care, who might have their socks stolen from them and wouldn't bat an eyelid. I decided I would read up on this more closely at some point.

I passed my grade four welding; I had a couple of years left to study in school but by now it had become easier since I had a decent knowledge of the subject. I gained two titles, "Best in Profession" and "Best Student at School." The officer kept his word and after three years, one month and three days I was given a ticket for the steam train and one hundred rubles, then off I went to freedom.





# FREEDOM

I arrived in Novy Urengoy in 1990 and didn't recognize a thing. The hutments had been demolished, the rubbish dumps filled in, everywhere there were multi-story residential houses, asphalt roads and all these different passenger vehicles in all different colors. My mother had been given a two-room apartment in a five-story building. For a start I enrolled at evening school and then went to work in my own brigade as a welder.

Out on the street one day I bumped into Lilia, a former classmate from the school I was kicked out of, I bought her roses and visited the kindergarten where she worked. I had never had a sexual relationship and I wanted for us to fall head over heels in love, but as it turned out she was already happily married to a butcher.

Lilia told me about all of our classmates, including how Pyotr, the class commander, had dropped dead of heart trouble.

I worked there a month before realizing all these things surrounding me were not what I needed at all. Work, drinking in the brigade, the movie theater and all the empty small talk were of no interest to me. Perhaps what I needed was to finish my studies at the institute and become a big boss? Or did I need to study nuclear physics and go to work at a top-secret laboratory? Or was what I needed to find a beautiful girl and get married? I was damned if I knew what I needed to do, but first I needed to finish school.

I ended up going to a bar with a colleague to celebrate International Youth Day and met Victor there (we had traveled to Tyumen several times together in the prison convoy). When Victor saw me, he genuinely lit up. We had a drink together and Victor asked what I was doing for work and how much it paid.

"I'm a welder, I get eight hundred rubles."

"A day, right?"

"What do you mean a day? a month."

"What are you stupid?"

"I don't know, maybe I am."

"These days, there's money lying around all over the place, you just need to know how to get it."

"Well I don't see it lying around anywhere and I certainly wouldn't know how to get it." Then Victor said, "Let's go see the manager."

Ten minutes later I was working at that bar.

It was a lot of fun working at the bar, the music booming, the drinking never stopped, and money rained down from the sky. I didn't work there long, maybe a couple of months.

Then the hard times came, there were all these gangs of different nationalities popping up like mushrooms, the cops were arresting everyone, putting them in jail.

I realized if I didn't get out of there that night, the next day they'd slap that year and eleven months, less three days, on me, and I'd be off to a "strict" prison. The nearest "strict" prisons were up in our wonderful northern cities, and I still have no idea if I would ever have got out of there alive.

# WANTED

I skipped town that night to a neighboring city where the Pur, a major shipping river, flows through. I bought two bottles of vodka, went over to a barge and offered the captain a drink. I told him my situation, and it turned out he was on the level, he says, "Spend a night or two here for now, and then we'll see." I stayed a couple of days with him at a dorm near the barge. He said he had a vacancy and would arrange for me to work as a welder at least for the time being, but this was no solution for me – life on a barge was a kind of stagnation and the wages came in kopecks. This year the barge was going nowhere as the ice hadn't melted, but it might be going to Omsk next year. Movement meant life; stagnation would mean death.

Tanya worked as a waitress at a bar and I proposed to her one day. She immediately broke up with the other one and only beloved lowlife in her life. I had money, which she loved, but I needed somewhere to run off to and hide. We came to an understanding and left for sunny Bashkiria, where her sister lived. That wife of mine was just no good. You couldn't eat a damn thing when she cooked and you couldn't talk to her about anything. I've completely forgotten what the sex was like. Some things you're better off not knowing, and others are best forgotten. She would lay on the sofa and watch TV, wash the dishes and fly into hysterics at having ruined her hands on account of me. I had no alternative then, I just had to put up with it.

Her sister Toma was fifteen years old. We would take

walks in the forest together, go out on the boat, and then chatter away with each other at night if I wasn't out fishing. I found work of a sort—they paid almost nothing—and spent my time fishing with a co-worker. We caught fish at night and sold it at the market the next day for six rubles a kilo.

Tanya and I traveled to Irkutsk, hoping to find happiness there. I rented a room from some wino for forty rubles a month, paid him for a year upfront and got a job as a welder in a cooperative. The wino had this racket going, and it worked a treat. He would rent out a room in a two-room apartment, take a year's rent in advance and then create the sort of conditions for his tenants that meant they would be out of there as quick as they could. Getting your money back was unthinkable, living in the same apartment as the wino was impossible, we had no desire to look for another apartment, and we decided in the end to return to Bashkiria.

While we were living together in Irkutsk, the old lady had taught me a course in surviving on the wrong side of the law using KGB tactics, and I had picked it up pretty well.

When we returned to Bashkiria, I left my wife there and went to Yakutia, thinking I might find a job in a goldmine. It turned out that it was impossible to get a job there without a permit, but you couldn't get a permit without a job. This law was designed, of course, to keep the people in servitude to the state. I had no permit and essentially no way of getting one.

I returned and went on catching fish, this being at least an interesting task and one that brought in a little money. We caught the fish in a net. We would pick out a patch on the river stretching two kilometers, thirty from the town and five from the road. We'd go along the river in daylight clearing out driftwood, sticks and logs. We would then dig a hole on the

riverbank every five hundred meters and lay down grass at the bottom of it.

We would put on woolen tracksuits that covered the whole body, and gumshoes on our feet. Normal sneakers wouldn't work for fishing because they'd fall off.

We'd start fishing downstream as it got dark. One would go into the river up to his chest while the other would walk along the bank. The one in the river would walk faster than the current drawing the net along the bottom at his side. We'd get out onto the bank wherever we could every twenty to thirty meters. We'd take the fish that we'd caught out of the net and pack them into our rucksack. The rucksack would be carried by whoever was walking along the riverbank. This operation would be repeated several times up to the first hole, where we would pile up the fish from the rucksack. We would continue in this way until the end of our little patch before walking back to the beginning with our now lightened load. There we might eat, have a smoke, and even get a couple of hours' sleep. At four in the morning we would wake up and begin a second round. When the fishing was done, we would walk to the beginning of our little patch and collect all the fish from the holes. We'd then change our clothes and head down to the city to sell our catch. We would rest until evening before setting out again for more fishing.

Around six months later my mother helped me get a job as a welder in Yamburg, a workers' settlement in the Far North. I traveled up there and took my wife with me.

Outside of the work, I began doing press-ups, squats, bench press and a whole range of stretching exercises every day. To begin with, I'd do the press-ups using my palms and keep going till I got to fifty; when that became too easy I began

doing it with my fists, also up to fifty; and when that got easy I started doing it with my fingers, the phalanges perpendicular to the floor, again fifty times.

I stopped there, but if I had carried on then the plan would have been as follows: tuck the little fingers away and do the press-ups on four fingers, and then on three, on two and then finally on just the thumb. Then you move on to using the whole palms, but this time doing the push-ups with your back and heels against the wall. Then moving on again to fists, five fingers, then four, three, two and finally the thumb.

It looked great, but how could you ever do that? I had a book that said this was a genuine exercise they practiced in Japan, but in order to do it correctly you needed to develop your inner energy or "Qi" (in some places written as "Chi"). I found an exercise for developing that inner energy in another book on martial arts: Sit cross-legged, with the tongue pressed against the roof of the mouth, the right hand held to the left ear, and stay like this for five minutes; then hold the left hand to the right ear and again sit like that for five minutes; then with both hands over the ears, arms crossed, the right arm on top, and again sit like this for five minutes. During this exercise, direct your attention to the dantian focal point, in this case the second center.

I practiced this exercise for several months, my energy levels increased a lot; sometimes I reached a state close to orgasm and felt an inner calm.

In Yamburg, I would go fishing in the Gulf of Ob both summer and winter.

In summer we'd wear dry suits, lay down netting every fifty meters perpendicular to the shoreline, chasing off the gulls till morning to stop them pecking at our fish. Come

morning, we would draw in all the nets and head home.

In winter we would have to lay down the netting under the ice – and this was real backbreaking work. We would wait until the ice had frozen thirty centimeters thick, choose a day when there would be a strong blizzard, put on a white camouflage cloak – in order to avoid being arrested – and at five in the morning we would walk out on the ice and lay down our netting. We lugged all our equipment behind us on sleds. Placing the netting underneath the ice was itself an art, which I won't go into the details of here.

If, for instance, tomorrow we ended up on the federal wanted list, anything that was of any significance to us today would suddenly become irrelevant. We couldn't live at home, friends and relatives would cease to exist. Or rather, they'd exist somewhere but it just wouldn't be feasible to openly arrange meeting up with them. No one could come visit us or their neighbors would immediately call the cops; people have a tendency to feel real bad when others are doing okay. There would be no legitimate work for us again. We'd have to avoid train stations like the plague and wouldn't be able to use the airport for at least a couple of months. And if we did have to fly somewhere urgently, we would have to hitch a lift to a neighboring city and fly out from there. We'd have to get to the airport just as the check-in was finishing, when everyone would be rushing around and the gates were about to close. We'd have to calculate all of our actions several steps ahead and would always need to keep a few escape routes in sight. We would need at least two different telephone booths for making any calls, and these would have to be on different streets at least a few kilometers apart. We'd use one booth to make the initial call, say a pre-agreed phrase, and wait to hear

the pre-agreed response, then immediately move on to the other booth. From the other booth we could talk for about fifty seconds before having to get as far as possible away from there. Taxi drivers, waiters, barmen, cloakroom attendants, lawyers and other legal professionals, hotel staff, prostitutes and traders would give us up for thirty pieces of silver without a second thought, so if we had to speak with them we would do so briefly and politely. All of our expensive – and even cheap – clothes would have to be put in the trash, we couldn't wear caps, or walk with our hands in our pockets. We would smoke only in designated places, only cross the road when the light was green. No more slang, not to mention swearing, always on our best behavior. Where large crowds gather – protests and demonstrations – keep away. Forget night clubs, restaurants, discos, dark alleys, evening walks in park. We'd have to stay away from anywhere we might be asked for our documents, or where someone might give cause for our documents to be checked. We could only drink alcohol at home, and then not go out afterwards. We couldn't look anyone in the eye. When dealing with other people we'd have to play dumb, allowing them to feel superior. We'd have to put ourselves in other people's shoes, try to understand their thoughts and actions. We'd learn all we could to help us survive, and not waste time on anything else. No further decisions would be made by the mind – it could no longer help us – we would learn to live on our animal instincts. The main thing for us to wrap our heads around as far as possible would be that no one gave a damn about us anymore.

Almost three years went by. I was with my wife in Saint Petersburg one day and there was a green outfit she really liked in one of the stores. I didn't want to buy it and she flew



into hysterics. I knew that if I bought her the outfit we'd have hardly any money left, and we would have to take the train from Tyumen to Novy Urengoy, which was a huge risk. But I no longer trusted my wife at that point, and she could have turned me in at any moment. I just wanted for it all to be over one way or the other, even if it meant yet another penitentiary. And then, when I got out, perhaps I could live normally? So I bought the outfit—enjoy wearing it, my dear wife, one day this manhunt will be over and I'll divorce you, you vile woman.

At Tyumen station I was surrounded by cops and found myself in a cell.

The people and the attitudes in the strict prison were far better than those at juvie. Quiet, calm, no showing off. One person would be reading, another writing a letter, someone else would be brewing chifir, everyone just living peacefully, as all serious people should. If you give your word to something then keep it or don't give it in the first place; I mean, no one's got you by the tongue, have they?

I had with me a carton of Magna cigarettes and said I'd start exchanging it that evening for tea once the coast was clear out on the walkway. I was immediately invited to try some other, Prima, cigarettes, and told to smoke as many as I liked. That evening around midnight, I suddenly sensed that something wasn't quite right in my cell. There was this mounting hostile energy. I spent that day thinking it over and realized what was causing it. I knocked on the food hatch, spoke to the commander, and everything was hunky dory, I gave him two packs of Magna, and he gave me a couple of brews' worth of tea. The hostile energy immediately evaporated from the cell—chifir anyone?

This “businessman” was released, about fifty years old, some very fine people had been squeezing him for his restaurant in the center of Tyumen. At first he didn’t want to sell, so they put him behind bars and now that he had agreed he was immediately given back his freedom. I never asked him for anything and never thought of doing so, but he gave me a carton of cigarettes and a green sweater, as it was cold at night in the cell in just the white shirt.

They sent a convoy for me – such a polite lot, everything strictly by the book – and I flew to Novy Urengoy. The investigator plied me with tea on the way. Why the hell, he says, did they send you to me? It’s been three years, and that’s no joke in the criminal world. People have been killed, or disappeared, or fled – there are no witnesses and even if there were, what could you possibly prove after three years? You sit here in prison a couple of weeks, he says, while I consult with the intelligent people. He called on me two weeks later and said that honest to God if I were to give him the slightest excuse he’d have me back there so fast it would make my head spin. But there was no excuse, because how the hell are you going to find anything after three years? Sign these papers, he says, and get the hell out of here, stay out of our way, get the hell out of town, don’t leave so much as a trace of yourself behind and if you ever end up in front of me again you’ll only have yourself to blame.

I went to my evening school, passed all the remaining exams and got my certificate, then filed for divorce. One evening my wife’s sister, Toma, came to visit me, she had recently arrived from Bashkiria. I’ve loved you, she says, since the age of fifteen, and we reminisced about sailing on that boat.

Together we went to see Dmitri, my partner in crime from our younger days; he must have been released by then. We sat with him in his kitchen drinking vodka. Dmitri had gone to the adult facility and was meant to be taken to Tyumen, but at the place he was being held while awaiting the convoy, there was this tough looking gangster. He told him that when the convoy came for him, Dmitri should take his place and go to Solikamsk, while the gangster would go to Tyumen in Dmitri's place. They would sort things out later on in Solikamsk. But Dmitri was never sent back. So he stayed out the rest of his sentence there, working as a cook, and made friends with the Uzbeks from the Gdlyan-Ivanov corruption case.

Dmitri brought his fiancée with him from Pyatigorsk and lived with her and his father in a studio apartment. He had a look about him as though he'd just returned the day before from a war in which everywhere and everything had been blown to bits.

Dmitri asked me not to visit him again because he was starting his life over with a clean slate. His father was also in the kitchen and echoed his words. Could he really have decided that all the problems in their life were down to me?

I thought it was a little unjust to blame me for everything. After all, who was it who taught me to smoke and drink? Why had I begun running away from home to go burgling? Why had I served three years and spent another three on the run? It was you who brought all these things on me – and now you're casting blame!

Fine, I won't come to see you again, every man is the master of his own misfortune.

Dmitri's father later fell asleep smoking a cigarette in

that very apartment. He suffocated and burned to death.

Dmitri went to Pyatigorsk and was stabbed to death in a drunken brawl.



# MOSCOW

I took as much vacation as I could in Yamburg and flew back to Moscow. And really I was flying to escape the torturous sorrow of all those wasted years—I was sure that in Moscow I would never feel sorrow again. I flew into Vnukovo airport with a briefcase, a couple of shirts and a sweater. At the airport, I put the briefcase down on the pavement, lit a cigarette and said, “Hello, Moscow. I’ve come back to see you and I’m going to live here.”

There is a law in mysticism that I have only recently grasped. But if I hadn’t quite grasped it before, does that mean it wasn’t working back then? It was always working away regardless, everything that happened for me happened regardless and everything was right and I couldn’t possibly have come up with anything better myself. The law says that when we do something, God bears witness, but when we bear witness, God will do everything through us himself.

I arrived at the hotel, leafed through a newspaper, called up a plant and got myself a job as a grade six welder. They gave me a dorm room and a gasoline blow torch that cut through iron—something very few people in Moscow were working with at the time. I took the blow torch and cut through all that could be cut. The foreman said he’d spent two years looking for a welder who wasn’t afraid of the thing.

Everyone at the plant drank like crazy. Everyone’s working day began in the locker room with a couple of bottles of vodka and ended the same way, but back then I wasn’t

drinking and never even thought of alcohol.

I waited a month before approaching the foreman to ask his help in getting me into one of the institutes and he told me it would be a cinch as he knew the rector at the place where he had studied himself.

We went to see the rector, I went into this whole performance about my registration, about the evening school, about how I hadn't taken the exam and would they let me into the preparatory department? The rector said that, first off, I was already a real, working welder, and second, in 1993 they had a shortage at the institute, with one student for every six places, and he was very pleased someone else wanted to study there. So write a paper for us, he says, to begin with, then take your math exam and we'll see how it goes from there. I got an A on the essay I wrote, but only solved two of the four math problems. The professor said he'd give me a C overall, which gave me a passing grade and meant I could celebrate my acceptance at the institute. But it is up to you, he said, to do the learning—you can't buy anyone around here. You don't know me, professor—I'll get my degree with honors!

I strolled along the avenues to the VDNKh amusement park, where I met Ksenia, a princess with plaits down to her waist, young and beautiful. I wasn't too badly dressed myself back then, in my black leather raincoat and white scarf. Ksenia was walking with a friend and asked me for a lighter. I gave her my lighter and invited her and her friend to the local bar. We got to know each other, became friends, it was all wonderful!

Everything would have been fine, but my money had run out and the vacation pay from Yamburg was coming to an end. My wages from the plant didn't save me either—they

paid practically nothing. I wasn't ready to eke out some pitiful existence in Moscow, and I couldn't ditch the institute. I would have to come up with something, but I didn't know what, and then it came to me. No way in hell could I have come up with it myself, it just came.

I went to a correspondence college and told them I was already enrolled at the institute but I needed to get out of there quickly, that they had no option for distance learning there, only evening classes. The dean of the faculty sent someone with me to the institute, I picked up the paperwork and passed it on to him. In short, I got moved from one higher education institution to another and it turned out to be very straightforward. That just left my job at the plant and the conversation I would have to have with the foreman. I realized it was a terrible thing to do when he had worked so hard for me. I resigned in silence, the foreman looking at me like I was a complete bastard.

I went to see Ksenia, told her I was flying up to the Far North but I'd be working on rotation, after two months I would fly back. She said she hadn't told me this before because she wasn't sure how serious our relationship would be, but the time had come to tell me she had scoliosis, curvature of the spine. When we were going down into the subway on the escalator, she stood facing me from the step above and said I could feel her back if I wanted. I felt her back, I was horrified but said nothing. Strange, why hadn't I noticed it before? My grandfather's idealistic notion that all women were goddesses had become automatic and I just said the scoliosis wasn't a problem for me.

I took my first semester at the college, took Ksenia to Yamburg and got her a job as a nurse at the hospital. I



divorced my first wife and married Ksenia.

The most useful thing I learned at that college could probably be summarized in a single example. I had to take an exam in Building Materials. I leafed through the textbook, didn't understand a thing but thought, what the hell, I'll take the exam anyway. A group of students gathered, twenty of us, and we went into the exam. This athletic-looking professor arrived in a leather jacket, with a pager, looking like a real tough guy. He asked us if we'd solved the "technical question," meaning had we studied the subject we were about to be examined on? We made a big noise about how we hadn't slept the whole night, we'd done nothing but study his subject. He asked us if we'd solved the "political question," meaning had we registered for the exam at the dean's office? We answered no. He said in that case there was nothing more he could do there, he put on his jacket and left.

Now, in everything I do I solve the "political question" first, and the "technical question" usually solves itself.

So two years went by and I completed the first two years of college. Once again I had a decision to make, studying as I was in a discipline I knew nothing about.

Distance learning was no kind of learning at all, just a lot of time wasted getting an accredited degree. I got that for someone working already as a big boss, all he needed was that degree, but that wasn't the case for me—I needed a start in life, some real knowledge. I needed to fly to Moscow and live there. I needed to transfer to the institute I had been enrolled at before and study something I knew—welding—at evening classes there. And that meant I'd have to quit my job and live in Moscow on no money.

As I contemplated this thought, trying to convince

myself it was the most important thing I had to do, the decision was made for me by God. I was unloading a dump truck of oxygen cylinders and one of the cylinders fell right on my leg, after which I spent fifty-two days in hospital.

I took some vacation and flew to Moscow. I picked up the relevant paperwork from the correspondence college and transferred back to the institute I had originally enrolled at. I flew back to Yamburg, went into the personnel department and got a paper to say they were sending me to study welding. I picked up Ksenia and off we flew.

Ksenia's parents had a four-room apartment. One of the rooms became our own family nest for four years. I bought everything we needed at the time, a kettle, TV, video-player, stereo, and we began living there. At first I tried to find a job, but without a permanent residence permit for Moscow you couldn't find anything decent. Ksenia enrolled at the biology faculty in the pedagogical college.

I got a paper from Yamburg saying if I wanted I could study at the British College of Banking & Finance and I'd get a bursary of one hundred dollars a month, so off I went. The teaching was in English, and it was very difficult for me. I went to college in the morning and to the institute in the evening. After half a year of studying like this I was so screwed up I got confused one day and went to the institute in the morning. I'd have to choose which place I wanted to study at or I'd go out of my mind, so I ditched the college and stayed on at the institute.

The college taught me one important thing. I had an exam in Business Administration. I somehow managed to write something down and got the C I needed. There was a girl there who did such a great job it was worthy of an A, but

she got a D. She was crying, but the professor said although she had no doubt her work deserved an A, she'd handed it in an hour late, so it was no good to anyone. Imagine, she says, that you have a meeting starting at 10am and you prepare a report by 11am – what good is that to anyone? Hence the D.

My mother sent us a hundred dollars a month and we lived on that. I studied with great difficulty, struggling to get the information through to my brain. I wrote and re-wrote, read and re-read, took several exams a number of times, and there was a worry that they might expel me. The welding topics began at the end of the third year, and I started to comprehend them. I got my first A in metallurgy; after that the fear vanished and studying became easy.

Problems began in our family life as I no longer viewed my wife as a sexual being. I no longer wanted her at all, with her scoliosis. My sexual dissatisfaction grew and pretty soon I was ready to pounce on any girl. I tried to control the situation with my mind but it didn't do much good and I began pushing all this sexual desire down within myself. What they call "frustration" began building up inside me, this state of anxiety where there is no outside cause for anxiety but inside that state of anxiety persists.

It was right around this time that we began studying Sociology at the institute. The lectures were delivered by a lady, the professor, and she talked about the desires a person is for some reason unable to fulfil. Various solutions were proposed for dealing with such desires. You can either deceive yourself – you don't really want it – or compensate, do something else to convince yourself that it was really this that you wanted. All you have to do is get your head around the situation so that you can consciously reject that desire.

One solution, the most dangerous, was the one that I had taken, which is to simply take your desire and push it down, chase it away, don't even think of it. When you suppress a desire, or several desires, and do so many times, that's when the frustration starts.

Perhaps these things work in certain scenarios. For example, a lady wants a mink coat but she doesn't have the money for it. She buys a sheepskin coat and tells herself she doesn't really need fur because the sheepskin is more practical. Or she buys a fur coat, but one made from mink tails only, and convinces herself that it's the same as one that's made from the whole thing. Or she takes the situation apart and consciously tells herself she's not going anywhere, she's going to stay at home – the down jacket she bought ten years ago is the best thing for her. In my case, none of these things worked, because when it comes to powerful sexual desires, there's not a damn thing sociology can do about it. I asked the professor how I could deepen my knowledge of her subject in this area. She suggested a number of books for me to read like Berne's *Games People Play*.

I had read Berne before, way back in Novy Urengoy. He explained to a patient the meaning of the phrase "Here and Now." As in, take a look at something from this point of view then try and see. I remember summoning all my strength, energy and will trying to see a teapot on top of the refrigerator "Here and Now." I saw fog all around me and a brown drop of tea hardened on the side of that teapot. I took a rag, wiped the droplet off and thought of how tomorrow it would no longer be there; tomorrow's teapot would be a different teapot altogether.

I spent months scanning through these books very

carefully, I re-read Berne, with his patient, but none of it helped to solve my problem. I sought out the professor and asked what you could do if you were overcome with frustration. She replied that once you have abandoned everything to that state of frustration, it is no longer a question of sociology, but of psychiatry. A person may be put under hypnosis to talk about their suppressed desires. They'd also have to externalize those desires by using either deception, compensation or conscious rejection and then the frustration would magically disappear of its own accord.

I thought about this for a long time, and I can always tell the truth from lies. I had neither the money nor the desire to undergo hypnosis. Even if I were to talk about my suppressed desires, what was I meant to do with them then? I couldn't externalize them, or compensate for them when they first appeared — what had changed?

I didn't want my wife, I never would want her, and there wasn't a damn thing that could compensate for that. She would be jealous of any woman, even without good reason. If not for the viciousness of this nasty jealous streak, I could have found myself a mistress and solved the problem. But my suppressed desires grew like wildfire and the frustration held. I wanted to go to a bar and find a beautiful woman, or better yet two, to stumble into bed with them at some hotel and not crawl out of there for a week. I wanted my own apartment in Moscow, somewhere on the Arbat, a job with a beautiful secretary where I'd get paid a stack of money, and vacations abroad. Instead of that I had to live in a single room with my wife, who I needed like a hole in the head, with a mother-in-law and a father-in-law who'd had enough of me, and all this for a hundred dollars a month.

I came to the conclusion that all these sociologists and psychiatrists didn't understand a damn thing because they'd never been psychotic themselves. They'd read everyone's books at their prestigious universities and now they were going about with this important look on their chops as though they understood everything. And the ones who wrote the books had also read everyone's clever books back in their time and had also gone about with that important look on their chops.

My mother flew over, she was staying at the Moscow Hotel, and I went to visit her. We had a long chat about all sorts of things, and she bought me some glycine tablets. These are tablets that make up for a lack of glycine in the body, and you take them under the tongue. When a person becomes nervous and anxious, glycine is used up very quickly and cannot be replaced with more food as it is broken up in the stomach. The person starts to become more nervous and anxious, and the glycine is used up even faster, and so the cycle continues. I began taking these tablets and got to a more or less normal state.

I became interested in psychiatry, and it turned out there were certain drugs that would suppress the nervous system to stop a person wanting something so desperately. They start living in a kind of fog and become indifferent to everything. I decided against taking these things, I would just be a moron living in frustration.

I began studying different temperaments in more detail, and there was one particular explanation that appealed to me. A man has bought a cake and is going to a birthday party. He arrives at the subway station, puts the cake down next to him and waits for a train. Someone then walks past and sits down

on the cake. The Sanguine will demand money for the moral injury; the Choleric will start shouting and fighting; the Melancholic will start crying; the Phlegmatic won't be bothered by it.

When I turned twenty-five my mother bought me a computer and I started learning how it worked. I bought a bike and began cycling from Prospekt Mira to Sokolniki, riding through the parks on the way.

I decided to study English. I'd cut out a strip of card six centimeters by four centimeters from a sheet of album paper. On one side I'd write the Russian word, and on the other side the English translation and transliteration. I'd study, working through and turning over these cards, from Russian into English and English into Russian, gradually taking away the ones I'd learned. After a couple of months I'd go back to them and repeat. I'd take three hundred cards, get on my bike and ride to Sokolniki, then sit on the lawn there studying. In the evening I'd buy a bottle of good beer, drink it and go home.

This was the latest solution to the problem of frustration, if you could call it a solution, of course. There was no change in the desire, but the energy of that suppressed desire was being directed towards accomplishing something else. So there was no sex, but I was learning English and approaching that process in a creative way. You could paint a picture or write poetry or a book, or you could sit on a dating site writing love letters all night. If you keep doing this, you might come up with a work of genius, whether it's a picture or a book. During the lives of such geniuses, of course, no one understands them and they die in abject poverty or take their own lives. For anyone in a state of frustration, this is a sort of temporary escape because the creative process allows you to

live out your own daydreams and fantasies for a time. If you keep on substituting your energy like this then it will completely destroy your psyche.

This was how I passed my time until the end of the fourth year. My mother got me a four-week trip to England so I could learn English there, and I flew abroad for the first time in my life. You had to live with an English family there and study at the school. In the evenings, after classes, everyone would go to the bar to drink beer and then the disco. The country was strange, the people were different, the mentality was nothing like our own, the beer was good. The tyranny there was of a different kind, they weren't crooks. If I called a girl to the bar, she'd say I was a cool guy and she'd love to come but, as luck would have it, she was busy today because she had to prepare for an exam. I was blown away by England, I hung out in bars, drank beer, danced, went on excursions, and I didn't forget about learning. My fear of society evaporated there and I returned to Moscow a new man.

As an experiment, when I was traveling home from Sheremetyevo, I said something to a girl on the subway like, would you come out with me to a bar tonight? She called me a moron and said I should take a look in the mirror more often.

I would never stop at anything again. I considered, I didn't really know my own suppressed desires, so I should just do everything that came into my head. I drank beer and vodka, went to student parties, night clubs, staggered about drunk along the Arbat, and cheated on my wife at every opportunity. I wanted to scorn anyone who thought anything about me, to scorn my wife's jealousy. They could all go to hell, it was my life and I didn't want any of these frustrations.



After all, what was more important to me—a decent mental state or some stupid woman? I'd get rid of the damn woman and that would be it.

I wanted to get divorced, and mother said she'd rent a studio apartment for me. My wife was also at college and asked me to wait, as she had no money and needed to get her degree. We came to a sort of agreement that I would live with her, while she would live on the money my mother sent and not bust my chops too much.

I passed the fifth year and flew back to that same school in England again for five weeks. Nothing was the same as it was the first time I went there—you can't go into the same river twice. I drank beer in moderation, tried to learn as much English as I could.

I returned to Moscow and graduated the sixth year with straight A's. I knew welding inside out now and could answer any question on the subject. I defended my thesis and received my degree with honors. I celebrated for a few days, went to Saint Petersburg and hung out in bars there for a couple of weeks. Eventually I had to make a decision on where and how I would live from then on.

While I was studying in England I had got to know a Spanish guy named Pedro. I wrote to him asking him to help me emigrate to Canada. It is a necessary requirement for all immigrants to Canada that they have ten thousand Canadian dollars in the bank. I didn't have this kind of money, and neither did my mother. Pedro replied saying I should fly to Spain and he would help me from there. I filled out all the necessary immigration forms, booked myself a week in Spain and flew out. To begin with I stayed at a hotel, drank wine, swam. The week ended, I threw away my return ticket and

went to see Pedro. I got the money from him, transferred it to an Austrian bank, flew to Vienna, looked up the Canadian embassy and submitted my documents. The next thing was to wait until they called me in for an interview, perhaps a year or a year and a half.

The hotel room was one hundred fifty dollars a night. I estimated my finances—I had around two and half thousand left. I realized this money wouldn't last long but I had no intention of going back to Moscow. The visa ended after three weeks, and I decided to stay in Vienna. I went to the station, put my bag in a locker and began living on the streets. I wanted to spit on everything. I slept on a bench at the station, went to the locker room in the morning, picked up my bag and took a shower for twenty shillings, the cost of a packet of cigarettes. I had a wash, brushed my teeth, shaved, took all the cold cuts and kolbasa out of my bag and bought two bottles of beer. After breakfast, I put my bag back in the locker and took a walk. I soon realized I didn't have to sleep at the station, I could sleep where I liked. This was freedom! For instance, I went to see a castle, and I went roaming about on the streets. I would get tired, sit down on a bench, drink a beer, put my rucksack under my head and drift off into a sweet sleep, it was warm out, there were no mosquitoes.

Once I got woken by the police. I showed them my passport with the visa in it. They asked me to take off my sneakers or the bench would get dirty and then someone would sit on it. I said someone would steal the sneakers while I was sleeping, and what would I wear on my feet then? They laughed and told me Vienna wasn't Moscow. That was certainly true—at night I saw open stores you could go into, take everything you wanted and then leave money at the

counter. I lived that way for two weeks, and then I got tired of Vienna.

I took the train to Bratislava. The Austrians checked my passport and stamped it. The Slovaks checked my passport and held onto it: what the hell do you want in Slovakia? I'm going to take a look at your caves then I'll move on. And do you have money? I showed them the two thousand dollars. Have you declared this money? They don't do declarations for two thousand, go to hell. If you don't have a declaration then it means you're smuggling this in. They took me off the train at some village and locked me up in a cell. I sat in the cell for half an hour then called over one of the guards and asked, "What do you want?" He said fifty dollars would do. I gave him the money and he unlocked the cell.

It struck me that this had been a good experience, because if I should ever end up on the federal wanted list again then I could somehow make my way out of Russia to this village. I would then cross the river and it would be thirty-five kilometers to Vienna on foot. There would be no more borders—all of Europe was mine, and I could go where I liked. The train would be in twenty hours and I spent them in a bar with two women.

I went to Prague, where a couple of police immediately laid into me, like, "Clear off back to your Moscow or we'll put you in a cell." I went to the airport and flew back to Moscow.

I'm riding in the minibus from Sheremetyevo and I realize the minibus is jumping over bumps, the driver is swearing away and all the people are furious. This is the country I'll be living in now and there's nowhere else for me to go.

I found a job in Moscow as floor manager at the ZiL

automobile plant, I had a talk with the chief welder, the chief engineer, they take me on, tell me go to the personnel department and sign up there. I went to the personnel department, they were all really polite, checked my passport and sent me on to the workers' department, and there everyone began barking at me—had I misunderstood something, what was wrong with me? We have instructions here—we can only take on people with temporary residence permits as laborers, we can't take anyone on as floor manager without a permanent residence permit. I went back to the chief engineer. Option two was either sign up as a grade six welder but work as floor manager, or ask my wife to register me for permanent residence. I didn't want to be a welder—or what was the point in graduating from the institute? I went to see my wife, and my mother-in-law balked at the suggested—no way, never!

To hell with them all, I flew to Yamburg.



1960  
C. G. ...

# YAMBURG

I turned up at the personnel department, showed them my reference saying I was a really great, promising welder and they told me to go to Moscow and study as a welding engineer. There's your reference, there's your degree with honors. They wouldn't even talk to me at the personnel department. I grabbed some woman in the corridor and asked what I could do. Make an appointment with Mr. Pudin. Pudin said times had changed and sent me to the head of the workers' department.

The head of the workers' department offered me a tea and a job as a welder—if you're wise you'll come to understand, if you're a fool it's forever.

I took the welding job, and at a grade lower than before I started the institute. I worked there two months before my frustration was roused. I took a vacation in Moscow, drank for a month and came back. I was on a downward path, I went from woman to woman, and the most drunken women, women older than me, nine months went by like this.

I was welding a storage tank with Alexander on the night shift, a container the size of a three-story house. I'm welding on one side and Alexander on the other. "Shall we go for a smoke?" Outside it was February, a blizzard, snow, I had on a rabbit fur hat, snow was blowing all over the fur. The snow melted as we smoked and my hat became soaked through. I put the hat on over my mask and went back to welding. The mask wouldn't go down as it was frozen to the

hat, and I couldn't take the hat off as it was frozen to my hair. I went to a cabin to get warm, finished the shift and then went to the trust and resigned. The manager, Mr. Mazepa, asked, "What made you decide to quit?" I said I'd get a job as an engineer somewhere, I hadn't studied six years for my hat to freeze to my hair. I didn't have further education before, there were no opportunities, I had to be patient, but now I had a degree, so to hell with it, did I have to play democracy? Mr. Mazepa said, "Go take a vacation, don't resign."

After three weeks I got a telegram: "You have been offered the position of engineer at FTL." What this was, I didn't know. It turned out to mean "Field Test Laboratory."

I arrive at the FTL, where half of them are blind drunk and the other half only half-drunk. The boss, Zhilkin, is sitting at an empty table, takes out a liter bottle of vodka with a third left in it. He necks the remaining third straight from the bottle and asks if I can see any sugar-free Orbit on his table. I found it, gave it to him, and he went home for the rest of the day. The next day, the same thing happened.

The deputy, Shudra, then flies in and he starts bugging me for some reason, and when he takes out his hand to say hello his hand is like a toad. So this is where I am, well okay, let's give it a year and then we'll see.

This beautiful woman comes in, eight years older than me, her name is Nadia. I take one look at her and see that she's as slippery as an eel.

Sevryuga, the chief welder, calls me over and starts harping on about how the FTL has got out of hand, the boss drinks like a bastard, the deputy just is a bastard, the workers drink round the clock and stagger about the town and there's no order. I can that see he's the ornery type, he has some sort

of dastardly game, and I'm trying to get to the bottom of it. He makes a deal with me, like he'll help me become boss, then I'll be at his command, along with the whole laboratory. Well I wasn't completely against the idea, because my salary was twenty thousand and the boss's was a hundred.

As if in passing he asks me about Nadia – do I like her or what? I say she's beautiful beyond words, but doesn't she live with Chernyuk, the managing director? "I know this Chernyuk, he's no director, he's a cissy." He says he'll work on Nadia and she'll get with me. Okay, agreed, I'll play your game, why not?

Some time goes by and then I'm sitting in this bar when Nadia is handed to me, drunk. Only you can be entrusted with a treasure like this. Tomorrow is Sunday, she doesn't need to work, let her drink, but you must get her back home or she'll freeze, it's cold outside. I proceeded, of course, and the lady turned out to have form. For instance, I had only to think of her going off in her short little skirt to pour me a half glass of brandy and off she'd go!

Strangers began calling me, warning that they knew all about Nadia, and as soon as her husband died of cancer she had got with another man. Others said they were calling out of respect for my mother and wanted to warn me that Nadia was such trash I couldn't even imagine. Alright, I would figure it out myself, without the well-wishers.

I had to fly to Moscow on business. To begin with they wouldn't give me any money because Nadia had told the accountant not to give me any, and then I had a drink and after that found out in passing that I'd be getting married in October. But no one had asked me whether I wanted to or not. She had already agreed with the administration that they



would register us right there in Yamburg. I asked Nadia and she said she wanted to surprise me. She had a private dentist and a private hairdresser. I got to be famous all over thanks to her, but I'd be damned if I wanted any of this.

I flew to Moscow on business with two of the lab workers. We had to go to the welding institute to get our certificates of accreditation and we were sitting there at the airport in Yamburg. Nikifor, fifty-ish, six foot two and broad-shouldered, was dressed in a suit. Anton, forty-ish, five foot nothing and fat, a hundred twenty kilos, wore a t-shirt. We're sitting in the lounge drinking vodka, the plane has been delayed. Anton is stuffing his face with salad; ketchup and mayonnaise fall onto his t-shirt. The boarding call comes and we run. We arrive in Moscow, it's raining outside and we're standing on the stairway getting wet. I'm wearing a leather raincoat, Nikifor's suit gets soaked through, and orange splodges spread across Anton's t-shirt from the ketchup.

We got to the Izmaylovskaya Hotel that evening around seven o'clock. I went to resolve the matter of divorcing my wife, by then long overdue, while the other two stayed in the room. At a bar I spent a long time listening to my wife's hysterics, then—okay stop it, I'm tired of this, I don't want to live with you and I won't do it. I get back to the room at eleven. The door doesn't open for all the bottles piled up, there are two naked prostitutes in the room. Anton is sleeping in the bath in his stained t-shirt, Nikifor is walking about in his underpants, drunk. I got rid of the prostitutes and said, "Nikifor, let's get some sleep, we're going to see the professor at the institute tomorrow and study. Anton can sleep in his bath."

"Shall we have a drink?"

"Go on then, pour out the last of it."

The next morning at seven I wake Nikifor, he more or less wakes up and immediately begins drinking to ward off the hangover. My head is also splitting. "Pour us a drink and go wake up Anton." It turns out Anton can't change his t-shirt because he's left his bags at Yamburg airport. Nikifor takes his suit out from under the mattress, all wrinkled up like an asshole. I ask him, "Why the hell would you put it under the mattress when it got wet yesterday?" He says, "I had to hide the money there, from the prostitutes."

Outside, Anton has disappeared—we see him later on walking along drunk with a string bag, one of those mesh nets full of beer, he's found a taxi, he says, for a hundred rubles. We go to the taxi and it turns out to be an Oka. "How are we all going to fit in your Oka?" I ask the driver. "Just give me the money," he says. "Let's go." We drive in silence, drinking beer. Anton says, "So now we drink up the beer, throw out the bottles, and we'll get lighter. The car will lift up." Okay, dream on—you think it's going to lift up? The beer's still inside us.

There is a manhole leaking at VDNKh and there's shit running all along the street in one great puddle. We get stuck in it, the car stinks inside, the water splashing under our feet, the driver says we'll have to push. We start pushing, up to our knees in shit.

We get to the institute and the professor goes nuts when he sees us. "Who's in charge here?" he says. "Let's have a talk." He asks, "Why is Nikifor all wrinkled up like an asshole?"

"Because it rained yesterday and he got soaked through, then he hid his suit under the mattress from some prostitutes so they wouldn't steal his money."

“And why is Anton all covered in stains?”

“Because he was stuffing his face with salad at Yamburg and ketchup fell on his t-shirt, then he left his bags at the airport, spent the night in the bathtub, and he had nothing to change into.”

“And what’s with the beer in the string bag?”

“We had to drink to ward off the hangover so we wouldn’t die, now, during the trip.”

“And why does it stink of shit and your trousers are all wet?” Well, my dear professor, because we drove here in an Oka and it got stuck in a puddle at VDNKh, where there was a manhole leaking, and we had to get out and push.

The professor says,

“Give me the documents, I’ll write up the certificates for you and you can go. Aren’t you going to study?”

“Professor, you do the certificates and we’ll wait here.” Half an hour later he came back out with the finished certificates.

A month later I called the professor: “I’ve got thirty men to send over to study with you.” He said we didn’t need to send all thirty, only one person needed to go and he’d give him exactly thirty certificates.

I return from the trip and it turns out Nadia has moved me into her apartment and discharged me from where I was staying before. All my things are hanging up in cupboards in her room. “Yeah,” I think, “I’m really stuck with this woman. And you can’t get rid of her, it’s as if through her good intentions she’s paving a path for me straight to hell. What do they do in cases like this? Right, I have to make it so she gets rid of me. Well, I know how to do that.” I got drunk as a swine and I don’t remember but I think I gave her one in the side; I

fell asleep on her bed in my raincoat and boots.

I wake up, Nadia is nowhere to be seen, and neither are my things. There is brandy on the table, the bottle pointing in the direction of the other room. So then I left, since everything seemed to have been so neatly resolved, taking the bottle of brandy with me.

Sevryuga, the chief welder, didn't know we had split up and said she was an old bat—I should open my eyes and take a look at her ass and her teeth. I didn't understand this game—he was the one who had set me up with this woman, and her with me.

There was a guy named Andrei working in Sevryuga's department, I moved in with him and he explained to me the essence of this sophisticated political game. I'd got out of welding and no one knew who I was. To earn popularity through honest labor you had to work for ten years—if that was even possible.

Sevryuga made it so that within a month everyone in Yamburg knew all about me. Sevryuga wanted to get rid of my boss and push me into his place. I asked, "Then why did he have to make it so that Nadia and I would split up, what damn kind of difference is it to him?"

"Because Abbas, the chief engineer, was looking for Nadia today but couldn't find her anywhere, and he asked sarcastically, 'Where's the fuckin' bride?'"

Sevryuga had twigged that Abbas didn't have a lot of respect for her.

Nadia went back to Chernyuk. On Builders' Day they organized a booze-up in the tundra, she was very beautiful, all dressed in white. Chernyuk took care of her like a real gentleman. Maybe you should try getting her back? Forget it,

to hell with her.

It seems, all you decent gentlemen, that you are all mired in shit, your whole rotten life is stinking and rotten. The people I met in prison were far more honest and more honorable than you.

Zhilkin, my boss, asked me to go to Irkutsk with him to help him buy a Toyota. They were cheap there and came directly from Japan. We scheduled our vacations so that we could take a month off together. We decided we'd meet in Moscow and fly to Irkutsk. This was doomed from the get-go because Zhilkin was drunk when he flew in, and I was drunk, and we decided to sober up and meet in Moscow in a week. Finally, we flew to Irkutsk sober a week later. I say, "I picked up a half liter — anyway, if you don't want any I'll drink it all myself."

"Go ahead and pour it," and Zhilkin takes out a liter bottle of Kuzmich vodka.

Irkutsk started with prostitutes. I'd never used their services before, while for Zhilkin it was the other way around — he only ever used them. "Go on," he says, "and find some, bring some back." I found a blonde and a brunette, it was his choice, and he pushed the other one to me. I was still sober, I was embarrassed, then I got hammered and got on with it. We spent the whole time picking up girls, driving to Baikal, I would go swimming there in the icy waters at night, we stayed at a resort, and hell knows what we got up to. Back at the resort, Zhilkin put a pack of Doshirak ramen on the stove inside the plastic packaging and the fire brigade paid us a visit.

Everything came to an end when a girl robbed Zhilkin of all the money he had set aside to buy the Toyota. "Well, to

hell with them, pour me another, nothing's changed."

I fell in love there with Oksana, a beautiful young girl who had just recently started her career. She fell in love with me too, and for four days we were together. I told her I'd take her away with me, she should quit. I don't know – why did I ask other people's advice? Everyone thought that I would come undone and persuaded me against it. Oksana called and said she'd quit – she was waiting for me. Some woman later called wanting to squeeze me for money for Oksana – I told her they could all go to hell and never went.

I was in Irkutsk some years later and was told that Oksana was working back at the same place, she wasn't so pretty anymore – she was on the needle. I had this sense of guilt that I never took her with me like I promised.

Zhilkin got a paper from the court ordering him to pay out thirty-three percent in alimony. He decided he wouldn't pay anything, quit and retired.

I was made boss, and I started to understand what it meant to work with people. I had no experience in management, no connections, no support. People with their jealousy and greed come to you and they report back to their friends, everyone wants nights, overtime, vacations in summer, and on the other side you've got the higher-ups making constant demands.

The first shitty thing: when Shudra, my deputy, began running about yelling how they'd put me in charge and not him. He wrote to the Health Ministry claiming I was overexposing people and didn't monitor the radiation levels, and another to the FSB saying I was transporting radioactive sources in violation of regulations. It took me two years to get all those commissions off my back. The second shitty thing:

When the higher-ups ordered me to sack one of the workers who'd been drinking for several months. This worker turned out to have been a hero of the Afghan war – he threw his knife at the wall. The third shitty thing: when I sacked this worker I had to give his grade six welder's job to a different worker who'd been working as a grade five. The fourth shitty thing: when one worker came up to another with a knife, and he complained to the police. After that I stopped counting the shit, because it was everywhere, and every day.

I had to send radioactive sources by plane from Yamburg to Tyumen. The plane was an ordinary passenger jet, I brought the radioactive sources to the airport and put them on the plane so no one would see them. The ladies at the airport signed my documents for me and I went to see the manager. The airport manager said I could go to hell and he wouldn't sign a thing. I explained that it was all above board, but he didn't want to hear it and said the aircraft commander wouldn't sign it either. I called Abbas, who called Mr. Kelin, and the plane was delayed. The boxes with the radioactive sources were dragged off the plane onto the apron and all the passengers flipped. People are coming up to me and spitting at my feet. "I thought you were a normal guy, but you're a piece of shit, I'll never lend you a hand again!" To hell with your hand, I don't have time for you now, you can shove it up your ass! Abbas called me, and we went to see Mr. Kelin. He in turn calls the director of Gazpromavia in Moscow. Dismiss the airport manager, he says, and appoint a new one to get those documents signed urgently. And send a new crew. I arrive at the airport, the airport manager is miserable, sitting with a fax in front of him telling him he's fired. I went to the deputy manager, who signed all the documents in silence. A

new crew arrived by plane and the commander put his signature on the documents. The ladies at the airport told me I was a bastard—their manager had been given a medal by Brezhnev himself for exploring the Arctic.

My boxes took off in the plane and I breathed a sigh of relief—too early, as it turned out. A week later I got a call from Tyumen airport saying there was no agreement between Yamburg and Tyumen and therefore the radioactive sources would be flown to Novy Urengoy. I travel the three hundred kilometers, wait for the radioactive sources, and then they don't give them to me because all the paperwork refers to Yamburg. By hook or by crook, I managed to get hold of them. I travel by Bukhanka van with the radioactive sources, getting maximum exposure, the dosimeter won't quit. The Yamburg security service stops me and everything starts over again. It's three in the morning, I have yet to reload the radioactive sources onto a plane and once again I'm exposed to radiation—later that morning I have to report to the trust. I am drunk, because the radiation is easier to handle when drunk, but who do you explain that to?

The deputy manager calls and says everyone's looking at me now, and I should be presentable, don't get hammered in public, don't go around screwing every woman you meet. Find one woman and live with her, write down a declaration that one day you'll get married and I'll give you your own room. It's easy to say find someone, but where should I find her when all the ones around here are whores?

Tamara came over to me on a Saturday night. She says, "I want you, I've come to you alone." How could I turn the girl down? She used to screw my roommate Andrei, it's true, but now she'd decided to screw me. "Come in, I've got loads



of beer, vodka, my roommate's on vacation, only there's nothing to eat, we can sleep tomorrow, it's the weekend." She made us something to eat, cooked fish, potatoes, and there was something else, and it all tasted so good. The sex we had was so incredible I'd never seen anything like it and never even knew it existed. I wake up with a splitting headache, hungover, there's a note on the table—here's some porridge for your breakfast, there's lunch in the kitchen, I'll come and cook dinner myself. She and I write the declaration for that single room together.

We hold a house-warming party, I'd bought a music center, the music's blaring, a bunch of old girlfriends come over and they all wish us well. At two in the morning Tamara takes off a shoe and throws it in my face. The heel hits me in the face, blood everywhere, black eye. I put on sunglasses and go to a meeting. Abbas says, "Take the glasses off, what are they glued on or something?" I take them off, the black eye comes to light and you can smell the alcohol fumes thirty feet away.

I flew to Moscow and picked up the divorce papers from the registry office. My ex-wife, Ksenia, is yelling and hysterical. That face of hers is so repulsive, that malevolent grin, I was horrified—how had I ever lived with her? Eight years had gone by since we got married, and I had loved her once! How does Nature allow this? What kind of love goggles had I had to wear, what sort of hormones had I been force-fed that I should love this woman? "Oh go to hell you idiotic woman, stop yelling or I'll knock you out." But she goes on yelling and doesn't shut up, like, "I've been screwing this guy here the whole time, so intelligent, he's a doctor, and his dick is bigger than yours."

“Alright then get out of here already, I’ve had enough of you, you bitch. I’ll go off somewhere alone so I’ll never see you or hear you again.” Only I didn’t have any money, they hadn’t transferred my wages.

For a start I went to the bank and put in a request for the ten thousand Canadian dollars I had in my Austrian bank account. They said it would come through in a few days. With all that was left I bought some vodka and went over to a bench in some courtyard. There was a woman sitting there, she ran off when I started getting shit-faced. I went to the train station to sleep, on Komsomolskaya, met some guy there, some sort of local hoodlum. We walked together, finished the vodka, then picked up some more somewhere, and some more. I woke up on a train at four in the morning. My head was splitting, it had a bump on top, I had no money, my gold signet ring was also missing. Ah, to hell with him and everyone else, but where was I going to get something to cure this hangover? I walked some way, found a bunch of homeless people, drank some rotten liquor with them and slept on a lawn somewhere.

I tramped around like this for several days – and then I see my ex-wife walking along.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t myself, that’s just how it is, let’s go home.”

“You go – go back to your doctor, the intellectual with the big dick.”

“Okay. The bank called – your money has arrived from Austria.”

I went and withdrew all the money, booked myself into a hotel, had a wash, drank some good vodka and bought a

model six Zhiguli and my first ever cell phone. I wasn't a great driver, so I drove the car to a friend's garage.

Papers arrived from Austria, from the Canadian embassy, inviting me to fly over for an interview. I flew to Vienna for a few days, had the interview, and they said, "Wait for your forms and then go get a medical."

I flew to Moscow with Tamara, my ex sent me some of my things, her new man, the doctor with the big dick, brought a bag and flung it at me in the subway. Why'd you have to fling it at me like that? Have I done something to you? Take my ex-wife for yourself, she's well educated now, but if you'd known her before, she was an idiot. My ex-wife handed over my documents and the keys to the car.

We got in the model six and somehow I got it started. We got a music system and an alarm fitted at some garage and drove to Saint Petersburg. Tamara turned out to be a wonderful friend, traveling companion and bride, there were no issues. I was glad and felt happy to have her.

We decided to take the car from Petersburg to Novy Urengoy. We drove through Mordovia, the car flipped over and landed in a swamp. It's night, I pull Tamara out of the car, carry her to the roadside, then I plunge into the swamp a couple of times, get our money, everything's floating in and around the car. I stop a KAMAZ truck, ask them to take us to a nearby bar, everyone there turns up their nose at us.

You can all go to hell, upstanding people of this rotten society, what is this shit? It seems like there are only bandits in this world – who can you speak to as a human being? Well what do you expect from people, and why? I would help someone in a situation like this whatever way I could.

I went over to some local fellas and they agreed to help

us out without any great fuss. I bought brandy and drank it from the bottle as we drove along.

The fellas took us to the hospital, where my wife was given an x-ray and her leg put in plaster. Then they found us a hotel and I left Tamara there. We went back to the scene of the accident, the cops were already there and they began laying into me, saying I was drunk.

“I was sober when I was driving—after swimming in a swamp of course I’m drunk. What, do you want me to catch pneumonia?”

“Take a breathalyzer, give us a blood sample, she’s not your wife, it’s a criminal case for causing injury.”

“You can all go to hell, here you go, here’s five thousand rubles, just get off my back.”

I drove the clapped-out model six to the fellas’ garage, then I took a look at it and they took me over to the hotel. In the morning my wife and I took a taxi to Vnukovo airport and flew to Novy Urengoy.

The papers arrived from Austria, from the Canadian Embassy, telling me to go for my medical. I flew to Moscow, took the medical and sent the results on to Vienna.

My mother had got an apartment in the Moscow suburbs and was getting ready to retire there. Next vacation I decided to fly to her first, and then to Tamara, who was also on vacation.

This time, something happened to me. I flew over to my mother’s and I started feeling unwell, although I’d only had two beers. My mother called for a private ambulance and I was taken into hospital. This was a private nuthouse that cost five thousand rubles a day. I opened my eyes and saw that I was hooked up to a drip and there was a beautiful woman

sitting on my bed.

“Who are you? Where am I?”

“You’re in a hospital. I’m your neighbor, I’m in the ward next door.”

I was there for two weeks and after that I programmed myself off booze for a year.

A chat with the psychiatrist revealed that I had plenty of psychiatric issues typical of an adult, along with plenty of others more typical of a teenager. Well yes, I’m abnormal.

The psychiatrist discouraged me from that lady neighbor, saying something like she’s not a good match for you. Why did I listen to him? I don’t get it. Why was I listening to other people at all?

Programming is bullshit, two months later I was getting hammered ten times as much.

Papers arrived from Austria asking me to take an additional medical, to take tests for HIV and Hepatitis C, because I smoked and had tattoos—I took them all and sent them off.

I flew back to figure out what was wrong with my car. In Ryazan I found a mechanic at a garage, told him about the accident and asked what it would cost to repair it. The mechanic says for an accident like that it’s going to cost eighty thousand for the repairs, plus the tow-truck. A new model six cost a hundred five thousand—there was no sense getting the repairs done. I decided to leave the car with those fellas.

So I’m sitting in Ryazan in a park with two prostitutes. Some old lady walks by with a mad look about her, starts yelling to the whole park—she sees such a blight on me, and only Archimandrite Father Polycarp can remove it. She can also remove such things, but not when they’re the size of the

one I have. I ask the old lady, "Where does Father Polycarp live? How do I find him?" She gave me the address, I committed it to memory. I'd have to go on Saturday morning, he would be holding a service for the sick.

I went back to Yamburg. I'm drinking like crazy, sick of it all, my frustration progressing. I take a look out the window, out there is the tundra, there's snow, and not a single tree. In winter it's dark all the time, the sun comes up and sets an hour later.

Tamara and I took a vacation, I wanted to marry her. I went to the registry office, but they didn't accept my application because it was Wednesday – their day off. I hit the roof, spat on the floor and told the staff to go to hell. The house of the district police inspector awaited me and I spent fifteen days there.

I wanted to marry Tamara a second time in her city. While preparations were being made for the wedding, she called me by a different name. I smashed up everything, hurled the dress into a puddle, flipped the table over, got into a fight with her relatives, the wedding was off.

I calmed down a little and made up with Tamara, we sat in the hotel in silence drinking sherry. "Let's go and get married in Irkutsk, we've got to get lucky third time round." We went, calmly, quietly, the wedding went ahead, there was only my uncle and his lady there. I now had a third wife, and she was a perfect ten out of ten.

More papers arrived from Austria, from the Canadian embassy, telling me to take my medical all over again as a year had gone by since the first one. I would have to change my passport because it was ending soon, I weighed up all the pros and cons and didn't go.

I wouldn't be able to take Tamara to Canada. What damn good was Canada to me without my Tamara? What would I do there? Fill up people's cars at the petrol station or cleaning at some supermarket? I'd get paid one and a half thousand dollars when I was already getting three and half. To hell with you, Canada, and Austria too, better I go for a drink.

The trust manager, whom I respected, took honorable retirement. Abbas, the former chief engineer, would now be manager, while Gniliuk would take his place, and they were both creeps.

I got a call at work one day from a clinic in Yamburg. "Your wife has been diagnosed with HIV."

Oh fuck!

I'd never had any kind of shit like this before. "According to our rules you will also have to take tests." To hell with that, I'll take the tests when I'm on vacation in Moscow and bring them over. Everyone knows each other in Yamburg, and I got the feeling they'd all start looking at me differently—I'd have to quit. I take the tests in Moscow, I know I don't have HIV, I live an ordinary life with my wife, I don't use protection, I just wanted to spit on everything and on my own life too.

Tamara and I flew to Anapa to take a break, five-star hotel, everything was perfect. I started drinking heavily, and our neighbors began complaining. We were moved to another room, and then another, then another, and then in the end they gave us our own villa so we couldn't bother anyone. I ended up in a nuthouse in Anapa for a night, I drank too much and got really ill. Next morning the girls at the nuthouse told me my blanket kept falling down in the night and they put it

back for me.

I got myself out of this nuthouse with the girls and ended up in the cooler. What was all this that was starting to happen in my life? And this wasn't even the start! I bought a yellow Volga in Anapa, drove it to Moscow, and it fell apart.

I would have to go two weeks without Tamara — she was traveling to a clinic for HIV patients in Noyabrsk for a full examination.

For my vacation I arranged to go fishing and drinking with my colleagues from the lab on the Gulf of Ob. We were driving back from our booze-up and my company car got stuck in the sand. I called the emergency breakdown service and they said they'd help get any people out of there but the rest was my problem.

One of the lab workers volunteered to help me out, he was ex-military, I hadn't even noticed him before, but as it turns out he was a stand-up guy. We tried using a tractor to pull the car out and it didn't work — we tried with another, and it worked.

My driver got injured as the car was being pulled out and I took him to hospital. We washed the car, drove it to the garage, the driver would live. On Monday all the higher-ups had turned against me.

Gniliuk issued a decree: "For using a company vehicle for personal errands, you are to be deprived of your annual bonus, and all bonuses for the next three years." What the hell is that? Are you saying you don't use company vehicles for personal errands?

They're all chipping away at me at work, they all want something from me, and I don't want anything from any of them, get off my back, I'm going to quit soon so I don't have



to see or hear you again!

I'm a little stressed about getting a new job, will I be able to find one when I quit? One of my workers told me a saying: "The clever spend all their lives earning, the beautiful spend all their lives screwing and the fools spend all their lives working." I realized I was a fool and I would spend all my life working.

I would start drinking dead on 18:30 as soon as the working day was done. I once had a drink at 18:00 and Gniliuk called me up immediately.

"Come over here, what's this, have you started drinking half an hour early?"

"How did you know?"

"I have people everywhere."

So obviously some shithead from my lab reported me to him. Almost everyone there was a shithead now, while before, apparently, they'd just managed to hide it.

"I can't come, I don't have a car."

"I'll send you my car now."

So I go, I take my time, I have half an hour to kill and then I'll quit in person, and I won't do it by the book. You won't find a job after if you do things by the book.

"Write your explanation."

"What do I write?"

"Write whatever it is."

"Okay, and who do I write it to?"

"You write it to me."

"This paper is spoiled, give me another... I find myself in a state of insobriety at 18:35."

Gniliuk asks, "What do you want?"

"I want to quit Yamburg."

“Perhaps you should give this some thought?”

“No, I’m tired of your shit already.”

“Write a statement.”

“Here’s your statement.”

“You’ll need to go on working for another two weeks.”

“Okay... I have a request for you, I recently got accreditation from the Gazprom committee, they concluded that I am a competent specialist, fully compliant with my current position, I got all thirty signatures. Could you make me a copy?”

I had hit a brick wall.

“I don’t understand, did I do something to harm you personally? Have I done any such thing? What’s wrong with you, you rotten swine—all this time you’ve been chipping away at me, drop dead you prick!”

And Gniliuk did drop dead—a few months later he was crushed like a soft-boiled egg in a car accident.

Abbas dropped dead of a stroke.

Sevryuga dropped dead from thrombosis.

Chernyuk died of a heart attack.



# DOWNWARD SPIRAL

I fly to Moscow with Tamara, sell my Gazprom shares and buy myself a new car, a Lada Zhiguli model 15—we drive it to Novy Urengoy. I go to the city of Nadym and get a job there as chief engineer at some company. They want me to fill out the paperwork to get licenses to open an FTL, I work from home, do the paperwork, spend all my working hours and my free time with Tamara. We drive to Yekaterinburg to get one of the licenses and to Moscow to get another.

I arrive at the site as chief engineer and it turns out it's all gone to shit—there's no water, nothing to eat, the water from the shower is boiling hot. The main thing is I miss my wife, I can't work, I'm hammered the whole time, and after a month I quit.

I get a job as the manager of an FTL in Novy Urengoy. I take a plane to Yekaterinburg and then to Moscow for those same licenses, this time with a driver. Along with the licenses I also have to buy a Bukhanka van and drive back in it. The driver and I travel to his home in Cheboksary, get loaded, I find some woman there.

We arrive in Novy Urengoy in the Bukhanka, and I spend the whole time getting hammered. I went to a bar and met the lowlife there who had been screwing my first wife and I'd taken her away from him. He was now a "businessman," and on recollecting the incident had his stooges smash my

face in.

On another occasion I go to a different bar and I get my face smashed in again, this time so they can take my mink hat. It had just become impossible to live!

I take Tamara and we go for a trip in the car. We drove to her city, stayed there four days, I spent all four nights in the cooler, life really wasn't going anywhere.

We went to the Emmaus hostel near Tver and bought a motor boat. At the hostel they tried to shame me: "How much can one man drink?" "Have you no shame?" "Keep the noise down!" This sort of thing. I get a can of petrol out of the boot of my car and say if I hear anything else like that from you I'll douse your damned Emmaus in petrol and burn it down! This seemed to get them off my back, they never mentioned anything about shame after that.

Tamara and I are making shashlik out in the countryside, by the river. It's night outside, the wife is giving me grief, so we go back to the hostel. I'm so drunk I can't see the road.

She's aggravating me so much I start the car sharply in reverse. The car flips over a cliff edge and plunges into the river. Some fishermen pull me and my wife out of the car, only the cat gets left inside.

I go to Tver, get a tow-truck, fish out the car, the cat turns out to be alive, it just starts biting. I take my car to the garage and wait while they do their thing.

We've arrived in Novy Urengoy and I'm afraid to go outside, I stay inside, I've got the shakes, I have no life anymore, we have to get divorced, my wife is all in tears, and so am I.

"I don't want to leave you, infect me with your AIDS and

we'll die together, I don't want to live anymore!"

I take the tests, I don't have anything. This girl from Cheboksary I met on a business trip flies over to see me in Novy Urengoy, the three of us sit in the kitchen drinking, my wife has bought the ticket for this girl, and she's run off.

My wife is going crazy and I am too, we fight every day.

My wife takes a train home, the door of the train carriage is open, she's crying.

I'm just howling like a wolf at the top of my voice, and I can't get my head round any of it.

I drive my car drunk, smack into a bridge, damage the car, do some sort of repairs, drive to Moscow, take it into a shop and buy a new Chevrolet Niva.

That's it, I can't live any longer and I don't want to. I remember the old lady's idea that there's no such thing as "I can't," there is only "you have to," but I didn't have to, and that was the whole point! I'm drinking the whole time, and I've got the shakes constantly. A worker of mine moves into my two-room apartment with me, he also has the shakes, we get hammered together, he sleeps in one room and I in the other. The driver fills up with diesel, as though we have to go somewhere, I sign off an authorization form for him as though we've gone, he drives to the station, sells the diesel and we buy vodka.

I went to an over thirties night to find a woman, and I couldn't hold out for ten minutes even, I drank a gin and tonic and don't remember a thing.

I went back to the same night again after a while, didn't manage to get in because some woman attacked me. I ask, "Who are you? What do you want from me?" She says last time I got smashed on gin and don't remember a damn thing

but she's been coming to this night every time and waiting for me.

Alright, well, it wouldn't hurt for me to have at least some other living soul. The woman is well over forty, works as a caretaker, her name's Laila.

My worker has moved into a dormitory, my driver quit.

I live with Laila, she's a widow and has turned out to be a good woman. We go to the over-thirties night, Laila dances the Lezghinka, everyone applauds, she looks great when she dances.

Some kind person has knifed three tires on my Chevrolet Niva.

We go to meet Laila's kids, I'm recovering a little, I get the tires fixed. The kids are twice my size – kids my ass! – but I'm perfectly behaved.

My mother calls from Moscow, asks how long I'm planning to live like this. Is there any way out? My life's over now and I don't want a damn thing. My mother says I could sell the two-room apartment I'm living in and buy a studio outside Moscow, that I could change everything, that I'm only thirty-two.

Mom, you must be joking – I'm thirty-two? It just couldn't be!

I call her:

"Come here and sell it, I can't make head or tail of the damn thing."

"I'll come in two weeks, sort yourself out and put the apartment in order."

It's easy to say "put it in order" but how do you do that?

I go after my worker, we get hammered together, we go to the apartment and put everything in order together. We

buy brooms and everything we need, divide the apartment into square meters and clean precisely one square meter at a time, then a shot of vodka and a pickle. And then we do another square meter, and another shot of vodka. We did this for two weeks until it was all cleaned. Laila came and washed the curtains.

My mother has arrived, we're sitting in the kitchen, I'm drinking vodka. Another week and I reach a more or less respectable state. I bring Laila jam, mushrooms, pickles – dozens of jars – all prepared by Tamara. It comes time to go to Moscow, I come back round by the time I get there, Laila is crying.

I have to travel through Tamara's city. I stopped off at hers to give her three thousand rubles, I had to. How beautiful she still was! We sat in the car in silence for half an hour, and then I drove on.

I have arrived in Moscow with exactly one thousand rubles in my pocket, and I don't know what to do. I buy vodka, cigarettes, juice, I open up the yellow pages and call anyone I can. They say come today, take fifty thousand in advance and get yourself to work in Sakhalin. Fifty thousand? For that I'd go to the North Pole!





# SAKHALIN

I couldn't work there properly, I was getting hammered the whole time. I was saved a little by the fact that everyone was getting hammered, but everyone somehow coped with it and I couldn't. The work was dull, and there was so much of it, dirt everywhere, right up to your waist, there'd be three meters of snow in a single night and then it would melt.

A month went by and then I went to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. I got shit-faced, hung about where I shouldn't have and got beaten up by a bunch of thugs.

I'm lying in hospital, no water to wash the blood off, not knowing when it will come, no medication, six people on the ward, everyone watching TV, my head's spinning, somehow or other I get up to have a cigarette. After a number of days they gave me a block of laundry soap and a bit of sheet in place of a towel, I went to the shower, which was like a gas chamber in a concentration camp.

It's my birthday today, I'm thirty-three years old, and no one comes to see me, or congratulates me, and no one calls. I think about how Jesus Christ had already been killed on the cross at thirty-three but I'm still alive.

After a week my head has calmed down, I tell the manager I'm going to walk to Moscow on foot or if he discharges me I'll drink in moderation, although it won't always work out that way.

I make the analysis that my company here is at the very bottom rung in the hierarchy of companies, compliance

inspection for the contractor, and they pay me \$1,250 a month.

But working in compliance inspection for the client you could get \$2,200.

And at the company of the main contractor they paid as much as \$5,000. And who was stopping me going and getting a job there? No one was stopping me, I just didn't have all the information.

I remember the Canadian embassy—why didn't I emigrate to Canada? Because I had a loving wife and a good position. Where was my loving wife now? Where was my good position? I have nothing and I'm in the shit. All these things are unstable, like smoke.

I'll read some documents in English and learn the terminology, then at some point I'll find a job in some foreign company.

Aidar was working in compliance inspection for the client, he comes up to me and says his wife's dying of cancer. Someone recommended this book to her, but the book didn't help. Aidar sees the trouble I'm in and he wants to give me this book—and I guess suddenly it's going to help? The book is called *How to Get By When Nothing is the Way You Want it to Be*, the author is Alexander Sviyash.

I open the book, I start reading and I realize the end will come for me soon—it's very strange that it hasn't already come. The world's attitude to me is exactly the same as my attitude to the world. I hate everything and everything hates me. The only way out is for me to change my attitude to the world, and then the world will change its attitude to me.

I try to change, but it doesn't always work.



# KUZMINKI

I quit after a month and a half, fly home, get some money and decide not to go out on any projects again. I'll live with my mother and work in Moscow. I'm looking for work, I put in an application at some company, I'm online – I look for a woman, meet Kristina, give her my number.

I started looking around for a place to buy myself an apartment with my mother. The money from the sale of the two-room apartment in Novy Urengoy was exactly enough for a studio in the Moscow suburbs in a building that's still under construction. There's no house there, just the foundations, but there was also no alternative, so we paid.

Mother says let's go to Uglich, take a look at some of the beautiful places where we might buy her a dacha. I buy a dinghy with a motor, go to Uglich with my mother and uncle; we look at some places, I ride around on my boat.

I started drinking out in the country with my uncle, didn't get chance to dry out the dinghy, scrunched it up and threw it in the trunk of the car. One evening I'm out drinking with my uncle at a restaurant. Someone says something to me, I turn over the table and end up in a cell, they give me two days. I do my time, I get out, mother is angry, we go home.

I'm driving my mother and uncle back to Moscow and I get a call inviting me for an urgent interview. I go, I'm dirty, I've got a beard, I'm dressed for the countryside, I've spent two nights in jail, but I pass the interview.

I go home, Kristina calls: "Let's meet up."

“Okay, I’m just driving past Kuzminki, where are you?”  
Could this beautiful woman with the fashion magazine really be Kristina? Damn, what am I meant to do with her?

Kristina, listen, just don’t get scared okay, I need to go into the woods and dry out my dinghy, put it in a tree, and I want to make a pot of tea, I’m not feeling too good. Where’d you get the dinghy? Well, I was drunk in Uglich, I didn’t manage to get it dried out so now it’s back there in the trunk, then I was in jail for two nights, and then I had an interview. Why, you moron? Maybe I am a moron, I don’t know, you would know better. Will you have some tea? Ah, it’s got really strong, this is real chifir. You don’t want any? Well come sit down on the tree anyway, what are you standing for? Put the fashion magazine down. Alright, I’ll fold up the dinghy now and we’ll go.

Kristina, I can’t take you home because I’ve been driving since this morning and so much has happened. I don’t have money for a taxi, so you’ll need to get the bus home.

Kristina, look, there’s a cafe that sells beer, what do you say I park the car and we go for a drink? What do you think, one more beer and we’ll go to your place?

We began a great love affair. I worked at the company, I got sixteen thousand rubles, didn’t have enough money for anything, but we’d always buy two or three bottles of wine or whisky. Kristina had a young daughter, three and half years old, and I lived with them. Kristina’s ex-husband paid her alimony, which we also drank part of.

We sometimes went to vacation homes and Kristina always said I didn’t know how to behave in polite society. Kristina’s friend had a birthday, I was invited to an Italian bar in Kuzminki, I got completely shitfaced and fell asleep at the

table. I had to take Kristina's brother to the airport, I drove really slowly as I was scared of driving in Moscow, and Kristina was seething the whole way.

She got tired of it all and said I was a jerk and I came from the country.

"Kristina, how can I not be a jerk, and not come from the country?"

"I'll teach you if you're ready to learn."

"Of course I am, I'm tired of all the cops stopping me in the street, too."

"Only a country bumpkin would walk around in trousers like that, and only a lug would wear those shoes, your shirt is cheap, the mink cap is like something out of a seventies movie, chuck it out, don't yell into your phone like that, Muscovites don't talk about 'phoning,' you have to say 'call,' you have a moronic hairstyle, your jacket is from some cheap market."

For a couple of months the cops didn't stop me at all, taking me for a real Muscovite.

I didn't have enough money, I started thinking about going out on some project again and began looking for work. I wrote to companies, registered on job-hunting sites, but no one got back to me. I felt like I was banging my head against a wall. In five months of job hunting I didn't get a single reply.





# ARCHIMANDRITE FATHER POLYCARP

**K**ristina's mother was dying of cancer, she hadn't told anyone and we only found out about her illness in the final stages. It was a Friday, we were drinking wine, Kristina was crying.

I told her about the crazy old lady in Ryazan and about Archimandrite Father Polycarp, who held prayers for the sick on Saturdays. Kristina lit up—let's go tomorrow morning, it might help, don't have anything more to drink. "And maybe the old lady was crazy and there is no Father Polycarp?" Kristina looked it up online: Father Polycarp, Archimandrite, exorcist, casts out demons.

We left in the early morning, but we were still late. You have to get there at 11am and we got there at 2pm. I have a bad hangover, there's snow all over, the church is closed, it's unclear what we should do next. Should we go home, back to Moscow? A young guy comes along and says, "Have you come to see Father Polycarp?"

"Does he really exist?"

"Of course he exists, come on, I'll take you to him."

We arrived at his house, there were people sitting in the upper room, five of them altogether, they fed us lean vegetable soup. An elderly nun said that Father Polycarp was now asleep following the service, but after he woke up he

might receive us, or might not.

I talk to some old man about whether there's a God. The old man explains something about the system of our universe in terms of physics, I don't understand a thing. He says he has two specialisms, music and physics. He had worked as a conductor at the prestigious Mosconcert and had retired – he felt something was missing and went off to the monastery. He stayed a while at the monastery and realized everything there was just as profane, with the same petty squabbles as in ordinary life, and he went to some old lady, stayed there for a bit, and then to some father. Finally he came here, to Father Polycarp, everything here was wonderful, it was like nothing else.

The elderly nun came in and said that Father Polycarp would receive us. We went up to the second floor and there, at a long wooden table, sat this enormous giant of a man in a cassock. He looked me in the eye and my legs gave way, he was that powerful. He offered us a seat at the table, on a bench. I said nothing, and Kristina took out the medical history. Father Polycarp said that there was nothing we could say, as her mother had already died, and he could see her soul with God. The body would go on for a short while in this world, and in it her earthly life would come to an end. Why had we come so late? The only thing he could do would be to pray for her, she would then die without pain and we would not need to buy any drugs. A large icon hung on the wall. He stood next to it and prayed.

There was nothing we could say in return, and we got up to leave. Father Polycarp said, "Wait, I shall pray for you, also," and he prayed to the icon again.

We said good-bye, left the house and sat in the car in silence. I got ready to drive to Moscow and realized I couldn't, I was shaking like I had a fever. I started the car, pushed my chair back and told Kristina we'd have to wait. I went on shaking till I fell asleep. I woke up half an hour later, drank some tea and drove off.

Kristina's mother never regained consciousness and died without pain.

On Monday I opened my post box and there was an invitation to work with a form attached where you had to write your measurements for all the protective clothing. The invitation indicated a salary of \$2,200. At the time my salary was around \$500. I wrote a reply saying I would accept the offer and completed and sent off the form.

No sooner had I sent his message than I received a call from a different company. They asked was I really born in Irkutsk? Yes I was. Perhaps you would be interested in helping to build a gas pipeline in the Irkutsk region? Of course I would, what's the company? It was a foreign company and a real foreign project—I went along and passed the interview.

They asked me what salary I was looking for. I didn't know what to say and told them I had another offer where they had promised me \$2,200. They gave me \$2,500.

I would have to start at this company in the new year after the holidays, and I was working my last days at the old place.

They'd organized a company dinner at a restaurant on December 25, we needed to get there for 4pm, but I wasn't feeling too good as I'd had too much wine the night before. I'd have to go home to get my suit and tie, and that was

something I really didn't want to do. Kristina said most companies in Moscow dress casual for corporate events and I shouldn't sweat about wearing a suit. I listened to her – I don't need to go home, let's have some wine, there's plenty of time. I wore jeans, a shirt and a bright red sweater and went off to the party.

As I walked into the restaurant a brass band was playing, and everyone, of course, was dressed in suit and tie, I was the only one wearing jeans and a red sweater and I felt very awkward. We sat at our tables, the director general made a speech and I thought that speech would never end, I wanted a drink, but everyone sat silently hanging on his every word, there was silence in the hall.

Sitting next to me at the table was Ivan. He had worked in Sakhalin before and now he was deputy head of the department where I worked. I sat in silence and thought if Ivan has worked in Sakhalin then he must give about as much of a crap about all this nonsense as I did, but I didn't want to be the one to start that conversation. Ivan couldn't help himself, he opened a bottle of vodka under the table, tapped me on the side and handed me a glass. We poured out the vodka and drank it down quietly. The speech went on for forty minutes and we managed to drink the whole bottle. Then everyone clapped and an official toast was given, we had another drink and a bite to eat to soak it up.

I thought the speeches were over but it turned out this was just the start. Next to speak were the deputy director general, the trade union, and hell knows who else. When all the speeches had finished, Ivan and I were completely slaughtered. At last the door opened and I went for a cigarette.

I didn't care that I was wearing a red sweater and jeans, and that I was drunk.

I found the smoking area, lit a cigarette, took a look around me and realized something was wrong. There were more than a hundred people in the hall, but I was smoking on my own—that just doesn't happen. Where were the others? It turned out the others were smoking outside because the director was planning to smoke where I was smoking.

He came over and asked how I found it working at his company. I said working there sucked and that's why I was leaving after the holidays to go to Siberia.

"Why does it suck? what don't you like about it?"

"The salary is 16,000 rubles, which is very low, it takes me two hours to get there, there's nowhere to park my car because the spaces are only for management, so you have to drive around for blocks looking for a space, which means I'm always late and I get written up in the black book. I drive back in two hours if I'm lucky, the work is dull, I put together a five-hundred-page report on the joints welded in-country and there are no prospects."

The director said I should go see him after the holidays and he'd raise my salary to 30,000, but I already had one foot in Siberia.

After the cigarette break, I went into the hall, and almost all the other employees were hissing and yelling at me, expressing their displeasure. What right did I have to speak to the director general in person, let alone to tell him I was unhappy? You can all go to hell, I thought—and said what was I meant to do, stick my tongue up his ass and shut up? You like it? You can shut up. I'm going home.

After the festivities I went in to work and I had a terrible hangover. I sat and waited for the day to end. Ivan offered me a drink to ward off the hangover—yes please, pour away. We go to work drunk the whole week. The boss tried to prick our conscience—there are only three people in the department and two of them are drunk, and that's sixty-six percent, that sort of thing. Boss, you're a good man, but I don't have time for you right now.

I wrote my letter of resignation, resigned and received the 30,000 I was promised. The director general wished me luck and said that if things didn't work out for me in Siberia I could always come back.

# A FOREIGN COMPANY

In the center of Moscow, not far from the Lubyanka, is the office of the company I was going to work for. I'd have to fly to Siberia in two months. In Moscow, I studied the technical documentation and put together the standards by which the project would be constructed, I had no duties.

The office was full of foreigners, and everything was organized so that each person would feel like they were part of a single team, engaged in a single activity – for me this was quite new. We drank coffee, chatted, went outside for a cigarette, went out to a restaurant for lunch.

I got to know Mamolyga, who was the quality manager. We nearly became friends, we'd talk shop and discuss personal matters.

One time, Kristina met me for lunch. I wanted to invite her to the restaurant, but this Italian guy had come out and invited us to a pizzeria. Although I really wanted to, I couldn't turn him down. I didn't turn him down because there was this fear within me that as he was an Italian it meant he was a boss, and you can't ruin that relationship at the start of your career. Actually this Italian was not a boss at all, he was an electrical engineer.

We went to the pizzeria, I chose a table in the smoking

section but Kristina said there was a draft against her back and we needed to move. There were no other tables in the smoking section, and there was just one non-smoking table. I refused to move, told Kristina that she was unhappy with everything as always. Kristina flew into hysterics, crying, at the whole pizzeria, then stood up and walked out. I felt very uncomfortable in front of the Italian, I wanted to get Kristina back and had to go to the office, the lunch break was over.

Well why in the hell did you come here, who asked you to? Kristina's hysterics went on a long time, several days. Through her hysterics it came out that in order to kiss some Italian's ass I had seriously offended the woman I loved. Any normal man would have moved to a different table without saying a word. I couldn't understand it: either she was right, and I was a piece of shit; or I was right, and she was hysterical. So I never understood it, but I decided not to mix my work life with my personal life again. I didn't want to talk to Kristina after this episode. The first paycheck arrived in my account, 75,000 rubles, and I couldn't believe it could happen, the amount seemed enormous after six months of working in Moscow. Before flying to Siberia, I went to see Father Polycarp and spent half an hour praying for the sick. I was shaking again as from a fever and thought that this was because the demons were flying out from me.





# SIBERIA

**F**rom Irkutsk it was a five-hundred-kilometer drive north. I was in a car with Charles, the safety manager from South Africa. The different places in Siberia were very beautiful, the taiga and the rivers. Charles was asking the driver to stop the whole time so that he could get another photograph of the landscape.

We arrived in the little village of Chikan and stayed in a dorm there. There's no shower, nothing to eat, and no cell phone coverage. We bought potatoes and vodka from the only shop they had, bought elk from some locals, made a stove outside from some bricks and cooked up something on it. I have a permanent contract, with no leave, I have to work every day except Sundays, Charles has to work six weeks and then gets two weeks off.

The subcontracting companies that will work here are still mobilizing, setting up, equipment is being transported, portacabins installed, a pipe welding station, there is no real road.

There is, essentially, nothing to do, and the driver and I go off to look for a couple of women in the next village, while Charles stays to get some sleep.

We found these two women in the village, rented this sort of "shack" at a hotel, brought them there, bought vodka and snacks. The security guard at the hotel comes up to me and says, "You need to be more careful, these women had

syphilis, and we don't know if they ever got treatment." We think, "To hell with them," and we go home.

Some time went by, the companies arrived and the work began. Mamolyga, whom I had made friends with in Moscow, has also flown over. He turns his nose up at me, and I ask, "Why?" He says because he's a blue blood, and we're all just pieces of crap. "Okay I get it, the only thing I don't get is did someone tell you that or did you decide it for yourself?" He wouldn't say any more. Yeah, well you can go to hell too.

I found a girl, Julia, out in the country a hundred kilometers away and brought her back to the dorm. Tomorrow is Sunday and we can sleep in, we sit in the kitchen and drink beer. Grigory comes over to me from Mamolyga's department and starts raising hell. He says I'm keeping him from sleeping, I've brought a woman, I'm getting drunk. I realized something was wrong, because for a start Grigory is a wino himself, and second he's behaving too aggressively, he's looking for a fight, definitely. I took Julia and the beer and went to bed.

On Monday the bosses come over, saying why did you bring a woman here, disturb people's sleep and get drunk? I say, "First, where does it say I can't invite a woman over to see me? Second, why can't I drink beer on a Saturday? Third, no one was stopping anyone from sleeping, it was all calm and quiet." They shoved a breathalyzer at me, I blew into it and it came out with three zeros after a period. There was nothing they could say, they all left me alone.

I caught hold of Grigory in some place where there were no other people and I ask him, "What are you doing, you jerk?" He says Mamolyga told him to go to the kitchen and

start a fight so I'd get kicked off the project. If I'd fallen for the provocation, I wouldn't have got away with having a fight.

Mamolyga writes a complaint against some paperwork I've delivered and puts all the bosses in copy. The bosses put together a meeting, people come in from Irkutsk and Novosibirsk, it's a good thing someone knows a little something about welding.

I explain to everyone at the meeting that comments 1 to 20 do not make any sense because we don't use that welding process, comments 21 to 40 also make no sense because we don't have that kind of gas, while 41 to 58 have nothing at all to do with our project.

I go to see Mamolyga and ask him, "Why did you write this? I mean it's all lies, your 58 comments, do you give any thought at all to the things you write?" He says he gives it a great deal of thought, but the big boss back in Moscow won't give it a damn bit of thought. What everyone will understand is that Mamolyga has made 58 comments on my work, and whether or not they contain any truth is not important. "Well you're a real bastard, Mamolyga, I've never met anyone quite like you, you can drop dead, you prick!"

After six months I started working on rotation, one month on, one month off. In other words I worked for a month, then took a month's vacation. I picked up Julia and we traveled together to Moscow. We went out on the dinghy, stayed in the dacha, and it seemed like everything was good. We went to the village of Sychevka, a good four hundred kilometers outside Moscow, and there were these owls in the road there that just didn't want to fly off. I honked at them and they looked at me like they wanted to say, "Why are you

making all that noise, can't you see I'm sitting here?" And then they slowly turned their round heads and reluctantly flew away.

The problem was I didn't see Julia as a sexual being. I decided not to repeat the same mistake twice and we split up.

Mamolyga was fired from the project and dropped dead of a spinal sarcoma.

The project in Siberia lasted two years, a lot of it was good, and some not so good. But all of this was, as they say, a peasant's life, and I was tired of it by now.



# GAZPROM

A couple of months later I got an offer to go to Tunis, but I had this egoism about being the greatest welder – it would be good to get known in Russia. I got a call from Gazprom and they invited me to develop their standards. I thought of how the whole country would then see my family name on those standards. I quit and went to Gazprom. We agreed on 100,000 rubles a month. The work there was creative, but there was so much of it that there was no time left for the rest of my life.

In the first few days of working there I got a call from this foreign company in Kazakhstan, I explained that I couldn't quit as I had just started working at Gazprom and was now in my first few days there, but I kept their number.

I would probably have carried on working at Gazprom, but six months later I got 52,000 rubles. I asked the director why it was 52,000 when we had agreed to 100,000? He told me frankly that I had already developed all the standards he needed me to. These standards could now be used for twenty years, it would just be a case of changing the cover. He said I could stay, but I would only be paid as much as I earned.

To get a decent salary at Gazprom, first you have to get an assignment that pays well. You could work for a month doing something that cost ten million, and you could do something that cost three kopecks. Who did what work depended entirely on the director, and he would give out the

money to whoever was willing to bow down to him. I didn't want to bow down to him and I quit.

I didn't come into this world to bow down to any man, let them all go to hell.

I went to see Father Polycarp and prayed for the sick.



# KAZAKHSTAN

I came home unemployed again, I was getting so tired of all this, when would it end? Will I find a job someday that suits me, or is that just impossible? I found the phone number for the foreign company in Kazakhstan and called them up. I explained that I realized six months had gone by but if the vacancy was still there then I was ready to fly tomorrow. They told me they were very glad I'd called because in those six months they hadn't found anyone. I took the interview, joined the company and flew out.

It was a foreign project, in English with proper foreign standards. I spent several months trying to hack my way through those standards. Then, once I had figured it all out, I was given instructions to build a ship and had to hack my way through from the beginning again—the standards in shipbuilding are different. There were different materials, high pressure pipelines, low pressure pipelines, nickel alloys, copper alloys, stainless steels and so on. I started getting through it faster and faster, and finally I realized I could work in any country in the world now and no longer had to depend on Russia.

You had to work seventy-five days at the base and then you would get twenty-one days off, the nearest town was seventy kilometers away. You could go there on Saturday night or Sunday. I went there a couple of times, rented a room at a hotel, drank beer and tried to find a girl, but it didn't work

out. As a result, I became tired of the whole thing and started reading books and watching movies after work, that's how I passed those seventy-five days.

I got the feeling that my whole life was passing me by, and that frustration started again. I started thinking it was time for me to throw myself off a roof or hang myself – drown myself – but I was scared.

They were leasing the building in the suburbs where I had bought an apartment and I asked my mother to find some people to make repairs on the place, I wouldn't have time with my twenty-one days off.

My relationship with Kristina came to an end, and then started again, it was clear that we wouldn't live together. I went to see her for the umpteenth time: we spent the evening together drinking wine and in the morning we got my things together to go back on the project. We stuffed seventy-five boxes of different discs into a suitcase, and they wouldn't go. We started opening the boxes and put the discs into cases.

Kristina's daughter looked at us and from out of nowhere she brought out Vadim Zeland's audiobook, *Reality Transurfing*. I took the disc with me.

I flew to Kazakhstan and made my way through all the discs, there was only *Transurfing* left. I put it on, and really liked it. The recording was professionally made, the music played, the speaker read the text, I listened to it twice.

*Transurfing* proposes the following technique: create a "slide" of what you want to achieve – but there should be no great desire or importance attached to the event or else it won't happen. I bought all Vadim Zeland's books and audiobooks and started studying them.

I opened up a page on a dating site and started to get to know some women from Moscow. One of the girls on this page used the phrase, "If you want to have something you never had before, start doing something you never did before."

I sat down with a sheet of paper and made a description of the type of woman I normally ended up with before I'd start having problems with her: a lady of around thirty-five, divorced, has children, further education, is hysterical.

I took another sheet of paper and wrote: a lady under thirty, never married, no children, no further education, not hysterical.

I flew to Moscow, met Nadia, she meets all the criteria from my slide, but there is something missing from her, or the opposite – something unwanted.

I took a holiday in Turkey and invited her to come with me. She flew over and I realized I hadn't put enough detail on that slide, Nadia was too greedy.

The repairs on my studio apartment were finished. I flew back from Turkey, went into the apartment, there had been no time to buy furniture or anything else, I'd do that another time. All that was left in the apartment were some empty cardboard boxes.

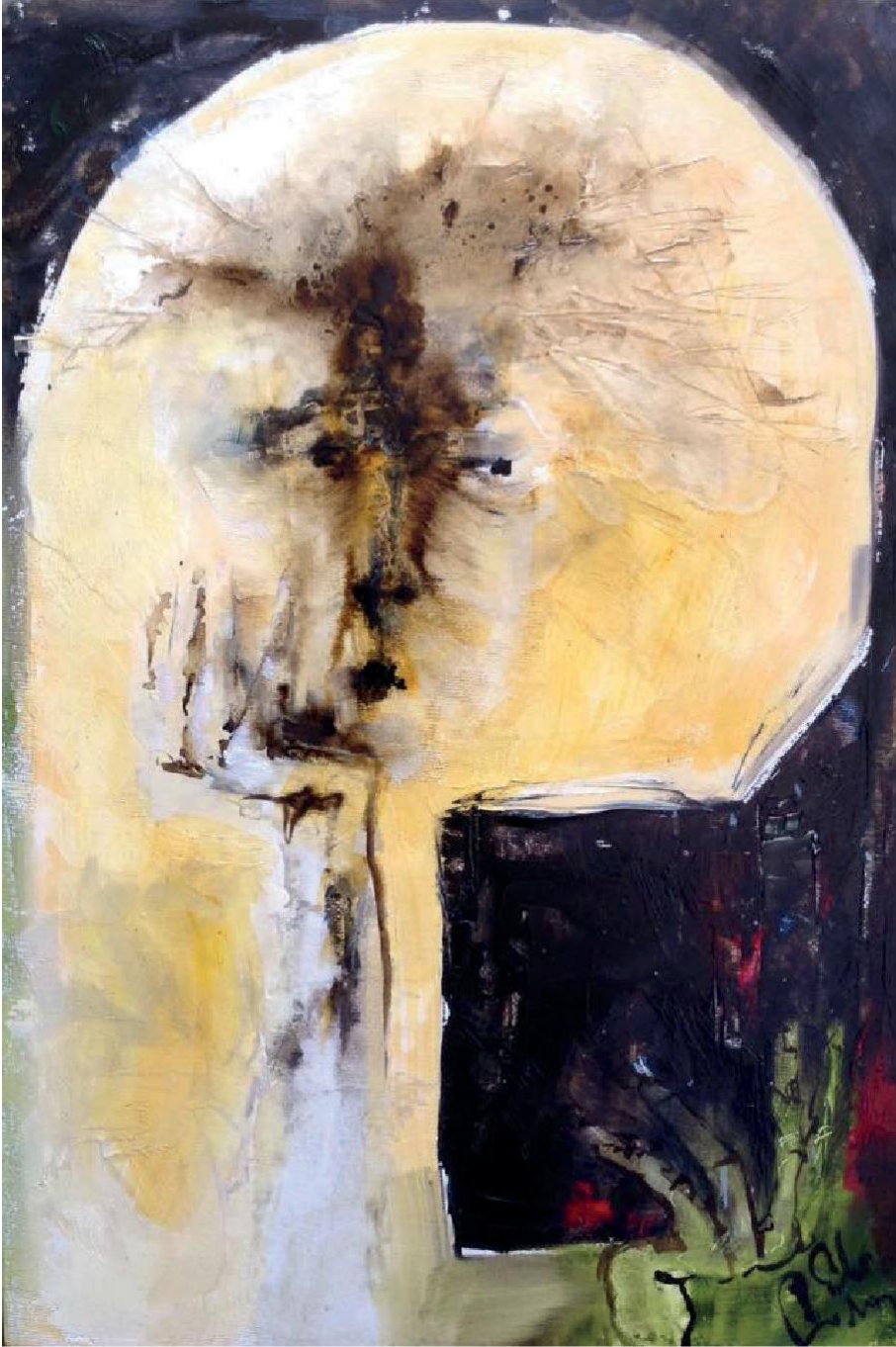


# LYUBOV

I flew back to Kazakhstan, wrote out those extra details, changed the slide multiple times, until I got my ideal Princess. I met Lyubov, from the Moscow suburbs, online. I fly to Moscow, call Lyubov and invite her over. When I saw her I immediately realized she was exactly as I had described, there was nothing to add to her, and nothing to take away. I invited Lyubov to my new studio apartment, which still contained nothing but empty cardboard boxes. I had known her only a couple of hours, while we went out for food and wine. She comes into the room and says: "This is where I'll put the baby's cot, and the wardrobe will go here. We'll have to make a list of everything we need to buy."

By the time of my next visit to Moscow she'd organized the registry office, the photographer, the video, the restaurant, the limousine, the rings, the dress, all the other things you need for a wedding, and even a korovai. All I had to do was marry her.

The matter of my family life had finally been resolved, I had found my Princess! When I looked at her I knew that there could never be any misunderstanding between us, no scandals or jealousy or hysterics, it was like she was a part of me.



# THE SEARCH

I flew back to Kazakhstan and was sent on a business trip to Karaganda. There was nothing for me to do there and I went to a bookshop. I bought Somerset Maugham's *The Summing Up*. I had read some of his books before and I liked them, but I hadn't read this one. The author had spent his whole life searching for the meaning of life, he had gone through many trials, become rich and famous, had a family and children, studied all the subjects that interested me at the time—psychology, religion, philosophy, dramaturgy—to a high level, and at the end of his life concluded that these were not the things worth living for at all. At the end of the book, he writes that only Mercy and Beauty are worthy of his attention.

I was struck to the core, because everything he had written I had also studied, not at the same level perhaps, and not the same amount, because I had realized earlier on that it wasn't worth it. For instance, you don't have to study one philosopher, compare him with another, find their similarities and analyze their differences, because it's almost immediately obvious when something is a lie.

I was also struck because Mercy and Beauty were not the things that made life worth living for me—I was not Somerset Maugham.

I read the Torah and see that it's only a memorial. Even if it was ever relevant, I can't find anywhere in it the kind of meaning that I'm looking for.

I read Schopenhauer, he writes that people worry what

will happen after their death, but don't think at all about what happened before their birth, even though they're the same thing. In other words, after we die we will never be again, and that worries us; but before our birth we never were, and we couldn't give a damn. And why is this the case?

I read about politics and realize it's such a labyrinth, there are so many lies that you can just gather it all together and chuck it out to save yourself the time.

I read Professor Stoleshnikov, who writes about how the government lies to us and does what it wants with us. And clearly they do, but what can we do about it? Do we go to war, or just go on fuming?

I read about the ten habits that lead to poverty: self-indulgence; greed; doing things you hate; measuring your success by money; spending more money that you can afford to; going for short term gain; whining; comparing yourself to other people; measuring your wealth by money; isolating yourself from your own family.

Clearly, we could get rid of these habits without any wealth coming our way. I know that if I were to suddenly become wealthy, I wouldn't live long. I'd quit my job and start drinking heavily, my liver would give out in a year at most. I start going to see Archimandrite Father Polycarp every vacation. Sometimes I make it over to see him a couple of times. I don't understand what's happening to me when I go there, but something's happening. After visiting him, there is a change in my inner state and I don't feel as bad as I did before.

My wife gives birth to a daughter. I look at her and realize despite the fact I always dreamed of having a daughter, she cannot be the meaning of my life.



I decided to become a muscle head, went to the gym and read up on bodybuilding. I have to do squats, deadlifting and bench pressing. I'm doing squats and something in my back snaps, but I carry on. Something in my back is holding me back but I carry on. Something has cracked so that I can barely move my leg and I can't carry on anymore, somehow I walk, dragging my leg behind me.

I flew to Moscow. I got even more shitfaced than usual, punched through the middle of the bathroom door, frightened my wife, and she took the daughter and ran.

I went to my mother, told her about my leg, that it hurt. My mother, who has experience in these things, says, "It's the spinal column." I went off, got an MRI and went to see the doctor. The doctor says I'll need an urgent operation because I have a slipped disk that is going to quickly wear down the nerves and then my legs will switch off. I tell the doctor, "If I need it, let's get on with it—do it." He says, "We have a waiting list and you'll need to wait ten years." What, are you all idiots in this world or something?

My mother calls a private clinic, we go there, I pay them the money. They'll do the operation in a few days. I stay home on my own and drink vodka. I open up that page on the dating site again and find some dumb woman, she comes over and we get hammered.

At home there's a pile of bottles, mess everywhere, the ashtray has smashed, I can't pick it up because I can't bend down. I'm drinking vodka and thinking, who's to stop me throwing myself off the roof? If you can just get to the roof and throw yourself off, all this will be over immediately. So okay, maybe for a moment it's going to hurt, but right now it hurts the whole time and you put up with it. Perhaps my heart

will rupture as I'm flying? I read that death sets in with a rupture of the heart, interesting—how does it happen? Oh to hell with it—so what if it ruptures? you don't need it anymore anyway, what do you want me to do about it?

But I still haven't found the meaning of life! Let's suppose that there's a God, and He asks me why the hell did you throw yourself off the roof, when you hadn't found the meaning of life? What can I tell him? Or I suddenly remember why I flew to Earth and it turns out I went to God myself at some point and asked Him to send me here and now I've thrown myself off a roof! And why did I throw myself off—because yet another dumb woman ran away from me? Well she can go to hell, let her run where she wants. The operation is going to get done, my leg will stop hurting, it will all get sorted out first time round, right? So I finished off that bottle of vodka and decided if life's not as important as it was before, then I could always throw myself off the roof tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, or after any number of years and it wouldn't change a thing.

I had to find the meaning of my life, and not like before, more intensively.

Vera, my wife's sister, calls and says, "I'm going to come over to your place now, if you don't mind, and if you're not going to get drunk." I would still have carried on getting drunk, of course, but then how would I get to my operation? I'd have to go out myself in at least an acceptable state. "Come on over, it's no trouble." She arrived, cleaned up the mess, threw out the bottles, I sat in silence on the balcony for hours, smoking and looking out at the city lights. My wife came over before the operation.

The operation was a success, my spine went on hurting

for another couple of months, then it stopped. I don't do heavy lifting anymore.

I fly home, go to see my mother, sit down just like a piece of shit, I have no energy at all. I can't and don't want to do anything, I just drink beer and smoke. Mother says, "Go on, take a walk, the weather is lovely!" I can't. I'm sitting in an armchair, barely alive, and thinking this is life — a kind of hard labor, my strength is gone completely even, I call a taxi and go home.

I don't manage to get off the booze before the project starts up again, have to call a doctor with a drip bag, I come to myself after a couple of days and fly out to work.

I read *Transurfing* again and again. It's quite obvious the water is crap, the air is polluted and the food contaminated. And what can we do? Okay, first I went and bought an AquaDisk. I make water in it, it's beautiful. The water tastes good and it's a pleasure to drink, you can have a few liters of it a day. The AquaDisk comes on the project with me, I'm drinking decent water, my energy levels increase.

I've bought a pH meter and I'm measuring everything that comes into my hands. Before the water filter the water measures 6.9, in other words it's acidic, and after the water filter it's 7.2, in other words alkaline, nothing but a miracle. I go deep into the subject of nutrition, decide to eat more alkaline foods, any kind of salad, meat once a day, then every other day, then twice a week, then I cut it out altogether, increase the pH level in my stomach. My condition drastically deteriorates, I'm dying, it's like I'm splitting apart. If I don't find an answer to the question "Why?" today, I'm not going to hold out till evening — I'll burst.

I leaf through the Torah — what did people eat before?

Apparently they were all vegetarians before the flood, and only ate plants, then after the flood they started eating meat as well. Why is this written down and what does it mean? It must have been the case or it wouldn't have been written down, nutrition has always been relevant. Alright, so the Torah can't answer my questions. Who can answer them? Transurfing had already got me into this state, there was no sense in asking it.

I remember I once read Evgeny Shadilov, he knows exactly what he's talking about. I find his books and realize this is what happens when you suddenly decide to become vegetarian. I eat meat, pasta, buns, and I wash them down with coffee, I lower the pH level in my stomach and come back to life again in the morning.

I know you shouldn't conduct experiments on yourself like this, especially when you're over forty. You have to know exactly what you're doing, why you're doing it and what the effect is going to be.

I'm flying home on vacation and as we're coming in to land my head starts splitting apart, it feels like it's about to explode. I go to a decent clinic, pay them my money. They say my nose has been broken several times and now I can't breathe through it at all. As a result, the pressure inside my head is not the same as it is everywhere else, and I'll feel it especially on airplanes. They'll need to do an operation, without it I won't be able to go on living normally. After the operation it hurts everywhere, but I come back around.

I fly home, I start getting an allergy – when will it end already? I come to see the doctor at a private clinic and there's this Georgian sitting there. He asks, "What kind of soap do you use?"

“What kind? The usual kind, toilet soap, the kind they sell in the shops.”

“That’s awful stuff, young man—soap smells delicious, but why do you think it smells that way?”

“I don’t know.”

“Because there’s oil in it—just imagine if you took a piece of skin and rubbed oil into it, what would happen to the skin? That’s right, it can’t breathe, and nothing can get through it, so what happens then? Then—all the crap stays inside. Then you eat a bit of lemon, the crap turns to liquid and makes its way through the skin to the outside, it has to find a way out somewhere. And we can be certain you’ll get an allergic reaction in precisely that spot, all that crap is toxic.”

He didn’t need to explain anything further to me, I grasped everything very quickly myself.

I tell the Georgian, “Do I understand you correctly that if I go to the pharmacy and buy some tablets, they’ll clog the skin up even more, so even if the crap has liquefied it won’t be able to get out?”

He says, “Correct—it’s exactly the same industry. First they mutilate people with their soap, then they cure them with their tablets. By the age of fifty a person is apt to be quite ill but goes on living in order to work for the pharmacy.”

Until this conversation I couldn’t have even imagined the scale of the deceit going on in this world!

“Thank you, doctor, you’ve opened my eyes to the problem, but is there any way out?”

“There is a way out, of course—buy some all union state standard household soap, it’s big and brown, use that instead.”

The allergy went after three days, and I don’t get it

anymore.

I fly back to the project in a different frame of mind—everything everywhere is a lie, and behind that lie is big business, which stands to benefit from lying. I tried reading something to get my head round it, and to change something, and I almost croaked. Why did it happen that way? Well, because all the authors who try to do something—and well done to them—they don't quite fully understand what it is they're writing about.

They cut me to pieces, it's my second operation already, and if it carries on like this there won't be a damn thing left of me. What alternative do I have? I don't know, and I could hardly find out, because no one knows a thing in this world.

So okay, I'll live this life one way or another then I'll croak. What have I got to do? I've got to earn enough money to buy a house, plant roses, drink wine, make shashlik and just generally not depend on other people.

I open Excel and create a new spreadsheet. What do I have? I don't have a damn thing. I work seventy-five days on and twenty-one days off. Let's suppose that goes on till I'm sixty, hell knows how many more times that means. Well how many times is that exactly? Here's how many. What's the salary? How much of the money gets spent? How much is left over? What else have I got to buy in my life? In summary, what's left? And it's a very decent amount, I have enough for everything, to plant roses till I'm eighty, and not to have to talk with other people at all. Add more for your wife—when you snuff it, she'll still have eight years left to live till she's eighty. It's easy, I'll add a little here, take a little away from there, and there we have it, the wife won't have to depend on anyone else till she's eighty.

If I carry out this plan I will have settled all my earthly affairs. But what if I lose my job? You'll find another job, the salary will be a little less or a little more, you're a world class engineer, the world's a big place, there'll always be someone out there who needs someone for that job – Algeria, Nigeria, Oman, and a lot of other places where they build plants, and there'll be enough of that in your lifetime, don't worry.

In order to live more or less bearably till you're eighty, what did you do when you were younger, those exercises using chi? And did the energy come from somewhere by itself? And how did you do it, do you remember? Then start doing it again, every day for fifteen minutes. Sit down, put your right hand to your left ear, touch your tongue to the roof of your mouth, focus on the dantian point; now your left hand, then both hands.

Tomorrow is Sunday, I can sleep, today I have to finish this book. *Transurfing* – how many times can you read it? How many pages are left, fifty? Read it to the end and be quiet, no one's asking you to do anything else, nor will they.

*Transurfing* helps up to a certain point, even my wife found that. But why does it help, why does it work? Well because you know yourself that you need to start moving on this course, and everything else that is not of immediate concern, you shut off. It's concentrating your attention and your energy on one object that exists in the real world at that particular time. The skill that you've acquired is something you can now use in your professional life, forever, it won't get away from you, don't read *Transurfing* anymore. There's only one page left now!

What's the advert at the end? The publishing company published P.D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*.

Alright, go have a smoke and go to bed.

Outside, it's two in the morning, a full moon, I discard my cigarette butt and look up at the Moon. "Oh Lord, perhaps You're on the Moon? Where are You, oh Lord? Do you even exist at all? Oh Lord, help me to find what I'm looking for! Please help me find it! I don't know what it is, but I know that I won't find it without You!"

I saw as clear as day a huge black cross break off from the Moon, fly down to me like a shadow and envelope me completely, I even straightened my shoulders. I smoked another cigarette and wondered what it was. Alright, I'm going home.

On the bedside table lies the book on Transurfing, I spread out on the bed, time to go to sleep, I switch out the light, and I'm almost asleep when I see the advert for P.D. Ouspensky. Why the hell didn't you pay any attention to the advert before? Who's to stop you finding that book online and reading it? Tomorrow is Sunday, you can sleep all day. Come on, get up, look for that book and read it, then you'll know; if it's just more rubbish you can throw it away and have done with it. You're getting a Sign here, it's always done this way in people's lives, they always get Signs, but no one ever sees them. What did you study so much for? You're forty-two now, and you started when you were fifteen. That means you've been studying twenty-seven years—and you still haven't learned how to see the Signs? Alright—I see the Signs, stop yelling at me, I'll get up and start reading, only I'll go down and have a cigarette while the computer's loading.

I found P.D. Ouspensky's book, spent all night reading it, then all day, until I finished it. It was clear to me now—this is what I had been looking for.



But there's nothing written in it about what to do, all that's written in it is that it exists. But mustn't there be people who know about it? There just can't be. I just have to find these people now. The important thing is you can now picture what it is you are looking for, if only approximately.

I came across Lefort's *Teachers of Gurdjieff*. Obviously it was all lies. Or perhaps not all of it? These so-called teachers couldn't be teachers, because their ego shows through on every page. Picture the situation: You arrive hell knows where, you want to learn, you look for a teacher, and they start barking at you that you are total crap. You don't need to go anywhere to find out that you are total crap—that much is clear. Then what was this book written for? To show you that in your city, not very far from your own home, there may be someone who knows The Path.

I came across the website of the so-called successors of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. The site is based in America but they have a branch in Moscow. There's a book there, I read the whole thing and realize it isn't just lies, it's a load of crap, too. The person who wrote it, first off he's a wuss, and second he's a pervert. You have to look at the forum, but there it is: some pervert sitting there in America being fed from the spoon of another pervert. You wonder why people would go there, don't they have eyes or something?

I went onto a site about Gurdjieff, there are a lot of books, music, videos, it's full of photographs, but what else is there? There isn't anything else. I came across another website, something to do with Islam. Dr Nurbakhsh is pretty decent, it seems like, and he has a lot of books. Shall we have a look at the things he writes? "A thousand years ago, the Sufis walked around in khirqahs." The phrase "bullshit" comes to mind.

We move on to Hazrat Inayat Khan. Seems like kind and decent man, he's written a lot of books. Alright, buy all of the books, let it be. You can read them in your old age while you're looking at your roses.

Idries Shah. This guy knows what he's talking about, I'm just not sure how to put it into practice, all his stuff is too intellectual. I'll have to buy all his books, read them, get to grips with them. But where can I buy them? At the Enneagon publishing house.

Without a second thought, I put all the books they have in my shopping basket, I fly to Moscow and I buy them. I'll figure out which books are worth reading, probably the ones with the cloth binding, and which I can use for firewood. What sort of forum do they have? Who's arguing with who, and what about? They're all arguing about something called dhikr, and whether you should read it in Russian or in Arabic. I don't get this at all, what's this "dhikr" and why would you read it at all? Ruslan Zhukovets has written an article about dhikr and they're all arguing about it, it makes sense now. Now let's read the article itself. And he's right, if I read a name in Arabic, how will I even know what I'm reading? So why is everyone against him? Because they used to read it in Arabic before, and now they're being told they have to read it in Russian and they can't stomach it, so they're all gabbing away. That's another four books then—Ruslan Zhukovets—they probably have them on koob.ru, read them.

Ruslan knows what he's talking about. If I were to start writing a book on welding, I'd write it like this too: clear, concise, and only what is absolutely necessary.

Why the hell did I come into this forum with my opinion? Who needs my opinion? Perhaps I took offence on

behalf of Ruslan's books? If you haven't read them, why are you trying to pour scorn on them? What sort of crowd is this, all hung up on their Shah? And they call themselves "spiritual people."

Father Polycarp is a spiritual person, I have no doubt about that. What did he say? "Why do you go on searching in the world's garbage dump?"

You're not spiritual at all, that's why you're arguing, fuming away, you want to hide your uselessness under a mask of intellect.

It only takes one Olsufiev to ruin everything. What did he tell me? "There are even more false disciples than there are false teachers. Idries Shah."

What do you mean by this, Olsufiev? Why are you giving me such a hard time? Who do you think you are? Save your trashy words for all those illiterate and untranslatable writers. Don't mess with me, it's none of your damn business if I'm a false disciple or not!

Lapsan won't rest, he also ruined everything. What did he tell me? Thank you for thinking so highly of me, believing I can improve myself, but I'm just the same as I ever was, and I'll go on trying to spoil everything. Maybe you're right, if I get an idea and expect it to happen it's my problem, not yours. Reminds me of the penitentiary – you ask someone for a pen to write a letter and they tell you if you don't have a pen it's your problem, don't put it on other people.

Apparently Alexei is a decent guy, but he writes too intellectually, I don't understand it all. "Alexei, could you explain to me, what are Levels of Being? Do I understand correctly that they are life experience, social position, intellect, worldview, knowledge, literacy, and other things like that?"

Alexei says, "All the things you have listed relate to one level only, and I would call that the level of bor-ing."

Olsufiev dropped dead of heart trouble.



# RUSLAN

“N ikolai, tell me as a friend, if I write to Ruslan and ask him to be my teacher is that normal?”

“Konstantin, he’s a writer, he’s not going to eat you. If he writes back, great, if he doesn’t – what will you have lost?”

Ruslan replied to me. “I do not know whether or not I can teach you, let us meet in Moscow and then we shall see.”

“Alright, but what should I do in the meantime? It’s another month till I’ll be in Moscow.”

“You could try vipassana.”

I downloaded a couple of dozen explanations of vipassana but it didn’t make a damn bit of sense to me. Everyone writes in their own way, and so many details you can’t get anywhere with them. It’s like the people writing them can’t see the wood for the trees. Fine, take them and do it, you can figure it out.

My attention drifts back and forth, my stream of consciousness doesn’t stop for a second either; where should I focus my attention? How do you stop your stream of consciousness? I try focusing my attention on my nose, where the air comes out, I’ll be damned if I can keep it there. I focus on the air coming in and out, not a damn thing happens. Alright I’ll carry on tomorrow.

I focus my attention inside my head, on the inside wall of my own forehead and try to hold it there, but it shifts all the same. What’s that shelf on the inside of my forehead? Hell

knows. I try to place my attention on that shelf, as though it were resting on it. But what's that light that came up from below, that state like ecstasy?

"Dear Ruslan, can you tell me what that light is that comes up from below, as though a projector were shining through smoke? What should I do with that light?"

"Don't do anything, don't pay any attention to it, it's only a side effect."

I'm sitting looking at the inside wall of my forehead, my attention rests there as though on that shelf, all the while it tries to escape and I return it seamlessly to the shelf. When the light begins to come, that state of ecstasy arises. I had been in that state a few times before, when I used to do those exercises of mine with the chi.

Today is Sunday, I will sit and hold my attention on that shelf until something happens. Or I die, or there must be some effect, there must be some reason why everyone's writing about this vipassana, surely? Ten minutes, twenty minutes, thirty minutes. What's happened to me? Has my head melted inside or something? There was snow there and now it's melted right to the shoulders. Okay, let's go for a smoke. I don't understand a damn thing, what happened to my vision? I see clearly out of the right-hand side, but straight on and to the left it's like looking through clear fabric.

"Dear Ruslan, can you tell me what happened to my vision?"

"Konstantin, I am writing about the effect of 3D-vision in this book, it happens, and it will pass."

Vipassana. Twenty minutes. Something strange happens, the shelf on the inside of my forehead has gone, now I can hold my attention on the whole head and it doesn't drift

around. Why? Because your whole body has been packed up with snow, so there's no space left to stuff your attention into. But now the snow in your head has melted, and your attention can sit there peacefully. Look—the snow has melted on your left shoulder, too, and you can focus your attention there now as well. Sooner or later the snow is going to melt everywhere inside you and your attention will be everywhere too.

What's going on here? Blood starts running out of my nose, something that's never happened before in my life. Shove your fears up your ass, take some toilet paper and sit there with it. Do the practice and although you may die, you might also go on living. It wasn't by accident that God sent you his cross from the Moon, you are now under God's protection.

I flew into Moscow, and Ruslan and I arranged to meet at a café. I got to the café, ordered a coffee. Ruslan arrived, sat opposite me, took a look at me and asked, "How did you kill your ego?"

"I don't know, it just died... Would you sign my copy of *The Keys to Awareness*?"

"Sure, I'll sign it, come over to Tver, we'll agree a time on the phone."

Tver—there it is, not sure where to go next, I'll take this taxi driver, I guess, tell him the address and go with him.

There's a little cottage there, clean, quiet, photographs on the wall, in this cottage lives Sergei. Ruslan demonstrated some practices, Sergei recorded them on video, I uploaded them onto a memory stick, it didn't all make sense yet but I'd figure it out—there would be time on the project, a whole seventy-five days.

We sat down, had something to eat, drank tea. My back



was really hurting, Sergei had done it to me, he cracked my spine and my neck.

I went back to the project and started performing the practices. I gave the video to Nikolai, and he started doing it too. I think I was entering the stage of a Plant.

# MYSTICISM

**M**y most recent trip to Moscow was coming to an end and I decided to pay a visit to Father Polycarp, only I wasn't sure whether or not he was still alive. Sergei said, "If he's dead then find his grave and just stand by it for a while." I asked him, "If he's dead then what's the point?" Sergei said, "For someone like Father Polycarp it makes no difference if he's dead or alive."

I took my wife and my wife's sister, and off we went. The church was closed and we went to Father Polycarp's home. His son came out and said his father had died almost a year ago. Where is he buried? His grave is behind the church. A prayer for the sick is being read at that time by three fathers, take down their addresses.

We went to Father Polycarp's grave, stood by it, there were tears in my eyes.

I flew back to work, daily practices: lataif, expression, dhikr.

I come into the canteen in the morning like always, I eat my eggs. I lift my head to see Nikolai sitting opposite and my jaw drops—he's a hundred years old! I look around and I'm horrified—mannequins everywhere, and they're all almost dead!

"Dear Ruslan, can you tell me what this means?"

"Konstantin, at the level of vibration you are currently on, they seem to be dead, but when you return to your normal state, they will come to seem like normal people again."

That evening I got home and wrote this:

*This morning I was in such a state...*

*Something happened that swept me out of my usual state.*

*I go into the canteen this morning for breakfast*

*And to my horror I find myself in a world of shadows*

*Everyone is in a deep sleep, like they are just receiving  
sustenance*

*All around me are zombies, or it's like they're on drugs*

*They're all sleeping, like they're receiving sustenance*

*At the same time, almost all of them are mumbling  
something*

*Half of them are talking on their cell phones*

*The other half are discussing the news*

*These speakers are backdrops and look like shadows*

*A lot of these backdrops are quite noisy*

*And these are what we call "NORMAL people"*

*I have no idea how I can live now among all these backdrops*

*These backdrops aren't just here*

*They're anywhere and everywhere...*

*It's just that I never saw it before*

*Because I was one of these shadows myself*

*But now everything has changed*

*And I don't know how I can live now*

*alone among the shadows*

*But like before I don't become despondent*

*I go on fulfilling The Plan...*

I fly back to Moscow and I have to get a new passport. But I can't get to the passport office because it's closed. I go the next day, it's open but there's such a crowd of people you can't get in. I have to get some paperwork from the local housing authority, but it's closed. Wherever I go, everything's closed. I find myself in this terrible state, fear dripping from me like from a bucket, my time in prison comes back to me, the penitentiary and all the rest.

I call Ruslan, he says it's the stage I'm in, the darkness has assailed me. And this isn't just anyone's darkness, it's my own, because I've spent my whole life pumping my energy into this darkness. My darkness doesn't want to let me go and it's resisting, because it's going to be very dull without me. He said you need to buy some gerbera daisies and put them in your home—they'll drive out the darkness—and don't go anywhere for a couple of days.

I lay down to sleep on my mattress, I lie on the floor by the radiator, I can't sleep, and I think rather than just lying down like this, why don't I start doing some Lataif?

I'm doing lataif and I fall through into a completely different world. And this is a really bright, colorful, opulent world. There are people walking about in black hats with tassels, like the professors at Cambridge, there's a square on top of the hat and the tassels dangle off it. I follow them to a class. A woman says we're Sufis, we'll teach you, sit down and listen carefully. I sit down and I don't hear a damn thing because everything they're saying turns into beeps: "beep-beep-beep." I point to my ears as if to say, "I don't hear you."

The classroom vanishes and a concert hall appears in the open air. I'm sitting on a bench in this hall and a show is being performed below, someone walks along, jumps, it's an

acrobat, there's music playing, it's all so opulent I realize there is nothing like this on earth and I've never heard anything like it. A man appears to the left of and begins whacking me on the nose. I've had an operation on my nose, it's painful, agonizingly so, blood is coming out. I crack him in the chops with my left elbow and he disappears. People appear in front of me and seem to hang in the air. I realize they are asking why I hit him. I hold my nose in my right hand, wipe off and show them the blood – see this?

Everything disappears and I'm standing by a swamp, the smell coming off it is hideous. Behind me there's wall, in front there's the swamp, a plank has been thrown into it. I realize I have to move forward, along the plank, and I go. The plank buckles and the stinking goo of the swamp gets in my shoes. I think to hell with them, I'll be back soon. A man is standing in front of me on the plank, he doesn't let me pass and doesn't move himself, behind me another man keeps shoving me, I'm sick of it already. I give the one in front a push in the side, throw him off the plank into the swamp, crack the one behind me with my right elbow, and he flies off the plank as well. I find myself at the point where the swamp ends.

A man stands with his back to me, turns around and nods his head in such a way as if to say – what do you want? I hold my nose in my right hand, wipe off and show him the blood. The man sneers, turns to the side, a huge wooden barrel appears beside him, the word "BLOOD" inscribed on it. He starts drinking the blood from the barrel and slowly drops down onto his back with the barrel. Two men appear on either side of him and bear him up to stop him falling.

I wake up, it turns out I'm lying on my mattress by the radiator and I don't understand a damn thing – what was

that? It's the early morning now, my state of mind is perfect, like never before. I realize there's a green light for me everywhere now.

I go to the passport office and there's no one there. A beautiful woman opens the door and says, "Take a seat here, let me see your papers." She writes something down and says, "There are some mistakes on your paperwork." I think, "Alright, looks like I'll have to do everything again now then." "Don't worry," she says, "I'll sort it all out. All done, go back to your project, when you come back you can get your new passport."

I went to the housing authority – I still had to go there – and everything was settled very straightforwardly.

That morning I went to see Father Polycarp, stood by his grave.

I went to Tver, I talk to Ruslan about the Sufis and the barrel of blood. Ruslan says this is called a "spiritual experience."

"The first thing is they want to speak with you, and you're not listening – 'beep-beep-beep' – in other words, you don't understand a word, so they have to show you, that's the Sufi way.

"The second thing is the man hits you on the nose, so it's the fear of pain that you need to work on.

"The third thing is the stinking swamp – that's your life. You must walk along a narrow plank – this is The Path – but you exhibit aggression, you need to work on this.

"The fourth thing is you show the man your blood – that's self-pity. He sneered and told you before you reach this place I am in, you will give a barrel of blood such as this."

I arranged to speak with Ruslan on Skype every week

from then on, so that he could see the state I was in and would be able to fix it in time.

If I had had any remaining doubts, now there were none.

I started reading the poems of the Sufis: Rumi, Attar, Ferdowsi, Nizami.

I realized that before I was only reading the poems, and now I understood that the events had really taken place. Majnun going to his Leyli, all tattered and dirty, barely alive, and the animals following after him, protecting him. Or Sheikh Sanaan lying under the Christian woman's window. "I love you," he says, "so much I cannot live without you," and she tells him something like,

"Put on a zunnar, drink wine and go herd pigs, in a year we'll see how I'll still be mocking you, I'll find a new way."

I fell head over heels in love with Vera, my wife's sister. I liked her before, too, only not like that! I began composing verses, writing letters every day, I was sick of the jealousy. Not that it's important to me what society thinks, I spit on all that, but the thing is, I need her like a hole in the head, why should I be in love with her?

Ruslan gave me a new practice for working on things like fear of physical pain, the feeling of shame, loathing, jealousy, envy and stupefaction.

I had conquered jealousy, and it had become easier, but I wasn't sure what would happen when I saw Vera. Alright, let's see – whatever happens, happens.

Before the vacation, I talk with Ruslan on Skype and he says I shouldn't do anything more because the level of suppressed desires has now opened up to me and that would be game over, as they say.

A couple of days before the vacation, I wrote this poem:

*So it's time to take a vacation again,  
The shift has gone by in a flash like a game.*

*The wise dhikr has spun and the hu has flown by,  
A vivid awareness has quickly arrived.*

*The wicked sense of guilt has died,  
The fear of pain, jealousy, dreams expired.*

*And I sense this world as something new!  
Everything in it is full of meaning now!*

*Everything is wonderful, opulent and pure!  
And You are a beautiful, marvelous story!*

*Soon I'll depart to that World of Doors,  
Soon You will slip into the World of Shadows.*

*I was never able to reach You, I strove,  
And I strove, but in the end I was on my own.*

*I shall pluck fragrant apples from the apple trees,  
Find beautiful, warmhearted books to read.*

*Let the music now magically play and play on,  
Let wine flow, the life in my soul is begun!*

I flew into Moscow and like a madman began buying everything, disks and books by the hundreds, different things for my wife, I stopped at nothing, and when I'd spent a million I pretty much calmed down.



My wife and I went to visit Vera, we stepped into her apartment. Vera met us, we drank tea, nothing much happened to me. I was sitting in the kitchen and decided to wait in the car, I read dhikr for ten minutes or so.

A song came on in the car – one of Versinky’s poems – something about a member of a chain gang. I drove, enjoying myself, the music played through my whole body, I felt real freedom and indescribable elation. I went home, put the same song on my laptop, put on my headphones, and there was no damned elation at all. I asked Ruslan, what was the meaning of this? He told me when you listen to music in the car or through speakers it is felt by the second body, the ethereal body, but when you listen through headphones it is felt only by the mind. The distinction is a bit like that between swimming in a pool or pouring water in your ears. I read *A New Model of the Universe*, by P.D. Ouspensky. He writes that his pupils have tried to perform an “inner prayer of the heart,” as described in *The Way of A Pilgrim*, and none of them could do it, because in that description there weren’t enough clues as to how it should be done. I found this book about the pilgrim, read it all the way through and started performing the practice, only I came up with a different prayer. After a little while it paid off beautifully. Now it switches itself on and works when I get up and go somewhere. For example, I’m sitting working at the computer, I get up to go for a smoke, and that prayer switches itself on in my heart immediately. The sensations in my body are incredible, the closest comparison would be like the state before orgasm. It was the end of December, a little over a year since I’d been practicing, I was on vacation. Ruslan told me to come early to Tver tomorrow and he would perform an initiation for me. Then,

in accordance with the tradition, we would drink armagnac and I'd spend the night at the little cottage in Tver.

My wife baked me some pies for the journey and I decided to go to bed early so that I could leave for Tver at 10am, the weather was lovely.

My wife was then pregnant for the second time. I look at her and I just don't get it, she's blowing up like a ball.

Everything was fine five minutes ago, and suddenly it feels like she's about to pop! I call my mother – what should I do? I call an ambulance and my wife gets taken to hospital. I have to go to the hospital in the morning, bring my wife all the things she needs, hell knows where this hospital is, where is this place? Outside it's snowing, the streets are covered, accidents everywhere, you can't drive too fast, I limp along at 10kmph. It takes me two hours just to get to the hospital. I drive to Tver, and everywhere it's the same, snow, wind and accidents, I arrive in the evening at 11pm. I look around at everyone and they're all sitting there as if they know I'm going to be late.

Ruslan said it happens a lot, it's called environmental resistance. The environment doesn't want me to receive my initiation, and I have to use super strength. I was initiated and received a silver medallion.

I fly back to the project, begin performing the mystic practices, they are more to my liking than the spiritual practices. I'm being pulled in all directions, there's so much energy, and I begin to receive an understanding of all these different topics as if out of nowhere.

Rumi writes about a Sodomite who wore a dagger in his belt. Another Sodomite asked him, as they indulged in the sin of Sodom, "What's the dagger for?" He answered, "If anyone

plots any ill against me, I can rip open his stomach with this dagger!" The Sodomite moved back and forth on him and said, "Thank Allah I am plotting no ill against you!"

So I come to the canteen and I twig that sitting opposite me is one of the big bosses, he's a total asshole and he has these expensive glasses, maybe a thousand dollars' worth – no more than the dagger Rumi writes about perhaps?

A new project has begun, and in accordance with Kazakh tradition a ram must be slaughtered in order to give it a good start. They bring out the ram, we stand and wait for the imam to arrive and slaughter it. Outside there's snow, wind, wet, you can stand and wait, cold, but there's nowhere to go, the big bosses are all around, you can't leave. Suddenly I feel my heart start thumping – what's going on? It turns out the imam has arrived and is walking towards us. He looked at me, said nothing, and went and slaughtered the ram.

Ruslan later explained that this imam is involved in mystical practices and, perhaps, reads dhikr. He also felt me with his heart, but didn't say anything, because his mission was to slaughter the ram.

I come in to work one Saturday, after lunch, and I see there's a single letter in my mailbox. I'm due to go on vacation on the Monday, so I think, great, no one's going to be screwing with me – there's only one letter. I open it, and it says I'm fired. I get a call from the personnel department: come over, sign these papers.

I went home, but where could I go? I'm on the plane and I'm thinking: the work is in full swing, the welding is done, I'm the only one who knows how to certify the welding tech, and yet they've fired me.

There was no way I could accept this whole situation.

Ruslan gave me a practical exercise for acceptance. I'm sitting at home on the balcony, I do not and I cannot accept it—how could I? A month goes by, I'm sitting on that same balcony and I think: "Why can't I accept it though? I've got enough money for eight months, in that time I'll find another job better than that one. Enjoy your freedom, have a beer!"

As soon as I'd accepted the situation I immediately got a call from work: "We weren't thinking, we fired you, we're sorry, come back, no one else can do your job."

I later discovered that this is a necessary stage on The Path. Either you change jobs, in other words a person completely changes their life, or, as in my case, you lose your job for a period time, so that person gets the chance to realize something and take stock.

My ego, which until I got fired was pretty strong, cracked, it was rocked and it crumbled. Now I don't tell anyone to go to hell, only in extreme circumstances, whereas I used to tell everyone to go to hell without a second thought.

I was sick of the boss, such an asshole, the dagger just wasn't enough for him, or those thousand-dollar glasses. I didn't know what to do, maybe it really was time to leave? I was practicing "expression" one Sunday, but little by little that boss crept his way into my imagination, I'd had enough. I took him and I set fire to him, I put the fire from a volcano on him—come on and burn you bastard!—and I swept the ashes with a mystic sign. I came in to work on Monday and he got fired in spectacular fashion while another one got burned at work and flew out to Italy!

Adilet later tells me something like you can't use magic for your own personal ends. I ask Ruslan and he says I can in two circumstances: when they threaten my family or me

personally, and when they get in the way of my spiritual work. That boss threatened me and got in the way of my spiritual work, so I burned him rightly and lawfully.

My wife gives birth to triplets, I sit in my studio apartment, on the balcony like always, and I think, time to move out of this studio to a three-room apartment, or life's going to be impossible, the noise, the crying, mess everywhere—but where would we move to? No one will give me any credit, because I work in Kazakhstan and I have no idea how to arrange any of it anyway. No one will give my wife any credit either, she worked in a library before, the salary was ludicrous.

It's alright, I think, one way or another it will all sort itself out, I'm going to the dentist. I walk out of the doctor's onto the street, my jaw drops, I'm smoking and something comes over me: "Walk through that door, into the estate agents, there's a girl sitting there, and she's going to solve all your problems." I walk in, there are five men sitting there and this one girl—so of course I go to her.

At this point in time, work on the three-room apartment is now complete and I have already moved in. The building that the apartment is in is one building along from where my mother lives. Everything worked out in the most convenient way possible, overall. I'm sitting on the balcony in my own home in Moscow, a cigarette in one hand and a glass of brandy in the other. I've just lit the cigarette, and I'm about to take a sip of brandy, when the thought comes to me: what would have happened if I'd thrown myself off the roof back then? And then something comes over me, I vanish from this world and I find myself in a different one. I have a vision: I was born only recently, I'm still quite young, and I'm sitting

in the arms of this plump woman. She pushes me towards her tit and I have no way out. The television's blaring through the whole room, there's some show on, like a quiz show, the furniture in the room is cheap, it's about to fall apart, and this woman is talking on her cell phone endlessly about some bullshit or other.

If you were going to give ten points for one scenario and minus ten points for another then the place where I was born again would be a minus ten, no question, it would be hard to even think of anything worse. She spends a long time chatting, a long time feeding me, I get tired of her.

I came back into this world, to my balcony. I drink the brandy in a single gulp, look at my cigarette, and not even a millimeter has managed to burn down while I've been away. I go back in, look at my wife, at the furniture, at my situation – it may not be a ten but it's a good eight, and the important thing is I get to do things and make decisions here. And there was a lot more interesting stuff but you can't write everything down, because on The Path something new happens every day that will never be repeated.

# PARABLES

## Master Naqshbandi

These Muslims have come to see the great master Naqshbandi and they say, "Tomorrow is going to be a holiday, and we are going to deliver an address about God, is there anything you would like to add to our address?"

Naqshbandi replies, "Your God is under my heel." The Muslims are outraged and take Naqshbandi to court. Five hundred thousand people assemble at the court, and on all sides of the building are messengers who shout out to the people to explain what's going on.

The judge asks, "Great master Naqshbandi, some Muslims came to see you and asked you to add something to their address about God, what did you say to them?"

"I said your God is under my heel."

"What did you mean by this?"

"Somebody remove my right sandal and take a look at what is there under my heel."

The sandal is removed and there is a gold coin.

The judge says, "The great master Naqshbandi teaches us a lesson here and says that we have forgotten God and worship money."

## A Jugful of Rainwater

A man lives in the desert with his wife, they have no money and nothing much to eat. The wife is always pecking away at her husband: "Go out and earn some money!"

He says, "Where do you expect me to earn money in the desert?"

She says, "I've come up with a plan: we'll get a jug, not one made of simple clay, but one that's made of something that will hold water for a long time and keep it cool, we'll fill it with rainwater from the water hole, bring the jug to the Sultan and he will give you plenty of gold as a reward."

They settled on the plan, made a new jug, filled it with water and off the man went to see the Sultan. The walk took him two weeks, but he got there. At the Sultan's palace, all the courtiers stand and ask, "What have you brought?"

The man replies that he has brought the Sultan this jug of water, but it is no ordinary jug of water, it is made from a special kind of clay, and the water is the very best as it has been drawn from a fresh water hole. The courtiers tell him, "Wait here," and bring the jug to the Sultan.

This Sultan was a Sufi, a wise man, and he said to the courtiers, "Pour the water onto this plant, then fill the jug with gold and give it to the man, but accompany him home so that no one robs him on the way. When you go with him, take him by the Euphrates so that he can see how much water we have."

I've told this story many times to a lot of different people, but no one has ever heard me. I can't tell you how much clean water there is on The Path.



## Harut and Marut

Two angels, Harut and Marut, told God that the people of Earth were mired in their own lust. God said to them,

“Perhaps if you were in there position you might also be mired?”

“Never!” they said, “and we can prove it!”

God gave them human form and sent them to the Earth. Princess Zuhra would not give herself to them, and so one of them raped her, and then the other one did, too.

God asks, “What should I do with you now?” The angels gave no reply, and God gave them two options: either they go on living and then die, according to the laws of humankind, or they sit in a well in the city of Babylon until the Final Judgement. Harut and Marut chose the second option, and they sit in their well to this day, teaching people sorcery.

In order that she not completely fall apart, God transformed Zuhra into the planet Venus.

My wife said, “How lucky for Zuhra—first she gets raped by an angel, then by another, and then she ends up getting turned into a planet.”

## When the Time Comes to Set Out on The Path

Has the time come for me to set out on The Path? Tell me, when will that time come?

It happened on a voyage at sea – the parrot was bored out of his mind and was overjoyed when he discovered that there was a monkey on board the ship.

To make the time go quicker, the parrot suggested, “Shall we play hide-and-peek?”

The monkey said, “I don’t know that game, how do you play it?”

The parrot explained, “It’s very simple, you turn to face the wall, shut your eyes and count to a hundred while I go off and hide. When you get to a hundred, you start looking for me.”

So that’s what they did.

It so happened that the moment the monkey got to a hundred, the ship exploded. The parrot managed to find a plank of wood floating on the sea. In a little while he saw the monkey, who was swimming towards him at the point of total exhaustion. Gripping onto the plank, the monkey looked at the parrot and said, “What a stupid game!”

When you begin to feel that life is a stupid game, it’s time to set out on The Path.



# THE PRACTICES

**G**uided simply by the principle of “do no harm,” I will not go into the techniques used to perform these practices here. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to perform any spiritual, let alone mystical, practices on your own without making mistakes, and when you perform them incorrectly the effects can be unpredictable.

There is also a point that isn’t possible to decide for yourself: these practices must be performed in combination with each other, so that they complement one another.

## Muraqaba

Somebody is not really present in what they’re doing as he doesn’t have the ability to divide his attention. You could put this another way: he is attuned to the thing he is doing, in other words, he becomes so fully immersed in the activity he is performing that he is never present in the “Here and Now.”

For example, this somebody is sitting at his computer working. He is absorbed in his computer, he neither sees nor hears anything around him, in other words he is completely attuned to his work. His boss comes over and asks him to do something, at which point somebody becomes totally absorbed in conversation with his boss.

Somebody else could simultaneously work at their computer and have a conversation with their boss. Meaning he could become attuned to a number of different kinds of

activities that he's performing at the same time.

The most that this "somebody" and "somebody else" can ever do is to be simultaneously attuned to one type of activity and then immediately become attuned to another. In all the clever books they call this "switching over." Some writer once said that rest is substituting intellectual labor with physical labor.

Somebody wakes up in the morning, brushes his teeth, takes a shower, has breakfast, reads the paper, goes to work, comes home, talks with his friends, goes to the shop, drives his car, has sex and all of it on auto-pilot.

In some literature, in place of the word "auto-pilot" they talk about someone being "asleep," but this doesn't change the essence of the thing. Somebody is always sleeping and doesn't plan on waking up. For instance, if you tell him he's asleep he'll be outraged and say he's wide awake. In other words, he is so soundly asleep he doesn't even notice.

Practicing muraqaba allows you to divide your attention in two, so that part of your attention is focused on your own presence, and the other part is focused on the activity you are performing at that moment.

When performing this practice, I sense my own presence in the "Here and Now" with my heart, while I sense everything else around me at the top of my head, close to the nape.

These days, I sense my own presence in my everyday activities in the "Here and Now" with my heart, and sense everything around me with my whole body.

## Parts of the body

Somebody might spend the whole day sitting in an uncomfortable position and not notice. This practice allows one to experience sensations in the body far more profoundly. You may, for instance, feel the blood circulating in your veins.

## Lataif

Somebody thinks he is the summit of all creation, that he has choice, that he forges his own happiness and takes important decisions, even on the scale of the country or the planet. In actual fact, he is a marionette in God's hands. His strings are pulled and he dances about exactly as he is required to dance about. If tomorrow, for example, a revolution or a war is needed, somebody will run to defend someone, or protect someone's interests, and in doing so he is absolutely certain that he decided to do so himself. His strings are pulled via centers, of which there are seven in all. Somebody has no suspicion that the centers are present, but those centers haven't gone anywhere.

Vital energy comes to us through those centers also.

Practicing Lataif allows you to really sense all seven centers. Furthermore, the centers themselves begin to work more intensively and give off considerably more energy, which is of a far higher quality.

In the first two years of the practice, I either simply sensed the centers or I felt them firing up. Now when I practice Lataif, my attention drops, as it were, at the center on which I am working.

# Expression

Somebody is stuffed with their own energies, their suppressed fears and desires. He hasn't even a millimeter of free inner space.

I once read that in Japanese companies they have mannequins of the bosses standing at the exit. Anyone can go up to a mannequin and give it a smack or kick it. This could be considered a partial practice of expression, because after a little while the energies will come back and fill up all that space again.

Somebody might go out to a nightclub, have a good old drink and dance till morning. This is also only a partial practice of expression, because as long as he is not working on himself, his inner space will once again become stuffed up with those same energies after a few days.

There are religions where people sing songs and perform dance moves to music. This could also be considered a partial practice of expression. Only partial, because there are no pivotal moments in it.

Before you begin to perform the practices you must enter an altered state, which may be achieved through special breathing techniques.

As far as I have understood it from the ancient Sufi poems, this altered state was previously achieved through night vigils. The main part of the practice, direct expression, is performed in the altered state. There is a certain kind of music that seems to touch the soul. These are the sorts of melodies I choose for performing this part of the practice. If I'm on vacation, then I turn up the music really loud on the stereo, but if I'm on shift, I listen to the music through

headphones.

Small, in-ear headphones do not work in this case. They have to be big headphones to have an impact on the ethereal body, high fidelity, for flawless sound quality, and wireless, so that they don't inhibit movement.

While performing the practice, I saw the emotions flying out of me, among them fear, tears, sadness, recollections, dreams, elation, and other things like that.

Everything that flew away never came back, but I had so many of these things I thought I'd never be totally satisfied with the results.

To begin with, I practiced every day for a month, then switched to doing it once a week and that is the routine I continue to do now.

It was only after three years of practicing that my emotional core became more or less balanced.

## Dhikr

Dhikr has come to us from the Muslims, Allah is believed to have ninety-nine names.

For instance, somebody has a conception of what is "just." This concept influences his whole life. Everything that happens to him in his life and conforms to his ideas he considers just, and everything else that conflicts with his ideas is totally unjust. After practicing dhikr in the name of God "The Just," that somebody will see the objective meanings of that concept.

I began practicing dhikr after four months of practicing Muraqaba, "parts of the body," lataif and "expression." The first two names were "The Wise" and "The Truth." I



performed each of them for ten minutes.

Then for about a year I performed dhikr every day for ten-fifteen minutes in one name over the course of a month and a half before substituting it for another.

For the last two years I have been reading dhikr every morning in two names for fifteen minutes each and then changing both names every month and a half.

My recent sensations from this have been like something close to orgasm, along with an understanding of several of the objective meanings of the names.

The Goddess came to me for half a year and then simply vanished. She approached from behind, took me by the shoulders and very tenderly embraced me. My physical state was like that before orgasm, but it came from the heart and lasted half an hour.

Now, when I perform dhikr, in my heart my attention drops.

You may read the name loudly, in a whisper, or to yourself. The first two methods put me off, so I switched to “silent dhikr,” which is when you read the name to yourself in your heart.

I don’t work any more than a month and a half with the same two names, because the practice then loses its efficacy, although I suspect that time is subjective and may vary depending on the type (Yin and Yang).

Arguments over which language to read the names in—whether in Arabic or one’s own native language—have always raged, continue raging and may never end. If you want to progress along The Path, you have to read them in your own language or you will not be able to grasp their meanings.

Dhikr can help you not only in your spiritual and mystical development, but in everyday life as well. I was in Moscow on my last vacation and in an hour I would have to get behind the wheel of a car. Physically, I was in no condition to drive—I had a hangover and a breathalyzer test showed 0.350. I got to my chair and performed dhikr to “The Life-Giver” for fifteen minutes. My physical state returned to normal and the breathalyzer showed 0.000.

## Working with Fear

There are those fears that do not interfere with our lives particularly, like “We’re all going to die,” or “There’ll be a sudden meteor shower.” And then there are those other fears that do interfere with our lives, like “They’re making redundancies soon, I’ll lose my job and then I’ll have to live in a garbage dump.”

This practice is for working with fears that are currently interfering with our lives.

I saw the mental plane, familiarized myself with the mystic sign “Aum” and took away the fears that were at that moment interfering in my life.

It is believed that everything that happens in our lives begins on the mental plane before later manifesting itself upon ours, the physical plane.

## Working with Desire

There are those desires that do not interfere with our lives particularly, like “I want there to be peace on earth.” And then there are those other desires that do interfere with our

lives, for example wanting to screw your neighbor while her husband is away on business. She seems to be okay with it, but you might have big problems later on.

This practice is for working with desires that are currently interfering with our lives.

The practice is similar to the last one, the only difference being that you use a different mystic sign for working with desires.

I saw the mental plane, familiarized myself with the mystic sign of the Broom and swept away the desires that were at that moment interfering in my life.

## Alignment

Somebody is certain he has a strong character, and a strong “core.” His wife is proud of him, while his colleagues and neighbors fear him as he’s so tough.

Somebody else has rather a weak character, and no “core.” His wife is always trying to change him, while his colleagues and neighbors pity him, or otherwise rejoice in his misfortune.

In actual fact, the characteristics of this “somebody” and “somebody else” have no basis in reality, it only seems that way. Neither of them can objectively have such a thing as a “core.” Any vivid life event will induce particular emotions, and these emotions will produce reactions that will knock them both down.

To avoid getting knocked down, you must find your center and feel it.

I have found a point in the middle of my torso that serves as a kind of center through which all axes pass. This

point is the center of the physical body and can be distinctly felt.

In the second part of the practice I had to feel my own energy field. I felt it very distinctly, as though I were inside a shell. A part of the shell, on the left-hand side by the shoulder, was heavily bruised, and it took me several days to rectify with energy from that center.

Now, whenever anything happens in my life that might knock me down, I go to that central point and I hold onto it so that I am not knocked down.

## Three Questions

There are three big differences in how I present myself to other people, how I thereby perceive myself and what sort of person I really am at that moment.

For example, I decided to tell my boss I was unhappy with the way he was running things. These are the three big differences:

- I want to show other people and the boss himself that for me he's just a worm in the dirt;
- I have no other choice, he's always on my back and it's never going to end – if I say something to him now, I think he just might leave me alone;
- I worry that the boss will write to one of the higher-ups and I'll be fired.

In the second part of this practice, you have to ask yourself the question – “Me?” – and try to get a feeling for where and what kind of sensations you are experiencing inside. After a couple of weeks of this practice I received a very definite answer: “Leave me alone with your questions, already, I am the spirit that dwells inside you.”

## Fear of Physical Pain

Somebody has toothache and says to himself, "It's fine, it'll pass," and he doesn't go see the dentist. He'll have to go at some point either way, perhaps in a few months, or years even, but by then the problem with his teeth will be much more serious. In this example, somebody's decision is being made by his fear of physical pain, although he's sure he took it himself for the sake of expediency.

I saw that fear of physical pain residing in the first center; it has moved aside now and no longer makes my decisions.

## The Sense of Shame

Somebody feels a sense of shame for something in the past, and in the present, for promises he couldn't keep, for his behavior, for his children's school grades, for his friend, for the nation as a whole, and so on.

It is a heavy burden to bear. The sense of shame can poison any life that appears successful on the outside, and running to the Himalayas won't help.

I saw that sense of shame residing in the second center; it has now gone and it has been three years since it last troubled me.

## Disgust

Somebody cannot walk by the garbage on his block because it smells. He tries to avoid bumping into his alcoholic neighbor in case he stretches out his hand to say hello. He won't eat macaroni because they gave it to them for lunch one day at kindergarten and he found a worm on his plate.

In these examples, somebody's decision is being made by his disgust, while he is sure he made it himself due to his refined upbringing.

I saw disgust residing in the third center; it wasn't easy to get rid of it, but it's gone forever now.

## Jealousy

Somebody would kill his wife if he found out she'd been cheating on him. He monitors her every glance when they go to the store. He has a hunch she had a lot of other partners before him, and he grills her about it when he gets drunk:

"Tell me the truth!"

He is jealous of his driver on account of his boss's secretary, as the driver brings her chocolates, but he tries not to let it show so his colleagues won't laugh.

I saw jealousy residing in the fourth center; it was hard to get rid of and it took a long time, but it has now gone away.

## Envy

Somebody takes every opportunity to call his colleague a moron, as he is envious of his higher salary. Somebody's neighbor is a thief because he recently bought a nice car. Somebody secretly envies his best friend since his friend married a beautiful young woman.

I saw envy residing in the fifth center, and that's why they say it strangles you; there wasn't much of it and it was easy to get rid of.

## Stupefaction

Somebody is hard at work today, since he has to submit a report. A colleague is getting in the way of his work, talking about the news. His cell phone rings, someone asking him to answer some questions. The boss runs in, demanding that he complete the report urgently, before lunch. Somebody falls into a stupor – this is what we call stupefaction.

I saw stupefaction residing in the sixth center; you can learn to let it slip through you, and not fall into any stupor.

## The Coiled Spring

The first part of this practice involves working with the fourth center. I saw that in my heart a lot of space was taken up by an enormous spring.

The second part of the practice involves working with the sixth center, the so-called "third eye." I saw that the space within it was infinite.

## Vipassana

Vipassana comes to us from India.

We make ourselves aware of our ordinary breathing. The practice helps us go inside, it calms us and induces an altered state in which we can more effectively perform other practices.

On the Sufi Path, this is employed as a supplementary practice.

## Pranayama

Pranayama comes to us from India.

We sit and breathe a set number of times. This increases the physical capacity of the lungs, puts a stop to the murmuring of the mind and induces an altered state in which we can more effectively perform other practices.

I saw these points that gradually flare up like the coals inside a fire. They say that this is the conflagration of prana.

On the Sufi Path, this is employed as a supplementary practice.

## Listening

While performing this practice, I was surprised at the number of sounds around me, which in my normal state I couldn't even guess at.

The possibilities of our hearing are much greater than what we use it for in everyday life. Perhaps before, when we lived in the woods and went hunting, we used our hearing more productively.



# Kamlanie

Kamlanie comes to us from the shamans.

We perform certain circular movements and read a mantra. The practice enables us to receive a very high quality of energy and induces an altered state in which we can more effectively perform other practices. While performing this practice, one may receive the answer to a question very pertinent to them.

On the Sufi Path, this is employed as a supplementary practice.

I once read a parable: God tells his angels to all start worshipping Adam.

The angels ask, "Why would we do that? what's so special about him?"

God says, "Adam knows the names."

The angels answer, "Let him show us then."

Adam begins giving names to everything—this is a giraffe, that's a lion, that's an elephant—and so on. The angels realize they do not have this ability and begin to worship Adam. One of the angels says to God, "I will not worship him, because You made me out of fire, and him from clay, which means that I am better." God gave him the name Iblis and made him general director in Hell.

After practicing kamlanie I sit in the smoking room watching people, and it occurs to me that everyone is living like Iblis.

Everyone is comparing themselves with things they cannot be compared to, believing themselves to be better.

Someone might say, for example, that he's a third generation Muscovite while all the rest are newcomers so they

can't possibly understand. The doctor believes the engineer cannot know anything about life because he's just a grease monkey. Someone might think he's the bomb because he was in charge of a big construction project in soviet times, he sees everyone else as beneath him. Someone who has come first place in their sport despises smokers. The math professor looks down upon the poet. The trucker considers metal workers third-class human beings.

It is a human quality that has been skillfully exploited by politicians of all countries in all ages.

Almost all humans reside in Hell because they think like Iblis.

## Visualization (The Chains)

While performing one part of this practice, I saw that I was bound in thick chains to a gray field out in space. My arms, legs, neck and torso were all chained. I could neither get up nor move about in this space.

A stream of bright white light started pouring down from above, the chains began to melt under that light and finally dissolved completely.

## Seeing Beyond the Mind

I have seen how my thoughts are like the glowing wires inside a cable. The cable is about a meter in diameter and the thoughts flow gently through it by themselves. If I take one of these thought-wires and focus my attention on it, it begins to flow through me. No one is forcing me to take any of these wires, I can simply ignore them.

## Growing Stronger

I saw how much energy I was squandering. Worrying about all kinds of nonsense, discussing things that don't affect me at all, regretting what has passed, dreaming of what will never come, and all these different fears.

I was greatly surprised to discover I could get back a part of that energy that I had already wasted.

## Acceptance (Opening the Heart)

They say when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. Accepting a situation internally doesn't mean I have to put up with something because I have no other choice. Internal acceptance has quite a different meaning, and it is very profound. I got fired out of the blue that time, I tried with all my strength to accept it but I couldn't.

In our lives, things will sometimes happen that we cannot accept. If we start by trying to accept them "with all our strength" we won't get anywhere. Acceptance is simply beyond our strength.

A part of this practice involved reading prayers, and they worked. Afterwards I was surprised—why couldn't I accept it yesterday? The realization suddenly came to me that yesterday I did not have the strength, while today God had given it to me.

## Will Centers (Activating the Seventh Center)

I have seen that five of the seven centers are connected to God not at the front, as I had earlier thought, but from behind, all except the first and seventh. The second through sixth centers have a way out that also serves as a way in, to the side of the spine where the hose attaches, while at the front of the center there is just a nut.

If we take a mannequin as our model, we drill a hole through his chest, coming out through his spine. We drive a tube into that hole, threaded on both sides, so that one end of the tube comes out of the chest and the other out of the spine. We twist a nut onto the tube at each side of the mannequin so that it is firmly held in place, and then at the spine we fix a flexible hose to him. Hey presto!

While we sleep the life force comes to us from God, as our transformed energy in the form of our emotions moves from us to God, to be used for something important that we will never know.

When a person performs the mystical practices, a high-quality energy purer than emotion makes its way along that hose toward God.

Energy of the highest quality then comes back from God, giving that person the ability to grow and give to God an even greater quality of energy.

When a person dies, it is through that hose that the energy of their death leaves them, a very precise energy, highly necessary for something important that we will never know.

# Ideas

Ideas—it's fantastic! They sit deep inside us, giving us whatever fantasies they want. We think we're making decisions ourselves, because we're so individual, so unique, because we've had a particular education, a particular upbringing, because of our life experience. This has nothing to do with it.

Our ideas are formed in childhood and we can change them later on, if only something very vivid should happen in our lives. One central idea sticks out like a cane from the ground in your garden, and all around it several smaller canes stick out. If a person knows their own central idea, they might at least be able to work around it or find compromises. If he doesn't know it, then, as they say, it's game over. Ideas are designed so as to perfectly mask themselves, they may be primary, secondary, tertiary and so on. It is very difficult to discern which of his ideas a person is guided by right now, and which he was guided by a moment ago. The problem with ideas is that they reside in the mind, and we are also trying to see them with the mind, which is impossible. In order to see your own idea, you must first depart from your mind.

If somebody starts criticizing one of his own ideas because he has decided it is not right, then all that this tells us is that from now on he will be enslaved to one of his other ideas, which he thinks is right. And in both cases he is not free.

Take for example the idea that "my wife should be true to me." Let's think about it impartially—should she or shouldn't she? I won't answer that!

The first time I was performing this practice, I saw that "everyone is perverted." Not in the sexual sense, but in

the sense that they say, “everything should be how I want it,” but it isn’t; “everyone should be honorable,” and they’re all dishonorable; “everyone should tell the truth,” yet everyone indulges in lies; “everyone should be qualified to do their job,” and there are some real shmucks around.

What’s it all about? Nothing in my life has anything to do with or even wants to have anything to do with my ideas! It’s a good thing I already spent some time reading dhikr in the name of “The Just” and realized that the problem here was me. What I mean is that first idea, “everyone is perverted,” was the primary idea in this case, and all the others were secondary to it. A person tells the truth, for instance, which means he’s not perverted, then he begins to lie, and clearly he’s perverted.

It’s a good thing I’m working with Ruslan or I would have wasted years not knowing about my central idea. We talked over Skype and I said I doubted I would ever be able to reach God. Ruslan asked why. I said because I’m a piece of shit. Ruslan said go back to working on your ideas.

I went back to my practices and it turned out that cane in my garden, that fundamental idea of mine was that “I’m a piece of shit,” and not that “everyone is perverted.”

Everything else around was bound up in this idea. Once I had worked on this central idea, all the other little ideas evaporated as though they’d never been there at all.

Anyone who has the idea he’s a piece of shit won’t get into a prestigious college, can’t even look in the direction of a beautiful girl, won’t aspire to a high-paying job and so on.

You might have guessed by now why my whole life really was a piece of shit before I found The Path?

## Divine Presence

The Divine Presence is anywhere and everywhere, it is all around us, but we do not feel it. We know nothing about it, and yet we live within it!

Osho tells a story about a fish living in the ocean who goes around asking everyone, “Where is the ocean and what is it?” No one can give that fish a clear answer.

I dwelt within the Divine Presence the whole time I was performing the practices, and then when I flew to Moscow I stopped feeling it.

## Subpersonalities

Somebody behaves one way with his wife (1); he behaves completely differently with friends (2); with his bosses he’s nothing like how he is with his wife (3); with the people working under him he’s nothing like how he is with his bosses (4); we see a completely different person when he’s with his mother (5); with his dad he drinks vodka, cursing at everyone (6); somebody playing with his kids (7); somebody with his mistress is nothing like somebody at all (8); somebody with a waiter in a restaurant, when he’s there alone (9); somebody with the same waiter at the same restaurant, when he’s there with his mistress (10).

When the subpersonality changes, somebody changes too. Absolutely everything changes – his movements, the way he walks, his tone of voice, his posture, mannerisms, his facial expressions, everything.

Into this mix go his ideas, what country he lives in, what city, his stage of life, kindergarten, school, college, childhood

friends, first love, second love, last love, films, books, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, all the different events and the dozens, if not hundreds of other such things.

Do you think when somebody gets home, goes to his room, lies down on his bed entirely alone with himself and turns out the light that he will be himself?

He won't be himself, because that very concept does not exist.

This is how somebody has always lived, will go on living, and will die.

## Meditation on Death

I imagine my wife has died, she is lying in her coffin, beautiful as always. Faceless gravediggers have nailed the coffin shut, lowered it into a grave and buried it.

I imagine my daughter has died, she is tiny and beautiful, like an angel! She could have lived a long and happy life, married, had kids, laughed, danced and worn pretty clothes. She has been buried next to my wife's grave.

I imagine that my mother has died. How much have we gone through together in this life, mom! The time will come, and there's nothing you can do about it, we'll all be there one day.

I imagine that Ruslan has died. How will I go further on The Path without him? We once went to Father Polycarp's grave together and I put this question to him. Where should I go if you die? He said you must go within, where else? I'd have to get the names of God for reading dhikr from Wikipedia.

I imagine I am dying. Smoking has given me cancer. If I



couldn't prevent the cancer, what can I do now? All I can do now is die. Everything will go on living tomorrow just it does today, only without me. Lao Tzu was right: Heaven and Earth have no love for humankind.

I have died, there's nothing more of me.



# THE GOLD MEDALLION

I recently turned forty-six. I asked Ruslan if I could wear a gold medallion, instead of the silver medallion. Ruslan said Sergei would be bringing me one before my birthday.

Sergei brought me the medallion and asked, why did I need a gold one?

I said that there was only one goal in my life now – to become a Great Sufi, and if God grants me that possibility, then someday I'll compose a poem!

Ruslan called me on May 14, congratulated me on my birthday, said many kind words, and wished that I might someday write the greatest poem.

# Afterword

**A**fter I finished my book, I didn't know what to call it and decided to push back the publication a while. And I really couldn't tell if it was even worth publishing. I flew back to Moscow on my next vacation and this so-called layer of repressed fear opened up in me. I knew that this fear was irrelevant at that moment but I got into this really morbid state. I just sat there on the balcony for five or six hours, smoked, drank wine and watched my fear. There seemed to be no end to this fear.

I asked Ruslan to transfer energy to me as often as he could and started going to see him several times a week. Energy transfer drastically accelerates the process of the student's spiritual growth.

After several transfers, the fear was driven out of me with such intensity that I really didn't know how I managed to live with it.

I had to drive 125 kilometers to the town of Maloyaroslavets. As I was driving there I would periodically vanish from the world. It was as though the world disappeared from me for a period of time, and then returned. The world would only appear for me when the car driving in front was ten centimeters away from me. I'd manage to brake sharply to prevent a collision and then the world would disappear from me again. And so my vanishing went on, and I didn't know how to go on driving. I was saved by the fact that there were traffic jams all over and the traffic was moving

at a very low speed. I began performing the inner prayer of the heart intensively and stopped vanishing. I was doing it all the way there and back, and if I stopped I would quickly vanish.

When I got home I called Ruslan and asked what was happening to me, and when it would end. Ruslan explained that the suppressed fear was closing off the heart channel in a powerful stream. As the heart channel closed, I essentially ceased to exist in the world. It would only end when all that suppressed fear had been dispelled, and that might take another two or three weeks.

I asked why that didn't happen to normal people, and why they didn't vanish from the world. Ruslan said people have an auto-pilot setting and it's always on. All those things, lust, jealousy, envy, hatred, thoughts of the past, plans for the future are constantly coursing through any normal person, but that autopilot goes on working, keeps the person in the world and doesn't let them disappear.

I went to see Ruslan as often as I could, received that energy transfer, and when my vacation was over, I flew back to work with the fear and the vanishing.

Back at work, I realized something really serious was happening to me, because the fear had never been greater, and I couldn't inwardly comprehend how it could be there at all.

When I left work I sat in the gazebo and got talking to some girls. I went over to them, said hello and struck up a conversation about nothing in particular. I smoked a cigarette, talked and went home free from worry. I thought, why was I scared of going up to girls before and starting a conversation? I'd had this internal resistance to it before.

In the morning I performed dhikr, two Names, fifteen minutes each, and in the evening did some very powerful

practices. Every day I advanced, and it was so quick I didn't grasp what was happening to me.

One day this beautiful young girl came up to me and asked me to work with her spiritually. I started working with her, but I wasn't quite sure where to start or what to do exactly.

I came up with a plan for her and wrote detailed instructions for each practice. I uploaded videos of the practices, audio lectures, video lectures, books, films and articles onto a memory stick for her.

I looked at this girl and in my heart I sensed a very subtle, warm energy, which made her the most beautiful girl in the world. I really wanted to help her, and to do all I could to help her become the happiest Princess on earth.

I suddenly realized that this energy is the Unconditional Love about which Ruslan and Osho had written.

When this kind of Love comes about, it depends on nothing and demands nothing in return. It simply exists by itself, and it is beautiful!

The name of my book came to me as if by itself: *A Book for Princesses and Sufis*.

My shift came to an end and I flew home on vacation in a state of Unconditional Love.

In his poem *Ilahi Nama*, Attar writes that people are "cross-eyed." He is referring to the duality of people, their lack of integrity and inability to see oneness.

In the *Rajneesh Bible*, Osho tells us that the Hindus divide time into four ages:

"Satya Yuga"—supreme consciousness—the golden age; everything in the world was as it should be; there was no crime, immorality, death, sickness or poverty; everywhere, and in everything, there was absolute equilibrium; "satya"

translates as “four;” this age was very stable, like a table standing on four legs.

“Treta Yuga” –consciousness—the fall has begun; “treta” translates as “three;” there are only three legs left on the table, and it isn’t as stable as the table with four legs.

“Dvapara Yuga” –subconsciousness—man has fallen still further; “dvapara” translates as “two;” there are only two legs left on the table; it has become almost impossible to reach equilibrium, and man lives on instinct; he does not know why he does one thing or the other, why he has this or that desire, why this or that makes him happy or unhappy, he is feeling his way through the darkness.

“Kali Yuga” –unconsciousness—the age of darkness in which we are living now; “kali” means “one;” man is completely unconscious; the table has only one leg left.

I recounted this to my wife. “Lyubov, it’s a damn terrible life for you, you’re desperately trying to stand up on one leg, and not only that but you’re cross-eyed!”

Lyubov looked at me askance and told me something along the lines of, “We have a good life, and it’ll carry on like that as long as we don’t know we’re standing on one leg and we’re cross-eyed. As long as no one tells us about it, or shows us by their own personal example, their own level of being, we live well. But if someone does suddenly show us this, then of course we start to wonder. In practice that never happens in people’s lives, because everyone everywhere is cross-eyed, and everyone is living on one leg.”

She stood up and thoughtfully added that if a table only has one leg then it should be moved as close as possible to the center of the table or it will just fall over.

Lyubov said she would learn from me and asked me to stand her on three legs.

I wrote her a decent learning plan to take her first steps on The Path.

The plan included five topics: Practice, Theory, Philosophy, Imagination and Intuition.

I went to see Ruslan, got an energy transfer and for the first time ever I was not knocked down. I wasn't knocked down anymore, I was in a state of awareness, in the "Here and Now."

I no longer wanted to drink beer, and I began performing the practices. During these practices I was buzzing all over like I was in a transformer.

The will of God, which Ruslan writes about in his books, came to me for the first time on my balcony while performing the practices. I saw very clearly that I would have to make some business cards. I sat down after my practices, wrote out some text for the business cards, and I didn't like it much. I rewrote the text a second time, and then a third, a fourth, a twentieth. I kept writing until it came out decent. The next time I went to see Ruslan, I showed him the text. Ruslan corrected it a little, and I started looking for a place I could order them from. Until I had those 100 beautiful, finished business cards in my hands, I felt a tremble in my heart, there's no other word for it.

On the cards were written the words "Spiritual and Mystical Practices, Attention, Energy, Awareness, One-On-One Work."

I felt that tremble in my heart again and saw that I should give a business card to the salesgirl, but this time something inside stopped me. I felt very awkward in front of this girl and in front of the other salespeople, I put myself in her place. Suppose I'm this girl working in a shop, some man comes up and thrusts a business card at me, offering to teach



me Spiritual and Mystical Practices. Is he in love me or something, this man, or is he just an idiot?

I went home – to hell with it. But there it was, my heart went on trembling more and more and there was nothing I could do about it. I couldn't concentrate on my practices, books, or anything else for that matter. This girl and the business card blocked everything from me. I would just have to find this girl and give her a card. I went into the shop, but it wasn't her shift, I came the next day, and the next, and finally I gave her a card.

Ruslan told me not to ponder or weigh things up so much. The will of God does not come only to me, but to all the people around me, through me. I should just act – give out the card and have done with it. He added: how do you know where that card is going to end up, and what it might influence and how?

And that's how I came to give out nine business cards in Moscow. The signal was always that trembling in my heart. I'm looking at some girl, for instance, and there's no trembling, then I look at another and there is.

One time I was standing at a bus stop, and there were these two beautiful deaf girls there. They were expressing themselves to each other in signs, waving their arms about. This mean looking woman demonstratively recoiled from them, hissing something as she went.

I looked at the deaf girl and felt in my heart an energy far more subtle, warmer and more pure than Unconditional Love. Not only did this girl seem to be the most beautiful on earth, I would be quite happy to take her in my arms and spend the rest of my life blowing the dust from her. I gave her my card, and she indicated to me with her fingers that she would write. I awaited her email, but it never came.

That subtle, tender, warm and perfectly beautiful energy in the heart is Compassion.

Before flying back to work I went to see Ruslan and he gave me another energy transfer.

After the transfer, Ruslan said, "That's it, there is no more veil, there is only Divine Presence!"

I flew back to work and God gave the Princess to me. I showed her the initial practices, did dhikr with her in the Name of "The Loving One." After dhikr I decided to give her a transfer. I had never done a transfer before, but this time I saw that it was precisely what I needed to do.

It was as though a hole had opened at the nape of my neck, and energy poured into it from above through a funnel. This energy flowed from my head into my heart, then afterward from my heart to my hands as if through a hose and poured directly into the Princess.

During our next Skype conversation, I was asking Ruslan a lot of questions about energy transfer, how to dose it, how often to do it, and how much I would be enough for.

Ruslan said since that energy came to me through my seventh center I was enough for the whole world. God gave me six beautiful Princesses and I began carrying out Spiritual and Mystical Work with them. I will now always keep going with this work, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

One time I was sitting in the gazebo smoking a cigarette and I thought, why has God only given me Princesses and up till now He has not given me even one Mister?

No sooner had I thought of this than five men came over to the gazebo. They sat themselves down importantly and started talking. They were all college educated, they looked respectable, they must work as managers, or coordinators, or engineers.

I listened in on their conversation and saw very clearly that this was God's answer to my question. In the course of a half hour, none of them uttered a single relevant or even remotely intelligent word. Their entire conversation amounted to nothing more than the feverish chatter of five machines. Men, for the most part, are simply not in the condition of learning.

God gave me a Mister, Arysbeq, and I began working with him. A month later he came out with a phrase that would become famous: "Konstantin, why did everybody suddenly get so stupid?"

Now, I observe and understand intuitively where I need to change the course of my Work, what I need to move towards and what I need to do. God's will is issued in parts, a little more each day.

Right now God's will is to set up a Sufi School in New York.

I have found a professional translator in New York to translate my book and Ruslan's books into English.

I will publish my book in Russian in Moscow and in English in New York.

I am gathering together the educational materials I will need for our work in America—books, audiobooks, articles, parables, poems, lectures, audio lectures, video lectures and films.

In Moscow, I went to the Tradition Press publishing group to ask them to publish my *Book for Princesses and Sufis* and to create a website for the Spiritual and Mystical Practices School of Sufism in Russian and English.

\* \* \*

*Anastasia, one of my beautiful Princesses, asked,  
“How long does The Path go on for?”*

*I replied, “Princess, The Path goes on all through  
life and does not end in death.”*

*January 2018  
Konstantin Usov*



## **Spiritual and Mystical Practices**

Sufi School

# ATTENTION, ENERGY, AWARENESS AND THE PATH TO GOD

The Spiritual and Mystical Practices School of Sufism presents a system of teaching the spiritual and mystical Path and gives the opportunity to those who need it to gain personal experience.

The practices used have been adapted for teaching the modern person according to their inner state. The selection of practices accounts for the student's personal degree of preparation and potential, making the teaching process at the School individual and flexible.

The working style of the Master emphasizes maximum practice, direct transfer of energy, clarity of presentation, and the beauty of advancement.

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The illustrations in this book  
are kindly provided by  
*Evgeny Solodky*



Evgeny Solodky is an extraordinary personality, creative and multitalented. He is an artist, architect and one of the initiators of the Yellow Mountain artist collective at the end of the 1980s. In 1990-2000 he initiated and developed multi-component art projects in Europe and Russia: “Research into Deep Wells” (1998); “Defining the Central Point” (1999). Since 2005, Evgeny dedicated himself to the Helon project. “Helon” was the name that the artist gave to the maxi yacht created according to his own design. The international Helon project was a round-the-world journey incorporating exhibitions and art-presentations in all corners of the globe.

[www.helon.ru](http://www.helon.ru)

# THE BOOK OF SPIRITUAL WORK

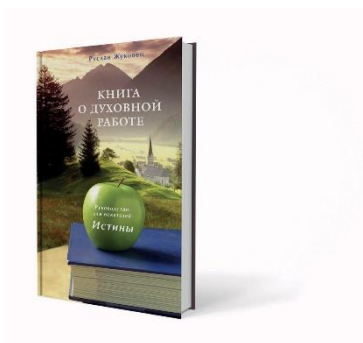
*Ruslan Zhukovets*

This book has a number of both direct instructions and tips to explain and help the seeker understand the core principles of spiritual work. The different chapters relate to different levels of being and existence.

The book is based on the principle of discontinuous learning. Each chapter reflects some aspect of the teaching, and it may seem like there is no connection between the different chapters. This connection will, however, come to be understood in the process of studying and work.

Like a river, life brings us situations and experiences that lay bare our essence and reflect our own state. Life itself is a Master, when you are willing to learn.

Continuous introspection and awareness will help you, day after day, to get to know yourself, escaping your illusions. Each new reading of this book will bear fresh fruit.



# THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE MYSTICAL PATH

*Ruslan Zhukovets*

Mystics share their experiences in order to help genuine seekers find their own Path more quickly and easily, and then follow it.

In this book, the author continues to set out various aspects of contemporary descriptions of the mystical Path, along with the rules and governing principles of spiritual work. A number of previously hidden truths directly related to Sufi methods of mystical work are laid out in the book in simple and accessible language.

What are the Downward and Upward Streams of Creation? How do you become visible to God? How do you alter the pattern of your fate?

Every reader will take something from this book that will be useful and valuable to their own development, raise their understanding of mysticism to a new level, and some, God willing, will go on to seek and discover The Path.





Konstantin Usov  
A BOOK FOR PRINCESSES  
AND SUFIS



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