

TULUBAIKAPORTIA



by VANECHKA

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Episode 11: about abysmal weather conditions, bewildering wilderness & strong spirits

nova-nevedoma.com/bewildering-wilderness-and-strong-spirits/

“To know oneself, a bloke must first know Baldeige. For it is in the state of Trü Baldeige that everything authentically human comes out, and the bloke becomes himself, a block of blokeness, a Platonic ideal of blokehood.” — “The Adventures of Maximilian Bzdynkin: Baldeige and Other Meanings” by Maximilian Bzdynkin

They say a snowy day is only bad if you run out of liquor.

Well, here I am — through whistling gusts of horizontal snow, I trudge seeking my path to Tulubaika, alone in pathless drifts, a dark abandoned desert, a gaping wide abyssal maw prepared to swallow me alive. Around: a treacherous terrain, no trees, no light, no living soul, just me and minus forty-five, a lone man against a fierce and eerie storm of countless scalding tiny blades, biting my face, my eyes, my spirit. The Inuit have over fifty names for snow, but one’s enough for me, that one is “Death”. It’s omnipresent, omnipotent, omnipiercing. It sneaks

under the flaps of my ushanka¹ loosely tied under my chin, behind my scruff, behind my gloves into my sleeves. It sears my skin, making me quiver, wring, and hunch. I cannot breathe, I cannot see, my nose and eyes are plastered, sealed by the crusts of ice and frozen snot. I stagger struggling to set feet, my steps get bogged and buried in the quicksnow mire. Imbued with shallow hope, I fall and rise, an icebreaker, the ark of warmth tossed by Boreas to and fro, that bastard. He swirls around and pulls the strings: my puppet leg is up and right, my arm curls left and down, and clings to nothing: no balance, no support, a rope-walking without a rope, no path, only the destination.

In dread delirium, my thoughts appear and flounder, they're blizzard-sifted, torn asunder, sore, ineluctable, protean. They swarm within and join the frost in biting me, now, inwardly, for no one holds the arrière-garde of mind, no one has kept the Bedlam locked, I ponder and digress to questioning the purpose of my mission — the Grand Imperative.

It always starts and ends with one inquiry to deep archives of self: who the hell am I amidst this bloody storm? A victim of my own bravado, a single-player suicide squad versus the force of nature, a nameless silhouette, incognito, invisibilis, ergo sum, a saviour of the evening, a hero with the short straw as a sword, awaited by his comrades haunted by the booze withdrawal; a champion who soon will bring those thirsty bastards liquid fire.

In order not to feel time's horrid fardel, always get drunk. C'est l'unique

question... alas, I'm sobering up, perhaps too soon.

I'm crumbling. The spirits have started the exodus — they are leaving my body, and I sense how they hover. All huddled up, fixing my earflaps, I turn around, my back facing the wind. No, not to step back, not to retreat — I can't. Instead, I force my tingling, trembling hand — still gloved, of course, I'm not a fool — to draw a square metal flask out from my bosom. I ring my thumb and index finger around the vial's neck — with or without a cause, I fear my lips will stick and freeze to it. Imagine, in the spring, the snow will melt, and I, a giant rotten snowdrop, will surface. Someone will find the wretched corpse with a flask protruding from its mouth. *Finita la commedia!*

I shut my eyes, I drink, with love and passion, measuring gulp-by-gulp evasive time, until the flask is empty.

Keeping that kindling kiss, I start to feel her flaming lips and taste her tongue on mine. They intertwine and clash in a maelstrom of herbs led by the sacred trio: anise, grand wormwood, fennel. She scorches my throat, ignites my guts, and louches my thoughts. Oh, my *fée verte*! My MDMA-demoiselle! Since our last kiss — how much? — the aeons passed, and while my hours were slowly drawn, I managed to forget your tender voice and holy features of your face. But time has come, my soul's awake, the spirit inside my stomach has warmed the spirit inside my heart, and now it pulsates in rapture.

— I plead, I'm ready!

But nothing happens.

The merciless wind and snow soar, roar and scream at me. I feel her eau de vie flowing like lava through my veins, yet nothing happens.

I sniff one long escaping snot and wipe my nostrils. Boreas still slices the night in thin and tattered layers. I see them, one by one, they're all alike: dark, stygian blue, no end and no beginning.

I scream:

— Reveal yourself!

My voice is hoarse, my throat is burnt. I cough.

And then... Benumbed, I hear her whisper: supreme, sublime, subduing, soothing, and instantly, it strikes me that it wasn't le baiser français, an act of love and passion, but one of domination, her over me.

She says:

— Shut... Your... Eyes... And... See-ee-e e

eeeeeeeeeeee

eeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

eeeeeeee' The "ee" merges with the wind and creeps into my head. It echoes, resonates, and fades away. Soaked in her veil, I desperately lick the flask — no fear, no doubt — I obey. Throwing away the empty flask, I close my eyes, reverse, and face the wind again.

Still nothing, though. Mais non, la fée, il n'y a rien. That dark and

whistling void evokes despair, and I, bewitched and fooled, fall on my knees.

And suddenly, from all around, I hear “Flight of the Bumblebee”. At a frantic pace, it orchestrates with howling gusts of air and shrills a swirling motif of chaotic fluttering strings, cascading in chromatic scales. My eyes, I dare to open them and see it all for what it is, united and disassociated. The flying streams of snow near me perform their shape-rich lacework: curls, threads, flowers, lines, and castles in the sky. Whereafter, she appears to me. A ghost! A fleeting apparition! A genius of the purest grace! Behind the clumps of snow, upwards, I see her glowing dress, its pinkteal hem stretched all along the firmament, now and then flashing an orchid in the folds. Alas, veiled by snow, Istina is faintly visible.

Amidst the symphony of wind and violins, her voice plays out again.

— That weakness of yours you have to accept—

— I will, my Circe, — I say, impatient as a randy adolescent.

Echoing in my skull, she keeps her speech, which makes me feel ashamed of interrupting:

— ... and kneel before the opulence surrounding you. Foremost, adopt one maxim — that petty hope of yours is... * an il . lu . — What?! . . si . . on — Your friends are weak...

— YES!

— You are weak...

— NO!

Giggles drift off into the distance and dissolve in the orchestra.

I palm my face, defending it from the searing snow, try to shake off my other limbs and, step by step, move forwards.

— On a voyage a wanderer went, for a magical elixir seeking, but he found all the same just as every soul before him...

— Is this a riddle?!

— Death...

— Oh, fuck!

I smash the snow surrounding me.

A cascade of her giggles enriches the music with an eerie staccato.

— You're seeking a path to the place you don't want to reach...

— This doesn't make any sense!

— How bewildering

the wilderness is... But for one it is magical bliss He must adopt and obey, Only then it will show him the way ay Boreas rages. ay

The darkness thickens. ay
The snowflakes get way sharper.

It starts blowing ayw from all
directions, ya whirling around. yay The endless green
y puddle crawls above in the sky, yielding indygo and
vaylet.
y

— You're not helping!

I fall on my left knee. Boreas blows off my ushanka. Bastard! It is still
held tied around my neck, suffocating me. I try to remove it or put it
back on my head, but once I loosen the knot, it flies away into the
darkness, getting lost somewhere in between the night's layers. I spit in
its wake and keep moving. Now I can better hear her voice — together
with the wind, they scald my ears. I cover and shut them with my hands.

— The emptiness, your mind is lost in it.

Adopt the fear, it shines and glistens,

Get rid of your excessive grit,

And listen, listen listen. isn listen isten isn isten n n n

n n n . . . In the midst of the tempest, leftwards, I see the door of my
perception between two yellow windows. The neon “DRINKS” sign
dimly glows above it, beckoning. As I move towards it, the snowdrifts

around become harder and shallower. My foot falls through the icy crust and millions of freezing grains shovel down into my valenok². I fall, and try to crawl towards the sign on all fours.

— Fear can only show you the door... but you have to walk through by yourself...

— Shut up!

— From madness, you are one step away...

— I'm crawling, you bitch!

— Make it...

— Shut the fuck up!

Stammering and slipping, I rise and run to the shop's door.

The bell above me rings. Wobbling like a float, I, my black coat, all my clothes and hair icecrusted, snowdusted, invade a peaceful warm interior of the shop and sprinkle the doorstep with snow, generously. Another demon has escaped the underworld.

Quiet pop music is playing in the background. No witches, no bumblebees. Bright light. I squint. The shop lady stares at me. Why is she terrified? Blinking, I take my hair out of my face, turn my head to and fro, and with my reddened eyes spot liquor shelves. Snowing the floor further, I reach them, looking for a suitable drink, running my quivering fingers over the bottles.

Go I know not whither and fetch I know not what, mate. Oh, fuck you

guys!

45% ABV...

50%...

22%... No...

56%

60%

better, but—

ARTISANAL SAMOGÓN, MADE IN TULUBAIKA

74%!

74%! Yes!

I carry a bunch of funfériques³ to the shop lady. I smile. She does, too, tensely. I empty my wallet, thank the lady, shove bottles in my pockets, and leave.

Before me: a treacherous terrain, no trees, no light, no living soul, no warm ushanka, two bottles, minus forty-five.

So mote it be. The Grand Imperative has always been and is, no matter what, never lower the strength of your spirit.

Notes

1. Ushanka (from ushi, “ears”) is a winter fur hat with ear flaps, also known as “embodiment of Russianness in Western film often purchased ironically at markets by people who will never experience -30°C ”. The position of the flaps encodes the wearer’s entire

- philosophy and political / ideological background: up (optimist, tourist, or cop), down and tied (realist), down and untied (yolo-man, or disco cop, Harry Du Bois in a Revolutionary's Hat).
2. Valenok, and plural valenki, is felted wool footwear traditionally worn in Russian winters. Aggressively non-waterproof.
 3. Anglicised-through-French rendition of “фунфырик” (funfyrik), a drunkards’ slang term for a small bottle of alcohol. Possibly from German fünfzig (fifty), possibly not. See also: a funférieur (фунфурье) — a sommelier for funfériques.
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Read next part

Episode 12: about meeting strange cats in birch groves

<https://nova-nevedoma.com/strange-cats-in-birch-groves/>

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