TOLSTAIA KAPORTA



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Tulubaikaporia

Episode 21: about the danger of wicked tongues

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> "Gradually a human loses their form and becomes a ball. And, having become a ball, a human loses all their desires."
> — "Makarov and Petersen" by Daniil Kharms

The world either sits silent or mumbles monologues. Tulubaika-tulubaika-tulubaika-tulubaika — and so it goes, round and round. What tongue is this? What tongue is this that creeps into my ear, slithers along the cochlea, and worms its way inside? Betwixt the folds it rubs itself and works its impropriety, whilst I forget what I was even thinking. I've got, to put it mildly, other things on my mind right now — a tongue right in my brain.

— Have some bloody decency, — I whisper, gripping the armrests. — I don't even know you.

— Tulubaika labubaika labutulu bu, — something babbles away in there, no rhyme or reason.

— Might we at least not do this in public? We're in a cinema. Let me

finish the film.

— O luluka baikaluka tulu tu bailu.

— What have you even found in there?! And what sort of word is that?!

— Butu u tuka totau u tululai lu / Tulubaika-tulubaika uka tuka tu.

— I'm going to scream, — I say, barely audible, but instead I roll my eyes. There, behind the lids as if behind stage curtains, the remnants of the playing film flicker in a shadow theatre, its contents refusing to settle in my head.

And so it is every day: at work, at home in bed, in the park, in the canteen, visiting friends — I hear something-or-whatnot-chort-knows-not-what. There's no fleeing from tongues, no hiding from the word, it follows alongside like a shadow. It started one day — can't remember when — and has been with me ever since.

— What do you hear? — says my doctor Such-and-Such (his name, honest), a moustachioed man, in his poisonously blue gloves (no other doctors to be found, for in such matters he's a dab hand, a proper expert, a jack of all trades).

— A word, doctor, a word, it chatters, it moans, slick, sloppy, like a tongue right in my ear.

— What sort of word is it?

— I don't know, doctor, I don't know, — I say, nearly weeping. — Letters of some kind, incomprehensible. I don't know what it means.

— Repeat it to me, I'll at least have a look in a reference book. A dictionary, if you prefer. I can ask AI, too, if we become that desperate.

— Doctor, I can't. Thing is, I don't know how to repeat it.

— Write it down then, here's a bit of paper.

— I don't know, — and here come the tears, — I don't know how to write it down. Perhaps it's not even a word, just drebbeden. Like a sound, or music. Can that happen?

The doctor frowns, twitches his whiskers like a cockroach, peels off his poisonously bluest-blue gloves.

— There's nothing I can do. Your symptoms, compadre, aren't even symptoms, but the chort knows what. Your tests have come back: urine, stool, blood, electroencephalogram — something entirely baffling is happening in your head. All I can do is shrug my shoulders and throw up my hands.

— Alas and alack?

— Alas and alack, if I dare say.

— Dare, doctor, dare. There are words more frightening, believe me.

Slushy out. A light autumn draught blows from everywhere. Into my

ear again something jabbers and ululates. Tulubaika-tulubaika ululabubay / kalulu o tulubaika bubu baba bay. Glossolalia — into this world through me speaks an ancient god. Repeating it — I refuse, sorry, don't want to, but even if I did, I can't.

Above the square, murmurations of maculatures take wing. The rain intensifies, passers-by grumble, unfurl their brollies and transform into one great black mushroom of Roman formation.

— Tullible weather, — I hear suddenly from the crowd.

— Tunt of day, tulubankery and tuloodle, right? — a second one answers.

— Tuloodle, more so — tulu-wuly, tutsy-wutsy, this tuluguy.

— Ooika? — a third one catches on.

I wrap myself tighter in my coat and quicken my step.

— Oooika, aye, tulu-bloody-kation. I baiked him tutulessly the other day, and kababaxed in a lututuy. Lu-tu-tu... — so they tut disapprovingly.

— Lu-tu-tu, lu-tu-tu... — they ululate something or other.

From beneath their brollies their little eyes pulse like coals, red-swollen. From their mouths crawl tongues wickedly wicked, wickedest. The freaks. And them! And them too! They've surrounded me, cornered

me. From it — what's it called? — from that incan-bloody-tation there's nowhere to hide.

I speed up more, now nearly running, fairly hurtling along. Something squelches underfoot, and a second later I find myself resting in a puddle. I come to my senses somehow, see lying next to me a business card swollen with water, caked in muck:

KONDRÁTY, VOLKHV. I CURE ALL. EVEN TULUBAIKA

I fair shudder.

It can't be! Right?

Right?

I toss the card. In my head — lum-de-lum, tum-tu-lum, luttututtuttumingly.

Pah!

Sprawled out, all covered in muck. Above me glide the murmurations once more.

— Luttututtuttum! Bay-bay-baika-tulubay! Tattatattatam! Bay-babay-lubay-tubay! — cry the murmurations starlingly.

That's it — done for. Utter tunt! Plugged my ears, shuttered my eyes — no good. Absolute tollocks! The tongues grow anyway, as if from within, like worms in the brain, parasites, helminths. They crawl, they

dart between the folds, they tickle and whisper, they laugh — lu-lu-lu, tu-tu-tu, bai-tu-tu KA-KA-KA! I snatch up the card — volkhv it is then! Be so kind, get into my pocket. Charlatans I don't trust, of course, swindlers I despise, but the word — there it is, before me, black on white, written. I recognise its contours, as if I'd always known them, and yet to read it, to say it aloud I still cannot — my own tongue is like gel, flows between my teeth with no sound.

Pah!

I slap my palm against the puddle. Spray flies. Passers-by look at me like I'm a nutter, walk round me, turn away, shield themselves from the spray with their brollies.

TULUBAIKA!

A-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a!

TULUBAIKA!

ENOUGH!

If you repeat something enough times, from the word there remains only a meaningless sound, amusement. Parrots are therefore dumb and amusing, for all they do is repeat. Professors, reading the same lecture a hundred times over, they too lose their minds in time. Children, repeating mama-mama-mama, straightaway become bored and learn to speak other words like sex, drugs, alcohol. Doctors, who reassure their patients that everything will be fine, everything will be fine, everything

will be fine, everything will be fine, thereby violate every conceivable Hippocratic oath, sending their patient to the grave. Nothing will be fine! Nothing at all, in fact! Prayers repeated several times also drive gods mad and cease to work. Tulubaika-tulubaika-tulubaika-tulubaika! Amen! Parrot on like that, and only ancient, forgotten, chthonic incantations will do the trick.

It — an ancient incantation.

It all fits.

Tulubaika-tulubaika! Tulubaika! Tuluba—

Ow! Stop it! Fuck off! Let me think!

What, what if it's not a meaningless sound?

Thus I thinker deep at home; goes without saying I'm dried off, washed, downing endless chaish brews; with milk, naturally, how else? And cinnamon and cardamom too, for the warmth. Blanket, sofa, phone — all as it should be. In my hands — the volkhv's card.

— Doctor.

— You again?

— Aye, doctor.

— You can't be cured. Hopeless case. Don't call me aga—

— Wait! I've found the word. That drivel. I know how it's spelt.

— Oh, you do now? Well then, tell me.

— It's... on a bit of paper. I can show you on video.

— I've no time for you now. I've an operation on. We're transplanting human brains into an elephant, a full ten of them, one's not enough, apparently.

TULUBAIKA!

— Please, doctor.

— Dictate it to me.

TULUBBBABABAM!

— But doctor, I... I still don't know how to read it. I don't know what it is.

— You are insane. Don't call me again. Ever.

— But doc—

Tulubberriously untullbanous!

Bundled myself in the darkness of the blanket, music in my ears — suicidal depressive black metal, screeching vocals, overdriven guitar trills, blastbeats. Title of the song: Sempre Tulubaikando Op.2. The band too, it seems — Tulubaiktomy. Tu-lululu-tu-tu tu-lululu-lu-tu-lu.

Bay! Luttuttum tuttutum ai-ai-ai-yaiaiyai! Tuuuuuuuuuuuuuu-luuuuuuuuuuuuuuu-baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay-kakakakakaka!
Tuuuuuuuuuuuuuu-luuuuuuuuuuuuuuu-baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay-kakakakakaka! Tulubaika! Tu-lululu-tu-tu tu-lululu-lu-tu-lu, Tu-lululu-tu-tu tu-lululu-lu-tu-lu!
Tuuuuuuuuuuuuuu-luuuuuuuuuuuuuuu-baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay-kakakakakaka!

AAAAAAAAAA!

— Greetings, volkhv Kondráty. I be that I be.

— Eh?

— Hello?

— Hello?

— Volkhv, please, help me.

— With what?

O Babbatulla! Baitu baitu lu-lu-lu!

— I... with that... you know... with that thing.

— With what thing, and what's more, what's "that"?

— The card. I'm ringing about healing services. On the card you wrote

that you'll cure, heal all ills, even the...

— Even what?

— The...

Tulubaika!

Tulubay!

Tulu!

Tu!

Ka-ka-ka! Kakka! Kakka!

— Now, it's happening again!

— Mm? What's that you hear?

— Well, volkhv, you know what I mean. You wrote it.

— Imagine you're a parrot and repeat yourself.

— F... The... Voice, volkhv Kondráty, I hear a voice. It's everywhere, it's all around, sometimes I hear only it. I... cannot describe it. It's like tongues, wickedly wicked, wickedest tongue-tentacles that crawl into me, into my ears, my nose, my mouth, even my eyes. It's on your card. It's that, I know for certain. The thing on your card, I hear it.

— Come round, droog.

Lubba luttububba luba ai-ai-ay.

O Lababba tukka lutu tutu bay!

Tulubaika!

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

This is how it was in olden times: you'd rise an hour before dawn to the snoring of roosters, arch your back, down a bucket of spring water in one, maybe even four. Outside the darkness thickens. The settlement slumbers. Well, you'd reckon, a rotten day awaits me, and I'm the core of it, the root of the rot. You barely even want to live it. Instead — you look for what to do. Understanding you crave, the genuine you crave, Istina you crave, to taste it, aye, so it sets you trembling, trembling to the fibres and strings of your spirit. With such a request you go to pay respects to the local volkhv, cap in hand.

And so here I am: rose an hour before dawn to the snoring of pissheads, cracked my back and my knees, downed a funférique of samogón from the freezer in one, took two more for the road — makes it barely audible, that thing, the whatsit, you know the one. Outside the darkness thickens. I'm rattling along in a bus, the first one on the timetable. The city slumbers, practically dead. A marvellous tulu awaits me. Might even baika to the end. Lulubyes in my chest, in my head t'tulument baikakastly entutuates, sort of. Gonna tululump myself proper, tulubazzle myself, tu-like, lu-like, bay-like, ka-like — well innit just a right lubabaikence? Tell me, innit proper tulubation, lubabaious

entuluishlessness? With such a request I go to pay respects to the local volkhv, cap in hand.

Autumn landscape: the birches have drowned in golden dunes. Right by the road beneath a tree stands a windowless half-hut, half-dugout, half-shed, half-roadside loo. Here he stands slightly hunched, shaggy, dreadlocked, grey, bearded like a chort, staff for a walking stick, in a robe, film over his eyes, on his forehead a flowerlike sign, a cluster of O's stuck together. He bares his teeth at the pleasure of meeting.

— Well then, droog, g'day! — he smiles: a mellow face, a kindly gaze.

— Greetings, volkhv Kondráty. I be that I be, — I say, giving a little bow.

— Had a spot of Tulubaika, have we?

— What? Aye, that's the one, the... aye, that.

A sweat breaks out, my legs seem to float in opposite directions, my knees buckle, I go slack. I nod, cheeks red, bashful. The volkhv smiles.

— We'll sort it out baik quick. All'll be tuluby-boo.

Hearing hallucinations, must be.

Much of interest in the décor: cups, spoons, pots, along the far wall, on creepers, hang dried white lilies. Lububaikment and toobooby in my head: dense sounds tremble, lutte or tuttu or bayayaykey, a right

tuley-luley lulge kind of thing, a distullulled one, bloody baituring lullocks. The samogón — should've saved a funférique or two, maybe for evening at least.

— Come on tulully, droog.

We descend to the cellar. There amidst thick roots lies a whole hall, mushrooms cover the walls, here and there pink orchids bloom. Ah, much tulucious!

In the middle — a great slab of stone, like a table.

— Take ka seattu.

My heart beats softly, so as not to startle the volkhv — let him work, let him brew me up some whatnot from fly agaric, herbs and grasses: tuluba-tea, lulukwort, juice of babaka, and the rest.

— Right, you tubaikkuaff this, and it'll straightaway tulubise you. Head might spin. Tulubaika?

— Eh?

— Drink up, I say, and lie down. Yours is an almost hopeless case, droog, tulubaikemia. Should've come sooner.

— I didn't know you existed.

The volkhv nods, walks out, leaving the cellar door open.

— Give us a shout if anything, will you? I'm up here. Tulubaika?

— Aye?

I raise the bowl to my lips — black slop, aromas that pierce me to tears — I swallow a breath of holy air, for courage, and then the bowl, slurping it like an oyster. Bitter, but my receptors are well used to any assortment of slop.

I lie down, close my eyes, but straightaway feel my tulubay opening, the darkness becoming gelatinously dense, the reality toos and loos, gently baiking.

Indistinguishable whispers invade my hearing: tu-tu-tu-tu-tu, ba-ba-ba-ba-ba, lu-lu-lu-lu-lu...

And suddenly from everywhere green stems emerge, upon them — orchids, as if with eyes, faces, mouths, and from them — endless pink tongues. They lick my ears, my face, creep into every conceivable orifice, tickle and caress all extremities available for caressing — they whisper: Tulubaika-tulubaika-tulubaika! — envelop me in cool saliva, arouse me, fever me, such that I tremble — they whisper: O luluka baikaluka tulu tu bailu, squealing, O luluka baikaluka tulu tu bailu — with tongues and stems they entwine, enwrap my whole body, like a mummy in a mausoleum, I am. I see, I see, I hear, I hear, I feel, I feel it — everywhere, omnitulubaikadly, outside me and within, surrounds me only it —

Tulubaika.

Read next part

Episode 22: about hymns to various things

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