TOLSTAIA KAPORTA



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Tulubaikaporia

Episode 16: about hardships of awakening

nova-nevedoma.com/hardships-of-awakening/

> Having unlocked the meaning of countable and uncountable in time, I felt as though I held a mousetrap in my hands, wherein ancient fate trembles like a frightened little beast.
> — Velimir Khlebnikov

Somewhere in the depths of years to come, in the taiga around a moss-covered burrow, people will gather with orchid bouquets in their hands, fruits in their baskets and nervous smiles on their faces. What will emerge won't be a bear, nor even some creature divine making its umpteenth return to the world, but merely a maiden of mystical natures who, for whatever reason, hasn't fancied waking up from whatever dream for so long that her underground slumber could be measured in years, thousands, millions, or perhaps billions of seconds, depending on how one prefers to reckon time.

The crowd will be doing what crowds do best — chanting, clapping, paparazzing, orchestrating, and hyperbolising-cacophonising a randomly sparked emotion, until one of the leaders of this spectacle will raise his hand, calling the gathered legions to order.

They will freeze in anticipation of words; an existential silence will fall.

Though everyone will know the figure before them is human, few will be able to believe it. Her hunched body covered in dirt and moss will be shivering either from cold or from excess attention, and her eyes will be shut tight against the aggressive light phenomena of varying brightness.

— Happy Awakening! — the leader of the gathering will say and pat the den dweller on the shoulder.

Still coming to her senses, our heroine will flinch and eye the leader with incomprehension, a mixture of surprise and freshly-brewed anger.

— Happy Awakening! — the deputy leader will say and also pat the den dweller on the shoulder with his sweaty hand, though the den dweller couldn't care less about its sweatiness.

— Happy Awakening! — the president of a very important country will say, next in line to give her shoulder a pat.

— Happy Awakening! — the president of a country that is also important, but a bit less so, and thus was allocated a worse spot in the queue, will say and also pat her shoulder.

— Happy Awakening! — someone from the following little humans in the seemingly endless queue will say and do the same as several patters before, and millions of patters after.

— Bloody hell, — our heroine will think, — how much I don't want to

get up... — she will grimace and present her shoulder.

— Happy Awakening! — her mum will say, patting her shoulder, treacherously opening the thick curtains and leaving the bedroom where, after an eternity of fame as the most well-slept person in the world, her daughter will find herself with dismay, shed the pink veil from her eyelids, lie for another couple dozen minutes, have porridge with hazelnuts for breakfast and, led by parents on both sides ("Like a blind person, I swear...") will go off to first grade, after which falling back asleep will be impossible, after which life will go downhill along well-worn tracks.

From some abysses will emerge a substrate called Time, which she will have to reckon with. Funny thing is, it will differ from the time that lives in clocks and ticks, or pours like sand, or falls as a shadow from the sun onto the dial — or rather, it will have nothing in common with that time at all, so much nothing that it wouldn't hurt to have a new separate word for it. "I'm sick of your language games," our lethargic heroine will think, "don't call different things by the same name." Of course, one can ignore this "Time" and pay it no mind, but at some point it, like everyone else, will also pat you on the shoulder and say:

— Happy Awakening!

— Go away, let me sleep some more, — our awakened heroine will snarl at Time, burrowing into the blanket as if into a den.

— Happy Awakening! — Time will repeat, grinning with all thirty-two

teeth (or however many teeth personifications of concepts are supposed to have).

— I have a temperature, — she will theatrically proclaim to Time, plug her ears, hold her breath and lie like that until her face turns pale. — I don't feel well. My head's spinning. **cough-cough**

— Happy Awakening! — Time will repeat, grab her by the ankle and pull her out of bed onto the cold linoleum and drag her along the corridor, and all along its length her nails will sketch long feline tracks.

At some point she will clutch at the doorframe and squeeze her eyes shut to either wake up faster or perhaps fall back asleep, but neither will happen. Time will keep pulling her leg, slowly, without particular effort, but with indeterminate persistence and inflexibility, for such is Time's nature. All of human existence is nothing but resistance of human to Time, and Time to human, a love-hate relationship.

The logic of life in dreams differs from the logic of life in life — in dreams something always happens. In a couple of hours, one can be born, go to school, leave Tulubaika, stop a zombie apocalypse, plant a tree and immediately see it grow, perhaps even wake up into a new dream, while in life nothing happens, so much nothing that there will be nothing to remember later, and everything will seem so quick and rapid, as if it's not a memory but a dream, and not just a dream but a flash, a temporal anomaly, like the one you fall into for a couple of minutes during the most boring university lecture at nine in the morning on Monday. In the world barely an hour has passed, but

inside, in the sleepy chambers, first all existence ended, descended to the most nothingiest Nothing, and then consciousness spread like mould across the universe, and it's as if you were born again, and the professor wants something from you again:

— Happy Awakening! — he will say.

Everyone around will giggle. The professor will smirk craftily.

— Perhaps you can help us... when we talk about realising something significant, what's the most terrifying thing about such an awakening?

The professor's spectacles and two dozen young eyes will stare at our heroine with a thirst for knowledge, and she will straighten up in her chair and blurt out with all her ironic might:

— That the alarm keeps ringing.

What's been realised can't be unrealised, can't be realised back, or as grandad used to say, "you can't push a turd back up your arse." Impossible to continue, impossible to stop. Don't want to sleep anymore, want even less to get up, move limbs, wash up, cook, breathe, trudge off to some jobs and slowly stew in their capitalist cauldron, play nonsense with some Atlantic plankton until the end of time from its very beginning, when Atlas took a second to scratch his arse, and Atlantis went straight to the bottom. There's a fiasco for you.

Beautiful, ineffably beautiful it looked even in those moments when every piece of its magnificence was hiding in the dark waters of the

ocean named after it by the ancient Greeks or vice versa. Sad, ineffably sad, but more epic than ever the sinking world looked, when the queen of Atlantis, finding herself on the highest building, was sinking with it and refused to swim, though she realised she could. There's a fiasco for you. All she needed to do was lie on the water's surface, didn't need to swim at all; the water's salty from tears — she wouldn't sink. But no, our heroine dug her claws into the tower's top, for she didn't want to leave her native expanses.

— Happy Awakening! — our heroine will say to her old cat. — We'll be catching mice in the new house, you little shitter ("That's what grandad called both her and me.") Mum and dad promised loads of them. We're taking the scratching post with us, too.

The heroine will scoop up the cat and drag her to their old family car, smelling of machine oil and air freshener's attempts to fight it. Setting sail from the native harbour of Tulubaika, they, together with the cat, will watch their wooden house diminishing until it drops off the horizon and sinks, atlantically. Together with the cat they will lie on the new, but still cold linoleum of the new flat, read the works of great anarchists, absorb the great anarchist spirit, so similar, as it will seem to our heroine, to the feline one, so close, as it will seem to our heroine, to herself. Together with the cat they will swear that they will always walk by themselves, choose their own cigarettes and energy drinks and alcoholic beverages, learn to play bass on their own, shave half their head bald on their own, create the most original and independent depressive-suicidal black metal band, recording their best hits on

cassette in basements, stairwells, abandoned factories, where the ground is strewn with syringes (be they basements, stairwells, or abandoned factories), choose their own fiancé or fiancée or both, ones who will also choose them on their own, walk until dawn on their own, be sad and merry with just a couple of notes, an infinity of broken rhythms and rough screams, invent intoxicating and sobering mixtures with a modicum of unwonted levity ("My head's splitting"), meanwhile committing all sorts of explicit and indecent things that even the most freedom-loving cat shouldn't see.

— Happy Awakening! — the fiancé will declaim and gently kiss her forehead and offer breakfast in bed, which the heroine will have to decline, for it's improper. Anarchism is anarchism, but teeth should be brushed first, and anyway that's some aristocratic anachronism. Normal people don't leave their bed for hours, days, weeks, basking in the rays of sun tickling skin through the blinds, lethargising, dreaming, musicating with fingers various broken rhythms on the wood of an IKEA bedside table.

The best way to resist Time's authority is either to forget about it or to wait for something, something grand, cleansing, striking — best of all written in dactylic hexameter. Then the ordinariness of "eternal now" will turn into a reel of moments, like how childhood appears in memory, an album of old, overexposed photographs of people either rehearsing or practising happiness, an album that's at once joyful and embarrassing and nostalgic to look at. Then new events will simply stop happening. Time will stretch out, and from being in a fast river that

doesn't freeze in winter, just like the Tulubaika River with rapids and whirlpools, the heroine will suddenly find herself in a deep lake in some temporal solitude without skills for overcoming bottomless and boundless waters.

— Happy Awakening! — sadly or merrily from afar will sound the voice of the first ancestor. They will have lined up in a queue to look at our heroine: all from parents to animalcule in slippers, to soulless cosmic dust, to the spark at the beginning of all.

— Happy Awakening! — the next ancestor will say.

— Happy Awakening!

— Happy Awakening!

— Happy Awakening!...

And so on deeper into the generations until our heroine will cease to understand every ancient and lost in time language of her ancestors.

Read next part

Episode 17: about helices of all kinds

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