

# TULUBAIKAPORTIA



by VANECHKA

Translation and commentary by Vanya Bagaev

## Episode 9: about meeting strange ravens in birch groves

[nova-nevedoma.com/strange-ravens-in-birch-groves/](http://nova-nevedoma.com/strange-ravens-in-birch-groves/)

---

There is an infinity in the infinity of fleeing avenues with an infinity infinitely fleeing intersecting shadows. All of Petersburg is the infinity of an avenue raised to the power of  $n$ . And beyond Petersburg — nothing is. “Petersburg” by Andrei Bely

Sublime that day was Tulubaika, its beauty seen without needing his third eye, Kondráty sprawled out on the grass rusty and brisk and basking in the setting sun and gentle breeze beheld it marvelled  
dazed  
& charmed.

Among the forests, lost in the endless birchbyrinth  
its crowns aglow with gold, it lounged  
the village.

Its image breathed, as if alive, with movements slow, hypnotic  
it soothed his eye

it stirred his thought  
beguiled his spirit.

Somewhere there among the treey streets a house was inside, behind the  
closed doors — an oak bed where lay  
Kondráty's body  
a nullity in human form  
frozen in different time and space  
abased  
far from the infinite eternal.

At once that gigathought and sight impaled Kondráty's mind. Just  
wow, he reckoned, bojemoi<sup>1</sup>!

How have I missed that all the time?

The perfectest perfect of  
perfectly perfect perfects

O!

O Tulubaika!

O!

(and O!)

Was I a fool, a degen?

Too brash, too craven to explore?

Behind Kondráty landed a stately stygian raven its left wing striped with  
white, its eyes alike charcoals, its beak alike a blade  
ominous, sharp  
obsidian-made.

Encroaching on Kondráty's solitude, the raven uttered:

Krraa!

Oh, hi, birdie!

Such a mesmerising view we've got here, huh?

Inside his head, he named all animals he saw:

squirrels, starlings,

ravens, rats,

wood pigeons, foxes, frogs,

et cetera.

Some were his friends

some foes

some passersby

some food

some interlocutors, the others

— mere messengers.

This raven, not a random bird but a new friend was no exception, and

with no retort (and no choice), accepted "Kutkh" to be his name.

Kookily, his head he tilted, tousled his plumage, and stared back.

Kraaa!

Kraaa indeed, my droog<sup>2</sup>

I know, I know, one seldom can feel full with anything but

Tulubaika.

Kondráty sat and took his bag  
a ramshackle rucksack.

Above, the golden crowns of birches flashed and rustled warningly.

The wind Boreas grabbed Kondráty's beloved umbrella with that  
perfectly perfect, facsimile image of Tulubaika painted on it and ran  
away into the birchwood corridor of stripes white / black

the corridor optically infinite.

Jingling the runic rosary woven into his hair and beard, Kondráty,  
hopping and stumbling, tangling in his baggy clothes, chased the  
umbrella.

Alas, Boreas was a moron  
a moron mocking, a faster moron  
a moron stronger.

Right at a ravine where below streamed a brook, Tulubaika ascended  
like a plane, spewing diminishing hee-hee-hee:

hee-hee-hee

hee-hee-hee

hee-hee

hee-hee-hee

hee!

Higher it flew and farther above the trees somewhere Kondráty knew  
no whither. Panting, he stopped and spat.

I'll find you, dear!

Spreading his hands, Kondráty screamed into the birchwood wilderness,  
labyrinthine and golden. It spread beyond the ravine  
with no beginning  
with no end to see.

He spat again and, stomping, returned to Kutkh.

Can you imagine?  
Boreas, that bastard, stole my Tulubaika!  
My Tulubaika!  
Imagine!

He spat once more, picked up the rucksack and threw its only strap over  
his shoulder. With curiosity, Kutkh kept inspecting him.

What?

I'm leaving! Poka! <sup>3</sup> (he shivered) It's going to be a wee bit too chilly to  
sleep in here, my droog!

Kraaa, kraaa!  
cawed Kutkh, jumping, his wings aflutter.

Ah-huh, the food! (Kondráty made the eureka gesture)  
Well, lucky you are, today —  
I'm fasting, huh!

Inside his rucksack he fumbled. He pulled out a half-loaf of bread, or

rather a rusk, sprinkling crumbs, tore a small piece from it and handed it to Kutkh. Warily, the raven jumped back, but then snatched it and hurried away.

Oh, yes, thank you, too, Kutkh!  
Enjoy your meal, by the way!

Alas, no answer followed  
the raven dissolved in the birchwood  
like anything would. . .

By dusk, Kondráty returned to his mattress under the unfinished  
motorway's bridge, a border where ended the realm of birches  
and started Ensk<sup>4</sup>  
where grey took over gold.

No wind, no chill, instead —  
a makeshift hearth made by the others.  
Accustomed they were to silence  
the sense of it was shared  
their language was unspoken  
by nods and glances played.

In blankets wrapped, hairy, dishevelled, in semblance of a ritual  
they huddled  
slept or entertained their eyes and minds with dancing tongues of flame

and crackling embers  
they were like imps locked longing in their den  
waiting to be mustered.

Kondráty nestled on the sideline. For them, in all his outfits and  
demeanours he appeared an exemplar of a menagerie or circus. No fun  
they made nor mocked him, no

the awe at the unfathomable caused the social distance.

His ginger mane with rosary entwined  
his face painted with coal and chalk and  
the , an O of many eyes<sup>5</sup>  
a little inflorescence of monads on his forehead.

He did look like no bum  
no vagabond, no junkie, no man in misery, no —  
looked a volkhv of olden days<sup>6</sup> he did  
a hitchhiker from unseen dimensions, for whom the mattress, the  
bridge, the makeshift hearth were bringing joy, at least until that day. . .  
that day he had no Tulubaika.

Found in a dump, outwardly commonplace, inwardly sui generis, the  
umbrella subdued his mind, became an artefact, a talisman  
even a friend  
acquired a dominion over his consciousness  
and far beyond it.

He used to place it between him and the hearth and his underdog  
friends. The plain back outer part was shielding him from their curious

eyes, and the inside where Tulubaika hid served as a source of reveries.  
Hooked to infinity  
fully locked in  
he dived into Tulubaikan scenery  
at first — wide awake  
later — in lurid dreams  
but on that day...  
Boreas stole it all.

Kondráty frowned, growled, grimaced and turned facing the wall. He  
mumbled, scribbled Tulubaikan runes with chalk on the concrete, tried  
to evoke a dream of dreams, any dream, or better so —  
a dream of Tulubaika  
again. . .  
but vainly.

The runes that day declared no word  
the symbols formed no meanings  
Kondráty's mind was there still  
inside his head imprisoned in the skull bones.

That day a good night's sleep was not forthcoming.

Then, followed the morrow  
someone sprayed the vegetation  
with the drops of sorrow

someone covered whiteblack trees  
with an eerie fog  
teary, sticky, cold  
leaving none in sight beyond one's hand  
none in mind inside one's head.

Golden was the ground, golden was the sky  
monochrome was the visible horizontality  
but Kondráty knew the way.

Snapping twigs, tinkling rosary and beads, his body interspersed with  
birches, wobbling his way through their multidimensional striped fence.  
From under their coloured caps, mushrooms peeked and lapsed as  
Kondráty passed them, for their imminent end in his hands they  
foresaw. But that day they were safe, for he sought Tulubaika  
nothing else  
nothing more.

He met a large, bulky oak, and said, lifting his head:

Hey, my friend, have you seen around here lately  
my Tulubaika?

The tree shook its crown, leaves rustling, bark cracking.

No? You haven't? Shame, eh. . .

All right, I'll keep looking then.

Thanks, anyway. . .

Kondráty saluted to the oak and moved further. On his way, he asked every tall tree, for only they could see high enough, far enough, both in space and time. At moments, he paused his journey to hug one of them or chat about things mundane  
about the weather  
about the transience of time  
and if the world was sane.

He approached the ravine long and deep that divided the birchwood in two parts. Down there beneath, among the dead trees and scrubs, chirped the brook, its cold streams sleeked the pebbles.

Morrow to you, little river.  
By any chance, have you seen Tulubaika?

...

No? It hides inside an umbrella, by the way.

The brook splashed, simpered, and rolled onwards.

Well, alas. . . (Kondráty shrugged)  
Thanks, anyway!

Using a fallen birch, he crossed the ravine and entered the realm of raspberry and nettle. Through thickets waded he for hours, yet no signs of Tulubaika revealed themselves  
no bush  
no tree

no stone  
no mushroom  
— no one had witnessed it.  
Boreas stole and hid it somewhere in secret.  
Now it was lost  
lost was his mind  
lost thoughts lurked through his convolutions.

What if somebody found it? Would they handle the beauty?  
the knowledge?  
the higher energies it emanates?  
the view sublime?  
No one could possibly withstand that!  
And what if a squirrel sees it?  
Well, kirdyk, poor squirrel  
finita la commedia. . .

Kondráty gave up  
& tired, hungry, frustrated  
returned to his everyday deeds.

Deep in the wilderness of birchwoodness, secluded in a quiet grove  
under the golden canopy, he made a fireplace and, sitting in the sultan  
pose, was brewing a concoction of various plants and mushrooms he'd  
gathered earlier, leading a ladle slowly-lovingly inside a small pot.

What was the recipe? No clue.

It was Kondráty's secret brew  
his chef's special.

No one was ever granted a chance to know parts of the mixture, let  
alone a casual observer  
like you.

For Kondráty, the value of plants and shrooms was determined by their  
ability to warp the perception: some were for the mind, some were for  
the taste buds — together, they formed the uniquely unique blend of  
unique uniquenesses.

The cooking process required one full day, aside from the time of  
gathering / drying. He could've shopped for them, yes, but seldom did  
he have any money  
or any idea of that.

Crucial was having a raw organic product picked with his bare hand in  
the place of positive energies. After hours of slow brewing, the  
concoction needed some time in a cold, dark place to acquire its  
psychoactive properties. He drank it to tune his mind to the currents of  
Tulubaikan consciousness permeating everything around  
somewhere denser  
somewhere sparser.

From those currents, using a metaphysical ladle, he could draw arcana,  
and then fulfil his mission of enlightening people, giving them a chance  
to discover more about Tulubaika

conscious    unconscious    subconscious    metaconscious  
hyperconscious  
and some other  
consciousness types —  
regrettably, few eager were that knowledge to accept.

Upwards, Boreas, sneaky bastard, embraced the birches' crowns again  
and “played” with them pressing his pervert fingers on their  
uncountable leaves.

Rustling cascadingly, the birchchoir whispered:  
Fair afternoon to thee, our dear Kondráty  
in our humble grove  
welcome thou art.

Hello (Kondráty grunted).

Thy life, how fares it?  
Oddly we feel it hath been but blink since thy last visit.

You, trees, always say that.  
So-so, I'm mourning.  
Have you seen Tulubaika?

Tulubaika?

Yes, Tulubaika

But everywhere it is

and nowhere doth it end.

I know, I mean mine  
my Tulubaika  
the one in the umbrella.

In days of yore, we saw it, aye  
ever dost thou bring it hither  
with thee it cometh, on each day that passeth.

Today is not that day. Boreas stole it  
sneaky bastard.

What is lost shall once be found.

Not if it's stolen.

Even so. . .  
Thou shan't dispute with those for whom  
the time-space continuum is  
but a landscape.

Are you spoiling me a plot right now?

No plot there is — only ripples and circles upon the water's face  
spreading quaquaversally  
from a pebble cast.

Cheers.

This is a banger of an insight.  
I can't even describe how helpful that is.  
Literally speechless.

Kondráty scooped a ladleful of green-brown liquid up from the pot and brought it to his face, inhaling the aromas. They crept inside his nostrils and heated his airways, blurring his sight, destabilising it and narrowing. The currents bent, twisted and wrapped around him. He closed his eyes, blew on the ladle, prepared to sip but

flinched and spilled the hot concoction on his crossed legs.

Whoops!

Near to the fireplace, a raven landed, smashing his sudden presence on the idyllic harmony, sending the tongues of flame  
adance.

Eat me, Tulubaika!

You, little bastard!

I've almost pooped myself.

Do you know what's privacy, aye?

It was Kutkh — that one white feather revealed him. The raven posed in front of him, watching and waiting, his plumage shone and shimmered ebony and blue lobelia, his eyes contained the night  
his beak — a rolled piece of paper  
He dropped it, cawed and, swirling a golden hurricane, surged upwards

& vanished.

Kondráty covered the concoction with his hands, and when the dust and leaves had settled, he stood up, picked up the piece of paper and unrolled it  
a banknote, a tenner  
money.

Oh, well. What am I supposed to do with it?  
Hey! What am I supposed to do with it?

No answer followed. Numb air. Silence.

He shook his head, pocketed the tenner and returned to brewing. Soon, the concoction blackened, thickened, acquired the syrupy consistency. Kondráty split it evenly into minijars with airtight seal locks, wrapped them in blankets, buried in his underbirch stash nearby, a small pit he had dug one day. He extinguished the fireplace, packed up, glanced over the grove, wished a fair while to the wise birch and headed to Ensk.

Ensk was oversized for a town, oversized enough to become a city, oversized enough for people to habitually ignore each other except Kondráty.

Among the commoners, he was a freak, among the freaks, he was a tsar  
— Tsar Kondráty, first of his name

the Seeing  
the Hearing  
the Feeling  
the Wandering  
the overlord of the unseen dimensions.

As he strolled through Ensk's streets, people's attention contorted, faces changed, wrinkles smoothed, jaws dropped, eyes widened, hearts stopped  
(for a moment)  
souls trembled like leaves in the wind.

Whether moving or standing, they turned their heads at uncanny angles, following Kondráty passing them. He couldn't be missed or mistaken for someone else, his every step produced copious sounds: equipment rattled in his rucksack, the runic rosary and beads jingled, boots scuffed the pavement. Sometimes, under curious looks, he could sharply turn his head and stare back at the beholders, smirk cartoonishly, raising the outer sides of his brows, or wave his hand, wiggling fingers, appearing skittish and creepy. Yet, ordinarily, he ignored such looks, not on purpose — he wasn't aware of them, for muddled was his brain, an amalgamation of thoughts aswarm.

Some called Kondráty a charlatan, a madman, a poseur, a shmagus — few sensed the aura he emanated. For those, he was a teacher spiritual, a sage, a clairvoyant, the prophet wisest. On those occasions, humble and coy he was, excused himself, and said that he was just a Kondráty and no one else. He didn't channel someone's will or maxims. He was merely a

Kondráty, one of many random Kondrátys that could've existed.  
In fact, everyone could've been a Kondráty if they wanted willingly.  
Equally, a Kondráty could've been anyone.  
Hence to transcend they must accept the simple fact —  
he is like them  
a creature trembling  
a person saying all in his name, not covering himself up in the name of  
supreme powers.

There was only “a” Kondráty and “the” Tulubaika  
a place that is what isn't and isn't what is  
a place you go you know not whither to fetch you know not what  
& the mind of his was just a tiny rift in it  
an eye that could see no other human could.

Sometimes, in sight of that eye there was another eye  
& another  
& another  
& another  
the eyes were, in fact  
infinite.

They had different iris colour, different shape, different pupil size,  
floating always, each of them in their eigen direction: either left or right,  
either slow or fast. All you could see through the very first eye is the  
second eye, displaced, but sometimes magically, sometimes obeying  
efforts of the beholder  
all eyes aligned

& through one eye the one could see  
another eye  
    & another  
    & another & another  
    & another & another & another  
    & another & another & another & another  
    & another & another & another & another & another  
    & so to infinity  
until what had to be seen was seen  
but it must've been looked at carefully, otherwise. . .  
Well, kirdyk, poor creature  
finita la commedia!

This would've sounded more convincing if a Kondráty said it to you directly, for no written words could possibly convey his mellow expression, the depth of his blue eyes and movements of his face when he was looking inside you and giving birth to those infant words above. If not his heroic humbleness and reclusive detachment, he could've been rich, he could've built a cult around himself, but his prominence remained niche among those few people.  
Things sacred shall be free, for otherwise  
what's sacred about them?

The grief for the umbrella did not fade but having the tenner soothed it.  
If ever was he friends to money, it dumped him for his passivity.  
What do people buy? And how?  
Dither it made him, uneasy.

Whenever lucres surfaced in his life, his first thought was of new equipment: jars, lighters, chalk, et cetera. The next thought was of substances mind-altering, or better so mind-mending psychoactive catalysts for his psychomagical voyage.

But the tenner was not enough.

Then food, mayhap?

That wouldn't hurt.

What do ravens eat?

He stopped by a bakery and stared through the shop window onto the assortment of cakes and muffins, sandwiches layered neatly on a large serving board, lumps, and slices of sourdough and pillars of baguettes resting in wicker baskets among the wooden interior.

The doorbell rang, the rosary jingled  
a Kondráty walked through the door.

A wryly smiling cashier met him.

He pointed onto a seeded sourdough, prepared the tenner but a peculiar culinary idea betided in his mind, and he hurried out of the bakery to another shop.

Deep in the woods, there was a pond, a peaceful water basin where willows overhanging the reeds and constellations of *Nymphaea alba* rising from the primeval slime bloomed.

At night, there developed a massacre bloody

an infringement on nature  
a hunt for frogs.

A Kondráty, equipped with a hand net, naked  
hid in the reeds, waited  
for hours, he bet on frogs to join crickets in their nightly song.  
Meanwhile, dazed, he gazed at the nymphaea. Towards the moon they  
unfolded their petals and reminded a Kondráty of his umbrella  
the same but with a handle reversed.

Mayhap, it also camouflaged somewhere in a pond pretending to be a  
nymphaea and at night opened its oculus upwards to the sky, speaking  
to it or screaming in desperate and painful shrills pleading a Kondráty to  
hear and be its saviour.

Hypnotised, mesmerised, sleepy  
with no ticks of time tracked, he submerged into  
dreams and almost missed when the croaking commenced.

Frogs gathered on nymphaea leaves  
in reeds  
on stones  
on shore.

He saw them, his victims, brown and green, spotted dark. He sneaked  
up and swung with the net, transferred the frogs to his sack  
and once more

He sneaked up and swung with the net, splashing water, drowning the  
nymphaea's leaves.

He sneaked up and swung with the net, transferred the frogs to his sack.  
Thus passed a few hours, the pond became quieter  
by a few dozen croakers.

At dawn, in his grove, a yawning Kondráty embarked on culinary adventures. On his improvised stove, stood boiling two pots: in the first one, in spring water, the poisonous substances were being expelled from the *Nymphaea alba*

— this was for a Kondráty

in the second one, the frogs were being fried deep, salted, peppered, submerged into three hundred millilitres of extra virgin and extra premium olive oil that he bought instead of bread

— this was for Kutkh.

Once a frog acquired required crispiness, a Kondráty transferred it to the wooden bowl beside him and put another one into the oil using chopsticks, those wrapped in paper that Asian restaurants add to your order all the time. Surely, forks and other cutlery were in a Kondráty's possession, but only chopsticks could help to transfer frogs from the pot to the bowl keeping their little bodies intact to avoid splashing boiling oil.

Soon, frog by frog, the exotic breakfast came to life

A Kondráty sat under a birch, surrounded by a mushroom mob:

Leccinum scabrum, Amanita muscaria, of different size. He chewed the  
nymphaea and thought  
of Tulubaika  
of winter soon approaching  
    & whether deigned to visit him the raven.  
At times, he pondered the infinite eternal  
    a wee bit.

Under a towel, the frogs fried deep were cooling down. A Kondráty  
frowned and raised his head up to the sun to tell the time  
  
— Kutkh was late.

He closed his eyes and filled his lungs with morrow chills

Kra-a-a-a-a-a!  
the raven's caw reverberated across the grove  
and near a Kondráty, Kutkh emerged.

Here he is, the master of arrivals sudden  
even if you're expecting him.

How have you been, my droog?

Kutkh stared at him, tilting his head, waiting.

Kra!

Good, good. Look—

A Kondráty took one crispy frog from the bowl.

This is for you.

I made it.

He hurled it to Kutkh.

In flight, the raven caught the frog, clutching it in his beak, and a second later devoured the treat.

Kra-a-a-a-a-a!

Is that “thank you”, or “more”?

Kra-a-a!

Ah, both.

A Kondráty gave him another frog  
another & another.

Thus, frog by frog, consumed he everything, as if inside his stomach was a black hole or frogs were made from air.

A ravenous bird was raven Kutkh

Kraa!

The raven bowed, wingswung, and flew away.

Again, alone a Kondráty was

— he and the boiled nymphaea.

Soon, the kinship of the vagrant and the raven reached a new,

unprecedented level. The morrow followed and again there was a  
banknote in the raven's beak  
this time — fifty.

A few times a week a Kondráty went to the town to buy some  
equipment: spirits for tinctures, empty bottles and jars, and more olive  
oil.

Nights he spent at the lake, naked  
bringing frogs and nymphaea to the edge of extinction.

Cold were those nights, but he neglected the bridge and his human  
friends. Instead, those minor hours of his sleep moved to the birchgrove  
where in a tent made of the things abandoned, curled up in bliss, he  
dreamed, warmed by the smouldering fire.

At dawns, he cooked, then sat and waited  
trepidated  
each time afresh.

The raven came and brought new boons. They sat and ate keeping a  
stern decorum, at times chatting and bantering in the corvus lingua  
about the things mundane  
about the weather  
about the transience of time  
& if the world was sane  
& whether sane was  
a Kondráty.

Once matured the concoction, matured the time for the ritual. A  
Kondráty knew it couldn't be the same without the umbrella, but

couldn't be it even better with the raven?

He took the jars out of the dugout and opened one of them

— an odour of the slurry swept in the air

— a Kondráty invited it into himself

— the pungent smell hit his receptors

— he twitched

cramped his cheeks

& every muscle in his face.

Breathing heavily, fainting almost, his consciousness fading, staggered he, crushed a few fly agarics and leaned against a birch tree, his bloodpumping system overdoing its job.

Wow!

The perfectest perfect

of perfectly perfect perfects

— now eat me

Tulubaika!

Covering his nose, a Kondráty closed the jar and hid it in his pocket from the pouch, he took out a collection of dried herbs and dumped it into the embers. The embers puffed, hissed farted.

A smoke ran from them, enchanting aromas usurped the grove.

A Kondráty took the runepebbles and emplaced them round the fireplace. Now everything was ready and prepared, all that was left was for Kutkh to arrive. A Kondráty assumed a waiting pose and sat not doing much

hooked to infinity  
locked in.

Kutkh appeared just in time, landed next to a Kondráty, cutting through the brume of smouldering herbs.

Kra-a-a kra'a-kra'a!  
the produced sound was like a hit against a sheet of iron.

Kra-a kra-a!  
cawed a Kondráty and nodded.

Kra-a r-rakka kra!

Kra-Kra r-rakka!

A Kondráty patted the earth, invited Kutkh to join him.

Kr-r-a'a!

Kra!

Kra-kra-kra!

Kra!

Through the smoke, the raven walked and, approaching a Kondráty, raised at him the dark coals of his eyes.

Kra'a  
(a Kondráty cawed and placed the concoction jar beside the bird)

Kra-aa-a!

At the jar the raven looked, at a Kondráty, shook his head, and immersed his beak into the dark slurry. He ruffled his feathers, flapped his wings and cawed again and again.

It was a caw of wonder

a bustling cry

the cry of thunder

on a stormy day.

A Kondráty, face asmile, patted the raven, then took the jar and quaffed its content.

A vortex formed from the smoke, the birches' crowns rustled, a Kondráty's eyes turned white, backward he threw his head and then—utter emptiness. . .

void of unconsciousness. . .

A Kondráty woke up, yawned, stretched, scratched his nose, and felt the absence of the ground. Startled, he unsealed his slimy eyes and realised — with no control, he was aflight much so.

The ground was there, but far away beneath. He couldn't focus to fathom the event. Everything moved too fast as if in front of him there was a colossal spinning globe.

Someone sped up the Earth!

Boreas, bastard!

Once vision bettered, downwards he saw Ensk with the river across it —  
all in one big miniature enclosed in golden endlessness.

Now, he was flying above the river. It flickered, glared, moving as fast as  
the town, the birchwood, the globe, yet in the opposite direction.

The river flowed in reverse

(so it seemed)

it reflected the cloud running above.

The illusion became more optical

the optics became more illusionary.

A Kondráty saw his own shadow — a large silhouette travelling on the  
water surface together with him. He waved to it.

The silhouette waved back.

A Kondráty smiled. But then he saw it — the silhouette was surrounded  
by birds.

ravens

countless in their quantity

orderless in their position.

Craning his neck, he lifted his head to see them. Clawing at his clothes,  
they carried him, some flew next to him, somersaulting, all cawed.

Oye, there was sound!

Loud sound

deafening sound!

The raven holler reverberated, chaotic and hellish, it mixed with the

swishing wind. A Kondráty screamed, cawed, wheezing and gasping for air.

The dark eyes gleamed and stared at him.

(he flinched)

The ravens grasped more firmly and pulled him farther up.

(he looked down)

— the ground was bidding farewell.

Goodbye, Kondráty

bon voyage! Poka!

On the ground, his diminishing shadow had enormous wings. Again, he turned his head as much as he could. Above, was gliding Kutkh. His dimensions, they were amplified, his body was as big as Kondráty's, his wingspan embraced half of the sky.

A Kondráty blinked and rubbed his eyes.

Kutkh's size remained the same.

Kra-a-a!

the raven cawed, flapped his wings

and overtook a Kondráty.

They traversed the town, flew above the golden birchsea. Kutkh was leading the flock, glided beneath them, just above the trees, almost touching their crowns, and the birchsea rippled.

Transcendental was the moment

grandiose

lasting for eternity  
every possibility happened —  
meaninglessness became meaningful  
meaningfulness became revelatory  
lives became inane  
emptiness became matter  
matter became incorporeal  
histories and geographies appeared and vanished  
most importantly  
Tulubaika.

Tulubaika was surfacing amidst the golden forest. Yet, at that moment,  
a Kondráty's head was empty. Someone removed his brain and left only  
what was supposed to be there  
the primordial void.

A thought was born there, a daring spark, an arrogant flash, an aspiring  
supernova.

A Kondráty extended his arm towards Kutkh, wiggled, and gutsily  
jerked ahead, unkindly the unkindness of ravens loosened their grip  
& he fell down, squeezing his eyes in fear  
& in the next moment appeared on Kutkh's back.

Kra-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a!!!

The sky darkened  
roared the thunder  
blazed the lightning

(or was it lightnings?)

KRA-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A  
-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-  
A!

It rumbled, vibrating and ravenberating  
through each bone of a Kondráty's body.

His teeth rattled, drumming at two hundred and thirty-three beats a minute, a dark vignette started circling over his sight. His eyelids tight a clenched, Kondráty dipped his fingers into the silky plumage and clawed, clutched spasmodically.

[illegible]

Kutkh spiralled and turned over. His corpus started changing,  
eyes bloomed on it  
copious oculars  
a trypophobic nightmare

oOoO  
Oo0Oo0oO  
o0Oo00o0o  
Oo0Oo0Oo0OoO

o0Oo0Oo0Oo0Oo  
 Oo0Oo0Oo0Oo0Oo  
 o0Oo0Oo0Oo0Oo0  
 Oo0Oo0 o0 o0Oo0  
 o0Oo0 o o0Oo0Oo  
 0Oo0Oo0 o0 o0O0  
 o0Oo0Oo0Oo0Oo0  
 Oo0Oo0Oo0Oo0Oo  
 o0Oo0Oo0Oo0Oo  
 Oo0Oo0Oo0OoO  
 o0Oo0Oo0Oo  
 Oo0Oo0oO  
 oOoO

All the eyes stared into a Kondráty's soul.

He was paralysed.

His fingers forgot how to grip.

He collapsed into the golden sea.

The ravens hovered over him, forming a circle with multiocular Kutkh  
 at the centre, all of his copious eyes blinking  
 all at once.

First, came the sensation of pain, the nagging physical discomfort  
 created by the total sum of bruises, scrapes, and sprains acquired from  
 hitting the birch branches he had knocked down in flight, remnants of  
 which were now lying around the bush whereon he landed, then, he  
 opened his eyes

— leaves fell down like snow or ashes  
moving in spirals, zigzags, and loops  
trunks of the birches painted a tunnel  
— a black striped perspective onto a patch of clear blue sky  
amidst their golden crowns.

His nostrils steamed, his mouth, too. Creeps crawled up his corpus.  
But none of it mattered.  
Tulubaika welcomed him  
with serenity.

In a state of oblivion, a Kondráty rested until the sun rolled into the blue patch above, a hole in the golden crowns, closing a door wherefrom he had fallen. The autumn sun is not cold yet bright. He closed his eyes, and the red pictures appeared in front of him. He squinted and relaxed, controlling the gradient, and the red pictures assumed new unknown forms  
images of Tulubaika.

Disappearing and appearing again, yet still preserving the silhouette of the birch tunnel visible, but then the pictures started flashing. A Kondráty opened his eyes again and saw  
Kutkh in his normal eyeless form  
silent and ghastly grim, the raven was graciously gliding down  
in his talons, he carried something black.

Kr-r-a...

a Kondráty wheezed.

Yet no answer gave the raven.

A few more circles after, he dropped the item, swooped down and disappeared between the birches. Kondráty tried to sit, then stand, struggling and feeling that total ache-sum, but approached the item.

It was the umbrella

folded

his umbrella.

He picked it up, pushed the button and the umbrella opened.

Inside, as if looking at him from the centre of the umbrella's hat, wherefrom the handle was growing

sat Tulubaika in its rural glory.

The view was the same as the last time he saw it except it now felt different.

It was truly alive

the whole image breathed

moved mesmerisingly

drifted dizzily

bereft of its past stasis, it seemed like a portal

a door which was revealed to him

& which he was supposed to enter

by himself.

Kondráty stopped blinking and stiffened. The raven brought Tulubaika back to his knees, and now its image was more sublime than ever,

He stared at it, inside it, beyond it, benumbed, his eyes agape.

A-A-A-A-A-A-A

A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-  
A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A!!!

Tulubaika squealed

And snowflakes slowly drifted down.

## Notes

1. “Bojemoi” is a direct rendition of Russian “Oh my God”, because why not.
2. A direct rendition of “friend” in Russian, also used like that in “A Clockwork Orange”.
3. Informal way to say “good bye” in Russian, similar to just “bye” or “see you”.
4. See Episode 19.
5. The multiocular O (O) represents one of the most interesting Cyrillic characters, appearing in only one place in all of medieval Slavonic manuscripts — the phrase “many-eyed seraphim” in a 1429 copy of the Psalter.
6. The term “volkhv” (ВОЛХВ) designates a pre-Christian Slavic priest-magician. It’s unclear whether volkhvs represented an organised pagan priesthood or were merely village practitioners of folk magic who also resisted Christianisation and whom Christian

chroniclers conveniently demonised. An English term for it could be “magus”, “sorcerer”, or “pagan priest”, or all three at once.

---

*Read next part*

Episode 10: about meeting strangers in abysmal weather conditions

<https://nova-nevedoma.com/meeting-strangers-in-abysmal-weather/>

nova·nevédoma

*A literary locus and samizdat press  
for original fictions and translations.*

[nova-nevedoma.com](http://nova-nevedoma.com)



scan to subscribe

*Find us on Substack*



[blog.nova-nevedoma.com](https://blog.nova-nevedoma.com)