



LIGHTS

ALL

NIGHT

LONG

a novel

LYDIA FITZPATRICK

LIGHTS
ALL
NIGHT
LONG

LYDIA FITZPATRICK

Penguin Press • New York • 2019

PENGUIN PRESS

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC penguinrandomhouse.com

Copyright © 2019 by Lydia Fitzpatrick

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Fitzpatrick, Lydia, 1982- author.

Title: Lights all night long : a novel / Lydia Fitzpatrick.

Description: New York : Penguin Press, 2019.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018034986 (print) | LCCN 2018038616 (ebook) | ISBN

9780525558743 (ebook) | ISBN 9780525558736 (hardcover) |

ISBN 9781984877901 (international edition)

Classification: LCC PS3606.I8874 (ebook) | LCC PS3606.I8874 L54 2019 (print) | DDC
813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018034986>

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover design: Ben Denzer

Main cover image: RobShaw@BackFromLeave / Getty Images

Version_1

For my family

Contents

CHAPTER ONE	7
CHAPTER TWO.....	13
CHAPTER THREE	19
CHAPTER FOUR	25
CHAPTER FIVE.....	32
CHAPTER SIX.....	41
CHAPTER SEVEN	49
CHAPTER EIGHT	65
CHAPTER NINE	71
CHAPTER TEN.....	82
CHAPTER ELEVEN.....	93
CHAPTER TWELVE	101
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	114
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	126
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	134
CHAPTER SIXTEEN.....	148
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN.....	154
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN.....	160
CHAPTER NINETEEN.....	168
CHAPTER TWENTY.....	177
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE	189
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO	197
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE	209
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR.....	216
CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE.....	222
CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX.....	227
CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN	231
CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT.....	237
CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE.....	245

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	247
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	249

We look at the world once, in childhood. The rest is memory.

—*Louise Glück, "Nostos"*

CHAPTER ONE

The air in the Baton Rouge airport tasted like toothpaste. Chemical-tinged and cold enough to give Ilya goosebumps, to make him wonder where he had left his winter coat, whether it was somewhere in the Leshukonskoye airport or wadded in the backseat of Maria Mikhailovna's car or still at home on the hook that had given it a permanent hump behind the collar. Up ahead, through a set of glass doors, his host family—a man, a woman, and two girls—were holding a poster that said ILYA ALEXANDROVICH MOROZOV in cramped letters. His name was surrounded by hollow red hearts. The poster was too small to be held by four people, but they each gripped a corner determinedly. Ilya walked past them. He felt their eyes move over him, and then on to someone else, and all the while he kept his face vacant and slack.

Behind them was a row of baggage carousels, but only one was moving. Ilya stood by it and waited for his army duffel to emerge. The bag had been Vladimir's. It was the one Ilya and his mother had brought to the clinic, stuffed with gauze and ointment and a plastic bedpan. Now everything Ilya owned was inside—his clothes, a book of English idioms, his *Learn English: The Adventures of Michael & Stephanie* tapes, and his tape player. The duffel was half empty. He'd told Maria Mikhailovna that everything inside was worthless, but still she'd written his name on a baggage tag in the same careful letters that she used to correct his translations. Then she'd swaddled it in plastic wrap, murmuring about what thieves the baggage handlers were, about how Leshukonskoye was bad, but Moscow was worse, and who knew about America. When the bag finally circled, the plastic wrap was in tatters, clinging to the old hammer-and-sickle pins that Vladimir had stuck in the canvas. Ilya almost smiled, wondering what, if anything, they'd bothered to steal. More likely they'd looked inside and known instantly that he was too poor to steal from.

Ilya headed for the bathroom. He had to walk by the host family again, and he allowed himself a longer look this time. Maria Mikhailovna had told him that they had three daughters, and all winter he had imagined them: three girls, each more beautiful than the last, like in a fable. But there were only two girls, knobby and prepubescent, with long, lank hair and rabbit eyes. The man was tall, the woman short, and they both had bodies like

matryoshka dolls, like all of their weight had sunk into their hips and asses. They weren't fit. They weren't tan. They could have been Russian.

Outside the bathroom, Ilya fished in his pocket for a coin before realizing that peeing was free here and that he didn't have any American coins anyway. The stalls smelled like lemons. Each tile was perfectly bright and white. He took a long piss. The family would either wait or they wouldn't, and he didn't feel especially tied to their decision. He pumped the soap dispenser a dozen times, just to see if there was any limit to how much soap one could take. There was not. The dispenser kept dutifully squirting pink gel until his palm was full. He washed his hands, smearing soap all the way up to his elbows, and he had to rinse for a long time to get rid of the suds.

As he pulled a wad of paper towels from the dispenser, a sonar noise filled the bathroom. A sound both underwater and electronic. Ilya pinched his nose and blew hard out of his ears, thinking that the noise was in his head, that his internal pressure might still be out of whack from the plane, but the noise gathered strength and resolved into a stuttering human voice. Ilya's English was good, but these words were hesitant and mangled. It took him a minute to realize that the voice was speaking Russian, not English, was hacking away at the same series of syllables, and that those syllables were his name. There was a pause, a static silence, then the voice asked him to come to the information desk by the Budget Rent-a-Car.

The family huddled under the orange fluorescence of the Budget sign. This time Ilya lifted a hand in greeting. As they recognized him, confusion tangled the adults' faces. The man gave Ilya an embarrassed smile and held out his hand, and Ilya could feel him pocketing his hesitation.

"Zdravstvuyte," the girls said, in unison, their tongues tripping over the silent "v."

The older girl stared at the poster as if it had betrayed her. "Did we spell your name wrong?" she said.

"I'm Cam Mason," the man said, "but you can call me Papa Cam."

"And I'm Mama Jamie," the woman said. Her hair was very yellow and cut in a banged bob, a style that Ilya had only ever seen on prostitutes and small children. They introduced the girls—Marilee and Molly—and as they waited for him to say something, their faces were so wide open, so vulnerable with hope. He knew the expression because he had imagined

them having it, when he was vulnerable with hope too. But now Vladimir was in prison, and Ilya hadn't imagined the guilt these strange, smiling faces would call up in him. His throat narrowed, and because English felt like too

much of a betrayal he said, in Russian, "I'm Ilya." ——

The airport doors parted with a sucking sound, and the heat rushed through them. It was wet, heavy, something to be reckoned with. Ilya's lungs could barely expand, and he imagined them sticking, their pumping slowing to a twitch and then stopping. He was momentarily terrified, but the Masons were unfazed. The girls each took one of his hands and led him across a parking lot. Papa Cam and Mama Jamie dropped back, whispering, Ilya guessed, about his lack of English.

Halfway across the lot, Papa Cam hit a button on his key ring, and a car honked in enthusiastic response. It looked like something an oligarch would own—black, with aggressive tires and tinted windows and enough rows that they could each occupy one. It was spotless except for a bumper sticker that read, LOVE, GROW, SERVE, GO!, the senselessness of which reminded Ilya of the Young Pioneers slogans that his mother and her friends would recite when they were drunk and feeling cynical and nostalgic. They all climbed inside and again the girls sandwiched Ilya. Papa Cam put on a pair of sunglasses that wrapped around his head and gave it the look of an egg that's been cracked by a spoon. He adjusted the rearview mirror until it was centered on Ilya's face.

"We're two hours from Baton Rouge, three hours from New Orleans, and a whole lot happier for it," he said.

As they sailed down the highway, the girls told Ilya their favorite colors, favorite foods, and favorite sports. Molly told him that she was seven and three-quarters, and Marilee told him that she was eleven, and he pretended not to understand a word. When they'd exhausted the topic of themselves, they took turns asking him what he ate for various meals in Russia and what sounds animals made in Russian and whether *American Idol* played in Russia. He nodded vaguely.

"Mama," Molly said, tugging on Mama Jamie's seat belt from behind, "you said he'd speak English."

"I know I did, sugar pie," she said. She twisted in her seat and reached out and touched Ilya's knee. "Did you take English in school?"

Ilya shrugged.

"He doesn't know a word," Marilee said.

“Shhhh,” Molly said.

“Why?” Marilee said. “It’s not like he can understand us.”

He wanted to slap the girl, and he could feel the urge showing on his face, so he brought his hands up and hid his eyes in the cave of his palms.

“He might be tired,” Mama Jamie said, “or shy.” And when Ilya let his hands fall, she was giving him this huge and forceful smile, as though her smile alone might be powerful enough to drag him from his shell.

“He looks old. Like twenty. Or there could be something wrong with him.” Marilee leaned forward and dropped her voice to a whisper. “Like from Chernobyl?”

It took Ilya a moment to understand her pronunciation of “Chernobyl,” to feel its sting.

“Hey now.” Papa Cam braked and flashed his eyes in the rearview. “Let’s give him some peace and quiet, girls. He’s traveled a ways to be with us.”

“Life is hard there,” Mama Jamie said.

“The life expectancy is only sixty-one,” Marilee said.

Molly tapped his thigh with her pointer finger. She had become his favorite by default. “What about a rooster?” she said softly. “Do roosters in Russia go cock-a-doodle-do?”

Her eyes were dancing over his face, the sort of eyes that hid nothing. For a second, she reminded him of Vladimir, and he wanted to answer her, to give in to her the way he’d always given in to Vladimir, but the second passed, and Papa Cam turned the radio on to a news station, and the low voices lulled the girls into silence.

On either side of the road was swamp. Kilometer after kilometer of swamp, and Ilya had learned the word, though he’d never known the thing itself. It was beautiful. Shimmering and still, you thought, until you looked closer and saw long-legged birds sunning with their wings spread and fish leaving ringlets on the surface. Buzzards picked at carcasses on the roadside and their feathers ruffled as the car sped by them. The sun was hidden behind a low shield of clouds, but still everything was bleached by it.

Way out across the water, in a tangle of swamp trees, Ilya caught the flash of metal. He narrowed his eyes and tried to follow it, and then the pipeline pierced the thicket, shot across open water, and curved along the road. Before long it led to a refinery and its crown of smoke. There were the stacks and the cooling towers and the lengths of chainlink fence. It was just like the one in Berlozhniki, and Ilya imagined the pipeline snaking through

land and water, connecting this place and the place he'd come from. Oil pumping through it like blood. He knew, though, that it didn't work that way.

"That's my office," Papa Cam said. He worked in human resources at the refinery. Maria Mikhailovna had told Ilya that, and that the Masons were getting paid to host him. "If they don't feed you, if they're treating you poorly, just call me," she'd said, in a burst of worry. "You can use a code word if you need to. How about 'Raskolnikov'? Just mention him like he's someone you know." At the time they'd been a third of the way through *Crime and Punishment*—an English version, poorly translated—and now it occurred to Ilya that they'd never finished it. Maria Mikhailovna had spared him the punishment part.

Papa Cam eased the car off the highway and onto a smaller one with traffic lights. There were shops now, fringing the swamp. Groceries and video stores and pizza places and a store with a sign saying, EVERYTHING'S A DOLLAR!, and through the windows Ilya could see that the shelves were completely full. There were gas stations, their crimson signs slashed by the white *E* of EnerCo. Each series of shops was larger than the town square in Berlozhniki, and they seemed to go on forever.

Ilya swallowed. He was exhausted. It had been two days since he'd left Berlozhniki. Thirty-six hours since he'd flown out of Leshukonskoye, but his stomach was still sour with the liquor he'd drunk there. Samogon, the man hawking it had told him, but it had tasted more like rubbing alcohol. He wanted to close his eyes, but when he slept he dreamt of Vladimir. For months—since the night of the Winter Festival—he'd been dreaming of Vladimir. On the flight to Moscow, he'd awoken to a stewardess's hand on his arm, her face bent over his.

"You were screaming," she'd said, her mouth tight, and then she'd moved off down the aisle.

Now Mama Jamie was pointing at something. "That's our church," she said. Up ahead, an ugly building rose out of a field. It was shaped like a pyramid, with two walls of concrete and two of glass. As they got closer, Ilya saw letters carved over the door. STAR PILGRIM CHURCH, they said, and otherwise he never would have known that it was a church. There was no cupola, no cross—Orthodox or not. Papa Cam slowed as they passed it and through the glass Ilya could make out rows of seats, a shadowed aisle that must lead to a pulpit.

“We go every Sunday,” Mama Jamie said. “I think that’s the same—in Russia, I mean?”

Ilya stifled a snort. He imagined Babushka hearing her say that, as though Americans had been the first to worship on Sundays.

“Is he Christian?” Marilee said loudly, like she was suddenly terrified to be sitting thigh-to-thigh with a heathen.

“I’m not sure, honey,” Mama Jamie said. “But whatever he believes is OK. Remember? We talked about that.” Then she aimed another invasive smile at Ilya. “We also have family dinner every night—all five of us. Six now, with you.”

Ilya knew this meant that there was another daughter, who would, no doubt, be waiting at home with questions about communism and *American Idol*, but he let himself imagine that Vladimir would be the sixth at the table, that somehow Vladimir had been able to come too, that he was with them now, in the back row of the car, with his duffel under his head and his boots propped against the window.

“Tell them to stop. We need some refreshments. I’m starving,” he’d say, pointing at one of the convenience stores whose windows were plastered with advertisements for lottery tickets and sausage sandwiches. “I bet these places put the Minutka to shame. I bet they have Doritos we’ve never even heard of. Did you see that sign? ALL YOU CAN EAT! They’ve got no idea how much this Russian can eat.”

Molly had fallen asleep with her mouth agape and her temple bouncing against Ilya’s shoulder, and Vladimir said, “The girls are a bit of a disappointment, no? One’s a bitch. And they’re both a little young. But just be patient, Ilyusha. Think of the long con. Trust me—the age gap will be a good thing down the road.”

Ilya turned around, suddenly sure that he would see his brother’s face, but the back row was empty. The leather was smooth and shining in the sun, and Ilya bit his lip to stop the burn in his eyes. The seams in the road ticked by, taking him farther and farther from Vladimir, and he could feel it in his gut, this growing absence, and, worse, he was sure that Vladimir, wherever he was now, could feel it too.

In the front seat, Mama Jamie was still talking about the family rules. She was saying something about praying every night. She put her hands together and bowed her head in supplication. “Pray,” she said, dragging the word out so that each letter was a syllable.

Behind him, Vladimir belched. “We’ll pray for your daughters to get hot,” he said, and Ilya looked Mama Jamie in the eye and made his face as blank as a field of snow.

CHAPTER TWO

At the train station in Berlozhniki, a billboard stretched across the tracks. **A**BERLOZHNIKI MINES RUSSIA’S FUTURE! it said, though the mine had closed decades earlier and in the winter, when the trains stopped running, there was no one to see the banner. On the town square, birds roosted on a concrete pedestal where a statue of Stalin had once stood, facing the labor camp, his overcoat unbuttoned as though he were expecting milder weather.

Two kilometers from town was a crescent-shaped complex of six huge kommunalkas, which had been built for the coal miners and their families. When the mine collapsed, the families stayed, without their miners. This was before perestroika, when living in a place was the closest you could come to owning it, and Ilya’s family had lived there for half a century without ever believing it their own.

On the west side, the kommunalkas overlooked the remains of the mine, and, on the east, the remains of the camp, where the cells and the guard towers crumbled slowly, where crosses had been staked in the ground. In winter, snow fell, and people measured its depth by how much of the cross it swallowed. If it only reached the footrest, the winter would be mild. If it reached the higher crossbeam, the winter would be long. To the north, across the river, the refinery jutted into the sky, smoke heaving from its towers. Ilya’s mother worked in the cafeteria at the refinery, and she moaned sometimes about the poison it was spewing and the cancers that were sure to result, but Ilya was mesmerized by it. Electricity in the kommunalkas could not be counted on, but the refinery’s lights shone all night long. Like a city, like places Ilya had seen on TV. Moscow or Times Square or a space station. A patch of some other world stitched into Berlozhniki’s horizon by mistake.

Ilya’s family lived in Building 2, which was considered the best by practical people because it was closest to the road into town and the worst by spiritual people because in the ’70s two brothers had jumped off the roof. Their apartment was one of a dozen on the eighth floor. All the floors were identical except for the color of paint used in the long, low hallways, so they

came to be known by colors instead of numbers. Ilya's floor was zhelty, a bright yellow that had dirtied over time to mustard. At the head of each hallway was a shared kitchen—though most of the residents had acquired tiny electric stoves—and at the end of each hallway was a shared bathroom. Before he died, Ilya's father would wake in the middle of the night and trudge down the hall just to take a shit in peace. Vladimir had reported this fact to Ilya. All Ilya remembered of his father was a pair of dark, expressive eyebrows, and the thrill he'd get when his father flipped him over and pretended that a piece of candy had fallen out of his hair.

Their apartment was tiny: a bedroom that Ilya's mother and grandmother shared, and a living room where Vladimir and Ilya slept head-to-toe on a pull-out couch. The walls were crisscrossed with water pipes and studded with radiators. Above the couch hung a painting of a mother and child mushroom hunting that had been prized for its innocuousness long enough to become loved for its familiarity. There were striped curtains and a plaid tablecloth and mismatched floral cushions on each of the kitchen chairs. The woodstove was used for storage, and the red corner was papered with worker propaganda. When the shift occurred, Babushka had tacked a laminated icon right on top of Gorbachev's portrait. She'd only used one pin, so it could be quickly removed if things shifted again, but it had been there for Ilya's whole life: Jesus on the cross, the plastic clouded with grease, Gorbachev's birthmark half visible over the thorny crown.

Ilya was the younger son, without much to distinguish him from his brother but a chipped front tooth and a lopsided sag to his shoulders. The tooth was a mystery, but the shoulder sagged because his collarbone had broken during birth and never healed properly. He had been born in '93, when Yeltsin was impeached, and tanks were shelling the White House. His mother said that the doctor had been listening to Echo of Moscow, to Rutskoy as he pleaded with the air force to bomb the Kremlin, and that in the excitement of it all he'd gripped Ilya's shoulders a bit too hard with the forceps. She said that she could still hear the snap. "Like a nut cracking," she'd say, with the same wince every time, because Ilya's pain was intertwined with her own. But the kids in the kommunalkas had a different story: "Your mama's a bone breaker.

Tight enough to crush a man," they whispered, until the day Vladimir overheard and threatened to crack each of their collarbones one by one.

When Ilya was little, he was happy to be like Vladimir. Happy to have the same buzz cut, to wear Vladimir's old snowsuits, which were too small

in the waist and too long in the leg. Happy to time Vladimir skating up and down the Pechora on a knockoff Timex and to diligently log Vladimir's times in a notebook, though they never really improved. When he was little, Ilya treated school like Vladimir treated school: as time spent dreaming up things to do when not in school. He learned to read from Vladimir's comic books and hockey magazines, his chin hooked over Vladimir's shoulder. Ilya was an observer and a mimic, Vladimir a natural performer who never seemed to mind the force of Ilya's attention, though he did, from time to time, take advantage of it. Afternoons, when they were walking home from school, he'd ask Ilya to steal Fantas from the Minutka, and Ilya would stuff them under his sweater without a second thought. Once, ancient Anatoly, who worked the register, caught him and made him spend the day unloading beer crates as punishment. Ilya stole two beers to make up for the lost Fantas, and Vladimir accepted these as though they were his due.

When Vladimir and his best friend, Sergey, clung to the back of the #33 bus, the one that took the neftyaniki out to the refinery, Ilya clung to the back too. They would jump off just before the gates in snow that came up to Ilya's knees. Everything—the snow, their skin—was blue-tinged by the refinery's light. Vladimir and Sergey dragged sticks along the chainlink fence, which seemed so high that it even segmented the sky, and when they were far enough from the road, they took turns flicking matches through the fence and watching them burn little holes in the snow. They circled the refinery slowly, like sharks might, looking for a break in the fence, and inevitably Vladimir and Sergey began trading stories of Fyodor Fetisov, the oligarch who owned it all.

“Once,” Vladimir said, “he took a bath in beluga.” “With two prostitutes,” Sergey said.

“That each cost two million rubles a night,” Ilya added, because this detail had stuck with him. Two million rubles was more than a thousand Fantas. Two million rubles could probably buy the Minutka and everything inside it.

“That's right,” Vladimir said. “And they had on thongs made of gold.”

“And diamonds for nipples,” Sergey said. They all went silent for a moment at the power of this image. “He can do whatever the fuck he wants with them. Anything,” Sergey said, with a cruelty that sometimes surfaced in Sergey and that made Ilya wish it were just Vladimir and him leaning against the fence.

“Where does he live? On the square?” Ilya said.

Vladimir and Sergey looked at each other and laughed.

“He doesn’t live *here*,” Vladimir said. “He’s probably been here once, to cut the ribbon.”

“No one lives here,” Sergey said.

“Not even the prostitutes?” Ilya asked.

“Ilyusha,” Vladimir laughed, “I like the way you think.” ——

When it was too cold to be outside, Ilya and Vladimir watched movies. Vladimir was obsessed with American movies, and Ilya liked them because Vladimir did. The pure action movies were Vladimir’s favorites—anything with Jean-Claude Van Damme or Bruce Willis, anything with roundhouse kicks and explosions and sparse dialogue—but he would settle for badly dubbed dramas or sitcoms with too-loud laugh tracks or whatever Kirill the cranky Chechen was hawking at the Internet Kebab. The movies were all a decade old. The tapes were all bootleg.

In *The Bodyguard*, the dubbing turned to Chinese five minutes in, and a wave of static washed across Whitney Houston’s face. In *Die Hard*, the Russian had been added without removing the English, so every line Bruce Willis said was a tangle of the two. One VHS was unlabeled, and Vladimir had bought it hoping that it was porn, but it was a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie, the title of which they never learned because the tape began at some point a third of the way in and ended right before the climax. Vladimir kept the VHSs stacked, according to genre, next to the TV, and when the VCR jammed, which it did with regularity, Ilya would hold the player’s mouth open, and Vladimir would use Babushka’s tweezers to un snag the tape with a patience and attention that were rare in him.

He and Ilya spent whole winters sitting cross-legged on the carpet. They watched blood fly and cars wreck and buildings crumble. They knew the dubbed Russian by heart. When the power went out, and the VCR whirred to a stop, they recited the dialogue. *Kickboxer* was their favorite. Vladimir could enact the final fight scene perfectly.

“Like he trained for the Bolshoi,” their mother would say.

“Oh, the Bolshoi,” Vladimir would say with a swoon because their mother had a crush on Alexander Bogatyrev.

“I just mean,” she’d say, “that if you can memorize this, you can memorize other things. Useful things. What’s eight times six?”

And Vladimir would groan and say, “Mama, you’re ruining it.”

One afternoon, when Ilya was seven and snow was falling lazily outside and they were watching the unlabeled VHS for the millionth time, Ilya found himself mesmerized by Jean-Claude's lips, by the fact that he was speaking a totally different language. Halfway through the movie, the fighting lulled and there was a love scene. Vladimir had roamed out to the balcony to take a piss. On-screen, Jean-Claude's character was in bed with a blond woman. They were both so tan that Ilya thought they were a different race. The woman's hair was in a lascivious halo around her face. The sheets vined up her body, covering strategic areas, though Vladimir was convinced that for a half second half of her nipple showed. She was asking Jean-Claude if he'd ever give up and settle down.

"Yebat 'ne," a husky voice said.

The Russian was ridiculous and the dubbing was off, so it took a second for Jean-Claude's lips to part in a silent "Fuck no." No sound came out, but Ilya could *see* the sounds he was making: the flash of his teeth against his lower lip with the "Fff," the slight grimace of the "ck," the pursed lips of that final "o," and Ilya found himself stringing the sounds together until he could hear Jean-Claude's voice clearly, as though he had whispered right into Ilya's ear.

"Fuck no," Ilya said softly.

It was English. He had said two words in English. Not only that: he knew what they meant. He looked to see if anyone had heard him, sure that the thrill he felt, a thrill like he'd cracked a code, was illicit. His mother was sleeping off her night shift, and Babushka was working the coat check at the Museum of Mining, and Vladimir had finished peeing and was doubled over the balcony railing spitting on the sidewalk.

The woman in bed was sitting up now, with the sheets clutched to her chest. Jean-Claude leaned over her.

"Yebat 'ne," the husky voice said again.

"Fuck no," Ilya said, his lips moving at just the moment Jean-Claude's did, and again that thrill twirled up his spine.

"What did you say?" Vladimir stood in the doorway, his cheeks pink from being outside and upside down. He was ten then, with this haze of hair on his upper lip that Ilya wanted badly for himself.

Ilya said it in Russian.

"No," Vladimir said. "You said it in English. Say it again." "Fuck no," Ilya murmured.

Jean-Claude and the woman were kissing now, but in a minute the Chinese mob would kick down the door and shoot the bed with such vigor that feathers filled the air.

“You learned that? From watching their lips?” Ilya nodded.

Vladimir clapped his hands. “Come here,” he said. He went back onto the balcony, and Ilya followed him.

The balcony was the size of a shower stall and webbed with so many strands of laundry line that you had to crouch to get to the railing. When they did, Vladimir propped Ilya on the rail. The courtyard was a muddy expanse, scabbed with spring snow. One man trudged across it, coming from the bus stop with a bagged beer. Behind him, the refinery was the whole horizon, bright and pulsing.

“Yell it,” Vladimir said. He had his arms around Ilya’s waist. The metal rail was so cold that it felt as though it were burning Ilya’s ass right through his pants.

“Go on,” Vladimir said. “Yell it.”

Ilya was quiet, and then Vladimir said the woman’s line in Russian, ““Are you gonna give up?””

“Fuck no,” Ilya said, and his voice wasn’t big enough to carry. The man with the beer kept trudging.

“Fuck no!” Vladimir yelled, and Ilya could hear the thickness of English on Vladimir’s tongue, could hear how his own had been clear in comparison.

Ilya opened his mouth and this time he yelled it. The insides of his cheeks tightened in a rush of cold, and the man with the bottle looked up. If he could understand them, he didn’t show it. Vladimir pointed at him just as he dropped his beer in a patch of slush and disappeared around the corner of their building.

“See,” Vladimir said, “you already know more than that old fucker.” He lifted Ilya down. “Jean-Claude wasn’t born American.”

“He wasn’t?” Ilya said. He’d thought Jean-Claude the epitome of all things American.

“He was French. Or Dutch or something. But he’s American now. He moved there. And you know who he brought with him?” Ilya shook his head.

“His brother. They live in a mansion right on fucking Hollywood Boulevard.” They ducked under a line of Ilya’s underwear, which had been

Vladimir's before him and had turned the color of concrete. Vladimir nudged Ilya toward the TV. "Go see what they say next," he said.

And because Ilya wanted that thrill again, and because Vladimir had told him to, he did. He spent the afternoon a meter from the screen, his fingers kneading the nub of Babushka's carpet. Behind him, Vladimir practiced choke holds on pillows, while Ilya listened to the Russian and moved his lips like the Americans. The little, sharp words were the easiest to mimic: the "nos" and "thanks" and "fucks." But as weeks and months passed, he learned to pause the videos, to play them in slow motion and tease out the vowels and cobble together longer words. Syllable by syllable he watched the way American tongues hit American teeth. There was a lot he didn't understand, but that seemed inconsequential next to the miracle of what he did.

CHAPTER THREE

The sun was still high as Papa Cam pulled onto a smaller street and sped up a rise into a cul-de-sac where a lone house bit a chunk out of the sky. It was as graceless as a kommunalka. Over one of its shoulders, Ilya could make out the refinery, so small that its lights had merged into one light. Its smoke melted into the clouds. The Masons' lawn was cut military short, but the lots on either side were full-grown with sawgrass.

"It was supposed to be a neighborhood, then the market crashed," Papa Cam said. He slung Ilya's duffel over his shoulder with a grunt and made his way up a brick walk to the door.

"We have it all to ourselves," Molly said in a rote, uninflected way, as though that were the party line.

Inside, everything—the walls, the furniture, the pillows, the countertops—was the color of tea made for a child, with lots of milk. The ceilings went up and up and up, and there seemed a determination not to divide space into rooms. The kitchen bled into the dining room, which bled into the den and the foyer, where the stairs curled into an open-air hallway. Mama Jamie gave Ilya a tour, using game-show host gestures, and the house did seem like something on TV. It was all polish; it lacked dimension, lacked the smells and sounds and smudges that were life in the kommunalkas. Ilya's duffel, in all of its dirtiness, suddenly seemed like the only real thing, and he wanted to grab it from the chair where Papa Cam had left it and run.

He would head toward the refinery and figure things out from there, he thought, just as Mama Jamie reached out and took his arm. Ilya flinched, and there was this flash of fear in her eyes, as though he'd been the one to touch her. She looked at him and he looked at her, and his heart was beating so hard that he was sure that she could see it shaking his body. Then she smiled. And he was wondering how many times she would do that—let her goodwill trump her instincts—when footsteps sounded in the hallway and a girl appeared at the top of the stairs. The third daughter. The *first* daughter, he thought, because she was the eldest. She was his age. Maybe a year younger. Her hair was dyed a shade close to white, which was more unsettling than attractive, but still there was something beautiful about her. Like the girls in Berlozhniki, she was all long, pale lengths: her shins, her wrists, her neck, which she was stretching now, with an arm crooked over her head and an elbow pointing to the ceiling. Her voice was long and pale too.

“Took you a while,” she said, and it did not in any way mean that she cared. She let her arm drop and rolled her head gently and her eyes closed with the motion. She was wearing an enormous black T-shirt with cut-off jean shorts, and as she walked down the stairs toward him, the T-shirt consumed all of her shorts except the little white threads that hung down her thighs like icicles. Her sneakers were high-tops, spray-painted silver so that even the laces were crusty with paint.

“Ilya,” Mama Jamie said, “this is Sadie.”

Sadie looked at him for a long moment. “Welcome to Leffie,” she said. “Home of the largest boudin ball ever cooked.” She smiled. A darting, furtive expression. Ilya tried to think what “boudin” meant and could not.

“It’s not as bad as all that,” Papa Cam said.

“True,” Sadie said. “There’s the corn festival.”

“Ilya doesn’t speak quite as much English as we were thinking,” Mama Jamie said, “but he’s going to learn fast. Immersion, right?” “He doesn’t speak *any*,” Marilee said.

Sadie rolled her eyes—whether at Marilee or her mom or his lack of English, Ilya wasn’t sure—and walked past them all into the kitchen. She opened the fridge door and disappeared behind it. Ilya thought that they would all migrate to the kitchen, that naturally they would follow her, but Mama Jamie just called, “Don’t spoil your supper,” and led Ilya upstairs, where the girls’ bedrooms marched down the hall, one after another. Marilee and Molly opened their doors to reveal studies of pink and green—plaid,