


A week passed and then another week. My job became even more stable; my friends even more reliable. I remembered the ad. Hadn't I always dreamed of living in Europe? As an American didn't I use English without thinking? Yes, I had. Yes, I did.

I applied anyway.

(5)




My acceptance letter arrived with an unsigned contract for one year and an information pamphlet titled "Life in Moscow: Getting By." On the pamphlet's cover a circus bear stood upside down; it looked beautiful but disturbed. I began reading:

"1) If you are arrested and interrogated answer only in English, especially if you know Russian. Otherwise..."

For an instant I imagined myself handcuffed and seated in a windowless Russian prison: a man in uniform stands over me. He is pointing a bright lamp in my eyes, his accent is thick and hard like a German's: If you will sign now..., he says — here he holds up a document in Russian and pulls the lamp closer to my eyes, repeating himself for emphasis: If you will sign now you can to avoid the unwanted problems! *Is the document a confession? A waiver of my rights? False testimony?* I shift uncomfortably in my seat. His words smell of danger and I correct them without thinking: If I sign now, I say, I can avoid unwanted problems. A smile pushes its way onto my face, my sweating hand grabs a pen, and slowly, so as not to smear the ink...

I signed the one-year contract.



(6)

I read on:

"2) American dollars can be exchanged for Russian rubles at the approximate official rate of one dollar to six rubles (1USD=6RUR). In addition it is often more convenient to purchase rubles from men in black leather jackets who offer unofficial rates that are much more attractive; however, this can be illegal and therefore should never be attempted at night.

3) Some Americans have had problems with local conmen and petty thieves; when speaking to strangers say you are from Canada.