

The soles of my shoes burned as I walked on the blazing sidewalk. In the distance I saw a kiosk that looked to be open.

*...But maybe I was wrong! Maybe Russians really were the smartest people on earth? After all, it had been proven statistically that all important inventions had been created either by Russians, or — in the few remaining cases — by Americans who had immigrated from Russia. And that despite what I had been told for years it wasn't America that had played the decisive role in all world wars; now I was learning that it was Russia who had suffered relentlessly, thereby forcing the enemy under its own weight to become soft and thin. In truth it was Russia, not America, that was responsible for western civilization...*

I stopped before a kiosk:

Two bottles of vodka, I told the man behind the metal bars and he handed me a tall bottle whose label slipped off when I grabbed it.

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#456. Between lessons a Russian student asks if she may smoke; I laugh without smiling and say, Go ahead I'm used to it! I light her cigarette with my disposable lighter.

(30)

I shoved one bottle in each pocket and started back.

*But wait a minute...*, I thought, *Russia isn't even in the West...!*

I stopped in my tracks. Something had occurred to me. I went back to the man who had given me the bottle of vodka:

Do you have any cigarettes? I asked.

The man pointed at the half of his display that was filled with cigarettes. In my haste I had only seen the half filled with alcohol.

Primas? he asked.

No no that's the whole point. I need Marlboros. Only Marlboros. He can buy Primas himself.

And counting out all the money in my wallet, I bought forty-eight packs of Marlboro cigarettes.

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#460. I watch with horror as a married woman throws herself in front of a moving train. I have lived in Russia long enough to understand what