

## Serenity

YEVGENY GRISHKOVETS

It was the kind of weather where you couldn't be sure of anything. Summer had come to a close. Yet for some reason there was no real yellowing of the trees. Still, the wind was already driving dead, green leaves into corners and under fences. Outside the city, the grass was high and somehow unclean. Summer was ending, or more precisely, all indications were that it had already ended. Only a few more days of August to be endured, and...

Almost all his friends, buddies, comrades, acquaintances and colleagues had returned from somewhere tanned, and they wanted to get together, to share stories. But Dima had sat out the summer in the city. Of course, he had not sat all summer long, it's just that if a person spends the whole summer in the city, even if not without some pleasure or benefit, it is nonetheless said that he "sat it out." So this is what Dima told everyone: "Whaddya mean how was it?! I sat out the whole summer

in the city!” After which Dima sighed, gave a brief, dismissive wave, and made a sad face.

Dima shipped his family off at the beginning of July. His son to an international camp, so the boy could practice his English; his wife and daughter first to her parents in the North, and then to the South, to the sea, where they’d gone together on many occasions. But he stayed in the city... on business.

There was in fact business to be done, and there was a significant and substantial reason for staying behind in the city and working, yet by the middle of July the city was melting from the heat, no one was making any decisions, and any business planned for the summer had come to a standstill. It had been stupid to plan so much business for summer. First, most of the people responsible for deciding various questions had taken off, and those who stayed behind were tired, or somehow ill-tempered... bleary-eyed... from the heat, from the sound of summer ringing in their ears, or from the buildup of static electricity. By the end of July, Dima fell into a state of lethargy. Into a strange sort of summer idleness where the days crawl by gruelingly slowly, and time flies incomprehensibly fast.

At first, Dima lay about for a few days on the couch, in front of the television. He flipped endlessly back and forth between channels, stopping for a while here and there... then flipping some more. When he stumbled upon an old movie, one he had known since he was a boy, he clapped, rubbed his hands, adjusted the nest he’d turned his divan into, and ran to the kitchen to put on some tea and throw together the unhealthiest—and therefore tastiest—snacks possible. Old movies, open-faced sandwiches, and sweet tea evoked serious and profound pleasure. There was something in this he had not felt for a long time: serenity!

On the third day of this serenity, he started to lose all sense of time. He went to sleep toward morning and woke late in the afternoon. He awoke to the sultry sounds of summer from the courtyard. When the refrigerator was empty, Dima fought back hunger for nearly an entire day. It seemed somehow impracticable to leave the building. Dima put off his

departure for a long time. He had long since stopped shaving, but suddenly shaving brought great satisfaction. Then he spent a long time washing up, got dressed, and then went out to the store... with satisfaction. And selected a whole pile of stuff. Returning from the store, he didn't rush to eat, and didn't begin nervously snacking either, but with unexpected satisfaction straightened the apartment, washing all the dishes and carefully putting everything away in the refrigerator. Then he unhurriedly made himself lunch and dinner in one (meaning, Dima had not had lunch, but it was already evening). He prepared the meal while listening to the comforting sound of the radio... Dima opened a bottle of wine, and peaceful, disparate words flew around in his head: "not bad" or "that's it..." or "damn...." While the meal was finishing up in the oven, Dima drank down two glasses of wine. The wine hit the spot marvelously.... Dima picked up the phone. He called parents (his parents), then placed a call and got through to his wife in the South. Zhenya said that everything was very nice, just that the weather wasn't so good. Then his daughter took the phone, and she said she was resting fine, the food was fine, and in general everything was fine. When Dima asked if she missed her papa, his daughter quickly replied, "Yes." After this, Dima immediately called up an old friend, but couldn't get through to her and that finally calmed him down.

Things were good. Even very good. Periodically a thought would flare up: "Oy, there's stuff to do, I should..." But then responses arose like: "Just wait a bit, just wait..." or "But it's summer!"

The only thing that irritated him was the heat. And it wasn't because it was hot—in the sense that it was stifling, with sweat and all that. What was irritating was that the heat just hung around.... The previous year, Dima had spent the summer with his family on the Baltic coast. His friends had said, "Why there? The rain never stops and the sea is cold... beautiful, but cold." But they got lucky with the weather! And it was so wonderful to sun themselves on the beach or sit under umbrellas at a cafe and drink beer, to watch the news in the evening and learn there was nonstop rain at home, storms in the South, and hail in Greece.