



HINDSIGHT IS 20/20 April 23 - June 13, 2015

“There must be another way to go through life besides being pulled through it kicking and screaming,” thought Grisha, as he walked out the front door heading to work early one Tuesday morning. The sun was shining so brightly it was painful to look up; he squinted and schlepped to his bus stop, heat radiating on his stooped shoulders. Grisha pictured his bus getting into an accident just cataclysmic enough where he wouldn’t have to go to work: twisted metal without any life threatening injuries, he quickly told himself, uncomfortable with the feeling that his imagination imperiled other people. He wondered if another downtown building would explode a little closer to his office, smoke coming in the cracked windows. He imagined deftly gathering up in his arms his computer, keyboard, and spiral-corded phone, walking past his boss, and dropping it all on the curb. He mashed the side of his hair with one hand and checked his watch; 7:45.

A bird came down off a wire to look at him, and Grisha squinted back. The bird didn’t seem afraid of Grisha; in fact, it was the friendliest bird he had ever interacted with. Grisha kicked his foot to scare off the tiny creature, but the bird did not react. Grisha glanced toward his approaching bus, but his ambivalence was assuaged when he realized the bird had addressed him by name. “Hello Grisha,” said the bird. Hesitant to respond, Grisha tugged his collared shirt. At almost the same time, the bus arrived to the stop and opened its large metal doors for Grisha to step in. The bird looked up one last time and said “Well? What are you going to do Grisha?” The bird began hopping down a side street, and impulsively, Grisha decided to follow the bird as the doors of the bus close shut.

“Wait, wait,” cried Grisha as he struggled to keep up with the bird. The bird halted in front of a cafe and stared pointedly at people streaming out into the morning with cups of coffee. “Tell me bird, how did you know my name?” asked Grisha, but the bird said nothing. A woman with a drawn expression tore sections of a warm rosewater almond croissant out of a brown paper bag. She chewed while shouldering her tote, stepping off a curb, pausing before finding her moment to walk between cars. Her pleasure in the pastry was gone as she arrived on the other side of the street; her face twisted as she chided herself, she shoved the remaining croissant, wax paper, and receipt back into the brown bag and deposited in a trash can without breaking her stride.

“What a waste,” Grisha said, “I don’t throw away food. Actually, I don’t eat sugar, really.” Grisha wondered what he was trying to prove to the bird.

The bird flew to the edge of the city’s center, Grisha at his heels. At the entrance to the tunnel that connected the city’s employees to their outlying homes, a municipal worker sprayed a concrete wall with a power washer. The water ricocheted off the wall and filled the air with mist that made little rainbows in the headlights of cars that crawled into the tunnel, and the bird beckoned Grisha onto the narrow pedestrian path. Grisha hesitated to enter; the tunnel was noisy and noxious with no perceivable end. Car after car contained a man or woman lip syncing



to the radio or making phone calls. A diesel engine stalled; emissions commingled with cigarette smoke from some languid arms in the cars' windows. At intervals, drivers would start up a din of horn honking even though no one had a move to make. Emerging finally from the echo chamber, the bird led Grisha to a footpath, and they watched traffic fan out and accelerate across the eight lane highway.

"The city is ugly," Grisha said, tired and unsure of what else could even be said. An expression of mirth flashed in the bird's eyes; the bird made a caustic dip in the air and blinked at Grisha. "Bird I don't love being the object of your ire. What do you want from me? Where could I even start?" A weird thought occurred to Grisha, but he couldn't shake it, so he asked, "Did God send you?" Met with silence from the bird, a few steps later: "God?"

"Easy now. We have some ground to cover Grisha. I'll try to tell you when we get there."

The bird set into a pace befitting a long trudge, flying level with Grisha's hand, as they crossed two cemeteries in grim companionable silence. Streets widened, soot and soil blew and adhered to Grisha's moistened face. "There is an increasing recognition among people everywhere that we are destroying ourselves and the world in which we live," said the bird. "We do not seem to be able to change the world, to change other people, or to change ourselves. Many of us, myself included, have felt the futility of trying to rid ourselves of frustration, conflict, pain, and illness, while still holding on to our old belief systems." Relenting, the bird was lifted into a gale and rose several stories higher than any of the disused buildings on the street. Grisha squinted in the ambient filth, running, rounded a curve, and broke upon a wooden boardwalk just in time to see the bird land on the prow of a boat as it left the port. The boat towed an enormous barge of refuse. The barge embraced heaps of wet cloth, aluminum, and paper exhumed from snow piles, containers for liquids, drywall, polyester, water-spotted metal, magnets, and mud.

Grisha called the bird back, but the wind took the sound. He was too far from home to be so alone. Grisha slumped on a high barbed fence and toed a bifurcated circuit board. He watched as barge after barge made its drifting progress across the horizon.

Text by Bea Fremderman and Olivia Henry