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Natasha Lvovich

Vermont, "Portus Eunostos"¹

"...I would return to Straus Park every day, because returning was itself now part of the ritual of remembering the shadow cities hidden there... You may never find yourself; but you do remember looking for yourself. That too can be reassuring, comforting."

— Andre Aciman, *Shadow Cities*
in *Letters of Transit*



Photo-illustration by Katya Mezhibovskaya

I couldn't get hold of Pete and Eula for a long while. My e-mails bounced back to me, and their phone beeped and beeped without the answering machine picking up. By the time I heard Pete's cheerful voice at the other end, I got really worried. I had been feeling guilty for not being in touch for months and, most importantly, for not visiting, as I usually do, once or twice a year. Last spring and summer I was very focused on my writing, and on Sandy, our new puppy, which made it impossible to travel. I agonized over planning the trip for a while, trying to squeeze it in-between Julia's summer camps and conference presentations, until Julia, who is quite perceptive, asked, "Mom, do you HAVE to go?"

Pete told me they were doing fine, but that their computer was off, as well as the answering machine, and that they couldn't find my phone number. That sounded odd. I almost stopped breathing. I recalled a conversation about a prefabricated house to be delivered and assembled somewhere on the hill or about a possible extension of the cabin... They haven't moved anywhere or changed anything, have they? At that thought, something in me contracted. "The cabin is still here, in the usual place, and we are here, in good health, better than ever! Nothing has changed, as you like it. How could we upset Natasha? (He laughed.) When you come over, you'll see. This is a surprise. I will not tell you a thing, only that you won't need to stay in a motel."

Yes, I have to go, regularly and obsessively, but I don't know why, not yet.

I drive North, on New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts highways, often in heavy traffic and annoyed by monstrous trucks, in the anticipation of the second part of the voyage, the Vermont miracle. *Vermont*

1 Portus Eunostos--Harbor of Safe Returns in Ancient Greek, in Andre Aciman, *False Papers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), p. 7

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is the most beautiful word in English. It is of light blue glass with a noble, not playful, sonority, and once I cross the Massachusetts border, I hear its melodic hum. I hug the green landscapes and trees; I don't talk or listen to music; and in this complete silence, I am suddenly lighter. My usual intensity and my multilingual "abundance of self," as Ilan Stavans poignantly put it, are gone. In Vermont, I instantly "lose weight" and attain "the unbearable lightness of being." I leave my heavy Russianness, my endured Americanness, my staged Frenchness, and the ties between them at the Massachusetts border. I achieve a meditative state, devoid of thoughts, of dramas, and of compulsive reflections. I am "on the road."

We leave behind a McDonald's, our usual bathroom stop and Julia's eat-whatever-you-want-it-is-vacation lunch. It has to be that one because this is where civilization on route I-91 ends, and I am eager to leave the antiseptic Formica behind, not without mixed feelings though. At this ritualistic stop, I am compulsively checking that in my absence nothing has changed and that I can step in the same river twice or even many times, as if I am in control of the passing by space, passing by time, and passing by life.

By now I recognize every mile of the landscape, every turn of the road, every view that will open on my right and on my left: a rest area with "no facilities" is coming into view, then a sign, *Welcome to Vermont, the Green Mountain State*. Here, here, at the rough turn there will be a vertiginous abyss formed by the mountains and valleys, the majestic infinity, in which we are small, our suffering, meaningless, and growing wings, a realistic possibility. Then it's woods and woods again, on both sides of the empty road, and I slow down a bit, to get this all in, to blend in the movement and in the landscape, when I catch a surprised look of a small truck driver passing me on the left: Hey, are you asleep or what?

When I approach exit 15, the sign says, *Bradford, Vermont/ Orford, New Hampshire*. This is us, and I veer to the right, gliding, smoothly and effortlessly, as if the car is fused with my body and I am roller-blading on the fresh black asphalt. At the stop sign, a right toward Bradford, and at a large intersection, with a gas station and a store so poignantly called Market, I make a left and go straight less than a mile, along a town similar to thousands of towns I have seen in America. It is nothing fancy: white cottages, green lawns, a diner, a garage, a video store, and yard sales spilling on the road, with bottles and jars, old dolls and teddy bears, one or two thick whisky shots and wine glasses out of broken sets. Not a soul around but occasional cars, vans, and trucks. Cars stand for people, become people, are people. There are no sidewalks here.

New York is an easy rhyme for immigrants (Brooklyn-Shmooklyn), desensitizing them and the ones who came before them to a vibrant crowd on its sidewalks. Multiplicity becomes harmony or an easy illusion of harmony, and a wish for the world congruency and peace is mirrored back and forth from a person to the Melting Pot, solidifying it into reality. But here, in the open sky of New England, I can't be that twisted cosmopolitan story. Here I am a car (*cah*), like everybody else, and the proof is that I know exactly where I am going.

If I stop at a gas station or at a store, I smile to someone else's smile and I say hi, as if saying hi to strangers is what I do in New York every day.

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I don't ask to repeat what they said in their soft crowing New England accent. *It is a gorgeous day today! It must be nice to be on the road...How was traffic on I-91? I know I know, these gas prices are soaring, and still the traffic is awful!* I self-confidently swallow my *th* in *them* and my *h* in *him*; I push forward the *a*'s and the *o*'s in my throat; and I pronounce *Wednesdy* instead of Wednesday. Every English word I use here makes me safer, firmly grounded, and exhilarated. I leave behind the hyphen; I give myself a break with mental monitoring.

When I pass over the bridge, I am in Orford, New Hampshire, although there is no visible change in the landscape. A tiny spot in my brain is seeking a border or at least a different meaning for a different word (perhaps my hyphen is still there, after all), and since there is none, I call it Vermont—not the place but the concept. Right off the bridge, I make a left and I pass a conventional steeple tower of a white New England church and an adjacent town post office. This is where Pete picks up his mail and from where, a dozen trips ago, he would have me follow him all the way to their home, up the twisted road to the woods. I am a big girl now.

From lots of open space and the infinite sky, I must cave in up the hill into a small one-lane road in the woods. It loops and twists up and down, left and right, with trees closing above my head or receding into an open meadow, spinning me in the rhythmic tango. As in Paradzhanov's static cinema, the movie becomes theater, and the theater becomes gallery--a sequence of pictures frozen in time. They are my favorite paintings: Kuindzhi's slender birches in the puddle of sunlight, Shishkin's dark ancestral forest, Levitan's shaved lifeless grass. Like the main character in Vladimir Nabokov's autobiographical novel, *Glory*, who ends up going back to Russia, I wish to enter the paintings hanging on the walls of my childhood home, making it home, going home. But home is elusive...

Every wrong turn, like a wrong article, makes me blush with self-inflicted embarrassment: I can't possibly be disoriented in my own house, can I? On the left side of the road, a lonely pale cottage appears in the middle of nowhere, blurring with the woods. A silent dog is sitting motionlessly on the porch. I've reached my landmark, Edward Hopper--my mnemonics, my method of Loci. I am close to my destination.

I wish I could go on and on this road forever...or do I wish to take it from the start over and over again...? But I am approaching the finale signaled by a farm right in front of me, and by Julia's ecstatic yelps, "Look! Horsies! Cows!" Surprisingly, it is still there, the authentic farmland, the nostalgic un-sanitized outpost of the "old world," with cows and "horsies" picking grass on a large hill, with the smell of manure and hay, and I understand now why Pete was so reluctant to get a computer.

This is where, a few feet on the left, a gravel road up the hill is hiding in thick trees and bushes. I used to miss it, but not anymore. Up, up, up, the crunch of the gravel under the wheels and the whistling of branches on my windshield, and once we are in the open, it is half-way up the grassy hill topped by a brown log cabin. A small figure is standing on the porch and waving to us--this is Eula. Still climbing, I am eager to look back, but I decide to save the special treat of a spectacular view for a moment later, after I get off the car, hug Eula and Pete, and, holding my breath, embrace the majestic panorama of the mountains, the ones in the

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distance pushing the clouds, and the closer ones, with serpentine threads of the roads, polka dot houses, and occasional Lilliputian cows.

This is what I am longing for, a place above and beyond Chronos and Xenos, a place of a larger conception than my fleeting life, the pre-Babel innocence, wholeness, and humbleness. Here my immigrant travails seem arrogant in their attempt to conquer and to control. How does it feel, I wonder, to see this every day, to acknowledge one's tiny place on earth, among this grandiosity?

I met Pete in my "previous life," in Moscow, where he appeared, literally out of the woods, as a tourist in the early 80s. He claims that it is his love for Russian opera and music that motivated him to go. But I suspect, now that I know Pete a little better, that music was not his only inspiration. Pete is a thinker, an adventurer, and a philosopher. What he does for a living (managing property, driving and miscellaneous jobs) does not begin to define him as an explorer and a writer whose thriller, along the lines of *Gorky Park*, was waiting to be written and to be lived.

Like all Americans at that time, he had been raised in the bipolar world of the cold war, on Soviet nuclear threat and the menace of communist expansion. His innate exploratory spirit and a need to conceptualize his values and beliefs, pushed him across the ocean, across the iron curtain. The trip to Soviet Russia was a mystical odyssey, filled with challenges and maybe even dangers, and a quest into the vice and virtues of the world that lay, huge yet impenetrable, at Pete's porch.

This is why, although on a tour, Pete was not a conventional tourist. He had a referral, via our uncle Sam's friend, and this is how Pete a.k.a. Frank appeared in our Moscow apartments. Frank was his official passport name that he decided to use in the USSR, writing the first lines of his spy story. It goes without saying that in his hotel he was watched and listened to, that his group guide was a KGB agent, and that a fellow American tourist must have been working for CIA! Alas, as naïve as it sounds, his account was not fiction.

No Soviet citizen was allowed into *Intourist*, the main Moscow hotel for foreigners, without being questioned. Having an open relationship with foreigners meant trouble at work or at school, a broken career, and continuous surveillance. But what did we care? As Jews and a family of refuse-niks, we didn't have much of a career and we were used to watching our language while talking on the phone. I was involved with French teachers working in Moscow and with other foreigners. My cousin, Aliona, met with American Jewish activists and reporters. We were not fearless, but we had nothing to lose but our own dignity.

By the whole clan, we greeted, toured, and fed Frank/Pete in Moscow, and little did he know that our excessive hospitality was the expression of intellectual hunger similar to his, the hunger to learn about the world on the other side of the fence, to peek at a "real American" from our caged kitchens, and to tame our fear by positioning ourselves, again and again, in tacit opposition, which defined our sense of selves. In my parents' and in my aunt Ilia's house, at the tables filled with smoked fish, herring, pickled mushrooms, salad "Olivier," and shredded red beets in mayonnaise, we passionately tried to bridge Pete's script with our real life stories, as if

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that connection could smash iron curtains, fences, and gates.

All that is written up in history books now. The Soviet Union is passé, so is the hotel, *Intourist*, in Moscow, demolished, among other symbols and monuments of the Soviet past. For the last few years, perhaps at about the same time that I began driving the road up the hill by myself, I have stopped holding on to Pete's "Russian" name, Frank.

Pete and Eula's cabin is perched on the hill, with the porch elevated above the ground, like a small stage. However, everything is in reverse from theater here: instead of the audience looking at the stage, the audience is *on* the stage overlooking the empty theater, where the action takes place: seasons, light, and foliage colors changing the scenery, and with it, our thoughts and moods. One is never bored here!

From the distance the cabin looks like the Russian letter Д (D), the dark brown letter of the word, *dom* (house, home), and of the word, *dacha* (country house). In Moscow Pete was trying to tell us how small his house was, much smaller than our Soviet apartments. But, of course, we didn't believe him: why would you have a small house in America when you have all the opportunities in the world to have a palace?

The cabin is incredibly small; it is one room with the built-in kitchen, a bathroom, and a bed in the "closet." There are so many things inside that one wonders how they ever find what they need (and they always do). Things are everywhere and on top of each other: a microwave oven is on a cabinet, and the cabinet is on a chest. There are two cats, Andrea and Tiptoe, and a rabbit in a cage. Tiptoe usually sits in the bathroom and Andrea gracefully waltzes around the scaffolding of furniture and things. Somehow she always ends up at the front door, begging to be let out (*ayyut, ayyut*), but she is not allowed on the porch unless she is tied on a leash because of birds (she might catch them) and bears (they might catch her)! The cabin is full of knick-knacks, dolls, jars, pictures, and souvenirs, and the couch is covered with a beautiful quilt that Eula made herself. Amazingly, every object seems to belong here, and, although there is no free space, the room looks neat and cozy. It smells of lumber and a happy marriage.

Eula feeds deer, birds, and the rest of the fauna inhabiting the friendly Stevens's woods. Every morning she fills with grain bird feeders hanging around the porch and sprinkles the ground with the feed for the deer. Once we watched from the cabin's window a deer family of three feeding only a couple of feet away from us while Eula whispered into Julia's ear one of her lively stories about a brave disobedient deer baby who once broke free from his mother and showed up all by himself. And once, Eula told us with exhilaration, a bear climbed straight to the porch, a big black male bear, and started to fiddle with the door knob, locking in the hosts watching the scene from the window in awe.

I want my children to taste this vanishing world, one that is close to nature, part of nature, which is, amazingly, only a half-hour away from a modern supermarket. I want them to experience a comfortable non-materialistic life in America, to be content with an American myth not only as a story of vertiginous economic ascension, entrepreneurship, and wealth,

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but the one which offers an essential feature of choices themselves, including a deliberate choice of material indifference.

During my recent visit to Moscow, I encountered startled faces in response to the figure of my annual income. I must have been looked upon as “lazy” when I implied that my tenured professorship satisfies me. Although sometimes I experience economic difficulties, I have chosen time over money--for reading, writing, research, and intellectual life. Along this conversation, someone remarked, “I don’t get it: you have emigrated to America and ended up driving a Toyota?”

When we immigrated to this country, Pete and Eula “adopted” us, like orphaned children, the whole clan of 14 people, and heroically undertook a program of immigrant assistance and foster parenting. They drove to Brooklyn to pick us up, took us to their home, fed us, offered sightseeing and entertainment, and introduced us to their neighbors. They took us to Washington D.C. and to Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia to familiarize us first hand with American history. Pete searched for university jobs for me in Vermont, and every visit, Eula played with little Pauline, cut our hair, and cooked her unforgettable spaghetti and meat balls, salads out of the greens from her garden, and pancakes for breakfast on the porch.

During these years of poverty, hardships, and embarrassing infancy, we couldn’t place Vermont or Pete and Eula into a complex picture of American life. We didn’t even know how to feel, let alone how to speak about our gratitude, our new realities, and our emotions. I have no memories of the details of our earlier visits, except for the stories that have become legendary, repeated over and over again and solidified into family history. Pete likes to cite my ex-husband’s vodka pronouncements (“There are only two types of vodka: good and very good.”) and we giggle every time Eula imitates little Pauline’s first English words (“I like caaaaaandy, cooooookies, and ice crrrrrrream...”). I am reminded of another day when Pauline, stuffed with too much chocolate, went berserk and harassed, in her broken English, a timid local girl who had been asked by Eula to be her playmate.

On our recent visit in the winter, Julia slid down the icy hill on a blue plastic sled that Eula un-dug from the shed, out of pieces of old furniture, tools, and various knick-knacks. On the sled Eula had painted in big white letters, POLINA. We have a history here, we have a past.

Pete and Eula own a hairdresser salon called *Sampson and Delilah*, a small log house in Bradford, where time has stopped. I like visiting “the shop,” as they call it, where colors have faded from time and from sun and my eyes rest in the imperfect and slightly chaotic space. Pete would take us here and would leave for a while to do his errands, and Eula would offer me coffee with bagels. While doing somebody’s hair, she would chat with me about hundreds of casual things, a universal female chat about hair, eyebrow waxing, getting rid of fruit spots on your favorite blouse, and treating allergies. She knows it all, as a woman did in the “ole times,” the alternative medicine and secrets of femininity, healthy eating, and pleasures of good simple life. And, as much as she reminds me of my grandmother, Mina, there is some lightness about her that Russian women rarely have. Eula is not exactly a product of the culture of glamour, having grown up on the farm and having had her share of rural life. But, unlike

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my grandmother, she is not dragging on her road a heavy luggage of war and terror that must be picked up, in one form or another, by several generations of our women.

Eula has a beautiful lively face, expressive hazel eyes, and her magical hands are always at work, like my grandmother's. She makes dolls, she sews quilts, she plants trees and flowers, and she can fix anything, from furniture to electricity. She also grows vegetables in the garden (*gahd'n*), a small square of land down the hill from the cabin, with squash, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, carrots, and red beets. Julia and I follow Eula around her garden, pull out perfumed mesclun leaves, jolly burgundy beets, or fat lazy cucumbers, and hear her garden talk, which sounds like music to my ears. *Squash is getting huge this year... The rainy weather killed my pepper... Those bugs are feeding on my tomatoes...* This will be the most delicious lunch, with fresh salad, fried green tomatoes, and red beets boiled with stems and leaves. It is a feast!

Meanwhile Julia is driving Pete's car. She boasts about that drive the whole year. Pete puts her on his lap and while he takes care of the pedals, she holds the wheel—and here they go, up and down and across the hill. Recently, we have been getting fun rides, like in an amusement park, in a "ranger," a powerful little all-terrain vehicle for various tasks around the property. The ranger speeds on the hill and breaks through thick bushes, and, the wind in our hair and the sun in our eyes, we laugh and scream of pure pleasure to be alive.

In the summer and in the fall, I go mushroom hunting. It is common knowledge, however, that mushrooms grow in supermarkets, not in the woods, but those crazy Russians must be off to the woods to get them. How do we know which mushrooms are edible and which ones are poisonous? How do we know how to cook them? When we first engaged in this bucolic extravaganza and brought to the cabin bagfuls and handfuls of beautiful mushrooms, Eula and Pete let us cook them, but made it clear that they would not share the feast of this nostalgic Russian delicacy.

It is an awkward expression in English, but in Russian "the gifts of nature" or the "gifts of the woods" is common phraseology. For every Russian family, including city dwellers, walks in the woods on weekends or camping trips on vacation, picking mushrooms or berries is a common leisure activity and a necessary mental break. In Russian cultural prescription, once you leave the city, you leave behind the never-ending problems—and with them, what is commonly known as the comforts of civilization, bathrooms, phones, and stores, the binary polarities to the countryside and wilderness.

I will never forget our first excursion "into wilderness" out of New York. We got in the car with a bag of sandwiches for a picnic, looked at the map and found an area colored in green, somewhere in New Jersey. We assumed that this is where the city ends and we got on the road heading to the green spot on the map, via Verrazano Bridge and New Jersey Turnpike. As we passed the ugly industrial landscapes and never-ending shopping malls, we moved on and on, changing highways to smaller roads, stopping to look at the map again and again, but the print of civilization never receded into wilderness. Our cultural script was in dissonance with the reality where every inch of land had been put to work and where, as

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we discovered later, wilderness was labeled as “park” and “reserve” and was protected, “benched,” trailed, asphalted, and ticketed, turning nature into a museum of nature or a business, a tourist attraction.

Oh how happy we were to find our way back to Brooklyn via the dark and polluted multi-lane New Jersey highways! And what a relief it was to get home, to unpack our picnic bags, and to eat our sandwiches in sardonic silence!

In Russia, roaming in “real” wild unprotected woods, without trails and benches, getting lost and finding one’s way back, hunting for wild berries, mushrooms, and nuts was part of exciting nature experience. It was also a way of transmitting survival skills that had saved lives during wars and famines and an invaluable natural supplement to poor diets during food shortages. But besides its biological and pragmatic function passed on from one generation to the next, spending time in the woods and learning about nature, usually with family, was a poetic experience and one of the pleasures of a Russian childhood.

Mark, my uncle, whom I called Marka, was a family’s “gifts of nature” aficionado. Wherever he was, Marka’s nose would always sniff in the direction of woods-- for the right place to pick blueberries, wild strawberries, wild raspberries, lingonberries, and mushrooms. In Moscow or on vacation in Estonia, he would bring home buckets of blueberries, jars of wild strawberries, and baskets full of mushrooms. Ilia would always whine about the work needed to process his harvest into jams, compotes, and soups, once a good portion of it had been eaten in “live vitamins.”

Marka was a real *gribnik* (*mushroomnik*), initiated into the deepest secrets of life of the forest, who took this business very seriously. When we were kids, Marka would occasionally take Aliona and me to his mushroom hunting trips. We had to get up at four in the morning--why so early? Because mushrooms grow during the night and emerge from the ground by dawn, so we have to be there before other *gribniks* would come and get them all! This explanation sounded a bit silly, but Aliona and I did not ask questions; we put on heavy rubber boots and went, half reluctantly, half happily. We were supplied with pocket knives to cut off mushrooms, not to tear them off the ground, since the roots must be left there for other mushrooms to grow. We had to carry baskets, not plastic bags, where mushrooms would rot, and we had to chop stem ends to check for worms, in which case they had to be discarded.

It is still dark when we take the metro, then the suburban electric train called *elektrichka*, which is part of the dense railroad system covering Moscow suburban areas for more than a hundred kilometers in multiple directions. Marka’s special “mushroom place” would always be far, always at the end of the line, not easy to be reached by crowds of competing *gribniks*. We step on the platform of an unfamiliar station, take the stairs elevated above it first up then down—and we are in the woods. No restaurants, shops, signs, bathrooms, rangers, booklets, and nature centers. Right off the platform, it is wilderness--undisguised, uncivilized, and unconquered. It belongs to everybody; it belongs to nobody; it is a no man’s land.

The sky begins to color, and the woods are wet and uninviting. Marka

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distributes baskets and knives and leads us in the green depth. We break down and move along, our heads bent to examine the ground under the trees and bushes and using a stick to remove suspicious leaves or moss, where a mushroom could be hiding. This is an exercise in concentration and in meditation, and sometimes we forget to watch or to call each other. The mushrooms, Marka says, do not want to be picked and so they hide, camouflaged in autumn colors. But the poisonous ones are often in the open, eager to jump in our baskets, bright, pretty, and untouched by prudent worms. We learn to speak "Mushroomese" (not Latin but colloquial Russian language), and every time we go, new mushrooms, new names, and new forest stories are added to our vocabulary.

See this violet russula? I tracked three, no, look, five at a time! Have you seen what Marka found? Two huge boletes! Why do I get russulas and he gets birch boletes and ceps? (Ceps and birch boletes are first class mushrooms.)

The earth, the grass, the flowers, the insects, the changing landscape is drugging us, like the books of Jules Verne or Alexander Dumas. We are half-dead and already dragging our feet when Marka looks at his watch, calculates the time we need to get to the train, and signals the end of the hunt. We are covered by mud, the black soil thrust deep in our fingernails and our hair wet and entangled. He takes us out of the woods with such confidence, as if he is looking at street signs, and after a long walk, here we are, back to the train station and right on time, as a crowded *electricchka* is crawling to the platform. It is full of *gribniks* like us, loudly sharing their best mushroom stories, of stinky drunkards, who lose balance at every stop and make havoc collapsing on somebody's lap, and of ageless women in headscarves, gray-skinned, tired, and dozing off, carrying tens of heavy bags with apples or potatoes.

The following day, Ilia's house will transform into a mushroom preparation and conservation factory. First, selection and sorting out: the chanterelles to be fried, the boletes to be dried, and the rest to be boiled and then pickled. My parents come in the evening to help and to eat the delicious mushroom soup with potatoes and barley. Canned pickled mushrooms, with pasted labels printed in Marka's professional hand (brand, month, year), will be open jar by jar on special occasions and will chase solemn vodka toasts pronounced for the world greatest mushroom hunter, Marka, for his little assistants, and for the hostess of the house, Ilia. For all of us, the family! Alla famiglia!

In Vermont our mushroom hunts do not begin to replicate the Russian experience. One is never too far from the house or from any civilization, and, besides, I don't speak "Mushroomese" in English...But does anybody? Is there a shared colloquial language with embedded endearment, like in Russian, for the non-existing experience and history? Every child in Russia knows *lissichki* (chanterelles), for example, which means little foxes, or *syroyeshki* (russula), which means eat-raw, and it is not by accident that these nouns end in *-chk(i)*, *-shk(i)*, a diminutive suffix signifying familiarity and affection. Those generic mushrooms commonly sold in American grocery stores and wrapped in plastic, do they even have a name?

During our walk in the woods that I lead now instead of Marka, Eula tells us about plants, trees, and flowers and shows us animal footprints.

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Mushrooms grow huge in Vermont and they die a natural death of over-ripening and aging. Yet, we pick quite a few and I try to incite Julia into the game, trying to recreate that focused attention that we, as children, had been able to sustain for hours in the woods. Like so many kids nowadays, Julia is having difficulties with concentration, and I am wondering if the ancient Russian forays into the woods for mushroom picking had played a role in fostering sustained attention, among other cognitive skills, while developing family ties by learning and working together.

When we leave, I load the trunk with paper bags of carefully packed vegetables from Eula's garden, with daisies and wild carnations wrapped in a wet cloth, and often with a pot or two of Eula's plants. There is always a little something for my mother, accompanied by a special loving word, and drinks and snacks for the road. This is what my grandmother used to do and what my mother still does, the lost art of the old world—the art of family.

Pete and Eula have been living on this hill all their married life and only once they shared with me the desire to have a house with more space, to sell a small part of the property (only into ecologically capable hands), to work less, and to retire. Pete said that if they do this, I would not have to stay in the motel and they would be able to enjoy me and other guests ("company," as they like to call it) with more comfort. We could stay late drinking wine on the porch and "watching the grass grow." We could have those Russian New Years with crazy dancing outside around a pine tree. Eula could use a nice real kitchen, and the "company," their own bedroom.

How could I tell him that I dreaded that, that I needed them and Vermont to remain the same, that I must hold on to something and to somebody to come home to, where I don't live but where I am fully accepted, in a happy return to a benign undemanding family, to a benign a-cultural space.

"Visit whenever you can," Pete and Eula say. And I do. I do.

P.S. There are two *dom(s)* now perched on the hill. Pete and Eula are enjoying a new house, with three bedrooms and a modern fully equipped kitchen. The cabin, at its flank, cleaned up and fully functioning, is there to welcome guests, to welcome us, and to offer sameness and change--a change I can live with.