



# Amor Towles | Notebook

[Author website](#)

## Table for Two (2024)

[NYT review](#). Started 051224. Completed 051724. Divided into 2 major sections:

1. New York
2. Los Angeles

“The Line” — “During the last days of the last Tsar, there lived a peasant named Pushkin in a small village one hundred miles from Moscow.” “The possibility of precipitation seems worthy as a topic only to those without the imagination or intelligence to speak of the latest literature, the cinema, and the international situation — or, in short, the times. But who a society is in turmoil, a discussion of the weather doesn’t seem quite so unwelcome...” (11) “For while Pushkin was standing at the end of the line, he knew that when the new fellow arrived, it would no longer be the end of the line. In fact, it would no longer be the end of anything at all.” (40)

“The Ballad of Timothy Touchett” — “A few years before the end of the millennium, one Timothy Touchett sat in the Main Reading room of the New York Public Library’s Fifth Avenue branch with a copy of Maxwell Perkins’s *Collected Letters* before him.” “The road along which a young man discovers what he is capable of is no midwestern interstate. It has no uninterrupted views to the horizon, no painted white lines, no brightly lit signs indicating the distance to one’s destination. Rather, it is a narrow and winding byway crowded with undergrowth and overhung with branches.” (51) Timothy the forger is sold out by Mr. Pennybrook, but “At long last, here comes your experience.” (74)

“*Hasta Luego*” — “I had noticed Smitty thirty minutes before we met.... We were both standing in the customer service line at LaGuardia Airport on a Friday at five in late December.” “It seems Mr. Smith’s bill exceeds the limit on his credit card.” (101) “As I stood there in the customer service line thinking of all that had just transpired, what I found myself hoping, what I found myself almost praying for, was that despite all my flaws, when the time came, as it surely would, my wife would be willing to fight for me as hard as Jennifer had fought for her husband. / My wife, her name is Ellen.” (106)

“I Will Survive” — Storyteller’s mother-in-law calls her daughter convinced her husband — a stepfather — is having an affair. Instead, we later learn, he’s roller skating to the Gloria Gaynor song. The daughter, Nell, follows her stepfather and finds him out, then tells her mother ... and her parents’ relationship head way downhill. “By rehashing the particulars with her inner circle, [Nell] was hoping that she would receive some confirmation, some assurance that whatever had happened, it hadn’t been her fault. And as those who love her best, we lied. Each and every one of us.” (141)

“The Bootlegger” — Tommy’s wife is the narrator. “We hadn’t been in our seats for more than two minutes when Tommy began to fidget. He kept looking over his shoulder toward the entrance of the concert hall with a knitted brow.” Tommy Harkness, his wife, and Albert Fein. His daughter Meredith is disgusted by what Tommy has done, but Mr. Fein seems okay with it — his recording of the concerts. “My father has come to some sort of peace about all of this — because he’s a kindhearted old man who wouldn’t cast a stone at a mountain. But just because he’s willing to forgive you doesn’t mean I am.” (175) The prelude to Bach’s Suites for Cello (in G Major). “There’s nothing particularly ironic about a curse. In fact a curse is the opposite of irony. Because it intends to mean exactly what it sounds like” (176)

it means, word for word, note for note, in every possible respect.” (176)  
Turns out the police handed the cassette tape to Tommy’s wife. “And in the years that followed only when [Tommy] was away on business, and the children were sound asleep, and the city was hushed unexpectedly, like with a newly fallen snow, would I take the cassette tape the police officer had given me from the back of my drawer and listen to Mr. Fein’s recording.” (179)

“The DiDomenico Fragment” - A portion of painting by an early Renaissance artist. The Annunciation. “The only advantage to growing old is that one loses one’s appetites. After the age of 65 one wishes to travel less, eat less, own less. At that point, there is no better way to end one’s day than with a few sips of an old Scotch, a few pages of an old novel, and a king-size bed without distractions.” (181) Lucas, a child, is used to help protagonist pave the way to gain access to a piece for sale.

“Eve in Hollywood” — A novella featuring Evelyn Ross, with real characters such as [Olivia de Havilland](#), [David O. Selznick](#). This story revisits Eve from *Rules of Civility*. Instead of heading home after visiting Katherine in Chicago, she heads west. “In the dining car, he [Charlie] was seated again with the pretty young lady with the scar. She was reading that new detective story — the one with the strangled brunette on the cover.” Their friendship carries the story. Prentice Symmons is the has-been, overweight, former actor. To him, the Beverly Hills Hotel lobby “isn’t the world. It isn’t a continent, or a country, or a town. It isn’t even a room! It is a prison cell. It is my Bastille.” (263) Eve gets rid of Litsky and his pestering Olivia by spiking his drink. (288) Marcus Benton works for Selznick. He eventually hires Eve to watch after Olivia. At the end of Part 1, Olivia has received the photos. To begin Part 2, Eve contacts Charlie. Prentice is brought in and identifies where the photos were taken: Freddie Fairview’s. “Over the last few years, as [Prentice] had gained in mass and dimension, he had diminished in the eyes of the town.... You are a man of no consequence, he said of himself with a smile as he reached the front door. A no one. A nobody!” (351) Wendell (Wendy) is the photographer. Litsky is his partner in the blackmail caper. Finnegan, a former colleague of Charlie’s on the police force and now head of security at the hotel, sets up Litsky and Wendy to take the money and photos for himself. “Windfalls come to the watchful.” (401) Eventually Eve tells Charlie her story about the “kept man,” “who lived in fortress of secrets. Secrets about his family, about his career, about his love affairs. Secrets about his apartment! But whatever the reasons they had for keeping their mouths shut, they were all just forms of lying. And I’ve had my fill. At this point, I want to hear *everything*. I want to hear what’s happened no matter how ugly, or uncomfortable, or unnerving it might be. Because if we don’t stare down the things that make us want to look away, then the world is just a mirage.” (440)

## Book: The Lincoln Highway

### Discussion topics

1. **Rereading**: I loved reading — and **rereading** — Amor Towles’ “[A Gentleman in Moscow](#)” (2016). Soon after finishing I turned to Towles’ first novel, “[Rules of Civility](#)” (2011), which, though very different, was another joy to read. Therefore, in 2021, with no trepidation whatsoever, I took up Towles’ third novel, “[The Lincoln Highway](#)” (2021), and once again I was not disappointed. “Yes, the boy read the story exactly as he had in the boxcar, but Ulysses didn’t hear it the same way. For this time, he knew what was to come. He knew now to look forward to some parts and dread others — to look forward to how Ulysses bested the Cyclops by hiding his men under the pelts of sheep, and to dread the moment when the covetous crew unleashed the winds of Aeolus ...” (325) See also p 349: Duchess tells a story: “It was an act worth seeing more than once. Because the first time you saw the show, when Marceline snapped his fingers at the end, it would seem like the world had gone right back to the way it was. But the second or third time you saw it, you might begin to realize that the world wasn’t *exactly* the way it was....” [Vivian](#)

[Gornick can't stop rereading](#), NY 1. | Gornick's new book is part memoiristic collage, part literary criticism, yet it is also an urgent

argument that **rereading offers the opportunity not just to correct and adjust one's recollection of a book but to correct and adjust one's perception of oneself**.... It is one of the great ironies of

consuming literature that as much as we read to expand our minds, we often take in only whatever it is that we are primed to absorb at a particular moment. Do not, Gornick says in this brief, incisive book, let that be the end of it. The book: **Unfinished Business: Notes of a**

**Chronic Re-reader**. | [Pianist Mitsuko] Uchida, 74, is an artist who returns to the familiar, especially the works of Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven, as part of a lifelong argument for the benefits of repeated examination. "The great composers always change," she once said in an [interview](#). "And as you change, they change." [Link to recording in Apple Music](#). [NYT review of Uchida's Carnegie Hall concert](#) on Feb 24, 2023.

[After all, Billy says he's read *Professor Abacus Abernathy's Compendium of Heroes, Adventurers, and Other Intrepid Travelers* 24 times (50).] Me? The first time I read, I follow plot, plot even more than character development. Sometimes I'll "hear" echoes from other reading, but mostly, the first time it's plot, or the action taking place in the book.

2. **Plot summary**. "America is three thousand miles wide, [Emmett] thought to himself. Five days before, he and Billy had set out with the intention of driving fifteen hundred miles west to California. Instead, they had traveled fifteen hundred miles east to New York. Having arrived, Emmett had crisscrossed the city from Times Square to lower Manhattan and back. To Brooklyn and Harlem. And when, at long last, it seemed his destination was within reach, Emmett had taken three trains, four taxis, and now was on foot." (450) Why does the book present itself in a chapter count-down? Can we trust all of the speakers / storytellers? 10 days. *In medias res* ...
3. **Characters** and the long line of youthful heroes. Who is telling this story? Good and evil. Good and evil characters. Names: "Ransom"; Emmett's father's bad luck and bad judgment (11). Emmett is a carpenter. Jimmy Snyder "liked running people down whether he knew them or not." (70) They all have their stories. As Billy says to Ulysses (325): "You don't have to tell a story from a book, Billy replied. You could tell a story from yourself. Like one from the war overseas. Do you have any of those?" Billy's and Woolley's innocence. Duchess's duplicity. How much do we trust Duchess? Story told from 8 different perspectives. Who is your favorite or most interesting character?
4. Echoes ... Ulysses and his 10 long years; 10 days of this plot
5. **Food**. Fettuccine mio amore (437) and A Gentleman. Also ...
6. **Genres**. Picaresques. Road stories. Epics. What's so different about this one? Trains and boats (rafts) and planes. And roads and highways. New York to San Francisco. Father dies; mother deserts. Ten ... Nine ... Eight ... (see p. 469) The sleight of hand, the bottle and napkin trick.
7. The year — 1954 — what's happening at this time? Why did Towles chose this year? How long is the book's action sequence? Role of time: "one of a kind day" (see Woolly below). "For a one-of-a-kind kind of day deserves to be relived at the slowest possible pace, with every moment, every twist, every turn of events remembered to the tiniest detail." (501)
8. Themes: revenge, trust, "unfinished business," friendship, family (fathers, but also, "It was Emmett's job to spare Billy from such vicissitudes for as long as he possibly could." (43). Can't trust Duchess, and what is trust if it's not reliable? "Look, Emmett, you know me. I could have done my stretch and then done Woolly's. Five months or five years, what's the difference. But given Woolly's state of mind, I don't think he could have done five more days." (37) It's Duchess who believes in "embellishments." He can't read; he can't swim. (Both of which contribute to his undoing.) *In medias res* : "He began in the ninth year of the war with the hero, Achilles, nursing his anger in his tent." (159) "If Billy were going to start at the very beginning, he would go back to the twelfth of December 1935, the day that Emmett was born. That was two years after their father and mother had married in Boston and moved to Nebraska.... But Billy wasn't going to start at the very beginning. He

was going to start *in medias res*. The hard part, as Billy had explained to

Emmett in the train station in Lewis, was knowing where the middle was." (509)

The idea of "unfinished business": Duchess gets the phrase when he hears Emmett say that to Jake Snyder: "If we've got unfinished business, let's finish it." Duchess: | You could wait your whole life to say a sentence like that and not have the presence of mind to say it when the time comes. That sort of levelheadedness isn't the product of upbringing or practice. You're either born with it or you're not. And mostly, you're not.(87) It was Emmett who was teaching the lesson. / Alan Ladd in *Shane*. / Frank Sinatra in *From Here to Eternity*. / Lee Marvin in *The Wild One*.

Duchess says: "By letting go of the farm and taking his beating in the public square, Emmett had already balanced his accounts. If we were going to head out west together, then maybe it was time for me to balance mine." (165)

Because we have souls, we are morally responsible for what we do. Hawks and cobras are not morally responsible for their actions; but humans, possessors of souls, are caught in a moral drama, either doing good or doing ill. (David Brooks)

| Another way to express the same idea was that through our misdeeds we put ourselves in another person's debt, just as through their misdeeds they put themselves in ours ... the only way to get a good night's sleep is to balance the accounts. (92)

Sally defines: | What is kindness but the performance of an act that is both beneficial to another and unrequired? ... For kindness begins where necessity ends. (104)

Random

Why are the chapters in reverse number order? "Count to ten" in bullying plot line. (Ted Lasso)

I loved reading — and rereading — Amor Towles' "[A Gentleman in Moscow](#)" (2016). Soon after finishing I turned to Towles' first novel, "[Rules of Civility](#)" (2011), which, though very different, was another joy to read. Therefore, in 2021, with no trepidation whatsoever, I took up Towles' third novel, "[The Lincoln Highway](#)" (2021), and once again I was not disappointed.

Long line of youthful heroes: Huck Finn, Holden Caulfield, Chappie (Rule of the Bone), Owen Meany, Hattie (True Grit) ...

But who is the hero here? Emmett? Billy (and his backpack)? Ulysses? Duchess? Woolly? Sally?

Then there are Towles' literary heroes: Twain, Melville, Salinger, Whitman. (251) See also, "We Live Here."

Billy loves heroes, from those he's read about to those he meets.

Billy believes: "That's where she'll be, Emmett. At the fireworks display at the Palace of the Legion of Honor on the Fourth of July." (24)

So many storytellers and so many stories. Duchess tells how he ended up in juvie. (353)

Food. Including Fettuccine mio amore. (437) Food in *A Gentleman in Moscow*.

As I've grown older and take more time to read, I've also learned to appreciate rereading. Which is exactly what I'll do to prepare for our review of "[The Lincoln Highway](#)" on May 31. In fact, I chose this book for our discussion because I wanted to read it again, coming at it from a fresh

perspective.

The [Lincoln Highway](#), dedicated in 1913, was the first highway built for the automobile, stretching across America from Times Square to San Francisco. The adventure Towles relates in his novel reminds me very much of Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," with the highway replacing the mighty Mississippi, the automobile replacing the raft, with Emmett and Billy Watson standing in for Huck and Jim.

[Amor Towles](#) talks about "The Lincoln Highway" in this video from the author's website.

Literary and Biblical references: Job and Noah (see below). Huck Finn. Billy Budd. Catcher in the Rye. We're dealing with a fallen, postlapsarian reality.

Duchess as enforcer (95) as well explainer, storyteller, life's historian. Sister Agnes to Emmett: "We both know that there is a goodness in him, a goodness that has been there from the beginning ..." (131) In Lewis, "one sense of right and wrong." (133) Duchess has "unsettled debts" and "the big ones rose right to the surface, three of them in all: One I would have to make good on, and two I would have to collect." (165) The first was the skillet on Warden Ackerly: "One down, two to go." Why is it so important to Duchess to settle his accounts? He gives away Emmett's Studebaker to Maurice: "Sister Agnes had always said that good deeds can be habit forming." (306)

Sally: "Emmett could tell that Sally was as ashamed as he was, and there was comfort in that too. Not the comfort of knowing that someone else was feeling a similar sting of rebuke. Rather, the comfort of knowing one's sense of right and wrong was shared by another, and thus was somehow more true." (477)

Billy: "When Billy stopped speaking, the professor closed his eyes for a moment. Not like Emmett does when he's trying to hold in his exasperation, but like a lover of music who has just heard the ending of his favorite concerto." (412)

Abacus: "A little boy from Nebraska appears at his doorstep with a gentle demeanor and a fantastical tale. A tale not from a leather-bound tome, mind you. Not from an epic poem written in an unspoken language. Not from an archive or athenaeum. But from life itself. / How easily we forget — we in the business of storytelling — that life was the point all along. A mother who has vanished, a father who has failed, a brother who is determined. A journey from the prairies into the city by means of a boxcar with a vagabond named Ulysses. Then to a railroad track suspended over the city as surely as Valhalla is suspended in the clouds. And there, the boy, Ulysses, and he, having sat down by a campfire as ancient as the ways of man, began —" (506)

Woolly: he's much like Billy, only more complex, deformed in a way. (257)

"For a one-of-a-kind kind of day deserves to be relived at the slowest possible pace, with every moment, every twist, every turn of events remembered to the tiniest detail." (501)

Emmett Watson: "For most people, Emmett figured, rules were a necessary evil." (144) "But when it came to rules, Billy wasn't simply an abider. He was a stickler. He made his bed and brushed his teeth without seeing to be asked. He insisted that he be at school fifteen minutes before the first bell, and he always raised his hand in class before speaking." (145)

Ulysses : Billy says "We're not friends yet. We're just getting acquainted." (231) "Abandoned by God." "If I learned anything in the war, it's that the point of utter abandonment — that moment at which you realize no one will be coming to your aid, not even your Maker — is the very moment in which you may discover the strength required to carry on.... For only when you have seen that you are *truly* forsaken will you embrace the fact that what happens next rests in your hands, and your hands alone." (330) "I am of the opinion, Professor, that everything of value in this life must be earned. That it *should* be earned. Because those who are given something of value without having to earn it are bound to squander it. I believe that one should earn respect. One should earn trust. One should earn the love of a woman,

and the right to call oneself a man. And one should earn the right to hope... When Billy said that as one named Ulysses, I might be destined to see my wife and child again, I felt a stirring within me.” (421)

Townsend in Harlem. Tells Emmett about Duchess: “He is one of those guys who are born with no peripheral vision. He can see everything that’s right in front of him, see it more clearly than most, but the second that something is pushed an inch to the left or right, he doesn’t even know it’s there. And that can lead to all kinds of trouble. For him, and for anyone within spitting distance. All I’m saying, Emmett, is now that you’ve got your car, maybe you should let Duchess be.” (378)

## Notes for presentation

Bio to Malinda

- Born 1953 in nearby High Point, NC, at the height of the Korean War, then missed Vietnam due to a middling lottery number, later aided by the suspension of the Selective Service System during the Nixon presidency..
- Graduated from Hampden-Sydney College, then collected a Master’s degree in English from UNC-CH. Special field of study was “the literature of the South.”
- Began as a copywriter, then became director of marketing at Thomasville Furniture Industries before starting up an advertising, marketing, and branding agency based in the Piedmont Triad of North Carolina.
- Clients predominantly in, first, the home furnishings industry, then later specializing in golf and resort industry marketing, including Club Car, Softspikes, Golf Pride, Nicklaus Golf, Pinehurst Resort, and many others.
- At the end of his professional career, he joined Golf Channel, previously a client, as Vice President of Business Marketing, Education, and Events.
- Retired in 2017. Today he and his wife, Betty Poore, split their time between Blowing Rock and Sanibel Island, FL.
- Spends almost all of his time now voraciously reading fiction, non-fiction — almost anything he might be interested in — and, oh, yeah, playing a considerable amount of golf.

LinkedIn profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mark-burris-4bb1662/>

Amor Towles’ earlier book, *A Gentleman in Moscow*, featured a lot of food and drink. The book, *The Lincoln Highway*, not so much, but it does feature a long, food-filled passage about Leonello’s, a fictional Italian trattoria, and its famous dish, *fettuccine mio amore*. By the time it was cooked, it simply must be accompanied by a *vino Rosso*.

For background, consider beginning at page 466 and go through the next few pages.

Perhaps your cocktail might be an Italian *apertif* of Mo’s choice and a rich red wine?

Why does the chapter heading begin with “10”?

The Warden and Emmett driving from Kansas to Nebraska.

| - What I’m getting at, Emmett, is that you are not one of them. We haven’t known either other long, but from my time with you I can tell that that boy’s death [Jimmy Snyder] weighs heavily on your conscience. No one imagines what happened that night reflects either the spirit of malice or an expression of your character. It was the ugly side of chance. But as a civilized society, we ask that even those who have had an unintended hand in the misfortune of others pay some retribution. Of course, the payment of the retribution is in part to satisfy those who’ve suffered the brunt of the misfortune — like this boy’s family. But we also require that it be paid for the benefit of the young man who was the agent of misfortune. So that by having the opportunity to pay his debt, he too can find some solace, some sense of atonement, and thus begin the process of renewal. (4)

| [Emmett] knew too that he had been an agent of misfortune rather than its author. But he didn't agree that his debt had been paid in full. For no matter how much chance has played a role, when by your hands you have brought another man's time on earth to its end, to prove to the Almighty that you are worthy of his mercy, that shouldn't take any less than the rest of your life. (5)

Emmett is fallen; he's like Billy Budd: "Struck dead by an angel of God, yet the angel must hang."

This book is about the fallen. And the simple.

The banker, Tom Obermeyer, is seen as a villain by Mr. Ransom. But later we learn of Ransom's plot for contiguous ...

| Mr. Obermeyer looked to Emmett with a mixture of skepticism and sympathy — two emotions that in Emmett's view had no business being on the same face at the same time. (9) Emmett just wants to avoid debt, which is why he rejects Mr. Ransom's offer to loan him some money.

Emmett's father had both bad luck and bad judgment. Emmett went to Mr. Schulte "because he figured that no matter what happened, a carpenter would always have work." (12) - The way I figure it, Mr. Schulte, it was Job who had the oxen, and Noah who had the hammer. (13)

Billy's backpack introduced (17). - That's quite a pack, Emmett said.

Change in speaker/narrator. Now Duchess (32).

Woolly = Jim? Woolly appears in Rules of Civility as well.

Duchess = Tom Sawyer? "That's what you'd call an embellishment — a harmless little exaggeration in the service of emphasis." (37)

Jimmy Snyder = Claggart

"Mostly, he said, what people have been giving me is advice." (84)

| ... as the kid's older brother, as his guardian and sole protector, it was Emmett's job to spare Billy from such vicissitudes for as long as he possibly could. [like Holden Caulfield] (43)

Contrast how Emmett and Billy, then Duchess became orphans: Emmett's and Billy's dad dies; mother leaves. Duchess's father leaves him in an orphanage near the Platte River. | In fact, it was only when I happened to glance through the window and spied my father speeding down the driveway with Miss Maple's head on his shoulder that I realized I'd been had. (59)

[Nine begins]

"Mostly, he said, what people have been giving me is advice." (84)

If we've got unfinished business, let's finish it.

## The Lincoln Highway

Completed 101221

[NYT review](#) by Chris Bachelder

[Driving the Lincoln Highway](#). NYT photo essay from 2013. "The Lincoln was the country's first transcontinental automobile highway." "The Lincoln Highway reaches its westernmost point across the state in San Francisco's Lincoln Park."

Emmett Watson, Billy Watson. Emmett plays the role of hero, Billy is the Chorus, the observer, the one who prevents the hero from making a terrible mistake ... from counting to 10 to ...

| *All classical heroes, he says, however strong or wise or courageous they may be, have some flaw or defect or weakness that leads to their downfall.* From *A Skillful* the

*have some jaw in their character which leads to their undoing. For Achilles the fatal flaw had been anger.... / Billy understood that his brother had the same flaw as Achilles. Emmett was not a reckless person. He rarely raised his voice or showed impatience. But when something happened to make him angry, the force of his fury could come to such a boil that it resulted in an *injudicious act with irreversible consequences.* / This must be it, thought Billy. This is the time and place at which I needed to be in order to play my essential role in the course of events. (558)*

| Then Billy understood. / Emmett wasn't there. Ulysses wasn't there. Sally wasn't there. Once again, he was alone and forsaken. Forsaken by everyone, including his Maker. And whatever happened next rested only in his hands. (559)

In Billy's backpack is everything he needs: silver dollars, the book, a flashlight, a surplus watch ...

Emmett is at Salina because he killed Jimmy Snyder.  
Duchess because of the watch his father lifted, then stuffed into Duchess's pocket to keep the police from fingering him.  
Woolly because of the fire that killed four horses ...

Sally Ransom and her father  
Duchess and Woolly (Wallace Wolcott, see Rules of Civility) and Sarah  
Ulysses takes them to New York  
Duchess finds Fitzy, and he wants him to lead to his father; he never gets there.

Billy comes up with the safe's combination on his sixth try.  
A Studebaker (Emmett) and a Cadillac (Billy)  
Ellie Matthiessen is the librarian who gave Billy the book: *Professor Abacus Abernathes Compendium of Heroes, Adventurers, and other Intrepid Travelers.*  
(156) "I am pretty sure that we are on our adventure, Emmett. But I won't be able to make a start of setting it down until I know where the middle of it is."  
(159)

Townhouse was in Salina with the boys. His father was a postman:  
| - As much as I love my father, I can't imagine living like that. Covering the same ground day after day, week after week, year after year.  
| - They moved him six blocks south and four blocks east, and it nearly broke his heart.... / But he never forgot the first route. Every year on Memorial Day, when he's got the day off, he walks the old one. Saying hi to everybody who recognizes him, and half the people who don't. In his words, if you've got a job as a mailman, then the US government is paying you to make friends. (519)

| Billy started back in 1946, on the summer night that his mother walked out on them. He explained about Emmett's doing the hitch at Salina and his father dying of cancer and the brothers' plan to follow the trail of a bunch of postcards so that they could find their mother at a fireworks display in San Francisco on the Fourth of July. He even explained about the escapade and how since Woolly and I had borrowed the Studebaker, he and Emmett had to hitch a ride to New York on the Sunset East. (408)

And of course there's a circus and a house of ill repute.

Much of Duchess' story is settling accounts: Ackerly, the "cowboy" he beat up in the alley, and the Hondo fiasco: "The John Wayne picture we went to see on that rainy night back in Salina. I feel bad because of the beating you took." (302)

Leonello's, the birthplace of fettuccine mio amore. (467)  
"Dennis" is Sarah's husband.

So many characters you need a program. Some come in and go out. Others come in, go out, and return (The Pastor). Still others make a welcome — if almost miraculous — appearance ... Prof. Abernathie.  
The Lincoln Highway, "the first road to stretch across America," from Times Square to San Francisco.



In many ways this is Billy's book, presented *in medias res*.

| June 12, 1954 — The drive from Salina to Morgen was three hours, and for much of it, Emmett hadn't said a word.

Emmett's plan: Buy a house, fix it up, sell it; buy 2 more houses ...

| Meanwhile, the cowboy — who was still leaning dismissively on the door of Emmett's car — shouted, *You show him, Jake*, as if Jake were about to teach Emmett a lesson. But the cowboy had it upside down. It was Emmett who was teaching the lesson. / Alan Ladd in *Shane*. / Frank Sinatra in *From Here to Eternity*. / Lee Marvin in *The Wild One*. (88)

Duchess is Tom Sawyer (creative), Dirty Harry (enforcer), a kind of judge and settler of accounts ... He enables much of the action. But he keeps meticulous records: he intends, he says, to make all accounts right. He's just driven so much, he breaks down from time to time and does something evil, maybe even stupid. Such as the rifle ... He can't swim, read ... (list for closing the house: 534)

| - I have no doubt that you are angry with Daniel for taking liberties with your car. But we both know that there is goodness in him, a goodness that has been there from the beginning, but which has never had the chance to fully flourish. At this critical time in his life, what he needs more than anything else is a friend who will stand reliably at his side; a friend who can steer him clear of folly and help him find the way to fulfilling his Christian purpose. (131) [Sister Agnes]

| After leaving Lewis, for the first one hundred and fifty miles we had seen more grain elevators than human beings. And most of the towns we passed through seemed to be limited to one of everything by local decree: one movie theater and one restaurant; one cemetery and one savings and loan; in all likelihood, one sense of right and wrong. (133)

| Over the years, the collection of my father's cases had slowly diminished. One had been stolen, another misplaced, another sold. Hamlet was lost in a game of 5-card stud in Cincinnati, appropriately to a pair of kings, But it was not a coincidence that Othello was the last of the six, for it was the one my old man prized most. This was not simply because he had received some of his best reviews for his performance of the Moor, but because on several occasions the jar of blackface had secured him a timely exit. (248)

"... Fitzzy's beard came in as white and woolly as Whitman's, so with the floppy hat on his head and his milky blue eyes, he was every bit the song of himself." (251)

| - My life, such as it is, Mr. Ulysses, has ben the opposite of yours in many respects. I have never been to a war. I have not traveled this country. In fact, for most of the last thirty years, I have remained on the island of Manhattan. And for most of the last ten, I have remained in that. (420) [Abernathe]

[Amor Towles talks](#) about The Lincoln Highway.

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## Rules of Civility

Rereading, started 041925. Completed 042225. Kate Kontent and Evey Ross. Wallace Wolcott. Anne Grandwyn. "Friends ... are the envy of the angels." (49) Hank and Dicky Vanderwhile. Kate: "But for me dinner at a fine restaurant was the ultimate luxury. It was the very height of civilization." (137) "On the morning of Friday, July first, I had a low-paying job at a waning publisher and a dwindling circle of semi-acquaintances. On Friday, July eighth, I had one foot in the door at Conde Nast and the other in the door of the Knickerbocker club – the professional and social circles that would define the next thirty years of my life." (161) "So I got a pot of warm water from the kitchen and washed her feet." (212) "The tin slipped into the bath"

from the kitchen and washed her feet." (212) "Tinker eased into the booth beside Anne. And in the moment before the waiter tucked the table back, I could see Anne sliding her hand discreetly along Tinker's thigh." (237) "Some people are born with the ability to appreciate serene and formally structured music from like Bach and Handel. They can sense the abstract beauty of the music's mathematical relationships, its symmetries and motifs. But Dicky wasn't one of them." (273) "It was a rifle you could have worn to your wedding." (308)

Started 091017. Rereading 111021. Completed 111421. Reread April 2025.  
"Friends, Casper observed, are the envy of the angels." (49)

(2) Theodore "Tinker" Grey

(1) Eve Ross

Katey Kontent

(3) Wallace Wolcott, KIA in Spanish Civil War:

| In a single stroke, he was going to shed every aspect of his life that was sensible, familiar, and secure. And in the month before he left, rather than review the disadvantages of his decision with friends and family, he opted for the company of an amiable stranger. (189) (See p. 455 in *The Lincoln Highway*.)

(4) Dicky Vanderwhile

Henry Grey, brother, artist

Nathaniel Parish ... "was a senior fiction editor at the Pembroke Press and something of a fixture." (149)

Valentine Hollingsworth, drove her home one night and years later, marries Katey; introduced on 205

Mason Tate, editor of *Gotham*

Bitsy Houghton

Anne Grandwyn

Kim Kincaid says she preferred *Gentleman*, but liked *Civility* nevertheless.

Opening section is New Year's Eve 1937 and the top three characters above meet by chance in a cheap bar. The most of the book is 1938, a full year for the four main characters who have such an impact on Katey's life.

The Preface deals with a look back — 1966 — as "Val and I, both in late middle age, attended the opening of *Many Are Called* at the Museum of Modern Art — the first exhibit of the portraits taken by Walker Evans in the late 1930s on the New York City subways with a hidden camera."

The photograph they see of Tinker — the one that gets them talking — was taken in 1938. "You couldn't blame Val for making the mistake. It was natural to assume that this was the later picture — and not simply because it was hunt later in the show. In the 1938 picture Tinker not only looked better of, he looked older too: His face was fuller, and it had a suggestion of pragmatic world-weariness, as if a string of successes had towed along an ugly truth or two. While the picture taken a year later looked more like the portrait of a peacetime 20-year-old: vibrant and fearless and native."

Val felt embarrassed for Tinker.

—Oh, he said, I'm sorry.

He took my arm again and shook his head for Tinker as for us all.

—Riches to rags, he said, tenderly.

—No, I said. Not exactly. (8-9)

Eve Ross

She was indisputably a natural blonde. Her shoulder-length hair, which was sandy in summer, turned golden in the fall as if in sympathy with the wheat fields back home. (15)

| Like an adventuress trying to complete the first solo flight across the Hudson River, she hoped to type as fast as was humanly possible.... Which is to say, be careful when choosing what you're proud of — because the world

has every intention of using it against you. (37)

With over a millennia of heritage behind them, each with their own glimpse of empire and some pinnacle of human expression (a Sistine Chapel or Gotterdammerung), now they were satisfied to express their individuality though which Rogers they preferred at the Saturday matinee: Ginger or Roy or Buck. America may be the land of opportunity, but in New York it's the shot at conformity that pulls them through the door. (39)

Between two bookends, there was a small selection of reference books: a thesaurus, a Latin grammar, a soon-to-be extremely outdated atlas. But there was also a slender volume without a title on the spine. It turned out to be a book of Washingtonia. The inscription on the first page indicated it was a present to Tinker from his mother on the occasion of his 14th birthday. (70)

*Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation* (327-335)

| Seated directly across from me was a friend of Tinker's named Wallace Wolcott.... Wallace, who had a slight speech impediment — a sort of dead stop in the middle of every remark — was obviously more interested in playing with his spoon than making eyes at me. All in all, one got the sense he'd rather be behind his desk at the family paper concern. (88)

| In retrospect, my cup of coffee has been the works of Charles Dickens. Admittedly, there's something a little annoying about all those plucky underprivileged kids and the aptly named agents of villainy. But I've come to realize that however blue my circumstances, if after finishing a chapter of a Dickens novel I feel a miss-my-stop-on-the-train sort of compulsion to read on, then everything is probably going to be just fine. (128)

| Pembroke was forty years behind the times. On my first day on the job I could tell that the editors at Pembroke were nothing like their younger counterparts around town. Not only did they have manners, but thought them worth preserving. They treated the opening of a door for a lay or the hand-scripted regret the way an archaeologist treats a fragment of pottery — with all the loving care that we normally reserve for things that matter. (151)

On the morning of Friday, July 1st, I had a low-paying job at a waning publisher and a dwindling circle of semi-acquaintances. On Friday, July 8th, I had one foot in the door of Conde Nast and the other in the door of the Knickerbocker Club — the professional and social circles that would define the next thirty years of my life. (160)

I gave his forearm a reassuring squeeze.

—Goodnight, Dicky.

As I climbed out of the car he grabbed my wrist.

—*When shall we two meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain?*

I leaned back into the roadster and laid my lips against the whorls of his ear.

—*When the hurly-burly's done. When the battle's lost and won.* (173) [Act 1, Macbeth]

Written by a Belarusian immigrant named Vernon Duke, "Autumn in New York" practically debuted as a jazz standard. Within 15 years of its being played, Charlie Parker, Sarah Vaughn, Louis Armstrong, and Ella Fitzgerald had all explored its sentimental bounds. Within 25, there would be interpretations of the interpretations by Chet Baker, Sonny Stitt, Frank Sinatra, Bud Powell, and Oscar Peterson. The very question that the song asks of us about autumn, we could ask ourselves of the sort: *Why does it seem so inviting?* (206)

Ella & Louis - Autumn in New York (HD)



Despite its wordiness, I could tell that Mr. Tate generally appreciated Cabot's work. Cabot had a good instinct for the intersection of gossip and history and he seemed to be an unusually effective interviewer — charming people into answering questions that were better left unanswered.

—I think he's read too much Henry James, I said.

Tate nodded for a second. Then he handed me the draft.

—See if you can make him sound a little more like Hemingway. (208)

| At Eleventh Street, I gave the cabby an extra buck to help me get her up the stairs. We dumped her on my bed with her legs dangling off the mattress. I called the apartment at the Beresford [where Wallace lives] but no one answered. So I got a pot of warm water from the kitchen and washed her feet. Then I took off her dress and tucked her in bed in a camisole that cost more than my entire outfit, shoes included. (212)

How was Mrs. Ross bearing up? She was like someone in mourning, only worse. When a mother loses a daughter, she grieves over the future that her daughter will never have, but she can take solace in memories of close-knit days. But when your daughter runs away, it is the fond memories that have been laid to rest; and your daughter's future, alive and well, recedes from you like a wave drawing out to sea. (218)

| —Well, at first I wasn't sure I was going to make it. Four hundred pages of a man alone in a cabin philosophizing on human history, trying to strip life to its essentials ...

—But what did you think in the end?

Tinker stopped breaking sticks and looked into the distance.

—In the end — I thought it was the greatest adventure of them all. (228)

[Towles impresses with his literary references, their range: From Walden to Agatha Christie (251); Dickens; Hemingway over Henry James ...]

| There is an oft-quoted passage in Walden, in which Thoreau exhorts us to find our pole star and to follow it unwaveringly as would a sailor or a fugitive slave. It's a thrilling sentiment—one so obviously worthy of our aspirations. But even if you had the discipline to maintain the true course, the real problem, it has always seemed to me, is how to know in which part of the heavens your star resides. (230)

| Historically, once in the hands of a hairdresser, I had done whatever necessary to stymie conversation: grimacing; sleeping; staring blankly into the mirror; once I even feigned ignorance of English. (233)

[To Bitsy] I told her how Evey and I had met Tinker at The Hotspot on New Year's Eve and how the three of us had bandied about — to the Capitol Theatre and Chernoff's. I told her about Anne Grandwyn and how she'd introduced herself at the '21' Club as Tinker's godmother. I told her about the car crash and Eve's recovery and the night with the closed-kitchen eggs and the star-crossed kiss at the elevator door. I told her about the steamer to Europe and the letter from Brixham. I told her how I'd talked my way into a new job and insinuated myself into the glamorous lives of Dicky Vanderwhile and Wallace Wolcott and Bitsy Houghton nee Van Heuys. (240)

| —What happened? I'll tell you what happened: My old man lost everything we ever had, bit by bit. When Teddy was born, the four of us lived in a house

with fourteen rooms. Every year we lost a room — and moved a few blocks closer to the docks. By the time I was 15, we were in a boarding house that *leaned* over the water. (276)

| I caught up with the others outside, giving a little prayer of thanks to no one in particular. Because when some incident sheds a favorable light on an old and absent friend [Eve], that's about as good a gift as chance intends to offer. (278)

| So despite the rest of it, Dicky asked with supernatural remove, are you fallen for him still? / *Don't say it, Katey. For God's sake, don't admit it. Get off your ass and kiss this madcapper. Convince him never to discuss it again.* / —Yes, I said. / Yes — that word that is supposed to be bliss. Yes, said Juliet. Yes, said Heloise. Yes, yes, yes, said Molly Bloom. The avowal, the affirmation, the sweet permission. But in the context of this conversation, it was poison. / I could almost feel something dying inside him. And what was dying was his self-confident, unquestioning, all-forgiving impression of me. (296)  
—If we only fell in love with people who were perfect for us, [Dicky] said, then there wouldn't be so much fuss about love in the first place. (297)

| I had been given one of the mock-ups because the image had been my idea. / Well, sort of. / It was actually a variation on a painting by Rene Magritte that I had seen at the Modern.... (305)

| The year 1938 had been one in which four people of great color and character [Dicky, Eve, Wallace, Tinker] had held welcome sway over my life. And here it was December 31, 1940, and I hadn't seen a single one of them in over a year. (318)

It is a bit of a cliché to characterize life as a rambling journey on which we can alter our course at any given time — by the slightest turn of the wheel, the wisdom goes, we influence the chain of events and thus recast our destiny with new cohorts, circumstances, and discoveries. But for the most of us, life is nothing like that. Instead, we have a few brief periods when we are offered a handful of discrete options. Do I take this job or that job? In Chicago or New York? Do I join this circle of friends or that one, and with whom do I go home at the end of the night? And does one make time for children now? Or later? Or later still? / In that sense, life is less like a journey than it is a game of honeymoon bridge. In our twenties, when there is still so much time ahead of us, time that seems ample for a hundred indecisions, for a hundred visions and revisions — we draw a card, and we must decide right then and there whether to keep that card and discard the next, or discard the first card and keep the second. And before we know it, the deck has been played out and the decisions we have just made will shape our lives for decades to come. (323)

#### Food and dining

| I took my time coming to life too [as did the restaurant]. I sipped a second champagne and savored my canapés. I had another cigarette. When the waiter returned I ordered a glass of white wine, asparagus gratin, and for the entree, the specialty of the house: *poussin* stuffed with black truffle.... The asparagus arrived with a touch of fanfare, presented table side in a small copper pan. The individual spears were arranged in perfect order — each identical in length, no two overlapping. On top had been delicately scattered a mixture of buttered bread crumbs and fontina cheese which had been broiled to a crunchy, bubbling brown. The captain served the asparagus with a silver fork and spoon. Then he grated a touch of lemon peel over the plate. (136)

| We ordered martinis from a waiter named Mitchell and reviewed the menus. To begin, Wallace ordered aspic, of all things, and I had the house salad — a terrific concoction of iceberg greens, cold blue cheese and warm red bacon. If I were a country, I would have made it my flag. (182)  
[Prepare for dinner on 111521.]

[After wrapping Wallace's family's Christmas gifts] ... With the job complete, we passed into the kitchen, where the air smelled of slow-roasting potatoes. After checking the oven, Wallace wrapped an apron around his waist and seared the lamb chops that I had carefully selected the day before. Then he removed the chops and deglazed the pan with mint jelly and cognac. —Wallace, I asked as he handed me my plate, if I declared war on America, would you stay and fight with me? (192)

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[NYT review](#) of *Gentleman*

[Amor Towles' notes in Goodreads](#)

## *A Gentleman in Moscow*

Betty read it first; I was unaware it existed. Then in Bermuda I noted that Kim was reading *Rules of Civility*, "because my book club is reading *A Gentleman* and I didn't want to begin that one here."

Much as Donna Tartt in *The Secret History* tells us truths early and removes much of the action's suspense, Towles also turns to his readers and tells them things they may want to remember ... or not. Such as Prince Petrov's entrance and our need to not bother remembering his name. (102)

| But experience is less likely to teach us how to bid our dearest possessions *adieu*. And if it were to? We wouldn't welcome the education. For eventually, we come to hold our dearest possessions more closely than we hold our friends. We carry them from place to place, often at considerable expense and inconvenience; we dust and polish their surfaces and reprimand children for playing too roughly in their vicinity — all the while, allowing memories to invest them with greater and greater importance. (14)

About Andrey, one of the hotel staff: | Andrey was handsome, tall, and graying at the temples, but his most distinguishing feature was not his looks, his height, or his hair. It was his hands. Pale and well manicured, his fingers were half an inch longer than the fingers of most men his height. Had he been a pianist, Andrey could easily have straddled a twelfth. Had he been a puppeteer, he could have performed the sword fight between Macbeth and Macduff as all three witches looked on. But Andrey was neither a pianist nor a puppeteer — or at least not in the traditional sense. He was the captain of [Metropol restaurant] Boyarsky, and one watched in wonder as his hands fulfilled their purpose at every turn. (27)

On dueling: | In Russia, whatever the endeavor, if the setting is glorious and the tenor grandiose, it will have its adherents. In fact, over the years, as the locations for duels became more picturesque and the pistols more finely manufactured, the best-bred men proved willing to defend their honor over lesser and lesser offenses. So while dueling may have begun as a response to high crimes — to treachery, treason, and adultery — by 1900 it had tiptoed down the stairs of reason, until they were being fought over the tilt of a hat, the duration of a glance, or the placement of a comma. (Note the use of the Oxford!) (46)

"I have no intention of thanking people for things I never asked for in the first place." (53)

**Nina Kulikova**, age 9

**Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov**

| But for the virtuous who have lost their way, the Fates often prove a guide. On the island of Crete, Theseus had his Ariadne and her magical ball of thread to lead him safely from the lair of the Minotaur. Through those caverns where ghostly shadows dwell, Odysseus had his Tiresias just as Dante had his Virgil. And in the Metropol Hotel, Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov had a 9-year-old girl by the name of Nina Kulikova. (55)

| I have had to protect myself with my hands from the sun and the heat. She

| Nina had not contented herself with the views from the upper decks. She had gone below. Behind. Around. About. In the time that Nina had been in the hotel, the walls had not grown inward, they had grown outward, expanding in scope and intricacy. [And later the Count expands his room, emboldened by his new friend.] (57)

For pomp is a tenacious force. And a wily one too. / How humbly it bows its head as the emperor is dragged down the steps and tossed in the street. But then, having quietly bided its time, while helping the newly appointed leader on with his jacket, it compliments his appearance and suggests the wearing of a medal or two. Or, having served him at a formal dinner, it wonders aloud if a taller chair might not have been more fitting for a man with such responsibilities. (59) [Pomp plays a role at the end with the manager.]

**Why reread?** | Rising from his chair, the Count took up the largest of the ten volumes that he had retrieved from the basement. True, it would not be a new venture for him. But need it be? Could one possibly accuse him of nostalgia or idleness, of wasting his time simply because he had read the story two or three times before? (64)

Quote from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*: All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. (64)

[About the "Anna Karenina principle," from Wikipedia.](#)

[Note the alliteration. Towles is nothing if not a writer bent on showing off.] As best as the Count could determine, the Bolsheviks assembled whenever possible in whichever form for whatever reason. In a single week, there might be committees, caucuses, colloquiums, congresses, and conventions variously coming together to establish codes, set courses of action, levy complaints, and generally clamor about the world's oldest problems in its newest nomenclature. (65)

**Mishka** shows up (the pacer) and toasts the 10-year anniversary of the Grand Duke's passing, "who died on the back of his horse on the 21st of September 1912 ..." (84)

On Christmas Eve, his brief *hors d'oeuvre* with Nina (who has ice cream): "It is a sad but unavoidable fact of life," he began, "that as we age our social circles grow smaller. Whether from increased habit or finished vigor, we suddenly find ourselves in the company of just a few familiar faces. So I view it as an incredible stroke of good fortune at this stage in my life to have found such a fine new friend."

He gifts her his grandmother's opera glasses. She gifts him the master key she's used to enter rooms all over the hotel. (94)

But had the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come suddenly appeared and roused the Count to give him a glimpse of the future, he would have seen that his sense of well-being had been premature. For less than four years later, another careful accounting of the twice-toiling clock's twelve chimes, Alexander Ilyich Rostov would be climbing to the roof of the Metropol Hotel in his finest jacket and gamely approaching its parapet in order to throw himself into the street below. (105)

Thus ends Book 1. Book 2 opens in 1923. At the opening we learn of his and Mishka's ceremonious drink on 10-year anniversaries of their friends' deaths. As he's about to don a grey blazer to meet Mishka, he reconsiders: "It's an anniversary of sorts — for it had been one year to the day since the Count had last set foot outside of the Metropol Hotel. (109) [All of this from her room as she serves him.]

## **Anna Urbanova**

After all, what can a first impression tell us about someone we've just met

for a minute in the lobby of a hotel? For that matter, what can a first impression tell us about anyone? Why, no more than a chord can tell us about Beethoven, or a brushstroke about Botticelli. By their very nature, human beings are so capricious, so complex, so delightfully contradictory, that they deserve not only our consideration, but our *reconsideration* — and our unwavering determination to withhold our opinion until we have engaged with them in every possible setting at every possible hour. (121)

[When she surprises him with sex, he thinks of himself as comfortably a step behind.] From his relaxed position, the one-step-behinder imagines that his evening with a new acquaintance will transpire like any other — with a little chit, a little chat, and a friendly goodnight at the door. But ... (122)

| Now, when a man has been underestimated by a friend, he has some cause for taking offense — since it is our friends who should *overestimate* our capacities. They should have an exaggerated opinion of our moral fortitude, our aesthetic sensibilities, and our intellectual scope. Why, they should practically imagine us leaping through a window in the nick of time with the works of Shakespeare in one hand and a pistol in the other! (134)

**Wine!** | Whichever wine was within, it was decidedly not identical to its neighbors. On the contrary, the contents of the bottle in his hand was the product of a history as unique and complex as that of a nation, or a man. In its color, aroma, and taste, it would certainly express the idiosyncratic geology and prevailing climate of its home terrain. But in addition, it would express all the natural phenomena of its *vintage*. In a sip, it would evoke the timing of that winter's thaw, the extent of that summer's rain, the prevailing winds, and the frequency of clouds. / Yes, a bottle of wine was the ultimate distillation of time and place; a poetic expression of individuality itself. Yet here it was, cast back into the sea of anonymity, that realm of averages and unknowns. (144)

| On the 22nd of June 1926 — the tenth anniversary of Helena's death — Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov would drink to his sister's memory. Then he would shed this mortal coil, once and for all. (145)

| It is a fact of human life that one must eventually choose a philosophy. Or such was the opinion of the Count, as he stood before his old windows in suite 317, having slipped inside with the help of Nina's key. (146)

He tells the story of the Hussar who insulted Helena. (148 ff.)

The anecdote from the bar and the "3 things" about Russia that are world class. (156 ff.)

As long as there have been men on earth, reflected the Count, there have been men in exile. From primitive tribes to the most advanced societies, someone has occasionally been told by his fellow men to pack his bags, cross the border, and never set foot on his native soil again. But perhaps this was to be expected. **After all, exile was the punishment that God meted out to Adam in the very first chapter of the human comedy;** and that He meted out to Cain a few pages later. Yes, exile was as old as mankind. But the Russians were the first people to master the notion of sending a man into exile at home. (164)

At the conclusion of Book 2, he has stepped down from the roof and spent time with Abram, "the handyman," and he's learned the value of fresh grind of beans before brewing. Book 3 begins in 1930. (171) By now the Count is employed.

From the lobby the Count observes a group of four student-types. "The blonde accepted the coat with a nod, and without a word of thanks. / Without a word of thanks ...? / The Count rose to his feet. / "Nina?" (185)

| Nina Kulikova always was and would be a serious soul in search of serious



ideas to be serious about. (186)

| This, one might be inclined to observe, is exactly how Napoleon must have appeared when in the hour before dawn he walked among his ranks, reviewing everything from the stores of munitions to the dress of the infantry — having learned from experience that **victory on the field of battle begins with the shine on a boot.** (203)

“Then allow me to introduce myself: I am **Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov** — former colonel of the Red Army and an officer of the Party, who as a boy in eastern Georgia dreamed of Moscow, and who as a man of thirty-nine in Moscow dreams of eastern Georgia.” (210)

They eat, share ideas, learn, watch films (esp *Casablanca*). **Definition of a “gentleman.”**

| At one in the morning, conspirators took their seats. On the table before them were a single candle, a loaf of bread, a bottle of rose, and three bowls of bouillabaisse. (221)

**Andrey**, he of the long fingers, is a master juggler. (224)

| The Count considered for a moment what other sort of wonder might capture her imagination, but which he had actually seen in person. / “Would you like to hear a story about a princess?” he suggested. / Sofia sat upright. / “The age of nobility has given way to the age of the common man,” she said with the pride of one who has recited her times tables correctly. “It was historically inevitable.” (239)

| And in the days that followed, a man who had long prided himself on his ability to tell a story in the most succinct manner with an emphasis on the most salient points, by necessity became a master of the digression, the parenthetical remark, **the footnote**, eventually even learning to anticipate Sofia’s relentless inquiries before she had the time to phrase them. (272)

| So was the count “aware” of what took place in the fourth-floor corridor at a quarter to eight? One might just as well ask if Noah was aware of The Flood, or Adam the Apple. (281) [By this time — 1946 — Sofia is 13. (282)]

| “Every country has its grand canvas, Sasha — the so-called masterpiece that hangs in a hallowed hall and sums up the national identity for generations to come. For the French it is *Delacroix’s Liberty Leading the People*; for the Dutch, *Rembrandt’s Night Watch*; for the Americans, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*; and for we Russians? It is a pair of twins: Nikolai Ge’s *Peter the Great Interrogating Alexei* and Ilya Repin’s *Ivan the Terrible and his Son*. For decades, these two paintings have been revered by our public, praised by our critics, and sketched by our diligent students of the arts. And yet, what do they depict? In one, our most enlightened Tsar studies his oldest son with suspicion, on the verge of condemning him to death; while in the other, unflinching Ivan cradles the body of *his* eldest, having already exacted the supreme measure with a swing of the scepter to the head.” (290)

Mishka says to him ... “Who would have imagined,” he said, “when you were sentenced to life in the Metropol all those years ago, that you had just become the luckiest man in all of Russia.” (292)

Amidst Osip’s and the Count’s discussion of *The Maltese Falcon*, Osip gives this speech: “The Bolsheviks are not Visigoths, Alexander. We are not the barbarian hordes descending upon Rome and destroying all that is fine out of ignorance and envy. It is the opposite. In 1916, Russia was a barbarian state. It was the most illiterate nation in Europe, with the majority of its population living in modified serfdom: tilling the fields with wooden plows, beating their wives by candlelight, collapsing on their benches drunk with vodka, and then waking at dawn to humble themselves before their icons. That is, living exactly as their forefathers had lived 500 years before. Is it not

possible that our reverence for all the statues and cathedrals and ancient institutions was precisely what was holding us back?" (297)

The Count meets **Richard Vanderwhile**, the aide-de-camp to an American officer, who viewed the duck caper, later serves in the State Department and much later accepts his friend's and his "daughter's" wishes. (300)

For all the varied concerns attendant to the raising of a child — over schoolwork, dress, and manners — in the end, a parent's responsibility could not be more simple: To bring a child safely into adulthood that she could have a chance to experience a life of purpose and, God willing, contentment. (309) This during the episode of Sofia's fall.

| "Alexander," he said with a smile, "you have been at my service for over fifteen years. It is a pleasure for once to be at yours." Then he was gone. (311)

Then for the first time that night, he let himself weep ... but they were not tears of grief. They were the tears of the luckiest man in all of Russia. (313)

**Music:** [Horowitz (!) playing **Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto** at Carnegie Hall in New York. / The Count had seen Horowitz perform in Moscow in 1921, less than 4 years before the pianist traveled to Berlin for an official concert — with a wad of foreign currency in his shoes ... (313) / At first, he heard muted voices, a few coughs, and the last rustling of an audience settling in; then silence; then heartfelt applause as the performer presumably took the stage. / After the trumpets sounded their first martial notes, the strings swelled, and then his countryman began to play, evoking for the American audience the movement of a wolf through the birches, the wind across the steppe, the flicker of a candle in a ballroom, and the flash of a cannon at Borodino. (314)

Thus ends Book 3 with Sofia presumably safe and on the mend. Book 4 opens in 1950.

**More music** when he hears Sofia practicing the piano with Viktor Stepanovich:

At the sound of the first measure, the Count took two steps back. / Were those eight notes familiar to him? Did he recognize them in the least? Why, he would have known them if he hadn't seen them in thirty years and they happened to enter his compartment on a train. He would have known them if he bumped into them on the streets of Florence at the height of the season. In a word, he would have known them anywhere. / **It was Chopin. / Opus 9, number 2, in E-flat major.** (325)

| Some might wonder that the two men should consider themselves to be old friends having only known each other for four years; but the tenure of friendships has never been governed by the passage of time. These two would have felt like old friends had they met just hours before. (333)

| But Anna's return to the stage also proved fortunate for the Count because instead of visiting the Metropol a few days a year, she was now in residence for months at a time, which allowed our seasoned astronomer to chart the newest of her constellations with the utmost care ... (339) (1952)

On 347, **Richard Vanderwhile** asks the Count to spy ... "Richard. I am no more inclined to gossip than I am to spy. So, let's not speak of this again and we shall remain the best of friends." (348)

The Count to Anna: "**I'll tell you what is convenient," he said after a moment. "To sleep until noon and have someone bring you your breakfast on a tray. To cancel an appointment at the very last minute. To keep a carriage waiting at the door of one party, so that on a moment's notice it can whisk you away to another. To sidestep marriage in your youth and put off having children altogether. These**

**are the greatest of conveniences, Anushka — and at one time, I had them all. But in the end, it has been the inconveniences that have mattered to me the most.”** (352)

**More music:** After drumming his fingers on the armrest of his chair, the Count rose and recommenced his pacing while humming **Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 1 in C Major**. / “Dum de dum de dum,” he hummed. / It was a delightful composition, you had to admit, and one quite well suited to his daughter’s personality. The first movement had the tempo of Sofia coming home from school at the age of ten with fifteen things to relate. Without taking the time to explain who was who or what was what, she would zip along, punctuating her report with *and then, and then, and then, and then*. In the second movement, the sonata transitioned to an andante tempo more in keeping with Sofia at seventeen, when she would welcome thunderstorms on Saturday afternoons so that she could sit in their study with a book in her lap or a recording on the phonograph. In the third movement, with its fleet pace and pointillist style, you could almost hear her at the age of thirteen, running down the hotel’s stairs, freezing on a landing momentarily to let someone pass, and then bolting brightly ahead. (358)

But, of course, the Count also wept for himself. For despite his friendships with Marina and Andrey and Emile, despite his love for Anna, despite Sofia — that extraordinary blessing that had struck him from the blue — when Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich died, there went the last of those who had known him as a younger man. Though, as Katerina had so rightfully observed, at least he remained to remember. (374)

Book 4 closes. And Book 5, 1954, introduces Paris and the *denouement*.

| “For what matters in life is not whether we receive a round of applause; what matters is whether we have the courage to venture forth despite the uncertainty of acclaim.” (Count Rostov to Sofia, 388)

| Alexander Rostov was neither scientist nor sage; but at the age of 64 he was wise enough to know that life does not proceed by leaps and bounds. It unfolds. At any given moment, it is the manifestation of a thousand transitions. Our faculties wax and wane, our experiences accumulate, and our opinions evolve — if not glacially, then at least gradually. Such that the events of an average day are as likely to transform who we are as a pinch of pepper is to transform a stew. (402)

Sofia asks the Count, “Do you ever regret coming back to Russia?”

| “Looking back, it seems to me that there are people who play an essential role at every turn. And I don’t just mean the Napoleons who influence the course of history. I mean men and women who routinely appear at critical junctures in the progress of art, or commerce, or the evolution of ideas — as if Life itself has summoned them once again to help fulfill its purpose. Well, since the day I was born, Sofia, there was only one time when Life needed me to be in a particular place at a particular time, and that was when your mother brought you to the lobby of the Metropol. And I would not accept the Tsarship of all the Russias in exchange for being in that hotel at that hour.” (421)

[Emile Zhukovsky, the chef, is negative early in the day, but as the day progresses, he grows increasingly optimistic and upbeat. Reminder of the two clerks in *Bartleby*.]

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### **Food and Wine**

Removing the silver dome from the serving plate, the actress revealed one of Emile’s signature dishes: whole bass roasted with black olives, fennel, and lemon. / “Lovely,” she [Urbanova] said. / And the Count could not agree more. For by setting his oven to 450°, Emile ensured that the flesh of the fish was tender, the fennel aromatic, and the lemon slices blackened and crisp. (119)

[When the labels have been removed from the wine collection's bottles ...] Whichever wine was within, it was decidedly not identical to its neighbors. On the contrary, the contents of the bottle in his hand was the product of a history as unique and complex as that of a nation, or a man. In its color, aroma, and taste, it would certainly express the idiosyncratic geology and prevailing climate of his home terrain. But in addition, it would express all the natural phenomena of its *vintage*. In a sip, it would evoke the timing of that winter's thaw, the extent of that summer's rain, the prevailing winds, and the frequency of clouds. / Yes, a bottle of wine was the ultimate distillation of time and place; a poetic expression of individuality itself. Yet here it was, cast back into the sea of anonymity, that realm of averages and unknowns. (144)

So, having made do with cabbage and potatoes for three months straight, the young lieutenant is unprepared for the arrival of Mrs. Trent's beef. Seared for fifteen minutes at 450° and then roasted for two hours at 350°, her roast is tender and red at the center yet crispy and brown at the crust. Thus, our young Hussar sets aside his regimental tales in favor of extra helpings and the refilling of his own glass with wine; while in accordance with the established rules of etiquette, it is you who must entertain the Princess with a few amusing stories of your own. / Having cleaned the gravy from his plate with the last crust of the pudding, the young lieutenant finally turns his attention to his hostess ... (148)

Friends, food, drink and the correct way of doing things. And I'll never watch Casablanca the same way.

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Interpretation of **Casablanca**, pp. 408 ff. "But in setting upright the cocktail glass in the aftermath of the commotion, didn't he also exhibit an essential faith that by the smallest of one's actions one can restore some sense of order to the world." (459)

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