



Love & Vodka: My Surreal Adventures in Ukraine

R.J. Fox

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So Bobby from Dearborn in Michigan and Katya from Dnipropetrovsk in Ukraine (“never the Ukraine,” she scolded) meet on the E.T. ride at Universal Studios Hollywood theme park, flirt for an hour or so, exchange email addresses, say goodbye, and go their separate ways. Time passes and countless messages are exchanged until one day, Bobby tells his parents that he is in love and will be flying off to Ukraine. And so he does.

With parting words from his mother (“be careful”) and father (“I think you’re nuts”), he flies off to a country of grim-faced customs officials where about the only thing that’s familiar is a McDonalds. Cops demand bribes, motorists are combative, and nobody understands baseball. At dinner, early in his visit, there is a toast from Katya’s father: “Today we celebrate the arrival of a visitor from the United States—our former enemy.” An icebreaker, to be sure, but after days of befuddlement over traditions strange to him, failing to grasp the point of Katya’s relatives’ jokes and vice versa, eating too much watermelon and nearly raw fish, and drinking way too much vodka, he is still in love. And therein lies the heart of the story.

R. J. Fox, who teaches English and video production in the Ann Arbor public schools and also writes stories, poems, and screenplays, is no dilettante when it comes to courting, judging by his charming chronicle.

THOMAS BEVIER (Winter 2016)

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