

Russian literary fiction

The Shirt

Novel. Moscow 2004. 254 pages

Publishers: Bulgaria/ Aviana, Croatia/ Bozicevic, Czech Republic/ Vetrne mlyny, Estonia/ Varrak, France/ Actes Sud, Germany/ Ammann, Hungary/ GABO, Italy/ Barbès, Korea/ Storyhouse, Latvia/ Janis Roze Publishers, Norway/ Cappelen Damm, Serbia/ Zepter, Spain/ 451 Editores

The Shirt is a Moscow winter fairy tale. It is the story of a little man in a big city, and the tale of a day in the life of a shirt that is put on in the morning and taken off at night. Alexander lives in Moscow. He draws up plans for villas, and constructs office space, a Sisyphean labor in view of the speed with which Moscow is changing. On top of this, he is in love. Max, an old friend from his home town comes to visit, and the timing for the visit is as bad as can be, because Alexander is love sick and can only think of HER. He is busy the whole day: he picks up Max at the airport; calls a French colleague to task, who has just stolen a lucrative contract out from under his nose; has his hair cut; drops by a construction site to clear up a problem with the client; goes out to eat with Max; gets involved in a traffic accident; and drinks too much – always looking for an excuse to call HER. Finally, he makes a date with HER, but SHE does not show up. Alexander feels like he just went into free fall.

The Shirt is a novel about (masculine) love, the kind that turns the body up side down and lays the nerves bare; a love that is neither happy nor unhappy, but just unendurable. Alexander gives in to short daydreams. Again and again throughout the day, Alexander flees briefly to a world in which only orders and comradeship exist, but more importantly, a world from which he cannot call HER. He dreams that he is in a medieval prison, on an endless space mission, at a polar research station, in places, where life is simple, and everything has an order to it, and, most importantly, where he cannot receive any letters from HER. At the end of the day he imagines the lady in question saying to herself with a sigh: Can you imagine that men like that still exist!?



THE AUTHOR

translations
14 languages

awards
Big Book shortlist 2018
Best Debut 2004
Anti-Booker Prize 2004

sample available
english

other works
Vodka is Much Bigger
A...a
The Rivers
Asphalt

"There only are two kinds of readers: those who like Grishkovets, and those who have not read him yet." *Echo Moskvy*

"Exactly what was needed: Literature for an intelligent, educated reader, which combines a refined sense of irony with a positive view of the world." *Knizhnoe Obozrenie*

Grishkovets was born in 1967 in Kemerovo. He became famous in Russia for his plays, which he writes, directs and acts in. He has been awarded two major Russian theatrical prizes for his plays which have also been performed in Germany, France and Poland. His first novel, "The Shirt" (2004), was an event in the literary life of Russia and brought him a prize for the Best Debut, and the Anti-Booker prize. Grishkovets lives in Kaliningrad.

Evgeni Grishkovets