

Andrew V. Kudin

HOW TO SURVIVE IN PRISON



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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

This book was written in a prison cell during the winter of 1997–1998. I wrote it simply to avoid losing my mind under the inhuman conditions I faced at that time. Perhaps the most surreal aspect of my experience is that I was never formally charged or brought to trial—indeed, no criminal case was ever opened against me. It may sound unbelievable, but it is the absolute truth.

It's difficult for ordinary people to imagine someone being thrown into jail simply for criticizing the authorities. Sadly, now, more than a quarter-century after the events described in this book, the situation in Ukraine has significantly worsened. Today, openly criticizing the Ukrainian government can lead not only to imprisonment for up to fifteen years but even death—and no one is held accountable. In modern Ukraine, murders, and persecution of journalists and human rights activists who dare express views differing from the official stance have become commonplace, and nobody is surprised by it anymore.

After five months of illegal imprisonment, I was released in February 1998. Determined to hold Ukrainian authorities accountable, I attempted to sue for the unlawful treatment I'd endured. In response, however, I received an absurd official document from Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs stating that I had never been imprisoned. Not a single official record noted my incarceration. As a result, I was denied even the basic right to file a lawsuit.

So, I decided to publish this book. Upon publication, it immediately caused a scandal. Readers embraced it enthusiastically, but the Ukrainian authorities reacted with hostility, ultimately forcing me to leave Ukraine for a period of time.

The book went through multiple reprints, eventually reaching seven editions in Ukrainian and Russian. By early 2000, the number of printed copies sold exceeded 250,000, while digital downloads online surpassed one million.

I became a frequent guest on radio and television programs and regularly gave interviews to journalists. I received an Honorary Diploma from the Oleksa Tykhai Charitable Foundation for my active efforts in protecting human rights in Ukraine. Later, I was elected deputy to a local council in one of the central districts of Kiev (Ukraine's capital) and served as a member of the commission overseeing law enforcement activities.

Initially, I enjoyed this attention, but soon it became oppressive. I did not wish to become an authority on prison life, nor did I want to dedicate my time to endless discussions about the realities of corruption and injustice that plagued Ukraine since its independence in 1991. My exposure to these dark sides of Ukrainian reality was purely accidental—I did not want that accident to define the rest of my life.

Afterward, I deliberately avoided writing further about prison. Instead, I tried to draw attention to my other works, unrelated to prison topics. My fiction and philosophical writings were praised by critics but met with little enthusiasm by readers. They wanted a sequel to “How to Survive...” or something similar.

Years have passed, but the book continues to generate interest, and I still receive many letters from readers. The first English translation was unsuccessful—moreover, it was extremely difficult to translate this text because of the extensive use of slang, with many words and expressions having no direct English equivalents.

For this reason, in April 2025, I created a new English translation, carefully adapted for English-speaking readers but still faithfully preserving the original voice of the book.

I have often asked myself why this book remains popular and continues to resonate deeply with readers after so many years. Perhaps it is because this story is not merely about prison in a literal sense. Often, prison in this book serves as a metaphor—a metaphor for the country one inhabits, and even for one’s own body from which a person desperately seeks to break free in search of absolute freedom.

Perhaps, too, this book offers insight into our present-day realities. After all, as the saying goes, if you want to know the future, look carefully at the past.

Ukraine’s independence in 1991 did not bring the happiness or prosperity its people dreamed of. Corruption, brutality, and lawlessness spread through the country like rust, slowly destroying it from within. Eventually, this corrosion culminated in an unimaginable national tragedy, bringing Ukraine, as we knew it, to its painful end.

People—and nations—do not die overnight. Their demise is preceded by a long chain of events, each link forged by acts of neglect, corruption, and cruelty. Understanding these links might be the only way to prevent history from repeating itself

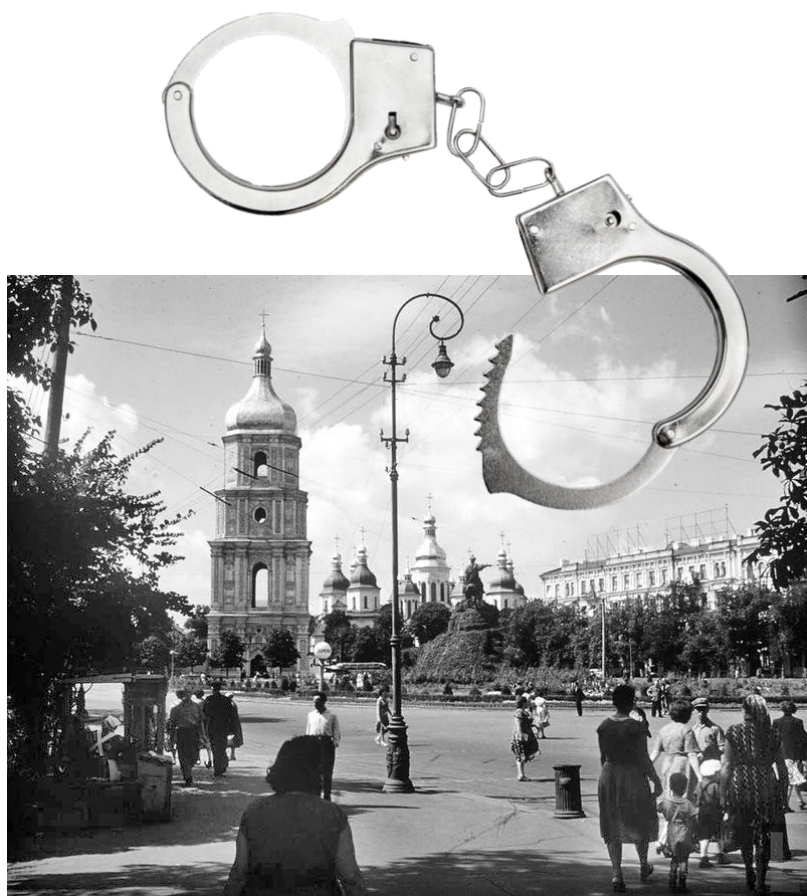
—The Author

April 2025



To my Mother, who gave me life...

To my Mother, who sacrificed her own life to save mine...



**This is how Kiev, Ukraine looked
during my childhood and youth.**

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Lukianivska Prison, Kiev (Ukraine) 1900

PROLOGUE

*"Everyone ends up in jail eventually..."
(A deeply held belief among law enforcement officers.)*

The cell door slams shut behind you. Welcome, buddy—make yourself at home.

No use standing by the door. You don't owe anybody anything here. Nobody has the right to pry into your soul or ask about the reasons that landed you behind bars. In places "not-so-far-away," excessive curiosity is frowned upon. Those planning to live a long life usually steer clear of such habits. (In Russian slang, "places not-so-far-away" refers to prisons or labor camps, suggesting their grim reality and frightening closeness—though they typically linger somewhere at the edge of the public consciousness. It can even carry an implicit threat, as in, "We can settle this here or somewhere not-so-far-away.")

Upstairs, sure—the cops would bend over backward to squeeze information out of you. But down here, in a cell, we're fine just knowing your name and the charges. Just enough to address you properly. The rest is your call. Talk if you want, or keep your mouth shut if that feels safer. Do whatever suits you best.

I don't know about you, but it seems perfectly normal to me that we met behind bars instead of at the opera. In our country, that's nothing unusual. You'd be hard-pressed to find a Ukrainian who hasn't spent at least one night in a cell. It's not even surprising. After all, we were born and raised in a country that itself has always been one giant "not-so-far-away" zone. Prison is just a smaller-scale model of our homeland.

We must have sinned terribly in our past lives to be reborn in a place like this. No matter how you look at it, our motherland doesn't exactly seem like the jewel of the former mighty Russian

Empire. Here, people have only a vague concept of what a law-abiding state actually means.

Ukraine isn't America, Europe, or even Russia. Only a patient in a mental asylum could realistically expect things to change here anytime soon. In civilized countries, the casual greeting is, "How are things?" But asking the average Ukrainian this question sounds clueless, almost offensive. It's hard to imagine anything less appropriate to ask. What's the point, anyway? Isn't it obvious? The person is still alive and standing upright—there is no need to pry further. Besides, no one ever gives you an honest answer.

Landing behind bars in Ukraine is surprisingly easy. You don't need special talents, complicated schemes, or even much effort. This country doesn't give you time to react—one minute you're walking free, the next you're in prison, like a whispered "hello" passing in the dark.

The strange part is how the "guardians of the law" lock people up with undisguised pleasure but let them out again with unmistakable reluctance—as though releasing prisoners was some kind of insult to civilized society.

And speaking of release, getting out isn't just a memorable event in a prisoner's life. It's an epic saga that begins the moment you first step inside and drags on for years, sometimes decades. Not only is it painfully slow, it's also outrageously expensive. Nobody, no matter how street-smart, is ever fully prepared for such an ordeal. So, as Vladimir Vysotsky famously sang, "Those who survived the cataclysm are in deep pessimism."

Many guys, once locked up, literally start banging their heads against the wall. Never saw it helping anyone think clearly. Besides, prison walls are always tougher than an inmate's thick skull, no matter how hard he tries.

Doing time, I've seen all kinds of people at rock bottom. Buried alive in their cells, stripped of human rights, getting dogged by fellow cons. Regular people slowly turn into beaten-down lumps of human clay. They figured life was over; all good things—joy, light, love—everything that spelled happiness—felt like ancient history. Only blackness, emptiness, and hopelessness lay ahead. My cellmates' eyes were dead, staring out like corpses.

"Damn," I told myself. "This joint ain't for me. Gotta find a way out."

That's the first thought that crossed my mind the moment I saw my cellmates. They looked exactly like a bunch of homeless dudes rounded up by cops during a routine sweep.

The common trait of my fellow cons was their numb indifference to their own fate and health. Plenty of them stopped caring about hygiene (what for, anyway?) and lived like animals: they ate whatever slop they got, took a piss when nature called, and spent the rest of their time zoned out on their bunks, staring at the ceiling. Others, by contrast, paced the cell restlessly, back and forth, as if flames from campfires long gone still lit their asses. These dudes liked playing at being prison "shot callers," spouting stupid lines like "Prison's our home" or "There ain't shit out there," drawing only dull nods and submissive murmurs from the crowd.

Most inmates, though, knew damn well the opposite was true: there was nothing to do behind bars. They fidgeted, paced, and chewed their fingernails raw. They put in effort, but all they ever managed was making things worse. Their nervous energy splattered onto the filthy walls, poisoning the whole cell atmosphere.

Hardly a day passed without some poor bastard declaring a hunger strike to protest prison brutality. Poor, naive fools! They actually believed they could change things this way. In a country where nuclear reactors blowing up near the capital barely make

the evening news, who gives a damn about some convict going hungry? Refusing to eat? Big deal. Let him starve. Nobody bothers asking what the hell he's protesting about. No one's gonna meet his demands. He won't get set free or handed a box of dynamite to blow up the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Some inmates took things further, cutting their wrists instead of hunger strikes. I have always wondered why anyone would choose this way to settle scores in life. Hara-kiri is tough in a filthy cell, sure. But cutting your throat or stabbing it with a sharpened spoon would get the job done faster. Instead, guys slit their wrists—maybe deep down, they still hoped someone would save them, scold them like naughty kids, and maybe show some pity. Sure enough, many got saved, but nobody pitied them. Without anesthesia or comforting words, metal staples got punched into their wrists, followed by hard kicks to their kidneys before tossing them back into their cells. Guards figured the more pain an inmate felt when being dragged back to life, the less likely he'd try suicide again. But survivors had other ideas—they just started looking for easier and more reliable ways out.

Not everyone can handle seeing blood, especially their own. Most guys care about how they die. Writhing in agony or choking on your own blood isn't exactly a pretty sight, right? Maybe that's why some choose to hang themselves with ripped shirts or pants.

Thinking about suicide and actually doing it are worlds apart. Among all my fellow cons, only one guy ever went through with it. He was a tall, solid-built bricklayer, around twenty-five. Never complained and never talked about killing himself. He just lay on his bunk for days, his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Coming out to the yard, man?" we'd ask, but he never stepped outside the cell.

Yura—that was his name—was charged with killing his wife out of jealousy. They used to work together—she was an accountant,

he was a bricklayer—and took odd jobs on the side to make extra cash. They earned enough to live comfortably, weren't rushing to start a family, and didn't have fancy tastes. Yura was just your typical working-class guy, wanting nothing more than to be "no worse off than anyone else."

Every morning, he and his wife would leave for work together, and every evening, they had come home at the same time, climbing the dimly lit staircase to their modest fifth-floor apartment. On weekends and holidays, they would dutifully visit relatives or friends, sitting around cramped kitchen tables, making small talk, and laughing at jokes they had heard dozens of times. They were an ordinary couple, living a standard life in a small, standard Soviet-era apartment decorated with faded wallpaper and family photos gathering dust on shelves.

"We loved each other, you know," Yura said quietly one evening, his voice hollow, as he drank weak tea after evening roll call. He wore an old, knitted, sleeveless pullover. It looked awkward on him, frayed at the edges, with threads sticking out. "She knitted this herself for our first anniversary," he added, tugging absentmindedly at the wool as if trying to unravel his memories.

It's difficult to judge now if it really was pure love or something else—perhaps dependence or the quiet fear of loneliness. For Yura, divorce meant more than losing the woman he loved. It meant returning to a life of having nothing. The apartment, the furniture, even their old car—all belonged to his wife. Yura himself had moved to Kiev from a tiny village with empty pockets, nothing to his name but youthful good looks, and a couple of years at a vocational school. They decided to split exactly on their third wedding anniversary.

"Please, Yura," she said calmly, swirling champagne in her glass and looking at him from the worn-out armchair opposite. "We need to live apart for a while. It'll help us both sort things out."

Yura sat silently, his coffee growing cold on the table. A cigarette trembled between his fingers, sending thin trails of smoke toward the yellowed ceiling. His gaze was fixed blankly on the flickering TV screen. The news hadn't exactly come out of nowhere—he knew perfectly well his beautiful wife had been spending more and more evenings out, late meetings with her boss, a polished, arrogant man fifteen years older than her. Yura knew but always pretended he didn't, hoping it would somehow resolve itself.

Before bed, around midnight, she came over and kissed him gently on the lips. Her lips felt distant, already belonging to someone else. “Thank you for being so understanding,” she whispered softly and slipped quietly into the bedroom.

Yura didn't feel like going to bed. He stared after her with dull, indifferent eyes, then shuffled into the kitchen, his slippers scraping across the old linoleum. He decided to make himself a sandwich—anything to distract from his restless thoughts. But as usual, fate played another small, cruel joke on him: there was no bread left, just an empty plastic wrapper lying on the countertop. Cursing softly, he opened the fridge and found instead a half-empty bottle of vodka hidden behind jars of pickled tomatoes and half-dried sausage.

Vodka poured down his throat, spreading through his veins, burning away the pain, warming his numb insides. He couldn't clearly remember how the axe, usually stored on the cluttered balcony among rusty tools and old paint cans, ended up in his hand. It felt cold and heavy, and its wooden handle had worn smoothly for years of use.

When he gently pushed open the bedroom door, he still clutched the axe tightly, his knuckles white. His wife lay sleeping peacefully, her head resting on a faded green plush elephant—a childhood Christmas gift from her godfather. She looked innocent, vulnerable, unaware.

He crept closer, moving with unnatural quietness for such a big man. He towered over her bed, breathing heavily, heart pounding violently against his ribs. For a moment, he hesitated, looking down at her face bathed in soft moonlight filtering through old curtains.

“You won’t believe it,” he murmured, recounting the story later with a bitter laugh, “but I almost stopped myself.”

The axe blade descended awkwardly, splitting flesh and bone with a sickening wet crack. But it wasn't a killing blow—just enough to wake her to a nightmare. Yura staggered backward, horror-stricken, as his wife jerked violently, choking on her own blood. She made strange gurgling noises, her eyes wide open, pleading, confused.

He stood frozen, trembling, unable to tear his gaze away as blood spread slowly across the sheets, staining the dark red-green elephant. As if in a trance, he reached out and clumsily covered her twitching body with a heavy woolen blanket, hiding her dying spasms from view. But beneath the blanket, her body writhed endlessly, the convulsions brutal and agonizing, as if high voltage coursed relentlessly through her limbs.

All night, Yura sat on a chair next to the bed, paralyzed, staring blankly at the motionless form beneath the woolen shroud. God only knows what he was thinking in those dreadful hours. At dawn, still reeking of alcohol and fear, he dressed carefully, locked the apartment door, and went to the nearest police station to turn himself in.

The police officer at Kiev’s Pechersk precinct greeted him cheerfully, sipping tea and leafing through a sports newspaper. “Good of you to come forward, buddy!” he chuckled, slapping Yura warmly on the shoulder. “Relax, women come and go. You’ve got your whole life ahead.”

After a few minutes of half-hearted lecturing about controlling his temper, the officer glanced at his watch and sighed. It was obvious he didn't feel like writing a lengthy report, let alone visiting the scene, gathering evidence, or interviewing neighbors.

"Tell you what, Yura," he said casually. "Come back in a couple of days when I'm off duty. Then we'll sort this all out."

Feeling strangely numb and detached, Yura obediently went home to his village, stayed with his elderly mother for two restless nights, and then returned straight to the police station in Kiev.

That's how Yura ended up behind bars. Pretty soon, he learned the hard way that prison was nothing like the movies or TV shows he'd seen. Outwardly, Yura seemed no different from the rest of us inmates. He'd joke darkly, swap stories from the outside world, and never whined about his troubles openly. But sometimes, he'd drift away, lost in thought, and then suddenly ask bizarre questions—usually to himself, sometimes to his cellmate, Zhora. Zhora was the kind of guy you wouldn't trust alone near your window—freckled head to toe, skinny, jittery, always pacing, and known for breaking into apartments through fire escapes when nobody was home.

"You think she's waiting for me up there?" Yura once mumbled, eyes vacant, staring at the ceiling.

Zhora stopped scrubbing his teeth with his worn-out toothbrush, spitting toothpaste into an empty soup cup. "Are you serious, man?" he snorted. "She wasn't exactly loyal to you down here. What makes you think heaven's gonna change that?"

"Shut up," Yura snapped, suddenly defensive, eyes flashing with anger. "I know she's waiting. I've been talking with her all damn night."

Zhora rinsed his toothbrush calmly, smirking slightly as he packed it away in its homemade plastic holder. “You managed to divorce her pretty brutally down here, Yura. But how’re you gonna split with her up there? Pretty sure they don’t leave axes lying around in paradise.”

The next morning, just after ten, Zhora got called upstairs to talk with his investigator. Yura watched him leave silently. At about eleven, Yura climbed onto the top bunk. Nobody really paid attention. We figured he was stringing up his laundry to dry—just another dull routine in this hellhole. Then came the sickening sound—a sharp, dry snap like somebody breaking a fistful of pencils. We all jerked around, hearts pounding, stomachs dropping. Yura dangled motionless from a homemade rope tied from torn bedsheets. His neck twisted grotesquely; the rope strained under his heavy, lifeless body.

I still don't know how that makeshift rope held Yura's weight, but it did. His eyes stared blankly ahead, his mouth slightly open, his tongue swollen, and his face turning dark purple.

When Zhora got back, Yura's body had already been hauled away, leaving only a dreadful silence and that unmistakable scent of death lingering in our tiny cell.

Zhora cursed bitterly, kicking the metal bunk with frustration. “Just my damn luck,” he spat. “The good shit always happens when I’m out.”

Our cell group soon broke apart. By chance—or maybe fate—I ended up sharing a cell with Uncle Grisha (literally meaning “Uncle,” though not an actual relative; younger inmates often address older prisoners respectfully as “Uncle” or “Grandpa,” despite having no family connection). Uncle Grisha was a thin, wiry man in his sixties, silver-haired and quiet. Everybody knew who he was—a high-profile financier whose questionable deals had landed him in prison. He carried himself with dignity, rarely

raising his voice. He seemed to read my thoughts as I sat numbly staring at the cracked wall.

“Everyone chooses their own way out,” Uncle Grisha murmured quietly, eyes thoughtful behind his cheap, scratched glasses. “He chose his way. We have to choose ours. The secret is to hold on.”

I understood exactly what he meant. My goal by then was painfully clear: I needed to get out of prison alive, with minimal damage—mentally and physically. Yura couldn't bear it and took the shortest way out. Whatever anyone else thought, he'd found his version of freedom.

Sitting quietly on my bunk, I rolled beads made from dried prison bread between my fingers, staring into the vacant, hopeless faces around me. Would we all eventually follow Yura's desperate path?

But Uncle Grisha's quiet strength helped pull me back. I knew clearly—my way had to be different. Suicide was for the weak, the broken. I chose life, no matter how bleak or unbearable my surroundings.

There's nothing pleasant about seeing the guy you just spoke to moments ago now hanging dead before your eyes. Death stinks—it's rotten and ugly, and you can never get used to it. Death always comes with raw pain—a silent scream tearing your guts out from inside. All the philosophical talk about death being natural vanishes when you face it directly.

Behind prison bars, nerves are always stretched thin. Even one careless word or thoughtless move can spark violence, chaos, and bloodshed. So, the suicide of an inmate—no matter how quiet and personal—hits everyone hard. I knew that maintaining self-control was crucial. Panic, anxiety, even fear—all those emotions drain energy and dull your instincts, making survival impossible. My mind had to stay clear, sharp, and ready for whatever came next.

What I desperately needed was a practical survival strategy—a detailed roadmap to navigate the extreme conditions of prison life. But there wasn't any guidebook—inside prison or outside. Prisoners stumbled blindly, hitting their heads repeatedly against the same brutal walls, learning nothing.

So, if nobody else had ever written such a manual, I decided I'd create one myself.

I racked my brain for every scrap of knowledge I had about survival under extreme conditions. My army training proved invaluable, as did tips and stories shared by veteran prisoners. I recalled historical accounts—memoirs of prisoners who'd survived Nazi concentration camps and Soviet gulags. Prison has always been a place where exceptional, resilient people emerged, tested by horror.

While drafting this survival strategy, another idea took root: I decided to write a book about prison life, about what I'd seen and felt, exactly as it was. Of course, names and certain events needed altering to protect those involved.

Sometimes, I wondered if I should postpone writing until I was free again. A book written from the outside might be clearer and more objective. But I knew deep inside—it wouldn't be the same. And honestly, once I got out, would I ever willingly revisit these dark corridors, even in memory?

Those who'd put me here were determined to crush my hope. I write these notes completely isolated from the outside world. Books and letters, except for the Bible, are forbidden. Lies, fake evidence, and provocations are everyday prison routines. People on the outside can't grasp how hellish it truly is. Ex-prisoners rarely speak honestly about their experiences. The usual bitter answer to curious outsiders is: "You'll find out once you're there."

And they're right. There aren't enough words to describe the gut-wrenching fear that grips you every time you hear a guard's key turn roughly in the lock or the distant echo of steel doors slamming shut—knowing you're completely powerless, completely trapped, and utterly alone.





In this house, on one of the oldest streets in Kiev, which used to be called Karl Marx Street and now bears the name of architect Gorodetsky, there is an apartment where I lived from 1966 to 2000.

Chapter 1

FIRST DAYS



*“Too lazy to work, too nervous to steal—
A badge and a gun, now that's a sweet deal.
A uniform's perfect for slackers, you see:
You lock people up, and call yourself free.”*

(Local street proverb)

**The photo shows the building of the police department
in Kiev's Holoseevsky district.**

If there's a knock on your door late at night, and your startled question, "Who's there?" is met by an unintelligible mumble through the keyhole—"Police"—don't expect the intelligent, calm faces you've seen in cop shows. If it weren't for their rumpled uniforms and cheap badges, you'd never guess these guys represent law enforcement in Ukraine. In fact, your visitors are more likely to resemble the mugshots you'd see in the crime section of the morning paper.

Usually, they'll be a group of five guys in plain clothes and one uniformed officer—brought along purely for effect, so you don't doubt they're "official." The uniformed cop is always the youngest, the greenest, and clearly the least informed. He stands there with glazed eyes, clueless about whose apartment he's entered or why he's even here. They told him to go, so he went—like a trained puppy. Where he's sent makes absolutely no difference to him.

The guy in charge will be easy to spot: better dressed, slightly less drunk, and radiating arrogance. But don't fool yourself—even he rarely has a full grasp of what's going on. He's just another mindless drone following orders. He probably hasn't read the warrant, but he's waving around in your face, and if he has, he barely understands it.

The first thing you'll notice about your midnight guests is how healthy, smug, and well-fed they look—faces bloated from greasy food and cheap booze, minds unburdened by thoughts or scruples. Their eyes dart nervously, betraying greed and suspicion; their speech is coarse, abrupt, and barely literate—a bizarre cocktail of broken Russian mixed with butchered Ukrainian, filled with slang you couldn't replicate even if you tried. To speak their language convincingly, you'd have to become a corrupt cop yourself.

Ukrainian cops follow their own warped dress code. Even if by chance one gets hold of something decent or expensive, he'll wear it in the crudest, most tasteless way imaginable. Their shoes are permanently scuffed, their socks rarely changed, and there's always a sweaty folder jammed under their arm. On special occasions, they douse themselves liberally in cheap eau-de-cologne, leaving behind a stench powerful enough to stun a horse. The younger ones—those who've barely completed their first year of stealing under the cover of a badge—proudly drape themselves in chunky gold chains and flashy costume jewelry seized from previous victims. Apparently, this passes for style.

If these fine guardians of law and order start pounding on your door, first glance at your watch. If it's between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m., you're better off ignoring them entirely, no matter how threatening their curses and shouts become. Frankly, after 6 a.m. isn't much better. And God help you if your front door is wooden, not metal, and opens inward; it won't last long under their boots.

While your uninvited visitors are busy trying to kick in your door, use your last few moments of freedom wisely: think fast about what they're likely after and stash it where they're too lazy to look. Cops are notoriously idle—they won't move heavy furniture or break a sweat looking too deeply. Logic isn't their strongest suit, either. For example, during my first two apartment searches, these geniuses never bothered opening my wall safe because they couldn't locate a key. But they gleefully ripped wooden panels from the balcony wall and smashed furniture, probably just out of frustration or sheer malicious joy.

When the cops inevitably burst through your doorway, you'll have the dubious pleasure of watching them wave their barely legible warrant before trashing your home from top to bottom. The senior policeman among them usually shouts first: "Documents, money, valuables, weapons, and drugs—put it all on the table now!"

Take careful note of what they're demanding, and whatever happens, never voluntarily hand it over. Every bit of cash these vultures find is divided amongst themselves and later wasted on vodka, cheap hookers, and gambling. Don't fall for the trick of seeing your money recorded officially on some paper form—it's purely decorative. You will never see your cash or valuables again. Documents are another headache: important ones will conveniently get "lost" along the way. Nothing could be simpler for these cops. During the search, papers are haphazardly dumped into boxes labeled "Box 1," "Box 2," and so forth. Later, those useful for fabricating cases will be manipulated and falsified; the rest will end up shredded, burned, or dumped in a landfill. Good luck proving any of it later.

Ukrainian police represent a unique kind of criminal—wearing badges instead of masks, carrying identification instead of guns, and abusing power openly, without shame. They're not here to protect the law—they're here to profit from breaking it. Anyone expecting fairness, justice, or even basic decency from these cops with badges will quickly learn a harsh lesson: the only thing worse than being robbed by criminals is being robbed by criminals wearing uniforms.

For most Ukrainian citizens, the long nightmare of rotting in a filthy prison cell begins at their own front door—with a sudden, humiliating police raid. Without the slightest hint of shame or restraint, the cops barge in, tracking muddy boots across your clean floor, overturning furniture, and scattering your belongings as if they were worthless trash. They pretend to search for crucial evidence but show no concern if nothing turns up. Watching them tear apart your home, you could swear they'd manage to drive a tank through your living room unnoticed amidst the chaos.

Family members watch helplessly, eyes wide with shock and humiliation, hearts pounding in silent panic. Sometimes witnesses are brought in to maintain an illusion of fairness—

usually, neighbors awakened in the middle of the night, frightened, half-dressed, and desperate only to return to bed. Unwittingly drawn into this brutal spectacle, they quickly conclude their once-friendly neighbor must now be a dangerous criminal. To them, anyone taken by the police must surely be guilty. It never occurs to them that guilt can only be determined by a court of law. But that doesn't matter here—the mere accusation already decides your fate.

Police officers always finish their "work" with the same phrase: "You'll have to come with us. The authorities want to have a little talk with you."

"About what?" you stammer, your head spinning at two in the morning.

"They don't tell us. Let's go."

"Should I bring anything with me?"

"No, just your ID and notebook. You'll be home later today."

They lie not because they have to but because they have forgotten how to tell the truth. Lying is as natural to them as breathing. Their only goal is to avoid resistance. They know from bitter experience how badly things can go when their victims fight back—especially given the pathetic level of their own training.

Most people arrested late at night don't resist, naively hoping this misunderstanding will quickly clear itself up. They have no idea what awaits them behind bars.

If you are unlucky enough to be dragged away in the middle of the night, remember never to take your real notebook with you. Otherwise, anyone listed there will inevitably face trouble. Personally, I managed to flush mine down the toilet. To avoid suspicion, I gave the cops an old, useless notebook filled with meaningless phone numbers. Only later, at the station, did one officer finally open it; his face turned purple with rage when he

realized he'd been tricked. The next morning, another search party was sent to my apartment, equally ignorant but even more stupid. They trashed the kitchen furniture, ripped cabinet doors off their hinges, and broke out the floorboards. Ironically, they also failed to notice the walled-in safe containing guns and documents. Instead, they spent half their time rummaging through trash cans and dirty laundry.

When the cops finally finish destroying your home, they shove you into a car—handcuffed or not—and drive you to the nearest police station, where you disappear as completely as if swallowed by the Bermuda Triangle. Weeks, months, or even years may pass before your family hears anything from you. Sometimes, they never do.

The complete lack of information is far worse for your loved ones than the mess left behind. After a raid, relatives often notice many items missing—things never listed in the official report. Cops aren't picky. They grab anything within reach, valuable or not, figuring they'll sort it out later. Loyalty and friendship don't exist among them. They live like rats in a cage, driven by greed, envy, and mutual hatred. They fear their colleagues far more than any civilian witness, knowing perfectly well how easily fellow officers could betray them.

From the moment of arrest, life shifts violently into a parallel dimension. Three days in the free world pass unnoticed; three days behind bars seem longer than years.

Expecting objectivity from a Ukrainian investigation is utterly hopeless. Your file will brand you as an "anti-social element" with no redeeming qualities, suitable only for prison. Later, when you read your own file, even you may start doubting your innocence.

During my imprisonment, I read the Criminal Code of Ukraine and was shocked by its absurdity. According to Ukrainian law, the vague "firm conviction" of an investigator alone is enough to

keep someone behind bars for eighteen months or longer. Don't believe me? Read the Ukrainian Criminal Code yourself.

Yet countless naïve people still hope for justice from these corrupt officials. Asking for fairness here is like requesting a million-dollar loan from a homeless person. The investigative system's sole purpose is keeping you behind bars—the longer, the better. Justice here is not even an illusion but pure nonsense. Irrefutable evidence of innocence rarely changes anything. Releasing a prisoner means admitting a mistake, something these arrogant bureaucrats fear more than anything. As a result, innocent people remain locked up indefinitely, their cases dragged out endlessly while investigators fabricate new trumped-up charges.

Sometimes, prisoners are simply forgotten. I once shared a cell with a quiet accountant named Andrei S. Even if proven guilty, his alleged crime carried a maximum sentence of four years. However, Andrei had been sitting in jail awaiting trial for more than five years, his case gathering dust on an investigator's desk. Neither the police nor the prosecutor's office were in a hurry to free him. He became just another piece of furniture in the prison system.

Sadly, Andrei's case isn't unusual. Thousands suffer similar fates—locked up, forgotten, abandoned by justice. Such cases happen so frequently that nobody even pays attention anymore. Society accepts this as normal—just another grim fact of everyday Ukrainian life.

The ugly truth is simple: expecting justice, decency, or even basic humanity from the Ukrainian police and investigative bodies is hopelessly naïve. They aren't guardians of the law; they're its executioners—corrupt from head to toe, heartless bureaucrats who rob and destroy lives without remorse. Those who still believe in justice will find only betrayal, cruelty, and emptiness behind the cold metal bars of a Ukrainian prison.

I wonder who said that there are good and bad people in every profession. Undoubtedly, every job shapes a person's character, worldview, and values. A bullet hole in someone's head means one thing to a doctor and something completely different to a mercenary. For people in different professions, the grass smells differently; even the sky is another shade. Decent, honest people simply cannot work in law enforcement—not because they're weak, but because the nature of that work inevitably destroys human dignity. Those who manage to remain decent either resign or get fired. Today, law enforcement agencies in Ukraine are the most dangerous, corrupt, and criminalized segment of society. Even the blind can see it clearly.

Of course, you are free to hold your own beliefs, however detached from reality they might be. But for me, a cop remains a cop, regardless of what euphemism you use. He spends most of his life within prison walls and inevitably transforms into nothing but a uniformed watchdog.

Dogs guarding people's homes are usually kept chained—that's what makes them useful. In civilized countries, that chain is the Law. It clearly defines each step and limits the power of uniformed beasts holding clubs. Only a psychopath would let a rabid dog loose around children playing in the yard. Regret only comes after these beasts, dizzy with impunity, maul an innocent family member to death. No wonder nobody wants to visit such homes.

But in Ukraine, these uniformed dogs run without chains. Each cop interprets the Law as he pleases, always choosing personal benefit above all else. Their favorite pastime is seeking out easy victims from whom they can squeeze money. They're responsible for unleashing a crime wave that has engulfed the entire nation, perfectly illustrating the old saying: "A fish rots from the head down."

The first thing you notice when dealing with Ukrainian cops is their pathological greed, multiplied by sheer ignorance. Observing them, one inevitably concludes that the human head was created solely for eating, drinking, and swearing—not for thinking. No wonder Arthur Conan Doyle openly mocked police officers for their stupidity and narrow-mindedness in his Sherlock Holmes stories. It turns out that cops can be stupid, not only in Ukraine.

Being in prison is never easy, but the time from arrest until the preliminary investigation concludes is the hardest. Typically, if a person survives the first three days of brutal interrogations and so-called "discussions," they'll likely withstand whatever comes afterward. Most people, however, break down immediately when confronted with real danger. This is precisely why cops rush to extract information within the first hours and days after arrest, exploiting the prisoner's initial shock. Thus, your behavior during those critical first three days behind bars will determine your fate.

After the preliminary investigation ends and your case becomes clear, you become disposable. Like paper that's been run through a shredder, you lose all significance. You'll be thrown onto the docket, and your sentence will be read out mechanically.

But that's jumping too far ahead. Right now, you must fight desperately for your life and freedom. You'll be pressured and treated like a hunted frightened animal. Newspapers and TV channels will hysterically label you a criminal, and your family will endure torrents of lies and humiliation. All of this has a single purpose: breaking your will—the core of your personality. Everything else, good or bad, is secondary. Those who wish to survive must train their willpower relentlessly, knowing severe trials come precisely when least expected. Once your will is broken, your struggle ends; you're finished.

Trying to maintain your will under these circumstances is exhausting. It's incredibly difficult for prisoners to remain composed and objectively assess their situation. Many critical mistakes occur during these early days. If you feel control slipping away, force yourself to rest. Only those who do nothing avoid mistakes. Lie down on the cold floor and push away troubling thoughts. Relax your wrists and eyes. Recall peaceful moments—snow-covered mountain peaks, a raging ocean, anything to chase dark thoughts from your mind.

You're not the first person to unexpectedly find yourself behind bars. In the initial phase of imprisonment, your mission is simple yet crucial: hold your ground, resist provocations, and watch your mouth. Learn silence if you wish to survive. Any words you speak will inevitably be used against you.

In Ukraine, a detainee has virtually no rights. Prisoners can be held at police stations indefinitely—without food, warm clothing, or proper sanitation. You'll drink water from a filthy tap only once a day when escorted briefly from your cell to the toilet. Forget having a mattress; you'll learn to sleep on cold concrete. Even basic necessities like toilet paper become luxuries.

The Russian author Victor Suvorov, in his book *The Aquarium*, claims special police units train their fighting techniques on death-row prisoners called "puppets." I seriously doubt this. Firstly, such prisoners are usually too weak and broken by imprisonment to offer any meaningful resistance or training benefit. Secondly, why complicate things? Every day, countless prisoners are tortured, maimed, and even killed by cops without any court hearings or investigation. Guilt or innocence does not matter to them. Their orders are simple: make them confess at any cost. And if the accused is a woman, why not rape her? According to the police's primitive logic, all women are hookers.

As long as a prisoner refuses to talk, no formal report is filed. Without official confirmation, frantic family members won't even know if their relative is being detained at that particular police station. Relatives only receive confirmation after their loved one has been sufficiently "persuaded."

The dirtiest and cruelest tasks fall to the cops proudly representing the so-called "inquest agencies." These people are uniformly cowardly. They act bravely only when in groups, taunting and brutalizing a prisoner who's restrained by cuffs. They carefully avoid leaving marks on the prisoner's face, instead focusing their blows where bruises won't easily show. This twisted, systematic beating of prisoners has a sickening official name: they call it a "discussion."

An indispensable "participant" in these discussions is a rubber club, which is relatively harmless compared to a baseball bat. Baseball is practically unknown in Ukraine, but cops don't seem bothered by this minor detail. A wooden bat is especially convenient for striking the spine, chest, and kidneys—favorite targets among cops. More caution is taken when aiming at the head, typically targeting the crown or the back of the skull. Before delivering such blows, cops often place a thick book on the victim's head to avoid excessive bleeding and staining their uniforms with "criminal" blood. The Code of Criminal Procedure is best suited for this purpose: it's thick enough, usually hardcover, and conveniently within reach. I sometimes had the grim impression that the Code was published specifically to facilitate such "discussions."

As a rule, Ukrainian cops lack creativity and ingenuity. Across different towns, the same methods of torture are routinely employed. The two most common are "Hanging on a crowbar" and the "Lastochka" ("Swallow").

"Hanging" is the simplest yet most brutally effective method. With hands cuffed behind his back, the prisoner is suspended

from a crowbar. The weight of his body twists the shoulder joints severely, causing unbearable pain. From time to time, cops "check" with their clubs whether the prisoner's liver, spleen, and kidneys are still intact. Victims usually remain in this position for hours—sometimes nearly an entire day.

The "Lastochka" slightly resembles a yoga position known as Dhanurasana or the bow pose. A prisoner's hands and feet are twisted behind his back and tightly handcuffed. In its simplest form, the victim is left immobilized on the floor; in the more sophisticated version, he's hung from the ceiling until his ribs crack. As for fingers, cops rarely break them, and if they do, it's usually only the left hand—the right one must remain intact to sign interrogation records. So, at least you don't need to worry about your handwriting.

Human beings have never been particularly good at enduring prolonged pain. Most prisoners quickly confess to anything they're asked and sign whatever documents are put in front of them, simply to make the torture stop. They naively reassure themselves, "I'll confess now and then retract everything in court. Things will sort themselves out, and I'll be set free."

Naïve fools! Don't they realize it'll be too late by then? In court, no one will care about the truth. Ukrainian courts are overwhelmed with cases; judges can't possibly read through entire volumes of evidence. Typically, they glance only at initial statements obtained during preliminary investigations and base their verdicts upon those documents alone. Any attempt to change testimony later is viewed suspiciously as a transparent effort to evade "well-deserved punishment."

A few words about confessions: ironically, the more a prisoner confesses, the more viciously he is beaten and abused. By admitting guilt, prisoners unwittingly justify their torturers' criminal actions. Beating an innocent person is entirely different from beating someone who "admits" guilt. Thus, those

confessing in hopes of escaping torture merely guarantee themselves further torment. According to cops' twisted logic, if a prisoner talks after being pressed lightly, surely he'll reveal even more when pressed harder. So the clubs continue to whistle relentlessly above the prisoner's head, accompanied by his desperate cries: "Why? I'm yours! I've told you everything!"

Thank God you're different. You persistently remain silent and refuse to sign anything. Cops begin to grow nervous: they're operating under tight deadlines, and if they fail to extract information, they'll face their bosses' wrath. They do everything possible to stop you from regaining composure and analyzing your situation. A prisoner who manages to start thinking clearly becomes far harder to break.

Think carefully: confessing is easy—you can always give in later, but what's the point? First, as you already understand, confessing won't bring relief. Instead, cops will double their efforts. Second, admitting guilt might ease your conscience but won't shorten your prison term. Are you really so bored with freedom? Do you genuinely want to experience what real imprisonment feels like? If so, lock yourself voluntarily in a room without food or water and find out.

I'm joking—don't get angry. I see you're not exactly in the mood for laughter. You've gotten yourself into a fine mess if cops have decided to experiment on your head with a wooden bat. Unfortunately, the bat always turns out stronger. So do whatever it takes—fake a heart attack, pretend to faint, shed tears—to persuade your tormentors that:

They've gone too far and risk accidentally killing you ahead of schedule;

You're physically unable to give testimony, even if you wanted to;

Further mutilation is pointless and may cause trouble for your tormentors later on.

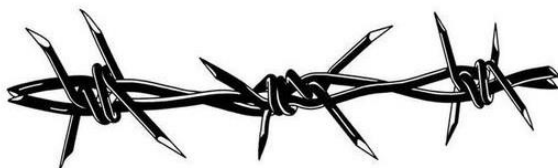
Remember, your main goal is never to let them break you. Abuse will be plentiful; you'll hear the full repertoire of obscene language. Ignore it; pretend you're listening to a dull radio broadcast. You don't usually argue with your radio, do you? Nor throw a flowerpot at the TV when it shows a hated politician's face?

There's nothing to be done—life resembles a chessboard. Make one wrong move, and you're suddenly in checkmate.

*“This all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.”*

(Omar Khayyam)

The world hasn't changed much over the last thousand years. Between interrogations, you'll have plenty of time to ponder that fact.



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This preview contains pages 1–37 of the complete volume.

The complete edition comprises 220 pages.