

Eduard Limonov

(Spent 2.5 years in prison)

ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF EDUARD VENIAMINOVICH

Lefortovo Prison, Moscow, 5:45 in the morning, the year is 2001. Cell No. 32. First floor.

I was in Lefortovo prison, under investigation, from 9 April 2001 through 02 June of 2002.

After that I was transferred to the Saratov Central Jail, which is where I received, a verdict on 15 April of 2003 : four years, for organizing the acquisition of weapons in large amounts (six automatic rifles). My other crimes they were unable to prove.

And so, 05:45 in the morning.

Several hits of the heavy jail key against the jail lock ring out, the feeding slot opens up, from the feeding slot a voice: “Get up, get up, its reveille lads!”

The voice is dispassionate and calm as a rule.

The help at Lefortovo are military, on their sleeves are FSB chevrons. This is a prison for state criminals. Everyone sitting here is going to get a long term, so there’s no sense in snubbing them. They’re going to be punished through the roof as it is anyway.

There are three of us in the cell. The Chechen Arslan Alkhazurov (he passes through in the case of Salman Raduyev) – Raduyev is sitting on the second floor ; a long-nosed and ill-kempt young Jewish lad, whom I call “Watermam” because he washes clothes abnormally much and long, and me.

All of the cells in Lefortovo are for three people, there are two six-person ones, but they are usually uninhabited. They are loaded up with people only when some dear guest, some Edmond Pope, needs to be given a bit of a pressing.

We get up, make our beds, and get dressed, only to lie right back down on the made beds, having covered ourselves with government-issue quilted jackets.

This is one of the privileges of the Lefortovo prison.

We don't have any clocks, but above the entrance to the cell we do have a radio that can't be switched on; it gets cut in by the duty officer from a control panel. As soon as the radio comes to life, you've got to get up and get ready for your exercise walk.

I get up considerably earlier.

I love these morning hours, when my cellmates are lying there like sacks. While I dig around in my papers. I've got lots of papers. My court papers, and besides that I'm also writing three books all at once. When I tire of one, I transfer my attention to another one.

The feeding slot doesn't even open, the soldier is too lazy. A quiet "Will you be going for a stroll today?"

"You bet I am!" I say loudly, so he'd wake up there.

The feeding slot opens up : "It's twenty-six below out there, by the way..."

"I'll go!"

After some time, the door opens. I'm already standing in my quilted jacket and in my hand I have two pieces of cardboard. They're to put under the palms of my hands, I'm going to be doing push-ups.

I come out. My cellmates don't go for exercise walks. Two people lead me to the elevator.

They take me up to the roof of the building. Exercise yards are nothing but ordinary cells except that there's no roof. High above the bars and the net, the sky is still black.

The spotlight hits me in the face. Up above, sentries are pacing about on a wooden deck. It is indeed very cold, the air burns the lungs.

Not wasting any time, at a jog, like a squirrel on a wheel I start my dash alongside the walls. Then I do push-ups and squats. The sentries are used to me by now, it seems they respect me for never having missed a single exercise period.

Back in the cell, Alkhazurov is already awake. He sits there watching the news on our portable black-and-white TV. We say hello. We've got an amicable relationship. I'm learning the Chechen language with him. I discover that one of the soles, of my made-in-Stavropol slippers, has burst from the frost. "They make 'em from crap", comments Alkhazurov.

They're passing around breakfast. I've had it with porridge, I eat bread with an apple.

And I dive into my notes. I draw up a rough work plan for the day for myself.

Investigative actions aren't being conducted with me. Because I'm the main defendant, what's called the "steam engine", they're weaving together a criminal case for me without my participation. Weaving it like a sweater, and everything they've got goes into the case file. There are investigative actions going on in forty-four regions.

I never refuse lunch. The food we get is as simple as soldiers' food, lots of porridges, especially barley, but borshches and even rassolnik [beet-and-cabbage soups and meat-and-pickles soup—Trans.], of perfectly barracks-like quality, are de rigeur as well. And I happen to be a great admirer of barracks.

After lunch, having waited some ten minutes or so, I turn on the light signal, switch down. A lamp lights up in the corridor above the cell door. The convoy man sees it, and depending on how busy he is, he comes up.

“I’m listening!”, he hits the lock with the key, signalling that he is in place, on the other side of the door.

“To the exit I’m ready to work!” say I. Always the same phrase.

“Wait!” says the soldier.

I wait. I’ve already put on my quilt jacket, in my hand a stack of pupils’ exercise books without staples, they had been removed before the exercise books had been handed to me. In the other hand a large apple.

Finally the locks grind, the door bursts open. My cellmates look at me with envy.

I walk out.

In the corridor they’re supposed to search me, face to the wall, hands on the wall.

They don’t search me, they lead me directly into the isolator, and as we go the convoy man asks me “Until when will you be working today?”

“Until eight!”

Both sides – both mine and theirs – know our schedule perfectly well, but this is a ritual we’ve got.

Actually, I’d asked them once for a table lamp; nearsightedness, I said, and the light bulb is dim. They refused to give me a lamp, but unexpectedly started taking me into empty cells. For the last month they’ve been taking me to the penalty isolator. Intended for a single person, it is even better than an ordinary cell.

And so I sit there and enjoy the solitude for a whole five hours, from three to eight.

At first the convoy men would look in through the peephole and I could hear them chuckling there.

Then they stopped chuckling. They understood that I'm a serious person.

I wrote seven books in Lefortovo. Among them were such successful ones as *Drugaya Rossiya* and *Kniga vody*, or *Sviashchennye Monstry* [The Other Russia, The Book of Water, Holy Monsters]. For me this was a forced Lefortovan autumn that continued for 15 months.

At eight they lead me through the half-darkened jail to my thirty-two.

They open the door. On the other side of the door it feels like I've walked into a sauna.

Waterman is doing laundry. Arslan is watching television.

"Did your cellmates take supper for you?" asks the senior warrant officer with the FSB chevron.

"Yeah, yeah, we did!" answers Alkhazurov.

The door is shut.

For two hours I engage in conversations with my cellmates. After five hours of silence it even feels refreshing.

At 9:45 we've got lights-out.

Now here there is no mercy.

"Lie down, lie down, lads!" They watch to make sure you really do lie down and go to sleep.

Or "Get in bed and sleep..."

I lie down and go to sleep.

One day in the life of Eduard Veniaminovich is over.