

Moscow on the Hudson

(Comedy) (1984)

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Major Characters

- Vladimir Ivanoff**.....**Robin Williams**
 A charming and frustrated Russian musician who decides to defect to the United States after traveling to New York City with the Russian circus (“To defect” is to ask to become a member of a new country, after fleeing an old one, often because of political repression).
- Lucia Lombardo**.....**Maria Conchita Alonso**
 A very cute Italian immigrant living in New York, who becomes romantically involved with Vladimir after he defects to the US.
- Lionel Witherspoon**.....**Cleavant Derricks**
 An African-American security guard at a New York Department Store who becomes good friends with Vladimir.
- Orlando Ramirez**.....**Alejandro Rey**
 A Cuban-American immigration lawyer who helps Vladimir start the process of becoming a citizen of the United States.
- Anatoly Cherkasov**.....**Elya Baskin**
 Vladimir’s Russian friend, a circus performer, who dreams of living in the United States because he hates life so much in the Soviet Union.
- Boris**.....**Saveli Kramarov**
 A KGB (Soviet police) agent who travels with the Russian circus to New York, and who is always making life difficult for Vladimir.

Plot Summary

This film is an interesting look at what it is like to be an immigrant in modern America. It is the story of Vladimir Ivanoff, a sweet and talented but frustrated Russian saxophone player who feels the despair of living in the Soviet Union during the early 1980s. In Moscow, one is forced to stand in line to buy virtually anything, from toilet paper to shoes, and what is available is often of poor quality and very expensive. Worst of all, there is no freedom to protest the conditions of life. Vladimir is not political, but he feels suffocated, and desperately wants a better life for himself (The movie takes place about 1983, just a year or two before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power).

Even at the height of the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union, the Soviets would occasionally send ballets, circuses and other artists to perform for American audiences. It is during one of these “cultural exchanges” that Vladimir finds himself in New York City, and even though he speaks little English, knows no one in the States, and risks never seeing his family or friends again, he suddenly decides to defect to the United States, while shopping at the world famous Bloomingdale’s Department Store. For the news media, it is “another chapter in US-Soviet relations,” and for Vladimir, it is the beginning of a very different life in America.

Soon after defecting to the US, Vladimir becomes involved with three very different people; Lucia, a very cute Italian woman who sells perfume at Bloomingdale’s, Lionel, a black security guard at that same store who invites Vladimir to live with him and his family, and Orlando, a Cuban immigrant who becomes Vladimir’s immigration lawyer. Together, the four of them present a wonderful picture of the American experience, in which everyone seems to be from another part of the world, and all come to find their dreams in New York City.

A quick note on the language used in this film: Since most of the major characters are non-native English speakers, there are quite a few mistakes made. Some of the major incorrect sentences are still listed with a >>> symbol, with a correct version of the sentence usually placed immediately below. In addition, much of the early dialog is in Russian with English translation. Thus, when the written translated English is being explained, a [W] sign is put at the end of the sentence.

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

Vladimir and Anatoly prepare for their big trip to New York, impatient to get away from life in depressing Russia.

>>>Does this bus goes to Union Center?

Watch your subject-verb agreement!: “Does this bus *go*....?”

Get a free transfer from the driver.

A piece of paper that allows you to use a second bus or other public transportation for free after paying for the first one.

It’s pretty tough getting around here at first.

“Tough” is an excellent way to say hard or difficult.

If you want to go on the New York tour, you better behave. [W]
 Note “better” is both an adverb and a modal verb meaning should.

I couldn't help it! [W]
 One way of saying “I couldn't stop myself from doing it.”

KGB Pig! [W]
 The KGB was the secret spy agency of the Soviet Union, much like the CIA, which is the American spy agency.

They see you as a target of seduction. Like whores, they want you to share their diseases, their immorality. [W]
 “A target of seduction” is a person who somebody is trying to seduce or attract, often with sex or material goods like cars or houses (“To seduce” is to sexually attract). A “whore” is a vulgar but common word for a prostitute. “Immorality” is something ethically wrong or bad.

Times Square. Greenwich Village. Rockefeller Center.
 These are three famous tourist attractions in New York City: A central square, a fashionable neighborhood and a large complex of buildings.

I know the same nausea is grabbing at you [W]
 “Nausea” is the feeling of being sick to one's stomach. “To grab” something is to seize or take hold of it with a sudden movement.

I am content. :: **Bullshit!** You are a gear in a mad machine! [W]
 If a person is “content,” they are happy or satisfied. “Bullshit” is a vulgar but excellent slang word to describe lies, half-truths or nonsense. A “gear” is a part of a machine that allows for the control of power or speed. In this case, “mad” means crazy, not angry.

Don't you have a soul? [W]
 The part of a person that is not physical, which lives on after they have died (In theory!).

See how corrupt we are? [W]
 If a person is “corrupt,” they are dishonest, they cheat or they can be easily bribed.

My stomach is growling.
 “To growl” is to make a deep rough sound in the throat, like an angry dog.

>>>Let's practice our English. Let us practice.
 Note that “Let us” must be contracted to “Let's” when the speaker is trying to make a suggestion.

Sure thing!

A colloquial and common way of telling a person that you strongly agree with them, or that you will do what they are asking of you.

Do you read Ernst Hemingway? :: Every fucking day.

A common but vulgar adverb, used to express anger or other emotion.

I'm going to defect.

A critical verb in this film, meaning to officially leave or abandon your own country in hopes of becoming a citizen or resident of another one.

You know I am obliged to report you to the authorities.

If a person is "obliged to" do something, they are required to do it by law or under pressure from someone else. "The authorities" is a term that refers to the police or other powerful government officials.

I could be KGB. :: Then my ass is already frozen.

The second sentence is Anatoly's way of saying he is already in deep trouble with the police, but this is never used.

I pave streets. [W]

"To pave" a street is to cover it over with cement or tar.

Why does everyone in this family make such a fuss over toilet paper? [W]

"To make a fuss over" something is to act like it is very important.

Is she the one with the big tits? [W]

A vulgar slang word for female breasts. It's safer to say boobs.

Pickled mushrooms!

If a food has been "pickled," it has been put in a type of salt water in order to preserve it or to keep it edible for a long time.

There's a great tune; "Take the A Train." [W]

A "tune" is another word for a song.

Before we marry, you should join the party. [W]

Here, "the party" refers to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

I'm not a joiner. [W]

An interesting word that refers to those people who like to join different clubs or organizations.

It's a bit humiliating, always borrowing Anatoly's place. [W]

If something is "humiliating," it is very embarrassing or degrading.

That's what friends are for. [W]

A good little expression that you say to a friend after they have thanked you for helping them.

Get away, you snoop! [W]

A “snoop” is another word for a spy or a person who tries to find out about the personal lives of others.

You certainly know how to get a girl's heart. [W]

A sweet way of saying to attract a girl romantically.

It's for your soft, rosy, bottom, not your heart. [W]

If a person's skin is “rosy,” it's red like a rose.

A Person's “bottom” is their ass, derriere, butt, etc...

The decadence, the crime, the poverty. [W]

“Decadence” is a powerful word that refers to the general decay or fall of a society, often because of immoral behavior like what was practiced in the last days of the Roman empire. “Poverty” is the condition of being very poor.

Jordache, Calvin Klein.

These are famous brands of expensive clothes.

There are whores in Gorky park who have carved my name on trees. [W]

A “whore” is a prostitute, and “to carve” is to use a knife to cut out specific shapes, often in wood or stone.

Horseshit! You smiling bastards.

“Horseshit” is a less common variation of “bullshit,” both of which mean lies or nonsense. A “bastard” is an angry and vulgar word for a mean or abusive man.

Next, they'll tell us the crops are good this year. [W]

A “crop” is a grain or fruit or vegetable grown by a farmer, such as wheat or apples.

You have no respect for position. [W]

In this case, “position” refers to people in authority, such as a high level politician.

He sympathized with the Afghanistans. [W]

“To sympathize” with a person is to feel sorry for them or perhaps emotionally support them (People who live in Afghanistan are called Afghanis. The Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan in 1979).

You're not a dissident. [W]

A person who protests the policies of a government, and a word especially associated with those who protested in the Soviet Union.

They don't have any balls! [W]

A slangy way of saying that they don't have any courage (The "balls" here refer to men's testicles).

Your neighbors say he yells anti-Soviet slogans out the window. [W]

A "slogan" is a short expression, often which has a political message.

He makes rude gestures to people doing their socialist duties [W].

"Rude" is impolite or disrespectful, and a "gesture" is a small action, such as the waving of one's hands to express an opinion ("Socialist duties" is a ridiculous way of referring to the work that people were forced to do while living in the Soviet Union).

He likes mischief. :: Perhaps he is senile. [W]

"Mischief" is activity that causes problems or trouble. If a person is "senile," they can no longer remember anything. Common in old age.

It might be wiser for you not to use the apartment of Anatoly Cherkasov for your sexual encounters. [W]

If a person is "wise," they are smart, clever or show great wisdom. A "sexual encounter" is the act of meeting a person for sex.

One day I will perform on Broadway and there will be a big sign.

"To perform" is to act, play or sing before the public.

"Broadway" is the world-famous theatre district of New York.

Vladimir and Anatoly arrive in New York, and soon Vladimir decides that he cannot return to Russia.

America is magnificent. They say it is customary to take towels. [W]

"Magnificent" is a powerful adjective meaning excellent or wonderful. If it is "customary" to do something, it is commonly done.

Look---A giant prophylactic! It fits me! [W]

A "prophylactic" is a very official word for a condom, or anything that prevents disease. If something "fits" you, it is the right size.

This television is a piece of crap, just like in Russia. [W]
 If something is “a piece of crap,” it is of very poor quality. A slangy, vulgar and common expression.

It must be smooth like velvet.

If something has a “smooth” surface, it is flat, even or not rough.
 “Velvet” is a fine cloth with a fuzzy surface, often made of silk.

Don't play games with me, OK, pal?

In this case, “to play games” with a person is to try and manipulate them or take advantage of them. “Pal” is another word for friend, though it is often used sarcastically, as here.

>>>>They want me to spy on you. :: I shit on them.

“To spy on” a person is to secretly watch over them to see what they are doing. The second sentence is Anatoly's way of showing disrespect, but it is never used.

>>>>Maybe this decadence attempt to lure us. :: They have succeeded!

The first sentence should be “Maybe this is a *decadent* attempt to lure us.” The verb “to lure” means to try and attract, and “to succeed” at something means to do well at it.

I'll have a black Russian, please.

A type of alcoholic drink.

Is something the matter?

“Is there something wrong”

>>>You don't look like Marxist. :: I'm not. I'm a humanist.

A “Marxist” is a believer in the philosophy of Karl Marx, the 19th century communist. A “humanist” believes in working to improve the conditions of humanity, but rejects most organized religions.

>>>I'm happy to talk to you, but I must now to make toilet.

“.....but I must now go to the bathroom.”

Vladimir's sentence above is truly terrible.

What about credibility with him?

A person's “credibility” is their trustworthiness, or the extent to which other people feel that they tell the truth.

Tomorrow, during the opening parade, on my bicycle routine, I'll do it.

In this case, a “routine” is a regularly done act or performance (If something is routine, it *is* common or done regularly).

>>>They grab you, they throw you right to bear.
 “They’ll grab you and throw you right to *the* bear.”

Would you like to watch me take a piss, comrades? [W]
 “To take a piss” is a common slang expression for going to the bathroom, or more specifically, urinating. A “comrade” is a fellow worker or friend, and it was a favorite word among communists.

I hope it ain’t as bad as when we had those Chinese acrobats.
 An “acrobat” is a circus performer who walks on ropes, wires, etc. (Note that “ain’t” is very ungrammatical; It’s better to say “isn’t”).

They were Romanians. :: I thought you said they were from Rome.
 A funny line and put here to remind you that Rome is in Italy, and not Romania!

What a piece of lasagna!
 This is Lionel’s totally ridiculous way of saying that Lucia is very sexy (Lasagna is a well-known Italian pasta, and Lucia is Italian).

You must be Russian!
 Note the use of the modal verb as a form of logical deduction (“I am convinced that you are Russian”).

We had a nuclear freeze demonstration this year, and I marched.
 A “nuclear freeze demonstration” was a common activity in the 1980s in which people protested the nuclear arms race and demanded governments stop building more nuclear weapons.

“Make Love, not War” we say.
 A much loved expression of the 1960s hippie generation.

>>>I look for blue jeans. : Designer jeans?
 Vladimir should say “I am *looking* for blue jeans.” “Designer jeans” are made by expensive clothing manufacturers such as Calvin Klein.

You go straight back to men’s wear, where the pole is. :: I am Russian, not Pole.
 “Men’s wear” is that part of a store where men’s clothing is sold. Note that a “pole” is both a post or a long thin round structure, and a person from Poland!

You can’t miss the denim den.
 In this case, the part of the store where they sell blue jeans (Denim is the material from which blue jeans are made).

Ciao!

An Italian word meaning goodbye, and now used in many European languages, including English (Pronounced 'chow' /Rhymes with cow!)

I don't give a shit. I swear, I'll do it!

"I don't give a shit" is a vulgar but common way of saying "I don't care." In this case, "to swear" to do something is to promise to do it.

Three items to a dressing room!

Here, an "item" refers to a piece of clothing.

Gentlemen, will you please button your flies!

A man's fly is the zippered or buttoned opening in the front of his pants.

Anatoly, you are pale and sweaty. :: It's nothing. Just a slight cold.

If a person is "pale," they look very white and unhealthy.

If a cold is "slight," it is very weak or unimportant.

Only one customer to a cubicle. This ain't Russia, you know.

A "cubicle" is a small part of a larger room, usually surrounded by a thin divider to form a space for working or dressing.

Fags, everywhere.

An insulting word for a homosexual or gay man.

Your wife will love "Forbidden Fruit."

This is the name of a perfume, though it seems to have a very sexual connotation (If something is "forbidden," it is not allowed).

Fabulous choice, Sir.

Another word for great, wonderful or excellent.

Suddenly, I feel dizzy. :: Let's get you some H2O.

If a person feels "dizzy," they may have trouble standing and feel like they are spinning or disoriented. "H2O" is a common way of referring to water (since water is one part Hydrogen and two parts Oxygen).

I got a dizzy Russian on my hands. :: Great, take him home for supper.

To have a big problem "on your hands" is to be responsible for taking care of it. "Supper" is a somewhat old-fashioned word for dinner.

The men's room is downstairs to the left as you get off the escalator.

A "men's room" is one way of referring to a public bathroom for men (For women, it is often called "The ladies' room," though many say this is old fashioned and prefer "The women's room").

I defect. :: Say what?

A very slangy way to tell somebody you don't understand.

Don't be grabbing on the uniform. :: I have to supply the threads myself.

"To supply" something is be responsible for getting it.

"Threads" is a very slangy way of referring to fancy clothes (Thread is actually very fine cord used for sewing clothes).

I defected! :: You're not going to do that here;

I told you where the men's room was.

A very funny line; Note that "to defect" (to officially abandon the citizenship of one country and seek safety in another), is not the same thing as "to defecate" (Which is a very official word meaning to go to the bathroom, or more colloquially, to poop or take a shit).

You're about ready to get maced.

"Mace" is a very unpleasant type of gas that disables people when it is sprayed in their eyes.

Oh, my God. Don't you get it? He's defecting!

In this case, "to get it" means to understand.

Code Two! We got a defection going on. Style boutique!

"Code Two" is a military or police way of announcing a higher state of alert or readiness. The "style boutique" of a store may be where they sell fancy clothes, perfume or other products (A boutique is a small shop or department of a larger store).

Call the damn police!

A filler word used to express emotion such as anger or frustration.

You damn son-of-a-bitch.

A strong insult expression for a very mean or abusive person.

I know the Russian is behind the counter.

A narrow table or surface at which people shop or prepare food.

I'm a lawyer. I specialize in immigration.

This is Orlando's way of saying that most of his legal practice is devoted to helping immigrants deal with immigration law.

Come on, get up.

The most versatile phrasal verb in English, in this case meaning stop or don't move. "Come on" often takes on the meaning of the words that follow or come before it.

We're between Estee Lauder and Pierre Cardin.

Two very well known and expensive clothing manufacturers.

I want political asylum.

A legal term that refers to the giving of certain political rights, such as the right to stay in the country, to those people who claim that they have been oppressed by their own governments.

>>>They will send me to mental hospital!

Note how Vladimir often drops articles; ".....a mental hospital."

We are Soviet officials. :: I got mace, I got handcuffs. And if that don't dissuade you, I got a 6 inch razor that will end this entire discussion.

In this case, an "official" is a powerful government figure. "Handcuffs" are the metal devices that police put on criminals to keep their hands together. "To dissuade" a person is to convince them not to do something. A "razor" is a sharp and dangerous metal blade that can be used to cut somebody very badly (It can also be used for shaving).

You stay put until the proper authorities get here.

"Stay put" is another way of telling a person to not move.

In this case, the "proper authorities" refers to the police.

I told you to back off. Now you're in my jurisdiction, which runs from Style Boutique through Denim Den up to Personal Fragrances.

If you tell a person to "back off," you are telling them to move back or to not get so close. A "jurisdiction" is the area in which a court (or person) has power or responsibility (Lionel is describing the areas of the store where he is responsible for security).

I think it's some Russian running around talking about defection. :: We don't like that kind of thing here at Bloomingdales. It's up to you to keep order.

If something is "up to you," you're responsible for making it happen.

He's being held against his will.

If a person is "held against their will," they would like to leave but they are not being allowed to.

Ain't nobody been smoking no shit around here!

This is Lionel's slangy way of saying that nobody in the store had been smoking marijuana or any other illegal drugs.

I've had it with you guys today. Back off!

"To have had it" with a person is to be sick and tired of them or more specifically, of their behavior.

A dramatic chapter in Soviet-American relations is being played out.

If a drama is “played out,” it occurs over a period of time (During the Cold War, whenever a Soviet citizen tried to defect to the US, it put a lot of stress in the relationship between the two countries).

Things are quite **chaotic** here, as you can see.

If a situation is “chaotic,” it is marked by complete disorder and confusion.

A member of the Russian circus troupe has decided to defect, in all of places, Bloomies.

A “circus troupe” refers to the performers in the circus, including the clowns and animal trainers. “Bloomies” is a silly nickname for the Bloomingdale’s Department store.

Vladimir, have mercy! [W]

One way of asking a person to forgive or show compassion, especially if they are threatening to hurt you.

Gentleman, how do you plan to **handle** this?

“To handle” a situation is to take care of it.

Agent Ross, with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

:: Frank Williams, Justice Department.

The “Justice Department” is the part of the Federal Government responsible for law enforcement. The FBI is located within it.

For now, consider yourself an applicant for political asylum in the United States.

An “applicant” is a person who fills out many papers in order to apply for a certain privilege or right (In this case, the right to stay in the United States as a refugee).

That’s a matter for immigration.

In this case, a “matter” is a topic or subject, and “immigration” refers to the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the US government.

It’s 147⁵⁰ and 30 for the windbreaker.

A light jacket that people wear to protect themselves from a cold wind.

Bitch!

A very vulgar word to describe a mean or abusive woman (though for some reason, gay men will use this word to refer to other men).

I understand how the brother feels. I'm a refugee myself from Alabama.
Black men will often refer to other black men as "brothers." Alabama is a state in the American South that was well known for its mistreatment of black people until the 1960s Civil Right movement.

***Vladimir gets to know his African-American family,
his Cuban-American lawyer and a sweet Italian-American Girl.***

He knows you're a foreigner, man. He's jiving on you.
Note that "man" is a very common filler word that has no meaning, but is added for stylistic effect. "To jive on" a person is to try and scare or manipulate them, but this is very slangy, and quite dated.

The first thing you gotta do is look mean.
Note that "have got to" ----> "gotta" in rapid speech.
"Mean" is unpleasant, abusive or nasty.

Crazy motherfucker!
An extremely vulgar insult word!

This is what is known as a ghetto. We're talking capital G.
A "ghetto" is a poor area of a city, which in the United States is often populated with African-Americans or other minorities. The second sentence is a slangy way of saying this is a very serious (or poor) ghetto.

Slavery? At least the work was steady.
If a person describing their job says that "the work is steady," they are saying that there is always enough work to do.

Hush, grandpa!
A good little word when you want to tell a person to shut-up.

This is my buckethead sister, LeeAnn.
Lionel's word to describe his sister as stupid or silly, but it's never used.

You've got to watch out for his sis.
A short slang word for sister.

You are kind to share your home with me.
An alternative way of saying nice or sweet.

You look kind of peaked, sweetheart.
An interesting adjective meaning pale or sickly.

>>>Man in store give me card.

“The man in the store gave me this card.”

Orlando Ramirez? Sounds like a Cuban ambulance chaser to me.

An interesting and negative expression for a lawyer who is thought to make his money by following ambulances to the hospital, and then asking the injured person if they would like to sue somebody.

Well, get his fucking feet off of my couch. :: Oh, hush grandpa.

A very vulgar but surprisingly common adjective, often used to express emotion such as anger.

My fee for helping you with all the immigration matters is fairly cut and dry.

“Fairly” is an important word meaning somewhat, for the most part or rather. If something is “cut and dry,” it is simple or straight forward.

Then Castro came along and my father was on his ass.

Orlando’s slangy way of saying that once Castro came to power in Cuba, his father could no longer make a living.

Castro is a Cuban bullshit artist who has been taken in by Russian bullshit artists. :: I’m not political.

A “bullshit artist” is a person who cheats and manipulates other people. “To be taken in” by somebody is to be fooled by them.

We took a nice life raft to Miami Beach Florida. The only way to fly, let me tell you.

A “life raft” is a very small floating surface or boat made of wood or rubber, designed to save a person if a bigger boat starts to sink. “The only way to fly” was a famous advertising slogan for an airline.

I want sun! We’re not wasting 10 bucks on that lotion!

“Bucks” is a very common way to say dollars.

“Lotion” is a type of cream that is rubbed on the skin.

Here, come on, make it snappy!

This is a colloquial way to say hurry up!

This is only stage one. You will be interviewed again. At that time we will determine your status, and until then, you will need a work permit.

In this case, a “stage” is a small part of a bigger process or project.

A person’s “immigration status” refers to the type of visa they have which allows them to be in the country, and a “work permit” is a card that allows a person to legally hold a job.

In one month, we'll give you an advisory opinion as to whether asylum should be granted.

An "advisory opinion" is a legal term for an official recommendation (in this case, which would allow a person to stay in the country).

"Asylum" is the shelter or protection that is given to a person by a country after they have fled their own country. "To grant" is to give.

In one year, you can petition for citizenship.

"To petition" for something is to officially ask that it be given to you.

Who is your boss? :: His name is Ronald Reagan, now sit the fuck down, Mr. Baxtar!

A very vulgar but fascinating filler expression that is added within phrasal verbs to express anger, frustration and other emotions.

Your impatience is wearing me down.

"To wear down" a person is to make them tired or weak.

Black men don't like to be called "boy." They take it as an insult.

Until the 1960s, racist Americans would some time address black men as boy, but this is (fortunately) very rare today.

>>>Why you come America?

"Why did you come to America?"

There wasn't much opportunity for a girl, or for a boy, for that matter.

"For that matter" is an excellent little expression which is added to a sentence after a second subject or idea has been added to the original sentence. It functions in a similar way to "in fact," but it is more stylish.

I have an uncle Sal, and he has a funeral parlor, so he sponsored me.

A "funeral parlor" is a place where dead people are put in caskets (boxes for the dead). In an immigration context, "to sponsor" a person is to promise to pay for their expenses if they cannot, once they come to the US.

I'm going to become a citizen, and then watch me take off.

In this case, "to take off" means to become very successful.

I want to work in media. Sportscaster.

"Media" is a general term for TV and radio as well as newspapers and magazines. A "sportscaster" broadcasts sports news on TV.

>>>I am be followed.

"I am *being* followed."

They watch you to make sure that you're not a spy. Also to prevent the KGB from kidnapping you, for your own protection.

This is an interesting line, but it's not likely the KGB ever kidnapped dissidents after they sought political asylum in the US.

Relax, amigo.

A Spanish word that means "friend."

Excuse me for my rudeness.

If a person is "rude," they are impolite or too blunt or direct.

We're going to begin with abdominal warmups, OK?

A reference to exercises that will help turn fat into muscle around a person's abdomen, which is another word for stomach.

Inhale, keep it nice and firm. First we do lower back drops.

"To inhale" is to breath in, and in this case, "firm" means slow and steady. "Lower back drops" is a type of back exercise.

I feel fine. I wish to be useful.

If a person is "useful," they are helpful to people around them. This is Vladamir's way of saying he would like to have a job and work.

I have an appointment at the human resources administration. :: The unemployment office.

Note that "human resources" is a fancy way to refer to various types of government and business offices. In this case, where people come to get their unemployment checks if they cannot find work.

I think Lucia's got something going for you. She's got an ass on her!

This is Lionel's very slangy way of saying that Lucia probably likes Vladimir, and that Lucia has a very pretty or sexy ass.

The Great Charlie Parker! That boy could blow!

In this case, "to blow" means to play the saxophone (You blow air into that type of musical instrument).

What do you want me to call him? Rhinoceros?

A large and ugly animal that looks like a strange elephant.

We'd have some coffee if you'd get off of your butt once a week.

If a person never "gets off of their butt," they are seen as lazy.

Bullshit! Deliver books? I got a college education!

In this case, a way of expressing frustration because a suggestion is so ridiculous or nonsensical.

We know you got your **pride** and we know you got a college education.
A person's "pride" is their self-respect, or the satisfaction they get in knowing what they have done or accomplished.

You leave my mother out of this! She's more of a man than you'll ever be!
If a person tells you to "leave my mom out of this," they are telling you that they don't think their mother should even be part of the conversation. The second sentence is a funny (and ironic) way of saying that the speaker's mom is more "manly" (brave or courageous) than the person she is speaking to, who is in fact...a man.

>>>I must to pay, please.
Never use an infinitive after a modal verb!: "I must pay..."

***Vladimir becomes overwhelmed by freedom and choice,
and soon starts to fall in love and lust with Lucia.***

Coffee? Aisle two.
A row or passage for walking, found in spaces from grocery stores to airplanes.

Don't worry. You're merely suffering some hypertension.
"Merely" is an interesting little word that means only.
"Hypertension" is a medical word that refers to high blood pressure, or perhaps the extreme nervousness that can go with it.

Don't be alarmed; You're among friends.
If a person is "alarmed," they have suddenly become scared.

You should have seen yours truly when I first came from Bombay.
"Yours truly" is an interesting way of simply referring to oneself.

You're something of a celebrity.
Here, "something of" is a way of saying "just like."
A "celebrity" is a famous person.

>>>Nothing fancy, my friend. :: I take it!
In this case, "fancy" means a job that is interesting or well paid.
Note that the second sentence should be "I'll take it."

When I speak English, my lips, my tongue....It aches.
"To ache" is to hurt or be sore.

Do you know how difficult it is to get a job
in celestial mechanics and astrophysics?

Two very difficult fields of study that deal with
stars, planets and the laws of the universe.

Dear Sasha and beloved grandfather....

“Beloved” is an emotional word that means much loved or cherished.

A ground ball to 3rd! Nettles scoops it up, throws to Randolph.

In baseball, “a ground ball to 3rd” is a ball that is hit on the ground to
the 3rd base (A *fly ball* is hit in the air). “To scoop up” a ball is to quickly
grab it as it goes by on the ground.

Double Play! It’s incredible.

In baseball, a “double play” is when 2 players are called out in one play.

What does he need that Madison Avenue preppy junk for?

“Madison Avenue” in New York is famous for the advertising
industry. “Preppy” is short for preparatory, or the act of preparing for
something, from school to business. “Junk” is another word for trash
or anything else that is useless.

I might remind you that while your ancestors were beating drums and
chasing animals barefoot, my people were giving the world Michelangelo.

This is Lucia’s way of saying Italy was more advanced than Black
Africa. A person’s “ancestors” are their relatives who lived in
the past. If a person is barefoot, they are not wearing shoes.

We invented style.

In this case, “style” means good taste, or possibly high fashion.

Today I opened my own restaurant and I’m starting to make big bucks.

A very common word for dollars.

G-A-Y. :: Sorry, you had a nice face and
I thought we had a moment back there.

In this case, “to have a moment” is a way of saying to make a
short but meaningful connection, in a romantic or sexual sense.

I hope it didn’t upset you.

“To upset” a person is to make them angry, worried or very unhappy.

Sunday I got a date with Lucia. :: I knew there
was something going on between you and her.

If “something is going on” between two people, it can mean
that there is some romantic or sexual interest between them.

She sure digs you. :: I know she does.

“To dig” a person is a very slangy way of saying to like them.

You’re probably the only man in New York who doesn’t have herpes.

A common, well known and much hated sexually transmitted disease that can cause lesions or sores on a person’s sex organs.

They all have made adjustments to life in America.

To “make adjustments” is to do things a little bit differently than before in order to do well with a new situation (In this case, life in America).

They still despair, and so do I.

“To despair” is to become sad and perhaps even hopeless
(This word is much more common as a noun than a verb).

You bought the blender we had on sale.

A “blender” mixes food together (A good kitchen tool for making milk shakes and other fruit drinks).

>>>That’s a nice tape deck. :: I buy it from friend of Lionel from back of truck. A ghetto blaster.

A “tape deck” is a small stereo for playing music tapes. A “ghetto blaster” is a type of tape deck that is known for being able to play music very loudly (to blast music is to play it very loudly).

Note: “I *bought* it from a friend of Lionel from *the* back of a truck.”

When I make it very big, I’m going to bring them all here.

“To make it big” is to become a great success
(In business, the arts, sports or life in general).

I really like you. :: Likewise.

A cute little word that here means “me, too,” though it can mean “also” or “the same.”

>>>I don’t like to get involved. :: Me too.

“To get involved” with a person is to become close to them or perhaps become an important part of their lives (romantically, or otherwise).
Note that here, Vladimir should say “Me, neither.”

I don’t want you to....exaggerate what it is.

“To exaggerate” something is to make it appear better, worse, bigger, more important etc. than it is in real life.

As a former citizen of the Soviet Socialist republic, I make no moral thought about sex.

This is Vladimir's way of saying he thinks there is nothing wrong with having sex with a person, even if you're not married to them.

I do desire you in a big way.

Vladimir's way of telling Lucia he really wants to have sex with her.

Vladimir becomes a limousine driver and Lucia becomes an American.

This here is my first trip to NYC.

One way of referring to world-famous New York City!

I had my damn watch stolen out at the airport last night. :: Really? That's a bitch.

A very slangy way of saying "that's really too bad."

I took my rollie off, set her on the basin, stepped back to shake the dew off my Lilly, turned around, and she was gone like that.

A "rollie" is a silly way of referring to an expensive Rolex brand watch. Here, the "basin" is a sink. Finally, the last underlined words are a completely ridiculous way of saying to wipe the piss off his penis (Dew is wetness that has fallen from the sky, and a Lilly is a type of plant).

I'd like you to check this out.

Here, to "check out" something is to look at it or study it carefully.

It's digital. Touch gives you heart beat and body temperature.

"Digital" generally refers to anything that uses computer technology.

It's great for your sex life. It gives you the dick of death.

Vladimir's way of referring to a strong or hard penis (A dick is a penis).

Plucked one of them long-stemmed American beauties.

"To pluck" a plant is to pull it out of the ground, and a "stem" is the root of a flower or plant.

Just relax Sir. I give great limo.

A famous slang expression is "to give head," which means to perform oral sex. This, like many other "give" expressions, is a funny play on words related to that expression (A "limo" is a limousine, which is a very big car in which rich people are driven).

I liked ET better.

The famous Steven Spielberg movie, *Extra-Terrestrial*, about beings from other planets.

I think it was decadent. :: I think it was fun.

If something is “decadent,” it is reflective of moral decline, often because of excessive sex, drinking or other similar behaviors.

On the Lucy Lombardo scale of 1 to 10, I give it a 7.

:: What, now you’re reviewing film for the masses?

Here, a “scale” is way of measuring or judging the quality of one film in comparison with another. “The masses” is a favorite word among communists that refers to all working and middle class people.

You want fantasy? :: Let’s go to my place.

A “fantasy” is a person’s great desire or dream.
This word often has a sexual connotation.

Don’t you get possessive, OK?

A guy who is “possessive” with his girlfriend is often jealous, and wants to control what she does (He acts as if he wants to own her).

You’re making mountain out of mothballs. All I said is let’s go to my place.

“To make a mountain out of a *molehill*” is a well known expression which means to act as if something is much more important than it really is. Vladimir’s version is never used (A mothball is a small ball of a strong smelling substance to keep moths away from cloths. A molehill is a small dirt mound made by ants or other insects).

I’ll see you sex fiends later.

A “sex fiend” is a person who is completely obsessed with sex.

If all Russians could eat Mu Shu Pork, they wouldn’t be afraid of the Chinese.

A delicious Chinese pork dish made with thin noodles.

You have beautiful lamb chops; Did anyone ever tell you that?

Vladimir’s ridiculous way of referring to Lucia’s breasts.

What did the Declaration of Independence say? That all men are created equal and given certain rights, inalienable.

The Declaration of Independence is the document written by Thomas Jefferson and adopted on July 4th, 1776, declaring the 13 American colonies independent from England. If a right is “inalienable,” it can not be taken away by anyone (The phrase is “inalienable rights”).

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

These are the three rights that the Declaration of Independence says all men have (“To pursue” something is to try and obtain it).

The Bill of Rights is the first 10 amendments of the Constitution.

A true statement! An “amendment” is an official change to a document, and the US Constitution, written in 1787, is the highest law of the country. The Bill of Rights, passed in 1791, guarantee such rights as freedom of the press and freedom of religion.

Freedom of peaceful assembly.

An “assembly” is a meeting or gathering of people, often to discuss political issues.

The right to arm bears.

“The right to *bear arms*” is part of the second amendment to the constitution, and basically means the right to own or possess guns (If you arm a bear, you are giving a gun to a wild animal!).

Unreasonable search.

In the Bill of Rights, an “unreasonable search” is one by the police or other state authorities where there is not a probable cause to believe that the person being searched has committed a real crime.

That’s my wife. This is my mama.

An old-fashioned word for mother.

All rise for the honorable Judge Louise R. Reynolds.

“To rise” is to stand up, which people do when a judge enters the court. “Honorable” is an adjective of respect placed before a judge’s name.

No longer are you all Englishman, Italian, Pole or whatever. Neither will you be hyphenated Americans.

A hyphen is “-”, and a “hyphenated-American” is one who says they are Chinese-American, Polish-American, etc...instead of just American.

You are no longer a subject of a government, but an integral part of the government.

If something is “integral,” it is important to the greater whole. This is Judge Reynold’s way of saying that in the United States, people control the government, and not the other way around.

May you find in this nation the fulfillment of your dreams of peace and security...

“May you...” is a poetic way of saying “I hope that you....”

“Fulfillment” is another word for satisfaction or contentment.

...and may America in turn, never find you wanting in your new proud role of citizen of the United States.

If a person is “wanting” in something, they are not as good or skilled as what others had expected.

Will the petitioners please rise? Now let us take the oath of allegiance.

A “petitioner” is a person who applies for a specific privilege (such as US citizenship). An “oath of allegiance” is an official declaration or promise to be loyal, in this case to the United States.

“I hear by declare an oath that I absolutely and entirely renounce all allegiances and fidelity to any foreign prince or potentate...”

“To renounce” a commitment is to declare you no longer agree to it. An “allegiance” is a declaration of loyalty, and “fidelity” is another word for loyalty or faithfulness. A “potentate” is a rare word for king.

...I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, so help me God.”

A “mental reservation” is an emotional or intellectual hesitation. “Evasion” is the act of lying or tricking a person. “So help me God” is the curious way that official oaths or allegiances are often ended.

Vladimir struggles with his music and his relationship with Lucia, as Lionel decides it's time for a change.

You don't like a man being crazy for you?

If a person is “crazy for” another person, they like them very much, or are perhaps madly in love with them.

I think we should move in together.

If two people “move in together,” they decide to live together in the same house or apartment.

That way we save on rent, utilities.

“Utilities” is a critical word that refers to electricity, gas, water, etc...

You don't have to talk. Just tell me what you think.

When put together, these two sentences are quite funny (but if you're not paying attention, it's easy to miss the joke).

I have worked and struggled to make myself in America.

“To struggle” is to work very hard against great difficulties. In this case, “to make oneself” is to work hard in order to succeed in life.

I didn't mean that! :: Then what the hell do you mean?

A common addition to WH questions which shows emotion such as anger or frustration.

Communist pope killer!

A silly way of insulting Russians (It was believed that the person who tried to kill the Pope in 1981 may have been working for the KGB).

There goes the neighborhood.

A cliché' that people will use jokingly whenever they think somebody is about to move into the community who is undesirable or going to cause trouble (It may have also been used more seriously by racists).

She's not the only piece of pasta on the menu,
so you got to make a move for something else.

This is Lionel's silly way of telling Vladimir that Lucia is not the only attractive woman in New York, and that he (Vladimir) must try to romantically attract other women.

Don't turn up your nose, honey, it blocks the light.

If a person "turns up their nose" at another person, they are looking down on them or acting snobby. The above is a funny way of dealing with those type of people.

Hello, sweet thing.

A completely ridiculous way for a man to say hi to a woman he doesn't know.

A nice round of applause for Ivanoff.

A way of referring to clapping from an audience.

Welcome aboard.

The words said to a person who has just gotten on a plane, train or bus.

Why don't you sit in on it with us?

To "sit in on" a song is to join the band on stage, usually by playing a musical instrument.

You didn't get smoked, man.

Lionel's very slangy way of saying embarrassed or humiliated.

Better to know who you are. That way, you know your limits.

Vladimir's way of saying that a person should know what they are capable of doing so that they won't disappoint themselves.

All he said was practice and work on it.

“To work on” something is to continually practice until you get it right.

You’re full of shit, man.

If a person is “full of shit,” they are saying lies, nonsense or stupid things (Very slangy and vulgar, but useful).

By the way, you are white. You just don’t pick up soul in two or three months.

Lionel’s way of suggesting that black people have a natural talent for playing certain types of music that white people take longer to learn.

That self-pitying ain’t gonna get you nowhere.

If a person has “self-pity,” they feel sorry for themselves because of their situation (Correct: “Self-pity won’t get you anywhere”).

It gets so bad sometime I don’t think I’ll make it.

In this case, “to make it” simply means to survive.

It was my misery. I could hold it. I could caress it.

“To caress” something is to touch, pet or stroke it gently (usually one caresses a person or cat, and not an emotion!).

If that was wonderful, what happens when he hits deep depression?

A colloquial way of saying to become psychologically very depressed.

Hey, defections are in the blue jeans department, fella.

A “defection” is the act of defecting, or officially asking for political asylum in another country. “Fella” is a causal way of saying “fellow,” which is another word for guy.

I’m turning in my badge.

“To turn in” something is to give it back to the owner. A “badge” is a metal identification worn on a shirt, often used by the police or security officials. This is Lionel’s way of saying he’s going to quit his job.

I was due a raise. It didn’t come.

If a person is “due” something, they have a right to it and expect it. A “raise” refers to a rise in salary or wages at a job.

I want toilet water.

“Toilet water” is just....the water in a toilet. However, there is a famous French perfume called “L’eau de toilette,” which means toilet water.

You keep your pecker in your pocket.

A “pecker” is a silly slang word for a penis, and thus this is Vladimir’s way of telling Lionel to stay out of trouble.

The feets have been swelling up real bad, so I got to keep them up.

If a body part “swells up,” it becomes bigger than is normal or healthy (Note there is one foot and two feet, but there is no such word as feets!).

Please call me when you get settled [W].

“To get settled” is to get comfortable with the new environment after moving to a new home or job.

Shut up down there, will ya, Jack? It’s not a nightclub, asshole!

For some reason, some people will call total strangers Jack.

“Asshole” is a very vulgar insult word like bastard (but note that while you can *address* a person as asshole, you can only *describe* a person as a bastard. Odd, but true!).

You don’t like jazz, pal?!

Another word for friend or buddy (But as here, often used sarcastically).

>>> Hey, you fuck yourself! OK, mister, OK pal?

Vladimir’s well intended insult, but alas, not grammatical!

Either “Go fuck yourself,” or the classic, “fuck you,” is correct.

Shut the fuck up! :: You ain’t no fucking Russian.

Note that “the hell” and “the fuck” are fillers that are usually found in WH questions, but they also can work within phrasal verbs.

Both express emotion such as anger or frustration, though the second one is clearly much more vulgar. Do not use “ain’t.” Here, use “aren’t.”

Vladimir is mugged, and then with Lucia, Orlando and a fellow Russian, thinks long and hard about freedom, happiness and life in the States.

What was in the wallet, besides the money?

:: Some **ID**, driver’s license, social security.

ID is short and common for identification. In the US, a person’s social security number is one of the most common types of ID.

You know, this is a God damn insane country.

“God damn” is a vulgar filler used to express anger or other emotions. “Insane” is an excellent alternative word for crazy.

You're overreacting. I always heard the Russians overdid things.

“To overreact” to a situation is to react too strongly or too emotionally. In this case, “to overdue things” is to be too emotional, serious or obsessive in life in general.

They are juveniles. They do get away with a lot of crap.

A “juvenile” is a teenager or young person. “To get away with” something is to be able to do it without getting caught or punished, even though it is illegal or wrong. “Crap” is a vulgar but useful word to describe lies, nonsense or other bullshit, or more literally, junk, trash or animal shit.

An apple turnover.

A favorite pie dessert served at McDonalds.

Do you think you were really better off in Russia?

If a person is “better off” elsewhere, their life is easier, more profitable or more enjoyable there.

Is it freedom for a woman to spread her legs like that for a magazine?

“To spread” your legs is to separate them, the way women do in adult magazines (Of course, you also spread butter on the toast!).

No freedom here. If there is, she is an orphan.

An orphan is a child without parents. This is Vladimir’s way of saying people in the US have killed the freedom they have been given by behaving so badly (The crime, pornography, materialism, drugs, etc...)

New York frightens me. It’s brutal. It’s crazy.

If a city “frightens” you, it scares you. “Brutal” is a powerful adjective meaning very cruel, mean or even violent.

What are you staring at? :: **Take it easy!**

“To stare at” a person is to look at them for several seconds or longer, without looking elsewhere. “Take it easy” is a popular way of telling a person to calm down if they are too nervous or emotional.

He’s telling me to go back to Moscow, turd.

Literally, bird shit, though often used as an insult word like jerk or ass.

In Moscow, we have to fight for a crumb of freedom. Here, you shit on it.

A “crumb” is a very small piece of bread that has fallen off. “To shit on” something is to not appreciate it, or treat it without any respect.

He says if I want law and order, I should go back to Moscow and stand in line for bread. Stale bread.

“Law and order” is a set phrase to describe a situation where crime is under control and society functions efficiently. If bread is “stale,” it is old and not fresh.

Firecrackers. Independence Day.

Firecrackers are small explosives that make a loud noise, which are set off at holiday celebrations. In the US, Independence Day, which celebrates independence from England, is on the 4th of July.

“When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary....

This is the poetic opening to the Declaration of Independence.

....We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator...with certain inalienable rights....

Note that a “truth” is almost never a plural count noun, but it is in the Declaration of Independence! If something is “self-evident,” it is obvious. The last half above is Thomas Jefferson’s way of saying that God has given all men certain rights that can’t be taken away by a government, King or anybody else.

....Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”

These are the 3 inalienable rights that Jefferson lists in the Declaration.

Hello, comrade.

A favorite word among communists for a fellow worker or citizen.

What happened?! :: I got mugged.

If a person is “mugged,” they are physically attacked, usually while being robbed.

Beloved family....

A sweet word for dear, cherished or much loved.

He lived life on his own terms, even to the end.

Vladimir’s way of saying his grandfather always lived his life the way he wanted to, and not the way people told him to.

Moscow on the Hudson

Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion

1. In the end, did Vladimir think the United States was a great country in which to live?
2. As an immigrant, what do you think are the best and worst things about life in the United States?
3. Is there “too much freedom” in the US?
4. Do you think it’s easier for foreigners in the US to get to know each other than it is to for them to get to know Americans?
5. What do you like and not like about New York?
6. How has your experience in the States been similar to Vladimir’s?
7. Lionel jokes about being “a refugee from Alabama”; Do you think black Americans face some of the same difficulties that immigrants do?
8. Are Vladimir and Lucia a good couple?
9. What did you like and not like about this movie?