



# The Suitcase: A Novel

By Sergei Dovlatov

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Sergei Dovlatov's subtle, dark-edged humor and wry observations are in full force in *The Suitcase* as he examines eight objects—the items he brought with him in his luggage upon his emigration from the U.S.S.R. These seemingly undistinguished possessions, stuffed into a worn-out suitcase, take on a riotously funny life of their own as Dovlatov inventories the circumstances under which he acquired them, occasioning a brilliant series of interconnected tales: A poplin shirt evokes the bittersweet story of a courtship and marriage, while a pair of boots (of the kind only the Nomenklatura can afford) calls up the hilarious conclusion to an official banquet. Some driving gloves—remnants of Dovlatov's short-lived acting career—share space with neon-green crepe socks, reminders of a failed black-market scam. And in curious juxtaposition, the belt from a prison guard's uniform lies next to a stained jacket that once belonged to Fernand Léger.

Imbued with a comic nostalgia overlaid with Dovlatov's characteristically dry wit, *The Suitcase* is an intensely human, delightfully ironic novel from “the finest Soviet satirist to appear in English since Vladimir Voinovich.”

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## The Suitcase: A Novel By Sergei Dovlatov Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Several decades after emigrating from the Soviet Union, the author discovered the battered suitcase he had brought with him gathering dust at the back of a closet. Rummaging through its contents provided the inspiration for this engaging collection of stories in which Dovlatov acts as narrator. All are delivered with an exquisite sense of timing, and ironic humor counterpoints the seriousness of their united theme: the woeful failing of Soviet socialism. "The Finnish Crepe Socks" describes his partly successful attempt to become a black market racketeer while at college. In "A Decent Double-Breasted Suit," Dovlatov, by now a journalist, is approached by the KGB to spy on a Swedish writer. Regarding the whole thing as a lark, Dovlatov is willing to comply, but for a price--a new suit. The Swede is expelled, which gives the narrative a bittersweet twist. The most poignant story, "A Poplin Shirt," frankly examines the author's troubled relationship with his wife and her decision to leave Russia without him (he subsequently emigrated in 1978). A subtle tension underlies Dovlatov's writing, for although he now seems to regard his youthful scrapes with a somewhat jaundiced eye, his longing for his mother country is palpable. This slim volume of interconnected tales, called a novel by the publisher, is a companion to Dovlatov's similarly semi-autobiographical *The Compromise and Ours*.

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From Library Journal

Several of Dovlatov's books, published here after he left Russia in 1978, have been translated into English, and he also contributes to *The New Yorker*. This work consists of eight stories, the titles of which represent items the author brought with him when he emigrated; together they form an account of his life in Leningrad in the Sixties. He moves in bohemian circles, with journalists, actors, black marketeers--all dedicated drinkers--whom he describes with a keen sense of the comic and absurd. The funniest story is about a prison camp convoy in which the crazy prisoner emerges more sane and responsible than his two drunken guards. Despite proclaimed sympathy for nonconformists, the stories reveal an underlying contempt for them and their milieu, and this lack of warmth and compassion makes the book somewhat trivial and superficial. It is very entertaining, though, and good for laughs.

- Ulla Sweedler, *Univ. of California Lib., San Diego*

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Review

Praise for *The Suitcase*

"Dovlatov's writing is simple but witty, with a hint of nostalgia . . . His tales open a small window on to daily life in the former Soviet Union." —*The Observer*

## Users Review

From reader reviews:

**Serina Horne:**

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have a lot more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time

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