

Trek To Chisinau

Daniel Chervoniuk

It's a dark space in the corner of Bucharest. Flinching lights tease the station with blackness, and the plastic seats smell like piss. Busses line the outskirts of the platform, and the drivers are sleeping in a small room on the other side of the station. I'll check my watch.

-1:25-

I've been waiting here for an hour. I could've gotten on the Midnight bus to Chisinau, but I would've gotten in before Maxima had awoken, and I have nothing else to do in Moldova. No - the 1:30 is better. It's an eight hour bus ride, God willing, and I'll have time to get some of their currency, and maybe some breakfast. I never had a Moldovan breakfast. Hopefully they have *luca*. I'm sleep deprived, naturally. It's one in the morning. I tried sleeping at my hostel earlier, but an Aussie kept me up with his snoring. I was out of my bed at 23:30, caught the last tram from Piata Unirii, and now I'm here, at the Filaret station. There's a homeless man snoring on the piss seats next to me. I can't handle that sound. It sounds like death.

-1:28-

But I'm willing to do this all for her. Maxima. She's an angel. And what a story I'll have for her then, and how much she'd appreciate how determined I was to see her. I can stomach the homeless man anyway, considering we're the only two people on this side of the station, and I don't want to be alone.

Other buses are going to Tel Aviv, Plovdiv, and Budapest. I would've gotten on any one of them if someone told me to. I mean, nobody speaks a lick of English in this God forsaken country, and I feel so lost.

-1:30-

"*Ȧ sosit ora 1:30 la Chisinau?*"

A man exclaimed to me, emerging from one of the aforementioned dark corners of the station. He was shorter than me, with a round face and a long nose. He was dressed in a suit, with a guitar case stretching out from his back.

"I'm sorry, I don't speak -"

"H-has the 1:30 to Chisinau arrived yet?"

An English speaker.

"I don't think so."

The guitarist trudged on toward the other side of the station, disappearing into the driver's room. He emerged a couple seconds later with a weary eyed gentleman, who was wearing a polo shirt a size too small, light blue skinny jeans, and colored flip flops. He was bald with a stubble, built down to his waist.

"He's here, my friend. Come."

I followed the guitarist and the driver towards a large, black bus, with the name “MirTrans Express”. The driver started the engine, turning around and grabbing a clipboard from a compartment behind his seat. There was a list of names and check boxes. The driver looked at the guitarist.

“Nume?”

“Florin Cebotari.”

The guitarist replied. And then the driver looked at me.

“Și tu. Care e numele tău?”

I looked at Florin.

“He’s asking you your name.”

“Peter Jones.”

“150 pentru amândoi.”

I looked at the guitarist as he started digging into his wallet.

“It’s time to pay.”

I took out 150 lei and handed it to the driver rather awkwardly. He nodded, stuffing mine and Florin’s money into a metallic box next to his wheel. He motioned us through toward the seats.

“We could sit together, if you’d like?”

“Fine.”

I said. I wouldn’t have minded Florin’s company, granted he wouldn’t snore, and I need some form of distraction for the next nine hours, anyway. He stowed his guitar case in the overhead compartment, and I put my backpack underneath my seat. The driver lit a cigarette, and started reversing out from his parking slot, and began driving north.

“So, Peter, is it?”

“Yes. Florin?”

“Yes. Your name sounds American.”

“I am American.”

“What are you doing in Romania?”

“I’m here to catch the bus to Chisinau.”

“Ah, and even stranger. What are you gonna do in Chisinau?”

“I’m gonna see about a girl.”

Florin bursted into laughter so explosive that the driver craned his head back to look.

“A girl?! A Moldovan girl?”

“Yes.”

And again he laughed, cocking his head back so much I thought he’d break his neck.

“Why are you laughing?”

Florin suddenly encompassed a rather serious disposition.

“I have to ask first, my friend - have you met this girl before?”

“Well, of course.”

"How did you meet?"

"At a dumpling restaurant in Florence. I'm a student there."

Florin caresses the hairs of his chin.

"And she came up to you?"

"I was with friends. We were playing a game, where one of us picked a girl for the other to approach. She was with friends. My friend Kudra picked her, so I went for her. And we ended up spending the night together. Before she left, she said she lived in Chisinau. So I'm gonna visit her."

Florin seems as if he's about to burst.

"What was she doing in Florence?"

I thought for a while.

"I don't remember."

Florin now seems to have solved some sort of equation inside his head. He grabbed my wrist, and held it up toward my face.

"Check the time."

-1:40-

"Don't lose this watch, okay?"

The bus stops. It looks like we're outside the airport in Otopeni, near Bucharest.

"The Airport. This is where most of the others get on."

And they do. Now the entire bus is full. Men, women, and children. All speaking in Romanian or Russian. Some have travel pillows, blankets - most have suitcases and luggage. A couple light cigarettes near the back of the bus, and others are quick to shut their eyes in an attempt to sleep.

The lights dim and the bus takes off again. Florin checks the row of seats behind us.

"There's an empty row. I'm gonna try to get some sleep."

"Okay."

"You, don't fall asleep."

"Why? I'm tired."

"Things will change."

Florin left his seat, and went to the row directly behind. He curled his legs over the empty seat next to him, resting his head in the crevice between the seat and the window. And he began to snore. But his snoring felt really soothing. It was a strange sensation. Like a melody.

I imagined her voice somewhere, accompanying his snoring. She had a beautiful voice, Maxima. And beautiful eyes. Big and brown, as if drawn with the bark of a cedarwood tree. Or if you took a blank canvas and poured a dark chocolate syrup over it. With a brush, you could paint a circle, and stare at it for hours.

And her hair, placed perfectly on either side of her face. Brown as well, but maybe a shade lighter than her eyes. It went down to her shoulders. I remembered how she parted her hair behind her ears. You could see her jaw, and how delicate it looked. But sharp. And her lips. I