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I Did Nothing to Stop Russia's Decline Into Tyranny. Should I Be Blamed?

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The White Ribbon protests in Russia, 2011. **Social Media**

At New Year's, it's customary to take stock, to celebrate achievements, to lament failures. And so, 2025, by virtue of its sheer hopelessness, has led me to the following conclusions.

We who have left Russia will never return home. Perhaps our children will when they grow up — but that will be their choice.

It will not be us who build the beautiful (or dreadful) Russia of the future, but some entirely different people whose names we do not yet know.

Thinking about what scoundrels are in power in Russia and how many crimes they have committed is our main occupation. Of course, we won't give it up, but it has become deadly tiresome.

It may be better to think about ourselves, what we have done and failed to do.

In 1996, I was a very young journalist and did not personally take part in politics. But senior colleagues around me discussed the dishonest methods by which President Boris Yeltsin had stayed in power. They even praised those methods, considered them acceptable, since they had brought the "right" person to power.

And that seemed normal to me.

By 1998, I had already become a well-known journalist and was earning a lot of money. But I paid no taxes on it. I wrote extensively about the dire situation of people with disabilities and of orphans while pocketing money that should have gone toward their care. I soothed myself with the thought that everyone around me did the same and that I couldn't possibly tell my employers how exactly to pay my salary.

In 2000, I voted for Putin. What an idiot! What pushed me to do it was the fact that Putin speaks German. That really was my main argument in favor. I seriously believed that life would improve if the country were run by someone who knew at least one foreign language.

In 2008, I was at war — covering the five-day war from the Georgian side. I saw the horrors people went through. But that did not stop me, five years later, from accepting an award from the hands of Dmitry Medvedev, who had started that war. I shook Medvedev's hand and somehow rationalized it to myself. I no longer remember how.

In 2011, at the height of the white-ribbon protests, I went on vacation. It was New Year's, and I thought it acceptable to travel around Italy rather than fight for freedom and democracy at home. Well, now I have no home — what's there to be surprised about?

In 2018, I found myself in the Kremlin. I didn't shake Putin's hand, true, but my then boss was receiving a state prize, and I sat in the hall nodding along, wearing a nice jacket and tie. This was after the annexation of Crimea! What the hell was I nodding about?! What was unclear about the Putin regime in 2018, which had already annexed a neighboring territory and persecuted dissenters?

But I nodded along.

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Right up until Feb. 24, 2022, I did everything I could to convince myself that life was getting better. My main argument for this self-deception was that children's hospitals in Russia had improved significantly, ramps for wheelchairs had appeared on city streets and most orphans had found foster families. These undeniable improvements were enough for me to consider life to be fine.

I did not go out to protest on Feb. 25 of that year. Nor did I on any other day after that. I was afraid. I took the children and left. And in all these years since then, I have not managed to work out anything that would help stop the war.

Perhaps nothing can be done. But that impossibility does not excuse me, because it was I who failed to come up with anything, or was too afraid to imagine something that might stop this nightmare.

In all these four years, apart from entirely predictable texts about what scoundrels are in power in Russia, I have written only a children's book, a fairy tale. I'm proud of it; it's the only unexpected thing I've managed to create since the war began. But it does nothing to stop the war.

After all of the above, whom can I reproach — and for what?

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