



# The Russian Debutante's Handbook

By Gary Shteyngart

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**The Russian Debutante's Handbook** By Gary Shteyngart

**A visionary novel from the author of *Super Sad True Love Story* and *Little Failure*.**

*The Russian Debutante's Handbook* introduces Vladimir Girshkin, one of the most original and unlikely heroes of recent times. The twenty-five-year-old unhappy lover to a fat dungeon mistress, affectionately nicknamed "Little Failure" by his high-achieving mother, Vladimir toils his days away as a lowly clerk at the bureaucratic Emma Lazarus Immigrant Absorption Society. When a wealthy but psychotic old Russian war hero appears, Vladimir embarks on an adventure of unrelenting lunacy that takes us from New York's Lower East Side to the hip frontier wilderness of Prava--the Eastern European Paris of the nineties. With the help of a murderous but fun-loving Russian mafioso, Vladimir infiltrates the Prava expat community and launches a scheme as ridiculous as it is brilliant.

Bursting with wit, humor, and rare insight, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* is both a highly imaginative romp and a serious exploration of what it means to be an immigrant in America.

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## The Russian Debutante's Handbook By Gary Shteyngart Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Vladimir Girshkin, a likeable Russian immigrant, searches for love, a decent job, and a credible self-identity in Gary Shteyngart's debut novel, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook*. With a doctor-father of questionable ethics and a manic, banker mother, Vladimir avoids his suburban parents and their desire that he pursue the almighty dollar as proof of success. Vladimir gets by as an immigration clerk, eking out a living in a cruddy New York City apartment while accumulating an array of quirky acquaintances, from a wealthy but disheveled old man (who claims his electric fan speaks to him) desperate for citizenship to Challal, a portly S/M queen. As a love interest, Challal is replaced by Francesca, a graduate student whose friends welcome Vladimir for the status he brings their bohemian clique, and whose parents encourage them to shack up (she lives at home) as visible proof she can maintain a steady relationship.

*The Russian Debutante's Handbook* is a quirky amalgam of dead-on American absurdities, albeit with somewhat stereotypical characters. While Vladimir flounders with how to improve his state, he becomes an expatriate in a trendy European city, becomes somewhat of a mobster himself, and generally has a good time. While many of the central characters remain elusively thin, Vladimir is a delight, and Shteyngart's wit is merciless: Russian women wear "wedding cakes of blond hair" and graduate students lounge in a bar "as if waiting for funding to appear." Reminiscent of Gogol and other Russian satirists, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* is a genuine, sublime social commentary. --Michael Ferch

#### From Publishers Weekly

Four years after its initial publication, Shteyngart's debut novel makes its first appearance in an audio version. Strong gamely does his best to capture the antic rhythms of Shteyngart's irrepressible comic novel, but his reading lacks fluency, failing to emulate the book's dry, sardonic wit. More so than most novels, Shteyngart's book depends on the sound of language—immigrants' careful tap dance around a language not entirely their own. While it would perhaps have been too simplistic to have a Russian-sounding voice read this novel, the gamble of having a voice so clearly not Russian results in a competent but unenlightening reading that undersells its source material. Strong sounds too wholesomely American and too white bread to be protagonist Vladimir Girshkin. The result is a reading that lacks a true connection to Shteyngart's work. (Reviews, Apr. 29, 2002) (Jan.)

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#### From Library Journal

Failurchka Mother's Little Failure is what Vladimir Girshkin's overweening Russian immigrant mother calls her 25-year-old son at the beginning of this picaresque, episodic, and somewhat sprawling first novel. Vladimir is stuck in a dead-end job and saddled with girlfriend Challah, "queen of everything musky and mammal-like." Then through a series of chance encounters, he is catapulted to the eastern European city of "Prava" to find himself welcomed into the fold of powerful Mafiosi. Shteyngart introduces a large cast of exotic characters, mainly twentysomethings meandering from adventure to adventure. Yet this distinctive new voice, which is both richly ironic and often side-splittingly funny, still seems to be seeking the right register. The relentless humor and satire obscure the development of character that is necessary to make readers believe the cast is real and not just being staged. Moreover, one wonders why the author felt the need to (thinly) disguise Prague (Prava) with its river Tavlata (Vltava) and the 1969 (1968) Soviet invasion. Thus, his highly imaginative but at times maddening panorama comes to resemble a dazzling Potemkin village. Though this is not an experimental novel, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the author is still experimenting with a very large talent he's not entirely sure what to do with. But having gotten a taste, we

will eagerly await his next offering, in which less just might be more. Recommended for all literary collections and larger public libraries. Edward Cone, New York  
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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Theodore May:**

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#### **Arthur Daniel:**

Spent a free time to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or their very own friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book could be option to fill your totally free time/ holiday. The first thing you ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the e-book untitled The Russian Debutante's Handbook can be very good book to read. May be it may be best activity to you.

#### **Ruth Haddock:**

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or perhaps go to the outside with them household or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity that is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent all day long to reading a e-book. The book The Russian Debutante's Handbook it doesn't matter what good to read. There are a lot of folks that recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. If you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy often the e-book. You can m0ore effortlessly to read this book through your smart phone. The price is not to fund but this book provides high quality.

#### **Sandra Leggett:**

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