

## 23 September 2011

Go on, be honest, if you lived in a flat and somebody woke you up at 0150 by banging on your door and shouting 'water', albeit in Russian, what would you do?

One of those times that the temptation to ignore it is slightly outdone by the stark realisation that it's not something that's just going to go away. Yes, on first impression it did seem like a nutter had found my front door, but on answering, the waking edge, went as it is to subject me to a daily passing state of confusion, eased to the extent that I registered a kind of gushing sound in my kitchen. Then I saw that Lake Baikal had taken root there.

How much water had spewed out of a split water pipe remains probably never to be known, but armed with a pan and a 40 litre bin, which I filled at least half a dozen times, we're talking more fluid than your average dog splashes on the average lamp post.

Probably an hour later the worst of it was over and the landpeople went downstairs to inspect the damage that I really really did not want to see. I left my door open for half an hour in case somebody wanted something, but in honesty this was the last part I played in the saga and with the modest exception of being shown the new pipe fitting this evening, nothing more has been said. I hope it stays that way. I feel very sorry for the people downstairs but don't feel I am to blame and do not wish to give them money. This is something they have to sort out with Lord and Lady Land who also claim not to be responsible. Anyway, mop and bucket later, my place is probably cleaner for the affair and I have a new kitchen sink pipe fitting, which appears not to fit into the same category as the previous which could only be described, and was, by the Russian plumber who called, as Chinese, cheap.

I couldn't very well take a photograph as happy snapping during a crisis which whose impact in essence was not really on my own flat would be seen as very selfish. Selfish I can be, but not in this way. Just picture the scene, kitchen floor, lots of water.

Money and Kazakhstan seem to go together, in many cases. Let me explain. Recently during an English exam I asked a boy of about 20 the scripted question, 'what do young people like spending their money on in your country?' His answer told a story, and I quote... "In my country young people like buying cars, you know, Bentleys, sports cars. And for those who don't have the money, well, they buy i-pads, i-phones."

Be assured that not all candidates give this answer, nor would many have the life experience to even consider it, but the nouveau Kazakh riche are many in number, and growing, both in that way and in confidence.

## 20 September 2011

Most days this month I haven't made some rational decision not to write anything for the blogge, so the three week absence from literary action needs to be explained in musical terms. Results can be very motivating, or rather, absence of results can strip us of any desire to continue, so the relatively recent addition to my box of tricks of a few nicely played Kazakh melodies has led in turn to the propensity to play them with some degree of frequency. So I haven't written anything here.

The latest tune, as yet incomplete, is the famous Adai written by the legend Kurmangazy. You can hear Zhansaya play it

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and it probably has to be said that she plays it considerably better than I do at the present moment, but I am working on it. But I know a lot of tunes, what is so special about Adai? Well, a number of things, the foremost being the fact that it is a very nice tune known and loved by most Kazakhs. The second, well, it is the first tune I am learning to play by reading the notes. Partly, anyway.

I've also got to know the dombra better, the frets have stopped surprising me and it's getting easier to recognise the similarities between different tunes, so much so that I have even started to create my own. I can't claim to have got very far with it, but we all have to start somewhere.

As for football, well, I'm not sure I have much to say about the wider sport itself, but I was lucky enough to be invited to play five-a-side today at a football complex across the city today. I am not

good at football, I assumed, and in spite of scoring the winning goal in the freak win against the top team, I was right. To be honest, I couldn't really miss. The lads there obviously play every week, or more, and had a fair dollop of talent beforehand. I and maybe a couple of my team were really there to make up the numbers, perhaps happily, but I think the adjective 'outclassed' can consider itself to have done a very good descriptive job.

I have a list next to me of things to write tonight. And just beyond them is my dombra.

Decision made.