

Raisa Borovsky



2035

a dystopian novel



RAISA BOROVSKY

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A DYSTOPIAN NOVEL



If a book were written with a plot matching the turmoil of our current times, it would be thought of as ludicrous. But Raisa Borovsky unflinchingly holds up a mirror to our “complicated world,” particularly to life in America, by projecting the restrictive future it potentially holds in store for both young and old. She weaves a tale that confronts blind loyalty, fear of Big Brother, and even government-imposed vocabulary, such that those of us living through today’s nightmare don’t see this book as a tale at all, but an inevitable trajectory if we allow the repression to continue. A combination wake-up call and warning, **2035** leaves us realizing that the future is already knocking—or rather, banging—on our doors.

— **Judy Kiviat**, author of *Atlanta in Your Pocket*

A chilling dystopian novel of the near future, Raisa Borovsky’s **2035** tells its edgy and sad story of loyalty, fear, and difficult choices mainly from the point of view of a largely indoctrinated teenager. The novel underlines dangerous tendencies in contemporary US politics, education, and spectacle, highlights the human capacity for bravery under difficult circumstances, and includes original touches, such as imagining Canada as our greatest enemy and making it dangerous even for a kid to use more words than the 496 words that comprise the entirety of the authoritarian President’s vocabulary.

— **Bernard Horn**, author of *Love’s Fingerprints*, and
Facing the Fires: Conversations with A.B. Yehoshua

Raisa Borovsky grew up in the USSR, at a time when speaking your mind could get a person in a lot of trouble. She obtained political refugee status and moved to the United States just a few months before the collapse of the Soviet Union. That experience gives her a very special perspective on political events taking place in the United States today.

In her dystopian novella, *2035*, she imagines an America in which speaking unapproved truths can get one sent to the “gulag” of Alaska, student compositions can only be written using the approved 496 words that make up the “President’s Vocabulary” lexicon, people get arrested for seeking out necessary but unauthorized healthcare, history is rewritten or erased, and Canada is the greatest enemy of the United States.

The image the book presents is chilling. Although many dystopian novels are placed in the distant future, the title of this one, *2035*, suggests that this could be the America we live in less than ten years from now. Is it a cautionary tale or a terrifying glimpse into the future? Only time will tell.

—**Judy Bloomberg**, author of *Always a Traveler, Never a Tourist: In Search of People and Places on the Road Less Traveled*

Through the alternating perspectives of Eric and Walter, Raisa Borovsky explores a foreboding reality of America under a totalitarian regime. It is easy to empathize with the characters: Eric’s childlike curiosity for what there may be outside of his bubble and Walter’s grim, cruel situation. This book is a fascinating read. It invites us to reflect on the state of our current reality.

—**Yelena Lembersky**, author of *Like a Drop of Ink in a Downpour: Memories of Soviet Russia*

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BOSTON · 2026

Raisa Borovsky *2035: A Dystopian Novel*

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*To the generation of my children,
who have inherited
a very complicated world...*

REFERENCE

NORMALS—white children who live with their biological parents

PRESIDENT'S CHILDREN —children abandoned by their mothers after birth and adopted by the government

COLORED KIDS—children who look African American or Latino, or have Asian features

THE VOCABULARY—the list of words routinely used by the President of the United States. There are 496 words on the list. Students are strongly discouraged from using any words that are not a part of the President's Vocabulary, since doing so might make them seem smarter than the President

GOD'S PARTY—the ruling party of the country

LIBERALS—the party of the minority and folks who sympathize with them

CHAPTER ONE

The federal police, as usual, came after dark. Their cars never moved with a siren, always silently. Just white—so bright that it hurt eyes—flashing, rotating lights.

You would never confuse the federal police with the state police, whose cars flashed a nice blue color; they went along with long, gently warning sounds: “Uu—uuu”.

Very few people were afraid of the state police. State police would come and go. You could ask the guys to show their IDs, and they would wait patiently, no matter how long it took you to study their papers. They were polite... Well, most of the time.

If they arrested someone, that person would sooner or later have a trial, and relatives could even hire a lawyer. Provided they had the money for it. The arrested person could be acquitted and return home; or if they went to jail, the family could visit them, and everybody knew when they were to get out.

People arrested by the federal police were rarely heard from or seen again. They would disappear si-

lently—as silently as the vehicle that took them. In rare, very rare, cases they might return—usually years later—but they would not say much. They were completely changed human beings. Possibly, they were not even those arrested years ago; they might as well be their clones.

Eric saw the police lights from his room, while sitting on his bed and exchanging messages with virtual friends. The door to the living room was open, and he could see his father flipping off the lights. His mom’s silhouette was clear against the dark window, her back turned to the room, to Dad, to Eric—to the entire world. Dad made a step towards her and whispered—as if he were afraid to be heard from the street, through the closed window:

“Mary, don’t stay so close... Mary... step away from the window.”

By that time, Eric was in the living room, closer to his parents, watching the obnoxious rotating light circling around their ceiling, penetrating their small apartment. Mom did not move. By the slight tremor of her body Eric knew that she had heard Dad. She did not turn her head or reply. Dad stepped closer, gently placing his hand on Mom’s shoulder.

“Mary... Please...”

Now Eric was glued to the window, too. The car was almost certainly taking a shortcut on their street,

just passing to another neighborhood. Just to see it disappear...

It did not disappear. It slowed down near their townhouse, then rolled a little further, and stopped—fully stopped—two houses down across the street. Two men in black bulletproof jackets walked out, the third one remaining near the car. Mom and Dad next to Eric turned into stone; he could not hear them breathing.

“It’s Jimmy’s house...” whispered Eric. “It’s a mistake, right, Dad?”

No one moved or talked. Time froze. The deserted street below them was rapidly changing from dark to shining white—almost otherworldly, as in a sci-fi movie.

Finally, the front door of Jimmy’s townhouse flung open, and the two bulletproof men appeared, pushing someone else in front of them. Someone else, who walked awkwardly, in small steps, hands behind his back, handcuffs across his wrists and ankles. Even before the light flashed on his face, Eric knew who he was. Jimmy’s dad. Jimmy, his best friend.

The police car momentarily flashed a crimson light—the sign of carrying a dangerous criminal—then, without any noise, took off and, a few seconds later, disappeared around the corner, together with the white rotating lights.

It might have been a bad dream. Eric was the first to utter a sound:

“It was a mistake—right Dad?”

Dad slowly turned around, 180 degrees, now his entire body facing Eric, his face whiter than the walls of the room. Or maybe it seemed so because of yellowish streetlights outside the window?

“Federal. Police. Never. Make. Mistakes.”

His hand was heavy on Eric’s shoulder.

“Now. You are going to bed. No “buts.” See you in the morning.”

Mom continued looking out the window. Her body moved slightly, but she did not turn. Did not say anything. Eric did not expect her to. Mom rarely talked.

* * *

Eric vaguely remembered the time when his mom chatted like a young girl. She would even sing. She used to sing Eric lullabies. She sang in the morning and before dinner, and while playing with Eric in the backyard. Sometimes, she would even sing to their guests. There used to be guests in the house. Mom would often laugh, and everyone began to laugh with her.

Dad loved it when Mom was singing. He once told Eric that he first fell in love with Mom when he heard her singing in a high school musical. Another

time he told Eric that when Mom laughed, the whole world lit up.

Like all preschoolers, Eric took his mom for granted. Mom was as permanent as the sky and the sun. And she was inseparable from her singing, her laughter. There was also Grandma, who would come and stay with them for weeks at a time. She baked Eric's favorite pancakes and read him fairy tales from books with pictures.

Eric's friends who came over for playdates were very surprised to see books. They would watch movies, or hear stories read by cellphone. Eric could do that, too—but for some reason he loved it when Grandma was reading books printed on paper, stopping just at the right time, giving Eric time to digest the story, asking him what he thinks is going to happen next. And why did that character behave in a certain way? And what does Eric think they should have done?

Electronic voices on the phone never asked such questions.

CHAPTER TWO

It was a typical morning in early May, when days are almost as long as they can be, the air temperature still pleasant, the usual blanket of smog rising above the roofs of the neighborhood townhouses not thick enough to completely hide the pale blue sky.

Too old for the school bus and too young to drive his own car, Eric biked to school. He habitually stopped near Jimmy's house, waiting for his friend to come out. His phone beeped. "Go w/o me"—read the text.

That is when Eric remembered; so, it was not a dream... Or was it? In any case, he left, feeling unusually numb.

The route was all too familiar; he could walk it with his eyes closed. He knew every single poster on the way, every portrait of the President hanging on the walls of the nearby buildings. For years, he entertained himself by counting the portraits, mentally sorting them by size, backgrounds, inscriptions... By the end of elementary school, he knew them all so well, he thought he could draw each one by memory.

The portraits changed from time to time, but they were always in the same place, the same size. The President on the posters never aged. Well, the President was a special being; maybe he really did not get older. No one ever spoke about his age, or what would happen when the President died. It was well understood that the Vice President would take his place. Once the Vice President became President, he would choose his own Vice President among the best, the most loyal people in the government. And, when the new President died—in some remote, very remote, future—his Vice President would become the President, and so on. Nothing to worry about; the world was stable and predictable; their country ran like a perfectly built machine. Everybody knew their place, no one ever complained.

But why was Jimmy's dad arrested? Eric used to see him in evenings while playing in his friend's house. Jimmy's dad always looked tired: he worked long hours. He would chat with the boys for a minute or two, then walk to the bedroom with Jimmy's mom, close the door tightly, and Eric would hear him speaking fast in an annoyed voice, although he rarely heard more than just a few individual words.

"Why is your dad always angry?" he used to ask Jimmy.

“He’s not angry, he’s tired,” Jimmy would respond. “He stays up on his computer late at night, working.” And then he would change the topic.

“Jimmy’s father thinks too much,” Eric’s dad once said. “He will get into big, BIG trouble one day... Don’t you ever listen to what he says!”

Eric wondered what his dad meant. Jimmy’s father never spoke to the boys about anything other than school or sports. He must have done something awful, though. Something against the people of the United States. Federal police did not arrest citizens for nothing.

* * *

Five weeks left of school. Not till summer vacations, but forever. Five weeks till the end of life as Eric knew it. He was already fourteen, time to stop living off government welfare. The state paid for eight years of school. Any further education was the responsibility of parents. Well, their state did not receive any federal subsidies, so one could not complain. In some other parts of the country, things were even tougher.

Here, every child aged six to fourteen was eligible for free education. Even the President’s kids could go to school—although everyone knew that it was just a waste of money: those kids usually ended up on the

street anyway, begging, stealing, and ultimately going to jail. They did not need any education, as far as Eric and his friends were concerned. But the state paid for them anyway.

It paid for colored kids, too, even for those whose parents had been deported for being in the country illegally. Well, things were less straightforward with colored kids. Some of them did have parents, and even sometimes parents who had money. They would go on to high school, and rarely—very rarely—even to college.

High schools were no longer free. The price depended on what they taught, how they taught... and, well, on where they were located. Schools that prepared students for college were the most expensive and almost always located in wealthy neighborhoods. As for colleges, they were for the select few.

Eric knew that his parents had been saving for years so that he could go to high school. It would not be the most expensive school, but not the cheapest, either. He would have to learn how to write on his own, not just search the internet and give instructions to AI to compile a text. He would have to learn to read from a book, without an option to click the read-me-aloud button. He would learn how to do some programming on his computer. And he would study digital photography and graphic design.

Photography sounded silly: every first grader knew how to take pictures with their cell phone, and by third grade most kids could use multiple editing programs to alter their pictures any way they wanted. No need to go to school to learn that. And he had no idea what graphic design was, and why he needed to study it. His parents, try as they may, would not be able to afford to send him to college. Dad said graphic design is the closest to art you could study. No high school taught drawing or painting.

The problem was that Eric loved to draw. It was stupid, he knew. Everyone knew it—except his classmates would chuckle when, in a few strokes, he would produce a portrait of their teacher preaching in front of the class. He would draw, or rather sketch using pen and paper, instead of a tablet or a phone. “Old-fashioned,” the kids would say. At the same time, the reason he was respected (or even slightly feared) by his classmates, was their concern that he would depict them in an unfavorable way—recognizable, but stupid nevertheless, something that would make other kids laugh.

Nobody wanted to get on the tip of Eric’s pen. Especially the teachers, although the teachers had even less control over his creative exercises than his classmates. None of them could ever catch Eric; he al-

ways managed to hide his creation before the teacher discovered the reason students chuckled while looking at them. Except for Ms. Wolf. Ms. Wolf, a recent graduate from teacher's college, miniature, with enormous velvet-brown eyes and a crown of bushy golden hair, taught history and politics. She reminded Eric of a princess from his grandma's fairy tales, maybe even of a fairy. She should have been a famous actress, not a middle school teacher in a middle-class neighborhood in a god-forsaken suburban town. Ms. Wolf wore ankle-length skirts with wide belts that highlighted her almost unnaturally thin waist. Jimmy's mom once called her "sexy." "Sexy" was a bad word, associated with woke, liberal Europe, or, worst even, with homosexual people—but, against his will, Eric felt a spike of electricity running through his body.

His abdomen would become tense and his throat dry before Ms. Wolf's lessons. In class, he would draw her in various costumes, of historical figures, movie characters, space travelers, even in a bathing suit. He would draw her dancing, or flying, or galloping on a horse. All would have been well... if she had not caught him. Only once, but that was one of the most embarrassing things that ever happened to Eric. She snatched the piece of paper and put it in her purse, before other kids could figure out what

was happening. Next time it was history class, Eric stayed home sick.

When he ran into Ms. Wolf at the church on Sunday, she acknowledged him with a slight nod and a half-smile, as usual. Maybe, she had forgotten...

CHAPTER THREE

Would Jimmy be OK? And Jean? What would happen to his family now, after he had been arrested as an enemy of the people? Walter was never conscious long enough to find the answer. Sometimes, he was not sure whether he was dead or alive. Well, he must be alive, since there was not a spot on his body that did not hurt, his throat painfully dry, his head spinning and heavy, as if it was separate from the body, hanging in space above it... Was it from hunger, thirst, repeated beating? Or maybe it was just motion sickness—how long have they been on that boat?

There were at least a hundred men in the hold, sitting and lying, their bodies pressed together. A few dim electric lights allowed seeing your neighbor but did not help to distinguish day from night.

Days—or maybe weeks—or maybe several months—had passed since Walter and others had been herded into the ship, handcuffed, beaten, and hungry. They were thrown in the hold without food or water, and it took forever for two lazily moving

guards to unshackle each man. Many had to skip more than one meager meal, because their hands were still tied behind their backs. The ones who were finally liberated had bloody wounds around their wrists, which would not heal.

And still, men talked. Somehow, they knew things that had never appeared on the internet, that were never mentioned anywhere even in whispers.

By the way the ship rocked, they tried to determine whether they were sailing north or south. Surprisingly, it mattered. If they were going north, it meant the gulag in Alaska—dark frigid winters and short summers, but they would work in fresh air and see the sky, and the guards would speak English, and... It was their own country, after all, they would still be in the United States.

Sailing southward meant Latin America, being thrown in a dungeon to never see the light of day again; sharing cells with locals, some of whom were true bandits; guards barking in an unknown language, prisoners tortured for violating rules they could not understand. If Walter believed in God, he would be praying to be shipped north.

* * *

They were thrown on grass-covered permafrost and given one final meal. The last meal before they

began to work, even though very few men could stand up, even less walk. Too many weeks spent without moving, leg muscles atrophied.

The sky was pale blue, the air cool and painfully fresh—so fresh it hurt to breathe it. Mosquitoes buzzed in the air. Prisoners in uniforms were returning from work; slouchy, dragging their feet, they entered wooden barracks. A few of them walked past Walter, and a couple of inmates slowed down.

“See those tents? You better get there, even if you must crawl. And up on your legs tomorrow, if you want food. Those who are not at work in two days get shot. You’re lucky bastards that it is still summer: most of the ones who arrive in winter freeze to death right away. You may be able to build your cabins before snow...”

“When does it get cold?”

“Probably another couple of months. If you are lucky to get building materials in time, you’ll be all set. It used to start snowing in August, but the Earth is getting warmer; now snow often holds off till mid-September. You will be working in mines during the day, but shorter days than us, so you have a few hours for building your winter dwelling. Days are still long; it is only dark for three-four hours, that’s the time you can sleep.”

“Watch out for snitches, they’re everywhere.”

“What happens if they tattle on you?”

“Well, you’ll know in time... Pray it will never happen to you! Criminals—I mean bandits—are also bad—there are not too many of those, thank God... and they are not as dangerous as snitches. Why not? You’ll recognize them immediately. They don’t hide who they are. They will try to make you do their work for them, take your food... Maybe have some fun... at your expense... It is up to you to stand up to them. The guards won’t interfere. Which may be for the best. The less you interact with the guards, the better. You’ll learn the rest when the time comes...”

* * *

Alaska. Oil drilling. Cold air, so fresh that you want to drink it. Unless you are in the barrack, with forty other guys—then smell of dirty bodies thickens the air. But a human being gets used to everything. When at the end of a long, long day, Walter fell on his bunk, he would try to think of Jean, his wife. Or of Jimmy, his son. Of the world left far, far behind. Then would come a squeaking, piercing sound—the get-up signal. He would understand that he must have slept, falling asleep sooner than any thought had time to form.

Prisoners never had enough sleep. Still, three times a day they would get a small paper bowl with

something edible, usually cold, or lukewarm at best. Drinking water was unlimited. And they got uniforms, even warm jackets once it got colder. Some big guys down there, in the South, needed oil. So, they had to keep prisoners alive, and strong enough to work.

Oil. Most of it gets exported, he always knew it. But there was also gasoline for cars, which he used to buy at gas stations... well, in his past life. And, of course, airplanes. Most people never thought of where the oil came from. But not Walter. He had known.

As a college student, he would take part in protests against drilling in Alaska. He would carry posters of grizzly bears, whose habitat was being destroyed; of the black ocean water with whales, dolphins, and dead fish washed ashore. With his friends, he would proclaim “save our national parks!” Police used tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets against them, and some of his friends were beaten, and some expelled from the university. But others kept demonstrating, kept protesting. Until it was too late, until news of new wells was all over the media, with loud praise for those who had defeated the rotten liberals and brought more wealth and glory to their country, to their President...

Like his friends, Walter learned to condemn those weakling-liberals aloud. He would denounce rotten

Europe, infested by transsexuals and illegal immigrants who committed terrible crimes, unpunished by authorities. But secretly he would browse the internet for hours, in search of posts from European countries.

In college, he studied environmental science as his minor, while majoring in computers. He earned an A for his capstone, by proving that global warming was a hoax, that environmental protection was liberal bullshit, that oil and coal mines were essential for the country's security, for protection from numerous enemies who wanted to take our wealth and destroy our freedom. He swore alliance to the President, and to God's Party the latter was leading. But, unlike so many of his classmates and colleagues, he never went as far as joining the Party; he preferred to lay low, to remain inconspicuous.

Piece by piece, he collected information about the environmental catastrophe. He looked for the connection of climate change with natural disasters that plagued our country: floods, hurricanes, forest fires. He downloaded photographs of disappearing beaches and dying forests, information about poisonous air and water too dangerous to drink, infected by uncontrolled industries.

Eventually, he started his own website, carefully selecting the most reliable information and the most

obvious facts. His posts were entirely in English, and the site was available in the United States—to those who knew how to find it. He thought he was careful, very careful. The only person who was aware of what he was doing was his wife, Jean; a couple of friends might have been guessing, but he knew they were like-minded and would never give him away.

He did not suspect anyone or blame anyone. He knew all along that an entire department of CIA programmers was looking for politically dangerous websites like his, day and night. People had been arrested and had disappeared before him. Jean had begged him to stop, and he promised he would—but he could not. Something stronger than his love for his wife and child, stronger than logic and common sense, compelled him to carry on.

Unlike many of his prison mates in the gulag, he knew why he was there.



During Raisa Borovsky's lifetime, she's been a journalist, librarian, Hebrew and English teacher, computer programmer, and yoga instructor. She lived in Russia, USA, Africa, and Thailand. She spent a year in Israel, volunteering at the front lines. She is now a psychologist, with a private practice in mental health counseling in Boston, Massachusetts.

It is 2035, and the United States is no longer a democracy. There have been no presidential elections since 2024; and according to the New Constitution, none are required. The President is a godlike figure; his party controls not only what people do, but what they say—and even what they think. Secret police come at night, arresting dissidents; people who dare to disagree with the government, disappear never to be seen again.

Still life goes on—especially for fourteen-year-olds...



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