

# The Mercurian



*A Theatrical Translation Review*  
Volume 3, Number 1 (Spring 2010)

Editor: Adam Versényi  
ISSN: 2160-3316

*The Mercurian* is named for Mercury who, if he had known it, was/is the patron god of theatrical translators, those intrepid souls possessed of eloquence, feats of skill, messengers not between the gods but between cultures, traders in images, nimble and dexterous linguistic thieves. Like the metal mercury, theatrical translators are capable of absorbing other metals, forming amalgams. As in ancient chemistry, the mercurian is one of the five elementary “principles” of which all material substances are compounded, otherwise known as “spirit”. The theatrical translator is sprightly, lively, potentially volatile, sometimes inconstant, witty, an ideal guide or conductor on the road.

*The Mercurian* publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation, rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre, as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versényi at [anversen@email.unc.edu](mailto:anversen@email.unc.edu) or by snail mail: Adam Versényi, Department of Dramatic Art, CB# 3230, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3230. For translations of plays or performance pieces, unless the material is in the public domain, please send proof of permission to translate from the playwright or original creator of the piece. Since one of the primary objects of *The Mercurian* is to move translated pieces into production, no translations of plays or performance pieces will be published unless the translator can certify that he/she has had an opportunity to hear the translation performed in either a reading or another production-oriented venue. All material published in *The Mercurian* is protected by international copyright law. Inquiries related to production or reproduction should be directed to the translator of the piece in question.

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# The Mercurian

*Volume 3, Number 1*

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### Editor's Note:

This issue of *The Mercurian* is entirely Russian in content. We proudly present Libby Appel and Allison Horsley's new translation of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, originally commissioned for performance at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Accompanying the translation are Horsley's article, "Translation for Performance: Another Chekhov Play?", reprinted from *The Mercurian*, Volume 2, Number 1, and Appel's meditation on *Translating Chekhov*. Appel and Horsley have created new translations of all of Chekhov's major plays and they will appear in future issues of *The Mercurian*. The translations can also be accessed at the website for their Chekhov project, [www.chekhovplays.com](http://www.chekhovplays.com). **We are also excited to present two new contemporary Russian plays that create an exciting dialogue with Chekhov's work.** John Freedman's translations of *The Polar Truth* by Yury Klavdiev and *Flying* by Olga Mukhina were commissioned for the New Russian Drama Project, a collaboration between The Center for International Theatre Development and the Department of Theatre Arts at Towson University. The project was designed to help bring new Russian drama to audiences in the United States through the translation, study and production of plays by a new generation of Russian playwrights. Professional theatre artists worked with CITD and Russian translators to develop the selected plays into producible form for theatre audiences in the U.S. The translated plays also formed the basis of cultural exploration and interdisciplinary learning through courses, guest residencies and a season of eight new Russian plays in readings, workshops or full productions at the university. The translation of *The Polar Truth*, was performed as part of this season in November of 2009. Freedman developed his translation of *Flying* in residence at the university in the fall of 2008, in conjunction with graduate and undergraduate students in a seminar course. A staged reading of the text was presented by the students in December 2008. The New Russian Drama Project culminated in a series of professional gatherings, including a conference in May 2010 that was sponsored by CITD and held on the Towson University campus. The project's success in helping to generate interest in the plays can be seen in subsequent publications, including this edition of *The Mercurian*, and productions. Both plays published here have moved on to further life on the stage. The South African premiere of *The Polar Truth* took place at The City Varsity School of Theater, Cape Town, South Africa in June 2010. *Flying* will receive its North American premiere in January 2011 at Breaking String Theatre in Austin, TX. More information about the project and the featured plays is available at [www.newrussiandrama.org](http://www.newrussiandrama.org).

With this issue of *The Mercurian* we are also excited to announce the formation of a new Advisory Board for the journal. From its inception *The Mercurian* has been a labor of love for me, the new Advisory Board will help me develop new sources of material, introduce me to new translators and translation projects, and assist me in reviewing submissions. Establishing a system of peer review should enhance the quality of the journal overall and allow us to move forward in new and exciting ways.

Back issues of the journal can now be found under “Related Links” on the website of the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina, <http://drama.unc.edu/> where we will maintain a permanent web presence.

As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 3, No. 2 will be December 15, 2010.

--Adam Versényi

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## Translation for Performance: Another Chekhov Play?

Allison Horsley

Recently, I have come to understand the significant difference between the ability to speak Russian and the ability to speak Russian *as a theatre practitioner*. Over the last five years, I have been engaged in a project, commissioned by Oregon Shakespeare Festival, to complete new literal translations of Chekhov's four major plays for adaptation by the theatre's former artistic director, Libby Appel. Initially I attempted to convince the theatre not to hire me for the project because I didn't feel adequately fluent to take on one of the world's greatest writers in his own language. I hold a BA in Russian, but translating Chekhov was something else. I told them that I could recommend some native speakers for the job, and they countered that they wanted a theatre person. It occurred to me that what I lacked in Russian authenticity I made up for in theatre practicality, and as a working dramaturg who once interned in the OSF literary office, they knew that. I accepted, and to date we have completed *The Cherry Orchard*, *Seagull*, and *Uncle Vanya*, and I've recently started work on *Three Sisters*.

Our first collaboration began in the summer of 2004, with *The Cherry Orchard*. Having never translated Chekhov before, I was unsure of which Russian text to use as a base because I was unsure of how much, or little, Soviet rule affected publications of Chekhov. I began with four published Russian versions of the play, one of which boasted pre-Revolutionary lettering, and I compared them. Seeing no significant differences aside from the reinstatement of material censored at the time of the play's premiere, I settled on the most thorough Soviet version I could find, and simply started at the beginning, with a massive dictionary and a couple of grammar primers by my side. From there, I improvised.

Rather than viewing my literal translation as a “clean” copy of the play for Libby’s use as a jumping-off point, I saw it as an opportunity to share the dramaturgical equivalent of extensive vacation photo commentary. I included as much information as I possibly could so that Libby could see what I saw. For many words, I provided a choice between synonyms in English, separated by slashes, and Libby chose from those or came up with her own. If I was at a loss for the English word or phrase, I took all the space on the page I needed to explain the phenomenon I was viewing. If a word was colloquial or obsolete, if usage was formal or informal and it was significant, I noted it.

Approximately nine months later, I delivered 75 pages of the following to Libby Appel and Oregon Shakespeare Festival:

GAYEV. The train was two hours late. What is that? What way of doing things is that? [Gist: Is that a way to run things?]

CHARLOTTA. (*To PISCHIK*) My dog even eats nuts.

PISCHIK. (*astonished*) What do you know! [Pischik says this phrase ALL THE TIME – each time I’ll just note it with “what do you know” but depending on style, it could be something like: “Fancy that!” “Get a load of that!” “I say!” “Just think!” “You don’t say!” or “Imagine that!”]

*Everyone exits, except ANYA and DUNYASHA.*

DUNYASHA. We grew tired of waiting for you [coll.]... (*She removes ANYA’s overcoat and hat.*)

ANYA. I did not sleep on the way [journey] for four nights... now I am  
very cold. [I am frozen]

After I sent Libby my translation and notes, she spent time at the Oregon coast  
reconciling her previous knowledge of Chekhov Country with my added commentary. She  
returned with a draft of her adaptation:

GAYEV. The train was two hours late. Is that a way to run things?

CHARLOTTA. *(to PISCHIK)* My dog even eats nuts.

PISCHIK. *(astonished)* What a world!

*Everyone exits, except ANYA and DUNYASHA.*

DUNYASHA. We've been waiting for you forever... *(She removes ANYA's  
overcoat and hat.)*

ANYA. I didn't sleep on the journey for four nights... now I'm freezing.

I pored over her version, comparing it to my translation, then the original, and noted places  
in which I felt she deviated too much from what I viewed as being the gist of the Russian.

As a dramaturg, I noted words or phrases that seemed to strike an odd note in context. After rounds of discussion in person and over email, and further research on specific words, contexts, and various outdated Russian billiard games, we went into rehearsal in January of 2007. The cast contributed to the occasional changing of Libby's language choices in the play, as did Libby's own direction of her adaptation. This new version was received well by audiences and theatre practitioners alike, and we began discussing which play to do next.

I began work on *The Seagull*, the title of which Libby has now adjusted to *Seagull* with my hearty support, in the fall of 2007, and felt slightly more comfortable in what seemed at that point to be more familiar territory. I began to notice the similarities in speech patterns between characters in each of the plays, sometimes corresponding to age, sometimes corresponding to world view, and always reflecting what felt, to me, to be the central conflicts at work in the play. *The Cherry Orchard* reveals a changing civilization in the sharp contrast between the styles of speech employed by Gayev as compared to that of Lopakhin. *The Seagull* struck me as surprisingly clean and modern in its dialogue, more European in word choice, and felt to me like an effort to articulate something unspeakable using theatre as an imperfect microphone. *Uncle Vanya* felt alive and human, as lush and ephemeral as the forests Astrov tries to preserve.

In looking at these plays in Russian over the last five years and trying my best to make sense of what I see there, I have discovered the following: a) Chekhov is very funny, often in a wicked, awfully human way. Just when someone is about to get what he or she wants, someone else comes into the room and blows that dream out of the water; b) it is either very easy to anticipate the next line because the dialogue flows logically or it is impossible to anticipate the next line because someone is continuing a conversation you



didn't know he or she was having; c) these characters might lie to themselves but they do not, convincingly, lie to one another very often. While none of the above are observations limited to a reader of Russian, they are elements of Chekhov's writing that seemed more pronounced to me in the translation process. In each of the plays, I fell in love with a different character for whom I had previously never cared. I loved Gayev in *The Cherry Orchard* for his useless lyricism and good heart just as I loved Marina in *Uncle Vanya* for her industriousness in the face of lethargy. I loved Masha in *Seagull* for her straightforward speech, as I loved Treplyov for writing such dense language for Nina to speak in the play-within-a-play.

While I believe that Chekhov is a writer whose works will stand the test of time, he is also a writer whose reputation has suffered in the hands of all of us who have tried to shoehorn his plays into the style of language we expect from them. I do not mean to suggest that other translators have done a disservice to Chekhov in their efforts to communicate his ideas to American audiences, but rather there need to be more translations, more often. Regardless of their language of origin or destination, Chekhov's plays need to be translated and re-translated as often as possible to reflect and predict the language of the current theatre and its audiences.

## TRANSLATING CHEKHOV

Libby Appel

I discovered Chekhov's plays when I was 16 years old and an English teacher in my junior year high school class assigned us *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* to read. It was a revelation for me from the first moment I picked it up. I still have difficulty understanding how a teenage girl could fall so madly in love with this play about loss, memory and grief, but fall in love I did. And this was the start of a life-long passion with all of Chekhov's works.

I studied all the biographies and critical discussions I could find about Chekhov's life and works, literally feeling his presence in my life. I developed a reputation for being the three sisters—all of them at one time. When I discovered that my penchant in the theater was for directing, I made it my business to direct all of the plays, several times, including a few of the one-act farces. I have been reading the stories all of my life and have taught Chekhov works in my acting and theater classes.

Thus it seemed a natural progression when I had the opportunity to link up with a literal Russian to English translator, Allison Horsley, and begin my journey as a translator/adaptor of Chekhov's plays. My first venture was with *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*—which seems an obvious choice as it rests in my heart as my first love. Allison and I worked very harmoniously to produce the working draft which I then took into rehearsal and directed with a superb cast of actors at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

From that first translation, I felt compelled to continue with all the major plays. Fortunately, the new artistic director at OSF, Bill Rauch, agreed that something special was happening with these translations and he commissioned me and Allison to continue on with as many plays as we had the desire to do.

When there are so many translations available in American English, what makes our work so special? Well, I believe a lifetime of studying and interpreting and “living with” A.P.

Chekhov has made his works an essential part of my being. I feel I “get” the plays deep in my soul. I think these translations have a freshness of approach (I am a great believer in the idea that as the language changes in our lives, new translations need to be developed every few years) and they are a merging of Chekhov’s late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’ language with a contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century idiom. Each play is undoubtedly Chekhov’s but the translations put you into your own life at the present moment.

I feel that I have found that elegance and sparseness of language and the subtle yet profound, buried passions of the characters that is Chekhov’s signature. The translations retain the Russian names as Chekhov wrote them and also include the occasional Russian word so that while you are transported to the period, place and time, the readers and producers of the plays are feeling the life of the Chekhovian world in their own time.

A labor of love is absolutely the starting point for these translations.

# THE CHERRY ORCHARD

By Anton Chekhov

New version by Libby Appel

From a literal translation by Allison Horsley

Commissioned by  
The Oregon Shakespeare Festival  
Artistic Director Bill Rauch  
Executive Director Paul Nicholson

**Required royalties must be paid every time this play is performed before any audience, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged.** To purchase acting editions of this play, to obtain stock and amateur performance rights, and for all other inquiries, please contact:

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275 Seventh Ave., 26<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
New York, NY 10001,  
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[literary@abramsartny.com](mailto:literary@abramsartny.com).

## ACT I

*A room, which has always been called the nursery. One of the doors leads to ANYA's room. It is dawn, the sun will rise soon. It is already May, the cherry trees are blossoming, but it is cold with early morning frost in the orchard. The windows in the room are closed.*

*DUNYASHA enters with a candle and LOPAKHIN is seated with a book in his hand. There is the faint sound of the train in the distance.*

LOPAKHIN    There's the train, thank God. What time is it?

DUNYASHA    It's almost two. *(She puts the candle out.)* It's light already.

LOPAKHIN    How late was the train? Two hours at least. *(He yawns and stretches.)* What an idiot I am! I came here just to meet them at the station and phfft – fell asleep... Asleep – sitting up! Damn it. You could have woken me up.

DUNYASHA    I thought you had gone. *(Listening.)* Listen, I think I hear them coming.

LOPAKHIN    *(listening)* No... they have to get the baggage, and so on...

*Pause.*

Lyubov Andreyevna has lived abroad for five years, I'm not sure what she's like anymore. She's a good person – no airs, easygoing – a simple person, really. I remember, when I was a kid of fifteen, my father punched me in the face with his fist — blood was running from my nose... He was drunk, as usual, and we came here to the house for something. Lyubov Andreyevna, I can just

see her now, so young, so slender – she brought me up to the wash-stand, here in the nursery, in this very room. She said, “Don’t cry, little peasant, it will heal in time for your wedding...”

*Pause.*

Little peasant... It’s true, my father was a peasant and here I am in a white waistcoat, in fancy shoes – a pig in a parlor... Only I’m rich, I have a lot of money, but if you think about it, really look at it, who am I kidding, a peasant is always a peasant... *(He leafs through a book.)* I was reading this book and I didn’t understand a single word. Reading, fell asleep...

*Pause.*

DUNYASHA The dogs didn’t sleep all night, they sense their masters are coming home.

LOPAKHIN What’s the matter with you, Dunyasha...

DUNYASHA My hands are shaking. I am going to faint.

LOPAKHIN You are so dainty these days, Dunyasha. You dress like a grand lady , and your hair style, too. It’s not right. You have to know your place.

*YEPIKHODOV enters with a bouquet; he is in a suit jacket and brightly polished boots, which squeak loudly; entering, he drops the bouquet.*

YEPIKHODOV *(picks up the bouquet)* Here, the gardener sent these, he says to put them in the dining room. *(He gives DUNYASHA the bouquet.)*

LOPAKHIN And bring me some kvass.

DUNYASHA Yes, sir. *(She exits.)*

YEPIKHODOV Now it's dawn, it's three degrees below zero, and the cherry trees are all in bloom. I cannot approve of our climate. *(He sighs.)* I cannot. Strictly speaking, our climate is not conducive to temperance. And, Yermolai Alekseyevich, permit me to add, I bought myself these boots three days ago, but, I assure you, they squeak so, that there is absolutely no possibility whatsoever — What should I grease them with?

LOPAKHIN Leave me alone. I'm sick of you.

YEPIKHODOV Every day some kind of terrible misfortune happens to me. I do not complain, I am accustomed to it. I even smile.

*DUNYASHA enters, hands LOPAKHIN kvass.*

I am going. *(He stumbles into a chair, which falls.)* There... *(As if triumphantly.)* There you see, pardon the expression, absolutely no possibility whatsoever, nothing to be done... *(He exits.)*

DUNYASHA Yermolai Alekseyevich, I must confess to you, Yepikhodov proposed to me.

LOPAKHIN Ah!

DUNYASHA I don't even know how... He's so shy, only sometimes he begins to talk and

you can't understand a word he says. It's kind of romantic, only I just don't get what he's saying.. I kind of like him. He loves me madly. But he is an unlucky person, every day there is something. We even tease him: "a disaster waiting to happen"...

LOPAKHIN *(listening)* Ah, I think I hear them coming.

DUNYASHA They're coming! What is wrong with me... I'm cold all over.

LOPAKHIN They are coming, yes sirree. Let's go meet them. Will she recognize me? We haven't seen each other in five years.

DUNYASHA *(agitated)* I am going to faint now... Oh, I am going to faint!

*There is a sound of two carriages driving up to the house. LOPAKHIN and DUNYASHA quickly exit. The stage is empty. Noise begins to emerge from the neighboring rooms. FIRS, having gone to meet LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA at the station, hastily crosses the stage, leaning on a cane; he is wearing antique livery and a top hat; he is muttering to himself, but it is impossible to make out a word. The noise offstage intensifies. A voice: "Let's go through here..." LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA, ANYA and CHARLOTTA IVANOVNA with a little dog on a leash. They wear traveling clothes.*

*VARYA is in an overcoat and kerchief, GAYEV, SIMYONOV-PISCHIK, LOPAKHIN, DUNYASHA with a bundle and umbrella, SERVANTS with luggage – everyone walks across the room.*

ANYA Let's go in here. Mama, do you remember which room this is?

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA *(joyfully, on the verge of tears)* The nursery!



VARYA        It is so cold, my hands are numb. *(To LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA.)* Your rooms, the white one and the violet one, have remained just the same, Mamochka.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    The nursery, my dear, wonderful room... I slept here, when I was a child... *(She cries.)* And right now I am a child again... *(She kisses her brother, VARYA, then her brother again.)* And Varya looks just the same — like a nun. And I recognize Dunyasha... *(She kisses DUNYASHA.)*

GAYEV        The train was two hours late. Is that a way to run things?

CHARLOTTA *(To PISCHIK)* My dog even eats nuts.

PISCHIK        *(astonished)* What a world!

*Everyone exits, except ANYA and DUNYASHA.*

DUNYASHA    We've been waiting for you forever... *(She removes ANYA's overcoat and hat.)*

ANYA        I didn't sleep on the journey for four nights... now I'm freezing.

DUNYASHA    You left during Lent. There was snow then. It was so cold. And now? My darling! *(She laughs, kisses her.)* I waited for you forever, my joy, my light... I will tell you now, I can't hold it in a minute longer...

ANYA           *(limply)* Here we go again...

DUNYASHA   The clerk Yepikhodov proposed to me after Easter.

ANYA           That's all you ever think about. *(Fixing her hair.)* I've lost all of my hair-pins... *(She is so weary, she even staggers.)*

DUNYASHA   I don't know what to think. He loves me, he loves me so!

ANYA           *(Glances toward her door, tenderly)* My room, my windows, it's as if I never left. I am home! Tomorrow morning I'll wake up and run to the orchard... Oh, if only I could fall asleep! I didn't sleep the whole way, I was so worried.

DUNYASHA   Pyotr Sergeyevich arrived three days ago.

ANYA           *(joyfully)* Petya!

DUNYASHA   He is sleeping in the shed, he's living there. "I am afraid," he says, "of being in the way." *(Casting a glance at her pocket watch.)* Someone needs to wake him, but Varvara Mikhailovna has forbidden it. "You," she says, "do not wake him."

*VARYA enters, she has a bunch of keys on her belt.*

VARYA                 Dunyasha, coffee quickly... Mamochka is asking for coffee..

DUNYASHA This minute. (*Exits.*)

VARYA Well, thank God, you have come. You're home again. (*Caressing her.*) My darling has come back! My beauty has come home!

ANYA I've been through so much.

VARYA I can imagine!

ANYA We left during Holy Week, it was cold then. Charlotta talked the whole way, doing magic tricks. Why did you stick me with Charlotta?

VARYA You couldn't possibly travel all alone, darling. At seventeen!

ANYA We arrived in Paris, it was cold there too, snowing. My French is terrible. Mama was living on the fifth floor. I came in and her apartment was filled with French people, ladies and an old priest with religious pamphlets, and it was smoky, so depressing. I suddenly began to feel sorry for Mama, so sorry, I held her in my arms and couldn't let go. Mama was holding me tight too, she was crying...

VARYA (*on the verge of tears*) Don't say anything, nothing...

ANYA She had already sold her villa near Mentone, and she had nothing left, nothing. I had no rubles left either, only enough to make it back home. And

Mama doesn't understand! We would sit in the train station to eat lunch, and she would order the most expensive thing and give the waiter a whole ruble. Charlotta too. And Yasha would order something expensive for himself. It was so dreadful. You know Mama's lackey, Yasha, we brought him here...

VARYA                      I've seen the scoundrel.

ANYA                      Well, how is it here? Did you pay the interest?

VARYA                      With what?

ANYA                      Oh, my god, my god.

VARYA                      The estate will be put up for sale in August...

ANYA                      My god...

LOPAKHIN            *(Peeks in the door and bleats). Baaaaaa... (Exits.)*

VARYA                      *(on the verge of tears)* This is what I would like to give him... *(Shakes her fist.)*

ANYA                      *(embracing VARYA, quietly)* Varya, did he propose? *(VARYA shakes her head no.)* He does love you... Why don't the two of you talk it over, what are you waiting for?

VARYA        I don't think anything will come of it. He is so busy all the time, he doesn't care about me... God bless him... it's very difficult for me to see him... Everyone talks about our wedding, everyone congratulates us, but in fact, there is nothing to it. It's like my worst nightmare... *(in a different tone)* You have a brooch in the shape of a little bee.

ANYA        *(mournfully)* Mama bought it. *(She goes toward her room and speaks happily, like a child.)* And in Paris I flew in a balloon!

VARYA        My darling has arrived! My beauty has come home!

*DUNYASHA has returned with a coffee pot and is brewing coffee.*

VARYA        *(Standing by the door.)* I work all day long, darling, doing housework and I'm always daydreaming. If we could marry you to a rich man, then I wouldn't worry, I would go to a monastery, then to Kiev... to Moscow, go from one holy place to the next. I would walk and walk. The bliss!

ANYA        The birds are singing in the orchard. What time is it now?

VARYA        It must be nearly three. It's time for you to sleep, darling. *(Entering ANYA's room.)* The bliss!

*YASHA enters with a traveling rug and traveling bag.*

YASHA           *(he crosses the stage, delicately)* May I pass through here?

DUNYASHA    I didn't recognize you, Yasha. My, how you have changed since you've been abroad.

YASHA           Hm... And who are you?

DUNYASHA    When you left, I was this tall... *(She indicates a height from the floor.)*  
Dunyasha, Fyodor Kozoyedov's daughter. Don't you remember?

YASHA           Hm... What a peach! *(He glances around and embraces her; she screams and drops a saucer. YASHA quickly exits.)*

VARYA           *(in the doorway, annoyed)* What is going on in here?

DUNYASHA    *(on the verge of tears)* I broke a saucer...

VARYA           That's good luck.

ANYA           *(entering from her room)* We must warn Mama that Petya is here...

VARYA           I left instructions that he not be woken up.

ANYA           *(pensively)* Six years ago father died, a month later my brother Grisha drowned in the river, a beautiful seven-year-old boy. Mama couldn't endure it,

she left, she left without looking back... *(She shudders)* If only she knew how well I understand her!

*Pause.*

And Petya Trofimov was Grisha's tutor, he will remind her...

*FIRS enters, he is in a jacket and white waistcoat.*

FIRS           *(he goes to the coffeepot, concerned)* The mistress will have her coffee here...  
*(He puts on white gloves.)* Is the coffee ready? *(Sternly to DUNYASHA.)*  
You! The cream?

DUNYASHA   Oh, my god... *(She exits quickly.)*

FIRS           *(he busies himself around the coffee pot)* Ekh you, nincompoop... *(He mutters to himself.)* They came back from Paris... And the master used to go to Paris... in a horse and buggy... *(He laughs.)*

VARYA               Firs, what are you going on about?

FIRS           What can I do for you? *(Joyfully.)* My lady has come back! I was waiting!  
Now I can die... *(He weeps from joy.)*

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA, GAYEV, LOPAKHIN and SIMYONOV-PISCHIK enter.*

*GAYEV, entering, moving about as though he were playing billiards.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     How does it go? Let me remember... Yellow to the corner!  
Bank shot to the center!

GAYEV             I cut to the corner! At one time, sweet sister, we slept in this very room, and  
now I am fifty one years old. Isn't it strange ...

LOPAKHIN     Yes, time flies.

GAYEV             What?

LOPAKHIN     I said, time flies.

GAYEV             It smells like patchouli in here.

ANYA             I'm going to sleep. *Bonne nuit, maman. (Kisses her mother.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     My beloved baby. *(She kisses her hands.)* Are you glad to be  
home? I just can't believe it.

ANYA             Good night, uncle.

GAYEV             *(kisses her face, hands)* God be with you. You look just like your mother! *(To  
his sister.)* Lyuba, you looked the same at her age.



*ANYA offers her hand to LOPAKHIN and PISCHIK, exits and closes her door.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     She's so exhausted.

PISCHIK     I imagine the journey must have been long.

VARYA     *(To LOPAKHIN and PISCHIK).* Well then, gentlemen, it is three o'clock in the morning, time to go.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(laughing)* You are just the same, Varya. *(Draws her close and kisses her.)* I will finish my coffee, then we will all go to bed.

*FIRS places a cushion under her feet.*

Thank you, my dear. I've become quite addicted to coffee. I drink it day and night. Thank you, my dear old man. *(She kisses Firs.)*

VARYA     I'll check to see whether they've brought all of the luggage...  
*(She exits.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Am I really sitting here? *(She laughs.)* I want to jump up and swing my arms around. *(She covers her face with her hands.)* This can't be real! God knows, I love my country, I love it tenderly. I couldn't see out of the train window, I was crying the whole time. *(On the verge of tears.)* But now I must drink my coffee. Thank you, Firs, thank you my dear old man. I am so happy that you are still alive.

FIRS     The day before yesterday.

GAYEV           He doesn't hear well.

LOPAKHIN    I have to go to Kharkov at five this morning. Damn it! I wanted to see you, to have a talk... You are as splendid as ever.

PISCHIK       *(he has difficulty breathing)* She's even prettier... Dresses like a Parisian... I'm simply bowled over by her.

LOPAKHIN    Your brother here, Leonid Andreyich, says to me that I am a boor, I am a kulak, but it doesn't matter to me. Let him talk. I only want you to trust me like before, that your sweet, kind eyes will look on me as before. Merciful God! My father was a serf who belonged to your father and your grandfather, but you have done so much for me that I have forgotten all that and I love you, like family... more than family.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    I cannot sit still, not the way I feel... *(She leaps up and walks around agitatedly.)* I cannot bear this joy... You ought to laugh at me, I'm ridiculous... My dear little bookcase... *(She kisses the bookcase.)* My little table.

GAYEV         Nanny died while you were away.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    *(She sits and drinks coffee.)* Yes, God rest her soul. They wrote me.

GAYEV         And Anastasii died. Cross-eyed Petrushka left us and lives in town and works for a policeman. *(He takes a box of fruit-drops from his pocket, sucks on*

*one.)*

PISCHIK        My little daughter, Dashenka... sends her regards...

LOPAKHIN    I have something to tell you, some very good news. *(Glances at his watch.)* I must go now, there's no time to talk... Well, two or three words. You all know very well your cherry orchard is going to be sold to pay your debts. The auction is scheduled for August 22<sup>nd</sup>. But don't worry, my dear, sleep peacefully, there is a way out... Here is my plan. Attention, ladies and gentlemen! Your estate is only fifteen miles from town, the railroad runs nearby, and if the cherry orchard and the land by the river were cut up into lots then rented for summer houses, you'd have at least twenty-five thousand a year income.

GAYEV        Pardon me, what nonsense!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    I don't quite understand you, Yermolai Alekseyich.

LOPAKHIN    With the summer houses you would make at least twenty-five rubles a year per lot, and if you advertise it now, I'll bet you anything that by autumn you won't have one vacant lot left, everything will be taken. In other words, congratulations, you are saved. It's a marvelous location, the river is deep. Only, of course, it'll be necessary to clear everything out ... for example, let's say, take down all the old buildings, this house here that is really no good for anything anymore, chop down the old cherry orchard...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Chop down? My sweet, forgive me, you don't understand anything. Our cherry orchard is the only interesting, even remarkable thing in this entire province.

LOPAKHIN     This orchard is only remarkable because it's very large. There's a crop of cherries once every two years, and then there's nothing to do with them, no one buys them.

GAYEV        This orchard is mentioned in the *Encyclopedia*.

LOPAKHIN     (*glancing at his watch*) If we don't think about this and come up with a solution, on August 22 the cherry orchard and all of your estate will be sold at auction. You must decide! There is no other way out, I swear to you. Absolutely none.

FIRS            In the old days, forty – fifty years ago, we used to dry the cherries, and we soaked them, marinated them, made preserves, and we used to...

GAYEV        Be quiet, Firs.

FIRS            And we used to send cartfuls of dried cherries to Moscow and Kharkov. The money came pouring in! And the cherries back then were mild, juicy, sweet, fragrant... we knew the recipe...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     And where is that recipe now?

FIRS            Forgotten. No one remembers.

PISCHIK        (*To LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA*) What about Paris? How was it? Did you eat

frogs?

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     I ate crocodiles.

PISCHIK     What a world!

LOPAKHIN     Until now in the country there've only been masters and peasants, but now summer cottages are appearing. All the towns, even the small ones, are flooded with vacationers. And I think in twenty years, they will be here in extraordinary numbers. Now they just drink tea on their balconies, but one day they may take up cultivating their own piece of land, and then your cherry orchard will be a happy, rich, prosperous...

GAYEV     *(indignantly)* What nonsense!

*VARYA and YASHA enter.*

VARYA     Mamochka, you have two telegrams. *(She takes out a key and unlocks the old bookcase with clink.)* Here they are.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     They are from Paris. *(She tears up the telegrams, unread.)* I am through with Paris...

GAYEV     Lyuba, do you know how old this bookcase is? A week ago I pulled out the bottom drawer and there were numbers branded into it. The bookcase was made exactly one hundred years ago. How about that? We could celebrate its jubilee. It is an inanimate object, but all the same, it is a bookcase.

PISCHIK        *(amazed)* One hundred years... What a world!

GAYEV        Yes... That is something... *(Touching the bookcase.)* Dear, respected bookcase! I salute your existence, the more than one hundred years in which you have been faithful to the radiant ideals of truth and justice; your unspoken appeal to fruitful labor did not weaken in the course of a hundred years, inspiring *(on the verge of tears)* optimism in generations of our family, faith in a better future and cultivating in us the ideals of goodness and social awareness.

*Pause.*

LOPAKHIN    Yes...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    You are just the same, Lyonya.

GAYEV        *(a little confused)* Off the right ball to the corner! I cut to the middle!

LOPAKHIN    *(glancing at his watch)* Well, it's time for me to go.

YASHA        *(he gives LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA medicine)* Perhaps you will take your pills now...

PISCHIK        You shouldn't take medications, dearest lady... there is neither harm nor benefit from them... hand them to me, please... much respected one. *(He*

*takes the pills, empties them into his palm, blows on them, places them in his mouth and washes them down with kvass.) There!*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(frightened/alarmed)* You have lost your mind!

PISCHIK     I swallowed all the pills.

LOPAKHIN     Greedy!

*All laugh.*

FIRS     His honor stayed with us during Holy Week, he ate half a bucket of pickles...  
*(He mutters.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     What is he saying?

VARYA     He's been muttering for three years now. We are used to it.

YASHA     Old age.

*CHARLOTTA IVANOVNA crosses the stage in a white dress, very thin, tightly laced, with a lorgnette strung from her waist.*

LOPAKHIN     Pardon me, Charlotta Ivanovna, I have not yet had the chance to greet you.  
*(He tries to kiss her hand.)*

CHARLOTTA *(taking her hand away)* If I permit you to kiss my hand, then you will want the elbow, then the shoulder...

LOPAKHIN I have no luck today.

*All laugh.*

Charlotta Ivanovna, show us a trick!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Yes, Charlotta, show us a trick!

CHARLOTTA Not now. I wish to sleep. *(She exits.)*

LOPAKHIN I will see you in three weeks. *(He kisses LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA's hand.)*  
Goodbye for now. It's time to go. *(To GAYEV.)* See ya soon. *(He kisses PISCHIK, offers his hand to VARYA, then to FIRS and YASHA.)* I don't want to leave. *(To LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA.)* If you think about the cottages and decide, then let me know, I will lend you fifty thousand. Think about it seriously.

VARYA *(angrily)* Would you just leave!

LOPAKHIN I'm leaving, I'm leaving... *(He leaves.)*

GAYEV Kulak. Oh, excuse me... Varya is going to marry him, he's Varya's sweetheart.



VARYA           Don't talk nonsense, uncle.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    What is wrong, Varya? I would be very happy, he is a good man.

PISCHIK           The man – to be frank – is worthy... And my Dashenka... also says, that... she says many various things. *(He starts to snore, but immediately wakes up.)* But nevertheless, much respected one, lend me... a loan of 240 rubles... to pay interest on my mortgage tomorrow.

VARYA           *(alarmed)* Nothing, nothing!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    I have nothing, nothing.

PISCHIK           It will turn up. *(He laughs.)* I never lose hope. There I was thinking, all was “kaput”, but on the contrary — lo and behold, the railroad passed through my land, and... they paid me. Any day now, something else will turn up... Dashenka will win two hundred thousand ... she bought a lottery ticket.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    The coffee is finished, we can go to bed.

FIRS           *(Brushes GAYEV, instructively).* You put on the wrong trousers again. What am I going to do with you!

VARYA           *(quietly)* Anya is sleeping. *(Quietly opens the window.)* The sun is coming up, it's not cold. Look mamochka: what wonderful trees! My god, the air! The

starlings are singing!

GAYEV           *(opens the other window)* The orchard is all white. You have not forgotten, Lyuba? There is that long path that runs straight, straight, just like a silver ribbon. It shines on moonlit nights. Do you remember? You haven't forgotten?

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA   *(gazes out the window at the orchard)* Oh, my childhood, my innocence! I used to sleep in this nursery, I would look out at the orchard, feeling happy every morning, and it is exactly the same, nothing has changed. *(She laughs from joy.)* All, all white! Oh, my orchard! After every dark, foul autumn and cold winter, you are young, full of happiness, the heavenly angels have not abandoned you... If only I could let go of this heavy burden from my heart, if only I could let go of my past!

GAYEV           Yes, and now they want to sell the orchard to pay our debts. It is so strange.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA   Look, it's Mama – walking in the orchard... in a white dress! *(She laughs from joy.)* It's Mama.

GAYEV           Where?

VARYA           God be with you, mamochka.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA   There is no one, it was just my imagination. To the right, on the path to the shed, a white sapling is bent down, it looks like a woman...

*TROFIMOV enters in a threadbare student's full dress uniform, wearing glasses.*

What a marvelous orchard! The masses of white blossoms, the deep blue sky...

TROFIMOV Lyubov Andreyevna! *(She turns to look at him.)* I only came to pay my respects and I will go at once. *(He feverishly kisses her hand.)* I was told to wait until morning, but I couldn't stand it.

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA looks at him with bewilderment.*

VARYA *(on the verge of tears)* It is Petya Trofimov...

TROFIMOV Petya Trofimov, the former tutor of your Grisha... Have I changed so much?

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA embraces him and cries quietly.*

GAYEV *(embarrassed)* That's enough, that's enough, Lyuba.

VARYA *(cries)* Petya, I told you to wait a little until tomorrow.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA My Grisha... my little boy... Grisha... my son...

VARYA What can we do, Mama. It is God's will.

TROFIMOV *(softly, on the verge of tears)* Don't cry, don't cry...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(cries quietly)* My boy was lost, drowned... Why? What for?  
                                  *(Quietly.)* Anya is sleeping there, but I am talking so loudly... so noisy...  
                                  Why, Petya? Why have you grown so ugly? So old?

TROFIMOV     On the train a peasant girl called me “Professor Fleabag”.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     You were just a boy then, a sweet student, but now your hair is  
                                  thin, you have glasses. Is it possible you’re still a student? *(She walks to the*  
                                  *door.)*

TROFIMOV     I will probably be a perpetual student.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(she kisses her brother, then VARYA)* Well, go to bed... You  
                                  have grown old too, Leonid.

PISCHIK       *(goes to her)* Yes, to bed now... Oh, my gout. I will stay here tonight.  
                                  Lyubov Andreyevna, my soul, tomorrow morning, if you would... two  
                                  hundred forty rubles...

GAYEV         Always the same story with him.

PISCHIK       Two hundred forty rubles... to pay the interest on my mortgage.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     I don’t have any money, dear friend.

PISCHIK        I'll pay it back, my dear... It's a tiny sum.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Well, fine, Leonid will give it to you... Give it to him, Leonid.

GAYEV        I will give it to him. Hold out your pocket.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    What are you doing, give it to him... He needs it... He'll pay it back.

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA, TROFIMOV, PISCHIK, and FIRS exit.*

*GAYEV, VARYA, and YASHA remain.*

GAYEV        My sister is still throwing money away. *(To Yasha.)* Move away, my good man, you smell like the chicken coop.

YASHA        *(with a grin)* And you, Leonid Andreyich, you are just the same as ever.

GAYEV        What? *(To VARYA.)* What did he say?

VARYA        *(To YASHA.)* Your mother came from the village. She has been sitting in the servants' quarters since yesterday, she wants to see you —

YASHA        Good for her!

VARYA        You should be ashamed.

YASHA        She could have come tomorrow. *(He exits.)*

VARYA        Mamochka is exactly the same, she hasn't changed at all. If she had her way, she would give away everything.

GAYEV        Yes...

*Pause.*

If you prescribe too many remedies for a disease, it means the disease is incurable. I have racked my brain, and I have many remedies, a great many, but in truth, there's not a single cure. It would be grand to receive an inheritance from someone, it would be grand to marry our Anya to a very rich man, it would be grand to go to Yaroslavl and try our luck with our aunt the countess. She is very, very rich, you know.

VARYA        *(she cries)* If only God would help us!

GAYEV        Don't howl. Our aunt is very rich, but she doesn't like us. In the first place, my sister married a lawyer, not an aristocrat...

*ANYA appears in the doorway.*

She married beneath her, and I can't say she has conducted herself very virtuously. She is good, kind, sweet, and I love her very much, but whatever excuses you invent, it must be confessed, she is *louche*. You can see it in her smallest movement.

VARYA        *(with a whisper)* Anya is standing in the doorway.

GAYEV           What?

*Pause.*

What on earth — something has gotten in my right eye. I can hardly see out of it. And on Thursday, when I was at the circuit court...

*ANYA enters.*

VARYA                 Why aren't you asleep, Anya?

ANYA                I can't sleep. I can't.

GAYEV            My little one. *(He kisses ANYA's face, hands.)* My baby... *(On the verge of tears.)* You are not just my niece, you are an angel, you are everything to me. Believe me, believe...

ANYA                I believe you, uncle. Everyone loves you, respects you... but dear uncle, you must keep quiet, just keep quiet. What did you just say about mama, about your own sister? Why did you say that?

GAYEV            Yes, yes... *(He covers his face with her hands.)* Yes, it's horrible! My God! God, save me! And today I made a speech to the bookcase... how stupid! And it was only when I finished that I understood how stupid it was.

VARYA                It is true, uncle dear, you must be quiet. Just keep quiet, that's all.

ANYA                If you would keep quiet, things would be easier for you.

GAYEV            I will be quiet. *(He kisses ANYA's and VARYA's hands.)* I will be quiet. Only this is about business. On Thursday I was at the circuit court. Well, a group of us got together, and started talking about this and that, and, it seems, it may be possible to arrange a loan on a promissory note, to pay the interest to the bank.

VARYA            If only God would help us!

GAYEV            On Tuesday I'll go and have another talk. *(To VARYA.)* Don't howl. *(To ANYA.)* Your mother will have a talk with Lopakhin; he will not refuse her, of course ... And you, when you're rested, will go to Yaroslavl to the old countess, your great-aunt. So then we will operate on three fronts – and we're sure to win. We will pay the interest, I am convinced... *(He places a fruit-drop in his mouth.)* On my honor, on whatever you want, I swear the estate will not be sold! *(Excitedly.)* I swear on my happiness! Here is my hand, call me worthless, a dishonorable man, if I let it go to auction! I swear with all my being!

ANYA            *(she is suddenly happy)* How good you are, uncle, how smart! *(Embraces her uncle.)* I am calm now! I'm calm! I'm happy!

*FIRS enters.*

FIRS            *(reproachfully)* Leonid Andreyich, have you no fear of God? When are you going to bed?

GAYEV            I'm going, I'm going. *(to FIRS)* Shoo! I am going. All right, don't worry, I will undress myself. Well, children, nightie-night... Details tomorrow, but now



I'm going to sleep. *(He kisses ANYA and VARYA.)* I am a man of the Eighties... People look down on those times these days, but I always say, in my life I have suffered a great deal as a result of my convictions. It is no wonder the peasants love me. You should know the peasant! You should know with what...

ANYA            You are doing it again, uncle!

VARYA            Uncle dear, be quiet.

FIRS            *(angrily)* Leonid Andreyich!

GAYEV           I'm coming, I'm coming... Go to bed. From two sides to the middle. I make a clean shot! *(He exits, FIRS doddering behind him.)*

ANYA           I'm calm now. I don't want to go to Yaroslavl, I don't like my great- aunt, but still I feel calm. Thanks to Uncle. *(She sits.)*

VARYA           We should go to sleep. I'm going. While you were gone, there was some unpleasantness. As you know, only the old servants still live in the servant quarters: Yefimyushka, Polya, Yevstignyey, and, of course, Karp. They began to let all kinds of drifters spend the night – I didn't say anything. Only then I heard the servants were spreading rumors that I ordered them to be fed only peas. From stinginess, you see... And it was Yevstignyey the whole time... All right, I think to myself, if that is how it is, then just stay calm. I call for Yevstignyey... *(She yawns.)* He comes in... "How could you be such an idiot, Yevstignyey," I said... *(Looking at Anya.)* Anechka!

*Pause.*

She's asleep! *(She puts her arm around ANYA.)* Come to bed... Come! *(She leads her.)* My darling has fallen asleep! Come...

*They are going.*

*Far beyond the orchard a shepherd plays a reed-pipe. TROFIMOV crosses the stage and, seeing VARYA and ANYA, stops.*

VARYA                      Shh... She's sleeping... sleeping... Let's go, my dear.

ANYA                      *(quietly, half-asleep)* I'm so tired... all the little bells... Uncle... dear... Mama and Uncle...

VARYA                      Let's go, my dear, let's go... *(They exit into ANYA's room.)*

TROFIMOV    *(with emotion)* My sunshine! My spring!

**CURTAIN**

## ACT II

*A field. An old, crooked, long-deserted chapel, near a well, large stones that to all appearances were tombstones sometime in the past, and an old bench. The road to the GAYEV's estate is visible. On one side are dark poplars: the cherry orchard begins there. In the distance is a row of telegraph poles, and even further on the horizon a large city appears, which is only glimpsed in very good, clear weather. The sun will set soon. YASHA and DUNYASHA sit on the bench; YEPIKHODOV stands nearby and plays a guitar; all sit pensively.*

YEPIKHODOV (plays on the guitar and sings) *"What is the busy world to me, who is my friend and who is my enemy..."* How pleasant it is to play a mandolin!

DUNYASHA That's a guitar, not a mandolin. *(She looks in a mirror and powders her face.)*

YEPIKHODOV For a man who is madly in love, this is a mandolin... *(He croons)* *"If only my heart could be warmed ..."*

*YASHA joins in singing.*

YEPIKHODOV and YASHA *"If only my heart could be warmed by the one I love, love, love, love."*

*CHARLOTTA enters. She is wearing an old military peak-cap. She takes a rifle from her shoulder and adjusts the buckle on the strap.*

CHARLOTTA These people sing horribly... fooley! Like hyenas. I'd like to talk to someone but there's no one to talk to — no one.

DUNYASHA *(To YASHA)*. Nevertheless, how lucky you are to have been abroad.

YASHA Yes, that's true. I can't disagree with you there. *(He yawns, then lights up a*

*cigar.)*

YEPIKHODOV Naturally. Abroad everything has been fully developed for a long time now.

YASHA Obviously.

YEPIKHODOV I am a culturally developed man. I read various remarkable books, but in no way can I understand my own path, strictly speaking, whether I want to live or blow my brains out. But nevertheless I always carry a revolver. Here it is...  
*(He shows a revolver.)*

CHARLOTTA I'm finished. I am going now. *(She takes up the rifle.)* You, Yepikhodov, are a very intelligent person and very scary; women must love you madly. Grrr!  
*(She starts to go.)* These "culturally developed" people are all so stupid, I can't talk to them... I'm always alone, alone, I have no one... who I am, why I am – unknown... *(she exits, taking her time)*

YEPIKHODOV Strictly speaking, not touching on other subjects, I must express myself, absolutely, no possibility whatsoever, that fate treats me without pity, like a storm to a small ship. If, let us suppose, I am mistaken, then why did I wake up this morning, say for example, and see a spider of a terrifying size on my chest... Like this. *(He demonstrates with both hands.)* Or I take some kvass to drink, and I see something in it that is absolutely disgusting, like a cockroach.

*Pause.*

Have you read Henry Thomas Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*?

*Pause.*

Avdotya Fyodorovna, may I trouble you with a few words.

DUNYASHA Speak.

YEPIKHODOV It would be preferable to speak with you in private... *(He sighs.)*

DUNYASHA *(embarrassed)* All right... only first bring me my wrap... It is by the bookcase... it's a little damp here...

YEPIKHODOV Certainly... I will deliver it... Now I know what to do with my revolver... *(He takes the guitar and exits playing.)*

YASHA A "Disaster waiting to happen". A stupid man, if you ask me. *(He yawns.)*

DUNYASHA Please God, don't let him shoot himself.

*Pause.*

I've become so anxious, I worry about everything. I was just a little girl when the masters took me in, now I'm no longer used to a peasant's life. Look, my hands are white-white, like a grand lady. I've become so sensitive, so delicate, refined, I am afraid of everything... It's all so terrifying. And if you deceive me, Yasha, I don't know what will happen with my nerves.

YASHA *(kisses her)* Little peach! Of course, every girl must remember her place, and what I hate most of all, is when a girl goes too far.

DUNYASHA I have fallen madly in love with you. You are educated. You can talk about anything.

*Pause.*

YASHA *(yawns)* Yes... In my opinion, if a girl tells me she loves me, it means she's immoral.

*Pause.*

It is nice to smoke a cigar in the fresh air... *(He listens.)* Someone's coming...  
It's them.

*DUNYASHA impetuously embraces him.*

Go home, take the path that goes along the river, like you went out for a swim. I don't want them to think I've been with you. I can't have that happen.

DUNYASHA *(she coughs quietly)* I have a headache from that cigar...

*She exits.*

*YASHA remains, sits by the chapel. LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA, GAYEV and LOPAKHIN enter.*

LOPAKHIN Ladies and gentlemen, you must finally decide – time won't wait. The question is so simple. Do you agree to use the land for cottages or not? Answer one word: yes or no? Just one word!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Who has been smoking those disgusting cigars here... *(She sits.)*

GAYEV It's very convenient now that they've built the railroad. *(He sits.)* We went into town and had breakfast today... yellow to the center. Now, I would like to go back home, play a game...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Let's wait a little.

LOPAKHIN Just one word! *(Imploring.)* Give me an answer!

GAYEV        *(yawning)* What?

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    *(she looks in her purse)* Yesterday I had a lot of money, but today there is very little. My poor Varya is feeding everyone milk soup to save kopeks. In the kitchen she gives the old ones one pea, and yet somehow I keep spending... *(She drops her purse, spilling gold coins.)* There, it's raining kopeks. *(She is annoyed.)*

YASHA        Allow me, I'll pick them up. *(He gathers the money.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Yes, please, Yasha. And why did I go with you to have breakfast... your silly restaurant with that silly music, and tablecloths that smell of soap... Why drink so much, Lyonya? Why eat so much? Why talk so much? Today in the restaurant you were talking a lot again and it was all so silly. About the 70s, about the Symbolists. And to whom? Talking to the waiter about the Symbolists!

LOPAKHIN    Yes.

GAYEV        *(he waves his hand)* I am incorrigible, that's obvious... *(Irritated, to YASHA)* What's the matter with you, you are constantly under foot.

YASHA        *(he laughs)* I can't hear your voice without laughing.

GAYEV        *(to his sister)* It is either he or I...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Leave, Yasha, be off...

YASHA        *(he gives LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA the purse)* I'm going now. *(He can barely restrain himself from laughter.)* Right away... *(He leaves.)*

LOPAKHIN    That rich tycoon Deriganov intends to buy your estate. They say he's coming to the auction himself.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    And where did you hear that?

LOPAKHIN    They're talking about it in town.

GAYEV        Our aunt in Yaroslavl promised to send something, but when and how much she will send, we don't know.

LOPAKHIN    How much? One hundred thousand? Two hundred?

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Well... ten thousand – maybe fifteen. We must be thankful for small mercies.

LOPAKHIN    Forgive me, I have never encountered such frivolous, un-businesslike people as you, ladies and gentlemen. You've been told in plain language that your estate will be sold, but you just don't understand.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    What are we to do? Instruct us.

LOPAKHIN    I instruct you every day. Every day I say the same thing. The cherry orchard and the land have to be leased for summer houses. Do this now, hurry – the auction is around the corner! Understand! If you finally decide on those houses, they will give you as much money as you like, and then you'll be saved.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Summer houses and summer people – it is so vulgar, forgive me.



GAYEV        I completely agree with you.

LOPAKHIN    I don't know whether to sob, or shout, or swoon. I can't stand it! You have worn me out! *(To GAYEV.)* You are an old woman.

GAYEV        What?

LOPAKHIN    A babushka! *(He starts to leave.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    *(frightened)* No, don't go, stop, my friend. I beg you. Maybe we will think of something!

LOPAKHIN    What is there to think about!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Don't go, I beg you. I feel better with you here...

*Pause.*

I feel something terrible is going to happen, like the sky will suddenly fall.

GAYEV        *(deep in thought)* Bank shot to the corner... curve to the center.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Oh, so many sins...

LOPAKHIN    You? What sins...

GAYEV        *(he places a fruit-drop in his mouth)* They say that I've eaten up my entire fortune in fruit-drops... *(He laughs.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Oh, my sins... I have always thrown money away without any restraint, like a madwoman. I got married to a man who never earned a kopek in his whole life — only spent them. My husband died from champagne — he drank constantly. So I fell in love with another man. I had an affair with him, and exactly at that time — this was my first punishment, a knife straight to the heart — here in the river... my little boy drowned. I went abroad, left forever, never to return, never to see this river again... I closed my eyes, ran, as far as I could get, but he came after me... desperately, ruthlessly. I bought a villa near Mentone, because he fell ill there, and for three years I didn't have a moment's rest day or night. His constant demands exhausted me, my soul dried up. And last year, when the villa was sold for debts, I left for Paris, but he followed me there and took everything I had, left me, ran off with another woman. I tried to poison myself... It was so stupid, so shameful... And suddenly I was drawn back to Russia, to my country, to my little girl... *(She wipes away tears.)* Lord, lord, be gracious, forgive me my sins! Do not punish me anymore! *(Takes a telegram from her pocket.)* I received this today from Paris... He asks my forgiveness, begs me to return... *(She tears the telegram.)* Do I hear music somewhere? *(She listens.)*

GAYEV                     That is our celebrated Jewish orchestra. Do you remember, four fiddles, a flute and double-bass.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     It still exists? We should invite them over for something, have a party.

LOPAKHIN     *(listening)* I can't hear them... *(He quietly sings.)* "And for money Germans will Frenchify a kulak." *(He laughs.)* What a play I saw yesterday at the theatre, very funny.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     And it probably wasn't funny at all. Don't go to plays, instead look at yourselves more often. How boring your lives are, how much nonsense you talk.

LOPAKHIN That's true. I admit it, our life is stupid...

*Pause.*

My papa was a peasant, an idiot, he didn't understand anything, didn't teach me anything, only beat me when he was drunk — always with a stick. And in truth, I'm the same — a blockhead and an idiot. I didn't learn anything, my handwriting is bad, I write so poorly that I'm ashamed for people to see it — like a pig.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA You should get married, my friend.

LOPAKHIN Yes... that is true.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Perhaps to our Varya. She's a good girl.

LOPAKHIN Yes.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA She comes from simple people, she works all day, but the important thing is, she loves you. And what's more, you've liked her for a long time.

LOPAKHIN Well then? I'm not against it... She is a good girl.

*Pause.*

GAYEV            They offered me a job at the bank. Six thousand a year... Did you hear?

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    You can't be serious. You stay put!

*FIRS enters; he is carrying a topcoat.*

FIRS            *To GAYEV*) Allow me, sir. Put this on, it is damp.

GAYEV            *(he puts the coat on)* I am sick of you, old man.

FIRS            No matter... This morning you left without telling me. *(Inspecting him.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    How old you've become, Firs!

FIRS            What can I do for you, madam?

LOPAKHIN    She says, you've grown very old!

FIRS            I have been living a long time. They were planning my wedding before your papa was on this earth... *(He laughs.)* When the freedom came, I was already a senior butler. I never agreed to freedom then, I stayed with the masters...

*Pause.*

And I remember, everyone thought they were so happy, they didn't even know why, they were just happy.

LOPAKHIN Oh yes, those were the good old days. It was wonderful how they beat everyone.

FIRS *(not catching what LOPAKHIN said)* And how! Peasants with masters, masters with peasants, but now it's all mixed up, you can't understand anything.

GAYEV Be quiet, Firs. Tomorrow I need to go to town. They promised to introduce me to a general who may give me a promissory note.

LOPAKHIN Nothing will come of it. And you will not pay the interest. Be quiet.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA There he goes again. There is no general.

*TROFIMOV, ANYA and VARYA enter.*

GAYEV Here come our darlings.

ANYA Here's mama.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA *(tenderly)* Come, come... My dears... *(Embracing ANYA and VARYA.)* If you only knew how much I love you both. Sit close to me, here.

*Everyone takes a seat.*

LOPAKHIN Our perpetual student is always with the young ladies.

TROFIMOV It's none of your business.

LOPAKHIN He will be fifty soon, and he's still a student.

TROFIMOV Stop your idiotic jokes.

LOPAKHIN Are you angry again, you crackpot?

TROFIMOV Leave me alone.

LOPAKHIN *(laughs)* Let me ask you a question, how do you see me?

TROFIMOV Yermolai Alekseyevich, this is how I see you: you are a rich man, soon you will be a millionaire. You are a necessary part of the evolutionary process. You are the wild beast that eats up everything in his path.

*Everyone laughs.*

VARYA Petya, better stick to talking about the planets.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA No, let's continue yesterday's conversation.

TROFIMOV    What were we talking about?

GAYEV        About the proud man.

TROFIMOV    We talked for a long time yesterday, but we didn't arrive at any conclusion. To your way of thinking, there is something *exalted* about a proud man. From your point of view you may be right, but to speak objectively, what is there to be proud of? Physiologically, we are nothing to brag about. Temperamentally, the vast majority of us are crude, inept, profoundly unhappy. We have to stop being so impressed with ourselves. We should just work.

GAYEV        And then we die.

TROFIMOV    Who knows? And what does that mean – die? It may be that a person has a hundred senses and when we die only the five we know go with us, but the remaining ninety-five stay alive.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    How smart you are, Petya!

LOPAKHIN    (*ironically*) Oh, sure!

TROFIMOV    Humanity is progressing forward, perfecting its strengths. Everything that is unattainable for us now, some day will be closer, will be more clear to us. Only we must work. We must support those who strive for a higher truth. But in Russia, very few people are on that quest. The vast majority of intellectuals — and believe me, I know a lot of them — aren't striving for anything, they don't do anything, they're not capable of working. They call

themselves the “intelligentsia”, they think they are above everyone else. They treat the peasants like animals. They’re terrible students, they read nothing serious, they do exactly nothing about anything. They only talk about science and art. But they don’t understand a single thing about either one. They pretend to be so serious, they walk around with grave faces, and they are always talking about “important” things. They philosophize, and meanwhile right before their eyes the workers are starving, they sleep without beds, thirty or forty in one room, bedbugs everywhere, stench, dampness, moral filth... And obviously, all of this talk, talk, talk is only meant to keep them from looking at the reality of the situation. Show me, where is the child welfare they talk so much about, where are the libraries to teach people to read? They only write about them in novels, in fact they do not exist. Only filth exists, vulgarity, barbarism.... I am frightened and I hate grave faces and serious talk. Better we should just shut up!

LOPAKHIN    You know, I wake up at five o’clock every morning, and I work from morning until evening. I deal with a lot of money — my own and other people’s, and I get to see what people are really like. It doesn’t take much to see how few honest, decent people there are. Sometimes, when I can’t sleep, I think, Lord, you gave us vast forests, immense fields, the deepest horizons, and, by rights, we who live here should be giants —

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Giants! Giants are good only in stories. In real life, they are frightening.

*At the back of the stage YEPIKHODOV passes through playing a guitar.*

*(Pensively)* There goes Yepikhodov...

ANYA    *(pensively)* There goes Yepikhodov...

VARYA    Why is Yepikhodov living with us? All he does is eat and drink tea all day



long.

LOPAKHIN     And he intends to shoot himself.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     But I like Yepikhodov. When he talks about his  
“misfortunes”, it’s funny. Don’t dismiss him, Varya.

VARYA     He must be dismissed, mamochka — it’s impossible.

GAYEV     The sun has set, ladies and gentlemen.

TROFIMOV     Yes.

GAYEV     *(low, as if reciting)* O nature, marvelous, you shine with eternal radiance,  
beautiful and indifferent. You, whom we call mother, combine in yourself  
living and dying. You give life and you destroy it...

VARYA     *(imploring)* Uncle, dear!

ANYA     Uncle, you’re doing it again!

TROFIMOV     You’d better put the yellow ball in the side pocket.

GAYEV     I will be quiet, I will be quiet.

*Everyone sits, pensive. Silence. One can only hear FIRS quietly muttering. Suddenly a distant sound is heard, as if from the sky. The sound of a breaking string, dying away, mournfully.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA      What was that?

LOPAKHIN      I don't know. Somewhere far away a cable wire broke in the mines. But somewhere very far away.

GAYEV      Or maybe a bird of some kind... like a heron.

TROFIMOV      Or an owl...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA      *(she shudders)*. It makes me feel uneasy.

*Pause.*

FIRS      Before the catastrophe it was the same: the owl cried, the samovar droned endlessly.

GAYEV      Before what catastrophe?

FIRS      Before the freedom.

*Pause.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     You know, friends, let's go, it's evening already. *(To ANYA.)*  
You have tears in your eyes... What's wrong, little girl? *(Embraces her.)*

ANYA                    Nothing, mama. It's nothing.

TROFIMOV     Someone is coming.

*A PASSERBY appears in a worn white peak-cap and topcoat; he is slightly drunk.*

PASSERBY     Permit me to ask you, can I get to the station from here?

GAYEV                You can. Take that path.

PASSERBY     I humbly thank you. *(Coughing.)* Superb weather we're having... *(Recites.)*  
My brother, suffering brother ... come down to the Volga, whose groans ...  
*(To VARYA.)* Mademoiselle, grant a hungry Russian thirty kopeks...

*VARYA is frightened, she cries out.*

LOPAKHIN     *(angrily)* Have you no sense of decency!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(struck dumb)* Here, take... this... *(She looks in her purse.)*  
No silver... oh, it's all the same, here is a gold coin...

PASSERBY     I humbly thank you! (*He leaves.*)

(*Laughter*)

VARYA        (*frightened*) I am leaving... I am leaving... Oh, mama, our servants have nothing to eat, but you give him gold.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     What's wrong with me, it was so stupid! I will give you everything I have at home. Yermolai Alekseyevich, may I have another loan!

LOPAKHIN     At your service.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Let's go, ladies and gentlemen, it's time. And, Varya, we've just promised you in marriage, congratulations.

VARYA        (*on the verge of tears*) You should not joke like that, Mamochka.

LOPAKHIN     Ordealya... get thee to a nunnery...

GAYEV        My hands are trembling: it has been too long since I played billiards.

LOPAKHIN     Ordealya, o nymph, remember me in your prayers!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Let's go, ladies and gentlemen. We'll have supper  
soon.

VARYA                     He frightened me. My heart is pounding.

LOPAKHIN     Please remember, ladies and gentlemen: on August 22 the cherry orchard goes  
up for sale. Think about this! Think!

*Everyone leaves, except TROFIMOV and ANYA.*

ANYA             *(laughing)* Thank you, Mr. Passerby, you frightened Varya, and now we can  
be alone.

TROFIMOV     Varya is afraid that we will suddenly fall in love with one another, so she  
won't leave us alone. With her narrow mind, she cannot understand that we  
are above love. We must avoid those petty and illusory things that hinder us  
from being free and happy. This is our goal. Forward! We are moving  
ineluctably to the bright stars that burn in the distance! Forward! Do not fall  
behind, friends!

ANYA             *(clasping her hands)* How well you speak!

*Pause.*

It is wonderful here today!

TROFIMOV     Yes, the weather is amazing.

ANYA           What have you done to me, Petya, why don't I love the cherry orchard anymore? I loved it so tenderly, it seemed to me there was no better place on earth than our orchard.

TROFIMOV    All of Russia is our orchard. The earth is great and wonderful, there are many miraculous places on it.

*Pause.*

Just think, Anya: your grandfather, great-grandfather and all of your ancestors owned serfs, they were in possession of living souls, and don't you see how those souls gaze at us from behind every blossom in the orchard, every leaf, every tree. Can't you hear their voices... To *own* living souls – that has changed all of you, your whole family. Your mother, you, your uncle don't even notice that you are living on the credit of all those centuries of people. We're behind the times by at least two hundred years. We still have exactly nothing, no real relationship to the past. We only philosophize, complain about boredom and drink vodka. But you see, it's so clear — to begin to live in the present, it is necessary to first atone for the past. The only way we can atone is with true suffering, and with uninterrupted, hard work. Do you understand that, Anya?

ANYA           The house we live in hasn't been our home for a long time, and I will leave, I give you my word.

TROFIMOV    Throw away the keys and run as fast as you can. Be as free as the wind.

ANYA           *(in a rapture)* How well you speak!

TROFIMOV    Believe me, Anya! I am not yet thirty. I am young, I am still a student, but I have already suffered so much. When winter comes, I am hungry, ill, anxious,

as poor as the most wretched, and I've seen everything. But inside my soul, I have an unquenchable feeling. I have a feeling that happiness is coming, Anya. I can already see it...

ANYA           *(pensively)* The moon is rising.

*YEPIKHODOV is heard playing the same sad song on the guitar. The moon is rising. Among the poplars VARYA is looking for ANYA and calls: "Anya! Where are you?"*

TROFIMOV    Yes, the moon is rising.

*Pause.*

Here it is, happiness, here it comes, it is always getting closer and closer, I already hear its footsteps. And if we don't recognize it, what does it matter, others will!

*The voice of VARYA: "Anya! Where are you?"*

It's Varya again! *(Angrily.)* Disgusting!

ANYA           Well? Let's go to the river. It's so nice there.

TROFIMOV    Yes, let's go.

*They go.*

*The voice of VARYA: "Anya! Anya!"*

*Enter FIRS, then CHARLOTTA IVANOVNA. FIRS is muttering, looking for something on the ground near the bench. He lights a match.*

FIRS                   *(mutters)* Ekh, you nincompoop!

CHARLOTTA *(she takes a seat on the bench and takes off her cap)* Is that you, Firs? What are you looking for here?

FIRS                   The mistress lost her purse.

CHARLOTTA *(she looks)* Here is a fan ... And here is a handkerchief..., it smells like expensive perfume.

*Pause.*

There is nothing else. Lyubov Andreyevna is perpetually losing something. She even loses her own life. *(She quietly sings a song.)* I don't have a current passport, Grandpa. I don't even know how old I am, but it always seems to me that I am quite young. *(She puts her cap on Firs; he sits motionless.)* Oh, I love you, my sweet old dear. *(She laughs.)* Einz, zwei, drei! *(She takes the cap off Firs and puts it on herself.)* When I was a little girl, my father and mother were circus performers at fairs. They were very good. And I did the "salto-mortale" and other grand tricks. When Papa and Mama died, a German lady took me in and she began to teach me. *Gut.* I grew up, then I became a governess. But where I'm from, who I am – I don't know... Who my parents were, if they were even married... I don't know... *(She takes a cucumber from a pocket and eats.)* I don't know anything.

FIRS                   When I was 20 or 25, I was out for a walk with the deacon's son, and the cook Vasilii, and we saw someone sitting on a stone by the side of the road — someone strange, a nobody really. I got scared and after I left, they killed the



man. He had some money on him.

CHARLOTTA Well? *Weiter.*

FIRS                Later, well, they arrested them and questioned them. Then the trial came.  
They got me too. I was in jail for two years... It was a long time ago.

*Pause*

I don't remember all of it...

CHARLOTTA You will die soon, grandpa.

*We hear Yepikhodov's guitar... The moon is rising... Somewhere by the poplars  
VARYA looks for ANYA and calls: "Anya! Where are you!"*

**CURTAIN**

### ACT III

*The drawing room, separated from the ballroom by an arch. There is a chandelier. We can hear the same Jewish orchestra that was mentioned in the second act playing in the entry hall. It is evening. In the ballroom they are dancing the grand-ronde. The voice of SIMYONOV-PISCHIK: "Promenade à une paire!" They enter the drawing room: in the first pair are PISCHIK and CHARLOTTA IVANOVNA, in the second – TROFIMOV and LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA, in the third – ANYA and the POSTAL CLERK, in the fourth – VARYA and the STATIONMASTER and so forth. VARYA quietly weeps and, dancing, wipes her tears. In the last pair is DUNYASHA. They cross the drawing room, PISCHIK cries out: "Grand-ronde, balancez!" and "Les cavaliers à genoux et remerciez vos dames!"*

*FIRS in a tailcoat carries seltzer water on a tray.*

*PISCHIK and TROFIMOV enter the drawing room.*

PISCHIK        I have high blood pressure. I've already had two strokes, it's difficult to dance, but, as they say, when in Rome... I'm healthy as a horse. My late father, the joker, God rest him, used to say that our ancient Simyonov-Pischik clan is descended from the very horse that Caligula made a senator... *(He takes a seat.)* But the calamity is: no money! A hungry dog thinks only about meat... *(Begins to snore and immediately wakes up.)* So I... I can think only about money...

TROFIMOV     Come to think of it, you do look something like a horse.

PISCHIK        Well... a horse is a good beast... you can sell a horse.

*They are playing billiards in the neighboring room. VARYA appears in the ballroom under the arch.*

TROFIMOV     *(teasing)* Madame Lopakhina! Madame Lopakhina!

VARYA                     *(angrily)* Professor Fleabag!

TROFIMOV     Yes, I am Professor Fleabag and I'm proud of it!

VARYA             *(in bitter thought)* Here we hired musicians, but how do we pay them? *(She exits.)*

TROFIMOV     *(To PISCHIK)* All the time and energy you spend looking for money to pay your debts, you could turn the world upside down.

PISCHIK             Nietzsche... the philosopher.. the greatest, most celebrated... a man of colossal intellect, he says that it is all right to make counterfeit money.

TROFIMOV     You've read Nietzsche?

PISCHIK             Well... My Dashenka told me. But now I am in such a terrible spot, that I would gladly counterfeit money... the day after tomorrow I have to pay three hundred and ten rubles... I already have one hundred thirty... *(He feels his pockets, anxiously)* The money is gone! I lost the money! *(On the verge of tears.)* Where is the money? *(Joyfully.)* Here it is, behind the lining... Phew, I broke out in a sweat...

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA and CHARLOTTA IVANOVNA enter.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(she hums a lezghinka)* Why has Leonid been gone so long?  
What's he doing in town? *(To DUNYASHA.)* Dunyasha, offer the musicians  
tea...

TROFIMOV     In all probability, the auction didn't take place.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     This is the wrong time to have a party... Well, never mind...  
*(She takes a seat and hums quietly.)*

CHARLOTTA *(gives PISCHIK a pack of cards)* Voila! Here is a pack of cards. Think of a  
card.

PISCHIK     I'm thinking of one.

CHARLOTTA Now shuffle the pack. Very good. Give it here, o my sweet Herr Pischik. Tell  
us your card.

PISCHIK     The eight of spades.

CHARLOTTA *Einz, zwei, drei!* Now look for it, it is in your side pocket...

PISCHIK     *(takes the card from his side pocket)* The eight of spades, absolutely correct!  
*(Astonished.)* What a world!

CHARLOTTA *(holds the pack of cards in her palm, to TROFIMOV)* Say, quickly, what card  
is on top?

TROFIMOV All right, the ace of spades

CHARLOTTA Indeed! (*To PISCHIK.*) Well? What card is on top?

PISCHIK Queen of hearts.

CHARLOTTA Indeed! (*She claps her hands, the pack of cards vanishes.*) What nice weather we are having today!

*A mysterious female voice answers her, seemingly from under the floor: "Oh, yes, splendid weather, madam."*

You are absolutely my ideal.

*Voice: "I like you very much as well, madam."*

STATION MANAGER (*applauds*) Bravo, Madam ventriloquist!

PISCHIK (*Astonished*) What a world! You are most charming Charlotta Ivanovna... I am simply in love...

CHARLOTTA In love? (*She shrugs her shoulders.*) Are you capable of love? *Guter Mensch, aber schlechter Musikant.* ("A good man, but a bad musician.")

TROFIMOV (*he slaps PISCHIK on the shoulder*) What a horse you are...

CHARLOTTA I beg your attention, there is still one more trick. (*She takes the blanket from*

*a chair.) Here is a very good shawl that I wish to sell... (She shakes it.) Does anyone wish to buy it?*

PISCHIK       *(Astonished)* Marvelous!

CHARLOTTA *Einz, zwei, drei! (She quickly lifts up the fallen blanket.)*

*ANYA stands under the blanket; she curtsies, runs to her mother, hugs her, and runs back to the ballroom amid general delight.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA       *(applauds)* Bravo, bravo!

CHARLOTTA Now another! *Einz, zwei, drei. (Lifts blanket.)*

*VARYA stands under the blanket and she bows.*

PISCHIK       *(Astonished)* What a world!

CHARLOTTA The end! *(She throws the blanket on PISCHIK, curtsies and runs into the ballroom.)*

PISCHIK       *(hurriedly to her)* What a naughty woman! So naughty! *(He exits.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA       And Leonid still isn't back. I don't understand what he is doing in town for so long! I'm sure it is over already, either the estate is sold

or the auction didn't take place, but why must we be kept in the dark for so long!

VARYA        (*trying to comfort her*) Uncle bought it, I'm sure of that.

TROFIMOV    (*sarcastically*) Oh, yes.

VARYA        Great Aunt sent him money to transfer the estate to her name. She did it for Anya. And I'm certain, God willing, uncle is buying it.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Your great aunt in Yaroslavl sent 15,000 to buy the estate in her name – she doesn't trust us – but that money wouldn't even cover the interest. (*She covers her face with her hands.*) Today my fate is being decided, my fate...

TROFIMOV    (*teases VARYA.*) Madam Lopakhina!

VARYA        (*angrily*) Perpetual student! You have already been thrown out of the university twice!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Why are you angry, Varya? He is teasing you about Lopakhin. Well, if you want to – marry Lopakhin. He is a good man — interesting. If you don't want to, don't marry him, no one is forcing you, darling...

VARYA        Honestly mamochka, I take these things seriously. He is a good man, I like him.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Then marry him. I don't understand what you're waiting for.

VARYA     Mamochka, I can't propose to him myself. For two years now everyone has talked to me about him. Everyone talks about it, but when he is with me, he is either silent or he makes jokes. I understand. He's preoccupied with his business. He is busy getting rich, and he's not concerned with me. If I had money, even a little, even a hundred rubles, I would leave everything, I would go far away. I would go to a convent.

TROFIMOV     The bliss!

VARYA     *(To TROFIMOV.)* A student is supposed to be smart! *(In a gentle tone, with tears.)* How ugly you've become, Petya, how old! *(To LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA, no longer crying.)* I can't be without something to do, mamochka. I must do something every minute.

*YASHA enters.*

YASHA     *(barely restraining himself from laughter)* Yepikhodov broke a billiard cue! *(He exits.)*

VARYA     Why is Yepikhodov here? And who let him play billiards? I do not understand these people... *(She exits.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Don't tease her, Petya. You see that she's suffering.



TROFIMOV    She's such a busybody. She pokes her nose into business that isn't hers. The whole summer she hasn't given me or Anya any peace. She was afraid that we would have a romance. What business is it of hers? Anyway, it never even crossed my mind. I am so far from that vulgarity. We are above love!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    And I, therefore, must be below love. (*In strong agitation.*)  
Why isn't Leonid here? I just need to know — was the estate sold or not? This is so terrible for me, I don't know what to think. I am losing my self-control... I could scream now... I could do something very foolish. Save me, Petya. Say something, speak...

TROFIMOV    Whether the estate was sold today or not – what difference does it make? We've been down this path before, now there is no turning back. Calm down, dear. There's no need to fool yourself. For once in your life you need to look at the truth.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    What truth? You see so clearly what truth is, but it's as though I've gone blind, I see nothing. You fervently solve all these important problems, but tell me, my friend, isn't it because you're young, and you've never really known life? Yes, you look boldly into the future and see a brave new world out there, but have you ever had to live with your idealistic visions? You are braver, more honest, more profound than we, but think about it, be a little generous, have mercy on me. You see I was born here, my father and mother lived here, my grandfather. I love this house. Without the cherry orchard I don't understand my own life, and if it's really necessary to sell it, then sell me along with it. (*She embraces TROFIMOV, kisses him on the forehead.*) You know my son drowned here... (*She weeps.*) Pity me, good, kind man.

TROFIMOV    You know I deeply sympathize with you.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Yes, but you should have said that differently, very differently. *(She takes out a handkerchief, a telegram falls onto the floor.)* Today my soul is so heavy, you can't imagine. It's so noisy here tonight and my soul trembles at every sound, I am trembling all over, but I can't be left alone, I'm terrified of my own thoughts. Don't condemn me, Petya... I love you as I do my own family. I swear to you I would gladly have you marry Anya, only, my friend, you must finish your studies. You don't do anything, you let fate toss you from one place to another. It's so strange... Isn't it true? Yes? And you ought to do something about that beard, let it grow out somehow... *(She laughs.)* You are so funny!

TROFIMOV     *(Picks up the telegram.)* I do not wish to be handsome.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     That telegram is from Paris. I receive one every day. That ridiculous man is sick again, things aren't going well with him... He asks forgiveness, he begs me to come, and I really should go to Paris to be with him. Don't look at me that way, Petya — what can I do? He's sick, he's alone, unhappy, and who will look after him, who will keep him from making mistakes, who will give him his medicine? And the truth is, I love him. Yes, I love him, I love him... He's a stone around my neck, I will sink to the bottom with him, but I love that stone and I cannot live without it. *(She presses TROFIMOV's hand.)* Don't think badly of me, Petya, don't say anything, don't speak...

TROFIMOV     *(on the verge of tears)* Forgive my bluntness, but for God's sake he robbed you!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     No, no, no, don't talk like that... *(She covers her ears.)*

TROFIMOV     He's a parasite. You are the only one who doesn't see this! He is a rotten

parasite, a nonentity...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(angry, but restrained)* You are twenty-eight or twenty-nine, but you're still a little school boy.

TROFIMOV    Very well!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     You should be a man. At your age, you should have someone who loves you. And you should love... you yourself should fall in love!  
*(Angrily.)* Yes, yes! You have no true purity. You're just a prig, a ridiculous eccentric, a freak, a virgin...

TROFIMOV    *(in horror)* What is she saying!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     "I am above love"! You're not above love, but as Firs would say, you are a nincompoop! Not to have a lover at your age!

TROFIMOV    *(in horror)* This is horrible! What is she saying?! *(He quickly goes into the ballroom, clutching his head.)* It is horrible... I cannot... I am leaving... *(He exits, but immediately returns.)* Everything is over between us! *(He goes into the entry hall.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(she cries after)* Petya, wait a moment! Silly man, I was joking! Petya!

*We hear a crash, as if someone has fallen down the stairs. ANYA and VARYA cry out, followed by an immediate burst of laughter.*

What happened?

*ANYA runs in.*

ANYA           *(laughing)*. Petya fell down the stairs! *(She runs out.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    What a crackpot Petya is...

*The STATION MASTER comes to a stop in the middle of the ballroom and reads "To the Sinner" by A. Tolstoy:*

STATIONMASTER    "The crowd gushes, gaiety, laughter abound;  
  
The ballroom, richly adorned, rings with their sound.  
  
Everywhere the glitter of crystal and gold.  
  
Beyond the long ballroom, she reigns;  
  
Her immodest dress reveals what must not be told,  
  
Her dang'rous charm lures men in,  
  
Gazing upon her they all fall to sin."

*They listen to him, but he has barely read a few lines when the sound of a waltz carries in from the ballroom and the reading comes abruptly to an end. Everyone dances. TROFIMOV, ANYA, VARYA, and LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA cross into the ballroom.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Well, "Professor Purity"... well, Petya... I beg your forgiveness... Come dance... *(She dances with PETYA.)*

*ANYA and VARYA dance.*

*FIRS enters, stands his cane near the side of the door. YASHA also has come in from the drawing room, he watches the dances.*

YASHA        What is it, grandpa?

FIRS         Don't feel well. In the old days we had generals, barons, admirals dancing at our balls, but now we send for the postal clerk and the station master, and they do not come willingly. I feel weak. The late master, the grandfather, cured all our illnesses with sealing-wax. I have been taking sealing-wax every day for over twenty years — maybe I'm alive because of it.

YASHA        I am sick of you, grandpa. *(He yawns.)* If only you'd shrivel up and die soon.

FIRS         Ekh, you... nincompoop! *(Mutters.)*

*TROFIMOV and LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA dance in the ballroom, then in the drawing room.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *Merci.* I need to sit for a bit... *(She sits.)* I'm tired.

*ANYA enters.*

ANYA             *(Anxiously)* In the kitchen just now, some man said that the cherry orchard has been sold.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     To whom was it sold?

ANYA             He didn't say. He left. *(She dances with TROFIMOV, they both exit into the ballroom.)*

YASHA            That was just some old man jabbering. A stranger.

FIRS              And Leonid Andreyich is still gone, he hasn't come back. The topcoat he's wearing is light, I'm afraid he will catch a cold. Ekh, youngsters!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     I can't stand it. Yasha, go find out to whom it was sold.

YASHA            He left a long time ago, that old man. *(He laughs.)*

YEPIKHODOV   *(offstage)* Off the right ball to the corner, I cut to the middle.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(slightly irritated)* Well, what are you laughing at? What are you so happy about?

YASHA                Yepikhodov sure is a riot. What a waste! “A disaster waiting to happen.”

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Firs, if the orchard is sold, where will you go?

FIRS                  Where you order me to go, I will go.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Why are you so pale? Are you ill? You should sleep...

FIRS                  Yes... *(With a smile.)* I should sleep, and who will serve? Who will see to things? Only me in the whole house.

YASHA                *(To LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA.)* Lyubov Andreyevna! Permit me to make a request, be so kind! If you go to Paris again, take me with you, do me that favor. It is positively impossible for me to stay here. *(He looks around, in an undertone.)* You can see for yourself, the whole country is uneducated, the people are immoral, and the boredom — in the kitchen they feed us disgracefully, and Firs goes around mumbling all kinds of ridiculous things all the time. Take me with you, for the love of God!

*PISCHIK enters.*

PISCHIK              Permit me to invite you... to a waltz, most beautiful... *(LYUBOV*

*ANDREYEVNA goes to him.)* Charming, but all the same I must have one hundred eighty rubles from you... I need it... *(They dance.)* One hundred eighty rubles...

*They cross into the ballroom.*

YASHA           *(quietly sings)* “Can’t you see my heart is breaking?”

*In the ballroom a figure in a grey top hat and in checked trousers waves her arms and jumps. There are shouts: “Bravo, Charlotta Ivanovna!”*

DUNYASHA   *(stopping to powder her nose)* The mistress ordered me to dance – there are many gentlemen, but very few ladies, — and my head is spinning from dancing, my heart is pounding. Firs Nikolayevich, just now the official from the post office said something to me that simply took my breath away.

*The music stops.*

FIRS           What did he say?

DUNYASHA   “You,” he said, “are like a flower.”

YASHA           *(yawns)* As if he knows anything — *(He exits.)*

DUNYASHA   “Like a flower”... I am such a delicate girl, I love tender words so very much.



FIRS                They'll be the death of you.

*YEPIKHODOV enters.*

YEPIKHODOV   Avdotya Fyodorovna, you run away from me... as though I am some kind of insect. *(Sighs.)* Ekh, life!

DUNYASHA    Are you speaking to me?

YEPIKHODOV   Undoubtedly, perhaps, you are right. *(Sighs.)* But, strictly speaking, if I look at it from another point of view, I will permit myself to express myself like this: pardon my bluntness, you have completely reduced me to an utter state of mind. I know my *fortuna*, every day some sort of new misfortune happens to me, and I have been accustomed to this for a long time, so that with a smile I gaze at my own lot in life. You gave me your word, and although I...

DUNYASHA    I beg you, we can talk later on, but leave me in peace. Now I am dreaming.  
*(She plays with her fan.)*

YEPIKHODOV   A new misfortune every day, and I, strictly speaking, I just smile, I even laugh.

*VARYA enters from the ballroom.*

VARYA            You haven't left yet, Semyon? What an ill-bred man you are! *(To*

*DUNYASHA.*) Off with you, Dunyasha. *(To YEPIKHODOV.)* You play billiards and break a cue, then you walk around the drawing room like a guest.

YEPIKHODOV Permit me to express to you, I am not accountable to you.

VARYA Accountable! You just keep your mouth shut! All you do is wander around this house, never doing anything helpful. Someone please tell me, why do we employ a bookkeeper?

YEPIKHODOV *(hurt)* If I work, if I wander around, if I eat, if I play billiards, only people of proper understanding and maturity can discuss that with me.

VARYA You dare say that to me! *(Flaring up.)* You dare? So, I don't understand anything? Get out of here! This minute!

YEPIKHODOV *(cowering)* I beg you to express yourself in a more delicate fashion.

VARYA *(losing her temper)* Get out of here this minute! Out!

*He goes to the door, she after him.*

"Disaster waiting to happen!" Don't ever darken this door again! I don't ever want to see you here again!

*YEPIKHODOV has exited; from the other side of the door his voice: "I will lodge a complaint about you."*

Oh, are you coming back? *(She takes the cane FIRS stood by the door.)*  
Come... Come... Come, I have something to show you... Oh, are you coming? Are you coming? This is for you... *(She raises it threateningly, at the same time LOPAKHIN enters.)*

LOPAKHIN    Damn — thanks a lot.

VARYA                    *(angrily and sarcastically)* It's my fault!

LOPAKHIN    Please, it's nothing. I give you my most humble thanks for the lovely welcome.

VARYA            Don't mention it. *(She moves away, then looks around and asks softly.)* Did I hurt you?

LOPAKHIN    No, it's nothing. The lump coming up, however, is humongous.

*A voice in the ballroom: "Lopakhin is here! Yermolai Alekseyevich!"*

PISCHIK            Here he is, in the flesh! *(He and LOPAKHIN kiss one another.)* You smell slightly of cognac, my dear, my soul. And we're enjoying ourselves here too.

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA enters.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Is that you, Yermolai Alekseyevich? What took so long? Where's Leonid?

LOPAKHIN    Leonid Andreyevich came with me, he is coming...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    *(agitatedly)* Well, what? Was there an auction? Say

something!

LOPAKHIN *(confused, afraid to reveal his joy)* The auction was over by four o'clock... We got to the train station late, we had to wait until nine-thirty. *(Sighing heavily.)* Oof! My head is spinning a little...

*GAYEV enters; in his right hand is a package, with his left he wipes tears.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Lyonya, what? Lyonya, well? *(Impatiently, with tears.)*  
Quickly, for God's sake...

GAYEV *(he answers her with nothing, he only waves his hand; to FIRS, weeping)*  
Take these... They're anchovies, Kerch herrings... I ate nothing today... You can't imagine what I have been through —

*The door to the billiard room is open; one can hear the tap of balls and YASHA's voice: "Yellow ball to the corner, cut to the center." GAYEV's expression changes, he is no longer crying.*

I am terribly tired. Firs, help me change clothes. *(He exits to his room across the hall, FIRS after him.)*

PISCHIK What about the auction? Tell us!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Was the cherry orchard sold?

LOPAKHIN It was sold.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA      Who bought it?

LOPAKHIN      I bought it.

*Pause.*

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA feels faint. She sits. VARYA takes the keys from her belt, throws them onto the floor in the middle of the drawing room, and exits.*

LOPAKHIN      I bought it! Wait a minute, ladies and gentlemen, be so kind, my head is spinning, I can't speak... *(He laughs.)* We arrived at the auction, Deriganov was already there. Leonid Andreyich had only fifteen thousand, but right away Deriganov bid thirty more than the mortgage. I see, so that's how it's going, I leap in with him, offer forty. He forty-five. Me fifty-five. He then increases it by five, I by ten... five, ten, five, ten... well, it ended. I bid ninety thousand over the debt, and it was mine. The cherry orchard is now mine! Mine! *(He guffaws.)* My god, lord, the cherry orchard is mine! Tell me, am I drunk, am I crazy, am I dreaming... *(He stamps his feet.)* Don't laugh at me! If my father and grandfather were to get up from their graves and see this moment, how their Yermolai, beaten, barely-literate Yermolai, who ran barefoot in the winter, how that same Yermolai bought the estate — the most beautiful estate in the world. I bought the estate, where my grandfather and father were serfs, where they weren't even permitted in the kitchen. I'm dreaming. I must be crazy, it can't be true... *(He picks up the keys, affectionately smiling.)* She threw the keys down, she wants to show that she is no longer the mistress of the house — *(He jingles the keys.)* Well, it makes no difference.

*One can hear the orchestra tuning up.*

Hey, musicians, play, I want music! Everyone come and see how Yermolai Lopakhin chops down every tree in the cherry orchard — every damn one of them. We'll build summer houses, and our grandchildren and great-

grandchildren will see a new life here... Music, play!

*Music plays. LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA lowers herself onto a chair and cries bitterly.*

*(With reproach.)* Why, why didn't you listen to me? My poor, good friend, we can't go back now. *(With tears.)* Oh, if only all of this would pass, if somehow our absurd, unhappy lives would pass.

PISCHIK *(He takes him by the arm, in an undertone).* She is crying. Let's go into the ballroom. Leave her alone... Come... *(He takes him by the arm and leads him to the ballroom.)*

LOPAKHIN What's wrong? Music, play louder! Let's have it the way I want it! *(With irony.)* A new landowner is coming, a new master of the cherry orchard! *(He accidentally pushes the little table, almost toppling the candelabra.)* I can pay for everything! *(He leaves with PISCHIK.)*

*In the ballroom and drawing room there is no one except LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA, who is sitting, bitterly crying, her entire body contracted. The music plays quietly. ANYA and TROFIMOV enter quickly. ANYA crosses to her mother and kneels in front of her. TROFIMOV remains in the entrance to the ballroom.*

ANYA Mama! Mama, are you crying? My sweet, kind, good mama, my beautiful, I love you... I bless you. The cherry orchard was sold, it is already gone, it is true, true, but don't cry, mama, your life is still ahead of you, your good, pure soul remains... Come with me, come away from here, come! We'll plant a new orchard, more splendid than this, you'll see, you'll understand, and joy, quiet, true joy will fill your soul, like the sun at twilight, and you'll smile, mama! Come, sweet! Come!

**CURTAIN**

## ACT IV

*The Nursery. There are neither curtains on the windows, nor pictures. The little furniture that remains is piled in one corner, as if for sale. A feeling of emptiness. Near the front door and at back of the stage suitcases and trunks are piled up. On the left a door is open, VARYA and ANYA's voices are heard. LOPAKHIN stands, waiting. YASHA holds a tray with little glasses, filled with champagne. In the entry hall YEPIKHODOV packs a suitcase. Offstage there are voices of the peasants who have come to say goodbye. The voice of GAYEV: "Thank you, brothers, thank you."*

YASHA        The peasants came to say goodbye. It is my opinion, Yermolai Alekseyich, the people of this country are good-hearted, but they really comprehend nothing.

*The noise dies down. LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA and GAYEV enter through the entry hall; she is not crying, but is pale, her face trembles, she is unable to speak.*

GAYEV        You gave all your money away, Lyuba. You can't do that! You cannot do that!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    I couldn't help it! I couldn't help it!

*They both exit.*

LOPAKHIN    *(through the door, after them)* Please, I most humbly beg you! Have a farewell glass of champagne. I forgot to bring any from town, but I found a bottle at the train station. Please!

*Pause.*

Well, ladies and gentlemen, don't you want any? *(He moves away from the door.)* If I had known, I wouldn't have bought it. Well then, I won't have any.

*YASHA carefully rests the tray on a chair.*

At least you have a drink, Yasha.

YASHA        To those departing! Good fortune to those who remain! *(He drinks.)* This champagne is not the good stuff, I can assure you.

LOPAKHIN    Eight rubles a bottle.

*Pause.*

It is damned cold in here.

YASHA        They didn't light the stove today. It doesn't matter since we are leaving. *(He laughs.)*

LOPAKHIN    Why are you laughing?

YASHA        Because I'm so happy.

LOPAKHIN    It's October but it's sunny and quiet, like in the summer. Good weather for building. *(Glancing at his watch, through the door.)* Ladies and gentlemen, please remember you have forty-six minutes remaining until the train departs! It means we leave for the station in twenty minutes. Hurry.

*TROFIMOV enters from outside in a topcoat.*



TROFIMOV I think it's time to go. The horses are here. Where the hell are my galoshes? I've lost them. (*Through the door.*) Anya, my galoshes aren't here! I can't find them!

LOPAKHIN And I have to go to Kharkov. I'm taking the same train as you. I'll spend the whole winter in Kharkov. I stood around all summer yammering with you and I did nothing. I can't be without work, I don't know what to do with my hands; they just hang there, like they were somebody else's.

TROFIMOV We're leaving soon, and you can once again go back to your useful work.

LOPAKHIN Have a little champagne.

TROFIMOV No thanks.

LOPAKHIN So, now Moscow?

TROFIMOV Yes, I'll take them to town, and tomorrow I'll go to Moscow.

LOPAKHIN Yes... Well, the professors must have stopped giving lectures. They must be waiting for you to arrive!

TROFIMOV Cut it out.

LOPAKHIN How many years have you been studying at the university?

TROFIMOV    Think up something new, we've heard it all before. *(He looks for the galoshes.)* You know, very likely, we won't see one another again, so permit me to give you a piece of advice before we all leave: Stop waving your arms all around! Break yourself of the habit – of... *(he gestures waving his arms)*. And building summer cottages here, counting on vacationers becoming individual “agriculturists”, relying on that – that's waving your arms around too... Well, what the hell, I like you anyway. You have fine, beautiful hands, like an artist, you have a fine, beautiful soul...

LOPAKHIN    *(embraces him)* Farewell, my friend. Thank you for everything. Here, take some money for the trip.

TROFIMOV    Why? I don't need it.

LOPAKHIN    But you don't have any.

TROFIMOV    I have. Thank you. I received some for a translation. It's here in my pocket. *(Anxiously.)* But where are my galoshes!

VARYA        *(from the other room)* Take your filth! *(She throws a pair of rubber galoshes onstage.)*

TROFIMOV    Why are you angry, Varya? Hm... These aren't even my galoshes!

LOPAKHIN    In the spring I planted poppy seeds on 2700 acres and now I've earned a clean forty thousand — and when my poppies were in bloom, what a picture it was!— So here I am telling you, I earned forty thousand and it means I can give you a loan. Why turn

your nose up? I am just a peasant... no ceremony.

TROFIMOV Your father was a peasant, mine, a pharmacist — and from this follows absolutely nothing.

*LOPAKHIN takes out his wallet and stuffs the money into Trofimov's pocket.*

Take it back, take it back. Even if you offered me two hundred thousand, I wouldn't take it. I'm a free person. And the things that all of you value so much don't have the slightest power over me. It's like a puff of smoke in the wind. I can manage without you, I don't need your money. I am strong and proud. Humanity is moving toward a higher truth, to the greatest happiness possible on earth, and I am in the front ranks!

LOPAKHIN Will you reach it?

TROFIMOV I will reach it.

*Pause.*

I will reach it or I will show others the way to reach it.

*In the distance one can hear an axe tapping on a tree.*

LOPAKHIN Well then, farewell, my friend. It is time to go. We've been turning up our noses at one another, but you know, life is short. When I am hard at work, without stopping, without resting, then my thoughts become a little more clear, and I start to understand why I am here on this earth. But tell me brother, how many people are there in Russia who have any idea why they exist? Well, the world keeps spinning all the same. They say Leonid Andreyich took a position at the bank, six thousand a

year... but you know he won't hold down the job, he's very lazy...

ANYA           *(in the doorway)* Mama asks, please don't start chopping down the orchard until she has left.

TROFIMOV    Can't you show some respect? *(He exits through the entry hall.)*

LOPAKHIN    Yes, of course... Damn it, how could I let that happen — *(He exits after him.)*

ANYA           Did they send Firs to the hospital?

YASHA        I told them to this morning. I'm sure they sent him.

ANYA           *(To YEPIKHODOV, who is crossing through the hall.)* Semyon Panteleyich, please ask someone if they took Firs to the hospital.

YASHA        *(offended)* I've already done that. Why ask for the tenth time!

YEPIKHODOV   The aged Firs, in my personal opinion, is not fit for mending, he should join his forefathers. And I can only envy him. *(He has laid his suitcase on a hatbox and crushed it.)* Well, there, of course. I should have known. *(He exits.)*

YASHA        *(Derisively)* "A disaster waiting to happen..."

VARYA           *(from the other side of the door)* Did they take Firs to the hospital?

ANYA           They took him.

VARYA                       Why didn't they take the letter to the doctor?

ANYA           We need to send it after him... *(She exits.)*

VARYA           *(from the neighboring room)* Where is Yasha? Tell him his mother has come and wants to say goodbye to him.

YASHA           *(waving his arm)* She's driving me crazy.

*DUNYASHA all of this time is busying herself about the luggage. Now, when YASHA is left alone, she goes to him.*

DUNYASHA   Look at me once, Yasha. You are leaving... abandoning me... *(She weeps and throws her arms around his neck.)*

YASHA           What's there to cry about? *(He drinks champagne.)* In six days I'll be in Paris again. Tomorrow I'll be sitting on the express and whoosh! *(makes a noise like a speeding train)*. I just can't believe it. *Vive la France!* This place is not for me, I can't live here... that's the truth. Enough of this ignorance and ill breeding! *(He drinks champagne.)* What is there to cry about? Learn to behave yourself, then you won't need to cry.

DUNYASHA *(she powders her face, looking in the mirror)*. Send me a letter from Paris. I loved you, Yasha, loved you so! I am a delicate creature, Yasha!

YASHA They're coming. *(He busies himself near the suitcases, quietly humming.)*

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA, GAYEV, ANYA and CHARLOTTA IVANOVNA enter.*

GAYEV We must go. There's not much time left. *(Looking at YASHA.)* Who smells like herring?

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA We must be seated in the carriage in ten minutes. *(She glances over the room.)* Farewell, sweet home, old friend. Winter will go by, spring will come, and you won't be here anymore, they are going to pull you down. These walls have seen so much! *(She feverishly kisses her daughter.)* My treasure, you are radiant, your eyes are sparkling like two diamonds. Are you happy? Very?

ANYA Very! A new life is beginning, mama!

GAYEV *(cheerfully)* Indeed, everything is good now. Until the sale of the cherry orchard we were in such a state, but once the matter was finally decided, irrevocably, everyone calmed down, even became cheerful... I am a banker... now I am a financier... yellow ball to the center. And you, Lyuba, you look so much better.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Yes. My nerves are better, that's true.

*They give her her hat and coat.*

I'm sleeping well. Carry my things, Yasha. It's time. *(To ANYA.)* My little girl, we will see one another soon... I will go to Paris, I'll live there on the money your great

aunt sent to buy the estate – long live your great aunt! – but the money won't last long, I'm afraid.

ANYA           Mama, you will return soon, soon... won't you? I'll study hard and get my degree and then I'll go to work so I can help you. Mama, we'll read books together... won't we? *(She kisses her mother's hand.)* We'll read in the autumn evenings, read many books and a new, miraculous world will open before us... *(She dreams.)* Mama, do come back...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    I will, my treasure. *(She embraces her daughter.)*

*LOPAKHIN enters. CHARLOTTA quietly hums a song.*

GAYEV           Charlotta is happy, she is singing!

CHARLOTTA *(She carries a bundle resembling a wrapped baby.)* My little baby, bye, bye ...

*The crying of a baby can be heard: "Wa, wa!"*

Hush, my good, my sweet child.

*"Wa! wa!"*

I feel so sorry for you! *(She throws the bundle on a piece of luggage.)* Please find me a job. I can't go on like this.

LOPAKHIN    We will find you something, Charlotta Ivanovna, don't worry.

GAYEV           Everyone is leaving us, Varya is going away... we have suddenly become superfluous.

CHARLOTTA I can't live in this town. I must leave... *(She hums.)* It doesn't matter...

*PISCHIK enters.*

LOPAKHIN The miracle of nature!

PISCHIK *(out of breath)*. Oh, let me recover my breath... I am worn out... My most honorable... Give me water...

GAYEV Ah, you're here for money? Your obedient servant, I will remove myself from sin... *(He exits.)*

PISCHIK It's been ages since I've been here. Most beautiful... *(To LOPAKHIN.)* You're here... I am happy to see you... a man of most colossal intellect... take... receive... *(He gives LOPAKHIN money.)* Four hundred rubles... I still owe you eight hundred forty...

LOPAKHIN *(shrugs his shoulders in bewilderment)* It's like a dream... Where did you get it?

PISCHIK Hold on... it's so hot in here... a most extraordinary thing happened. Some Englishmen came to my place and found some kind of white clay on my land... *(To LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA.)* And four hundred for you... beautiful, astonishing... *(He gives her money.)* The rest later. *(He drinks water.)* Just now a young man was saying on the train, he thought he was some kind of philosopher, he started telling people, "Jump. Just jump off the roof." As if this was his whole philosophy. What a world! Water!



LOPAKHIN     Who were these Englishmen?

PISCHIK        I leased them the lot with the clay for twenty-four years... What a world! But now, forgive me, there is no time... I must ride much farther... I am going to Znoikov's... to Kardamonov's... I owe everyone... *(He drinks.)* I wish you well... I will come back on Thursday...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     We're leaving for town now, and tomorrow I'm going abroad...

PISCHIK        What? *(Anxiously.)* Where? Oh I see the furniture... suitcases... Well, never mind... *(On the verge of tears.)* Never mind... People of supreme intellect... these Englishmen... Never mind... Be happy... God help you... Never mind... Everything on this earth comes to an end... *(He kisses LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA's hand.)* And if you should hear that my end has finally come, remember this old... horse and say: "On earth there was such and such a man... as Semyonov-Pischik... God rest his soul"... Most splendid weather... Yes... *(He exits strongly embarrassed, but immediately returns and says in the doorway.)* Dashenka sends her regards! *(He exits.)*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     Now we can go. I'm leaving with two things on my mind. First – Firs is ill. *(Glancing at her watch.)* Maybe five minutes more...

ANYA            Mama, they've already sent Firs to the hospital. Yasha sent him this morning.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     My second problem — Varya. She is used to getting up early and working, and now without work she'll be like a fish out of water. She has grown thin, she has grown quiet and the poor little thing cries...

*Pause.*

Yermolai Alekseyich, you know very well that I was hoping... you would marry her,

and everything looked as though it was going that way. (*She whispers to ANYA, who nods to CHARLOTTA, and they both exit.*) She loves you, and I think she is to your liking, and I don't know, I don't know why you two just avoid one another. I don't understand!

LOPAKHIN To tell you the truth, neither do I. Everything is so strange... If there's still time, then I am ready now... Let's get it over with —*basta*. But without you still here, I don't think I can do it.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Superb. You'll only need a minute. I'll call her now...

LOPAKHIN Luckily we have champagne.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA (*animatedly*) Wonderful. We'll leave —

LOPAKHIN (*He casts a glance at the bottle.*) It's empty, somebody already drank it.

*YASHA coughs.*

That's what they call lapping it up...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Yasha, *allez!* I'll call her... (*Through the door.*) Varya, leave everything, come here. Come! (*She exits with YASHA.*)

LOPAKHIN (*looking at his watch*) Yes...

*Pause.*

*Behind the door is restrained laughter, whispering, finally VARYA enters.*

VARYA       *(she inspects the luggage for a long time)* It's strange, somehow I can't find...

LOPAKHIN   What are you looking for?

VARYA               I packed it myself and I can't remember.

*Pause*

LOPAKHIN   Where are you going now, Varvara Mikhailovna?

VARYA       I? To the Ragulins... I agreed to take care of their home ... as a ... housekeeper.

LOPAKHIN   Is that in Yashnevo? That's fifty miles.

*Pause.*

Looks like life in this house has come to an end...

VARYA       *(looking around at the luggage)* Where is it... Or, maybe, I packed it in the trunk...  
Yes, life in this house is coming to an end... it will be no more...

LOPAKHIN   And I am leaving for Kharkov now... on the same train. A lot to do. And I'll leave  
Yepikhodov in charge of the estate... I hired him.

VARYA                      *(she gasps)* Who ...?

LOPAKHIN    Last year at this time, if you recall, it was snowing already, but now it's quiet, sunny.  
Only it's cold... Three degrees below zero.

VARYA                      I didn't notice.

*Pause.*

Besides our thermometer is broken...

*Pause. A voice in the door from the courtyard: "Yermolai Alekseyevich!"*

LOPAKHIN    *(as though he has long been waiting for this summons)* I'm coming. *(He quickly exits.)*

*VARYA, sitting on the floor, lays her head on a bundle, quietly sobs. The door opens, LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA carefully enters.*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Well?

*Pause.*

We must go.

VARYA                      *(no longer crying, she rubs her eyes)* Yes, it's time, mamochka. I have just enough time to get to the Ragulin's today. Hopefully we won't be late for the train.

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA     *(through the door)* Anya, get ready!

*ANYA enters, then GAYEV, CHARLOTTA IVANOVNA. GAYEV wears a warm topcoat with a hood. The servants come in. YEPIKHODOV busies himself with the luggage.*

Now we can start our journey.

ANYA             *(joyfully)* Our journey!

GAYEV            My friends, my sweet, dear friends! Abandoning this home forever, can I be silent, can I hold myself back and not express those feelings that fill my being...

ANYA             *(imploringly)* Uncle!

VARYA                 Uncle dear, you shouldn't!

GAYEV            *(dejectedly)* Yellow ball to the center with a bank shot... I will be quiet...

*TROFIMOV enters, then LOPAKHIN.*

TROFIMOV    Well, ladies and gentlemen, it is time to go!

LOPAKHIN    Yepikhodov, my coat!

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    I'll sit for one more minute. This feels good, so good... It's as though I've never seen these walls before, these ceilings, and now I look upon them so

greedily, with such tender love...

GAYEV        I remember, when I was six years old, on Trinity Sunday I stood at this window and watched my father go to church...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    Did they take all of our things?

LOPAKHIN    It looks like it. *(To YEPIKHODOV, putting on the coat.)* Yepikhodov, will you see that everything is in order.

YEPIKHODOV *(he speaks in a hoarse voice)* Don't you worry, Yermolai Alekseyich!

LOPAKHIN    What's wrong with your voice?

YEPIKHODOV    Just now when I drank some water, I swallowed something.

YASHA        *(with contempt)* Disaster...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA    We will leave – and not a soul will remain here...

LOPAKHIN    Until spring.

VARYA        *(she takes an umbrella from a bundle, it looks as if she is raising it threateningly; LOPAKHIN pretends he is frightened).* You don't really— you don't actually... I

wasn't even thinking of that...

TROFIMOV Ladies and gentlemen, please take a seat in the carriage... It's time! The train will arrive momentarily.

VARYA Petya, here they are — your galoshes, by the suitcase. *(With tears.)* And they're so dirty, so old...

TROFIMOV *(putting on the galoshes)* Let's go, ladies and gentlemen!

GAYEV *(strongly embarrassed, afraid he will begin to cry)* The train... the station... curve to the center, white with a bank shot to the corner...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Let's go!

LOPAKHIN Is everybody here? No one in there? *(He locks the side door on the left.)* Okay, locked. I've got some things piled up in there. Let's go!

ANYA Farewell, house! Farewell, old life!

TROFIMOV Hello, new life! *(He exits with ANYA.)*

*VARYA takes a look around the room and takes her time exiting. YASHA and CHARLOTTA exit with a dog.*

LOPAKHIN Well, then, until spring. Let's go, ladies and gentlemen... See ya soon! *(He exits.)*

*LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA and GAYEV remain, the two together. As if they had been waiting for this, throw their arms around one another and sob restrainedly, quietly, frightened they will be heard.*

GAYEV *(in desperation)*. My sister, my sister...

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA Oh, my sweet, my delicate, beautiful orchard! My life, my youth, my happiness, farewell! Farewell!

*ANYA's voice happily calling: "Mama!" TROFIMOV's voice, excitedly: "Halloo!"*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA *(she cries)* Shh, we must cry quietly... Listen... Last time to look at the walls, at the windows... Our dear mother loved to walk in this room...

GAYEV My sister, my sister!

*ANYA's voice: "Mama!" TROFIMOV's voice: "Hello!"*

LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA We're coming!

*They exit.*

*The stage is empty. We can hear a key lock the main door, then the carriages departing. It becomes quiet. Amid the silence we hear the muffled tap of an axe on a tree, it sounds*



*solitary and sad. Footsteps are heard. FIRS appears from the right door. He is dressed, as always, in a jacket and white waistcoat, slippers on his feet. He is ill.*

FIRS           *(he goes to the door, tries the handle).* Locked. They left... *(He sits on the couch.)*  
They forgot about me... Never mind... I'll sit here for a little while... oh, it's so  
good... I'm sure Leonid Andreyevich didn't put on his fur coat, he went in a  
topcoat... *(He sighs, preoccupied)* I didn't look after him... Youngsters! *(He mutters*  
*something, which cannot be understood.)* Life just slipped by, as if I wasn't there at  
all. I need to lie down for a bit... No strength, nothing left, nothing... Ekh, you...  
nincompoop! *(He sits motionless.)*

*A distant sound can be heard, as if from the sky, the sound of a breaking string, dying away,  
mournfully. Silence sets in, and we can only hear, far away in the orchard, an axe tapping  
on a tree.*

#### CURTAIN.

**Allison Horsley** has served as a dramaturg and/or literary manager for La Jolla Playhouse, Denver Center Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Kitchen Dog Theater, Yale Repertory Theatre, Baltimore's Centerstage, and Dallas Theater Center. Since its La Jolla premiere in 2004, she has been the dramaturg for the Tony-winning musical *Jersey Boys* (Broadway, London, Toronto, Las Vegas, national tours). Allison is currently under commission from Oregon Shakespeare Festival to create new literal translations of Chekhov's major plays for adaptation by Libby Appel, and together they have completed versions of *The Cherry Orchard*, *Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *Three Sisters*, with *Ivanov* coming next year. She holds an MFA from the Yale School of Drama and is an assistant professor of dramatic literature at her undergraduate alma mater, University of Denver.

**Libby Appel** is currently Artistic Director Emerita of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She served as Artistic Director of the festival from 1995 to 2007. Prior to that she was the Artistic Director of Indiana Repertory Theatre from 1992 to 1996. She was the Dean of the Theatre School at California Institute of the Arts from 1981 to 1989 and head of the acting program at California State University Long Beach from 1976 to 1981. She holds a BA from the University of Michigan and an MA from Northwestern University as well as three honorary doctorates from Southern Oregon University, the University of Portland and Willamette University. Ms. Appel was the 2010 recipient of the Stephen and Christine Schwarzman Legacy Award for Lifetime Achievement and Excellence in Theater which she received this April at the Kennedy Center in D.C.

## **The Polar Truth**

A play

By

Yury "Strike" Klavdiev

Translated by John Freedman

Contact for author and translator: jfreed16@gmail.com

*The Polar Truth* by Yury Klavdiev ~ 2006.

English translation by John Freedman ~ 2008.

Several young people in a far northern Russian city have had their lives changed radically by exposure to HIV. Some have been driven out of society by prejudice; others have run from society out of despair, anger and confusion. But life goes on – they continue to experience desire, love, affection, jealousy, anger and hope. As these people explore the new limits and new possibilities of their lives, they begin realizing they are in the process of building a new society, one that has the potential to right many of the mistakes of the old world which has rejected them. An episodic, quick-shifting play that merges dialogues and confessional, inner monologues.

2 males, 2 females if roles are shared; more if not. Various simple interiors. 1 act.

### **Characters:**

Kid

Girl

Nettles + Dandelions

Tapeworm

*A few other people (a policeman, passersby, Ira, cashiers, Marina's boyfriend, Sasha, The Victim, cops) are best taped on audio. These are people who surround us but whom we don't notice until they die or do something else worthy of note.*

*Their voices on tape are sufficient.*

### **Contents:**

**1. The Kid**

**2. Sunny**

**3. Nettles + Dandelions**

**4. Tapeworm**

**5. 2 + 4 + 1 (We Are Many)**

**6. 2 + 4 + 1 + 3 (It's Easy Being God)**

**7. A Lesson about the World**

**8. The Polar Truth**

## 1. The Kid.

-Howdy.  
-Yeah, hi.  
-You know what I'm here for?  
-Pretty much.  
-Alyona called me.  
-You?  
-Is that so surprising? That she called me?  
-No.  
-Then why do you ask? You think she's got no place to call from?  
-I dunno.  
-Wha' don't you know?  
-I dunno.  
-She said you guys have problems.  
-What problems could we have?  
-That's for you to tell her. She told me to come talk to you.  
-What about? Did she say that?  
-She did. She said you've given up.  
-She said I'm given up? Did she say why?  
-I don't give a fuck why.  
-Ah, yeah, well...  
-Yeah. Because whatever the reason is you figure it out with her.  
-We don't have any problems with that.  
-If you didn't have any problems I wouldn't be here. Is that clear? That's why I came here to talk to you, because you have problems.  
-I don't have any problems.  
-You're a strong, healthy dude, aren't you? You're a strong, healthy dude.  
-What of it?  
-Then apply your strengths where they're needed. You do have need of strength, don't you?  
-What for?  
-Because you're one fucked motherfucker.  
*Kid grabs the other by the neck. The other guy twists out of his grip.*  
-What the hell are you doing?!  
-Don't like that, huh?  
-What's your problem?!  
-She didn't like it either, you got that? What're you jumping around for? Stand still –  
-I'm standing still. You stand still. Wha'd'you want?!  
Let's talk –

-I already told you; it's her you're going to talk to.

*Kid gives the other a knee*

*chop. Grabs his clothes. The*

*other grabs Kid's clothes.*

*Kid hits him in the chin.*

*Kicks him in the ribs. Comes*

*down with a hook on his ear.*

-I fuckin' told you! –

*Kid drops on his knees and*

*twists the other guy's*

*sweater on his fist. Holds*

*him tight to the ground.*

*Pushes his knee into his*

*nose.*

-I saw Alyona. I saw her bruises. She said it was you.

And I know it was you. Because you're a fuckface,

goddamit. Because you're a cocksucker. And if anybody

has any more problems because of you, man, you're not

even going to come close to Alyona, is that clear? If

any fuckin' mother has any problems because of you, you

and me are going to have to meet again. And I have no

fucking idea what I might do. Did you understand what

you just heard?

-Yes –

-So that's how it fucking is.

*Kid smashes the other guy's*

*nose with his knee.*

-So what happened?

-Nothin' man. We just had a talk and clarified a few

things here and there.

-How come he looks like such shit after talking to you?

-What do I have to do with it? He looks like shit

anyway.

-You mean he was already like that when you saw him?

-Maybe not quite. He fell down, too, you know.

-How did he fall?

-You want me to tell the whole goddam story? When I got

there I see he's all bloody, like he's just been in a

fight. So I ask him, where are they? Who're you

fighting with? He says they just left. Then he got sick

and keeled over. That's when you guys got here.

-Are you saying you didn't beat him up?

-Are you kidding?! I didn't touch the guy. What would I

beat him up for? I've known this guy –

-You only beat up strangers?

-Man, I don't beat up on anybody, I'm telling you!

-So you know this guy, but you didn't beat him up –

-Nope.  
-Well he says you did.  
-Why?  
-That's what I want you to tell me.  
-Well I already told you I didn't beat anybody up.  
-If that's true you can sit tight here until tomorrow.  
-What do you mean? How come?  
-Because he's in there writing up a complaint against you. And that complaint means you've got to go through an ID line\_up. But the only person who can schedule that is the detective. And the detective only comes in tomorrow. That clear?  
-So you're puttin' me in a cell?  
-I sure am. You didn't expect me to take you out for a walk, did you?  
*Pause.*  
-I'm HIV positive.  
-So what?  
-Nothing. I'll just bite through my veins and spill blood all over your floor here. And you're fucked. Good luck washing that up. You can't even kill the virus by boiling it, you know that? It dies only at 212 degrees and liquid starts boiling at around 200. That's how I got it. I didn't boil it hot enough. Naturally, they let me go. Made me sign a paper and let me go. And they didn't take that dick smack's complaint. I heard about it because he told everybody. The cop went to him and said, "That guy you're fingering has AIDS. He's dead in three years. What the hell good's jail going to do him?" That got me thinking. How did it happen? I started thinking about everybody. What I did with who. At least the last year I might come up with. Try to anyway. And I started thinking about all those people – you run across a lot of people when you're hanging out with junkies. It's all the same people, but there's a lot of them. You think it's a lot of them, but it's really all the same people. Anyway I was more worried about hepatitis than HIV. 'Cause they're all your friends... I'm going along thinking about the women, of course. 'Cause that's probably where I picked it up. Hepatitis you get from the drugs, of course. And HIV you definitely get that from the women. Because I can tell you right now that I didn't get anybody's blood in me from any needle. Anyway, I'm going down the hall back to the cell and on the right there is this room with easy chairs and a TV set. There's two guys drinking tea, sitting there watching television. With a

DVD player on a glass shelf under the TV\_set. And there's this soft rug on the floor. And I think, what the hell is that room? Because there's just a hall there with nothing but cells. Brick walls and cells, like that, every ten feet. And it occurs to me I'm just seeing a picture of normal life. For the last time. I'm not making anything big out of that. Those're just thoughts I was thinking. That's the truth, that's how my life came down. That never happened again because I was never in there again where I saw that. So this is all for real. I go into the cell and I sit down thinking. And all the other guys in there see I'm kind of in a world of my own and some guy comes up and asks me, "What happened? What'd they say to you?" At that moment there was nothing I wanted more than to share this with someone, to say it out loud. So I say, "I'm HIV positive." And he says, "You mean that's what you're all bent up over?" And I say, "Yeah." And he says, "Get off it. I thought something happened." And he points around at everybody and says, "This guy's got HIV and this guy's got HIV and this guy over here. Everybody's HIV positive in here. So what? Everybody's cool. What's your big problem? Life goes on. I thought your mother died..." Hold on a second, that's my phone –

## **2. Sunny.**

-Hello. Is Sergei home?

-Yes.

-May I speak to him?

-Who's asking?

-It's Sveta.

*Dial tone.*

-Hello. Is Valya home?

-Who's calling?

-It's Sveta. May I –

*Dial tone.*

-Hello.

-Is that you, Sveta?

-Hey, hello, Sanya.

-It's not Sanya. It's his brother. Listen, slut. You show your face around here again I'll strangle your bitch ass, you hear me? Keep your diseased body away from normal people.

*Dial tone.*

-Here, let me try.

-Go ahead.

-Hey, is Sergei home?

-Who's calling?

-It's Ira.  
 -What Ira?  
 -You probably don't know me. I just met Sergei recently.  
 -Is Sveta standing there with you?  
 -No, who's that?  
 -Forget it.  
*Ira hangs up the telephone.*  
 -That's cool.  
 -What a bunch of cunts –  
 -Forget it.  
 -What do you mean, forget it, Ira! You can't imagine the shit that goes on. I'm like some fuck\_knows\_what for all of them now. Man –  
 -Cool it, Sveta –  
 -Cool fucking what?! They're all the cool ones. For me to cool it I need to talk to somebody. Just talk to somebody. Fuck!  
 -Screw 'em all, man. Who needs to fuckin' talk to them?  
 -Who else am I going to talk to? There isn't anybody else!  
 -Sveta –  
 -What?  
 -Let's go for a spin, huh?  
 So we headed up into the hills. It's not far – about 80 rubles by taxi. And on the way there's this place – Old Village. The highway from the factory is always full of these huge, stinky old trucks. The road around there is as black as the dirt under your nails. A nasty wind whips across there. There are these abandoned homes, all burned out inside. Nobody's lived there for ages. Just stray dogs sleeping there. And homeless people. There are still some offices up there, but they're closed at night, locked down by armed guards. It's night already as we're driving up there and I get to thinking that these old homes are like us. Somebody made us but now we're left to our own devices. Some place that somebody used to care about but not anymore. It's like that with us – like we don't quite exist. Regular trucks don't even drive by, just these dirty old things. It's just that in this place by us there's something everybody needs. And that's what they come to haul away on these trucks. And we sit here, like these abandoned houses – doors wide open, windows kicked out. Nobody hears anything. Nobody even looks our way. It's just like we don't exist. That time we didn't stop in. It was late at night and really scary. The place was

probably crawling with derelicts. They could kill you. But that place stuck in my head. I'd seen it before, but this time it was like for the first time. We arrived up in the mountains, got out and sent the taxi away. We walked around talking and looking down at the city below. We were just shooting the breeze about nothing in particular. Just regular stuff, whatever was happening to everybody. I told Ira what was on TV. She works all the time and only watches television on weekends. On the weekends it's all that pop entertainment shit. I have all kinds of time on my hands. I don't work. So I know what's going on in the country. I tell her all about it and she tells me what's going on in town. I stay home all the time – I don't get out almost at all.

*Snow whirls silently and  
aloofly past the houses which  
protrude above the earth on  
stilts. It is as though the  
houses don't even want to  
touch the earth. Although  
people walk upon it. And  
stand on it. Buried to their  
knees in daily cares, sunk to  
their torsos in problems,  
buried to their necks in  
poverty.*

-Ira?

-Huh?

-There is somebody else besides us, isn't there? He made it all up, didn't he? We didn't think it up – we just use it as we can and then die, that's all.

-So?

-I wonder what's in it for him? Or did he sell us to somebody long ago? Developed the idea and then sold it off.

### **3. Nettles and Dandelions**

-Hey, man.

-Howdy.

-How're you doin' without me?

-You're indispensable, man. Things are bad without you.

-Hungry?

-Famished. Everything's ready, but I didn't eat anything. I was waiting for you.

-You waited for me? How about that? How romantic can you get?

-Fuzzy?



-Yeah?  
 -I love you.  
 -I love you, too. So what do we got here? Look at all this!  
 -I was walking through the marketplace and I look at all those tomatoes – really fat and juicy –  
 -Aha –  
 -And I think it's been ages since we had anything really special, hasn't it?  
 -It has –  
 -And so I –  
 -Christ. You're so cute.  
*Marina and Volodya set the table: two dishes, two forks, two tea spoons. A sugar bowl. Candy in a dish. The doorbell rings.*  
 -Is that for you?  
 -I dunno. What time is it? I don't think anyone was coming. Hello, Nadezhda Ivanovna. My God, what happened?!  
 -For God's sake, help me, kids! Help me, please! Oh you sweethearts! How glad I am you're home! It's horrible, kids. You've got to help me.  
 -What happened, Nadezhda Ivanovna?  
 -Sit down! Have a seat!  
 -Volodya, bring some water from the kitchen!  
 -Nadezhda Ivanovna, calm down now!  
 -I don't have any time to sit, I'm in a hurry –  
 -What can we do, Nadezhda Ivanovna?  
 -It's Kolya. He was hit by a car.  
 -Oh my God!  
 -Is he alive? Is he alive, Nadezhda Ivanovna?  
*Yes, he's alive.*  
 -He's alive, thank God! You kids are always so nice! But he doesn't – he lost almost all his blood, for God's sake. They told me how it happened, when he was hit his body flew through the air and he landed against the corner of the building. And there's a steel shaft sticking out there and it went right through him. When the ambulance got there they couldn't get him off and they had to have the steel sawed off. While they were doing that all his blood flowed out onto the snow.  
 -Sweetheart, what kind of blood type do you have? And you?  
 -A.  
 -B.

-My dear, sweet Marina! I'll say prayers for you for a hundred years –

-Marina, do it! You're blood's right. It's no big deal–

-Marina, please! Marina, please help us!

-Nadezhda Ivanovna, I can't do it.

*God damn it.*

-Marina, please. Please!? Sweetheart, help us. He's in shock. He's in shock and he has no blood. He lost 20% of his blood.

-Nadezhda Ivanovna –

-There's nothing to be afraid of. It's a good hospital and they have all the latest equipment. It doesn't hurt at all. My dear, sweet girl, please help us –

*God fucking damn it.*

-I can't do it. I'm sick. I'm sick, Nadezhda Ivanovna. I'm sorry, I can't do it.

-Now, now, honey! That's all right, child! I'm so sorry, I didn't know –

-No, it's me who's sorry. But I really can't do it. Really, I can't do it.

*Son of a fucking bitch.*

-Were you that scared?

-That's not it.

-You mean you're really sick?

-Really.

-Really?

-You don't believe me?

-But you know Kolya. Why else wouldn't you help him?

-You think I'm really a bitch, don't you?

-Obviously not, if you're sick –

-I. Really am. Sick.

-How come you didn't say so? What's the matter?

*The tomatoes have gone mushy.*

*The glasses are empty.*

-I'm HIV positive.

-You're HIV positive?!

-Yes.

-Why didn't you tell me?

I picked my things up and left. Not far from our house there is this big cluster of heat pipes. A convergence of several systems or something – it's this whole heatpipe city. A little hill. Nothing ever freezes there. it's the first place to bloom in the spring. Homeless people always lay around there keeping warm. The place is covered with trash, newspapers, old bags and rags, but it's the first place to bloom. It was the end of May. The first snow was just beginning to melt.

And nettles and dandelions were already pushing up. A few leaves here and there on this warm island by a manhole cover. Nettles and dandelions. Nettles and dandelions. I found out in spring, too. Everybody was having their blood checked. And I came up positive. Naturally the doctor went and told everybody. The church was right to burn those fuckers in the old days. 'Cause they always know best what people need. They fucking stand guard at the gates of life. Yeah. So they can drive like maniacs, charge as much money as they want and do whatever they want... Nobody would talk to me the next day. Just polite little nothings. Then I noticed everybody's drinking glasses were all together except mine which was off to the side. I found that doctor and I smacked her in the face. Then I quit my job. And I sat down on that plot of land with the nettles and dandelions and I started stroking the leaves. The weeds were still young and the nettles didn't sting. That's how we are, too. I mean, nettles and dandelions are weeds, but they're really pretty, too. When they're young. Then I flew to the Crimea. I have family there. Obviously I didn't tell them anything. Just my dad on the last day when I was leaving. He was cool about it, he said, "No big deal." He said, "No big deal."

Kolya's a great kid. We're good friends. We were. When I got back I tried to start everything over from scratch. I got myself another job and never went back to the old place. I wanted to change my name, but everything here's such a hassle. Basically, everything's okay now. Twice somebody recognized me on the street – can you imagine that? In a whole year! I mean, this is a pretty small town but we don't even know each other – anyway, I told those people they were mistaken. Then I met Volodya, he's a really cute guy. Damn, incredible how things happen. And so I'm stroking those leaves with my palm and they're really soft and alive. And they'll keep living, they're not sick. They don't have HIV. Sometimes I start thinking that it's only we who die and that everything else will just keep living on.

*Kolya died without ever  
regaining consciousness.*

#### **4. Tapeworm**

*Sveta wanders through a  
crumbling, abandoned  
building. All blackened from*

*isolation, wind and wet snow,  
the whole place is silent.  
The damp boards and wet trash  
exude a moist silence. There  
is nothing whole here at all.  
Nothing to sit on. Everything  
is broken. There's no place  
to rest – everything here is  
so old you have to keep  
moving if the floor isn't  
going to cave in.*

SVETA

Don't get me wrong, I didn't want to offend anybody.  
It's just that everybody used to be cool; now there's  
no telling what to expect. Everybody did everything  
together. Did the shopping, the cooking, and we all  
came together in the kitchen. I'll show you.

*Picks a wad of tin foil up  
off the ground. Deftly shapes  
it into a cone-shaped figure.  
Attaches a stick to it.*

SVETA

See, this is the spoon. And this is where you put the  
shit.

*Puts a handful of snow in the  
cone – there's lots of dirty  
snow here. It falls through  
the holes in the roof and  
builds up in little piles all  
around the house.*

SVETA

And that's it. You pour water in. Then you boil it and  
you're done.

*Heats the cone up with a  
cigarette lighter. The snow  
melts.*

SVETA

See? That takes care of it. Then you drink it or you  
can share it. You only get infected if you use the same  
needle. But, hey, everybody's on top of that, everybody  
knows that this town is rampant with AIDS. Even kids  
know it. We all grow up knowing that you don't share  
needles. I mean, that's as simple as knowing that cops  
are assholes and grass is green and ratting is stupid.  
People still get infected though. What d'you expect? If  
I've got problems, if something's going down with me,  
whadda you think, somebody's gonna share with me if

I've got AIDS? But us here, we're all together in this, we're in it together, we're not like those others – screw each other for a kopeck. Everything's different here, we're the next generation. We're gonna make it better so there'll be a reason to live and something to remember –

*Shit, how did it work out  
like this?*

SVETA

Shit, how did it work out like this? Probably because although we were thieves and God-knows-what-all-else, fucking around with crime and prostitution – we still came up with something. We saw through into something. Because our ceiling was higher and more transparent. And the trees showed us where things are better. And our grass was softer. And our birds spoke in tongues. We woke up when we wanted to and there was always a sun there to greet us. Even when things were bad, it never got too stupid. Because you can always call someone or someone will call you and find you and help you out or you'll find somebody 'cause you're looking for them... We wanted it all. We went everywhere, on hikes, in the country, we were always heading somewhere. We read each other's books. When's the last time they gave somebody a book? Fuck, man, yeah, and our cigarettes were even longer than theirs! Flowers, toys... we were always cutting something out and giving gifts –

*Is she crying?*

*Rustling from above.*

SVETA

We definitely had something. Right in our hands, almost. Almost in our blood. We almost had hold of it. We were almost right there in it. Shit. Maybe that's why. We're like those animals in the zoo that refuse to eat and die in their own shit because who in the hell needs a life like that? They know freedom. They had it. They were there. It's just that you shouldn't put all your eggs in George smack's cart. It's like in the Garden of Eden with the apple. Like the knowledge of good and evil. Good is an open road. Evil is dependence. Because that road takes you somewhere and dependence, it just runs you up against anybody and everybody. Or it's like this: you fuck for money and then you get run up against anybody and everybody. And you keep running up against them and you don't give a fuck anymore and there's nothing to give a fuck about. Just kitchens and teapots and bottled water... And then

you're just sucking dick and it's all because  
everything is so fucking screwed. And fuck if  
anybody'll ever hire you again but you don't want to  
die because you want to live because everybody's out  
there living and they're doing a worse job of it than  
you but nobody's taking away their life and in any  
case, what the hell did you do that was so bad? You're  
sucking cock and shooting up, so what's that, a crime?  
*Cries.*

*Rustling from above.*

SVETA

Hey!

*A shaggy-headed,  
supernaturally skinny kid  
jumps down from above. He's  
in a shredded overcoat and  
dirty shoes. Sveta stares at  
him awhile (he's wearing red  
jeans and a T-shirt of  
psychedelic colors; around  
his neck hangs a fat gold  
chain with a key-chain  
ornament of a hand skeleton).*

SVETA

Who are you?

BOY

I'm Tapeworm.

SVETA

You're what?

TAPEWORM

I'm Tapeworm.

SVETA

Why's that?

TAPEWORM

That's what they called me in school.

SVETA

What for?

TAPEWORM

Fuck if I knew. I was skinny.

SVETA

Was?

TAPEWORM

I was then. Now I'm just skinny.

SVETA

What are you doing here?

TAPEWORM

Who were you talking to?

SVETA

Nobody.

TAPEWORM

I talk to nobody too.

SVETA

You spying on me?

TAPEWORM

No. There's all kinds of newspapers and old magazines up there. I come here to read. It's my library.

SVETA

This is your library?

TAPEWORM

(*Approaches the window*). And that's where I live.

That's where my clothes are. My stove. My lamp. Only you can't turn it on at night.

SVETA

Why's that? The dogs?

TAPEWORM

Nya-uh. People. Dogs just want something to eat. That's normal. People'll kill you for fuck-knows-what.

SVETA

How come you left home?

TAPEWORM

I'm HIV-positive.

*Pause.*

SVETA

What?

TAPEWORM

You know, when you really want it bad you don't think about anything else. You just wanna have it.

How do I put this? I didn't have anything. My parents were Jehovah's Witnesses. I was just a little fuckhead, that's what I was. My whole life. Everywhere. Out on the street, at school, who gave a damn what I thought? I was dying for... I was dying for everything. But most of all I wanted to fuck. I just wanted to have a good fuck. Have you ever tried getting a fuck when you're called Tapeworm? Who's going to take pity on Tapeworm? You go out on the street and everybody says, so who's your boyfriend? And you say, I'm hanging out with Tapeworm. You know, the guy whose old man and lady preach God up everybody's ass. Oh, he's fucking hot – Shit, man. When you're nobody you got no business at all. You're no metal head, no kid, no cat, no funky monkey, no bro, no snitch, no Joe, no Jack, no Jake, no hobo, no Rastaman, no freebaser, no thug, no hood, no skater, no skinhead, no amphead, no bagboy, no bag

bride, no bag man, no nothing. Even if you're all those things, if you're a nobody, you're a nobody. You can wear whatever you want and you can walk any walk you like. 'Cause everybody who's anybody has a chick. And they all fuck. Because you only fuck who you love. They like each other. That is so totally cool when you like somebody. And then if somebody likes you, well then that's just the coolest thing there is. That means you're fucking hot. You can't be fucking hot if you're not fucking. That's when you're fucked royal. Man I jerked off all the time. I was the super\_hand\_cunt meat flogger to beat all teenage meat floggers. I was 14 and I was jerking off and I was 16 and I was jerking off and then I started hanging out with other guys – somehow friends started showing up from somewhere. I met this chick Angela and two days later we get drunk sublime out there on a park bench. We started sucking face and she'd already been shooting up for a year or so, she was 17. She was definitely doing hard stuff, sometimes going cold turkey. She'd come see me at home, hit me up for a couple of rubles for a syringe. I'd boil up some water – my parents weren't home – and she'd set it all up. I'm sitting there next to her, touching her and stroking her hair and all the time she's looking at me. Nobody ever looked at me like that.

Nofuckingbody.

Not one normal motherfucking healthy person ever looked at me like that. We were together about a week I guess. Later I heard she was nympho. She'd say, "What a nice kid, I can't turn him down, can I?" That's not why I dumped her though, it's just that I finally found a girl who, you know... Angela and I just fucked. With this new girl it was something else entirely.

A year later I run into the guys I was hanging out with and they say, "Did you fuck Angela?" And I say, "Yeah." And they say, "Go check it out, man. She's got the clap, she fucking infected half the neighborhood. So I went down there and I didn't have the clap. But I had HIV. So I come out of there thinking finally I'll get some use out of the old man and old lady. They're God\_fearing folk, they'll help. Yeah...

*For Jehovah's Witnesses blood  
is something of a fetish.*

*When his parents found out he  
was HIV-positive they gave  
him his own tin pan and*



*spoon. They didn't give him  
any forks or knives. They  
declared the toilet and  
bathtub off-limits to him. He  
took sponge baths in a pail  
and then washed it out in  
boiling water. He had to wash  
out his tin pan and spoon  
with boiling water every day  
too. One day they saw him  
feeding the dog and they  
refused to give him any food  
for the rest of the day. They  
wouldn't let him go outside.  
They said, "Screw you going  
out infecting normal people."  
He'd sit home for days and  
read. They only let him have  
one book.*

TAPEWORM

The fucking Bible. They said, "Read this. You'll be seeing Him soon."

SVETA

Did you read the whole thing?

TAPEWORM. Yeah. Only I still don't get it. So I die and I end up there – what's there to talk to Him about if I already know everything there is to know? Go figure – we sit down to talk and He says, "So, did you read how cool I was to let those high priests go?" Yeah, that was great. "And did you read how I forgave that dude on the cross?" Yeah, totally cool. "And do you remember how Peter came in denying things?" Right on, man, what the fuck are you gonna stick your neck out for?

SVETA

So what would you want to talk to him about?

TAPEWORM

With Him?

SVETA

Anybody.

TAPEWORM

How about you?

*The night is long. Longer  
than any of us even if every  
one of us has been through  
several thousand nights. What  
difference does it make what*

*you talk about at night? No  
matter what you talk about  
the conversation will come  
out longer than anyone doing  
the talking. Although  
sometimes there's something  
to just being silent with  
somebody who thinks like you  
or who is going through the  
same thing as you...*

*Just talk. Just have a talk.  
Silently. Out loud. Doesn't  
matter how. The main thing is  
to say everything you need to  
say before winter ends.*

*Because then spring comes and  
you start wanting everything  
that you can't have.*

*Fuck.*

#### **5. 2+4+1**

*Dark. Voices in an abandoned  
building.*

*-Pull him over here –*

*-Come on, come on. Quit shitting. Nobody's going to  
kill you. Put him over here or somebody'll see him from  
the street –*

*-Who the hell's going to see him? There's nothing but  
trucks out there –*

*-All right. Let's hear it now. What the hell's going  
on?*

*-Dudes. I'll tell you, only don't hit me, okay?*

*-Nobody's hittin' you yet, all right? We should have  
beat the shit out you back there but nobody did that.  
Yet. You hear? So if you start fucking with us your ass  
is down the stairs and you're dead. See that hole over  
there? You got that?*

*-Sasha, gimme a flashlight. I can't see a fucking  
thing. I'm gonna crack his ass and I'll miss. Then  
he'll fuckin' shit in his pants. Are you shittin' in  
your pants, pretty boy?*

*A slap is heard.*

*A flashlight comes on. In the  
darkness a room can be seen.*

*It's an abandoned building  
but it's still a livable  
room. Or at least somebody is  
trying to make it look that*

*way. The walls are papered  
with newspapers. A lamp hangs  
from the ceiling. The floor  
is clean. Random furniture  
stands about. But the main  
thing is the bed in a corner:  
Tapeworm and Sveta lie on the  
bed.*

KID

You two – who are you?

TAPEWORM

Who are you?

SASHA

He fuckin' asked you first, fuckface. Are you fuckin' hobo?

VICTIM

Call the police.

*The guy holding Victim brings  
his knee down on his throat.*

*Victim groans.*

SASHA

Who fuckin' said you could talk? Shut up.

SVETA

Sorry about this, gentlemen, but we live here.

KID

You hobo?

TAPEWORM

What's it look like? (*Gets up. He's sleeping in his clothes.*)

KID

Maybe not.

VICTIM

Hey guys –

KID

Sasha, shut this fucker up –

*A groan.*

TAPEWORM

Listen, guys. I'm sorry to put you out but you're going to have to go someplace else. Next door maybe. We live here and we're sleeping.

KID

Isn't that something. What's this, you guys fucking run away from home?

TAPEWORM

Yeah. We fucking ran away from home.

KID

Don't get me wrong. I'm just asking.

TAPEWORM

No problem. It's a natural question. This is our house now.

SASHA

What did you buy it?

SVETA

No. We just moved in.

KID

Isn't that something. All right, Sasha, we're outta here. There's residents here now –

SASHA

What for? Listen, dude, we won't bother you for long. We've just got some business to take care of here–

TAPEWORM

No.

SASHA

Say what?

TAPEWORM

No, I said. This is our house. I won't put up with that here.

SASHA

And how do you plan to do that?

SVETA

Listen guys, let's not get started. He asked you nice –

KID

Sasha, don't make a nuisance of yourself. There's tons of these places. Let's just go to another. There's people living here. Let 'em alone.

TAPEWORM

If you want to know I can show you. (*Pulls out a crude homemade gun.*) It's loaded. You just light it here – (*pulls out a cigarette lighter*) and that's all there is to it. I tested it on a three-inch-thick slab of oak.

Then I'll cut you up. We'll keep the tender parts and the rest I'll throw out the window. This place is fucking swarming with stray dogs. In two hours' time there won't even be stink left of you. Is that clear?

SASHA

Fuck me. These guys are runaways. Here's what I'll tell you–

VICTIM

Hey, dude! Shoot these fuckers' asses! They're trying to kill me!

TAPEWORM

Fuck you. It's not my problem.

KID

No truer words ever spoken. You done time?

TAPEWORM

No. I just don't give a fuck about anything that doesn't concern me. And this house here is a place of peace. If anybody doesn't believe me, I'll shoot this fucker and throw him out the window.

SASHA

You shoot many people?

TAPEWORM

Nobody yet. But you can be the first.

SASHA

No problem, dude. We're outta here. This is your territory.

KID

Wait a second, Sasha. I want to ask him one question and that's it.

TAPEWORM

It's past our bedtime.

KID

Two seconds, bro. I just wanna ask – how come you guys are living here?

TAPEWORM

We like it here. And there's no place else anyway.

SASHA

Why's that?

SVETA

We're HIV-positive, dudes. We've got no place else to go. His folks made him eat out of a pan. And nobody talked to me for six months. Get it? Now get outta here. Leave us in peace.

KID

HIV, huh? Then put it here, bro! (*Extends his hand to Tapeworm.*)

TAPEWORM

You too?

KID

Three years. What about you?

TAPEWORM

A year.

SASHA

Fuck, Vitya! You've got HIV? What the hell didn't you tell me for?

VICTIM

Fuck my ass. I'm fucked.

KID

I'll fucking say –

TAPEWORM

You guys done now? Go on, get outta here.

KID

Sasha, I'll be right there, okay?

TAPEWORM

Now what?

SVETA

Hey, kid, if you don't mind, now, we'd like to get back to sleep.

KID

No, no, I... You guys really live here? Or just for now?

TAPEWORM

Forever. It's our house now. Forever.

KID

Would you guys mind too much if I, you know, came by sometimes to visit? We could sit and have tea or something. How do you guys get along here?

TAPEWORM

Stop by. I'm Tapeworm. She's Sunny.

KID

Did you guys pick those names yourselves?

TAPEWORM

Yep.

KID

Then call me Kid. That okay? Just Kid.

SVETA

Howdy, Kid.

TAPEWORM

Hello.

KID

This is so cool. How do you guys, uh, you got a stove or something? How do you guys stay warm?

TAPEWORM

However we can. There's a stove over there. Over here, under the bed, we put a box of hot coals. It's enough to keep us for the night.

KID

That's great. What about firewood?

TAPEWORM

There's plenty from the buildings all around us.

They're all wooden.

KID

So you can live here, huh?

TAPEWORM

Of course.

KID

There's one thing I don't get, though. Why not in the city?

TAPEWORM

We don't want to.

SVETA

Why should you live where your own mother makes you eat out of a tin pan? Or where everybody refuses to talk to you? It's good here. We go into the city if we want to get out. Go to the movies or something.

KID

Sounds good. But where do you get your money. To go to the movies –

TAPEWORM

I work.

KID

Where?

TAPEWORM

Wherever I can find something. Mostly unloading trucks. Most other places won't hire me. I'm still too young.

SVETA

I work in a store.

KID

And that's enough to live on?

TAPEWORM

Mostly, yeah.

SVETA

We don't need much.

KID

Well, that depends on what kind of life you want, I guess.

TAPEWORM

Who knows how to live? We used to live differently and we got HIV.

KID

I get your point.

TAPEWORM

Get outta here now. People are waiting for you.

KID

All right. But can I really come visit?

TAPEWORM

Sure you can. Write down my number and call before you come.

*Kid leaves.*

SVETA

What the hell did you give him your phone number for?

TAPEWORM

Why not? He's one of us. He's got a right to be here, too.

SVETA

What if he wants to come live here?

TAPEWORM

Why not?

SVETA

But why should he?

TAPEWORM

Because he liked it here. That's good when somebody likes where you live. People have to have the chance to grow, don't they?

SVETA

Meaning –

TAPEWORM

Meaning places have to grow, too. That's how cities happen.

SVETA

You want there to be a city here?

TAPEWORM

If it's going to be better than that one, why not?

### **6. 2+4+1+3 (It's Not Easy Being God)**

*New furniture has showed up  
in the house. The stove is  
now made of stone. Glass  
panes are now in the window  
frames. The ceiling is  
painted white. There is  
carpet on the floor. Shelves  
stand at the walls. On the  
shelves are pots, pans and  
books. There are flowers on  
the window sills.*

KID

Sveta, is the water hot?

SVETA

Yeah.

TAPEWORM

Vitya, pour me a cup, too.

KID

All right.

SVETA

*(Looks out the window).* These dogs are so wild. Why do they fuck so crazy?

TAPEWORM

They die fast so they fuck crazy.

KID

I heard on the radio today that Korn is coming to town.

SVETA

Yeah! I'd love to go.

TAPEWORM



That shit's decadent music. Doesn't interest me.

KID

Then Sveta and I'll go. I haven't been to a concert in ages.

SVETA

You want a concert? I'll make you sing. Who put the Bible in the bathroom? You got nothing else to wipe your asses with? We've got toilet paper. Let's be a bit more respectful of our books, gentlemen.

TAPEWORM

It wasn't me. I didn't even know we had a bible. How'd it get here in the first place?

KID

It was probably me. Sorry. I put a whole bunch of books in there for reading matter when we're just sittin' there... It must have been in with them.

SVETA

Where'd you get that in the first place?

KID

Probably when I was just casing joints, looking for things I might use –

SVETA

Pasha.

TAPEWORM

Yeah?

SVETA

Would you read us something from the Bible?

TAPEWORM

What the hell for? There's nothing about us in there. And everything else we know already.

KID

What do we know?

SVETA

What everybody else does. 'Thou shalt not kill. That shalt not steal or fuck in vain.

TAPEWORM

Don't fuck a woman who's not yours. Fucking in vain – that's jerking off.

KID

What's wrong with jerking off? Without that in prison everybody'd kill each other at the drop of a hat. Well, that and heroin, of course.

SVETA

Who gets smack into prison?

KID

You know, it's the priests who do it mostly. And they sell it during services. Nobody else is in there but

you. They fuckin' tap the bags or dilute the shit with flour or sugar or laxatives, the fuckers. But at least you can get it.

SVETA

The church is no better than the people who make it.

TAPEWORM

You got that right. They're all the same. So there's no point bitching about how everything's gone to shit.

KID

But that's not true, Pasha. It's just that whoever needs God goes and prays to him. He who needs smack, goes out and buys. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

SVETA

What's HIV then?

TAPEWORM

HIV is a gift.

KID

Yeah, right. Why is HIV a gift?

TAPEWORM

Because a person with HIV is a person closer to God. It cuts his life down to the period that Jesus lived. HIVpositives die right around 30 or 40.

KID

Meaning?

SVETA

I guess I get it. You mean if everybody –

TAPEWORM

If all of us would think that these last 15 years are our last, if everyone would just sit down and think for a few minutes, just give five minutes to thinking how these 15 years are our last –

KID

What? We'd be God?

SVETA

I dunno –

TAPEWORM

We will be. We all will be.

KID

Well, I doubt that –

SVETA

Me too.

TAPEWORM

Well, I don't. What's so strange about it? If you think about it, what did God do that was so great?

KID

He created the Earth. He did everything.

TAPEWORM

Exactly. He's already done all the hardest stuff for you. Now all you have to do is follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

KID

You think everyone can be like Jesus Christ?

TAPEWORM

I don't doubt it.

KID

You're fuckin' me.

TAPEWORM

I can tell you why.

KID

You're on. If you're right, I'll haul your share of firewood today.

TAPEWORM

Okay. What did Jesus Christ do?

KID

Well –

SVETA

He did lots of things.

TAPEWORM

He healed the sick. Any of us can become a doctor.

KID

Maybe. What else?

SVETA

Can you make water into wine? And can you walk on water?

TAPEWORM

That's a trick. If he did that, he did it like David Copperfield.

KID

So what's important then?

TAPEWORM

God healed and we can heal. God raised the dead and each of us can do that, too. All you've got to do is manage to be at the right place at the right moment and say, "Dying is stupid." And then stand up and go. It's amazing the powers you have –

KID

And what else?

TAPEWORM

What else? Don't kill? That's easy. Don't wage war? A snap. Don't fuck up other people's lives? It's harder pissing in a pot. Don't fucking go fucking everybody? What's so tough about that? Don't steal? That's the easiest one of all.

KID

And what about those, uh, friends of his? What do you call 'em? You know, that team around him.

SVETA

The apostles.

TAPEWORM

You think spending 20 years to convince 12 people to do good deeds like you is so difficult? You really don't think you could do that?

KID

What is this, the new gospel or something?

TAPEWORM

Now I like that: The Gospel According to Tapeworm.

KID

Yeah, yeah –

SVETA

Shit, if you're right... If only you were right, Pasha –

TAPEWORM

It's easy to test.

KID

Get outta here.

TAPEWORM

Live one day like that. It's not difficult. Just one day. 24 hours, during which time you get to sleep for 8. So it's just 16 hours. You can still eat and go where you want and take elevators and wait for busses and sit in cafes and watch movies in the evening. After all that there can't be more than 8 or 9 hours left. Is it really so difficult? Eight or 9 hours a day and you're God. Then another day. Then another. Don't you think it's worth it?

KID

Fuck, man –

SVETA

But you can't swear –

TAPEWORM

Why not? I'll bet Jesus cussed a blue streak when he chased the merchants out of the temple. The main thing is not to fuck up. God does not fuck up. We kill and screw everything up. That is why, and only that is why: He is God and we are people.

KID

Did we have to get HIV for that?

TAPEWORM

No. It's just easier for us. We only have 15 or 20 years of life left. We won't even get tired of being good.

KID  
Okay. I'll try it.  
TAPEWORM  
First go bring the firewood.  
KID  
Oh shit –  
SVETA  
Come on, wasn't he convincing?  
KID  
No, yeah, everything makes sense. I promised and I'll keep my word.  
(*Leaves.*)  
SVETA  
Do you really think it's that easy, Pasha?  
TAPEWORM  
It is totally not easy.  
SVETA  
And you think that's all there is to it?  
TAPEWORM  
Yep.  
SVETA  
You really believe all that?  
TAPEWORM  
I believe everything I say. Otherwise I believe there's no goddam reason to open my mouth.  
SVETA  
I still don't get it. You say it's not easy –  
TAPEWORM  
Of course it's not easy. Nothin' is easy for us, man. There's no way we should be living. But we are. So why shouldn't we make the extra effort and live a good life instead of just taking it as it comes? Why live like everybody else?  
SVETA  
But then you'll be all alone. Not like everybody else – that means going it on your own.  
TAPEWORM  
I've always gone it alone. In the corner, with my Bible and my tin food pan. And you've never been like everybody else. And now we're all not like everybody else. Why should we be like everybody else? And what does that mean, to be like everybody else? Can you say what it means?  
SVETA  
It means – having a family –  
TAPEWORM  
Depends on the family. A wife and a child isn't a

family yet. Sitting down at the same table every evening – that isn't a family yet. The main thing is – you know what it is?

SVETA

What?

TAPEWORM

To be the one-and-only. The very last one. Everything you do will never be done again by anyone. Everything you say will never be said again by anyone. Everybody you meet will gain something from you. You change everything you come into contact with. It's like you reach up and touch the sky every time. You know everything there is to know and you yourself expand knowledge deeper, wider and farther. Now that's a real person. Those would be real people. When every one of us is the last of our kind. When every one is unique. When you can't afford to lose a single one because you can't go on without him. Now that's life. Everything else is a fake.

SVETA

Do you think we're like that?

TAPEWORM

We can be like that. And we can do it faster than anyone else. Everything's in place. But only for us. That's why HIV is a gift.

*Kid returns. With him is*

*Marina, who is nearly frozen to death.*

SVETA

My God! She's white!

TAPEWORM

Where did you find her?

KID

Next door. I look over there and I see her burning newspapers. She can hardly talk.

SVETA

I wouldn't think so.

TAPEWORM

Wrap her up in a blanket, quick. And then put her next to the stove. Only not too close, like that –

KID

*(To Marina).* How're you doing? Huh? What are you doing out here?

SVETA

She doesn't look like a homeless person, does she?

TAPEWORM

No. Maybe she's a whore?

MARINA

No... no. Thank you. Thank you. God, it's cold –  
KID

I would think so, sweetheart. It's kinda\_like winter  
out there. You could throw a shoe trottin' around out  
there. Have you noticed?

SVETA

Just what she needs to hear from you –

TAPEWORM

Did you run away from home?

MARINA

No, I don't have a home.

KID

Just our type, then. Pasha, Sunny – what do you say? We  
let her in to get warm? Maybe she'll end up staying –

MARINA

I don't have a home... He used to be so good to me. He  
was so fine, but he's not anymore. Now he does nothing  
but drink.

SVETA

Look, she's covered in bruises.

TAPEWORM

Yeah.

KID

That's my job. (*To Marina.*) Somebody hurt you? What's  
his name? Where's he live? We'll get the car warmed up  
and go pay him a visit –

SVETA

Hold your horses! Do you see what shape she's in?

MARINA

He was so good. But I can't stand it anymore. He was  
fine. We had everything. We had everything. We had  
everything. We had everything. We lived better than  
anybody. Better than everybody. You know, it was like...  
we had –

TAPEWORM

Kid?

KID

Yeah?

TAPEWORM

You remember what we were just talking about?

KID

So?

TAPEWORM

You want to try it? Be like God?

SVETA

Pasha, this isn't the time for that.

TAPEWORM

You want to?

KID

What do I have to do?

TAPEWORM

You want her to stay. She'll stay. If you help her.

Remember? Be God. Make her want to stay. Make her smile. That's really being God. See to it that people don't die and that people are happy. (*Tapeworm leaves with Sunny.*)

MARINA

He was perfectly normal. Until he found out. Even then he was fine at first. And then someone said something to him. Someone told him it was the fucking end. And the shit hit the fan. He became someone else and I didn't have anyone any more. I don't have anyone anymore and he's been yelling at me for a month. I just... All I have is HIV. I don't have the plague. I'm not a leper. I'm not dying. There's nothing wrong with me inside. I just have HIV, it's just a sickness, it's just a sickness, IT'S JUST A SICKNESS AND NOTHING MORE, WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU ALL OVER ME FOR? WHAT THE FUCK DID I EVER DO TO YOU?!

KID

Shhh. Shhh. We've got it too. We've got it too. Look. Look. It's just us. We live here. You like it? Look, that's our stove. It used to be just a metal barrel. And then we put bricks around it and broke off an old stovepipe from another place. Pasha and I climbed up there and looked after each other until we got it down. Nobody fell and got killed. And you're not going to die either.

Now, let's go in here. By the way – you see that carpet on the floor? Sveta brought that back. She wanted to surprise us. She bought it and brought it back here herself – cut it to size and laid it out. We come back and we can't believe it – she's standing there grinning. We say, how'd you do that? And she says, You don't really fuckin' wanna know. She told us later, though. She forgot her gloves at home and she nearly froze her hands off. Like you, there. But that didn't stop her. She did it all herself. The cabbie wanted to help her but she told him no. Because first she wanted it to be a surprise and second she didn't want anybody to know we live here. So she did the whole thing with her own hands and she did it great. And everything's going to be great with you.



Look over here – you see that flower in the window?  
I stole that from the movie theater. I'll give it to  
you if you want. Come on. It's yours. It's yours to  
take care of now. It's some tropical kind of thing with  
these big leaves. It'll croak in a minute if somebody  
doesn't look after it. The main thing is that it will  
be grateful to you for taking care of it. Every day.  
It's a nice plant – it's not like all those people out  
there. Because it doesn't give a shit if you're HIVpositive,  
no. The main thing is that you have somebody  
nearby. Somebody who can't live without you. Then you  
won't die. Because you can't. Right? Okay, lie down  
now. Everything's going to be fine. I'll go get your  
things tomorrow. And that'll be it. Okay?

### **7. A Lesson about the World**

*A room in a big house. The  
place is outfitted  
beautifully. Several chairs  
stand in a semi-circle around  
a large pane of glass in  
place of a blackboard. Kid  
and Tapeworm sit on the  
windowsill and smoke into the  
open window.*

KID

Everything all right yesterday?

TAPEWORM

Fine. Were you warm?

KID

Love is the best warmer. Everything's great.

*They laugh.*

TAPEWORM

What's up today?

KID

I guess today's the first day of the new quarter. After  
that, who knows?

TAPEWORM

I guess there's no way avoiding school entirely. But  
basically we've got it better here than they do there.

KID

I'm with you on that all the way. Gimme five.

TAPEWORM

As for you. I've been wanting to tell you what a killer  
job you did back then.

KID

You, too – when I came here and stayed. Yeah. Because –

TAPEWORM

Because otherwise you wouldn't have come and stayed.

KID

Yeah, that's right. Because when you pointed that pistol at us, I'll tell you, my knees went a bit jelly. Man, you described it all so vividly what was going to happen – "We'll throw to the dogs whatever we don't want."

TAPEWORM

Tell you the truth? I was pissin' rivers in my pants. But that's the funny thing. You're pissin' rivers and a voice inside you starts talking and you hear it like it's coming from somewhere else. And you realize that this voice that's talking – it'll help you out. It'll squeeze the trigger if you don't. It'll take care of everything for you.

KID

So where's that voice come from?

TAPEWORM

I think it's God. He makes people answer for all the shit. Because all the real shit comes from God. And he's always right there when you're on the mark and you aren't blowing shit.

KID

You know, I could tell that. And that's why I came. You didn't look like a tough at all, but everything about you was tough. I saw you were ready with answers. I wanted to find out how that happened. I saw it right away you'd done time.

*Marina and Sveta enter the class.*

MARINA

Hello everybody.

KID

Hello.

TAPEWORM

Howdy.

MARINA

Shall we sit?

*Everyone sits on chairs.*

Today's lesson is a lesson about the world. You remember how on the first day of school they would always start us out with a lesson about the world?

Today I'm going to teach you a real lesson about the world. Let's talk about what the world means to us. How do we understand it. What does the word mean.

What we think it should mean. And why doesn't it mean what we think it should? All right?

KID

Only I want to say let's not do this for long. 'Cause me and Pasha have to go gather firewood and it takes a lot longer after dark. Plus, not all the dogs around here are on our side yet. And you can talk forever about the world. For example, I would –

MARINA

Okay, let's keep things in order and not talk out of turn. And don't forget to raise your hand? All right?

*Tapeworm raises his hand.*

Yes, Pasha?

TAPEWORM

Sveta should be the one.

MARINA

Ladies first? If you're ready, go ahead, Sveta.

SVETA

It's not so much that I'm ready, 'cause I think every person's ready. Every one of us, when we come into this world, is ready to come. Because everybody thinks the world is there specially for him. Think about that. Isn't that so? We grew up thinking we'd do it, that we'd become those people, these people we wanted to be – that we'd grow up and would basically be ready for that, to make the world what we thought it should be. And, for me, I kinda think we have. These buildings, these trees. The air we breathe. Our earth. It's me, it's you, my friends. Everything I know and everyone I know. You know what I've noticed? That all the evil that happens in the world happens because of people I don't know. I don't know a single bureaucrat. I don't know a single politician. And they don't know me. When I get to know somebody they immediately cease to be my enemy. This person can no longer do me any harm. Maybe that's because he knows now that I exist in the world. And so he tries not to fuck things up for me. I think if everybody knew us, if they knew us personally, then things would be a lot better. Then it would be a lot easier to elect a president because then you'd really know the person. And we wouldn't elect some moron.

MARINA

That's an interesting point of view. Anyone want to add anything?

KID

Can I?

MARINA

Of course.

KID

I just want to add one thing. The main thing is it's a shame they don't know us – I mean those of us who have HIV. They think we live in our own little world. That some of us got HIV because of drugs or somebody else or some other way and that that makes us some sort of... pirates or something. Like we live in a cave and we'll die there. So first of all I want to say that fuckin' hell we're going to die – they can choke on that if they want.

*Everybody laughs.*

Yeah. And second of all sometimes we understand everything a lot better. We know what's what. Nobody can ever kill any of us. Because we're all on short tethers already. We know what life is. Yeah? The only people who kill and send others out to kill are all healthy as horses because they don't give a flying fuck about anything. And that's all there is to it. All they care about is making a pile of money and that's what all the wars are fought about. Isn't that what you told us, Marina? Money is the root of it all. Everything else is just pissin' in the wind, isn't it? We don't have time to piss in the wind. Because we want to live. For me there's two worlds – theirs and mine. And mine's better. Because mine's real and in mine everything people do or say has real value. Because our measuring stick isn't money – it's time. If you do everything right, you live longer. You do it wrong, you just die. And dyin', man, that's really stupid shit. That's about all I got to say.

MARINA

Do you want to add anything, Pasha?

TAPEWORM

Yeah, I do, because –

*Tapeworm gets no chance to add anything because a bunch of cops burst into the room.*

FIRST VOICE

Just like they said.

SECOND VOICE

Okay, everybody. Line up nice and neat.

THIRD VOICE

What are you guys up to in here?

MARINA

Excuse me, but who are you? We're in the middle of a lesson.

FIRST VOICE

A lesson?

SECOND VOICE

Fancy, fancy here. Look at this, Pasha, they've even got flowers –

THIRD VOICE

I don't get it. What the hell is going on here?

MARINA

We're living our lives.

FIRST VOICE

Hell of a place to live!

TAPEWORM

Put that pot back where it belongs.

SECOND VOICE

Aren't we feisty? Get that warp outta your back –

KID

Listen, boss, take it easy, huh?

SECOND VOICE

Listen, smartypants. I know you. You're that fucker with AIDS, aren't you? I remember you recently –

FIRST VOICE

AIDS?

SVETA

He's got HIV. So what of it?

SECOND VOICE

I'll tell you what – you're all going down with us and we're getting' to the bottom of this –

MARINA

No.

THIRD VOICE

What's that?

MARINA

No. This is our home. We're not doing anything wrong. This building belongs to nobody. Nobody cares about this place. It was just falling apart.

SECOND VOICE

I don't give a fuck about this place. We came out here. We wasted our time on you. And now you're going with us. You got that?

THIRD VOICE

Come one. Move it! Get going. Explanations later.

TAPEWORM

No. I'm not going anywhere. This is my home.

FIRST VOICE

What's your name, kid?

TAPEWORM

You can call me Tapeworm.

SECOND VOICE

You want 'em spread-eagled in the snow?

KID

Think about your health, boss. We're at home here.

THIRD VOICE

Shut your trap, mother! You want to get your arms twisted?

*Tapeworm pulls out his  
homemade gun and aims it at a  
cop. Another cop pulls out  
his pistol and aims it at  
Tapeworm. Kid pulls out a  
high-powered slingshot and  
aims it at the cop. Cop  
number three unsnaps the  
safety on his submachine gun.*

SECOND VOICE

All right, drop your weapons motherfuckers! Asses on the ground! Face down!

KID

Don't cuss in here. You're in a schoolroom. As for this slingshot, I can put out a dog's eye with it, brother. So put down your shooter –

FIRST VOICE

Isn't there another way to do this?

TAPEWORM

You see, Marina? That's just what I wanted to say. The world is you and you alone. Everything else is war. War every day. War begins when you're still a kid. In kindergarten. Because I guess somebody like these assholes here dreamed up a world for themselves and now they try to make us all live like them. Not even HIV can save you from that. It can only save you from thoughts about death. Because death was dreamed up by assholes just like these guys. To give them something to threaten you with.

FIRST VOICE

Listen guys... and you, girl... Marina's the name, yeah? Let's settle this like civilized people. Nikita, put down your pistol. Valya, put that machine gun away.

SECOND VOICE

Only after them.

THIRD VOICE

So what are we going to surrender our weapons to every shithead who comes along?

SVETA

Shitheads?! God\_fucking\_dammit you motherfucking prick, who are the shitheads here?! You're the dick smacks that came barging in here. Our house. Guns drawn. And

you fucking molest our plants. You didn't even take off your goddamed shoes when you came in. You didn't say hello. You call us names and want to drag us down to the station just because we're here – and you call us shitheads? What do you want, you cocksucker? What do you fucking want from us?

*The wind blows a window open.*

*Snow blows into the room.*

KID

You dudes ought to make tracks while you still can. My fingers are getting tired. And this fucker splits bricks. I made it myself.

FIRST VOICE

All right, guys! Drop your weapons!

SECOND VOICE

You got your head screwed on right?

FIRST VOICE

I'm doing fine. Put down your fucking shit. What are your eyes all bugging out like Rambo for? What are these guys, felons? What did they do?

SVETA

We don't have anything, anyway. We've only got two months of summer. We can't eat anything. We take pills every two hours. Nobody'll talk to us but they call us all kinds of names. You pricks would hang yourselves after one week living like this. Our own parents chase us out of our homes. We're abandoned by everybody we loved all our lives. Nobody'll give us any work.

Everybody fucks us up the ass and they think we're going to die because of it. But we're alive. We're ALIVE, fuck it. Because everybody wants to live. More than anything on earth, people want to live. The want to LIVE, suck my ass, and there's no fucking ifs, ands or butts about that. What're you guys after? You want us to leave this place? We've done everything here and now you want us to leave? Go fuck yourself in your goddam nose, man, because this place belongs to us, not your cocksucking asses. (*She draws a knife from her sock and slits the wrist on her right arm. She makes a snowball out of the red snow at her feet.*) You ever read the Bible, you fucking horse prick? Eat my flesh, you cocksucker, because other than this snow, there is no other flesh in Norilsk! (*Flings bloody snow at the cop.*)

*Pasha reaches out to her;*

*Sveta cuts him with her*

*knife. With his other hand,*

*Pasha scoops up another ball  
of snow from the floor.*

#### TAPEWORM

Drink my blood because soon there will be no other  
blood left in Norilsk! (*Throws the snowball at the  
cop.*)

*Kid aims at the lamp overhead  
and fires at it. Darkness.*

*Shots in the dark.*

*Wind. Dogs bark.*

#### 8. The Polar Truth

*A circle of light. Kid stands  
in the middle. Talks to  
himself.*

-Hello.

-Hello.

-Hello.

-You coming today?

-Are you free?

-I am after nine.

-So early? How about the girls? They free?

-It's the boss's birthday today. Short day.

-Yeah? That's cool.

-You coming?

-I'll think about it.

-You'll think about it?

-Yeah. It's just that I have to pick Polina up today.

If I come with you, what am I going to do with her?

-Let's all go together.

-Together? With Polina, too?

-Why not? Here's the key –

-Wow! The key already?

-What's the big deal?

-Nothing –

-So go pick up Polina, then, and come over to my place.

You can have a normal bath at my place.

-All right –

-Well, good, then. I'll go out this evening and pick  
some things up. Something to go with tea or maybe a  
little gift for Polina or something. All right?

I want to live a normal life because here you can't  
live a normal life. Not me, not anybody else. That's  
just what this place is like. So that's my dream. A life  
like that. Where you just live a normal life. And  
nothing more. Everything else is money and what's the  
point of dreaming about that? People earn money, but a  
dream, that's... that's something you'll never have. On



the other hand, it's something that'll make you live  
your life in a way that might make your dream come  
true. Yeah. A dream – that's the truth. There's nothing  
else but dreams and truth.

*The circle of light.*

*In it stands Girl.*

The truth? That's what we are. Those of us who live.  
Who work. Who earn wages. It's people who don't beg for  
anything from anyone – gimme money, gimme trust, gimme  
an office, gimme taxes, gimme soldiers, gimme, gimme,  
gimme and I'll just go and do as I please. People like  
that don't know anything about life – look at all the  
sciences they went out and invented. Organizations.  
Administrations. Welfare offices. All that to explain  
to us why we still keep living so stupidly. But we  
don't live stupidly. We just live. We try to have  
children. We raise and educate them. We. Not they. We  
try to feed our families. We do that ourselves. Not  
they. The truth is me. The truth is we. It's every  
single individual. Not them. And that's all there is to  
it. Because we go for swims in the river. We like to go  
for walks. Sometimes we get our butts kicked and  
sometimes we kick butt if we care enough. All those  
people drive around in super\_duper, heavy-duty armored  
cars and they block off half of the beach for  
themselves with barbed wire so that people won't come  
and drown their fucking asses. Because they don't know  
the truth. They ain't got it. It's us. Not them.

*The circle of light.*

*Nettles+Dandelions stands in it.*

The truth, that's when you're almost dead and a friend  
comes to you and says, "Don't die, because if you die  
everything's going to be horrible." Or when it rains  
and you're cold and you think there's nothing worth  
anything left anymore and there's nobody around and you  
find a little money where you thought there was none  
and you go and buy yourself some pie and a kitten at  
the animal market. And you sit there together and you  
look at the rain and now it's nothing more than rain  
and there's nothing sad about it. The truth – that's  
everything that's good. Everything that's happened to  
us. Because good things happen all the time. With  
everybody. And bad – that's just an illusion, it's an  
untruth. Because everything bad ends sooner or later.  
It always comes to an end.

*The circle of light. Tapeworm*

*stands in it.*

The truth is HIV. Because HIV shows what a person's worth. In real terms. Ask yourself what you'd do if you were going to die in ten years. Your answer to that question will show how much truth you have in you.  
**THE END.**

*People everywhere are the same. We want the same things. We want to understand why the things we want are not happening and what we can do to make them happen.*

**Yury Klavdiev**

Yury Klavdiev was born in 1975 in Togliatti, a major center for automobile manufacturing in Russia. Although his grandfather organized the first theatre in Togliatti, Klavdiev himself felt little connection to this art form. He found acting difficult to believe and the aristocratic characters portrayed on stage seemed unconnected to his life. Instead, he spent his youth with the street gangs of Togliatti, while he secretly composed poetry at home. In 2002, however, he attended a production of Ivan Vyrypaev's *Oxygen* when a traveling version of Moscow's New Drama Festival visited Togliatti. The experience of seeing characters and subjects from a life that he recognized convinced him to start writing plays.

Klavdiev in his plays seeks to capture the real lives of those outside of privileged spheres in Russian society. His characters, who are often homeless or involved in criminal activity, both endure and inflict emotional and physical violence. They struggle for survival and attempt to understand their fate in a harsh world that mirrors what Klavdiev sees in his society. Children and teenagers hold a special place in Klavdiev's imagination and he often depicts young characters caught up in a world that forces maturity on them too soon. At the same time, he believes that his plays are written in between the real and ideal worlds. His characters express both despair at the way they see the world in the here and now as well as hope for the way they would like it to be. Critic John Freedman writes that the playwright "examines volatile loners and outsiders who precariously, though nimbly, maneuver on tight wires stretched between the poles of violence and tenderness."

Klavdiev's plays include *I Am the Machine Gunner*, *Martial Arts*, *The Bullet Collector*, *The Slow Sword* and *The Polar Truth*. He and his wife, Anastasia Moskalenko, wrote the children's play, *Piggy and Carp: A M-m-m-Monstrous Vegetarian Drama*. Productions of his plays have toured and been produced throughout Russia and Europe.

## A Conversation with the Translator

**David Gregory** speaks with **John Freedman** about the translation of *The Polar Truth*. Gregory, a third-year MFA Theatre student at Towson University, is working to create the first English translation of *Los Engranajes* (The Gears) by contemporary Spanish playwright Raul Hernandez Garrido. As Gregory's thesis project, the play will have its US premiere at Towson in February 2010.

**John Freedman**, theater critic of The Moscow Times, has published nine books on Russian theater. His play translations have been performed in the United States, Australia and Canada. He is the Russia director of The New Russian Drama: Translation / Production / Conference.

**DG: What was it about this particular play that led you to devote your time and passion to its translation?**

**JF:** I often come to the plays I translate through productions of them. If I see that a play works well on stage, and I can imagine it would work in other ways in other circumstances, it is likely to grab my attention. That happened when I saw Georg Genoux's production of *The Polar Truth* in Moscow at Teatr.doc. It struck me as a marvelous chameleon of a play that could be done in vastly different ways. I must add that, by the time I saw this play, I was already a big fan of Klavdiev's and I was dying to take a shot at putting him into English.

**DG: How did you approach the translation process for *The Polar Truth*? Did you work with the actors or director of a particular production of this play? If so, how did that affect the final translation?**

**JF:** I did this one as I have done most of my translations up to now. I found a play and writer that I loved and wanted to share with people in the United States, and so I went to work on it. In other words, I had no idea where this play might go, whose hands it might end up in. I just knew this writer needed to be known in the U.S. and I was determined to do something about that. When the Towson/CITD New Russian Drama program began picking up speed, it was natural that I would include this play among the many I was having people read at Towson. Actually, Daniel Ettinger was the first person I sent it to and he was quite supportive. I gave it to others, Robyn Quick included, and through Robyn the play ended up on course syllabi and found its way into the hands of Joseph Ritsch. Joseph saw something that spoke to him in the play and he chose to direct it. There you have it. That's how it worked with this particular play.

Before rehearsals began, Joseph and I discussed the play, the translation, the writer and the context during one of my short residencies at Towson. I have not discussed the translation with the actors or Joseph since he entered rehearsals. None of them have sent me any questions, so I can only assume and hope that they found the translation to be clear and effective.

**DG: How did your collaborative relationship with Yury Klavdiev surface? How much freedom does he and other playwrights give you in the translation process?**

**JF:** A brief chronology of my relationship with Klavdiev would be this. In early 2006 I saw three productions of his plays in Moscow and was mightily impressed. That same summer I attended a playwriting festival in Togliatti, Yury's hometown, where Yury staged and read an early version of

his extraordinary play *The Slow Sword*. It was a revelation with its references to Japanese anime, Tarantino films, Russian violence and thuggery, Russian sentimentality and Russian ethics. I introduced myself to Yury and did an informal interview with him for *The Moscow Times*. I ended up writing a couple of articles about him based on that fascinating chat. The following year, when I saw the production of *The Polar Truth*, I realized I wanted to take this "relationship" further.

Yury is a fabulous "collaborator." I did with his work what I always do: I translated the text quickly, stopping for nothing, rushing over what I didn't know or understand, and just getting a text down. What I do is flag everything I have questions about as I race through the translation, seeking in the first draft to capture the energy, the velocity, the ebb and flow of the work as a whole. My first drafts always contain more asterisks than words. Essentially, they are a collection of questions. I then go back and comb the sloppy new English text more carefully, checking it against the original. I do this several times until I am left with those problems I simply cannot solve with my own limited knowledge. This is when I approach the writer with specifics. Many such questions are often stupid. But the translator MUST know what he or she is doing. So if the question is stupid, I ask the writer's forgiveness, and I honestly pose stupid questions. I sent a ream of questions to Yury and he got back to me within a day. He provided clear, concise, explanations of everything. His command of his play, of what he wanted to say, of what might remain hidden in the text but needed expression, was striking. I had known before that he was a meticulous writer, but it was only at this point that I realized the full extent of his meticulousness.

**DG: Do you have a specific style of writing you like to incorporate into all your translations and how do you determine what style is best for the piece?**

**JF:** I suspect every translator does, indeed, have his or her own style. That is probably inevitable. We all have our own DNA, after all. However, our job as translators is not to express our own style, but that of the original author. One of the things you must do – to the fullest extent it is possible – is to, shall we say, "dissolve" into the original author's style. I think that is a more precise image than "blending." You really want to become one with the vision, the mannerisms, the outlook, the temperament of the author. I have translated very different writers – Olga Mukhina, Nikolai Erdman, Yury Klavdiev and Maksym Kurochkin come to mind immediately. These are four different planets – four different universes, actually. It's not for me to say how successful I have been working with them. But I know that I feel almost physiological changes coming over me as I work on their texts. I feel myself becoming informed by these dramatic worlds, becoming more tender, more caustic, less tolerant, more acerbic than I really am. This is one of the reasons, incidentally, that I try to get a first draft down as quickly as possible. It is not easy to go in and out of another person's mind and sensibility. I throw myself in, let myself drown in the vat of Mukhina's or Klavdiev's worlds, and work feverishly to get some sort of a whole before returning to my own reality.

**DG: What are your goals in a translation and how do you gauge the success of a translation of such as *The Polar Truth*?**

**JF:** I guess my goal is to bring out American qualities – things that Americans can identify with easily – without eclipsing the original Russian qualities. It is a hard thing to do, but the ultimate goal is to make an American audience aware of a foreign experience while also recognizing much in the work that is familiar.

**DG:** For our translators out there, what piece of advice can you give when embarking on a translation of their own?

**JF:** All I have to offer are paradoxes. Sometimes the best way to render a text faithfully is to violate it in some way. A perfect example is humor, one of the least translatable elements of any culture. I often do not try to create a joke or pun in the same place where one exists in the original. As I “lose” an author’s pun in one place, I know that a similar opportunity will arise in the English soon. I allow the structure of English – and I mean both the language itself and the structure of the way we formulate thoughts in English – to determine where the humor will make a natural, organic appearance.

But probably the biggest, most daunting piece of advice I can offer is this: A translator must not only know two languages, two cultures, two traditions and two histories, but he or she must also know what he or she does not know. Let that sink in a minute.

You must know what you do not know. You must recognize the outer limits of your own personal knowledge. You must sense when a phrase or scene implies more than what it actually communicates on the surface. These are the moments when you go to the author and say, “I know what you’re saying, but I don’t think I get everything you are implying.” It is a virtually impossible, but nonetheless crucial, task. The point is this; you must always doubt everything you write, even as you blindly trust your instincts. You must know that there are cultural allusions, literary quotes, personal quirks and political references lurking under the simplest of phrases. If you miss out on these, you are missing out on the whole drama of the play.

*The playwright biography and translator interview were created for the New Russian Drama season and appear on the project website at: [www.newrussiandrama.org](http://www.newrussiandrama.org).*

# FLYING

By Olga Mukhina

Translated by John Freedman

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*English Translation* © 2009

Translation developed in a workshop at Towson University as part of the “New Russian Drama Translation/Production/Conference (2007-2010)” hosted by the Center for International Theater Development (CITD) and Towson University.

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## *Author's Note:*

*This text was created according to the principles of verbatim. That is, it is an entirely documentary play. It is sampled, so to speak, from 15 interviews. It contains not a single phrase of my own unless it is the odd stage direction or a simple explanatory phrase. Even the incident with the window and the dog is the whole truth and nothing but. Believe me. All of this is life, like rain in July; this wintry snow is for you.*

*My heartfelt thanks go to: Mikhail Krylov, Yury Kolokolnikov, Pavel Derevyanko, Zhanna Tserulite, Mikhail Parygin, Lyuba Tikhomirova, Tikhon Pendyurin, Fyodor Lyass, Mitya Firapontov, Ilya Maximov, Dima Zemchenkov, Sasha Musakhanov, Yevgeny Kamenkovich, Mamontova & Dorogutin, O. Naumova, O. Martyanova, Valentina Borisovna Fyodorova, Lyubov Anisimova, the residents of Podberyozye, Gorodishcha and all my friends.*

MUKHINA.

## FLYING

### *M*

#### **Snowstorm**

*A freelance DJ*

#### **Blizzard**

*VJ and streetfighting man*

#### **Maniac**

*Promoter and BASE jumper*

#### **Volodya**

*Policeman*

### *W*

#### **Snowflake**

*Brunette, a vamp and a TV star*

#### **Lenochka**

*Blonde, cute, a media-planner*

#### **Orangina**

*Redhead, a glamorous beauty, a designer*

#### **Bushy-Tail**

*Light-brown hair, waitress, a beauty, a virgin*

Television studio employees, journalists, café clients, guests at the home of Maniac, people on the street, soldiers, dancers, “Yo-Yo” the pet dog.

## PART ONE

### FEAR

*A large office at the BCH television studio flooded with light.*

*The BCH initials are on everything. Five people sit at five computers. Maniac, who is a tall, handsome blond, Orangina, Snowflake, Lenochka and Bliżzard, a psychedelic-trance star and a charming, short-statured young man of about 26 with the face of a child and child-like eyes to match. All of them are at work.*

*There is a sixth – a young man also of about 26 with the pale face of a cherub, as if he were created to give women insomnia. He sits on a sofa, wears large silver headphones and leafs through a magazine. A small yellow case stands at his feet. He occasionally puts down the magazine and moves about the room, dancing and looking around. This is his first visit here – he is a stranger. All are dressed in black or dark blue tight-fitting clothes. Only Orangina wears orange. Lenochka wears a T-shirt emblazoned with the text, “Fuck Face Control,” and she has a big, black eye. She constantly looks at it in her mirror, touches up her make-up, powders the shiner and brushes it with toner. Snowflake wears a black blouse printed with “Sin” in red letters. The red straps of her bra occasionally slip seductively off her shoulders.*

*Snowflake takes tranquilizers three times a day and so is always very calm.*

*Music plays. People come and go, bringing things in, taking things out. The five sign papers. Maniac stamps official documents, draws something, leafs through glossy magazines. It is as though all of them have stepped out of one of these magazines – they are young, hip and attractive. Someone fiddles with computer or stereo wires; someone else is looking through compact discs. Maniac counts money. Someone wipes off a camera lens. Someone watches television; someone looks at a computer monitor. On some computer monitors we see the faces of Snowflake and Bliżzard – their faces are also on magazine covers and advertising posters. On one of the computer screens we see the words of the TV station’s slogan running continually: “No Fear in Love.” Someone smokes in the corridor and peeks in the door. The teapot whistles; someone is making tea, someone else – coffee. Someone is sitting beneath a palm tree, others beneath an aquarium. A big gold fish swims in the aquarium. Some*



*people are tired, others are sad and stare  
thoughtfully out the window. Outside the window there  
is snow, life, sun, blue clouds, cafes, cars, bustling  
people in scarves and winter hats.*

### **MANIAC**

The sensation reminds you of fear. You feel it between your solar plexus and your neck. Somewhere in the chest. You know it because you feel the desire to touch. You physically want to touch someone. To see, to hear, to smile and to be embarrassed.

### **BLIZZARD**

It's a chemical reaction.

### **MANIAC**

Nobody can define why it happens at this very moment with this specific person. Every telephone ring sets you on fire, every time you go out you hope you will see them.

### **SNOWFLAKE**

Nobody knows the secret.

### **LENOCHKA**

The meeting of two parallel lines.

### **BLIZZARD**

Nobody knows why it disappears.

### **ORANGINA**

You try to get it back, but it's not the same.  
*They work silently. It's obvious they've been working  
together forever; they're a tight-knit, well-oiled  
crew, as if they are relatives or a band of small  
monkeys. They are constantly in motion, never sitting  
still, always doing something and they have no idea  
they are being observed. Maniac likes Snowflake but  
Snowflake has all kinds of affairs going. She  
considers Maniac a friend. Blizzard is smitten with  
Orangina, he directs his every word at her. She  
pretends not to notice; she likes Snowstorm. In fact,  
all the girls like Snowstorm, although maybe that's  
only true because he's the newest one here – they all  
want to be the first one to win him. Lenchka has a  
husband; he's the one who gave her the black eye. She  
likes Snowstorm, too, but she is mortified because the  
shiner has made her less beautiful than she really is.  
All of them are extremely attractive; you want to look  
at them, to be next to them, to be their friends, to  
fall in love with them. Something about them gives off  
warmth, contentment, tranquility and a physical sense  
of pleasure.*

### **BLIZZARD**

I had a girlfriend, a ballerina, and we used to buy things in pairs – unisex. That way both of you can always wear the same

things.

**LENOCHKA**

It's that easy?

**BLIZZARD**

Not really. When she dumped me she took everything. Even the sheets. When I tried to stop her she hit me on the head with a chair.

**SNOWFLAKE**

She was absolutely firm in her decision.

**BLIZZARD**

The whole hall was bloody.

**MANIAC**

Did she find somebody else?

**BLIZZARD**

You know how girls do it.

**ORANGINA**

How?

**BLIZZARD**

To get rid of one guy they find a third they go live with and then they dump him. They just keep crab-legging it from guy to guy until they find what they want.

**MANIAC**

I asked a friend today if you can just walk up to a woman you like and put your head on her shoulder. He said you can.

**BLIZZARD**

Basically, that's what everybody does.

*Maniac goes to Snowflake and puts his head on her shoulder. Snowflake smiles and washes a tablet of some kind down with a drink of water.*

**SNOWFLAKE**

I finally decided today. I'm not going to love anybody anymore.

**ORANGINA**

Why's that?

**SNOWFLAKE**

I can't love anybody if they don't love me.

**MANIAC**

I can't either.

**SNOWFLAKE**

I'm only going to love when somebody loves me.

**LENOCHKA**

I feel this hatred welling up in me. Instantly. I don't know what it is.

**SNOWFLAKE**

I know exactly what you mean. And I'm perfectly aware of it as it happens.

**MANIAC**

It's the ego.

**SNOWFLAKE**

But that's what my love is like.

**LENOCHKA**

If I see somebody's getting frustrated with me, that's it. It's all over. The love boat has landed. On the rocks.

**SNOWFLAKE**

I know it sounds awful, like somebody handing down an irreversible verdict. It's not very Russian and it's not very feminine – but these mood swings have just become a part of my life.

*They work silently. Someone sighs, someone eats something, someone drinks something, someone goes out, another comes in, someone forgot something and came back in before going back out.*

**SNOWFLAKE**

I was walking down the street today and on the corner when I turned in from the left side, right there on that spot, I promised myself – this is it. I'm crossing out love and I'm never going to love alone again.

**LENOCHKA**

Yeah, let's put an end to solitaire love.

**ORANGINA**

What's he say about it?

**SNOWFLAKE**

He says, "Your skin drives me wild! Show me another man who can love you more than I do!"

**LENA**

How's that for an equation?

**MANIAC**

Yeah, but he doesn't know you're toying with him –

**SNOWFLAKE**

Is that what I'm doing?

**MANIAC**

Well, yeah –

**ORANGINA**

I need him, I need him not; I love him, I love him not

**BLIZZARD**

Good in the evening, bad in the morning

**ORANGINA**

Or the other way around

**SNOWFLAKE**

You know what he says to me? A thousand years ago people like me were burned at the stake

**SNOWSTORM**

Snowflake, that's a compliment

**SNOWFLAKE**

It is?

**BLIZZARD**

A hundred years ago you would have been stoned

**ORANGINA**

Poor women

**SNOWFLAKE**

I don't care what you say; I think women are an incredibly deprived lot

**BLIZZARD**

I mean, women have fear instilled in them from childhood

**SNOWFLAKE**

I mean, it's men that are afraid of women

**ORANGINA**

I mean, everybody's afraid of everybody

**MANIAC**

I mean, everybody's just afraid of fear

**LENOCHKA**

I'm afraid of darkness, maniacs, the cold, germs, snakes, spiders, heights, fast cars, policemen, guards, face-control, rude people, dogs, men and random sex

*Orangina looks out the window, beyond which another window is visible, as well as the window of a café, a really pleasant place where it smells of coffee and a waitress's hands are cleaning off a table and emptying ashtrays. A handsome young man named Volodya is drinking espresso and talking about something as he cracks and eats pistachios. The waitress, Bushy-Tail, looks like Twiggy. She has huge eyes, a smart little blue dress, long legs, a white apron and a chic, tidy hair-do. She is always smiling, humbly and modestly.*

**VOLODYA**

I think about women a lot. I think about them constantly. In fact, I don't think about women in the plural, but about one woman, one single woman. Of all the women I've ever met, I know not one could ever become my other half.

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Why not?

**VOLODYA**

Ah, for one reason or another. When people come together – it's a whole science.

**BUSHY-TAIL**

What about when they break up?

**VOLODYA**

No one person is ever to blame for breaking up. It's nobody's fault. It's just two puzzle pieces that don't fit.

*Volodya sips his coffee. Bushy-Tail leaves. Volodya is silent. Looks at her. Waits for her to come back. Looks out the window. Sees Orangina looking out her*

*window but he doesn't know her name. Bushy-Tail  
returns, replaces his ashtray.*

I've always been attracted to unhinged women, I guess you could say. I mean, the kind of girls who know how to stick up for themselves, the kind that can really stick it to you. But I've always wanted someone defenseless and fragile so that she'd be the kind I'd be able to protect and take care of.

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Can you do that?

**VOLODYA**

You know, I never leave anyone in the lurch. Anybody's secrets are safe with me. If you ever end up on an uninhabited island with me – you won't go hungry.

*The office. People are coming and going. The group of six is constantly surrounded by a crowd of faceless people. Five of them are working. Snowstorm is always up and dancing. Somebody sighs. Lenochka puts make-up on her eyes. Somebody's looking at the clock; somebody's washing their hands. Snowflake sprays on some perfume. Somebody's cleaning their desk, somebody's putting something on, somebody's taking something off, somebody's getting ready to go somewhere.*

**LENOCHKA**

I think women are made purely for decoration

**ORANGINA**

*(Taking Snowstorm's photo)* Those are just childish illusions

**LENOCHKA**

Why did people invent Faberge eggs or Feng Shui?

**SNOWFLAKE**

I would really like to settle down. Become soft, calm and caring. But I'm so sensitive. I like it when people care for me

**MANIAC**

People ask God for love even though they haven't the vaguest notion what it is. What a nightmare.

**LENOCHKA**

I'm afraid of falling in love

**BLIZZARD**

Why?

**LENOCHKA**

I can't. I'm married

**ORANGINA**

I fall in love once a year

**SNOWFLAKE**

I never do

**BLIZZARD**

Being in love should be more controllable the older you get. But

—

### **ORANGINA**

Whenever I fall in love I am all nerves

### **MANIAC**

Love is a damned psychosis. Last fall I liked this one girl so much my knees went weak. I prayed to God, “Lord, bring her back to me. Bring her back.” And what do you think happened? What came of all that? Six months of nagging ailments.

### **LENOCHKA**

*(Reading from a book)* An obsessive thought of a yellow-black aura evoked by the constant reconsideration of a certain individual of the opposite sex

### **SNOWFLAKE**

All you have to do is redirect the energies of love

### **LENOCHKA**

The older you get, the less there are

### **BLIZZARD**

Love is destiny putting you to the test

### **MANIAC**

It's destiny having a systems failure

*The café. People are coming and going. Music plays against the sound of tinkling forks, plates, knives, glasses, cups and saucers. It smells of cinnamon, honey and hot apple cider.*

### **BUSHY-TAIL**

Are you married?

### **VOLODYA**

No.

### **BUSHY-TAIL**

Why not?

### **VOLODYA**

I had a girlfriend. She was a ballerina. I had really strong feelings for her. They still surface at times. Like a time bomb or something. We used to meet in corridors and dark corners, there was never anything official about it like I would have liked. She always denied it all and she begged me never to tell anyone about us. “If you tell anybody, I’ll kill you,” she used to say. That’s the kind of girl she was

*Through the big window the six are seen leaving their office and going out onto the street. One breathes in the fresh air, another lights a cigarette and stands looking around with satisfaction. Snowstorm forgot something and goes back inside. Everyone waits. The girls are beautiful and flirtatious and they look towards the window of the café. Snowstorm returns with a yellow suitcase. Everyone waves their arms in different directions; they can’t come to a consensus*

*about where to go. Big snowflakes fall on them all. Someone is cold, others are not. Someone goes back in for a hat or a scarf. Others fumble as they put on gloves or mittens, taking them off, dropping them, picking them up as they cross the street while others catch up with them. One tries to hold another's hand, but the hand is pulled back before it can be clasped. Someone pulls up a collar or a hood; someone puts on glasses. They laugh.*

And then this guy shows up in a white Lexus. Makes a ton of money a month, all real cool-like. A DJ or something. Talk about being outgunned. I tried to make her see sense, tell her it was just a fling, but people don't hear anything at moments like that. So she packed up her bags and she was gone. I even wanted to marry her. But it turned out she didn't love me.

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Why not?

**VOLODYA**

I don't know. Probably because she was afraid of ruining her reputation.

**BUSHY-TAIL**

What's that supposed to mean?

*The six enter the café, which is packed and noisy. They shake snow off their coats as they remove them. It seems they are endlessly taking things off, coats, scarves, hats, gloves, mittens, until they finally get down to their beautiful, bared shoulders, bare midriffs and thighs. They take seats, read the menu, someone walks by, someone else recognizes someone and waves, someone moves in front of someone, somebody makes room for somebody else who couldn't find a seat, somebody scoots over, others bring a chair, while others move over to a table by the window and people exchange seats. Someone recognizes Snowflake and Blizzard and points a finger at them. Someone opens his mouth...*

**MANIAC**

When you start looking for things in love, there's nothing left to find

**BLIZZARD**

What's dangerous is sudden moves

**LENOCHKA**

Why?

**MANIAC**

Because then the search is expanded. And there's a whole universe out there. Whatever you want to find is out there to be found.

**BLIZZARD**

It all happens suddenly. You don't have time to think. Any person with brains figures that out sooner or later

**LENOCHKA**

Love dies anyway

**ORANGINA**

And so fast

**LENOCHKA**

But why?

**MANIAC**

Because whatever it is, it's already been done

**LENOCHKA**

Who?

**MANIAC**

Who? Partners. Lovers. People. A human. One, two

**BLIZZARD**

It all comes down to sex

**MANIAC**

Is that before you know it's love or after?

**SNOWFLAKE**

And you've got to have education of some kind

**SNOWSTORM**

At least elementary

**BLIZZARD**

Basically it's a very difficult thing, all these physical signs

**BUSHY-TAIL**

*(Approaches with a notepad and pen)* Whiskey? Tequila? Two whiskeys and one tequila? One? One whiskey and two tequilas? Gold or silver?

**MANIAC**

*(To Snowflake)* What're you gonna have? To drink?

**LENOCHKA**

If a woman takes the time to answer, then she's already said "yes" to everything he has in mind. And that's all there is to it. It's horrible. There's nothing more horrible than that. A random affair in the making.

**BLIZZARD**

That's what destroys our youth

**MANIAC**

If only

**SNOWFLAKE**

Carrot juice

**ORANGINA**

And orange juice

**MANIAC**

I suggest a compromise

**BUSHY-TAIL**



A carrot-orange cocktail?

**MANIAC**

And a salad of some kind

**BUSHY-TAIL**

What kind?

**MANIAC**

Herbs

**LENOCHKA**

And herbal tea

**BLIZZARD**

Green tea

**BUSHY-TAIL**

With jasmine?

**SNOWFLAKE**

And orange pekoe

**BLIZZARD**

I need a vitamin boost

**SNOWFLAKE**

And dessert

**ORANGINA**

Make that two

**SNOWSTORM**

I don't know what I want

**BUSHY-TAIL**

The fish plate's good

**SNOWSTORM**

I hate fish

**BUSHY-TAIL**

It's very good

**BLIZZARD**

*(Takes Bushy-Tail by the hand)* If it's not will you have dinner with me?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Try it

**SNOWSTORM**

I'll chance it

*Volodya puts on his coat and scarf, all the while keeping a close eye on Bushy-Tail, no matter where she goes. He casts a suspicious glance at Blizzard, waves to Bushy-Tail, pointing to his watch. She nods back at him, as if sharing with him something only they know.*

*Volodya goes out into the snowstorm on the street. The café is filled with music, the television is tuned to BCH, on which the TV star Snowflake is seen reporting the news but without sound.*

You're a lot more elegant in real life than on screen

**SNOWFLAKE**

The screen adds twelve pounds

**LENOCHKA**

Really? I didn't know that

**SNOWFLAKE**

Do you like my eyebrows?

**ORANGINA**

*(Taking Snowflake's picture)* Oh, yes

**LENOCHKA**

I bought some new boots

**MANIAC**

I want some just like that. Do they have big sizes?

**LENOCHKA**

I'll ask if you want

**ORANGINA**

*(Smelling Snowflake)* I just love the way you smell

**SNOWFLAKE**

*(Her cell phone rings with the melody from "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg." She doesn't answer it.)* With his love he pours molten copper over my head

**MANIAC**

If you aren't part of the solution, you're part of the problem

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Here's your fish plate

**BLIZZARD**

Why don't you join us?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

You haven't even tried it yet

**SNOWSTORM**

The smell alone is making me sick to my stomach

**BLIZZARD**

I love fish

**SNOWSTORM**

What's your name?

**MANIAC**

Her name's Bushy-Tail

*A small book of some kind falls out of Bushy-Tail's apron. Orangina picks it up.*

**ORANGINA**

*(Photographing first the book and then Bushy-Tail)* What are you reading?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

A biology textbook. I want to be a doctor

**SNOWFLAKE**

*(Gagging)* Are you kidding?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Why?

**MANIAC**

You're too beautiful

**BLIZZARD**

Order something for yourself

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Another time

**MANIAC**

I'll take care of this

**BLIZZARD**

Tell me, Bushy-Tail, what do you love more than anything on earth?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Macaroni and cheese

**BLIZZARD**

Is that bizarre? I do too.

**BUSHY-TAIL**

And boiled onions

**BLIZZARD**

You're joking

**BUSHY-TAIL**

No, it's true

**BLIZZARD**

I thought I was the only person on earth who loved boiled onions

*Bushy-Tail leaves, clears something from the table, brings back another order, is always efficient and on time with everything. She seems to be everywhere at once. People are walking all around. Blizzard is seen on the TV screen.*

**SNOWSTORM**

Do you have the sensation that the world revolves around you?

**BLIZZARD**

Non-stop almost

**ORANGINA**

And that everything around us is a lie?

**BLIZZARD**

I have the feeling people confuse the truth for what it's not

**SNOWFLAKE**

She really is a pretty girl

**ORANGINA**

She has such delicate wrists, slender ankles and such an androgynous figure

**BUSHY-TAIL**

*(Appears)* What kind of figure?

**LENOCHKA**

Two huge eyes

**BUSHY-TAIL**

I've never considered myself pretty. Not for five minutes

**ORANGINA**

You could be a trend-setter  
**SNOWFLAKE**  
 God wanted to make her a handsome boy  
**SNOWSTORM**  
 But changed his mind at the last minute  
**MANIAC**  
 Come on, Bushy-Tail, have a drink with us  
**BUSHY-TAIL**  
*(Speaks and disappears)* I don't drink or smoke  
**LENOCHKA**  
*(To Snowflake)* Did you quit smoking?  
**SNOWFLAKE**  
 I never smoked to begin with  
**ORANGINA**  
 You don't know how lucky you are  
**SNOWFLAKE**  
 I have lots of other flaws  
**BLIZZARD**  
*(To Bushy-Tail)* Where do people like you come from?  
**BUSHY-TAIL**  
*(Appearing)* The Far North  
**LENOCHKA**  
 Just what I thought for some reason  
**BUSHY-TAIL**  
 Where are you from?  
**MANIAC**  
 The eternal question – whence have we come?  
**SNOWFLAKE**  
 It's because she's so natural, sincere and photogenic  
**ORANGINA**  
 How old are you, Bushy-Tail?  
**BUSHY-TAIL**  
 Me? I'm seventeen. What about you?  
**ORANGINA**  
 Me? I think I'm twenty-five. I don't remember  
**SNOWFLAKE**  
*(Hands Bushy-Tail a business card)* Call me this evening  
**BLIZZARD**  
 Don't be afraid  
**ORANGINA**  
 BCH  
**BUSHY-TAIL**  
 What's that?  
**BLIZZARD**  
 Don't you watch television?  
**BUSHY-TAIL**  
 No

## **SNOWFLAKE**

“Love Knows no Fear”

## **BLIZZARD**

Definitely give it a watch

*Outside. Volodya walks along the street looking in shop windows, shivering from the cold. He stops in a store, shakes the snow off his shoulders, looks over the men's clothing then moves on to look at the women's clothing. Looks at the hats, tries on one, another, a third, standing before the mirror, gazing at himself from all possible angles. Takes off the hat, puts it back in its place and walks back out onto the street.*

*In the café it's warm. Someone is even dancing; someone has walked away, another has returned. Someone is still eating, someone is drinking. Snowflake reads a book, Snowstorm drinks whiskey on ice, smokes and people watches.*

## **SNOWSTORM**

I was totally phased out by helplessness, uselessness, moneylessness – I left my wife. I went to another city to live with a friend. I wasn't doing anything at the time, just playing some music, writing some poetry, and I remember how everything just came crashing down on me. I was writing these really gruesome, depressing poems with suicidal overtones. They came under the title of “Me Searching for Glory.” They were about this guy lying in a bathtub who slits his wrists and realizes that the only thing tying him to the real world is his girlfriend who he really loves and empathizes with. These poems were colored by the dramatic experiences of a friend of mine – he'd split up with his girlfriend, too. She was a ballerina. And the last line went like this:

She'll return to me, of course,

Some other Monday morn.

But today the end is my goal.

A knife is my compass,

My heart is my atlas.

And then it all ends with a lot of howling. The only things I had to my name were a towel, three books, forty rubles and 200 records. Two hundred records was the sum of my life. That's the exalted state I lived in at the time. I was a genuine maniac. A maniac of despair.

## **MANIAC**

*(Peering over Snowflake's shoulder)* What are you reading?

## **SNOWFLAKE**

I'm rereading Nabokov.

## **MANIAC**

You break my heart. That's my favorite writer.

**LENOCHKA**

So what do you do when you're not working?

**MANIAC**

I swim. That's why I have big shoulders

**ORANGINA**

That's beautiful (*Takes Maniac's photo.*)

**BLIZZARD**

I like track and field, myself

**LENOCHKA**

You run fast?

**BLIZZARD**

I wanted to run to the sun when I was a kid

**MANIAC**

What is that food you're eating?

**BLIZZARD**

Bread, mushrooms and cheese

**MANIAC**

I've got greens of some sort

**LENOCHKA**

Vitamins

**MANIAC**

I wonder who the first guy to eat greens was

**LENOCHKA**

Our neighbors used to complain to my mother that I sniffed the grass

**SNOWFLAKE**

You get in trouble?

**LENOCHKA**

She says, what do you sniff grass for?

**MANIAC**

Really

**SNOWSTORM**

My mom still has no idea that I smoke and use psychotropics

**BLIZZARD**

Is that already a beer you're drinking?

**SNOWSTORM**

Beer and coffee

**LENOCHKA**

Ooh, yuck

**MANIAC**

What are your blinies with?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Kiwi and strawberries

**LENOCHKA**

Mine are with chocolate

**ORANGINA**

Mine are with honey and lemon juice

**SNOWSTORM**

Don't non-conformists live well?

**MANIAC**

But we die young

*Volodya walks along the street outside, stops in front of a woman's lingerie store, goes inside, warms up his hands, looks at his watch, gets embarrassed, leaves, goes back in the opposite direction, enters the previous store, tries on hats again – one, another, a third. Finally chooses one and buys it, puts it on and goes back out on the street.*

*In the café the six pay their bill and prepare to leave. Someone washes his hands, others endlessly keep putting things on while somebody helps someone else put something on.*

**BUSHY-TAIL**

*(Looking over the business card. To Orangina, who takes her picture) What do you do?*

**ORANGINA**

I'm a designer. I make everything beautiful. You know how that is?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

*(Nodding in the direction of Maniac) What about him?*

**MANIAC**

I have the luxury of doing nothing whatsoever at the moment.

Sometimes my friend and I (*embraces Blizzard*) hire prostitutes and we film it on video

*Blizzard gags. Bushy-Tail's eyes get real big.*

*Orangina takes advantage of the moment and photographs it.*

**LENOCHKA**

Ooh, yuck

**SNOWFLAKE**

That's his stupid idea of a joke

**BLIZZARD**

Want some chewing gum?

**LENOCHKA**

Is it strawberry?

**ORANGINA**

My favorite

**SNOWFLAKE**

My perfume is strawberry

**SNOWSTORM**

I've been wondering how come it smells so sweetly of strawberries

**LENOCHKA**

*(Takes the chewing gum from Blizzard's hand and then takes his hand in hers)* What an interesting hand. Now, now, now, now, now – let's look at this in the light

**MANIAC**

What about me?

**SNOWSTORM**

Do you believe in palm readings?

**MANIAC**

Tell my fortune

**BLIZZARD**

What do you see?

**MANIAC**

What are you looking so hard for there?

**SNOWSTORM**

Careful, Lena. He's jumpy

**LENOCHKA**

You have a very strange life line

**BLIZZARD**

Why?

**LENOCHKA**

Because it breaks off

**BLIZZARD**

Okay –

**SNOWSTORM**

So now you live on with the weight of this painful paranoia hanging over you

**MANIAC**

How much time does he have left?

**LENOCHKA**

You have about –

**MANIAC**

The years are numbered

**BLIZZARD**

*(Pulls his hand away, hugs it to him)* Knock it off. I don't want to know.

**LENOCHKA**

I realize, you probably shouldn't do that

**SNOWFLAKE**

That's serious stuff

**ORANGINA**

You have a beautiful T-shirt. What's that written on it?

**LENOCHKA**

Angels don't weep

**ORANGINA**

What about yours?

**SNOWSTORM**

Masturbating is no crime



**MANIAC**

What do you think?

**ORANGINA**

I think it's a sin

*Snowstorm has left, but he comes back.*

**SNOWSTORM**

I forgot my case

**BUSHY-TAIL**

I thought I saw someone forgot a case

**SNOWSTORM**

*(Picking up his case)* That was me

**BUSHY-TAIL**

*(To Snowstorm)* I forgot, what's your name?

**SNOWSTORM**

Blizzard

**BLIZZARD**

Blizzard – that's me. He's Snowstorm. "There once lived two fine friends – Snowstorm and Blizzard." You know that song?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

No

**BLIZZARD**

That's about us. He wrote the lyrics. I wrote the music

**SNOWSTORM**

But we'll sing that for you another time

**BUSHY-TAIL**

How come you have such funny names?

Olga Mukhina, "Flying": © 2004. Translated by John Freedman: © 2009. 26

**MANIAC**

Because they're homosexuals

**BLIZZARD**

He's joking

**SNOWSTORM**

Does that bother you?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

I don't care

**SNOWSTORM**

Somebody gimme a smoke

**BLIZZARD**

Here

**MANIAC**

You like to dominate?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

*(Remaining alone. Looks over the business card)* In the Far North there's never anything to do. There's nothing except theater.

And in the Far North women really dress up beautifully to go the theater. It's not like here. People here just wear whatever they wore to work when they come to the theater. Where I come from,

women put on evening gowns and jewelry, and they never fail to put on heels. When you walk to the theater the fresh sea air comes in and it smells like fresh-cut cucumbers. That means the fishermen are beginning to sell their day's catch of smelt – that's a kind of fish. It smells like fresh cucumbers.

*The six are out on the street. They head in the direction of the office, slowly, deliberately, taking their time, chewing their gum, looking around, sometimes just stopping and standing there. Once again, someone forgot something, so they went back to get it. Someone puts on glasses, someone else takes something off and asks another to try it on. They exchange clothing and laugh, looking at their reflections in storefront windows and car windshields. Someone pulls out a make-up case, someone else steps off to the side and talks on their cell phone.*

### **SNOWSTORM**

Unlike you I simply have no talent for talking to women. For some reason I start lying immediately

### **BLIZZARD**

You just have to think that they have nothing you want

### **SNOWSTORM**

But that's not true

### **MANIAC**

Just pretend it is

### **BLIZZARD**

Coffee, ice cream with mint and don't look 'em in the eye

### **SNOWSTORM**

I do just the opposite. I look deep into their eyes

### **BLIZZARD**

She'll think, "how come he's not looking at me"

### **MANIAC**

You look at 'em later

### **SNOWSTORM**

I made a date for dinner with this one girl. I call her up and confirm and then I come to pick her up and call her and she hangs up on me

### **MANIAC**

What the hell are you confirming? Dinner dates aren't office jobs, you know

### **BLIZZARD**

Did you talk to her about love?

### **SNOWSTORM**

What's there to say about love on the phone?

### **LENOCHKA**

Women don't accept commands

### **ORANGINA**

Women only understand presents and aromas

**MANIAC**

Women have to listen to everything all the time, to convince themselves and others that they are wanted 24/7. That used to be done by letters, now it's telephones and text messages

**BLIZZARD**

People have started hiding behind text messages

**MANIAC**

Orgasm. Sex only in words, only in text messages. Without that you've got a temper tantrum

**BLIZZARD**

Her underwear didn't match her eyes

**MANIAC**

And she already wore that dress last time

**BLIZZARD**

To another restaurant

**MANIAC**

And not with him

**LENOCHKA**

You are exceedingly cynical

**MANIAC**

I can't deny what's true

*They ascend in a transparent glass elevator, shake off the snow, take off their gloves, mittens, caps, and scarves and wipe off their foggy glasses.*

**LENOCHKA**

Sex for men is a sport

**MANIAC**

The kind of sex where you go and come – that strikes me as something savage. You kind of want something more

**ORANGINA**

Everyone dreams of happiness

**MANIAC**

Or of sex

**SNOWFLAKE**

Is there anything sacred in your life, Maniac?

**MANIAC**

No. You can't serve God and mammon. You can't sit on two chairs at once

**LENOCHKA**

Snowstorm, are you married?

**SNOWSTORM**

No

**LENOCHKA**

Why not?

**MANIAC**

When the evaluations begin – all these “are you married, I'm not

married” – that’s it. From there on even the slightest minus becomes a huge tragedy. Everything should be absolutely ideal

### **SNOWSTORM**

I’ve got some numbers in my cell phone belonging to girls who send me messages sometimes. Most of them are exes, women I’ve been involved with. Sometimes I have sex with them

### **BLIZZARD**

It can happen to anyone

### **ORANGINA**

But not everyone

### **BLIZZARD**

Sometimes it’s really hard to jive different sex drives

### **ORANGINA**

You’ve got to understand them to do that

*The café. Volodya drinks an espresso. Bushy-Tail eats pistachios out of his bowl.*

### **BUSHY-TAIL**

So what was she afraid of? You were telling

### **VOLODYA**

She was ashamed of me because she said I was just a sergeant

### **BUSHY-TAIL**

*(Impressed)* You’re a sergeant?

### **VOLODYA**

First I was a junior sergeant. Then, after 14 days, I made senior sergeant

### **BUSHY-TAIL**

That fast?

### **VOLODYA**

For service to my country. When I was out on a mission. True, they wanted to discharge me later, ’cause I wasn’t the only one who got a promotion. We were out celebrating that. And nobody ever celebrated big events like that without me. I ripped off my stripes and I said, leave me alone – I’ll just be a regular soldier. But they changed their minds later. Before the army I studied agriculture in college.

### **BUSHY-TAIL**

Isn’t that something

*The office. People walk around and leave. Five people sit at five desks, working at their computers.*

*Snowstorm keeps dancing. He’s wearing silver headphones. People are drinking coffee and tea, others feed the gold fish. Snowflake and Blizzard are having their make-up done. Orangina takes photos as someone is hooking wires up to something. Maniac signs pieces of paper as others come and go.*

### **SNOWFLAKE**

If a man and a woman come to an agreement, then, yes, mutual

understanding of some kind is possible

**MANIAC**

Nobody understands anybody. Everybody only understands their own desires

**BLIZZARD**

Eat, drink and sleep

**SNOWSTORM**

It's hard for anyone to see beyond the end of his own nose

**LENOCHKA**

The only thing anyone knows well is what he wants

**SNOWFLAKE**

If someone can clearly define his desire, then something may come of it

**MANIAC**

What if he wants sex? Does he get it?

**SNOWFLAKE**

What if he wants a fairy tale?

**LENOCHKA**

Rules are what we want

**SNOWFLAKE**

We don't do things by consensus, we just follow our feelings

**LENOCHKA**

Irrationality is a woman's only logic

**BLIZZARD**

*(To Orangina)* Admit it. That's true

**MANIAC**

Let's go to my place and watch a movie

**LENOCHKA**

That's the second "yes" a woman says: If a woman agrees to go to the movies, then that's all she wrote

**MANIAC**

If only

**BLIZZARD**

For love a woman must have three things

**SNOWFLAKE**

What?

**BLIZZARD**

First, a stopwatch

**LENOCHKA**

Why's that?

**BLIZZARD**

So as not to open her mouth for more than six seconds

**MANIAC**

Forget all that la-la-la bla-bla-bla chicky-chicky sis-boom-bah

**BLIZZARD**

Remember: you have only six seconds. Men understand only short, unambiguous commands

**MANIAC**

And don't back a man into a corner

**BLIZZARD**

Family life is just like life on the job. Right-left, gimme your hand, sit, when, how much, and where. Wednesday evening, Tuesday. I can make it Wednesday, Wednesday at five, all right

**LENOCHKA**

What's the second?

**BLIZZARD**

The second is a black belt

**SNOWFLAKE**

Karate?

**BLIZZARD**

A classic black belt

**ORANGINA**

What's the third?

**MANIAC**

The third is that there is only one foreign language. And you have to learn it

**BLIZZARD**

That language is called the male language. You have to learn to speak to men in their own language

**LENOCHKA**

How do you learn it?

**BLIZZARD**

You simply have to forget Russian. And learn three phrases.

These three phrases are very difficult to pronounce. (*Counts off on his fingers.*) I'll wait for you. I love you. I kiss you. And then in the opposite order. Kiss you. Love you. Waiting for you.

**MANIAC**

And no philosophical, psychological or religious conversations

**LENOCHKA**

Why not?

**MANIAC**

It's forbidden

**BLIZZARD**

One way or another, they lead to fights

**LENOCHKA**

What do you talk about then?

**MANIAC**

You have to understand each other without words

**SNOWFLAKE**

But understanding is very difficult

**MANIAC**

There's a lot of zeroes on the end

**SNOWFLAKE**

A man and a woman can understand each other on an animalistic

level, that they want each other, that they want tenderness and understanding

**LENOCHKA**

They themselves don't know what that means

**SNOWFLAKE**

It's all very mystifying

*Bushy-Tail and Volodya walk down the street.*

**VOLODYA**

I was christened when I was sixteen years old. I was big. I believe everything that has anything to do with God. Do you?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Yes, I do believe

**VOLODYA**

I went into the army and I had this cross. I lost it in combat training. I lost my cross. Basically all we did was beat each other's faces in. And then a week later at five in the morning we get into formation in the yard in full combat dress and they do the roll call and say, "You're going to Chechnya." You don't question orders. On the runway at the airport this guy approached us. He says, "You guys are going on a mission and I've got crosses for you. Only I don't have enough for everybody." It goes without saying that I didn't get one. There were 54 of us. We didn't have enough ammunition to go around. Naturally, there wasn't enough for me. They passed me over. But all I could think of is that I didn't have a cross. And with no ammo all that stuff just starts to overwhelm you. Bad, bad thoughts.

**BUSHY-TAIL**

How could you not have ammunition?

**VOLODYA**

They gave me some later. Later on there was plenty of everything. One day we were cleaning out one house. It was obvious Russians lived there. There was a small icon right where you'd expect one to be in the corner of the room. The place looked like a hurricane hit it. We went in, looked around and I sat down on a chair. I felt something poking me underneath. I stood up and looked and there was this cross lying there. So, you see? I found one. I haven't taken it off since.

**BUSHY-TAIL**

They say you shouldn't wear someone else's cross.

**VOLODYA**

Yeah, I've heard that; about taking on somebody else's sins. But I found that one there and I've had no problem. After that luck was on my side. A grenade blew up three feet from me and I didn't have a scratch. I don't know if that was a fluke or what. Everybody thought I was dead meat but it didn't even touch me. Except I went deaf for awhile. Not a scratch. And now I've met

you.

*Volodya and Bushy-Tail stand at the entrance to her apartment building. Bushy-Tail says goodbye and goes in. Volodya continues to stand there as if he's waiting for something.*

*The six stand in a parking lot. Snow is falling and all of them are gesturing in different directions as they discuss who will ride with whom in whose car.*

*Everyone approaches his or her own car. Maniac invites everyone to pile into his; Blizzard invites all to join him in his. The women laugh as they decide which car to get in and the men try pulling them in their direction. Blizzard and Maniac clean the snow off their cars. Maniac's car is red, Blizzard's is white.*

*The doors are now open, music can be heard from the cars and everybody is dancing in the snow as they wait for the engines to warm up. It emerges that Maniac's car is an Alpha-Romeo, Blizzard's is a Lexus.*

*Snowflake and Lenchka get into the Alpha-Romeo, Orangina and Snowstorm get into the back seat of the Lexus. They drive off.*

*Bushy-Tail's apartment. Bushy-Tail pulls a box out of her closet – in it is a new pair of black shoes, a white dress and fancy earrings. She looks over Snowflake's business card. Makes a telephone call.*

*Somewhere on the other end of the city the music from The Umbrellas of Cherbourg can be heard.*

*The Lexus. Blizzard, Snowstorm and Orangina.*

**BLIZZARD**

*(Turning up the music)* What do you think of this?

**ORANGINA**

I like it

**BLIZZARD**

The female organism also differs from the male in that speakers affect it differently

**SNOWSTORM**

Women feel physical pleasure from this music

**ORANGINA**

I had this terrible dream that I was dancing all wrong

**BLIZZARD**

You dance and you dance and there's no point to it

**SNOWSTORM**

Except that it feels great

**ORANGINA**

Will you teach me how?

**BLIZZARD**

Just stand in front of the mirror and dance



## **SNOWSTORM**

You have to make friends with your body. Your own. Since you've been given a body, you might as well live in harmony with it. It's so cool to be able to glide across the floor

## **BLIZZARD**

I used to have a great body. I wanted to be a bodybuilder and compete in competitions with the Arnold Schwarzenegger technique. No anabolic steroids. I loved looking at myself in the mirror. I looked like that statue of Apollo

## **SNOWSTORM**

It's hard to move well if you don't love yourself

## **BLIZZARD**

And if you don't like the way you are when you dance

## **ORANGINA**

When I dance at least I stop thinking

## **BLIZZARD**

So what is it you think about all the time?

## **ORANGINA**

I'm constantly haunted by thoughts that maybe I'm not living right

*Snowstorm's knee accidentally comes to rest against*

*Orangina's knee. She pulls her leg away.*

*The Lexus catches up with the Alpha-Romeo and begins*

*to pass it. Orangina's knee falls against Snowstorm's*

*knee. Blizzard sees this in the rear-view mirror and*

*Orangina tries to pull away. As the car turns Orangina*

*falls over into Snowstorm's lap.*

## **BLIZZARD**

*(Smiling)* Are we lacking excitement in our lives?

## **SNOWSTORM**

Excitement can appear only when you don't expect it. When you chill out and just live, boldly, putting nothing into parentheses

*The Alpha-Romeo. Maniac, Snowflake and Lenchka.*

## **MANIAC**

The most exhilarating moment in my life was when my brother took me up in a supersonic jet. Now that was something.

## **SNOWFLAKE**

Wasn't it scary?

## **MANIAC**

It was thrilling. It made me want to sing. But everything inside me was all churned upside down as if I was no longer me and my body wasn't mine. The only thought I had in my mind was – God, I hope I don't barf

## **SNOWFLAKE**

And you call that the most exhilarating moment in your life?

## **MANIAC**

Nothing can compare to it

**LENOCHKA**

Music sometimes does that to me

**MANIAC**

There was this time when I had just returned from a BASE jumping competition and it was my mother's birthday. She asked me to bring over a video of it to show the guests. So I do. And this one guy comes up to me and he asks, "Why do you do this?"

**SNOWFLAKE**

Really

**LENOCHKA**

Why do you?

**MANIAC**

Well, this is what I say to him: "See, when I come right to the edge and I look down from the top of a cliff or a skyscraper with my toes hanging over, my heart stops and my breath stops and I think – now I'm going to go and jump

**SNOWFLAKE**

Why would you do that?

**MANIAC**

That's just what he asked me

**LENOCHKA**

Adrenalin rushes, the psychological wounds of childhood and inferiority complexes all take on extreme forms

**MANIAC**

I wondered about it myself for a long time. Everybody has dreams of a material kind, hopes to achieve material prosperity. But why do you live? Take a step out there on the edge and you instantly understand why

*The Lexus is caught in a traffic jam.*

**BLIZZARD**

This world is so chaotic and futile, you have to know how to distance yourself from it. There are so many things to do in life that you waste all your energy on everything at once instead of focusing on one specific thing. But life was granted to us so we could extract the maximum enjoyment from it. Comfort is the true fetish of the 21st century. So when you fall in love you have to do it with comfort in mind. You have to be relaxed together.

**ORANGINA**

Every person strives for harmony in life

**SNOWSTORM**

Or at least for inner tranquility

**BLIZZARD**

The Japanese know the secret of love. It's comfort. I dream of having a Japanese woman

**SNOWSTORM**

Me, I like plump women with glasses and a young kid

**ORANGINA**

Every woman in the world wants to lose weight

*The Alfa-Romeo. Also stuck in a traffic jam.*

**MANIAC**

Look around at people. Why do you think they jump? Because the most awesome high a person can get is to rise above his own self. Lenchka, conquer that wild beast in you that arises from savage fear! The sensation you get when you jump is like turning somersaults

**LENOCHKA**

Where did you learn to do that?

**MANIAC**

I used to be really fat and I weighed 300 pounds. Blizzard and I started taking private lessons in acrobatics. We wanted to fly freely and sublimely. And I lost weight.

**SNOWFLAKE**

How many times have you jumped?

**MANIAC**

I'd guess about 80

**LENOCHKA**

You're kidding?

**MANIAC**

Oh, that's no big deal

**SNOWFLAKE**

Some countries have banned it as suicidal

**MANIAC**

Every person who jumps from four different objects gets his own number. Maybe I'll get my own number soon. By the time I get to 835...

**LENOCHKA**

Orangina lives in apartment number 835

**MANIAC**

Maybe 834

**LENOCHKA**

No, Blizzard lives in 834

**SNOWFLAKE**

You mean they're neighbors already? I didn't know that

**LENOCHKA**

Everything everywhere has numbers on it

**MANIAC**

Then maybe it's something else

**SNOWFLAKE**

There are so many sick people in the world

**LENOCHKA**

Is it true you don't have a safety chute?

**MANIAC**

No safety chute and no insurance

**SNOWFLAKE**

You must have some philosophy about that

**MANIAC**

My philosophy is that, sooner or later, all of us will be  
smashed to death against a cliff

**SNOWFLAKE**

Isn't that lovely

**LENOCHKA**

Are you a good BASE jumper?

**MANIAC**

A good BASE jumper is a live BASE jumper

**SNOWFLAKE**

He's crazy. Did you know that even his hands glow in the dark?

**LENOCHKA**

Yeah, he shows that to everyone

**MANIAC**

Blizzard and I once got drunk on champagne and we did a two-way  
jump

**LENOCHKA**

Together?

**SNOWFLAKE**

I'd never jump

**MANIAC**

What about with me?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Not in your dreams

**MANIAC**

Snowflake, I'm beginning to wonder if you're a conformist at  
heart

**SNOWFLAKE**

Is that so bad?

**LENOCHKA**

You don't have any principles at all

**MANIAC**

You think I don't have any principles? Man, it's you that  
doesn't have any principles

**LENOCHKA**

Yes, I don't have any principles, but that's because I get new  
ones every day. We live in an accelerated age. Everything is  
speeding up

**MANIAC**

Speeding up for some, slowing down for others

**SNOWFLAKE**

It's all so confusing

*The street. Bushy-Tail rides a tram car. Looks out the  
window.*

*Maniac's apartment. An enormous amount of people in constant, chaotic motion. Smoke. Music. Someone's dancing. Someone isn't. Someone's watching a DVD. The girls are changing clothes, pulling new things out of bags, brushing their hair, rebrushing their hair, putting on make-up, redoing their make-up. Bushy-Tail enters, looks around, takes off her coat. Nobody pays her any attention. Bushy-Tail, on the contrary, misses nothing. She's transfixed by everything she sees, her eyes open wide as she looks for a familiar face in the crowd. She recognizes Blizzard, then Orangina and sees Maniac, Snowflake and Lenchka in various places. She listens carefully to the conversations going on around her.*

**BLIZZARD**

*(In the bathroom, shaving his head bald)* I'm in a mood like roulette – betting on red but the ball doesn't fall

**ORANGINA**

*(Photographing the process)* You have really sharp mood swings, up and down, up and down

**BLIZZARD**

Is it that obvious?

**ORANGINA**

It's really irritating

**MANIAC**

*(On his telephone)* Six feet? How much is it from the blast pipe to the blister fairing? Wow –

**SNOWFLAKE**

*(On her phone)* You're so cool about your decision it's absurd

**SNOWSTORM**

*(Leafing through a magazine, going into the bathroom)* Would you do me a tattoo?

**BLIZZARD**

I've been wanting to do one for a year

**SNOWSTORM**

Me for three

**SNOWFLAKE**

Maybe you're ready but I'm not

**MANIAC**

Federal? Then that's clear

**SNOWSTORM**

What ideas do you have?

**BLIZZARD**

I dream about these ideas – birds, patterns, dragons

**SNOWFLAKE**

Just because you want to isn't enough. Nothing can come of nothing

**MANIAC**

All right-all right. But where's the guarantee they don't decide at the last minute that some cosmonaut would be better?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Well, you can think so if you want to

**MANIAC**

What can I say, man? You're cool

**LENOCHKA**

*(On her phone)* Listen, I can't spend my whole life in the process of creating this thing

**BLIZZARD**

*(In the bathroom)* I had this dream about Vladimir Vysotsky. I had that dream and I said – that's it! I'll do Vyotsky's profile on my chest!

**MANIAC**

No, I can't say as I'm ready for that. That came out of the blue

**SNOWSTORM**

You gonna do Marina Vlady on your back?

**BLIZZARD**

Yeah, I already set aside a hundred dollars

**MANIAC**

How much you need? 60 thou? Yeah, I got it, I hear what you said

**SNOWFLAKE**

No, I'm not depressed. I've got too much to do, to be depressed. I'll give you a call if that happens

**MANIAC**

Can you put that in an email? Get it off to me today

**LENOCHKA**

You can redo it 60 times over but it still isn't going to be right! Everybody's so damn smart. Did you think I was going to go slit my wrists in the bathtub?

**MANIAC**

Those fighter jets are his? Holy shit! *(Laughs hysterically.)*

**SNOWFLAKE**

A woman can't only give with her body. She has to give with her head, too

**LENOCHKA**

If you like it, dig it. If you don't, get over and get on with it!

**MANIAC**

Is he offering anything under the table?

**BLIZZARD**

*(In the bathroom)* Is that a nice skull?

**SNOWSTORM**

You want a skull tattoo?

**SNOWFLAKE**

It's the eternal problem – the battle of reason and feeling

**MANIAC**

So what you're saying is basically everything revolves around these fighter jets

**SNOWFLAKE**

I have no idea what to do

**MANIAC**

All right, okay. There's people waiting here

**BLIZZARD**

This tattoo drove me wild

**MANIAC**

Our project was accepted on the federal level. The President just signed off on it

**BLIZZARD**

That's hot shit

**MANIAC**

It's perfectly logical

**SNOWSTORM**

What's the project?

**MANIAC**

It's secret

**BLIZZARD**

Then you'll read about it tomorrow in the papers

**SNOWFLAKE**

Are you going off into space?

**MANIAC**

Unlike you, when I go, I'll go on travel orders  
*The six walk along the street with Bushy-Tail. They duck into a night club of some sort, passing by a long line. Neon lights flicker as they pass through facecontrol. Lenchka shows signs of nervousness, Snowflake keeps talking on her phone. Strobe lights, a bar, the dance floor, bathrooms, sofas, pillows, the bar, dance floor, bathrooms, the street – and so it goes until morning. Orangina photographs Bushy-Tail.*

**SNOWFLAKE**

*(On her phone)* Are we talking about the ideal man? All men say it doesn't happen like that

**LENOCHKA**

*(To Bushy-Tail)* You show too much of your personal self in your facial expressions

**SNOWFLAKE**

"Just like that," as Assol said in *Scarlet Sails*

**BUSHY-TAIL**

What do you mean?

**ORANGINA**

Signs of a good upbringing

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Is that bad?

**LENOCHKA**

It could cause problems. But it might not

**BLIZZARD**

*(Looking at himself in the mirror)* I've already tried on a couple different kinds of crosses. I didn't want anything ostentatious, nothing with gold chains, you know

**MANIAC**

Well, that one's just right

**SNOWFLAKE**

I always sit and cry when I watch that film. God, I love it

**MANIAC**

Are you macho?

**BLIZZARD**

Macho sometimes. You gotta always be ready. I can turn on the tough-guy

**SNOWFLAKE**

Over 35, smart. No, I don't admit the possibility of a man without brains

**BLIZZARD**

Sometimes I'm as soft as a baby's kiss

**LENOCHKA**

*(Looking at Bushy-Tail)* A whole utopia of feminine innocence and female infantility

**BLIZZARD**

I'm a prince. Really. In fact.

**MANIAC**

Weak, jumpy and jaded

**LENOCHKA**

You have to awaken men's pity. You know? But as a child, not as a woman. Make them want to feed you, put you to bed, kiss you tenderly on the forehead and rub iodine on your banged-up knees

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Why?

**LENOCHKA**

That's what all women want

**BLIZZARD**

And men

**MANIAC**

Everybody wants back in the womb

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Yesterday a couple got married at our church. They were really young. They were all surrounded by little kids and then all the old women ran up to congratulate them. It was really beautiful

**MANIAC**

A woman's imagination is excited by a prince on a white horse and a wedding with fleurs d'orange at 20, at 30 and at 60



**LENOCHKA**

Which is entirely natural

**MANIAC**

*(Sniffing the air)* And howling winds blow the sands of Morocco  
past our faces

**BUSHY-TAIL**

It smells just like autumn leaves

**LENOCHKA**

Only don't start smoking here

**SNOWFLAKE**

If you smoke next to her you are liable to be blinded by a flash  
of bright light. You can be injured or burned

**MANIAC**

I've finally figured it out. I'm going to be a homosexual

**LENOCHKA**

Why do you say that?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Don't accept sin into your heart

**MANIAC**

You're not going to be jealous of men, are you?

**SNOWFLAKE**

*(In Maniac's direction)* Only don't be obsessive about it

**BLIZZARD**

We'll just try it on for size

*Volodya's apartment. The alarm clock rings. Volodya  
gets up, washes, does his exercises. Turns on the  
iron, irons his shirt and his pants, checking the  
folds on his pants leg.*

*The street. Maniac, Snowstorm and Blizzard. They  
smoke. It's snowing. It's cold. Snowstorm has stripped  
off his shirt, baring his breast to the elements.  
Steam rises from his body.*

**MANIAC**

*(Clapping Blizzard on his bald head)* Looks good on you. You're  
the man

**BLIZZARD**

That's not what's important

**SNOWSTORM**

What's important for you?

**BLIZZARD**

I myself don't know. *(Looks over his life line.)* The funniest  
thing about it is – my life line really does break off. It used  
to be really long and all normal, but now it's like there's this  
white spot all over my palm

**MANIAC**

Oh, screw that

**SNOWSTORM**

Go wash your hands

**BLIZZARD**

Easy for you to say

**SNOWSTORM**

Nobody's got a guarantee

**BLIZZARD**

You've gotta be ready for death at any moment

**MANIAC**

Now that's my warrior, that's my samurai

**BLIZZARD**

What if Lenchka's a sorceress? She's got a really heavy eye

**MANIAC**

Have you ever noticed her eyes are different colors?

**SNOWSTORM**

Like David Bowie

**BLIZZARD**

Come on, get off it. It's time to get back to the grindstone

*(Heads back in the other direction.)*

**MANIAC**

Only please don't be late

**BLIZZARD**

*(Digs through Snowflake's purse, spritzes on her perfume)* I'm

going to make one more strategic move

**SNOWFLAKE**

Just don't drown yourself in that stuff

**ORANGINA**

Who are you doing that for?

**BLIZZARD**

I have an interview

**SNOWFLAKE**

Be careful. Never say what you really think

**BLIZZARD**

Why not?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Because everything changes so fast

**BLIZZARD**

*(He's all dressed. Tosses keys to Snowstorm)* I'll be back around

10 or 12. *(To Orangina.)* Will you get Snowstorm back to my place?

**ORANGINA**

All right.

**MANIAC**

Lemme give you a kiss on the forehead

**SNOWSTORM**

Come on, let's hit it!

**BLIZZARD**

This is called taking a leap into reality

## PART TWO

### AWE

*Blizzard walks out onto the street. Breathes in the fresh air. Claps himself on the pockets and realizes he forgot his cell phone. Thinks. Decides not to go back. Pulls eye drops out of his pocket and releases drops into his eyes. Wipes off the tears and goes looking for his car. He vaguely remembers where he parked it. Puts on his Gucci sunglasses and checks out the people walking by, hurrying to work in the morning. He smiles at everyone, delights at a simple sunbeam as if he were a paragon of virtue who loves all people and nature too. Big, fat snowflakes hit him in the face.*

### BLIZZARD

We live in a very severe country. Wherever nature has beauty, it's a severe beauty. Very severe. If there is friendship, it's severe. Too. Our people are genuine heroes who live – by living their lives. They are very severe people, I would say they are severe in the extreme. Their life journeys – are very severe. And exalted. No sentimentality. No indulgences. People here have always had hard lives. The guy who founded Moscow. And the guy who founded St. Petersburg. (*Smokes. Thinks.*) Want me to tell you a story about my life? A real, severe life story. A tale of grief, despair, manic-depressive psychosis, sin, debilitating passions and addictions that have come to us from infernal hell itself. Write it down, give people a chance to read it, a tale of weakness and strength, of tears, my heart, fears, love, Adam and Eve, warmth and cold, black and white. I'll tell you what real whiteness is; when a man no longer sees his own arms and legs, when the whiteness blinds his eyes and he goes blind, goes blind forever. In order to die right here and be reborn. Pure and innocent. Like the white, newly driven snow.

*Blizzard is covered in snow. He comes out of his reverie but can't find his car. He has no idea where he left it. Keeps looking, finally finds it. Standing next to his Lexus is Volodya. He carefully looks over the license plate then carefully looks over Blizzard.*

### VOLODYA

This your Lexus?

### BLIZZARD

Yes

### VOLODYA

(*Shows his badge*) May I see your ID?

### BLIZZARD

Sure. My pleasure

### VOLODYA

*(Looking over Blizzard's ID) Open up your trunk  
Blizzard opens his trunk.*

*Orangina, Lenchka, Snowflake, Maniac and Snowstorm  
with Bushy-Tail. They lie around on rugs and pillows,  
drink tea from China tea cups and smoke a hookah. The  
girls' bared shoulders sparkle with glitter,  
Snowstorm's head lies on Orangina's stomach, she combs  
his long locks with her fingers.*

**ORANGINA**

No matter what you say I'm always the man in relationships. I  
always make the decisions because men are weak, regardless of  
how physically imposing they might be

**LENOCHKA**

They're all a bunch of unflappable wolves

**SNOWFLAKE**

They are utter babes

**LENOCHKA**

They play with their toys and think they are the center of the  
universe

**ORANGINA**

A man is a babe is a babe is a babe and then, suddenly, he's an  
old geezer

**SNOWFLAKE**

They are incurably infantile

**LENOCHKA**

No, I don't need men at all. I can't even think about men any  
more

**SNOWFLAKE**

Men should not be thought about at all

**BUSHY-TAIL**

What's that supposed to mean?

**SNOWFLAKE**

You have to play with them. If you think they are thinking,  
think again – they are thinking something else entirely

**LENOCHKA**

Or they aren't thinking at all

**SNOWFLAKE**

A man is not susceptible to being remade. You've got to take him  
in the bag he comes in and then just put him where you need him

**ORANGINA**

On the other hand, how can you do without a man?

**SNOWFLAKE**

You can become a lesbian

**LENOCHKA**

You can give yourself up to total nihilism

**SNOWFLAKE**

But that's carrying it too far

*Lenochka's phone rings but she doesn't answer it.*

**MANIAC**

Husband?

**LENOCHKA**

He's no husband. He's a cad. A maniac.

**SNOWFLAKE**

How many times have I warned you? Don't ever admit anything. We deny everything.

**LENOCHKA**

But he's the one who said only the truth can save our relationship (*Cries.*)

**ORANGINA**

Lenochka – fresh air and fresh fruit

**SNOWFLAKE**

Here, I can give you a pill

**LENOCHKA**

What is it?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Why can't a person just have a regular pill, a tranquilizer?

**LENOCHKA**

Will it help?

**SNOWFLAKE**

In twenty minutes

**MANIAC**

(*To Bushy-Tail*) People suffer from a lack of understanding of their own sexuality and by the age of 30 they lose their mind incontrovertibly

**SNOWFLAKE**

Every person thinks in his or her own box

**MANIAC**

A hotbed of psychic ailments

**LENOCHKA**

A global failure to communicate

**MANIAC**

This is horrible, what they're saying here. Just horrible

**ORANGINA**

It's incontestable

**MANIAC**

A bunch of old wives' tales and laundromat philosophy. A gaggle of amateurs!

**BUSHY-TAIL**

(*Distracted, looking out the window*) They predicted it would snow by late morning and, sure enough, it began snowing late in the morning.

**SNOWFLAKE**

Snow white white

**ORANGINA**

As white as white can be

**LENOCHKA**

I have the sensation we are flying upwards

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Where I come from in Siberia nobody ever clears the snow away.

They just clear out narrow passages. The snow drifts stand higher than a person's head. And people there don't walk like they do here. There they kind of shuffle their feet. Because they are used to spending so much time walking on ice. It's always cold and dark and people light fires and they don't ever complain to anyone. That's because they think it's like that the whole world over. Life there's hard.

*The street. Volodya and Blizzard stand by the Lexus.*

*Volodya looks through the trunk. Blizzard looks at his watch and at Volodya. He clearly has begun to be nervous.*

**VOLODYA**

You can close it now

*Blizzard closes the trunk.*

Take off your glasses

*Blizzard takes off his sun glasses. They stare each other in the eye.*

*(Putting Blizzard's ID into his pocket.)* You're coming with me down to the station.

*They go.*

*Lenochka, Maniac, Snowflake, Orangina, Bushy-Tail and Snowstorm. They meandered and danced and talked but they never got tired. Finally they begin collecting their things, putting on their coats, paying the bill, looking at their watches.*

**MANIAC**

*(To the girls)* Want some candy?

**LENOCHKA**

Is it good?

**ORANGINA**

The colored ones taste better than the solids

**MANIAC**

*(Studying the wrapper)* The colored ones are more interesting

**SNOWFLAKE**

It's all chemicals and nothing else

**MANIAC**

What is benzoate nitrate?

**ORANGINA**

What is modified starch?

**SNOWSTORM**

Just what I wanted

**LENOCHKA**

The first time I ever ate these things I nearly gagged on all  
the sugar, I just gagged on it

**MANIAC**

And if you leave them out a little bit then they really get like  
rubber

**SNOWSTORM**

I had these friends who were taking some concoction for  
bodybuilding and they mixed something else in there, too. You'd  
drink that stuff and, man, you'd instantly love everybody,  
'cause everybody was suddenly so smart and so cool

**SNOWFLAKE**

Try drinking that alone

**LENOCHKA**

I can't do it

**MANIAC**

I did and I threw up

**SNOWSTORM**

Everybody throws up at first

**MANIAC**

Basically, there is no reason to love people

**LENOCHKA**

Yeah, but you have to

**MANIAC**

By nature people are vile and greedy

**BUSHY-TAIL**

I love people, though

**ORANGINA**

Those are your rose-colored glasses talking

**MANIAC**

My friends would take those tranquilizers they give cats before  
taking them on a trip. Turns out those things are really strong  
psychotropics

**SNOWFLAKE**

Man, what people won't take

**LENOCHKA**

And why, is what I want to know

**ORANGINA**

I read about this one guy who specially raised jellyfish in an  
aquarium and then he'd dry them and eat them

**SNOWSTORM**

This other guy would catch scorpions, rip off their tails, dry  
them and smoke them

**LENOCHKA**

The historical record shows that there were people who ate  
nothing but clay

**SNOWFLAKE**

Or nothing at all

**LENOCHKA**

I've read that clay is teeming with life

**MANIAC**

Everything is teeming with life

**ORANGINA**

I used to eat dirt when I was a kid. To win bets

**MANIAC**

I still do that all the time

**SNOWSTORM**

We're all of us all just the same

*The police station. Blizzard is being searched. They unzip his pants and search down his underwear. They pull out a small packet, call over witnesses, run tests, take fingerprints, collect a urine sample – in short, they found drugs.*

**BLIZZARD**

*(For the hundredth time)* I'm a musician. I'm not an addict. I'm a good guy. I don't deal. It's for my own personal use. I bought it off an Armenian. I'll give you a written pledge not to leave town

**VOLODYA**

A musician you say

**BLIZZARD**

I'm just a DJ

**VOLODYA**

A DJ you say

**BLIZZARD**

Well, a VJ, actually

**VOLODYA**

*(Sighs)* A VJ

**BLIZZARD**

If you let me go I swear I'll never do it again

**VOLODYA**

But maybe you will

**BLIZZARD**

No, I won't. I mean, I don't know if I will or I won't. But I don't want to

**VOLODYA**

We're going to have to search you

**BLIZZARD**

I don't have anything on me

**VOLODYA**

You know for sure you don't?

**BLIZZARD**

*(Thinks)* For sure

**VOLODYA**

If you don't then maybe I'll let you go



*Maniac's apartment. Snowflake and Maniac enter and walk around. They lie down on the bed without taking off their coats or shoes. They are very far from each other. And silent. Snowflake closes her eyes, it's like she's already asleep. Maniac gets up, turns on the television.*

**SNOWFLAKE**

*(Opening her eyes)* Oh God, only not that

**MANIAC**

*(Turns off the television)* What then?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Well do something. You're the jaded one. You know what to do in moments like this. You have such intelligent eyes *(Smiles.*

*Begins to laugh.)*

**MANIAC**

It's cold. Listen, it's cold in here *(Wraps himself in a blanket and walks around the room.)*

**SNOWFLAKE**

Want something to drink?

**MANIAC**

No

**SNOWFLAKE**

Eat?

**MANIAC**

No

*Cell phones ring. Maniac gathers them up and turns them off.*

I'm just not ready to communicate with anyone right now *(Walks around, looks through the compact discs and picks one. Turns on some music.)*

**SNOWFLAKE**

Oh, that's nice. That's nice

*Maniac lies on the bed. They both lie on the bed listening to music. Silence.*

**MANIAC**

Transcendental meditation. Quasi-physical state

*Snowflake smiles, eyes closed.*

Almost like we're floating. Such clear thoughts. And so noble.

Next to that all these body movements don't mean a thing.

**SNOWFLAKE**

More illusions

**MANIAC**

It's been like that for ages. People have known that forever.

Our feeble minds can't get a grasp

**SNOWFLAKE**

Beethoven?

**MANIAC**

Beethoven

**SNOWFLAKE**

He's so good

*They lie there listening to Beethoven.*

*Blizzard and Volodya riding in a police car. They look at each other.*

**BLIZZARD**

What's your name?

**VOLODYA**

Volodya

**BLIZZARD**

How old are you?

**VOLODYA**

Twenty-five

**BLIZZARD**

Say, Volodya, why did you single me out?

**VOLODYA**

Your eyes

*They look each other in the eyes.*

**BLIZZARD**

I've seen you somewhere, but I don't remember where

**VOLODYA**

Your face is familiar, too, for some reason

**BLIZZARD**

Maybe on TV?

**VOLODYA**

I don't watch TV

**BLIZZARD**

Why not?

**VOLODYA**

Why should I?

*The street. Orangina and Snowstorm get out of a taxi, go up the stairs, get into the elevator. Their bodies frequently touch – knees, hands – but it's always by accident. This continues to embarrass Orangina as they approach her apartment. Orangina is in the full bloom of a crush. She blushes constantly. Snowstorm is sweeping her, sweeping her, sweeping her off her feet.*

**SNOWSTORM**

I once rented an apartment next to St. Isaac's Cathedral. We dropped a couple of tabs. Basically, popped one or two tabs too many. I headed into the shower but it turned out to be a window. I wasn't used to the place, you know. Fortunately it was on the first floor. I busted out the window and I'm walking around naked, dripping blood. I went out on the square and struck up a conversation with God. We had a long talk there that day.

**ORANGINA**

And then what?

**SNOWSTORM**

What else? They locked me up.

**ORANGINA**

So what did God have to say?

**SNOWSTORM**

You ought to knock that shit off, Snowstorm.

*They're silent. Orangina continues to blush from embarrassment.*

You know what was drawn on those tabs?

**ORANGINA**

What?

**SNOWSTORM**

Milli Vanilli

**ORANGINA**

Oh get off it!

**SNOWSTORM**

It's true. There was this one time they came up to me after a concert and they said, "Listen, Snowstorm, explain psychedelic trances to us and how to become psychedelic trance stars. We want to know."

**ORANGINA**

And what did you say?

**SNOWSTORM**

Listen up, dudes. The job's already taken.

**ORANGINA**

By you?

**SNOWSTORM**

You'll see that soon enough.

*Orangina stands in front of apt. No. 835. Snowstorm pulls out his keys and opens apt. No. 834. Puts down his yellow suitcase. Orangina is nervous, she fumbles with her keys. Snowstorm helps her open the door. Orangina is embarrassed, she doesn't know whether to invite Snowstorm in with her or not. They aren't finding it easy to part, even though she doesn't know what to say.*

Remember that guy we were drinking with yesterday?

**ORANGINA**

Which one was that?

**SNOWSTORM**

The one with AIDS.

**ORANGINA**

No, I don't.

**SNOWSTORM**

I drank vodka out of his beer mug. I only realized later I shouldn't have done that.

**ORANGINA**

I could have been a lot worse

**SNOWSTORM**

This is no laughing matter

**ORANGINA**

God forbid

**SNOWSTORM**

I probably ought to have a blood test

**ORANGINA**

It's too early for that

**SNOWSTORM**

Maybe I can still be cured?

**ORANGINA**

Your sample will blow people away

**SNOWSTORM**

They'll turn it over to the cops. The chemical make-up of my blood is irreversibly altered

**ORANGINA**

And your brain

**SNOWSTORM**

Yeah. I've got to clean up. Start working out

**ORANGINA**

Take vitamins

**SNOWSTORM**

What if they have additives or something?

**ORANGINA**

Hallucinogenics

**SNOWSTORM**

Exactly

**ORANGINA**

Suffering fortifies the soul

**SNOWSTORM**

I'm a sinner. I don't like suffering

*Bushy-Tail's apartment. Bushy-Tails walks about her apartment in a long night-shirt reminiscing about the evening spent with her new friends.*

**BUSHY-TAIL**

It's like I was thrust into a new country where nothing has names yet. Or somebody invited me into a fairy-tale, a real magic kingdom

*Volodya and Blizzard stand before the door of Apt. 834.*

**VOLODYA**

This yours?

**BLIZZARD**

Yes.

*Volodya approaches Apt. 835. Music is heard coming*

*from there. Volodya rings the doorbell. Orangina opens the door. Blizzard is rather surprised to see Snowstorm.*

**VOLODYA**

*(Showing his badge)* Police. I need two witnesses

**ORANGINA**

Where?

**VOLODYA**

Here

**ORANGINA**

What happened?

**VOLODYA**

I have to conduct a search

*Orangina, Snowstorm, Blizzard and Volodya enter Apt. 834.*

*(Walking about the apartment.)* Let's get to it Maniac's apartment. Maniac and Snowflake are still lying on the bed with their eyes open.

**MANIAC**

You sleeping?

**SNOWFLAKE**

You can sleep in this state?

*They are silent.*

**MANIAC**

Somebody told me you went to confession

**SNOWFLAKE**

Yeah

**MANIAC**

What did you confess?

**SNOWFLAKE**

My passionate desire to be liked and to entice and embarrass others. My penchant for listening to narcotic music, for wild dancing, for provocative, voluptuous feelings and for spiritual and psychological obscurantism

**MANIAC**

Did you explain that that's your job?

**SNOWFLAKE**

And lots, lots, lots more

**MANIAC**

And how do you feel now? Did you like it?

**SNOWFLAKE**

I counted off every man I've been with for the last six months. I remembered every one of their names

**MANIAC**

They all ought to assemble right here in this room. And hold their silence. With this music playing

**SNOWFLAKE**

They're all wonderful. I loved every one of them

**MANIAC**

But the fact is – there are a lot of them and only one of you

**SNOWFLAKE**

He told me you assimilate into yourself all the people your partners have slept with

**MANIAC**

You know what telegony is?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Something to do with television?

**MANIAC**

You're better off not knowing

*They are silent.*

**SNOWFLAKE**

I miss being bold and spontaneous like I used to be

**MANIAC**

Purse-mascara-lipstick-shoes?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Well, something like that

**MANIAC**

What else did he say?

**SNOWFLAKE**

He said a lot and I cried a lot and I was so confused, the whole room was swimming in tears

**MANIAC**

What was to cry about?

**SNOWFLAKE**

I cried because I was so sad, from a sensation of being absolutely alone and abandoned in the world, a complete vacuum, shame, repentance, cold, horror and repulsion

**MANIAC**

Women are such pious people

**SNOWFLAKE**

And then he says, "Forget your dream of yourself. God is a jealous God." And my tears dried up. They dried up instantly.

And I say, "What did you say? Forget my dream of myself? How do you do that!?"

*Blizgard's apartment. Volodya opens and closes desk drawers and closet drawers. He looks everything over at length. Blizgard's entire life is pulled out for everyone to see. Condoms rain down, CDs, vinyl records, guitars, clothing, a synthesizer and miles of cords tumble out and roll on the floor. Speakers, cognac and whiskey bottles, cigarettes, incense, business cards, photos of Blizgard with Alla Pugachyova and Arnold Schwarzenegger, and a photo of a ballerina. Volodya picks up the photo of the ballerina*

*in his hands, looks it over at length. Puts it back in its place. Volodya sees a yellow suitcase. Approaches it. Snowstorm buries his face in his hands. Volodya opens the case. From it he removes a towel (puts it on the table), three books (puts them on the table one by one), 200 vinyl records (looks them over carefully), 40 rubles (puts the money on the table). Picks up the books. Leaf through them.*

**VOLODYA**

Mikhail Chekhov. Anna Akhmatova. Shakespeare.

*A small packet of tablets lies in the Shakespeare volume. Blizzard looks at Snowstorm, Snowstorm at Blizzard.*

Wait a minute.

*All sit quietly. All are silent.*

**BLIZZARD**

Okay. If I throw all that stuff out the window right now he'll never prove I ever possessed it. These guys will back me up. So I go like this... *(Slowly reaches for the tablets.)*

**VOLODYA**

In your place. Sit still.

**BLIZZARD**

I have a face like a monkey. I've got the shakes. Oh my fucking God I'm in shock.

*Blizzard leaps up, grabs the packet off the table, opens the window and tries to throw the tablets out the window. They fall on the windowsill and bounce all over the floor. Volodya shoves Blizzard back onto the sofa, pulls his revolver and points it at Blizzard's head.*

**VOLODYA**

What are you doing? Why would you do that? You want a buzz, drink vodka. What is wrong with you junkies? You smoke yourself into oblivion and then you're at each other's throats

*Removes his belt and ties Blizzard's hands with it.*

*Gathers the tablets off the floor, counts them and carefully puts them back on the table.*

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty... twenty-one, twenty-two, twentythree, twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight... twenty-nine, thirty... one... thirty-two... thirty-three

—

*Maniac's apartment. Maniac and Snowflake.*

**SNOWFLAKE**

There's a golden Buddha in your window

**MANIAC**

That's a Buddhist cathedral

**SNOWFLAKE**

I thought it was a restaurant

**MANIAC**

You see nothing but restaurants

**SNOWFLAKE**

Do you go there?

**MANIAC**

That's all we need now is Buddhism

**SNOWFLAKE**

Ooh, look! I can see him sitting there! Is that why you rented this apartment?

**MANIAC**

Naw, I thought it was a restaurant at first, too

*They are silent.*

You know, someday I'm going to slip some crushed glass in your food. I'll make you a milkshake for breakfast and I'll slip crushed glass in there. And then I'll freeze you up in a block of ice.

**SNOWFLAKE**

I'm fasting right now. I can't have milk.

**MANIAC**

You're fasting, are you?

*They are silent.*

I should probably fast, too. I'm so totally lacking in energy.

*Blizzard's apartment.*

**BLIZZARD**

Don't tie my hands. I won't do it again. *(To the witnesses.)*

Would you guys step out, please.

*Orangina and Snowstorm leave. Volodya unties*

*Blizzard's hands.*

*(Pulling out a \$100 bill)* Volodya, please. Take this and don't do what you were going to do. You want me to, I'll get down on my knees. I don't have anything more today, but I'll get more tomorrow. I'm a famous musician. I can get a lot of money.

**VOLODYA**

No deal. I couldn't care less what you're trying to say to me.

Put on your coat. I'm locking you up. You can take off your shoestrings right now.

**BLIZZARD**

I'm taking off my shoestrings. I'm putting on long-sleeve sailor's shirt. My raspberry red velvet pants. And my beret on my head. *(Blizzard wants to put on a record.)* And all this shake, rattle and roll –

**VOLODYA**

What are you doing?

**BLIZZARD**



I just want to put on some music

**VOLODYA**

How come you let me down? Why did you lie to me like that?

**BLIZZARD**

*(Smiling blissfully)* Forgive me.

*The witnesses return and leave the door open. Blizzard sees that the door to Orangina's apartment is open, too. As is the door to the balcony. Blizzard suddenly races across to Orangina's apartment and throws himself off her balcony.*

*He falls downward as if flying. As if in slow-motion his entire life flashes before his eyes. Blizzards thinks he is flying and, as honest, sad, exhausted and utterly free as he now is, he never wants to return to earth again. Free of everything and believing only in God, he is a true saint, a true freak.*

*Maniac's apartment. The following conversation occurs simultaneously to Blizzard's flight.*

**MANIAC**

There are certain sensations that make you super-aware. And you ride along on them like you're surfing, skimming over the surface, never sinking below the surface, never stopping

**SNOWFLAKE**

I used to skim over the surface, too

**MANIAC**

And now?

**SNOWFLAKE**

I don't skim now

**MANIAC**

Why not?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Because you can't skim over the surface all the time

**MANIAC**

Yeah, you've got to shake things up. You've gotta jump and fall, too

**SNOWFLAKE**

And jump back up again

**MANIAC**

There's nothing to skimming over the surface

**SNOWFLAKE**

It's really supercool

**MANIAC**

But it's pointless if you do it all the time

*Blizzard flies, doing somersaults in the air.*

**SNOWFLAKE**

Where do you fall when you jump?

**MANIAC**

Doesn't make a bit of difference. It's the action itself that has meaning, of course. But you can't attach meaning to it  
(*Smiles.*)

**SNOWFLAKE**

Do you have a goal?

**MANIAC**

Everybody has a goal. Even if you have no idea what it is, you still have one nonetheless. But if you don't define it yourself, somebody else will do it for you. Whoever comes up with the best definition

*Blizzard flies. A dog walking on the street sees him flying, raises up his head and watches in amazement. Somewhere in the distance his owner calls:*

**VOICE**

Yo-Yo! Yo-Yo! Yo-Yo!

**MANIAC**

You want to relay a message of some kind, you want to have some impact

**SNOWFLAKE**

Why's that?

**MANIAC**

To fill in the world void. Don't you want to?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Me? No. I already lost my optimism, my youthful sincerity, my faith in people, my ability to think sober thoughts, to properly evaluate situations, to love my brother and orient myself in space

*Blizzard flies and the dog's eyes grow bigger and bigger.*

The only thought that ever comes to me when I wake up in the morning hours is to commit suicide. But now I can't even do that.

**MANIAC**

Why not?

**SNOWFLAKE**

Because you can't do that

*Orangina's apartment. Snowstorm, Blizzard and Orangina stand just as they had been standing, as though not a second has passed and, indeed, nothing has happened. Volodya runs out onto the balcony; a visceral, bloodcurdling scream is heard. Orangina's eyes go dark and she falls in a faint.*

**VOICE**

Yo-Yo! Yo-Yo! Yo-Yo!

*On the ground beneath the balcony a dog lies dead in a pool of blood.*

*Blizzard runs down one street, another, a third,*

*covered in Yo-Yo's blood. He runs past red walls,  
fences, houses of some kind, and indeterminate people.  
The red ball of the sun, slipping beneath the horizon,  
reflects in his eyes. Blizzard runs to meet it,  
faster, faster, in order to reach out to it, to touch  
it with his hand, to catch it before it hides. It  
seems to him that he succeeds, that he made it in  
time.*

*Having reached the horizon, he slips down below the  
earth, not thinking, asking why or whether this leads  
anywhere. He goes down, down, down, passing trains  
resounding in his head. He races into the first open  
door he sees, pushes his way through a crowd into a  
corner, sits down in an empty spot, closes his eyes,  
takes the beret off his head, wipes off his red, wet  
face, smearing it with blood. He is riding somewhere,  
racing somewhere on this train so as to have time to  
think what he should do next in order to catch his  
breath and get hold of himself.*

*Snowstorm reads a poem to Bushy-Tail.*

### **SNOWSTORM**

There once lived a boy, a timid genius, who lived on the back  
lot of life

His daddy drank, his momma stank – the family was like that

But the boy was a romantic. He escaped life in dreams

Smelling his bubblegum wrapper he would fly away

From the wrong side of town and the back lot of life

To a light, quiet, cozy world, a land of starry dreams

And this timid little boy swore one day he would leave the

back lot of life,

Jump on the trolley of dreams and ride away forever

*Blizzard in the subway. Eyes closed, as if in a*

*trance, Blizzard thinks Vladimir Vysotsky and Marina*

*Vlady are smiling at him from a black-and-white*

*photograph. A cry is heard in a dream, as if it has no*

*connection to reality. But the cry gets louder and*

*louder. Blizzard thinks someone is shouting at him:*

*“Atten-shun! Atten-shun!”*

*Blizzard opens his eyes. A soldier stands over him,*

*screaming at him as if in a horror film.*

### **SOLDIER**

Atten-shun!

### **BLIZZARD**

(*Making to leave*) Attention what?

### **SOLDIER**

Atten-shun!

### **BLIZZARD**

*(Tired of smiling) I'm out here. This is my stop.  
Blizzard looks around. The entire subway car is filled  
with bald, young men, new army recruits, just like  
himself.*

### **SOLDIER**

*Atten-shun!*

*The doors open. Blizzard runs out, two soldiers  
following in hot pursuit.*

*Street, walls, fences: déjà vu.*

*Somewhere very near, one or two streets over,*

*Snowflake is walking and people are turning to look at  
her. They point at her, but she ceased noticing this  
long ago.*

### **SNOWFLAKE**

*The street is dirty. People try as they may, laying out white  
rugs beneath their feet. But everything is pointless in this  
city. Everything is pointless.*

*The soldiers catch up with Blizzard, a fight starts.*

*Blizzard falls. They kick him viciously in the sides  
and stomach. He has stopped putting up a fight. Lies  
limply on the asphalt. Blood trickles out his mouth.*

*The soldiers leave. Blizzard wipes off the blood with  
his hand, his hands are all bloody. He smiles  
exhaustedly. Gets up.*

*Volodya stands in front of Blizzard.*

### **BLIZZARD**

*What are you, Volodya, James Bond or something?*

*Volodya hand-cuffs Blizzard.*

### **VOLODYA**

*You can't run from yourself*

*They get into a police car.*

### **BLIZZARD**

*I don't understand anything at all. I'm screwed now. I'm already  
on two years parole. What is happening. Why? I must have a  
concussion. I'm sick to my stomach. They're probably going to  
put me in prison. What about my job? What about everything? What  
about my dreams? My Lord, how did this happen to me? A complete  
and total breakdown. What I'd really like is to wrap myself in a  
blanket and go to sleep. So that when I wake up, all of this  
will be yesterday and not today*

*Blizzard looks at his bloody hand, sliced in the  
fight. His lifeline has now been extended. He closes  
his eyes and slips into an indifferent sleep.*

*The Office. Maniac, Snowflake, Lenochka and Snowstorm.*

*Blizzard's face has been replaced everywhere by  
Snowstorm's.*

### **MANIAC**

We all stand neck-deep in darkness. The only difference is that  
some of us look in the direction of the light. Others look to  
the dark

**SNOWFLAKE**

*(On the phone)* Forty days without sex?!

**LENOCHKA**

That's unfeasible

**MANIAC**

Like during the war. You huddle under a flag and defenders  
appear at your side. You know who you're fighting for and  
against. With the whites or the reds. For good or for evil

**SNOWSTORM**

Most of the time I spend in the space between black and white.  
It's rather gray, of course, but at least there's movement. I  
know who's sleeping with who. I know who does what where when  
and why and I appreciate every one of them equally

**MANIAC**

It's nothing more than a mask

**SNOWFLAKE**

Fifty?!

**LENOCHKA**

Strange

**SNOWFLAKE**

I don't think that's my style

**SNOWSTORM**

I don't use masks at all. I win people over with my extreme  
sincerity. I achieve results by means of the utmost candor.  
Basically, I never hide a thing. I don't fear my emotions

**MANIAC**

I lead a double life.

**LENOCHKA**

Really?

**MANIAC**

I keep my manias and phobias in check. And I've got those babies  
up the ying-yang. Both manias and phobias

**SNOWFLAKE**

I didn't know that; that you can't. I realize that doesn't  
justify me

**SNOWSTORM**

Hey you phobias of mine, you manias, you late anxieties and  
early fears

**SNOWFLAKE**

It's just I'm a very emotional person

**LENOCHKA**

I confessed for three days

**MANIAC**

I did two

**LENOCHKA**

And he looked me so hard in the eyes, with that same kind of insolence I have when I'm showing off, and he had this two-faced smile

**MANIAC**

He can't be two-faced

**SNOWSTORM**

You don't even have the right to look him in the eye

**MANIAC**

You're supposed to lower your gaze

**SNOWSTORM**

At least bow your head

**SNOWFLAKE**

This weather is oppressive

**LENOCHKA**

And he says, "At least bow your head."

**SNOWFLAKE**

I'm sick and tired of this black-and-white film

**MANIAC**

All this Adam and Eve and the apple

**LENOCHKA**

I mean it wasn't us that picked it

**SNOWSTORM**

Well, it's time to pay up now

**SNOWFLAKE**

Could it be because I spent so much time on tranquilizers?!

**MANIAC**

That's all really useful when you have to define all your shortcomings

**LENOCHKA**

You know what you're supposed to do but you don't do it

**ORANGINA**

After that it's a matter of will power

**MANIAC**

You've got to make sense of your will power

**SNOWSTORM**

See if you have any or not

**LENOCHKA**

I don't

**SNOWFLAKE**

Whenever it's cold my mood and character go sour

**SNOWSTORM**

We are really lucky we live in a climate like this

**MANIAC**

It helps calm us, calm our flesh

**LENOCHKA**

Which is almost impossible to do in the more southerly countries

## **SNOWFLAKE**

*(Hangs up the phone. Sighs)* Maybe we ought to fly somewhere, huh? Like Bali

## **MANIAC**

It's a good idea, though

*The jail cell.*

## **BLIZZARD**

I've changed lately. I haven't exactly figured out how yet. All my thoughts on it are still at loose ends. Basically everybody just goes along paying no attention to where they're going. What the hell is the meaning of life? Career? Fame? Money? I mean, in my mind I know that's not what's important. But what is important – I don't know. But I think about it. Why? Because that's what everybody talks about. And I know there is love.

*Blizzard thinks about Orangina. Orangina walks down the street, as beautiful as a character from a Bergman movie. Men look her in the eye and watch her pass; she lowers her eyelashes.*

## **ORANGINA**

When will I achieve perfection? When will this sin leave me? When will I quit having all these voluptuous dreams? When will I quit dreaming? When will I become more pure spiritually? When? Lord, purify me of all this filth. Lord, absolve me of my youthful sins.

*The bar at a café. The television is on, showing the BCH news with the sound turned off. The star presenter Snowflake (no longer smiling) reports on a war. Volodya looks her over carefully, drinks beer, chews pistachios.*

## **VOLODYA**

The only thing I can't figure out is why people wage war. Man, they're always at war... For what? Why? Money? Principles? I don't get it. I mean, with Hitler it made sense. But what's this going on now? Man, live and let live. I just really don't know. I don't get this politics. I mean, have these people never felt pain or something?

*"BCH" station identification and an ad for "Eternity is Ahead! Infinity is no Limit!" Bushy-Tail appears on screen, says something and smiles. She is framed by the words "Icon of the Season." Volodya turns on the sound.*

## **BUSHY-TAIL**

In the Far North we have icicles like you've never seen here. Our icicles flow off the roof over the windows and it's like the houses are encased in ice. Icicles like that are really dangerous. If an icicle like that falls on your head, it's all over.

*“BCH” station identification and an ad for “No Fear in Love.”*

**VOLODYA**

What a stupid death

*Snowstorm and Orangina drink coffee at the next table.*

*Orangina wears a black dress and has a pure expression on her face. She wears no make-up and her hair is pulled back simply. She holds a big Book.*

**SNOWSTORM**

Look, I have everything. I’ve achieved everything I wanted to achieve. What is there for me to ask of God? I don’t know. I have everything I’ve ever wanted. You see my eyes?

**ORANGINA**

You have blue, blue eyes

**SNOWSTORM**

Look into my retinas. What do you see there? Do you even see a hint of sorrow?

**ORANGINA**

No, there’s no sorrow in them

**SNOWSTORM**

What about fear?

**ORANGINA**

No, there’s no fear in them

**SNOWSTORM**

Love?

**ORANGINA**

No

**SNOWSTORM**

Come on, look closer. What do you see there?

**ORANGINA**

There’s nothing there at all

**SNOWSTORM**

I even bought the exact car I wanted to have

**ORANGINA**

What kind?

**SNOWSTORM**

A Peugeot. Convertible.

*Jail cell. A sunbeam comes through the window and hits*

*Blizzard right on the crown of the head.*

**BLIZZARD**

But love turned out to be something else altogether. Not connected to what I wanted to have. I had hope, I lived in constant expectation of something. But it turns out love is bound up only with whatever you hope to give. You can count on requited love only if fortune smiles on you. But I understand now that’s not essential. It’s as if my tears help me thaw out.



I always prayed and I always pray. I've begun to believe in God.  
When I was born I was such a beautiful baby and then stuff got  
in the way. My head got chock full of filth and I set off down  
the wrong road –

*The café. Snowstorm looks at Orangina. Tears run down*

*Orangina's cheeks.*

**SNOWSTORM**

You're beautiful. Laid-back and deliberate. I love watching you  
bring a cigarette up to your mouth

**ORANGINA**

I simply cannot quit smoking

**SNOWSTORM**

There's a dreaminess in your eyes

**ORANGINA**

Oh, I can't listen to that anymore

**SNOWSTORM**

And indifference. To everything happening this very moment

**ORANGINA**

*(Puts out her cigarette)* In order to quit smoking you just have  
to not smoke

**SNOWSTORM**

What are you reading?

**ORANGINA**

A new book

**SNOWSTORM**

I had one like that

**ORANGINA**

I don't read fiction at all anymore

**SNOWSTORM**

*(Taking a call on his cell)* Hello. I'm mainstream. Yes, I  
currently am in demand as never before. *(Looks at his image on  
the television.)* Your call has confirmed that once again  
*Jail cell.*

**BLIZZARD**

It's like my heart iced over and turned to stone. It's numb, but  
that's normal, they say. They say that's natural. It happens to  
94 percent of human beings. Now, of course, I realize I have  
never loved anyone, that all I ever had was a nagging desire for  
everyone to love and admire me. I wanted to find that one person  
who would love me. It's like I was preparing myself as a gift  
for someone. I tanned myself in a salon. I love nothing but my  
own body, never even guessing that love was passing me by at  
that very moment. We shared nothing but temporary physical  
pleasures, which we all mistakenly call by one and the same name

*Lenochka, Maniac and Snowflake enter the café and take  
off their coats. The girls kiss Orangina, take off*

*their coats and other items, taking more and more and*

*more clothing off.*

**LENOCHKA**

After that I immediately went and had a glass of wine. Then I  
went and indulged in the seven deadly sins

**SNOWFLAKE**

How was that?

**LENOCHKA**

In my thoughts, I mean

**MANIAC**

I went out and immediately lit up

**ORANGINA**

When you smoke, your prayers do not reach God

**LENOCHKA**

Why's that?

**ORANGINA**

Because they cling to the earth like smoke

**SNOWFLAKE**

Angels come flying when you make the sign of the cross

**MANIAC**

And when you swear they fly away

**SNOWFLAKE**

A very bad hangover and deep depression

**LENOCHKA**

You'd think somebody could at least call, some guy of some sort

**ORANGINA**

You're off limits. You're married

**SNOWFLAKE**

Two men told me they love me today

**MANIAC**

And you want more, don't you?

**LENOCHKA**

*(Nods towards Orangina)* Can somebody get her out of her trance?

**ORANGINA**

I downed a vodka and it had no effect at all. Stone cold sober

**LENOCHKA**

How can you possibly drink vodka?

**SNOWFLAKE**

You can't

**MANIAC**

Vodka? There ain't nothin' better

**SNOWFLAKE**

God, what I didn't drink yesterday

*They all look over the menu.*

**SNOWSTORM**

Green tea?

**LENOCHKA**

Jasmine

**ORANGINA**

And Coca-Cola

**SNOWFLAKE**

I drank whiskey and martinis yesterday

**LENOCHKA**

They even have parmesan carpaccio with mushrooms

**MANIAC**

Parmesan is a no-no

**SNOWSTORM**

I don't eat mushrooms

**LENOCHKA**

Why not?

**SNOWSTORM**

They make me want to vomit

**MANIAC**

They remind him of other mushrooms that he can't eat anymore

**LENOCHKA**

People who have ingested a lot of mushrooms usually can't even talk about it

**SNOWFLAKE**

Let alone eat them

**MANIAC**

I know

**LENOCHKA**

Is fish out, too?

**ORANGINA**

Out

**SNOWSTORM**

I don't eat broccoli and I don't eat carrots and I don't eat sauerkraut

**MANIAC**

It's easy for me, I'm a vegetarian. I don't even touch meat

**ORANGINA**

I absolutely love carrots

**SNOWFLAKE**

You've lost weight

**ORANGINA**

Ten pounds in a week. I keep getting skinnier and skinnier

**LENOCHKA**

There's something criminal about that

**MANIAC**

You just have a complex about it

**SNOWSTORM**

But a nun's habit would become you

**LENOCHKA**

What about me?

**MANIAC**

You too

**SNOWFLAKE**

And me?

**ORANGINA**

It would become anyone

**LENOCHKA**

And a salad

**SNOWFLAKE**

How about shrimp?

**MANIAC**

That's cheating then

**LENOCHKA**

Can't have café glacé

**SNOWFLAKE**

Should I have a martini?

**MANIAC**

Against the rules

**LENOCHKA**

But you know, there's something to that – abstaining for forty days

**SNOWFLAKE**

Fifty

**MANIAC**

*(Closing the menu)* Okay, that's it. Mineral water and black bread for everybody.

**SNOWFLAKE**

Only let's not be fanatics about it.

*The street. Snowstorm leaves the café.*

**SNOWSTORM**

Today I'm so frivolous,

Gracious and careless.

Melancholically dissatisfied with everything

I sail to meet my fate at midstream

*Bushy-Tail comes walking down the street, leading a dog on a leash. She carries a glossy magazine with her photo on the cover.*

*Snowstorm heads toward her; stops by his new car.*

Hey

**BUSHY-TAIL**

I didn't recognize you right away in that cap

**SNOWSTORM**

That's a pretty coat you've got. You remember that movie *A Man and a Woman*?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

No

**SNOWSTORM**

He's a race car driver and she goes around in this coat

**BUSHY-TAIL**

How're you doin'?

**SNOWSTORM**

I want to buy myself a T-shirt. I want to print a prayer on the back for everybody to read. I'll write, "Lord, thank You, Lord, for all the beautiful things You have given me."

**BUSHY-TAIL**

That's cool

**SNOWSTORM**

*(Looking at the dog)* That's a pretty dog. Boy or girl?

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Boy

**SNOWSTORM**

Yeah... Women are more sexy than men, of course

**BUSHY-TAIL**

I don't know about that –

**SNOWSTORM**

Men are more horny, but they're not as sexy

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Animals are smarter than we are

**SNOWSTORM**

They don't get hung up thinking

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Yeah

**SNOWSTORM**

I love animals. Like Churchill

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Me too. Like Bridget Bardot

**SNOWSTORM**

*(Leads Bushy-Tail over to his car. Opens the door for her)* If I was an animal I'd be a bear. That's the perfect lifestyle. You sleep half the year.

*Volodya comes out of the café. Looks around. Looks at his watch. Looks at Bushy-Tail, Snowstorm, the Peugeot.*

**BUSHY-TAIL**

Those little bear cubs are so cute –

**SNOWSTORM**

Basically, you've got to love each other and be cool about it.

Main thing is that nobody start a war

*Volodya sees Bushy-Tail get into the Peugeot convertible. He takes out his pen and writes down the license plate.*

*He stands and watches the car disappear into the distance as if he has gone blind and deaf and keeps going over something in his mind that he experienced long ago.*

**VOLODYA**

Bones lay in the ground  
Gloom covers the earth  
Everything there was between us  
Has drowned in my heart  
*The café.*

**LENOCHKA**

*(To Orangina)* When are you coming back to work?

**ORANGINA**

I'm not

**LENOCHKA**

Why?

**ORANGINA**

Do you really want to keep doing all this?

**LENOCHKA**

*(Thinks)* Well, yes

**SNOWFLAKE**

Of course we do

**MANIAC**

As if there were any other choice –  
*Kissing, Bushy-Tail and Snowstorm race down the road  
at a break-neck speed.  
Blizzard in his jail cell. He's drawing a tattoo on  
his shoulder – the face of Jesus Christ in a crown of  
thorns.  
Dressed in a space suit, Maniac slips an engagement  
ring on Snowflake's finger.  
Snowflake in a rose dress, peonies in her hair.  
Lenochka is pregnant, she rubs her big belly.  
Orangina in a nun's habit.  
Volodya still stands there by the café.  
With a horrendous crash a huge chunk of ice crashes to  
the ground just inches from him.  
Volodya lifts his head.  
The sun is warm.  
Snow is melting.  
Spring has come.*

**THE END**

*Russian text* © Olga Mukhina 2004

*English Translation* © John Freedman 2009

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fashion whatsoever without the express permission of the author  
and the translator.*

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**Olga Mukhina** was born in 1970 to two geologists living in Moscow. When she was six years old, the family moved to Ukhta in the far north, where she spent the remainder of her childhood. Mukina returned to Moscow as a young adult with the hope of writing films. After several unsuccessful efforts to gain admission to a screenwriting program at the cinema institute, she turned her attention to the stage. Based upon her first play, *The Sorrows of Ksaveria Kalutsky*, she was invited to study dramatic writing at the Gorky Institute in 1991. She wrote two other plays, *Alexander August* (1991), and *The Love of Karlovna* (1992), before crafting the work that established her position as an important new voice in Russian theatre, *Tanya-Tanya*, in 1994. This play was introduced to the public in June of 1995, through a staged reading at Lyubimovka, which had been the suburban estate of Konstantin Stanislavsky. Early the next year, a full production of *Tanya-Tanya* opened to great acclaim at the Fomenko Theatre in Moscow. This production has been marked by some critics as instrumental in convincing critics and audiences in Russia that contemporary playwriting was worthy of their attention. According to critic and translator John Freedman, "This is the play that broke the vicious circle, that proved to large numbers of people with disparate backgrounds, styles and tastes, that a contemporary play could look, sound and feel good when performed on the stage" (Introduction xii). In the ensuing years, new drama was increasingly presented at festivals and produced by new theatre companies.

Part of the sensation created by Mukhina's work may be due to its dramatic departure from the dominant styles of playwriting during previous decades. Mukhina turns her attention to the realm of the personal and the emotional, with characters lost in a swirl of poetic images and desires. According to Freedman, "Mukhina is a writer of a completely different sensibility. She is a poet playwright, a dreamer capable of following the raptures of life into enchanted territory while never losing sight of the harsh limits and killing pressures of reality. Mukhina's characters soar in their aspirations even as their lives figuratively are dashed on the rocks" ("Bringing Forth Brilliance"). The impact of her poetic vision quickly spread beyond Russia's borders. Within a year of its first Moscow production, *Tanya-Tanya* was translated into five languages. The Moscow production toured to Poland, Germany, and Bulgaria. Staged readings were presented in 1997 at the Avignon Festival and, in 1998, at the New York Theatre Workshop. An English translation by John Freedman was published in 1999 and later presented in a reading at Portland Stage and performed at the California Institute of the Arts. Mukhina's subsequent plays include *YoU* (1996), which was produced at the Moscow Art Theatre and *Flying* (2004), which has been made into a film to be released in 2010.

#### Works Cited

Freedman, John. Introduction. *Two Plays by Olga Mukhina*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.

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## Another Conversation with the Translator

**Julia M. Smith** conducts an email interview with **John Freedman** about the translation of Olga Mukhina's *Flying*.

Julia M. Smith is a collaborative theater artist and educator and holds a BFA from NYU's Experimental Theatre Wing. Until 2008 she was a Senior Artistic Associate for Theatre Action Project and she remains a company member of of various companies based in Austin, TX while completing her MFA at Towson University. Her work has been recognized by the Austin Critic Table Awards, B. Iden Payne Committee, The Austin Chronicle and The New York Times.

**JS: What drew you to Mukhina's work in general and this play in particular?**

**JF:** I can't imagine not being attracted to Olga's work. It is so unique, so personal, so rich, so evocative. Her work is absolutely unlike any other. There is only one place to go to find dramatic literature like this – to Olga Mukhina. She stands alone. It is a thrilling challenge – to an audience, to a director, to a translator. I was knocked out by *Tanya-Tanya* when I saw the premiere of the play back in 1996. Within a couple of days I had already chased down Olga's phone number and I asked her if I could translate the play into English. I had no idea what I was going to do with it at that time. I just knew I wanted to share this amazing play with others. Somehow. Sometime. I think what attracted me instantly – and still has a strong hold today – is the magic of the work. The dream quality that, at the same time, is grounded firmly in reality. Somehow Olga allows us to break free of the bounds of earth while remaining very much inside the world we know and live in. So I translated *Tanya-Tanya* and then *YoU*, when she wrote that. By the time *Flying* came around in 2004, I jumped on it as soon as I could get to it.

**JS: Was the translation process of *Flying* different from the process of translating *Tanya-Tanya*?**

**JF:** I guess the only thing that changed was that with **Flying** I already had experience not only in translating Olga's work, but in communicating with her personally. Her evasiveness; her love of spinning spells with words and dramatic situations; her penchant for caressing you tenderly on the cheek even as she is winding up to punch you in the solar plexus with her other hand; her love of telling you one thing when she actually means another – these are all things that I knew just a little bit better by the time I dug into *Flying*.

**JS: How do you feel Mukhina's work is changing over time?**

**JF:** It's hard to say. Writing is very, very difficult for Olga. She has only written three plays in the last 14 years! On one hand that makes it difficult to compare the works. She once told me, "I can't write with my blood!" But the fact is that she, indeed, writes in her own blood. I guess what I mean to say is that her plays are always what she is at the moment that she writes. The total lack of social touch points in *Tanya-Tanya* led to some very clear social, even political, references in *YoU*. This was expressed primarily in an unnamed war that rages beyond the limits of the play, but colors almost everything that happens in the play. In *Flying* the intrusion of the public on the private is actually a major element of the play. This includes the world of television (in Russia, particularly, a tool for state propaganda), and the effect of drugs, easy money and quick success on people's lives. To some



extent *Flying* is a portrait of people's lives crumbling under the weight of external, social impulses. So I guess we can see in this a certain development in Olga's plays from the personal to the public. Nonetheless, *Flying*, like all Olga's other works, remains a fiercely private, internal exploration of specific individuals.

**JS: In *Flying* many of the characters work in a television studio or company. How has new media or the access to more media influenced modern Russian culture especially youth culture?**

**JF:** Television in the Putin years was turned back into a propaganda tool. It once again plays a role similar to that which it did in the Soviet era. Young people working for television studios – as Olga once did herself – have access to power, relative wealth, a glamorous lifestyle. These tend to be “beautiful people,” who live in a world apart. They affect fashion trends of all kinds. They form a small, but relatively powerful elite class. Since most tend to be quite young and they often get these jobs without having to actually do anything, it skews the way they see the world. Think, for instance, of the girl in Yaroslava Pulinovich's play *I Won*. She becomes a TV host after a simple interview. The boy she falls in love with is on the verge of becoming the chief sound engineer at a TV studio at the age of 21 and without any training at all. Chances are the people in Olga's *Flying* got where they are by similar routes. What that means is that they begin to live with an impression that life is easy and success comes automatically. The programs that these people create and broadcast encourage an audience to believe fairy-tales like this. To answer your question directly, the new media in Russia has created a phony, totally unrealistic, but seductively attractive image of being young. There is an incredibly dangerous breach between the image of hip youth and the reality of life as it is lived. Entire lives can disappear into that black gap. Olga's play is about that. The “glamorous life” is so attractive, but when it comes in and whacks you on the head, you may not get up again.

**JS: You and Yury Urnov worked with a group of undergraduate and graduate students at Towson University during the Fall of 2008 to present an abbreviated staged reading of *Flying*. Have you continued to work on your translation of the play since then and if so how did that reading influence the continuation of that translation process?**

**JF:** No, the translation that now exists is the one we arrived at by the end of that special course. The cuts that Yury made were done literally in the final days before the staged reading was held. As such, for most of the course we were working on the entire text. During that time I made a lot of changes and did a lot of fine-tuning based on the questions, knowledge and experiences that the students brought to the table. Yury brought up a lot of good points that influenced my attitude to the translation. All of that work is evident – at least to me – in the text as it now stands. I may well return to the translation when a production of the play is mounted, but there would be no reason for me to do that now, without live actors and a director to work with.

**JS: Mukhina often displays images alongside the text in her scripts. Did the images she used for *Flying* impact any of your translation choices?**

**JF:** Those pictures did not influence me in any specific, concrete way. But there is no denying that they are powerful tools that the writer provides for anyone seeking entrance into the world of the work. They create a very tangible system of coordinates, they set out flags reminding you constantly of the kinds of things that express, and have influence on, the people of the play.

**JS:** In the beginning of the script, Mukhina makes the claim that all of the events are true, even though after reading it we know that to be impossible. As translator of this piece, did you have any conversations with the playwright about this statement?

**JF:** No, this is a very old and common trick in literature, especially in Russia. It is instantly perceived as a wink from the author, a bit of a fun joke. It sets up a jocular tone before anything actually happens. I could fill an encyclopedia with the names of writers who tease readers with this claim. Alexander Pushkin in the early 1800s insisted that his famous story cycle known as *The Tales of Belkin* was a collection of prose writings by a man who died recently of a cold, was of average height, had gray eyes, a straight nose and so on. Many a Russian folk tale ends with the words, “I was there, I drank the beer, it wet my beard but missed my mouth.” Now, Olga will be happy to tell you that she didn’t write *Flying* at all, that she just compiled a bunch of interviews she conducted with her friends. She revels in calling the play a verbatim or documentary play. But don’t ever forget what D.H. Lawrence said: “Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.”

The playwright biography and translator interview were created for the new Russian drama season and appear on the project website at: [www.newrussiandrama.org](http://www.newrussiandrama.org).