

Andrey Ivanov

IT'S ALL HER FAULT

Translation from Russian by Olga Bukhova-Wilkinson,
with grateful thanks to Clare Brennan for assistance

Characters:

Mother (Tania)

Son (Kostia)

Toffee

Raven of the Tower

MONOLOGUE-1

Mother and Son are in their separate rooms. The rooms are separated with something more significant than just a wall. Mother holds an empty birdcage. Son is bent over his computer.

MOTHER (*on the phone with a friend*): God, it was cold... I know, mid November, why wouldn't it be? But still, a little thing like that ... A budgie ... So I bought that silly bird... The guy in the shop, his hands were huge! Can't imagine how he deals with tiny birds with those hands ... Yeah, teeny-weeny. It looked like he was going to crush it ... Well, of course he wasn't... So there it was, fluttering around, trying to keep out of reach of that huge hand and then – he got it. And, you know what? When he brought out and opened his hand, it just lay, like dead ...no, it wasn't ... It was just, well, still. So I took it home.

I clutched it under my coat all the way home - Oooh! That wind! Bitter, it was! ... My fingers went all wooden with the cold... And, you know what? I arrived home and, as a fool, stood in front of the door. You know, I often do it nowadays. Stupid, stupid, I know! I think if I ring the bell, I'll hear Vania's slippers coming up along the corridor... So I could stand there forever –

just waiting for his slippers... In the end I reached for my own key and opened the door ... What? Kostia? No, he never opens the door to me. He won't answer the door for anyone. When I ask why ... you know, I might be struggling with the shopping, the keys and ... Well, he claims he doesn't hear the doorbell, he has those headphones on ... Anyway ...

So I let myself in and called out for him: Kostia! Darling, look who's come to live with us! Here's someone who wants to meet you!

I was picturing his reaction, his face as a child - when children are happy their faces literally light up, don't they, they go all dimples on their cheeks and sparks in their eyes... Like that birthday when Vania got him a budgie – his little face! He was so happy... he kept wanting to hold it and stroke its legs – he couldn't get over how tiny they were. Like twigs, he said, so wrinkly and thin! ... About a week – that's all that bird lasted ... god knows why ... Sure thing, Kostia got into a terrible state. Just dreadful. That was when I decided – no more pets! Kostia was once begging for a puppy. But just out of love for him I said no ... It was his suffering I couldn't bear. I just wanted Kostia to be happy.

So, anyway, there I was, standing in the hallway as a fool, calling and waiting for him but he wouldn't come out ... Even with those headphones I know he can hear me. That poor budgie was sitting on the cage floor, with its eyes shut tight ... I got really angry. I do everything to establish some kind of contact with him after all what's happened and to clear the air somehow ... and he...

That was when I took the cage to the kitchen, put the cage on the table and started doing the dishes. And then I can't bear it anymore and yell: KO-O-OSTIA!!! ... In a few seconds I hear the door of his room open and there he comes ... Stares at me ... And I say: darling, look who's going to live with us! You remember, don't you, how much you loved birds? ... But he just stares at me... you know, with this horrible gaze... It started a while ago, when Vania was still around ... He stares at me as if I was some kind of a deep sea fish (*tears in her voice*) He studies me. I used to tell Vania: something is wrong! Kostia is so cold ... he is not a loving kind, it's odd at his age ... But Vania used to say – he's a teenager, what do you expect? He'll be fine. ...Oh, poor darling Vania... No, no, it's OK, I'm fine... So... He stares with these terrifying eyes first at me ... then at the bird ... And then – can you believe it? – he just turns and goes ... No, not a word ... My hands started shaking. I mean, why? What did I do? ... No, seriously, what did I do to deserve it? After all I do for him ... And he very well knows how hard it is for me right now ... So I grab that bloody cage, dash to the window and open it wide ... Awful wind and drizzle! I open the cage, the bird is screeching, I shake the cage but the bird is still in it, flapping madly... And then in the end I get it out – right there, in

the cold ... it's still screeching and flapping its little wings but it can't manage in that terrible wind, and at last is blown away, but I can hear its voice... And I cry and cry...

Beat.

I have no idea what's gone into me ... Now, I'm stuck with this blooming cage. They look great with candles – I saw in an article, in a magazine. Very original, you know, like a little flicker in a cage ... You wouldn't like ...? Oh, well, never mind. It's just that it doesn't seem to fit ...

MOTHER tries to find a suitable place in the room to put the cage.

SON (*talking on the phone with a friend*): Can you believe it? Every time, every bloody time! I hear the lift. Then her footsteps, right up the front door. Never got her key ready. So she stands there. Listening, y'know. What's she listening for? To hear what I'm up to? Like I might be getting high or shagging someone ... Drives me mad ... Anyway, next thing, she's ringing the bell. And I wouldn't open. Like, got my headphones on, so what the ... Then, of course, she'll start screwing my brain – can't you hear me ringing or what? No, I can't. Can hear only 'Linkin Park'.

Yeah, right ... next thing, she's outside my door. Listening – again! Bitch! And then she gets in and starts yelling. Like, she can't just say my name – she's always got to yell it. Yell, yell, bloody yell! ... Can tell, she doesn't notice herself ... And, like, then she starts saying there's someone to meet me. I'll bet it's a puppy. Like, she wants to be friends ... Why the fuck would I want a puppy? ... Y'know, the main thing is, don't let her think you're giving in. That you're not, like, 'mummy's sweet little boy'. Fuck her with her puppy ... So I keep quiet.

And then she starts yelling again. Only this time from the kitchen ... Yeah, I go. But slowly. And, guess what! It's not a fucking puppy – it's kinda sparrow, all wet. And there she is, standing there, watching me – like, see what a fucking brilliant mum I am! And I'm supposed to be, like, overjoyed? ... If dad'd been there – he'd've made a joke, said something funny, got us all rolling round, laughing. That way, I wouldn't give a shit it wasn't a puppy. Like, I was going to be over the moon about some sad sparrow ... And another thing, if dad'd been there, she wouldn't be standing about with that face on her, watching me. She and dad would've had a snog and he'd've been joshing her how bloody awesome she was.

But dad's not here, is he? Only she is, staring and staring ... I bloody hate her! Everything she touches – she screws it up! ... What the hell! You know what I want. The whole fucking thing to disappear – like, go! Ka-bam! Annihilation! Her, the flat, the school – whole bloody lot ... Just me, alone ... Sure, I could. I could shack up in that old abandoned place, the cement factory ... You know the one ... Just me, the laptop and the Wi-Fi ... Well, could go and plug it in occasionally at the train station, couldn't I ... I'd get by just fine.

Anyway, so there I am, looking at that sparrow thing, right. I mean – c'mon! What was she thinking? LOL ... It's got these weird little legs – like twigs. Ugh!... But, what's it up to me? So I leave the kitchen. And behind me I can hear her. Stomping ... Wow, is she pissed off! ... But then, get this – there's this funny kinda squeaking sound, like a tiny door opening on tiny hinges – and this, like, squawk. Next thing, there's this crashing banging! ... The kitchen window flapping, I'm telling you ... She'd only fucking chucked the fucking sparrow thing out, hadn't she! ... Really, thwacking into the frame – and again, and again ... And then, on top of the banging, there was this sobbing sound ... Crying – she was crying. What's that about? ... Fuck her!

I look out my window. Fucking freezing out there, man, I tell you ... I felt like shit – y'know, kinda dead inside ... The bitch! That's it. Over. I'm never, not ever speaking to her. Not even a word. Not ever again ... She's off my horizon, y'know.

Then I'm, like, watching this stuff on YouTube – people falling off things, smashing into things, you know the kind ... yeah, well, don't really know why ... Yeah, I was laughing. Like, real laugh – loud. I knew she could hear me ... Didn't help though, right. Still felt like shit. So I'm laughing my arse off in my room, actually, feeling like crying, mate ... And she's out in the kitchen, wailing.

And then, y'know what, this morning when I went out? I found these feathers – green feathers ... on the flowerbed under the window. Cat must've got it.

MOTHER: I can't tell you how upset I was. I hardly even knew where I was until I started to shiver. The window was still open. And then I heard this sound from his room. You know what he was doing? He was laughing! Loudly! ... It gave me creeps. Because I understood. Oh, I understood alright. He was laughing at me. As if I was some kind of idiot. A hysterical fool. Not his mother, just some clown who cooks his food and washes his clothes! ... God, I miss Vania so much! ... He'd have known what to say, some special words to calm me, make me feel better ... They say people leave their imprint on us, don't they? But, however hard I try, there's nothing. I can't find him, can't hear his voice ... Sorry. I'll stop – before I set myself off ... And, in his room, Kostia's still laughing. I snap. That's it! I open his door and I tell him, calmly ...

SON: She marches in and yells: stop that laughing, now! ... Yeah, right, sure. I tell her I'll do, like, what I want. And she's, like, stop it! And then she starts on me: take the bin out! Clean up your room! Wash the dishes ...

MOTHER: I tell him, you've got too much time on your hands, my dear. You don't know what to do with yourself. All this pent up energy, you need to burn it off. Come on. What you need is a little bit of direction ... Don't you think so? ... He needs to be taken in hand. After all, I'm not a block of wood either. It's best to be firm at times like this ... So, I tell him, go and clean up your father's suit ...

SON: So then, get this, you know what she says? Go and clean his suit. His suit! Like, y'know ... It's hanging in his wardrobe. It's the one he was wearing when ... It's, like, his last suit. She kept it. But, I mean - it's, like, totally clean! Okay, well, there's like just this one drop of blood. Tiny ... On the sleeve. You can hardly see it.

But she is, like, fuming, you know. What she means is: go and get that blood off it. Bitch! Why the hell did she keep that suit in the first place? And now she's telling me – go clean it. As if nothing had happened.

MOTHER: And, would you believe it, all at once he jumps up and says - okay mum, I'll clean that suit for you.

SON: And she's like – yes, well, don't forget to take the bin out, too. So I act up - of course, mummy... I'll clean the suit. But I don't say a word about the bins or cleaning up the room or anything, right. And in my head, like, I'm thinking: kill her, I could fucking kill her ...

MOTHER: ... I was so pleased, you know, I really thought that he had realised how much he'd upset me and wanted to show me he was sorry. So I went back to the kitchen, thinking about that suit ... Didn't I tell you? ... Yes, of course it's a frightening thing. But it's not just *any* old suit ... I keep it in the wardrobe. I go there whenever I feel the need. It's as if death never happened ... I can stroke it and I can smell Vania. As if he were right there. He always wore this perfume - 'Deep Red' I bought it for his anniversary, you know ... this square bottle. Like warm fresh wood in the sunlight... It makes me feel serene ... I don't even cry. ... No, it's alright, I'm fine, really ... I just open the wardrobe and stand and stroke his jacket and smell his scent. Just can't look at that sleeve... Because there is a tiny blood stain there – like a bullet hole – and that's where death is. So, when Kostia agreed to clean it off, I felt so happy. He'll wash it off and he'll feel better for it, too.

SON: And then she went all sappy, like, right then, you clean the suit and we'll have a nice cup of tea. Bollocks to that! Go stuff yourself with that nice cup of tea. She's forever standing by the wardrobe, sniffing that suit. Pervy, isn't it ... It's, like, shocking. Honestly, I don't like

being alone in the room with that wardrobe ... But I don't give a shit, I'll manage. You want the suit cleaned, bitch? I'll fucking clean it, you bet I fucking will!

MOTHER: Then, just as I'm finishing the dishes, I hear him in the bathroom...

SON: I'm in the bathroom, right. With this knife – fine blade, dead sharp. And I start cleaning up the fucking suit.

MOTHER: But it's an odd sound - not like someone's rubbing fabric. Besides, he's whining ... a funny voice, like a girl's ...

SON: So I'm there, right, and I'm laughing like Hannibal Lector, y'know? And I keep scraping and scraping at that bloody suit ...

MOTHER: I dashed to the bathroom – and he's slashing it with some kind of blade, ripping it to shreds. It's not a jacket anymore, just ... rags... and there's this smell ... petrol... a total shock...

SON: So she starts hissing at me like a snake...

MOTHER: I tell him: you silly boy - what do you think you are doing? And my hands are shaking ...

SON: I keep laughing, right ...

MOTHER: And he's crying, just crying ...

SON: I held the lighter next to it and ... whoosh!

MOTHER: The flames up to the ceiling, he's sobbing, and I'm frozen to the spot. It's burning – and then I realise - turn on the tap! ... I take it out of the bath, shake it - it's badly charred. And Kostia dries his tears and tells me without so much as blinking ...

SON: So I tell her, right? I tell her, hey, look, mum, I've cleaned the suit, OK? I'm off to play now for a bit. Or maybe hangout on Facebook. And I bugger off, like, totally cool ...

MOTHER: And off he goes, shoulders hunched up around his ears. And all I can do is sit there, with tears running down my cheeks. But what I want to do is thrash him – punish him, somehow – but I just keep crying. And in my arms there's this charred, slashed mess – and I hug it and stroke it ...

DIALOGUE-1

Mother is in her room, at the table, with a cup of tea. She looks like she has an awful headache, but is putting on a brave face. She is on the phone with the same friend.

Son is in his room, lying on his bed, listening to music and smiling to himself.

MOTHER: God, it's tough. I used to think maybe he's drinking, or smoking, or taking drugs, or who knows what else besides ... He doesn't let me in. It's as if he didn't exist at all ... And now, well, I'm afraid he might be ... well ... that he's ... God, I can hardly bring myself to say it ... That he's queer ... gay ... you know ... whatever they call them nowadays ... homosexual ... No, wait ... listen! ... I've never seen him even talking to a girl, let alone go out with one ... you know. Never! ... He has some kind of a friend, a classmate, they are forever on the Internet doing ... whatever ... I don't know ... whatever it is they do on the Internet ... They hang out together ... Somewhere! ... No, I'm not exaggerating, they spend far too much time together and it's weird ... I mean, what if my Kostia is ... you know, one of 'them'? That would be a total disaster. That's like.... I don't know. Remember that programme? ... Pathetic, miserable people! ... Disgusting, I call it. Revolting! ... Made my skin crawl just to think of it. Do you think it could be my fault? Is there something I should have noticed? What if he's seen something dreadful, you know ... on the telly ... the Internet ... one of those programmes that they show ... and it's, you know, affected him? Damaged him? His life could be ruined ...

... Ask him? Ask him! I couldn't! ... No, no way, of course I couldn't discuss it with him ... How do you imagine I could? Look, I've just managed to say those words to you, I've never even spoken them out loud before. How can I ask my own son if he is one of ... 'them'? It's a nightmare, a total nightmare ... But listen ... I think I've found a way around it. I've done something rather sneaky and quite possibly brilliant [*She smiles*] A pedagogical success. A new method ... I mounted a sort of ... well, you could call it a sort of undercover operation ... I went on the Internet [*Goes to her laptop*] and I found some places where they talk to one another. You know, the sort of thing, chatter rooms ... well, anyway, I studied their jargon, the way teenagers talk to one another. All these LOLs and smiley faces that look like little bunnies and things ... and the swearing! You wouldn't believe it! F-ing this and f-ing that ... I know, I agree. But I thought to myself – I can put up with swearing if it's for my child's sake, can't I? So, anyway, I've set up a fake account! ... An Internet account thingy ... On Facebook, a social network, you know ... I've made up a whole new identity – a mysterious teenage girl! ... I did! ... Well, to be honest, it wasn't that difficult. Had to invent some twisted life story for her, something really mysterious, spooky, even. I found a great picture, perfect! Good-looking, moody, all in black, snake tattoo the length of her arm ... Learned a bit about

contemporary music and marked all these horrendous bands that Kostia likes as her favourite. Then, added a couple of quotes from Nietzsche, the most cynical ones ... Kids do like all things mind-bending and cynical, don't they? ... I'd checked out his profile ... God, it was depressing! Talk about goth! All gloomy, doomy! Sinister pictures of nooses, swords, all kinds of blades. And he calls himself, okay, get this - 'Raven of the Tower'. I thought, the efforts I've gone through to make him happy, for God's sake! Now I discover he's only really happy with ravens and scary faces ... And the music they listen to! ... Some blaring, really ... Ah, well, anyway ...

So I sent him an invitation to become friends with this mysterious girl. And also, I called her 'Toffee' – like candies, you know. And I waited.

He was cautious. So I got Toffee to put up hearts and winking eyes, and smiley faces, and thumbs up under his horrid pictures and stuff ... they call them 'likes' ... as if I really liked those nooses of his. He didn't link for a long time. No answer whatsoever. But then...

Enter TOFFEE and RAVEN OF THE TOWER. The barrier that separates them is flimsier than the one between MOTHER and SON.

SON brightens up and starts tapping at his keyboard. MOTHER types on her laptop. MOTHER and SON react only to TOFFEE's and RAVEN's dialogue.

TOFFEE. Hi.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Don't even think about asking me something banal like, 'How are you today'. It's so common.

TOFFEE. I know how you are.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Really?

TOFFEE. Because I've checked your emoticon.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. True. [*Smiley*] Is it really you - that picture?

TOFFEE. Like – doh! Who else could it be?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You're weird ... Everybody else put any crap but their own pictures.

TOFFEE. Why is that?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Dunno. Maybe they don't like themselves ... or it's spots ...

TOFFEE. What about you – is that really you in the picture?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Like, 'doh' to you too! Course it is!

TOFFEE. So you like yourself?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Didn't say that. But the picture is mine.

TOFFEE. Who *do* you like?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. No one.

TOFFEE. Same here.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Where are you from?

TOFFEE. I've come from Saint-Petersburg.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Here we say 'Peter'.

TOFFEE. Everybody who's not from Saint-Petersburg say 'Peter'. [*Smiley*].

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Your profile says you're into *taxidermy* ... what's that?

TOFFEE. It's the art of making stuffed animals. My father is a taxidermist.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Hey, that's fucking bad! [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. What does that mean – good bad or bad bad?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Well ... Doh! ... Good, of course. You're funny. Cool. [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. [*Smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. How long have you been in town?

TOFFEE. A week.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. And?

TOFFEE. It's ... wicked. What do you do?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Nothing much. Go to school ... Write poetry ... That kinda thing.

TOFFEE. LOL.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. LOL what? What's so funny?

TOFFEE. Funny? Nothing. Poetry? That's interesting.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Interesting?

TOFFEE. Yeah. Can I read some?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Forget I mentioned it.

TOFFEE. Come on, what's the problem?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Nothing ... I just ... don't know where to find it right now.

TOFFEE. Did I upset you ... with the LOL? [*Sad smiley*].

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I'm not fucking upset, okay!

TOFFEE. Okay. I only asked. Pity. About your poems.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Right. What about you – what do you do?

TOFFEE. I fucking do my fucking lessons, for fuck's sake! Also I help my mum. [*Smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. It's weird, the way you swear, sometimes. [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Weird? How do you mean weird? Am I getting it wrong?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You're fucking joking? [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. No.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. LOL! [*Smiley*] Anyhow, you don't look like such a goody-goody – not in that picture, anyway!

TOFFEE. What the fuck you're on about?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. 'Help my mum'!

TOFFEE. So – what's wrong with that? I love my mum ... Whatever ... I also like to walk around cemeteries. And, sometimes, I run off ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. What's with that? You love your mum but you run off and hide in cemeteries?

TOFFEE. Sometimes, sure ... when things get ... you know, too much ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Aren't you afraid of cemeteries? The zombies might come and get you. [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. No! Fuck off! It's quiet there ... peaceful. There I like to think about eternity...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Fuck off ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You're kidding me?

TOFFEE. There I think about eternity, I'm telling you.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. [*Smiley smiley smiley*]

TOFFEE. Well, what about you? Don't you help your mum?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. No.

TOFFEE. Not at all?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. She died.

Beat.

TOFFEE. Died?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Died.

TOFFEE. So who do you live with?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Just myself ... and my dad.

TOFFEE. So she's fucking dead?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah ... kinda.

TOFFEE. And your dad – he's alright?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah, he's okay. We go fishing. And play volleyball ... He's cool.

TOFFEE. And your mum – was she ... cool?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Her? Cool? Not fucking likely! All she ever did was yell, yell, yell!

Beat.

MOTHER. So you can imagine! Even my blood pressure went up! I told myself – I shouldn't have started this ... The first words that came to my mind were frightening: he doesn't love me. He doesn't love me! A son, to say that about his mother! He upset me so much – I have no words to describe it. Everything I do ... my whole life revolves around him ... And he imagines me dead. I even cried. But I kept it quiet ... So that he couldn't hear me in his room ... I always cry like this – I've got this special technique, you know, it sort of stifles the sobs ... Same way you hold back a sneeze, you know, when you pinch your nose ... Like sobbing from inside ... Of course, I don't always hide my tears, sometimes I cry in front of him – to show how deeply he hurts me ... Anyway, it was awful... But I also got angry, really angry – furious! I almost wanted to end all that stupid Toffee thing. But then I decided to go on – for

the sake of my son. Hadn't I started this game to find out the truth about the way he feels? So, your mother is dead? Fine! Dead she'll be! The main thing for me was to find out about *him*: that he's okay... that he's not gay...

SON. Now, fancy that: I, like, told her my mother was dead and she just shut it. ... Y'know, that cool bitch on Facebook. She better not bloody feel sorry for me, for fuck's sake! Women, huh! Remember Nadia, that time a bolt went through your foot during that plant visit? She couldn't stop crying. Said she couldn't help it – she was *feeling* for you! Fucking stupid! If she felt so much, how come she never made it to visit you in hospital? None of them did. What a crowd of arseholes ... that class of ours! ... Screw 'em! Whatever.

Anyhow, then I thought – why would this Toffee cry? It's not like she really knows me. I'm not the only one whose parent had died, am I? Maybe it was something else ... like, she needed a piss or something? So I thought - that's enough, why should I be thinking of her at all, for fuck's sake? So I thought ... fuck her! You know? Like, so what? I've got better things to do...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Hey, Toffee? You there? Wassappenin'? [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Hi! I'm here. How was school today?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. C'mon. Get away with that! Fuck school.

TOFFEE. Sure. Right. Sorry.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. It's OK ..., just ... I hate school. I've only got one friend there. Don't tell me you like school.

TOFFEE. No, I don't. I have private tutors. I do the school programme at home.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Really? That's cool. [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Anyhow, what about your friend?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Just a friend... What else? We hang out, do stuff ... break in to an old abandoned factory ... dick around ...

TOFFEE. What d'you mean 'dick around'?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. We just bloody talk.

TOFFEE. So that's it? Nothing else?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. For fuck's sake, what else is there?

TOFFEE. No, nothing. [*Smiley*]

MOTHER sighs with relief.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. If you want I can take you around that factory too. It's cool. There are stray dogs – but you'll be alright if you stick with me. [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Don't know. Doubt it.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Why's that?

TOFFEE. It's just that ... I'm allergic ... to ultraviolet. I go out only at night.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You're kidding me! [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. I'm not! It's a rare condition.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Wow! That's wicked. So, hey, you're like a vampire.

TOFFEE. Sure! That's me - a vampire!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Like, you go out at night, sucking blood. [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. That's right.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. But you don't sleep during the day, do you – 'cause it's day now and we're talking. So you can do it in daytime too? [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Do what?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Suck blood.

TOFFEE. Sort of.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. [*Smiley*] Do you believe in vampires?

Beat.

TOFFEE. Well... Yeah...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You're a goth, aren't you, you should be obsessed with vampires.

TOFFEE. Obsessed? How do you mean?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Like, you must love them. You know – 'Twilight', Dracula, stuff like that ... Vampires were invented for you bitches [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Who are you calling 'bitch', huh?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah, right. Sorry ... girl it is! [*Smiley*]

Beat

MOTHER on the phone with her friend. SON in his room, acting nervous

MOTHER. I can't tell you how relieved I was. And happy. We were talking. Openly. Sincerely ... Okay, I know it wasn't for real, but still ... a contact ... Even though he says he wants me dead, so what? It's a pose. Like the language. Never mind I don't understand half of what he says, I have to Google these words. Never mind. I felt like it was a breakthrough. Yet I decided to run a little test: to find out how much it meant to him – talking to this girl.

I called to him: Ko-o-o-stia!

SON [*on the phone with his friend*] Right, and you know what – that was when she started again. Yelling! Ko-o-o-o-stia! Just as this chick was writing to me. I got real furious, I thought 'Fuck you!'

So I yelled back: I'm busy!

MOTHER. He shouted back to me, he was busy! So I tried again: do you want to go to the movies? I'll give you a tenner. And he shouted back – no, I'm doing my homework! [*She smiles*]

SON. She has to make a show all the time – just to demonstrate what a fucking great mummy she is! Started offering me money for the movies, or like – shall I make you a cake? Fuck you and your cake, and your movies! So I shout like I'm busy, leave me alone. And put the headphones on.

SON puts on headphones. MOTHER is delighted.

MOTHER. Got him! You see? The relief, I can't tell you ... Because, at long last I've found a way to reach him, a feeble one, but very real and awfully valuable. Now I knew for sure he is not gay, I knew our Kostia's normal... My son is a real man – sure, a bit rude ... But quite romantic at heart, like me ... And I also found it could be so addictive – this Internet thing ... [*Returns to the computer*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Tell me more about yourself.

TOFFEE. Like what?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Anything. I dunno. Whatever.

TOFFEE. Well ... I have a little brother. I look after him.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Cool. I haven't got any brothers. Or sisters.

TOFFEE. I look after him but he, well, it's like he doesn't appreciate how much I do for him.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. How do you mean?

TOFFEE. He sulks all the time. Doesn't talk to me ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Maybe you don't understand what he needs? Or maybe he has stomach ache?

TOFFEE. What, like, all the time? Don't know. Anyway, I'm fed up with it.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Talk to him. But talk for real – honestly.

TOFFEE. I do talk – all the time.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. And?

TOFFEE. He says – 'Go die'.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Bloody hell. [*Smiley*] So you're, like, pissed with him?

TOFFEE. Totally.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You know ... I like you ... A lot ... I don't even need any more pictures of you.

TOFFEE. Why would you want more pictures?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. To check: what if this one has been air-brushed and in actual fact you're ugly - a dog. [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Hey, I'm not ugly!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I know you're not. But you relax, I don't wank off at your pictures ... honest ...

TOFFEE. You don't ... WHAT? Yuck!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Sorry. I mean, aren't girls afraid that someone would wank off in front of their pictures?

TOFFEE. No ... I don't know ... I have to go.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Wait a sec! Forget about wanking, it wasn't really what I meant to say. [*Sad smiley*]

TOFFEE. What did you mean to say?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. That you're great ... I mean ... cool. Don't disappear on me, okay? [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Okay. See you tomorrow.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Definite? [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Definite. Night!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Enjoy your walk [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. What?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Don't you go out at night?

TOFFEE. Oh, yeah, sure ... that's right. Maybe I'll go check out that abandoned factory of yours.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Okay. See you ... Bye then.

TOFFEE. See you.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Are you still there?

TOFFEE. Yes. Why?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Bye! [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Bye.

MONOLOGUE-2

MOTHER and SON are in their rooms. Dim lights. There is a lit lamp on SON'S table.

In MOTHER'S room a candle is burning, locked in a birdcage.

SON: [*talking with a friend on the phone*] Y'know, I've been thinking about her all day. How she is moving around their new flat and stuff ... What's it like, d'you think, living in a flat full of stuffed animals? All those glass eyes ... Nah, didn't think

anything like that ... just imagined, like, how she's moving around there ... She looks like a ghost, anyway – all white. You can see in her picture – white as chalk ... Her kid brother's a pain ... And her dad's just, like, taxiderming everything he can put his hands on ... So, yeah, you kinda could say she's all alone. Same as me.

Hey, talking of chalk. Teachers are weird! Today during chemistry the teacher was eating chalk again – what do you make of that?! Mad, I know! ... What's she on? And she's, like, 'Pay no attention, class, it's calcium deficiency' ... How the fuck pay no attention? ... Fat pig ... Crunch-crunch-crunch ... White flakes all over her tits... Yeah, mental... I know ...

Sometimes I believe I see, like, ALL teachers munching chalk like that ... white saliva drooling out of their mouths ... and then they make us eat bloody chalk too ... Crunch-crunch-crunch ... Until we start drooling, like, white saliva as well... Fucking crazy. Now, as I go to school, I feel like my guts are getting full of bloody chalk ... Good for you, mate, that you didn't come today. Total waste of time.

... No, I do it on the phone, 'cause the Internet is so fucking slow. Five minutes to refresh a page ... Also, had a mock exam today, so no time at all. I thought I might get to the Internet-café during the lunch break, to check what she's posted to me ... Toffee ... Nah, I didn't ... Why should I? ... But she'll message me. Anyway, I don't fucking care ...

Right, so, when I get home – power outage! Shit! I was fuming, even broke a mug ... I thought, like, she's out there waiting for me, she has no one to talk to – I saw she has no Friends in her contacts yet, just me.

So ... now listen to this. I was hanging around the flat like a fool, in total darkness, and felt a cold draught, so I thought, like, she must have left the window open – again – so, I went into her room and closed the window. And what did I find? That cage ... Do you remember? The one for the bird ... the one she brought home for me, right? The budgie. ... And there was this candle ... But get this ... it was stuck right in the middle of the bloody cage! ... Go figure – first she chucks the bird out herself and next thing, like, she's lighting a candle for it ... She can't just get rid of the cage. Typical! First, she's sniffing dad's jacket, now she's fiddling with the fucking cage...

Right, but that wasn't what was gross. I was so mad at her that I kicked her bed ... hers and dad's bed, that is ... that was ... And I heard something hit the floor. Something big. It must have fallen from under the cover, y'know ... So I lifted the cover and ... Are you ready for this? A dildo! For fuck sake! Huge blue rubber dildo! Now, is that gross or is that gross! ... Stood there and didn't really know what to do next.

It was like when I saw porn first time in my life. I was eleven. Couldn't believe people actually DID it. It looked to me as if people were murdering each other ... [Laughs] Yeah, can you imagine? ... Like something scary and fucking unnatural ... But this time – I actually started laughing, yeah ... 'Cause it was a dick to die for ... So I went and got some pliers, took that dick - not with my hands, you're kidding me or what? And then candle out, dick in! In the cage. Thought, let it be a surprise. I stood there laughing and looking at my creation and then I heard, like, she was back home.

MOTHER: It was a most stupid day, really ... Take my boss ... Well, you know the database I told you about? ... Impossible! She wants it now! ... No, not in the time they've allocated, no way ... And then Svetlana ... Can you believe, she calls us all together to discuss our New Year's corporate party - three months in advance! ... Three months, I'm telling you! ... Also the menu ... It's definitely for not less than three hours, knowing our people ... But main thing, I didn't have even half of that database ready. So I tell her, 'Svetlana, please, can't you just decide without me? I'll go along with whatever you decide, I really don't care.' And she makes her lips in a pout, you know the way she does ... and says 'Tania darling, I don't force you, but you know, it's a team thing' ... Yes, she definitely can! ... We had this older woman, worked with us for ages ... So Svetlana had taken her off the yearly bonus because she had forgotten to say Happy birthday to her! ... How about that? ... And then, come the end of the meeting, she looked round at everybody else and said 'Let's all thank Tania for taking the minutes of the meeting. I'm assuming, Tania, that's what you were so busily tapping into your laptop all this time?' ... Yes, made a fool of me ... I didn't know where to look. I just smiled. How stupid was that? As if I was her 'whipping boy' – I mean, 'girl' in this case ... Well, of course, they all sniggered ... As if I had been doing something alien at work. But I did work, I had to! ... Exactly ... that's what I go there for – to work ... Well, never mind ...

I've been thinking a lot about Kostia – whether I'm doing right or wrong. Maybe, that's why I failed with the database. Well, in the end I decided there's nothing wrong in what I do. In a way, I get excited about this whole story myself. I think about him a lot, wondering what's he doing right now ... what's he feeling ...

Well, I got home, and the lift wasn't working, of course – a power cut! And I'd been thinking – how nice, I'll come home and we'll talk, and all ... Well, not me, of course, Toffee ... And there you go, no power, can't get the computer on. I got really upset ... I had planned so much about what Toffee's had been doing during the day ...

Anyway, I got to our door and rang the bell. He didn't answer, of course. And suddenly I felt – I don't expect Vania's slippers any more. As if I had come to terms with Vania's death. I mean, I stood there in front of the door and knew that there's only Kostia now ... And I didn't care that he wouldn't open the door for me ...

Well, I opened the door – it was all quiet. I said 'Kostia, I'm back!' Nothing. I came closer to his door and heard that he was, like, sobbing, sniffing – as if he was crying – again. I didn't knock on the door; I thought he was still upset about Vania's jacket. But I had forgiven him, of course! Well, men don't like anyone to see them crying, do they ... So, I thought, I let him cry. And then I went to my room. And there ... what a mess!! Everything upside down. And the bed! Oh my word! ... He must have been on it watching telly ... You know how I love everything in its place ... What? No power? ... Yes, you're right ... Well, then he must have been watching the telly while there had been electricity ... Yes, in our bedroom ... You remember, we have this huge plasma TV. When Kostia was little, he loved coming to our bed. He would settle in between Vania and I and we would watch morning programmes, all together, with a cup of tea ... Well, it was a different telly then ...

Can't tell you how mad I got. Embarrassing really, now that I think about it ... Well, everyone should have boundaries, do you agree? Some personal territory. He can do whatever he wants in his room, can't he ... But my room is my room! I ran straight up to him. I said – what on earth is it? What a lack of respect? Don't you understand? ... And he was lying on his bed, and his eyes were red from crying. Never mind, I thought, I don't care. He can cry if he wants. But what about me? Does anyone care when I cry?

SON: And then I heard her stomping and yelling – totally manic! She barged into my room, almost broke the door handle, crazy bitch, and grabbed me by the ear, and started screaming like a fucking pig and twisting my ear. Apparently she didn't like the dildo in the cage, ha-ha-ha ... And she yelled 'Don't you ever dare go into my room again! I'll put locks on my door!' And I, like, said 'Feel free! Looks like you've forgotten dad pretty soon and even found him a substitute! Did you see I've found a flat for your new boyfriend?' Right, so, then she grabbed my jeans ... the Levis ... they were right there on the chair, y'know ... and started thwacking me with them right on my face. ... 'Course it hurt! For fuck sake! Those are metal buttons! ... Nah, I didn't care ... No, honestly I didn't ... I was, like, imagining how I'll run away ... I thought, you don't even need to burn anything down to become homeless, do you ... You just forget everything from the past – that's it! Done! I could hide out in our den in the factory. ... Or even ask that Toffee if I could stay at hers for bit. ... Until I find a job. Then can kip at the den and go to work. And go to Toffee's to shower and wash my clothes...

MOTHER: ... It was the answering back that set me off! I was quite calm, reasoning with him about privacy and respecting the person you live with, and ... and he kept answering back! He accused me of... He said I forgot Vania too soon! ... How dare he? He's got no idea ... I told him 'If you knew how much I suffer in silence' ... Ah well ... I had to run out ... But he deserved it! ...Never mind, once he's talked to Toffee, he'll calm down. He can tell her everything. ... We both will calm down ...

SON: Yeah, right ... I was sitting there and staring at my jeans. ... You know, when I touched my hair, there was blood! Fucking shit! ... Yeah, must have been a button on the jeans ... so I, like, sat there and didn't feel anything – at all ... like, blind and deaf and numb ... nothing. As if she and everything else were somewhere so fucking far from me. ... But I was thinking about Toffee, of course ... wondering how she was ... At that moment power was back.

MOTHER: ... Me? No, I was just making dinner ... for this ungrateful son of mine ... Thinking stuff ... And all of a sudden there was music blearing from the radio – power was back on! I almost put the knife through my hand.

SON: I put the computer on and guess what ... It said 'Re-routing'! ... Yeah, not enough money. But I thought I'm not going to ask her for money, not even leave my

room. ... I just used my mobile. Well, it's slow, I know ... but I still could chat with her ...

MOTHER: I finished making the salad and went back into my room, to the computer. ... Tidied everything, of course ... I had topped up the Internet on my way from work, I hoped the payment had already gone through. ... I thought, I had to make him feel a bit better, he was upset, obviously. So I went online and there he was, waiting! Online, that is.

DIALOGUE-2

Mother and Son. Enter Toffee and Raven of the Tower.

TOFFEE. Hiya! [*Smiley*]

Beat.

TOFFEE. Hello! Are you there?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Hiya. [*Smiley*] Sorry, the Internet on my mobile is slow.

TOFFEE. On your mobile? Why not your computer?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. The Internet needs topping up.

TOFFEE. Okay. So ... how are you?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Fucking great.

TOFFEE. Is that 'fucking great' good or 'fucking great' bad?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. 'Fucking great' good.

TOFFEE. Hard to tell from ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. From what? Now you'll tell me you can know people's mood from their user pic.

TOFFEE. No, nothing. Just kidding. [*Smiley*] So all's well?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah, all's fucking great, couldn't be better. And you?

TOFFEE. I'm good. I walked by that place, last night. The one you told me about. Where you have your den.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. And?

TOFFEE. It's cool.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Isn't it? My friend and I have a den there under old conveyor belts.

TOFFEE. [*Smiley*]

Beat.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Oh, the Internet's back! Great. ... Right. We have a sofa there. Found it on the tip. Cool, hey?

TOFFEE. The tip? Uggety-uggety!!!! What about the bugs?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Bugs? There aren't any bugs. We've got a table, too. Made it ourselves. From old crates. It's our secret place.

TOFFEE. Sounds cool. What do you do there?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Sniff glue.

MOTHER is horrified.

TOFFEE. You what?!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Just kidding, ha-ha-ha! Nothing much. Hang out. Stuff. I'll take you there. You can meet my friend.

TOFFEE. Yeah... sure... some day.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Make it soon, OK? ... How's it going – at home?

TOFFEE. Lousy!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. How come?

TOFFEE. My fucking brother. I could kill him!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. What'd he do?

TOFFEE. He went into my room. And took something ... something private ... actually, something really secret ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. What kind of thing?

TOFFEE. My diary. My ... fucking secret diary. And he read it... He laughed at me.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. What did you do?

TOFFEE. I hit him. And now I feel bad.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Don't! He asked for it, didn't he? My mother hit me once. She didn't suffer any remorse.

TOFFEE. How do you know? She might have done.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I don't give a fuck.

TOFFEE. My dad stuffed another animal today.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. What?

TOFFEE. A goat. A silly billy goat. Ridiculous really. We had people round - everyone stared at it.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Why a goat?

TOFFEE. Don't know. Because he hasn't stuffed a goat before. Stupid goat! Everyone was staring - laughing - pointing. I felt ... I felt ... fucking sorry for it.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. How come?

TOFFEE. Dunno. Maybe it didn't want to be made fun of, with everyone staring ... Maybe it just wanted to graze its grass and after death rot in peace under the ground ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You can eat goats! [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Yeah, you can. [*Sad smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. But y' know, I reckon I know what you mean – about the goat.

TOFFEE. Really?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah. Being laughed at and that ... Like, when I was fourteen I was wild about that silly cow...

TOFFEE. A girl that is?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah, a girl. Like... in love, y'know. Anyhow, I went and told her, didn't I!

TOFFEE. And then what?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. The bitch! She blabbed, didn't she! To the whole fucking class.

TOFFEE. Blabbed – that you were in love ...?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah... I'd been reading her my fucking poems on the fucking phone.

TOFFEE. Poems! You write poetry?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Kinda ... I told you! You wanted to read them! Remember?

TOFFEE. Sorry, sorry! I remember... 'Course that's fucking ... great! I mean you writing poems. [*Smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Sure. Right, OK. Well, anyway ... I was, like, y'know, reading her these poems. Over the phone – she'd called me ... And when I finished, I was, like, waiting ... to hear what she thought. But it wasn't her on the other end of the line. It was Phil and he was saying like, 'Well done! Nice poems! Wanker'...

TOFFEE. Phil?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. This guy - two classes above us. Actually, he's been put away now... Fucking idiot. Turned out, she was dating him all the time. She was just ... They just wanted... to take the piss... She, like, gave him the fucking phone and he was fucking listening ... to my poems! ... Bastards! So then, like, everyone was

fucking laughing. The whole class! Like at your fucking goat! After that I hated being in school, even asked to be moved to another class.

TOFFEE. Fucking bastards, yeah... And do you know that girl's family name?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. 'Course I do. Why?

TOFFEE. No reason. [*Smiley*] Why don't you send me your poems?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. No way!

TOFFEE. Come on, I really want to have a look. I won't laugh, promise. I love poetry.

Beat.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Fuck. Can't fucking find them...

TOFFEE. It's OK I'll wait.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Ok. Here we go.

During the short days or the long nights

When my heart struggles to break free

I bathe my soul in alcohol

I swathe it in nicotine.

I'll contract cirrhosis of the soul

My soul will rot

They'll hospitalise me in a unit

For sick pariahs like me.

On my bed I'll lie,

Staring at a shabby wall

All night long, I'll hallucinate – call for the nurse.

Come morning, I'll slash my wrists.

Outside my window a tree will wither.

For forty days, I shall not laugh

When the smell of winter infects the wind

I'll know it's time to go.

I'll don a woolen jacket

I'll grab a couple of suitcases

In the dark of the night, I'll step thro' my window

And disappear into the fog.

TOFFEE. Awesome ... Fucking ... awesome. So... you drink and smoke?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Not really ... Anyway ... That's not what it's about.

MOTHER sighs with relief.

TOFFEE. It's fantastic! I mean it. Really.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Thanks. I've never showed that one to anyone else. Only you.

TOFFEE. Hey! That's so cool. I'm, like, totally flattered.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. For fuck's sake! What's with the flowery stuff? 'Thanks' will do.

TOFFEE. Yeah, sure. OK – Thanks, then. But ... it's a bit ... obscure.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Obscure? What's obscure?

TOFFEE. The poem.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Really? Didn't expect that one from you [*Smiley*] You're a goth, remember?

TOFFEE. Sure thing. [*Smiley*]. So you don't drink at all?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Well, beer ... sometimes. Not often.

TOFFEE. Drinking beer is not good. It's fucking bad.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. OK, thank you, 'mother'! [Smiley]

MOTHER is worried.

TOFFEE. I'm not 'mother'! I'm Toffee!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. So what's with this screwing my brain: 'Drinking beer's not good' ... As if you don't drink or smoke. All goth girls smoke.

TOFFEE. No, I don't drink and don't smoke. I can't. You know, because of my illness.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Bet if you weren't ill you'd be boozing. For sure!

TOFFEE. No, I' wouldn't. [Smiley]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You know... it sounds weird... I've just written 'mother'— and it felt freaking weird. Haven't used that word since ... for ages.

TOFFEE. Why not?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I just think of her as 'she'. I mean – I used to think of her like that. She's so ... She was so... This word doesn't ... didn't suit her.

TOFFEE. Why?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. When I was little I used to call her that: 'mother'. Back then, she was still normal. But then something really fucking horrible happened to us. She changed.

TOFFEE. Maybe, you're the one who changed?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I changed a lot too! Fucking shit! But anyway ... it's not, like, I could go to her and just say 'Hi, mum!' Talking to her – it's not an option. No way! She's either sucking up or yelling. Well, she used to ... like, yell – a lot. She even beat me up! But, y'know what makes me feel, like, really shitty... I just want hug to her ... and stay like that for ... But we just yell ... I mean we used to. Yell that is. What the fuck! It's not like it matters. Anyway, she's dead.

Mother is crying.

Toffee? Are you still there?

TOFFEE. I am, yes.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Sorry, I'm off-loading all this stuff on you ...

TOFFEE. That's ... okay. But ... is that all you remember about your mum? Is it all so ... fucking ... bad?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Not all of it. I told you. When I was little she used to read to me. A story. I loved it. About Peter Pan. D'you know it? These kids, they were, like, able to fly ... and there were these pirates ... and there was a woman ...

TOFFEE. A girl. Wendy.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah, Wendy. A girl, okay. She, like, flew away with them and was cooking for them and they, like, had respect for her and wanted ...

TOFFEE. They wanted Wendy to be their mother.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. That's it ...! Yeah, well, like I said, I don't remember really...

TOFFEE. Peter Pan shot her with an arrow...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. He did! You're right! Everyone thought she was dead. They thought they'd killed her. But they were wrong – she wasn't – they hadn't. That's cool, dontcha think? They read to us same kinda stuff when we were kids!

TOFFEE. Yeah, ... so ... cool.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. But there was something weird about that one, too. Like, remember how Peter Pan said to Wendy 'You're my mum!' But, he also sort of fancied her, didn't he... And, with other kids, he was their Father and Wendy was Mother – so he was like her kid and her, you know ... husband. So, if you think about it, he was playing at being her husband and her son. Freaky or what? [Smiley]

TOFFEE. Totally...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER: Yeah ... and then, when I was falling asleep ... I'd dream – like, my bed, it'd be all covered in that powder...

TOFFEE. Magic dust...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. That's right. And then my bed would rise up in the air and float out through the window ... and I'd be, like, hanging onto the sheet, looking over the edge, onto all the different countries and seas ... Anyway ... It was ... crazy! Just crazy shit like that! LOL. [Smiley] And after she finished reading, she was, like ... 'Now close your eyes and go to sleep and you'll find that island in your dreams' ... TOFFEE. And did you?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah ... couple of times ...

TOFFEE. I also loved this book when I was a kid. I used to imagine that I could fly up, out of the window in my nightie ... And then, the other thing I used to dream about was how, one day, I would read the story to my own son and...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. What if it turns out he's a she – I mean, a daughter?

TOFFEE. No daughter for me! I'll have a son, I'm sure.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You're so cool. Hey, why don't we meet up? At night, if you like. ... Could take you to the factory.

TOFFEE. I like you too. A lot ... But no, I go out really late.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. When do you sleep then?

TOFFEE. In the morning. Till lunch. Today I've already slept enough.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. So when shall we meet up? I won't try anything on, promise. Just want to show you our secret place.

TOFFEE. What do you mean, you 'won't try anything on'? Have you done it before?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Course I have. And had sex.

MOTHER is horrified.

TOFFEE. Really? Who with?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. What's it to you? [Smiley] How about you?

TOFFEE. Sure! 'Course I have.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Bollocks! [Smiley]

TOFFEE. Bollocks yourself! [*Smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. So what? Does it matter?

TOFFEE. Did I say it did?

MOTHER sighs with relief.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. No, but, seriously ... You've seen the place, sure. But you haven't seen our den. Come on, let's go out!

TOFFEE. It's a no.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Too fucking bad. [*Sad smiley*]

TOFFEE. So your den is under the conveyor belts?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yes.

TOFFEE. Right. I might come at night and leave something for you.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Why not meet and go together?

TOFFEE. Some other time.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER I mean it! I think you're beautiful. And cool. And we've got so much in common.

TOFFEE. Like what?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Fuck! Just think ... We're alone. Don't love anyone. And we live fucking shitty lives!

TOFFEE. Yeah, maybe.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Honestly. We have to meet up.

TOFFEE. Okay. Bye for now.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Wait!

TOFFEE. What?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Look, I'll message you from school tomorrow – Okay? Only thing ... My phone's crap, so slow to reply ...

TOFFEE. It's okay.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. My phone is fucking derelict. Also, I've dropped it couple of times.

TOFFEE. Bye then.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Bye.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Are you still there?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Bye ...

MONOLOGUE-3

MOTHER and SON are in their rooms, both on the phone with their respective friends.

MOTHER: ... Yes, me too! ... And don't even mention the weather – absolutely awful! ... My blood pressure has been really high for a couple of days ... No, no headache, just some weird kind of heaviness in my head ... And bags under my eyes all of a sudden ... Listen, there's one thing ... Could I borrow some money from you? No, not a lot ... You see, I got him a new phone. It's his birthday next week. Anyway, it didn't cost that much. Besides, I got a great deal – Internet connection, apps, the whole caboodle as they like ... Boys! ... Oh, thank you, darling! ... The rest? Everything's okay, you know the drill: work-home-work-home... With Kostia? No, in real life no chance to talk with him, as usual. Same story ... Online? Well, not very often now, really ... Just now and then ...

SON: She's bought me a phone ... Samsung Galaxy Ace. It's fucking brilliant! ... 4G! The camera with lots of pixels, Internet loads better ... For my birthday, she said ... really odd! ... No, not till next week. Who gives a fuck what goes on in her head! ... Exactly ... I can get really good conversations going ... With Toffee ... No, haven't met yet ... Dunno ... Y'know she has this illness – or maybe she still doesn't trust me ... No clue ... But I dream about her! And I think she also likes me, y'know, I think she does ... Not the way Zeena has a fucking crush on me, keeps staring at me all

the time and all ... No, man! ... It's like when people get to know each other, for real, and trust each other ... 'Cause we hang out a lot ... like, all the time, especially on weekends ... Not with Zeena! Don't be stupid! With Toffee. And when I'm at school, I do it under the desk, you've seen me ... 'cause she so cool! ...

MOTHER. ...No, not much really, don't have much lately ... But face to face – it's so, so hard to get through to him, I've been telling you. For example, yesterday I was cleaning this birdcage from wax, and I suddenly felt he was standing right behind me. What a fright! Well, I turned to him and he said 'Get rid of it!' I said, I won't, it's my cage and I'll do with it what I please ...

SON. And I, like, said 'No, it's my fucking cage! You brought that stupid bird to me! Chuck it out, can't bloody stand it! You were the one who killed it!' Well, I mean, the bird ... Y'know, just wanted to wind her up really ... I don't give a shit for that cage, to be honest, but she'd remember how I'd put her rubber bloody dick in it, right? It was the first time since then that she'd taken it out of her room ... So she was all, like, ballistic: 'Back to your room!', blah-blah-blah, and I, like 'You killed it! You killed it! You killed it!'

MOTHER. ... You see, he started talking again about that poor ... poor little budgie ... answering back at me ... how I threw it out into the cold ... Making me feel guilty ... Yes, it's very, very upsetting, but lately I try really hard to hold back ...

SON. So she thwacked me right on my mouth ... yeah, hard ... Grabbed the fucking cage and stomped back into her room. I thought: you pathetic bitch! ... Just made a couple of butties and spent all evening on the Internet ...

DIALOGUE-3

Enter TOFFEE and RAVEN OF THE TOWER

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Hey Toffee, are you there?

TOFFEE. Hi Raven.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Hi. Are you all right? [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Fucking great. I mean – great! Guess what father stuffed today – a budgie!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Cool. I had a green budgie recently. Just for a day.

TOFFEE: What happened?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER: It died.

TOFFEE. Poor budgie ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Yeah... He got eaten. By a cat. But only after his wings had frozen and he'd gone crashing down to the ground. It was my mother. All her fault.

TOFFEE. Perhaps she didn't mean to ...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Anyway, I don't want to think about that!!!

TOFFEE. Okay.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Hey! I've been to that factory today. Where we both go.

TOFFEE. And? [*Smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I've found your note in the den. With your poem.

TOFFEE. And? What did you think?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Fucking awesome! Really, I mean it – it's great! I didn't understand all the words, though. Had to Google them... What am I like! ...

TOFFEE. Thank you.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. What about the den? Did you like it? [*Smiley*]

TOFFEE. A bit mucky.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Also true. [*Smiley*] ... Listen, I want to say something. It's a bit serious, okay?

TOFFEE. Okay. [*Smiley*].

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. It's so serious that there isn't probably anything more serious than this.

TOFFEE. Okay.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I love you.

Beat

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Toffee?

TOFFEE. I'm here.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I shouldn't have... I'm sorry.

TOFFEE. That's not something you can say sorry about.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Sure. Okay. ... What about you?

TOFFEE. I love you, too.

MONOLOGUE-4.

MOTHER and SON are in their rooms. MOTHER is upset. SON is gloomy.

Both are justifying to someone on the phone. TOFFEE and RAVEN OF THE TOWER are also on stage. They whisper to each other.

MOTHER: No, Svetlana, that's not how it is. ... Okay, okay. Just lay off a bit, can't you! ... I am not "futtering about on Facebook" instead of working. Our customers use social networks too, you know! I'm, I'm ... I'm bolstering our Internet presence. That's what I am doing! ... If it doesn't matter, why are you getting at me? ... Then why are you talking to me like this? ... I see ... Well, of course, in future, I'll ...

SON: Yes, sir, my mum knows about it ... She knows it all... Please, sir, can I have my phone back? I'm expecting an important call... Family matters... Yes. I promise, I won't use it during the lessons, give you my word, sir... I'll switch if off in class...

MOTHER. Sorry, I never called you back ... Busy, that's right ... You know, I try to do some extra hours, this ... and that ... and where is the day gone? Got to bed only at five in the morning ... No, no way, forget about the Internet! I have no time at all for the Internet now ... Yeah, all is well, thank you ...

SON. ... Shall we go next week? ... I know, sorry, mate ... Got to get some sleep, I was chatting with Toffee all night. It's alright for her, she doesn't sleep at night ... but I've got school tomorrow ... What's with getting at me like this? I'm telling you, I've never had anything like that before ...

DIALOGUE- 4 AND CONTINUATION OF MONOLOGUE-4

TOFFEE. ... He was very handsome. And strong. When he died, I thought I'll die too... But then I, like, found what to live for. To go on living. How sad is that ? [*Sad smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Tough shit, that. Pretty gothic.

TOFFEE. So, now I've even told you the story of my tragic love ... [*Sad smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Was he a goth too? Did he, like, wear black leather all the time?

TOFFEE. No, he was more into jackets. ... Raven, do you really like my poems?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I fucking love them, I've been telling you.

TOFFEE. Want to read another one? I just wrote it...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. 'Course I do! [*Smiley*]

MOTHER focuses on typing a text from a sheet of paper.

TOFFEE.

He dangled his skinny legs
Over her window ledge.
Her incredulous hands held tight to his shadow
Black as night and soft as felt.

He spoke of mountains' sparkle
Of waters sun-glittered

Of swooping flight over land and sea
To his home - Neverland.

Magic dust covered them, falling from tiny fingers.
Tinker Bell fought back her tears
Her face revealed more
Than all the poetry and all the prose in the world.

Lightness raised them;
They opened the window, laughing.
The boy felt the silver thimble warm in his palm;
In his heart, he sensed the fairy's tears.

She was pure and bright, he was bright and pure.
They left home before dawn.
The boy's name was Peter, the girl's - Wendy.
The windows were crying about them for a long, long time.

TOFFEE. Well?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. It's fantastic. Exactly like in that book. Back from when we were kids!

TOFFEE. Yes! Did you like it?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. 'Course I liked it! Especially the last verse. It's amazing!
Toffee, you're a fucking poet! [*Smiley, Smiley, Smiley*]

TOFFEE. Thanks. You too ... [*Smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I've started to write a song about you. I mean not about you but, like, for you.

TOFFEE. Wow... That's amazing! Is it nearly finished?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Nearly, yeah ...

TOFFEE. You are my Peter Pan, Raven! [*Smiley*]

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Toffee, I so want to see you, talk to you... I could cry! ...

TOFFEE. Me, too. I want to see what you look like, how you breathe, how you smile.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Let's do it! C'mon – how about meeting at our den? ...

Never mind the den, let's go wherever you want. A night club? Or a park? You can go there at night too...

TOFFEE. I can't ... yet...

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. For fuck's sake! When then? I can't wait any longer. Are you having me on? Is this just a game to you?

TOFFEE. No! No, not at all, Raven.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Well, what then?

TOFFEE. I've got you a birthday present, okay? Please let's keep chatting. I need it so much. I'm so lonely!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. You're not the only bloody one! As if I'm not! I don't need a present, I need you.

TOFFEE. I need you, too, but... Please forgive me, please, please!

TOFFEE. Raven?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. It's alright ...

TOFFEE. Same time tomorrow?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Okay ...

TOFFEE. Bye.

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Bye.

TOFFEE. Are you there?

TOFFEE. Raven?

TOFFEE. Bye.

MONOLOGUE-5

MOTHER and SON are in their rooms. MOTHER is talking on the phone to her friend. SON is at his laptop. There is a guitar hanging on the wall above SON's bed. MOTHER's laptop is in SON's room, but he doesn't notice it. RAVEN OF THE TOWER is also on the stage. He doesn't do anything.

MOTHER. ... No, we don't talk about anything like that, you know ... just how's everything, what's new with him, what's new with me – I mean, Toffee ... And I've become soooo inventive – you wouldn't believe it, ha-ha-ha ... I could write a novel about that girl: her father is a taxidermist, and she is allergic to the sun – a story to make you roll with laughter, really ... Only I beg you, please please please not a word to anyone, do you understand? It's my pedagogical experiment, that's all it is, okay? ... We manage to communicate now, even if it's only like this ...

No, nothing's changed offline ... that is, in real life. Of course, I keep trying on and off, but Kostia wouldn't respond. For instance, I told him another day ...

SON. ... For instance, she's, like, 'Let's sit down at table together for once'. And I'm thinking, are you fucking stupid or what? Why should we eat together if I can't stand your fucking face? She's always scowling, y'know, such a 'strict mum' ... And another thing – she keeps topping up my plate: more food, and more food! That's what she used to do with dad. He wolfed it down, but I can't eat that much. And what's the point of eating together if we never talk anyway? I'd rather watch a movie. Or hang out with Toffee ... And it's like, because she loves me, do you get it? ... No, *she* does, not Toffee. Toffee loves me for real. It's like, food is love for her. So that's what I told her – I don't fucking want to eat with you!

MOTHER. Yes, that's what he said: I don't want to eat with you! [*She smiles*]. And he frowned, you know, a real man who knows his mind ... Well, it could be for the best as we don't usually get along very well at meal times ... we just sit there ... nothing to talk about. But on the Internet we can chat for hours! ... What? You don't believe it? ... Yesterday we stayed online till dawn! ... Well, sometimes I allow it to myself and to him ... Just chatting, nothing special ... He was telling me all about our trip to the seaside - when Vania was still ... with us, you know ... It was a bit weird, getting it from his point of view. As it happens, Kostia was even jealous about me and Vania – it turned out to be quite a romantic trip, so the pair of us used to bundle him off to

join in the children's games they organize at the hotel ... yes, and then we'd sneak off to ... Anyway, this whole Toffee thing is a very positive influence, it's definitely bringing us closer. He's more concentrated, smiles more often. ... Well, still gloomy sometimes but not as much as before. I've got Toffee to suggest him good music ...

SON. She told me about this singer/songwriter – O-ku-dja-va, he's back from the Soviet times, y'know ... her dad really likes him. He's alright, just guitar, but the lyrics are cool ...

MOTHER. And I'm so proud of him: he signed up for guitar lessons. He even wrote a song for her! Can you imagine? I heard him one day when I got back from work and he was practicing: 'Toffee, Toffee...!' Turns out he has a very nice voice ...

What? ... No, it was in his song. ... Ah, never mind ... Just wanted to say, the lyrics were really nice, nothing about alcohol or nicotine as it was in his poetry ... Yes, very uplifting ... And it's doing me good, too ... it makes me remember my youth ... And, you know, I started writing poetry again. Imagine! Me - poetry! After all these years ... Not too bad, actually, if I say so myself ...

The only thing – I have to keep inventing things to avoid our meeting ... Yes, he's desperate to meet Toffee. I've gone for this sun allergy and sociopathy – but our Kostia wouldn't listen, keeps saying let's meet up. Even demands it, you know. Well, he can get these teenage tantrums – like, 'Will we ever meet, or what's going on here?' So far I've managed to convince him to keep just chatting online ... because for him this relationship is also very valuable ... No, he knows I won't let him go out in the dark, I keep it under control very strictly. That's why it's very convenient, you know, a romantic love story: they're in love, but he can go out only at day time and she – only in the dark ... Any girl can only dream of something so romantic and tragic, wouldn't she? Anyway, the Internet is absolutely great ... I'd say magic! It's so easy nowadays to become friends with someone ...

And it's his birthday today! I've ordered a book on the Internet; the delivery will be any time now. As if it was from Toffee: it's 'Peter Pan', you know, the fairytale, a gift edition, really beautiful ... We have a special story with this book ...

Oh, I'm so tired, I've been cleaning all day today ... Yes, and chatting, of course. It's become a bit of an addiction now ... How do I do it? I just keep carrying my laptop around the flat. Can't even remember where it is now ... I feel really tired now ...

SON notices MOTHER's laptop, comes near and puts it on. Reads the correspondence. Goes to his bed tiredly, sits down. Puts on his own laptop. Waits for it to come up. Goes to RAVEN OF THE TOWER and starts strangling him.

MOTHER. No, of course not! What is it you're saying? ... There's nothing weird about it, it's just a game! ... What? ... Vania's jacket? No, I'm not upset about it anymore; it's only a *thing* ... It's all come to calm down now, so ... It's just a thing from the past. But I think of Vania a lot. I cry sometimes, of course, but it gets better ...

SON. When you delete a profile, your avatar becomes just a head of a puppy, all bleak and grey. And white margins. Nothing else is left there, just the apologies from the website that no one could be found any more at that space. I've never had a puppy. Not even a stuffed one, like Toffee's father makes ... Not even a dead scrawny little thing ... I could have my puppy on a shelf, and he could lift his dead paw, nod with his dead head and look at me with his dead glass eyes ... But now I have my own puppy! Even though it's bleak and grey, with white margins around him.

SON kills RAVEN OF THE TOWER.

DIALOGUE-5, CONTINUATION OF MONOLOGUE-5

SON opens the window in his room making a lot of noise. MOTHER hears the noise and gets worried.

MOTHER. Kostia!

SON gets on the window ledge.

MOTHER. Kostia! What are you doing there? Kostia, can you hear me?

Beat

MOTHER. Kostia!

MOTHER breaks the partition between the two rooms and storms into SON's room.

MOTHER. Kostia! Stop! Stop! Is it because of me? Oh, Kostia darling!

SON. No, mother. It's because of Toffee. It's all her fault.

MOTHER. [*She sees her laptop*] No, wait!! So now you know?... But ... it's nothing, nothing wrong about it, is there? I'm sorry! Talk to me, Kostia, please!

SON. I'm a budgie, mum.

MOTHER. No! Please! Please!

SON. I'm not Peter Pan.

MOTHER. Oh, my darling boy!

SON. Yes, here I am.

MOTHER. I'm so sorry!

SON. You can't say sorry about things like that.

There is a doorbell.

Blackout.

In the dark we hear the voices of TOFFEE and RAVEN OF THE TOWER.

TOFFEE. Hi, Raven! Are you there!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I'm here. Hi, Toffee.

TOFFEE. Happy birthday!

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. Thank you! Are you alright?

TOFFEE. I'm fucking great. Awful, really. And you?

RAVEN OF THE TOWER. I'm fucking great too ...

END