

# Adult Education

Written by Andrei Ivanov.

Translated from Russian by Christine Bird, with thanks to Selina Boyack for her expert guidance.

## ***Characters:***

*Tan'ka*

*Serëzha*

*Kostia*

*Egor - Tan'ka's father*

*Larisa - Serëzha's mother*

*Slavik*

*Veronichka*

*Renat the Barber*

The action takes place in modern-day Minsk, Belarus.

## **Act 1**

### **Scene 1**

*The rear facade of a dirty fish stall. Spit-encrusted asphalt, and a rubbish bin with a tattered theatre poster sticking out. Enter TAN'KA, young and very beautiful. She*

*appears extremely nervous. She fishes out her cigarettes, removes one from the pack and grasps it in her fingers. TAN'KA squats back on her haunches and takes out her mobile phone. She starts smoking the cigarette. TAN'KA selects a number and presses 'call'. She gets scared, jabs her finger on 'end call' and starts to cough. She jumps up, walking to and fro before stopping, relaxing and squatting back onto her haunches. Looking totally decided, TAN'KA dials the number after all. With an expression of terror on her face, she lifts the phone to her ear.*

TAN'KA: Hello, Sergei Romanovich? It's me, from college... Hello. Well like, from the business school on Tolbukhin Street. You started teaching us philosophy a bit ago. Philosophy. Aristotle, Sacophles, like... Nah, nothing specific. No, it's just. Do you know who I am? (*blooming*) Do you?... No? How do I explain? (*PAUSE*) It's Tan'ka... Group 115-33. I always... No, I went to all your lectures. I was like, under the beard the whole time. You know, 'the beard' - the one in Room 10, remember, the guy hanging by the window... The guy in the frame. The picture, like. That beardy prick, Marx. Oops, sorry. I don't normally swear. It's just that I... Yes, yeah that's me, exactly, with light brown hair. (*happily*) The one with light brown hair sat under the beard. You know who I am? Safe -

*VERONICHKA leans out at the rear of the stall, wearing bangles and enormous earrings. She is chewing gum.*

VERONICHKA: (*Hisses*) Tan'ka.

TAN'KA: Right well, I'm phoning cos you know -

VERONICHKA: (*Hisses*) Fucksake, Tan'ka.

TAN'KA: OK. Sergei Romanovich, could you possibly excuse me for a moment.

Please - (*Presses the phone against her chest. To VERONICHKA, furiously*) What do you want?

VERONICHKA: 'What do you want', fucksake. You're getting on my tits. Do some bloody work, I've got a long queue here.

TAN'KA: Do some work yourself. Can't you see I'm on the phone?

VERONICHKA: You do my fucking head in. On the phone.

A VOICE: Excuse me. What's wrong with the 25-ruble carp. Has it gone off?

VERONICHKA: (*Across the stall*) Gone off to sleep, more like. It's not gone off, it's fresh. Do we look like we're selling out of a car boot?

VOICE: Selling? Chance would be a fine thing.

VERONICHKA: (*To Tan'ka*) I'll tell the boss what a skiver you are.

TAN'KA: Yeah? Come here and say that. I'll rip your hair out. Maggot.

VERONICHKA: Psycho twat.

*VERONICHKA disappears inside the stall. TAN'KA lifts the phone to her ear.*

TAN'KA: Hello. Sergei Romanovich, please excuse me. I just. I'm like, writing my essay at the moment... Yeah, in the library. I have to be quiet here. I was talking to you when this librarian lady like comes up to me and says - be quiet! It took me ages to find my way out so that's why I went silent. I'm sorry. So, on Monday, this essay... yeah the one about Sacophles. I just. Wanted to ask you, how should it be laid out, this essay? Should I maybe put a photo or something on the front page?...

No, so what's best?... Right, OK. And how big should the margins be, does it matter? What's the best way?... Right, OK... No, but we have to handwrite our essays... Oh, so you'd accept it?... OK, well in that case I'll print it out. It's just that they make us handwrite all our essays. But you let us (*smiles*). (*PAUSE*) You on VK?... No, I was only asking. Like, I'm on VK. I've got 1030 friends. And 650 followers. Well, people who leave stupid comments on my photos. I've deleted them... Facebook? Nah, I don't have that one, it's too complicated. I don't really get Facebook. The likes on it are kinda weird... Really? That's cos you're so clever. That's why you love Facebook. Do you know what I really love, Sergei Romanovich? I love theatre. I just never have anyone to go with. I'm always planning theatre trips and like, I can never find anyone to go with. They're all thick as. To be honest, none of them care about theatre (*laughs*)... To what? Er, this, see I wanted to go to this (*walks over to the bin, fishes out the poster and looks at it*) Othello. And I just like never have no-one. Have you seen it?... Me neither. I don't know, I bet Othello is interesting... (*PAUSE*) Not at all, that's everything. I didn't have nothing else to say. Well. Well I just phoned you about the essay, yeah. You know, like, not totally about the essay. See how you told us about Socrates, Sergei Romanovich. That he's kinda like: 'Speak so that I may see you'. Well now I'm speaking.

## Scene 2

*Hipster barber shop. SLAVIK, wearing a cutting cape, is seated in a chair in front of a mirror. He is good-looking, with a beard and gelled back hair. RENAT THE BARBER is tinkering with his hair. SERĚZHA, a young man trying hard to look intellectual, is seated in the next chair along. SERĚZHA has a tumbler of whisky by his side. RENAT THE BARBER periodically tops up his glass with more whisky from*

*the bottle. SERĚZHA turns off his phone and puts it in his pocket. He looks seriously at himself in a nearby mirror. (PAUSE)*

SLAVIK: SerĚzh.

SERĚZHA: Mmm.

SLAVIK: Who's that on your phone?

SERĚZHA: Oh, one of the chav girls from college rang - *(looks anxiously at SLAVIK)* rung.

SLAVIK: It's 'rang'. Marlezonov won't drink with you if he hears you say 'rung'. But I'm cool with these things. Let me pour you another. We're friends after all. Renat, pour SerĚzha a drink.

RENAT THE BARBER: Jawohl. *(Pours SERĚZHA a drink)*

*(PAUSE)*

SERĚZHA: Listen, Slavik. Can I ask you something?

SLAVIK: Why are you asking permission? We're friends after all, SerĚzh. Of course you can ask. Ask away.

SERĚZHA: Remember you were talking about your creative hub? /

SLAVIK: Renat, would you mind using the Warming Beard Wax this time, I find the Ocean Wax has a weird scent, a bit cheap-smelling.

RENAT THE BARBER: Jawohl.

SERĚZHA: About kind of holding lectures there /

SLAVIK: Smells like that Fluffy Duck shampoo we had when I was a kid. Soviet. That really heavy, greasy smell, you know? Makes you want to heave.

RENAT THE BARBER: Yeah, I'm one of them people who gets queasy round anything Soviet too.

SLAVIK: Hahaha, Renat you mean *those* people... Sorry, Serëzh, what were you saying? About the hub?

SERËZHA: Right yeah, about holding lectures there, maybe on philosophy. Well... Workshops. So maybe I could... you know, make it young, hip, stylish with infographics and memes. It would bring in the local hipsters.

SLAVIK: C'mon, Serëzha, be serious. What kind of hipsters are there round here? All we've got is recession. This is what we realised - for a decent spiritual hub, you need dosh, right? Which means that for now, Serëzh, we're not led by our hearts but by whatever sells well. The likes of: 'How to make a successful start-up business out of shit and a plastic bottle'. Or life-coaching, psychology, whatever. 'How to become Tim Cook when you're just some clown from Serebrianka'. As in you're not some gay cunt, but the head of Apple... sorry Renat... but that kind of spirit, you know? And soz, Serëzh, but we've already roped in some guys from the Cabal. You're my mate, Serëzh. But philosophy? Can't you do something about start-ups?

SERËZHA: Well I could give it a try...

SLAVIK: Serëzh, we need it to be professional.

SERËZHA: I see. (*Drinks his whisky*)

SLAVIK: Renat, can I get a titty? (*SLAVIK waves his empty glass in RENAT's direction*)

RENAT THE BARBER: Jawohl. (*Tops up SLAVIK's whisky from the bottle. SLAVIK quacks*)

SLAVIK: I'd rather hear about your chavette from college. So what, has she asked you out to the theatre?

SERĚZHA: Look, she's far too young to 'ask me out'.

SLAVIK: So it's true then? You've got whore from Shabany coming on to you?

SERĚZHA: Listen, have a think about the lectures yeah? Just in case...

SLAVIK: SerĚzha. I understand that you want to join the Cabal. That you want to earn a bit on the side. I get that you're on college wages... You're my mate, SerĚzh... And I'm not completely against it. Marlezonov will be against it of course, but he's just a nihilist... but you have to understand. The Cabal is more than just a circle of friends. The Cabal is a brotherhood. A brotherhood of successful people. A brotherhood which, by the way, pays crazy money to rent the loft with our hub in...

SERĚZHA: It's actually your papa who pays the rent...

SLAVIK: By choice rather than necessity. The brotherhood pays, SerĚzh. Anyway, it's beside the point who pays. This might come across a bit patronising and cynical... but SerĚzh... you... alright, I get that the Cabal can do a lot for you. But what can you do for the Cabal?

(*PAUSE*)

SLAVIK: God this conversation has actually made me sweat. Renat...

RENAT: Jawohl. (*Pours another drink from the bottle for SLAVIK*)

SLAVIK: Where's the fire, Serëzh? Why do you need it so badly?

SERËZHA: I feel like I need to totally change my life. I just wanna get the hell out of dodge.

SLAVIK: I understand.

SERËZHA: I wanna make some money and fuck off on the next shitty tractor out of here.

SLAVIK: I get it, Serëzh. Where would you go?

SERËZHA: To Malta. They need emigrants over there. There's all sorts of programmes. And pomegranates like this in Autumn. (*Spreads his hands wide to indicate their large size*)

SLAVIK: I understand. Nice one, Serëzh. Sounds like a plan. There's nothing doing here. I'd bail out myself and head for the pomegranates. But the business needs me for now...

SERËZHA: Well there's nothing holding me back, know what I mean? Everything's pissing me off. Where would I not move to? Anywhere would be better. Call this a country? More like some sort of Silent Hill. Everywhere is so grey. And these hats.

SLAVIK: Which hats?

SERËZHA: The knitted hats women wear on the bus. You know, the lumpy, ugly hats with beads sewn on. They're so... creepy. Soviet. When I was little, a doctor wearing one of those hats came to give me my injections. She never took it off inside. Everyone else was wearing fur ones, but hers was knitted. What kind of a

bollocks Soviet custom is that, not taking your hat off inside? (*PAUSE*) Plus she proper jabbed in those needles. It was sore. Whenever I see those hats now, on buses or streets, I get a sense of disease. Of pain. Of all-encompassing gloom.

SLAVIK: (*Dramatically*) Yes Serëzh, we're sick... Society makes us that way...

SERËZHA: I can't stand seeing those hats anymore. I can't stand these grandiose Stalinist buildings, this collective farm mentality... this 'Smachna Hut' fast-food-fuckery... I had a dream last week. Remember their Zlatka sandwich? The one with sliced kolbasa and mayonnaise? So I basically dream that I'm getting sold to a Zlatka sandwich. But this Zlatka is a ginormous monster, with mayonnaisey jaws, its head made from two Zlatka sandwiches. It's really scowling and stroppy, babbling. They're haggling over me. Saying that I'm somehow too expensive, and looking at me so sceptically. But I don't want to be sold. I cling onto the microwave, frightened. And then it buys me and bites into me. I'm all covered in mayonnaise and ketchup. And I think it'll gobble me up and swallow me down, and then my sufferings will come to an end. But it doesn't swallow me down. You know when you like some food and you kind of take your time over it in your mouth. You just sit there with a bit of food in your mouth and that's it. And you savour it. Well that's how the Zlatka sits with me in its mouth. And I realise at this moment that the Zlatka won't swallow me down at all. It's just going to hold me in its mouth. Forevermore. In my mayonnaise and ketchup tomb.

SLAVIK: You were tripping balls.

SERËZHA: Who needs me round here with my philosophy, know what I mean? I can't make a living or *be* someone. Here, Lukashenko's peasant moustache rises in

the sky above us each morning. Don't you find looking at all this storm damage frightening?

SLAVIK: (*Contentedly examining his beard in the mirror*) It is frightening.

SERĚZHA: (*Caustically*) I'll make some cash and leave.

SLAVIK: Yeah, you're not exactly full of the joys. Of course you could leave. Or maybe try an upgrade? Be a programmer?

SERĚZHA: I tried it. That's not what I'm talking about at all.

SLAVIK: Of course you're not. Only, SerĚzh. You really won't earn enough with lectures to relocate to Malta. Not in the hub or anywhere else. The lectures are a fucking car crash.

SERĚZHA: (*Bitterly*) So what isn't a fucking car crash then?

SLAVIK: Well you're so creative... make films, I don't know... cinema's on trend.

SERĚZHA: Cinema?

SLAVIK: Well not cinema-cinema. Kind of... fast cinema. For instance - you find a sponsor, get your acquaintances together for free, cast students gratis, film some sort of half-arsed shit... the main thing is to get the sponsor's branding plastered across every shot. Then you bang on to the media about how this is honest cinema, that it's unpalatable to the authorities and all that. Start up distribution. Soon, before everyone knows it, the biggest suckers have been to see it and you make your money back three times over. That's how you sell any old shit.

SERĚZHA: Yeah except that's not an option. You need funds for cinema as well...

SLAVIK: Then there are donors, Serëzh, crowd funding. A website, mission statement and all that bollocks... it's all possible, even round here. Like Marinka there, collecting money with pop-up events to get booklets about the Grand Duchy of Lithuania published. She did it. The most important thing is to write a good blurb and have an upbeat vid. Some girl even started raising funds to make a film about faggots. Oh sorry, Renat. I mean, what the hell, Serëzha. People even hand over money for films like that.

SERËZHA: Nah, all that stuff is properly scraping the bottom of the barrel.

SLAVIK: It's a golden barrel, Serëzha.

SERËZHA: I'm a total introvert. I'll never make a living like that.

*SERËZHA AND SLAVIK are rather drunk by now.*

SLAVIK: Well then I don't know. Maybe you should go vegan. Or find yourself a whore. Maybe you're burnt out?

SERËZHA: Burnt out?

RENAT: I'll just put a bit of wax on and that's it done.

SLAVIK: Burnt out. Maybe emigration is a blind alley? I mean, I'm burnt out. And so's everyone else in the Cabal, I reckon. It's when, you know... you don't want anything in particular. It's a kind of emotional and spiritual burnout. Marlezonov was actually just saying he's so bored of snorting coke that he's stopped. Unbelievable. People normally start 'cos they're bored. But he's stopped. Though he's probably lying. Nothing gives me a buzz, know what I mean? I even went to Burning Man with two whores this summer. We went naked quad biking across the desert in

Tyrannosaurus masks. So cool. But then you lie down in your hammock and get overwhelmed by such a beigeness. And you just lie and think - why am I here, now? In the States, in this dusty desert, with these whores I hardly know? Why am I not at home in front of my computer? Why am I not in a little coffee shop on Zabitskaia Street? And then I have to explain it all to myself from the beginning: Slavik, you're at a banging arts festival, you're here because it's mind-blowing fun. These whores are your friends Alisa and Zhenia. They're gorgeous hot students from the Arts Academy, notable for the fact that they always want you. You're here, Slavik, enjoying life and crossing the boundaries of human perception. That's how you explain it to yourself, explain it and then get tired. You score and pop a sugar cube loaded with acid... so it all feels kind of better. But in ten hours time, it all starts again. Who am I? What am I doing here? That's it, burnout. Maybe you need to inject some emotion into your life?

SERĚZHA: Emotion? Yeah, right. I need to get out. I'd rather have money injected into my life... *(PAUSE) (Looks at Slavik)* Oh, I'm not asking.

SLAVIK: Yeah and I'm not offering... So, Serëzh. Go on, tell me about this Shabany chick who phoned...

SERĚZHA: Well... this girl... kinda lumpenprole. Nothing to shout about in her studies. But stunning... I dunno... kinda fresh. Sassy. Called Tania.

SLAVIK: Mmmhmm... so what do you think of her?

SERĚZHA: Er well... she's alright. Like I say, stunning.

SLAVIK: Mmm, I see...

SERĚZHA: She's a bit rough. Apparently she batters girls. Lads too, sometimes.

SLAVIK: Is she wild?

SERĚZHA: Yeah, I'd say so. She's also still a virgin.

SLAVIK: Whaaaat?

SERĚZHA: Well that's what they say about her. I've even heard lecturers say it. It's kinda like a local legend: Tan'ka Sechkaruk and her virginity. She swans around like she's the bees' knees. Tells everyone she'll only give it away for love, like. They say that she's a bit fucked up. With a personality like steel. As in she can't stand loose morals. Batters chicks who spread it about. And tells everyone about her own virginity. Who must she tell if even the lecturers know about it? And why the hell would anyone talk about this stuff? It's weird. She's never once told me. In my lectures she just sits totally silent.

SLAVIK: SerĚzha, that's it. This whore has bloody well fallen for you.

SERĚZHA: Listen, can you stop saying 'whore'? It's getting on my nerves... OK?

SLAVIK: Kk . I've got it, SerĚzha. How to save us all from burnout.

SERĚZHA: How's that then Slavik?

SLAVIK: You need to plough your whore.

*(PAUSE)*

SERĚZHA: Wh... what?

SLAVIK: SerĚzha, listen. In the first place, you'll save yourself from burnout - you'll deflower her. Everyone loves doing that. And secondly - I'll save myself too. It will be a challenge. It will be a show. Let's make it interesting for you... I have a

MacBook stored in my papa's cellar. It's brand new, Serëzha. You wanted some money? Well a MacBook is worth near enough three grand. You could sell it. Or you could just use it. Do whatever you want.

SERËZHA: I really don't understand /

SLAVIK: (*Leaps up*) Let's have a bet. If this whore is so complicated, then let's bet. For the MacBook. You could make use of a MacBook at yours, right?

SERËZHA: Well... I suppose I could... so what /

SLAVIK: Let's bet that you will pick the flower of this Shabany chick's innocence. And? You up to it?

SERËZHA: What you on about? She's a minor.

SLAVIK: Sure, but the age of consent is sixteen. She's the one crawling under you.

SERËZHA: She only mentioned the theatre. She's not crawling anywhere. I'm her lech... lecher... fucksake, lecturer.

SLAVIK: Serëzha. Three grand. A MacBook. A challenge, Serëzha. You're gonna spread this whore's legs and post the report. It's gonna be fun. I bet my bollocks on it... but what if you lose... then you owe me a MacBook? Hmm? Dealio? To make it fair?

SERËZHA: Wh... where would I get a MacBook from?

SLAVIK: Hey we need to set a time frame. Get her banged in the next week, Serëzh? Bang her?

SERËZHA: Slavik, what are you talking about?

SLAVIK: Serëzha. I'm about to save us all from burnout. Oh. Do you want me to let you into the Cabal?

*(PAUSE)*

SERËZHA: *(Suddenly quiet)* Yes.

SLAVIK: If you pop her cherry, then you can have your lectures and the MacBook too. How hard can it be, to plough a chav...? But something is making me doubt you... Will you actually manage it? Maybe you're too nice and well-brought up...

SERËZHA: *(Desperately)* Yes...

SLAVIK: Really, you'll do it?

SERËZHA: *(Lost)* Yes... I'll do it.

SLAVIK: Ha. Nice one Serëzh. Let's shake on it. Yes? *(Jumps up, grabs Serëzha by the hand.)* Renat. Take a picture of us. Documentary evidence.

*RENAT takes a photo on his phone of Serëzha, sad and drunk and Slavik, who is drunk and happy. They are shaking hands.*

SLAVIK: So what about it Serëzh? We betting?

SERËZHA: Are you... is it a serious offer... about the Cabal, the lectures, the MacBook?

SLAVIK: Yeah course.

*SERËZHA is silent. (PAUSE)*

SLAVIK: Have a think for now, Serëzh, have a little think. I'm going now. I just need another sneaky whisky...

*SLAVIK, staggering, moves towards the door, stops abruptly and with his face contorted into a grimace of disgust sniffs at his beard. SERĚZHA settles drunkenly onto his chair.*

SLAVIK: Renat, have you used that wax again? I asked for the 'Warming' ... I smell like a bloody puff. Oh, sorry Renat. I just meant that it smells rough.

*SLAVIK leaves. His voice can be heard.*

SLAVIK: *(Offstage)* Hello, Marlezonov. Want a laugh?

*RENAT looks at SERĚZHA.*

RENAT: *(Offended)* I'm not actually gay.

*SERĚZHA slumps face down on the table top.*

### Scene 3

*SERĚZHA's small flat. It is a little dirty, with lots of books. There is an old computer on the table, and the wallpaper on one side is claw-marked. SERĚZHA is woken, hungover, by his mobile phone ringing and the unnerving barking of his dog behind the door. SERĚZHA picks up the phone.*

SERĚZHA: Hello, yes Mama... Yes... Hi... Yes... Yeah, I'm sleeping... No, I'm not late.

*SERĚZHA looks at the old clock on the wall and, realising he is late, jumps up in horror and attempts to get dressed. He keeps his voice even.*

SERĚZHA: What you on about? I'm off today. I do have the right... *(yawns nonchalantly, pacing round the room)* Not at all, it's just that we've got ice-hockey

today... Everyone's got to bow down and conform when the hockey's on... Yeah, means all the plankton are off to the match. Who else will they get to fill the stands?... Yeah, yeah... Oh bloody hell, not this again? I know that I work in the public sector... I know. I don't call them that when I'm there, obviously... No, not with the other teachers either. Still, plankton is plankton. Hardly anyone would even understand... *(falls over while trying to pull a sock on, making a noise)* Sorry?... Oh that. That was Jon Snow. He's knocked something over in the corridor. I'm buggered if I know why he's barking... Yes I walk him. I do walk him. Sometimes I just let him out onto the balcony if I don't have time or whatever... What you on about, Lassie?... Mama, please stop calling him Lassie... I already told you. He's Jon Snow because 'snow' is English for 'sneg'... Look he doesn't have to be bloody white. He's black, it totally suits him... Snow - it's not 'cos he's white but 'cos he's shaggy like the character in the show. D'you know what, it doesn't matter. Jon Snow!... No I don't let him into my room. He chewed up all the rugs and gnawed the wardrobe legs, both of the damned things - *(out the door)* Jon Snow put it down! Down I said! *(into the phone)* What?... For goodness sake Mama, I feel like I've already said this a hundred times... Right, OK, and what do you think?... Well yeah, true, it is pretty unlikely, yes. You reckon that with my experience I could just walk into a uni?... Yeah yeah, a Master's, change the record will you? Are you having a laugh or what Mama?... Definitely not. Tutoring in what?... Philosophy. Who the hell needs this philosophy?... I'm not using bad language. If you go out to pasture like that, you get in trouble for skiving and end up owing the taxman. And after that everyone else and his dog will screw you over... What are you... What are you whispering for?... Who is it you're scared of?... For goodness sake, I didn't say anything of the sort. Do you think your phone's tapped or something?... Right, what use am I to anyone? What

use is either of us to anyone in this country? They don't give a monkeys about me and you. Nobody gives a monkeys about anybody. What's up?... Alright, calm down... OK, OK, I'll stop talking about it - Jon Snow, down!... I'm looking for work, I am... There is one possibility that might work out... No, that was something else... What do you mean it's been three years already?... Yeah, but I'm really looking now. Sake Mama, why are you winding me up? Are you doing it on purpose or what? I just really don't have a lot of time... Yes. No. Well yes, exactly, as I already told you it's my day off... Of course I'm not lying, what do you mean? I've just got a couple of meetings today, that's why I'm rushing... It doesn't matter who with - JON SNOW, FOR FUCKSAKE PUT IT DOWN!... Well, you know what thought did... No definitely not with a girl. It doesn't matter... Mama, what do you mean a wife, I'm still young... What does 'you're loafing around' mean? Loafing around how? I wish I could loaf around a bit. I've got no time for loafing. You know what I've got a lot of? I've got a lot of work, just for the record. That's right. 'It doesn't take up much time.' Really? I'm stressed. You just won't believe me. I come in, sit down here and stress.... About so many things. About having to live in this country, for example. Looking at these miserable faces. Unable to feel like a normal human being. Degrading myself. Listening to your constant 'when you get a decent job', 'when you get married'. You don't think about me at all. All you think about is grandchildren, isn't it? Damn, Mama, how come you're all alone? D'ya reckon I'm to blame? Go out and meet someone, or get a cat. You've spent long enough sitting round reading. And me? I'm not a grandchild-producing-machine. I want a decent life for myself too... I don't know what. Something's got to give. I'm trying to work it out... What you shouting for all of a sudden? (*Sighs heavily*) (*PAUSE*) OK, OK,

it's all alright... Everything's alright. I'm sorry too. Yes. I'll pop over tomorrow. I'll walk the dog. OK. Right, bye then.

*The barking continues. SERĚZHA looks at the clock. No longer rushing, he sits down, adopting a pained expression. He types a number into his mobile phone, cuts the call short and walks out into the hallway. The barking recedes, he slams the door; the barking now sounds a bit more muffled. SERĚZHA returns, sits down and again adopts a pained expression. He dials a number.*

SERĚZHA: *(In a weak voice)* Hello, Anna Seměnovna, good morning... Sergei Kurlovich here... Yes, I know, this is precisely why I'm phoning. I couldn't phone earlier... Yes, they're all sat waiting, I understand. The thing is, I was taken to A&E this morning in an ambulance... My kidneys... Yes, they've diagnosed a stone... No, I'm still in the hospital, they've given me some injections. I'm just sat waiting. So they couldn't see a stone in the renal duct on the scan, but they want to keep me in. It's most likely to be passing sand... The pain comes and goes. I've had this before. I don't think I'll stay in. But there's no way I can come in today... Yes... Four classes. If it's not too much trouble for you... Yes, and you can let Group 33 go. It's their last class. Thank you very much for your understanding, Anna Seměnovna. Thank you... Well yes, it's not much fun, so painful. They say that it's comparable with being in labour. It's at times like these that you start to understand women. And love them... *(forces a chuckle)* Thank you. Good bye.

*SERĚZHA turns his mobile phone off and exhales. Walks out. Slams the door. The barking gets louder.*

SERĚZHA *(Offstage)* For fucksake, not my bedroom. Out into the corridor! You've clawed all the wallpaper. Droopy-eared arsehole. Eat!

*The barking subsides. SERĚZHA returns with a mug of tea in his hands. Sitting at his computer, he opens and checks his social media. As he reads, a swarm of notifications pings in. SERĚZHA again picks up his mobile phone, jumps up and walks around the room while dialling a number.*

SERĚZHA: Hello, Slavik. Have you gone fucking mad? You're placing bets on me now?... Yes I... When?... I was drunk... What do you mean 'too late'? I don't remember. I can only remember Renat putting me in the taxi. Thanks for the taxi by the way... What?... I invited her to the theatre? Fuck. Slavik, I don't want to, I'm not agreeing to take part in this... How much did Marlezonov bet?... Yeah, I saw Roma on the chat too... So what, is it the whole Cabal?... Even Renat has placed a bet? (PAUSE) And... supposing I do. What percentage would I get?... How much is that?... Yes, I remember, the MacBook, the lectures. Fuck. (*falteringly*) But I didn't agree... I did? Aw c'mon Slavik, we were pissed... Course I need the money. But damn. Like this?... Right. OK, I suppose... OK. So if I do it, how will I prove it?... What, film it? Fuck Slavik, that's mean. She's so young. Then to film her at it. And actually post it in the chat. No Slavik, this is bullshit, we can't do it like that. I'm out. What?... a MacBook? Fucksake, where will I get you a MacBook from? Do you know what my wages are like? Slavik. You and your MacBooks. Slavik... Yes, yes, the bet, I get it. Bloody hell... Yes, I do have honour. What are you shouting for?... (*aggrievedly*) What are you shouting for?... I do need the money. No, I haven't changed my mind... (PAUSE) (*sighs*) I'm here. Right, OK... OK, I say. Yes, I'll do it... A week, yes. I remember. (LONG PAUSE) (*In a different voice*) Listen. And if I do. Then can we make the lectures at the hub official? With a contract?...

#### Scene 4

*Tan'ka's small, messy flat. The floor is dirty, and the furniture is very old. The room is split into two halves. One side is more or less tidy. Tan'ka sleeps here. Squalor dominates the other, where Tan'ka's bedridden father EGOR is lying on a saggy couch.*

*Alisa Kozhikina's song 'I Am Not A Toy' is playing loudly. TAN'KA is flitting about the room. She is applying lipstick and smartening herself up. EGOR weakly stirs under his duvet, speaking in an aggressive voice.*

EGOR: Off somewhere nice later, little bitch? Am talking to you Tan'ka. Can't hear me or something? Fuck yer old man, yeah? Yer old man rears you, old man feeds you, now it's fuck yer old man. Come here, little bitch! Maggot. Get me some grub. Ye hear me? Grub, pronto! Where've ye fucked off to now? Come here!

TAN'KA: *(Singing in English over the Russian song from verse 1, line 1)*

It's another new day | I never follow the crowd | I want everyone here | To respect me, I'm proud...

*Tan'ka darts out of the room, returning with a plate of pelmeni which she places in front of her father.*

EGOR: What the fuck am I supposed to do with this and no vodka? Get me some vodka. Tan'ka. You want to end me, ya maggot... Your mother wanted to end me before. She sprinkled my nosh with washing powder. Now you. Give me some vodka. No? Give me that pen and paper there. I'm going to write a letter. To the President's office. That these birds want to butcher me. My own daughter won't get me a drink... left to rot in my own home by my own flesh and blood. Mister

President. Help! (*Crying*) Why are you so evil, Tan'ka? You know I can't walk.

They took a chunk of my backbone. Daughter!

TAN'KA: Right, who would sprinkle washing powder on yer nosh? You got the DTs again? Get these pelmeni down you, fucknut. I'm not giving you no vodka.

EGOR: (*Woefully*) Ach you're a little bitch.

TAN'KA: (*Singing along to the chorus*) Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa... I'm not a toy | Oh, yeah  
| I can't be no-one but myself | Oh, yeah

EGOR: Tanechka, it hurts, oi how it hurts... sweetheart, darling... yer old man is perishing... hurts so much. Pass me the hawthorn tincture off the little shelf there!

TAN'KA: You're so full of shit. You were clearly told - get drunk again and you're fucked.

EGOR: Let me get fucked then. Maybe I want to snuff it. What do I need a life like this for?

TAN'KA: Whatever the life, it's still a life. What you trying to say - that I don't look after you well or something? I do every damn thing for you. I wash you, feed you, bollocks shmollocks, clean up your shite, and you think *you've* got it fucking bad? I badly wanted to strangle you after you finished Mama off. Alky.

EGOR: So strangle me. Go on, Tanechka, strangle yer old man.

TAN'KA: I did want to. But not any more.

EGOR: Why not?

TAN'KA: Well I've got nobody else except you, alky. *(Mildly threateningly)* I will love you.

EGOR: So you won't give me no vodka?

TAN'KA: Nope.

*EGOR turns to face the wall. (PAUSE) TAN'KA continues to get herself ready.*

EGOR: *(Muffled)* You prostitute.

*TAN'KA's face grows angry. She walks up to her father and tips the pelmeni over his chest. EGOR shakes them off.*

EGOR: Mad bitch. Tan'ka, what you doing?

TAN'KA: *(Quietly)* Never say that about me again. Because it's not true. I'm not a prostitute, Papa. I'm a virgin, for your information.

EGOR: Alright... alright.

*Tan'ka goes back to the mirror as if nothing has happened.*

TAN'KA: *(Singing along to the second half of verse 2, leading into the chorus)*

Never go with the flow | I don't swim with the tide | Always true to myself | Leave the rest far behind...

EGOR: You can clean up the pelmeni.

TAN'KA: You're the one in the wrong.

EGOR: I suppose. Where ye goin'? Out whoring?

*TAN'KA gives her father such a stare that he goes silent. (PAUSE)*

EGOR: Will you turn off your blasted music? It's hurting my ears. You off out?  
Breath of fresh air?

TAN'KA: I'm going to the theatre.

EGOR: To the theatre. Ladi-fucking-da. To the theatre. Well just look at you, ya skank. To the theatre, I ask you. Where ye get the spondoolicks for the theatre? My pension? Well fuck you, you'll accounts for every teensy-weensy brass kopeck. There'll be no theatre. Shite all vodka for me - bollocks to yer theatre bullshit. Bollocks.

TAN'KA: I was invited, so shut it. My ticket is being paid for.

EGOR: And which fuckwit asked you out?

TAN'KA: He's a good guy. Decent.

EGOR: Yeah, right... but who is he?

TAN'KA: Mind your own.

EGOR: What, is he from your college? (*PAUSE*) Do you sit at the same desk? No... you like older men. Our Kostia was a grown man... you're going out with someone from college y' slag, is it?

TAN'KA: (*Sings*) I'm not a toy...

EGOR: And what will you tell Kostia? Kostia loves you so much. And you've fucking forgotten him.

TAN'KA: Why tell Kostia? He's inside.

EGOR: Alekseevna phoned a bit ago, we talked. Seems they let him out on parole. He'll come to see you, and what will you say? That yer cheating on him.

TAN'KA: They haven't let him out. I'd have known. What would he come here for anyway? His sister and her dude moved away to Orsha. He's got no flat or fuck all here.

EGOR: He'll come for you. I remember, he really loves you. He did that chump in for **you**. For you.

TAN'KA: I never asked him to do anyone in. He did the crime now he's doing the time. He won't come.

EGOR: Oh but he'll find out, Tan'ka. Oh but he'll find out that you've got yourself another chump. Kostia will be living on his memories... thinking that you're waiting for him. Love - it's, y' know, such a force... a frightening force... Kostia will come, and you are fucking /

TAN'KA: Shut the fuck up. Enough, I'm off.

*TAN'KA walks off. Alisa Kozhikina's song 'I Am Not A Toy' is still playing. EGOR throws the pelmeni at the old HiFi.*

EGOR: Fucksake. Dry up! Yer a bloody shambles. Not a toy, fucksake.

## Scene 5

*SERĚZHA and TAN'KA are just outside the theatre. SERĚZHA, wearing a blazer, is rattled. They are hiding from someone. TAN'KA peeks out from the wings.*

TAN'KA: Not a good situation... right, looks like he's gone...

SERĚZHA: Who's gone?

TAN'KA: That numpty. I mean the bouncer.

SERĚZHA: I never would have thought that theatres had bouncers.

*TAN'KA spins round, smiling.*

TAN'KA: Sergei Romanovich, you're talking to me.

SERĚZHA: What?

TAN'KA: Well you've just sat quiet the whole time. Since we met, you've basically kept so quiet. It's been me doing all the talking, sir... and now you're talking. Sick.

SERĚZHA: For pity's sake Tania, you're not allowed to talk at the theatre. Do you understand?

TAN'KA: I understand. How come?

SERĚZHA: Because there's a show on - that's how come. That's why that woman told you off...

TAN'KA: What for? Bloody horse... I have zero respect for people like that. People are having a conversation and she like butts in.

SERĚZHA: For goodness sake. Do you even understand what people go to the theatre for?

TAN'KA: Well... yeah... for a show... the culture, right?

SERĚZHA: You just can't behave like that. Did you actually hit her?

TAN'KA: I just hit her a little bit. I'm sorry, Sergei Romanovich... but there's no way I'm apologising to that horse.

*Blue flashing lights appear, reflecting off the walls.*

SERĚZHA: Bastard, is that a siren? What, have they called the cops?

*TAN'KA peeks out.*

TAN'KA: Yep, looks like it. That horse must have rung 'em. Flipping out for some reason.

SERĚZHA: Oh god, we need to hit the road.

TAN'KA: Nah, they'll kick off. We should wait. It's chill, Sergei Romanovich. I've been through this a hundred times before. Plus, she won't even have a bruise. An assault charge won't stick, she can't prove nothing.

SERĚZHA: For Pete's sake. We came out to the theatre. Assault.

TAN'KA: Sergei Romanovich, I'm sorry sir.

SERĚZHA: Right so now what... let's wait.

*They tuck themselves deeper into the alleyway. Tan'ka snuggles into SERĚZHA.*

*SERĚZHA doesn't move away. TAN'KA looks at SERĚZHA. (PAUSE)*

TAN'KA: You are so beautiful, you know. I always look at you in lectures, sir. I look so hard that I sometimes can't even hear what you're saying up there...

SERĚZHA: I've noticed.

TAN'KA: Is that why you asked me out to the theatre, sir? Because you noticed me looking at you?

SERĚZHA: Well... something like that...

TAN'KA: (*Smiles*) You got a tab then?

SERĚZHA: Eh?

TAN'KA: Any ciggies.

SERĚZHA: I don't smoke.

TAN'KA: How come?

SERĚZHA: No reason. I'm clean-living.

TAN'KA: Respect, Sergei Romanovich. Do you work out?

SERĚZHA: (*Puffing his chest out*) Well, you know... yeah, now and then...

TAN'KA: Sick. I know. You're strong, sir. I only ever choose strong and beautiful men. For real.

SERĚZHA: I'm intelligent too.

TAN'KA: Yeah right, you even read Sacophles.

SERĚZHA: So you... tell me about yourself.

TAN'KA: Like what?

SERĚZHA: Well, I don't know... what do you do in your free time?

TAN'KA: Erm, I... I work. For one thing.

SERĚZHA: Where?

TAN'KA: I... in a book shop. Mmhmm.

SERĚZHA: In 'Svetoch'? Or in 'Knigarnia'?

TAN'KA: Erm... nah. It's not a well-known book shop. It's just a little fucker. Tiny. I sell books. Yeah.

SERĚZHA: Cool. So... what about your parents?

TAN'KA: My parents? They're average parents. My papa's in the military. An officer. A sergeant. I mean a colonel.

SERĚZHA: Cool. My papa was in the military too.

TAN'KA: So what does he do now?

SERĚZHA: Well he left us when I was still small. I dunno what he's up to...

TAN'KA: Aw, that's bollocks; oh sorry, Sergei Romanovich.

SERĚZHA: Don't worry. Do you think I don't swear?

TAN'KA: And your mama?

SERĚZHA: OK, Mama. She lives in the centre, opposite the circus. One of the big houses round Dom Veteranov. And your mama?

TAN'KA: Mama? She's... in Spain. She's got a business in Spain. Yeah. That's her. My mama.

SERĚZHA: So why are you here? And not in Spain?

TAN'KA: Well... I needed to finish my studies first... and then, y'know, then I'll go over there. To Spain, like. So what, Sergei Romanovich, do you really swear sir?

SERĚZHA: Course, yeah. Nothing human is alien to me.

TAN'KA: It's just that I thought you were... like. Kinda nice. Good. I mean in a cool way.

SERĚZHA: Turns out I'm not.

TAN'KA: It's well cool how you said 'bastard' today, sir. You normally just talk about philosophy, like. About Sacophles and the Blokes.

SERĚZHA: The Stoics.

TAN'KA: Yeah, them. But can you say: 'jebend'?

SERĚZHA: 'Jebend'.

*TAN'KA bursts into laughter.*

TAN'KA: This is so cool, like... dunno why but I never thought it'd be so cool. Can you manage any more?

SERĚZHA: I can.

TAN'KA: OK, say 'scroteyflaps'.

SERĚZHA: 'Scroteyflaps'. What does that even mean?

TAN'KA: *(Laughs)* Fucked if I know.

SERĚZHA: *(Suddenly sees the funny side)* Scroteyflaps.

SECURITY GUARD: *(Offstage)* Who's there? Out you come!

*SERĚZHA and TAN'KA exchange glances.*

## Scene 6

*A college corridor. TAN'KA is lighting candles. These are arranged in a love heart shape in front of a lecture theatre door. She knocks on the door and runs away. The door opens and SERĚZHA appears. Judging by the noise, the lecture theatre is full of students.*

SERĚZHA: *(Into the lecture hall)* OK, quieten down please. Quiet!

*SERĚZHA looks into the empty corridor, uncomprehending. His eyes grow wide as he lowers his gaze onto the candles. TAN'KA, beaming with joy, appears from behind a wall and walks over to SERĚZHA. SERĚZHA is not happy*

SERĚZHA: *(Into the lecture hall)* I said quiet. Just one moment. *(Closes the door)*

*TAN'KA throws herself at SERĚZHA and begins to kiss him.*

SERĚZHA: *(Trying to prise TAN'KA off)* You... why aren't you in class?

TAN'KA: Fuck that... Sergei Romanovich, I just wanted to /

SERĚZHA: Have you gone mad or something?

TAN'KA: *(Whispers, disoriented)* Thank you for the theatre, Sergei Romanovich. It was sick... nobody has ever taken me to the theatre before... come here. Yesterday, when we were running away from the feds, I got it. That you - you're like, the one.

SERĚZHA: Which one? Tania. What are you doing?

TAN'KA: It's you, sir - you're the one I'm going to be intimate with. I'm not like thinking about getting married yet. And children... I'm not one of your kiddy ones. Just intimate to begin with. It will be kinda my first time... I have been intimate before, but never had sex... Have you?

SERĚZHA: Tania.

TAN'KA: *(Suddenly pulls away)* Hang on, don't you want it?

SERĚZHA: *(Embarrassed)* I... emmm... I can't say at the moment /

TAN'KA: What is it? Aren't I pretty?

SERĚZHA: Don't say that...

TAN'KA: I'm the fittest girl in college. Or is it 'cos I was fuck... talking in the theatre?

SERĚZHA: Not at all...

TAN'KA: Don't you like the candles?

SERĚZHA: Tania...

TAN'KA: So you do want it?

SERĚZHA: *(Helpless)* I do.

*TAN'KA again throws herself at SERĚZHA, kissing him.*

SERĚZHA: *(Looking from side to side in horror)* Right that's enough... what are you doing? *(He accidentally grabs Tan'ka's breast as he tries to push her away)*

*TAN'KA suddenly slaps SERĚZHA across the face. She backs off, breathing heavily and smiles. SERĚZHA is in shock.*

TAN'KA: No... that's not allowed. Not yet. You get in big trouble with me for that. Only snogging is allowed at this stage.

SERĚZHA: Tania... you... this... you know that... no. I don't want to keep seeing you. No. I don't want it. I'm sorry. It's just been a mistake.

*(PAUSE)*

*TAN'KA, face like stone, begins to stamp on the hot candles.*

*SERĚZHA goes into the toilets. TAN'KA keeps stamping on the candles. Tears run down her face.*

### **Scene 7**

*SERĚZHA is in the toilets speaking with SLAVIK on the phone.*

SERĚZHA: Slavik, no more. Soz man, but that's an end to it. I'm backing out.

SLAVIK: No, SerĚzha.

SERĚZHA: Yes Slavik, yes. She's fucked up, this Tania. I mean completely fucked up.

SLAVIK: We have an agreement, SerĚzha. Don't you remember what you'll get if you come through? You'll get a huge sum of money in the form of a computer, a membership ticket to the Cabal and the chance of earning some cash on the side.

SERĚZHA: Yes. But I /

SLAVIK: And if you back out, SerĚzha, then you owe me the latest Mac. I take these matters seriously - you're either my friend or you're not, and I can't tell which it is at the moment. If you are unable to stick to an agreement then there are others who can...

SERĚZHA: So what, are you threatening me now?

SLAVIK: I'm just giving you a friendly warning, Serëzha. It's just that our lads are really keen on this project of yours. And I just need to let you know, by the way, that you won't be able to pull the wool over anyone's eyes. They've already found her VK page, they all know what she looks like. Anyway, the lads have actually started putting money on it. Mainly on you coming through. Have you been on the chat lately? I've now got actual money in my hands. Real money, Serëzha. Everyone's looking forward to the report-back by the way. You've got six days left. OK, so you took her to the theatre. But we still don't have a report, you see. Or didn't you cop off?

SERËZHA: Slavik... damn... you're putting me in a situation...

SLAVIK: You've put yourself in this situation, Serëzha. Think of Malta, Serëzha. Have a look outside the window, and then think of Malta. Out the window, and then Malta...

*TAN'KA bursts into the toilets, weeping.*

SERËZHA: I'll phone you back.

*TAN'KA rushes towards SERËZHA.*

TAN'KA: Sergei Romanovich... can you, like, just say, what you want... whatever you want, do it... but I know that you - are the one. I just know.

SERËZHA: Tania. Calm yourself.

*TAN'KA falls onto SERËZHA, who pushes her away. TAN'KA hits SERËZHA.*

*SERËZHA, failing to contain himself, hits TAN'KA back in response.*

SERËZHA: Lay off. You're sick...

*TAN'KA, now smiling, wipes her tears away. Some of her buttons have popped open during the exchange and her bra is now visible. SERĚZHA gulps, looking at her body. TAN'KA again falls on SERĚZHA, who hits her harder. TAN'KA suddenly presses her lips to SERĚZHA's, drinking him in. SERĚZHA unexpectedly returns her kiss. They kiss one another with fierce, animalistic passion. SERĚZHA attempts to get hold of his phone and start filming, but he drops it and surrenders himself completely to desire. Without breaking from their kiss, he and TAN'KA tumble into a cubicle.*

### **Scene 8**

*SERĚZHA'S flat. SERĚZHA and TAN'KA are lying in bed. They have evidently just had sex and TAN'KA is smoking. Next to them is a Cognac bottle. SERĚZHA and TAN'KA are tipsy.*

TAN'KA: Fuck, SerĚzha, you're sick.

SERĚZHA: Thank you.

TAN'KA: And it hardly hurt at all...

*TAN'KA snuggles up to SERĚZHA. He pulls her in close.*

TAN'KA: I fucking thought it would be sore.

SERĚZHA: But it wasn't.

TAN'KA: I had no doubts deciding it was you. I picked you ages ago.

SERĚZHA: Baby. And a switch flicked in me. I thought that you were. Well... it's not important... but you are so young and sweet... and wild. Are you wild? (*gently bites her*)

TAN'KA: I am. (*bites SERĚZHA hard*)

SERĚZHA: Ow, fuck! Ssss... what you doing?

TAN'KA: I am wild. And as for me being young; don't be a pussy, Serēzha. I consent to all this.

SERĚZHA: Right, well that's good. By the way, see how you've been telling everyone about your virginity and all that? Please don't tell anyone about us, alright?

TAN'KA: Safe.

SERĚZHA: Erm, how comes your jacket smells of fish?

TAN'KA: Err... fuck knows, man. Oh, I bought some cod down the market, it probably brushed against my jacket.

SERĚZHA: I see.

TAN'KA: Hey, shall we tell each other secrets?

SERĚZHA: Secrets?

TAN'KA: Yeah, you know, secrets. The stuff you never normally tell no-one. We're in a relationship now, we should know each other's secrets. I did some cats in when I was a kid.

SERĚZHA: Did them in?

TAN'KA: Hung them. And used bricks. I probably finished off about seven cats. I dunno, like... something came over me. I was running round for some reason, catching these fluffy little fuckers, and then I went off behind the cookers - there were some cookers kicking round behind our building, fuck knows what cookers

were doing there, left over from the nineties. And that's where I did the cats in. I set fire to one. I once slashed a dog, too.

SERĚZHA: But why?

TAN'KA: Oh fuck. I don't even know. I was young and stupid, basically. I actually really love pussycats. And then... well. I used to catch a cat, cuddle it, stroke it. I liked stroking them. But then I'd nuzzle into it, and it'd be so stinky. Or it'd start scratching itself. Or I'd see a flea on it. And then I'd snap and lose it. Like, what the fuck. There was this one little kitten, a sweet, purry little fluffball, but then such a disgusting, stinky beast too. Little bastard. Like it was taking the piss. So then I was like bullshit, fuck you for mugging me off, pussycat. So I took the mofo behind the cookers. I buried them there in a row. Nobody knew.

SERĚZHA: No way. You're something else.

TAN'KA: I'm wild. So what about you?

SERĚZHA: Me... promise not to tell?

TAN'KA: I promise.

SERĚZHA: Word of honour?

TAN'KA: I swear on my fucking grave.

SERĚZHA: OK, when I was young... what age would I have been... about 11, probably... or maybe 12...

TAN'KA: Go on!

SERĚZHA: Me and my friends... killed a person...

TAN'KA: You? A person? You're shitting me. You don't have it in you.

SERĚZHA: No. I couldn't do it now. But I could then. I'm not proud of it in any way, obviously. It's a nightmare. But it's a secret. So there was this person... how to put it... who also wasn't quite a person... Ivan - Vania. He was a total Down's. He used to run around slobbering. He was so disgusting. He'd come looking for cuddles. So we'd sometimes... kick him round a bit. So anyway. This one day we went to Tsnianka, to swim in the reservoir. In the evening. And he was in the yard. He never normally left the yard at all. But this time we set off and Vania tagged along. Nobody saw him set off after us. So... here's how it happened. We were kinda playing with him at Tsnianka. We were playing /

TAN'KA: What were you playing?

SERĚZHA: Well kind of... pretending to drown him. He was laughing, so we thought he liked it. Then again, he was nearly always laughing. Maybe he wasn't capable of anything else. So basically. He drowned. We tried to resuscitate him, but no. And we decided to bury him. We were so fucking scared. So there... the woods beside the diving station... that's where we buried him... fuck... what the hell am I saying? It's as if it's not about me. It really isn't about me.

TAN'KA: So what, didn't they find him?

SERĚZHA: He had... the kind of parents that didn't notice straight away. And then... they searched. They even searched that wood. They didn't find him. Nobody knows. And those friends of mine have since moved away. We swore never to tell anyone, ever... Ever since then, I always go to church on 14<sup>th</sup> June. I light candles for him. And pray that God's servant Ivan may rest in peace.

*TAN'KA wipes tears away from SERĚZHA's eyes.*

SERĚZHA: (*quietly*) I sometimes dream of him. He hugs me. Slabbering. Drooling so much that I'm drowning in it.

TAN'KA: Just fucking let it go.

*SERĚZHA sits down on the bed, shaking.*

SERĚZHA: I've never told anyone. I've even sobered up. Don't tell anyone. Don't tell anyone. Forget about it, OK? I'm just going to act like I never told you anything.

TAN'KA: Chill, it's all cool. I won't tell anyone. *PAUSE*. I sometimes dream of Bryan Adams.

SERĚZHA: No way.

TAN'KA: Mama once took me to his concert when I was little. I dream that he's chasing me round a church. And he has such strong, white teeth. He kinda clack-clacks. He runs after me clacking his teeth. It's scary. I even pissed the bed one night.

*A dog barks in another part of the flat.*

TAN'KA: The fuck is that?

SERĚZHA: My dog. Jon Snow.

TAN'KA: Does he bite?

SERĚZHA: No. He's good. Well, he's on the balcony at the moment. 'Cos he keeps chewing everything and scratching the wallpaper. He was tiny when I got him. From a shelter.

*TAN'KA looks at Serëzha's broken phone lying on the bedside cabinet.*

TAN'KA: So what, did he break your phone?

SERËZHA: Yeah. When I was on the loo.

TAN'KA: Is it totally fucked? Does the camera not even work? We could have took a selfie.

SERËZHA: *(has a sudden thought)* Oh fuck, that's right, the camera's broken...

TAN'KA: Eh?

SERËZHA: Aw, no... Nothin'. It's nothin'...

*PAUSE*

TAN'KA: Shall we get some grub?

## Scene 9

*TAN'KA'S flat. EGOR is in an old wheelchair, trying unsuccessfully to open a bottle of TAN'KA's perfume.*

EGOR: Oh, ya bastard, c'mon ya... oh, ya bastard... is that it? Bollocks...

*EGOR gives up and resorts to spraying the perfume into his mouth instead. There is a knock at the door.*

EGOR: *(shouts)* You and yer deputies can fuck right off.

*There is another, more insistent knock.*

EGOR: Fuck yer bibles too.

*There is a powerful thump on the door. And another. EGOR is frightened.*

EGOR: 'Oo's there?

*Another thump.*

EGOR: I'm coming, I'm coming. I'll open it now.

*EGOR wheels awkwardly into the corridor. He returns with a gloomy Kostia.*

EGOR: Oh, Kostia... I hear all this knocking and I think hell's bells, Tan'ka's got keys, who could it be, knocking like that? But it's Kostia. I was just talking to Alekseevna, your old neighbour. She told me they let you out on remand or something. How did you get 'ere? Why did you come? When did you arrive? What you after?

KOSTIA: What's that smell?

EGOR: I put a bit of eau-de-cologne on a cut...

KOSTIA: So what's happening?

EGOR: Well it's 'ere, look. I was just picking a spot on my shoulder /

KOSTIA: I mean what's happening with Tania?

EGOR: She's fucked off out to her class. So is it her you've come to see? *PAUSE*  
Yes of course, to see her. Congratulations Kostia - you're out the slammer. You're probably a real boss, fuckit, what d'ya call it... Kostia, maybe we can have a little drink in your honour? Eh? Just to mark the occasion? I'd pour you one myself, but as you can see, the cunts done an operation on me and I'm fucked. I can't walk by myself to the shop and the wheels on this chair are shite...

KOSTIA: *(walking round the room)* So where's old Vital'evna?

EGOR: She died in the summer. She was on her way to Tevli to see her mother, but she died on the bus... it was roasting... the heat killed her. Her heart.

KOSTIA: Where does Tania study?

EGOR: At the college on Tolbukhin Street. *PAUSE* It's good you came, Kostia, very good. You'd make me such a good son-in-law. *PAUSE* She waited for you, oh how she waited. Properly waited. She told everyone I've got a fella, he's away on business... she waited... but then not long ago, someone new showed up.

*KOSTIA looks at EGOR malevolently.*

KOSTIA: She was supposed to wait till I got out.

EGOR: Tan'ka has no shame at all now. She's going out with some chump, a fucking teacher as far as I know. Thinks she's the fucking queen. Little bitch. 'Stead of a normal fella... Kostia, I'm begging you. Look out for her. She's young and stupid, it's not her fault. So she's got herself involved with some city fucker. It's no big deal... just this one time. *PAUSE* But I beg you, Kostia, no battering people. I'm not worried about Tan'ka, fuck it, you wouldn't hurt her, I know that. Keep an eye on her, please. You're a man of the world, I can see that. We'll have the two of you fucking married in no time /

*KOSTIA storms over to EGOR and grabs him by the collar. EGOR is terrified.*

KOSTIA: Is she a virgin? Is she still a virgin?!

EGOR: I... Kost... I... Yes. Yes! Yes, Kostia.

*KOSTIA walks to the door, enraged. He turns round in the doorway.*

KOSTIA: I promise you, Mikhailovich. I will always be with her. Always.

*KOSTIA leaves the flat. EGOR follows him with frightened eyes, breaking into a coughing fit.*

## **Act II**

### **Scene 10**

*SERĚZHA's flat. Badly beaten, SERĚZHA is curled up on his bed with bloody tissues strewn all round. SERĚZHA lifts a tissue to his nose. SERĚZHA is crying. Dog barking emanates from behind the door. The sound of incoming Facebook chat notifications can be heard from the computer, which is switched on. The phone rings. SERĚZHA answers it.*

SLAVIK: Serëzha. What the fuck? The clock is ticking. You've only got one picture in all this time. And that's blurry. You can't even see her face properly on it. The guys are leaning on me now. Do you ever even go on the chat? Oh I can see; you're on there now. Are you gonna pop this whore's cherry then?

SERĚZHA: *(sobbing)* I've already done it.

SLAVIK: Well, Serëzha. Congratulations and all that. But where's the footage?

SERĚZHA: There is no footage... I broke my phone...

SLAVIK: Come on, Serëzha, you understand the modern world. No pics or vids means it never happened... and... why you snivelling? Got a cold or something?

SERĚZHA: No... I got fucking battered.

SLAVIK: By who?

SERĚZHA: Her ex. The criminal.

SLAVIK: No way! Was it bad?

SERĚZHA: To a pulp.

SLAVIK: Take a selfie, Serězha. That would be a start. At least let's throw the hungry dogs a bit of drama. Is your webcam working?

SERĚZHA: Yes...

SLAVIK: You take a selfie. And I'll get straight on the chat and write the text. So what happened?

SERĚZHA: I got fucked up... that's what happened... he burst in to my lecture... dragged me out into the corridor and fucked me up. How did he find out...

SLAVIK: Absolutely brilliant. Well I don't mean brilliant, obviously, you poor bugger; but things are really heating up. Was she in that lecture?

SERĚZHA: Yes. She was. She dragged him off me... and left with him... I'll probably get the sack...

*SERĚZHA sits down at his computer and takes a photo of himself with the webcam.*

SLAVIK: Right Serězha, pull yourself together. So you say you did it with her?

SERĚZHA: I did... and he battered the shit out of me for it...

SLAVIK: Jesus Serězha, you look like it too. You really aren't a happy chappy. Can you see how sorry everyone feels for you? See them all liking your photo?

SERĚZHA: Slavik, I'm done...

SLAVIK: No Serëzha, you're not. I'm sorry, you're my friend, but we need proof. Anything at all, Serëzha. You've slept together once, and you'll sleep together again...

SERËZHA: No. He'll actually kill me. Slavik, it was a mistake. A mistake. I should never have signed up for all this... I don't even have a camera now.

SLAVIK: OK Serëzha, in that case you know the script. Look, your webcam works. We've pacified the Cabal for now with your drama, but they need sex. We've given the people blood, but now they'll need sex. So do it, there; I believe in you. Or get your dosh ready for a Macbook. Right, I'm off to bed, it's late. Mwah.

*SERËZHA shakes out his jeans, rummages through the cupboards and gathers all his money into a pile; there is very little of it. SERËZHA snaps and throws his money at the wall. A door slams unexpectedly within the flat. TAN'KA's voice can be heard, along with a dog barking.*

TAN'KA: *(offstage)* Serëzha. It's me. Your door's open. I'm coming in, Serëzha. Fucksake, dog. *(dog-whimpering is heard)* Serëzha.

*TAN'KA tumbles into the room. She is in tears, drunk, her make-up smudged.*

SERËZHA: What you doing here?...

TAN'KA: Serëzha, you poor thing... look what he... is it sore? Serëzha, there was nothing between me and him. He used to always hit on me, ages ago... and I'd like joke - fucking sound, knock yourself out, buy me flowers and toys... but you aren't the one Kostia, you are not the one. He's called Kostia... I won't be with you, Kostia... and he's like - OK. And he would buy me flowers, all that romantic shit, but he bastard well knew that he wasn't the one, and that I wouldn't be with him. And

made out it was some sort of fucking love. What kind of love is that? Kostia knew I hadn't been with anyone. That I was still a virgin. Kinda like he was my knight in shining armour, fuck knows. He just went fucking mental over my virginity... he loved me 'cos I was a virgin... and Tolik used to walk me home. Tolik was just a guy out of my class. (*crying*) He was just my fucking classmate. An alright guy. Just a friend. But he wasn't the one. He took me on his horse once. And Kostia spotted him. And he thought that Tolik was him - the one. That I wanted to be with him. And he beat him to fucking death with his knuckle dusters. He's a nutjob, Serëzha. I'm sorry. I thought he was still inside...

SERËZHA: Just do one, will you? I don't want to see you. Get out of here. Take your Kostias and Toliks with you.

TAN'KA: Serëzha, darling, I love you. I could just sleep here on the rug by your bed if you like? I'm sorry, darling. I never wanted him to batter you. I took him on the piss to chill him out. I bullshitted him that we hadn't done anything... he got pissed and started blubbering... but I came to you... I'll just sleep here, Serëzha darling. I'll sleep quietly, I won't bother you...

SERËZHA: I said do one. Are you simple? Leave! Enough.

TAN'KA: Serëzha darling, no - you can't, you fucking can't, darling... you are the one. I mean I chose you. Don't speak to me like that Serëzha darling, please...

SERËZHA: You're mental. Leave me alone!

TAN'KA: Serëzha, my strong, clever darling... Serëzha... my beautiful darling... How can you speak to me like that? I love you so much and you're swearing at me... darling...

SERĚZHA: I've had enough. You're scum. I don't need you, got it? Pathetic little kid.

TAN'KA: *(appearing short of breath)* SerĚzha darling. I will actually die...

SERĚZHA: I couldn't care less. Even if you die. You're a pig-thick chav. You're trash.

TAN'KA: SerĚzha darling... please don't speak like that...

*TAN'KA tries to kiss SERĚZHA. He hits her. TAN'KA again tries to kiss him, but SERĚZHA pushes her away once more and retreats into a corner. PAUSE. TAN'KA looks up at SERĚZHA.*

TAN'KA: *(smiling)* SerĚzha darling.

SERĚZHA: OK, I'm sorry I called you trash. Please excuse me, just go and that's an end to it.

TAN'KA: Come on, SerĚzha darling. Come to me...

SERĚZHA: Which bit don't you get?

TAN'KA: You're gonna come here right now, SerĚzha darling. Do you know why?

SERĚZHA: I will not come to you. And you won't come here either. I'll set the dog on you in a minute.

TAN'KA: If you don't come here right now, then I'll tell Kostia to fuck you up again.

*PAUSE. TAN'KA moves towards SERĚZHA.*

TAN'KA: He'll beat the shit out of you if I give him the order. So it's really best you come over here.

SERĚZHA: Tania...

TAN'KA: He could kill you. You get me? I'm sorry, but he could kill you.

SERĚZHA: Tania, why are you saying these things?

TAN'KA: I could phone him right now. And say that you'd raped me... come to me, Serëzha, darling...

*PAUSE*

*SERĚZHA stands up woodenly .*

SERĚZHA: *(defeated)* I'm coming, I'll just turn the computer off...

*SERĚZHA trudges to his computer as if to the gallows, and switches on the web-camera. He walks over to TAN'KA. She undoes his trousers. SERĚZHA, his expression dull, turns back and looks into the web-camera.*

## **Scene 11**

*SERĚZHA's room. He is sat in front of a new Macbook, with the Facebook page open on-screen. SERĚZHA's curtains are drawn. SERĚZHA approaches the window warily and, quickly glancing behind the curtains, jumps away fearfully. His mobile phone rings. The dog is barking behind the door.*

SERĚZHA: Hello.

SLAVIK: Alright, mate! So how's the machine?

SERĚZHA: It's good.

SLAVIK: Well-earned. Don't you worry, I covered your face up, you can't see anything. You're an animal, by the way. Everything looks tickety-boo between you and this whore from what I can see...

SERĚZHA: No, it's not tickety-boo.

SLAVIK: Right, well as I promised - bring your lecture plans, we'll have a look at them, I'll explain to you how we structure prices and we'll work out basically what's what and how to proceed. We're having a party tomorrow at our place, you should come. You're a guest of honour now; a member of the Cabal. We're meeting at seven and going to The Loft bar.

SERĚZHA: I won't be there.

SLAVIK: Eh?

SERĚZHA: I'm being followed.

SLAVIK: What?

SERĚZHA: The knuckle dragger who battered me. He's following me. This is the second day he's been standing outside this building.

SLAVIK: Are you sure? Call the cops then. He did beat you up. Get him done for assault.

SERĚZHA: Then she'll set him on me. She's the one who ordered him to keep watch on me...

SLAVIK: SerĚzha, are you actually OK there? Are you feeling paranoid?

SERĚZHA: I'm not OK, Slavik, not OK at all. Why the fuck did I get myself involved in all this? You're the one to blame, you and your fucking burn-out. It's your fault.

SLAVIK: I don't like your tone, Sergei. We'd best finish this conversation here if you're wasted.

SERĚZHA: I've left my job. I'm lying to Mama. I order all my food online.

SLAVIK: Are you winding me up, SerĚzh? What's with the horror film?

SERĚZHA: No. Do you know what his face is like? He is completely expressionless. I'm scared, Slavik...

SLAVIK: OK, SerĚzha, turn down the Hitchcock. Best you sleep it off and come over tomorrow at seven. Go on, I'll be waiting for you. Do you know what else?

SERĚZHA: What?

SLAVIK: You need to be a bit more grateful, SerĚzha.

*SERĚZHA puts his phone down on the table. He curls up on his bed in foetal position. The front door can be heard banging. SERĚZHA flinches. PAUSE. TAN'KA comes in with a carrier bag of food and a bottle.*

TAN'KA: SerĚzha darling, my sweetie-pie.

*SERĚZHA does not react.*

TAN'KA: See what I brought. Let's have a picnic.

*TAN'KA takes the food out of the carrier bag, takes out candles, sets them out in a heart-shape on the floor and unselfconsciously starts lighting them with a lighter.*

*SERĚZHA remains in the same position throughout.*

TAN'KA: I got us fish too, I put it in the fridge. We'll eat some fishy. Do you like fishy, Serëzha darling? *PAUSE* I'll stew it on onion, that's how Mama taught me: you chop the onion and then put it in the pan for a bit with water and oil... then you put bits of fish on top and more onion on top of that, bam, and you stew it. It turns out yum, Serëzha. Darling? *PAUSE* Oh, have you got a new computer? What is it, an Apple? Darling, that's so cool. Oh, Facebook. I don't understand anything on there... maybe you can show me what it's all about?

*SERĚZHA gets up and closes the laptop.*

SERĚZHA: Let's do it later with a clear head.

TAN'KA: Alright.

*TAN'KA plays the song "I Am Not a Toy" on her phone, finds plastic glasses and pours alcohol into them.*

TAN'KA: See, Serëzha. *PAUSE*. What is it? Darling?

*SERĚZHA stares opaquely at the candles, at the glasses and at TAN'KA. TAN'KA presses a glass on him and moves in to kiss his lips. SERĚZHA does not resist.*

SERĚZHA: I can smell fish.

TAN'KA: I went to Sant's seafood shop. It fucking reeks of fish in there. It probably rubbed off on my top. Serëzha darling to us; to our love!

*They drink. TAN'KA embraces a limp SERĚZHA. She takes a picture of them both on her phone.*

TAN'KA: So did you quit college?

SERĚZHA: Mhmm.

TAN'KA: But why?

SERĚZHA: Pay's too low.

TAN'KA: Fair enough. SerĚzha darling, we're together. It's sick, innit?

SERĚZHA: Yeah.

TAN'KA: My sweetie-pie. I knew you wouldn't ditch me...

SERĚZHA: Course not.

TAN'KA: It's probably because you're a philosopher.

SERĚZHA: "To throw away an honest friend is, as it were, to throw your life away".

TAN'KA: Exactly.

SERĚZHA: That's Sophocles. From his book /

TAN'KA: You're so intelligent. Do you like the candles?

SERĚZHA: Yes.

TAN'KA: Sick. Shall we lie down?

SERĚZHA: OK.

*They lie down. TAN'KA embraces SERĚZHA.*

TAN'KA: I didn't think you'd fall for me at the start. I'm so... ordinary. My mama and papa are from near Petrikov. Whereas you are more urban, kinda... complicated. Clever. I thought it'd be like, 'get out of here, kid!'

SERĚZHA: Course not.

*TAN'KA nestles fiercely into SERĚZHA, burying her face in his shirt. PAUSE.*

TAN'KA: Truth be told, I sell fish at a stall near Moskovskoe Metro station. I bullshitted about the books to make you like me. I do fish, basically. Is that cool?

SERĚZHA: Yeah, it's fine. I feel sleepy. I'll make the bed.

TAN'KA: Right, OK. At least I can get cheap fish. We can eat fish. Eh, SerĚzha darling?

SERĚZHA: Yeah. Fab. *(makes the bed)*

TAN'KA: SerĚzha darling, so like, there's one more thing...

SERĚZHA: What?

TAN'KA: My mama isn't in Spain. She died. And papa's bed-bound. He's disabled.

SERĚZHA: Mhmm...

TAN'KA: Is that all OK?

SERĚZHA: Yeah, it's all cool. Listen... do you mind if we don't... well, do it today? I'm a bit tired somehow.

TAN'KA: Yeah, course. Let's just lie and cuddle. But we'll do it tomorrow, yeah? I want to try going on top. OK, SerĚzh?

SERĚZHA: Of course, you go on top.

*SERĚZHA lies down. TAN'KA turns off the light, lies down next to SERĚZHA and hugs him.*

*PAUSE. Time passes. SERĚZHA falls asleep. TAN'KA gets up, finishes drinking the alcohol from the glasses, opens up the laptop and opens Facebook; the recording of her having sex with SERĚZHA pops up, with SERĚZHA's face covered. A cascade of like and comment notifications pings in.*

## Scene 12

*SERĚZHA wakes up in his room. He is alone. His dead dog is sprawled out in the middle of the room. Aphorisms of the ancient philosophers are scrawled on the wall. TAN'KA and SERĚZHA's sex video is playing on the open laptop screen. SERĚZHA is in shock. He throws himself onto the dog, shaking him and crying.*

SERĚZHA: Jon Snow, no! Little doggy...

*SERĚZHA walks to the window. He rushes over to the wardrobe and quickly starts to get dressed. Once dressed, SERĚZHA throws a few things into a bag and runs out of the flat. He is panic-stricken.*

## Scene 13

*LARISA's flat. LARISA opens the hall door - SERĚZHA enters. LARISA is delighted to see her son.*

LARISA: At long last SerĚzh... you phone in the afternoon and don't appear till evening. I mean, really. Are you hungry?

SERĚZHA: Not at all, I had a snack. Everything's alright.

LARISA: Take your shoes off. What you up to?

SERĚZHA: Well... it's... you know, one thing and another... I had some things to do...

LARISA: People to see...

SERĚZHA: Exactly... that sort of thing.

LARISA: How's work? How's Lassie?

SERĚZHA: Lassie's fine...

LARISA: Do you at least walk him?

SERĚZHA: I do.

LARISA: And how's work?

SERĚZHA: Work's fine too. Mama, can I stay at yours for the night? I... I'm... going to yoga. It's closer for me to walk from here.

LARISA: Oh well at least you're doing some sort of sport. Yes, stay over, of course... dark horse.

SERĚZHA: Why am I a dark horse?

LARISA: Well, you never told me anything about Tania...

*SERĚZHA is shocked.*

SERĚZHA: About Tania?

LARISA: Yes, Tania-Tania. What a lovely girl! (*whispering*) She's quite ordinary, of course, but wise beyond her years to talk to. How old is she, Serëzh?

SERĚZHA: Ei... nine... teen...

LARISA: Well she's still really young of course, but then you're hardly an old man yourself. She decided to surprise you. Come on, let's have some tea.

SERĚZHA: No.

LARISA: Serėzh?

SERĚZHA: I...

LARISA: Come on... *(goes into the kitchen)*

SERĚZHA: I'm coming, I'm coming... I need to make a call...

*SERĚZHA looks at the shoes and notices TAN'KA's shoes. SERĚZHA stamps on them maliciously.*

LARISA: Serėzh.

SERĚZHA: Coming...

*SERĚZHA goes into the kitchen. TAN'KA and LARISA are smiling at him from the table. They are drinking tea. TAN'KA stands to embrace SERĚZHA. It takes SERĚZHA all his strength to keep a lid on his rage.*

TAN'KA: My sweetie-pie. Serėzha - I was missing you already.

SERĚZHA: Hey...

TAN'KA: Isn't your mama lovely?... we've been sitting here, drinking tea. She's been telling me all about you. Them wood burnt pictures you made are sick... sit down.

LARISA: Do you remember those little patterns you burned into the chopping boards? You were awarded a certificate at the Youth Arts Centre, I'm sure it's round here somewhere. Yes Tania, they were just stunning. Finished with wood stain and varnish... I gave them all away to the neighbours. One even started crying, I'll never forget. Lina from the second landing, remember her Serëzh? They still had their boy, that one who wasn't quite right? I gave it to her; they were a bit disadvantaged... And she started crying right there in the doorway. Oh, she says, look how beautiful your son's work is. Mine has never managed such beautiful things. That's my little Serëzha, a real craftsman.

TAN'KA: Yes, he's good at lots of things...

SERËZHA: Erm... could I get some tea?

LARISA: Of course, Serëzh... (*pours the tea*) Tania, see when he was thirteen /

SERËZHA: How's work going, Mama? How's things?

LARISA: Well Serëzha, we're completely log-jammed. Swimming in end-of-the-month paperwork. Otherwise, life's good. Pavlovna and I went to the theatre recently. So anyway, Tania, when he was thirteen, he /

SERËZHA: Mama, is there anything to eat? I'm hungry.

LARISA: Goodness, Serëzh, you won't let me tell my story. You just said you weren't hungry.

SERËZHA: Well I am now. Your place whets the appetite... the ambience...

LARISA: Serëzh, get yourself some cutlets from the fridge and heat them up, will you? I'm enjoying sitting here...

*SERĚZHA goes to the fridge, opens the door and looks inside.*

LARISA: Whereabouts do you work, Tania? Oh sorry, you're probably still studying...

TAN'KA: I work and study. Serėzha knows where... (*looks at SERĚZHA with a smirk*)

LARISA: Serėzha, where does Tania work?

*(PAUSE) SERĚZHA looks at TAN'KA.*

SERĚZHA: She sells... books. In a book shop.

TAN'KA: In a book shop.

LARISA: Well done you. Well I beaver away for a national company. As an accountant. So where did you two meet?

TAN'KA: On the internet. Practically everyone meets on the internet now.

LARISA: That's true, it's such a good thing. The future is upon us. My colleague's daughter met a guy on the internet too and now they're married, into their third year of living together, everything's going great and she's expecting a baby soon. It really is a marvel, the internet. All this computer technology. But you know kids, it has a dark side too. It isn't all sunshine and rainbows. Eh Serėzh, remember that games console we got you when you were a kid? And what did you do? Got completely obsessed with it. You would forget to eat you played it that much. And then you'd have nightmares and cry in the night. It's the same now. Like Pavlovna's nephew, a 17 year-old lad; you should play sport, study, think about what you're going to do with your life. He's like a big kid. So no. He spends his days with his headphones on,

shouting at the computer. They have some sort of game too where they drive about shooting and shrieking at each other. His grades have gone downhill, his health's gone downhill... his mother's tearing her hair out, she doesn't know what to do. It's sly, that internet.

*SERĚZHA stands at the fridge eating cold cutlets.*

TAN'KA: Yeah, these days you really can do all sorts on the internet. Like Serėzha. He buys pizza and all kinds of groceries online. Don't you, darling?

SERĚZHA: Yes.

LARISA: What you eating it cold for?

SERĚZHA: Mama.

LARISA: Tanechka, would you like a cutlet?

TAN'KA: No thanks, I had a kebab.

LARISA: Right then kids. Three's a crowd, as they say; I can see the sparks flying between the two of you... I'm off to watch my programme. And you pair - hey, you know what? Why don't you stay over, Tania? It *is* the weekend tomorrow... I'll make up the bed in the box room for you. Stay over. There goes Serėzha... Serėzha! Where you off to?

SERĚZHA: *(in the bathroom)* To wash my hands. They're greasy.

LARISA: Do stay, Tania.

TAN'KA: Well, I could...

LARISA: Excellent. We'll have our breakfast together. I'll show you Serëzha's photos.

TAN'KA: I guess I could...

LARISA: What do you say?

TAN'KA: Agreed, Larisa Vital'evna.

LARISA: Well that's great. You're so pretty, Tania dear. Absolutely gorgeous, just fantastic.

TAN'KA: Aw, thank you.

LARISA: You keep it up, dear. Right kids, you two do your catching up. I'm off to bed.

*Exit LARISA. TAN'KA looks at the door. SERËZHA is standing in the bathroom looking wistfully in the mirror.*

#### Scene 14

*A small room in LARISA's flat. TAN'KA is lying in bed. SERËZHA is sitting by the open doors of an old cupboard. There's an old television inside the cupboard with Super Mario leaping round on-screen. SERËZHA, is looking at the television and pressing buttons on the joystick of an old 'Dendy' games console. TAN'KA puts her arms round SERËZHA's shoulders.*

TAN'KA: Enough of that, Serëzha darling...

*PAUSE*

TAN'KA: Come to me, darling... (*fondles SERĚZHA playfully*) What have we got here?... *PAUSE* What, can't you get it up? What's wrong?

SERĚZHA: Hang on, I need to kill the dragon...

TAN'KA: What fucking dragon?

SERĚZHA: This one. (*nods towards the screen*) To free the princess.

TAN'KA: Are you simple or something, SerĚzha? Up you come to bed. Your princess is right here darling, got it?

SERĚZHA: Yeah, coming.

TAN'KA: What's wrong, don't you love me?

SERĚZHA: I do. Hang on.

TAN'KA: Fucking hurry up.

*TAN'KA stands up, positions herself between SERĚZHA and the television and smashes the console. The screen is filled with white noise. SERĚZHA, fists clenched, stands up and approaches TAN'KA. SERĚZHA and TAN'KA choke back the rage in their voices, so that LARISA does not overhear.*

SERĚZHA: Bitch, you've done it this time... I'll make a statement to the police about you and your criminal friend, got it? For assault and threatening behaviour. And for what you did to Jon Snow, I'll give you such a good hiding that you'll be coughing up blood, you stupid little kid. And then you can go home as you are, in your underwear. Come here!

*SERĚZHA tries to hit TAN'KA, but she laughs and starts to run away. SERĚZHA chases TAN'KA*

TAN'KA: Sergei Romanovich, don't tell me you beat up girls?

SERĚZHA: Come here!

TAN'KA: Come on, that's enough Serězha darling. Let's go to bed.

SERĚZHA: Come here!

TAN'KA: *(laughing)* Then I'll tell the police you killed that Down's kid, and where you hid him.

*SERĚZHA, thunderstruck, comes to a standstill in the middle of the room.*

SERĚZHA: But I... what are you saying?

TAN'KA: *(threateningly)* There there Serězha darling, what's the matter? You'll catch flies with your mouth open like that. I love you, how come you still don't get it? Here's the conundrum. You are educated, so intelligent, decent. A philosopher. Whereas I'm trash. A chav. Beauty and the fucking Beast. But I want to be happy. Imagine that, this scummy chav wants to be happy. To love; all that bollocks. I won't let you go. Come on. To bed.

*TAN'KA lies down on the bed, looking at SERĚZHA. SERĚZHA, shocked, slowly begins crawling towards the bed.*

TAN'KA: Wait. Now get undressed. Do a striptease.

*SERĚZHA undresses.*

TAN'KA: That's it... You're good, Sergei Romanovich. Good... (*taps on the bed beside her*)

*SERĚZHA obediently crawls to bed.*

SERĚZHA: We were just kids...

TAN'KA: Remember, I'm on top today.

*TAN'KA rapes Serēzha. She is on top.*

### Scene 15

*A children's park. KOSTIA is seated on a swing. TAN'KA walks up to him.*

TAN'KA: Hey.

*PAUSE*

TAN'KA: What you staring at?

KOSTIA: What was it you wrote to me on VK?

TAN'KA: I just wrote the truth, Kostia.

KOSTIA: What was it you wrote to me on VK?

TAN'KA: What did you think? That I'd be a virgin forevermore? In case you still hadn't understood, then I basically spelled it out for you.

*KOSTIA punches the swing frame, hard.*

TAN'KA: What a knob...

*PAUSE*

TAN'KA: I basically told you that you're not the one. I've found the one that I need.  
I always used to tell you that you weren't the one.

KOSTIA: Where is he?

TAN'KA: Have you heard? 'Where is he?' Off you go to your Orsha or wherever it is. That's enough now, got it? Stop standing under his window; it's giving him nightmares...

KOSTIA: I have nightmares too...

TAN'KA: Like I give a toss. Stop hanging around.

KOSTIA: It was you who told me...

TAN'KA: Well now we're through, got it? Finished. Go away!

*PAUSE. KOSTIA regards TAN'KA expressionlessly.*

TAN'KA: If you so much as lay a finger on him, then forget about me altogether.  
Just completely forget me. As if I were dead.

*KOSTIA groans, as though in pain.*

KOSTIA: Slag.

TAN'KA: Shame on you. I am not a slag. This is true love. With one man.

KOSTIA: You were like a sacred being to me.

TAN'KA: It's a sin to even think like that, understand? I'm a normal woman, not sacred. It's just that I have principles. Do you understand me? Now fuck off! I'm done.

KOSTIA: I wanted to be with you. For you to be my girlfriend.

TAN'KA: Well I don't want the same thing.

KOSTIA: Now you're spoiled goods. You're just a dirty slapper.

TAN'KA: Kostia, you can say what you want. Me and you are over, alright. Don't come back here again.

KOSTIA: Why are you so evil?

TAN'KA: What you on about, Kostia? How am I evil? I'm a kid, whereas you're a big, strong man; you've even done time. How am I evil?

KOSTIA: Why didn't you finish with me sooner?

TAN'KA: I'm finishing with you now, Kostia, alright.

KOSTIA: You played me. Said you loved me. Went out with that guy and waited for me to batter him. Was it fun for you? To see how it would all end? How about now? Is this fun too?

TAN'KA: Have you lost the fucking plot? You know, Kostia, each of us loves in our own way. The way you loved me made you kick Tolik to death. And I also loved you with my own kind of love, you understand? But now I don't love you. Not with any kind of love. *(gets ready to leave)*

KOSTIA: Wait!

TAN'KA: What is it?

KOSTIA: What should I do now?

TAN'KA: Do I look like a doctor? Do what you want.

KOSTIA: I don't know.

TAN'KA: Alright. Why don't you go to church and pray for forgiveness. We're done  
- goodbye.

KOSTIA: Wait!

*PAUSE*

KOSTIA: I promised your father. That I would always be by your side. You're  
spoiled goods now. But I'll be there anyway. I promised.

TAN'KA: Kostia. You're properly getting on my tits.

*TAN'KA leaves. KOSTIA punches the swing, splitting his hand open. He wants to  
inflict as much pain on himself as possible.*

## Scene 16

*By a church. SERĚZHA, looking rough and dressed in summer clothes comes out of  
the church. KOSTIA is seated by the entrance; he looks homeless. Passers-by throw  
him coins.*

KOSTIA: Is that you?

SERĚZHA: I don't have any change, sorry.

KOSTIA: It is you...

SERĚZHA: Are you talking to me?

KOSTIA: Yes, to you.

*SERĚZHA recognises KOSTIA and quickly makes to leave.*

KOSTIA: Wait! Listen. I want a word with you. I won't touch you.

SERĚZHA: (*keeping his distance*) What is it?

KOSTIA: Come here. I've got a sore leg. I can't walk very well.

SERĚZHA: What do you want?

KOSTIA: Tell me about her.

SERĚZHA: Has she sent you again? To follow me?

KOSTIA: No. I came here myself.

SERĚZHA: Why are you lying? I've seen you a few times outside my block.

KOSTIA: I'm looking out for her.

SERĚZHA: Of course you are.

KOSTIA: Tell me about her.

SERĚZHA: You want to kill me. And so does she. You've got me under siege from all sides, bastards.

KOSTIA: Look, I won't harm you. She... forbade me.

*PAUSE*

SERĚZHA: (*quietly*) I'm so fucking sick of all this...

KOSTIA: (*approvingly*) Well, you don't look like you're mistreating her...

SERĚZHA: Me? Her?!

KOSTIA: Tell me about her. Come here.

*SERĚZHA takes a couple of steps towards KOSTIA.*

KOSTIA: Do you love her?

SERĚZHA: No.

KOSTIA: You do.

SERĚZHA: No.

KOSTIA: I can see it.

*PAUSE*

SERĚZHA: And you? Do you love her? If you want her, you're welcome to take her. Vasia, Kostia or whatever you're called. Take her, tell her to leave me alone, please. I even went to see her father, even gave him money to talk her round... but the asshole just nodded his head and took the money... I didn't want to be with her. She made me. Forced me. You... you know what she's like...

KOSTIA: I do.

SERĚZHA: I had wanted to leave, just get out of here. But now I'm here and I can't do anything. She's totally got me by the bollocks. I'm like her slave. She forces me... yeah, I love her. It's some sort of jebend, but it isn't love. Not love, just some sort of scroteyflaps. I don't even know what it is... She forced me to love her, do you understand? I can't sleep when she's not at home. I can't get to sleep without her. The bitch humiliates me and I like it. I want more... *(SERĚZHA cries)*

KOSTIA: How was it?

SERĚZHA: What?

KOSTIA: How did you do it with her...

SERĚZHA: Are you actually serious?

KOSTIA: Yes.

SERĚZHA: You're sure you won't kill me?

KOSTIA: Yes.

*PAUSE*

SERĚZHA: Well it was good. She was my first virgin. She was so timid back then.

So... kinda gentle. She was afraid. But I was very... careful...

*KOSTIA punches the ground, breathing heavily.*

SERĚZHA: *(alarmed)* What's the matter? Take her from me. Take her.

KOSTIA: She wouldn't come with me.

SERĚZHA: How do you know?

KOSTIA: I know. I know what I am to her.

SERĚZHA: What?

KOSTIA: I'm a dog to her.

*PAUSE*

SERĚZHA: She's not a fan of dogs.

*PAUSE*

KOSTIA: Don't hurt her.

SERĚZHA: OK.

*PAUSE.*

SERĚZHA: Why are you here?

KOSTIA: Begging for alms. And I'm praying for forgiveness.

SERĚZHA: I'm praying for forgiveness too. I light a candle every year. *LONG*

*PAUSE* Do you remember killing him? You know, that guy?

KOSTIA: No. I was pissed.

SERĚZHA: I once killed somebody too.

KOSTIA looks at SERĚZHA.

SERĚZHA: No, it's true. I remember what it was like.

*PAUSE*

SERĚZHA: What if we... her?

KOSTIA: Get to fuck. Back to her. She's probably home by now.

SERĚZHA: No, really. Let's. She's wrecked both of our lives...

KOSTIA: Go away! (*pushes SERĚZHA away*) Go on, she's waiting for you.

SERĚZHA: You want to...

KOSTIA: No.

SERĚZHA: You want to. I can see.

KOSTIA: I'm gonna deck you in a minute.

SERĚZHA: She's already killed us both. We're nothing to her... come on.

*KOSTIA hits SERĚZHA, knocking him over. SERĚZHA stands back up.*

SERĚZHA: Listen; only you can understand me... I won't manage alone... please... only three people will cry over her. Me, you and her father. She's just a skanky little nobody...

KOSTIA: I can't...

SERĚZHA: You can. Imagine her gone. That she is no more. What would it matter what you did or where, if she were no longer there? Imagine the freedom. Kostia... You are Kostia?

KOSTIA: Yes...

SERĚZHA: Kostia, there is no other way out. This is the only way of beginning a different life. Live how you want. With whom you want. But first, she has to go. Because you're hurting...

KOSTIA: *(quietly)* Yes...

SERĚZHA: *(quietly)* I'm hurting too. You and me are brothers. We're hurting. You and me are nothing without her. And with her - we're nothing. But when she is no more, we'll be ourselves again, do you understand me?

KOSTIA: *(quietly)* Yes...

SERĚZHA: So? What do you say?

*KOSTIA lifts his head and looks at SERĚZHA.*

*Bryan Adams, teeth gleaming white, passes by unexpectedly and throws KOSTIA some coins.*

### **Scene 17**

*The fish stall. TAN'KA and VERONICHKA are closing for the day. They wipe their hands and cash up.*

VERONICHKA: The car's late today for some reason.

TAN'KA: Mmm.

VERONICHKA: And the whole day was... fuck knows what kind of day it was.

TAN'KA: Mmm.

VERONICHKA: I'd a two-rouble coin fall apart today. Did you see?

TAN'KA: I saw.

VERONICHKA: Did you see? The coin broke in two, the middle circle and the outside ring. It's never happened before. It's a bad omen.

TAN'KA: Fucksake... where's the car...

VERONICHKA: Why, you off to see your lecturer?

TAN'KA: He's not a lecturer. He's a teacher.

VERONICHKA: Well he's neither to you. What's happening with you pair?

TAN'KA: Everything's cool. We love each other. Cook together. Watch films. That sorta thing.

VERONICHKA: Tan'ka, you're such a lucky little bitch... will you get married?

TAN'KA: Yeah, course we will. A bit later. We'll get married when I say so.

VERONICHKA: Does he do what you tell him?

TAN'KA: Obviously. He wouldn't dare do otherwise...

*KOSTIA walks up to the stall.*

TAN'KA: What you doing here?

KOSTIA: Just passing.

TAN'KA: Keep walking then, if you're just passing. And stop hanging around people's flats. Got it?

KOSTIA: Is he here?

TAN'KA: Who?

KOSTIA: Your man.

TAN'KA: Why, what you gonna do to him? Do one!

VERONICHKA: Tan'ka, that's so rude.

TAN'KA: Be quiet!

VERONICHKA: Erm, I don't think so. *(to KOSTIA)* My name is Veronika.

KOSTIA: Go home, Veronika. *(looks round)*

VERONICHKA: *(indignantly)* Nice...

TAN'KA: Listen, what do you actually want?

*KOSTIA looks very calmly at TAN'KA.*

VERONICHKA: Right, I'm actually going now. I have no fucking interest in other people's rows.

TAN'KA: Where you off to? What about the till?

KOSTIA: *(very calmly)* Let her go.

*VERONICHKA grabs her bag and leaves, looking round shyly.*

TAN'KA: What you standing there for?

KOSTIA: Would you rather I got down on my knees?

TAN'KA: You'll kneel if I tell you to. But for now, I just want you gone in the next 10 seconds.

KOSTIA: Tania, there's no need for you to be like that with me...

TAN'KA: There is a need, with you and all the rest. You're all like bloody cellar cats. I pick you up, thinking you're all affectionate and nice, but look closer and you stink and lick your balls. You need to be loved by force. Kicked then loved then kicked again.

KOSTIA: You... when you finished with me back then... on the swings... I cried.

TAN'KA: So now you're back for more?

KOSTIA: I've never cried before.

*PAUSE*

*KOSTIA turns round.*

TAN'KA: What is it? Who are you expecting?

KOSTIA: A guy... but it looks like he's chickened out. *PAUSE*

*KOSTIA approaches TAN'KA.*

TAN'KA: *(scared)* Kostia, what are you doing?

KOSTIA: Why are you so evil, Tania?

TAN'KA: I... I don't know.

KOSTIA: What is it that you want from life?

TAN'KA: I... well, I want a family... I want kids... I want happiness. Like everyone else...

KOSTIA: You are not like everyone else.

TAN'KA: *(spooked)* Kostia. I'm not evil. How am I evil? It's just I know that nothing in life is simple... know what I mean? If you want something from a person you have to kick fuck out of them.

KOSTIA: "Love them then kick them". What did you want from me?

TAN'KA: You... protected me... you're kind of... a real man... I always knew that you would protect me.

KOSTIA: But do you know what I wanted? Did you care at all what I wanted?

TAN'KA: I did know. You men all want the same thing... it's obvious. Forgive me, Kostia.

KOSTIA: I forgive you... *(turns around)*

TAN'KA: Kostia... you're scaring me. Kostia...

KOSTIA: *(voice trembling)* Don't be afraid, little one. Don't be afraid. Come to me.

TAN'KA: And Veronichka... had a two rouble coin break in half today... a bad omen...

*KOSTIA embraces TAN'KA, crying. He squeezes her tighter; TAN'KA thrashes in his grasp.*

KOSTIA: *(crying)* I love you, little one... I love you.

*Fade-to-black.*

## Scene 18

*A video-message from SERĚZHA.*

SERĚZHA: Hi, Slavik. We still can't seem to catch each other online, so I'll do it this way. What I basically wanted to say is that I can't make Madrid on the eighteenth, I'm actually illegal now. I have found a new job, so I'll need to settle in to it. Sorry, man. It's a cool job; we sing in an ancient theatre. It's these reconstructions. The same way we have medieval re-enactments, they have ancient Greek theatre here. They're based here in La Valletta, but they travel all round Italy and play in old ruined amphitheatres. It's cool. I've got a toga, mask, the works. I speak a bit of Maltese now, and my English is not bad either. I'm studying all the tragedies and comedies, and singing in the choir. So that's it. I was working with fish in the port before, but this pays better. So yeah, I won't make Madrid. You should get a flight to Rome in September. Hi to Marlezonov and all the rest. Yeah that's right, you were asking what happened with all that other stuff... since we never got the chance to have a proper chat about it back then... so basically, I... come home one day. And she's not there. So then I go over to hers, here, there and everywhere...

basically, it became clear that she'd been murdered. Right by her work. That criminal strangled her with his bare hands. Properly fucked up. *PAUSE* Remember that time I phoned you? I was obviously not quite myself. I'd taken acid and gone on a paranoid trip. I obviously wasn't being followed. And she was alright. Everything between us was alright. Yeah. So anyway, her father and I buried her. They put that criminal back inside. He remained silent in the interviews. Kept shtum. They interviewed me too. So that's it. Then I sold that Mac, got a visa and came here. The visa's already expired though. I'm here illegally. But if the theatre takes me on, they've hinted that they'll sort out a work visa. Everything's more or less OK, in other words... Slavik, could I ask you a favour? Could you get some shopping for her father? As a gift from me. I'll drop you some cash by Web Money... OK? I'll write down the address for you now. (*Types the address*). Look, I'd be really grateful if you could manage it. *PAUSE* And if you ever happen to be passing Kozyrevskoe Cemetery... if you could drop in on her for me and lay a little flower, then I would also be grateful. Very. On your left, right in the corner if you're on foot. You'll see her photo straight away in a kind of stupid heart-shape... and an idiotic epitaph. Her father chose it. Even her epitaph is chavvy... it's burned straight into my bloody memory. I can still remember it.

We come here today,

Our flowers to lay,

So hard it is true,

To go on without you.

THE END

Minsk, 2017