**Vitaly Doudko**

**GIRLS AND BOYS**

**A one-act tragedy**

**Translated from Russian by Denis Klimets**

**Original title:**

***ДЕВОЧКИ И МАЛЬЧИКИ***

VITALY DOUDKO

GIRLS AND BOYS

A one-act tragedy

(Second edition)

Characters

**Vadim**

**Marina**, his wife

**Daughter**, 18 years old

**Psychotherapist**

**Elena**

**Petrova**

**Boy**

**Officer**

**1st female student**

**2st female student**

**1st male student**

**2st male student**

**Students**

**Conductor**

**Female violinist**

**Popyan**

**Someone**

**Restaurant owner**

**Waiter**

**Madame**

**Monsieur**

**Little girl**

**Young mum with a baby**

**Restaurant visitors**

**Airport passengers**

*International airport checkpoint.*

*Border control booth. Petrova is sitting in it. A border patrol officer walks around the booth.*

*First passengers. Among them is Vadim.*

**Vadim** (*holding out his passport*). Hello!

**Petrova.** Hello. (*Having run a trained eye over the document, examines Vadim's face*).

**Vadim.** Do I look like him?

**Petrova.** Yes. (*Whispering*) The cup was on the table... (*Officer**opens the door, also examines the passport*).

**Officer** (*quietly*). Olenka, what's wrong with you?

**Petrova** (*distantly*). There was a cup on the table... That's him.

**Officer.** Who?

**Petrova.** From the courses.

**Officer.** Where's the flight from?

**Petrova.** From Paris. Tanya, I'd like to present the burgundy bag. You liked it. Replace me, please.

**Officer.** Are you out of your mind? For two minutes. Without any purse. Sweetheart, you've totally lost it....

**Petrova.** Yes, I did. Fate has come calling.

**Officer** (*sitting down in Petrova's chair, stamping the passport, holding it out to Vadim**with a smile*). Here you are.

*Vadim is crossing the border zone. Petrova comes out of the booth.*

**Petrova** (*self-consciously*). Vadim Anatolievich, remember me?

**Vadim.** Were you a student of mine?

**Petrova.** Yes.

**Vadim.** You look great in the booth.

**Petrova.** I'm on duty... Tomorrow is your round anniversary.

**Vadim.** Did you see that?

**Petrova.** Can I have your business card, please? I want to say congratulations.

**Vadim.** With pleasure. Here is my card.

**Petrova** (taking a glimpse). Your business number.

**Vadim.** You want a home one? (*Taking a card, adding notes to it*).

**Petrova.** I'll never forget your classes.

**Vadim.** Thank you. I'm honoured.

**Petrova.** The difference between the phrases, „The cup was on the table“ and „There was a cup on the table.“

**Vadim.** Got it?

**Petrova.** Gradually, through grammar exercises.

**Vadim.** Surprisingly... at the airport.

**Petrova.** Going to sleep with irregular verbs.

**Vadim.** You were literally astounding. Were you a diligent student?

**Petrova.** I'm diligent in all things.... Should I congratulate you tomorrow?

**Vadim.** What's your name?

**Petrova.** Olga.

**Vadim.** Your patronymic name?

**Petrova.** Just Olga. (*Confusingly*) Distinguished from the others...

**Vadim.** On merit?

**Petrova.** You caught the eye of... a woman. I could be wrong...

**Vadim.** I'm still sympathetic.

**Petrova.** Thank you. See you tomorrow?

**Vadim.** Goodbye, Olga.

**Petrova.** Pleased to meet you, Vadim Anatolievich.

*Vadim leaves. Petrova slipped into the booth.*

*Officer strode measuredly out, casting impenetrable glances at the passengers.*

*It's been a few years.*

*Marina's and Vadim's flat.*

Vadim reads a book. Marina ransacks papers.

*We alternately hear the thoughts of Marina and Vadim, as if the dialogue were real life.*

**Marina.** Manicure scissors are missing. I went through drawers, shelves. Gone completely.

A furious Kuznetsova is out of her mind. „My son's on the bench and he's not singing in the choir? “ Quietened him. He'll sit and listen to the singers. „Why is Deniska unfit? “ I explain, „The horn. It's a one-note hum.“ Insulted beyond belief.

**Vadim.** I haven't heard from my daughter in a month. She's an alumna, graduating from high school. Wants to achieve everything on her own.

**Marina** (*squealing with indignation*). Where's my sweet treat?! Why lug around with a bulky cake when you can just bring some éclairs or chocolate bars?

**Vadim.** A wonderful melody. You never set it up with my characteristics.

**Marina.** No way to cover food and other expenses. The penny has been earned... Why not just give me a wad of banknotes?

**Vadim.** The silence of the steppe. If Marinka doesn't interfere, it will sound clear.

**Marina.** Petrenko played Beethoven's piece tolerably well in October, but yesterday she was mistreating. My musical memory is full of holes. A student with a stylish necklace made of metal rings. The name jumped out from my head. I almost popped out: "Original collar." Instead of "necklace."

**Vadim.** A wife is a capricious creature. Or a perfect, unrivalled creation? Where have my feelings gone?

**Marina.** I had a dream that I was pregnant. I even felt heaviness in my lower abdomen. Vadim has pulled a trick - he wants a baby. At my age! (*Aloud*.) I'm not getting divorced! We were living happily ever after, who could expect this! Divorce. Personally, I wasn't ready.

*Vadim**gazed at Marina.*

**Vadim** (*also aloud*). Divorce?

**Marina** (*on second thoughts*). You're manufacturing.

**Vadim.** Did the students drive you spare?

**Marina.** I snapped.

**Vadim.** Georgy will drop by.

**Marina.** Zhorik? Why do you need that? Not satisfied with the municipal library?

**Vadim.** A pile of papers.

**Marina.** With refreshments?

**Vadim.** Well... with tea.

**Marina.** Will start snooping around the toilets and washing his hands in the bathroom.

**Vadim.** That is what they are intended for. Are you upset about something?

**Marina.** Don't rush.

**Vadim.** I didn't make a sound.

**Marina.** They are not rushing to catch the train.

**Vadim.** Yes, with the arrangement.

**Marina.** Not for a fire.

**Vadim.** Fallen behind schedule.

**Marina.** You lead me astray.

**Vadim.** I lead a solitary existence. Even though the schedule…

**Marina.** An instance with false representations. Are you seeing things?

**Vadim.** Not yet.

**Marina.** Do you follow your own way?

**Vadim.** It's not followed.

*Long pause.*

**Marina.** Rephrased it?

**Vadim.** Missed it. The train swayed its tail. I've been loitering around for a whole hour. I was getting into my gear. I was turning around in front of the mirror.

**Marina.** Are you troubling water?

**Vadim.** Ear to the ground since evening. Until all hours in fine feather. Is it extremely urgent to visit?

**Marina.** I promised.

**Vadim.** Go by yourself. You'll waste your time. (*Silence*.)

**Marina.** The school is about to celebrate its anniversary. Will you pay for a haircut and cold wave?

**Vadim.** Reach into the treasury.

**Marina.** Someone promised a velvet dress...

**Vadim.** It was fashionable after the war.

**Marina.** Fashion is cyclical. I was cheated at the laundry. The manager is talking big: dirty laundry weighs more. Why is it heavier if it is starched even after washing? Then she shut up.

Vadimzigzags around Marina, hugging her. She jumps back like a scalded cat.

**Marina.** Get off me.

**Vadim.** Are you in a bad mood?

**Marina.** Having a fun!

**Vadim.** Did you get up on the wrong side of the bed?

**Marina.** No, on the right one.

**Vadim.** Are you torn by inner conflicts? Standard ones. Feeling down?

**Marina** (*irritated*). Your bells and whistles.

**Vadim.** Mutual. I am not asking for your desire.

**Marina.** Arrogance way over the top?

**Vadim.** Not at all.

**Marina.** Am I your property?

**Vadim.** Not really, but I'm not asking.

**Marina.** What if... you don't feel like it?

**Vadim.** Couldn't care less.

**Marina.** Feel like flopping down on my back?

**Vadim.** A few seconds left.

**Marina.** No more, no less?

**Vadim.** Not enough? In order to gain inspiration. In anticipation of the merger.

**Marina.** Who initiated this?

**Vadim.** A centuries-old tradition.

**Marina.** Can't get your mind off the primitive communal system?

**Vadim.** Refresh.

**Marina.** When the male approaches, the female gets down on all fours...

**Vadim.** Traditional configuration. A classic one.

**Marina.** Itching for vulgarity?

**Vadim.** Everyday affairs.

**Marina.** If your fluids start flowing...

**Vadim.** Fif you lose your mind? Between the legs.

**Marina.** You have a few bumps there.

**Vadim.** Lively... pioneer.

**Marina.** Any additional claims?

**Vadim.** In the permanent repertoire.

**Marina.** Are you trying to get information out of me? Who authorised it?

**Vadim.** You did.

**Marina.** When?

**Vadim.** When I became a wife.

**Marina.** Aren't there too many stupid questions?

**Vadim.** A final one.

**Marina.** Come on, go ahead.

**Vadim.** Do you provide freedom? Unlimited.

**Marina** (*unfriendly*). Unlimited freedom?

**Vadim.** Yes. Am I a free lance?

**Marina.** Free from what?

**Vadim.** From obligations.

**Marina.** Think about it in your spare time. Free or not.

**Vadim.** Do you mind?

**Marina.** It's a free country.

**Vadim** (*ironically*). Did you rest during the day?

**Marina** (*in anger*). Do you take care? Yes, I took a nap. A daily rest period is indicated.

**Vadim.** The daily one is harmful.

**Marina.** For you, a thorn in the side.

**Vadim.** To watch TV in the evening.

**Marina** (*rudely*). Who is stopping you? And stop espousing.

**Vadim.** Have you weighed everything up?

**Marina.** Are you threatening me?

**Vadim.** Just warning you.

**Marina.** You're much too harsh.

**Vadim.** From the cradle.

**Marina.** Nothing could be easier than sending...

**Vadim.** By compass?

**Marina.** Far, far away.

**Vadim.** Will I make it?

**Marina.** No idea?

**Vadim.** Not even the slightest clue.

**Marina.** Shall I whisper?

**Vadim** (*excessively polite*). Would it be too much trouble for you to be sent there as well?

*Psychotherapy office.*

Marina and Doctor are sitting at the table.

**Marina.** Is this a rehabilitation centre?

**Doctor.** Yes, the psychological rehabilitation centre.

**Marina.** Can I count on your help?

**Doctor.** I hope so.

**Marina.** Do you heal with words?

**Doctor.** Mostly, yes.

**Marina.** Medicines too?

**Doctor.** Together, we identify the problem and determine a course of treatment.

**Marina.** Tell the truth?

**Doctor.** We are peculiar; we need to express ourselves.

**Marina.** Do you confide in anyone?

**Doctor.** Sure thing.

**Marina.** Whom?

**Doctor.** Daughter.

**Marina.** Your daughter?

**Doctor.** Yes. Giving away advice.

**Marina.** Is she smart?

**Doctor.** Beyond her years.

**Marina.** Many people have a harmful tendency to reveal the most significant aspects of themselves. So, I'm trying to figure out how honest to be. Conceal details?

**Doctor.** Keep your secrets safe, but by accumulating the effect of our dialogue, you reveal yourself to the limit.

**Marina.** Will you listen to me?

**Doctor.** I'm seeing patients for that.

**Marina.** Are you a psychotherapist?

**Doctor.** Yes.

**Marina.** Medical specialisation? Gloomy shocks... emergency help...

**Doctor.** What brings you here?

**Marina.** It seems like... my husband is cheating on me...

**Doctor.** Did they react badly?

**Marina.** Of course.

**Doctor.** Is there any confirmation?

**Marina.** No... Yes... No... Indirect ones...

**Doctor.** Do you love your husband?

**Marina** (*pause*). I think so.

**Doctor.** Notes of scepticism.

**Marina.** I love him.

**Doctor.** How long have you been married?

**Marina.** Twenty-three.

**Doctor.** Is this your first marriage?

**Marina.** Yes.

**Doctor.** Do you have children?

**Marina** (*hesitating*). Daughter... grown up... eighteen... not with us...

**Doctor.** Independent, prefers to keep to herself?

**Marina.** In another city.

**Doctor.** What do you do for a living?

**Marina.** At music school.

**Doctor.** And your husband?

**Marina.** Tried and tried again... He started a small publishing company. He supplemented the family budget by trading sugar. The business didn't work out... Not everyone should engage in commerce, debit and credit. A lot of honest work. Workers, engineers, scientists.

**Doctor.** What is his educational background?

**Marina.** Historian, second degree in French.

**Doctor.** Did you get paid well?

**Marina.** About average. He was keen on teaching. "There is no profession more honourable than that of a teacher." The department offered him a salary.

**Doctor.** Ok, now we know each other. Any complaints?

**Marina.** Blood pressure fluctuates, low, high. Irritable.

**Doctor.** Have you been seeing a psychotherapist?

**Marina.** No.

**Doctor.** Do you sleep regularly with your husband?

**Marina.** Yes.

**Doctor.** Often?

**Marina** (*ashamedly*) In different ways...

**Doctor.** Tell me how many.

**Marina.** You ask...

**Doctor** (*agreeing*). Do not answer.

**Marina.**  Two or three times a week... And even longer intervals...

**Doctor.** Do you go to bed at the same time?

**Marina.** Why?

**Doctor.** Family rules usually apply.

**Marina.** My husband goes first.

**Doctor.** And you?

**Marina.** I'm watching television.

**Doctor.** Any more complaints?

**Marina.** Excitement.

**Doctor.** What caused it?

**Marina.** There is no unity in the family. Going downhill.

**Doctor.** Do you remember your daughter?

**Marina.** Every day.

**Doctor.** Grounds for suspicion?

**Marina.** Take it and put it down?

**Doctor.** In the most acceptable form.

**Marina** (*spitting out*). He's looking for a woman!

The Doctorlooks intently into Marina's eyes.

**Doctor.** Which one?

**Marina.** An abstract one.

**Doctor.** An abstract woman?

**Marina.**  Yes. He strives for her.

**Doctor.** Can you... feel that?

**Marina.** By instinct.

**Doctor.** Please explain.

**Marina.** It's complicated.

**Doctor.** Do you have a trusting relationship with your spouse?

**Marina.** Not entirely. I'm losing it.

**Doctor.** Would you like to save it?

**Marina.** Very much.

**Doctor.** Is there any evidence?

**Marina.** No.

**Doctor** (*repeating*). There is no evidence.

**Marina.** Are you surprised?

**Doctor.** I don't see the logic.

**Marina.** It does not make any sense! My feelings.

**Doctor.** I'm not an investigator looking for evidence. A dream?

**Marina.** I'm sleeping terribly.

**Doctor.** Is Sokol convenient for you?

**Marina.** Direct line.

**Doctor** (*writing a prescription*). Mild sedatives. They are also mild sleeping pills. One tablet, during the day and at night.

**Marina** (*searchingly*). Doctor, did my husband have any?

**Doctor.** I'm almost certain he didn't. Take walks, relax more. I look forward to seeing you in two weeks.

*Marina**and Vadim's flat.*

*Vadim is waiting for Marina. When she appears, wearing a new beret, he embraces her.*

**Vadim.** Finally! I've been waiting for this.

**Marina.** Tuesday.

**Vadim.** I mixed up the schedule.

**Marina** (*about the beret*). Not bad, huh?

**Vadim.** A masterpiece!

**Marina.** I bought a beret. It is pulled over the ears and forehead. (*Demonstrating various ways of wearing* *a beret*.) It is inexpensive, two hundred roubles.

**Vadim.** Versatile! To pull down in autumn, even in winter in the bitter cold. Let me refresh it.

**Marina.** Nope. You'll stretch it. You're large-headed.

**Vadim.** At least hold it for a moment.

**Marina.** Here, commend me.

**Vadim** (*taking the beret*). What a sight! Congrats on your purchase.

**Marina.** Are you envious?

**Vadim.** It is due.

**Marina.** Made from natural wool.

**Vadim.** Multi-season, durable.

**Marina** (*flirtatiously*). Do I look like a foreigner? Yeah?

**Vadim.** Don't be proud. Although, no. I mo-ved around a bit, con-si-dered...

**Marina.** What do you want?

**Vadim.** Hug you without delay!

**Marina.** Too shiny. Sensational news?

**Vadim** (*in a vague manner*). Not really...

**Marina** (*feeling for the thread*). In love? (*Taking bundles out of her handbag*.)

**Vadim.** Only with you. (*Hugging her.*)

**Marina.** You're suffocating me!

**Vadim.** Did you show off your boobs this morning? Special adjustment made.

**Marina.** Unintentionally...

**Vadim** (*jokingly*). That's an outrage! Clean up in front of your husband.

**Marina.** Were you peeping?

**Vadim.** Out of the corner of my eye...

**Marina.** A little squint is cute on juveniles.

**Vadim.** Restless all day long...

**Marina.** Eager beaver.

**Vadim.** Dinner is ready.

**Marina.** A family or romantic one?

**Vadim.** In combination! In a couple! You don't stimulate me at all with your caresses.

**Marina.** It's worth a try, you'll be under my skirt in no time.

**Vadim.** Not without it... A sumptuous dinner is frying and sizzling! Fried potatoes, lightly salted cucumbers, crispy.

**Marina.** Lightly salted and crispy to boot.

**Vadim.** Spot on!

**Marina.** You're pushing it!

**Vadim.** Smoked sausage, cheese, white wine...

**Marina.** I bought a whole load of stuff. Even wine and fruit.

**Vadim.** For starters – boiled pork, white fish, red fish, greens.

**Marina** (*looking at the table*). How beautiful! Let's feast.

**Vadim** (*pretentiously*). We eat potatoes from the same plate.

**Marina.** Are we short of plates? Like... pigs?

**Vadim.** You always ruin the party!

**Marina.** Sorry, I won't.

**Vadim.** Unbelievable! Apologising.

**Marina.** Don't mess with me. Let's eat from the same one. Like whom?

**Vadim.** Newlyweds.

**Marina** (*impressed*). Newlyweds...

**Vadim.** A husband is happy when his wife eats with him. It brings us closer together. He is calm, admiring his wife.

**Marina** (*warily*). Allegory... I'm listening attentively.

**Vadim.** That's all. A brief remark.

**Marina.** Did something happen? You can't fool me.

**Vadim.** Potatoes, quickly, while they're still warm.

**Marina.** From the same plate?

**Vadim.** Why not?

**Marina** (*without complaint*). While it's still warm, bring it over. (*Eating from the same plate*.) Delicious! Finger lickin good.

**Vadim.** On blended oil.

**Marina.** You are a master of strategy!

**Vadim.** Pieces of bacon. Market-fresh, with streaks of meat. For taste. Sunflower oil produced by farmers.

**Marina.** A skilled cook. When shall we drink?

**Vadim.** For dessert.

**Marina.** Are you trying to impress me with a feast?

**Vadim.** Committed a lot of acts...

**Marina** (*animatedly*). Did you get your hands on a coin? A big one?

**Vadim.** A country house in mind...

**Marina.** A country house?

**Vadim.** Along the Belarusian road. Two-storey log house with a stove and fruit garden.

**Marina.** Now it's the perfect time for a hug... (*Moved closer to Vadim*.)

**Vadim.** Are you trying to get round intimately?

**Marina.** Around you? (*Putting her hand on his knee*.) Are you indifferent to me?

**Vadim.** No.

**Marina.** Are you flirting?

**Vadim.** Yes.

**Marina.** Want to set up a date?

**Vadim.** I'll fly in on wings.

**Marina.** Am I going to be late?

**Vadim.** Surely.

**Marina.** Will you wait?

**Vadim.** Certainly.

**Marina.** Will you hug me?

**Vadim.** Everywhere.

**Marina.** Kiss?

**Vadim.** And kiss.

**Marina.** In an erotic sense?

**Vadim.** From top to bottom.

**Marina.** With sentiments?

**Vadim.** The most passionate ones. I want to start an affair with you.

**Marina.** Long-lasting?

**Vadim.** Perpetual.

**Marina.** Under an everlasting star!

**Vadim.** Do you like my Don Juan behaviour?

**Marina.** I'm moping over you. I'll jump in feet first. Sir, have you seduced me?

**Vadim.** Me?!

**Marina.** Who else?

**Vadim.** My lady! You are a seductress.

**Marina.** Me? You liar!

**Vadim** (*taking a bottle of wine*). White from Burgundy.

**Marina.** You're an expert on French wines.

**Vadim.** Exclusively those from Burgundy. Grand Cru.

**Marina.** A mark of quality?

**Vadim.**  Grand Cru – exquisite. It cannot be translated in a simplified manner; it is more descriptive. Encompasses the early sunrise, lazy rain, and a light breeze. The average age of a grapevine is eighty years. In its third year, the vine is capable of bearing fruit, especially on stony soil and on south-western slopes. But the berries are still watery and lack the bouquet characteristic of this grape variety.

**Marina.** What do you drink it with?

**Vadim.** According to etiquette, with fish and seafood, in fact with various delicacies.

He uncorks the bottle, unscrews the cork from the corkscrew, and examines it. He pours a little wine into a glass, swirls it around so that the wine spreads along the sides and creates a large evaporation area, allowing the aroma to "awaken." He inhales the aroma, takes a sip of wine, and smacks his lips. Marinasupervises his actions.

**Marina** (unable to hold back). What about me? (Pouring her a drink and one for himself.) Thank you, my dear.

**Vadim.** Your devoted servant.

**Marina.** For what?

**Vadim.** For the safe return of our daughter.

**Marina.** Cheers, and enjoy! (Drinking in small sips.)

**Vadim** (about wine). Are you satisfied?

**Marina.** Lovely.

**Vadim.** Still wine. Through fermentation, the sugar in fresh grapes is converted into alcohol. Rich bouquet. The taste, smell, and aroma of a wet fox at the edge of the forest.

**Marina.** Foxes?

**Vadim.** It ran through the forest and came out into a clearing.

**Marina** (*taking a sip*)*.* I was wondering! The fox... wet... lost.

**Vadim.** Nothing to sneeze at. (Playfully.) Wifey, would you get naked... for the audience?

**Marina.** A large audience?

**Vadim.** A peeping one.

**Marina.** What do you need it for?

**Vadim.** That's interesting to hear.

**Marina.** Level of nakedness?

**Vadim.** Let's assume... final.

**Marina.**  They won't grope me? I can't stand it.

**Vadim.** Are you shy in the bath?

**Marina.** Is retribution coming?

**Vadim.** For getting naked?

**Marina.** I wish.

**Vadim.**  You're just an inexperienced newcomer.

**Marina.** It's boring without winning.

**Vadim.** From the thrill of sport.

**Marina.** From the thrill?

**Vadim.** Yes.

**Marina.** A strap. (*Hypothetically*.) Take off your clothes quickly and put it on fast?

**Vadim.** Quickly? They won't see it.

**Marina.** What do viewers desire?

**Vadim.** Some details.

**Marina.** They are all identical.

**Vadim.** Not even close. Its unique features...

**Marina.** Yeah, right, you're the expert.

**Vadim.** So, the strap.

**Marina.** By the way, I read in a glamorous magazine that actresses are getting naked without any hesitation. Even if they do not boast perfect forms. Are you... trying to provoke me?

**Vadim.** I want to enter your universe.

**Marina.** Through nudeness?

**Vadim.** Impromptu.

**Marina.** And you, are you surrounded by women?

**Vadim.** With your knowledge.

**Marina.** Considering your complexes...

**Vadim.** We never strip naked.

**Marina.** Private parts for show...

**Vadim.** We do not display anything inappropriate. We are more chaste.

*Marina and Vadim's flat.*

*Vadim and Daughter.*

**Daughter** (*conspiratorially*). Dad, who taught you how to swim?

**Vadim.** It happened.

**Daughter.** You stayed in Voronezh from Thursday to Sunday.

**Vadim.** Didn't forget?

**Daughter.** Dad, numbers and dates are my forte. They stick in my memory.

**Vadim.** For me, numbers are torture.

**Daughter.** It's easier to get by in English than in French. (*With relish*.) You popped into the school, and the PE teacher complained: I can't swim. They let you. You moved back and forth along the side of the pool, quietly giving the command: "Exhale. Breathe through the tube." You made your lips like a tube and blew out loudly. (*Demonstrating*, *exhaling air*.) Crouching down, you gave instructions: air enters the deflated lungs automatically, so it must be pushed out. The girls mistook you for the coach. Only Katya is quick-witted. She cried in the shower: "Your dad was in the pool. You stared at him!" From Thursday to Saturday, non-stop: "Swim, splash around. Just breathe out." On the third day, I managed to stay afloat! I floated! The girls ran along the edge, teasing him playfully: "Breathe through the tube!"

**Vadim.** Why was Katya crying?

**Daughter.** Her father is divorced. They meet in secret. She cries after every meeting.

**Vadim.** Who taught me?

**Daughter** (*excitedly*). Nyoma! His name is Nyoma!

**Vadim** (*smitten*). Unbelievable!

**Daughter.** He studied with you, he was older than you. Master of Sports, he could swim the length of a pool underwater.

**Vadim.** Unique memory retention.

**Daughter.** He played for the institute and clubs in the Moscow region. He had a wife and child, and he was their breadwinner. He was paid for the competition. The dean's office expelled him for failing, but the physical education department defended him.

**Vadim.** Fantastic!

**Daughter.** He was a coach in Luzhniki. He was walking along the edge and muttering, "Breathe out. Breathe through the tube." Soon you started swimming. Did he finish his studies?

**Vadim.** No. Expelled.

**Daughter.** That's a shame.

**Vadim.** He wouldn't have passed with a diploma.

**Daughter.** Nyoma... Does it sound like a nickname?

**Vadim.** His name was Naum.

**Daughter.** Or is it the surname "Naumov?"

**Vadim.** I've got it! His surname is Naumov.

**Daughter** (*cajolingly*). Home reading... Get through fifty pages, summarise without hesitation.

**Vadim.** A monumental task.

**Daughter.** You memorised vocabulary on public transport, at the end of the coach. You mimicked the pronunciation with your lips. The passengers thought you were talking to yourself. I remember it from kindergarten.

**Vadim.** Wow!

**Daughter** (*mysteriously*). Dad, will you carry me?

**Vadim.** Who? You?

**Daughter.** A little bit.

**Vadim.** You're a big girl.

**Daughter.** Like a little girl.

**Vadim.** Please.

**Daughter.** If I fall, will it hurt?

**Vadim.** I won't let my daughter down. Caught in the trap? Gotcha, you naughty girl.

Vadim picks up his Daughter and carries her carefully around the room. The Daughter wrapped her arms around her father's neck and pressed herself against him. Vadim lays her down on the bed.

Shall we read about Korobochka?

**Daughter** (*clapped her hands*). Yes, yes, about Korobochka! She betrayed Chichikov.

*Marina**appears in a dressing gown.*

**Marina.** What do you do?

**Vadim.** We are going to read from Gogol. Scene at Korobochka's.

**Daughter** (to *Marina*). Gogol is not your author.

**Marina.** I won't disturb you. (*Exiting*.)

**Vadim.** Where shall we start? Where they trade dead souls?

**Daughter.** Yes. Where they refuse to sell them.

**Vadim** (*opening a book, reading*).

“In everything the will of God, madam,” said Chichikov with a sigh. “Against the divine wisdom it is not for us to rebel. Pray hand them over to me, Nastasia Petrovna.”

“Hand over whom?”

“The dead peasants.”

“But how could I do that?”

“Quite simply. Sell them to me, and I will give you some money in exchange.”

**Daughter.** About the heel.

**Vadim.** And about the heel. (*Finding it, reading it*.)

“Do you hear that, Fetinia?” said the hostess, turning to a woman who was engaged in dragging in a feather bed and deluging the room with feathers. “Take this coat and this vest, and, after drying them before the fire — just as we used to do for your late master — give them a good rub, and fold them up neatly.”

“Very well, mistress,” said Fetinia, spreading some sheets over the bed, and arranging the pillows.

“Now your bed is ready for you,” said the hostess to Chichikov. “Good night, dear sir. I wish you good night. Is there anything else that you require? Perhaps you would like to have your heels tickled before retiring to rest?”

As they approach this scene, the Daughter falls silent and stretches out her leg. Vadim tickles her heel. Both of them roll around laughing.

**Daughter** (*suddenly*, *angrily*). Why did you give it away to someone else?

**Vadim** (*confused*). What are you talking about?

**Daughter.** Sent off to Voronezh!

**Vadim.** She wanted it herself.

**Daughter.** Can a schoolgirl predict the future? You had to advise against it! Children are better off with their parents! There is no excuse for your behaviour. Have you decided to get rid of me?

**Vadim.** We didn't even think about it!

Vadim tries to hug his Daughter. She recoils sharply.

**Daughter** (*hysterically*). Do you remember our trains? How many were there then?

**Vadim.** Did not attend kindergarten.  
**Daughter.** And it stuck in my memory. Wrapped up against the wind. Twelve is a golden number. To sum up, is it a lot or a little compared to him?

**Vadim.** Your entertainment. I learned to read and count early, acted thoughtlessly.

**Daughter.** Sniped and hustled.

**Vadim.** The trains were rushing by... at breakneck speed.

**Daughter.** The pinnacle of my victory!

**Vadim.** The amusing girl marched home.

**Daughter.** I also remember once saying nasty things on the phone. They forced me to carry out an urgent task at night. I still remember... I'll never tell. I quietly entered the room. I crouched down, trying to understand the meaning. You turned around, your eyes wide with horror. You waved his hand, got dressed, and left. You never allowed yourself to do that again.

**Vadim.** We picked up a kitten, and it infected us with ringworm. We shaved it off and put him in a hospital next to the Novodevichy Convent. A mishap with a kitten.

**Daughter.** We went to the cinema, you put together a fancy outfit. Hide your bald spot, bare skull. With her headscarf, a mother with a little girl kept her eyes fixed on the queue for tickets. She couldn't resist. "An exotic hat? Custom-made in a workshop?" You teased me: “Yes, in the workshop.” She looked at your construction for a l-o-n-g time, then silently walked away.

**Vadim.** A clever mother.

**Daughter.** I was afraid you would catch it. And you hugged and pampered me. We were relaxing at the seaside. A very long name.

**Vadim.** Belgorod-Dnestrovsky.

**Daughter.** Yes, Dnestrovsky.

**Vadim.** At the tourist base, right in the dunes, at the water's edge.

**Daughter.** Food poisoning. You carried me to the village.

**Vadim.** The distance is not close.

**Daughter.** On the back, on the shoulders. It was exhaustingly hot. Did you take care of me while carrying me?

**Vadim.** Do you have fond memories?

**Daughter.** Cloudless.

**Vadim.** Did you hurt the little one?

**Daughter.** No.

**Vadim.** The middle one?

**Daughter.** No, neither.

**Vadim.** We missed you.

**Daughter** (*grimacing*). If I missed you, I wouldn't have sent you away to strangers.

**Vadim.** Is Aunt Lucy a stranger?

**Daughter.** Just an aunt. And you are my father.

**Vadim.** Your initiative.

**Daughter.** I was a burden.

**Vadim.** You mum and I...

**Daughter.** There's a crowd of government children around my mother's skirt. Music teachers will find peace in a yellow shelter... Did you dream of a girl?

**Vadim.** Yes.

**Daughter.** You dream came true — you just threw her away. (*Crying*.) I haven't had my period in two years!

**Vadim.** We'll treat it...

**Daughter.** With hormones?

**Vadim.** Who is to blame?

**Daughter** (*bitterly*). Amenorrhea. You're to blame! You are!

**Vadim.** There are plenty of medicines.

**Daughter.** They already put me on hormones. With the prospect of turning into a fat barrel.

**Vadim.** They sent the money regularly. We were sure it would be better there.

**Daughter.** I am a poor church mouse. Your money was barely enough for clothes. The girls at school dressed more elegantly. I was a scruffy Cinderella. Why am I so unlucky? Poor thing! Renounced. But I'm not worse! I'm different!!

**Vadim.** That's great.

**Daughter.** I am not gifted at playing the violin or speaking foreign languages.

**Vadim.** We did not urge you to do so.

**Daughter.** I want a father who loves unconditionally. He takes her to concerts and showers her with gifts.

**Vadim.** We will organise a cultural programme.

**Daughter.** Little ones in obedience. When she grew up, misunderstandings arose, and you immediately distanced yourself. You wished for a quiet abode. You crossed out your daughter. The only one, the one and only.

**Vadim** (trying to catch and kiss his Daughter's hands). My dear, it will work out. A fan will show up. Gallant courtship. Family, granddaughter.

**Daughter.** There will be no granddaughter.

**Vadim.** We'll find professors. They treat a lot of diseases.

**Daughter.** Questionnaire: "Who do you discuss your personal problems with? Who helps you when you need it?" I have no one!

**Vadim.** Am I not counted?

**Daughter** (still screaming). A beggar woman. No apartment, no car. Leather boots are beyond my budget.

**Vadim.** I saved up and accumulated some funds.

**Daughter.** Orphaned and defenceless, even though my father is still alive! Stepdaughter!

The Daughterhits her father in the face. Vadim's legs buckle involuntarily and he falls to his knees.

Marina and Vadim's flat.

We hear Marina and Vadim's thoughts to themselves.

**Vadim.** You can't joke around with your daughter. She refused medical attention.

**Marina.** Nadezhda Sergeevna has many people who are ill. No one is ill at my place. Even Denis. He ran down the corridor, fell, and fractured his arm. They put a cast on it. The one-armed guy's rushing over here!

**Vadim.** Who should we blame for Valerka? A small beetle!

**Marina.** I bought a modern iron with a humidifier.

**Vadim.** The money is gone. He pawed the ground – in vain. Apart from Marynka, there's no one else. (Aloud.) Marysh, I have a request.

**Marina.** Is it feasible?

**Vadim.** Hand the CD to Valerka at the Pushkin monument.

**Marina.** What's the catch?

**Vadim.** So that he wouldn't reveal my trip to Belgium. It's up to you.

**Marina.** Old dodger! I'll be on the lookout. I'll give it to you – and then I'll get lost. At the Pushkin monument?

**Vadim.** Yes. The scenario is as follows: do not bow and scrape.

**Marina.** What if he starts lecturing?

**Vadim.** Dive into the underground. Your task is to disappear before he blurts it out.

**Marina.** Should I pass you the CD and scoot?

**Vadim.** Kind of.

**Marina.** Escaping will alert him!

**Vadim.** He'll put it down to your melancholy. Let's rehearse. You walk towards him with a smile: "Hello, Valer. Are you doing well? Vadim handed over the bag. And off to the underground. Got it?

**Marina.** Yes, yes.

**Vadim.** Let's play a game. Take the CD. I am Valerka. We are getting closer.

Marina and Vadim meet in the centre of the room.

**Marina** (handing the CD to Vadim). Hello, Valer. How are you doing, radical? Vadim handed over the package.

**Vadim.** Thank you, Marinka. Are you well puttering?

**Marina.** We're moving.

**Vadim.** Is business booming?

**Marina.** Not too bad.

**Vadim** (jeeringly). Vadim is a hard worker. In a hurry? Beaver-like?

Marina finally realises her mistake. He looks down and stares at Vadim. He twisted his finger at a temple.

**Marina** (defending herself). I'm not deaf, am I?!

**Vadim.** Simulate. Impenetrable deafness! I heard the murmur of a stream, and the day before, the membranes burst. First.

Marina and Vadim are in different corners of the room, drawing closer to each other.

**Marina.** Hello, Valera. Are you smoking heavily? Vadim passes the bag.

**Vadim.** Thank you, Marinka. It's on me.

**Marina.** How much?

**Vadim.** He is aware of it. His share.

**Marina.** A big one?..

Vadim scratches the back of his head in confusion.

**Vadim.** Yes... a peculiar situation... One more time. (They move apart and then come closer together.)

**Marina** (smiling, hands the CD to Vadim). Hello, Valer. Vadim handed over the package. (He quickly heads to his corner.)

**Vadim** (chasing after her). Where are you going? Let me give you a lift. I bought an awesome car.

Marinareaches her corner and looks triumphantly at Vadim.

**Vadim.** Finally. Highest score!

**Marina** (in an ostentatious manner). It will be a walk-over! Yeah? Spot on!

**Vadim.** Received an award.

**Marina.** I love all kinds of gifts.

They walk towards each other with their arms wide open and merge in a kiss. Without breaking their grip, they move in small steps into the next room...

Marina's and Vadim's flat.

Limping, Vadimenters.

**Marina** (*not very friendly*). Are you limping?

**Vadim.** Not life-threatening. It knocked... in one place.

**Marina.** In a brawl?

**Vadim.** No. In the underground.

**Marina** (*frightened*). What a predicament!

**Vadim.** Stuck between the posts, it hit me.

**Marina.** Does it hurt?

**Vadim.** It's terrible.

**Marina.** Straight... there?

**Vadim.** Yes.

**Marina.** Did you go to see a trauma specialist?

**Vadim.** No. It'll be fine.

**Marina** (*firmly*). Show it.

**Vadim.** What should I show?

**Marina.** That what you hit.

**Vadim.** Come on.

**Marina.** Take off your trousers.

**Vadim.** It'll go away.

**Marina.** Take off your trousers, let's sort this out.

**Vadim.** Get off me.

**Marina** (*just as firmly*). Or I call the emergency trauma service.

Vadimreluctantly and slowly takes off his trousers.

**Marina** (*impatiently*). Move, red-cheeked maiden. I didn't see... (*She crouches down and* *examines it carefully*.) There's a bruise on the left side. To reduce swelling, apply a lead compress. The tool is intact and undamaged. Not bad, it won't dry out. A cold compress is on the left side.

*Vadim**buttons his trousers.*

**Marina** (*grumpily*). Are you feeling unwell? Your throat?

**Vadim.** Cold beer. I wanted to do it quietly.

**Marina.** I'm cured! Change your clothes.

*Vadim**hides under a blanket. Marina**sets the thermometer.*

**Vadim.** I'm getting chills. Who would warm me with their warmth.

**Marina.** Stop whining. The body is bursting.

**Vadim.** Tropical fever.

**Marina.** You knock down the thermometer.

**Vadim** (*zanily*). The temperature will rise. Without divine intervention, it would have been a disaster.

**Marina** (*skeptically*). Is it that bad? There is nothing worse than a sick master.

**Vadim** (*mumbling*). It's August outside. The sun rises later and sets earlier. Nature has gone into decline.

**Marina.** What is this nonsense?

**Vadim.** The back of my head feels like it's splitting. Even if you die, nobody cares.

**Marina.** Be ill properly, or I won't be your nurse. Where is the thermometer?

**Vadim.** I am counting on your compassion.

*Marina**takes the thermometer and looks worriedly at Vadim.*

**Marina.** Thirty-eight and seven! If you had kept quiet, you would have got all forty. Are you hungry?

**Vadim.** Bring me some boiled milk with honey.

**Marina.** I'll boil it. The fish is juicy and boneless.

**Vadim.** Get off the fish. Bring some analgin, lugol, and calendula. Did you have a feeling?

**Marina.** The same old stuff. From premonitions, wrinkles all over my body. (*Exiting*.)

**Vadim** (*after her*). Quick, get me a hot water bottle, my feet are freezing.

*Marina**puts a hot water bottle at Vadim's feet.*

**Vadim.** I'm exhausted and freezing.

**Marina.** Lie down and warm yourself.

*Marina's thoughts, we hear them.*

Pike perch and cod in batter are appetising and do not fall apart. The overseas fish fell apart. Fillet, advertised as boneless. Either a sergeant or a colonel. No, differently, Captain. The director added an imaginary workload. Extra money in her purse. Natasha pinched her fingers. They put a curse on my charges, nothing but misfortune. I feel weak and broken... I neglected my ice cream, and now my throat is sore. (*She changes mind*.) Vadik seized! He is collapsing due to high temperature. Thirty-nine is a bad number. But it's easy to bring it down. The throat is weak, a drawback of the craft. Passers-by ask silly questions, especially when it's cold. He's asleep, barely breathing. (*Aloud*.) Hey, are you asleep?

**Vadim** (*weakly*). Did we do the right thing by getting married?

**Marina** (*instinctively recoiling*). Not that sick.

**Vadim.** Only a fool would risk his life.

**Marina.** Got an answer?

**Vadim.** Yes.

**Marina.** How can I hear it?..

**Vadim** (*with a hoarse voice*). No kidding, it's serious. (*Jumping out of bed*.) What happened with Valerka?

**Marina.** Nothing.

**Vadim.** Shows no signs. A tricky bit. Disguised.

**Marina** (*strenuously*). Should he call?

**Vadim.** He's gone missing!

**Marina.** Tricky questions?

**Vadim.** Money, мoney, мoney.

**Marina.** Whose?

**Vadim.** For two. He is economical with the truth.

**Marina.** Why?

**Vadim.** A ticklish game... Suppliers and intermediaries are hanging by a thread.

**Marina.** Is something wrong?

**Vadim.** I can sense it. Where, I am not sure. Leakage of confidential information. Let's act in parallel, competitors.

**Marina.** What is confidential?

**Vadim.** I told you so. My trip to Belgium.

**Marina.** He knows.

**Vadim.** Unbelievable! From whom?

**Marina** (*with loss*). From me.

**Vadim.** With you?..

**Marina.** Yes, from me.

*Vadim**stared at Marina**in astonishment.*

**Vadim.** We rehearsed it. Can you clarify?

**Marina.** I'm at my wits end. I handed over the bundle and went on my way. He mumbles, "Is Vadik coming back from Belgium tomorrow?" Before I could even open my mouth, he intensified questioning: "Or is he already home?" I hesitated, and he continued in the same insinuating tenor: "Are you being secretive? Fiery salute."

**Vadim** (*laughing*). Ha-ha! Thirty thousand euros! Hit or miss!

**Marina** (*complainingly*). Talk nonsense more.

**Vadim.** To hell with them! Lost here, found there!

**Marina.** Have they disappeared into thin air? Can't catch up?

**Vadim** (*cheerfully*). Went down in flames! It serves one right! Not entirely honest.

**Marina** (*depressingly*). That's a considerable amount. Gone?

**Vadim.** No hope!

**Marina.** Unfair! A fortune has been squandered.

Vadimcollapsed onto the bed, covering his head.

Psychotherapy office.

**Marina.** Sometimes I don't understand him.

**Doctor.** Ask accordingly.

**Marina.** Your supporter. His saying: "People are constantly arguing about something. In the name of harmony, they seek the right words."

**Doctor.** Confirms that I am right.

**Marina.** "Do you have any secrets?" Instantly: "Yes." I was surprised. I will begin the interrogation. In search of a clue, I sorted through all the facts. Women... What are they hiding? Wealth? Illness? Vice? I asked him if he thought I had any secrets. He assumes that there is. Would you like to find out? "Why claim what is yours?" he replied. Doctor, is my husband hiding something?

**Doctor.** Does not trust his own thoughts.

**Marina.** That's not good. When we think individually, our thoughts become distorted. (*Pause*.) He thinks he is unlucky. He calls himself a person in the second half of his life.

**Doctor.** Were you afraid of losing him?

**Marina.** Since you got married.

**Doctor.** Obsessed with an idea?

**Marina.** It seemed like it would all be over soon.

**Doctor.** Were there any reasons?

**Marina.** From nothingness.

**Doctor.** Were you afraid of being abandoned? Did you want to take it private, play it safe?

**Marina.** Obviously, yes.

**Doctor.** Day and night under your influence? Men have their own choice. Has the right to leave.

**Marina.** Where?

**Doctor.** Leave you.

**Marina** (*short reflection*). Husband caught in a tricky situation. Does not protest

against my statements. I deliberately talk nonsense, and he nods. Not resisting.

**Doctor.** Is that a bad sign?

**Marina.** Not looking good. Don't pretend, don't argue.

**Doctor** (*leafing through notes*). Are we thrilled with our husbands or not? (*Pause*.) Doubts are normal. (*Unexpectedly*.) Aren't you tired of my blunt and naive questions?

**Marina.** I take them seriously.

**Doctor.** Thank you.

**Marina.** A poisonous thought pierced me: it would be easier without a husband. It stuck like a thorn in the flesh. A terrible thought struck me: I was the only one left – and less jumpy.

**Doctor.** You don't mention your daughter.

**Marina** (*not hearing*). He developed a theory of pure relationships, love without physical intimacy.

**Doctor.** It's quite possible.

**Marina.** What if they are not old?

**Doctor.** The same.

**Marina.** Outward beauty inevitably fades and dims. The inner one grows with age. A woman becomes irresistible. He argued that great love is moral and platonic. The theory did not hold up: without physical attraction, there is no harmony or enlightenment. Love is a fireworks display of passion, a rush, inspiration...

**Doctor.** Loving people sacrifice themselves.

**Marina.** Sometimes even crimes.

**Doctor.** Crimes too. Are your feelings fading?

**Marina.** Partially.

**Doctor.** Is that all?

**Marina.** Habit.

**Doctor.** It's a reliable thing. Guarantees stability and consistency. Is there anything that can be considered equivalent to love? Or even more significant? Are you familiar with the concept of years spent together?

**Marina.** Years... spent... together...

**Doctor.** Yes.

**Marina.** I haven't thought about it.

**Doctor.** Shall we discuss it?

**Marina.** Let's go. (*Without clear context*.) Want to hear a story about a female colleague at work?

**Doctor.** Yes, please.

**Marina.** Her husband frequents art salons with his acquaintance. They order coffee. Discussing books and plans. He sees her to the car, and they part ways. In civilised countries, they say, there is nothing reprehensible in this.

**Doctor.** What about the employee?

**Marina.** She wasn't even jealous. She is convinced: there was no flirting. "Does a spouse have the right to invite someone to a coffee shop?" Overcoming her hesitation, she decided, "Yes, he/she does." What do you think?

**Doctor** (*pause*). He/she does.

**Marina.** A common view.

**Doctor.** I don't get it.

**Marina.** Expand your room for manoeuvre.

**Doctor.** I'm not sure.

**Marina.** Subconsciously.

**Doctor.** Let's get back to our concerns. Were there any arguments?

**Marina.** Small ones, quickly evaporated.

**Doctor.** Were you jealous?

**Marina.** More like suspicious.

**Doctor.** You didn't give yourself completely to your husband, did you?

**Marina.** I felt distrustful. (*She whispered heatedly*.) Would you like to hear a seditious opinion?

There is a manlet. There has been a shift in physiological balance. The novelty beckoned. No problem! He is deeply attached to his life, to his shoes. What's wrong with spending the night in an inviting little nest?

**Doctor.** Are you condoning infidelity?

**Marina.** No! There's adultery. Adultery.

**Doctor.** Is adultery not cheating?

**Marina.** No. Cheating – destructive disorder. When he abandons one for another! Irrevocably.

**Doctor.** In your case?

**Marina.** It's unclear!

**Doctor.** A Russian philosopher once said that infidelity strengthens a relationship that is fading. His arguments are shaky.

**Marina.** The wife loosens the reins, then pulls them tight to guide her husband. Without insulting male pride. But it flies, again and again. Once she gave in to base instincts, it is his sacred duty to raise her up to the heavens.

**Doctor.** Won't she be undermined by the worm of regret?

**Marina.** Becomes tame.

**Doctor.** Pangs of conscience?

**Marina.** The wife's authority will be long-lasting and unquestionable.

**Doctor.** It is not proper for a doctor to argue. He directs the patient. You have constructed a system of gender-based, inexhaustible relationships. Intuition and life experience prevail.

**Marina.** Thank you. A short test.

**Doctor.** I see.

**Marina.** My husband has a new habit. He takes my hands in his.

**Doctor.** Are you uncomfortable?

**Marina.** Not at all.

**Doctor.** Did you confess?

**Marina.** No.

**Doctor** (stares intently at Marina). Why?

**Marina.** My secret delight. I study his gestures and subtext. I used to ignore it.

**Doctor.** Your husband's addictions?

**Marina.** Lie in bed in my place. I'll get up and heat up breakfast, it's already rolled over. Loves guests. It's a big burden for me. Clean up and put away the refreshments. He is a generous host who celebrates birthdays. This is not a holiday. I've aged a year...

**Doctor.** Do you have many female friends?

**Marina.** There are no selfless people, and I don't want to invite them all in a group.

**Doctor.** Are you unwilling to compromise?

**Marina.** Commotion, bustle. Buy groceries...

**Doctor.** Friends of your husband?

**Marina.** The demand was overwhelming. They dispersed. Cares about the well-being of relatives. He feels sorry for them. They are barely making ends meet. They earn their own living. He's trying to help out. Futile efforts.

**Doctor.** You relatives?

**Marina.** A forty-second cousin.

**Doctor.** Do you visit them?

**Marina.** Almost never. They are rich. I am of no use to them.

**Doctor.** The friends are gone, who is to blame?

**Marina.** Apparently, my dislike slips through on the phone. He criticises me.

**Doctor.** In a positive way?

**Marina.** I get annoyed, I lose my temper.

**Doctor.** Are you making your own observations?

**Marina.** With plenty to spare.

**Doctor.** Does he drink?

**Marina.** Alcohol?

**Doctor.** Drinks.

**Marina.** He prefers wine. He was involved in importing. The company went bankrupt, he was laid off. Endured the humiliation of unemployment. Once, as part of a group of winemakers, I travelled around Burgundy. He described the trip and the vineyards there with foam at the mouth. (*Showing the distance from* *the floor*.) The vines are grown no higher than a metre, and excess leaves are cut off so that they do not take up nutrients. They climb up the vine and turn into grapes.

**Doctor** (*with authority*). Have you been married for many years?

**Marina.** Yes.

**Doctor.** Now you're getting to the bottom of what your husband means to you?

**Marina.** You're right.

**Doctor.** Is he the first man?

**Marina** (*flaring up*). Is it really that important...

**Doctor.** Don't answer.

**Marina.** Yes.

**Doctor.** Have you had an emergency? Have you cheated on him?

**Marina** (*not immediately*). No! Undoubtedly, no!

**Doctor.** You were on the brink. Is forbidden fruit sweet?

**Marina.** Circumstances have arisen...

**Doctor.** An aching sensuality? We diagnosed a married woman as a bundle of nerves. The husband's task is to relieve tension.

**Marina.** She took a piece of paper and drew a line. I wrote "yes" in one column and "no" in the other. It's funny for an adult woman to be looking for a guiding thread.

**Doctor.** What's in both columns?

**Marina.** The one where "no" was written is covered with compelling arguments against it! That was the end of my wanderings.

**Doctor.** A passing fancy?

**Marina.** Nothing more.

**Doctor.** Haven't you drowned in sentimental networks?

**Marina.** No, no, I'm sober. Another quarrel. For a moment, I lost her vigilance and broke the silence. He became alert and replied curtly. I realised my mistake. I watched in an underhand way. It turns out to be good. Did he think I gave up, surrendered?

**Doctor.** Who is important?

**Marina.** He is also an instigator.

**Doctor.** The step towards reconciliation is yours to take. An unexpected and powerful move! Your husband is stunned.

**Marina.** Conclusion?

**Doctor:** "Marina is compliant and responsive. She knows how to forgive."

**Marina.** In my favour?

**Doctor.** Tell me about your daughter.

**Marina.** She was born healthy.

**Doctor.** Was the pregnancy without complications?

**Marina.** Without any. In the evening, around nine o'clock. Normal height and weight. I was lying in a ward on the second floor, my husband was standing under the window. Are you interested?

**Doctor.** Yes, very much so.

**Marina.** The nurse predicts: tomorrow. He went home. The door opens, a call from the maternity hospital – it's happened, she's given birth. A girl. Yes, a girl. Vadim was on cloud nine, visiting every day. We didn't buy a cot; it's not customary to do so in advance. We put two chairs together. The cot came from the neighbours. (*Sobbing*.) Nobody loves! My husband is cheating on me!

**Doctor** (*after waiting for flare up to go off*). Was the girl wanted?

**Marina.** They planned to have a boy second.

**Doctor.** Didn't work?

**Marina.** We put it off.

**Doctor.** Abortions?

**Marina.** Yes.

**Doctor.** Any regrets?

**Marina.** I wanted to confess my sin to the priest. They're on the lookout... to get even.

**Doctor.** Are you religious?

**Marina.** Rather, at the crossroads.

**Doctor.** Who insisted on the abortions?

**Marina** (*hesitating*). I did. Yes, I did.

**Doctor.** The girl developed normally. Who did most of the babysitting?

**Marina.** Both equally.

**Doctor.** Who did pot the child?

**Marina.** More often husband.

**Doctor.** Do you know the poet Innokenty Annensky?

**Marina.** I've heard of him, but I don't think I've read it.

**Doctor.** Would you like to read the poem?

**Marina.** Yes, with pleasure.

**Doctor** (*taking a volume of poems by I. Annensky from a desk drawer).* It is called "Ennui of remembering." I'm not a good reader. (*Reading*.)

Everytime the identical page,

Spilled with ink, opens up before me.

I shall go off from people... But where.

Where to hide from the night’s misery?

All the living ones fade far away,

And what never existed is plain.

The forgotten lines somehow are blurred

Until dawn to a swollen black stain.

One impossible answer: all me —

Where mirage letters loom into sight...

... I like children around in a house

And I like to hear them cry at night.

Pause.

Did you like it?

**Marina.** Very much.

**Doctor.** I also did. The atmosphere in a family depends 80 per cent on the woman. Why?

**Marina.** Carrying a load? Cooks, cleans...

**Doctor.** You are partly right. However, don't forget about your feminine nature. Shall we discuss it?

**Marina.** Let's go.

**Doctor.** A spectacle in company. We drank a shot, loud cheers, a noisy party. A bright charmer appears. The atmosphere is changing... Or the spouse returns. Without getting rid of the junk. Excited, she appears at the door of the flat... (*Without leaving her thoughts*.) Do you love your daughter?

**Marina** (*sadly*). About my daughter again?

**Doctor.** You let her go.

**Marina.** Not the end of the world, Voronezh.

**Doctor.** At an unstable age...

**Marina.** We didn't kick her out onto the street. To her relative, who couldn't dote upon her.

**Doctor.** You deprived yourselves of the joy of communication. Indulge in trifles, childish whims.

**Marina.** Apartment in the centre, sunny.

**Doctor.** ...Suffer through her school crush.

**Marina.** Larger than our Moscow one.

**Doctor.** Who suggested it?

**Marina.** My aunt was visiting. We were crammed together in a small space. On the eve of departure, she suggests, "I'll take your daughter with me. I will prepare her for the entrance exams."

**Doctor.** And your daughter?

**Marina.** Hot diggerty! New surroundings, new experiences.

**Doctor.** You didn't mind?

**Marina.** No. My husband, me, my daughter, my aunt. (*After thinking for a moment*.) Suddenly, they started acting up. Parents are mortal enemies... It gets worse. That's not right... We assessed the situation - we can't handle it...

**Doctor.** The quarrels are silenced.

**Marina.** The scandals continued unabated. Always on public holidays. I am afraid of and dislike holidays. (*Exiting*.)

*Private restaurant.*

*In the corner, at a table, sits a Visitor with his companion.*

*Accompanied by Elena, an elderly married couple enters. Elena chooses a table in the centre of the hall.*

*Vadim peeks out and immediately disappears. Appears with the Waiter.*

**Vadim.** Old man, help me out here.

**Waiter.** My dear good friend, the boss says no. You are on contract: foreigners are assigned to specific individuals. I don't know a word of foreign languages.

**Vadim.** Here goes nothing. (*Heading towards the visitors, carrying the menu. Speaks French. We can hear the translation*.) Good evening, ladies. Good evening, sir. Welcome to our restaurant. Here is a selection of dishes and drinks.

*At the sound of Vadim's voice, Elena**flinches and stares intently at Vadim.*

*Hearing his speech, the elderly French began to murmur. We can hear the translation.*

**Madame** and **Monsieur** (*interrupting each other*). Flawless pronunciation. No accent. Have you been to France?

**Vadim.** Thank you. Sometimes. (to *Elena, in Russian*.) Any advice?

*Elena**searches intently for Vadim's eyes, and their gazes meet. She slowly stands up and slowly sits down on a chair. The French observe this scene.*

**Elena** (*frowning crookedly*)*.* Дайте перевести дух.

*Vadim steps aside.*

*Finally looking up from the menu, Elena beckons Vadim with her finger*.

**Elena.** Hey you, server.

**Vadim** (*playing along*). What would you like?

**Elena.** It would be helpful to inform our table of the comeliness.

**Vadim.** Easy as pie.

**Elena.** Where is the candle?

**Vadim.** Small, but conveys emotion. (*Placing a candle*.)

*Elena**looks expectantly at Vadim.*

**Vadim.** The second one?

**Elena.** Don't you get it? (*Mockingly*.) "The candle burned on the table, the candle burned." (*Vadim**lights it.*) ‘And two little shoes fell with a clatter to the floor"... Waiter, the lighter is shaking. Vitamin deficiency?

**Vadim.** You are mistaken.

**Elena.** Are you trying to make me believe I am short-sighted and have chicken blindness? You will lose customers.

**Vadim.** Have you studied it?

**Elena.** The road to dinner is thorny. Are you blowing smoke?

**Vadim.** I don't wear glasses.

**Elena.** You should take a closer look.

**Vadim.** At what?

**Elena.** At the tablecloth.

**Vadim** (*taking a closer look*). The microscope is smashed to pieces.

**Elena.** Totally dirty!

The lengthy discussion attracted the attention of the others.

The Visitor and his companion pricked up their ears, and the Host and the

Waiter appeared in the hall.

**Vadim.** Where?

**Elena** (*tapping the tablecloth with her finger*). Crusty crumbs. No dazzling whiteness.

**Vadim.** Replace the tablecloth?

**Elena.** If there is a spare one in the office...

**Host** (*hat in hand*). Don't worry, we'll change it right away.

*The Host quickly leaves.*

*We hear the translation of a dialogue between French people whispering to each other.*

**Madame.** She encountered the object of her torment.

**Monsieur.** What?

**Madame.** Shame on you! They are stunned!

**Monsieur.** Coincidence?

**Madame.** Otherwise, I wouldn't have brought you here.

**Monsieur.** How will it end?

**Madame.** She's going to make fun of us a little, let's go find another restaurant.

**Monsieur.** A curious incident.

**Madame.** Our guide is a sphinx.

**Monsieur.** You can't have a peaceful lunch with Russians.

*The Host - with a new tablecloth.*

**Host.** It's a muff, gentlemen. We'll replace it quickly. We've got new recruits. They didn't settle in.

(*To Vadim, sternly.*) Take it off, let's change the tablecloth.

*The Host retreats with the tablecloth, but remains, wanting to get his bearings.*

**Elena** (*staring at the tablecloth*). Waiter, do you get one into a fix?

**Vadim.** As it turns out.

**Elena.** Ashtray?

**Vadim.** Right here and now.

Bringing an ashtray. Elenatakes it, sniffs it. Her body shook convulsively, as if she were suppressing the urge to vomit.

**Elena.** Ancient ashes.

**Vadim.** Where?

**Elena.** In the depths. Are you serving stinky bells and whistles?

**Vadim.** We'll take away that antique ashtray.

**Elena** (*with disgust*). Did you smell that?

**Vadim.** Mischief does not encourage snooping.

**Elena.** Nicotine... It will devour a huge animal.

**Vadim.** Have you experimented?

**Elena.**  On a mammoth.

**Vadim.** Mammoths occasionally visit.

**Elena.** Why are you arguing? The surroundings are provincial... (*On the verge of breaking down, hissing insultingly.*) You ruined my life! You... you cold, monstrous creature! Exactly – a monstrous creature! Highway bandit! Monster! This is where you belong, not at the UN podium! Your podium – boo-hoo – has collapsed. You were destined for a career! (*Lifting her skirt, panties flash for a second.*) Who was I saving it for? Who's going to take a chance?

She takes the astonished French couple by the arms and almost drags them out of the restaurant.

Let's get out of here, my friends. There are no highly respected citizens here.

**Visitor** (*to the Host, harshly*). Were you milked?

**Host** (*ingratiatingly*). Cannot hold a candle. A bedraggled polyglot. We'll knock him out tomorrow.

**Visitor.** How much do I owe you?

**Host.** You haven't finished your dinner. We have a wine cellar and excellent desserts.

**Visitor.** My lady is upset.

*The Visitor whispers to the lady and throws money on the table. They're both leaving. Both leave.*

**Waiter** (*shouting*). You idiot! Dumbass! Selfish! Missed a girl!

*Marina**and Vadim's flat.*

**Marina.** You've got me hooked.

**Vadim.** I didn't plan it

**Marina.** You didn't hook me, you just touched me.

**Vadim.** I'm at the other end of the kitchen. What could I have touched?

**Marina.** With your whole body. I could feel it perfectly.

**Vadim.** Feel touch from a distance

**Marina.** Don't you want to... have a chat?

**Vadim.** Me? No.

**Marina.** Are you managing to sort things out?

**Vadim.** In fragments.

**Marina.** Nothing to add?

**Vadim.** What about our daughter? Is she not upset?

**Marina.** No. If she asks for money, I give it to her.

**Vadim.** And I provide it.

**Marina.** Aren't you being a bit dramatic?

**Vadim.** The main thing is adaptation and learning.

**Marina.** We didn't discuss it.

**Vadim.** You say so, contact.

**Marina.** There were no obvious frustrations.

**Vadim.** W-e-l-l. No comment. There is nothing that should be...

**Marina** (*blowing up*). Even if you are warned about this, hurry up! I work hard until late at night. Fooling myself with a pittance. Or will I end up as a kept woman in my old age? Leave me with my hand outstretched!

**Vadim.** Are you planning to fuss over and protect her?

**Marina.** There are loads of clinics in Moscow – both private and free. A bunch of charlatans. Stuck like a leech. The two of us will be there.

**Vadim.** Let's do it together. Who shall we begin with? With a gynaecologist, an endocrinologist?

**Marina.** Whoever you want.

**Vadim** (*in a patronising way*). Did she have... a boyfriend?

**Marina.** I wasn't bullied.

**Vadim.** You're a mother, aren't you?

**Marina.** You are a father, a daddy. I don't have any easy money. If she wants to, she'll say so.

**Vadim.** Exquisitely.

**Marina.** Get to the bottom of it?

**Vadim.** They will inevitably ask.

**Marina.** Here, probe it. You will be accompanying her.

**Vadim.** I?

**Marina.** Who then? She won't come with me.

A painful pause.

Are there any signs of change?

**Vadim.** Stunning ones.

**Marina.** Troubles?

**Vadim** (*with feigned cheerfulness*). The indestructible OK! In the morning, I have a modest breakfast. I eat during the day and refuel in the evening.

**Marina.** Your routine is getting old. Is the discomfort bothering you?

**Vadim.** Endless comfort.

**Marina.** Have you fallen into oblivion? Wife...

**Vadim.** Is that so?

**Marina.** Something unusual?

**Vadim.** Was it you? She has appeared!

**Marina.** Got someone? You're ignoring me... More than a hundred days...

**Vadim.** You got C-minus in arithmetic.

**Marina.** Don't seek me...

**Vadim.** Are you pushing a visitor log? Were you working energetically with the calculator?

**Marina.** With my brain.

**Vadim.** Are you succeeding?

**Marina.** When necessary.

**Vadim.** You got lucky.

**Marina.** Teach those crack-brained?

**Vadim.** To botch of the chronicles?

**Marina.** Think about it too.

**Vadim.** Phenomenal potential!

**Marina.** Did it go off just now?

**Vadim.** In the past, occasionally.

**Marina.** Are you being modest?

**Vadim.** Who started it?

**Marina.** I did, but the tone was... humane.

**Vadim.** It won't let go?

**Marina.** You?

**Vadim.** Where did you get that from? I eat my eggs, wash them down with tea or coffee...

**Marina.** Don't be silly! I am your wife.

**Vadim.** Wow! You came to yourself!

**Marina.** It is necessary to get along.

**Vadim.** Are you feeling comfortable? Cast off in the same direction. It's not your problem! Am I begging?

**Marina.** You are bustling.

**Vadim.** Then get out of my face!

**Marina.** A fat chance! Cheering up?

**Vadim.** Where can I hide?

**Marina.** Wanderer, poor thing. Are we connected by ties?

**Vadim.** For now, yes.

**Marina.** You're talking in a roundabout way. You're looked after.

**Vadim.** Lady Bountiful.

**Marina.** You are consuming my meals.

**Vadim.** I am ready to fast.

**Marina.** Just kidding!

**Vadim.** Take care of yourself. Autotraining, jogging on rough terrain, barefoot along the riverbank. Oh, by the way. Beware of broken glass and tin cans. Don't worry about me.

**Marina.** I'm worried about your condition.

**Vadim.** Stop thinking about me, feel sorry for yourself.

**Marina** (*stormily*). Choose your words carefully.

**Vadim.** What's the matter?

**Marina.** I want to figure this out.

**Vadim.** It used to be necessary.

**Marina.** When?

**Vadim.** When things went wrong.

**Marina.** Daddy's fun, go ahead.

**Vadim.** I went for it.

**Marina.** Indulged? Bear cub.

**Vadim.** Yes, I nourished and cherished. Who gave birth?

**Marina.** I gave birth, you raised.

**Vadim.** My cross to bear. I repeat: "Get out!"

**Marina.** It won't go unpunished!

**Vadim.** Not a single bright day.

A heavy silence.

**Marina.** Has progress been made?

**Vadim.** In what?

**Marina.** In the business matters.

**Vadim** (*bewildered*). Move the pointer to your daughter.

**Marina.** What about you?

**Vadim.** I'll get away with it. Not for the first time.

**Marina.** Horseshit More caring than you. I have always been a domestic wife!

**Vadim.** Keep your trap shut!

**Marina.** I want to jabber!

**Vadim.** Bite your tongue!

**Marina.** Yours. On the injured protrusion.

**Vadim.** Take care of your daughter. To the end! It's your turn.

*Another session with the psychotherapist.*

**Marina** (*bursting into the office*). Imagine what this scoundrel has come to?

**Doctor** (*kindly*). Who are you talking about?

**Marina.** About Vadim.

**Doctor.** Are you speaking inappropriately about your spouse?

**Marina.** Shall I address him in an aristocratic manner? He's been evading for four months...

**Doctor.** Evading what?

**Marina.** Turns away when I lie down next to him. Terribly tired.

**Doctor.** Is he really get tired?

**Marina.** Or falls into a deep sleep.

**Doctor.** Nothing unusual.

**Marina.** The dream is artificial! After we argued, he decided to be completely honest. For myself! (*A meaningful pause*.) That scoundrel said: I'm not attracted to him.

**Doctor** (*in the right manner*). Despite your agitated state, I categorically reject your speech.

**Marina.** I bet he's got a mistress on the side.

**Doctor.** You are inside a medical facility. Please behave appropriately.

**Marina.** If he doesn't deserve anything else?

**Doctor.** Are you prone to bouts of... hostility?

**Marina.** My misfortune.

**Doctor.** Have you seen a psychiatrist?

**Marina.** What do you need here, then?

**Doctor.** I'm a psychologist.

**Marina.** Isn't it just the same old story...

**Doctor** (*slowly leafing through Marina's medical records*). I refuse to advise you. I am cancelling the session on the receipt.

**Marina** (*crushed*). You... refuse to treat me?

**Doctor.** In this context, yes.

**Marina.** But you're a doctor!

**Doctor.** Yes, I am a doctor.

**Marina.** What are your ethics and deontology?

**Doctor.** I haven't refused until today. (*Quietly*.) Please clear the office. Patients are waiting in the corridor.

**Marina.** Do I have the right to appeal to the chief physician?

**Doctor.** One floor up. Goodbye.

Marina– depressed, dejected – heading for the door.

**Marina.** Why did I even bother... Two decades later, he saw the light: he was standing at a broken trough. In the end, he remained a traditionalist. Three or four children is his formula for happiness. He wanted a righteous, close-knit family. As a student, he had some winning games, chose me... He never reproached me once. But I can see it! Where can I go?! Where is my territory? My patrimony? He gave every fact the scale of an event. The birth of a daughter is a huge event. Kindergarten and school are a phenomenon. He longed for a clan: children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters. He was searching for meaning in life. Moral, underlying. He hasn't decided on the meaning yet. I chopped it down to the roots. (Laughing nervously.) Feeling nostalgic. He cannot forget his youthful attachment. Keeps poems. He was stirred with shame. Once he left with her classmate... She told the truth! Secret thoughts. Is the husband the first man or not? In no way! Not a bit of it! Not two bits of it! Here he is – a psychotherapist. Does it matter how many times I slept with someone if there was no love? (Confidentially.) The biggest secret is that I got married without deep feelings. Having lived with my husband for so long, I am grateful to realise that he is my reason for living. But by that time, he had cooled off. Oh, you! Goodbye. (Running out.)

*Marina and Vadim in their flat.*

*Marina's thoughts, which we hear.*

The market is full of rude clowns. A top-lofty man was hanging around. Stamps, antique coins... I barely managed to get him off. What a disgrace. The second one pretended to be an artist. He invited me to write on canvas with oil... The headmistress is depressed. She takes her anger out on teachers. The careless student lifted the lid of the piano, hitting it on the wrong side. The daughter is grown up. Speaking through set teeth. Keeping distance. There are no dangers lurking.

*Marina and Vadim walk towards each other.*

**Marina** (*aloud*). Is it getting cooked little by little?

**Vadim.** Perhaps.

**Marina.** A unique period. Do you remember? Were we happy?

**Vadim.** Yes.

**Marina.** Should we have left more children behind?

**Vadim.** Yes, more.

**Marina.** Will you feel sorry for me?

**Vadim.** I will.

**Marina** (*with a trembling voice*). Did you love me... back then?

**Vadim.** Very much.

**Marina.** When we got married?

**Vadim.** Yes.

**Marina.** Then?

**Vadim.** And then.

**Marina.** And now?

**Vadim** (*forced himself to speak*). And now.

**Marina.** Thanks, Vadik.

*Vadim**gently runs his hand over Marina's shoulders and neck. She is barely holding back tears.*

Do you need me?

**Vadim.** Yes.

**Marina.** Are you sad with me?

**Vadim.** I was in your yard. I stood there for a while, wandered around.

**Marina.** Where I was born and raised?

**Vadim.** I imagined you as a little girl playing with your friends, opening the front door, running up the stairs...

**Marina.** What now?

**Vadim.** They arranged a modern office building.

**Marina.** Grandpa, the railway managers were arrested overnight. Everyone died. Then their wives, my grandmother. Ten years of Mordovian camps. She was a seamstress. Shock worker of Communist labour. Why my yard? (*Alarmed*.) What happened?

**Vadim.** Nothing.

**Marina.** No, it happened. You can't fool me. My dear, admit what happened?

**Vadim.** I was in my own yard. Feeble old men. I have been to many places...

**Marina** (*staring intently at Vadim*). Where else?

**Vadim.** In many.

**Marina.** Will it still be as dear to us?

**Vadim.** The daughter has returned. A young woman...

**Marina.** What do you think?

**Vadim.** Isn't it obvious? Your little girl.

**Marina.** And yours.

**Vadim.** Not very perceptive.

**Marina.** Will you take care of her?

**Vadim.** Yes, my daughter again.

**Marina.** And me?

**Vadim.** So can you.

Training classroom. A small language group.

Among the young students is Vadim's Daughter. Vadim enters the classroom. The noise dies down, silence reigns. All eyes are fixed on the teacher.

The entire lesson, Vadim is on the rise: he is in his element.

**Vadim.** Hello, my name is Vadim Anatolyevich. I am standing in for your teacher. Today, we're having a casual chat. Are you beginners? (*Students look at each other*.) Are you the beginners' group?

**1st female student** (*sitting at the front table*). Yes, we are learning from scratch.

**Vadim.** What language have you learned at school?

**1st female student.** German.

**Vadim.** Why did you choose French?

**2nd female student.** I like the pronunciation.

**1st female student.** Literature.

**Vadim.** Who did you read?

**1st female student.** Stendhal, Balzac.

**2nd female student.** Françoise Sagan.

**1st male student.** Romana Garri, Boris Vian.

**Vadim.** Boris Vian?

**1st male student.** It's a bit tight.

**Vadim.** That's normal.

**1st female student.** German will become the second language.

**Vadim.** English?

**1st female student.** The third one.

**2nd female student.** Or English as the second language, rather than German as the third.

**Vadim** (*to the 1st female student.*). Are you the group head girl?

**1st female student** (*surprised*). Yes, I am.

**Vadim.** Name the countries where French is spoken.

**1st female student.** France, Belgium.

**1st male student.** In some cantons of Switzerland.

**2nd female student.** In the province of Quebec, Canada.

**Vadim.** In Africa?

**1st male student.** Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia.

**Other students.** Senegal... Mali... Cameroon... Kongo...

**Vadim.** What is the capital of Mali?

**1st male student.** Bamako.

**Vadim.** Do you think it's hot in Bamako?

**1st male student.** South of the Sahara? African heat.

**Vadim** (*reminiscing*). When I left the airport building, the asphalt on the square was scorching hot, and my heels were literally sinking into it. It feels like you're not standing on solid ground, but on a surfboard slipping away from under your feet. (*Unexpected*.) Why are black people so smiley?

**2nd female student.** They are characterised by an optimistic outlook.

**1st female student.** More enlightened than Europeans.

**1st male student.** In Western languages, "Negro" has a derogatory connotation.

**Vadim.** Well done! I deliberately used it to get you riled up.

**1st female student.** Variants?

**Vadim.** Black people, Africans, indigenous people.

**1st male student.** African Americans.

**Vadim** (*to the 2nd* *female student*). What is my name?..

**2nd female student** (*hesitating*). Your name is...

**1st female student.** Vadim Anatolyevich.

**Vadim** (*to the 1st female student*). Thank you.

**1st female student.** I'll make a note of the latest information.

**Vadim.** There is plenty of rote learning in language, so learn to take notes. I look through my student notebooks and find something valuable. Our group had a wonderful mentor. We made funny mistakes, and it laughed until she couldn't breathe. It was unbearable — it ran out into the corridor, laughing. Kept a list of rare gems. Much depends on the teacher... Don't be lazy, grab the reference book from the shelf. Encyclopaedias and reference books should be available in abundance. Why do people trust dictionaries?

**1st female student.** The experts are hard at work.

**Vadim.** Of the highest quality.

**2nd female student** (*not sure*). A collective effort?

**Vadim.** That's right. In addition to the author, a reviewer, scientific advisor, chief editor, supervising editor, and managing editor are also involved. (*Addressing the students at the back tables*.) Please respond.

**2nd male student** (*sitting at the back table*). At the forefront are activists, turning the barrel organ.

**Vadim.** Please be kind to the young lady.

**2nd male student.** We sit quiet as the grave.

**Vadim.** Young ladies are a special tribe.

**1st male student.** What is special about it?

**2nd male student.** Didn't get it?

**Vadim.** They are friends with graceful girls. They think they have grasped the alphabet of life. Without realising it, they are about to taste the bitter bread. (*Bow to the* *girls*.) A brief digression. So, here are the recommendations.

**2nd male student.** I'm getting into a relationship with the head girl.

**Vadim.** You're also a toady.

**2nd male student.** A die-hard one. It's harmless to keep company with the head girl.

**Vadim.** Get it.

**2nd male student.** What is your name, Miss Head Girl?

**1st female student.** Alyona.

**2nd male student.** I'm Maxim. I won't be rude to you anymore.

**1st female student.** I accept your apology.

**Vadim.** Guys, are you sure you're at the right university? Maybe we should go to the theatre? (*Pause*.) If you're going to be speaking at an official banquet, it's a good idea to grab a quick bite to eat beforehand. Just don't faint... You relax during the day, and by evening, a cocktail party is on the cards. The delegates' excitement is indescribable: a relaxing time-out. For them. It's rush hour for you. Toasts are coming in showers. The guests show off their erudition, drawing on their cultural baggage of anecdotes, literary allusions and quotations from the Bible. Intermixed with abundant libations. The interpreter is given a glass of vodka for show. By the end of the feast, the cheekbones cannot be opened... A colourful picture? An exquisitely laid table, mouths watering...

**2nd male student.** Can't you just grab something tasty and gobble it down quickly?

**1st female student.** When you rush, your perception becomes distorted.

**2nd female student.** It won't take long to choke on it.

**1st female student.** What a scene: they rushed towards the interpreter and pulled the icy oyster out of his mouth.

**2nd female student.** Second recommendation?

**Vadim.** Less humorous. Don't emphasise your intellectual level.

**1st female student.** Why?

**Vadim.** It could lead to dismissal.

**2nd female student.** There will be an excuse. Failed.

**Vadim.** Don't hit straight from the shoulder in judging those above you.

**1st male student.** Is the temptation strong?

**Vadim.** You are under your manager, but not above him.

**1st male student.** Not high enough in rank?

**Vadim.** Your role is to interpret, not to comment.

**1st female student.** Are interpreters a dependent guild?

**Vadim.** Extremely. Peter the Great's decree stated: "A subordinate in the presence of his superiors must appear dashing and foolish, so that his intelligence does not confuse his superiors."

**1st male student.** Cool – dashing and silly!

**1st female student.** Nothing has changed.

**2nd female student.** Social and cultural evolution has not brought any distinctive personalities to the fore.

**2nd male student** (*ironically*). Has a weakness for borrowing: evolution, culture, arena...

**Vadim.** Professional holiday – 30 September. On this day in 420, the patron saint of translators, Blessed Jerome of Stridon, a scholar and encyclopaedist, passed away. Translated the Bible into Latin... Let's analyse the phrases: "The cup stood on the table" and "There was a cup on the table." Is there a difference between them?

**Uncertain responses from students:**

The cup stood...

There was a cup on the table

Stood on the table...

**2nd male student.** A cup, not a jug or bottle.

**2nd female student.** It stood, it did not lie down.

**1st male student.** It lies down if you tip it over.

**1st female student.** The difference slips through.

**2nd male student.** A cup, not a plate.

**Vadim.** For those who are curious, please refer to a grammar textbook.

**1st female student** (*timidly*). Could you advise us...

*Group laughter.*

**Vadim.** You are free to go. A lively group. Good luck.

*The 1st female student whispers to the others and raises her hand.*

**Vadim.** Yes, please.

**1st female student.** Vadim Anatolyevich, would you be interested in becoming our manager?

**Vadim.** Unfortunately, no. Order of the Dean's Office.

*The students are leaving the classroom. Only Vadim and his Daughter remain.*

**Vadim** (*glowingly*). Admitted?!

**Daughter.** None of your damn business?

**Vadim** (*stopped short*). Well... congratulations...

**Daughter.** Do fathers want boys?

**Vadim.** More often.

**Daughter.** But you wanted a girl?

**Vadim.** A daughter.

**Daughter.** Before I came along, were you trying to get me?

**Vadim.** Yes, desperately.

**Daughter.** My dear father, you have renounced me.

**Vadim.** You mum and I...

**Daughter** (*cutting him off abruptly*). Don't bring my mum into this. Nothing for you.

**Vadim.** You're so imaginative!

**Daughter.** Reality was pressing. I left you. Yes, you did not argue. Outwardly, everything seemed wonderful.

**Vadim.** I married for love.

**Daughter.**  A revelation has come to you! Not the one. Not your ideal. Boredom and indifference pushed aside... False showmanship. School committee, warmed the bench at meetings. It broke down in seventh grade... On top of that, I was a mediocre student. Unsatisfactory grades, threes out of five.

**Vadim.** Not everyone should radiate intelligence.

**Daughter.** Wanted a girl prodigy? For her, to swim butterfly and crawl, play the piano, preferably the violin, be fluent in languages, and get straight As.

**Vadim.** We never put any pressure on you.

**Daughter.** Disappointment: not trained in anything. The wool-gathering was gone. I became out of place. I basically grew up without a family. The family hearth – the holy of holies! There is nothing in the world except family! (*Angrily*.) Why didn't I learn French when I was a child? My future is ruined. I am your daughter.

*The Daughter slaps him. Vadim felt week in his knees again.*

*The 1st female student appears at the door. The Daughter disappears.*

**1st female student.** Vadim Anatolyevich, problems with your daughter?

**Vadim** (*standing up*). Why did you decide that?

**1st female student.** My dad is an experienced psychoanalyst. He has a large clientele.

**Vadim** (*hastily*). No, thank you.

**1st female student.** Provides consultations in Sokol.

**Vadim.** Thank you. I'll figure it out.

**1st female student.** We're sorry you won't be joining us.

**Vadim.** Don't regret it. Never. "Live with dignity and accept whatever comes your way." Aphorism.

**1st female student** (*appalled*). My mum knows about my flaw and is really upset about it. I am incredibly amorous... (*Vadim**gazes at the girl.*)

**Vadim.** Who takes care of you?

**1st female student.** My mum.

**Vadim.** And Dad?

**1st female student.** And Dad. We are a close-knit family. (*Confused*.) I hate to tell on her, but there's no hiding it, it will come out... Your daughter is not in the journal.

*He hands the journal to Vadim.**He glanced at it and handed it back.*

*The 1st female student runs out of the classroom.*

*Marina's and Vadim's flat.*

*Vadim**in a suit. The Conductor**and the Violinist enter. Muffled noise in the second room, where the orchestra members are seated.*

**Vadim** (*stolidly*). Please take a seat.

**Conductor.** Violin section is assembled.

**Vadim.** It is a great honour.

**Conductor.** Do you like "The Dance of the Knights?"

**Vadim.** There are works that give you goose bumps.

**Conductor.** I will conduct standing in the doorway. (*To the girl* *with the violin*.) *Natasha*. A young prodigy, a national talent.

**Girl** (*curtsying*). Already national.

**Conductor.** Perfect pitch, winner of numerous competitions.

**Girl.** They didn't praise me before.

**Conductor.**  In due course.

**Girl** (*not letting up*). Is it due now?

**Conductor** (*strictly*). You're talking too much.

**Girl** (*becoming serious*). I'm sorry.

**Conductor.** Smart girl. Ready?

**Girl.** Yes.

*The Conductor**waved his baton. The sounds of "Dance of the Knights" from Prokofiev's ballet "Romeo and Juliet" began to play.*

*The dance is over. A solemn pause.*

**Vadim** (*to the Girl, ceremoniously*). Your violin?

*The Girl holds out her violin. Vadim takes it, touches the strings, the deck, and returns it.*

The violin makes my heart ache.

**Conductor.** She is captivating.

**Girl.** But my heart does not ache; it is in harmony with the sounds. I merge with it: simultaneously a violin and a bow.

**Vadim.** Let me put forward a hypothesis. There is a respectful alliance between the strings and the bow – the source of magical sounds. I am not well versed in music. Singing was pure torture. Auto-da-fé. The teacher wanted a simple little tune. Singing between notes – it would be difficult to invent a more sophisticated form of torture.

**Conductor.** May I ask?

**Vadim.** At your service.

**Conductor.** Are you alone?

**Vadim.** With my wife and daughter.

**Conductor.** Sometimes it's unbearable – the light is harsh, but then you look up and the clouds are dispersing... Down with despondency.

**Vadim.** Thank you for your advice.

**Conductor.** You are a long-time regular at our concerts.

**Vadim.** Did you notice me in the hall?

**Conductor.** Orchestra members. Hence the personal concert. Their verdict: a person in need of music. The golden calf is not the highest criterion.

**Vadim.** May I also express my curiosity?

**Conductor.** Not objectionable.

**Vadim.** When performing emotionally charged pieces, are you experienced neutral professionals or do you empathise with the audience?

**Conductor** (*hesitating*). A trap question.

**Vadim.** A whirlwind of emotions... My mind can't cope.

**Conductor.** You're right. Professionalism prevails. We invite you to attend our concerts.

**Vadim.** A musical staff – dense thickets, brush. From a jumble of ovals, brackets, squiggles... magical music is born? The sound flows into the next note, blending harmoniously with it. A ridiculous laughing stock in front of the class... But I admire classical music boundlessly.

*The Conductor looks expectantly at the Girl. She adjusted the violin under her chin, flicked the bow, and the space was filled with the sounds of Brahms' Scherzo in D minor.*

*The music was stunning.*

*The Scherzo is over. The Conductor signalled to the Girl, and they both left silently.*

*On the alcohol stove – skillfully and quickly – Vadim is cooking. Frying pieces of bacon in a pan, slicing sausage and tomato, beating an egg.*

*Suddenly shudders, freezes, turns around sharply. He goes into the second room and looks inside. Returns to the table. He brews fresh tea. Eating. Turns around again.*

**Vadim.** Someone is hiding behind me...

*Brings fresh linen: undershirt, underpants, shirt, tie. Trousers, jacket, polished shoes. He changes his clothes without rushing.*

*Viewers will be moved by the tragedy of the moment.*

*A Little Girl appears, dressed elegantly in a white dress. With childlike spontaneity, she points her finger into space, counting to twelve as she watches virtual trains rush by: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Running away.*

**Vadim.** The music fades, then builds up.

*Vadim performs a move from the dance of despair.*

Time is rushing by. Who will pull the emergency brake? The results are in. Mum...

*He casts a melancholy glance around the room, bidding farewell to the white light forever. Exiting.*

Marina and her Daughter in black. Forty days after death.

On the table is a photograph of Vadim, a glass of vodka, and a piece of black bread on top.

The thoughts of Marina and her Daughter that we hear.

**Daughter.** Her father left her forever, and her mother is superficial and useless. In her petty cares, I never took centre stage.

**Marina.** Deniska stopped honking. He sang in a clear voice. New student. Accompanied by grandmother. The handles are pudgy. Charming little one. The restless eel. Teaching him to sit still and keep his back straight. Reports: "A little brother or sister is coming soon. It's a secret for mummy."

**Daughter.** There is no support. Who can I trust?

**Marina.** I did it when life got back on track. They moved from the category of the poor to a more affluent social stratum. He started to set up a household. He replaced the refrigerator and furniture and purchased a modest house. He acted indifferently, like a programmed robot. I obeyed his wishes. I used to treat it. For no apparent reason, I then blamed myself...

**Daughter.** Talentless, unlucky. Was I born with a silver spoon in my mouth?

**Marina.** Suddenly – an abyss, a precipice... It was necessary to renounce my position. To completely switch to the spouse's side. When they got engaged, he called her his beloved. "Beloved, betrothed." He doesn't speak Polish or Ukrainian. (*He yells loudly*.) Couldn't you have spared him?

Elenaappears.

**Marina.** Who are you?

**Elena.** A woman. More precisely... not a woman. Elena.

**Marina.** Elena the Beautiful. A former friend...

**Elena.** I was never... Vadim Anatolyevich's friend.

**Marina.** Who were you?

**Elena.** Nobody.

**Marina.** Then why did you bother coming?

**Elena.** I'm feeling down... Got the courage...

**Marina.** Come in.

**Elena.** I'll stand quietly. Please forgive me generously.

*Elena**bowed her head before the portrait.*

**Marina** (*distressfully*). Why is this, when adversity has passed? You became financially stable, and your daughter returned home. I was idolised by him from childhood. He is easy-going and non-confrontational. He stuck to the rule: sorting things out is a futile endeavour. And here he was, embarking on crazy adventures and fights. He was the instigator of the fight. At the bus stop, there is a dignified, imposing passenger. An interior designer. Suddenly, Vadim tugged at his beard.

**Elena.** Tugging at a stranger?

**Marina.** Yes. Tickled him under the chin.

**Elena.** That doesn't sound like Vadim Anatolyevich.

**Marina.** He definitely did that.

**Elena.** A fatal combination of circumstances.

**Marina.** A coincidence is not a coincidence – there's nothing to hide.

**Elena.** That kind of thing gets you punched in the face.

**Marina.** Please do not interrupt. He mistook him for a drunkard and pushed him aside slightly. The bus was stuck somewhere, and Vadim tugged at the architect again.

**Elena.** No further to go!

**Marina.** He hit Vadim on the ear. A brawl. The brave began to separate them. Vadim's ear is bleeding, and the beard man is bleeding from his nose. The investigator... Four little stars – a high rank?

**Elena.** Probably the captain.

**Marina.** The fish is called similarly - captain.

**Elena.** Fish?

**Marina.** I was frying it for Vadim.

**Elena.** What does fish have to do with it?

**Marina.** It has nothing to do with it. He tried to find out the background to the fistfight. He wrote a monograph entitled "Unmotivated Social Aggression." When he was sure that their collision was accidental, he was delighted. Our incident is a vivid example. To protect Vadim, she flirted, lifting her skirt higher... The police officer is strict. "If I don't stop playing games, he'll convince Vadim to punch me in the nose." I changed my mind in an instant; the topic was exhausted.

**Elena** (*pleadingly*). Final?

**Marina.** Settlement agreement. Vadim donated three hundred euros. The beard man was satisfied. He worked intermittently.

**Elena.** A story with geography!

**Marina.** A flirtatious girl appeared on the horizon with a bottle and a request to beat her up again. Just a little, for show, with the aim of getting another three hundred. Specialist in mathematical modelling. Ozone holes caused panic... I realised: she had fallen for Vadim. She wasn't presentable... (*Looks at Elena*.) Like you. She didn't overcharge for her services. Scared away.

**Elena** (*gloomily*). I understand. He didn't love you.

**Marina** (*indignantly*). What nonsense is this?

**Elena.** There was always a feeling.

**Marina** (*defensively*). You're daring me... I have been married to Vadim for a quarter of a century.

**Elena.** About myself, in passing.

**Marina.** Are you married?

**Elena.** No.

**Marina.** Besides, you're single. He slept with me with pleasure.

**Elena.** They have their own specifics...

**Marina.** Specifics are irrelevant.

**Elena.** They're not averse to anyone who spreads their legs.

**Marina.** The absurdity lies in the fact that it does not work for anything...

**Daughter.** The eloquent speech of two charming ladies. (*to Elena, with a hint of sarcasm*.) How do you know that?

**Elena.** I read it...

**Daughter.** One read isn't enough.

**Elena.** Ideally...

**Marina.** In practice, the opposite is true.

**Daughter.** Bet on one, and in return get a fiasco. Unrealistic expectations.

**Elena.** Scientifically speaking, "frustration."

**Marina.** The planet is ruled by rampant frustration.

**Daughter** (to *Elena*). Erudition is tested through exercises...

**Elena.** Such a sly one. (to *Marina*.) You're just a silly girl...

**Marina** (*haughtily*). No more stupid than you.

**Elena.** This is not a story about intelligence.

**Marina.** I am a teacher.

**Elena.** About the absurdity of life.

**Marina.** Get yourself a spouse. Your wisdom will be visible to the blind.

**Elena.** A basic sense... in its infancy.

**Marina.** Are you here for Vadim's memory or for posthumous notes?

**Elena.** We are colleagues. The invisible threads of mutual understanding. We met. No continuation... Rejected. I was daydreaming about our love. I am refined...

**Daughter.** You don’t say!

**Elena.** The slightest nuances of his intonation were clear. Out of place on this earth.

**Marina** (*furiously*). Stop it immediately!

Petrova appears with the Boy.

**Petrova** (*heart-rending*). Does Trofimov live here?

Marina, Elena, and Daughterstare unkindly at the woman who has entered.

**Marina.** Yes, here.

**Petrova** (noticing Vadim's photograph, incoherently). I serve at the border, at the airport...

**Daughter.** Not give a crap.

**Marina.** Yes, not give a crap.

**Petrova.** He travelled abroad, documents with corrections. I've been asked to sort something out... (Approaching the photograph with the Boy.) Have you had some bad luck?

**Marina.** Yes.

**Petrova.** Please do not consider this tactless.

Hurries away with the Boy.

Three women watch her leave, looking confused.

**Marina.** A strange border guard...

**Elena.** In a particular dress. Abandoned over the border.

**Marina.** With a little boy...

**Elena.** Slender, elegant, with a shapely bust...

**Daughter.** Unexpected joy.

*Pause. Marina and Elena look anxiously at the Daughter.*

**Elena** (*dismally*). Will I remain... an untouched maiden?

**Marina** (*speaking informally*). You... never?

**Elena.** I was searching for someone who was right for me.

**Marina.** Those who are searching are like a cloud.

**Daughter.** Yes, it rarely works well.

**Marina** (to *Daughter*). A pedantic know-it-all?

**Daughter.** More competent than you.

**Marina.** Sometimes it's cosy.

**Elena.** I can imagine. Imaginatively.

**Marina.** Submissive, assertive...

**Elena.** There were many Jacks among the maids...

**Marina.** None of them matched up?

**Elena.** The lot did not fall to me. I have been punished. By their absence.

**Daughter** (*trenchantly*). Castles in the air... with Vadik?

**Elena.** Yes, with him.

**Daughter.** It's time to find a replacement.

**Elena** (*gloomily*). I'm sick of fluttering around like a virgin.

**Daughter** (*with schadenfreude*). A desire for transformation? Want a prince?

**Elena.** Let's make a pair.

**Marina.** Those who wish to... come on in.

**Daughter.** You are different. Refined...

**Marina.** White bone.

**Daughter.** No wonder there were no hussars.

**Elena.** Do you think so?

**Marina.** What attracted you to Vadim?

**Daughter.**  This is madness. You can't go on forever. A long, drawn-out process.

**Elena** (*adjusting herself*). Captive of love... (*Pause*.) Notes not ready?

**Marina.** No.

**Daughter.** Mum, who came home first?

**Marina.** I did. No, you did.

**Daughter.** Yes, I did.

**Marina.** Why do you ask? You were scared, you cried. The ambulance and police arrived.

**Daughter.** You concealed it.

**Marina.** Concealed?

**Daughter.** Yes.

**Marina** (*complainingly*). What then? I implore you!

**Daughter.** Dad's note.

**Marina.** Where is it?

**Daughter.** I have it.

**Marina.** You didn't destroy it? Is it long?

**Daughter.** Short.

**Marina.** You're not lying, are you?

**Daughter.** No.

**Marina** (*inopportunely*). There was no reason to despair. I will preserve his image until the end of time... A certain young man was showing increased attention. We went to the theatre. Timid kisses... Suddenly it dawned on me - a worthless betrayal. Sexual desires under control.

**Elena** (*floored*). Have you avoided getting carried away?

**Marina.** Can you show me the note?

**Daughter.** It's for both of us.

**Marina.** When will you give it to me?

**Daughter.** When you calm down.

**Marina.** I am calm.

**Daughter.** Not entirely.

**Marina.** I've calmed down.

**Daughter.** It is addressed to you. But for both of us. Dad's will.

**Marina.** Why did you delay?

**Daughter.** I was waiting for the fortieth day. I tried to understand...

**Marina.** Is it clear now?

**Daughter.** No, it's a tangled mess.

**Marina** (*with foam at the mouth*). Not now.

**Elena.** No, no, follow the fresh tracks.

**Daughter.** You weren't asked.

**Elena.** What if you need support? A comforting word.

**Daughter.** You can't find in daylight even with a flashlight.

**Elena.** A great multitude. They are pronounced sparingly.

**Daughter.** Whatever for!

**Marina.** Yes, we'll manage.

**Elena.** Don't reject it outright.

**Daughter.** You came to our house by accident.

**Elena.** We indulged in friendly reflection...

**Daughter** (to *Marina*). She's hunkering down.

**Elena.** Please wait until the note is displayed.

**Marina.** Let her be.

*The Daughter takes a note out of her pocket and hands it to her mother. Marina retreats to a corner of the room, rereads it several times, and cries quietly.*

*Elena makes unsuccessful attempts to look inside, Marina dodges her.*

We hear Vadim reading "his" note.

**Vadim's voice.** Dear Marishka. Time will pass, and happiness will smile upon you. I would like to give some advice. You know where the money is. Second. I have never been unfaithful to you. I loved you. I remember every moment. And most importantly. Take care of our daughter. I love you both. Farewell. Your Vadim.

*Finally, Elena manages to glance at the note.*

**Elena.** It's not his handwriting!

**Marina.** Whose is it?

*Marina and Elena look suspiciously at the Daughter.*

**Daughter** (to *Elena*). When did you last see handwriting?

**Elena** (*obliquely*). It doesn't matter.

**Daughter.** It changes repeatedly throughout life.

**Elena.** Handwriting? Never.

**Marina.** It's changing. These aren't fingerprints.

**Daughter.** Not the iris.

**Marina** (*studying* the *note*). Request a graphologist's expert opinion? Irrefutable, it's his.

**Daughter.** Lost its outline.

**Elena.** To the point of being faceless.

**Marina.** Are you determining this offhand?

**Daughter.** Written under the influence of stress.

**Marina** (*grabbing onto an idea*). Stress distorts handwriting and biometric parameters.

**Daughter** (to *Elena*). You should cackle tirelessly!

*Elena**suddenly changes her mind.*

**Elena.** Indeed... A long period of time...

**Marina** (*showing the note*, *eagerly*). Have you come to your senses? Vadim's hand?

**Elena.** Yes, his hand.

**Marina.** Is the authenticity proven?

**Elena.** I'm also... under a lot of stress. The content is rewarding.

**Marina.** I will keep it forever.

**Elena.** His command.

**Marina.** Prayer for the night.

**Elena.** The text is beyond doubt.

**Marina.** As long as I live.

**Elena.** An exalted note.

**Daughter** (*with schadenfreude*). Hilarious! Two crazy, low-class women are fighting over a dead man.

**Elena** (*instructively*). Don't use vulgar language. I'm not a chicklet!

**Daughter.** Who are you then?

**Elena.** Candidate of Philological Sciences.

**Daughter.** Ha-ha! Candidate! Suffixes, prefixes. Deep kiss, suction. Made of glass, tin, or wood.

**Elena.** You're not some loose station girl.

**Daughter.** I don't care.

**Elena.** You are an intelligent girl, you are not from that world.

**Daughter.** She is also... a musician.

**Elena.** Besides, you are Vadim Anatolyevich's daughter.

**Daughter** (*changing her tone*). He hated me after seventh grade.

**Elena.** Who? Vadim?

**Daughter.** He's the one.

**Marina.** A complex, a quirk.

**Elena.** Didn't like you?!

**Daughter.** Yes, he despised me.

**Elena.** And before that?

**Daughter.** Loved with all heart and soul.

**Elena.** Unbelievable!

**Daughter.** All cut from the same cloth... First they bow and scrape...

**Elena.** Are you referring to fatherhood?

**Daughter** (*euphemistically*). To the rest too...

**Elena.** The father stands alone.

**Marina.** Did you love him?

**Elena.** Very much.

**Daughter.** Did he love you?

**Elena.**  Infinitely.

**Marina.** Fathers spoil their daughters more than mothers do.

**Elena** (*diffidently*). Take me with you.

**Marina.** With us?

**Elena.** Yes.

**Daughter.** With our family?

**Elena.** Well, to you place...

**Daughter.** That's all we needed!

**Marina.** There are two of us.

**Elena.** Take the third one. I will deliver provisions and take care of you.

**Daughter.** Would you like to live together?

**Elena.** No, I have my own flat. But we are permanently connected. A fleeting life in a slipshod manner.

**Daughter** (*with a hint*). Did the cups cause trouble?

**Elena** (*picking up the conversation*). Let me explain. Even the correlation between semantic changes and the processes of word formation. (*Marina**and Daughter**exchange glances*.)

**Marina** (*exhaustedly*). Where did the cup come from?

**Elena.** I never got to be a woman...

**Daughter.** There is still a glimmer of hope...

**Elena.** Relentless, merciless rock.

**Daughter.** I confirm – it's not too late.

Marina and Elena look sadly at the Daughter.

Dialogue between Marina and Elena – an attempt to overcome the rift. The Daughter intuitively adapts, intervenes with sarcasm, but cautiously.

**Elena.** I am in the grip of illusions...

**Daughter.** Division.

**Elena.** We are having an idyllic discussion. Not available to you.

**Daughter.** Idyllic. No way for us!

**Elena.** You are young. Young people are cruel to those close to them.

**Daughter.** What else?

**Elena.** I do not dispute the rights of the spouse.

**Daughter.** She is noble.

**Marina.** God, forgive me for the four innocents killed in my womb. They clung to life in agony! Don't be upset, dear. We'll find a groom. You will be a bride in a white dress. "Stunningly beautiful," they will say, "the bride."

**Daughter.** What if we don't meet that one?

**Marina.** We'll live together.

**Elena.** The three of us.

**Daughter.** A feminist commune?

**Marina.** Without any male individuals.

**Elena.** They balance. Without them, it's chilly.

**Marina.** Are you acting as their advocate?

**Elena.** Nature has been compromised. Incomplete set.

**Marina** (to *Daughter*). Are you sulking? Are you offended?

**Daughter.** You are unpleasant.

**Marina.** Your mother.

**Daughter.** You can't stomach children.

**Marina.** You are my flesh and blood.

**Daughter.** A vixen.

**Marina.** There is no one closer. You and me.

**Elena.** And me. I'll drop anchor in your harbour. Let us cherish responsiveness and mercy, and banish evil from our lives. I'm harmless. Lonely.

**Marina.** So are we.

**Elena.** Three's not a crowd. Without envy, without pretence.

**Daughter.** Your own problems are a dime a thousand.

**Elena.** I won't overload anyone or anything.

**Marina.** Someone is not shy about making loud promises.

**Elena.** Ladies, young ladies, girls. May I stay with you?

**Daughter** (to *Marina*). Annoying. What does she want?

**Elena.** Indivisibility.

**Daughter.** Persistent...

**Elena.** I studied diligently. I am not penny pincher. Easy outgoing.

**Marina.** Not bored of all the bragging yet?

**Elena.** I'm forcing myself on strangers. However, they are not entirely unrelated...

**Daughter.** You are strangers to us.

**Elena.** I am a student of Vadim Anatolyevich. I was sitting opposite him. He was the idol of the group. I made my eyes at him...

**Marina.** Which ones?

**Elena.** Different. I decided to take a bold step. I was shy, modest, and struggled to overcome my innate shyness. I don't judge girls who are uninhibited. To each their own style; it is inappropriate to impose a uniform code. (*Pause*.) I have put on an expressive blouse. I did not fasten the top two buttons... I even tried for the third one. Clearly an oversight, I have made the correction immediately. I pressed my body lightly against him in the doorway...

**Marina** (*disappointed*). Blouses, buttons... What's the point?

**Elena.** On the thorn... He wagged his finger.

**Marina.** You were a naughty girl.

**Elena.** An inch breaks no squares. The girls giggled. I wished I could melt into the ground... He relocated me. He wasn't married then.

**Daughter.** Back to square one.

**Marina.** The border guard flashed by like a shadow... (*Hugging the Daughter**with tears in her eyes.*) She brought the boy... What now? We'll find them. We have only one border. We'll warm them up and cuddle them. He will grow up to be a young man, a young man in a woman's kingdom, spoiled and pampered.

**Daughter.** You're always daydreaming.

**Elena** (*with longing*). I want to hold a tiny, defenceless bundle close to my chest. I will feed him with my milk. Sweet and delicious, because I don't smoke. If my nipples crack, I will overcome the pain and not stop feeding. I'm afraid of loneliness. A flat, a car... but no little one. (*To the* *Daughter*.) Are you sure it's not too late?

**Daughter.** It's not over yet.

**Marina.** Twilight. They sneak up quietly.

**Daughter.** I will help you raise your daughter.

**Elena.** Not a boy?

**Daughter.** He cannot be bound with chains.

**Marina.** He has bought a brush.

**Elena.** Single mother? In French, "single mother."

**Marina.** Languages have their own nuances.

**Elena.** In Russian, it is an unspeakable word. Why is she alone if she has a child with her?

**Marina.** Child of love.

**Elena.** In the old days, they used to say, "She developed a paunch."

**Marina.** Or the wind blew it.

**Daughter.** The slang term "knocked up" is popular.

**Elena.** The forms are far from graceful.

**Marina.** They symbolise the triumph of motherhood.

**Elena.** The herald trumpets at the crossroads of the capital city.

**Marina.** Essentially, it was a stroke of good fortune.

**Elena.** I would erect a monument to single mothers.

**Marina.** Illegitimate children are responsible for their parents.

**Elena.** I used to hang out with boys. Children's squabbles over toys. I appeal to your generosity.

**Marina.** Tolerance, compassion. Did you hang sweets on the Christmas tree?

**Elena.** An essential decoration. A prank – stealing a sweet and not breaking the fragile Christmas tree decorations. We filched them when the adults weren't in the room.

**Marina.** Balls, tinsel, garlands. The smell of pine needles...

**Elena.** Mandarins. Waiting for Santa Claus with presents.

**Marina.** Decorating a Christmas tree requires skill. The toys are hung evenly along the front of the lush branches. For added beauty.

**Elena.** Now more sweets now. Rubbish, crap. The sea pebbles and citron are gone.

**Daughter.** In the middle of summer, talking about the Christmas tree.

**Marina** (*suddenly burst into tears, cried out*). My husband, my beloved, where are you? I'm alone without you. Where are you? Take me with you.

*Elena and the Daughter hugged Marina.*

Popyan enters, addresses Marina.

**Popyan.** I am Robert Popyan. We studied together on the course. I heard about the tragedy... When we were students, Vadik gave me a coat. Cold winters. I was poor and freezing. A warm quilted coat... A vacuum in my stomach. He supported me with his scholarship. In the recesses of memory, the smallest details. I trade sugar... Please accept my sincere condolences. (*Seems out of place*.) I ran into a friend from university. I nodded to him. He turned away. The abominable transformation of people. (*Taking an envelope out of his pocket.*) With your permission... I would like to request the sum of...

**Marina.** Vadik was talking about you. Thank you.

Popyan placed the envelope on the table and bowed before the portrait of Vadim.

The Conductor appears with the Violinist and the Doctor. They stand near Popyan.

Someone of Vadim's old friends, probably Valery, nodded to Marina from a distance and stood behind the others.

*Silently, on tiptoe, the study group enters. The 1st female student crosses herself.*

**Marina.** The cactus bloomed repeatedly throughout the season. It shed lush, dense pods. Sent an encrypted message? Intend to prevent and avert? It has grown into a dense bush.

"... I like children around in a house

And I like to hear them cry at night."

A Young mum with a baby appears. With maternal pride, she frees her breast and gives it to the Baby. Singing a lullaby.

**Daughter.** Alone. Abandoned. I remember everything when I started walking. A playpen lined with cushions. Heating compresses. They treated me with folk remedies, without giving me any medication. They wrapped an oil towel around the body – the back and chest. I whimpered, he picked me up, rocked me, and I fell asleep. When I grew up, they used cupping therapy for coughs and inflammation. It followed the established ritual. Cups, Vaseline, matches, denatured alcohol. Dad gently rubbed Vaseline on my back. He wound cotton wool around a stick with a piece of string. Wet with denatured alcohol. I lay there, holding her breath, waiting for the flames. Dad, how will we manage without you? Who will protect us?

The Violinist comes forward. She performs Brahms' Scherzo in E minor with temperament and inspiration.

(*Raising her hands to the heavens.*) God, if you exist, open the gates of heaven to my dear and beloved father. Take him in your arms.

THE END