

# **DOLLS**

A Play in Six Scenes

by

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Translated from the Russian

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**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** — a gray-haired, gray-bearded man in glasses, 75

**NATASHA** — a brunette, 25

**LEO** (voice from an iPhone)

**LINE**

**SHNOBEL**

**SAMARA**

**ROMA**

**ALEX**

**WAITRESS**

**LIEUTENANT**

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

**AUERBACH**

**SWAT (8)**

# I. REHEARSAL

*On stage—an imitation of an intimate theatre auditorium: a low half-amphitheatre of seats arranged in the shape of a sideways C, its open side facing the real auditorium.*

*The imaginary auditorium is split in two by an aisle with steps, ending in a door right upstage, against the back wall of the real stage.*

*At the centre of the half-amphitheatre is a pseudo-stage where the action takes place. The real auditorium is thus positioned as if behind the back wall of the depicted stage of a puppet theatre—or, if you like, in a kind of theatrical looking-glass world.*

*And so, the curtain rises, and the audience sees Afrikan Fyodorovich moving slowly across the small stage in a wheelchair. He rolls up to a coffee table at the edge of the small stage. On the table stands a fairly large, upright black speaker.*

*The Director rummages in his inside pocket, takes out an iPhone, searches for something in it and finally finds it.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Just a second, dear. Hold on.

**NATASHA** *(from the wings)*

Yes, Afrikan Fyodorovich.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Look: I'll feed the music into the speaker and you come out at once, strutting like a peahen. We'll look at the pelt and listen to what our Beethoven has produced for the stargazer.

**NATASHA** *(from the wings)*

Ready, Afrikan Fyodorovich.

*Afrikan Fyodorovich, reaching toward the table, switches on the speaker on the table, then taps something on the iPhone with his index finger, and a strange, unhurried music pours from the speaker, with hints of decorative Russianness.*

*Afrikan Fyodorovich rolls away from the coffee table toward the edge of the stage and, stroking his beard, looks expectantly toward the centre.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** *(impatient, sharp)*

All right. Go. Quickly. I mean—slowly.

*To the music, Afrikan Fyodorovich begins to declaim in a rocking, lulling cadence, in the voice of an old storyteller:*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*fairy-tale-like*)

Homeward bound at last, returning

With his army, battle-earning,

And the maiden young and bright,

Home Dadon rode, proud in might.

*To the declaimed verse and the sound of the music pouring from the portable speaker, a female figure glides smoothly in from the left wing.*

*She is dressed in a rather bulky stage costume: a brocade robe, covering her from neck to floor, painted like a folk-print old Russian tower-house, crowned with an onion dome and a spire topped by a Golden Cockerel.*

*The “dome” of the tower-house is the actress’s head, set in an elaborate traditional headdress. On her right arm, up to the elbow, she wears a glove puppet of King Dadon.*

*In her left hand, like a shield, the actress holds a fairly large plywood chariot; attached behind it is the chariot’s accompanying notional cardboard army, bristling with cardboard spears, helmets, and shields. She holds King Dadon in such a way that he sits in the chariot as if behind a screen: in other words, with both hands the actress animates King Dadon moving forward in his chariot with the army escorting him.*

*The movement of the actress’s legs is concealed by the long brocade hem of the robe, embroidered with red bricks, and so the impression is created that the tower-house figure seems to drift slowly out of the wing and onto the stage.*

**NATASHA** (*gliding onstage, rocking the chariot with King Dadon seated in it, reads with the same intonation as Afrikan Fyodorovich*)

Before him rumour raced ahead,

Both the truth and falsehood spread.

By the city walls, the gate —

Crowd met them with clamour great.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*appraising her, rubbing his beard*)

And where’s the crowd? You know, that was a good entrance—and the little dress! Quite, quite a decent little dress, that... you know... Look—bravo, the workshop, bravo! Now—how about you drift to centre in front of me like a little swan, and then go on, go on—straight from the text.

*Having floated to the notional centre of the stage, the figure stops in front of Afrikan Fyodorovich and continues the text.*

**NATASHA** (*fairy-tale-like*)

Everyone behind them, chasing

Chariot, King and Queen, all racing;

All Dadon salutes with cheer...

*Natasha lifts the King Dadon puppet above the chariot; the Dadon puppet, in turn, raises his hand and greets the notional crowd welcoming him.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*fairy-tale-like*)

When amid the crowd — right here:

In a Saracen cap of white,

Hoary as a swan in flight,

His old friend of former days,

The Eunuch...

*All of a sudden Afrikan Fyodorovich irritably cuts off the verse, explodes into a barrage of lines, and, shaking his head, wheels his chair back and forth in a fluster, spinning the wheels with his hands.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

No, I can't do it like this... The marionettes are hanging offstage. Where's the oak—what's it—where's the oak, damn it... No, you, you know... We're due to deliver in two months, Natasha... The festival... Is this a rehearsal? No re-spect! No respect for the verse, for our home theatre, and for your colleagues—me, I won't even mention, you know...

**NATASHA** (*cheerful, calm; fluttering her eyelashes and Dadon; rocking the chariot and the troops attached to it*)

Maybe it's not that terrible, Afrikan Fyodorovich? They'll be back by Thursday—only a week and a half. Let me play it like this for now, with an imaginary partner.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*irked; waves a hand*)

Respect! Where's the respect? I raised that bastard from a—(pinches his fingers together)—God forgive me, from a louse. He couldn't do anything, no-thing. And then—he just up and left.

**NATASHA** (*soothing*)

You shouldn't, Afrikan Fyodorovich... Priborsky asked him.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*fired up, extremely emotional; shaking his hands*)

A charlatan! Your fashionable Priborsky is a charlatan. He hasn't got theatre at all—some kind of Egyptian heresy, God forgive me. And we work for the children, Natasha. Do you understand?

**NATASHA**

I do, Afrikan Fyodorovich.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*heated*)

Yes! And there's nothing harder, nothing nobler, nothing more rewarding than working for the children—seeing their joy and hearing children's laughter. Do you understand, Natasha? Not this bacchanalia—what do you call it...

**NATASHA** (*a little tired; sighs*)

"The Reading," Afrikan Fyodorovich.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Right, yes, you know... Fine—to hell with it. Go back—try the tent. Go take off the tower, throw on the tent—and back onstage.

*NATASHA nods obediently and disappears into the wings; noise is heard from offstage. AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH takes the notebook resting on his knees and, flipping through it, begins to read.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*fairy-tale-like*)

The King howled: "Children mine!

Woe is me! Caught in the twine —

Both our falcons! Snared! Undone!

Woe! My death at last has come!"

All wailed out behind Dadon,

And there rose a grievous groan

Through the depths, through mountain hearts —

Trembled.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Ready, dear?

**NATASHA** (*from the wings*)

One second, Afrikan Fyodorovich—my zipper's stuck. (*Noise is heard.*) That's it—I've fixed it.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Go on.

*NATASHA darts in from the wings. Now, instead of the brocade tower-house with brickwork, she is wearing a sarafan embroidered with golden stars and crescents, reminiscent of a yurt, flaring sharply toward the floor. Her bare shoulders and a golden bodice are on display; on her head—a kind of Eastern turban.*

NATASHA flings the sarafan open with both hands, and the audience sees that underneath she is wearing fairy-tale brocade harem pants painted with a bed and other tent furnishings. On her feet are soft leather slippers with curled-up toes; her belly, from the bodice down to her hips, is bare and gleams with a ring in her navel.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*astonished*)

Was flung open... And the maiden,

Queen of Shamakhan, light-laden,

All aglow like break of dawn,

Softly greeted King Dadon.

Ah—bravo, the workshop!

*Natasha, smiling, looks at the Tsar puppet on her right hand and bows low to it. She goes on with the author's text in Afrikan Fyodorovich's stead.*

**NATASHA** (*holding the King puppet in front of her, fairy-tale-like*)

As before the queen of night,

King fell mute before her sight,

Gazing deep into her eyes —

King forgot his sons' demise.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*fairy-tale-like*)

She **smiled** at him and, gently bowing

Took his hand, her beauty showing

Not a word between them said —

To her silken tent she led

*On these words, NATASHA tucks the King puppet into her bosom, wraps the sarafan closed, and, bowing to the auditorium, exits into the wings.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*looking into the notebook, fairy-tale-like*)

There she sat him down to dine,

Fed him sweetmeats, mead and wine,

Laid him gently down to rest

On a bed in brocade dressed...

Hm. What's it... Natasha, here's the thing... You know, don't put the costumes on. Come as you are —we'll work on the text now.

**NATASHA** *(from the wings)*

All right, Afrikan Fyodorovich, I'll change quickly.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** *(absently looking at the notebook)*

Change, my dear. How's Varvara?

**NATASHA** *(from the wings)*

Varvara's silent.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

She'll talk.

**NATASHA** *(from the wings)*

The speech therapist keeps reassuring me, but I'm still worried. Not a sound, Afrikan Fyodorovich. Others—you can't shut them up. Maybe we should show her to someone else?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Nonsense. Roma was silent too—just watched—and then it was like something burst, What's it. And so fast—as if someone switched him on.

**NATASHA**

Oh, if only, Afrikan Fyodorovich.

*NATASHA comes onstage in black leggings that cling to her long, slender legs and lush hips; she wears a black sports top, her hair gathered into a bun. She stops in front of Afrikan Fyodorovich.*

**NATASHA**

And how's Roma, Afrikan Fyodorovich?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Roma's in Budapest—spoke an hour ago. Hardly calls at all. We chat on Telegram a couple of times a month.

**NATASHA**

But he's in Bratislava.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

He can't sit still. He's got crypto.

**NATASHA**

Crypto?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Crypto, What's it. No idea what kind of crypto it is. And such a talent... All right, let's you and me... You stand there, stand on your feet—this way you'll take it in faster.

**NATASHA**

I'm standing, Afrikan Fyodorovich.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

That's my clever girl. Now just read. No acting.

**NATASHA**

From the very beginning, Afrikan Fyodorovich?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

From there, my dear. Read the whole text—read Leo’s too. We’ll fill up with meanings, What’s it. Know it by heart?

**NATASHA**

I do, Afrikan Fyodorovich.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

All right. Here we go. Read to me, not to the house.

*Standing opposite Afrikan Fyodorovich, NATASHA begins to read the verse in a fairy-tale tone, smiling warmly and gesturing moderately with her hands.*

**NATASHA** (*fairy-tale-like*)

Somewhere, in a kingdom distant,

In a thrice-nine land, persistent,

Lived the glorious King Dadon.

Fierce and dreadful from youth on,

He would wrong his neighbours boldly,

Harm them, slight them, sharply, coldly;

But grown old, the King desired

Rest from wars that left him tired,

And to settle down in peace...

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*squinting, stroking his beard; cuts in and explains good-naturedly, choosing his words with care*)

Stop. The little verses seem so-so, right? A fairy tale, this and that... But! In these two quatrains, Natasha, Pushkin’s genius paradoxically lays out the entire nature of, hm, unitary interhuman relationships—the whole, What’s it, futility of a living person’s struggle for prey, the bustle of consuming what belongs to others—against, hm, the inevitable, equally human desire to live quietly through the remainder of the time allotted to him at the end, Natasha.

That is: the strong Tsar Dadon, hm, who spent his whole life eating the weak, in old age—losing strength—himself, hm, inevitably becomes weak and starts worrying a great deal that now they will begin consuming him in exactly the same way as he, hm, when he was strong, treated the weak his whole Dadon life. Are you following my thought, Natasha?

**NATASHA** (*smiling*)

I am, Afrikan Fyodorovich. Only that’s Leo’s text, actually. He reads it in the oak costume, and he operates the Tsar as a marionette.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*acidly*)

Are you trying to remind me of that? Are you saying I don't know whose line is where in my production? Is that what you're telling me right now? Did I understand you correctly? Did I hear you correctly, Natasha?

**NATASHA** (*at a loss*)

I just, Afrikan Fyodorovich... Leo's there...

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*cuts her off sharply; even more acid*)

I see, Natasha. So you—a twenty-five-year-old actress—want to explain to me—a seventy-five-year-old director—where in the show which actor has which line, which roles the actors play, which puppets they operate... Did I understand you correctly, Natasha? You want to explain my scenography to me, yes? (*Barks.*) Yes or no?

**NATASHA** (*eyes down, quietly*)

No, Afrikan Fyodorovich. Forgive me, Afrikan Fyodorovich... I...

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*covers his eyes with his hand; agitated, with a reproachful strain*)

No, this is simply astonishing. Fifty-five years, almost! For nearly fifty-five years I've been staging puppet theatre for children, Natasha. I've seen everything and worked with everyone, but for the backbone of a production to have gone off two months before the premiere on tour with a commercial show... For a young actress who's barely been here, whom I am simply asking to read me Pushkin's text and calmly listen to my notes on its semantic content, to point out to me whose role is whose? And you, Natasha! From you I did not expect that—absolutely did not. I did not expect it at all.

*Afrikan Fyodorovich reproachfully shakes his bowed head.*

**NATASHA** (*starts to sniffle*)

What are you doing, Afrikan Fyodorovich... I'm with you like I'm with my own father, honestly... I never even thought of offending you, showing disrespect and all that. I just remembered Leo—about the oak and—

*Natasha hides her face in her hands and keeps sniffing.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*bitterly, looking at the floor; his eyes covered with his hand, as if not hearing her sniffles*)

I didn't expect it, Natasha. From you—absolutely... You know, everything good in life begins with respect. Remember that, please. Not for me—remember it for yourself, and for Varvara...

**NATASHA** (*breaks into loud sobs*)

Why are you doing this, Afrikan Fyodorovich... Please forgive me, Afrikan Fyodorovich...

*Natasha cries bitterly, because she's got a fresh bout of PMS; Varvara has been silent for the third year running; and in general life has had a crack in it from the very beginning—plus this old putz on top of everything.*

*Afrikan Fyodorovich, seeing that the actress has been successfully brought to tears, immediately turns kind. He speaks gently, with concern.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*gently, fatherly; turning the chair wheels with his hands, he carefully circles Natasha in the chair*)

Well, there we are—it's already started to run... Natasha, why are you crying over such trifles? Just think for yourself: the lead actor has gone off two months before the premiere with other people abroad; the lead actress, instead of listening carefully and carrying out the director's instructions, is telling him who has which text. Come on—dry your eyes. Tears have no place at rehearsal; your profession is for the strong of spirit.

**NATASHA** (*sniffling, crying*)  
I'm not crying, Afrikan Fyodorovich.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*fatherly; cautiously patting Natasha's knee*)  
How can you not be crying, Natasha, when tears are running out of your eyes? Come on, come on—stop it.

**NATASHA** (*sniffling; wipes her eyes with her hand*)  
I'm all right now, Afrikan Fyodorovich. Sorry.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*nods with satisfaction; smiles good-naturedly*)  
Good. Let's go. Read on. From the words: "And to make himself some peace."

*Natasha nods obediently, still sniffing, and begins to declaim with a stage anxiety in her voice.*

**NATASHA** (fairy-tale-like)

And to settle down in peace.

But his neighbours would not cease

Plaguing now the agèd King,

Dealing harm on everything

To defend his realm's far reaches,

Guard against their border breaches,

He was forced to keep in pay

Countless warriors, vast array.

All his captains never slumbered,

Yet their failures went unnumbered:

Watch the south, and look — alack!

From the east — a new attack!

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*stroking his beard, choosing his words with care*)  
Uh-huh, uh-huh. Wait—I'll tell you. Here, Natasha, my dear, the classic—through the prism of an aging ruler's anxieties, craving not only peace but also, hm, the preservation of his position as an

unchangeable, hm, status quo, What's it—reflects the dynamic curve of the development of human civilization, evolving, hm, exclusively in a state of permanent war. That is: in a state of constant redistribution of property through managed violence. Do you understand, Natasha?

**NATASHA** (*calmed down, cheerful*)

I think I understand, Afrikan Fyodorovich. Only the foreign bit about preserving positions—I didn't quite get that. Was that French?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

What French? (*smirks*) Oh—you mean status quo? Natasha, that's a Latinism, What's it. Literally from Latin: "the existing state of affairs."

*Suddenly the distinctive iPhone ringtone sounds. Afrikan Fyodorovich reacts with a marked note of displeasure:*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Why isn't your phone switched off at rehearsal?

**NATASHA** (*apologetic, making excuses*)

Sorry, Afrikan Fyodorovich—I'm waiting about Varvara. They promised to get her into an experimental program. The waiting list is a year, but they promised to fast-track her for me.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*good-naturedly*)

All right. Answer, Natasha.

*NATASHA pulls the ringing iPhone out of the back pocket of her leggings and looks at it.*

**NATASHA**

Oh, Afrikan Fyodorovich—it's Leo on Telegram. Should I decline it, then?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*irritated*)

Answer. We've been interrupted anyway. And ask him while you're at it—when he's going to deign to show up.

*NATASHA holds the phone in front of her and switches on speaker. A clearly drunken voice comes from the iPhone speaker:*

**LEO (VOICE FROM THE IPHONE)**

Nata! Is that you, Nata?

*NATASHA holds the iPhone in front of her, looks at it, and answers.*

**NATASHA** (*cheerful, looking at the phone*)

Leo! Are you at the seaside or what?

**LEO (VOICE FROM THE IPHONE)** (*excited*)

We're pounding it at a lake right now—so beautiful, Nata! Anyway—we took the Grand Prix! We wiped the floor with everyone, Nata! Victory, Nata!

*Afrikan Fyodorovich, sitting in his chair, shakes his head and waves a hand.*

**NATASHA** (*joyful*)

Oh, Leo, congratulations! Listen—I'm at rehearsal with Afrikan Fyodorovich, and he's asking when you're coming to the theatre.

**LEO (VOICE FROM THE IPHONE)** (*cheerful*)

Ha-ha-ha—send Gandalf my regards from Finland! Tell him: day after tomorrow evening I'm in St. Petersburg, and Monday I'm at rehearsal.

**NATASHA** (*flustered*)

Leo, come on... We're on speaker—Afrikan Fyodorovich is right here next to me...

**LEO (VOICE FROM THE IPHONE)** (*cheerful*)

So what? With all respect to the maestro, I'll bring Finnish vodka as a gift. Afrikan Fyodorovich, greetings! Fyodor Afrikanovich, I mean—Afrikan Fyodorovich—don't worry, I'll play our oak better than the real thing.

*NATASHA walks up to Afrikan Fyodorovich with the iPhone, squats down in front of him, and turns the screen with Leo's face toward the director to improve communication.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*looking into the phone; good-natured but solid, with a hint of instruction; loudly*)

Well then—congratulations on the win, pupil. Get back sooner. You know the whole production rests on you.

**LEO (VOICE FROM THE IPHONE)**

Locked in, Afrikan Fyodorovich! Monday—like a bayonet—to rehearsal at eleven...

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*raises his right index finger, wags it; says firmly*)

Nine thirty, Leo. Be so kind as to be there Monday.

**LEO (VOICE FROM THE IPHONE)**

Yeah, I got it. All right—the meat's ready here. When I'm back, I'll tell you. Hugs to everyone.

**NATASHA**

Leo hung up, Afrikan Fyodorovich.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Fine. Let's go on with the text. From where we left off.

**NATASHA** (*fairy-tale-like, anxiously*)

Rout them here — bold raiders, fearless,

Coming from the sea...

## II. INVASION

*The door leading into the auditorium crashes open. It is set at the end of the aisle that splits the imaginary audience seating built onstage exactly in two—dead centre on the real upstage wall. And so, that very door crashes open and three people spill into the aisle: first a wiry, quick, skinny man, and after him—two women.*

**SHNOBEL** (*shouting*)

We're fucked, shit. We need the doors! The doors—what with? Huh? Line, what do we jam the doors with?

**LINE**

Fuck knows with what. Samara, what do we jam the doors with?

**SAMARA**

How the hell would I know what to jam the doors with? What am I, your locksmith?

**SHNOBEL**

So what do we jam the doors with? Oh shit... We're fucked. We're fucked.

*The man jerks his head around, spots a chair by the doors, grabs it and jams its back leg into the door handles, blocking the door. Someone immediately starts ramming the door from outside so hard it shudders and bucks.*

**SHNOBEL** (*toward the door*)

Stay put! Stay put, shit—I've got hostages! I'll fucking kill her! Girls—away from the door.

*The women obediently drop into seats on either side of the door. Shnobel, holding a pistol out in front of him, runs to the stage, jumps up onto it, shoves the wheelchair with Afrikan Fyodorovich; the chair and the director tip over onto their side. Shnobel then grabs Natasha by the hair and, pressing the muzzle to her head, drags her back toward the doors.*

**SHNOBEL**

Listen, you faggots! I've got a girl and an old man in here. You make a move—I'll do it. Verily I say, I'll do it. Freaks, shit.

**VOICE FROM BEHIND THE DOOR** (*over a megaphone*)

You bullshitting us, speed freak? Maybe you've got nobody there but your whores, and you're trying to screw with our heads right now?

**SHNOBEL** (*yanks Natasha by the hair*)

Go on—tell the cops.

**NATASHA** (*screams*)

A-a-ah! He's got a gun, he'll kill me! Help! A-a-a-a!

**SHNOBEL**

Heard that, faggots? Try anything—and I put one in her. You get it or not?

**VOICE FROM BEHIND THE DOOR** *(over a megaphone)*

Easy, young man, easy. We got it. Don't get hot. The old lady and the cashier were enough for you—don't kill anyone else. We can sort this out calmly.

**SHNOBEL** *(jittery)*

Sort out what? What old lady? What the hell are you on about?

**VOICE FROM BEHIND THE DOOR** *(over a megaphone)*

The one you ran over at the crossing, genius. And the cat. She had the cat in a carrier. What are your demands?

**SHNOBEL**

Demands? What demands? ...Oh. Demands. Get lost, all right—I need to catch my breath. There'll be demands, verily I say. Back off the entrance, I said, or I'll blow her fucking head off!

**VOICE FROM BEHIND THE DOOR** *(over a megaphone)*

Easy, easy. Think what you want, tell it to the negotiator. All right, we're backing off. You just stay calm. We're right across.

*Footsteps recede from the door. Police sirens are heard—patrol cars arriving at the scene of the emergency.*

**SHNOBEL** *(to the women)*

So what do we do?

**LINE**

Samara, what do we do?

**SAMARA**

How the hell would I know what we do? What am I, your planning department?

**SHNOBEL** *(to LINE)*

Why do you keep asking her? Your brains dried out?

**LINE**

Go to hell. You're the one asking shit twice.

**SAMARA**

Let go of her hair, Shnob. You'll tear the girl up.

*SHNOBEL obediently loosens his grip. NATASHA cries. Aiming at NATASHA, SHNOBEL points at the stage with the pistol, waves his other hand at the women seated on either side of the door, and all four move away from the door toward AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH, lying onstage beside the overturned wheelchair. They all climb onto the stage. They look around.*

*SHNOBEL squats and peers at the director on the floor.*

**SHNOBEL** *(jabs the barrel into the director's shoulder)*

Who the hell are you people, shit? Grandpa—are you alive or dead?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** *(groans)*

I don't know... What's it... Why are you...

**SHNOBEL** *(scratches his forehead with the gun)*

We were walking here... Come on, granddad—back on the throne.

*SHNOBEL sets the wheelchair back on its wheels, hauls AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH up under the arms and drops him back into it, then points the pistol at AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH and gestures to NATASHA.*

**SHNOBEL**

Quiet, granddad. The young lady stays put—right here.

*NATASHA obediently and quickly squats down beside AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH's wheelchair. LINE drags a fairly heavy canvas sack in her left hand; from a hole in it small metal change spills onto the floor in a thin, brassy trickle.*

**LINE** *(looks down, then at the sack in her hand; puzzled)*

Shit... It's got a hole. It's all spilled out...

**SAMARA**

What even is that? Line—why'd you grab alms? Should've grabbed booze, or—hell—I don't know—gum and condoms.

**LINE** *(holds the sack out, looking at it; coins keep trickling out)*

Shnob handed it to me—what, was I supposed to debate him? Like—Mr. Shnobel, could you explain the expediency of seizure, because I'm not entirely sure...

**SAMARA**

Could've told him to fuck off—end of story.

**SHNOBEL** *(jittery; keeping AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH and NATASHA covered)*

What the hell are you on about—what alms did I hand you? I didn't hand you anything. That never happened.

**LINE** *(stares at the sack in her outstretched hand)*

Am I making it up? You grabbed the bag from behind the counter after you smashed the cashier and shoved it at me. The till was empty, but the bag was sitting there full. You don't remember shit, you wreck. Look—right here. Says: for the Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in Repino.

**SHNOBEL** *(baffled, thrown)*

For a church? What do you mean, for a church? Where—what church?

*SHNOBEL takes the sack from LINE and reads it closely.*

**SHNOBEL**

“Contribution toward the construction of the Church of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker in Repino.” Well, shit... Woe is me! I didn't know, Lord—I didn't do it on purpose... Forgive me, Lord! Lord, save and keep us!

*SHNOBEL crosses himself three times with his right hand holding the pistol, the sack of loot in his left. Having crossed himself, he stands there, scratching his forehead with the gun. The women stand close by.*

**SHNOBEL** (*looks at the stage, then carefully sets the sack down at his feet*)

Oh Lordy, oh Lordy... Sinners, sinners we are—there is no forgiveness for us, for real... So what do we do? We need some demands for the cops... They want demands... Maybe we order a helicopter. And cash.

**SAMARA**

A helicopter's fine. We can fly to the Finns. Or the Swedes.

**SHNOBEL** (*perking up*)

Exactly! Ask for, like, Swedish political asylum. I heard about that on the news back when I was a kid. And a mil in green.

**LINE**

What's a mil in green from the Scandis? One mil's not enough—needs to be two at least. And what, Shnob, you know how to fly a helicopter? Didn't know you were such a talent.

**SHNOBEL** (*thrown*)

No. I mean—besides a car, I can ride a bike. That's about it.

**SAMARA** (*sarcastic*)

Then ask the cops for a bike. Ask for a tricycle. One wheel each.

**SHNOBEL** (*sarcastic*)

What wheel are you talking about? You're still riding the speed something fierce.

**SAMARA** (*rubs her face*)

Yeah. It's easing off pretty well by now.

**LINE**

Finland's actually fun by boat.

**SHNOBEL**

What, I'm supposed to ask the cops for a boat? What the fuck are you talking about, Line?

**LINE**

Fuck off. We should ask for a helicopter with autopilot—let it take us there and then get the fuck out.

**SHNOBEL**

Autopilot is when there's nobody at the controls and it flies by itself. Helicopters don't even have that. Ever. You idiot.

**LINE** (*snaps*)

You're the idiot. Can't take a joke.

**SHNOBEL**

Tell your jokes to your own smart ass. Hey, granddad—you, who the hell are you people? Speak up.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*hands up, stumbling over words*)

We... A show... For children... What's it...

**SHNOBEL** (*levels the gun at AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH, shouting*)

What? What the bloody hell are you on about? What show—what fucking kids?

**NATASHA** (*terrified, hands up*)

For little kids, from three and up. Please don't shoot. This is a children's puppet theatre—we were rehearsing. Pushkin.

**SHNOBEL** (*stunned, lowers the gun*)

Jesus... Pushkin? For little ones? Shit... We're fucked. Line, we... Shit...

How is that... For little ones... For wee little ones... Shit... Lord, save and keep us. (*crosses himself*) What a sin... Pushkin, for real. Oh man...

**SAMARA**

What do you care about "little ones"? Those "little ones" are plenty big. What, you on a guilt trip or what?

**LINE**

He's always on a guilt trip about sins, why're you asking? His dad's a priest.

**SHNOBEL** (*squats down by AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH's chair and NATASHA; the gun hanging toward the floor now; much calmer*)

Don't touch my father—blessed be his memory. What a sin it is, hurting wee children. Even the last beast won't touch wee children. Shit, a children's theatre... And us—what are we, then? Lord have mercy. (*crosses himself fervently; speaks with concern*) Don't be afraid, old father—we're not some total psychos. We understand about children. Lord have mercy. (*crosses himself*) What show is it, granddad?

*LINE and SAMARA, meanwhile, also settle onstage not far from AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH's chair. LINE sits on the floor, hugging her knees and rocking back and forth. SAMARA looks at LINE, squats for a moment, then lies on her back with her hands under her head and crosses one leg over the other.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*timid, wary of the criminals*)

We, you see... We're staging, so to speak... What's it... A cycle... Pushkin's fairy tales...

Today it's "The Golden Cockerel," but, you know, we've got... What's it... "The Golden Fish," and... What's it... Six pieces total, all together... If, of course, you don't... I mean—this is the anniversary year of the classic's death, so... A kind of... Well, a show, so to speak... A big one... What's it...

**LINE** (*rocking*)

Oooo! The Golden Fish! I had one swimming in my dorm aquarium. Remember first year, sweetheart? If you hadn't corrupted me, you monster, I'd be teaching literature to snot-nosed Russian brats now, like a proper little Line.

**SHNOBEL** (*mean*)

Who corrupted who? Who fucked an innocent young man on a lecture-hall desk? Who brought dope into the group? I hadn't even heard about speed and the girls back then. Now I'll remember every last bit of your "proper little Line," you bitch. Lord forgive me. (*crosses himself*)

*LINE laughs loud and rasping, still rocking with her knees hugged.*

**SAMARA** (*staring up into the stage ceiling, swinging her leg*)

Kids, don't fight. We're three-in-one. One peace, kids. One love, my golden ones.

**SHNOBEL**

Listen—you're not in Goa. I've got two bodies on me, and I've got to deal with these. (*jerks his head toward the hostages*) One peace... Cops everywhere... Oh man... We're fucked—proper fucked... Jesus!

*All of a sudden SHNOBEL covers his face with both hands and drops to his knees in front of AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH's wheelchair. The pistol is in one of his hands.*

**SHNOBEL**

How is this even... Oh... For the Church of Nicholas the Wonderworker... Pushkin... Wee children... Sinners, sinners we are... Verily, before the Lord we shall answer—He will forgive, for He is merciful. The main thing is to repent sincerely. Lord have mercy on us sinners. (*crosses himself with the gun*) Lord, save and keep us...

*Catching some movement in the wheelchair out of the corner of his eye, SHNOBEL—still on his knees—snaps the pistol up at AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH and yells. NATASHA throws herself flat on her back, covering her head with her hands.*

**SHNOBEL**

Stay put, shit—sit, bitch, I'll drop you right here! What, old man—want to eat a bullet? Sit still, I said—don't twitch your grabbers...

*NATASHA starts to sniffle and quietly cries. AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH slowly raises his hands.*

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** (*terrified*)

I... What's it... my nose... to scratch... See... What's it... I can't stand, I'm paralysed... lower... legs...

**NATASHA** (*lying there, through tears*)

Please don't kill us. My daughter is mute—two years now—how will she be alone without me... Please don't kill us, please... Please don't kill us...

**SAMARA**

Shnob, what are you snapping for? Look at them—what are they gonna do to us?

**NATASHA** (*crying*)

Please don't shoot, please, please...

**LINE**

Hey, sweetheart... Maybe you really tone it down, yeah? It's a theatre. Puppets. Wee children. It's a sin, right?

*SHNOBEL, still on his knees, rubs his forehead hard with the back of his hand. After a moment he lowers the pistol.*

**SHNOBEL** *(slow, hollow; looking at the floor)*  
Why are we here?

**SAMARA**

What, you don't remember or what? We did a fresh hit on Nevsky and went for a walk... I—

**LINE**

Samara, he's on a guilt trip again—about his sins.

**SHNOBEL** *(lifts his head, cuts in, covers his face with his hands)*

How did we come to this? Who the hell am I to shove a barrel in people's faces, huh? Jesus... Who the fuck am I? *(screams)* HUH???? WHO... AM... I????

*SHNOBEL snaps the gun back onto AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH. AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH tucks his head into his shoulders, shielding himself with his hands. NATASHA covers her head too and presses herself into the floor.*

*SHNOBEL lowers the gun again and, sharply changing his tone, speaks quietly:*

**SHNOBEL**

Granddad... don't hold it against us... we, What's it... You know... In the heat of it... You'll forgive us? You'll forgive us, I said? *(shouts)* What, you deaf too, granddad? You forgive us or not, you old stump?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** *(waving his hands)*

I... What are you—! I, What's it, of course...

**SHNOBEL**

Whisper louder—I can't hear.

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH** *(clears his throat)*

With the greatest joy... I forgive you—and Natasha will forgive you too... Right, Natasha?

**NATASHA** *(with enthusiasm)*

Of course, Afrikan Fyodorovich... I... Forgive us... I mean—sorry—we forgive you, of course... with all our hearts...

**SAMARA**

Afrikan Fyodorovich? What, are you Black, Granddad Afrikan?

**AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH**

Not at all, What's it... I'm Russian! My father was from the Old Believers, What's it... Maybe that's why.

**SHNOBEL** *(stares hard at NATASHA's face)*

Natasha? And what's your patronymic, Natasha?

**NATASHA** (*timidly*)

Nikolaevna. Natalia Nikolaevna.

*SHNOBEL walks up to NATASHA, squats in front of her, peers straight into her eyes, and starts mumbling, all tangled up.*

**SHNOBEL**

Well, we're fucked... Just like Pushkin's, proper... Natalia Nikolavna, forgive us—be magnanimous... It came out so awkward, for, you see, we've been tweaked since noon—no joke. Truth is, your profile looks a whole lot like hers... Natalia Nikolaevna, how can it—... Listen, can I fix your curl a bit?

*SHNOBEL gently strokes the trembling NATASHA's cheek with the gun barrel; with his other hand he gently adjusts her hair, then turns her head toward him by the chin and reaches for her with his lips.*

**LINE** (*indignant*)

What the hell are you doing, genius—have you completely lost it? We're right here, and you're pawing some random girl. What's Pushkin got to do with it, you horny bastard?

**SHNOBEL** (*pulls back from NATASHA's face*)

Easy, Christian woman. She looks like his woman—like two drops. We had her portrait at home, in the library.

**SAMARA**

My friend, put a lid on it. Achtung, achtung—this be a hostage. Cops outside are waiting for demands. God's little flower, shit.

**SHNOBEL** (*reluctantly tears himself away from the object of communication and gets to his feet*)

Stop the tram, for real. What's the big deal... I was just fixing a curl. She really looks like her—like in that portrait... No hard feelings, granddad... And you too, Miss Nikolaevna—forgive us... Today's kind of a bad day... The day's gone to hell...

*NATASHA sniffles and cries. SHNOBEL gets to his feet and starts pacing slowly back and forth.*

**SHNOBEL**

I need confession, girls... I can't take it now... I need to get to confession—urgent—'cause I've got sins piled up on my soul...

**LINE**

Oh great. Even better. Did you fall on your head today, sweetheart? Who are you gonna confess to—me, Samara? Or Natalia Nikolaevna?

**SAMARA**

If you confess to anyone, they'll drop dead on the spot.

**SHNOBEL** (*heated, carried away; walks faster and faster*)

Wait... My father taught me back in my youth—blessed be his memory: you do some stupid shit—like you smash a cat against a wall, or you eat too much jam. And your conscience switches on and starts eating you quiet, like the Spartan fox. So you—dash into God's church... Talk to the priest—

and that's it, you're kinged: officially forgiven by the Lord, your conscience goes off into the woods like it never existed, and inside it's clean, dry, and bright.

**SAMARA** (*concerned*)

What are you even saying, you poor thing? Drink some water.

**SHNOBEL** (*decisive*)

That's it, I've got our demands. We won't ask the Motherland for too much. Let the cops bring us a priest, two mil in green, and a helicopter to Sweden. We lighten the soul—and off to the Vikings. Yeah?

**LINE** (*sarcastic*)

Look at you. So what, we're hauling a priest with us to the Finns now?

**SHNOBEL**

Why the hell would we? They've got plenty of their own. He'll take confession, give communion—and back he goes to shepherd his flock. And we fly.

### III. SIEGE

*Downstage, set on a diagonal, is a white plywood minibus with its flashers on. In front of and behind the minibus, using it for cover, SWAT snipers in masks and camouflage are frozen in different poses, aiming toward the theatre building. There are six of them.*

*The theatre building, its entrance door shut, stands upstage. Near the entrance the silhouette of a boxy SUV with its doors flung open is visible. Beside it is a black plywood police car with its flashers on. Next to it stand plywood silhouettes of cops in uniform. Two real cops in plainclothes are also there. One of them is holding a megaphone.*

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*low, confiding to the other*)

My skull's about to split open to shit. Cold beer and a one-fifty—that's what I need, not this.

**LIEUTENANT** (*sympathetic*)

Celebrated yesterday, comrade Captain?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*hoarse*)

K-9 Handler Day, for fuck's sake.

**LIEUTENANT** (*sympathetic*)

You're involved, comrade Captain?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*resigned*)

Involved like you wouldn't believe... Dad and Mum and the mother-in-law are retired, and my wife's active-duty. K-9 handler. Or K-9... handleress? Whatever the feminine is now, I don't fucking know. Every year, every shitty year—barbecue, a few shots—and then it's Cerberus this, Cerberus that. And I get blackout drunk every time.

**LIEUTENANT**

My condolences, comrade Captain. There's a shot bar two steps away—you'd patch yourself up and that's it.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** ( *rubs his forehead*)

Can't, Lieutenant. Not now. Auerbach is already here, and next thing you know—the assault won't be far behind.

**LIEUTENANT**

Auerbach? Someone high-up, comrade Captain?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

A major from Centre B, for the fight against anti-terror.

**LIEUTENANT** ( *baffled*)

For the fight against anti-terror?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

Against terror, of course. If it were up to me, I'd drop these animals, no question. Hostages in a puppet theatre—inhuman bastards. In a children's puppet theatre, shit—hostages. I'm shaking, Lieutenant... Maybe I really should patch myself up? No. No. Not now.

**LIEUTENANT**

Cursed junkies, comrade Captain—what else is there to say? I wouldn't take that kind alive either. But you should still patch yourself up. Want me to run and bring it?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** ( *lights a cigarette, studies the lieutenant*)

You're a good lad, Lieutenant. All right—run. Just fast. (*He pulls a note from his inside pocket and hands it over.*) One-fifty of Stolichnaya—right in a plastic cup—and a litre of cola. Maybe a sandwich. And grab some mint gum too.

**LIEUTENANT** ( *takes the note, pockets it, glancing around*)

Two minutes, comrade Captain. All set.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** ( *sighs*)

Just so the others don't see it...

*The lieutenant carefully glances at the plywood cop cut-outs, nods, and exits briskly into the right wing. Immediately, a short, lean man enters briskly from the left. He has a moderately short haircut: neatly combed grey hair. He is wearing a dark grey coat; a tie is visible, suggesting a suit underneath. In his hands is a large radio. He approaches the captain from behind in silence, stops two steps away, and—so as to make his presence known—coughs twice, delicately, exactly two times.*

**AUERBACH** (*coughs into his fist*)

Ahem... Ahem...

*The captain jerks in alarm and drops the megaphone. When it hits the stage it crackles, squeals, and makes a few other hard-to-identify noises, which continue for a relatively short stretch of time—three seconds, maybe five.*

**CAPTAIN WITHOUT A MEGAPHONE** (*bends down to pick it up*)

Damn... Who's there?

**AUERBACH** (*peering at the captain*)

You sick, Captain? Major Auerbach, Centre B. Sorry—I can see I scared you. So. What've you got today?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*straightens up, wipes sweat off his forehead; speaks fast and crisp*)

Apologies, comrade Major—nerves. We've got a full-blown disaster: three terrorists, armed with a pistol—one man about thirty plus two women around the same age, presumably under the influence of methamphetamine. Speed freaks, basically. They've got two hostages: the puppet-theatre director and an actress. They were rehearsing. Thank God there wasn't a performance—otherwise the place would've been full of little kids. The criminals got into the theatre by accident, running from the police; before that they stole an SUV—there it is. (*points toward a vague dark silhouette of a vehicle near the theatre entrance*) They tried to rob a gas station, but the cash collectors had taken the day's takings shortly before. The cashier, a twenty-four-year-old woman, is in intensive care with a fractured skull. After that they ran over a seventy-nine-year-old woman at a pedestrian crossing—along with her cat, the bastards, ran them both over; she was carrying the cat to the vet in a basket. Both dead. Then from the police they ran here, ditched the car—then into the building. Locked themselves in from the inside. The man threatened to shoot the hostages, but we seem to have talked him down. (*raises the megaphone and gives it a significant little shake*) That's the situation, comrade Major.

**AUERBACH** (*thoughtfully*)

Yeah, I'm up to speed. Centre B already fed it through. Tell me this instead, Captain: what are their demands? Do they have any demands?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

Waiting for an answer, comrade Major. If you like, we'll find out right now. (*eagerly waves the megaphone*)

**AUERBACH** (*thoughtfully*)

Go on, then. Ask. I'll listen.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*loud, into the megaphone*)

Affirmative, comrade Major. Attention, attention, this is the police speaking. We urgently need your demands. I repeat: we urgently need your demands.

*At the same time, the senior lieutenant comes out of the right wing, balancing very carefully with a plastic cup full of vodka in his hand. In his other hand he carries a white plastic bag; inside it the reddish outline of a one-litre bottle of Coca-Cola can be made out, along with a few small bundles.*

*The lieutenant approaches the captain and the major uncertainly and stops behind them, having no idea where to put the cup of vodka. After hesitating and glancing around, he carefully sets the cup down on the asphalt under the minibus—by its rear wheel—and props the bag with the cola against that same wheel. Having completed these manoeuvres, the lieutenant takes his place beside the captain and the major.*

*Meanwhile the theatre's entrance door cracks open. NATASHA's crying head is pushed through, held by the hair in SHNOBEL's hand. His other hand presses a pistol to her temple. SHNOBEL's head appears above NATASHA's.*

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*into the megaphone, loud*)

Attention, citizen criminals: calm, calm. We are ready to hear your demands. Most important—do not harm the hostages.

**SHNOBEL**

Hey, cops—why are you so loud? Just do what you're told.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

Then say it, and we'll listen.

**SHNOBEL**

All right, here's how it is: within an hour there's an Orthodox in here, and with him a bag with two mil in green. Got it or not? Also need a helicopter—with a pilot and full tanks, enough to make it to the Swedes. And no jokes—my nerves are tight as a wire.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*extremely surprised*)

How much? What "Orthodox" now?

**SHNOBEL**

What, cop—you taking the piss? I said: get me a church priest in here in half an hour. And the bag on him with two mil in green, no matter what. Got it?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

Why do you need a priest? Where am I supposed to get you one right now?

**SHNOBEL**

Wherever you want—get him. I need a priest for the rites. We're stripping the sins off the soul before the road. Orthodox—proper Orthodox. Confession, communion—all that. Then he can fuck off, and we're up in the sky and to the Swedes. For political asylum. 'Cause you've got a bloody dictatorship and darkness here, basically.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*after a brief pause*)

We need time to discuss your demands. Main thing—don't touch people.

**SHNOBEL**

Discuss it, then. You've got an hour.

*SHNOBEL's and NATASHA's heads vanish from the crack of the door. The door rattles as it's shut back against the chair.*

*The captain lowers the megaphone and turns to AUERBACH. Noticing the lieutenant's presence, AUERBACH nods to him.*

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

You hear that, comrade Major?

**AUERBACH**

How could I not...

**LIEUTENANT** *(to AUERBACH, salutes)*

Sir, good day.

**AUERBACH** *(shakes the lieutenant's hand)*

Good to see you, Lieutenant. Well then... We're going in.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** *(wipes sweat off his forehead with shaking hands)*

And the hostages, comrade Major?

*AUERBACH squats by the minibus wheel, takes out his radio, turns it over thoughtfully in his hands, and sniffs the air, puzzled.*

**AUERBACH** *(sniffs the air)*

Hostages, hostages... Priest, so—chopper and two mil... Hostages, hostages...

**LIEUTENANT**

Cursed junkies—what can you take from them, sir.

**AUERBACH** *(thoughtful; sniffs again, looks around)*

We'll take everything from them, Lieutenant. To the last drop of blood. Hm. Why does it reek of booze here? Does that coffin of yours run on alcohol, or are you actually guzzling vodka right here, on my operation?

**LIEUTENANT** *(embarrassed, stumbling)*

Sir, that's probably me... An abscess of mine suddenly burst open, sir. On my left foot. I had to run to the nearby shot bar and buy a hundred grams of vodka for disinfection and decontamination of an open purulent wound.

*To prove what he's just said, the lieutenant takes several demonstrative steps in front of the senior officers, limping quite heavily on his right leg.*

**AUERBACH** *(looks at the lieutenant's right leg)*

Ah. Well then, of course... Bad abscess, Lieutenant? On the left foot?

**LIEUTENANT**

Thank you, sir. After disinfection I feel much better.

**AUERBACH** *(thoughtful)*

Then why are you limping on the right leg, Lieutenant, if your abscess is on the left?

**LIEUTENANT** (*thrown*)

A-ah—well, it's on the right, sir. Did I say left? Sorry—I must've misspoken.

**AUERBACH** (*reaches to the minibus wheel, pulls out the plastic cup of vodka, sniffs it*)

Who are you bullshitting, Lieutenant? That's not a hundred grams—that's a full two hundred. And I don't see it's gone down at all. Or you haven't treated the wound yet?

**LIEUTENANT**

Sir—

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*cuts him off*)

Major, here's the thing. I asked him to run. Had to hit it hard yesterday, and now I've got to come back to life, so... I'm shaking, see? (*wipes sweat off his forehead*) That's it... I asked him, basically. My fault, sir—you can file a report.

**AUERBACH** (*smirks, stands, hands the cup to the captain*)

Here. Hold your medicine. What report? I clocked you right away—I've got an eye for it. Go on, Captain, treat yourself. Lieutenant—well done. You'll go far.

**LIEUTENANT** (*cheerful*)

Thank you, sir.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** ( *rubs his forehead*)

Ah, Major... So I'll just... Yeah? I'm at the edge.

**AUERBACH**

Quick. We've got work to do. Time's running.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*hands the megaphone to the lieutenant*)

Lieutenant—hold this a second.

*The lieutenant takes the megaphone. The captain takes the plastic cup of vodka from AUERBACH's hand and downs it in one go, exhaling loudly and sharply, his Adam's apple bobbing, then noisily "chases" it by sniffing the inside bend of his elbow.*

*Meanwhile the lieutenant rushes to the minibus wheel and, lifting the cola bag with both hands, holds it out to the newly revived captain.*

**LIEUTENANT**

Captain, Captain—of course! Here—What's it—a cheeseburger! Have a bite, Captain!

*Clearly buoyed, the captain makes a sharp negative gesture with his hand, pulls a red pack of Marlboro from his pocket, takes out a cigarette, and lights it with relish.*

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*takes the megaphone back from the lieutenant, first crumpling the plastic cup and dropping it by his feet*)

Stand down, Lieutenant. We'll eat later.

**AUERBACH**

Patched yourself up?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*smokes with relish*)

Seems like it.

**AUERBACH** (*turns the radio in his hands*)

All right then. My people are Volga Germans—serious Baptists. My granddad was an elder of the congregation, dragged me to every meeting, so I've been wired into it since childhood. I can talk the talk. I'll pass for a pastor just fine. So you sell him me instead of the pop—say all the Orthodox priests refused to go into a theatre, and the only one who agreed was a Baptist. I go in with the cash and start talking them through it.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*shakes his head, takes a drag*)

Dangerous, Major.

**AUERBACH**

Got a better idea?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*drags, sighs*)

No, Major. No ideas. I'm a simple cop—I wasn't trained to plan.

**AUERBACH** (*thoughtful, scans the area*)

We'll train you now. Centre B will bring the cash. The question is—where do we put the chopper? It can set down on the square, in principle.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

You're gonna let them go, Major? With the money?

**AUERBACH** (*pulls a phone from inside his coat, puts it to his ear*)

Let them go? Count them already dead. Hello, Mit? Yeah—this is basically clear. I'm going inside soon to bullshit them, Alpha with the snipers goes in through the back entrance in parallel. We're not taking them alive, so the hostages don't get hurt—guaranteed. That's the plan. Listen, they want two mil and a chopper—to fly to Sweden. Can we produce the props? Yeah, it has to be two, so they believe it. Put it in a backpack—so my hands are free. And have the chopper land on the square, by the Lenin statue—there's plenty of space. No, without the chopper they won't buy it, I think. Yeah, SWAT's here—I rode in with them. Yeah, Mit, hold on—I'll call back.

*AUERBACH pockets the phone and turns to the captain.*

**AUERBACH**

Command signed off. So, Captain—let's think how you're going to present me as the pop.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** (*brisk*)

I'll probably say: the priests all refused, but a pastor agreed—and that's it. He's not going to check.

**AUERBACH** ( *rubs his temples*)

No. Too simple, Captain. Not like that. Not like that. Now... Here's your legend: the nearby Orthodox churches are closed, and the ones that are open have evening services on—every priest is busy. The only free one is the pastor of the Baptist church "Little Spring" in the neighbouring shopping-office centre—his service has just ended. You tell him: if he wants a strictly Orthodox one, he'll have to wait till night, and even then it's not a given anyone agrees. But a Baptist—he's here, on hand, right now.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

Why “Little Spring,” Major?

**AUERBACH**

That was the name of the congregation my granddad was elder of. All right. Now call the bandits on your horn and try to explain the pastor. Tell them the helicopter and the dollars will be here in forty minutes. When the chopper sets down, we connect again and they have someone meet me. And why dollars, by the way? Why not euros? It’s Sweden.

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

Junkies, Major.

**AUERBACH**

So tell the junkies: only junkies take dollars to Sweden; decent sober people take euros to Sweden. They’ll believe you faster. Psychology. *(raises an index finger)* You talk?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE**

Talk right now?

**AUERBACH**

Why drag it out? Grab the devils by the horns and into the sun. Go on—try. They might refuse flat-out, who knows with junkies. Or do you need to rehearse the text?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** *(scratches the back of his head)*

Wouldn’t hurt to run it once. You be the terrorist, and I’ll practise?

**AUERBACH**

Sure. Start. Lieutenant—you’ll be the hostage. Get over here. Let’s model it.

*The LIEUTENANT steps up to AUERBACH. AUERBACH carefully hooks an arm around him from behind across the chest, and with the other hand presses the radio to his temple as a stand-in pistol.*

**LIEUTENANT** *(in a dramatic falsetto)*

Please save me from the terrorists!

**AUERBACH**

Where’s my pop, the chopper, and the money, you filthy cops?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** *(to AUERBACH, into the switched-off megaphone)*

Calm, calm. Don’t touch the hostage. The helicopter with the money is on the way, but the pop’s not simple.

**AUERBACH**

How is the pop “not simple”?

**CAPTAIN WITH A MEGAPHONE** *(into the switched-off megaphone)*

Evening services are on in the Orthodox churches—every priest is busy. You’d have to wait till night, and even then it’s not a given they agree. We managed to find you a Baptist pastor. A top-shelf pastor. From the Baptist church “Little Spring.” When he heard you took hostages in a children’s theatre and want to lighten your soul, he asked to come himself. How’s that, Major?

**AUERBACH** (*lets the lieutenant go, pats his shoulder*)

That's fine. That's right. Tell them that, then improvise. Just let me sync with SWAT first, then you call these devils on the horn. And don't forget to tell them: the chopper and the cash are forty minutes out. Lieutenant—you're a star. You should be in movies. Or acting onstage.

**LIEUTENANT** (*cheerful*)

Thank you, sir.

**AUERBACH** (*into the radio*)

Eighth, Eighth, come in. Auerbach calling. Come in.

## IV. RESCUE

*Same puppet-theatre mock-up as before. In the background, fairly loud, the rotor thump of a helicopter that has landed on the square. Downstage: the wheelchair with AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH. On either side of him, like a guard detail, LINE and SAMARA stand with their backs to the real auditorium. AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH, by contrast, faces the real auditorium. At the end of the aisle that splits the puppet amphitheatre in two, heads poking out through a half-open door leaf, half-perpendicular to the stage surface, are SHNOBEL and NATASHA. A pistol is pressed by SHNOBEL to the crown of NATASHA's head.*

**SHNOBEL**

Hey, Baptist—come in with your hands up. Come on, come on.

*SHNOBEL pulls his and NATASHA's heads back inside. In the doorway, hands raised, AUERBACH appears. Over his coat, on his back like a parachute, is a large khaki canvas rucksack.*

**AUERBACH**

Good afternoon. Pastor of the evangelical church "Little Spring." Nikolai Auerbach.

**SHNOBEL** (*pressing the pistol to NATASHA's head*)

Little Spring? First, Baptist, lock the door with the chair. And keep your hands where I can see them.

**AUERBACH**

Lock the door with a chair? How's that?

**SHNOBEL**

There—look—chair on the floor. You see it?

**AUERBACH** (*looks around*)

Yes. I see the chair.

**SHNOBEL**

You, Baptist—jam the chair leg into the door handles and lean on it, make it solid. Got it or not?

**AUERBACH**

Yes. Got it. Now.

*AUERBACH does what's required with the chair and checks the latch holds.*

**SHNOBEL**

Good job, Baptist. Now go forward. You see people on the stage? Go to them.

**AUERBACH**

Hands up?

**SHNOBEL**

What, Baptist—am I a Nazi? Just spread them out to the sides and walk.

*SHNOBEL and NATASHA, held by him, let AUERBACH pass ahead with his arms out. All of them move toward the figures on the pseudo-stage. SHNOBEL speaks toward the rucksack on AUERBACH's back.*

**SHNOBEL**

So, Baptist. Listen, Baptist—I'm Orthodox myself, sure, but if only a Baptist is available, what can you do. We're brothers in Christ, for real, right? My daddy was an archpriest—rector in Gatchina. I'm from Gatchina. Ever been, Baptist?

**AUERBACH**

No. Unfortunately, I haven't been to Gatchina.

**SHNOBEL** *(stops)*

All right, all right. Listen, Baptist—lower your hands now and put the rucksack right here by the granddad. Untie it so I can see what's in there.

*AUERBACH carefully takes the rucksack off, sets it beside the wheelchair, squats, and unties it. It becomes visible that the rucksack is packed with greenish bundles of cash.*

**SHNOBEL**

Baptist—hand me one brick.

**AUERBACH**

You mean—a bundle?

**SHNOBEL**

Exactly, Baptist. Hand me one bundle.

*AUERBACH hands SHNOBEL a bundle of cash.*

**SHNOBEL** *(takes it, looks it over)*

And why dollars, I don't get it? The cop said to the Swedes you need euros, but you still stacked dollars, look at that.

**AUERBACH**

I don't know anything about that. I was told to deliver you the rucksack and speak with you about saving the soul.

**SAMARA**

Dollars, euros—what's the fucking difference?

**LINE**

Two mil euros comes out higher on the rate.

**SAMARA**

On what rate?

**LINE**

How the hell should I know? They said it on TV. Go fuck yourself, you finance whiz.

*After these words, AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH's head drops sideways (left or right, at the discretion of the production). His glasses slide off and fall to the floor with a clatter.*

**SAMARA**

What's wrong with him, granddad? Granddad—what's wrong?

**LINE**

Samara, what's wrong with him?

**SAMARA**

How the hell would I know what's wrong with him? What am I, your Dr. House?

**NATASHA** *(covers her mouth with her hand)*

Afrikan Fyodorovich—oh God...

**SHNOBEL** *(comes up to the chair)*

What's going on here? What are you squealing for, you idiots?

**AUERBACH**

I think this man has lost consciousness. We should check his pulse.

*SHNOBEL leans in to AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH and pats his left cheek, then his right. AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH's head drops onto his chest.*

**SHNOBEL** *(thrown)*

Well, shit. Looks like granddad kicked it.

**NATASHA**

Afrikan Fyodorovich—oh God...

**AUERBACH**

May I check the pulse?

**SHNOBEL**

Check it, Baptist. Why are you asking?

*AUERBACH steps up to AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH's chair, puts two fingers to his jugular, waits a moment, then shakes his head.*

**AUERBACH**

No.

**NATASHA** (*crying*)

Afrikan Fyodorovich—oh God...

**SAMARA**

We've arrived.

**LINE**

We've left.

**NATASHA** (*crying*)

Afrikan Fyodorovich—oh God...

**AUERBACH**

I think it's a heart attack.

**SHNOBEL** (*irritated*)

Nah—more like a stroke, Baptist. My dad died like that—right in the cathedral on Christmas service.

Stood there, stood there—and down. Dropped dead right on the ambo. Stroke, God as my witness.

**AUERBACH**

The Lord's blessing is the chance to leave this earthly world in service to our Father. So take comfort, young man, for all who suffer shall abide in the Kingdom of Heaven.

**SHNOBEL** (*jittery*)

Been "taking comfort" a whole month. Listen, Baptist—get on with it, start absolving sins. We, What's it, need to fly. Hear the helicopter?

**AUERBACH**

A helicopter? Absolve sins?

**SHNOBEL**

Take confession. Let's do it right now, quick—'cause we've gotta move. (*nods toward the sound of rotor blades*)

**AUERBACH** (*calm*)

Confession is not practiced in our church, because we Baptists do not find biblical grounds for it and do not believe confession to a church minister is necessary for the Lord to forgive sin.

**SHNOBEL** (*stunned*)

The fuck are you, popster? Then what the hell did we need you for?

**AUERBACH** (*calm*)

I brought your money. But as a servant of the Lord I can only tell you: cleansing your soul of sins requires no one's direct involvement except your own. God Himself will forgive you through prayer.

**SHNOBEL** (*furious*)

Holy shit... You filthy cops... I said it from the start—get me a proper Orthodox. So what now, Baptist? How do we clean the sinful soul for the road?

**AUERBACH**

I can offer to pray together with you.

**SHNOBEL** (*suspicious*)

Pray? Girls—are you gonna get clean with me?

**SAMARA**

Hey, cleanser—go fuck yourself.

**LINE**

Yeah. That.

**SHNOBEL**

The Lord will judge you, sinners. All right, Baptist. All right—let's pray. Go on. Start.

*AUERBACH stands to the right of the chair. SHNOBEL stands to the left. The women watch in silence.*

**AUERBACH** (*folds his hands like a little boat*)

Repeat after me, young man. Our Father, who art in heaven!

**SHNOBEL** (*folds his hands—pistol included—like a little boat*)

Our Father, who art in heaven!

**AUERBACH**

Hallowed be Thy name!

**SHNOBEL**

Hallowed be my name!

**AUERBACH**

Thy Kingdom come!

**SHNOBEL**

My Kingdom come!

**AUERBACH**

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!

**SHNOBEL**

My will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...

*Three shots merge into one sound. SHNOBEL, and LINE and SAMARA, drop dead. Six SWAT in black rush on from the wings. NATASHA screams. AUERBACH darts to her and wraps an arm around her shoulders.*

**AUERBACH** (*holding NATASHA*)

That's it. That's it. It's all right. It's over, girl. Calm. Guys—we need an ambulance. One hostage croaked, looks like.

**ONE OF THE SWAT** *(into a radio)*

One-zero-zero to Kennel, come in. One-zero-zero to Kennel, over. Ambulance team to the entrance, urgent—hostage injured. Repeat: ambulance team here, hostage injured. Otherwise all clear.

**AUERBACH**

Check the bastards too. Good work, boys—smooth as butter. That’s it, girl—come on. We’re getting out.

*One of the SWAT rushes to AFRIKAN FYODOROVICH; three to SHNOBEL, LINE, and SAMARA.*

*AUERBACH, arm around the sobbing NATASHA’s shoulders, leads her toward the exit. Two SWAT sweep their muzzles around; four kneel over the bodies. AUERBACH pulls the chair leg out of the door handles. Then AUERBACH and the sobbing NATASHA go out through the open doors. The stage lights go out.*

## V. CRYPTO

*Onstage: five outdoor bar tables set under sun umbrellas. The tables belong to a beer house in the neighbouring building.*

*Behind four of them are plywood silhouettes of beer-house patrons, frozen in different poses with drinks in hand. It looks hot outside. At the central table two young men sit facing each other. One of them wears a surgical mask covering half his face; he also has mirrored sunglasses and a red NY Yankees cap. An open MacBook sits in front of him; he types intensely. His name is Alex. Opposite him sits a pretty, clean-shaven, neatly trimmed, slightly effeminate blond in shorts, turning his smiling head from side to side. This is Roma, Afrikan Fyodorovich’s son.*

*In the background: hungarian speech in varied intonations; cars passing; clinking beer glasses; cutlery tapping against ceramic and glass; city birds; and the rustle of leaves from nearby linden and maple trees—the ordinary sound texture of a Budapest early evening.*

**ROMA**

Sasha. Hey, Sasha?

**ALEX** *(eyes locked on the screen, fingers sliding on the trackpad)*

Yeah?

**ROMA**

Sasha—so? How’s it going?

**ALEX** *(all in the trading)*

How’s what going?

**ROMA**

How’s it going—there?

**ALEX** *(working)*

Where—there?

**ROMA**

Well—crypto.

**ALEX** (*working*)

It's going—just twisting.

**ROMA** (*turns his head from side to side, taps a rhythm on the table with his hands*)

Is that good? Maybe you'll at least look at me, Sasha?

*Alex doesn't answer. He stares at the monitor, keeps rubbing his fingers over the keyboard and trackpad. Meanwhile, between the tables with the plywood hungarians, a young waitress weaves through with a tray carrying two beers: one a dark stout, the other a pale weissbier. Smiling, the waitress comes up to the table, silently sets the dark beer in front of Roma and the pale one in front of Alex, absorbed in his work. Swaying her tight hips, she leaves.*

**ROMA** (*to the departing girl*)

Thanks, beauty.

*(He touches Alex's neck with his hand.)*

Sasha, are you even here? They brought the beer. Why aren't you answering, Sasha?

**ALEX** (*irritated, raises his voice, knocks Roma's hand off his neck*)

Don't touch me with your dirty hands. Can't stand it. Listen, there's a real pump on—I can't place orders fast enough. Sit quiet. Drink your beer in silence.

**ROMA** (*hurt*)

What's wrong with you? Get up on the wrong foot? Yesterday you weren't complaining about dirty hands.

**ALEX** (*extremely irritated, finger-skates the trackpad*)

I'm working. I'm making money. You're not working, you're not making money. And you're distracting me. Got it? Drink your beer. I don't know—suck on your vape. Don't get in the way.

**ROMA** (*hurt, almost crying, his lip twitching*)

What's with you, Sasha? Say it like a normal person—what am I, too stupid to understand? Why be a jerk? I was in such a mood...

*Suddenly an iPhone ringtone sounds. Roma jerks his hand into his shorts pocket, pulls out his iPhone, checks who's calling, and brings it to his ear.*

**ROMA** (*sniffs*)

Yeah, Dad—hi. What? Yeah, same as ever, working day and night. Things are going okay, okay, sehr gut. And you—how are you? Great, good for you. No idea about St. Petersburg—I'm not planning it yet. What? When's the premiere? I don't know, I won't promise—work, you know. I'll try, of course. Yeah, hugs back. Say hi to Natasha. Bye.

*Roma puts the iPhone on the table, takes his stout and drinks a sip, then pulls out a small square red vape and takes a few drags, blowing rings.*

**ROMA** (*blowing rings*)

Dad called.

**ALEX** *(stares at the laptop)*  
Huh?

**ROMA**  
My father called, I'm saying.

**ALEX** *(stares at the laptop)*  
So?

**ROMA**  
Nothing. He's got a premiere in two months—inviting me to St. Petersburg.

**ALEX** *(stares at the laptop)*  
So go. Go to your dad's premiere.

**ROMA** *(takes a sip)*  
I don't want to go anywhere without you. What are we doing tonight? Maybe "Alterego"?

*Alex suddenly breaks away from the laptop, shuts the lid, takes his weissbier and drinks a significant amount.*

**ALEX** *(sighs)*  
We need to talk.

**ROMA** *(drinks from his glass)*  
I've been saying that for ages. It's you who's been silent.

**ALEX**  
It's over.

**ROMA**  
What's over?

**ALEX**  
Everything. It's over. Today you pack your things and get out of my loft.

**ROMA** *(at a loss)*  
What are you saying, Sasha... Why? What—what even... What happened, Sasha?

**ALEX**  
I don't want to see you. No scenes, no talks. Just go.

**ROMA** *(hides his face in his hands)*  
Where?

*Alex reaches into his pocket, pulls out money, and puts it down in front of Roma.*

**ALEX**  
Here's five thousand euros. Take it and get the hell out wherever you want. Leave the key in the lobby with the guard. I'm not home tonight. I come back in the morning—you won't be here. Got it? I recommend you go to your dad's premiere. Arrivederci.

*Alex snaps up from the table, finishes his weissbier in one gulp, grabs the laptop, shoves it into his backpack, slaps the stunned Roma on the shoulder, and disappears into the dark right wing, weaving between the cardboard Hungarians.*

*Roma sits in silence for a while, then takes the money from the table, counts it, and puts it in his pocket. Then he finishes his dark stout, stands up, puts a banknote on the table, and, also weaving between the cardboard Hungarians, exits into the left wing.*

## VI. DREAM

*Centre stage: a small, square wooden kitchen table, dimly lit by a three-bulb chandelier. On the table: a half-empty bottle of Martini Rosso, an empty clear bottle of Smirnoff, and an empty faceted glass. At the table, on a chair, sits NATASHA. She is wearing a fluffy house bathrobe, because she is at home—in a rented two-room flat on the outskirts of St. Petersburg. NATASHA rustles a blister pack, tears it open, tosses one or two pills into her mouth, pours herself a full glass of a brown liquid, downs it in one gulp, grimaces, sets the glass on the table, and covers her face with her hands. She speaks tight, hoarse, half-whispering.*

### NATASHA

There. There you go. There... Why is she silent? Just one word. Just one... One shitty word... I'm dizzy... My head's spinning... Why does all this dirt land on me? Wh-y? Where do they come from, these vermin? Shit—millions in Petersburg—and they take you, of all people, as a hostage. There's something wrong with you. There's clearly something wrong with you. God... poor Gandalf... Afrikan Fyodorovich... Afrikan... Burned out... And what now with the work? I have to talk to Leo... Yeah. I have to talk to Leo—maybe to Moscow, to Priborski? But why the hell do you need him—there's a line.

Shit... *(looks at the blister)* Head in a fog... My head's about to melt and run off under the table. Fine. Let it run, then. Let the head run.

*NATASHA pours herself another half-glass and drinks it in one gulp.*

What a... still... what a vile... slop. Dirt... Couldn't Leo... couldn't he have grabbed a dry... Bianchi... at duty-free... No. But no. Had to drag exactly this... this broth... here... Bit-ter... shit... Com... compote... from... compost... Ugh...

*Then she staggers up from the table and starts pacing unevenly back and forth, stumbling in her sentences, tangling in the words.*

What... *(sobs)* What now... What... are you... silent... girl... my... This... that... damned bastard could've... at least a kopek... yeah, at least... at least... from his shitty trough... cruises, damn it... entertainer, you sooooo of a bitch... filthy... ppppig... How... how now... the flat... damn... Myself... my-self... Wi... wi... wine... cotton... my-self... I wouldn't... I wouldn't... have spread... my legs... on the first date... in summer... in the gaarden... in broad... day... But you... you always... always... care-ful... always... and then... all right... spread them, all right... everyone... everyone does... always... all right... everyone... but how... how... you... on the first... very first... date... Without... rubber... letting a strange... like that... Natalia... Nikolaevna... like...

the last... slut... only... for free... Stupid... stupid... stuffed... God... stupid... disgusting... Ah... I'm turning... all... I'm turning all... This... pills... fuck it...

*Staggering, NATASHA returns to the table, staggers again, drops onto the chair with a squeal. With trembling hands she grabs the vermouth bottle, pours some into the glass, lifts it in an unsteady hand, and squints through the glass at the lamp. She speaks with a tripping tongue.*

Na... zzzzz... zzzz... zzzzum birth...day... Maaay from... from... from to-mor... mor... mor-row... ev-ev-ev...rything ho-ho-ho... *(she hiccups)*

*NATASHA hiccups a few more times, then drinks from the glass.*

Maybe... a... m-maybe Petersburg... fuck it... *(hiccup)* Maybe really... to Mo... Mo... Moscow... m-maybe... to Moscow? B-back? Work... I'll find work... *(hiccup)* We... we'll manage... We won't go under... Fuck Petersburg... *(hiccup)* Mama's there... I'm her daughter... smells... like before... streets... our own... ashes... pigeons... Mummy... my... good...

*From the next room comes soft child crying. NATASHA lifts her head and turns it, dazed, from side to side. She moans or sings or fantasises in an absurd form of a drunken lament, half sing-song:*

Who... what... where... that... cry... Aaah... woke up... My... good... my... woke up... my... girl... Must... still... must... we... still... sleep... *(rocks)* Aaaaa... Aaaaa... Aaaaa... Aaaaa... Aaaaa...

*For a while NATASHA turns her head, hums scraps of a lullaby, or lets out a half-scream-half-groan that resembles crane calls. Then NATASHA gets unsteadily up from the table, looks around. Swaying, she pours herself vermouth, downs it in one go, and stumbles unevenly out of the table's circle of light, somewhere into the darkness. The child crying grows louder and louder; behind it, as a background, the audio track by Olga Sergeyeva, "Snowflakes Are Falling," begins. For a while crying and music are equally loud; then the crying becomes quieter, quieter, quieter—and finally stops altogether. Only Olga Sergeyeva's track "Snowflakes Are Falling" remains.*

*Downstage at the lip: the table, dimly lit by the three-bulb chandelier, with the Martini bottle and the chair behind it. The music ends. Out of the darkness steps a dishevelled NATASHA. In her hands she holds a fairly large white pillow.*

**NATASHA** *(sways, smiles, rocks the pillow, strokes it, sings a scrap of lullaby)*

A-a-A-a-A-a-A... / A-a-A-a-A-a-A... / A-a-A-a-A-a-A... / A-a-A-a-A-a-A... / A-a-A-a-A-a-A... *(5 times)*

*NATASHA sits on the chair, lays the pillow on her knees, rocks it, strokes it, and begins to speak in a tight, somehow cartoonish pseudo-child voice, with long, even pauses between the words:*

**NATASHA**

Ma-ma..... Ma-ma..... Ma-ma..... Ma-ma..... Ma-ma..... Ma-ma.....

*(6 times)*

*Then NATASHA puts her hands on the table and lets her head fall onto them. The pillow slides off her knees and falls to the floor.*

*The stage light goes out.*

**THE END**

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