

"WHILE SHE WAS DYING"

by Nadezda Ptushkina

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a vaudeville in three acts

translated by James Donoher

CHARACTERS

SOFYA IVANOVNA - a very old lady.

TATYANA - her daughter.

IGOR - their new acquaintance.

DINA - the "daughter" of Tatyana and Igor.

ACT ONE

A one-room flat, in which two women are growing older.

Everything is old-fashioned and comfortable. It has accumulated with the years.

A chiffonier, a cabinet, shelves on which are placed subscription publications, curtains with ribbons, a tassled tablecloth on a round table. Massive chairs, cumbersome armchairs, a lampshade. At the moment all this can be seen through the semi-darkness and looks significant, poetic and melancholy.

The room is lit by three candles.

The only things clearly visible are an old woman with a plaid on her knees (Sofya) and a younger woman with a book on her knees (Tanya) sitting on a small low bench by the feet of the old woman .

TANYA (reading aloud) ...They walked in to dinner arm-in-arm, and sat down side by side. Never was such a dinner as that, since the world began. There was the superannuated bank clerk, Tim Linkinwater's friend; and there was the chubby old

lady, Tim Linkinwater's sister; and there was so much attention from Tim Linkinwater's sister to

Miss La Creevy, and there were so many jokes from the superannuated bank clerk, and Tim Linkinwater himself was in such tiptop spirits, and little Miss La Creevy was in such a comical state, that of themselves they would have composed the pleasantest party conceivable.

Sofya gives a long drawn-out sigh.

TANYA (raises her head from the book and looks at her mother) Mamochka, does something hurt?

SOFYA No, Tanechka, don't worry.

TANYA (waits a little, then continues) Then, there was Mrs Nickleby, so grand and complacent; Madeline and Kate, so blushing and beautiful; Nicholas and Frank, so devoted and proud; and all four so silently and tremblingly happy; there was Newman so subdued yet so overjoyed, and there were the twin brothers so delighted and interchanging such looks, that the old servant stood transfixed behind his master's chair, and felt his eyes grow dim as they wandered round the table.

Sofya again sorrowfully and lengthily sighs.

TANYA Shall I read on?

SOFYA That's a very difficult question.

TANYA You're tired of listening?

SOFYA (sighs) I must, I must speak with you, Tanechka, I must.

TANYA (closes the book) Page one hundred and sixty two. (Places the book on a shelf.) Shall we have dinner?

SOFYA Tell me the truth, Tanya, only the truth.

TANYA Yes, mamochka?

SOFYA When I die, will it be easier for you?

TANYA (goes down on her knees in front of the armchair and touches her mothers hands with her cheeks) I love you very much, mama!

SOFYA Many of us old people, on leaving this world, are comforted that, with our passing, we can hope to ease the life of our dear ones. I don't have this comfort. I will die, but your life, I'm afraid, will become even more sorrowful.

TANYA You feel worse?

SOFYA My girl, only don't be frightened and don't panic. I know I will die today or tomorrow. Anguish, anguish grips my heart.

TANYA You're convincing yourself of this. I'll call the doctor.

SOFYA It's time, it's time... I'm not afraid of death. My anguish is for you, Tanechka. I will leave you alone, without a husband, without children, without a person dear to you. You are the best of daughters. Where is the justice? Why must you travel your road in loneliness? Why? Why?!

TANYA Mamochka, there are lots of old maids in the world!

SOFYA Don't say that! You're pretty! You've got a good figure, a higher education! You're decent, houseproud, cultured, and you don't have any bad habits...

TANYA The classic portrait of an old maid! Do you want porridge or rice, pudding?

SOFYA Tanechka! I'm serious.

TANYA And I'm serious as well. Cottage cheese or curd fritters?

SOFYA I've never asked you.

TANYA We haven't had omelette for ages! We should!

SOFYA It's impossible to guess anything about you!

TANYA (temptingly) So what do you think about omelette? Lightly fried, with grated cheese and celery?

SOFYA Is it possible to ask, at least before my death? It's very, very important to me.

TANYA Of course, mama! Ask about whatever you like! But first answer - do you want tea or a coffee drink?

SOFYA Have you ever been in love?

TANYA Certainly! I'm terribly susceptible! It was forty - fifty years ago. (Moves the armchair to the table.) You must eat this carrot salad with apples. It would be good to get through today without a laxative.

SOFYA And did you have any... relationships?

TANYA Relationships? What do you mean?

SOFYA Well, let's say... just don't be offended... let's say, with men?

TANYA I'm afraid there were. And they were with men. Only don't worry, mama! It's all in the past!

SOFYA You have a past? And many?

TANYA Many what?

SOFYA Of those... relationships?

TANYA I think... two... Is that enough sour cream?

SOFYA Two?! How long were they for?

TANYA Don't worry, mama! Two in my whole life.

SOFYA Two?! How awful! Only two!

TANYA (with dignity) I wasn't striving for quantity.

SOFYA Only two... Long ago?

TANYA (laughs) Longish.

SOFYA Why didn't you want to marry these two?

TANYA They didn't want to!

SOFYA Idiots! And what are they doing now?

TANYA Both married, as far as I know.

SOFYA And you still have relations with them?

TANYA Since they got married, no.

SOFYA That's short-sighted, Tanya! They could get divorced, become widowers. I'm sure they remember you. And bitterly regret their mistakes.

TANYA I don't think so. Is it tasty?

SOFYA Have you tried making enquiries about them?

TANYA Never. Mamochka, you're not eating at all well today.

SOFYA If you were married, I would die happy. It's my fault. You will remain alone because of my egotism!

TANYA You're exaggerating, mama! Eat another spoonful!

SOFYA It's hard to die with such a weight around one's heart.

TANYA I'm going to call the doctor anyway!

SOFYA The doctor won't comfort me. One thing and one thing only could reconcile me to the thought of parting with you - if you were married.

A loud knock on the door.

SOFYA A knock! How strange!

TANYA There's nothing strange! It's probably the neighbour.

SOFYA It's strange that they knock, they don't ring.

TANYA The electricity is switched off, mama. (Takes a candle and goes to open the door.)

SOFYA It's still strange. Ask them who they are!

TANYA (by the door) Who is it?

IGOR (on the other side of the door, playfully) Cuck-oo! Tanyushkin! Cuck-oo!

TANYA (opening the door, ironically) Cuck-oo!

IGOR (thrusting roses and champagne at her) Hi! (Understands that he has made a mistake and been too hasty.) ...hello, missus! Could you call Tatyana, please?

TANYA I'm Tanya.

SOFYA (from the room) Tanechka, who's there?

TANYA Just a minute, just a minute, mama!

IGOR You mean to say that you're Tatyana?

TANYA What are you unhappy about?

IGOR Are you the only Tatyana here?

TANYA The only one.

IGOR We'll check! Thirteen Fourth Bus Terminal Lane, block three, flat thirty-one.

TANYA Three-B.

IGOR What?

TANYA The block. Three-B.

IGOR There's a three-A?

TANYA Naturally. And a three-C, and a three-D, and a three-E...

IGOR What, do I have to run around the whole alphabet now? And make it to the fifth floor each time? There aren't any lifts in these Khrushchev buildings!

TANYA Well, I'm sorry!

IGOR Alright, missus! It's alright! Thanks for the consultation! Excuse me! (Takes the roses and champagne from her.) I'm about to make the descent on foot! It's a dark, stinking staircase you've got here, though! How is it that you all haven't become extinct yet?

TANYA Take a candle! (Follows him.)

IGOR Thank you, missus! I've got a lighter. (Clicks the lighter.) Damn! There was only enough to get up here. It's run out!

TANYA Take a candle! And be careful! It gets slippery under foot here sometimes.

IGOR I'm going to wander in the streets with a candle, like I'm in a religious procession!

TANYA It's dark. There's no electricity. I'm afraid the streetlamps don't light things much.

IGOR You've talked me into it, missus! Thanks! Goodbye!

TANYA Take care of yourself! (Turns to go back into the flat, slips and falls.) Oi, oi...

IGOR What happened, missus?

TANYA (through tears) Nothing. Don't pay any attention!

IGOR Can I help?

TANYA No, no... (Rises with difficulty, sobs.) Oi...

IGOR (returns) What's the matter?

TANYA I slipped. The neighbor's child is always eating bananas, and throwing the skins on the floor.

IGOR Nothing's broken, or that could have had consequences at your time of life.

TANYA (annoyed) I don't need your help! Go!

IGOR Whatever you say! Did you bang yourself hard? Shall I help you in?

TANYA It's all gone away now! (Begins to cry.)

IGOR What are you crying for?

TANYA I want to and I'm crying! I'm sorry! Don't pay any attention. My mother is dying at the moment.

IGOR (having been silent) My condolences. But I'm of no use here. Money won't help here.

Although... Take this! (Proffers money.)

TANYA Are you out of your mind?

IGOR From a pure heart, although it's material. All of us had a mother at some time!

TANYA I didn't ask you for charity!

IGOR I guessed it myself! This amount of money is peanuts to me! Take it, don't worry!

TANYA How dare you insult me like this, in passing?

SOFYA (shouting from the room) Tanechka! Has something happened? I'm worried!

TANYA (shouting) Coming, coming, mama!

IGOR I wanted to help. But you started getting at me for no reason at all! See you!

TANYA I'm sorry!

IGOR Changed your mind? That's a bit better! When people give - always take. That's my opinion.

TANYA I don't need the money. You'd be better helping me in.

IGOR Of course. Take my arm.

TANYA Let me hold the roses and champagne. You can have the candle.

Igor escorts Tanya into the flat.

TANYA Careful of the carpet. Don't bang yourself, this is the door to the room already.

And in this way, arm in arm, Tanya and Igor appear before Sofya.

Tanya has roses and champagne.

Igor has a candle.

SOFYA Good evening!

IGOR (extremely mournfully) Good evening!

TANYA Mamochka, allow me to introduce you, this is... this is...

IGOR (understands at last) Igor. Pleased to meet you.

TANYA And this is, this is, this is...

SOFYA Have you forgotten everyone's name today, Tanechka?

TANYA Sofya Ivanovna. My mama.

IGOR The one who's...

TANYA Yes, she's the one I've told you so much about.

SOFYA (to Igor) You've known Tanya for a long time?

IGOR (looking at his watch) Yes, I'd say already thirty-forty...

TANYA (interrupts) Forty! Exactly forty! Years! How time flies! Doesn't it, Igor?
IGOR Incredibly fast, I'd say.

SOFYA Very, very pleased to meet you! Sit down, Igor! Can I call you that? Although you're not young, I'm still a lot older than you. Tanechka, why didn't you warn me that we had a guest for dinner? And so well mannered - with roses, champagne! Cook something right away! You don't drink champagne with porridge! Give me, please, the roses! What a scent! I feel young and happy! We haven't had roses in our house for a long time! Tanechka, take Igor's jacket! And go to the kitchen! Igor and I will talk here.

TANYA (to Igor) Your jacket, please!

IGOR It's really time for me to leave! (Looks at the roses and champagne, decides to leave the roses, but take the champagne.)

SOFYA Open the champagne! Imagine - such a cultured person! Arrives with roses, champagne, sits for a minute and then runs off. It's even a little old-fashioned. No, I won't let you go! Please take off your jacket to begin with!

Igor takes off his jacket and gives it to Tanya.

SOFYA I don't understand - what are you standing for, Tanechka? Go and cook something! Igor and I will talk in the meantime!

TANYA (to Igor) Don't be afraid! I'll be right back! (Leaves the room.)

SOFYA (to Igor) Tanechka has told me a lot about you.

IGOR A lot about me?

SOFYA Of course. She hasn't anybody else to speak about.

IGOR You're confusing me with someone else!

SOFYA My legs don't work anymore - it's true. But my head, as you see for yourself - thanks be to God - is in full working order!

IGOR I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. But what could Tanya tell you about me!

SOFYA Don't be surprised, only good things. You don't even suspect how wonderfully Tanya regards you!

IGOR I really didn't suspect it!

SOFYA I've already managed to notice that you're somehow not very confident. That's not right! Yes, you've made mistakes! But that's in the past! All is not lost! And don't be upset about your age! Happiness is very, very possible for you!

IGOR What kind of happiness?

SOFYA Family happiness, naturally. There isn't any other in the world.

IGOR I prefer personal happiness.

TANYA (enters) Igor's always joking. He's been joking for forty years. Here are some oranges, and everything else we have is vegetarian! (To Igor.) What can I give you? Vitamin salad? Porridge? Cottage cheese?

IGOR Thanks. I'll have an orange.

SOFYA A man mustn't under any circumstances eat only oranges! You're so shy! And in general, very touching! Tanechka, give Igor a good plate of porridge!

TANYA (to Igor) Shall we open the champagne?

IGOR (stands) You carry on without me. It was very nice to meet you! (Swiftly leaves the room.)

TANYA (grabs a candle and runs after him) Wait!

IGOR (already in the corridor) Where in your dump of a neighborhood is it possible to buy flowers and champagne?

TANYA I'll give you the money just now!

IGOR I don't need the money!

TANYA Then stay another quarter of an hour! Please! And then I'll take you to the shop! For my mother's sake! She's dying!

IGOR I'm not a doctor, and I'm not a priest!

TANYA I'll explain everything. Quarter of an hour!

IGOR Alright. But I need to make a phone call.

TANYA Of course, of course, as many as you like. That's no problem. There's the telephone. (Delicately slips into the room, leaving Igor the candle.)

Igor dials a number.

In the room.

SOFYA (to Tanya, conspiratorially) Is that one of the two?

TANYA (enigmatically) Almost...

SOFYA Which one of them?

TANYA Later, mama! (Goes to Igor.) It's not comfortable for you here. I'll give you some light! (Takes the candle and raises it high.)

IGOR (on the phone) Tanyunchik! Bunny-rabbit! I'm late! Pussy-cat, I'll be there in half an hour. Me? At a meeting! It was all very sudden, I'm not happy about it myself! Don't be angry, my little mouse! No, my little bird, it won't be long! I kiss you passionately! My prickly little hedgehog! Cuck-oo! (Hangs up.)

TANYA You should have asked the little bird which block her little nest is in! The phone rings.

TANYA (into the phone) Hello! No, it's a flat. Who lives here? I live here! Who do you want? What? What? (Hangs up, to Igor.) She started swearing. It seems the call was for you. It seems it was your hybrid phoning.

IGOR Who? Damn! Her telephone has a call display! What did she say?

TANYA She said that if I'm blonde, then it's dyed. That she didn't give a damn about my legs, even if they grew out of my head. And that she doesn't give a... let's say a fig about my sexy looks.

IGOR It's good she didn't call you any names!

TANYA Didn't call me names? That's what you think? You're mistaken.

IGOR She called you names?

TANYA Naturally!

IGOR What kind?

TANYA The usual kind!

Pause.

IGOR Really?

TANYA Alas.

IGOR I'm sorry!

TANYA What fault is it of yours?

IGOR She's temperamental. She's only twenty!

TANYA Twenty?! What do you talk about with her?

IGOR We practically don't speak!

TANYA Twenty! And she was jealous of me!

IGOR Her? Jealous of you?! That's what you think!

TANYA You know, it would be pleasanter to talk with her than with you!

IGOR She's never seen you!

The phone rings.

IGOR (to Tanya) Don't pick up the phone! It's for me!

TANYA Sometimes the calls here are for me! (Picks up the phone.) Ah, bunny-rabbit! I hear you. Right away, little mouse, I'll call him! I'm passing him the phone now, pussy-cat! Bye-bye, hedgehog! (Passes the phone to Igor.)

IGOR (into the phone) Tan... Tan... Who's a womaniser? Who's got legs? She's got no legs at all!!!

TANYA Why do you say that? I do! Legs like legs! Perfectly decent legs!

IGOR Who's blonde? She's sixty if she's a day! I swear!

TANYA You shouldn't have sworn. I'm fifty... nine.

IGOR Oh, Tan... (Evidently the other party has hung up.) There. (To Tanya.) What have you done?! Do you have any idea how much I had to cajole her?! Two weeks! No less! I've had enough! (Grabs his jacket.)

TANYA Don't leave! What will I tell mama?

IGOR Even out of love of humanity, I can't stay here with you!

The phone rings.

IGOR That must be for me!

TANYA Don't pick up the phone in my house! That compromises me!

IGOR What do you mean?

TANYA You wouldn't understand! (Into the phone.) Yes, it's me, legless and sixty years old. Yes, I want to take Igor from you.

IGOR What are you saying? Give me the phone!

TANYA The call is for me! Me! You'd be better holding the candle! (Thrusts the candle at Igor.) That's the opinion you have of Igor? And I have another! He's kind and generous! He's noble and he has good manners! And he's really handsome!!! Who am I? Thank you! And what else am I? Well, that's really too much, you flatter me! What am I like? Thank you. I'm starting to have confidence in myself! Really?! I'm grateful to you, pussy-cat, I'm stopping feeling my age! Shall I give the phone to Igor? No?! Ah, it's me you're phoning?! I'm touched! Phone more often! Alright, I'll pass all this on to Igor with pleasure! All the best! It was interesting to talk to you! (Hangs up, to Igor.) She asked me to pass on to you that you're not to worry.

The little mouse has someone to spend tonight with.

IGOR It's simply dangerous to hang around with you! (Thrusts the candle back at her.) Hold this! (Dials a number.) Damn! No answer!

How can you take such liberties! At your age?!

TANYA What don't you like about my age? What age are you?

IGOR I'm a man.

TANYA What - does one year pass for every two with men?!

IGOR So how old, how old do I look?

TANYA Fifty years old...

IGOR (flattered) Y-yes?...

TANYA Because it's dark here!

IGOR I called on your flat by mistake. You slipped. I helped you in, like a gentleman...

TANYA But you can't be a gentleman for just five minutes! It's better not to start at all, in that case!

Igor suddenly cries out and clutches at his stomach .

TANYA What is it? Heart attack?

IGOR Gastritis!

TANYA At least eat something! Right away! Porridge - that's what will put you on your feet!

IGOR Alright, give me your oats!

TANYA (pulls him by the hand to the room) Quickly! Does it really hurt?

IGOR It's bearable!

TANYA Sit down. The porridge is in front of you! Eat!

SOFYA Tanechka, you've forgotten about the roses! Put them in a vase!

TANYA (to Igor) Eat! I'll be right back!

SOFYA (to Igor) Don't eat! Open the champagne first!

Igor puts down his spoon with obvious regret, and starts to open the champagne.

TANYA (returns already with the roses in a vase; to Igor) What are you doing? Eat! You've got an urge for champagne! (Puts down the vase, takes the bottle from Igor.)

SOFYA Tanechka, I insist: uncorking champagne is a man's job.

IGOR (tries to take the bottle from Tanya) Allow me to open it!

TANYA What are you clinging on to this bottle for? Eat! I'll deal with it myself! The cork pops out noisily. It spurts all over Igor's jacket.

TANYA Oh, I'm sorry! It's probably an expensive suit?

IGOR Yes, it's just been baptized. (Wipes his suit with a handkerchief.)

SOFYA Tanechka has never had anything to do with alcohol! She simply has no idea how to treat alcohol! We're not a drinking family, I have to admit.

TANYA (to Igor) I'm sorry!

IGOR Forget it! Glasses would be in order now.

Tanya hurriedly fetches three glasses. Igor gets ready to pour champagne into the glasses.

TANYA (hurriedly withdrawing one glass) Mama mustn't! (Takes away a second glass.) You don't need any either! (Moves the third a little.) Pour some in here! I'll drink.

SOFYA Tanechka, let Igor drink a little as well. He doesn't look like an alcoholic.

TANYA Champagne with porridge! (To Igor.) I'll give you some more porridge! Mama, I'll give you a glass of cold tea, and a drop of champagne in the tea. Well, let's drink! Or rather, let's all clink glasses, and I'll drink alone.

SOFYA Tanechka, allow Igor to drink!

IGOR Don't worry, I'm not going to drink.

SOFYA You won't drink? But why?! There must be a reason!

IGOR I'm driving.

SOFYA Ah, you're a chauffeur! A wonderful profession!

IGOR I'm an accountant.

SOFYA A chauffeur and an accountant?

IGOR Just an accountant.

SOFYA But why are you driving? An accountant driving? That's strange!

IGOR I've got a car.

SOFYA Your own?

IGOR My own. Why does that surprise you?

SOFYA Where did you get a car from?

IGOR How do you mean?

SOFYA Where did you manage to get a car from?

TANYA Mama, don't ask indiscreet questions.

SOFYA Did you win the lottery?

IGOR No.

SOFYA Inheritance?

IGOR I simply bought it.

SOFYA You bought it? A car? That's probably not easy! Saved all your life! Gave everything up!

IGOR There was a time when I gave everything up. But there's the surprising thing - when you save, nothing works out! Now I just earn a decent amount.

SOFYA You probably have several jobs? It's not worth overworking yourself so much at your age!

TANYA I suggest we drink. Rather, I suggest we all clink glasses, and I'll drink alone.

SOFYA (lifts her glass) To you, Igor, and to Tanechka! May everything work out for you this time.

IGOR Much more has already worked out than I expected.

SOFYA Well said! To you!

TANYA (drinks without pausing for breath and laughs) It's gone to my head.

SOFYA You're not used to it. It looks pretty stupid, Igor not drinking and snacking on porridge.

IGOR I've not eaten porridge for fifty years! When I was a child, my mama forced me to eat it. She used to say: Eat your porridge, Garik, you'll grow up to be a hero! O I should have listened to her. I didn't grow up to be a hero! Very tasty. I have some catching up to do. (To Tanya.) Could I have some more, please!

SOFYA (to Igor) You're a pleasant guest and a grateful eater.

IGOR I love home cooking! You can recommend me as such to all your acquaintances.

SOFYA Tanechka, I really like your Igor, I really do! But how did you find Tanya? After so many years?

IGOR Probably just luck.

SOFYA Well said. Like a man. You didn't expect it?

IGOR I couldn't have imagined it!

SOFYA And I wouldn't have supposed that, in my twilight years, life would make me a present of such a longed-for gift! You can never know, never!

IGOR You're absolutely right! Just an hour ago I would have laughed if someone had said that today I will eat porridge in the company of two... such dear ladies.

SOFYA A wonderful toast! Let's raise our glasses! Today, Tanechka, you're drinking for the three of us!

They all clink glasses. Tanya drinks and begins to laugh.

SOFYA Our Tanya is so happy today! It's because of you, Igor. You haven't seen each other for forty years! What do you think, has Tanechka changed?

IGOR For the better.

Tanya pours another glass and drinks without pause.

SOFYA Don't get carried away, Tanechka, measure must be observed in joy and in grief.

IGOR You think Tanya's drinking a lot today? How can you! I recall how much she could drink forty years ago! Drank everyone under the table!

SOFYA You allowed yourself to get drunk at one time, Tanya? Well, it happens to everyone.

TANYA (to Igor) What's this rubbish you're talking?

IGOR It's in the past! What's there to hide now? (To Sofya.) Sofya Ivanovna, I'll never forget how Tanya used to dance on the tables! She was applauded in so many taverns!

SOFYA (to Tanya) You used to go to taverns?

IGOR Guys went crazy over her! I went mad from jealousy!

SOFYA So it's true, mothers are the last to find out the truth about their own daughters! Now I understand why you didn't marry Tanya then! But she's completely different now!

IGOR Oh, I don't know... Oh, I'm not sure!

TANYA Igor's also changed. He's become braver! And today, mamochka, he found the courage to propose to me!

SOFYA Tanya, you're going to get married? To Igor?! Such happiness!

TANYA I'll have to think, mama!

SOFYA Think? About what?

IGOR There's no need to put pressure on Tanya, Sofya Ivanovna. I can wait.

TANYA Thank you, Igor! We've spent a wonderful evening! I know you're in a hurry. We'll let Igor go, mamochka!

IGOR No need to let me go! I've nowhere to go now, anyway! I haven't eaten the cottage cheese yet! Forty year old memories are crowding into my mind.

TANYA Excuse me, Igor! Mama needs peace!

SOFYA It's thanks to Igor that I feel at peace for the first time in many a long year!

TANYA Let's not be egoists, mamochka! Thank you, Igor, I'm sorry if something's not quite right.

SOFYA What's not right? Everything's wonderful! You make an ideal couple! Are you going on your pension soon, Igor?

IGOR I'm not aspiring to go on my pension. I prefer working. What's there to do on a pension?

SOFYA What's there to do on a pension?! It's the best time of your life! You on your pension! Tanya on her pension! How romantic! You'll buy a plot of land! Build a house! We have savings, of a sort! Tanya will take care of the kitchen-garden. You're not really against your own home in the countryside?

IGOR I'm not against it! I already have a house!

SOFYA You have a country house? Where is it?

IGOR In the Canaries.

SOFYA In the Canaries? And what's the plot like? Is there room to turn around?

IGOR Yes, there's room to turn around.

SOFYA And the house itself? Not too small?

IGOR Not too small.

SOFYA And a forest? A river? Are they nearby?

IGOR They're quite far away.

SOFYA What did you choose such a place for?! Without a forest! Without a river! And does anything grow on the land?

IGOR Something grows.

SOFYA And who takes care of all this?

IGOR Nobody. It grows itself.

SOFYA It's funny listening to men! It grows itself! What grows itself? Nettles?

IGOR Oranges, it seems. I'm not there much. Never!

SOFYA Oranges! What did you say? Can...neries? I've heard something, but I can't remember properly. What road is it on?

TANYA It's in Spain, mama!

SOFYA A plot of land in Spain? So far! But what for? It's not convenient! And expensive!

IGOR On the contrary, it's cheaper there!

SOFYA Do you understand anything, Tanya?

TANYA Something. Quite enough.

SOFYA Then explain it to me!

TANYA I'll explain!

SOFYA God, how tired I am of life! In our time, nobody took a plot in Spain! Maybe it's not bad! In my opinion, life is becoming somehow more elegant!

IGOR It really is time I left! It was a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for a pleasant evening!

SOFYA No, Igor, I won't let you go like that! Tanechka, turn me round! Have you been christened, Igor?

Igor is puzzled.

TANYA Well, did your mama have you christened?

IGOR A long time ago. When I was a child.

SOFYA That's quite sufficient! Come to me! Stand here! Tanechka, take the icon and give it to me!

Tanya takes the icon off the wall and gives it to Sofya.

SOFYA And stand next to Igor!

TANYA What are you playing at, mama?

SOFYA I've no time to lose. I feel that I will die. Tomorrow. Within a week at the most. Children! God bless you! Live long and harmoniously! Look after each other and be happy! I bless you!

TANYA Mama!

SOFYA Don't interrupt! These are the most wonderful moments of a woman's life! I remember now how your father and I were blessed, Tanechka! We were caught... Anyway, it doesn't matter now... And your father gave me a wedding ring. (Shows her hand.) It can't be taken off anymore I will be buried with this ring. And then we got married. Tanechka, put the icon back it's place! How do you regard marriage, Igor?

IGOR Marriage in general? It's beautiful.

SOFYA Tanechka, promise me that you and Igor will get married!

TANYA It's not worth deciding anything in a hurry, mama!

SOFYA Tanechka is very proud, Igor! She's never thrown herself at men! Never! She had a girlfriend, and do you know what she did?

TANYA Igor's not interested in my girlfriend, mama!

IGOR You're mistaken! I'm interested in everything!

SOFYA You see, Tanechka, you're wrong. Igor truly loves you. He's interested in everything about you. Well. It so happened that this girlfriend notices a suitable man on the street, and immediately makes it look as if she's slipped. And she grabs onto this man and asks him to escort her home, saying she's unable to get home on her own. And in this way she gets married eight times, and my Tanya not once! (To Tanya.) You need to warn your man what intrigues some women are capable of! (To Igor.) But not Tanya! No, not Tanya! When's the wedding? We're going to have a wedding? It can be modest, but we must have a wedding! When?

TANYA I wouldn't like to hurry!

SOFYA We mustn't hurry, but we shouldn't draw it out! What about in a week's time, eh?

IGOR We accountants have the end-of-year balance accounts to deal with now. I wouldn't like to lump everything together - balances, weddings...

SOFYA Of course, a lump's not good. When will you finish your accounts?

IGOR By the first of March. After that, we have the quarterlies right away. Until the fifteenth of April. And after that...

SOFYA I won't live that long. I have a premonition, Igor, that my time is nigh. I have a week left, another, that's all. Of course, I'll try.

IGOR Only, don't change your plans because of us!

TANYA Igor!

SOFYA But if I die, you won't put off the wedding for more than a year out of mourning?

IGOR What do you mean?! Who observes mourning these days? And for a whole year!

TANYA Igor!

SOFYA Come to us tomorrow, early! We'll discuss everything and make a final decision.

TANYA That won't work. Tomorrow Igor has to go on a business trip.

IGOR Me? On a business trip?

SOFYA For how long?

TANYA For half a year.

SOFYA But what about the balance of accounts?

TANYA He'll write it on the business trip and send it.

SOFYA If it wasn't for me, Tanechka could accompany you, Igor. Always, always I'm an encumbrance on her personal life.

TANYA It's impossible for me to go with Igor! Do you have any idea where you want to send me?

SOFYA Where do I want to send you?

TANYA To the tundra! To eternal permafrost! Travelling by dogs. Eating only fish! Alive!!! And sitting in a yurt by the light of oil-lamps, while Igor pores over his accounts.

SOFYA Give up such work, Igor!

IGOR Someone needs to do such work.

TANYA Igor will phone me often.

SOFYA From a yurt?

TANYA It's the end of the twentieth century, mama!

SOFYA Better to write letters! I still keep Tanya's father's letters. If there had been telephones in the trenches, what would I have left now?

The electricity blazes up.

IGOR Do they only turn your electricity on at night? (Kisses Sofya's hand.) Thank you for a diverting evening, Sofya Ivanovna!

SOFYA Take care of yourself for us! (Pulls him towards her and kisses him on the cheek.) I've become attached to you as if you were my son.

IGOR And you take care of yourself!

Igor and Tanya go out into the corridor.

IGOR (putting on his coat) If I stay any longer, you'll send me packing to another galaxy, without batting an eyelid.

TANYA Are you very angry?

IGOR It's nonsense! Only...

TANYA Only what?

IGOR I'm a little worried that I gave my word before the icon to marry you.

TANYA It's nonsense! Forget it!

IGOR I wouldn't like any reservations with the Lord God. And I don't recall him having a sense of humour.

TANYA It's a problem for me as well! We gave our word! I solemnly give you your word back.

IGOR An amazing, frivolous woman! True to your word for less than half an hour. I'm starting to guess why you never married.

TANYA And what made you imagine that we swore something before the icon?

IGOR You were the only one who was drinking, by the way. You'll note that I didn't drink a drop.

TANYA Did you even look at what you were swearing before? An icon! I took from the wall and gave to mama a portrait of Dickens. And Dickens, by the way, had a perfectly good sense of humour.

Igor runs into the room, looks at the portrait, runs out to the corridor and stares straight at Tanya.

TANYA And what?

IGOR Your girlfriend who married eight times is an angel compared to you.

TANYA In turn, I wish you happiness with your long-legged hedgehog, with your blonde pussy-cat, with your sexy bunny-rabbit and generally with all the little animals!

IGOR Thanks. Goodbye!

TANYA Farewell!

IGOR Tomorrow I'll pop round to find out how your mama's health is.

TANYA Don't put yourself to any trouble!

IGOR It's nonsense. I'll be in the area anyway. By the way, I still didn't find out the number of her block.

TANYA Find out and sit with your young mouse there.

IGOR Have I offended you in some way?

TANYA No, you've been doing your best.

IGOR I've even managed to stay a gentleman? What's your opinion?

TANYA The highest estimation!

IGOR But it's impossible to be a gentleman for only one evening! It wouldn't be worth starting in the first place!

TANYA The pussy-cat will be in raptures over your philosophy!

IGOR The pussy-cat generally values my other qualities.

TANYA Say hello to the pussy-cat from me!

IGOR How will you get yourself out of this if I don't come again? Kill me in a car crash? Push me under a gangster's knife? Provide me with a sudden fatal illness?

TANYA I'm not bloodthirsty. Live! In the long winter evenings I will remember the story of our... of our relationship. And tell it to mama. You can't even picture to yourself what a fantasiser I am!

IGOR I already picture a little. I'd like to hear a little more.

TANYA You remember absolutely nothing yourself?

IGOR Remember what?

TANYA You're right. It's hard to remember what never happened forty years ago.

IGOR That can be rectified. I'm ready to remember whatever you like.

TANYA I will read mama your letters.

IGOR Letters? A-ah! From the tundra! Be modest! Don't read the intimate parts out loud! I like the fact that our accidental acquaintance has such a future.

TANYA I understand that our life appears insignificant to you. It's easy to guess what it's like. Everything's obvious about the shops where I make God knows what kind of purchases. The simple cleaning, cooking, washing. The rare phone calls. Who calls us? Once a year a long letter from relatives. Read aloud. The dull, monotonous life, short of events. No one's interested in an old woman and an old maid, her daughter.

IGOR You look wonderful! In any light!

TANYA Thanks. But to me and mama, our life and we ourselves look quite different. We are very dear to each other. And where there's love, there's always lots of events, storms, joys, worries. I don't just shop, cook, clean. I strive for mama's sake, so that her days are longer. But all the same, some day I will be left quite alone. What will I do with my tenderness and love? How can I exist with the necessity to worry and care every hour? Who will listen to me with interest and understanding? And who will I listen to? Nobody in the world will have any time for me!

IGOR Look up old acquaintances. Get out more!

TANYA Fuss in place of love? Loneliness and suffering are more dignified. Mama is afraid to leave me on my own. I'll trick her. Let her leave this world certain that I won't be left lonely. She dreams that I will marry. Let her believe that her dream will come true.

IGOR But why don't you look for a real person, so you won't be lonely?

TANYA When I was twenty I didn't agree to marry without love, and all the more so at sixty. I'm sorry that we wasted the evening.

IGOR Quite the contrary. A marvellous evening! I'll pop round to see you again! Without fail! It won't present any difficulty, I'm sure to be in the vicinity.

TANYA Thank you. But under no circumstances!

IGOR You dislike me that much?

TANYA I'm afraid that you've created even too strong an impression on me!

IGOR That's nice to hear.

TANYA It's probably everything together: candles, roses, the champagne went to my head, I'm not used to it... Oh, what is there to hide - You're attractive! (Laughs.) I've come out of my usual rut. I'm agitated. I'm in confusion. I'm speaking too much. (Laughs.) Ah, what difference does it make anyway! None of this, of course, will come to anything!

IGOR I really did like being here. And I liked your mama. I'd like to visit her again.

TANYA No. You mustn't come here again.

IGOR I'll write down your telephone number. I'll give you a bell when I can.

TANYA Also unnecessary.

IGOR But maybe...

TANYA It's not worth it.

IGOR I'd just like to...

TANYA Thank you! Goodbye!

IGOR Goodbye! (Returns.) But it's stupid just breaking everything off like this...

TANYA Farewell!

IGOR Are you sure?

TANYA Absolutely!

IGOR It just seems to me...

TANYA Categorically!

IGOR But if...

TANYA What's the matter with you? It's late! It's time for you to go. And I need to go to mama. Farewell!

IGOR Goodbye! Glad to meet you!

TANYA I'm glad as well.

IGOR What - I have to go now, just like that?

TANYA All the best! (Closes the door behind him and returns to the room.) Mama! How are you?

SOFYA This is all terrible, Tanya, terrible!

Pause.

TANYA You guessed anyway, mama. Forgive me!

SOFYA Of course I guessed! Right away! I'm not deaf and I'm not blind and I've not yet gone out of my mind.

TANYA Forgive me, forgive me, mama! I wanted what was best for you!

SOFYA What do I have to forgive you for? For your last autumnal happiness?!

TANYA What do you mean, mama?

SOFYA Don't hide anything from me and don't be embarrassed. Enough! I see everything - how much you love him! This time, you're lucky - he loves you! It's clear as day! You will both be happy!

TANYA Yes? Thank you, mama!

SOFYA I've stopped being an egoist. I'm glad of your happiness.

TANYA But you're crying, mama!

SOFYA Because I'm still a bit of an egoist! I'm already used to the thought that you're married. But it's not enough for me!!! I still have a stone around my heart!

TANYA What kind of stone is it now, mama?

SOFYA You and Igor will already never have children! It's my fault! I was so happy with you. In my soul I was always afraid that you would get married! I am cruelly punished. I want a granddaughter, and I will never have her! God, how I want a granddaughter! For her to love me! And you as well, of course! And for all of us to be happy! I wouldn't be awaiting death now, but great-grandchildren! Grandchildren mean fun and laughter in the house! And so many troubles, sorrows, surprises. And instead of all this, through my fault you sit all day next to a dull old woman!

TANYA I love you, mama! And I'm happy with you!

SOFYA But we would be even happier if there was a big, harmonious family! A son-in-law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren... How late... hopelessly, irretrievably late we understand anything!

TANYA Mama, you shouldn't worry like this! Drink some tincture of valerian!

SOFYA Tincture of valerian - that's the only thing my daughter can give me at the end of my life! And Igor is such an interesting man! And you're still a beautiful woman! You could have had a wonderful daughter! She could have been forty years old already! (She begins to weep.) Tanya, forgive me! I'm an inveterate egoist! It must hurt you to listen to me! Why were you so obedient?

TANYA (embracing her) Forgive me, mamochka!

SOFYA Such a loving daughter! Why?

TANYA Forgive me, mamochka, forgive me!

SOFYA All the same, I'm happy that you're getting married. (Weeps.)

TANYA I don't need anyone, mamochka!

SOFYA (without tears in her voice, concretely) Have you gone mad?!

TANYA (confused) Mamochka?

SOFYA I'm happy! And you?

TANYA So am I.

SOFYA (suddenly sobbing) Why are we so unfortunate?

TANYA (comforts) Everything will be all right.

SOFYA (in a different tone) I congratulate you.

TANYA Thank you.

SOFYA I wish you everything that is good.

TANYA Mamochka!

SOFYA Are you happy?

TANYA (bursting into tears) Very happy, mamochka!

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The same flat.

Only now the flat is lit, not by candles, but by standard lamps.

Roses stand in the middle of the table.

The mis-en-scene is the same as in Act One.

TANYA (reads) Then, there was Mrs Nickleby, so grand and complacent; Madeline and Kate, so blushing and beautiful; Nicholas and Frank, so devoted and proud; and all four so silently and tremblingly happy; there was Newman so subdued yet so overjoyed, and there were the twin brothers so delighted and interchanging such looks, that the old servant stood transfixed behind his master's chair, and felt his eyes grow dim as they wandered round the table.

Sofya gives a long drawn-out sigh.

TANYA What, mama? Are you not in the mood to listen to Dickens today?

SOFYA It's true, Tanya, stop! My thoughts are far away!

What beautiful roses! Move them a little closer to me!

TANYA Page one hundred and sixty two.

(Closes the book, places it on a shelf, moves the roses.)

SOFYA Shall we have dinner?

TANYA You want to eat already?

SOFYA Are we waiting for someone?

TANYA Who would visit us?

SOFYA Lately it's been a pleasure to look at you! You've pinned a pink ribbon on! That ribbon of your great-grandma's is more than a century old! It suits your face, Tanya, it freshens you up, makes you look younger! Today is definitely some kind of special day!

TANYA Special? Why? (Laughs slightly nervously.) Surely not because of the ribbon?!

SOFYA And because of the ribbon as well! Something mysterious is hovering in the atmosphere of our home. You've suddenly been diverted by cookery. You've been cooking all day! What awaits us?!

TANYA Meat dumplings, beet and potato salad, cake... Lots of bother, but it doesn't amount to much.

SOFYA Has Igor gone away?

TANYA I think he's already on his way, far from Moscow.

SOFYA I don't understand anything.

The doorbell rings.

SOFYA Did you invite somebody all the same?

TANYA Surprise!

SOFYA Igor?

TANYA No-no!

SOFYA Who, then?

TANYA Be patient! (Goes to open the door.)

Igor is behind the door with a bouquet of flowers.

IGOR Hello there! (Holds out the roses.) For you!

TANYA (doesn't take the roses) You've already left on your business trip! Did you forget?

IGOR Can't you hear? The dog team's barking in the entrance hall. In quarter of an hour I'll throw myself flat on the sleigh and speed off into the tundra. I only clambered up here in order to bid farewell to my fiancée.

TANYA Bon voyage! Happy landings!

IGOR I have to rest. To collect my strength before the landing. You know, it's just my years! How is your mother feeling? By the way, give her the roses! (Holds the roses out to Tanya.)

TANYA (not taking them) Thank you. The ones she has from yesterday are still there.

IGOR Let there be more. (Doggedly tries to hand over the roses.)

TANYA You'd be better pampering the bunny-rabbit with the roses.

SOFYA (loudly) Tanya! Who's there?

TANYA No one, mama, no one!

IGOR (very loudly) It's only me, Sofya Ivanovna!

SOFYA Why aren't you coming in, Igor?!

TANYA He's in a hurry, mama!

IGOR I'm in a hurry to see you, Sofya Ivanovna!

SOFYA Well, then? Where are you? Come here!

IGOR Coming! I'm hurrying!

TANYA (stepping back from the door) Don't be too long, please!

Igor goes through to Sofya in his overcoat and kisses her hand.

IGOR These are for you! (Hands her the roses.)

SOFYA What a joy that you came. Tanya didn't warn me. But I guessed! Tanya has been expecting you very much. All the things she bought! All day she's been cooking, tidying. She didn't want to start dinner without you.

IGOR (kisses Tanya's hand) It's nice to hear you've been expecting me so, Tanechka!

TANYA I wasn't waiting for you.

SOFYA Not Igor?! Then for whom, Tanechka?

TANYA (to Igor) I assumed that you had left. I'm surprised.

IGOR Pleasantly surprised?

TANYA Just surprised.

SOFYA Igor, take off your crimson coat! Make yourself at home. Tanya, put the roses in a vase!

TANYA We only have one vase in the house.

IGOR I understand. Tomorrow I'll bring another.

TANYA But what will we do with your roses today?

IGOR Throw them out!

SOFYA Sweethearts, don't fight! Tanechka, take care of the roses! Tanya takes the roses from Sofya and leaves.

SOFYA The business trip was postponed?

IGOR Cancelled entirely.

SOFYA My dream's coming true. I dreamed a road, and on it this big pile of... (Stops short.) I'm sorry! It's a sign of good luck.

IGOR Just imagine - I dreamed exactly the same road, and on it - exactly the same pile...

SOFYA (very animated, with enthusiasm) Imagine that!

Tanya returns with the roses, placed in a champagne bottle.

SOFYA Imagine, Tanechka, Igor and I dreamed exactly the same dream?!

TANYA What kind of dream?

SOFYA (with fervour) We dreamed... (Stops short.) I've forgotten! As soon as I saw Igor, I remembered straight away!

TANYA So what was it you both dreamed in such synchronicity?

IGOR That is a little secret between Sofya Ivanovna and myself. How do you feel today, Sofya Ivanovna?

SOFYA Superb! And I had a good dream, and it came true - you came! It's time for dinner, Tanechka! Everyone's here!

TANYA Igor, unfortunately, has to catch a train.

SOFYA Tell her, Igor! She doesn't even suspect what joy awaits her.

IGOR Imagine, Tanya, the business trip has been cancelled entirely!

SOFYA We can all see in the New Year together!

IGOR Tanechka hasn't invited me yet.

TANYA It's a long time till New Year!

SOFYA Just one week! Quickly invite Igor! Although, why invite him?

TANYA Why indeed?

SOFYA Of course! Igor is one of us!

TANYA Unfortunately, mamochka, Igor won't be able to see in the New Year with us.

SOFYA Why?

TANYA Igor always sees in the New Year with his work collective. With his colleagues.

It's a tradition. Igor will wish us happy New Year over the phone.

SOFYA And you find this normal?

TANYA The world has changed, mama! They give out plots of land in Spain, and see in the New Year in a restaurant with the work collective. Attract all sorts of bunny-rabbits and hedgehogs. It's normal, mama.

SOFYA (to Igor) What have bunny-rabbits got to do with this? You work in a menagerie?

IGOR I quit today.

SOFYA What about the balance of accounts?

IGOR In the menagerie it was temporary work.

Without breaking off, so to speak, from my main employment.

SOFYA I sense, Igor, that you have a very complicated life. You must get married as soon as possible.

TANYA Igor, I have to remind you - it's time you left!

SOFYA But the business trip is cancelled, Tanechka!

TANYA But the balance of accounts is still left to do. Off you go, Igor, and don't appear without the accounts!

Igor groans and clutches at his stomach.

SOFYA What's the matter, Igorek?

IGOR (with suffering) Tanya knows.

TANYA Gastritis?

IGOR Give me a crust of bread, at least! I need to eat something, anything, right now! The pain is unbearable!

SOFYA What are you standing about for, Tanya? Take measures, quickly! Set the table!

Tanya goes through to the kitchen.

SOFYA And you, Igor, sit down!

Igor sits at the table.

IGOR The most important thing for me at the moment is not to move. To eat and sit. Five hours, no less.

SOFYA Then sit! We're happy! I don't understand - what's the matter with our Tanechka today?

IGOR What's this? I didn't notice a thing.

SOFYA She waited and waited for you... But when you came at last, it was as if she was disappointed. What's she rummaging around for? Perhaps you could try getting to the kitchen?

IGOR I'll try. (Goes to the kitchen.)

In the kitchen.

TANYA (cooking something, dishing something up) It's good that you came here! Sit down! I'll feed you in here, very quickly.

IGOR I'm not in a hurry, don't worry! That ribbon suits you. I can't help but notice your taste.

TANYA (puts a plate in front of him) Don't get distracted! Bon appetit! Beet salad. Meat dumplings. And here's a piece of cake for you. Bread. Butter. Cheese.

IGOR Why all on one plate? Don't treat me like this.

TANYA It's a big plate. There's plenty of space for everything.

IGOR Why are you feeding me in the kitchen? It degrades my human dignity!

TANYA Eat up fast!

IGOR Why are you always hurrying me? You're making me nervous!

TANYA I'm constantly worrying about your gastritis.

IGOR My individual identity does not only consist of gastritis. Delicious, by the way. I haven't eaten anything so delicious in a long time.

TANYA Shall I bung you some more?

IGOR Thank you! I'll abstain for now. Otherwise, I'll stuff myself here, and in the room I'll sit like a complete fool watching you eat!

TANYA What do you want from me?

IGOR Honestly?

TANYA Absolutely.

IGOR Well, if I'm being absolutely honest, I don't know myself.

The phone rings.

IGOR I'm not here.

TANYA What - are you already getting calls here?

IGOR What's up with you? I'm simply saying, just in case.

TANYA (on the phone) Hello. I recognized you. By your twittering. Igor? Of course, he's here.

Where else would he be? (To Igor.) Your pussycat.

IGOR You have a repulsive character.

TANYA As an old maid should.

IGOR (on the phone) Yes-yes? Cuckoo!

TANYA Pussycats cuckooing! The environment's been totally spoiled.

IGOR Today? It's difficult to say. Possibly... I'll try, but... No, no, don't change anything because of me. If you're busy, you're busy. I'll give you a bell when I can. See you! Kisses to my little hedgehog!

TANYA I'll remind you that this is not a telephone exchange, nor is it a hotline. And actually, I should be getting a call!

IGOR See you, bunny-rabbit! I don't know if I'll be able to phone you today. Pussycat, you see, there's a queue here... I'm phoning from a call box.

TANYA (throwing Igor's overcoat at him) Go to the little mouse, quickly! She's been waiting for you! And I'm expecting visitors.

IGOR I'll call you back myself, hedgehog. See you! (Puts down the receiver.) Who's coming to visit you? A new candidate for husband? But your mama has already managed to get attached to me! You can't traumatize her like that! And I'd like to know what doesn't suit you about me? Your mama, for example, for her part, doesn't have any problems with me. And that's the main thing!

TANYA What do you need from me? I'm expecting people right now! You're superfluous. What do you want?

IGOR Nothing special! I just like it, when the lamp's lit and the table's set. I'm sick of it, you understand, going from one restaurant to another... No one's made me so happy for a long time as your mama does. Can you imagine, I've never been a son-in-law, ever in my life?!

TANYA Then marry your hedgehog!

IGOR I'm too young for her.

TANYA You? For her? Young?!

IGOR Of course! I'm going to keep going for another twenty years. And she doesn't dream of getting married, but of being widowed.

TANYA What do you need her for, if you understand all this about her.

IGOR What for? I'm still a man!

TANYA That's clear!

IGOR You misunderstood me just now. Imagine we're sitting at work. One says: "I gave a piece of skirt a good interview in my jeep yesterday..." Another says: "Yesterday I picked one up, and me and her..."

TANYA I get your drift.

IGOR Excuse me! But do I always have to sit and be quiet?

TANYA Who's stopping you speaking? Tell them anything that comes into your head.

IGOR Yeah? Is that really a way out?

TANYA If your colleagues are discussing the war, it doesn't mean that they've personally taken part in military action.

IGOR Thanks for the advice!

TANYA And now go away!

IGOR In that case, why do I need to go anywhere? I'd better just stay here!

TANYA Do you think you're the only one with a private life?

IGOR I don't have one, as it happens.

TANYA Well, I do!

IGOR Tell me, tell me anything that comes into your head.

SOFYA Tanechka! Are we going to have dinner?

TANYA Coming, coming, mama!

IGOR We're bringing everything already, Sofya Ivanovna! (To Tanya.) Shall we go? (Takes the salad bowl.)

The doorbell rings.

TANYA Leave now!

IGOR With the salad? What do you mean? I'm a respectable person!

TANYA Take the salad to the room. And don't show yourself outside the room!

IGOR Got you!

TANYA So what are you standing about for?

IGOR I'm just curious who's come to see you.

The doorbell rings.

IGOR Why don't you open it? Ashamed to show him? By the way, how should I introduce myself to him? Your fiancée? Fictitious fiancée? Former fiancée? I'm confused! Let's agree on something!

The doorbell rings.

IGOR So persistent! He's set his mind on marrying you.

TANYA It's on business for me. From the Social Security.

IGOR Maybe I should switch jobs to work for the Social Security? People really prepare for their visits, I see!

Tanya opens the door.

Like a dog unleashed, Dina flies into the flat and cries in a heart-rending voice: "Mamochka, my dear! It's me, Dina, your daughter, your own daughter! I've missed you so!"

IGOR My dear departed mother always used to say: "You're too picky, Garik! You'll end up being caught by some woman with a child!"

SOFYA Tanya! What happened? What's all this shouting?

Dina, almost knocking Igor off his feet, rushes into the room and throws herself around Sofya's neck.

DINA Grandma! We've met at last!

SOFYA Tanya! Help me!

TANYA (dragging Dina away) Not right away! Gradually!

SOFYA You know her, Tanya? Who is it?

DINA (tears herself away from Tanya and again throws herself around Sofya's neck) Grandma! Don't you feel I'm your flesh and blood?

IGOR (to Tanya about Dina) Should I throw this flesh and blood out?

TANYA (again dragging Dina away) This is my daughter! Your granddaughter, mama!

DINA (throws herself around Tanya's neck) Mamochka! My dear! (Throws herself around Sofya's neck.) Grandma! My dearest!

TANYA (shouts) Stop this wailing! Don't hang around anyone's neck!

SOFYA (shouts) Don't shout at the child! Who is she? I don't understand! Oh God, how my heart is beating. Tanya, don't torment me. Who is she?

TANYA Your own granddaughter! Forgive me for hiding it.

DINA She's been hiding it for forty years. She was afraid of you, grandma. Afraid you would condemn her.

SOFYA Where did you hide her, Tanya?

DINA She rejected me in the maternity hospital. I was adopted by strangers. And they had seven of their own! And drank heavily! That's how my life turned out! Orphaned! With a living mother and grandma! (Cries.)

Pause.

SOFYA You could reject your own child, Tanya?

DINA Personally, I will not permit my mother to be condemned!

SOFYA Tanya, is this really all true?

DINA The pure truth. (Embraces the shaking Sofya.) Grandma! I can't get tired of looking at you. You are my unsung song. My dearest!

SOFYA It's my fault. Forgive me, Tanya! (To Dina.) And you forgive me!

DINA Never mind, grandma, who cares, forget about it.

SOFYA You poor girls! You were so afraid of me, Tanya? Was I really so monstrous? Forgive me, my girls!

TANYA Mama, calm down, it's not like that at all. I'll tell you the truth.

DINA Don't! The truth is too bitter! And I've grown up now! What is there to find out now, who's to blame, what is to be done? We could search a hundred years for an answer, and stay in the same place.

SOFYA Let me look at you! What's your name?

DINA Dina.

SOFYA Tanya's eyes. And my chin. Isn't that right, Tanya? My chin! And my late husband's eyebrows! He didn't live to see it, poor man! My chin and his eyebrows. Or mine? No, let them be his.

DINA His, of course! Who else's? Looks generally skip a generation.

SOFYA Tanya's eyes. And Tanya's forehead. The expression of the forehead. Igor, look at her forehead!

IGOR I'm in ecstasy over her forehead.

SOFYA But whose nose?

IGOR (to Tanya) At least drop a hint about the nose! Whose is it, after all?

DINA (to Tanya about Igor) Who's this? You didn't warn me!

IGOR What for? At this happy gathering, I'm incidental and unnecessary.

SOFYA Igor, are you really reproaching Tanya for having an illegitimate child? After such a long time?

IGOR Who am I to reproach Tanya for anything?

SOFYA What do you mean, who am I? You're almost married to each other!

IGOR Yes, I was almost about to marry a woman who had assured me that she was an old maid. An old maid is touching and romantic, strict and vulnerable. And suddenly, it turns out that she has been leading a double life for forty years. Bunny-rabbits and hedgehogs have more decency.

At least everything's clear with them right away.

DINA Who is he?

TANYA This... this... it's, well...

IGOR Anyway, I'm going on the business trip. (To Tanya.) I'll phone you from the tundra. Directly from a snow-drift.

DINA Who is he?!

TANYA Your father.

DINA (throws herself on Igor's neck right away) Papochka! (Kisses him eagerly.) Papochka!!! My dear! You and I have found each other! I never suspected that I had a father! I'm so happy! I need you so much!

IGOR No, no, it won't work with me! I don't agree to adopt you!

SOFYA You reject your own daughter! I'm beginning to be disenchanted with you, Igor!

IGOR I don't have any children. I never have had! No daughters, no sons.

SOFYA My Tanya doesn't know how to lie. You should know that already.

IGOR Yes, I've noticed that. (To Dina.) How old are you?

DINA Don't speak about this, papa! (Begins to sob.)

IGOR (shouts) How old?!

SOFYA Don't shout at the child! How old are you, my girl? Answer your papa. Don't be scared.

DINA Forty. And what?

IGOR Nothing! It's just that this has nothing to do with me. Forty years ago I was doing military service near Vorkuta. That's very far from here.

SOFYA And you, Tanechka, forty years ago...

TANYA I was working in Yelts. On an assignment. After the library institute.

SOFYA (to Igor) Were you in Yelts?

IGOR Never.

TANYA I travelled from Yelts to Vorkuta.

SOFYA You? From Yelts to Vorkuta? What for?

TANYA On an excursion.

Pause.

SOFYA Igor, the nose is definitely yours. Have a good look.

IGOR (to Tanya) And you're seriously insisting that she is my daughter?

DINA Why get upset now, papochka? What harm will it do you? It's too late to pay alimony! I have a place to stay! All you've done is benefit! Old age is just round the corner! And here your own daughter announces herself to you. There's someone to put your slippers on.

SOFYA All they've done is nag the girl! Sit next to me, Dinochka! Tell your grandma about yourself! How did you live without us?

DINA You call that a life?! My father and mother were deprived of their parental rights for unrestrained drunkenness.

SOFYA What mother and father?

DINA The ones I ended up with. I don't regard them as parents at all.

TANYA Why's that? They still brought you up!

DINA Who brought me up? I loafed around in an orphanage! Then I lived in a hostel!

IGOR I don't believe a thing!

SOFYA Tanya, you knew how your daughter was suffering, and kept silent?

DINA How could she know. We lost each other right after the maternity hospital.

IGOR And how did you find each other?

SOFYA My God! That's right, how did you find each other?

DINA Literally by accident. Literally yesterday.

IGOR Incredible! And how did you recognize each other? Ancestral voices?

DINA (shakes baby vests and romper suits out of her bag) There!

IGOR What's this junk?

DINA My inheritance! My baby vests, romper suits... (Sobs.) All that mama left me!

IGOR I don't believe this Mexican soap opera! I don't believe it!

DINA Here, specially for you. Here are mama's initials in the corners. You don't believe it after that? That's very strange! Don't you agree, grandma, it's strange not to believe it!

SOFYA Show me! (Examines the clothes.) It's Tanya's handwriting.

IGOR You're an intelligent woman, Sofya Ivanovna!

SOFYA But it really is Tanya's handwriting. Although embroidered and illegible.

IGOR (to Tanya) You, abandoning your child, put your marks on the baby clothes?

TANYA Naturally.

IGOR You're just some kind of cuckoo! In any case, I don't believe anyone.

DINA Well, I don't know! How is it possible not to believe! And don't you dare talk to mama like that! Yes!!! Ancestral voices! I, personally, recognized mama a long time ago. Cultured, and a sorrowful face. She used to come to the vegetable shop where I worked. One time I ended up with a shortfall. I was weeping in the storeroom, but the door to the shop was open. I needed money immediately! And none of the staff in the shop had any! Mama was standing by the counter and waiting. I came out tear-streaked and started throwing everything onto the scales. And she says to me quietly: "How much do you need? Only, don't cry, for God's sake!" And she gave me money, and didn't even look at my passport.

IGOR I don't believe a thing!

DINA What right have you?! She gave me money, I swear on my life - she gave it!

SOFYA Poor girl. A sufferer! Always alone.

DINA Alone. But now I've found mama, and you, grandma.

SOFYA Sincere! Beautiful! Why didn't you get married?

DINA You know how many times I've been married! Just five times officially. My entire passport's full of scribbles.

SOFYA And you have children?

DINA That's what's missing.

SOFYA We have to move house. We must be together. How much time we've lost!

DINA I'd be happy, I've literally nothing to move in with. You have such mansions here, and I have a kennel in a communal flat.

SOFYA We have a one-roomed flat, you have a room. We can claim for a two-roomed flat. Enough of you living with strangers! We'll be together! Tanyusha, pass the casket!

Tanya hands her mother quite a large casket.

SOFYA (opening the casket in front of Dina) Look, my little granddaughter!

DINA (clasps her hands) It's a real museum! The Tretyakov Gallery! As good as!!

IGOR (looks) Not bad! How did you come by this?

SOFYA (demonstrating) A diadem in pearls of varying size. A diamond necklace. And this is malachite. A garnet necklace and bracelet. A sapphire ring. All pure gold.

DINA A treasure-house! Did you raid a museum or something?

SOFYA The family jewels. I inherited through the female line.

DINA All this was left you by your mother?

SOFYA My mama, your great-grandma, was an academic. She even received the Stalin Prize. But the jewels, of course, aren't hers. You won't buy those on a Stalin Prize!

DINA So this scientist was left the jewels by her mama?

SOFYA Her mama, my grandma, your great-great-grandma, was a revolutionary, played a prominent role in the People's Will' party.

DINA And bought jewels with Party money! Well done great-great-grandma! She didn't let a chance slip!

SOFYA Why do you say that? Where would the Party get those kinds of funds?

DINA So whose jewels are they? Who acquired them?

SOFYA My great-grandma was a great party girl. She adored jewels, and bought them up all her life.

DINA Who was your great-grandma? Probably some kind of lady in the tsar's court?

SOFYA Almost. She was a serf, my great-grandma.

DINA A serf?!... So your grandma struggled for the freedom of your great-grandma?

SOFYA Something like that. My great-grandma was a serf, and her daughter, my grandma, was a revolutionary.

DINA But did your grandma ask your great-grandma whether she needed that kind of freedom?

IGOR An exceptionally inquisitive and bold child.

DINA And now these jewels are yours?

SOFYA No. Now these jewels are yours. Take them and keep them safe! You, granddaughter, are such a joy for me, such a joy! Thank God there is someone to pass our jewels on to! Thanks to you, I will die happy.

DINA Don't say things like that, grandma! Live!

TANYA Give me the casket, mama! I'll put it in its place. Let it stay there. Dina will know that these jewels are hers. She'll come to see us, look at them.

SOFYA Why all these complications? Let her take them! Let her have them all! She might well get it into her head to wear something. Take them, Dinochka! You are my most precious jewel.

DINA Grandma, what's this - you want to present me with all of this?

SOFYA I've already presented it to you. Who else would I present it to, apart from you?

DINA But these are jewels fit for a tsar! It's ridiculous money, it's several cars!

SOFYA But we're not presenting it to the first passerby, but to our own daughter and granddaughter.

DINA O-oh! (Throws her arms around Sofya's neck.) Grandma, my dearest!!! Thank you!!! (Throws her arms around Tanya's neck.) Mamochka!!! My only!!! Thank you for finding me! (Flings herself around Igor's neck.) Thank you, papochka! My dear!!!

IGOR Don't include me! You've nothing to thank me for!

DINA I will look at these jewels and remember all of you.

SOFYA What do you want to remember me for? I want to be with you while I'm alive! Because I have a premonition that I have a month left to live, perhaps two...

DINA That's as may be! I'm going to go now. (Convulsively stuffs the casket into her bag.) I have to get up early and all the rest of it.

SOFYA You're not going to stay the night with us, Dinochka?

DINA I will! Another time. I'm going crazy as it is. Maybe I'm sleeping?

TANYA The jewels, of course, are yours. But you'd be better leaving them with us. It's dangerous to walk the streets of Moscow at night with treasure in your bag.

DINA Everyone look at me! What fool would flatter me by mugging me? Grandma! Mama! Papa! Goodbye everyone!

SOFYA (making the sign of the cross over Dina) Lord, bless and protect my joy!

DINA (quickly making her way to the door) Thank you, everyone! Thank you for everything! I will never forget this day!

TANYA (following her) Don't be in such a hurry! Careful on the stairs! The neighbors' boy is always munching bananas and throwing the peels on the floor.

DINA I'm not scared of bananas! I work with bananas! See you!

Igor goes out into the corridor.

IGOR Now at least explain something to me!

TANYA (thrusts him his coat) Who are you, that I have to explain myself to you, or justify myself to you? Good night!

IGOR You're simply going to dump me, after what happened?

TANYA What happened? A small amateur show.

IGOR If I'd known forty years ago that I had a daughter, and that she was being treated like that, I would have taken the girl.

TANYA And you would have brought Dina to your mama's apron strings?

IGOR Dinochka would have been brought up in my family, and everyone would have loved her and cared for her. And my mother would have lived longer.

The phone rings.

TANYA It's for you!

IGOR I'm not here.

TANYA Tell them yourself!

IGOR (to the receiver) Y-yes? Why are you speaking to me like this? I have a daughter twice your age. And stop phoning here! My mother-in-law's here, my daughter... No, she's not my wife. Yes, I have a mother-in-law, a daughter, but she's not my wife! When did I lie? Yes, I came here by accident. Yesterday was an accident. But today's already not an accident! Yes, it's a long story. Don't phone any more! (Puts down the phone.) It's impossible to change the past. But it is possible to make the present correspond to the past. To balance the debits with the credits.

TANYA And come to a result.

IGOR As a result of our mistakes and our irresponsibility, the girl's life has been broken. Personally, I'm ready to sacrifice myself to redeem the past.

TANYA In what sense do you mean - sacrifice?

IGOR In the literal sense.

TANYA Don't frighten me!

IGOR I think that, if we get married, nothing that frightening will happen to us.

TANYA Is it worth the risk?

IGOR We can't just think about ourselves! And anyway, at some point one has to start a family. You, your mama, our daughter and me - all of us are much worse off apart.

TANYA You believe?

IGOR I'm starting, starting to remember you! Don't be offended!

Forty years have passed, after all!

TANYA We met each other yesterday for the first time in our lives! I've never been in Vorkuta! I've never given birth! Dina's just a shop assistant in the veg shop on the corner. I don't even know her phone number. I don't know her surname.

IGOR Do you take me for an idiot? You don't know her surname, and you gave her the family jewels?! Or were the jewels fakes? Is everything about you fake?

TANYA The jewels are real, and life is real! Only the daughter is fake. My mama is dying. I'll do anything, as long as she dies happy!

IGOR (shouts) Is Dina my daughter or not?!

TANYA Don't shout here!

IGOR (in a whisper) Daughter or not my daughter?

TANYA Of course not!

IGOR Who is she to me?

TANYA Nobody. She's nobody to you. And my mama's nobody to you. And I'm nobody.

IGOR You're a monster! A cruel, cold woman! I will erase you from my memory.

TANYA I'm not thrusting my society on you and I'm not detaining you.

IGOR Not detaining me? Are you in any state to understand what I've gone through

the past two evenings? In your opinion I can leave this house now and throw everything out of my head?

TANYA Well, you know, I can't put you up here.

Igor slaps her cheek and leaves. The phone rings.

TANYA (into the receiver) I'm listening! (Listens.) Now you listen! I'm sixty, with all that that entails. What's more, I'm an old maid. With a ridiculous manner of joking. Igor will not come here again. There's no mother-in-law here, and certainly no daughter! There aren't even any family jewels left here! I am not his wife. No, not his wife! Not his wife!!! Yes, he proposed to me. I refused. Yes, refused! Refused!!! Because I don't love him! And you don't love him? Meaning that nobody loves him? Pity! He's worthy of love. Well, you and I have had a marvellous talk. Phone, of course, phone! I don't get many calls.(Replaces the receiver.) Slapped me!(Strokes her cheek, recalling his slap with bliss.) He regards me as a woman. I'm unhappy as a woman, as a daughter and simply as a fool. God, how good it is to be unhappy! How long it's been since I was unhappy!(Paces the corridor, with an eternally happy voice.) God, how unhappy I am! How hopelessly unhappy I am!

SOFYA (from the room) Tanya! Where are you? Where have you got to? I'm so happy! So happy!

END OF THE SECOND ACT

ACT THREE

A week has passed. The table is laid for two for a celebration.

Roses on the table. The radio is on and is broadcasting some New Year programme. Sofya, dressed up, is sitting at the table.

Tanya, almost not dressed up, is decorating the tree.

SOFYA Did Igor phone today?

TANYA Not yet.

SOFYA Did he phone yesterday?

TANYA Mama, you've already asked that several times. And I've answered you several times. Igor phones every day.

SOFYA But what does he say?

TANYA That he loves.

SOFYA Whom?

TANYA Us.

SOFYA And in more detail?

TANYA He's worried.

SOFYA About what?

TANYA About your mood. About your health.

SOFYA Do you always speak with him only about me?

TANYA Not only.

SOFYA And does he love you?

TANYA Naturally.

SOFYA And you him?

TANYA Of course.

SOFYA I don't like all this.

TANYA In my opinion, everything's wonderful.

SOFYA And where did Dina get to?

TANYA I told you - she's sick.

SOFYA With what?

TANYA I told you - she has a slight cold.

SOFYA That doesn't put my mind at rest. You're so calm about it.

Because you didn't bring anyone up. At first, any illness looks innocent.

But it can end up as anything. A child demands vigilant watchfulness.

TANYA Dina hasn't been a child for a long time.

SOFYA For me she will always be a child.

TANYA There's no cause for alarm. A slight cold.

SOFYA Then - what's happening to you? Could you at least explain that to me?

TANYA Everything's fine with me. Do you like the tree? (Switches off the overhead light, lights the fairy-lamps.) I think it's very beautiful. Do you like it mama?

SOFYA I don't like anything at all! Tanya, do you think I don't know what's happening to you? I know what you're upset about. I know everything, Tanya. You're not truthful with me. And that offends me! Why do you lie to me? Do I really deserve this?

TANYA Have you guessed everything, mama?

SOFYA It's obvious to a blind person. Dina won't see in the New Year with us! So what? We won't be egoists! Don't repeat my mistakes, Tanya! Dina has her own young companions. Let's hope she has a fun time. And that something very happy takes place in her life. Everything is taking shape. She will be a good daughter to you, Tanechka, when she gets to know you more intimately. You'll see!

TANYA (embracing Sofya) I love you, mama!

SOFYA Then leave me right away! You hear? Go now! And don't you dare argue with me.

TANYA Leave? Me? Where to? Why?

SOFYA To Igor! You must see in the New Year with him.

TANYA I don't want to!

SOFYA Don't lie! You really want to! You just regret leaving me here alone. But I demand it! I have the right!!!

TANYA It's impossible, mama!

SOFYA Tanechka, daughter, with all my strength I ask you! Leave!!!

I will be just fine on my own. I really want you to see in the New Year with Igor.

TANYA Mama, I will never leave you alone!

SOFYA You want to deprive me of the party? That I suffer and get upset over you all night? I thought: what if suddenly, while we're sitting here, Igor meets another woman? New Year throws up the unexpected. I couldn't bear it, Tanechka! If he leaves us... Go to him! Only without you will I have a truly happy celebration!

I will picture to myself how you sit together, dance, laugh, stay silent...

I need only one thing for my happiness - that you leave.

TANYA It's dark already! How will I get there?

SOFYA You've become unsociable, hanging on to your mama's apron strings. Hail a taxi.

TANYA What taxi, on New Year's Eve? I should have called one sooner.

SOFYA Nonsense! It's only nine! You'll make it on public transport!

TANYA It's dark outside, damp, dank.

SOFYA The people are hurrying through the streets, anticipating the celebration.

People are good-natured and happy. Slush? That's under your feet!

And light, white snow is falling from above! Believe me - as soon as you're on the street, your mood will change sharply.

TANYA I've a bit of a chill. I'm probably falling ill.

SOFYA Wrap yourself up warm.

TANYA I don't want to go anywhere, mama!

SOFYA Then do it for my sake, Tanya!

TANYA But how will you be here alone?

SOFYA Alone? (Laughs.) Stupidity! All the people I love will be here with me!

TANYA Alright. I give in to you.

SOFYA Hurry up, Tanechka!

Tanya goes out into the corridor, puts on her coat and returns to the room.

TANYA I'm ready!

SOFYA And a gift? A gift for Igor? It's New Year!

TANYA Of course, of course, I'll buy something or other on the way.

SOFYA What do you mean, something or other? Something or other for Igor?

TANYA Don't worry, mama! I'll think of something!

SOFYA I've already thought of something! (Mysteriously.) I made a note. When Igor was leaving us the first time, he suddenly ran up to the portrait of Dickens and gazed at it with an intense stare. There's more to that than meets the eye! Igor, like you and I, probably adores Dickens! Give him our ten volume series as a present!

TANYA And what will you and I do without Dickens?

SOFYA Where will your Dickens go without you? Marry Igor, and Dickens will return to these same shelves.

TANYA I can't carry ten volumes right now!

SOFYA They're not that heavy! Please, Tanya, don't drag your feet! It will be a wonderful present, which will have great significance for Igor.

Tanya puts Dickens in her bag.

SOFYA Come here! I will kiss you! (Tanya approaches.) Why such a gloomy look?

Smile! There! That's it! That's a different matter!

I'm happy that you are leaving me for this New Year's Eve! (Kisses her.)

TANYA I also wish you happiness, health, and long years of life.

SOFYA I won't last long! A year at most.

TANYA I'll stay with you, mama.

SOFYA I won't allow that! Say hello to Igor!

Tanya leaves her flat. In the stairway a cheerful melody can be heard, seeping out from under all the doors and mixing into a cheerful cacophony,.

Tanya puts down her bag next to her door, lowers herself onto it, leans against the wall and sits. The telephone rings in their flat. Tanya jumps up, listens, gets nervous, but decides not to return. Sofya in the room also listens to the telephone.

SOFYA (to herself) Igorek's phoning... Or Dinochka... But Tanya's not here. (Sighs, moans, strains, stands on her feet, and then - along the wall, along the wall, holding onto it all the way, she makes her way to the telephone, speaking.) Coming, Igorek, coming... Coming, Dinochka, my beloved little granddaughter! (Reaches the telephone just as it stops ringing.) Come on, one more time! One more time! I've already got here! Dial the number one more time! It's not difficult! I'm not going anywhere!

(Sits on the chair next to the telephone.)

Tanya also hears the telephone stop ringing. She again sits herself down on the bag, takes a book from the bag.

TANYA Page one hundred and sixty two. (Opens the book and tries to read.) There was Newman so subdued yet so overjoyed, and there were the twin brothers so delighted and interchanging such looks, that the old servant stood transfixed behind his master's chair, and felt his eyes grow dim as they wandered round the table. (Weeps bitterly.)

While she was reading, pouring tears over the pages, at first from afar, then ever closer and louder, a strange unrhythmic tapping has been heard.

At last Father Frost appears on the landing on crutches and with a sack on his shoulders.

A New Year tree is sticking out of the sack.

TANYA (jumping up) Don't come any closer! I'll scream!

FATHER FROST (with Dina's voice)

Happy New Year! (Pours confetti on Tanya.) New Happy Year! Been thrown out of your flat? Because of me? Don't be scared! Don't recognize me? It's me, Dina! Your daughter! Remember? Something drew me to you. New Year! They won't throw me out, I thought. But I see you've been thrown out yourself! With your things!

TANYA Dina?! You?!

DINA Did you really think it was Father Frost?

TANYA Dina!!! How wonderful! I'm so happy! How cleverly you've thought everything out! So funny - on crutches! Happy New Year! New Happy Year! (Pats, pokes and pulls at Dina.) A real Father Frost! It was half a century ago the last time Father Frost came to visit me! A real one! (Turns and pats, pokes etc. Dina.) A real one!

DINA Gently, gently! The crutches are real as well!

TANYA And I have crutches! (Walks around on crooked legs.)

We'll be two invalids! (Laughs and pulls at Dina.)

DINA Careful! Oi, don't! Oi, let go! I'll fall!!! And I mustn't!

The crutches are real! I swear on my health! (Falls on Tanya.)

TANYA (holds her, confused) Real crutches? What's the matter with you, Dina?

DINA God punished me.

TANYA And more specifically?

DINA I tell you - God punished me.

TANYA What - he turned up personally and punished you?

DINA Not personally. He commissioned the boy who eats bananas, then throws away the peels. God punished me for you. Forgive me, Tanya!

TANYA I don't understand, Dina, I don't understand anything.

DINA I took your jewels and went crazy. There, I thought, my whole life's taken care of! I'll never go to them - meaning you - again! They'll change their minds! And I went down your staircase like I was on fire. So you couldn't raise the alarm, or bring me back, or take them away! But I slipped at the bottom. I broke both my legs. They used to chop off hands for theft, but now, it seems, God has started punishing legs. I've brought your jewels back. I couldn't do it before, I was lying upside-down. Tanya, forgive me! My parents really didn't give a damn about me. They didn't buy me apples! But you - bang - right away give the family jewels to belovedDinochka! Anyone's head would go into a spin! I'll ask you for these jewels some day, put them all on and go into my veg shop. All the staff will hit the roof.

The manager will go cross-eyed with envy!

TANYA What a joy that you've come! What a clever girl you are!

(Embraces and kisses her.) Let's go into the house! We'll make grandma happy! Lord!!! What grandma?! What am I up to?! I must have gone mad!

I'm sixty, and what am I up to?

DINA Sixty? Your worst enemy wouldn't put you at more than fifty... seven. Our manager's fifty-five. Although she lies, and says she's fifty-two! And she has three lovers! You don't believe me? I swear on my health! Three! I'm not consoling you! I know them all personally. Our lorry driver Grisha - that's one! When he's drunk, he lets it out himself that he's the manager's lover. Then there's a pensioner who drives around after her in an invalid car. And the inspector! But that only happens when there's an inspection. But she doesn't hold a candle to you, for instance, looks-wise. Sixty! All you should be doing now is partying! Partying and partying! Now's the time to do it!

TANYA (laughs) Oi, how lucky I am to have you, Dina, oi, what a good girl you are!

DINA Me?! Good? It's you who's good! I'm the one who's lucky to have you! I'd like to ask your advice about life! Oi, I really need to! It's burning me up!

TANYA We'll talk. We have all night. So then? Shall we go and confess together? Otherwise, my head's spinning from lying.

DINA Confess?! What's the matter with you? You want to send your mamasha to the other world at New Year? Is truth more precious than life for you? Your mamasha is a complete child! Oh, and I can't return the money that you paid me for lying - I spent it!

TANYA Don't worry about the money! It's not important.

DINA You're saintly people! Money's not important!

The family jewels - there you are, Dinochka, take them!

TANYA She thinks that you're her granddaughter.

DINA My ancestors knew for sure that I was their daughter.

And what did I get from them? They didn't stroke my head once in my whole life! (Sobs.) Don't deprive me of a grandma, Tanya! She's the only one I've got!

I don't have any other relatives! Only her!!!

TANYA Then let's speak informally! And don't get confused!

Informally, and call me mama. Got it?

DINA Easy. Straight from the heart.

TANYA We'll manage! Home?

DINA Forward! Attack!!!

They open the door and resolutely walk straight through to the room, not noticing Sofya in the corridor.

TANYA (ceremoniously and with bravura) Mamochka! Look what a joy we have! (Suddenly thinks.) Mama! Where is she?

DINA Maybe she went out for something?

TANYA Mama hasn't walked for ten years.

DINA She's been stolen! These are the times we live in - people are stealing anything!

TANYA I didn't move from the door.

DINA She was taken alive to heaven! After she gave me the family jewels, I'm not surprised by anything any more!

TANYA (desperately) Mama!!!

SOFYA (shouts) Tanya! Where are you?! What happened? Who are you with?

TANYA (throws herself on her mother) Mamochka! How did you get here? Is everything alright with you?

SOFYA (about Dina, who is hobbling after Tanya on the crutches) Who's that?

DINA I'm Old Man Frost come from the forest! With a beard spun of gold! As ever, hale and hearty! Happy New Year, children!!!

TANYA Don't be frightened, mama! It's our Dinochka! She wanted to see us!

SOFYA Granddaughter!

DINA I'm jolly Father Frost, and I've brought you all gifts.

SOFYA Clever girl! How cleverly you've thought everything out! Father Frost on crutches. Very funny. I've never seen anything like it. What does it mean?

DINA It means I broke both my legs.

SOFYA (to Tanya) And you argued with me! A slight cold! It's not dangerous, it's not dangerous!

You see what complications have developed?

TANYA You must go back to the room, mama!

SOFYA I'll go back! And I'll get there perfectly well myself!

TANYA Lean on me!

SOFYA I can do it without support! But you make sure I don't fall, Tanya. And you, Dinochka, get out of the way, so that I don't knock you, God forbid.

Dina goes into the room, places down the New Year tree that she brought, and lays presents wrapped in bright wrapping-paper under it. All this time Sofya slowly, along the walls, moves into the room.

TANYA Careful, mamochka!

SOFYA Certainly! I wouldn't fall down for anything, now that I've only just begun to live a happy, peaceful life!

TANYA Mamochka, you'd be better to lean on me.

SOFYA No need. I'll get used to it. I'm not going to sit forever any more. With such a family! There'll be so much work!

DINA (greeting them in the room) To give you delight, gifts jolly and bright!

TANYA Sit, sit, mamochka!

SOFYA I'll sit a little and go somewhere again. It's New Year, after all!

DINA For you, grandma, a camera!

SOFYA A camera? For me?!

DINA We'll photograph each other! Create a family album.

SOFYA I took photographs in my youth, but I've forgotten how to now.

DINA I'll teach you! You'll remember everything! We have the whole night ahead!

And for you, mamochka, here! (Gives Tanya an iridescent open dress.)

Please put it on! And fasten on more of the family jewels.

I blew all the money you gave me on the dress.

TANYA Thank you, Dinochka! I'm afraid I'm too old for this kind of dress.

SOFYA Old - give it to the child. Let her wear it!

DINA Put it on, mamochka! You'll immediately be much younger in it.

SOFYA Don't argue, Tanya, put it on! No one will see you in it, anyway.

TANYA I'll put it on. (Collects the dress and leaves.)

DINA We'll decorate the second tree! The more festivity, the better. We'll have a celebration, the three of us. (Finishes decorating the tree.)

SOFYA (examines the camera) Yes, there was so much in my youth! I got carried away. I photographed your grandfather.

DINA (absentmindedly) What grandfather?

SOFYA Your grandfather! Who else's? We have lots of his photographs. He didn't live to see this, poor man! He didn't see you! Not a lot's changed with the technology of this thing. Generally, the world changes slowly. The same feelings, the same joys that were there a hundred, two hundred and a thousand years ago. That's what I think, having lived a life. (Snaps Dina, and gasps at the flash.) Oi!

DINA Don't be frightened, grandma! It's the flash. What did you photograph me with the beard on for?

Tanya enters in the new dress, in beautiful high-heeled shoes, wearing the jewels.

DINA Good God, look at her! The Swan Tsarina! Mistress of the Copper Mountain! The malachite casket!

SOFYA Is Igor coming?

TANYA He'll phone.

DINA Mama, come to see me in the veg shop looking just like that! I'll carelessly mention to our manager: This is my mama! She's come in for some carrots. She's making borsch for me coming home!

TANYA (seriously) I will most certainly come. Thank you.

SOFYA (preparing to take a photograph) Stand a bit to the left, Tanya, between the trees! So both the trees get into the photo. We'll send it to our relatives! Dina, go to your mama!

It's not interesting to photograph Tanya on her own.

DINA As soon as I unfasten the beard.

SOFYA We need photographs with the beard, and without the beard!

Smile, Tanya, smile! Otherwise your eyes are staring somehow.

As if something unusual's happening to you. God have mercy! (Snaps.)

That's it! And now, Tanya, go away, quickly! It will be New Year soon!

DINA Grandma, why are you sending mama away? Where to?

SOFYA To your father! To Igor. You and I, Dinochka, will have a party here, the two of us. How well everything is working out!

TANYA I won't make it anywhere already! It will be New Year any minute now!

SOFYA All the more reason not to drag out the time! Run off! Run! Run!

DINA Running after men is the last thing to do, grandma! You go after him, and he goes away from you. It's better to run away from him. Then he'll come after

you! They've got this sort of reflex! It's not their fault. Maybe they're not happy with it themselves.

SOFYA Don't interfere when your elders are talking! Go to him, Tanya, go! Don't worry about us.

TANYA Alright, mama!

SOFYA Don't forget Dickens!

Tanya takes her bag and goes into the corridor. The phone rings.

TANYA (grabs the receiver, joyfully, with hope) Yes! It's me!!! (Disappointedly.) Hello, hedgehog! Thank you! Happy New Year to you as well. New Happy Year! Say hello? Isn't Igor with you? No, I can't say hello. No, naturally, he's not here. No, he's not coming here. I'm sure!

So, when he comes to you, pass my congratulations on to him. No, he's definitely not coming to see me. Yes, I'm sure. Goodbye!

SOFYA Tanya! You've still not gone!

TANYA (returning to the room) Not yet, mamochka! (With hope.) And what? Did you want to see in the New Year with me?

SOFYA Under no circumstances! I'm worried that you haven't gone yet. Go quickly!

DINA It's a mistake, grandma! A fateful mistake!!!

SOFYA Don't interfere!

DINA I can't remain indifferent to the fate of my mama.

TANYA Don't fight! Best to have a good time! (Kisses her mother.) Good health to you, mamochka! Happiness! Long-long years of life!

SOFYA What long years? A year, two, are left, no more.

TANYA (kisses Dina) Thank you for coming! Be happy!

DINA (accompanies Tanya to the front door) Don't go far! Wait in the same place!

SOFYA The present, the present, don't forget!

Tanya goes out onto the stair landing and sits on her bag.

DINA Well, grandma, we need to toast the Old Year!

SOFYA We'll celebrate in style! I'll get drunk tonight! Right then, pour out a measure of vodka for me... twenty millilitres! Straight in the fruit juice.

Dina prepares a drink for herself and Sofya.

SOFYA (anxiously) You haven't poured yourself a lot, have you, granddaughter?

DINA Don't you worry - there's enough to drink! I brought everything we need with me!

SOFYA Do you drink a lot?

DINA Generally, I don't drink as such. But right now, we need to drink! To the Old Year! May it rot in hell! The devil takes it! Hurrah!!! Long may you live!

They drink.

DINA I'll take the vodka out of here right away! So you don't get nervous!

(Goes out onto the stairs with the vodka and a glass.) How are you here, mama?

TANYA Thank you. Not bad at all. A little lonely. But with you in my thoughts.

DINA Let's see out the Old Year! Hold this! (Gives her a glass.)

TANYA Oi, what, are we going to drink on the staircase, like alcoholics?

DINA But we need to drink! Better to drink on the stairs, than not to drink at all!

Everyone knows that!

TANYA Without anything to eat?

DINA Not all at once! The main thing is to drink! I'll bring snacks out in stages.

To the Old Year! May it rot in hell! We need to talk... mama! Hurrah! Don't drink in little sips! You'll get drunk faster, and we need to drink all night. And you'll be rolling around the staircase covered in diamonds. Let's have another one right away! Otherwise, I don't know when I'll be able to slip out again.

TANYA Oi, I've had enough alcohol already, Dina.

DINA You need to drink here. You'll catch a cold. Close your eyes, so you don't have to see it, hold your nose and drink!

Tanya closes her eyes and irresolutely, slowly drinks.

DINA As for myself, I'm pregnant. And I never had a husband, don't have one, and don't foresee one. And as for myself, I'm forty! What am I to do?

Don't you open your eyes and don't interrupt - drink, drink!

Igor approaches in a Father Frost costume and with a tree behind his back.

TANYA (drinks up and opens her eyes) I haven't drunk that much yet, but there are already two Father Frosts!

DINA My colleague has arrived. We'll pour ourselves one more each, and you (to Igor) can swig from the bottle.

TANYA I've sunk low. Drinking in a threesome on the staircase. (To Dina about Igor.) Do you at least know him?

DINA This guy? Of course!

TANYA Who is he?

DINA Father Frost.

TANYA It's clear! To the Old Year!

They clink glasses and drink.

DINA (to Igor) Would you allow us to have a piece of your fir-tree? (To Tanya.) Smell the fir-tree, mama! Otherwise, you'll get drunk!

In the room.

SOFYA (lifts herself from the armchair and makes her way toward the front door) Dina! Dina!!! Where have you got to?

DINA I'm being called! Don't get bored! I'll slip out to you soon with some champagne!

(Grabs Sofya and takes her back to the table.)

Why are you running about everywhere today, grandma?

Ten years you've been sitting quietly, but now you're running around?

SOFYA Where did you get to? I was worried.

DINA I went to the toilet.

SOFYA The toilet's the other way!

DINA I went outside! I got used to it in my village. Twenty-five years in the city, but I can't shake the habit - it's simply terrible.

On the staircase.

IGOR You've decided to greet the New Year here?

TANYA Yes. And what? Why does this surprise you?

IGOR No, no, nothing. I like it here, in principal. Can I see in the New Year with you?

TANYA Why have I got two Father Frosts? I've got two, but somewhere, maybe, there aren't enough.

IGOR I understand. I'll go. The joke didn't work. (Pulls off the hat together with the eyebrows, moustache and beard, and is left only in a red nose.)

TANYA What are you putting on a striptease for me for? You were Father Frost, you've become a clown.

IGOR I came to apologize to you. Don't worry, I'm going now. (Takes off the nose.)

TANYA Don't take everything off! You were a clown - you've become Igor!

IGOR I'm at fault before you.

TANYA (laughs) You're talking about the slap? Don't be sorry! (Chortles.) No one had ever slapped me before you! Your slap is my best memory! What are you staring at me for?

Do you think I'm drunk? So what? It's New Year! You still condemn! me, is that it?

IGOR I'm relishing you! You're amazingly beautiful! I thought that such a thing would never happen to me!

TANYA Yes? Hello to you from the hedgehog. That mouse, by the way, is waiting for you.

IGOR You're hinting that it's high time I left?

TANYA I wasn't thinking of hinting at any such thing!

She simply asked me to pass on hello. I've passed it on.

IGOR I have a present for you.

TANYA I have a present for you as well! (Shoves the bag with her foot.) There. In that.

I'm so drunk! If I bend down for the present, I'll fall. Get it out yourself!

IGOR Later. And now give me, please, your hand! The right one.

TANYA I won't give it for anything! (Gives her hand.) Oi! (Takes it away.) That was the left one. Now let's calculate what's right. That's right. But you check and see if it's really right. I could be mistaken. Where's the heart? There's the heart. So that determines the right hand. What do you want it for? Oi! A ring!

IGOR I'm very worried - what if the ring doesn't fit you or you don't like it.

TANYA Why shouldn't it fit me? It fits! And I like it!

Igor bends to kiss her.

TANYA Oi, what's the matter with you?

IGOR (laughs) Everything's fine with me!

The chimes can be heard.

IGOR Happy New Year! New Happy Year!

TANYA Don't get so distracted all the time!

Igor is already almost kissing Tanya, but Dina appears with champagne and glasses.

DINA Happy New Year! New Happy Year! I won't get in your way! We'll swig champagne in a threesome, and I'll go back to grandma! Oi! It's papa! Happy New Year, papochka! New Happy

(Year! What are we standing here for? New Year is a family holiday! It's customary to greet it at home, and not on the staircase!

TANYA That's true, what are you standing here for?

IGOR I stood here, and now let's go on!

TANYA Well, let's go into the house!

IGOR You're inviting?

TANYA Grab the bag! There's a present for you inside!

IGOR It's heavy! Can I have a look?

TANYA Of course!

DINA (looking into the bag) What kind of people are these! Ready to give everything away!

Ready to take everything out of the house!

IGOR (looks) Oh Lord! And Dickens now!

TANYA From me and from mama... and from Dinochka.

In the flat.

SOFYA (again trying to stand) Dina! Dina! Where are you getting to all the time? The toilet's on the left!

DINA (running in) I'm always here for you, grandma! (Embraces Sofya and sits her in the chair.) Don't jump about so much, grandma! Save yourself for us!

Igor again puts his costume on and stands before Sofya's eyes as Father Frost with a tree and a bag.

SOFYA Three New Year trees and two Father Frosts! (Snaps the camera.) The relatives will be astonished!

Igor places the tree down. Dina swiftly takes it upon herself to decorate it. Among the decorations are the family jewels.

Igor places Dickens on the shelves.

SOFYA I told you about Dickens, Tanya! (Constantly clicks the camera.) And by the way, what are you doing here, Tanya? What have you forgotten here? Where should you be? With whom?

Igor finally frees himself of the wig, whiskers, eyebrows, nose and hat. And embraces Tanya.

IGOR Happy New Year, Sofya Ivanovna! New Happy Year!

SOFYA In the frame there are three trees, a bride and groom!

(Constantly clicks the camera.)

Dina, having taken off the costume, stands before Igor and Tanya.

SOFYA In the frame - a family. (Clicks.)

DINA And I'm pregnant. To give birth or not to give birth? That is the question!

SOFYA (drops the camera) You're pregnant? I will have a great-granddaughter?

TANYA (hugs Dina) Only give birth! I... Papa and I will always help you!

SOFYA And I still happen to be alive!

IGOR We have a country house. You'll come with the child. You will bring it up in the midst of nature!

SOFYA Their country house is so far away! And there's no river.

No forest. I'll go with you! I'll help out.

DINA I won't get in your way?

IGOR Not at all. There's plenty of room, and it's empty.

DINA What's it like for shops?

IGOR You can get stuff!

DINA Anyway, I was born and grew up in a village. And I'll adapt and live in your country house somehow. Nothing can frighten me any more!

IGOR I have no doubt about that.

SOFYA (hugs Dina) So much has happened, while I've been dying.

DINA Grandma, I love you.

SOFYA Dinochka, only don't be distressed. I have a premonition, that I have little time left with you...

DINA Grandma, my dear!

TANYA Mamochka!

IGOR Mother-in-law!

SOFYA No, no, don't try and dissuade me! It's time... it's time... Another two-three years and... I'm not afraid of death! But one thing alarms me - the child must have a father!

DINA If I had the slightest idea of who it might be!

TANYA There are plenty of single mothers in the world!

SOFYA I don't want to hear about it! Dinochka is a beauty. Gentle, cheerful, decent! No one can console me, if the child doesn't have a father!

TANYA Dina! You can't run away from matrimony.

If grandma's got something into her head...

IGOR (changes the subject of conversation) I'll hand in the balance of accounts and take everyone to the country house. We can discuss everything there.

DINA Winter at the country house?

TANYA But at the country house, it's summer.

IGOR And we're expecting a big harvest of oranges at the moment.

SOFYA The child could develop a rash from the oranges. Dinochka and I will sow carrots, radishes, and dill. I think it's time to start gradually packing. What will we need there most of all?

IGOR Dickens!

(Starts to take Dickens off the shelves and give them to Dina, Tanya, Sofya.)

TANYA (laughs and hugs Sofya) Dickens of course, mama!

THE END

WHILE SHE WAS DYING

a vaudeville in three acts by [Nadezhda Ptushkina](#)

Translated by James Donohoe