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THE RUSSIAN ROOM

By Barbara Sperber

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## THE RUSSIAN ROOM

TIME: The present

SETTING: A small city in Upstate New York

### CHARACTER DESCRIPTION:

WINSTON MacBRIDE: An ex-addict and an addiction counselor—  
In her early forties

ISAAC MARGOLIN : Director of the Counseling Program at  
St. Ann's Institute—a divorcee in his late fifties

SASHA MacBRIDE: WINSTON's 16 year-old daughter

YURI NAHOROSHOV: a brilliant, moody painter—in his late 40's

ANATOLY ROSHEVSKY: A struggling painter in his mid forties

NOTE: The same actor that plays Yuri also plays Anatoly. They both have Russian accents.

SCENE ONE

The MacBride Kitchen

Wednesday, 3 p.m.

*SASHA comes into the KITCHEN, wearing her high black boots, parka, and Russian fur hat. SHE throws her parka on the counter, then reaches into the fridge and takes out some blinis. WINSTON is sitting at the kitchen table.*

WINSTON

*(Waving a piece of paper) Why would it make you happy?*

*SASHA stares at her, then snatches the paper out of WINSTON's hand. SHE shreds it, and runs it down the garbage disposal. (Beat.) Then SHE grabs the blinis, tosses them into the sink, and runs them down the garbage disposal too.*

SASHA

*(Nursing a bad head-ache) I don't believe this! You have no right! To go into my room—like a common thief! And then—and then --you actually went and got tape—and you scotched it together!*

WINSTON

*(Very distraught, but trying to be calm) Why would it make you happy?*

*SASHA stares, open-mouthed, at WINSTON. Then SHE runs the garbage disposal again--for a long time. SHE achieves her goal--The garbage disposal is very loud, and WINSTON winces, but it also makes SASHA's headache much worse, so SHE finally turns it off.*

*SASHA stands at the garbage disposal for a few Beats. Then the headache gets the best of her and SHE reluctantly sits down. (2 or 3 Beats.)*

*WINSTON gets up and pours hot water from the kettle into a mug, adds a tea bag, and sets it in front of SASHA.*

WINSTON

Why—would it—make you happy?

*2 or 3 Beats. Then the air seeps slowly out of SASHA.*

SASHA

...Then I wouldn't have to experience pain in my body ever again...and my body wouldn't be encumbered.

WINSTON

*(Lighting up a cigarette)* Encumbered?

SASHA

*(Beat.)* By my soul.

WINSTON

Your body doesn't always hurt you.

SASHA

Oh yes it does.

WINSTON

You can take your tea bag out now. It should be ready.  
*SASHA doesn't.*

*(2 or 3 Beats.)*

WINSTON

Remember when you were six and you danced in *Swan Lake*?

SASHA

*(Beat.) (Lying)* No.

WINSTON

Six years old and going in every day and watching them rehearse! Thirteen-year-olds. Fifteen-year-olds. Even twenty-year-olds. And only six! No wonder they ended up giving you a part...They even made up a special dance for you.

SASHA

No they didn't. It was choreographed.

WINSTON

No it wasn't.

SASHA

Yes it was. It was in there already. *(Beat.)*

WINSTON

You're wrong pumpkin. The ballet mistress—what was her name? Edna? Ethel? She called me aside and told me that you showed so much promise she was going out on limb just to--

SASHA

*SASHA joins in with WINSTON now and they speak SIMULTANEOUSLY, but SASHA's delivery is leaden and mechanical):*

WINSTON and SASHA

Showcase your talents./ Showcase my talents.

SASHA

It was *in* the show. *(Beat.)* And how would you know—you never even made it to dress rehearsals. You were curled up in a fetal position in the attic of a halfway house. *SHE sits up and takes out her tea bag and suddenly faces WINSTON. (Speaking aggressively)* You DO want me to be happy? Don't you?

WINSTON

You can drink your tea. It's cooled off now. *(Beat.)* Of course I do. But I don't see how—how it would...make you. *SHE pauses.*

*SASHA pushes the tea mug away.*

WINSTON

You haven't always had so many head-aches.

SASHA

*(Interrupting)* Oh yes I have. For the last 13 years!

WINSTON

Thirteen years! Why...if you hadn't picked up *mono* again, it wouldn't have triggered your allergies...and then your allergies wouldn't have--

SASHA

*(Interrupting)* Oh yes they would! My body has failed me for the *(Fighting tears)* last sixteen years!

WINSTON

...You mean since you came out of the womb?

SASHA

You don't even *remember*--I can't believe this!

WINSTON

Remember?

SASHA

You bought me when I was three.

WINSTON

*Bought you?*—But you're *not adopted!*

SASHA

...And you've dragged me to everyone from chiropractors and... rabbis, to... Buddhist monks. To find out what was wrong with me.

WINSTON

*(Beat.)* I've taken you...for check-ups—*(Beat.)* To a rabbi—maybe, once.

SASHA

And a channeling-kinesiologist-Reiki nut.

WINSTON

But up until a few days ago, your head-aches were--

SASHA

Going in the right direction?

WINSTON

Yes. The right direction.

SASHA

For a nanno-second in time?

WINSTON

*(Beat.)* Sash--is this *(Beat.)* really about Yuri's letter?

SASHA

Winston, Why is it when shit happens to you--you become like *Mourning Becomes Electra*—but when something involves *another person*, it's like suddenly you're *Pollyana*? And NO, this is NOT about Yuri's letter! I'm sick of your crap.

*(2 or 3 Beats.)*

WINSTON

But there are so many things you love to do. Painting, dancing. And being with your friends *(Beat.)*

SASHA

*(Putting her head up now)* And which friends would that be? Who've you heard lately knocking at the door to see how I'm doing?

WINSTON

I wouldn't call...four friends that came to your birthday party in any way trivial—

SASHA

The friends you bribed by dangling *Cold Play* tickets right in front of their noses?

WINSTON

I didn't exactly...bribe. Sash--Did you know--I love you very much?

*SASHA suppresses a yawn.*

WINSTON

Could you sleep last night? Did your sleeping pill work?

SASHA

*(Beat.) (Lying)* As soon as my head hit the pillow. I didn't get up the whole night--not even to pee.

WINSTON

*(Getting up and wiping off the counter)* Good.

SASHA

*(Beat.)* Why? Why good?

WINSTON

I was rehearsing my memoir out loud... *(SHE pauses)* You're not hoarding your pills again...in that Ukrainian jewelry box I bought you for your birthday...like you did after that boy broke up with you?

SASHA

*That boy!* His name is Valentin. And no *(SHE's lying)*, I am not hoarding my sleeping pills!

WINSTON

I just meant—*(A few Beats.)*...

SASHA

*(Softly, and speaking very slowly)* Don't you understand? I want to kill myself. Then I'd be happy.

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)



SCENE TWO

ISAAC'S Office,

Wednesday, 7 p.m.

*WINSTON knocks.*

ISAAC

Come in, come in. Make yourself comfortable. Coffee?

WINSTON

No thanks, Isaac.

ISAAC

You enjoying it here with us at Saint Anns?

WINSTON

Very much so.

ISAAC

Not sorry you didn't stay in your job at Rehab?

WINSTON

Absolutely not.

ISAAC

Good. Your clients evidently feel the same. You got the highest evaluations on empathy of any first-timer I've ever seen. You still working on that memoir of yours 24/7?

WINSTON

24/7? I wouldn't have any time left for my clients then, would I?

ISAAC

*Touche'*. Listen, Winston, something's come up. By the way, I like that blouse. Is it new?

WINSTON

Thank you.

ISAAC

Did I ever mention. Justin Neufield is a college bud of mine. And he now works for Edgars, the Director of Windleton. *Beat*. He just called and asked if I know anyone who might sub as speaker at this weekend's National Recovery Conference. Two big shots in a row came down with the flu. And now they'll take (*teasing now*) even small potatoes to fill--

WINSTON

(*Interrupting*) You're asking me! Oh Isaac, I'm ever so grateful! You won't be disappointed. *What* is the topic?

ISAAC

"Achieving Sobriety and Stepping Up as a Parent."

WINSTON

(*Interrupting again*) Perfect. Fits my memoir to a tee.

ISAAC

Hold your horses. I thought I'd sound you out. There's someone else I have in mind as well.

WINSTON

And is this mystery candidate someone who also went to you for psychotherapy? And another recent hire?

ISAAC

I stopped playing Twenty Questions when I was in the third grade. You know I can't tell you that.

WINSTON

I'll take that coffee now.

*HE gets it for her.*

If anyone should know how I've struggled to get where I am, *you* should. My father fucking disinherited me before I turned 16--for not taking Jesus as my personal savior. After locking me in the basement so I'd see the light!

ISAAC

Too true.

WINSTON

But from masquerading as the world's most self-pitying asshole... I now wake up bursting with ideas for my clients, as well as myself.

ISAAC

*Proud* you were a tough case, Missy, aren't you?

WINSTON

Yes I am. I finally feel that I'm doing something valuable. And for which I have a gift. I've emerged from the chrysalis into new butterfly form. For the first time of life, I feel ready to risk everything and to stand in my own shoes. And reading my memoir at Windleton will allow me to--

ISAAC

*(Interrupting)* Listen, Winston. If anyone can empathize with you, it would be me. Nevertheless, there are various bureaucratic factors—

WINSTON

*(Interrupting)* And several of my patients have experienced a similar process. They've gone from deep depression and self-denial to being fully themselves, no longer decimated by their old sense of "sin."

ISAAC

Tell you what, Lambkin. Give me some time to think things through and get back to you. Say, by tomorrow a.m.?

WINSTON

Only if you promise to factor in the fact that I've dreamed of such a window of opportunity—

ISAAC

*(Interrupting)* Yeah. Yeah. *(Repeating what she said earlier)*: If anyone should know how you've struggled to get where you are...

WINSTON

Well, then. Is there anything else?

ISAAC

You think Sasha will be okay by herself at home, if you go? On such short notice?

WINSTON

Oh, Sasha will be fine. Yes, she's doing fine.

ISAAC

I thought you told me that last summer—when that boy dumped her, she—

WINSTON

*(Interrupting)* Oh no. she just slipped in the bath tub and hit her head.

ISAAC

But weren't there pills involved?

WINSTON

*SHE shrugs.* Anyway, that was over a year ago. Now she's doing fine. She's even asked me to go away so she can have some space. You know girls at sixteen! All they talk about is how they need their own space.

ISAAC

And if one actually gives it to them, it often boomerangs and they end up crying for help.

WINSTON

Oh, not Sasha. She's too intense, and too obsessed with her own imaginative life. Verging on the theatric.

ISAAC

Well you should know best, shouldn't you. *Beat.* By the way, any chance you'd like to join me for Chinese after the staff meeting? And maybe a flick?

*WINSTON hesitates.*

ISAAC

Peking Duck or Szechuan Lamb? (*Beat.*) Never mind. I'll ask you again when you get back.

WINSTON

*(Getting up)* It's not that I don't appreciate all that you've done for me. Just that I don't have the time anymore to invest in emotional--

ISAAC

Yeah, yeah. I know all that shit.

*HE puts his hand on her shoulder and escorts her out.*

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE THREE

SASHA's BEDROOM,

A Few Minutes Later

*SASHA's room is cluttered with Matryoshka dolls. On the wall is a poster of Dostoyevsky, blindfolded, being led to execution, and several of SASHA's paintings--mainly self portraits, but also snow-scapes, Russian Orthodox churches, an onion dome or two. Some are quite literal and precise, but others more fanciful and abstract.*

*SASHA is lying on the bed, reading her poem that SHE's composing in her journal out loud. SHE's wearing a night gown, a black fur Russian hat, and high black boots.*

SASHA

“Softly Russia flows into the room.  
I am reading The Brothers Karamazov.”

*SHE stops for a Beat.*

*SHE coughs, and continues:*

“Softly Russia flows into the room.  
I am reading The Brothers Karamazov.  
I am frail with longing  
For the wildflower  
For the golden tundra  
For the stalk/the  
Still, open cloud.  
I examine the hole in the ceiling.  
The socket of my wisdom tooth  
Still shoots pain  
Like an eye that refuses to shut  
Even when it's been removed...”

*SHE stops for a Beat., to catch her breath.*

*SHE resumes reading the poem.*

“Light spills through the  
Thick-plaited glass.  
I am down on the floor,  
My midriff heaving.  
I water for Dimitri,  
I throb in orgasm  
Over and over—  
Transform though this  
One perfect chord that  
Vibrates through the  
Thick-plaited glass.  
My soul is pained,  
Caught between Russia  
And...”

*A Beat or two. SHE can't think of what else to write next.*

“And...and...the flatlands of the lake.

*A Beat. or two.*

*SHE tosses the journal that SHE's writing in on the floor, and reaches under the bed for her bottle of wine. Taking it over to the Love-Seat, SHE pours herself some wine. SHE sits on the Love-Seat and takes several chugs.*

*YURI appears from behind the Love-Seat with his own bottle of wine and two wine glasses.*

YURI

Beautiful and talented too! May I join you?

*HE pours some wine into one wine glass and hands it to her. SHE takes it and sets the wine bottle on the floor. Then HE pours some wine into his own glass and sits down next to her on the Love-Seat.*

*A few more Beats., while THEY drink their wine.*

YURI

Can I give you some roses?

SASHA

Why, of course.

*HE reaches behind his back and gives them to her.*

YURI

Did you know you are even prettier than I thought?

SASHA

*(Giggling)* Why what did you think?

YURI

I thought...I thought...

SASHA

What did you think?

YURI

I thought you'd be a little clone of Winston's. But...you're a full grown, beautiful woman with an enticing...

SASHA

Yes?

YURI

An enticing scent.

SASHA

But how gross. Yes, please. I'll have more wine.



YURI

*(Pouring wine into her empty glass)* More like the scent of cherries. Like those from the cherry orchard surrounding the estate in Chekhov's—

SASHA

But weren't they chopped down?

YURI

*(Laughing and reaching across the table and touching her cheek)* Oh my little rascal, my prima donna. I can't keep up with you! I'm so happy that I returned home, and we finally are together again! *Beat.* Now, you can begin your life.

SASHA

*(In astonishment)* What did you say?

YURI

Oh—didn't you know? I can read your thoughts...even without you saying a word. Didn't you know that, Sasha?

SASHA

*(Beat.)* Yes, father. I did know that *(Very pleased, but a little reluctant to admit it).*

*YURI disappears behind the Love-Seat.*

*SASHA puts down the wine glass, then grabs her wine bottle and takes a few more chugs. A few Beats. SHE goes over to her night stand and reaches into the top drawer. SHE takes out a letter that has been folded and refolded many times, and then reads it to herself silently.*

*SIMULTANEOUSLY:* *LIGHTS GO UP on the lower LEFT SIDE of the STAGE, where YURI is sitting at a desk, composing this very letter. As HE writes, HE reads it out loud:*

YURI

"Dear Sasha,

Thank you for your letter. I'm glad to know you write poetry and that you get straight A's, as well as a budding painter. I am married now to a French woman, a philosophy professor. I now have a sixteen year old step-daughter. I'm sure you can appreciate that my time is not my own, and that, unfortunately, I will not be able to meet with you.

Yours Truly,

Yuri Nahoroshov”

*LIGHTS GO OFF on the LOWER LEFT SIDE of the STAGE.*

*SASHA tears the letter up into shreds and throws it across the room.*

.

SASHA

No! I'm your fucking daughter!! And I've been searching for you my ENTIRE life!

*SHE grabs the wine bottle again and takes a few more chugs.*

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE FOUR

The MacBride Kitchen,

A Few Minutes Later

*WINSTON comes into the KITCHEN, takes off her coat and boots, then dumps her briefcase on the chair.*

*The phone rings. SHE answers it.*

WINSTON

Isaac, Hey. Oh my God. Jesus Christ. No--believe me. You won't regret it. I promise you!...Yes! I won't forget. I've never forgotten *anything* you've said to me over the last ten years...Of course. Yes, I will. And Isaac? I can't begin to tell you what this—Okay, yes—cut the *schmaltz*, I know. What? Oh no. Never! I wouldn't bow out if my life depended on it. Yes, I'll tell Sasha right away.

*WINSTON dances around the KITCHEN and makes a fist:*

WINSTON

YES! YES!

*When SHE finally calms down, SHE sits down at the table for a few Beats., and thinks. Then SHE gets up, goes to the fridge, and takes out a plate covered with aluminum foil. SHE removes the foil and takes the plate over to SASHA's BEDROOM and knocks on the door.*

WINSTON

Sasha—please. Let me in.

WINSTON

Can I come in? 2 or 3 Beats.

*WINSTON cautiously enters and puts the plate on SASHA's night stand.*

*SASHA is standing at her easel, sketching.*

WINSTON

Here are the rest of the *blinis*. *SHE stands in back of SASHA for a few Beats. and watches her sketch.*

WINSTON

*(Peering over to look at what SASHA is sketching)* I love the way you caught the light on the birches. *SASHA continues sketching and doesn't look up.* Maybe we could go to Moscow when you graduate and see the birches firsthand. *SHE pauses.* Sash--Remember when--

SASHA

*(Interrupting)* No.

WINSTON

*(Trying another tack)* You know how you've had trouble focusing on anything but Yuri writing you back? Well I've had a similar obsession--

SASHA

*(Interrupting)* Could we please talk about something else?

WINSTON

What do you want to talk about?

SASHA

*(Continuing to sketch)* How about...the birch trees in Moscow.

WINSTON

But I don't know anything about the birch trees in Moscow.

SASHA

And you call yourself a memoir writer?

WINSTON

*(SHE pauses)* That's for the world to decide.

SASHA

Didn't I hear you say just now you'd like to go to Moscow to see the birch trees? You can't use your imagination to think of saying something even miniscule about the birch trees...which everyone knows are sacramental? *(Turning around and looking WINSTON straight in the eye)* But if you were blindfolded and pressed to the wall, with your hands tied behind your back-- and the firing squad got ready to shoot?

WINSTON

Well...I'd make up some crap about the birch trees...and then allude to the fact that the birch trees are a metaphor.

SASHA

For what?

WINSTON

Uhm...Redemption--or some such thing. *SASHA waits for her to continue.* And then--I'd prepare myself to embrace...the profound cataclysm of the human mystery.

SASHA

*(Disgusted)* Save those worn-out phrases for a chapter in your memoir where no one will notice. *A few Beats.* What's the title again?

WINSTON

THE LONG ROAD HOME.

SASHA

Oh yeah. THE LONG ROAD HOME. Only about a million memoirs at Barnes and Noble have that title. Me, I think all memoirs are self-pitying as well as self-serving. Besides, they never tell the truth anyway.

WINSTON

Sasha—talking about memoirs, I need your help.

SASHA

Shouldn't it be the reverse?

WINSTON

This is serious.

SASHA

Like another emergency revision to your third chapter?

WINSTON

*(Sitting down on the edge of SASHA's bed)* Remember when you were six or seven and I thought I couldn't make it through my last stint at re-hab? You were staying at Zolly's and I called you up. And you said, "Mommy I know you're feeling bad, but I believe in you."

SASHA

This is brutal. Would you please get to the point?

WINSTON

Well I finally have the chance to show my God-given talents to the world. I've been invited to read my memoir at the National Conference this weekend at Windleton—

*SASHA stops sketching again and interrupts her.*

SASHA

You mean you're going to cancel the ski trip you've only postponed two different times? The ski trip I've only been looking forward to forever, since Zolly left?

WINSTON

I'll make it up to you—I promise I will. And if the director likes it, he might publish it or give me a job.

SASHA

So you'll go from one shitty job counseling addicts like yourself to another shitty job counseling addicts like yourself? *(Then, as an afterthought)*: Only if we move to Windleton, it'll be colder, much much colder. With ice houses and Alberta Clippers.

WINSTON

Please understand. It's not like they'd normally ask a little shit like me.

SASHA

Let me see if I do understand. You didn't come into my room to *ask my permission to go*. But to tell me that you're going no matter what. Is that correct?

WINSTON

You've repeatedly told me how isolated you feel here—(*Trying to lighten the tone of the conversation*) and since Saint Petersburg is out of the question--

SASHA

(*Resuming sketching, then mumbling:*) Go ahead...and do what you want. You always do anyway.

WINSTON

What?

SASHA

Go ahead and go to your lousy conference. Now leave my room or I'll retract my permission. *WINSTON stares at her but doesn't move.*

WINSTON

(*Starting to get up*) I'm going to call Mrs. Polanskaya. You used to love it when she came and brought you new *Matroyshka dolls*.

SASHA

(*Interrupting*) No more Russian babysitters. Or the deal is off. *One or two Beats.*

*WINSTON pauses. Then SHE walks tentatively toward the door.*

SASHA

I mean it.

*WINSTON looks back at her, then leaves and shuts the door behind her.*

*SASHA continues to sketch for several Beats. Then SHE stops sketching and starts to sob. SHE throws herself onto the bed and puts the pillow over her head.*

*NOTE: THE LIGHTS stay up in SASHA's BEDROOM, as WINSTON goes back into the KITCHEN.*

*WINSTON sits down at the table, takes out her cell phone, and dials.*

WINSTON

Oh hello, Mrs. Polanskaya. Thanks for getting back to me so soon. Well, things have changed a bit here. Sasha insists on staying alone—you know she just turned sixteen. *(Beat or 2)* That's very nice of you. I appreciate that, but I think I'll let her have a little freedom—it's just for two days. Oh that would be nice. Yes, do call her a few times. I'm sure she'd appreciate that. Goodbye.

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)



SCENE FIVE

*At Starbucks*

Thursday, 10 a.m.

*WINSTON and ANATOLY are sitting at a table drinking cappuccinos.*

ANATOLY

So what is this national emergency that you mentioned on the phone?

WINSTON

Will you *please* invite Sasha to your co-op this weekend! I've been invited to read my memoir at *WINDLETON* this weekend and she refuses to stay with her former Russian babysitter. (*SHE pauses*) She needs something...to distract her while I'm gone.

ANATOLY

Distract her? From what?

WINSTON

Girls her age...can sometimes do self-destructive things.

ANATOLY

What kind of self-destructive things?

WINSTON

Oh, I don't know. Use your imagination.

ANATOLY

You have an impressive knack for timing, don't you? I haven't seen the girl since she was...

WINSTON

*(Helping Him out)* 12 months old? *SHE pauses.* Whatever my knack for timing—and don't think I don't know my own flaws—I shudder to think what Sasha might do. *(Beat.)* Last night I found a stash of sleeping pills in her Ukrainian jewelry box. The last time she hoarded her pills, she tried to-- Besides, she'll definitely think you're cool. After all, you're a Russkie, aren't you?

ANATOLY

I sympathize with all that you've been through. But you're using me, Winston.

WINSTON

Don't tell me you've already forgotten?

*HE stares at her.*

ANATOLY

Not necessary to go there, Winnie. I get the point.

WINSTON

Well?

ANATOLY

I don't know, Winston. A sixteen year old, nubile girl...

WINSTON

But they'll be other people there. Didn't you tell me that four or five show up?

ANATOLY

You might have cooked and cleaned for me and done my laundry. You might have nursed me back to health and let me cry on your lap when my girlfriends left me. You might have slipped under my bed sheets. But you never said you'd marry me.

WINSTON

That's not the point. Or rather, that *is the point*: I was complicit in my own victim-hood. I programmed myself to believe I had to please you!

ANATOLY

*(Changing the subject abruptly)* What does she paint?

WINSTON

Uhm. Mostly self-portraits. Some snow-scapes. A few birch trees...an onion dome or two. *(Beat.)* Oh yes. And Dostoyevsky being led to his execution blindfolded.

ANATOLY

Wouldn't work. This weekend we'll be doing still lives.

WINSTON

What if I told you that she won First Prize in the Fine Gallery Youth Competition and that the one thing that she wants most—*(in a disgusted voice:)* after meeting Yuri, that is) is to nab an art scholarship to your old *alma mater*.

ANATOLY

If you're so worried about her, why can't you bow out and stay at home?

WINSTON

I've put my life on the line taking care of Sasha! There's no cultural event I haven't taken her to. No artistic lessons I haven't paid for with my own sweat. I've given up booze, love, fucking, and weed—not necessarily in that order—and gone from phone sex girl to head vacuum-er at the *Red Roof Inn*, to cab driver, to third shift home care attendant to addiction counselor. I sleep on a ratty sofa bed in the *living room*, for God's sake, so she can have a bedroom.

ANATOLY

Calm down. There's no reason to--

*A few more Beats. of silence.*

ANATOLY

How do you know I'd like her work?

WINSTON

You'd like her work. *(SHE pauses)* Besides, you knew Yuri rather well. She'll be...curious.

ANATOLY

How do you know she'd want to come?

*WINSTON glares at him.*

I don't know Winston. Given her state, I'd feel...too responsible. If anything happened...Tell you what. Why don't you and Sasha come to my exhibit in March at the Sherman Gallery?

WINSTON

I let you live in our house for two fucking years, for God's sake. Even when Yuri and I were having problems. Now you can't even—

ANATOLY

Sorry, Winston. I'd like to help you out. I just don't feel comfortable.

WINSTON

Well I feel uncomfortable wasting my time any longer. I have to pack. *SHE gets up.* And let's skip the exhibit. *SHE leaves.*

*HE stays at the table and finishes his coffee.*

(FADE-OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE SIX

The MacBride Kitchen

Friday, 4 p.m.

*WINSTON is scurrying around nervously, getting ready for the taxi to take her to the airport. SASHA is sitting at the kitchen table drinking tea and reading a magazine, looking composed.*

WINSTON

*(SHE stops for a Beat.)* Now be sure to call me twice a day—I'll try to call you every evening. *SASHA nods as SHE drinks her tea and reads.*

WINSTON

You remember where I put Mrs. Polanskaya's number, if you have an emergency?

*WINSTON scurries around some more.*

*We hear the cab driver honking outside the apartment.*

WINSTON

Oh my God! Fucking A! It's here! The cab's here already!

*WINSTON runs over to SASHA and gives her a big hug. Are you sure you'll be okay? SASHA slowly extricates herself from the hug.*

SASHA

*Leave.* What if the cab drives away? You'll miss your plane.

*WINSTON gives her a final kiss.*

Oh jeez—I forgot my cell phone.

SASHA

*(Still composed)* The bottom drawer of your desk.

*WINSTON goes and gets her phone.*

SASHA

You'll be late.

*WINSTON grabs her things and starts to rush out the door. Then SHE turns around.*

WINSTON

Are you absolutely sure?

*SASHA gets up and pushes her out the door.*

SASHA

Mom! Go!

*WINSTON finally leaves.*

*SASHA shuts the door. Then SHE goes back and sits at the KITCHEN table and continues reading.*

*After a few Beats., SHE gets up and goes into the BEDROOM and opens the drawer of her bureau. SHE takes out the Ukrainian jewelry case and opens it. Then SHE takes out a plastic container and pours out an array of pills.*

*SHE places each pill in a formation on the dresser, lining them up like toy soldiers. Then SHE knocks them down and lines them up again. After SHE does this several times, SHE gets bored and goes to sit on the Love-Seat. Then SHE gets up again and forages in her closet. SHE brings out a candle and a lighter. SHE places the candle in the center of the pill formations, and lights the candle. Then SHE goes over to the bed and lies down.*

*A few Beats. later, YURI appears and sits down on the Love-Seat.*

YURI

I see you like Dostoyevsky.

SASHA

That's a picture of him being led to his execution.

YURI

Did you know that right after that second they raised their guns to shoot, he was miraculously pardoned?

SASHA

Oh, everyone knows that. And not miraculously. They did it on purpose as a way to torture him. Would you like to read the poem I'm working on when it's finished? It's, in fact, about that very moment.

YURI

*YURI nods in amazement.* So if I understand this correctly, you dance, write poetry, and paint?! Beautiful, as well as talented!!

*SASHA nods, in awe of Him.*

YURI

And what do you like to do best?

SASHA

I guess...paint. I must have taken after my old Dad.

YURI

*(Amused)* You mean me?

SASHA

Yes, I mean you. *(Beat.)* You know, the apple and the tree.

YURI

*(Even more amused)* Yes. The apple and the tree. *(Beat.)* But you know, if you really took after me, you'd...go further out on a limb.

*Awkward silence.*

SASHA

Whaddaya' mean "out on a limb"?

YURI

Oh I dunno. Maybe like doing something daring...and a bit devilish...just like your old man.

SASHA

*(Unsure how to answer)* If you're referring to what I tried to do two years ago, it was, in fact, a bit of a downer. If I say so myself.

YURI

Maybe you just didn't...do it right.

SASHA

Whaddaya' mean? Oh yes I did! You'd better believe I did it right!

YURI

Maybe...you didn't have the right touch.

SASHA

I thought...you'd understand me better. I know you're a famous painter and all, but, I dunno--you seem a bit off-balance to me.

YURI

I'm not living up to your expectations, Sash? Tell you what. I'll show you a list of my current exhibitions *(He walks over and hands it to her, and then sits down again)* Now look at *numero's* ten and eleven. What do you see?

SASHA

*(Reading slowly)* "Just A Little Bomb." "The Fire Within." So? So?

YURI

*(Smiling now, very proud of His accomplishments)* These two little *chotchkes* just happen to get me The Boronov Prize in Soviet Russia, before I fled, a year before the wall fell. And then in Paris, the same two... vetted me the Boulanger Prize.

SASHA

You used the word vetted wrong.

YURI

And you know what I had to do in order to learn to paint with such extraordinary depth? I had to learn to swim down all the way down to the DEEPEST level of the pool—the pool of my own depression. Where I had



never gone before. I had to learn to strip away everything and anything that prevented me from reaching the bottom. I had to go *that far down*—and risk everything--before I could swim up again to the surface.

SASHA

*(Skeptical now)* Oh really? Really Yuri?

YURI

Because, in order to live life to the fullest... one first has to experience its opposite . *(Beat.)* One has to meet death head-on, so it butts you in face. There's a Zen saying. Do you know it, Sasha?: "*In order to know what a grapefruit tastes like, you have to bite into it.*" Otherwise life is...meaningless.

SASHA

*(SHE pauses)* But what—if I should want to come back?

YURI

Why would you want to come back? And give up the chance to be part of the venerable rank of Russian female martyrs... like Ahkmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva?

SASHA

What... if I miss being here?

YURI

Trust me. You won't want to come back. *HE pauses.* Listen Sash-- Don't mean to be rude. But I really have to go now! I'm late for an appointment. *HE starts to walk away .*They're waiting for me in Stockholm.

YURI

Good-bye little Sasha. Remember Now, Sweet Dreams!

SASHA

No! Wait! Don't go. We just started talking!  
*(Then, as HE starts to disappear)* Please Yuri! Please don't go! I don't want to stay in this house alone! *SHE races over to the Love-Seat. , but HE's gone. SHE*

*sits down on the Love Seat and reaches for a bottle of wine. SHE drinks almost half the bottle, waits a second or two, then starts in on the rest of the bottle.*

*Her cell phone rings.*

*LIGHTS UP on ANATOLY in His LOFT, talking on his cell phone.*

ANATOLY

Hello, Sasha?

SASHA

Who is this?

ANATOLY

Is this Sasha Mac Bride I am talking to? This is Anatoly Roshevsky.

SASHA

Who?

ANATOLY

Anatoly Roshevsky.. . Yuri's friend and former student. Your mother said you might be interested in coming to out painting coop in the morning?

SASHA

SHE said WHAT? This is fucking un-believable.

ANATOLY

I have the feeling that your paintings would complement some of the work of our members.

SASHA

And how would you know?

ANATOLY

Winston--Your mother emailed jpeg to me. *Beat.* And your photo.

SASHA

SHE did WHAT? If you think you can just call me and—

ANATOLY

Why don't you please just think it over. Will you do me that for me, Sasha?

SASHA

My time is very taken up. I am extraordinarily busy, if you must know.

ANATOLY

You'll think about it then? You promise me you'll think it over?

SASHA

I can't stay on. *SHE hangs up.*

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

## SCENE SEVEN

Anatoly's Loft

The Next Morning

*During this SCENE, the sexual tension between ANATOLY and SASHA builds slowly but intensely. Though on one level SASHA is cautious and afraid of ANATOLY, on another level—somewhat unconsciously--SHE desires to seduce him and have power over Him. ANATOLY, for his part, is very sexually charged, but SIMULTANEOUSLY, HE's fighting his own impulses.*

*SASHA arrives at ANATOLY's LOFT dressed in a fake fur coat, her black Russian fur hat, a fancy scarf from Moscow, and high black boots--with a sheer blouse and a short skirt underneath. SHE's carrying her paints and a portable easel.*

*SASHA knocks on the door.  
ANATOLY opens the door.*

SASHA

*Where is everyone? SHE shakes the snow off her boots and coat, then stamps her feet vigorously on the door mat to make sure it's all off.*

ANATOLY

*Don't worry about the floorboards. They're almost as old...as I am.*

SASHA

*(Looking around) Where is everyone? SHE crinkles up her nose.*

ANATOLY

*Excuse the rotten pear smell. My loft-mate does still-lives. Beat. I think the ice storm must have screwed up the roads. Here, let me grab your coat.*

SASHA

*The roads? SHE puts her paints and easel down, then hands him her coat; SHE keeps on her hat.*

ANATOLY

The town budget—they have money for Ice Queens and Kings of the Wind, but no *moolah* to salt the roads. (Beat.) Salt prevents one's vehicle from skidding.

*Beat.* You didn't drive here, Sasha? I bet you took the bus. SASHA nods. You do like to be called Sasha, don't you?

*SHE nods, unsure what to say.*

Would you like to see what I've been working on?

*SASHA hesitates.*

ANATOLY

Winston didn't tell me you were shy. Are you shy, Sasha?

SASHA

What did she say?

ANATOLY

She said...you'd enjoy looking at my work.

*SASHA 's still not convinced.*

ANATOLY

(*HE tries a new tack:*) Nahoroshov.

SASHA

What?

ANATOLY

You're the spitting image of Yuri Nahoroshov. (*Beat.*) Isn't that the American expression?

SASHA

(*A bit stunned*) Oh. Really? (*Beat.*) Cool. My mom got rid of his photos—when I was three or something...two or three...

*ANATOLY takes SASHA by the arm and leads her into the BACK ROOM. Still a bit stiff, but obviously excited, SASHA follows.*

ANATOLY

There—in the corner—in back of that small canvas--against the wall.  
*SHE stares at his painting for a few Beats.*

ANATOLY

*HE shrugs with self-deprecation.* Prado-ready it isn't.

SASHA

Oh no—it's awesome. I love the way those lower branches curve down toward the earth.

ANATOLY

That's not a tree. It's a woman's body.

SASHA

Then where's her torso and her arms?

ANATOLY

You have to use your imagination--like anything in this world you really want to see. (*Beat.*) This is what I call... half a painting.

SASHA

(*Beat.*) Half a painting?

ANATOLY

Have you ever been trudging along for days, and nothing is happening—then *va-voom*. It jumps out at you from deep inside the canvas—something that didn't exist even a second ago. (*HE muses*)... Like you're suddenly catching yourself in the act of creation (*Beat.*) Ever get a moment like that, Sasha?

SASHA

(*Beat.*) (*Slowly*) Yes. I have.

*HE sees that HE has her full interest now, so that revs him up to proceed further.*

ANATOLY

(*Gesturing to the canvas*) Case in point. Half a painting.

SASHA

But if those are her arms, where are her legs? *(Beat.)* I'm not so young that I can't *(SHE pauses, as if trying to explain something very profound)*...use my powers of aesthetic judgment.

ANATOLY

Where were you when I went to high school? Beautiful and intelligent too!

SASHA

*(Teasing)* Can you develop that thought a little more?

*ANATOLY's cell phone rings.*

ANATOLY

*(Gesturing to SASHA)* Sorry. *SHE nods. HE answers the phone, walking back into the LIVING ROOM. SASHA continues looking at the pictures. Then HE joins her again in the BACK ROOM.*

ANATOLY

Bad news. No one can make it. Even the buses have stopped running.

SASHA

*(SHE pauses)* Do you really think I'm beautiful?

YURI

More beautiful than Akhmatova.

*An uncomfortable silence.*

ANATOLY

*(Taking her arm and leading her back into the LIVING ROOM, then gesturing for her to sit down with him on the sofa)* So...What do you like to paint...besides the birch trees in Moscow?

SASHA

*(Flustered)* How did you know *that*?

ANATOLY

*(Smiling)* A little birdie told me.

SASHA

Oh I can't believe this. (Beat.) Can I have a drink please?

ANATOLY

Orange juice? Coke? Bottled water-?

SASHA

I mean a real drink. My mother lets me.

*ANATOLY stares at her.*

SASHA

*(With bravado)* If...you give me a real drink, I'll...pose for you. Would you like that, Anatoly?

ANATOLY

You mother entrusted you to me--

SASHA

*(Interrupting, annoyed)* Entrusted?

ANATOLY

You might not believe this, Little One--but I'm on the wagon myself.

SASHA

Don't call me that. My name is Sasha. *(Beat.) (Suddenly getting frightened)*  
Why can't anyone come? What was the reason?

ANATOLY

The ice storm. No one could make it on account of the ice storm.

SASHA

Oh yes. *(Beat.)* I've changed my mind. I'm going.  
*SASHA gets up.*

ANATOLY

*(Pausing)* You...want that drink?

SASHA



Uhm...No thanks. I don't think so.  
*HE gets up to make her a drink.*

ANATOLY

You like maraschinos? Here—sweets for the sweet. You do like them, don't you? Everyone on the planet likes maraschino cherries. *HE walks back and hands her the drink.*

*SASHA sits back down on the sofa. HE makes a drink for himself and then comes to join her.*

ANATOLY

Would you really let me paint you? You've got...beautiful eyes. *(Beat.)* An *(French pronunciation:)* artiste could do wonders with those eyes. *(Beat.)* I'd only paint you from the neck up—something dignified and classical looking...like Velasquez...or Manet.

SASHA

*(SHE chugs down her drink)...*I better be going. *(SHE pauses)* I've got homework to do— *SHE puts down her drink, gets up, and grabs her parka. Then SHE slips on her boots.*

ANATOLY

*(Beat.)* Would you like me to tell you a little about Yuri?

SASHA

Do you think you're even clever enough to make something up that will attract my interest--and make me stay?

ANATOLY

Not...exactly. But why don't you sit down next to me...and I'll do my best to fill you in.  
*(SASHA pauses, then sits down next to him).*

SASHA

Five minutes. That's all--I have things to do. *(Beat.)* Very important things.

ANATOLY

What do you know about him?

SASHA

Just that he won one of the biggest competitions in the world and that when he flew to London to get his prize, he refused to accept it because the presenter was a Communist.

ANATOLY

I see. So...where would you like me to begin?

SASHA

How did the two of you meet?

ANATOLY

I studied with Yuri. He was a brilliant teacher, as well as a first class artist. And...when I came to this country—with his help—your mother took me in and let me stay at their house--just so I could study with Yuri.

SASHA

Uhm. Sounds like old Winston. (*SHE pauses*) And...you and Yuri still friends?

ANATOLY

That's dredging up old... Hope you don't mind if I pass.

SASHA

What was he like?

ANATOLY

He was what you'd call *intense*. Everything and anything was his for the taking. He was curious about everything, and probably the best-read painter I've ever met. If Yuri hadn't taught me how to look at things. Or should I say, *through things*, to what lies behind the visible world...I never would have understood what creation is about.

SASHA

You mean like Kandinsky?

ANATOLY

You dig Kandinsky too?

SASHA

I have a closet devoted to him.

ANATOLY

Just a closet?

*Silence for a few Beats. HE grabs her drink, and goes to replenish it. Then HE hands it back to her.*

ANATOLY

You know he loved you very much.

*SHE stares at Him in disbelief*

No really Sasha. If he didn't love you, he wouldn't have...why else would he insist that abortion was absolutely out of the question?

SASHA

Is that true?

ANATOLY

Yes, it's true. I don't lie about the work—or anything that's really important.

SASHA

Then...Winston was considering...?

ANATOLY

Jesus Christ, Sash. Who ever really knows the whole story?

*Seveal Beats. of silence.*

SASHA

*(The alcohol is beginning to take effect now)* You know, ever since I was little, I've fantasized about being with an older man—who *knew exactly* what was going on inside my mind—without me having to say a word. Not *one word whatsoever*. Like I'd be perfectly silent—totally mute—and he'd still *understand*. So I wouldn't have to speak at all!

ANATOLY

*(Teasing)* Did this man by any chance have a thick Russian accent?

*SHE smiles.*

SASHA

Would you like me to pose for you now?

ANATOLY

*(Looking at her intensely) Yes, I would. (Beat.) Let me get my paints ready. Stay put.*

*HE goes into the Back Room to prepare his paints.*

SASHA

*2 or 3 Beats. SHE slowly finishes her drink. SHE lies back on the sofa and makes herself comfortable, and starts playing with her hair. Another Beat. or two. Then SHE gets up and goes to look at ANATOLY's CD's. SHE takes one out and put it into the boom box.*

*ANATOLY finishes getting his paints ready, then HE goes back into the LIVING ROOM. SASHA has taken off her clothes, and is dancing to the waltz in SWAN LAKE in her bra and panties. HE stares at her for a few Beats. Then HE goes over and grabs her hand, and they swirl round and round to Tchaikowsky's music.*

(FADE OUT)

Back-Stage at Windleton

WINSTON

*(Calling on her cell phone) Anatoly, I'm really sorry to bother you again but I'm incredibly worried.*

ANNOUNCER'S Voice

Ready to go on in a few, Winston?

WINSTON

I...think so.

*(Mumbling to herself) Oh God, it's almost time. Oh fuck. Anatoly, have you seen Sasha? Do you know where she is? And did she come to your coop? Please call me as soon as you get this.*

*SHE hangs up and calls SASHA.*

WINSTON

Sasha, why don't you pick up? I've called three different times! I had this awful dream that you...and I have this strange feeling in the pit of my stomach. *SHE fights back little sobs.* I haven't heard from you in over twenty four hours. It's not like you! You always call when I'm away! *SHE hangs up, and tries to get her composure back, somewhat unsuccessfully—because it's time for her to go on.*

ANNOUNCER'S Voice

Our next speaker is Winston MacBride from St. Ann's. Ms. MacBride has worked with many different kind of addicts for the last five years. She is now working on her first memoir, called The Long Road Home.

*Winston puts her cell phone away and walks slowly On-Stage. SHE walks over to the podium where there's a vase of flowers and a glass of water. SHE clears her throat.*

WINSTON

*(Beat.)* Hello. Hello everybody. Thank you for coming. *SHE takes a big breath.* To quote one of Samuel Beckett's fictional characters, "I must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.

You there—in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4th row. In fact all of you out there *know* what I'm talking about. What it's like to be lying in one's own slop, unable to get up—and simultaneously crushed by weight of our guilt and shame. For *Not being able to go on*—or to be more precise, for *not being able to SUFFER, and then go on!*

I see several people nodding. We've all been there, haven't we? The question then becomes: Do we step up to the plate and get clean—*not only for ourselves—but also for our children?*

I never meant to be an addict. And I never meant to recover from addiction. These things just happened. As did my subsequent trajectory into studying

psychology and then becoming an addiction counselor. And though I was only partially aware that I'd *chosen* the life of a fuck-up, I was always conscious that I *wanted* to get clean. *Beat.*

The passage I'm going to read you is the pivotal event in my journey: when I finally realized my own complicity in staying helpless and when I entered rehab to ensure that my daughter would not bear the consequences of the choices I'd made to prevent myself from suffering.

Suffice it to say, I had a pretty traumatic childhood. At sixteen I started living on the streets. And I thought I was nothing if not resilient. I took a vast array of scrupulous and unscrupulous jobs. All this time not quite realizing that my true sin was dependence on drink.

Then, when I turned 18, my life changed dramatically. I met and married a painter in the style of Kandinsky, named Yuri Nahoroshov. Yet I couldn't stop drinking. And about a year after I married him, he began having sex with some of the models at his studio. As you can imagine, this behavior only increased my drinking exponentially. And though I begged him to stop, he'd alternately tell me he *had* stopped (which he hadn't) or he'd promise me he'd never do it again--with that charming ironic smile that even now lingers in my memory.

In fairness I should probably explain that he did frequently prod me to go into rehab, and even once organized a bona fide intervention. I paid no attention. I lied and cheated during this period, and I betrayed him and everyone else that tried to help me--all the while pretending that *I had no real problem.*

The passage I'm going to read you is the pivotal event in my narrative: when I finally realized my own complicity in staying helpless. And when I entered rehab to ensure that my daughter would not bear the consequences of the choices I'd made (to prevent myself from suffering).

One December day, just like this one, I was fighting pneumonia so I left work early. Yuri was supposed to be watching 18 month old Sasha. When I walked into the apartment, I sensed there was something wrong. I heard thin, muffled cries—almost like mouse squeaks, but not so high-pitched. *SHE pauses.* I went into the

bedroom and there was Yuri having sex with his model *du jour*.—*right in front of 18 month old Sasha!*

*SHE stops to take a drink of water and spills it. Then SHE grabs the napkin on the podium and starts to wipe it up. In the process the vase falls and breaks and the flowers spill out.*

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

Don't worry, Winston, we'll clean it up later. Continue on. What you're saying is very moving.

WINSTON

Sasha had crawled under the night table and turned her little face away—but she couldn't stop those whimpering squeals...those strange little cries. *A Beat. or 2. while SHE tries to compose herself.* It was then that I heard the voice: 'Even if you don't care about yourself, you must protect Sasha.' I made up my mind never to let Yuri see Sasha again, and promised myself that I'd never abandon her.

I bent down and grabbed her...and...and...with Sasha flailing under my arm... I ran out of the apartment. But...I couldn't stop those strange little squeals. *SHE stops to try to fight back the tiny sobs that are emanating from deep within her.* My poor little Sasha—my dear little girl. I couldn't protect her...she turned her face away...whimpering squeals...my poor little...

ANNOUNCER'S Voice:

Will someone *please* get her off the Stage?

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE EIGHT

The Porch of the MacBride Apartment

30 Minutes Later

SASHA

You didn't get very far, did you?

ANATOLY

I think I did!

SASHA

I mean with painting my portrait, silly.

ANATOLY

*(Beat.)* Did you really always fantasize about an older man knowing your thoughts?

SASHA

Yes! Try me—see if you can read my thoughts now.

ANATOLY

I don't think—

SASHA

No—You have to. If you want me to pose ever again!

ANATOLY

All right. You're worrying if I was right that the guy really loved you. *SASHA suddenly looks sad and is silent.* Just a guess. You know Winston once told me that he came here and wanted to see you.

SASHA



(*Sitting up*) LIAR. He never asked to see me.

ANATOLY

(*Quietly*) I think I'm right.

SASHA

My mom would have told me! She even offered to help me find him a year or two ago—but I declined. I wanted to find him *myself*!

ANATOLY

Uhm. Maybe I've mixed you up with somebody else.

SASHA

You said a little while ago that you used to cry on Winston's lap when your girlfriends left you. Why did they leave you?

ANATOLY

Oh...I don't know. I guess I have what you might call a hyper-sensitive temperament.

SASHA

What does that mean?

ANATOLY

(*A Beat. or two*) I guess...sometimes I'm not so...grounded. And when I drink, I sometimes do things I'm sorry for the next day.

SASHA

Then why don't you stop drinking today?

ANATOLY

Uhm. Good idea, Sasha. Brilliant idea. And I have a suggestion for *you*. Why don't you forget about Yuri and move on with your life?

SASHA

What makes you think I need to move on?

ANATOLY

*(Backtracking)* I'm not sure. I only meant--  
*A few Beats. of silence.*

SASHA

I'd better go in. I promised Winston that I'd call her.

ANATOLY

Sasha?

*SHE turns around and faces him.*

ANATOLY

I'm sorry...if I was your first.

SASHA

Chill out, Anatoly. I'm glad that I came. *(Beat.)* I'm what you call "half a painting."

*(Beat.)* See ya' tomorrow. Say around ten?

ANATOLY

Sasha—before you go in, I thought we could talk a little.

SASHA

Can't we talk tomorrow?

ANATOLY

Yes. Of course. *(Beat.)* Hey listen Sasha, you know the story of the bulldog and the bear?

SASHA

WHAT?

ANATOLY

It's an old Russian fable. There's this small little bulldog and this great big bear, and they're walking down the street and the bear says—Do you know anyone bigger than me? And the bulldog says, yes. *I am bigger than you.*

SASHA

(Interrupting) What are you really saying?

ANATOLY

(Beat.) I don't know. *Beat.* I've had second thoughts.

SASHA

(*Suddenly knowing where HE's leading, but deciding to play dumb*) About?

ANATOLY

I wouldn't be able to live with myself if...

SASHA

Spit it out, Mister Bear. (*SHE's lying:*) I have no idea what you're trying to say.

ANATOLY

I'm saying... that I can't see you anymore.

*2 or 3 Beats.*

SASHA

(*SHE pauses*) Can't or won't?

ANATOLY

(*Beat.*) Well you know that flat-mate I mentioned?

SASHA

Hmmm. I see. A *woman* flat-mate is it? (*Beat.*) So you're breaking up with me, are you?

ANATOLY

Besides, Winston would never forgive me.

SASHA

(*Going back inside the apartment now*) Bull-shit. You just got cold feet.

ANATOLY

Listen, Sasha--

SASHA

*(Interrupting) Winston would never forgive you? Well fuck you.*

*SHE slams the door closed. And ANATOLY walks away.*

*Inside SHE takes off her parka, and sits down at the kitchen table and slips off her boots. Several Beats.*

*Then SHE gets up and goes to WINSTON's computer in the HALLWAY and sits down. SHE goes through WINSTON's files and then clicks on to WINSTON's email. SHE speaks out loud as SHE searches:*

SASHA

*Search Inbox. Yuri Nahoroshov. After some trouble locating the email SHE's looking for, SHE suddenly finds it. SHE reads it.*

*LIGHTS UP on the LOWER LEFT SIDE of the STAGE. YURI is sitting at his computer composing this very email to WINSTON:*

YURI

*“Hi Winston. I am truly sorry that you did not let me see Sasha when I visited there a month ago, in June. I still think you were in the wrong. Even if—as you say—she *is* dejected over a break-up with boy and doesn't want to see anyone—I should think she would have wanted to see the father that brought her into the world. Also, as for her being 'too busy' to see me, that seems to me to be a lame excuse. Is it not possible that you—you, Winston, influenced her decision in a strong way? (I would not put it past you.) At any rate, I am writing to express my annoyance. *Beat*. Please send Sasha my love, Yuri”*

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE NINE

The Porch of the MacBride Apartment

A Few Hours later

*ANATOLY is standing outside the MacBride Apartment. HE rings the bell, but no one answers. HE rings several times and when he's convinced no one is in, HE takes out his cell phone and calls SASHA.*

ANATOLY

Hey Sasha. After I spoke to you, I found a photo of Yuri in my back room. It's a little faded but it shows his likeness very well. In fact it seems to be quite accurate of his features and his demeanor. I thought you'd like to have it, so I'm putting it in your mailbox. *Beat.* Okay. Goodbye.

*As HE turns to go HE notices that the door is slightly ajar. HE cautiously opens it and enters the KITCHEN. HE finds SASHA lying semi-conscious on the floor in front of the sink and water from the open faucet gushing down. HE races to turn off the faucet, then lifts her head and starts trying to slap her awake. When this only works partially, HE lifts her up and puts her arms around him, then HE starts walking her back and forth around the KITCHEN.*

ANATOLY

Sasha, I want you to repeat the following phrases after me. Sasha! Listen! You need to imitate what I'm saying!

*HE then proceeds to repeat the following phrases in phonetic English, and when SHE doesn't repeat the phrase or SHE talks too softly, He makes her do it over until SHE gets it right. And when HE's finished giving her these phrases to repeat, HE starts the same process over again in the same order:*

ANATOLY (*And then SASHA imitates what HE says*):

“Do you speak English?”

“Govorite li vy po angliyski?”

“Good morning!”

“Dobraye ootra!”

“Good evening!”

“Dobriy vyecheer!”

“How are you?”

“Kak deela.”

*Then WINSTON opens the door. SHE walks into the KITCHEN and is blindsided when SHE observes the two of them enacting this ritual. SHE goes over to SASHA and lifts SASHA’s arms off of ANATOLY’s shoulders and puts them over her own shoulders.*

WINSTON

Jesus Christ, what have you done? My precious Sasha! Walk with me!

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE TEN

SASHA'S BEDROOM

Three Days Later

*WINSTON is sitting on SASHA's bed watching SASHA pack. SASHA continues to pack, even when SHE is talking to WINSTON.*

WINSTON

But where will you go?  
*Several Beats.*

SASHA

As far as I can get from you...and Anatoly.

WINSTON

Why Anatoly?

*SASHA continues packing.*

WINSTON

You *did* go to the coop, didn't you? That's what he told me.

*SASHA doesn't answer.*

WINSTON

And he gave you pointers on your still life. He said you made a kind of abstract still life—a bowl with *Matryoshka dolls* stretched to the sky.

SASHA

*(Somewhat sadistically)* He gave me pointers all right. *Beat.*

*WINSTON doesn't know how to process what SASHA just told her, and in some deep sense, she doesn't want to.*

WINSTON

Sasha, you and Anatoly didn't...?

SASHA

*(While continuing to arrange last minutes items) Why should you trust me, Winston? (Beat.) When you aren't so trustworthy yourself.*

WINSTON

What do you mean?

*SASHA continues to pack and doesn't answer.*

WINSTON

Why would you think that?

*SASHA stops packing for a moment and walks over to her closet and takes down a shoebox. SHE takes out a copy of YURI's email to WINSTON and flings it on the bed and continues packing.*

*WINSTON picks it up and reads it.*

WINSTON

*(Several Beats.)* Listen, Sasha. I was trying to protect you.

SASHA

Like when you cancelled our ski trip so I wouldn't break my arm?

WINSTON

*(Feeling desperate now) What was I to do? Risk your whole well-being and self-esteem because of an idiotic rule that says both parents must be involved? (Beat.) I knew that Yuri would break your heart. That he'd get your hopes up, and take advantage of your active imagination. Then leave you and never see you again.*

*SASHA starts organizing her 3 backpacks and duffel bag, and then puts them outside her BEDROOM.*



SASHA

Are you sure you didn't tell me because you wanted to hoard me to *yourself*?

WINSTON

He was a Machiavellian, womanizing, lying *prick*. With no sense of appropriate boundaries. And did he even send you *one* check for child support? That's how much he wanted to see you ! Did he care that we had to go on food stamps? And that I had to take a ton of shitty, menial jobs just so you could have everything you wanted?

SASHA

Is that what you told your fellow addicts at Rehab? That you took no responsibility for your addiction--or your life? That you blamed *Yuri* for putting you into those demeaning situations? Anyway, I liked you better when you were doing shitty, menial jobs. At least when you *did* get home, no matter how late—you still had time for me. *Beat*.

*SASHA throws some last minute articles into one of her backpacks.*

WINSTON

Why don't you stay for just a few weeks? Then you can decide if you *really* want to leave.

*SASHA has trouble locating some articles of clothing in her closet. But SHE finally finds what SHE was looking for and throws them into her suitcase. Then SHE starts packing books, posters, and art supplies.*

WINSTON

If I'd known what was on your mind, I would have flown home right away. *Beat*. I've always put you first. Remember when Zolly moved to Oregon. And I was afraid you'd bottom out? I drove hundreds of miles so you could see Les Mis ... And afterwards I took you to Shun Lee's, the best fucking Chinese restaurant in New York.

SASHA

(Interrupting) And do you remember what happened that night? I dreamed I was buried under the floorboards of the Saint James Theatre, sobbing and crying for help. Then--when I heard your footsteps finally coming towards me-- and I shouted as loudly as I could, you walked right past me...like I didn't exist.

WINSTON

But I'm not responsible for your dreams!

SASHA

Well you're responsible for my life--or should I say for the lack thereof--BECAUSE I HAVE NO LIFE.

WINSTON

Please don't go. I promise. I promise I'll never leave you again.

SASHA

No. Put yourself first. That way it will be more honest.

*Several Beats., as SASHA attends to last minute odds and ends. SHE starts organizing her 2 backpacks and duffel bag, and then puts them outside THE BEDROOM.*

WINSTON

All right, don't forgive me. But for God's sake, Sasha, please don't leave me! Where will you go?

SASHA

I've already made arrangements. I've taken care of that already.  
*SASHA goes over and grabs all of her belongings, and then shuts the BEDROOM door and leaves.*

*WINSTON is left sitting on the bed.*

*SASHA slams the outside door.*

(FADE-OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE ELEVEN

*At Starbucks*

Later That Evening

*ISAAC is sitting at a table drinking coffee.*

*WINSTON enters and goes over to him.*

ISAAC

Hello, Winston. *HE gestures for her to sit down and join him.*

WINSTON

Aren't you going to ask me if I want coffee?

ISAAC

Do you want coffee?

WINSTON

No.

ISAAC

Listen Winston. You know the drill. One strike and then you're out.

WINSTON

Is it because your spies happened to see me nodding out here the other day?  
Because if it is—there's a perfectly good explanation--

ISAAC

It isn't.

WINSTON

If it's about what happened at Windleton--

ISAAC

Not that either.

WINSTON

You of all people should know how rumors spread. God knows how many people blamed you when Irina left you-- when the truth of the matter was the opposite-- that *she* was the one who cheated.

ISAAC

The truth of the matter is that I'm not firing you for nodding out at Starbucks or blowing it at Windleton. *Beat.* Or even—and I thought I'd never say this-- for falling off the wagon. I'm firing you because of what you did to Sasha. We can't have our counselors ever lose their sense of judgment when it endangers the life of another human being.

WINSTON

But... I tried so fucking hard—

ISAAC

Yeah. Yeah. (*Sarcastic and repeating back to her what SHE'd to him in an earlier scene*) If anyone should know how hard you struggled, I should.

WINSTON

But--These were *extenuating circumstances*. I slipped off the wagon for one fucking day. After an extremely emotional rollercoaster!--when I didn't even know whether my daughter had killed herself or not!

ISAAC

(*Sighing*) Isn't that what you always tell me that they all say!

WINSTON

Please, Isaac—I'll go into Rehab—this afternoon. You know I'm good for my marker. I'll do anything—Hey I have an idea. Why don't I take you up on you

invitation? How about going out for Chinese? What was it again...*Peking Duck* and *Szechuan Lamb*?

WINSTON

*(Then when HE doesn't respond): (Teasing but half serious too, as SHE tries to lighten his mood and simultaneously play the sex card):* What about taking in some porn?

ISAAC

You know I have genuine empathy for you Winston. And yes, that would be a good idea if you go back to Rehab. *He gets up and stands in front of her.* But unfortunately, I have to do my job. I have to protect the clients. *HE puts his hand on her shoulder.* I wish you the best.

*HE leaves.*

*SHE stays at the table and stares straight ahead.*

(FADE OUT)

(END OF SCENE)

## SCENE TWELVE

One Month Later

SASHA's Bedroom

*WINSTON is lying in her bathrobe on SASHA's bed, her face turned away from us. Several Beats. WINSTON gets up and starts "puttering" around the room. Her hair is matted and her face inexpressive. SHE wipes the surfaces of the bed and chair with a cloth, then the mirror and the Matryoshka dolls lined up on the bureau. SHE moves a few books next to a potted plant. Then SHE lies down on the bed again.*

*A few Beats. SHE reaches into the night stand and takes out a piece of paper and unfolds it. It's all crumpled up into several pieces, and it's perfectly clear that SHE's folded and unfolded this paper at least a thousand times.*

*SHE gets up and goes over to the lamp, pauses, and then brings the lamp closer to the chair so SHE can see the paper better. Then SHE sits down and reads it, as if it were only for the first time.*

*As SHE reads it to herself silently, we hear SASHA's voice reciting what's in the paper:*

SASHA

"By the time you find this, I'll be far away. Which is good for me...and good for you too. There are many reasons I could give for my...taking this bold act—all of them having to do with you. But in reality, none of them, even added up to make bigger, more salient reasons (yes—I know the word salient—you're not the only writer in the house)—none of them can be used to take the blame. The *real* reason I'm leaving, ironically, has nothing to do with you (though, everything to do with you). It's just time I went out on my own— and time for me to stop

needing other people—even people that should love me the most—to make me feel I exist.

p.s. Please don't try to find me.

p.p.s. Maybe sometime in the future, I might find it in my heart, under certain circumstances, to forgive you. But for now...

Your Daughter Sasha”

*A Few Beats. Then WINSTON meticulously folds up the paper, and puts it back into her pocket. SHE continues to sit in her chair, staring vacantly into space for several Beats., after which SHE gets up again and goes into the KITCHEN. SHE comes back with a mug of hot water and a teabag, then puts the tea bag into the mug and places the mug on the night stand. Then SHE sits down again.*

*A few more Beats. Then SASHA appears behind the Love-Seat.*

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SASHA

...But why—would it—make you happy?

WINSTON

Then I wouldn't have to experience pain in my body ever again...and my body wouldn't be encumbered.

SASHA

Encumbered?

WINSTON

By my soul.

SASHA

Your body doesn't always hurt you.

WINSTON

Oh yes it does.

SASHA

You can take your tea bag out now. It should be ready.

*WINSTON doesn't.*

*Several Beats. Then THE LIGHTS GO OFF in SASHA's BEDROOM.*

*WINSTON continues to sit in silence, staring into space.*

(FADE-OUT)

**(END OF PLAY)**