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The Macbeth Chronicles

Kings of the Entrance

Wife – Zinaida Matveevna

Husband – Fyodor Ignatievich

*Place of action: Moscow, apartment in a residential area.
The present day.*

Husband. Your morning coffee was more delicious and nutritious today than ever before, my dear gentle wife, the light of my unclouded eyes, my beloved Zinochka. With a slice of lemon, no sugar. I immediately perk up in no time and climb the corporate ladder of royal love – after your coffee I feel twenty years old again, instead of eighty-something.

Wife. Yum yum yum yum?

Husband. Yum yum yum yum yum.

Wife. How lively, young, velvety and fragrant you are today, Fedenka. You always remain for me, and for all who live on our beautiful, peopled planet, such a lively young hero for your little pussycat Zinochka, who is endlessly in love with you. At eight in the morning you, like a pilot in the barracks, loutishly rise like a hurricane, a typhoon at the trumpeting of a perky bugle, you make your bed according to all the military drilled canons – exact and even – straight as a die – without one wrinkle in the sheet. I look at you – such an energetic Olympian, personally my champion athlete – the keeper of my body and soul for sixty years now, and I want to live as energetically as you, to create, fly, flutter, spin, to feel ecstasies like a heavenly swallow, like an earthly Cinderella, my dear boy – Fedenka, you're a prince, oh, my beloved, my legend.

Husband. You are my missis – little girl Zinochka, a ringing, mountain waterfall stream that sweeps all the shit away! You give me energy for life! Only you – only our holy love! Imagine, while I was in the kitchen just now and you were in the bathroom, I caught and so magically pulverised two moths against the wall, literally in two fleeting seconds.

Wife. You spent one second on pulverising each moth my boy, my knight of the

musical fingers? You really are my magical bright joy – my superman.

Husband. It was like this, these two stupid fluttery moths flew out of our wall-mounted kitchen cabinet from a paper bag of flour, but this little boy was on the lookout, I whacked my hand and smeared them on the wall, with a prolonged swipe of my bony, musical fingers. You know, the warm little flutterers felt so nice under my fingers as I smeared them over the wall, with all their intestines and wings. And at first, on the wall, one moth was above the other moth – as if the yard dogs in the yard were fucking like there's no tomorrow. Can you imagine, even a second before I smeared them. And they never guessed, those stupid moths, what was coming to them from my flicked, artistic, hooligan finger – the conversion of their mothy insignificant essence into grandiose eternity through all-kingly death.

Wife. They made love to each other, these two moths of yours?

Husband. That's right – of course I wanted to invite you to look at this extinguishment of throbbing life, but you were in the bathroom, on the toilet. While you rushed to the kitchen these mothy little mites might just vamoose through the vent. And I thought I'd better smear these little moths immediately, and then relate to you my fabulous sensations from this marvellous procedure by the arbiter of destinies in the royal jungle of our apartment – in the most amazing crazy colours I will describe in words all my inhumanly happy delighting of the soul – than if I'd gone to you in the bathroom, waited till you finish your creamy toilette in that bathroom of yours, then rushed back with you, panting, to the kitchenette... That would all count as time, time, merciless time – the moths could flutter out of the kitchenette.

Wife. And then it's impossible to track down these gluttonous fluttering pests, moths get all over the apartment, especially in the wardrobe closet between endless folds of woollen clothes. They also get in the closet with our woolly sweaters and hats knitted personally by me, these moths can fly in and start voraciously eating our hallowed favourite woollies.

Husband. And perhaps even your luxurious as-good-as-living mink coat, for which I once slammed down seven of my colonel's wage packets with bonuses. Oh! Our flour moths would take it as their priority task to gobble up and devour your gorgeous delicious fur coat. If I put myself in the place of a flour moth, I can imagine how tasty a mink coat would be for a greedy moth.

Wife. Oh, don't say even say it, Fedenka, what a nightmare. My heart feels bad and my liver prickles at the very words.

Husband. Don't despair, my darling Zinochka, your heart is safe in my reliable officer hands – just as a medal-bearing comrade looks after his beloved Mauser!

Wife. I feel and appreciate that, my dear and noble officer.

Husband. And in short, I slapped down those horrible anti-wool moths while you were still in the bathroom, so that later we don't have the nightmare of these NATO moths devouring your mink coat in its entirety, then gently and smoothly smeared them across the wall – artistically, as in Kolyma the convicts, if you remember, smeared pesky moths across the wall along with their bloody brains, those indoor household parasites, eternal enemies of the whole country.

Wife. Back then in Kolyma prison camp you were like a God. You didn't let anyone else execute those vile convicts. You yourself put bullets in all the prisoners' foreheads, not in the back of the head as the instructions specified. But I was a medical nurse then and never told on you. I wrote everywhere in the death certificates of executed convicts that the bullet in the head entered through the convicts' occipital area and exited from their evil forehead. For this you let me try and shoot a bullet into a prisoner's forehead a couple of times, and his eyes stared passionately and terribly at me from under the barrel for several minutes. And so, when the convict started screaming at me with a twisted face – kill me, you bitch, you Saltychikha murderer, kill me! – I fired the gun into his forehead!!! Then the love grew strong between us, Fedya!

Husband. Those days of wartime cunning are gone, Zinul. The only ones left are prisoner moths mashed to a pulp in the closet. And to whom can you pass on your wide-reaching experience of execution by shooting. You know, I'd get such pleasure from shooting those convicts in the forehead right now. I regret that I wasn't born in China or the USA. Although in the USA they use digital executions – no real satisfaction to be got from that. The executioner there just presses a few buttons and that's all, he suffers more than the man who's executed – he keeps all the torments of the person put to death within himself. As for those dispatched by poison in a vein or electricity, they get nirvana – they leave with a happy fool's grin on their face. It's all perversion. The Chinese do the right thing – at the execution stadiums they stuff bullets in the back of their Chinese convicts' heads with carbines! I'd be made a general right away in China for gourmet humane shootings in the forehead. And here I am, with such experience, and only moths and cockroaches to crush. What's more, I smashed two moths and there aren't any more. Where can I get them? Out of my asshole? I could still now, Zinul, before dinner, in a rudimentary way, as a form of exercise, smash another fifty or so moths across the wall – with a slap of the hand, smearing them ever more smoothly, more insistently and with an artistic pause – only there's no more moths in the bag of flour in our kitchen – I carefully filtered all the flour through a sieve.

Wife. What a pity, how fatiguing. You need to apportion more moths for the

future in a bag of flour for the kitchen. Let's do it like this – I'll scatter a bag of flour over several cups – in a week there'll be so many moths there, you won't be able to contain your KGB gratification.

Husband. My dear Zinaida Matveevna. We'd do better to breed cockroaches like we used to for my KGB gratification. The joy from crushing cockroaches is a thousand times greater, my soul fills with zeal, it sings and swells, inflamed and strong. As if I were destroying all the people's enemies, and they give me a general's shoulder straps, they appoint me as supreme general of all the prisons in the country! My uncle, Savely Frolych, was Yezhov's deputy in the maintenance department. All the prisons he ruled were in spanking order. (*Clenches his fist.*) Although uncle never shot anyone himself. And he wasn't shot. In 1937, after Yezhov was done for, they took away all the other deputies, but they didn't bother to take uncle. And why? Because my uncle Savely Frolych was a very clever man. Before anyone could lay hands on him he developed infectious tuberculosis. Nobody wanted to mess around with him for fear of catching it themselves. And my uncle became director of a sanatorium in Malakhovka and passed away in his own bed, from his infectious, redeeming TB. But Savely Frolych died the winner and was awarded four rhomboids – an awesome decoration at that time. We had a dacha – Kalinin's dacha was the other side of the fence. A ten-room apartment in Stoleshnikov Lane. There was so much money around. The NKVD had all the money then. Then the KGB. My uncle had another ten-room apartment opposite for secret assignments. I used to play football on the roof of the Lubyanka. From my childhood onwards he reviewed all the parades on Red Square together with Stalin. When I smeared the morning cockroaches in our kitchen that year I had such a grand and jubilant mood all day that I still kept inside – like a stellar space killer, an intergalactic fighter pilot. So I could use it in distant galaxies for whoever needed to be exterminated out there. On the Milky Way I would first of all wipe out all the anti-milky milkmen there. But first of all, of course, I had to exterminate all the anti-Andromedists in our entire Andromeda Nebula, our Galaxy. So where did you put my cockroaches, Zinotchka?

Wife. I dispatched them with insecticide powder, my dear – don't you remember – we applied the insecticide together. Those bloody creatures got all over the apartment. They got into bed with us – you didn't have time to crush them. Don't you remember? You're a touch schlerotic as regards our cockroaches, even though you're such a big and grown-up general's boy. Don't you think?

Husband. Did I ask you to get this fascist insecticide dust, you old goat?

Wife. You didn't ask, my dear, for me to be a rather primitive fascist, real life required it and I satisfied the request.

Husband. You satisfied it. Well well, what an old goat. What a cunt!!! You open

her mind to reason, you educate her, and she cleans up like a Soviet charwoman, she wipes, polishes and poisons the cockroaches. Without any understanding of what she's doing.

Wife. For your sake, you old bastard, for the sake of our love, which no longer exists, I killed all the cockroaches in our apartment, you son of a bitch!!!

Husband. Son of a bitch – and what choice charwoman expressions she uses!!! Why are you getting worked up about nothing, Zinka? How come there's no love? We have so much love that we can share with other goats and bald goats. For sixty years we've been living-fighting-lording it in love. We celebrated our diamond wedding. Well, you're a goat without a dowry. Am I not your king?

Wife. You're my goat, my udderless goat king!

Husband. Alright then, alright. Don't get excited. We touched on the udderless goat theme yesterday.

Wife. And it seems we touched on the old goat theme yesterday, too?

Husband. Indeed we did, I concede – we even touched on the old goat idea yesterday before we actually mentioned the goat idea. In short, how about a dragonfly... You've nothing against dragonflies?

Wife. I have nothing against dragonflies, my worker ant – I'm your dragonfly!

Husband. In short, you're my beloved stinging dragonfly, and if you really truly love me as you say, pussycat-darling-sweetie-honeybunch – we need to get these cockroaches again. And don't argue! Don't argue, dragonfly! You dance like a dragonfly – so dance! All the fine summer long she sang and never had a moment to look back – the ant is your hero – and he wants to live on in love and harmony with you. And I ask so very little for this, only to breed a few cockroaches and have fun. They are so Formula One, so lively, energetic, they run round the apartment like lightning. To me, this is their propeller, their Brownian thrashing motion on the parquet and rugs in the apartment, which gives enough tooth-crushing cosmic energy for a thousand years ahead, so I crush these convict bastards, enemies of the anti-people, and become the hero of our fabulous country! Then I transfer this cosmic thrashing heroic energy to you, my darling Zinotchka. Isn't that so, my dear? And you hand it back to me with a doubly tooth-crushing heroic strength. We're twenty years old again, full of hope, we want to move mountains, turn rivers back, fuck for twenty-nine hours a day without Viagra. We want to live, live and live again! Live forever!!! But like kings!!! To thrash those convict bastards over the head and smear them over the wall, grind their brains!!! Don't you want us to be kings and thrash their brains out?

Wife. My dear, I want us to live together forever, live like kings and fuck

twenty-nine hours a day without Viagra, spattering those bastards' brains over the walls like bullets!!!

Husband. Well said. Spattering those bastards' brains over the walls like bullets. Then with utter justification fucking me for twenty-nine hours without Viagra!!! My darling beloved! Zinotchka my jet-propelled Ferrari!!! Come on, then – Ninotchka my former secretary and then my student, the one with the cats, lives in Apartment 193 – she's got Schumacher roaches scuttling all over the apartment – go and borrow a few in an old horseradish jar – in a week we'll have swarms of them, they fuck so hard – we can return the roaches to Ninotchka with a few extras, if she likes. The extra roaches they produce – later they'll be extra, I mean – I can crush from morning to night with my musical fingers – well, what a good, melodious, nightingale-lyrical heroic kingly mood I'll have for you afterwards. Believe me, darling titmouse. I'm not asking to go to China, I won't even ask.

Wife. Not this Ninotchka of yours again from Apartment 193! My dear Comrade Colonel, Fyodor Ignatievich! These roaches crushed by your tender fortepiano-Kalashnikov fingers – they'll get under your fingernails afterwards, with their entrails, with their squashed eggs. You don't trim your nails, my darling stop-at-nothing colonel, you won't even let me do it for you. And I, out of my love for you, also let you not trim the crooked nails you scratch me with at night, of course, so erotically in all these delightful critical places. But when in the daytime, in the light of the sun, you start eating my aromatic, don't you agree, own-recipe borscht with sweet red peppers and tomatoes, these slain, already dried roaches under your nails fall into my extraordinary, high-quality borscht with all their torn-off flattened legs, antennae, abdomen, and so on. And what can I do when confronted by this cockroach-killing pleasure of yours – I have to watch this with my shining indifferent sky-blue eyes, raped by your phallic egoism? You know, honey, in a non-virtual sense I can foresee that at some point there'll be a Vesuvian protest in my stomach, in the form of a rising hydrogen sulfide, explosive, gutwrenching, anti-roach prostration, so that I really want to puke out all the borscht I just swallowed with pleasure and appetite from this angry stomach and tormented intestines – right onto your plate!!!

Husband. Don't swear like that, Zinka! What a toothgrinder. Since morning you've been cursing like an old witch. With uncut nails it's easier to thump the roaches, and even to fumble round your clit and deep inside at night. If I had a gun with orders to shoot, I'd cut my nails for the trigger. You're a stupid, uneducated cleaner. Just now I was in such a sincere, sunny mood. I tried so hard. I so heroically crushed these two moths in our lovely comfy old kitchen. Then I tried so enthusiastically, poetically and sublimely to tell you, you stupid fool, how I crushed these moths with feeling in our sweet cosy kitchen, and now you... with

bloody female ingratitude start angrily spewing abuse for nothing. Don't you think a girl should be at least a bit grateful to the boy who loves her, even if this boy is well over eighty years old, and the girl no younger. But this boy does gymnastics every morning, takes all his drops, infusions and pills minute by minute. Just so that you, girl, are never sad, but become prouder of your champion boy with each passing hour.

Wife. You're out of your mind, Fedya. That's all your honest Pioneer girl can tell you in the honest words of a Pioneer. It's elementary, Commander Fedya, you're out of your mind. You can't live so long in this world, Fedya. What do you look like. You look like a hundred-year-old cockroach, Fedya!

Husband. You're going too far now. Just take a look at yourself, you old hag – you don't look seventy any more, roachface!!! You're the one I need to exterminate before any others. And I always thought, where did I go wrong?

Wife. Last year Fedya, the saleswoman in the bakery opposite, thought I looked seventy. I took you with me on purpose so she said I look no more than seventy in your presence.

Husband. What can I do with you. I can say you look fifty if you ask me nicely, my unforgettable Zinaida Matveevna.

Wife. And if I ask very nicely, will you say I look twenty-five?

Husband. Well, if you ask very very nicely – with a blowjob – I'd say you look twenty and cut your nails, and if you bring a jar of cockroaches too, maybe I'll cut my own nails here and there. Not everywhere. But you can eat your borscht without puking – I promise that crushed cockroaches won't fall from under my nails, into your signature fragrant borscht with red pepper and tomatoes, it's a promise. Zinul, you've been quite unbearable today, all morning. Are you trying to give me a heart attack?

Wife. You're going to die soon enough, old man – why should I bother harassing you and bring you to a heart attack – you'll kick up your goat's hooves before me in any case, my dear old ram – you're properly old, you old dickhead.

Husband. And of course you're not old at all, my she-goat, my little old lady. Ach, you really are a harmful dragonfly-splintery-bleating wrinkly girl. I had such a great champion mood this morning. I so magically crushed those moths. Like Andersen, with such inspiration and fervour, I told you this whole victorious miracle, how sweetly I crushed these moths for us, so we'd have an unforgettable, powerful, blooming, royal mood for the whole day and perhaps even for the whole week. Like when you yourself shot those jailbird suckers in the forehead! What a heavenly mood we had then! And you're so grateful you goat-face me in your own manure. How we can go on living together I can't imagine,

my little bitch is a pain in the ass.

Wife. Weeks, months and years – you may live, or you may not live...

Husband. The dead are lucky – time has no power over them... Why are girls always late? The dear creatures want time to leave without them, not realizing that time sits in the girls themselves and ages them, wears them away from the inside.

Wife. And in men, isn't it the case that time blazes away like a machine gun and kills all traces of youth?

Husband. Men shot back with a machine gun and returned to the new age eternally young, resurrected. That's me, like a petrified fool in love, living here with an ageing, brick-hard, wrinkly girl who's been an old woman for a very long time.

Wife. But who wants to live with eternally youthful, dynamic Ninotchka?

Husband. Dynamic Ninotchkas are no use to anyone, that's for sure.

Wife. And I'm not an old girl-woman at all, Fyodor Ignatievich. Use your eyes and open your mind. It's you that is such an old bastard and idiot that you don't see the smooth, delicate, pure, rosy skin on my face, with absolutely imperceptible small, wrinkly, but very beautiful lines.

Husband. Well, that's when you use your trademark French cream for eight thousand rubles a jar – you smear your face with an undulating centimetre of cream so your face isn't visible at all under this layer of cream – maybe then you look like a fifteen-year-old girl. But when you wipe off the cream, under the eight-thousand-ruble cream that costs half of my pension, there's your eighty-year-old wrinkly old woman's face again!!! You're my creamy joy. Look in the mirror!!! You threw all the mirrors in our apartment out in the trash so you wouldn't have to look at yourself. And just so that I look at you, an old killjoy, and suffer – what an old wrinkled hundred-year-old killjoy the Lord has rewarded me with, God bless my portly and noble old age.

Wife. Yes, I don't look as if I'm eighty, not at all, why do you get so angry and excited – Ivan Vasilievich from Apartment 104 thought I look no more than sixty – and he's a real live general!

Husband. Yeah, that Van Vasilich is a real column general according to documents. That legless general! Your legless general Van Vasilich from Apartment 104 is at least two hundred years old – at the age of two hundred and fifty your Van Vasilich from Apartment 104 is blind as a bat. Says she looks sixty. You know what, my dear Zinaida Matveevna, you can take your eighty-two years, wrap them in a napkin, put them in the fridge for the night, in the freezer

compartment, and in the morning hit them with a hammer – maybe your years will split away like ice. Maybe one chunk of ice will be forty years, another twenty, even fifteen and so on. Then you drop the icicles that are forty or more down the toilet, and swallow a fifteen-year-old icicle. Then go to the shop, buy a mirror all wrapped up, bring it home, go to your bed, lie on the bed and unpack the wrapped-up mirror and look at yourself – I assure you, my dearest Zinaida Matveevna: you will freeze motionless with shock on your bed for several days, like dried salted fish. And if I'm not at hand to hold up the mirror at which you will gaze and admire yourself, then this mirror, when you numbly stare motionless into it like a stupid icebound dried fish, this mirror will quite painfully slap your sharp-nosed snout, and what's more it will shatter on your bony, wrinkled slow-witted muzzle and cut you, slice off your Pinocchio nose. And then it will be altogether relevant to order a coffin for you with a hearse. There you are. You wanted the truth – here's the truth right across your Pinocchio nose, my dear, from my loving hands holding in their weary worker-ant palms your dragonfly's carefree heart. And you thought you'd swallow the fifteen-year icicle from the freezer and then like a princess from the skin of a frog you would appear on God's Earth, Zinaida Matveevna, as a young and chaste twenty-year-old girl, an icy cosmetic-enhanced slut. Never mind, I'm in a good mood today, but in short, look at me at the moment when you swallow your fifteen-year-old icicle and before that, of course, bring some cockroaches from Ninochka, my unforgettable idiot, Zinaida Matveevna. And if I then responsibly and sincerely tell you that you've again become my once-upon-a-time twenty-year-old Zinochka, the girl I once had the good fortune to fall in love with, then that's how it is – you're young again, you've cast off sixty years. What if I tell you also that I've got younger too, Zinaida Matveevna. What are you wasting time for, get a move on, hurry up, run off and get the roaches from Ninochka, dragonfly! For older people like us every minute is the equivalent of two weeks in our youthful prime. Off you go, don't hang about. Why are you grinning. I don't want to keep repeating myself. Want a whack on the arse to speed you on your way?

Wife. She'll send me packing with this horseradish jar – surely you can picture her reaction when she sees me with a horseradish jar, Fedya? She's got such roaches in her head that real roaches bear no comparison, especially if you ask for them.

Husband. Well, she's just like any girl, cockroach-crazy, my Ninochka, and your Ninochka too.

Wife. Absolutely. That glass cockroach jar is just symbolic of our Ninochka. I swear to you, she'll take the jar, and you know what she'll put in the jar? She's so crazy she'll put two-year-old samples of her faeces in the jar. She'll go to the fridge-freezer where she always keeps her best samples medically scientifically classified

as faeces and put these faeces in our glass jar in the form of ice – her two-year-old faeces that she'll chop in her kitchen with a meat tenderiser, without any disdain or shame. Those roaches in her head are so bad. And then I'll come back to you here bringing these best examples of faecal samples, now defrosted masses. And so I bring you, the greatest executioner in the world, the executor, the jar where there's supposed to be your long-awaited cockroaches, Fyodor Ignatievich. I give you this jar, put it into your hands. And you, a blind old man, not understanding that she, that roach-brain Ninochka has put her own last year's shit for her excellent analyses into the jar instead of cockroaches. Then you naïvely empty this jar of her shit all over the apartment as if it is was roaches, and you know what kind of odour will spread all over the apartment, Fyodor Ignatievich, from Nina Prokofievna's last year's shit? I would not wish it on you, and certainly not on myself, to smell it with my elderly nostrils and lungs. Last-year's faeces from crazy Nina Prokofievna are truly extraordinary, Fyodor Ignatievich, but the stench from them is no less, but even more extraordinary, Fyodor Ignatievich. Imagine – six months ago I went to Nina Prokofievna's apartment to borrow an onion for the borshcht. There were no onions left in our fridge. So I went to her apartment and we sat for about two hours chatting in the kitchen – drinking tea with biscuits and fruit jellies. Then I wanted to use her toilet. You cannot imagine how badly her toilet stank of shit, Fyodor Ignatich. The smell of her shit in her toilet, old refuse with tortoise-slow matter, just doesn't fade away. Then imagine how crazy it will be if we smear her shit all over the apartment instead of releasing her cockroaches. I go to the toilet every time when you've finished and flush it. And I wipe everything down – when you piss, Fyodor Ignatich, you don't only piss in the bowl, you piss on the floor, Fyodor Ignatich, in our shared toilet, although I forgive you for that. And every other time you take a shit it goes past the bowl. I forgive you that too, out of love and respect for you. Of course I don't understand and I ask inappropriate questions – how do you manage to shit right past the bowl when your narrow wrinkled decrepit old arse is squarely sitting on it. If I were to give you a gun right now, you'd be a centimetre wide of your target forehead. You wanted to visit China to pass on your experience in the firing squad. Why can't you learn to shit without missing the bowl in your own apartment? And then the stench of her shit all over our apartment, as well as your shit everywhere on the toilet floor, no, Fyodor Ignatich, you can cut me in two, I cannot cope with this total shit from you, and from her as well, all over our apartment. There is no love that can save you here and nothing will help save our mutual feelings in future. I'll run off to General Ivan Vasilievich in Apartment No. 104. Now you know! You know what I'm like!

Husband. That General Ivan Vasilievich in Apartment No. 104, he's nothing but a cocksucking old screw. He was in charge of ten of our prison camps in Kolyma. If

they'd given me a hundred camps I'd have ruled them like God. My uncle Savelya Frolych ran all the camps in the country. If he hadn't been taken away with Yezhov I'd have been in charge of at least half the country's camps. Then I'd shoot with you like in a shooting gallery. That would be something to remember now in old age and reminisce about. Why are you telling me this shit, you simpleton, about running away to Vasilich? Off you go then, get out – I'll kick your arse as you go. Who is this Vasilich, anyway, some kind of general?

Wife. Your brother-in-arms, your comrade and friend.

Husband. Enough-enough-enough. What kind of a brother-in-arms is this Ivan Vasilievich to me. He's a traitor. Betrayed my friendship and all that's holy. She's running off to him. Off you go, then, I'm telling you – good riddance. She's running off to him. She's run off with him. Yes, they amputated his gangrenous legs a month ago, both legs above the knee, for real, not for pretence – she's running off to him. What are you doing, running off to him in his wheelchair, you dry old cunt? Off you go – I'll spit on you with pleasure from the balcony as you trundle off to the savings bank with him in his wheelchair to get his general's pension – and you'll both get bashed over the head outside the door when they find out you have his general's pension in your purse. They'll give you a kick in the head at the savings bank right away, and rightly enough. I'd kick you in the head there myself for his general's pension. I'd crush you two bastards at the savings bank like a moth, right there on the asphalt, grinding you with the reinforced metal heel of my boot. I'm not reinforcing myself with metal for nothing. I know my place in the market.

Wife. What a cruel, iron, rusty Fyodor Ignatich you've become with your metal reinforcement everywhere after eighty-four years. I thought the years would soften you, but you're getting tougher and tougher. I can't go on like this with you, Fyodor Ignatich. Have mercy on me, a sinner – I'll leave you, a sinner. Or at night I'll smother you with a pillow. I'll put a square pillow on your evil rectangular snout when you're snoring, lying on your back, I'll sit my round ass on top of you and smother you. And you won't be able to dislodge me. I'll have you smothered by morning. You're always weak in the morning, Fyodor Ignatich, so I'll smother you in the morning.

Husband. Well, smother me then, get on with it, smother me. You've been promising for a long time that you'll smother me and I'm still alive, living and suffering – with such an old shit-arsed smothering beauty. I'd rather smother you, you round-arsed old bitch than have you smother me. Yes, I'll even strangle you in the daytime – I won't wait for the night. I'll stun you with a frying pan on the forehead, put a round pillow over your muzzle and sitting my old man's bony arse on top I'll smother you – I won't miss like I miss the toilet, you won't get away.

And then I'll jump from the balcony to the asphalt myself, head down to my death, so the cops don't get me. And fuck all this family happiness here with you, it's all been shitted away, surrendered. You think I'll surrender to jail? Fuck me if I'll go to my own jail. Listen, dear Zinaida Matveevna, do you know how fucking sick I am of everything here every day with you, a blockhead girl who is estimated at sixty by the bakery assistant at the shop opposite. First of all, specifically, I'm tired of you with your gangrenous last year's generals and your worm-eaten leech brains that even cockroaches will be afraid to enter, even to come up with something original to have a bit of fun in life.

Wife. Yes, you've been threatening to smother me for a long time, all your life, Uncle Sozzled Son-of-a-Roach Barmaley. But I, nevertheless, still go on living, living and suffering – a sweet candy girl.

Husband. The sweet child is suffering. And who else is suffering in this apartment prison cell of yours on the panel-built fifth floor. Don't I ask you to kill me almost every day? Tearfully I ask, breathlessly! With my last gasp I ask, you shaggy old witch, to enter your fucking sorcerer's astral, then you'd pull me, an old fool, into your fucking astral, and you'd kill me there astrally, without pain, in my sleep, using your worm-eaten fried demonic charms. And you keep on making excuses and changing the subject. You keep slowly devouring me alive with your cerebral leech worms – you've been devouring me all your life, you goat-legged vampire. That's what you need – to suck the living blood from me for the rest of my life. You know how many educated, decent people, not convicts, you dispatched like an official KGB witch, when we returned to Moscow after my taiga prison camps and they recruited you, knowing that you can destroy people psychically. I taught you to kill, bitch – you fell in love with this business. How much money did you bring into our family piggy bank then, you KGB witch, when you astrally dispatched someone on a KGB assignment. But she can't kill me. And everyone still admits to loving you, the bitch is a purchased overtime worker.

Wife. I've grown old, Fyodor Ignatich – I don't have enough esoteric forces to enter the astral and kill you there. And then, you're my husband. After all, a close relative. If I start blitzing your astral I'll hurt myself. And I'll hurt half of myself – I won't completely kill myself completely – then I'll suffer from gangrene, like the legless general. If you want gangrene in your legs, I can fix it. That would be easier for me.

Husband. I don't want gangrene in my legs. Well, this swamp creature is a wide-format broad.

Wife. And you're not a waterway Bukharin?

Husband. Waterway Bukharin never asked to be drowned. Alright then, poison

me with arsenic or rat poison, or with cockroach insecticide. You see, I've really had enough of living. I've lived eighty-four years, that's enough. You must understand. What did I ever do wrong to you, witch, that you can't kill me in the old age of my painful days? You killed that vagrant who was sleeping in our entranceway after one in the morning. You said it yourself – your astral dreams did the job.

Wife. He was a bastard, a stinking wretch, a hundred-gram piss artist. He used to breed germs for us with his stench. But if I start trying to dispatch you, Fyodor Ignatich, then I'll begin to suffer myself as a side effect, you understand, after all, I love you, we've spent our whole life together, and I'll begin to worry and kill myself before you've had a chance to die. And it never bothered me that our family life was childless. You're like a child to me, Fedenka. And you get a colonel's pension that's quite adequate, almost like a general's. And how would I go on living without your command officer's pension, like a witch with one broomstick?

Husband. What can we do then, Zinaida Matveevna? Go on suffering and living?

Wife. We must go on suffering and living, Fyodor Ignatich. And when God takes dispatches us, let God dispatch us, when he needs to smear you and me on the walls there in hell. Or do you want to be smeared on the walls of paradise?

Husband. Well then, go and see Ninka – in honour of our sacred friendship I ask you to bring at least a couple of cockroaches from her – we'll play janissaries – whoever gets there first, we'll kill him later. I'd willingly go and see Ninka, but you'll get jealous.

Wife. I am jealous. What do you want of me? And you'll start shouting off again, how you're going to play janissaries – you'll have a heart attack, you'll keel over even before the cockroach dies. You'll have to call an ambulance for them to give you injections. And I don't like the medical smell they exude, like in the camp. I'll die first. And you'll be left alone. It'll be so sad for you to start living without me after that, Fyodor Ignatich. You'll suffer all alone and who knows how much more of this tedious life you've got left. Is that what you want in your old age?

Husband. Then don't call the ambulance when I have a heart attack. I'll just die and let me die of a heart attack, like a hero, not from cancer, as if from some despicable magical evil.

Wife. When you say evil, you mean me?

Husband. Well, Zinka, you know yourself that you're evil, but a good egg all the same. We've been together since way back, I've lived to the age of eighty with you and never regretted it. We had money and I became a colonel even without my uncle, without his help, after he was taken away. Of course Van Vasilich rose

higher than me to become a general, but now they cut off his diabetic gangrenous legs, and he's a couple of years younger than me.

Wife. Ivan Vasilich used to really love chocolates. His life wasn't sweet – he didn't have an uncle to help him – that's why he loved chocolates so much, they sweetened his life.

Husband. He had a dick, you know, the kind he could use to make a career for himself. You know that.

Wife. But his legs were amputated because of the chocolates, not his dick. Gave him diabetes, that's why they cut his legs off. Let me tell you, Fyodor Ignatich, I tried to make life naturally sweet, so you don't sweeten it too much with fruit jellies and chocolates, so you don't come down with diabetes and get gangrenous legs in your old age that have to be amputated, so you keep going in your last years when you barely stand square on your feet.

Husband. Too true, Zinaida Matveevna, I'm really grateful for that, you're the most beloved colonel's woman in the world, you old fox. Oh, how sorry I am for Ivan Vasilich, our general in Apartment No. 104. Hey, maybe we should hasten the earthly fate of our gangrenous legless general. Maybe we could go into his astral, come on, let's kill our legless comrade-in-arms General Ivan Vasilich. That will put us in charge of our entranceway right away in our KGB apartment block, and we'll be doing a good deed to Ivan Vasilich. It would be the right thing to do, morally speaking.

Wife. Ooh, so you're encouraging me to do away with all the generals from our entranceway, Fyodor Ignatich. And who else from our entrance will you hit on next, after Ivan Vasilich? Look here, I'm a gentle woman. Come on then and do away with Ninka, after the general. Just give the order. I'll do it. I'm a very gentle woman, Fedya, who was liked not only by the colonels for being able to kill very conscientiously and tenderly.

Husband. Did you cheat on me, then, with this General Ivan Vasilich, Zinaida Matveevna?

Wife. Well, what else was I supposed to do, Fyodor Ignatievich, when Ivan Vasilievich was your direct superior in your Siberian Buchenwald work? You yourself insisted that I sleep with him, Fyodor Ignatich – so they gave you the colonel's shoulder straps of the crematorium. You yourself, Pinochet-Koshchey the Immortal, insisted on this service promotion of yours thanks to my cunt, back then, Fuhrer!!!

Husband. What will she remind me of next? She's already harking back to this little peppercorn in the borshcht of my unique lifestory.

Wife. That wasn't just a peppercorn, Fyodor Ignatich, it was a whole paper bag of ground peppers, straight in your mouth and nostrils, on the side from my borshcht!!!

Husband. Then get rid of this legless General Ivan Vasilich, there's good reason, he should've been done away with long ago – for our just family cause! What are you arguing about, woman? I'm the Fuhrer, bitch, I give the orders.

Wife. There was always good cause to do away with Ivan Vasilich. But why kill him now – let the legless gangrenous bastard suffer a bit more. What d'you think?

Husband. You have a point. Let the legless bastard suffer more. In our entranceway we're already the main authorities, more or less. It would be even better to take his general's pension – that'd be even better.

Wife. Yes, let him use up his general's pension, Fyodor Ignatich, let him use up all his general's pension buying chocolates for himself, and let his stinking black gangrene crawl and proliferate all over his feeble body. May his filthy arms and ears be cut off, and his lascivious lips, may his eyes rot with gangrene.

Husband. You can give Ivan Vasilievich the evil eye and that'll be the end of him, no doubt about it. And you'll be doing right by giving him the evil eye.

Wife. I'll make the gangrene eat up his liver, and his rotten brain will moulder away. What else can I do, Fyodor Ignatievich – what other orders will you give for a varied and creative life?

Husband. You're doing everything right – we're creatively living our loving family life together in a variety of ways! Well done, girl!!!

Wife. So who d'you really think set the gangrene on his legs, apart from the chocolates?

Husband. You?

Wife. I didn't want to admit it to you before. But now I see you like the idea. So now you know, and I can tell you, as a personal gift – I ordered the gangrene for Ivan Vasilich, your enemy the general, through higher powers.

Husband. Oho, well done you!!! So now we've become even more powerful keepers of the entranceway. All through your prayers, it seems, sweetie. How I love you, my dear!!! I instantly feel forty years younger, if not sixty!!! What a gift! This is a royal gift from up high, Zinaida Matveevna.

Wife. You should have told me yourself, big guy, when you made such a royal gift. After all, when we go out the entrance for a walk, you're always spraying saliva at Nina Prokofievna's apartment. With your crocodile dick in your trousers, ready to rise up and burst into that bitch Ninka, into the swamp.

Husband. Come on, that's enough, the crocodile penis ready to burst – you're just bandying words about. You're suffering from a cult of personality of my penis. Of course, I like it – such a generous and expanded understanding of the question of my balloon's life.

Wife. And when we see that Nina Prokofievna, that slut of a neighbour, in the yard, you stare at her all the time with your dinosaur pupils – as if you can't tear yourself away, as if you're watching some kind of crustacean porn. And why did I throw all the porn out of the house – you were seeing Nina Prokofievna in every woman on the Porn TV channel, you old dick. Not me, your sultry beloved little girl Zinochka.

Husband. I'm sorry, forgive me, I'm a sinner, Zinaida Matveevna. I apologise, you can hit me on the forehead with the metal-reinforced heel of my boot. It's in the hallway – go right ahead.

Wife. You old dog, if only I could rub your dick, even your sagging dick, into the asphalt with that metal-reinforced heel – maybe then I'd have fun. Forgiveness is no more than salty snot. You should prove by deed that you love me, then you could be forgiven, body and soul.

Husband. What kind of deed is it to demonstrate fucking Euclidean geometry, my Zinulya. If I killed Nina Prokofievna for you as a present, the way you gave Ivan Vasilich gangrene. But I can't – I don't have any magical authorised KGB powers with access to the astral like you. If I stab someone with a kitchen knife my government comrades will put me in jail. They'll find physical evidence – the kitchen knife with pieces of her meat and blood, and put me away. Do you want me to suffer in prison? I'll rot in prison then, and Nina Prokofievna will just give up the ghost and her soul will reside with God while she rests underground for eternity. What kind of torment is that, gentlemen?

Wife. You could push her down the stairs – let her break her legs and arms, her hip joints. And then I myself can give her KGB gangrene from the astral once she's reduced to that weakened state. While she's still healthy and walking I don't have enough of my own bewitching powers for her. However many times I tried, it doesn't work. She's probably a real witch herself. You prepare a springboard for me, Fyodor Ignatich, weaken her health, then I'll do the rest myself, I'm a wise woman, I'll finish it. You know, if we get rid of Nina we'll have super royal authority over the entrance. We can tell the people using our entrance that the basement is only for our gherkins – the whole basement will be ours, with our pickles for the winter – well, we can share a little corner with a few of them to divert attention. We can tell them it's our attic, the whole attic will be ours – you'll start breeding pigeons there, like in the old apartment in Chertanovo. You'll be the absolute king of the entrance with me as your queen. Or we can just rent

the attic to artists for the money, if you don't want pigeons. Let's call Nina – let's go for a walk now. Let's go get her. Then you can push her, as if she stumbled in the stairwell at the entrance and flew like a little bird, a smallish crow, down the merciful concrete steps and broke a few bones. And I, as a witness, will always say that it was she who stumbled without you and fell down the stairs headfirst. And she'll never tell on you – she still loves you.

Husband. She loves you as well.

Wife. Yes, she loves me, as, allegedly, a well-mannered and cultured sixty-year-old former teacher, a young lady. I'm also very cultured, you know, this bit of skirt is not stupid. And you know I have a very high IQ. I was the first one in the KGB unit with an IQ. And she's just a retired lieutenant colonel. And as a cultured woman I sincerely love this cultural Nina of yours. But that slattern Nina loves you more, the bitch!!! And I have to suffer!!! Don't you see how I suffer from this slut being in love with you?!!!

Husband. And Nina Prokofievna herself suffers that I live with you, and not her.

Wife. And you, you old suffering fucker, what direction are you suffering in? In my direction or in the direction of Nina Prokofievna?

Husband. I suffer in your direction, of course, my unforgettable Zinaida Matveevna.

Wife. Fyodor Ignatich, we must kill her, this Nina Prokofievna, or leave her there without arms and without legs – that will be easier for all of us. Don't you agree with me?

Husband. I agree. No problem. We'll smear her down to the smallest bones over the wall, like a moth in the kitchen. Come on, come on – none of us has long to live. Someone has to die in great torment, and in order to feel death coming in advance, someone has to stay alive and rule over this death.

Wife. You know how to speak sweetly and royally well. Go on then, call her – invite her for a walk!

Husband. Call her straight out, right away? But we wanted to ask her for cockroaches first.

Wife. Not now, Fedya – when she crashes down the stairs and she's already an entirely broken crow-bird we'll carry her, the little bird, to her apartment and from there we'll call an ambulance. You prepare a jar for the cockroaches – you can catch them there afterwards. I've nothing against cockroaches – I'm for them.

Husband. But these cockroaches run fast. And I'll probably get nervous and tired when we drag Nina Prokofievna the broken bird back to her apartment – I'll be no

good at catching cockroaches in her apartment.

Wife. Well, I'll give you a massage, take your hands in mine, hold them for five minutes – I'll give you energy. You'll catch cockroaches, Fedya, don't worry, you'll be happy. And if necessary I'll help you catch the cockroach enemies of the people, myself. Give Nina Prokofievna a call – don't waste time.

Husband. I'll call her, it's not hard to do. The phone's free of charge, it's not some radio-frequency mobile. Just time for a walk before lunch, to give us an appetite. (*Dials a number on the telephone.*) Ninochka! Hi there, sweetheart, our little kittycat. Yes, Zinochka and I thought we'd go for a stroll. And take you along too. Together, sunshine. Yes, today the birdies are singing sweetly. We'll come and fetch you. (*Replaces the receiver.*) She's nearly ready, as if she knew, little girl Ninochka, that we're going for a walk too and we'll take her along.

Wife. Here's the old horseradish jar for the roaches. Let's go for a walk with Ninochka. (*They leave.*)

The lights dim

After a while the Husband and Wife re-enter.

Wife. How I love you, my unforgettable, glorious warrior, my hero-king, Fyodor Matveevich. How I love you!!! Can I hug you and kiss you?

Husband. Of course, my darling Zinochka! You look so much younger. As if you were just twenty, that's all you look right now.

Wife. Oh, how sweetly you kiss, Fedenka. But there's no chance of diabetes!

Husband. What?

Wife. Don't be afraid, my dear, I'm only kidding.

Husband. You and your jokes.

Wife. And how beautifully she, Nina Prokofievna flew like a swallow, oh, how divinely she flew all the way down the concrete stairs with her crow's bag of bones – her body flew like a bird. The doctor counted five fractures – super! I'll go into the astral tonight and we'll give her the signature KGB gangrene in all the fractures of her limbs. Well, that's it now, Ninochka will be a doll without arms and without legs – like a plant! We'll feed her with a spoon. She will always be so glad and grateful to us for this. Are you happy, my dear?

Husband. I'm so happy. You can't imagine how happy I am, as if I was born again.

Wife. But she herself, this Ninotchka doll, won't be able to go to the toilet. And the smell of her shit is so omnipotent that I just don't know how we can intelligently and culturally bypass this circumstance.

Husband. We'll sidestep it. We sidestepped it without being too cultural.

Wife. That's true. I promise you this, we'll bypass it – with your cerebral cockroaches we can manage.

Husband. And with your super-wise cerebral convolutions with their superior IQ.

Wife. We'll manage. The main thing is that the doctor said she has two fractured hip joints, right and left. You're just a master of competent fractures, honey. And in the long run, there's no suspicion from the public prosecutor. Ninotchka was so grateful to us that we were next to her and helped drag her into her apartment and call an ambulance. And in the entranceway I pretended to stumble and almost trip over myself. But I fell on her. And you put out your foot in time and held me back so I wouldn't go tumbling after her. And she crashed down headfirst from a height, hitting the concrete steps of our entranceway staircase like a plaster skeleton. I counted about ten bumps on her head, and cuts. No less. Well, my boy, we gave the scum something to shit about!!! We can still participate in the filming as stuntmen and get a lot of money for it.

Husband. Exactly.

Wife. Well, where are your Ferrari cockroaches from Ninotchka's apartment?

Husband. Here, my little cockroaches are in the jar. Well, how nicely we brought the whole thing to completion. Well, just a grandiose, filigree, KGB operation. And then we humanely dragged the broken

Ninotchka to her apartment and called an ambulance, then you took my hands in your hands and gave me energy so I could catch the roaches afterwards.

Wife. And Ninotchka, our real, alien enemy, was a hero too, you have to give her credit. Ninotchka is really a marvellous marvel – what a marvellous marvel our heroic Ninotchka is. She promised to bequeath her apartment to us. It turns out that Ninotchka doesn't have anyone else. She said we should go to the hospital tomorrow with a solicitor and she'll sign her will for the apartment to go to us.

Husband. She's a truly heroic Ninotchka. It wasn't some trashy creature that I loved, after all. Do you understand me now?

Wife. I understand and forgive you, you are my miracle. Such victories are only seen in this world in fairytales. Now we only have to live and live, and not grieve!

Husband. The main thing now is to deal with the loft competently and earn

money from artists, as you say, for rent. I decided it's not worthwhile keeping pigeons in the loft. Crushing roaches will give me more pleasure.

Wife. Now I'm beginning to think properly and reasonably. Well then, release the cockroaches!

Husband. I'm releasing the cockroaches!!! The race is on!!!

(Lets the roaches out of the jar.)

Wife. Whatever the child finds amusing – as long as he doesn't cry, as long as he doesn't hang, or shit past the bowl, the bastard...

The lights dim

Moscow, 2012