[www.maximtitovets.com](http://www.maximtitovets.com)

maxtitovets@mail.ru

«Envy is a time bomb. There is no such thing as unfortunate love since only lack of love can be unfortunate. You can't be really happy unless you love and are loved in return».

Maxim Titovets, 2019

**Maxim Titovets**

**THE MAIDEN FOREST**

**A PLAY IN TWO ACTS**

**CHARACTERS**

Fyodor Kolosov, 57

Artyom Kolosov (Jacket), his stepson, 29

Alexey Khromov, 55

Veniamin (Venya) Frostin, 54

Tatyana Yaseneva, pediatrician, 34

Ignatych, retired Kolosov's neighbor

Chopper, unknown age

Ivan Rybin (Moray), Artyom's former classmate, 30

Slav, 30–35

Natalia, about 27

Khlora, 23

Local police officer, hunters, and others

The action takes place in Russia.

ACT I

**Scene 1**

June. Pentecost.

Early morning. Fyodor Kolosov's summer cottage in the Maiden Forest settlement.

In the center of the stage is an open-air summer terrace with a wooden table, a bench, and several chairs. The front lawn is covered in grass. There is a flowerbed. On the left, there is an old apple tree and high fence with a gate, the exit into the street. Fyodor's two-story house is on the right. A paved path runs from the porch. A carved wooden signpost stands near the path featuring the following signs: “Banya – 12 meters”, “Water well – 15 meters”, “New York – 8,321 km”, “Tokyo – 6,132 km”. A birch grove can be seen in the background.

*Tatyana leaves Fyodor's house. She comes up to the gate, turns around, and looks at the house, tidying up her hair. Fyodor opens a window on the first floor. Tatyana waves at him and leaves through the gate.*

*Fyodor leaves the window wings a little ajar and goes out on the porch. He is bare-chested and strongly built. He comes up to the washstand near the gazebo, humming an unsophisticated melody, washes his face and hands, grunts loudly. Then he takes a towel off the hook and wipes his face, chest, shoulders, and back. He puts the towel back. He does some morning exercises as he is going back inside.*

*Venya and Alexey walk up to the gate. Venya wears a trendy T-shirt with a print, a lightweight jacket, and jeans. A small bright backpack is slung over his one shoulder. Alexey is dressed in a decent-looking summer suit, with a hat on his head. He carries a small traveling bag.*

**Venya.** He put up a new fence. How can I even get it open? *[He keeps charging at the gate but cannot open it.]* Alexey, give me a hand!

**Alexey.** Hang tight, Veniamin. *[He gently pulls the gate open and lets Venya inside.]*

**Venya.** Mer-see boh-koo, mon amee.

**Alexey.** Move it, Frenchman. I'm famished.

**Venya.** There, what did I tell you? We should have taken some sandwiches with us!

**Alexey.** So why haven't you?

**Venya.** I didn't feel like bothering with it. *[He gets an apple out of his backpack and a penknife from his pocket, cuts the apple in two, pockets the knife again, and offers half an apple to Alexey.]* Help yourself.

**Alexey.** Meat is what I want.

**Venya.** Fyodor must be cooking breakfast for us. *[He takes out a mobile phone and presses the call button.]* Hi, mom. We are here. Yes, everything is as planned. Love you.

**Alexey.** Lizaveta Nikitichna must be worried about her sonny Venya.

**Venya.** Oh, come on, give it a rest. She asked me to phone her when we arrive.

**Alexey.** And why did we have to come here so early in the first place?

**Venya.** The early bird gets the worm.

**Alexey.** But it's the second mouse who gets the cheese.

*They approach the front door. Venya is munching on his apple. He tries to get inside but Alexey holds him back.*

**Venya.** What's up?

**Alexey.** Let's knock on the window first.

**Venya.** Why bother?

**Alexey.** What if he is with a woman?

**Venya.** My foot!

**Alexey.** Just to be on the safe side, Venya.

**Venya.** Our Fyodor lives a hermit monk's life.

**Alexey.** *[Giving Venya a shove and forcing him downstairs.]* "Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace. Thou talk’st of nothing..."

*Venya comes down from the porch, steps up to the window, and taps on the glass with his knuckles.*

**Venya.** Anybody home?

*Fyodor opens the front door and goes out on the porch. He is dressed in a striped vest and holds an electric shaver in his hand.*

**Fyodor.** What's up with you, fellas? The door is open.

**Alexey.** Hi there, Fyodor.

**Fyodor.** Alexey, what's new? *[They hug.]*

**Venya.** Ah, we knocked just to be on the safe side. What if you are with a lady? *[He sneaks a glance over Fyodor's shoulder, trying to see if someone else is inside.]*

**Fyodor.** A lady from Haiti! Fiction-mongers. *[He puts the shaver away.]*

**Venya.** Feeling funny in the morning.

**Alexey.** You're just hungry, I guess.

**Venya.** We had a three mile foot-slog. Je ne mange pas six jours!

**Fyodor** *[To Alexey.]* Where is your driver?

**Alexey.** I gave him a day off. This proletarian had an urge to get here today by a suburban train.

**Venya.** You should be a man of the people, Mister Former Deputy.

**Alexey.** Eat your heart out, Comrade Former Komsomol Leader. Your time is over.

**Venya.** Mon tam viend-rah!

**Alexey.** I doubt even a French teacher can help him.

**Fyodor.** Enough of this dogfight, fellas. Break! Let's get some breakfast.

**Venya.** He keeps teasing me! About the teacher. Maybe I would like to marry a rich French madame?

**Alexey.** A bloody bridegroom...

**Venya.** Opportunist!

**Alexey.** Look at a conformist's talking.

 *As the three of them get to the house porch, Natalia approaches the gate.*

**Venya.** Oh wow! Heave ho! Jiggers, fellas.

**Alexey.** Who is she?

**Venya.** Some pretty young lady.

**Fyodor.** Hold on a sec. We're going to figure it out.

**Natalia.** You don't have a dog, do you? I'll drop in. *[She enters Fyodor's garden plot and approaches the house.]* Morning.

**Fyodor.** Hello there!

**Venya.** Bon-zhoor!

**Natalia.** Good morning. *[She nods to Alexey and Veniamin, they bow to her, both pleased as dogs with two tails.]* I am sorry to come so early in the morning. Hope I don't disturb you.

**Alexey.** We are in the Maiden Forest, after all. Beautiful ladies are always welcome!

**Natalia.** Thank you. My name is Natalia.

**Fyodor.** Nice to meet you, Natalia. I am Fyodor. And these are my friends. *[Nodding at Venya and Alexey.]* Alexey Khromov and Veniamin... What is your last name, Venya?

**Venya.** Veniamin Frostin. *[He holds out his hand to Natalia, she gives it a shake.]* Enchanté, Natalia.

**Fyodor.** Veniamin... oh dear.

**Alexey.** Nice to meet you, Natalia. *[He gently pushes Venya aside and holds out his hand to Natalia, she shakes it as well.]*

**Natalia.** Oh. So much attention. You're making me blush.

**Fyodor.** We do love guests.

**Alexey.** Your face seems somehow very familiar.

**Natalia.** You are mistaken, Alexey. We have never met before.

**Fyodor.** Natalia, what brings you to my humble dwelling today?

**Venya.** Kes-keu-seh?

**Natalia.** My female friend and I are going to the *Sunny Beach* Recreation Center. GPS navigator showed the shortest route which runs through your settlement.

**Fyodor.** So, you came here with a friend?

*Alexey and Venya exchange meaningful glances and say in unison:*

**Venya, Alexey.** And where is she?

**Natalia.** She is in the car.

**Alexey.** Curious.

**Natalia.** Our car got a flat. We tried to pump the tire up with a compressor but failed.

**Venya.** It might have been punctured.

**Fyodor.** Have you got a spare?

**Natalia.** We can't get it out.

**Fyodor.** Well, this can be easily mended. Fellas, go eat your breakfast while I have a look.

**Alexey.** Yeah, right. Just for the record, Natalia, in my younger days, after I left the army, I had spent two years working in a tire shop.

**Natalia.** You can call me Natasha.

**Alexey.** And you can call me Alexey. Where is your car?

**Natalia.** Around the corner. In the next street.

**Venya.** I'll come with you!

**Fyodor.** What would we do without you?

**Alexey.** Venya is notorious for being a bungler.

**Venya*.***Natalia, everything will be treh bi-ahn! *[He takes off his backpack, casually throws it on the bench in the gazebo, and gestures to the gate, asking Natalia to follow.]*

*Fyodor, Natalia, and Venya head towards the exit into the street.*

**Alexey*.*** Fyodor, where can I put my things? *[Nodding at his traveling bag.]*

**Fyodor.** Bring them in. There is no one around.

*Alexey enters the house and almost immediately appears again, without his traveling bag and jacket, rolling up his shirt sleeves. Fyodor, Venya, and Natalia wait for Alexey by the gate. Then all of them go outside.*

**Alexey.** Let's go. Natasha, show us the way.

**Venya.** Let me share a joke. A while back Chapayev and Petka were crossing the Israeli border...

*The four of them leave.*

*As soon as they pass out of sight, Moray and Artyom appear on the other side of the street. They approach the gate and pass through it. Moray keeps watch at the gate. Artyom quickly approaches the house, enters by the unlocked door. He spends some time inside, then goes out with a cased hunting rifle in his hands and a box of bullets in the welt pocket of his jacket and comes back to the gate.*

**Moray.** Nicely done, Jacket!

**Artyom.** Keep under the radar, Moray.

*Artyom and Moray go off in the same direction they came from.*

**Scene 2**

The same morning. Moray's house next street from Fyodor's house.

*Chopper is sitting in an armchair and fiddling around with an old mobile phone.*

**Chopper** *[Pressing the call button.]* Karen! Everyone is in place. Wait for the signal at midnight.

*Slav enters. Chopper stops the call.*

**Slav.** Chopper, all right. The old geezers departed. Jacket and Moray went inside.

**Chopper.** Few surprises there. Natasha is the best drink-spiker on the block.

**Slav.** Yeah, this bitch knows how to wrap men around her finger!

**Chopper.** You bet!

**Slav.** Why would we even need this rifle?

**Chopper.** It is Frost's order. It has to be done.

**Slav.** And what if Kolosov realizes?

**Chopper.** I don't want him to bang away at us when we pull off the job.

**Slav.** *[Opening the furnace door and throwing more birch logs on the fire.]* Damned moisture.

*Pause.*

**Slav.** We have been stranded here all night. Whose digs are these?

**Chopper.** It is Moray's house. It was passed down to him from his folks.

**Slav.** They must have died a long time ago. *[He takes an old photograph off the table and reads the text on the reverse side of it.]* “August. 1997. I sought my love in the maiden forest. With a mocking singer, I spent the night in a stack...” *[He takes out a lighter, sets the photograph on fire, and throws it on a plate lying on the table].* My father got a garden plot here as well. But this drunkard never built anything there. The land went for nothing.

**Chopper.** A man only seeks for happiness but never has it. And it doesn't even exist. Slav!

**Slav.** Eh?

**Chopper.** Try it on. It's just your size. *[He throws a parcel with clothes to Slav.]*

*Slav unwraps the parcel.*

**Slav.** You can't be serious, Chopper...

**Chopper.** A must is a must. It's gonna get hairy at night.

*Slav changes into the police uniform, puts on the peaked cap, and puts steel handcuffs into his pocket.*

**Slav.** I look nothing like a cop.

**Chopper.** We are going to check it soon.

**Slav.** Jacket and Moray... I don't like these two. How come Frost knows them?

**Chopper.** It's none of your affairs. Frost vouched for them.

**Slav.** The chumps will get off as soon as it hits the fan. You and I are sticking our necks out.

**Chopper.** Relax. Jacket and Kolosov are settling their personal scores.

**Slav.** Is it true that they are related?

**Chopper.** Kolosov is his stepfather. It was he who got Jacket and Moray arrested for drugs a few years ago.

**Slav.** What a nasty son of a bitch.

**Chopper.** Jacket had spent four years in jail. Meanwhile, his mother died.

**Slav.** The fellow had damned bad luck.

**Chopper.** Kolosov buried Jacket's mother and got his grubby hands on the icon collection her granddad left to her.

**Slav.** How much money did Kolosov make on it?

**Chopper.** When Perestroika began, profiteers bid a four-room apartment in Moscow for those icons.

**Slav.** *[Whistling.]* And where is this collection now? *[Opening the door of a wardrobe and groping around inside.]*

**Chopper.** In the old Kolosov's apartment. The roost is alarmed. We are going to find out the password and take the icons without a big fuss. Karen the cracksman is already there.

*Artyom with the uncased rifle and Moray enter. Slav closes the wardrobe door, Artyom and Moray notice him.*

**Moray.** Jiggers! Cops! *[He takes off towards the exit, stumbles, and falls. Then he sees that Artyom and Chopper don't run away and keeps sitting by the door.]*

**Chopper.** *[Giving a laugh and coughing.]* You do! You do look like a cop, Slav.

**Scene 3**

Midday. The stage setting is the same as in Scene 1.

*Fyodor is sitting on the terrace. Some light snacks are served on the table. Venya leaves the house.*

**Venya.** I might have just dropped and broken a mug from your collection. *[He shows a jug with a broken handle to Fyodor.]*

**Fyodor.** Venya, don't sweat it. It's a cheapie.

**Venya.** Looks pretty.

**Fyodor.** It's a replica of an Infantry reservist jug. I've never even drunk from the original one myself, put it on to a shelf.

**Venya.** It's a shame anyway.

**Fyodor.** Put it on the table. You're going to hurt yourself.

**Venya.** *[Carefully putting the broken jug on the table.]* You have some beautiful icons inside. Are those the ones from your collection?

**Fyodor.** Those are copies, Venya. The collection itself is kept in safety, alarmed.

**Venya.** Gotcha. I figured as much.

*Pause.*

**Venya.** How can Alexey take a steam bath so early in the morning?

**Fyodor.** He is used to it. Has a healthy heart.

**Venya.** I can't stand this humidity. My Zodiac is a fire sign. *[He sits down at the table.]*

**Fyodor.** A fire sign? Do you believe in astrology now, Venya? Does your spiritual father approve?

**Venya.** You know, priests and devils, they both seem the same to me as of late. I am sick of theorizing. I'm letting my hair down. First-hand experience is priceless.

**Fyodor.** It's only a shame that we have to pay for this experience with our health, youth, and nerves.

*Pause.*

**Venya.** The whole life is a nasty joke. A friend of mine once came home from a business trip only to find his young wife in bed with her lover. “What are you doing here?!” The cuckold shrieked. “There you go,” his wife said to her lover. “I did tell you that my husband is an idiot.”

*Alexey, fresh-faced after bathing and wrapped up in a bathrobe, comes out of the banya behind the house and walks along the path towards them.*

**Alexey.** You're telling Fyodor about Galina, your third wife, aren't you? *[Coming up to the table and noticing the broken jug.]* Who smashed such a cool jug? Ah! I seem to know the answer.

**Venya.** It is because of men like you, pampered sticklers for cleanliness, that wives deceive their husbands!

*Venya stands up, takes the broken jug, and goes inside. Alexey laughs after him.*

**Fyodor.** Alexey, leave him alone, for Heaven's sake.

**Alexey.** Venya is a bungler and loser. It's a fact.

**Fyodor.** Veniamin never had luck with women. He is suffering, poor wretch.

**Alexey.** You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

**Fyodor.** It's baloney! Dogs can learn at any age, especially when they are hungry.

**Alexey.** Have you heard the news? Venya even took a life-couching course.

**Fyodor.** He asked me to join him too. Positive thinking is in fashion now.

**Alexey.** These shamanic dances are just like drugs.

**Fyodor.** Everybody's got to make a living.

**Alexey.** Some mysterious forces crank out these smooth-talking shamans who brainwash the common people. They create a temporary illusion of inner peace and self-confidence, get the gullible idiots motivated. They fill the hearts of losers like Venya with joy and their lives with struggles. This irrational joy and faith in the glorious future can later play a dirty trick and make their lives miserable.

**Fyodor.** Is it even possible that grown men buy into this?

**Alexey.** The examples are around us! Now our Veniamin dreams of retiring as soon as possible, marrying a rich French madame against all the odds, and traveling around the globe. He even has a French teacher now.

**Fyodor.** As for me, I don't have to wait for a miracle or retirement to change my life for the better. And it's never too late to find love.

**Alexey.** You, Fyodor, are in a romantic mood today, I see.

**Fyodor.** Come off it.

**Alexey.** You haven't fallen in love at your age, have you?

**Fyodor.** What next!

**Alexey.** I saw you a week ago in the city. You were walking together with a young mysterious stranger.

**Fyodor.** She is my neighbor here. We are just friends.

**Alexey.** Already?

**Fyodor.** What do you mean by this “already”?

**Alexey.** First, you are just neighbors, then lovers, and only after that you’re just friends.

**Fyodor.** Are you a bloody shrink now?

*Pause.*

**Fyodor.** Though... you know, Alexey, I have to admit: For some reason, I am drawn to this woman. She is a doctor in the regional polyclinic, works with special needs children.

**Alexey.** During my long life, I've visited fifty-six countries. I had to talk to lots and lots of people from all the continents. You know, I never tried to understand all of them. It's easy to “understand” a person. All it takes is to slap a label on him or her once: Coward, scrounger, drunkard, loser, rascal, smarty pants. And everything suddenly becomes clear.

**Fyodor.** What are you driving at?

**Alexey.** I have always wanted to see a person. Not to understand. To see. Here's an observation that I'd like to share with you as my best friend. I believe it is the most important one.

**Fyodor.** Come on, say it.

**Alexey.** There is no such thing as unfortunate love since only lack of love can be unfortunate. You can't be really happy unless you love and are loved in return.

**Fyodor.** I'm afraid. I'm afraid to lose my loved one again.

**Alexey.** You can't bring Lyudmila back. She's six feet under. But you are here, alive. If you found your love, Fyodor, take it, hold it tight, don't fritter away your energy.

**Fyodor.** “I sought my love in the maiden forest. With a mocking singer, I spent the night in a stack...”

**Alexey.** Take your chance. A million to one chance! Otherwise, you will just become the same embittered loser as Venya.

**Fyodor.** Veniamin is envious of you as his childhood playmate. You had much greater success in life.

**Alexey.** Envy is a time bomb. You never know when it's going to explode. You can never, ever let anybody see that you are successful and happy. People don't forgive you, especially if they are your childhood playmates. If there's no escaping, you should lie. At least tell them that you suffer from gastritis or hemorrhoid.

*Venya leaves the house, approaches the gazebo.*

**Venya.** *[To Alexey.]* So you think you are smart? Successful? Rich?

**Alexey.** What are you doing, you brawler?

**Fyodor.** Venya, my dear, stop messing around.

*Pause.*

**Venya.** Yes, I am a loser.

**Alexey.** Now there's a surprise!

**Venya.** I live with my mom in a two-room apartment.

**Alexey.** Here we go, the blessed fool is whinging again.

**Fyodor.** Alexey, stop that!

**Venya.** Women loathe me. My colleagues despise me. My friends are always laughing at me.

**Fyodor.** Stop your nonsense, Veniamin, would you? You are a great friend.

**Venya.** I'm living paycheck to paycheck. I hate my job and count the days till my retirement. I could have become a Doctor of Science!

**Alexey.** Do it now. Earn some money!

**Fyodor.** Here we go again.

**Alexey.** Instead of traipsing around motivation courses, finally take the responsibility for your own life.

**Fyodor.** Veniamin, whatever man has done, man may do. Someone still has to teach university students.

**Venya.** Actually, Alexey is right...

**Alexey.** Well, Veniamin, I'm sorry. I've been too hasty. *[He comes up to Venya and hugs him.]*

**Venya.** Only fools rely on their present-day superiority. When flood comes the fish eat the ants. But when water dries the ants eat the fish.

**Alexey.** There's my dear philosopher, Augustine! I love you so much for that. *[He hugs and kisses Venya, the latter tries to kick him off.]*

**Fyodor.** You are just like children, really.

**Alexey.** Don't worry, Venya, we will find you a woman. With breasts this big!

**Venya.** That's what I love.

**Alexey.** Did you see the way Natasha's friend looked at you this morning?

**Venya.** Oh yes, yes, yes! A gorgeous girl. Oon bell fam!

**Fyodor.** You are at it again, Don Juans.

**Alexey.** *[To Venya.]* What is her name?

**Venya.** Khlora!

**Alexey.** A hot little number!

**Venya.** Do you think it's her real name?

**Alexey.** Who cares? She is what you need!

**Venya.** *[Singing in a soft voice.]* “I sought my love in the maiden forest.”

**Alexey.** *[Singing along with Venya.] “*With a mocking singer, I spent the night in a stack...”

**Fyodor.** The girls were just kidding! They didn't want to bother with the tire. So they found us, old fools, to help them put the spare on.

**Venya.** Hey ho. We should have asked their phone numbers.

**Alexey.** You're right, buddy, we failed at that.

**Fyodor.** They must be enjoying their drinks while sitting in their bungalows on this Sunny Beach. And mocking at you.

**Venya.** Alexey! Why should you have to let the driver go?

**Alexey.** Look who woke up, an old ladies' man.

*Pause.*

**Alexey.** Fyodor, is this Sunny Beach far from here?

**Fyodor.** It's about twenty kilometers as the crow flies. If you and Venya hit the road now, you'll get there right in time for dinner. It will make the girls' day!

**Alexey.** Funny as a crutch.

**Venya.** Treh bi-ahn! Ha-ha-ha.

**Alexey.** And I am telling you that they will come here tonight!

**Venya.** You got it!

**Fyodor.** You are nothing but sexual maniacs.

**Alexey.** They will leave the ride there and come back by taxi. Natasha promised me.

**Venya.** Fyodor, do you have a razor? I should scrape my chin.

**Fyodor.** You are handsome just the way you are, Venya.

**Alexey.** I once knew a woman. She was a teacher at school. And she loved when I moved my unshaven jaw across her back, between the shoulder blades.

**Venya.** Boy oh boy!

**Fyodor.** Ugh... spare me the details, gentlemen. *[He goes inside.]*

**Venya.** So, Alexey, does it really work with the unshaven jaw?

**Alexey.** Depends on a girl.

*Fyodor comes back with a large bottle of cold beer.*

**Fyodor.** Dear soldiers of the dating front, let me offer you some refreshment. *[He pours the beer into the mugs.]*

**Venya.** A cold one!

**Fyodor.** I wanted to ask you to come hunt with me tomorrow. Shoot a boar maybe. I even took the rifle with me for such an occasion. *[The three of them clink their mugs and drink beer.]*

**Venya.** Gosh, it's so good! And we've got our own hunt here.

**Alexey.** Yep! *[He does duck lips.]* A duck hunt!

**Venya.** Yes! Yes. We are ducks, decoy ducks.

*Venya and Alexey quack, imitate ducks with their walk and movements. Meanwhile, Tatyana approaches the gate, enters Fyodor's garden plot, and walks towards the house. The men don't see her.*

**Tatyana.** Hello there!

**Venya.** Oh! It worked! Hello there!

**Alexey.** Hello, mysterious stranger.

**Fyodor.** Tatyana. I'm glad you dropped in. May I introduce my friends: Donald Duck and Launchpad McQuack.

**Alexey.** Alexey and Veniamin. It's a pleasure to meet you.

**Venya.** Tatyana, enchanté! My friends call me Venya.

**Tatyana.** Nice to meet you, jolly fellows.

**Fyodor.** Are you here for a reason?

*Venya and Alexey exchange quizzical looks.*

**Tatyana.** I'm going grocery shopping in town. Just came by to ask if you need anything.

**Fyodor.** No, I think we are good.

*Ignatych enters the garden plot, walks towards the terrace.*

**Ignatych.** Hello, summerfolk! Happy Pentecost Sunday!

**Tatyana.** Hello, Mikhail Ignatych. Same to you.

**Fyodor.** Hi, Ignatych. How's retired life treating you?

**Ignatych.** Everything is fine, but it's not something to envy. Have you heard the news? The word is that they want to raise the retirement age. To sixty-five years old for men. And to the gills for women.

**Venya.** Codswallop, I say! People don't even live this long.

**Alexey.** They want to raise it and they will. And we will live a European life.

**Ignatych.** Uh-huh. A European life. And those who don't make it to retirement will be cremated and continue working inside hourglasses.

*Venya steps aside towards the house, paces out the distance from the gazebo to the house, then from the porch to the directional signpost. Fyodor takes the beer bottle and pours the beer into a clean mug.*

**Fyodor.** Help yourself, Ignatych. Fresh and cold.

*Ignatych takes the mug and drinks.*

**Fyodor.** *[To Tatyana.]* I remembered: Buy a loaf of dark rye bread, please, would you?

**Tatyana.** Alright. I'll get it here tonight.

*Ignatych puts the empty mug on the table.*

**Ignatych.** Here's what I've come to tell you, Fyodor. I went to get some water from the well this morning. And as I was going back, I saw three men standing in the next street. One of them was Ivan Moray. He got out of jail this spring. Another one was someone with a false gold tooth capping. And the third one... I’ve immediately recognized him: It was Artyom, your stepson.

**Fyodor.** Artyom? That's odd.

**Alexey.** What a surprise!

**Ignatych.** I'm sure it was him. I have a good memory for faces.

**Fyodor.** He must have got parole.

**Tatyana.** Fyodor, isn't it dangerous? You told me that Artyom threatened you.

**Fyodor.** Let's see them try to come here. I have enough bullets for all of them.

**Alexey.** You can't shoot down all the fools.

**Ignatych.** I've deliberately walked past Moray's house now. All clear.

**Fyodor.** Thank you, Ignatych.

**Tatyana.** Maybe they left?

**Ignatych.** Maybe they did. Who knows what these junkies are up to. Fyodor, just keep in mind that your stepson is roaming free with some crooks in tow. Take care!

*Ignatych leaves.*

**Scene 4**

Twilight. Moray's house.

*Natalia, Khlora.*

**Khlora.** I’m scared, Natasha. I am so scared...

**Natalia.** Khlora, it's too late to change your mind.

**Khlora.** I didn't sign up for murder!

*Natalia fetches a slap across Khlora's face.*

**Natalia.** Shut up, you fool of a woman. Are you suicidal? Chopper won't just let us go.

**Khlora.** Chopper, this god damned cop, did schmooze you too. Are you fearing for your daughter's life?

**Natalia.** I'll go to any lengths for the sake of my Svetlana. Any.

**Khlora.** Oh please, Natasha, let me go. Honest to God, I won't tell anyone!

**Natalia.** God can hardly help us now.

**Khlora.** What should we do then?

**Natalia.** Listen, Khlora. Just do what you should do.

**Khlora.** It's terrifying.

**Natalia.** You will get some money, find a good hospital for your father. Think of yourself too. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance!

**Khlora.** It's like jumping into the deep end.

**Natalia.** Here, take it. You are going to add one tablet to Veniamin's drink. He stared at you so longingly this morning.

**Khlora.** A funny old chap. *[She takes the tablets and puts them in her pocket.]*

**Natalia.** I will handle Alexey. We will get the job done and make enough money for years ahead. Chopper delivers on his promises.

**Khlora.** Chopper is a douchebag. A werewolf! Why did Ivan even consort with him?

**Natalia.** Don't be afraid. Chopper is dancing to someone else's pipe too.

**Khlora.** If only I knew who is the boss.

**Natalia.** The less you know, the longer you live. We'll put those old men to sleep and you and Moray will get your fair share. You will be able to skip this town forever. And I will get my daughter back.

**Khlora.** Easier said than done. And what if those old guys die? This would make me a sinner.

**Natalia.** There is no repentance without a sin.

**Khlora.** And if we repent, will we be saved?

*Pause.*

**Natalia.** Have you already told Moray?

**Khlora.** *[She lays her hands upon her belly but quickly takes them off.]* No.Ivan doesn't know anything.

**Natalia.** It's for the best. You will tell him the good news when it's all over.

**Khlora.** He swears by God that he loves me. A funny little fellow.

**Natalia.** Think about your future, Khlora.

**Khlora.** No one ever loved me.

**Natalia.** You've got a chance to hit the jackpot.

**Khlora.** They all just used me.

**Natalia.** Soon you will take everything you ever wanted from life and even more!

**Khlora.** But Ivan loves me.

**Natalia.** He does, he does. And he will love your baby too.

**Khlora.** I will help Ivan. I'll only do it for our baby. Not for the sake of money. But for the sake of our brighter future.

*Chopper and Slav enter.*

**Chopper.** *[To Natalia.]* So?

**Natalia.** All good.

**Chopper***.* It's time.

**Slav.** *[To Natalia.]* Mind you don't screw up.

**Natalia.** Not my first rodeo.

**Chopper.** *[Taking out his phone and making a call.]* Frost, the whores are ready.

*Everyone leaves.*

**Scene 5**

Late evening. Fyodor Kolosov's summer cottage. Solar-powered lanterns light up the paths. There is a light in the windows of the first floor covered by curtains. The summer terrace is illuminated by the warm light of a Chinese lantern.

*Venya is sitting at the table on the terrace. Khlora is standing next to him with a glass in her hands. There are shish-kebabs, snacks, and bottles with beverages on the table.*

**Venya.** I am so glad you came back to us, Khlora.

**Khlora.** Pour me some more wine.

**Venya.** *[Pouring himself and Khlora more wine.]* I already got pretty pickled though.

**Khlora.** Your friend has a beautiful house.

**Venya.** Fyodor always had a good taste in everything. You should see his beer mug collection!

**Khlora.** Are you married?

**Venya.** I'm playing the field.

**Khlora.** Do you make a lot of money?

**Venya.** It's never too much money. All I want is to retire as soon as possible and go on a round-the-world trip.

**Khlora.** So you are a romantic.

**Venya.** A while back a desire sparked inside of me. And I am willing to change my life dramatically for the sake of it.

*Khlora snuggles up to Venya.*

**Venya.** Fyodor spared me a room on the second floor, shall we?

*Venya takes the bottle of wine and glasses and goes to the house together with Khlora. Fyodor comes out of the house with a bath cap on his head and a towel on his shoulder.*

**Fyodor.** You sure you don't want to go?

**Khlora.** We'll do that some other time.

**Venya.** I had enough bathing for today.

**Fyodor.** Well, it's up to you.

**Venya.** *[To Khlora.]* These jokers doused me with the well water. I've still got a rasped throat.

**Fyodor.** Cold training never hurt nobody, Venya. Bless you!

*Venya and Khlora go inside. A few minutes later, the light shines through a window of the second floor. Fyodor sits down at the table in the gazebo, pours beer into a big jug, and drinks it with relish. Alexey and Natalia are walking along the path from the direction of the banya. They are fresh-faced and wear bathrobes. Fyodor notices them, takes two mugs, and fills them with beer.*

**Fyodor.** I hope you enjoyed your bath!

**Alexey.** Thanks, mate.

**Natalia.** Your banya is wonderful.

**Alexey.** I adore women who are fond of taking a steam-bath.

**Natalia.** And I respect men who adore women.

**Fyodor.** Let's drink to friendship and understanding!

*The three of them clink their mugs and drink beer.*

**Alexey.** It's so nice here!

**Fyodor.** So nice here, so nice here, go and grab another beer.

**Alexey.** I threw some more wood in the stove. The temperature there is just as you like it, Fyodor.

**Fyodor.** Alright. I'll go now. Remember me kindly.

**Natalia.** See ya.

*Fyodor walks along the path towards the banya, humming an unsophisticated melody.*

**Alexey.** Let's do it again in about an hour. *[He wraps his arms around Natalia's waist and holds her tight.]*

**Natalia.** You seem to be in a good shape, Alexey.

**Alexey.** I remember! I remember now where I've seen you.

*Natalia pulls away from Alexey.*

**Alexey.** A few years ago, there was this *Passion Empire* massage parlor. It was the time when I was reelected and hit the bottle.

*Pause.*

**Natalia.** I recognized you at once this morning, Mister Deputy. Have I really changed so much?

**Alexey.** But that was another life.

**Natalia.** I don't remember. I don't.

**Alexey.** “I sought my love in the maiden forest. With a mocking singer, I spent the night in a stack.”

**Natalia.** Let it be our little secret. *[She kisses Alexey on the mouth, stands up, and takes away the dishes from the table.]*

**Alexey.** *[He finishes his beer, yawns, and stretches.]* Now that's some good beer. The beer we drank in the banya smacked somehow badly.

*The light in the window of the second floor flickers and then goes out.*

**Natalia.** Beer is still beer. Here, have a bite. *[She gives him a snack from the table.]* Let's dim the lights down. They attract mosquitos. *[She steps up to the light switch at the entrance to the gazebo and dims the lights.]*

**Alexey.** Uh-huh... *[Yawning again.]* Darkness is a teenagers' friend. *[His head droops down, he lays it on the table and falls asleep.]*

**Natalia.** That's it. *[She takes the bottle of vodka from the table, pours some into her glass, drinks it in one draught without having a snack.]* The Rubicon is crossed.

*Khlora comes out of the house, bringing Natalia's clothes with her. Natalia takes her clothes, slips out of the bathrobe, and changes quickly.*

**Khlora.** Veniamin. Old coot. *[She takes the bottle of vodka, takes a sip straight out of it, rinses her mouth, spits on the ground.]*

**Natalia.** Is he sleeping?

**Khlora.** Like a rock. He went out like a lamp.

**Natalia.** This is good. It means we're on track.

*Natalia takes out her mobile phone and presses the call button.*

**Natalia.** Chopper. We are ready. *[She stops the call.]* Khlora! In the banya, there is a padlock on the door handle. Go and lock Kolosov down.

*Khlora walks along the path towards the banya. At this moment, Chopper and Moray appear by the gate. They quickly enter the garden plot, approach the gazebo. Moray carries a truncheon.*

**Chopper.** *[To Moray.]* Tie him.

*Moray produces a plastic cable tie from the pocket of his jacket. He puts the hands of sleeping Alexey behind his back and ties them up with the cable tie. Then he ties Alexey's legs, pushes him down from the chair to the floor.*

**Natalia.** Kolosov is in the banya. The third one is inside, on the upper floor.

**Moray.** Where is Khlora?

**Natalia.** I sent her to lock the banya. It has no windows, only an air-hole. The old man isn't going anywhere.

**Chopper.** *[To Moray.]* Wait for me here.

*Chopper goes inside. Khlora is coming back. She walks along the path from the direction of the banya, holding the key to the padlock. She steps up to Natalia and gives her the key. Moray approaches Khlora, hugs her shoulders, and kisses her neck.*

**Moray.** It's alright, my darling. You did great.

*Chopper comes out of the house, approaches the gazebo. Natalia gives him the key.*

**Chopper.** Relax, Khlora. You've done your part. I can be grateful.

**Khlora.** Screw you.

**Natalia.** Think about your future, Khlora.

**Chopper.** Natalia! You know what to do next.

**Natalia.** Khlora, let's go.

**Moray.** *[To Khlora.]* Soon we will be together. Wait for it.

*Natalia and Khlora leave. Chopper and Moray get black balaclavas and put them on.*

**Chopper.** Moray, I need Kolosov alive.

**Moray.** I'll deal with it. Not a day in jail went by where I didn't think about settling scores with this scum.

**Chopper.** It's time to pay the piper.

*Chopper and Moray go towards the banya. Tatyana enters the garden plot through the gate, walks towards the gazebo with a loaf of bread in her hand. Some bustle and dull thuds can be heard from the banya.*

**Tatyana.** Are they sleeping? It's not that late, I guess. Hello? Fyodor, where are you all?

*Tatyana approaches the gazebo, sees Alexey, and puts the bread on the table.*

**Tatyana.** What kind of joke is that? Alexey, are you alright? Why are your hands tied? *[She tugs at Alexey's shoulder, holds his wrist, and checks the pulse.]* The pulse is weak. *[She tries to check Alexey's pupils but cannot see anything in the dark.]* He is soaked. It's like he got food poisoning. *[She starts to her feet.]* He needs an ambulance. Fyodor, Venya, where are you? *[She stops short, hearing the noise and voices of Chopper and Moray.]*

**Chopper.** What a hulk of a man.

**Moray.** He stroke me with a log.

**Chopper.** Help him put on his trousers, or he's gonna freeze his balls off. Kolosov, don't move. We need to talk.

**Moray.** You piece of shit! Take that!

**Chopper.** Now tie down his legs.

**Moray.** You are ours now.

**Chopper.** Get him. Don't move, old man, or you'll make it worse.

*Tatyana finds a place to hide. Chopper and Moray drag Fyodor, beaten and scantily dressed, through the grass. Fyodor's hands and legs are tied with cable ties, his mouth is taped. Tatyana quickly makes her way towards the gate. She is lurking, waiting. Chopper and Moray do not see her. They drag Fyodor onto the path and stop by the signpost.*

**Chopper.** Hold on! I've dropped my phone in the banya. Go and take it.

*Moray walks towards the banya. Chopper is waiting for him. Fyodor is lying on the grass.*

**Moray.** Chopper! The door got jammed shut, help me open it.

**Chopper.** Prick.

*Chopper leaves. Tatyana leaves the garden through the gate and bumps into Slav dressed in police uniform.*

**Slav.** Hello there!

**Tatyana.** Help me! Some bandits attacked my friend!

**Slav.** We'll get it all sorted out. Don't worry. What happened?

**Tatyana.** You have to call for backup.

**Slav.** Let's step aside so no one would see us. What is your name?

*Tatyana and Slav leave. The noise of Chopper and Moray trying to open the jammed door can be heard from somewhere around the banya. Fyodor groans. He stirs and tries to break the ties on his hands and legs, raises himself onto his knees in an attempt to get to his feet but falls to the ground.*

The end of Act I.

ACT II

**Scene 6**

Night. Moray's house.

*Artyom is sitting on a chair, holding the rifle. There is an open box of bullets on the table. Natalia is sitting in the armchair by the stove, with her back to the door. Khlora is taped to a chair, she is gagged.*

**Artyom.** Bitch. She bit my hand through.

**Natalia.** Let Khlora go, Jacket! This wasn't the deal.

**Artyom.** Chopper arranged everything for you. He told us to screw you too if you try anything. As for your daughter, we'll take care of her.

**Natalia.** I will cut your throats for my Svetlana.

**Artyom.** So stay put. Chopper delivers on his promises.

**Natalia.** What a nasty piece of work you are, Artyom. You dragged your buddy, Moray, into this crap. Chopper will finish him off.

**Artyom.** Every man for himself.

**Natalia.** You are not a stupid fellow. Let Khlora go. And go yourself.

**Artyom.** Chopper won't harm her. He only told to keep her back so that she wouldn't kick up a row. We are not savages.

*Pause.*

**Natalia.** Do you think Chopper will let us live when he gets the icons? Will he give us our shares?

**Artyom.** Chopper is only a sidekick. But Frost covers up for me. He loved my mother ever since school. Then she got married to Kolosov and died.

**Natalia.** Kolosov seems to have crossed you all.

**Artyom.** I hate the bastard.

*Slav enters. He is still dressed in police uniform, his face is all scratched up. He pulls Tatyana inside. Tatyana's hands are tied, she has a hood over her head. Slav forces Tatyana to the floor.*

**Slav.** Don't move, bitch. Or you'll get some more. *[He ties Tatyana up and checks if the rope is tight.]*

**Natalia.** Why did you bring this skank here?

**Slav.** This is Kolosov's wench. She saw everything. Meant to turn us in.

*Artyom gets out of the chair, still holding the rifle, and steps back to the fireplace.*

**Slav.** Now this woman is our guarantee. *[He approaches the table, pours himself a glass of vodka, drinks.]*

**Artyom.** She shouldn't see us. I don't need witnesses.

**Slav.** Did you think you'd get off with a whole skin, chump? *[He gets a hunting knife, approaches Tatyana, pulls the hood off her head. Tatyana's mouth is taped, there is a bloody scratch on her forehead.]*

**Artyom.** You are a louse, Slav. Do you want blood?

**Slav.** *[To Tatyana.]* If Kolosov gives us a hard time, I'll cut this bitch up and feed the bits to him. And you will help me with that.

*Artyom flips the rifle bolt. Slav leaps to his feet with a knife clasped in his hand, ready to hurl himself at Artyom.*

**Natalia.** Easy, Slav! We will deal with it ourselves. Go to the guys.

**Slav.** *[To Artyom.]* It's your life you will answer for her with, Jacket.

*Slav leaves.*

**Artyom.** That's it. The Rubicon is crossed. She recognized me.

**Natalia.** Let Khlora go and be off. Why would they share with you? They will just wipe you out. And then burn you in here. Together with Moray and Khlora.

**Artyom.** Stop bluffing!

*Tatyana carefully unties her hands and frees herself. She looks around and sees a poker lying on the floor. Natalia and Artyom do not notice.*

**Natalia.** Chopper is a cop. A werewolf. He leaves no witnesses behind.

**Artyom.** We are in cahoots.

**Natalia.** Uh-huh. You will be the first one to turn us in to cops if they catch us in the act.

*Artyom points the rifle at Natalia.*

**Natalia.** You are a good-for-nothing. You lack the guts to kill somebody.

*Artyom puts the rifle down. Tatyana leaps to her feet and strikes Artyom over his head with the poker. Artyom drops the rifle and falls unconscious. Tatyana grabs the rifle and runs out of the house. Khlora and Natalia keep their seats and stare at each other.*

**Scene 7**

Night. Fyodor Kolosov's summer cottage.

*Chopper and Moray wear balaclavas. Fyodor is tied to a chair.*

**Chopper.** Here's the deal. You will give us the icons and save your friends' lives. Tell me the password!

**Fyodor.** Who gave you a lead on me?

**Chopper.** Tell me the alarm password!

**Fyodor.** Who gave you a lead on me?

**Chopper.** We will ransack your roost anyway. But before that, we'll roast you in your own banya.

**Fyodor.** Who gave you a lead on me? Artyom?

*Moray kicks Fyodor in the stomach.*

**Chopper.** You are not suicidal, Kolosov, are you? Tell me the password.

**Fyodor.** So it was Artyom who told you about the icons. I'll kill the rat.

*Moray kicks Fyodor again.*

**Chopper.** If you don't care about yourself, think of your friends.

**Fyodor.** Go to hell, bastards!

*Slav, dressed in police uniform, enters the garden and puts on his balaclava. He approaches Fyodor and throws Tatyana's handkerchief at him.*

**Slav.** Tatyana sends you her regards.

**Fyodor.** And who are you, postie?

*Slav punches Fyodor, the latter falls off his chair. Moray walks up to Fyodor and presses his foot against Fyodor's neck.*

**Moray.** I'm gonna break your neck, scumbag.

**Slav.** *[He draws out a hunting knife and holds it to Fyodor's face.]* Be reasonable, chump. If you don't tell us the alarm password, we will just pass your bitch around. And then I will personally choke the life out of her.

*Moray takes his foot off Fyodor's neck. Fyodor clears his throat and spits blood. Slav takes the knife away and helps Moray get Fyodor on the chair.*

**Chopper.** Last suit has no pockets, Fyodor. Give us the icons. You will save your wench and your friends.

**Fyodor.** You are pieces of shit. Blast you.

*Pause.*

**Chopper.** Is it settled then, Kolosov? Their lives are in your hands.

*Pause.*

**Fyodor.** How can I be sure that you won't kill us after I tell you the password?

**Chopper.** We are not savages. You will have to take my word for it.

*Pause.*

**Fyodor.** I'll give you the icons. If you lay a finger on Tatyana, I'll make mincemeat out of you.

**Chopper.** That's a bargain. We are men of business. *[He takes his mobile phone out and presses the call button.]* Karen, he is good to go. Write down the password. *[He holds the phone to Fyodor's mouth.]*

**Fyodor.** Front door. One. Six. Oh. Six. One. Nine. The door to the study. Oh. Three. Oh. Five. Eight. Oh.

**Chopper.** *[To Fyodor.]* You made your choice. *[He stuffs his phone into his pocket.]* Now we wait.

**Fyodor.** Blessed are You O Christ Our God / You have revealed the fishermen as most wise / by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit / through them You drew the world into Your net / O Lover of Man, Glory to You.

**Scene 8**

Night. Moray's house.

*Natalia and Khlora are sitting at the table opposite to each other. There are an open bottle of vodka and two glasses on the table. Artyom is lying unconscious on the floor, he is tied hand and foot.*

**Khlora.** What next?

**Natalia.** Go.

**Khlora.** I won't leave without Ivan.

**Natalia.** Think of your baby, you idiot.

**Khlora.** I won't leave without Ivan!

**Natalia.** They will kill you both. You and Moray. You are his weak spot.

**Khlora.** If you let me go, Chopper won't take it lying down.

**Natalia.** I will deal with it. Tie me up. And go while Jacket is still out cold.

**Khlora.** They will kill us all.

**Natalia.** Yes. Maybe.

**Khlora.** Do you know what my father used to say? The best defense is a good offense.

**Scene 9**

Night. Fyodor Kolosov's summer cottage.

*Fyodor is tied to a chair, his mouth is taped shut. Slav and Moray are standing by. Chopper is talking on the phone.*

**Chopper.** Karen, stick to the plan. Out. *[He stops the call and puts the phone back into his pocket.]* All good, Slav. We've got the icons.

*Slav approaches Moray from behind and knocks him out with a truncheon. Fyodor is trying to free himself, squirming on his chair.*

**Chopper.** Don't move, Kolosov. You have lived a disgraceful life but you will die the death of a righteous man.

**Slav.** Don't take it personally, old man. We are just tying up loose ends.

*Slav puts the truncheon on the table, ties Moray's hands and legs with plastic cable ties, and drags him along the path towards the banya.*

**Slav.** The bastard is heavy.

*Slav and Moray whip out of sight. Tatyana, with the rifle in her hands, comes out of the dark and points the rifle at Chopper.*

**Tatyana.** Just a twitch and I'll shoot you, scumbag.

**Chopper.** Hello, Tatyana.

**Tatyana.** Who are you?

**Chopper.** You are just like a guardian angel coming down from heaven.

**Tatyana.** Untie him. Now!

**Chopper.** I have respect for bold people, Tatyana. Give me the rifle.

**Tatyana.** Untie him.

**Chopper.** Give me the rifle. Don't mess with me.

**Tatyana.** Don't put your fingers in the fire, sweetheart. *[She flips the rifle bolt.]*

*Chopper approaches Fyodor, takes the knife from the table, and cuts Fyodor's hands free.*

**Chopper.** Now that's a woman. [*He puts the knife towards himself and gives it to Fyodor.]* Lucky you, Kolosov. [*Aside.]* Frost, you son of a bitch, where are you?

**Tatyana.** Put your hands behind your head!

*Chopper slowly puts his hands behind his head. Fyodor quickly frees himself, removes the tape from his mouth, spits blood, takes the truncheon from the table, approaches Chopper from behind, and strikes his legs. Chopper drops down on his knees.*

**Fyodor.** You are dead, you piece of shit. Put your hands behind your back.

*Chopper is on his knees. He puts his hands behind his back, Fyodor ties them. He takes off Chopper's balaclava.*

**Fyodor.** I recognized Moray's voice at once. But you... I've never seen you before.

*Chopper spits on the ground.*

**Fyodor.** Face down.

**Chopper.** Do you know what I am doing now? I am speaking to a dead man.

**Fyodor.** What are you talking about?

**Chopper.** You are toast, Kolosov. You will all die tonight.

*Fyodor kicks Chopper to the grass, approaches Tatyana. At this point Slav reappears out of the dark and lashes out at Tatyana with the knife, trying to take the rifle from her. Tatyana dodges his attack nimbly. Fyodor sends Slav sprawling with a heavy blow, takes the rifle out of Tatyana's hands. Then he knocks Slav out by hitting him over the head with the rifle stock.*

**Scene 10**

Late night. Fyodor Kolosov's summer cottage.

*Slav is handcuffed to the handrail core, he is unconscious. Chopper is tied to a chair in the gazebo, his hands tied behind his back, his mouth taped.*

**Fyodor.** Thank you, Tanya.

**Tatyana.** Fyodor... I feared for you so much.

**Fyodor.** It's gonna be alright.

**Tatyana.** It was Artyom who brought the bandits here.

**Fyodor.** Artyom? Where is he?

**Tatyana.** Artyom is in Rybin's old house. Do you remember Ivan Moray?

**Fyodor.** I've seen him today. He's lying dead in my banya.

**Tatyana.** Good Lord! I might have smashed Artyom's head with a poker.

**Fyodor.** You are a doctor, not a killer.

**Tatyana.** I was frightened.

**Fyodor.** Who else has seen you?

**Tatyana.** There were two women in the house with Artyom. One of them was taped to a chair.

**Fyodor.** What a beauty. Must be Khlora and Natasha.

*Fyodor enters the gazebo, sits down at the table, and puts the rifle next to him. Slav regains consciousness but closes his eyes again, pretending he is still unconscious.*

**Tatyana.** We should call the police. My phone is broken. Where is Alexey? And Venya?

**Fyodor.** I don't know. Go inside, have a look there. Meanwhile, I'll deal with this piece of shit. *[He takes out the hunting knife he took from Slav.]*

**Tatyana.** Yes, sure.

*Tatyana goes up to the house. Fyodor gets up, walks up to Chopper with the knife, cuts the cable ties serving as handcuffs, and gets Chopper's hands free. Chopper silently rubs his numb wrists, removes the tape from his mouth. Fyodor sits on his chair, takes the bottle of vodka, and fills two glasses. He takes one glass himself and offers another one to Chopper.*

**Fyodor.** *[Swallowing his vodka in one gulp.]* Did you really think I would give you the collection?

*Chopper remains speechless.*

**Fyodor.** It's not the money. The icons hold a sentimental value. They remind me of Lyudmila.

**Chopper.** *[He removes the tape from his legs, now he is free.]* Karen the cracksman told me he had already got the icons.

**Fyodor.** These are copies. Knockoff.

**Chopper.** *[Takes his glass with vodka and drinks it off.]* Why didn't you say so?

**Fyodor.** You never asked. You kept harping on the same thing: Password, password.

*Pause.*

**Fyodor.** I want to offer you a deal.

**Chopper.** Go ahead.

**Fyodor.** You and I are men of business.

**Chopper.** We both have something to lose.

*Fyodor gets up from the table, approaches the porch, and opens a hiding place on the side. He produces a bundle of money wrapped in plastic, steps up to Chopper, places the bundle on the table in front of him, and takes his seat again.*

**Fyodor.** There's a million and 200K in there. You will get another million and 800K in three days.

*Pause.*

**Chopper.** What will I have to do?

**Fyodor.** I want you to kill Artyom today. He is in Moray's house now.

**Chopper.** How can I be sure that you won't turn me in?

**Fyodor.** We are not savages. You will have to take my word for it.

*The front door opens. Venya goes out on the porch, wearing his jacket. He looks rough. A rope is wrapped around his arm, he grasps his head every now and then and writhes in pain.*

**Venya.** Fyodor. Ouch... Where is everybody? My head is splitting. Ah, it hurts.

**Fyodor.** *[Aside.]* That's all we need now. Out of the blue! *[To Venya.]* Venya! You are alive. Thank goodness.

*Venya totters to the gazebo.*

**Venya.** Fyodor. What happened here? Why were my hands tied?

**Fyodor.** You should drink less, mate. Here, I'll help you.

**Venya.** *[Pointing at Slav.]* And this one? Blind drunk too? You could at least bring him inside, he's gonna freeze to death.

*Venya heavily walks up to Fyodor who is sitting on his chair. Fyodor unwraps the rope on Venya's arm.*

**Fyodor.** Where is Alexey?

**Venya.** Inside, with Tatyana.

*At this moment, Venya moves around Fyodor's back, nimbly puts the rope around Fyodor's neck, and starts choking him. Chopper quickly gets on his feet and runs up to Fyodor. Slav opens his eyes, watches them, and tries to get free of the handcuffs.*

**Venya.** Chopper, hold him tight!

*Chopper holds Fyodor tight with one hand and hits him several times in the stomach with another. Fyodor cannot fight back any longer. He loses consciousness from strangulation and slumps in the chair.*

**Venya.** I've heard everything.

**Chopper.** Frost! What the hell took you so long?

*Venya and Chopper tie Fyodor's hands and legs with the cable ties.*

**Venya.** Be grateful that he didn't wipe you out at once. You couldn't even cope with a skirt! Give me the money!

*Chopper gives the bundle of money to Venya, the latter puts it into the pocket of his jacket. Venya approaches Slav and removes the gag.*

**Slav.** Frost, you son of a bitch! Did you want to blow us off? The icons are fake!

*Venya kicks Slav, Slav falls quiet. Venya takes the rifle, makes sure it is loaded, flips the bolt, and points the rifle at Slav. Slav flattens himself against the ground cowardly.*

**Venya.** Chopper, clean it up here. And bring the petrol can to the banya. I will go and get Artyom.

*Venya leaves, holding the rifle.*

**Scene 11**

Dawn. Banya of Fyodor Kolosov's summer cottage.

*Slav and Chopper take Alexey inside, holding him by his arms. Alexey's hands are tied, his mouth is taped. Alexey fights his way free, gives Slav a blow with his tied hands. Chopper hits Alexey. Alexey crumples to the floor and stops fighting back. Chopper and Slav dump him into the corner.*

**Chopper.** Tie him tight, Slav.

**Slav.** Uh-huh. *[He ties Alexey up tight.]*

*Fyodor enters. His hands are tied behind his back. He is followed by Venya who pushes Fyodor on with the rifle. Slav goes outside.*

**Venya.** Sit down!

**Fyodor.** That is some rubbish you started, Venya. You will regret this.

**Venya.** Après nous, le déluge.

*Fyodor sits down in the chair. Chopper tapes Fyodor down to it, ties his legs.*

**Chopper.** Done.

**Venya.** Bring in the other one!

*Chopper leaves. He is almost immediately back together with Slav. They drag Moray who is beaten. Moray gives no signs of life.*

**Slav.** Looks like we overdid it a bit.

**Chopper.** He will have enough time in afterlife to come to his senses.

*Slav and Chopper throw Moray to Alexey.*

**Chopper.** Frost, it's time!

**Venya.** We have enough time.

*Slav and Chopper leave.*

**Fyodor.** That is how you repay kindness, Veniamin. I thought we were friends.

**Venya.** He that bewares of the sting should steal honey.

**Fyodor.** It's your revenge on me for Lyudmila.

**Venya.** You took her from me.

**Fyodor.** Lyudmila never loved you.

**Venya.** It doesn't matter now.

**Fyodor.** And what does?

**Venya.** You wanted to kill my son today.

**Fyodor.** I did. But God interfered.

**Venya.** Aren't you surprised that Artyom is my son?

**Fyodor.** I’ve always known it. When you take a woman with a child, it doesn't hurt to ask her who fathered it. Lyudmila trusted me.

*Pause.*

**Venya.** Three days before she died, Lyudmila called me and asked me to come and see her in the hospital. She gave me a strand of his hair that she had kept in the amulet. The DNA test confirmed that I am his father.

**Fyodor.** It was a moment of weakness.

**Venya.** You are lying!

**Fyodor.** After the chemo, she didn't know what she was doing.

**Venya.** Enough!

**Fyodor.** I am sure that Lyudmila regretted telling you. And now she can see what you are up to.

**Venya.** You sent her only son to prison. She became sick with grief.

**Fyodor.** I saved the life of this junkie but Lyudmila started hating me. It's unfair.

**Venya.** When I discovered that Artyom is my son, something happened to me.

**Fyodor.** You went nuts.

**Venya.** I decided to change my life forever. For the first time in my life, I had a dream.

**Fyodor.** You changed your life when you threw in your lot with these bloodsuckers.

**Venya.** Chopper is only a tool. Now I need the cash, badly.

**Fyodor.** Bite me, Venya.

**Venya.** Where are the icons? Where'd you hide them? *[Hitting Fyodor.]*

*Chopper enters and takes the rifle off of Venya.*

**Chopper.** These bitches, Natasha and Khlora, slit the tire. I'll skin them alive when I get hold of them!

**Venya.** Do you know what makes me happy now, Fyodor? Artyom is alive. He is far from here now. I'll provide him with an alibi. And he is your only heir.

**Fyodor.** You won't get the icons anyway.

**Venya.** Fyodor, it's a matter of principle.

**Fyodor.** You are pathetic, Veniamin.

**Venya.** I don't want it on my conscience.

**Fyodor.** When the Most High came down and confused the tongues / He divided the nations / But when he distributed the tongues of fire / He called all to unity...

**Venya.** The kondak won't help you now.

**Fyodor.** I am not afraid of you.

**Venya.** You are blind.

**Chopper.** We've cracked far cheekier fellows than you, Kolosov. *[To Venya.]* So, now?

**Venya.** Yes, bring her in, Chopper, third time's a charm.

**Chopper.** *[Through the open door.]* Slav, get her over here.

*Slav and Tatyana enter. Tatyana's hands are tied, her mouth is taped. She is not fighting, only looking at Fyodor. Slav makes Tatyana sit on a stool in front of Fyodor.*

**Fyodor.** You are befooling me, Venya. Wrap it up.

**Venya.** Playtime's over, Fyodor. Where are the icons?

*Slav leaves, shuts the door tight. Chopper reloads the rifle, flips the bolt, and points the rifle at Fyodor.*

**Fyodor.** Let me remind you, Venya, what your beloved Augustine of Hippo said: Only fools rely on their present-day superiority.

**Venya.** Tell me where the icons are and I will spare your lives.

**Fyodor.** You are gutless.

**Venya.** You and Khromov have always underestimated me. I will show you.

**Fyodor.** You are a petty crook, not a murderer.

**Venya.** For the last time, where are the icons?

*Fyodor remains silent.*

**Venya.** I'm counting to three.

*Venya gives a hand signal. Chopper takes out the knife and plunges it in Moray's leg. The pain gets Moray conscious, he starts screaming.*

**Venya.** Ivan Rybin, also known as Moray. One.

**Fyodor.** Are you mad?

**Venya.** The lives of Alexey and Tatyana are in your hands. Give the collection to me!

**Fyodor.** You won't do it.

**Venya.** Give me the icons! Where are they?

**Fyodor.** You've lost your mind! Let me go!

*Chopper steps up to Alexey and slashes his shoulder with the knife. Alexey gasps, slips down, and falls on his side.*

**Venya.** Alexey Khromov. Two.

**Chopper.** *[He holds the knife to Fyodor's cheek.]* Kolosov! Where are the icons?

*Fyodor shakes his head.*

**Chopper.** Suit yourself. *[He puts the knife away from Fyodor's face, approaches Tatyana, grabs her by the hair, forces her up, and takes her to the open door leading to another room. The sign on the door reads: "Steam room".]*

**Fyodor.** Hold on! Venya.

**Chopper.** Before I bang your bitch, I'll skin her alive. *[He pushes Tatyana through the door. We can hear Tatyana falling to the floor.]*

**Fyodor.** I'll tell you! Take anything you want. But don't hurt Tatyana!

*Pause.*

**Fyodor.** Venya, come to your senses!

**Venya.** We are not savages. Go ahead. Tatyana will live.

*Chopper takes the knife away and stands by the open door with the rifle.*

**Fyodor.** The icons are here, in the house. Five of them are in my study on the second floor. And you will find three more in the big room on the first floor.

*Chopper raises the rifle, shoots into the room Tatyana is in, and closes the door firmly.*

**Venya.** Tatyana Yaseneva. Three.

*Fyodor is appalled.*

**Venya.** Now you know what it feels like when your friend takes the woman you love. Now we're square.

*Chopper and Venya leave and close the front door. We can hear them boarding up the front door from the outside. It sounds as if they were driving nails into the coffin.*

*Fyodor is tied so tightly he can barely move. He starts squirming, trying to free his hands. He manages to do it by the skin of his teeth. Meanwhile, the room is filling up with smoke: The bandits have set fire to the banya from the outside. After getting his hands free, Fyodor unties his legs. He is free. He rushes to the front door, trying to open it, but it doesn't budge. He runs to the steam room, flings the door wide open, and enters the room. Shortly afterwards, he is back with Tatyana. The room is increasingly filling with smoke.*

**Fyodor.** Thank God, you're alive. *[He unties Tatyana's hands and removes the tape from her mouth.]* You're alive!

**Tatyana.** Untie Alexey, help them!

*Fyodor runs to Alexey, unties him. Meanwhile, Tatyana frees herself, comes up to the door, and tries to open it. The room is still filling with smoke. Tatyana is coughing. Fyodor and Alexey try to break down the door. Tatyana unties Moray.*

*Indistinct noises and shots can be heard from the outside.*

*Moray cannot get up; he is lying on the floor. The door does not budge. The room is almost entirely filled with smoke by now.*

*When Fyodor and Alexey exhaust themselves trying to break down the door, we hear pounding from the outside. The front door opens. Three men come in: Ignatych with an ax, a man dressed in camouflage fatigues holding a crowbar, and a man in police uniform.*

*Ignatych takes Tatyana outside. The man in camouflage helps Fyodor out. Alexey and the policeman get Moray out. Everyone leaves. The whole room gets filled with smoke.*

**Scene 12**

Morning twilight. Fyodor Kolosov's summer cottage in the Maiden Forest settlement.

*Slav is lying on a stretcher, handcuffed. The policeman is standing right next to him. A doctor is putting a bandage on Slav's head. An ambulance attendant and the man in camouflage are standing close by. Natalia is standing next to Alexey who is sitting on a chair. They are engaged in a quiet conversation. Alexey's shoulder is bandaged. Moray and Khlora are sitting on the grass by the signpost. Moray's leg is bandaged. Fyodor, Tatyana, and Ignatych are sitting in the gazebo.*

**Khlora.** Ivan, thank God. You are alive! That's what matters.

**Moray.** Khlora. You are my little guardian angel.

**Khlora.** I will wait for you.

**Moray.** Take care of our baby, my darling.

*The ambulance attendant and the man in camouflage take the stretcher and carry Slav outside. The local police officer approaches Moray.*

**Local police officer.** You got pretty banged up, Moray. But I'd say you deserve more.

**Moray.** You still got time.

**Local police officer.** Let's go, poor bloke.

*The local police officer, Moray, and Khlora walk towards the gate. Moray has a bad limp, Khlora helps him walk. They leave. We can hear the ambulance car driving away. Natalia says goodbye to Alexey and leaves quickly. Alexey joins those in the gazebo.*

**Fyodor.** Thank you, neighbor, for helping us out.

**Ignatych.** Count yourself lucky, Fyodor.

**Fyodor.** Yes. You're right.

**Ignatych.** I had already gone to bed and suddenly I heard someone rapping at the window. Two lasses. Drunk. Crying.

**Fyodor.** It was us who made them drunk, Ignatych. Good lasses, don't blame them.

**Ignatych.** That's exactly my point. Good lasses. They raised alarm.

**Alexey.** It's not so obvious who was made drunk!

*Fyodor shakes his fist at Alexey. Alexey falls silent.*

**Ignatych.** You are lucky Sergey, my grandson, was spending the night in the old ranger station with his fellow hunters. He is a local police officer here. Your banya had already been in flames when we got here.

**Alexey.** You put out the fire just in time.

**Fyodor.** The water well turned out to be useful. Venya, Venya, you are such a fool.

**Tatyana.** Venya and Artyom are on the run.

**Alexey.** Who would have thought? Our Venya is a bandit. It even made me respect him a bit.

**Ignatych.** They won't get far. Have you not heard? This sidekick of his, Chopper, who was shot by my Sergey, is a former police major. The local bandit who was supposed to be hunt down a long time ago. But he was as slippery as an eel.

**Fyodor.** Your grandson is going to be promoted now. He has neutralized a whole gang.

**Alexey.** Thank you, Ignatych. I know somebody in the Main Directorate, by the way, a general. I will put in a word for your Sergey. He saved our lives, after all.

**Ignatych.** No big deal. Anytime, dear neighbors. We’re always glad to be of service.

**Tatyana.** Thank you, Mikhail Ignatych.

**Ignatych.** Take care, girl. Alexey, you want a drink?

**Alexey.** I do. I am shaking all over the place.

**Ignatych.** Let's go get some plum vodka. It's therapeutic.

*Ignatych and Alexey leave. Fyodor and Tatyana are left alone.*

**Fyodor.** Tatyana. I came up with an idea tonight.

**Tatyana.** What is it?

**Fyodor.** I don't know how to start.

**Tatyana.** Don't be afraid, you can say it, Fyodor.

**Fyodor.** You can't be really happy in this world unless you love and are loved in return.

*Pause.*

**Tatyana.** I am happy, Fyodor.

**Fyodor.** And I am happy when we are together, Tatyana. Because I love you.

**Tatyana.** Seek and ye shall find.

**Fyodor.** “I sought my love in the maiden forest. With a mocking singer, I spent the night in a stack.”

**Tatyana.** This night will long be remembered.

**Fyodor.** Marry me, Tatyana. I will live for your happiness.

**Tatyana.** I feel at peace when you are by my side.

**Fyodor.** Will you be my wife?

**Tatyana.** Are you sure this is what you want?

**Fyodor.** Yes. I am sure. We are good together, the two of us.

**Tatyana.** The four of us.

**Fyodor.** What?

**Tatyana.** The four of us. I had an ultrasound yesterday. Soon you will become a father of twins.

*Fyodor holds Tatyana tight and kisses her. At this moment, the first rays of the sun kiss the horizon. The day breaks.*

**Fyodor.** It's a new day.

**Tatyana.** It's our new bright life.

**Fyodor.** Monday of the Holy Spirit. Rejoice, O Queen, pride of virgins and mothers; for every eloquent and capable mouth doth fall short of extolling thee worthily, and every mind is dazzled at the understanding of the manner of thy birth-giving. Wherefore, in unison do we glorify thee.

*Curtain.*