

Maxym Kurochkin

TSURIKOV

A Drama in Two Acts

For Natasha Vorozhbit

The Characters

Alexey Tsurikov

Alexander Pampukha

Tsurikov's wife Zhenya [roughly "Bridie"; see note]

Ulasik

Masha

Tsurikov the Elder

Manabozo the Great Hare

A Cripple

A Girl

The Last Visitor

A Photographer

The Photographer's Aunt

Street Sweepers

A Street Sweeper in a Cap

ACT I

Scene 1. Evening in the Tsurikovs' apartment. The TV is on. The Tsurikovs are having their first real talk in years.

Tsurikov's wife: Why won't I understand?

Tsurikov: You just won't.

Tsurikov's wife: So explain it to me.

Tsurikov: I already tried.

Tsurikov's wife: I understood everything that time.

Tsurikov: Yeah, sure.

Tsurikov's wife: I didn't?

Tsurikov: You understood?

Tsurikov's wife: I did.

Tsurikov: What was it you understood?

Tsurikov's wife: You're having troubles with the tax man.

Tsurikov: No kidding.

Tsurikov's wife: Am I wrong?

Tsurikov: Everything is perfect. Calm down.

Pause.

Tsurikov's wife: Did you have a hard day?

Tsurikov (*fuming*): All my days are hard.

Tsurikov's wife: Are you feeling nervous because of work? (*Tsurikov grimaces*) I'm just asking you.

(Entrance intercom signal).

Tsurikov: I'm not expecting anyone. (*Wife leaves; comes back.*)

Tsurikov's wife: There is a man to see you. He says he is your buddy from the Army.

Tsurikov: Did you let him in?

Tsurikov's wife (*covers her mouth*): Oh-hoh.

(Tsurikov takes in this information in a demonstratively calm manner.) He said you were in the Army

together.

Tsurikov: I got that. Where is he coming from? Didn't he say?

Tsurikov's wife: You met each other in the Army.

Tsurikov: Did you hear me? I got that: in the Army. I am asking what town he's coming from.

Tsurikov's wife: He didn't say. *(She is ready to burst into tears.)*

Tsurikov *(trying to soften a little his strident tone):* Honey, if a sergent Paterilo from the township of Vishnyovoe comes up in the elevator now I will be upset.

Tsurikov's wife: This one is not Paterilo.

Tsurikov: How do you know that? Did he say who he was?

Tsurikov's wife: Yes, he did. Sasha. His last name is strange, though – starts with a “P” too.

Tsurikov: Pampukha?

Tsurikov's wife: Right, exactly – Pampukha. Is that bad?

Tsurikov *(strangely):* Sasha is a good guy. I don't have time for him now. I don't know what I'll talk with him about. We haven't seen each other for ten years.

Tsurikov's wife: We can put him up in the children's room.

Tsurikov: No. I don't want anybody staying here overnight.. This is not some Party event. I could have had other plans. People need to call ahead of time.

There is an exuberant and indecently long ring at the door. (Crossly.) What's going on here? *(To the wife who is rushing to open the door.)* Sit down! I'll do that. *(He goes to the door.)*

Wife is frazzled. The sound of the door opening is heard. Unexpectedly, the men are heard jovially greeting one another. Tsurikov enters, his arm around his comrade's shoulder. Alexandr Pampukha is smartly dressed –white on top, black on bottom. He looks very young. He is holding a sports bag in one hand and a couple of plastic shopping bags in the other.

Tsurikov *(to Wife):* Do you know who this is? *(Speaking loudly, as if offering a great revelation.)* This is Sashka. Pampukha. Do you see? *(Turns to the visitor.)* Pukh, you motherfucker, where have you been all this time?

Tsurikov's wife *(offers her hand to the visitor):* Nice to meet you. Eugenia. *(On reflection)* Alexandrovna.

Pampukha *(happily):* Alexander. I have brought some crawfish. *(Hands the packages to the hostess).*

Tsurikov: Get the bathroom ready, dear. *(To Pampukha.)* I hope you'll spend the night here?

Pampukha: Of course.

Tsurikov: And go fix the children's room. (*To the visitor.*) We'll put you up in the children's room.

Pampukha: I am none the worse for sleeping on the carpet.

Wife leaves the room. (Following her with his eyes.) Wife?

Tsurikov: Uh-hum.

Pampukha: Are you sleeping with her?

Tsurikov: Of course not.

Pampukha: I would.

Tsurikov: You like her?

Pampukha: Uh-hum. My taste exactly.

Tsurikov (*generously*). Be my guest. (*Changes the topic.*) How long will you stay?

Pampukha: I am sorry. Am I in the way?

Tsurikov: No trouble at all.

Pampukha: But I couldn't afford a hotel.

Tsurikov: It's all right.

Pampukha: You must be busy...

Tsurikov: Of course I'm busy.

Pampukha: It's good that you are busy. That means you have a job.

Tsurikov (*rapidly assesses the situation*): You need a job? My driver is sick.

Pampukha: Sweet!

Tsurikov: Wherever. Let's celebrate.


Pampukha: I want women of easy virtue.

Tsurikov: Let's go look for women of easy virtue.

Wife enters the room.

Tsurikov's wife (*to Pampukha*): Your towels are the red ones.

Pampukha: Thank you.

Tsurikov: We'll just  to the office for a while, dear.

Tsurikov's wife: Till tomorrow morning?

Tsurikov: We'll be working.

Tsurikov's wife: Can I come along?

Tsurikov: You are not in on this. (*Shows his humanity.*) We are going to work.

Tsurikov's wife: Then I will wait for you.

Tsurikov: Don't wait for us. Go to bed. (*Wife tries to help Tsurikov get dressed. This is too much even for someone as patient as her husband*). Sweetie, go to bed. (*Wife kisses Tsurikov quickly*.) Good night.

Tsurikov's wife (*to the visitor*): Good night. (*Leaves*.)

Pampukha (*getting out a pistol from his sport bag*): Shall I take it?

Tsurikov: No need to. Is that the one?

Pampukha: Sure is.

Tsurikov: Let me look at it. (*Peruses the pistol; puts it on the table distractedly*.)

Pampukha: Alexey, old man... it just occurs to me... How will I drive if we Party down all the way?

Tsurikov (*smiling*): I am not too particular. (*Pats Pampukha's shoulder*.)

It's good that you have come.

After an embrace, the men go out.

2. The following morning. Breakfast.

Tsurikov and Pampukha are having breakfast in the kitchen. Tsurikov is in high spirits. Gulps down the juice. Pampukha has finished his juice. The wife sets three plates on the table.

Tsurikov (*to wife*): Aren't you eating?

Tsurikov's wife: Why not? Here is my plate.

Tsurikov: Oh, that's for you ...

There is a pause. Tsurikov and Pampukha eating heartily.

Tsurikov's wife (*frightened*): Who else would it be for?

Tsurikov: Well, I don't know what his name is.

Tsurikov's wife: Whose?

Tsurikov: The gentleman in the bedroom.

Tsurikov's wife: Very funny. (*Laughs*.)

Tsurikov and Pampukha chuckle too.

Pampukha: Let the man get some food.

Tsurikov: Go right ahead...

After a moment's hesitation the wife goes to fetch her lover for breakfast. Good job, mate.

Pampukha: Should we maybe not have noticed?

Tsurikov: No, it's just as it should be.

Wife returns.

A young man enters.

Ulasik: Good morning. (*Sits down at the table.*)

Tsurikov's wife sets a place for him.

Please begin.

Tsurikov: Thanks.

They eat in silence, being helpful by passing around the salt, bread, etc.

Tsurikov (*wiping his mouth with a napkin*): Did you oversleep?

Ulasik: We did.

Tsurikov: That happens. Are you a sensitive sort?

Ulasik: I don't know. Why?

Tsurikov: Do you take advice?

Ulasik: I might..

Tsurikov (*after some thought*): What's your name?

Ulasik: Dima.

Tsurikov: Pleased to meet you. I am Lyosha. And this (*pointing at Pampukha who does not seem inclined to pleasantries today*) is Alexander. (*Ulasik nods.*) Now then, Dima, I would suggest you adjust that placid character of yours...

Ulasik: I don't get it..

Tsurikov: I see you can really keep your cool-- not because you are dull, and that part is fine. But you are cool because you fail to understand, and *that* is bad. The lover is not entitled to be a fatalist --or rather, to be nothing more but a fatalist. You are not just a hunter. You are both the hunter and the hunted. Much depends you. Life, for one. Couldn't you be...I don't know....more fearful?

Ulasik: Thanks. I suppose that is good advice.

Tsurikov: Without question. (*To wife*) Just imagine, I had a dream last night. Want to hear about it?

Tsurikov's wife: No.

Ulasik (*getting up from the table*): Very nice to have met you. Sorry it happened like this.

Tsurikov: No harm done.

Ulasik: See you. (*To Tsurikov's wife.*) Walk me out.

Tsurikov's wife leaves to see her lover off.

Pampukha: Have you had any time to sleep?

They laugh.

Scene 3. After breakfast.

The conversationalists are a little tipsy.

Pampukha: I have a question. Let's take an animal – a cat...

Tsurikov: Hm.

Pampukha: The cat has been cloned.

Tsurikov: So?

Pampukha: Does the cat have a soul?

Tsurikov: Which one – the first or the second one?

Pampukha: The second.

Tsurikov: No.

Tsurikov's wife looks into the room.

Tsurikov's wife: Guys, can I get you something?

Pampukha: I'd love some herring. Thanks in advance.

Tsurikov's wife nods and disappears.

Pampukha: That's good. But what if she gives birth?

Tsurikov: The cat?

Pampukha: Yes, the second one.

Tsurikov: So what?

Pampukha: Will her baby have a soul?

Tsurikov: Yes it will.

Pampukha: That's good. (*Feels reassured.*)

Tsurikov's wife brings some herring.

Tsurikov (to his wife): Have a seat.

Tsurikov's wife sits down.

Tsurikov: Meet Alexandr.

Tsurikov's wife: Haven't we already met?

Tsurikov: Get to know him again. It won't kill you.

Tsurikov's wife: I'm Zhenya

Pampukha: Sasha.

Tsurikov: He is funny. Have a look at him...

Pampukha (*trying to please*): I am funny.

Tsurikov: Sash, tell her about the cat...

Pampukha: There's this cat... I'd rather tell her about the Army.

Tsurikov: Go ahead.

Tsurikov's wife: I don't want to hear about any of that disgusting stuff.

Pampukha: Do you like radio technicians? My original profession was radio technician.

Tsurikov's wife (*to her husband, with a challenge*): What's going on?

Tsurikov: What kind of tone is that, huh? Don't try to scare me. You are nothing more than my poor ignorant educated broad. What on earth do you think you're doing?

Tsurikov's wife (*with resignation*): I'm listening.

Tsurikov: Let me get to the point, if I may. Sasha will live with you for a while.

Tsurikov's wife: Is that it?

Pampukha: You don't like me at all, do you?

Tsurikov's wife: Lyoshenka. You know that I've had some practice with this before. But try to imagine for a change that I am not I but rather one of your silly girlfriends. Now explain to her, this proud independent woman you love, what's going on here.

Tsurikov: You will be living with Sashka.

Tsurikov's wife: Are you going to be leaving? Does it have something to do with those phone calls?

Tsurikov: No.

Tsurikov's wife: With your business?

Tsurikov: No.

Tsurikov's wife: With Masha?

Tsurikov (*distinctly*): Masha is my secretary.

Tsurikov's wife: Do you think I will settle for that?

Pampukha: You better get used to letting him go, bit by bit... Maybe he won't come back to you at all.

Tsurikov: Look at him. Isn't he charming?

Tsurikov's wife: I feel awful. Let's talk.

Tsurikov: Okay. Attempt number only Lord knows which one. Are you really ready to talk?

Tsurikov's wife: What does it mean 'to talk'?

Tsurikov: To talk means to listen quietly to what I am telling you.

Tsurikov's wife nods.

Tsurikov: You feel awful. But try to see this from a distance. What is there to be afraid of? We don't have anything in common: neither business nor friends. A total gentlemen's agreement. You have money and I have money. We have nothing to talk about.

Tsurikov's wife: If you'd just talk to me about your business...

Tsurikov (*to Sasha*): I did try once. She got that I have trouble with the tax man. That's all she got.

Pampukha: Don't worry. I am not very good with all those finer points either.

Tsurikov: We'll figure out something to do with the children. What are you afraid of losing? The usual suffering? Don't pretend that you have something to say. I am not trying to accuse you of anything, am I?

Tsurikov's wife: I knew you'd try to get me for that.

Tsurikov (*to Pampukha*): How can one talk to her?

Pampukha: No prob. I'll manage.

Tsurikov (*to his wife*): Sasha is the way out of this. Take my word for it. He is very fond of you. He is wild, and interested in everything. You could travel with him... to Sochi.

Pampukha (*to Tsurikov's wife*): But none of those Dimochka types.

Tsurikov's wife: What ... what has happened? What did he do to you?

Tsurikov: It's not him.

Tsurikov's wife: Then who?

Tsurikov: It wouldn't interest you.

Tsurikov's wife: I am interested in everything that has to do with you.

Tsurikov: Okay. Sasha has brought me an invitation.

Tsurikov's wife: From whom?

Tsurikov: From Viktor Alexandrovich. (*A pause.*) You see, I didn't want to tell you that.

Tsurikov's wife: From your dad?

Tsurikov: Right. From my father.

Tsurikov's wife: But he is dead!

Tsurikov: That's the point. (*Getting up, getting dressed.*) That's all. I am going to the office. *Pampukha is getting up too.* (*To Pampukha*) No, don't! I'll take a cab. And you two, meanwhile, have a little chat.

Scene 4. At Work. An Aquarium.

Tsurikov enters the office. Without saying hello he passes his girl secretary and enters his private office-aquarium.

Masha (*calling after him*): There was a call for you (*Glances quickly down at her notebook*) from Alexander Pampukha.

Tsurikov: What was it about?

Masha: He said to say your wife is first-rate.

Tsurikov: That Alexander Pampukha is a fast one.

Tsurikov returns and attentively gazes at his secretary. Examines her closely as if he were seeing her for the first time. The girl is embarrassed and anxious. She fixes her hair.

Masha (*having misinterpreted her boss's stare*): I just got a haircut.

Tsurikov: I am interested in Hell. The netherworld

Masha: You mean the basement construction?

Tsurikov: I mean the netherworld. Hell. The underworld.

Masha: I see. Is there someone in particular you need from there?

Tsurikov: No. Just dial and put me through. (*Changing the subject.*) Have you noticed that I don't sleep with you?

Masha: I have.

Tsurikov: And what do you think about that?

Masha: You are married.

Tsurikov: Not even close.

Masha: You don't think I'm attractive.

Tsurikov: Nonsense.

Masha: Maybe it's not the going thing right now...I don't know. I honestly don't know. Why don't you?

Tsurikov: I don't know either. That's why I asked.

The secretary gets on with her work. Tsurikov goes into his aquarium and makes a call. (Into the receiver.) May I congratulate you?

5. Aquarium.

Masha: Alexei Viktorovich, I just want to get something straight.

Tsurikov: Go ahead.

Masha: Which Hell are we interested in?

Tsurikov: Why, is there more than one to choose from?

Masha: I have counted at least 20 basic models.

Tsurikov: Let's go for the coolest one.

Masha: What does it mean – the coolest?

Tsurikov: You know Michael Jackson?

Masha: I do.

Tsurikov: Have we ever sold any phosphate fertilizer to him ?

Masha: No. He's dead.

Tsurikov: Right. Now do you know Kharkusha?

Masha: I do.

Tsurikov: There you go. Michael Jackson is dead but Semyon Petrovich Kharkusha gave us 70 % of our sales last month. Which one of them is cooler... you get it now?

Masha: To me, Michael Jackson.

Tsurikov: You and your illusions. (*Settles back in an armchair, smiling.*)

Well. Ok. So tell me – what variants are there.

Masha: Roughly speaking, Hell can be Judaic, Christian or Moslem. Of course, almost all other religions have also developed the concept of a Hell.

Tsurikov: Okay. Call all of them up.

Masha: What do you mean, “all”?

Tsurikov: Representatives. Agents – I have no idea who they are ...Whoever takes care of the details.

Masha: Details of what?

Tsurikov: The trip Masha. Our trip.

Scene 6. Tsurikov's House.

Tsurikov's wife and Alexander Pampukha sitting in deep armchairs, facing each other. They are casually dressed. They have their feet on the coffee table. There is a bottle of whiskey on the table.

Tsurikov's wife: I'm always hearing: “Tsurikov is so unusual. Tsurikov is so sunny. Tsurikov is so easy.” So where's this ease? How come it never shows? Hello!!? What I see is that he gets duller every day.

Pampukha: I disagree. Lyosha is evolving toward a breakthrough. Trust Pampukha – he's just getting started.

Tsurikov's wife: Respectable people are already slowing down.

Pamphukha: I wouldn't say that. I, for one, am getting ready to move...

Tsurikov's wife: Where to?

Pampukha: I can't stay with you forever, can I?

Tsurikov's wife: What do you mean "I can't"? (*She laughs nervously.*) Are you ditching me already?

Pampukha: Not at the moment.

Tsurikov's wife: Are you a scumbag?

Pampukha: No. (*Clarifies.*) It's my inner feelings. (*Making up to her.*) Kitty, do we have a bad time with each other?

Tsurikov's wife: That's just it. I feel very ... very comfortable with you. (*Kissing each other.*)
Interesting taste.

Pampukha: Should I gargle?

Tsurikov's wife: No, don't. It's pleasant. A very strange taste but pleasant.

7. The Last Visitor.

Tsurikov: What an idiot. Just imagine: his Hell is on the Sun.

Masha: Yeah...exactly. From his card I got the feeling that he is a nutcase.

Tsurikov: What was on the card?

Masha (reads the inscription on the business card): "The fourth Angel poured his cup upon the Sun: and he was given the power to burn people with fire."

Tsurikov: Exactly. So then I ask him: "Excuse me, but what about all that torture by freezing that literature refers to?"

Masha: Yeah, right.

Tsurikov: So listen to what he says: "That exactly is the purpose of the comets. At times they move close to the Sun, at other times they transport sinners to the realm of eternal cold – beyond Jupiter's orbit." How d'you like that?

Masha: What insanity.

Tsurikov (*about the last visitor in his waiting room*): Is that the last one?

Masha: Yes--for today.

Tsurikov: Let him in.

Secretary leaves. The Last Visitor enters.

The Last Visitor: Are you up on your fairytales?

Tsurikov: Have a seat, please. Cognac?

The Last Visitor: I wouldn't mind.

Tsurikov (*fills glasses with cognac*): Well, and what nice things have you brought me?

The Visitor: Nothing nice. I am more of a grief specialist.

Tsurikov: Now we're talking business! To your health!

The Visitor: And to yours!

They drink the cognac.

Tsurikov: Good. Let me get to the point. I really need to visit someone.

The Last Visitor: One of ours?

Tsurikov: Yes. And the sooner, the better.

The Final Visitor: Apply for travel documents.

Tsurikov: Any special conditions?

The Final Visitor: None.

Tsurikov: Do we need to draw up an agreement?

The Last Visitor: Yes, why not?

Tsurikov: I like you.

The Last Visitor: I like you too.

Tsurikov: Just as a matter of principle I won't ask you about anything else.

The Last Visitor: As you wish. I'll let Masha know if there is anything else.

Tsurikov (*getting up*): It was a pleasure to meet you.

The Last Visitor (*having gotten up too*): Same here. (*Leaves the aquarium.*)

Scene 8. A Photographer's Studio.

Tsurikov in a photographer's studio. The photographer wants to ask something but hesitates.

Photographer: Excuse a stupid question. Were you just kidding about the photographs for ...you know what I mean?

Tsurikov: No, I wasn't. (*Looks at his photographs and pays.*)

Photographer: Excuse me, but could I burden you with a small request? My aunt. She is actually the one who brought me up. It so happens that I don't remember my parents...But she...

Tsurikov: I am not too interested in this. D'you want me to take something along?

Photographer: No...Yes! If it won't be any trouble.

Tsurikov: It won't... If it isn't too bulky.

Photographer: A photograph. For my aunt – will you take it? (*Looks feverishly for a photograph and gives it to Tsurikov.*) That's me, a year ago. We had a banquet then... On the whole we rarely take pictures...

Tsurikov: What's your aunt's name?

Photographer: Lyubov Borisovna.

Tsurikov: Ok, I'll keep that in mind. Lyubov Borisovna.

Photographer: What if I were to ask you if I could write a short note?

Tsurikov: Now you're beginning to push your luck.

Photographer: Then I better not risk it.

Tsurikov: That's wise. (*Shakes hands with the photographer for no apparent reason and leaves. Returns.*) Write away. But quickly.

Scene 9. The Photographer's Aunt.

The photographer's aunt: From practically his early childhood on everyone noticed that he was an unusual child. By the time he started school he could practically read. In the third grade he was one of the 20 best pupils in his class. He was so diligent. He would go on class trips right along with the other children. They were taken to the Zoo, and often to the movies. There are these colossal assignments: even during the summer they had to do extra readings in foreign languages. What I especially want to emphasize is that the boy was very modest. When it was time to support his class he would tell me: "Aunt, I must go cheer for our guys." I've never prevented him. . He was very sociable, he had authority over younger children. He and I used to go to different sport clubs, but coaches don't like to enroll children outside their age group. Then we decided to exercise together. Though he mustn't put strain on his backbone. Well. What else can I say... He liked girls very much. We read a lot. And he himself liked to read too, but it is very important not to overdo things.. One can't buy new eyes, right? So many have ruined their eyesight like in this, exactly during childhood. Doctors recommend reading no more than 15 minutes a day. I tried to teach him to spend more time in fresh air. We would go to the Zoo every Sunday. He was a wonderful child.

Scene 10. The aquarium.

Tsurikov enters. Passes close by the secretary, slows down.

Tsurikov: Masha, how come you are drunk?

Masha: I had a drink.

Tsurikov: I see. Make me a cup of coffee.

Masha: Your wife came.

Tsurikov: What did she want?

Masha: You didn't spend the night at home.

Tsurikov: Why?

Masha: She was the one asking "why?"

Tsurikov: And now I am asking you – why?

Masha: You were with me.

Tsurikov: You should have told her that.

Masha: I did.

Tsurikov: Then what's the problem?

Masha: She cried.

Tsurikov (*bends down close to Masha, inquiring with interest*): Is *that* your problem?

Masha: No.

Tsurikov: Good. Don't forget about the coffee.

Tsurikov's driver, Alexandr Pampukha, enters. He is carrying a couple of shopping bags.

Pampukha (*to Masha*): Did my woman come?

Masha: Your – his, I am all confused. So you knew she was going to show up here.

Pampukha: Yeah, little by little I have trained her to fetch my sandwiches.

Masha: Listen. She is a decent woman. It's not right for her to be doing such things.

Pamphukha: It's a teachable moment. Teaches her about getting mixed up with a chauffeur. Did she make a big scene?

Masha: Actually no...A teensy bit. In any case it seems to me that she does love him. Your sandwiches are over there.

Pampukha: The boss and I just ate lunch. On the whole I don't much care for cold cuts. My bossiness is really just a matter of principle. Help yourself, if you'd like.

Masha: What do you have there?

Pampukha (*looks into yje package*): Ham, meatballs, cheese.

Masha: I want the cheese. Your lady and I finished off the cognac.

Tsurikov (*through the intercom*): Masha and Sasha, come here.

Masha: Damn it. I didn't make the coffee.

Scene 11. The Tsurikov apartment.

Ulasik is getting dressed.

Tsurikov's wife: Can't you hurry up?

Ulasik: That's new. Am I irritating you?

Tsurikov's wife: No. But you are getting dressed so slowly.

Ulasik: I don't like rushing. Are you afraid?

Tsurikov's wife: Why on earth would I be afraid?

Ulasik: Then you are acting as if I were sleeping with you for the money.

Tsurikov's wife: But you do sleep with me for the money!

Ulasik: How should I take that?

Tsurikov's wife: As if it was the truth.

Ulasik: I personally am offended by the truth.

Tsurikov's wife: And what is the way out of this?

Ulasik: Admit that your claim is insufficiently grounded.

Tsurikov's wife: Your envelope is by the phone in the hallway.

Ulasik: A pity that you should treat me like this. I am leaving.

Tsurikov's wife: What about a kiss for your babe?

Ulasik (*returns and kisses Tsurikov's wife with great pleasure*): I'll call you. (*Leaves. Returns. Closes the door behind him.*) You have guests.

Tsurikov's wife: You don't say so!

Ulasik makes a philosophical gesture, as if to say "Man proposes but..."

What can be done?

Ulasik: I hope the wardrobe option is not being considered

Tsurikov, Pampukha and secretary Masha enter.

Tsurikov (*almost gaily*): Do we have everyone?

Ulasik: Good evening, Alexey Viktorovich.

Tsurikov: Evening, Dima.

Pampukha (*passing by Ulasik, quietly*): Blockhead, your game is up.

Tsurikov: Dima, aren't you in a hurry?

Ulasik: I hate rushing.

Tsurikov: Excellent. I may need your help.

Masha (*to Pampukha quietly*): Who is that?

Pampukha (*to Masha quietly too*): Her partner.

Masha: But who are you then?

Pampukha: Give me a break.

Tsurikov's wife (*having kissed Masha, to Tsurikov*): Why did you drag her here?

Tsurikov: Does that offend you? (*To everybody.*) Friends, make yourselves comfortable. Here's the bar, help yourselves.

Masha steps up to the bar demonstratively, as if she were in her own house.

Dima, come along with me.

Ulasik: Where to? Aaaa...I think I can guess.

Tsurikov's wife: I told him all about it.

Tsurikov: I see.

Ulasik: You wouldn't be insane by any chance, would you?

Tsurikov: Let's go.

Ulasik: I need to think it over.

Tsurikov: I'll give you money.

Ulasik: You don't have to get like that right away...I am on.

Scene 12. Preparations in the Tsurikovs' apartment.

Tsurikov's wife: Will you bring the checkered one ?

Tsurikov: Put it on the bed. You'll see later – put shirts in a separate pile. Which tie is better?

Tsurikov's wife: I am begging you, not the red one.

Tsurikov: But I like it.

Tsurikov's wife: You look like a farm equipment rep when you have it on.

Tsurikov: There are all kinds of farm equipment reps.

Tsurikov's wife: You look like the village kind.

A ring at the door.

Tsurikov (*to his wife*): Go get it. (*Goes on with preparations.*)

Tsurikov's wife ushers in Masha, the secretary, into the room. Masha is carrying a little backpack.

Have you come to see me off?

Masha: I brought my backpack.

Tsurikov: And what does that mean?

Masha: I am coming with you.

Tsurikov: You said you weren't coming.

Masha: I've changed my mind.

Tsurikov: And what about your papers?

Masha: I took care of that before... just in case.

Tsurikov: Fine. (*To his wife.*) Sweetie, get your rival some provisions.

Tsurikov's wife (*handing a package to Masha*): Here are some non-perishables. Biscuits, hard cheese, boxed foods. And I've put in a little bottle of cognac specially for you, just the kind you like. (*A ring at the door.*) I'll get it. (*Goes to open the door.*)

Masha: How did you know that I'd come with you?

Tsurikov: I didn't.

Masha: What about the provisions? With the cognac – just what I like.

Tsurikov: Oh well ...just in case.

Enter Tsurikov's wife and Ulasik with a trunk on wheels.

Ulasik: Hello everybody.

Tsurikov: Hello.

Masha nods.

Ulasik: And where is that uncouth jealous savage?

Tsurikov: Pamphukha is in the garage. He'll be driving over right away.

Ulasik (*contemplates*): Hm... if it's true that a man can be judged by his friends ...

Tsurikov: It isn't.

Ulasik: One would like to think so. Masha, did you bring that coil water heater along? I didn't bring mine. Alexey Viktorovich told me that you think ahead.

Masha: I've got it. (*Looking at Tsurikov.*)

Tsurikov: You'd better start being on first name basis.

Ulasik: Plenty of time for that.

Tsurikov (*zipping his bag*): I am ready.

Tsurikov's wife: Do you people have everything?

Tsurikov: If we forgot something, we'll just come back.

Tsurikov's wife: Coming back is bad luck.

Ulasik: That's a superstition. *(Pulling the trunk towards him with his foot.)* A moment of silence before taking off.

They sit down wherever there is room. Keep silent for a second. Tsurikov's telephone rings.

Tsurikov: Yes!...drive up to the entrance. *(Gets up.)*

Ulasik: No, that didn't come out right. Let's do it again.

Like a lamb Tsurikov sits down again. Everybody is silent.

(Having sustained a proper pause.) That'll do.

Everybody gets up.

Tsurikov *(taking a coat and a bag. To his wife):* Don't miss me. *Wife wiping away her tears.*

Please don't. *(Kisses his wife)*

Ulasik *(to Tsurikov's wife):* Take care of Pampukha. *(Kisses Tsurikov's wife.)*

Tsurikov's wife: God bless you! *(Blesses the parting group with a sign of the cross.)*

Scene 13. Near the entrance.

A Cripple runs after Tsurikov and his companions.

The cripple: Wait! Wait... That's not where you're going.

Tsurikov *(stops):* We need hell.

The cripple: I am telling you – you're lost. Hell is that way.

Tsurikov: At ease!

The three travelers settle for a rest.

(To the Cripple) Will you show us the way?

The cripple: I will.

Tsurikov: And what would you like in exchange?

The cripple: Sympathy.

Tsurikov: No problem.

Manabozo, a fair-headed young man, rushes in.

Manabozo: Alexey... Alexey Viktorovich?

Tsurikov: You've got him.

Manabozo: I've only just managed to catch up with you. I'm your guide.

Tsurikov: And so how come you've let us down this way, young man.

Masha: We have been waiting for two hours.

Manabozo: I beg your pardon... We had a meeting and ... you know how it goes...we stayed too long.

The Cripple (*pointing the way*): Well, anyway, you need to turn back...

Manabozo (*nodding towards the Cripple*): Did you already promise him anything?

Tsurikov: Well, no. No really...

The Cripple : What do you mean 'not really'? They did too promise. I showed them the way. He owes me sympathy. We must play fair.

Manabozo (*to Tsurikov*): Did you promise him that?

Tsurikov: Kind of.

Manabozo: That's very bad.

Tsurikov: I for one don't regret it. Masha, sort the comrade out. Open your heart.

Manabozo: You don't understand. It wasn't Masha who gave the promise, it was you. It's up to you to do the opening.

Masha: Let me do that. It's easy for me.

Manabozo: Don't even breathe a word! Alexey Viktorovich has done a stupid thing. Don't make the situation worse by any false solidarity.

The Cripple: My mother gave birth to me in torment of blood and pain, and in moral agony: to be more precise, without a husband.

Tsurikov: So what?

The Cripple: "So what?"

Manabozo: Come on. Come on... He won't leave you alone.

Tsurikov: What's all this nonsense? Let's move on. We've lost a lot of time as it is.

Manabozo: Go ahead, feel. You gave your word.

The cripple: My mother gave birth to me in torment of blood and pain, and in moral agony: To be more precise, without a husband.

Tsurikov: What a shame.

The Cripple: The world has always always met me with unkindness. I lived through temperature swings. A draft in the maternity ward could have brought me, a helpless infant, to the edge of acute pneumonia.

Tsurikov: But it didn't.

The Cripple (*offended*): Is that how he shows sympathy for me?

Manabozo: Alexey Viktorovich, try to get it – if you don't do your sympathizing properly, he won't go away.

Tsurikov: Let's give it another try.

The Cripple: The world has always always met me with unkindness. I lived through swings in temperature. A draft in the maternity ward could have brought me, a helpless infant, to the edge of acute pneumonia.

Tsurikov (*expressing sympathy*): You don't say!

The Cripple: Strident screams of newborn babies, unconscious aggression from my mother, deliberately overfeeding me with breast milk.

Tsurikov: So, is he now going to recite all his injustices, blow by blow?

Manabozo: He certainly will. No doubt about it.

Ulasik: I'm going for a walk. Masha, want to come along?

Ulasik and Masha go off.

Tsurikov: Just don't go too far. (*To Manabozo.*) Could you spare a moment? (*Takes him aside.*) What's your name?

Manabozo: Manabozo the Great Hare.

Tsurikov: Nice to meet you. I'm Alexey, an entrepreneur. I can see there is no point in hitting you up for anything.

Manabozo: Exactly.

Tsurikov: One won't get anywhere by yelling, will one ?

Manabozo: Don't even ask.

Tsurikov: That's what I thought. Listen, Great Hare, I am a little confused. Is this here Hell?

Manabozo: A little further. Some 100m from here.

Tsurikov: Well, then why are we here and not there?

Manabozo: You know perfectly well. It seems to me you yourself are postponing getting there. Otherwise I cannot explain your behavior. Why are you wasting time with that whiner?

Tsurikov: I just felt sorry for him for no particular reason.

Manabozo: That sort of a thing that does not work here.

Tsurikov: Okay, I made a mistake. But you yourself, my friend, blew it. Who is responsible for us being lost? Who was two hours late?

Manabozo: I admit my guilt. To make up for this I'll give you advice: show your sympathy for this looser more actively. Don't wait for him to finish his spiel. You'll economize a lot, timewise.

Tsurikov: No matter what it'll take an hour, no less.

Manabozo: Four hours, at the very minimum.. But you'll economize three days.

Tsurikov: Oh no!

Manabozo and Tsurikov come back to the Cripple.

I haven't heard any of your songs for ever so long .

The Cripple (*readily*): Strident screams of new-born babies...

Tsurikov: What a heartbreak.

The Cripple: A swaddling blanket constraining my limbs...

Tsurikov: Ah-ah-ah.

The cripple: Unhealthy...

Tsurikov: What a shame.

The Cripple: Falling down...

Tsurikov: What a misfortune.

The Cripple: Ah...

Tsurikov: It's a terrible thing.

Scene14. A Breakfast Break.

Masha is making sandwiches. Tsurikov and Ulasik are eating them apace. The Cripple and Manabozo abstain from eating.

Ulasik: I am just wondering where all those notorious Charons and Cerberuses are. What about the river Styx? No Styx at all!

Tsurikov: Did you walk as far as the entrance?

Masha: We even went inside a bit.

Tsurikov: So how was that?

Masha: Wonderful.

Manabozo: We have some marvelous sights there. On our way I'll show you many interesting things and tell you all about them .

Ulasik (*taking a seat near Manabozo*): Tell me, are you the devil?

Manabozo: I am a spirit, a rebellious spirit. To your way of thinking – yes, I am the devil.

Ulasik: And what do you put your faith in?

Manabozo: In what sense ?

Ulasik: He is stronger, though, isn't he?

Manabozo: Who, “he”?

Ulasik: Well, he. I mean God.

Masha: This is completely infantile!

Ulasik: Why?

Masha: Because! A big lunker like you asking such childish questions. You should read some books.

Ulasik: I do read.

Tsurikov: I am wondering too. How come God puts up with this? What’s stopping him from strangling you all?

Manabozo: But there is no God.

Tsurikov: What are you saying. You talk nonsense.

Ulasik: You just said that you are a rebel. So who do you rebel against if there is no God?

Manabozo: Against you.

Scene 15. Tsurikov’s Apartment.

Pampukha lies on the sofa hugging Tsurikov’s wife. He touches her breast.

Pampukha (*gently*): And what do we have stacked up here?

Tsurikov’s wife: As long as you don’t say sagging there.

Pampukha: Never... What would you like me to say?

Tsurikov’s wife: I don’t know. Think for yourself.

Pampukha: Sticking up...

Tsurikov’s wife: How come you are suddenly in my face so much ?

Pampukha: The stars smiled ...

Tsurikov’s wife: Listen, *mon amour*, you are some sort of a parody.

Pampukha: What do you mean?

Tsurikov’s wife: Everything about you is cartoonish. More than needed. You are far too clever for your own good, and you have much too much nerve. Your member seems endless. Sasha, that’s not even normal. That sort of a thing is not even in anymore.

Pampukha: It grows just how it wants.

Tsurikov’s wife: You think and speak in pre-fabricated units. For every occasion you have a saying, or a quote from some Soviet movie. That’s not too great. Use your own words. They can be clumsy but they have to be yours.

Pampukha: I am a driver. D'you follow me?

Tsurikov's wife: So what if you are a driver. You have the ability to understand difficult concepts. You are smart. You are... *(Reflects.)* Who are you, Sashenka?

Pampukha: I am a Cossack.

Tsurikov's wife: A Cossack?! The kind with a shaved head and a little braid?

Pampukha: What's with the braid? The thing about the braid - - which by the way is not called a braid at all but a 'oseledets' —what you'd call a bun—that's all just ethnography. It's my spirit that's Cossack. You know, the spirit is much more important than a hairdo.

Tsurikov's wife: See, you can talk in a perfectly normal way. You are quite capable of conveying meaning in words.

Pampukha: Of course I can. I am not dense, am I?

Tsurikov's wife: I never thought that. And how does that Cossack spirit of yours express itself?

Pampukha: Through love for my comrades, scorn for danger and contempt for women.

Tsurikov's wife: Does that mean you're gay too?

Pampukha: Now who is thinking in stock phrases! You hear "love for a comrade" and right away it's "gay"!

Tsurikov's wife: Forgive me, I was mistaken.

Pamphukha: I am strict with you but it is for your own good: so that you don't get accustomed to too much comfort. This way we'll part painlessly.

Tsurikov's wife: Why should I be parting with you?

Pampukha: You will. Lyosha will come back and I'll give you back to him.

Tsurikov's wife: I am not a thing.

Pampukha: Do you really believe that?

Tsurikov's wife: Of course I do. I am exactly like you, like him. I have exactly the same rights. I can choose which of the two of you I will walk out on.

Pampukha: In theory that's true.

Tsurikov's wife: What do you mean in theory?

Pampukha: Just what I said....

Tsurikov's wife: Come on, give me one other argument besides "because you are just a broad.". Give it a try.

Pampukha: So, you aren't a broad?

Tsurikov's wife: Idiot! Sasha, I know who you are.

Pampukha is silent for a long time.

Pampukha: Do you want me to tell you an army joke?

Tsurikov's wife: Kiss me.

Scene 16. The Photographer's Aunt.

The photographer's aunt: I'm positive that he will find his place in life. Of course, I would rather see him as a pop singer or a military man...But he would also make a fine leader. He is modest and thoughtful. He has never been reckless. He is courteous, always ready to give a hand... He liked taking photographs.

Scene 17. A Meeting.

Tsurikov's group in the streets of Hell. Masha and Ulasik scrutinize the crowd. Tsurikov is checking the road map and debating something with Manabozo. In peripheral vision he sees a man with a plastic bag who is waiting for somebody. He rushes to catch up with him .

Tsurikov: Viktor Alexandrovich! Dad!

Tsurikov the Elder: What do you know!

Tsurikov: Hello!

Tsurikov the Elder: Hello, hello!

They hug and kiss.

What winds have blown you here?

Tsurikov: I don't know. I should be asking you.

Tsurikov the Elder: You have business here or ... are you just visiting?

Tsurikov: Dad, I came specially for you...

Tsurikov the Elder: Great! Will you be staying with me?

Tsurikov: Well, if you don't mind... but if it's any trouble - just tell me...

Tsurikov the Elder: What trouble? No trouble at all. Except, see, I've got a woman living with me right now....

Tsurikov: Forget I asked!

Tsurikov the Elder: So come over for a cup of tea. You can come right ... the day after tomorrow.

Tsurikov: Dad... did you call me?

Tsurikov the Elder: I called - *you?* Where to?

Tsurikov: Here, to you.

Tsurikov the Elder: I don't remember...Oh, in fact, I did call you.

Tsurikov: Thank God for that.

Tsurikov the Elder: How's your business?

Tsurikov: Rolling along.

Tsurikov the Elder: Could you spend 500 dollars on your Father?

Tsurikov: Goes without saying, Dad.

Tsurikov the Elder: You see, I've had this idea. When transcontinental corporations feel that, like...there is a stoppage in the world economy, right away they invent some sort of a war. Right?

Tsurikov: Go on.

Tsurikov the Elder: But they don't do that because they're monsters or like killing people. They do that because of business. So, this is my idea: what if these corporations got their analysts together and modeled this kind of world confrontation, like as if to deliver an attack on countries that are overstocked. Then, see, they would use the computer and add up how many people would die and what kind, and what sorts of destruction there would be...compute everything. Then they'd see what museums, libraries and ancient monuments would be bombed and cross them out. Then they would be replaced by factories of some sort up to equal value. Then they'll send out a notification to everybody in the destruction zone. Dear so-and-so, if a war breaks out chances are x % that your home will be hit. Y % of people will perish. If however you don't want the war to start, take your kids, grannies, grandpas, your papers, a minimum of foodstuffs ...and go out into the streets. Then there will be some bulldozers that will come and destroy your house. On a purely voluntary basis. With all your everyday possessions. And factories - those on the list, and bridges, and everything... stuff like that. Except for cultural stuff, goes without saying. This way, people stay alive and the economy has been helped: everybody would need a lot of stuff. And nothing bad happens to the environment. What do you think?

Tsurikov: Pop, what do you want from me?

Tsurikov the Elder: An idea like this has to be put into proper words, written up and put into a brochure. Then that is sent out to world leaders.

Tsurikov: Is that why you called me – just to put out a brochure with your drivel in it?

Tsurikov the Elder: If you can't, that's okay. Just say no.

Tsurikov: Dad, I can. I'll do it, dad. Whatever you ask. But I thought you called me to say me something important.

Tsurikov the Elder: What are you being hysterical about?

Tsurikov: Hysterical? I am not being hysterical.

Tsurikov the Elder: You are too being hysterical.

Tsurikov: Well, whatever... How'd you settle down here?

Tsurikov the Elder: It's all right. It's not paradise, of course, but one can live here.

Tsurikov: Great. Do you ever see Mom?

Tsurikov: We call each other from time to time. You know, she is a complicated woman.

Tsurikov: Are you waiting for anybody?

Tsurikov the Elder: Right on. You're looking great. What's with those... what-d'ye-call-em...'Beatles' of yours?

Tsurikov: Of ours? Yours, more like.

Tsurikov the Elder: Yes, time flies. Are those people waiting for you?

Tsurikov: Yes; that's Mashenka, my mistress.

Tsurikov the Elder: And that lad?

Tsurikov: He fucks Zhenya.

Tsurikov the Elder: Good going, guys. Too bad you are in a hurry. Or else you could introduce us.

Tsurikov: I better go now, no?

Tsurikov the Elder: Well, they're waiting for you. All right?

Tsurikov: Tell me your address

Tsurikov the Elder: My address? Let's see...

Tsurikov: Don't worry. I can take care of that...

Tsurikov the Elder: You get it, right? I can't tomorrow.

Tsurikov: The day after tomorrow?

Tsurikov the Elder: Sure, sure... (*Walks away quickly and uncertainly*)

Tsurikov returns to his group. He notices a 6 year old girl passing by quickly.)

Scene 18. At Ease.

Ulasik: There you stood, with your mouth wide open, as if though your dad were regaling you with some hamletish tale

Tsurikov (*in high spirits*): Good God, nothing like that. Actually, I was even surprised that he put up with me at all. You'd have to know my old man. No, we had a perfectly fine talk.

Masha: You know, you resemble your father.

Tsurikov: Thank you, Masha.

Masha: I meant it in a good way.

Tsurikov: And I thanked you without irony. See, he was this physicist ...in the past.

Ulasik: Well, that's good - you had a talk...what's up next?

Tsurikov: Nothing. I'll put out his brochure. (*Chuckling*) And send it out to world leaders.

Ulasik: I have no doubt. But let's get real. What did you get out of it?

Tsurikov: Out of what?

Ulasik: Out of the trip, let's say.

Tsurikov: Nothing, exactly. Then again, maybe I'll save the world.

Ulasik: Masha, how about I talk to you instead. Your wit may be a tad weak but at least you don't have your ass where your head should be.

Tsurikov: Masha, how come he's so frazzled?

Ulasik: Ok, so I'm frazzled. But at least, I am not pretending that I'm not frazzled. Masha, aren't you sick of fucking around strictly as a community service?

Masha: In what respect--do you mean, as a woman?

Ulasik: No, broadly speaking. How long can one run on empty like this? As things stand now, what about your own thinking, your self-interest, your common sense...that's what I mean.

Masha: Everything's as it should be. Why?

Tsurikov is chuckling.

Ulasik: No, Masha, everything is not as it should be. Everything is bad. Frankly speaking I am tired. We went down to Hell, went through everything, talked to dead people, to the father, to the devils, and who the hell knows to whom else ... to Manabozo! But then to return without as much as some stock-taking, without any conclusions!... It's stupid to have gone all the way down! Just to say we've been there! Lyosha Tsurikov was here! Isn't that all fucked up?

Tsurikov: What was I supposed to have done, in your opinion? How the hell should I gone to Hell in any other way?

Ulasik: I don't know.

Tsurikov (*without previous gaiety*): Then fuck off!

Ulasik (*briefly*): Up yours!

Masha: Am I in the way?

They keep silent for a moment.

Tsurikov: By the way, we are still here.

Ulasik: What d'you mean?

Tsurikov: I am just thinking. Dad has invited me over...for tea. Maybe it's worth going over to see how he's settled down.

Masha: Of course you should go.

Tsurikov (*to Ulasik*): What d'you think?

Ulasik: I'm not here to fight with you. Whatever.

Tsurikov: But remember, that would only be the day after tomorrow.

Ulasik: Whatever works.

Tsurikov: Masha?

Masha: Why do you even ask?

Scene 19. Visiting Dad.

Tsurikov enters his father's room. It's obvious he is not expected. The father is at the table, holding a cup and a saucer. A 6 year Girl is sitting on the sofa.

Thurikov the Elder: I didn't expect you.

Tsurikov: I see that.

Tsurikov the Elder: The room is a mess.

Tsurikov: I see that.

Tsurikov the Elder: What an ugly tie! You look like professor Soskin.

Tsurikov: Lower your pitch, dad. If it bothers you that I found you with a woman, just say so.

Tsurikov the Elder: You are an adult. Surely understand how things stand.

Tsurikov: Dad, I ...

Tsuriko the Elder: Let's change the subject.

Tsurikov: But I see that it upsets you.

Tsurikov the Elder: I don't want to talk about it.

Tsurikov (*after a pause*): Whatever you say.

Tsurikov the Elder approaches the Girl, kneels in front of her. She puts her arms round his neck. Tsurikov the Elder whispers something in the language of lovers. The Girl is smiling. She presses her face against the old man's hair.

We could talk about something.

Tsurikov the Elder: Would you like some tea?

Tsurikov: Sure.

Tsurikov the Elder makes some tea.

(Tsurikov approaches the Girl.) What's your name?

The Girl does not answer.

Have you tried a lollipop?

The Girl does not respond. Tsurikov is looking for a lollipop in his pockets.

It turns out that his supply of candy has run out.

Sorry.

Tsurikov the Elder: Tea.

Tsurikov *(takes the cup but doesn't drink):* Dad, you used to be a physicist, and you are supposed to be a believer. I just heard this strange thing from one of the devils. He says... there is no God.

Tsurikov the Elder *(calmly):* Liar.

Tsurikov: What would be the point of him lying?

Tsurikov the Elder: Maybe, he is not lying.

Tsurikov: So, is there a God or isn't there?

Tsurikov the Elder: Listen, is there nothing better we can talk about?

Scene 20. Near a river.

Ulasik is sitting on the bank of a river, a fishing rod in hand, pulling little fish out of the water. Manabozo and Masha are observing the procedure. They cheer each fish.

Ulasik: Masha, what school did you go to? *(Pulls out another fish.)*

Manabozo: She went to architecture school.

Masha: Who asked you? Why do you butt into everything? Did they send you to spy upon us? You can watch all you want but keep out of it unless we ask you to.

Manabozo's feelings get hurt.

Ulasik: Why'd you do that?

Masha: I graduated from architecture school.

Ulasik: I see. *(He has lost all interest in the topic)* Hm, I wonder if this river has a name.

Masha *(to Manabozo):* Forgive me. I shouldn't have done that.

Manabozo: No big deal. *(To Ulasik.)* Did you ask about God?

Ulasik: What about it?

Street sweepers pass by them, spearing candy wrappers and crumpled plastic glasses on their spike-tipped sticks..

Manabozo: That one over there, in the cap.

Ulasik: Are you kidding?

Manabozo: Nope.

Ulasik: But you were the one who told us that there is no God.

Manabozo: I lied. I couldn't resist. Try to understand me. I love lying but here it's really tough going. Not enough simpletons around.

Masha: Incidentally, according to our contract, you are prohibited from deliberately supplying us false information...

Ulasik: Masha, don't be a bore!

Manabozo: Go fuck your lovely self. I won't do it again.

Ulasik: Try to get it, chick, that goofball over there is the Lord.

Masha: But why is he here?

Manabozo: You'd better ask him.

Masha: Is that really OK?

Manabozo: Why not?

Masha (*having giggled hysterically*): Trippy.

Ulasik has already run up to the slender young man. The young man draws his head between his shoulders as if he were afraid of being hit.

Ulasik: Captain, you have a minute? (*Scrutinizes God.*) Tell me, are you really he? *God nods fearfully.* Come on, it's okay... (*Cheering up God*) Don't worry. (*To Masha*) Masha, what was it you wanted to ask him about?

Masha: Well... (*can't think of a question immediately*) Ask him what he is doing here. Why isn't he over there, in his own place?

Ulasik: Why aren't you over there? Where you are supposed to be.

The Lord (*stammering intensely*): I don't h-have the m-moral r-right.

Tsurikov enters. He is angry as hell.

Tsurikov (*To Ulasik*): Pack up your rods.

Ulasik (*packing up the rods*): How'd it go? Was it a hit?

Tsurikov: Sure. Would have been better if I hadn't gone there at all. (*He takes God for one of the cripples begging for sympathy.*) Beat it, comrade! (*To Masha.*) I told you not to talk to the locals.

The Lord walks away, keeping the beat with his candy wrapper spear.

Scene 21. On the road home.

Manabozo is leading Tsurikov's group toward the exit. The cripple catches up with them.

The cripple: Wait! Come on ... Wait!

Tsurikov stops, looking at the Cripple without any sympathy.

Alexey Viktorovich... Alexey Viktorovich (*on the verge of bursting into tears.*). Dear friend! (*Falls around Tsurikov's neck. Sobbing.*)

Tsurikov (*pulling his hands apart*): Come on, man... (*There is nothing else for him to do but to hug the Cripple and console him.*) Now, now... what's the matter?

The cripple: You... you don't understand... (*Bursts into tears.*)

Everybody looks at the Cripple and Tsurikov for a while.

Ulasik: Time is passing...

Tsurikov (*to Manabozo*): Let's go. (*Moves away from the sobber.*)

Manabozo: He just wanted to say good-bye to you.

Tsurikov: It's taking too long.

Manabozo: What is that you are economizing? Your miserable minutes... Oh you... people...

Masha: It's not that Alexey Viktorovich minds but we do have some appointments scheduled for tomorrow morning...

Manabozo: You ought be strangled.

Ulasik: You scumbag ... hold your tongue.

Manabozo: I may well be the devil. But I am a devil by birth. But he...

Masha: Are you aware of the fact that we transferred 40 000 to the indigent this spring?

Manabozo: Masha, don't be ridiculous...

Tsurikov: Mashenka...

Masha: What, Mashenka? Did I say something wrong again?

Tsurikov: Do you have any napkins?

Ulasik: Alexey Viktorovich. I swear, I... it smells like a setup. They won't let us go so easily. Alexey Viktorovich, we better beat it from here before it's too late.

Manabozo: Scram! Evaporate! I don't even want a whiff of you here.

Ulasik: Don't answer. He's just provoking you.

Manabozo: Who needs you.

Ulasik: We shall be moving towards the exit in silence, without reacting to the insults...

Tsurikov: Exactly... Masha, gimme one more napkin.

Tsurikov and the Cripple are sitting down on the grass side by side.

Manabozo, Ulasik and Masha stand at a distance.

Tsurikov puts his arms around the Cripple's shoulder. The Cripple wipes his eyes with a napkin. He speaks as an altogether normal, if unhappy, person.

The Cripple: I understand you completely. I was a bore during my lifetime too...But do try to see things my way too. It's just so awful... You won't believe how awful it is. The death, the waiting, it's unbelievable how awful it all is. I'm a stand-up comedian. You better believe it... I myself am all in favor of taking all this a bit more superficially. Not get so deep about it. But when it all got started...Oh, boy!...All that stuff they tell you about relief, lightness, joy, don't believe of any of it. (To *Tsurikov*.) You'd better go... you don't need to stay here because of me...

Tsurikov: We are not in a hurry.

The Cripple: I'm deeply grateful to you. But it's time. I understand.

Tsurikov: No trouble at all.

The Cripple: Go.

Everybody is getting up. They hug the Cripple, taking their leave.

They turn around and wave for a long time. He waves back.

What swine!

Scene 22. At Home.

A dinner in honor of the returning expedition. Tsurikov, Pampukha, Ulasik and Masha around the table.

Everybody is eating with great appetite.

Ulasik (to *Tsurikov*): Like we were saying, it's a generational trait. Everything's measured in money. Can you imagine that? I like your wife even with no money at all.

Masha: Then why do you keep taking it?

Ulasik: I don't think about it at all. I just take it and then forget about it right away. But in your heads it's just like a loop. Money, money, he takes money, he is on the take... It does bother me, I swear... Look... (To *Tsurikov*.) You are always in favor of open sets [/systems/relationships]... What I mean is that it was after all up to me alone to air Masha for almost three days. We were very close to one another. But so what? Did I stick it to her? Did I initiate a sexual relationship?

Masha: You'd just dare!

Ulasik: What could you have done... had I laid out the nets of my strange charm...

Tsurikov: You're drifting.

Ulasik: I just wanted to say something... I am not like Pampukha. I am not a senseless dumb member. I am capable of falling in love.

Masha: Oh no!

Ulasik: What's the matter?

Masha: It just occurs to me... If Pampukha was sent by his father, that means... Sasha, are you dead too?

Pampukha mutters in response. His mouth is full of food..

Ulasik (*amusedly*): Pukha, does that mean you're a stiff?

Pampukha mutters again. He still can't finish chewing. But he nods in response, as in "yes, I am a stiff."

Tsurikov (*to Pampukha*): They are like kids, aren't they?

Tsurikov's wife enters.

Beloved spouse, can you believe the boys and girls only just got it?

Tsurikov's wife: Got what?

Tsurikov: About Pampukha.

Tsurikov's wife: I myself got it a while ago.

Tsurikov: Who would have believed you turned out such a smarty-pants!

Tsurikov's wife: It wasn't too hard. You two are good ones, I must say... You left the gun so that one couldn't help seeing it.

Pampukha (*who still hasn't finished chewing*): Damn it! I forgot all about the gun.

Tsurikov: So tell me, where does the gun fit in?

Tsurikov's wife: Do I have to talk about it in front of everyone? What do you want me to say? I just know. From now on you will have Pampukha to help you, you know,... solve your problems....

Tsurikov: Aha. So you think Sashka will be working for me as a killer?

Tsurikov's wife: Why? Why should it be exactly as a killer? As a colleague. You have such strange phone calls. I go crazy worrying.

Tsurikov: I see.

Ulasik: Come on, what do you expect! You keep your wife on a total data diet.

Tsurikov: Do I look like someone who orders people to kill?

Masha and Tsurikov's wife (*together*): You sure do!

Ulasik: Do you want to know who you look like?

Tsurikov: A farm equipment rep?

Ulasik: Nope!

Tsurikov: Professor Soskin?

Ulasik: Girls...tell him to go fuck himself...This dickhead ... he really did go to Hell.

Tsurikov's wife: And so what?

Ulasik: Exactly, and so what? What was it he saw there? You think he really saw something there? Whatever that something was (*He does a forceful gesture.*) He spent three days smashed. Right, Masha?...

Masha: Well, to be honest, one time we got smashed right along with him.

Tsurikov's wife: Masha!

Ulasik: Agreed. But we also checked out a lot of different things. We went all over the place. And what did he do during all that time? He kept tanking up with some sort of a border guard. (*He takes a deep breath.*) I begged him to bring along a camera. 'cause mine is a disposable. I hate disposables.

Tsurikov: I did too bring a camera.

Ulasik: But you forgot the film. Great!

Tsurikov: You should have reminded me.

Tsurikov's wife: In this respect I never rely on him.

Tsurikov: In a normal place you can get anything.

Ulasik: Buy, buy, buy. If you are so smart why didn't you redeem your father? Eh? That is the simple question. (*He explains to Tsurikov's wife.*) I smell corruption like I smell women. Who the hell knows what is brewing there. Everything there is just ready to go. Just bring it on. Everyone has "for sale, for sale" written all over their faces. But pretty soon they'll pull a string on this whole business. Guaranteed.

Tsurikov's wife: Whose faces have that written on them?

Ulasik: Whose faces...whose faces... the devils'...as you'd say.

Tsurikov's wife: Devils are scary. Yesterday I went to the market...

Tsurikov: You seem nervous.

Ulasik: You want to know why he didn't cash out his old man? Because, see, the old geezer dared...he had the nerve to set up a private life down there. So cheap, Tsurikov! What Rank Freudism! So, the deceased has a chick. So what! This is the only father you have, there won't be another one. Chick-dick. How can there be anything disgusting when it comes to one's parents. Even if he got himself a guy. For God's sake! As long as he is happy.

Tsurikov: Would have been better if it had been a guy.

Tsurikov's wife: By the way, where were you?

Ulasik: We were in Hell.

Tsurikov's wife: And how was it there?

Ulasik: It was ...a town. Masha and I went into houses. In some places they had combination locks and in some others they didn't; in some places the front entrances were tidy, in some others they were shitty.

Masha: Some are smiling, some are crying.

Ulasik: Some are smiling, some are crying. Thank you, Masha.

The doorbell rings. Tsurikov's wife goes to open. Returns. She can barely keep up with the 6 year old Girl.

Tsurikov's wife: Look who is here!

The Girl (*to Tsurikov, without prompting*): You promised.

Tsurikov's wife: What did you promise the child? (*To Girl.*) What floor do you live on?

Masha (*suspecting something dimly*): Have I seen you someplace?

The Girl: A lollipop.

Tsurikov's wife: What do you want that toxic stuff for? Have a peach instead.

The Girl: A lollipop.

Tsurikov's wife: We usually don't have lollipops at home. It's better keep that sort of garbage away from children.

Tsurikov: Masha, did you buy what I asked you to?

Out of her handbag Masha takes out three different-colored treats—the lollipops. She gives them to the girl. The girl takes only one.

Masha: Take all of them.

Tsurikov's wife: Lyosha, whose child is this? What is her name?

Tsurikov shrugs. Grabbing the red lollipop by its stick, the girl heads for the exit. (Calling after her.) What is your name?

The girl doesn't answer.

Where is your mother?

The girl's face is distorted in terror.

She opens her mouth and in the voice of a furious devil pronounces:

She is in the slammer. She is sewing jail rags. She killed someone! (*Then in a frightening voice.*)

She is well! She is well! She is well! She is well!

Having spoken, she falls silent.

Tsurikov: Hello to old Viktor.

The girl nods in response and leaves.

Everybody except Tsurikov and Pampukha is a little puzzled.

Pampukha: I better go too.

Tsurikov: One for the road.

Pampukha: I've had enough.

Tsurikov's wife: When will you come back? Tomorrow? On Friday?

Pampukha: That doesn't depend on me.

Ulasik: Pukha, you scoundrel! But I've grown fond of you!

Pampukha: Well, it's time to go. *(Kisses Masha, Tsurikov's wife. He hugs Ulasik and Tsurikov.)*

See you!

Tsurikov and all the others *(in different tone):* Bye.

Tsurikov's wife kisses Alexander one more time. She can't stop kissing him. She wants to remember the taste of his kiss. At last they part. Pampukha leaves.

Tsurikov: Damn it! I forgot!

Masha: What did you forget?

Tsurikov: This photographer asked me to deliver an envelope to his aunt. His aunt is a wonderful woman. She was actually the one who brought him up. *(He takes out the envelope.)* But I forgot.

24. The Photographer's Aunt.

The photographer's aunt: Lenchka, an ex-classmate of his who has only just arrived here, says to me: "Lyubov Borisovna, he works in a studio now, making photos for passports, certificates..."

Frankly, I doubt it. With his creative ambitions... I am not saying it's a shame to work in a photographer's studio. But if only you knew what a beautiful squirrel he drew me for the holidays. Such quilting he did! And he's so obedient... If a child is well brought up surely it will serve him well in the long run. That sort of thing is much appreciated today. I'm sure they took him on as a writer, or for some youth group. Of course, I would love to see how he is getting on. But from early childhood on the boy had a frail nervous system. I am afraid to frighten him. Do you understand?

Scene 25. A conversation about a street sweeper.

Masha: We could send the envelope with Pampukha. Should I catch up with him?

Tsurikov: Not worth it. *(He tears the envelope into small pieces.)*

Masha: Among other things we also saw God.

Tsurikov's wife: You don't say!

Masha: Word of honor. *(To Tsurikov personally.)* We even asked him a question, and he answered.

Tsurikov: Excellent!

Ulasik: Yeah, sure, he is God and I am Michael Jackson.

Masha: Michael Jackson died.

Ulasik: Really?

Tsurikov: Isn't it curious that God is in Hell and not where he is supposed to be.

Ulasik: We asked him about that too.

Tsurikov: And what did he say?

Masha: "I don't have the moral right."

Ulasik: Plus, he stammered.

Tsurikov *(has been fidgeting. It's apparent, even though he is trying to hide it):* That wasn't the guy with the cap, was it?

Masha: Thin as a rail...

Tsurikov *(shocked):* Oh, shit!

Ulasik: And how are you feeling about that, bro?

Tsurikov: Back off.

Ulasik: By the way, Pampukha left his gun. A good reason for going back. And while you're there you can pose some of those questions... of the eternal variety, as it were.

Tsurikov *(laughing):* I am liking you less and less.

Tsurikov's wife: Can someone explain to me where Sasha went?

Tsurikov: Zhenechka [Bridie], am I really keeping you on a data diet?

Tsurikov's wife: You do, Lyoshenka. You do.

Tsurikov: An interesting phenomenon was revealed when we were taken to boot camp. The fall cut, that is to say, the guys who were drafted in Fall... I mean, half a year before us. So, they ... they were ... normal. Almost everyone. Sort of absolutely normal people. Get it?... It's the Army: old timers, the new guys – all those issues. So, they were normal. The other soldiers, the ones who were older, were just animals. But *they*, the fall cut, they were normal. And they stayed like that. Later we too became animals. But *they* didn't. They stayed the same like before. Even though they fucked with them more than with any of the others. In part, that was because they were not fucking us up

sufficiently. I had a friend from the fall group. A good guy. We became buddies right away. He was a virgin. Sometimes he'd lay out for me how he'd spend his first night with a woman. In detail... Then he stole a pistol from a sergeant and shot himself in the mouth. It's pretty common. His name was Alexander Pampukha.

Tsurikov's wife has thrown up.

Ulasik: Did she really only get it now?

Tsurikov (*smiles curiously at Dmitrii Ulasik*): Girls, bring me two glasses of cold tap water.

Masha (*rushing up*): I'll get it.

Tsurikov (*to Zhenya*): Go help Masha.

Tsurikov's wife and Masha leave the room and go to the kitchen.

Don't go to my Zhenya any more.

Ulasik: What d'you mean?

Tsurikov: I mean, don't go to Zhenya, to my wife!

Ulasik: You got it all wrong. I treat her well. One could even say I love her.

Tsurikov: You are the one who got me wrong. Do you remember what I told you? In the Army there were some good people in the fall cut and some not too good people in the spring cut.

Ulasik: So what?

Tsurikov: I am one of those spring guys. From the bad batch. (*For a long time he delightedly beats Ulasik.*)

W o m e n return with the glasses of water.

Tsurikov pours water over Ulasik.

Ulasik comes to. Hobbles to the door. Laughs and screams with pain.

Ulasik (*in the doorway*): What for?

Tsurikov: You didn't get it, huh?

Ulasik: No.

Tsurikov: Go think it over.

Ulasik: Can I come back if I get it?

Tsurikov: No.

Ulasik: But why?

Tsurikov closes the door behind Dmitrii Ulasik.

Women sit side by side on the sofa with their right hands raised up.

Tsurikov: What's this composition supposed to mean?

Tsurikov's wife: I got it.

Masha: I got it too.

Tsurikov: A good start. (*He sits down in an arm-chair and starts reading a newspaper.*)

The women slowly lower their hands.

Scene 26. Delivery service.

Manabozo and The Last Visitor gluing together the torn pieces of the letter so as to deliver it to its addressee.

Manabozo: This goes here...

The Last Visitor (*reading*): "My dear!..." This is right where it starts.

Manabozo: Give it to me.

The Last Visitor: As if we had nothing else to do.

Manabozo: You don't say!

The Last Visitor (*reading*): "My dear aunt! How are you getting on? I am..." He's what?

Manabozo (*reading*): "I am not doing well. Take me away from here".

They look at one other. The Last Visitor tears up the letter. (Bitterly.) How I dislike people.

Scene 27. A Conversation About Nothing.

Tsurikov, Tsurikov's wife, Masha.

Tsurikov: Zhenya, we've had a difficult life. I was angry that you didn't understand me.

Tsurikov's wife (*has begun to cry*): I don't understand you.

Tsurikov: Exactly. And do you think I understand you?

Tsurikov's wife: You don't, Lyoshenka. You haven't had luck with your wife. But look, I am not too stupid... If you have lived with me for this many years, it means that I am smart.

Tsurikov: This is not the case.

Tsurikov's wife: Lyosha, I am not stupid, I am just emotional! (*She weeps bitterly, sobbing.*)

Tsurikov: Zhenechka, Zenechka...

Tsurikov's wife: Lyoshenka, just tell me the truth... does he or does he not exist?

Tsurikov: Who?

Tsurikov's wife: God.

Masha: Guaranteed. We saw him.

Tsuriko's wife: Lyosha, say it.

Tsurikov: It doesn't matter.

Tsurikov's wife: How come it doesn't matter?

Tsurikov: Girls, don't we have anything better to do?

Scene 28. The devils' songs.

Manabozo and The Last Visitor are singing the saddest of all the sad folk songs. They are interrupted by the countriest of all the country songs on the local top 10. The song is sung loudly and selflessly by Tsurikov and his women. Manabozo and the Last Visitor fall silent. They look at one another mutely. What can one say in a situation such as this?

The curtain falls.

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