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EXODUS

0.

God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses! I am the God of thy father." And Moses answered, "I need to change my glasses; I can't see a damn thing when I'm on the internet." And the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." And Moses cried out, "My voucher for an all inclusive resort in Cairo expired... The whole family, seven nights, unlimited food and drinks, the hotel is 220 meters from its own private beach." Then the Lord said unto Moses, "Sanctify unto me all the first-born, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine." And Moses said, "Three thousand for a speech therapist, twenty eight hundred for the backpack, then there's the shoes, the track suit, damn, even a nice eraser starts at fifty; you wouldn't buy your own kid a crappy eraser. And she wants a second child!" And the Lord said, "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his eyes, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon thee, which I have put upon the Egyptians: for I am Jehovah that healeth thee." And Moses said, "After my mother's stroke, they put her in a hospital ward with a tuberculosis patient; now she cries, saying "Don't kiss me, I'm infectious." And the Lord said unto Moses, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" And Moses said, "I thought I would live like a human, have what everyone has; don't hurt others and no one will hurt you back. I thought if I lend my neighbor a screwdriver, he won't smoke in the stairwell; I thought Live For Now, I thought Dreams Come True and The Future Depends On You, I thought Live On The Bright Side and Life is Good."

CHARACTERS

MOSES/ANDREY

FOREMAN

MARINA

VALYA

FATTY

CHIEF PHYSICIAN

KIRYAKOVA

VISHNEV

NATASHA

STUDENTS

POLICEMAN

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER

1.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Someone's invisible hand turns on the disgustingly blue light. Moses opens his eyes, squints with pain, covers his face with his hand. The commotion starts: the others get their bedsprings squeaking, make guttural noises, yawn. Moses opens his eyes again and takes a very long look at the ceiling, at the familiar crack that resembles a dog's head. He gets his feet off the bed, touches the unpleasant and cold linoleum, gets into his slippers. He stands up and turns towards the bare, curtainless window; his bed is the closest one to it. The lamp is reflected in the glass, but if you stare at it long enough, you can see the smoke coming from the garbage incineration plant. Moses stares long

enough. Smoke flows from the plant's chimneys uninterrupted like time. Moses turns away from the view and makes his bed: first you need to spread the blanket, then take the prickly feather pillow and punch it in the belly so that its ears would perk up. This is the only acceptable way.

12:00

An empty auditorium, its floor covered by plastic film, it smells of paint and cigarettes. Foreman and Moses stand there, looking at the drawing at the wall, covering it from floor to ceiling. There is a bunch of different things in it: white clouds, blue pigeons, red mushrooms, wide boulevards, rectangles of benches, a gray birdhouse, a tall cross, a fat caterpillar, deformed red sun, and a rainbow with a black stripe instead of violet.

FOREMAN. Moses, why did you paint a cross here?

MOSES. There was empty space.

FOREMAN. And what is this, next to the cross?

MOSES. It's a bench.

FOREMAN. Looks like a grave.

MOSES. Well, it's a bench.

FOREMAN. I don't get it. Ok, it's a bench, but what the hell is the cross doing here?

MOSES. I don't know.

FOREMAN. Moses, this is a kindergarten, for the God's sake. You're painting the wall for five-year-old shrimps. What crossess? Balloons are good, the arch will be all right, just get the rainbow colors out of here — they have a meaning that we don't need here, dog is good, yeah, I like dog.

MOSES. It's a mole.

FOREMAN. All right, a mole. Let it be a mole. Get rid of the cross.

MOSES. I could decorate it.

FOREMAN. Decorate it? The cross? Just cover it up.

MOSES. I've run out of blue paint. Do what all over again?

FOREMAN. You see, Moses, I have a degree in philology. My thesis was titled

Magical Realism as an Artistic Method in the Works of Pavić.

MOSES. What's magical realism?

FOREMAN. It's pretty much the same as your drawing.

MOSES. There should be a ladybug here.

FOREMAN. There should be meaning! In everything. I used to teach at school. You know why they fired me? I'll tell you. I had a relationship with a student. Don't think badly about me, she was a high school student. Basically, it was a thing of free will, I mean, she was willing to date me, but somehow the rumors reached the teacher's room. If rumors start flying, they will fly to someone important. So now I've got to deal with these damn amateur paintings.

MOSES. Sorry to hear it.

FOREMAN. I also tried ghostwriting term papers for morons, but that didn't work out either. I wrote a paper in cultural studies, a good one, for a guy from the Mining University; I even made a list of references for it in English, but his English turned out to be below expectations. So they flunked him. And then he beat me up.

MOSES. I've never beaten anyone.

FOREMAN. How do you know, Misha, you've forgotten everything!

MOSES. I'm not Misha, I'm Moses.

FOREMAN. It's nice talking to you, really nice. You absorb every word like a sponge absorbs water.

2.

6:30

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blanket, then take the prickly feather pillow and punch it in the belly so that its ears would perk up.

11:12

University. A spacious lecture hall with high ceilings. Students, research assistants, and professors sit in rows on gray chairs with soft backs. Some are holding tablets, some with notebooks, some have their eyes on their phones. Marina stands on a platform in the front of the auditorium; behind her are heavy, burgundy curtains. She is holding a remote control in her hand so she can change slides. A bit to her right is a big screen for the projector. On the screen is a graph that looks incomprehensible to an average person.

MARINA. The dependent variable in our case is the type of employment. The independent variable in our case is socialization. You see, not all people with this diagnosis can return to their normal lives. But nonetheless, they must return to life. Otherwise, they will just join the ranks of so-called bums, pardon my language. Or the ranks of psycho-neurological internat inhabitants. As you see on the graph, the test group in the framework of standard rehabilitation without employment shows weaker coping strategies in stressful situations. Here, for example, are the indicators of self-control. It is important to mention that among the human subjects were only people in a dissociated state. We didn't investigate those with more pronounced illnesses, because with them, you know, you first need to develop basic skills: teach them to hold a pen, read, recover speech, sometimes from scratch.

Marina clicks the remote to show the next slide.

Observe the median of taking responsibility: there is a big difference, isn't there? It's after therapy, of course; the preliminary measures left a lot to be desired. Human subjects spoke metaphorically about feeling like Alice walking through the looking glass. They meant it in a bad way, of course. We confirmed these results with the help of phenomenological interviews. For you to be sure that our research is not unfounded, we've invited one of our human subjects, Moses. You can ask him your own questions. Moses, come on over.

Moses gets up from the first row. He's wearing a gray suit and white shirt, all sleek and crisp; his hair is smooth and evenly parted. He walks up to Marina, silently stumbles on the edge of the platform, curses under his breath, and stands next to her. He helplessly smiles, not knowing where to put his hands, and tries to put them in the pockets of his suit coat, but the pockets have

been sewn shut. He shifts his attention to a button on his sleeve and fiddles with it.

MARINA. Moses, tell us about your occupational therapy.

MOSES. You mean about work?

Marina nods.

MOSES. I found out that I have a talent for painting.

Someone laughs.

MOSES. Or so the doctors say.

MARINA. (to the *auditorium*) Let's get serious please, okay? (to *Moses*) Tell us what you do exactly.

MOSES. I paint walls. And pillars. Stairwells, too. They once asked me to do the toilets, so I did. I painted an owl on the door. It looks at you when you... you know, using a toilet.

Everyone laughs. Marina blushes.

MARINA. Moses paints walls in kindergartens. I don't have to explain to you how positive images and bright colors affect children. We have a question...

STUDENT. (*getting up from her chair*) Good afternoon. Olga, junior in cognitive psychology. How did you know you lost your memory?

MOSES. (*to Marina*) I didn't understand the question.

STUDENT. Well, so when did you realize for sure...uh...your special situation?

MOSES. I didn't realize that I didn't remember anything. I didn't realize that I didn't remember anything. At first I just thought that I didn't know where to go.

STUDENT. Dmitry, graduate student in psychological diagnosis. And how did you remember your name? Thank you.

MARINA. Moses chose his own name. Didn't you, Moses?

STUDENT 2. So, excuse me, you somehow understood that you are a Jew?

MOSES. No, I just liked the name. I saw it in a book.

STUDENT 2. So you're not a Jew?

STUDENT. Excuse me, how does it matter?

MOSES. Sometimes I think that I am Georgian. I love hachapuri and words that end with «i». «Hachapuri», for example.

STUDENT. Do you have a dream?

MOSES. My dream is to find a woman who also remembers nothing.

The button falls off of Moses' sleeve. He tries to find it as the audience applauds dryly.

12:32

The university's cafeteria, a kingdom of chairs and tables. It smells of dough, dish detergent, and wet rags. Marina and Moses sit in the corner, leaning on an empty table.

MARINA. Did you find the button after all?

MOSES. Nope.

MARINA. Ask the nurse, she'll sew it back on. What should I get you?

MOSES. Probably nothing.

MARINA. A cherry pie perhaps?

MOSES. Could I buy it myself?

MARINA. I have a lunch ticket.

MOSES. I understand.

MARINA. I'll take it for you, okay?

MOSES. Sure.

MARINA. Perk up, we've got two more places to talk about the study results.

MOSES. I'm Santa Claus, and you are Missus Claus.

MARINA. How's that?

MOSES. ou tell fairy tales, and I just stand next to you, rubbing my mittens.

MARINA. By the way, about fairy tales...we have an interview with you on TV

today.

MOSES. You didn't tell.

MARINA. I'm telling you now.

MOSES. When?

MARINA. At four.

MOSES. I have an IV at four.

MARINA. Or at five, I don't remember.

MOSES. Dinner's at five.

MARINA. I'll treat you.

MOSES. I want to eat with the group.

MARINA. With the group? Well, as you wish. I'll go alone.

Marina puts her purse on the table next to Moses and takes out her wallet.

MARINA. Watch my bag.

Marina shuffles off to the counter; her shoes are too tight. A student walks up to Moses.

STUDENT. Hi. Can I have your autograph?

MOSES. Mine?

STUDENT. Well, yeah, you've got such a cool story. Well, it's sad, of course, but cool.

MOSES. All right. Where?

STUDENT. Uh...(gets a book out of her bag and opens it) Right here.

MOSES. *(slowly repeats out loud as he writes)* A long happy life to Olechka. *(gives the book back)*

STUDENT. Awesome, thanks!

MOSES. What's that book?

The student shows him the cover.

MOSES. (*reading*) Mentally ill or insane? A Guidebook to Rare Neurological Illnesses. (Saddened) I see. (pauses) Give me your number, Olya. I'll shoot you a text.

STUDENT. Are you crazy?

MOSES. Yeah, basically.

Marina returns with a plastic tray.

MARINA. Here's an apple one, they didn't have cherry. I got one for myself too. And a casserole, take it, take it. I know what they feed you there. Tasty, yes?

MOSES. I got a football team together at the "house." We wanna play.

MARINA. The casserole isn't salty, is it?

MOSES. The chief physician won't approve.

MARINA. Moses, I need your signature to show that you aren't opposed to the interview being used for scientific purposes.

MOSES. I really don't want to paint kindergarten walls anymore.

MARINA. What?

MOSES. I'm not going to paint kindergarten walls anymore.

MARINA. Ah, that. You won't have to. The institute didn't secure a grant for research next year.

MOSES. Why not?

MARINA. You'll work until the end of the month and that's it.

MOSES. And what if I just leave?

MARINA. And go where?

MOSES. Somewhere. To work.

MARINA. You've only got this job because of our request; do you think someone will just hire you? I mean...maybe, of course..

MOSES. Why don't you come up with another test?

MARINA. I don't just work with amnesiacs. Do you know how much paper work I have? And on top of that I'm writing a dissertation.

MOSES. What do I do now?

MARINA. What do you do? Lay around, try to remember.

MOSES. But you said that remembering is easier when you work.

MARINA. I did say that. But you have a job there, don't you?

MOSES. Yes. Sewing handkerchiefs.

MARINA. Great.

MOSES. Marina, do you use handkerchiefs?

MARINA. I haven't thought about that.

MOSES. Well, I don't use them either.

MARINA. Listen, Moses, what can I do? Listen, if you want, I can talk to the head physician about the football team.

MOSES. I don't want it anymore.

Marina sighs and takes a bite out of the pie.

3.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Someone's invisible hand turns on the disgustingly blue light. Moses opens his eyes, squints with pain, covers his face with his hand. The commotion starts: the others get their bedsprings squeaking, make guttural noises, yawn. Moses opens his eyes again and takes a very long look at the ceiling, at the familiar crack that resembles a dog's head. He gets his feet off the bed, touches the unpleasant and cold linoleum, gets into his slippers. He stands up and turns towards the bare, curtainless window; his bed is the closest one to it. The lamp is reflected in the glass, but if you stare at it long enough, you can see the smoke coming from the garbage incineration plant. Moses stares long enough. Smoke flows from the plant's chimneys uninterrupted like time.

9:30

Workroom of the psycho-neurological boarding houses. Dim light; the old, long lights on the ceiling crackle. Wavy blue curtains barely cover barred windows. Directly across the windows hangs a cork board joyfully decorated with colorful cut-out letters that read Our Works; sewn items tacked below with pins: a handkerchief, a piece of embroidered pillow, a heinous hare with bulging button eyes, a lace napkin. The room is filled with rows of gray tables with built-in sewing machines. Old and young women and men sit at these tables. Near the table in the far right row, at which the smiling Vishnev works, stands the labor instructor in a blue uniform: young, beautiful, and healthy Almira Talmyrovna.

ALMIRA. Oh, what's with that letter? It looks more like an O than a C. Try harder, Vishnev..

Almira Talmyrovna makes several passes between the rows and returns to her place at a school desk. She takes her phone from her purse, writes someone a message, and smiles enigmatically.

KIRYAKOVA. Almira Talmyrovna!

ALMIRA. What is it, Kiryakova?

KIRYAKOVA. I think I've stitched my finger.

ALMIRA. *(without taking her eyes from her phone)* Good job, Kiryakova.

KIRYAKOVA. I'm bleeding.

ALMIRA. Someone help Kiryakova, I'm afraid of blood. Konovalova, go have a look.

VALYA. There's a hole in her finger.

ALMIRA. *(without taking her eyes off of her phone)* Is it deep?

VALYA. Not really.

ALMIRA. Bandage it up. You can just sit for the rest of the day, Kiryakova.

KIRYAKOVA. Almira Talmyrovna, she ruined my handkerchief.

Almira teases her hair with her hand, smiles, and takes a selfie.

VALYA. I've bandaged it up.

KIRYAKOVA. I stitched "Christ is Risen" as you ordered, and now there's blood on it.

ALMIRA. No big deal, Kiryakova, you'll sew more handkerchiefs in your life. Don't suffer over it.

KIRYAKOVA. Jesus also suffered.

ALMIRA. Yes, Kiryakova, he suffered for us. Therefore, don't you suffer and don't tell Vladislav Pavlovich about the finger or I'll have to suffer.

FATTY. I didn't think that he, SON OF A BITCH!, suffered for you too.

ALMIRA. And why not, Silin?

FATTY. It seems that you have a Tatar name. (*Involuntary writhing*)

ALMIRA. And do you know what racism is, Silin?

KIRYAKOVA. Racism. Noun. Uncountable. Reactionary theory and politics which put forth the idea that one race is superior over another. Preachers of racism. A victim of racism. Ugly outbreaks of racism.

ALMIRA. I don't doubt your knowledge, Kiryakova.

KIRYAKOVA. Vladislav Pavlovich says I'm smart.

ALMIRA. I don't think so. Your memory, Kiryakova, is a by-product of autism.

KIRYAKOVA. Autism. Noun. Uncountable. A developmental disorder of variable severity that is characterized by difficulty in social interaction and communication and by restricted or repetitive patterns of thought and behaviour.

ALMIRA. Exactly. Have you done? «Christ Has Risen», I repeat, must be made in a satin stitch, not cross stitch. Pass the samples back to me and if they're alright, everyone will do a minimum of thirty. I will give anyone who can do forty a positive note, and they will get extra cigarettes from the orderlies.

KIRYAKOVA. I don't smoke.

ALMIRA. Good girl, Kiryakova. C'mon, c'mon, pass it to the first row. (*Looking at the handkerchiefs*). Sloppy, very sloppy, Silin. Looks more like Holy Shit than Holy Week, God forgive me. Konovalova, as the most religious

one, you should try harder!

VALYA. I have fat fingers.

ALMIRA. That doesn't matter when you're using a sewing machine. Spirina, well done. Everyone should learn from Spirina. We're sending Spirina's works to the city library in April for the Warm Your Soul with Craft Festival..

SPIRINA. Can I go?

ALMIRA. We'll see what your legal guardian says. Whose is this? *(Shows off a handkerchief with the word "help" sewn on it)* I asked whose is this!

MOSES. Mine.

ALMIRA. Do you think this is funny, Moses? You seem to be a grown man. Do you think if you've been chosen for that university program and you muck around there giving out interviews, you now have a higher status or something? You're still a newcomer here, don't you forget.

ALARM. Attention! A fire alarm has been activated in the building. Please proceed to the stairways and exit the building. Attention!

ALMIRA. Sit down, sit down. Something's probably just broken.

ALARM. Attention! A fire alarm has been activated in the building. Attention. A fire alarm has been activated in the building.

ALMIRA. It's just a drill.

ALARM. Attention! A fire alarm has been activated in the building. Attention! Please proceed...

ALMIRA. All right, get up in single file, starting from the back rows.

ALARM. Attention! A fire alarm has been activated...

FATTY. There are four on IVs, should I go for them?

ALMIRA. Leave it be.

4.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Someone's invisible hand turns on the disgustingly blue light. Moses opens his eyes, squints with pain, covers his face with his hand. The commotion starts: the others get their bedsprings squeaking, make guttural

noises, yawn. Moses opens his eyes again and takes a very long look at the ceiling, at the familiar crack that resembles a dog's head. He gets his feet off the bed, touches the unpleasant and cold linoleum gets into his slippers. He stands up and turns towards the bare, curtainless window; his bed is the closest one to it. The lamp is reflected in the glass, but if you stare at it long enough, you can see the smoke coming from the garbage incineration plant.

16:09

Recreation room. Paper snowflakes, gray with dust and time, forgotten here for the whole year. The bookshelf props up the refrigerator, and all the books have been obsessively arranged by someone according to their size and color. An old large television set mumbles on a nightstand. Moses sits across from it in a green chair. The TV shows a report on the work of the Iskander multiple rocket launcher system. Valya enters unnoticed: the door was removed five years ago.

VALYA. Moses, give me a kiss.

MOSES. Back off, Valya.

VALYA. You're my fiance.

MOSES. Why aren't you in the prayer room?

VALYA. I've already prayed. And I've prayed for you.

MOSES. It didn't help.

VALYA. My love!

MOSES. Valya, you're sixty, and I'm forty three. Don't you notice the age difference?

VALYA. You don't remember how old you are.

MOSES. God fucking dammit, Valya! I'm watching a show.

VALYA. You'll be here until the bitter end. You've got to get your personal life figured out.

MOSES. It's you who will be here until the bitter end. You're incapacitated.

VALYA. Do you think a prince is going to come and whisk you off to a magical kingdom on a white horse? I also thought that once. Twenty years ago. Do you know how beautiful I was? I had goldfish, three of them. Youth, Hope and

Love.

MOSES. Why Youth, not Faith?

VALYA. I love unusual stuff.

MOSES. So where are the fish? Did you eat them?

VALYA. That's not funny. Bastard Pavlovich locked me up in solitary. Because I had put on lipstick. The fish died while I was locked up. It didn't cross anyone's mind to feed them. I returned from the underworld, I mean from solitary, and the whole box of fish food was still just sitting there behind the aquarium, untouched. And the fish were belly up. I made three wishes and flushed them down the toilet. I almost didn't cry. Strong women don't cry.

The chief physician comes into the room, a tall, thin man with an unremarkable face.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. How are you feeling?

MOSES. Vladislav Pavlovich, Valya spilled juice on me today and I got total recall.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Interesting.

MOSES. I remembered absolutely everything. I remembered drinking that same brand of juice at my home on Chkalov street, house number five, apartment one hundred twenty one. There was a cover on our kitchen table with a pine cone print; I was drinking juice with water because of my heartburn; my wife wouldn't allow me to drink juice without water. I'm drinking and the TV's on, the show Morning Express. And there's always this contest at the end with three questions where you can call in with the answers and win a ticket to the movie theater. And I know the first answer, the second as well. And even the third, but I've got to go to work: we have to check in at work, and the time is noted, so they can take money out of your salary if you arrive after eight three times.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Interesting.

MOSES. They're already tired of waiting for me, probably, Vladislav Pavlovich. Well, should I go?

VALYA. I didn't spill any juice on him. I don't drink juice, it has chemicals.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Moses, do you understand that it would require much paperwork, a bunch of procedures, your wife will have to confirm your identity.

(Pause.) And no one spilled juice on you, it turns out. *(Winks at Valya).*

MOSES. You're a bitch, Valya.

5.

6:30

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16:03

Moses and the Foreman are smoking on a playground behind the kindergarten. Both are sitting on two large mushrooms with tree stumps for stalks and painted bowls for caps. Moses finishes smoking, and searching for something new, goes to a big slide, slides down it, stops the middle and is helps himself along with his palms.

MOSES. Did you bring it?

FOREMAN. I did. *(He rustles inside a plastic bag and takes out a two liter bottle of cheap beer and two plastic cups)*

MOSES. Didn't they have anything else?

FOREMAN. You wanted to remember the taste of beer, so what difference does it make?

MOSES. If I have to remember, then I would rather remember the good stuff. Whatever, give me some.

They clink glasses and drink.

FOREMAN. We've done seven kindergartens this month, not bad.

MOSES. One elephant, two landscapes, a fairy tale city, a painting of balloons of different colors, an ordinary wooden hut, traffic laws in pictures and riddles.

FOREMAN. I noticed that we had drawn traffic laws in the kindergarten where there is a highway with no crosswalk. So what's your plan then? Back to the «house»?

MOSES. Yes. They're sending a car. They don't let me move around the city on my own.

FOREMAN. I would like to go with you. It's nice — they feed you and give you clothes. It's almost like a resort. You can read books all day. No need to humiliate yourself in front of your boss, no need to shout at people. You can't even imagine how much I don't like to shout. But it's my job.

MOSES. So don't.

FOREMAN. I've tried. It doesn't work.

MOSES. But you can do what you want and go where you want. They're strict with us. We have «feeding schedule». Breakfast at seven fifteen, lunch at one fifteen, dinner at five. And you need to show that your hands are washed or they won't let you in. You can't wear normal clothes. We all wear robes, both women and men. Everyone in flowered robes, just like nesting dolls.

FOREMAN. I heard that my girl was admitted to a philological faculty. She followed in my footsteps. What a fool, she could have chosen an IT faculty, she's quite smart.

MOSES. Have you congratulated her?

FOREMAN. I disappeared. I'm too old for her.

MOSES. Thirty three is old now?

FOREMAN. It was already too much for her to graduate from school in that unhealthy atmosphere; everyone discussed our relationship. She was depressed afterwards. I figured it out from her Facebook posts.

MOSES. Go and explain it to her. She's lost. Can you imagine how it feels when

someone just disappears on you? It feels like death, but worse. Probably.

FOREMAN. You think so? You seem so kind person, I think you had a good wife. Maybe you have kid! What do you think, boy or girl? I bet you have a boy. Someone's waiting for you somewhere. You are so happy, Moses.

18:05

Prayer room. Pictures of Jesus, Mary, and other saints hang on the pale green wall. There is a cross and a candle on a stand covered with a lace tablecloth. Moses enters the room and sits on a bench near the entrance. Valya gets up, kisses the cross, takes up the white tablecloth, opens a drawer in the stand, takes out a small bottle of cognac, takes a sip, finds a piece of bread in her pocket and takes a bite.

MOSES. Got a smoke?

VALYA. *(spinning around and hiding the bottle)* Jesus Chirst!

MOSES. I thought you are religious.

VALYA. One doesn't interfere with the other. How did you get in?

MOSES. It was open.

VALYA. Stupid me.

Valya puts the cognac on the altar, gets a key out of her robe, locks the room from inside, and sits next to Moses on the bench.

VALYA. Want some?

MOSES. Nah.

VALYA. *(taking a sip)* Are you squeamish?

MOSES. I don't mix.

VALYA. What? IV with cognac?

MOSES. How'd you get it?

VALYA. Well, I wash the floors for an orderly, and she buys it for me. Don't let her know about that, it's my business. You wouldn't wash the floors like I do, in any event.

MOSES. No argument here.

They sit in silence.

VALYA. Your icon is here, too. See the guy with the beard.

MOSES. They've all got beards.

VALYA. The bearded guy with the book. Blessed prophet Moses. It's he who gave the commandments to the people.

MOSES. Like which ones, thou shall not drink?

VALYA. That isn't one of them. Haven't you read the Bible?

MOSES. I don't remember.

VALYA. Have you heard of the Exodus?

MOSES. Who's that?

VALYA. Not who, but what. Moses delivered the people from slavery. Before that they were just migrant workers in Egypt.

MOSES. Had they taken their passports?

VALYA. Yes, the Egyptians had taken their passports, scammed them out of their money, and made them work at a construction site for days on end.

MOSES. And they had porridge. Just like we have at the cafeteria.

VALYA. There's nothing written in there about porridge.

MOSES. So they left, then what?

VALYA. They wanted to go back at first. But they were dying on the way. Some from snakes, some from hunger, some from old age.

MOSES. Some from porridge.

VALYA. God's will!

MOSES. How about Moses?

VALYA. And Moses, too.

MOSES. So what was the reason of leaving?

VALYA. For the sake of their children, I reckon.

MOSES. And where did they end up?

VALYA. Wherever it was better.

MOSES. And do you want to go somewhere better?

VALYA. And where is it better? Tell me where and I'll split.

6.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Someone's invisible hand turns on the disgustingly blue light. Moses opens his eyes, squints with pain, covers his face with his hand. The commotion starts: the others get their bedsprings squeaking, make guttural noises, yawn. Moses opens his eyes again and takes a very long look at the ceiling, at the familiar crack that resembles a dog's head. He gets his feet off the bed, touches the unpleasant and cold linoleum gets into his slippers.

12:27

Marina and Moses are treading new paths in the garden near the building of the psycho-neurological boarding house.

MOSES. You've forgotten to take off your shoe covers.

MARINA. *(looking at her feet)* Oh yeah.

Silence.

MARINA. I asked about football. It's forbidden.

MOSES. When can I go to work?

MARINA. You don't have to anymore.

MOSES. I can paint for free.

MARINA. You already have been.

MOSES. No, the foreman always slipped me a little.

MARINA. Good for the foreman. I've just come to say goodbye.

MOSES. You told me that it's better here than in the hospital. I thought there would be events. And what events do we get here? Yesterday my roommate thought that the refrigerator is the toilet and pissed in the crisper. Is this an event?

MARINA. Vladislav Pavlovich said you thought up a wife and wanted to run away.

MOSES. Run away, sure. There's a three meter high concrete fence and a checkpoint. It's easier to cross the Mexican border.

MARINA. What would you do if you did escape?

MOSES. Well, I'm a street artist now.

MARINA. Why a street artist?

MOSES. Well, I paint walls, Marina, what's not to understand?

MARINA. Street artists paint walls in the streets, exterior walls.

MOSES. Well, all right.

Silence.

MARINA. There is a charity event and they print the faces of those who've lost on juice packs.

MOSES. Why?

MARINA. What do you mean, why, Moses? Can't you imagine how good it would be? Everyone buys juice. Your family would see you and recognize you.

MOSES. No, I don't participate in this.

MARINA. Don't you want to be found?

MOSES. Kids used to collect football cards from gum wrappers, and now they'd be collecting amnestics?

Silence.

MARINA. Moses, don't send me text messages anymore. That's not why we gave you a phone. It's the property of the university, but you can keep it.

MOSES. Ok. Just go to the movies with me. I'll pay.

MARINA. I've got lots of work.

MOSES. On the weekend. I won't harass you. I promise. C'mon, let's just go to the movies and talk. Everyone should have something to remember. So I'll have too. C'mon. I'll pay.

MARINA. How'd you get so rich all of a sudden?

MOSES. I've already told you that I get paid, foreman gave me some cash. I worked hard, I put my heart and soul into it.

MARINA. That was for the purity of the experiment. That money. Do you understand?

MOSES. No.

MARINA. The customer didn't pay you. We did, the university. So that you would truly believe that you were working like a normal person. And so that we truly understood how work affects you.

MOSES. Nice experiment.

MARINA. Yes, I think so too.

MOSES. I've got to go. I've got stuff to do.

MARINA. Stuff to do, yeah.

MOSES. Yes, stuff to do, stuff to do. I have to water the ficus in the hallway and do some other thing. It's none of your concern.

Moses quickly heads off. Marina sits on the bench. She gets a juice box from her purse with a picture of Moses on it and drinks it.

14:02

Moses is standing in line for cigarettes. At the head of the line is a nurse. Everyone is holding plastic caps with pills in their hands. When it's their turn, they must swallow the pills, show their tongue, take three cigarettes, and sign the ledger. Moses takes his cigarettes and gets back into line unnoticed. He gets cigarettes again.

VALYA. Moses here butted into line...

MOSES. I'll tell everyone kind of a God you're praying to.

Valya shuts up. Moses approaches the guy with the buzz cut.

MOSES. Hey Fatty, come here. I've got something for you.

Moses gives Fatty his cigarettes.

7.

01:40

Night, gloom, the smell of cigarettes. In the back yard of wing number two two men in robes and hats trample.

FATTY. FUCKING BASTARD!

MOSES. Fatty, please shut your hole, the guard will wake up and I haven't finished.

FATTY. I can't help it. If you could I wouldn't stick out here. DIE, FAGGOTS!

MOSES. So you're not pretending?

FATTY. Are you dumb? BITCH, ASSHOLE, FUCKING BASTARD! Sorry, only the “dumb” part was meant for you.

MOSES. Ok.

FATTY. And don't call me Fatty, please. I have a name. My name's Lyosha. Lyoha. Mom gave me that name. And I wouldn't be fat if not for pills. FUCK! You wanna know how they plump you up? You'll find out. Everyone here is like that, cheeks stick out from the back. But Fatty is only me. I hate this!

MOSES. Where's your mom, still alive?

FATTY. What can happen to her? She gave me up once she figured out I had the tics. She BITCH! first put me in an orphanage, then I got here.

MOSES. Does she visit you, at least?

FATTY. Have you ever seen her? ROTTEN CUNT! She's even getting my social security money, they didn't even take away her parental rights, BASTARDS!

MOSES. Can you even be cured?

FATTY. With brain surgery. But no one here knows how to do it. Or they don't want to. But I'm normal. BITCH! I love math, numbers and counting, like money. Although to be honest, I have never counted money in my life. But I know that I'd love that.

MOSES. Listen, they gave me some at work. (*Gets a roll of money fastened by a rubber band out of his breast pocket*) Here, count it. And then you can start to save for your surgery.

FATTY. God, how cool, ASSHOLE! Can I hug you?

MOSES. Why not?

They hug.

FATTY. You're like the real Moses. From the Bible. He did nice things for people, didn't he?

8.

From the dissertation of M.I. Kadnikova. Analysis of phenomenological interview.

I've been at the home for six months already, as it turns out (“at the home” — in the psycho-neurological internat). At the beginning, it was even interesting (“Interesting” — manifestation of cognitive need). Conversations with people, so much attention given to you, as if you were the most important person on Earth (“The most important person” — self-actualization of personality). And then you came with your searches (“Searches” — research).

I like that I don't have a story like the others (“Story” — biography, past). It turns out that I don't have to suit anyone's standards (“Suit” — striving towards personal significance through conformity). So if I had been born to some family of musicians, I would have had to suit their expectations. Sing well, for example. If I didn't sing well, I would have suffered (“Suffer” — the state of strong internal conflict). And then I would have gone to study at a musical school and would have suffered there even more. And I would know how everything would end up, the end of everything (“The end of everything” — paradigm of external behavior).

Up to now I haven't heard a single story about someone's previous life. Even though they all have a good memory (“Good memory” — the lack of biographical amnesia). I don't know if that's because they don't want to talk about the past or they already think they've been living here all their lives (“They've been living here all their lives” — the consequence of learned helplessness).

Yesterday, a relative of an autistic girl came to visit. Judging by the guilty face, it was her mother. They say that she comes once a year. I should envy her, in a way (“Envy” — to feel one's own inadequacy in relation to another). There is someone that visits her, brings a chocolate bar from the supermarket (“Bring a chocolate bar” — to show nonspecific supportive permanence). But after the visit she walks around so alien, so sad, that it would probably be better for her mother not to come at all (“Alien” — to be in a psychological state of social and communicative isolation).

What would I like to remember? (“Remember” — show the need to create false memories). I like to think that if I don't know anything, I can imagine anything (“Imagine” — compensatory fantasizing). That my wife is an actress and people

recognize her on the street. And I don't allow her to take part in bed scenes and she listens to me ("Listens" — the necessity of self-affirmation). That my son is already grown up and independent, studying architecture ("Independent" — actualizing of a parental role). He does not take pocket money, he earns his own living.

There are lots of strange things here ("Strange" — inaccessible to direct perception). I don't understand how a "mentally retarded" person beats everyone in chess. Why can no one have personal belongings? ("Why" — a rhetorical question showing cognitive dissonance). There are no clocks anywhere, only on the microwave in the chief's office. The toilets don't lock from inside. Why is there no coffee, but there is a coffee drink? Why is everyone fat but hungry, why are there no outlets, why do I have a bed with wheels, why are there numbers on the furniture, why does Valya get sick from pills but still takes them? And our prayer room, who the hell needs it? ("The hell" — an expression of aggression brought on by prolonged depersonalization). Why is there a prayer room, but there is no God? ("God" — the possibility of transcendence). Or maybe I have just forgotten how things are and that they have been created like that ("Forgotten how things are" — showing social de-adaptation; "created like that" — incompatibility with one's own maladjustment).

9.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Someone's invisible hand turns on the disgustingly blue light. Moses opens his eyes, squints with pain, covers his face with his hand. The commotion starts: the others get their bedsprings squeaking, make guttural noises, yawn. Moses opens his eyes again and takes a very long look at the ceiling, at the familiar crack that resembles a dog's head.

8:25

A hall. Thirty people in a line. It's evident they've been standing for a long time, some shift from foot to foot, some lean on the wall, some hold onto it with their hand. In front of this line stands the chief physician and two orderlies.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Well, how long are we going to stand here?

KIRYAKOVA. I wanna pee!

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. I understand, Kiryakova. But until someone fesses up you'll have to wait. Everyone will have to suffer because of one person.

VALYA. I am an old woman, Vladislav Pavlovich, I can't take it....

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. You should polish benches less during walks. Movement is life, Konovalova.

One of the orderlies whispers something in the chief physician's ear.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Vishnev, stop staring at your slippers. Haven't you ever seen slippers? I'm asking for the last time, who drew these nasty things on the building's wall?

VALYA. What nasty things, Vladislav Pavlovich?

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Nasty, nasty things. We wipe your butts, and you shit on us, pardon the expression. I'm asking you, what am I supposed to say to the chief administrator? He came to work at seven this morning and how was he greeted? With that daub? You think of yourselves as artists? Bullshit. He tries to get good things for you all the time. He built the gymnasium for you.

FATTY. It's closed for renovations!

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. The massage room.

FATTY (*whispering*). Without a masseuse.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. The prayer room.

FATTY. The orderly has the key, she only lets us use it if she's in a good mood...

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. What are you mumbling there, Silin?

FATTY. I'm reading a prayer.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. I'm afraid I'll have to take away your cigarettes.

VALYA. Are you out of your damn mind, Vladislav Pavlovich?

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Watch your language, Konovalova! Or I'll close the prayer room.

VALYA. Jesus Crist! It's sacred!

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Well, the prayer room is a bit much...

VALYA. Thanks God!

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Well, I'm suspending computer classes until we work out this problem.

FATTY. Please, not computer classes!

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. I'd rather not, but what can I do?

FATTY. I know who did it.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Was it you, Silin?

FATTY. No, not me. *(Looking at Moses)* Him.

10.

6:30.

Pitch darkness. It's very hot and there's almost no air to breathe, only a small ventilation hole somewhere near the ceiling provides some relief. Moses is sitting on a mattress near the wall. On the opposite side of the room, Fatty is sitting on an identical mattress.

FATTY *(offstage)*. So if you turn the handle on the left of the radiator it won't be as hot. This room originally was for ASSHOLE! drying clothes. Now it's the "social adaptation room." Sounds so...beautiful. When I first came to the home, I thought it was for conversations, tests. I even wanted to spend a week here. Stupid me.

Silence.

FATTY *(offstage)*. If you could have a super power, what would it be? I would BASTARD! become invisible. I'd walk around the city at night. Go to the cinema for free. To clubs. I've never been to a club. *(Silence)* Actually, UH! we shouldn't be locked up together. They made the second solitary room into a VIP room, I saw it myself. There's a computer, television, and closet. And even curtains. And a carpet. An electric kettle. Outlets FUCK! too, can you believe it? It's for snitches that the orderlies employ. They've never even made me an

orderly once, because of my tics. Koshkina works as an orderly. ASSHOLE! They give her chocolate every month. I'm not a snitch. FUCK! I am not a snitch. I just had to use the Internet there. I just couldn't go on without computer class. They thought that I was playing checkers, but I was on the Internet. I guessed the password: one two three four five six seven eight. I needed an adventure, is all. I have a girlfriend, Vika. We chat. She sent me a sunshine and a heart. I sent her a smiling turd. That's just my sense of humor. BITCH! It's peculiar. Her birthday is today, I wanted to write to her that she's great. She BITCH! is great. Really great. I wanted to write to her, I didn't know that Pavlovich would send me here, too.

Fatty is silent. Moses is silent.

FATTY (*offstage*). What if everyone has gone extinct like the dinosaurs, and they have forgotten about us? And we're locked up. Zombies would have eaten Pavlovich first, FAGGOTS! he's crunchy. And everyone outside of the fence has died. When we watch the news in the lounge, it's always the same, day after day. As if someone recorded it once and just replays it over and over. The people on the screen may be dead already, just the video of them left. But my girl, she definitely exists. I wanted to sing her a song at a concert. There will be a concert BASTARD! on Women's Day. There's a concert on Women's Day every year. Men choose songs to sing in the auditorium FAGGOTS! Actually, you just have to open your mouth, move your hands nicely like they do on TV, and move around the stage. I've already chosen which song I'm going to sing for my girl; it's called My, My Beloved BASTARD! Want me to sing it? When I sing BITCH! I have no tics.

Moses is silent. Then he starts to sing.

“Bombs of love exploding just right in my head
I won't hurt you baby, though you're making me mad
My cigarette goes out like a sunset”

MOSES. Please shut up.

Fatty stops singing.

FATTY (*offstage*). So you're not going to talk to me anymore. I know, SHIT!, I'm not offended. I'll do the talking myself.

MOSES. It's all right.

FATTY (*offstage*). You hate me, I'm not stupid, I understand.

MOSES. It's all right.

FATTY (*offstage*). Moses, BITCH!

MOSES. It's all right, I said. You can call me Andrey. That's my full name.

FATTY (*offstage*). Andrey can't be the full name of Moses.

ANDREY. It isn't. Listen, can I ask you...

FATTY (*offstage*). Of course, man. I'll do anything you want, BITCH!

ANDREY. Do you remember I took part in a program where there was one woman, a psychologist, asking me questions and she was silent until I finished talking? Well, I didn't tell her everything.

FATTY (*offstage*). You fell in love with her, didn't you? ASSHOLE!

ANDREY. Well, no.

FATTY (*offstage*). You can tell me!

ANDREY. I didn't fall in love with her.

FATTY (*offstage*). Gosh, love is sure hard to admit, but I know.

ANDREY. All right, just go on believing that I fell in love with her. Basically, can you ask me questions? I'll tell you which ones.

FATTY (*offstage*). Got it, you fell in love. Questions like "what's your favorite color?" Like on a date?

ANDREY. No, not those. Ask me how it all started. No, wait. That sounds fucked up. Ask me how I got here.

FATTY (*offstage*). Are you asking me?

ANDREY. No, you ask me! Ask and listen quietly, got it?

FATTY (*offstage*). Got it. How did you, BITCH, get here? (*Adds after a brief*

thought) Just tell me the basics.

ANDREY. My wife was watching some TV series as usual in the kitchen, some trash channel, I think. I was washing the dishes. TV series bore me.

FATTY (*offstage*). Me too, imagine that.

ANDREY. Shh!

FATTY (*offstage*). Oh yeah. Sorry, sorry.

ANDREY. I love watching shows about animals or historical shows, or something about travel. But my wife loves dramas. I was half-listening to a conversation between the characters in the show in the background. A cop asked a woman, “Lady, is everything all right?” “Yeah, I’m fine.” But she was all bruised up and bloody...and this creepy music played, as if someone’s sawing something or someone, I don’t know. I turned away from the dishes. The cop kept pestering her. “What’s your name?” She said, “I don’t remember.”

FATTY (*offstage*). Just like you, eh?

ANDREY. Damn it, Lyosha!

FATTY (*offstage*). I’ll be quiet.

ANDREY. Then he asked for her documents, of course. He was high ranking, all polite, educated, with a German shepherd. A German shepherd, of course. Its name was Rex. What else would you call a German shepherd? And the woman didn’t have any documents. And then he looked at her with sadness in his eyes and said, and I remember this by heart: “Since you don’t remember anything, Rex and I will take care of you.” And that, honestly, didn’t sound very reassuring. As if he and Rex were going to rape her in the nearby bushes. But my wife seemed fascinated with that scene and put a piece of candy in her mouth without even removing the wrapper. And I thought: this is rad! No memory, no problem!

And then I forgot about it, we went about our lives as usual, as everyone does. One day I came home from work, my wife was sitting on the bed, and with some tool of torture she was clipping her damn nails. Her toenails, mind you, I think seeing her clip the nails on her hands wouldn’t have been so repulsive. She didn’t even say hello to me, just blurted out “wash the dishes” instead. And at that moment...

My wife was always putting me down. She worked as a pharmacist and was terribly proud that she is so “competent.” I juggled two jobs. In the morning I worked, you couldn't even call it an office, at a photo booth and took pictures for documents. Salary was shit, girls would come and do their make up for half an hour, then you'd photograph them once, twice, three times. “No, I'm not pretty enough!” And the second job was at a parking lot at night. It was actually my wife who made me take that second job, she saw an ad and started nagging me, “Go for it, come on.” She even took my phone and saved their number in my contacts. How do you like that?

And we've also got problems with our son. He's not right. They diagnosed him with autism. I'm embarrassed of Vitya, to be honest. You can't even go to the playground cause they see that he's different. It would become silent as soon as we arrived. As if we're infectious. I used to say hi to all the moms there at first. But they never replied. So I'd stopped; it felt like I was being robbed of something. And my wife wanted to have another kid, a healthy one. For what? Healthy people also suffer. This guy, Sergey, who graduated from my high school with honors is now a bum, he's all tatted up and chasing pigeons around the yard; he doesn't want anything more out of life. (*Catches his breath*) The school refused to enroll our son. We had to home school him. My wife was all like “Go do math homework with him.” And I wasn't getting paid for figuring out how long it takes a fucking pedestrian to get from point A to point B. Then I got stomachaches cause I was drinking gallons of instant coffee from plastic cups with gobs of sugar so that I wouldn't pass out at night. My wife and I had already not been having sex for at least four years at that point. I didn't feel like it. She tried to seduce me a couple of times, and I really wanted to tell her to just get dressed. Why would you sleep naked? It was really pissing me off that she slept naked. I sleep in pajamas, so why would she sleep naked? And the bed was so small. And there's a thirteen year old kid. And a cat. And we're all in the same room.

I waited until no one was home; the kid was at my mother in law's, and my wife went to a pharmacy. I didn't go to work, didn't call my boss. I just decided that I had had enough and that I wasn't going to sleep with that naked, alien person anymore. I took a good sized backpack that I kept on the balcony from my school days. Took some t-shirts, one pair of pants, one already on me, underpants, socks. A razor. I froze up. Forty two year old man had nothing to put in a backpack — it was almost empty. I grabbed some cash. I had nine thousand in an old Lermontov book, my stash. My wife never read anything so it was a perfect hiding place. I also took the book, I don't know why, it was my parents', I guess. I took a gas lighter that Yana, my first love, had given me. I went out into

the warm, humid May weather, headed for the park, and walked for probably an hour like an idiot. I got to the bus stop and saw my wife's friend Galya standing there, and thought that she'd see me with my backpack and that'd be it. So, I just fell into the bushes. I sat there, as if I had just killed someone. Waited probably an hour until she got on a bus, I felt such panic overwhelming me... I had no plan. I got on a trolleybus, stared at the floor the whole ride, got out at the train station, got a ticket for a suburban train to Youth Station. I liked the name. There were just people going to and from their country houses with flowers and mushrooms. I got off, wandered around the train station, found a hotel, and they didn't even ask for an ID. I hadn't taken any, anyway. On purpose. I paid. The room cost seven hundred rubles. The receptionist told me to check out at one. I went out for a walk, bought cigarettes, never having smoked in my life; I just wanted to. Then I realized that I still had my phone! I took the SIM card out and threw it away. I bought nice beer, chips, some expensive cheese with nuts, which I could never afford before. There was a TV in the hotel room. I laid down, snacked away on that crap, and watched a film. And it was so nice. I got up at noon and started to clean the room. Then I stopped. I had paid for it and didn't have to clean anything. "Relax, you're the master of your life." I took the backpack. Bought another train ticket and went to Semyonovo. Did the same thing. There were some dudes behind the train station, Tajiks, I think, selling SIM cards with no ID necessary. I bought one. Then I thought, why the hell did I buy it? I had no one to call. Got another room. Bought a whole cherry pie and champagne. It was awesome. Then I went somewhere else. I didn't find a hotel, so I slept in the train station with my backpack for a pillow. I decided to go to Siberia. I went all the way to Krasnoyarsk like this, slept wherever I could, and I was running out of money. I already looked homeless, with my face covered with stubble. I thought about getting a job, but that didn't go any further.

I was wondering why I hadn't run away before. Probably because of my mom. She passed away two years ago, tuberculosis. She was so proper, an accountant at a school. She always told me, "Take care of Natasha. Life's not easy, son. It's a cross you have to bear." She was really religious. I couldn't just disappear knowing that she'd be there pulling her hair out. I wanted her to think that I had grown up to be a good boy.

In short, by that time I had nothing with me, the phone was stolen. I bought a small manicure kit with the last of my money and very carefully cut off all the tags from my clothing in the bathroom of a McDonald's. I saw a library stamp in the Lermontov book. It was like a kick to the balls, the last thing that connected me to anything. And the stamp read Kamensk City Library. And I got mad at my dad, that bastard, he couldn't even buy me a nice book, he had to steal it from the library. That was how he treated my mom, too. There was a little chapel next to

the train station where I prayed and lit a candle. I told the priest that I needed to give away the book. He took it without questions and blessed me. If only he had known what he was blessing me to do. And that's all. I was probably subconsciously trying to draw attention. I got into an argument with an amputee that was begging for spare change. It didn't help. In short, I was wandering around the train station for the third day when some cop finally approached me. "Your documents, please." But I had no documents. "Let's go confirm your identity," he goes. And that's when the dialog from my wife's TV series popped into my mind. You remember nothing, Andrey. Even the fact that you are Andrey, you don't even remember that. I kept thinking that I would end up telling him everything. What does that even mean, "I don't remember"? His first reaction was "Are you pulling my leg, mister?" And I thought to myself: "Yes, I really am!" At first they put me in the slammer for three days. I don't know, maybe they thought I'd change my mind, so that I could get out of there. Then they called in doctors... *(Silence)* I know why that cop approached me. There was this fountain in the waiting hall of the station with this big, smooth ball. I already reeked at that point and was washing my hands in that fountain. Then my feet. The cop saw me. He didn't like it. But there was no "Do not wash your hands" sign.

In the hospital, even though they gave me pills that made me constantly want to piss and sleep, I decided not to remember anything. Because if I started to remember, they'd never leave me alone. So they took me to the psychoneurological internat, they couldn't let me marinate in the hospital forever. Marinate. Just like the name Marina, the psychologist they assigned to me. Marina took me to work outside the fence and showed me to the students like a zoo animal. It was even fun. Some sort of life at least, not like in here. I had even thought about sending my son to one of these places, but my wife hadn't let me. I have nothing to say here, she was right. *(Silence)*. Why are you so quiet, Lyoha?

Andrey hits the wall with his fist.

Lyoha! Damn it, Lyoha!

FATTY *(offstage)*. I'm getting up, I'm getting up. I'll make my bed.

ANDREY. What?

FATTY *(offstage)*. I dozed off, sorry, what happened next in the series?

ANDREY. I stopped watching it. I just saw the first episode.

FATTY (*offstage*). Look, do you remember that black suit you have?

ANDREY. Yeah, I got it from the university.

FATTY (*offstage*). I've got nothing to wear to the concert. I've just got a BITCH! robe. I can't sing about love in a robe. And record me with your phone when I'm singing. You've got a phone. Send the video to Vika.

The door to the room opens.

FEMALE VOICE (*offstage*). You're out! Not you, you!

FATTY (*offstage*). What about me?

FEMALE VOICE (*offstage*). You stay, keep thinking.

FATTY (*offstage*). BITCH!

18:24

Empty ward. Andrey is sitting on his bed and Vladislav Pavlovich is sitting opposite him on the next bed.

ANDREY. I've told you that I don't want to.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. You're just in the stage of denial.

ANDREY. I like it here without my wife. I've got Valya as my wife here.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. I can see how much you like having Valya as your wife.

ANDREY. One can see any number of things on a juice box. And how would I know if that's not just another experiment?

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Why can't you understand that it's good news? Someone cares about you. Half of the people here are abandoned, like old furniture. They would be celebrating right now if they got the same news.

ANDREY. Well, let them celebrate away.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Look, I'm going to be straight with you. You've got no ID, no rights. You're living on our money here. If you see her, you'll remember. If you remember, you'll get better. If you get better, you won't take up a bed here. I've brought you a photo.

Moses turns around.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. I'll leave it here. And by the way, you didn't live on Chkalov street, but Mechanicov.

The chief physician lays the photo on the stand and leaves. Andrey sits on his bed for a long time, then takes the photo and looks at it.

ANDREY. I wouldn't have chosen her as my wife.

11.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Someone's invisible hand turns on the disgustingly blue light. Moses opens his eyes, squints with pain, covers his face with his hand. The commotion starts: the others get their bedsprings squeaking, make guttural noises, yawn.

12:02

Auditorium. The walls are decorated with paper flowers and balloons. The banner that frames the stage reads "Happy Women's Day!" Vishnev and Kiryakova get on stage. Cheap romantic music plays.

KIRYAKOVA. Let's begin our celebratory concert! We would like to wish you all a happy spring holiday of beauty and love!

VISHNEV. Hello, our cute, gorgeous, gentle, beloved women.

KIRYAKOVA. We wish you joy, love, and romance.

VISHNEV. And beauty, perfection, and peace.

KIRYAKOVA. On such a beautiful day of celebration I cannot avoid reciting poetry.

When men sing of love,
 We can't take our eyes off.
 Our hearts open up to romance
 When men sing of love and dance.

VISHNEV. Please welcome Alexey Silin on stage, for all you cute ladies.

Fatty gets on the stage. He's in a suit. The pop-song plays. Fatty moves his hands beautifully, first catching an invisible bird in his fist, then presses the fist to his chest and sings, although his singing is not audible over the record. Andrey records Fatty's performance on his telephone.

Bombs of love exploding just right in my head
 I won't hurt you baby, though you're making me mad
 My cigarette goes out like a sunset
 Summer ends and I'm a little bit sad
 I'll leave you and come back for a hundred times
 When you kiss me, I'm ready for any crime

Most beloved beloved of mine!
 I love you in any case
 Meteorites will fall tonight
 And the sun will change its place
 Most beloved beloved of mine!
 Our destiny is purled
 Hold me tight like our first time
 We'll take over the world

Everyone claps for Fatty. He smiles, he's happy.

12.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Someone's invisible hand turns on the disgustingly blue light. Moses opens his eyes, squints with pain, covers his face with his hand.

11:40

The ward. Andrey is sitting on a bed. On the other end sit the chief physician, orderlies, a policeman, and a plump forty year old woman.

NATASHA. Well, he's put on weight here, and I thought he would get thinner. I've brought some oranges.

ANDREY. I don't like oranges.

NATASHA. I know.

POLICEMAN. Is this definitely him?

NATASHA. It is. It is.

POLICEMAN. Just like in TV show. *(to Andrey and Natasha)* You two are supposed to cry now.

Andrey laughs.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. He's nervous..

POLICEMAN. I've got to tell my wife, she won't believe it.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. So, should we discharge him?

ANDREY. *(to Natasha)* Why are you sitting on my bed?

NATASHA. Andrey! Jesus! *(to the chief physician)* What's wrong with him?

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Autobiographical amnesia, stress.

NATASHA. What have I done to deserve this?

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Don't feel bad, he'll remember in due time.

NATASHA. Vitya has really missed you. Terribly. He always asks, "Where's dad? Where's dad?"

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Be careful with the new information.

NATASHA. Oh yeah? Okay. *(Reaches out to the nightstand, looks at her hand)*
Nice and clean here.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Well, are you getting used to it, Andrey?

Andrey is silent. Everyone is silent.

NATASHA. My allergies were acting up. I had to put down the cat.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Don't stress him!

ANDREY. You're a murderer!

Chief physician smiles.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. I see it in your eyes, you remember.

ANDREY. You're handing me over to a murderer?

NATASHA. Andrey, what are you talking about?

ANDREY. I'm not going anywhere.

CHIEF PHYSICIAN. Well, we'll see.

13.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Someone's invisible hand turns on the disgustingly blue light.

10:15

A white room. Andrey is in an armchair, and in front of him is a wall. His chest and fingers are tied up with black straps with wires coming out of them. At a right angle to him, a man in a blue shirt is sitting behind a table, watching a monitor.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Read the number of the card and what's written on it.

ANDREY. Card number four. "Forty-five M. Inanis." There's a circle drawn on it.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Look at the card again. Remember its contents. Now repeat what's on it.

ANDREY. "Inanis." And a circle.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Put the card back in the box. Now I'm going to ask you some questions and you'll answer them truthfully. Are the walls of this room pink?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Are they blue?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Green?

ANDREY. Yes.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. White?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Take out every card. Read what's written and call out the geometric shapes.

ANDREY. "Two hundred and twenty G. Risus." A square. "Thirty-two K. Pecunia." Triangle. "Forty-five M. Inanis." Circle.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Tell me the contents of the card that you are seeing for the second time.

ANDREY. "Forty-five M. Inanis." Circle.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Now I'm going to ask a question about your name. When you hear the example with your name, you must lie. To all the other options you must tell the truth. Do you understand?

ANDREY. Yes.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Have you answered truthfully?

ANDREY. Yes, dammit!

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is your name Konstantin?

ANDREY. Yes, I mean, no. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is your name Stanislav?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is your name Moses?

ANDREY. Yes.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is your name Andrey?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. I told you to lie when your own name is said.

ANDREY. And what did I do?

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. And to answer the truth to the other options.

ANDREY. So...

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. You have four choices for answers, one of them is correct. And you must lie when you hear it, meaning you have to say "no." And for others you have to tell the truth, which is also "no." You should have answered "no" four times, understand?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. I need to see how your body responds to lying. Let's try a different question. Are you ready?

ANDREY. I don't know.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. I'll ask a different question. You must lie when you hear me asking a question about the correct statement. And you must answer truthfully to other questions. Did your mother die from sinusitis?

ANDREY. You can't die from that.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Answer the question.

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Did your mother die from a heart attack?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Did your mother die from cirrhosis?

ANDREY. Do you think my mother was an alcoholic? No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Did your mother die from tuberculosis?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Did your mother die as the result of a car accident?

ANDREY. No. I don't remember how she died. Has she died?

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. According to the questions, yes. All right, I'm going to ask you about something you definitely remember. Were you treated in Yekaterinburg after you had lost your memory?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Were you treated in Petrozavodsk?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Were you treated in Krasnoyarsk?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Were you treated in Novosibirsk?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Good. Now you will only answer the truth. To all the questions. Do you understand?

ANDREY. Yes. And what if I don't know the answer?

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Then answer "no."

ANDREY. Can't I answer "I don't know?"

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. I don't know. (*Pause*). No, you can't. You're confusing me. No, you can't. Was your wife's maiden name Kolesnikova?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Was your wife's maiden name Schoolgirl?

ANDREY. Haha. What a funny name. Schoolgirl? Are you serious? No, I hope not.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Was your wife's maiden name Kompantseva?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Was your wife's maiden name Drake?

ANDREY. What? Drake? What kind of names are you choosing?

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Answer the question.

ANDREY. No. Not Drake, or Snake, or Rake. I don't even remember having a wife.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Your heart rate is up though.

ANDREY. I drank some coffee. My heart always races when I drink coffee.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is your godson's name Huey?

ANDREY. Gluey. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is your godson's name Dewie?

ANDREY. No.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is your godson's name...

ANDREY. Let me guess... Louie?

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is your godson's name Vladimir?

ANDREY. Ah, I get it. It's some kind of game. Find the odd one out. Vladimir is the one that doesn't fit.

POLYGRAPH EXAMINER. Is that a “yes” or a “no”?

ANDREY. No you. Tell comrade Drake that she could think up better questions. And that I've made it all up...

Andrey takes the wires off and stands up.

ANDREY. Where the fuck is the goddamn door?

14.

6:30

Pitch darkness. Andrey turns on the light in the kitchen, takes the remote, turns on the TV and immediately reduces the volume to a minimum. Andrey puts on pink gloves, takes a rag, wipes off the pine cone print oilcloth, throws the rag in the sink, opens the tap, and washes dishes. The TV shows military actions, which is interrupted by the swearing of heavily gesticulating people in suits.

NATASHA (*offstage*). I'm off. Water the plant, but not too much.

ANDREY. What plant?

NATASHA (*offstage*). What do you mean, what plant? We've only got one — the money plant.

ANDREY. I see.

NATASHA (*offstage*). He sees. (*Loudly*). Until you get a job you'll have to water the money plant.

ANDREY. Be quiet, you'll wake the kid up. Do you really believe in that crap?

NATASHA (*offstage*). Listen, don't be such a skeptic. The utility bill is on the mirror in the hallway, the money too, don't forget to go to bank. Got it?

ANDREY. Got it.

NATASHA (*offstage*). And cook for Vitya something that looks like a normal meal.

ANDREY. Yeah, yeah, a normal meal.

NATASHA (*offstage*). I'm off.

The door slams. Andrey puts a mug on the tray and takes the gloves off. He pours some water out of the water filter and drinks. He turns off the light but leaves the TV on. He goes to the room where Vitya is sleeping. Andrey sits down on the edge of the bed and looks at the sleeping Vitya, then at the bookshelf, then back at Vitya. He gets up, and takes a book from the bookshelf, it reads M. Lermontov. He quietly goes to the front door. He puts the book down by the door, returns and carefully kisses Vitya's forehead. He leaves. Only the ticking of the clock and agitated voices from the TV can be heard.

THE END