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MAXIM TITOVETS

The Conformist

CITY LIFE SCENES IN FOUR ACTS



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**The Conformist. City
life scenes in four acts**

«Издательские решения»

Titovets M.

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«В ежедневной суете мы не замечаем, как стареют наши родители. К сожалению, мы не замечаем, как меняются самые близкие нам люди, не видим и не слышим друг друга. И только в минуты горести начинаем обращать друг на друга внимание и прислушиваться к словам родных». Максим Титовец, 2017. Книга содержит нецензурную брань.

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Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| THE CONFORMIST | 6 |
| ACT 1 | 7 |
| ACT 2 | 17 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 22 |

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City life scenes in four acts

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TRANSLATED BY OLGA SAVCHUK

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Sergey Lebedev, a professor, a neuro surgeon, 65.

Victoria Pavlovna, his wife, an owner of an art gallery, 62.

Aglaya, his eldest daughter, art expert, 28.

Inna, his younger daughter, 23.

Nikolay Orlov, an aspiring painter, 25.

Olga Orlova, his mother, a high-level public official at the ministry of education, 50.

Leonid Gromov, a retired general, a businessman, 63.

Mitya Gromov, his son, a man of pleasure, 25.

Liliya Vasilievna, Mitya's mother, general Gromov's wife, 54.

Alexander Veselov, the director of the art gallery, 30.

Katya, Inna's friend, 23.

Domeniko Longhi, a professor of painting.

Slepyen, a facilitator, Boss's assistant.

Exhibition guests, journalists, pub visitors and others.

Bright new life.

The action takes place in Russia at the present time. Seventeen months pass after Act 4.

ACT 1

Scene 1

Sunday evening. Professor Lebedev's house. There's a big living room with a door to a terrace. The window is closed. The light is dim.

Lebedev is sitting on a wooden chair at a huge desk, he's taking some items and children's paintings from its drawers, looking at them, touching them. Victoria Pavlovna is sitting in the armchair near the unlit fireplace with a book, on her lap we see a cat.

Lebedev. My treasures' treasures. (*Pensively*) Time passes by really fast. (*Takes off his glasses, locks them in a drawer*)

Is everything in the modern world really organized in such a way as to make every person think only about their pocket and how to line them better, how to fix their offsprings better... What about mission, duty for the society, love, after all? Could it happen to be important for anybody?

Victoria Pavlovna. These things don't exclude each other if one just knows the limits. But you'll always be romantic, Sergey.

Lebedev. This quality is what helped me take you away from Leonid Gromov thirty years ago, Victoria.

Victoria Pavlovna. A boaster, too. (*Smiling*) Right, I haven't made a general's wife.

Lebedev. But you have made the best wife and mother in the world. (*He stands up and hugs his wife*)

Victoria Pavlovna. This Wednesday will be the fifth anniversary of Alexey's death, it's the fourteenth of July, his name day. It was raining. I thought I wouldn't endure that. You were at a conference in Berlin, Aglaya went down with a pneumonia the day before... Everything was like in a fog and I felt almost dead. I worried most about Inna, she worshipped her older brother and I was afraid she would commit suicide, our little rebel. It was then, after the news of his death that she refused to continue her studies in Moscow and came back.

The cat jumps off her lap. Lebedev straightens up.

But now, five years later, I speak of it calmly, the girls have got over it and your insomnia has gone. I remember his funeral, a lot of people came to the cemetery, there was a military orchestra and they shot... anyway, the weather was dull, windy and everybody soon left.

Lebedev. This is a painful memory!

The door opens, Inna runs in, laughing, she's holding a paper envelope in her hand. She is followed by Aglaya.

Inna. You've made it so dark in here! (*Turns on the light*) Here! (*gives the envelope to Victoria Pavlovna*).

Aglaya. Calm her down at last! She's set everybody at edge! (*Laughs*)

Inna. I've got the first prize at the theatre contest!

Lebedev. Well done!

Aglaya. A diploma and twenty thousand roubles. (*Sceptically*).

The doorbell rings.

Inna. That must be Katya! I'll answer it. (*Goes off, singing*)

Pause.

Victoria Pavlovna. This could make a cat laugh. (*Throws the envelope on the table angrily*). I still can't understand how she could refuse studying at Moscow State University and join this farce!

Egor, the Olshanskies' son, was even a worse pupil than her, but he also was admitted to the University. He graduated, moved to Canada, started his IT company.

Lebedev. What if applied math isn't really her vocation?

Victoria Pavlovna. Don't make excuses for her! Inna just showed her character again. She went to the theatre institute – and you didn't forbid her! Who is she now? An actress, for God's sake! With no money, no decent education, she's got only fun on her mind.

Aglaya. It's been five years and you're still arguing.

Enter Inna and Veselov with a bunch of flowers, he hands it to Victoria Pavlovna.

Veselov. Victoria Pavlovna! This is from Leonid Fyodorovich Gromov with the best wishes. The deal's on Wednesday.

Aglaya. What about the expert's resolution?

Veselov. I emailed you a copy. Hello, Sergey Ivanovich!

Lebedev. Hello, Sasha! (*He shakes Veselov's hand, then leaves the room.*)

Veselov and Aglaya sit down at the table. Victoria Pavlovna puts the flowers into a vase. Inna sets the table for tea.

Victoria Pavlovna. How did it go?

Veselov. Wonderfully! Gromov's in. He's looking forward to adding to his collection. Apart from the deal itself he's willing to buy six modern painting for his villa in Spain.

Victoria Pavlovna. What else?

Veselov. Everything's ready for the exhibition. We're expecting the governor and a Chinese delegation at the opening ceremony. There will be a few representatives from the city council, too, then the media, the TV, the sponsors. Everything goes as it was agreed.

In addition to the main exhibition, the third hall will feature works by young painters (*to Inna*) including four paintings by Nikolay Orlov.

Inna. You're great! (*hugs Veselov*) Orlov won't let you down.

Veselov. Congratulations on winning the contest. I owe you a bottle (*shakes Inna's hand*)

Aglaya. Veselov, I've never thought you drink.

Veselov. I'm drunk with love, Aglaya Sergeevna!

The doorbell rings.

Inna. Veselov's in love! That's a surprise! (*goes off*)

Victoria Pavlovna. What about the young Gromov, will he come?

Veselov. Yes. He's back. He promised to come here today. Switzerland has done him good.

Victoria Pavlovna. That's good news.

Aglaya. Mitya Gromov is a simpleton, though still a good match for Inna. We were sorry that their engagement was canceled because of his overdose in February. But now he's returned and things seem to be improving.

Victoria Pavlovna. Seem to be. Although I don't like it that during the unexpected parting with Mitya Inna became so close with his school friend Nikolay Orlov.

Yes, Orlov's mother holds a good position in the Ministry of Education and an additional «lever» at the establishment won't be too bad. But I see that Nikolay lacks ambition and interest in his career. How else can one explain that, having got a degree in international affairs at the Ministry Academy, he still dabs in painting?

Veselov. Experts say he's got potential. And his father was a decent landscape painter.

Victoria Pavlovna. You said it – he was! But he got to drinking and died. This is bad heritage.

Aglaya. Such painters' problem is that their works grow in price only after their death – in a lucky case.

Victoria Pavlovna. This won't suit me and Inna!

Take Mitya. The young Gromov is not the brightest one. His father though! He's got real power. And the main thing, he's made a fortune that will help a few generations prosper for years.

Lebedev, Katya, Orlov, Inna, Mitya Gromov enter noisily and cheerfully. Inna and Mitya are holding hands.

Lebedev. We have guests, darling.

Aglaya. Speak of the devil and there he is.

Everybody greets each other.

Katya. Hello!

Orlov. Good evening! (He bows to Victoria Pavlovna, shakes hands with Aglaya).

Mitya. I missed you so much. Hello, Victoria Pavlovna, Aglaya!

Victoria Pavlovna. Hello, Mitya, I'm glad to see you! Please do come in, everyone. Girls, lay the table. We'll drink tea on the terrace.

Inna. We must celebrate the meeting! Veselov, where's the bottle you promised? (*Laughs*).

Mitya. Only tea for me. I don't drink alcohol.

Veselov. (*to Aglaya*) The Swiss clinic has obviously done him good: no alcohol, no drugs.

Aglaya. Just how long will it last?

Everybody goes to the terrace. Orlov lingers.

Inna. Nikolay, come in, we're going to have tea.

Orlov. Thank you, Inna. I'll join you soon, I need to make a call first.

Inna leaves, Orlov stays in the living room alone. He takes out his phone.

Olga Vladimirovna (*on the phone*). Yes, Nikolay.

Orlov. Hello, mum. Is it convenient?

Olga Vladimirovna, I'm listening to you, dear.

Orlov. My paintings have got approved for the exhibition at Victoria Lebedeva's gallery.

Olga Vladimirovna. (*coldly*) Congratulations.

Orlov. I wanted to ask you of a favour. It's very important for me.

Domenico Longhi, a professor of painting, is arriving here on Wednesday for the exhibition opening. I know you are old acquaintances. It would be great if he reviewed my works and published his review in his journal, and if he also gave an interview to our journalists. I'm confident in my works. You won't be embarrassed, mum.

Pause.

Olga Vladimirovna. You know how much I love you, Nikolay. That's exactly why I'll tell you something you won't like: if you want to achieve something in this life, never expect help from friends or relatives. Only rely on yourself.

Orlov. All right. Thank you, mum. See you. (*Hangs up, sits wondering for a while, then goes to the terrace to his friends*).

Inna (*meets him*) Nikolay, join us at the table!

Orlov. Only rely on yourself.

Inna. Pardon?

Orlov. It's all right, Inna. Life is beautiful. Come on, show me your diploma, it calls for celebration. (*Laughs*)

Veselov. My friends, champagne!!! (*He opens the bottle, pours into glasses*)

Inna, Katya. Hooray!

Aglaya. I'm driving, so I'll have tea. Do we have a cake?

Lebedev. Has anyone seen my glasses?

Mitya (*To Victoria Pavlovna and Katya*) I haven't had a drink in five months and I'm not even tempted!

Victoria Pavlovna. Well done, Mitya! We've been waiting for you to come back and are happy to see you.

Lebedev. Well my dear children and guests, welcome to our common holiday! Mr Gromov, welcome back and keep your good health! Miss Lebedeva, congratulations upon your winning and our wishes to play the main role in your play! Mr Orlov, here's to your talent and exhibition debut, let good luck and success be with you! My dear Victoria Pavlovna, my angel, we have wonderful children and let love and wealth always stay at our house. Hooray!

Everybody. Hooray! (*Glasses clinking, smiles, good humour and laughter*).

Veselov. Yesterday I got a new issue of a magazine with an article by professor Domenico Longhi. He writes about our gallery and about visiting the exhibition on Wednesday. Let's meet our guest first-class. Mr Lebedev, you know Italian better than the others here, would you read the article to us?

Lebedev. I would! Has anybody seen my glasses? I can't find them.

Inna. Have you looked everywhere?

Lebedev. I have. I even looked under the sofa.

Inna. When will you stop losing them? (*Laughs*) You must have been rummaging in the treasure box again. (*Goes off*)

Aglaya. (*to Orlov and Katya*) Inna and dad have a secret place in the house – it's the top drawer of the desk in the living room, they call it «treasure box». They keep our childhood drawings and crafts there.

Inna (*returns*). Here, take it, daddy-daydreamer.

LEbedev. Thank you, sweetheart. (*Opens the journal, pretends to be reading aloud with a clever face.*

If you believe in what you're doing,

You'll see what you really can.

You're strong and you will win.

Don't stop!

You're the strongest.

Just hold on and you'll win.

Aglaya. I don't think it's an article by Domenico Longhi, but the song by Adriano Celentano. That's a funny little fellow who calls himself a professor. (*Laughs*)

We hear the song La pigiatura by Adriano Celentano.

Scene 2

Lebedev's house. The same room. Inna and Mitya are alone.

Inna. You haven't called.

Mitya. It all happened so quickly. When I came to my senses, for a few days the doctors didn't let me use the phone. But I didn't call for another reason... I was embarrassed that I put you all in such trouble, especially you.

He goes to Inna, takes her hands and wants to kiss them. Inna backs off and sits into the chair. Mitya comes to the window and opens it. A clock strikes somewhere In the house.

Inna. Today, when you came, I was happy. I wanted to tell you about all the things that happened here in spring... about the theatre, the exhibition... about how I missed you... but now I feel as if something has burst inside.

Mitya. I often thought of you in the clinic. I couldn't remember what I wanted to tell you that day. And I still can't. Yesterday Veselov told me about you prize at the theatre contest. Now you'll finally get a leading role. This is perfect!

Inna. I don't feel like this is so important. (*We can hear the sound of a torn string*). ...I think I've fallen in love.

Mitya looks at her in silence, then sits on a chair.

Inna. Mitya...

Silence.

Mitya. I respect your choice.

Inna. I'm not indifferent to you.

Mitya. They say, people who survived clinical death have sharper perception of everything around them. I saw how you were looking at each other. And I understood everything at once.

Inna. I don't know how it happened. And I'm supposed to be feel guilty about it, but...

Mitya. Inna! (*Interrupts*) You have nothing to blame yourself for. I still have the same attitude to you.

Inna rises abruptly, comes up to him and hugs tight, clinging to his cheek. Mitya holds her around her shoulders.

Come Aglaya and Lebedev.

Lebedev. Here are our lovey-doves.

Mitya. I've stayed too late, I should go. Thank you for your hospitality.

Inna. I'll see you to the door.

Aglaya. Good-bye, Mitya! We were happy to see you, do come and visit us. Send our love to Lilia Vasilievna.

Lebedev. See you soon, Mr Gromov.

Mitya and Inna leave.

Lebedev. She's grown up so fast, our little rebel.

Aglaya. She's always been your favourite. Alexey adored her as well. This Wednesday is the anniversary of his death. Time flies by.

Silence.

Alexey and I were born a year apart and I always perceived him as my older brother. I remember our last meeting, just a week before he died in a crash during a trial flight. It wasn't the best time in my life, I had just split apart with Frolov after I had learned he had been cheating on me.

I think I was crying and Alexey was comforting me, as he always would. I still remember his words:

«Don't ask me where to find a decent and rich husband...

A lot of girls still believe with their whole heart that a pretty face will suffice to claim all treasures in this life. But they are wrong. Mature people are interested in a relationship between two personalities rather than exchanging money for sex.

If you don't see a decent man near yourself, chances are you don't have the qualities necessary to attract him, and you are moving on different orbits.

Then you should ask yourself: what are you made of? How clever are you? How educated? How interesting is your life? How successful are you at work? How much do you earn, after all? And judging upon the answers you should either improve yourself or lower your demand».

Lebedev. Alexey loved you and Inna a lot. Your mother and me miss him so much.

Victoria Pavlovna and Inna come in.

Victoria Pavlovna. Darling, the weather is wonderful today, let's go around the garden before bedtime.

Lebedev. I'd love to, dear.

Victoria Pavlovna. Aglaya, will you stay overnight? I could make you a bed in your study or in the guest bedroom.

Aglaya. No, mum, thank you, I'll go home. Tomorrow's Monday, I have a lot of things to do.

Victoria Pavlovna. Well, see you, then. Good night, Inna.

Lebedev. See you tomorrow, my sweethearts. (*Kisses his daughters*).

Inna. Good night.

Aglaya. Mum and dad, I love you.

Victoria Pavlovna and Lebedev go off.

Inna. Mitya has gone.

Aglaya. Aren't you happy to see him?

Inna. I've been waiting for him for a long time, but when I say him today, I suddenly understood I had been afraid of his return at the same time.

Aglaya. That's strange news! (*Pensively*) The parents were so happy to hear about your engagement last winter! Veselov said Mitya gave up drugs. The senior Gromov was generous to treat him. It seems the treatment in Switzerland has really done him good.

Inna. They say there are no ex-addicts. But this is not what's worrying me.

Aglaya, sister, you are ever so sensible and you've never lied to me. Just look at us- what kind of a husband and wife are we? My relationship with Mitya is nothing more than gratifying our mother and his father's wish. Mother dreams of settling me with some rich heir. Mitya's father hopes that his silver spoon will become steady and start doing business once he marries. But those are only their dreams and wishes, and nobody's asked us!

Aglaya. Inna, my dear! Our parents mean well. I'm not saying you are wrong. Certainly, love and feelings are still in force, but one can't underestimate the importance of choosing sensibly.

Inna. Choosing sensibly... a sensible choice... a convenience marriage. Whatever you call it, it's not me.

I don't want to be a rich heir's wife. I don't need a pushover for a husband, afraid of holding reins of his own life. I want to be a Muse! Men seek inspiration... I want him to be feel good with me. I want the relationship with this man to be the main project of my life. I want to invest effort, time and energy into my man, so that he would go to conquer the world and achieve whatever he wanted!

Aglaya. Alexey once said we couldn't have expectations regarding something we don't control. I didn't pay much attention then...

We all had a perfect picture of your ideal future ready in our heads. We expected your union with Gromov to bring some income, but obviously brother didn't call you a rebel without a reason. Really, we can't have any expectation from something we don't control.

Scene 3

The office at Victoria Lebedeva's gallery which belongs to Veselov. It's well-furnished and has a door to a balcony.

Veselov is in his arm-chair. Nikolay and Katya are drinking and playing fool: Katya is playing The Flea Waltz on a small keyboard, Nikolay Orlov is miming a phone conversation.

Katya. Enough! (*stops playing, pours more alcohol from the bottle, takes her glass and hands the second one to Orlov*) Where did we stop?

Orlov (*paces the office*) I love my haters and enemies: they motivate me with their negative energy. When I feel low and want to cry and roll on the floor in a throw of despair... what do I think about?

Veselov. Really, what?

Orlov. I remember how many people will be happy if I fall. «Yes, Orlov's lost it!» I tell them in my mind: «Sod off, you bunch of losers!».

I get up and keep on. It's easier for me to do a lot of things in defiance, not in the name of something. I have done my best deeds when I was depressed, when I had problems, when I was disappointed and nothing seemed to go right!

When I'm happy and satisfied I have no motivation to go ahead. A diamond isn't made lying on a sofa, it needs a lot of pressure. That's why I thank the ill-wishers that stand in my way, I give them my biggest smile which you can read as «To hell with you, bitch!» (*He throws the rest of the drink from his glass into the face of an imaginary opponent*)

Veselov. You're a real terrorist! (*Laughs*)

Orlov. I'm rather a conformer. I've learnt to survive in the modern world. I've adapted. Unlike my father, I've got accustomed. I've made my choice and I'm ready to be responsible for it.

Now I'll feel okay in any regime, be it capitalism, communism or even Queen Catherine. I've even started going to church... It's fashionable now. By the way, I met the governor there, all cats are grey.

Everyone only cares about their belly, willing to stuff it fuller, to snatch a better share, and settle one's children comfy and nice, as if it were our mission to gourmandize and grow capital.

Just look who's at the wheel now! Grandchildren of those who managed to snatch a bite.

I'm not the hero of my time, but its product.

If my environment is criminal, then my obedience to it becomes a crime, too. That's the price of conformism.

Silence

Katya. I split up with Nikita yesterday. Do you remember the cheerleaders you introduced us to a week ago? He cheated on me with one of them, the red-haired one. I think her name's Sveta.

Orlov. Congratulations, it was high time. (*Sits on a chair*)

Katya. Do you think so?

Orlov. We're old acquaintances, and I can see very well that you're tired of his cheating and binging.

Katya. At least he didn't use his fists.

Orlov. Katya! Why do you estimate yourself so low? You aren't stupid.

Katya. I'm afraid I'll always be single. I'm already twenty-three.

Veselov. Oh, the young today! Most girls only pay attention to a man's appearance, his money and his sweet words... All of this is rubbish! What really matters is how a man treats you, what he does for you and to what extent you can rely on him.

And if he's a good-looking douche, who behaves like a homeless cat – today he's here, tomorrow he has another girl, and the next day – yet another... Let him go to hell and make space for a normal adequate reliable guy!

Orlov. Amen.

Katya. And how do I recognise that adequate and reliable one? At first they all say the same. They're all generous and nice. One offers to move to Italy together, another one promises to divorce his wife... but no one proposes.

Veselov. If you can't choose one of two men, it means either is bad. Not in their own right, they could be wonderful people, but they don't suit you and you don't need them.

When you really are in love with a man, you don't think and don't choose. There's only him – the hero of your love. He's like a light in your life! He's your only purpose! And you think he's the best man in the world even if he's a complete loser, bastard or scoundrel. You are dizzy and you drop things. You are ready to run away with him anywhere, be it snow, heat, rain – you don't care...

That's why the sooner you stop choosing the earlier you can find a man who's your match.

Mitya comes in. Katya drops the glass.

Mitya. Guess why psychiatrists are so polite with their patients?

Veselov. So why?

Mitya. They know that their patients are not subject to criminal responsibility and consequently have nothing to lose.

Orlov laughs.

Katya. Mitya, I'm glad you are here. Why are you in such disorder? Where's Inna?

Mitya. We parted friends.

Orlov stands up and pours himself another drink.

Veselov. That's the news. Does Aglaya know? It might get alright.

Katya. Now we're fellows in misery. Nikita dumped me... let's drink. (*She hands Mitya a glass*).

Orlov. Everything happens for the best. Acorns were good till bread was found. Keep your chin up, Mitya!

Mitya. That's easy for you to say, Nikolay. You've always chosen what to do. I remember when your mother insisted on your training as a diplomat. You agreed to make her calm. But after the studies you refused the job. You paint pictures. But my father's a general. So I have to march all my life.

Orlov. Mitya, my dear fellow! My father was a talented alcoholic! And my mother worries I'll follow his example, but in vain. I loved my father and he's the best anti-model in my life. But I'll never become a poor drunken artist, because I have learnt to survive in this society and its harsh climate.

The success in life most often comes to people who are determined, able to make decisions and carry responsibility for them. It concerns both work and private life.

I can't help feeling amazed at such douches as you, who have never lifted a finger but keep moaning about how their life's bad, their little money and bad relationships with parents, their unhappy love.

But who's to blame? Parents? School? Government? School friends? Nobody's to blame but you. That's because you do nothing... just start, Mitya, and something will necessarily change.

Mitya. Do you love her?

Orlov. Who?

Mitya. Inna Lebedeva.

Orlov. I don't want to discuss it with you. Veselov, let's have a smoke.

Veselov and Orlov go out to the balcony. Orlov shuts the door firmly.

Veselov. I wasn't mistaken then. *(He lights a cigarette)*

Orlov. Pardon?

Veselov. I have noticed the way Inna has been looking at you lately.

Orlov. We keep it quiet about our relationships.

Veselov. Now I understand it: she received the first prize for a script of a one-woman show whose heroine dreams of being a muse for a talented artist...

Orlov. See, our relationship's already bringing its fruit.

Veselov. Do you love her?

Orlov. In a way, I do.

Her mother owns one of the largest art galleries in the country and can introduce me to some useful people in Europe, China and Americas, so I have an opportunity to make my business international shortly.

Veselov. Is your devotion to painting a disguise then?

Orlov. It's rather a tribute to my father and revenge to my mother for leaving him and making me sweat all my life, training to fulfill her far-reaching designs. Actually, her dream will soon come true, I'll be a rich and powerful man.

Veselov. Have you thought that Victoria Pavlovna might not be happy about your thwarting her daughter's wedding with Mitya Gromov whose father, by the way, is one of her best clients?

Orlov. It was Mitya who thwarted everything. He's to blame for his problems. I just happened to in the right place at the right time.

I have a way to reach Lebedeva, too: she loves her younger daughter a lot. And she knows perfectly well the position my beloved mamma has in the government.

Soon Victoria Pavlovna will realise that there's nothing good for Inna about that dope. When this happens, she'll hook onto my figure because I'll show the best of myself, letting everybody see clearly that I'm not going to be a poor unknown painter.

My mother's administrative power plus Victoria Lebedeva's money, connections and reputation will open the doors to all structures I'm interested in. That's my plan.

Veselov. That's a serious claim. *(Puts his cigarette out)*

Orlov. *(to himself)* I'd love to see your face when all Lebedeva's business is in my hands. Just wait and see.

Veselov. What about Mitya?

Orlov. Don't worry about him. Our romantic poet is in mixed feelings now and he'll soon find comfort on the first wench's bosom. Mitya is a douchebag. Eve now he gave up without a fight, letting me have Inna.

Veselov. Was Katya's breakup also your work?

Orlov. Knowing that horny ape's ways it was easy to organize the match-up. *(Laughs)*
Mitya and Katya are alone in Veselov's office.

Mitya. I'm at unrest. I'm like a person after a heart attack and whose limbs are numb.

Katya. Why should it happen so?

Mitya. I'm sick at heart.

Katya kisses Mitya, he kisses her back.

Mitya. Let's go away.

Katya. All right.

Mitya and Katya leave. Enter Veselov and Orlov.

Veselov. They took a French leave.

Orlov. I told you not to worry about Mitya Gromov.

Aglaya comes in. She's carrying a file and a phone.

Veselov. Aglaya, I'm glad to see you. Come in, please.

Aglaya. Hi! I won't be long. I dropped in my office. Somebody's lost a phone, it's out of charge. I found it near your door. *(Shows the phone).*

Veselov. That's Mitya's, I'll give it to him when he comes back.

Aglaya. I saw him and Katya downstairs, they told me you were here. Why were they in such hurry?

Veselov. I don't know. Would you like a drink?

Aglaya. No, thank you. I'm driving. I'd like a tea, though.

Veselov. And you, Nikolay?

Orlov. I think I've had enough today. I'll go home. I was glad to see you. Bye, Aglaya. Sasha, I'll phone you.

Aglaya. Bye.

Veselov. *(Pouring her tea)* Keep in touch!

Aglaya. I've known him for so long and I've never been able to get rid of the feeling that he's constantly concealing something.

Veselov. Never mind. To each their own.

Aglaya. Inna and Mitya split up. It seems, this time for good.

Veselov. I know. When he came Mitya was very depressed, but he tried not to show it. Victoria Pavlovna will be disappointed.

Aglaya. We've gone a bit too far with the senior Gromov, got stuck to our own interests. The children have made their choices.

Veselov. Time is the best judge.

Aglaya. You know, Sasha, Orlov isn't as simple as he tries to seem.

Veselov. What do you mean?

Aglaya. Mother was interested in buying some more venues for the restoration workshop in the new office building on the site of the former flour mill in the centre. I did some research. *(Nods at the file)*

One of the owners of the spot where the building is situated is Nikolay Orlov's company. He also controls four organizations which regularly get state agreements for reparation and maintenance

of buildings and premises of the education ministry. So, Nikolay seems to be using his family's administrative forces to develop his own business.

Veselov. One should expect this, considering who his mother is. From each as he can, to each as he wants, so to say. That's modern socialism at its most typical.

Aglaya. Yes, I agree, it's not new. Every household earns as they can. But why does he put on such acts, refusing the job in diplomacy, truly neglecting his mother's connections in the government and her money... A real nihilist! I feel he leads a double-game. It's his business anyway.

Veselov. Can he be involved in the recent prosecutor's investigation at the library?

Aglaya. That's unlikely. Our lawyer says the thread leads to Moscow – that's for sure. We've already activated the necessary people. Now this issue is solved.

Veselov. What do you recommend me to do in the future?

Aglaya. Take it under your control. You and mother should be alert in any law and financial issues when doing business with the city administration, new contracting parties and especially with the monitoring organizations. If they are gunning for us from there, this is where they'll fight from.

But you know, Sasha, this is not why I came. There's one more important question that I'd like to discuss with you.

She is interrupted by a phone ringing. Veselov picks up the phone.

Veselov. Yes... I'm in... He left not long ago. *(He pauses)* Nikolay Orlov has been killed!!!

Curtain falls.

ACT 2

Scene 4

General Gromov's countryhouse. It's Monday, early morning. Leonid Fyodorovich and his wife are in the living room.

Gromov. Where could he be?

Lilia Vasilievna. Take your medicine, Lyonya. *(She hands him some pills and a glass of water).*

Gromov. My heart's clenched. *(Drinks)* Dial him again.

Lilia Vasilievna. *(Calls on her mobile)* His phone's turned off.

Gromov. Bastard! I'll strangle him with my own hands!

Lilia Vasilievna. Will you stop your tantrum, sir?

Gromov. I'm sorry, darling. My nerves are frayed. Oh, Mitya, my Mitya...

Lilia Vasilievna. Could he get hold of a gun anywhere?

Gromov. Surganov says the shot was made from a gun. Now they're conducting a ballistics test and taking data from the CCTV. My honorary weapon is in the safe, I've checked it. But it's not a problem to find a piece in the city.

Lilia Vasilievna. Mitya couldn't have done it. They've been friends with Nikolay since the third school year. They went to a language camp in London together. You know this well.

Gromov. Did you speak to Olga Vladimirovna?

Lilia Vasilievna. Yes, she's shocked. She was on a business trip, but she came back at once and she's now with him in the hospital.

Gromov. And this should happen right before the governor elections! I've been contacted by the central executive party committee. Take my car and go see her right now. Talk to her. I think Olga understands how serious this is. Nobody needs this fuss. We'll deal with the media. Don't give any comments or interviews. I'll go to my office and make a few calls.

Gromov and Lilia Vasilievna leave.

Mitya and Katya come in. Both are cheerful.

Mitya. Mum, Dad, I'm home!

Katya. Don't shout.

Mitya. Are they asleep? It's still Monday morning and we haven't slept a wink! We'll wake them up. *(He pulls Katya to him and kisses her)*

Katya. You're crazy! *(She tries to release herself, laughing)*

Mitya. I'm as hungry as a hawk.

Katya. Me too.

Mitya. My head's splitting apart. I think I drank too much. What was that sour stuff you gave me?

Katya. It's Spanish dry wine.

Mitya. Ugh!

They take out sandwiches, sweets, biscuits, pour some juice.

Mitya. Now I know what I really want!

Katya. What do you want, Mitya?

Mitya. Orlov told the truth yesterday. I'm the one to blame for my problems. As a child I never dreamt of becoming a loser, drug addict and a parasite. But I turned one when I was twenty-five. I've always blamed father for not being able to choose my own way, but in fact I did nothing to find that way.

Of course, my ex-girlfriends are at fault for deserting me just because I cheated on them, drank booze and took drugs... I'm not to be blamed! *(He grins)*

Now things are going to be different. I know exactly what I want! I want to change myself and change my life. I will work. Can you imagine, I've always been afraid that father will stop giving me money and will cross me out of his will. That's such nonsense!

I am capable of providing for myself. I've graduated from a language gymnasium, so I can easily become a tutor or a translator from English and German. When Aglaya Lebedeva was presenting her thesis, I did translate a few of her articles into English.

I can start working for my father... but no, I'd be better on my own... There's a lot I can do!

I want to live so much! (*Excited*)

And you? Katya?

Will you stay with me? I need you so much!

Katya. I'll stay with you, Mitya.

Mitya. Remember this day! Today a new life was born in us! Let us live, Katya! Let us live!

Katya. Somebody's coming.

Gromov enters.

Mitya. Hello, dad! This is Katherine.

Katya. Hello, Leonid Fyodorovich.

Gromov. Hello, Katherine. (*Turns to Mitya, threatens him*) What have you done?

Mitya. What's happened?

Gromov. He dares to ask! Mother's been on edge all night long! Where have you been?

Mitya. I was relaxing. (*Cringing*)

Gromov. Why don't you answer calls?

Mitya. I've lost my phone somewhere. (*almost hopelessly*)

Gromov. Nikolay Orlov was shot yesterday. (*Katya groans*)

Gromov. There's an idea that it was you.

Mitya. (*He can't say a word, because he's amazed*).

Silence.

Gromov. Mind you! If you did it, I'm not going to cover up for you. This time you'll go to prison!

Mitya. Is Nikolay alive?

Gromov. At first there was a leak he was dead. The man who found him in the street, covered with blood, notified the security of the building. They called Victoria Lebedeva's office which he had left short before that, and then the police. Now Nikolay is in hospital. He has an exit wound in his shoulder, the bullet went through and through.

Mitya. It wasn't me.

Gromov. In the morning Colonel Surganov, my ex-colleague, called me. He knows the investigation officer in charge and he says the situation is really serious. The elections are pending... everything's been turned upside down, the affair is under personal control of the director of the Head Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Mitya. I didn't do it.

Katya. We were at my place together.

Gromov. I wish I believed that.

Mitya. Dad, don't you believe me?

Gromov. I don't know, Mitya.

Mitya. Do you believe me?!

Gromov. I couldn't believe you gave up studying in London. I could never believe you gambled your new car away. I couldn't imagine you were taking drugs until I saw you lying in the bathroom with foam at the mouth. How can I believe you now?

Mitya. You don't believe me, then.

Gromov. Listen to this. You'll go to the police right now and give testimony. Katherine, can you confirm he has been with you all this time?

Katya. Yes. We've been together. The whole night.

Mitya. I didn't do it! Father!

Gromov. Stay here and wait. I'll call our lawyer. (*Leaves*)

Katya. Listen to your father. He'll settle everything out.

Mitya. He doesn't believe me.

Katya. I believe you, Mitya! I love you! Everything will be fine!

Mitya. I am sorry, Katya. I must go. I'll do it myself. Please, go home now.

Katya. Mitya, no! Stay.

Mitya. I'll come to you soon. Thank you, sweetheart. (*Kisses Katya*) I love you very much. It seems, for the first time in my life I really love. (*Runs out*)

Scene 5

Tuesday. It's one day before the opening of the exhibition. Professor Lebedev's house. Inna and Katya are talking with animation.

Katya. I'll never forget the day when Mitya and I learnt that somebody had shot Nikolay Orlov. Are you angry at me, Inna?

Inna. Of course I'm not. I'm even happy that everything has become clear between us. Do you remember how we first met their company at a night club? Mitya started to court you first. I didn't even pay attention to him then.

Katya. You were so absorbed with your preparing for your graduation play at the institute that you didn't even notice me. Or did the director charm you that much? (*Both laugh*)

Inna. Yeah, yeah! You offered to go to the Dead Sea and I refused. Then I started dating Pavel from a basketball team, and Mitya went to London. We met again only half a year later when he came back and came to the avant garde exhibition in mum's gallery together with Leonid Fyodorovich. Then it all got started.

He had grave problems in relationships with his father because of his studying and in a week Mitya had to go back to London.

Look, he sent me his verse from England then (*takes out an envelope with a letter*):

I'll bring some sea foam to you

I gathered it to the sound of waves.

Like a silent smile of a thousand slaves,

I'll give you my dull ennui.

«Ah! That's another beggar poet'

We hear from an art abuser

«Two thousand years have brought

Completely out of common uses

All romance and love words.

«Ah! That's another stupid poet'

One should keep silent, no reply.

He has his point in certain way.

Then my first line, like a firefly,

Will come back after doomsday.

It sings of love, of motherland, of pain,

Of misery that tears the heart apart,

Of northern sea, that roars in vain,
And time that gives no second start.

I'll bring some sea foam to you
I gathered it to the sound of waves.
Like a silent smile of a thousand slaves,
I'll give you my dull ennui.

Katya. (*sobs, covers her face with her hands*)

Inna. Katya, what's wrong?

Katya. Leonid Fyodorovich isn't his enemy. On the opposite, he cares about him and has strong feelings for his son. I met him and Lilia Vasilievna. They love their son a lot.

Inna. I know, Katya! It's simply that Mitya's father has always been too strict to him... but it hasn't done much good. I almost went insane when I learnt that Nikolay had been shot. I remembered my brother's death. I won't survive another loss like that. Thanks God he's all right.

Victoria Pavlovna, Aglaya and Veselov come in.

Aglaya. Here you are, besties. Did you cry a lot yesterday? (*The girls smile back*)

Veselov. Mitya gave his testimony, today it has been confirmed, he's cleaned of all suspicions. Nikolay Orlov is safe, tomorrow he's going to be released from the hospital.

Victoria Pavlovna. But who shot him?

Aglaya. The investigators will find out. One thing is clear: the attacker knew the place which is not seen by cameras, and he was waiting there.

Victoria Pavlovna. Let God be with him! I can imagine what his mother, Olga Vladimirovna, has been through.

Veselov. Every cloud has its silver lining. The hype around this event has warmed up some interest to tomorrow's exhibition, there were reports on us on all national TV channels. The name of the young painter Nikolay Orlov has become known to the whole country! I suggest moving his works to the first hall, next to the modern art collection.

Victoria Pavlovna. I support your decision, Mr Veselov.

Veselov. I'm calling the gallery now and give all the necessary orders. Aglaya, do you mind my using your office?

Aglaya. Not at all, Sasha.

Victoria Pavlovna. What is that story of some important agreements with state structures that are being attributed to the Orlovs? I heard it on TV that he might have been shot because of them.

Aglaya. It's all legal. It is really his own business which he is keeping a secret. That is no wonder considering his mother. It's a matter of a few dozens of millions a year. The media nosed this out, put two and two together and made their conclusions.

Victoria Pavlovna. A talented man is talented in every respect! Inna, I'm so happy you and Nikolay are friends! I think I felt it from the start that you, lovey-doves, are hiding something from me. (*Smiling*) Surely, Mitya Gromov is a nice man, but, as it goes, love cannot be forced.

Inna. I haven't fallen in love with Nikolay for his money. (*Embarrassed*) Katya and I would better go to my room.

Inna and Katya leave.

Aglaya. It was hard for Inna. Nobody knew they were so close with Orlov. She almost fainted when she heard he was wounded.

Victoria Pavlovna. You tell me. Then this idiot, Mitya! I got stuck with him. Of course, I also thought he shot Nikolay because of jealousy. Who knows what this dope has in mind!

Aglaya. Weren't you dreaming of his marriage with Inna just a couple of days ago, mum?

Victoria Pavlovna. It's water under the bridge. Be it not for the senior Gromov, I'd never let him in my house again! Then there's this whore, Katya. I've never liked her. Her mother's the same, three children from three different men. She and the junior Gromov make a pair.

Aglaya. I'm very sad to hear those words from you. I don't want to argue, though, so let it be your personal opinion.

Victoria Pavlovna. Tell me what, my little wise head, if you are so clever, why aren't you still married? You are already twenty-eight, Aglaya!

Aglaya. Oh, mum, not that again, please.

Victoria Pavlovna. You need a man who you can rely on.

Aglaya. I know, I know, with an account in the cantonal bank of Zurich, a villa in Spain and so on and so forth.

Victoria Pavlovna. If you don't like Pyotr Alekseevich, then Innokentiy Yakovlevich likes you a lot, and he's got a chain of hotels in Bulgaria.

Aglaya. Mum, this Innokentiy Yakovlevich is sixty-seven years old.

Victoria Pavlovna. Which makes him even better for you.

Aglaya. (*to herself*) I can never stop being surprised at some mothers' desire to sell their daughters at a better price. This looks more like legalized prostitution.

Aglaya. (*to Victoria Pavlovna*) I'm afraid we won't match. I don't like men who propose to a successful and ambitious woman and then try to put her in a cage in their three-floor tower as if she were a rare trophy. What's the point of making a hen out of a bird of paradise when there are enough hens already?

Victoria Pavlovna. You'll never get married with those ideas.

Silence.

Aglaya. Mum, we need to talk seriously.

Victoria Pavlovna. I'm all ears, Aglaya.

Aglaya. Do you remember Irina, who was the maid at Denis Ivanov's wedding?

Victoria Pavlovna. Of course I do. She lives with her husband in Italy now.

Aglaya. That's right. So, two months before she met her husband she went to the seaside with her beloved cat. It was an old cat. There she met a girl who was the Cirque Du Soleil magician's assistant. They drank a little and started to chat. The girl asked, «Do you want me to do a trick?»

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