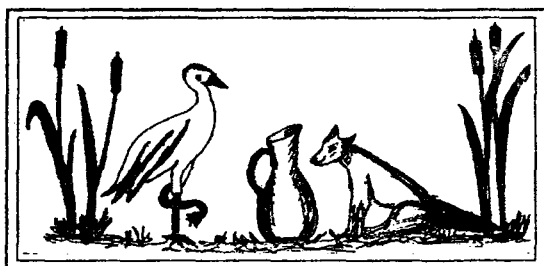


Mark Burno
Professor of Psychotherapy

Late Spring

3-act play
for the Realistic Psychotherapeutic Theatre



Moscow
Russian society of physicians-writers
2001

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

K h a s a n , 38 years, a painter

V a l e n t i n a , 40 years, his ex-wife, a schoolteacher of history

Y u l y a , 12 years, their daughter, a pupil of the 6th grade

O l g a , 36 years, Valentina's sister, an engineer

S e r g e y , 23 years, Valentina's cousin

V i k t o r , 37 years, a photographer, their neighbor

S v e t l a n a , 36 years, a shop assistant at the baker's

A l e x a n d e r , 36 years, Svetlana's brother and Khasan's friend,
a writer

V a d i m , 39 years, a businessman

All the events take place in a Moscow flat in spring of 1996.

ACT 1

K h a s a n ' s room. An old sofa, a few chairs. A writing table with books and a vase with brushes. Near the window there's an easel with an unfinished picture "Big May bug among yellow dandelions", made in water-colors and pastel. On the walls there are other K h a s a n ' s pictures: "Dragon-fly and forget-me-nots", "Nettles and burdocks", "Sparrow and icicles" etc. There's also an old little rug "The Fox and the Crane near a jug" (from the Russian folk tale). A sad K h a s a n is standing in front of the easel, brushes and palette in his hands. An angry V a l e n t i n a is standing near him. A sunny evening.

V a l e n t i n a . Khasan, we've let you in here...

K h a s a n . Valya, but this is my dear old room... In my childhood when I was ill I used to rap myself in a blanket and to watch the Fox and the Crane for a long time. The antique furniture of my late parents is now standing in your and your mother's high ceilinged rooms.

V a l e n t i n a . Oh, please, stop scolding us with your pitiful voice. Mum keeps reproaching me: "You should have studied in Tambov, not in Moscow. We would have been secure and well-off there now. And the flat wouldn't be smaller. Stepan who used to go out with me is now a banker. God, why did we met here 20 years ago and got married in such a rash way. Why do I

need this noisy Moscow! It's because of you that I have grown old before my time. And how many years you've robbed from my poor mother! Her health is so bad now, she is always short of breath.

K h a s a n . And my parents are dead. There's nobody to protect me from you.

V a l e n t i n a . When you're here, poor mother hides somewhere so as not to breathe the same air as you traitor, so as not to feel your presence. She has put the TV volume all the way up to protect herself from you bad energy. And don't you forget that your, our daughter is living with us. We must protect her from you, or you'll spoil her life as well.

K h a s a n . Oh, but what's my fault? Who have I deceived?

V a l e n t i n a . Yes, we know that you're ill, that you're trying to cure yourself with painting and pills, but you're also a hooligan.

A pause.

Khasan, there's one thing that needs to be settled. Quickly, otherwise Yulechka will hear and our Olga is here, there will be more guests coming too. You know the cemetery is full, you can't even buy a small piece of earth for a grave. So, you give us a place near your grandfather's and parents' graves. It will be convenient for Yulya to visit me and grandma, in return, we promise to treat you kindly, when you come here to see Yulya.

K h a s a n . Can't you let me live here in my room in return? I promise to be a quiet and obliging neighbor.

V a l e n t i n a . No, Khasan, you can come here for an hour or two once a month to see Yulya, and for the whole evening if we have guests.

K h a s a n . An hour or so is not enough for painting. And I need to see Yulya more often. Will I have to wait for her somewhere in the street again, hiding from you? My room is empty anyway, like a locked museum of childhood.

V a l e n t i n a . No, Khasan, there's no other way. Otherwise you'll be going to the kitchen, making tea, cooking for yourself. Mama won't be able to stand it, she'll die at once. Many

people think that you're still my husband. So, please, do as I tell you.

K h a s a n . I'll be eat in a cheap cafeteria near here, I'll move about without any noise.

V a l e n t i n a . No, you're an unpleasant stranger to us. You've made yourself dirty hanging around with lonely drunken old women who pity you. We know that they give you shelter in turns.

K h a s a n . But where was I to live all these 4 years after you turned me out of the house? When I'm in the unfamiliar atmosphere of their flats I can't create real inspired art, only common old rubbish to sell in the streets. And if I'm really a dirty bastard, a traitor how could you bring yourself to lie in a grave next to mine?

V a l e n t i n a . At least we won't see this pathetic mug of yours, we'll be looking at the sky. I advise you to think till the end of the evening or it will be too late. There may be changes in my life.

K h a s a n . Valya, why do you hate me? Why do you call me a traitor?

V a l e n t i n a . You're a painter, but you don't understand that porridge, bread and tea is not enough for a real woman. I'm far from being ugly, but I'm dressed worse than our geography teacher. Who is to provide his woman, his family with a full, interesting life? My God. It's so simple! You're paid a pittance for your beetles and dragonflies! Who needs your insects in the grass? Only Yulya does. And finally, I'm made of flesh and blood, I don't want to get my pleasure just with the PE instructor, hiding from everybody. (*Crying.*) We don't even have a decent vacuum-cleaner that will suck dust in instead of spitting it out. Yulechka is all thin and pale-grey because she's not fed properly. And you only ever complained of your troubles and went into hysterics.

K h a s a n . You also used to shout God-knows-what at me, and shake with hysterics.

V a l e n t i n a . I'm a woman. And you're a lazy dull sack of bones lying on the sofa, who tried to make bombastic talks. Pah!

Do you realize that I was a young and silly student and I looked at you, a painter from the capital, with my stupid wide-open eyes, and you have cheated me. A painter... You're lucky if you're asked to paint cucumbers in a greengrocery's.

K h a s a n . For many years, you and your mother have put up with our poverty and with holiday food packages.

V a l e n t i n a . Yes, mum is an ex communist party member, I'm still teaching history, but life has changed. Mum is retired. I'm teaching history "the other way round". But you failed to adjust to the new life. So, what do you want from me? A man must be a good lover, but also a practical-minded bread-winner. And you can't even count the rent properly. And you start crying wildly, rap yourself in the rug when in hysterics.

K h a s a n . But I told you before our marriage that I'm absent-minded, disturbed, that I get tired quickly. I mentioned the psychiatric clinic, didn't I? And that my exhibition was stopped for being too pessimistic. With my bright colours I try to drive away the depression but it still creeps into my heart and into my pictures.

A pause.

V a l y a , forgive me for beating you that day in December.

V a l e n t i n a . There are painters that are completely mad but people pay through the nose for their pictures! A woman needs a stable happiness, wealth and thrilling sensuality. Were you able to give it all to me? No. So you have deceived me for the rest of my poor life. Certainly, I'm looking for a man. But why should a bright, rich man want me when I'm 40? He can have young girls. (*Thoughtfully.*) I might meet another lunatic, but a rich one this time. (*Goes away.*)

K h a s a n sinks on a chair, buries his face in his hands. His shoulders start quivering, then shaking. He starts howling in an ominous way. Y u l y a runs into the room and embraces him.

Y u l y a . Daddy, stop it! My dear, my darling calm down! (*Caresses him. Khasan calms down at once.*) Thank you for the strawberry. We'll paint it, wont we? You're so wonderful.

Grandma and mum are also good but they don't understand that you, like me, need nothing but a cup of tea and painting.

K h a s a n . For the moment it's like this, my dear girl. And tomorrow you may want a pine-apple and a cake. I'm awful indeed. Do you remember what rage used to seize me sometimes when we lived together? How I insulted granny? How I hurt mum? They even had to call the police. But today I managed to control myself. I cried, though. I took a lot of pills in the morning to control myself. You also helped me. I also remembered the lawn near our window – and it lifted me, relieved my suffering in a way. I remembered the maples, the limes, the burdocks and the nettles. It's so nice, so quiet there with nature, with its inner hidden harmony, with its colourful kindness. Soon the red maple will be in blossom and a nightingale will start singing in the yellow acacia bushes, like last spring. I swear, fight and at the same time I'm so lost and helpless in this life. I don't have the courage to bargain a higher price for my pictures. I only wish you were stronger than me! I'm guilty of not loving you enough. I love you a lot for myself, but little for you, without real presents.

Y u l y a (*hugs her father, kisses him on the head, looks at the pictures on the walls*). Daddy, and how to draw a May-beetle so that one could hear his buzzing? How to draw nettles so that you can feel that it stings?

Curtain

ACT 2

The same room an hour later. It's grey outside. The easel has been moved to the wall. There is a bunch of wild flowers, a burning candle, and a tape recorder playing Joe Dassin songs. Four pairs are dancing: Khasan and Yulya, Viktor and Svetlana, Vadim and Valentina, Sergey and Olga. Alexander sits on a chair with his head down, looking lonely.

V a l e n t i n a . Oh, ladies and gentlemen, I'm so glad you've come, it was so boring.

S e r g e y . And how is my aunt Seraphima Spiridonovna? Listen, I'll tell you an old joke. A man is asked: "Why are you so black?" he answers: "I put my mother-in-law on the train and kissed it".

V a l e n t i n a . Stop it, Sergey! Mother has finally lain down to have a rest. It's so boring!

A l e x a n d e r . One can be sad, sick at heart but how can one be bored in the last days of May. The greenery is still soft, luxuriant light-green! It's too early for yellow dandelions to be blooming, for herbs to be blowing. Blue veronica is hiding in the grass, the nettles are covered with white flowers. The gentle velvet life of plants in late Spring. In half a month it's going to be hot, everything will turn dark and hard, will be covered with weeds. But for the moment, as Khasan puts it, the lawn is full of wonderful, great, tender harmony.

V i k t o r . If it rains at night, the morning will be nasty and the yellow dandelions wont open, and next to them among the wet burdocks and the goose-grass, there might be a crow sitting. I wish I could take such a photo.

S v e t l a n a . And put me near that crow.

V i k t o r . Buttercups are already opening their little, brilliant, yellow little faces. They are as alive as we are. They breathe, they have a system of vessels carrying nutritious sap which is like our blood system. When it's hot they drink water greedily, as we do. And they have skin. When I take photos of nature I feel that I'm part of its wise marvelous organism. Only people can not understand each other and agree. They are like the Fox and the Crow.

O l g a . Khasan, has the May-beetle sat on the birch-tree?

K h a s a n . It has fallen in the burdocks.

O l g a . Thank God not in the nettles near the crow.

S e r g e y . A dragon-fly with its itsiridescent face is above the ox-eye daisies.

S v e t l a n a . Khasan, what did you mean by that bug?

K h a s a n . My father and my grandfather were shoemakers, but they liked to read books about nature and rejoiced at this lawn near our windows. They watched flowers, herbs, and looked for their names in the botanic atlas.

A l e x a n d e r . It's evident that absolute harmony in nature is impossible. There's struggle everywhere. But there's no Good and Evil in the life of plants and animals. A wolf doesn't understand that he's doing harm to a hare, a hare doesn't understand that he's doing harm to the grass he's eating. Everything struggles like this, but when there are no evil intentions, it all results in a wonderful lawn.

S v e t l a n a . Many people today want to go back to dull, poverty-stricken socialism. They want a spiritual prison and rotten potatoes for 10 kopeks.

V a d i m . Me too?

V a l e n t i n a . Let me introduce my friend Vadim, a businessman, he has 2 French and Italian clothes shops in Moscow and one in St-Petersburg.

V a d i m (*shyly*). An acquaintance would be more exact. Valentina is my daughter's school teacher. Excuse me, I'm very shy. I am very, very shy. I often say words just to hide behind them. What can I say? I should say something... I remember a small pizzeria in Italy where I ate my first authentic Italian pizza.

S v e t l a n a . You're so modestly and elegantly dressed.

V a d i m . My status requires it. My late wife was a great help to me. She knew languages, computers. But she suddenly died of a stroke at the age of 38. Certainly, she got pie-eyed often and smoked too much.

V a l e n t i n a . Vadim, please, say me something good and kind.

V a d i m . I'll just finish telling you about my wife and then...

S e r g e y . Why don't you marry my sister, she'll learn languages for such an occasion and...

V a d i m . I'd rather you stopped talking such nonsense.

S e r g e y . Maybe you're not happy about Valya's Communist past?

V a d i m . No, why? My parents were utterly devoted to communism.

S e r g e y . Oh, does that mean that your initial capital consists of the communist party gold?

V a d i m (*in an irritated voice*). Maybe I should also tell you the number of my Swiss bank account?

V i k t o r . Oh, sir, indulging in such confidences could be dangerous.

S e r g e y . Somebody may send racketeers. (*Laughs.*) Oh good, good, that's pleased me.

O l g a (*to Valentina*). By the way, sister, where are your cakes?

V a l e n t i n a (*pointing at her puffed out cheeks*). Here they are! But Vadim has brought a whole basket of wonderful cakes and terrific tea ("The rose of Sudan").

S e r g e y . And now I'll please my belly! Change! Change! Ladies choose your gentlemen!

S v e t l a n a chooses K h a s a n , Y u l y a chooses S e r g e y , O l g a chooses V i k t o r . Only V a l e n t i n a doesn't let go V a d i m , who's getting more and more gloomy. They dance or talk standing or sitting on the chairs.

V i k t o r . Khasan, did your grandfather have many kids?

K h a s a n . A lot of. That's why the flat is so enormous. It was given by the Soviet government after the Revolution. A professor of philosophy had lived here before he was deported. Suppose my exile from this flat is my punishment for it. I wish I knew his name at least. Now they've started publishing Russian

philosophy. And when I read Berdiayev I keep thinking: maybe he used to live in this flat?

V i k t o r . And where are your relatives?

K h a s a n . They are in the land of our ancestors, in Astrakhan. Valentina and her mother tried to send me there. We are baptized Tatars, from Astrakhan. But I love Moscow, this dear old house, my dear Yulya, the lawn, and all of you, even Valya. In fact I can't even speak my native tongue properly. I'm a Muscovite.

K h a s a n and S v e t l a n a go to the proscenium, dancing and talking to each other in a low voice.

K h a s a n . You are wearing high heels today. You're nearly as tall as me.

S v e t l a n a . Shall I take off my shoes?

K h a s a n . No, why?

S v e t l a n a . I wish you wanted to kiss me.

K h a s a n . What for?

S v e t l a n a . I want life to give me something very simple. I don't want cakes or wild intoxicating passions. I don't even regret that God never gave me children neither with my last boyfriend, nor with the ones before, who, by the way, didn't leave me in a very nice way, but I'm not angry with him any more. I just want my only one to be with me. The one that would need me more than anything else in the world... The one who would give away anything for me. His money, his car, his flat. Who would always wait for me. Who would touch me tenderly at least 12 times a day. To love only in dreams, in letters – that's not for me. Even my dog needs them, those tender touches.

K h a s a n . And what dog do you have now?

S v e t l a n a . A doberman, a bitch.

K h a s a n . Ah, they say sheep-dogs don't like it.

S v e t l a n a . It depends on the sheep dog.

K h a s a n . Viktor loves you.

S v e t l a n a . Viktor lacks self-confidence, so he's incapable of having real feelings.

K h a s a n . Viktor's photo landscapes are full of inspiration. You just haven't discovered yet that quiet tenderness in him. By the way, photography means "painting with light" in Russian.

S v e t l a n a . And his hands are all yellow 'cause of cigs and the developer.

K h a s a n . And mine are covered with paint.

A pause.

You know, Vitya's photos have a special atmosphere, tense and disturbing, nearly dark and depressive sometimes, but always with a shy sunbeam of hope. And shyness is always accompanied by tenderness. I can't even copy details of his photos for my pictures, as they are art in themselves, they reflect his feelings, his soul.

S v e t l a n a . It may be so... But Viktor would never feel me as you can. It was only once with you, 4 years ago, if you still remember. I thought I would go crazy. Only with you did I realize that in love everything is permitted, you may know nothing but tenderness. Khasan, within an hour, you have grown a wonderful garden in my soul. It's still blooming in the midst of this dull life. Kiss me.

K h a s a n . I didn't mean it actually, I was depressed and had my beer goggles on. I did wrong to Viktor and should tell him about it finally. And will you forgive me. I remember nothing and I don't think I felt much. I'll never be able to touch Valentina again, but no other woman either. I get the feeling that when I'm cheating on my ex-wife I'm also betraying Yulya.

S v e t l a n a . Your ex-wife is a pitiful, hysterical fool. And I'm even worse.

A pause.

I do know, Khasan, that I'm to be alone forever. Even though I have a flat of my own, and I earn enough money in the shop. But when I'm used to a person and no longer shy of him, I often become offended, irritated, angry, I may even shout at him terribly in depression. I'm still tolerated in the shop 'cause I always manage to run away and hide when I loose my self-control. In fact I completely let myself go but only if I'm no longer shy of a person.

That's why my last boyfriend and the previous ones ran away from me. But I'm still shy of you.

K h a s a n . Me and you...

S v e t l a n a . I'm not inviting you to marry me. My husband should not only be clever, delicate and devoted, but also a natural-born psychotherapist, who would share his healthy warm strength with me, who would tolerate all my everyday depressive moodiness. Neither you, nor Viktor are capable of that, I know. I have heard your heart-rending screams. And many times Viktor ran away from me roaring back to his den. Luckily, it's next door.

K h a s a n . Maybe some pills could help you?

S v e t l a n a . I haven't been to the clinic for 6 years. The pills make my brain dull and slow. So, instead of the only one I'll have just the vacuum of his form. A different woman might have filled this vacuum with dreams, letters from faraway, but we, wolves, need both spirituality, tenderness and flesh. Only here, in your company can I feel warm from time to time.

K h a s a n and S v e t l a n a come closer to the others, dancing.

S e r g e y . Tell me, dear cousin, why do you always invite Khasan when you have guests?

O l g a . To show that she still has a husband, even an ex-one.

V a l e n t i n a . What's the use of this ex-husband! Vadim, tell us how you were flying to New York not long ago.

V a d i m . Imagine - over Greenland. It was a bright day, I could see endless black mountains, covered with snow, and icebergs in the ocean. A lawn with nettles is nothing in comparison with this. If I wasn't shy I would tell you...

A l e x a n d e r . I'm like a Greenland iceberg, frozen by antidepressants. If my stories could give a meaning to my life, I would take less pills. I could dance as beautifully as Khasan does.

A pause.

Without pills I become strange and suspicious. It's bad with pills, but it's even worse without them. That is my fate...

Y u l y a . Uncle Alexander, will you read your stories today?

A l e x a n d e r . If you want it, dear Yulya. I'm ashamed of reading my stories aloud. A story is a man's soul, like a picture or a drawing. Khasan's soul or my soul. Kids when drawing are not ashamed of showing their souls to each other, as they don't understand what's going on here. When I was a child I wasn't ashamed either...

O l g a . Alexander, write about a woman, an engineer, a mysterious and silent fool, who comes here from her Orenburg for a day or two every year.

V a l e n t i n a . In order to complain of her mad drunk husband who beats her with a poker at night.

S v e t l a n a . My God, how pathetically unhappy we are, it's all so boring! No rare illnesses, champagne and pine apples, just vodka, herrings, poker and hangover.

O l g a . I always come here in the last days of May when there's a tender richness of different plants near your old house. There are so many forget-me-nots, buttercups, but I prefer modest flowers of shepherd's purse in the burdocks.

V i k t o r . At work I only take dull photos of dull people – for the foreign passport or for the ordinary one. And here, on the lawn, I take black and white photos of flowers and herbs. I don't want to take colour photos. Black and white is deeper, there's more spirit in it.

O l g a . At home I have Viktor's photos and Khasan's sketches, and Yulya's picture "Bumble-bee on clover". He's such a nice little bear cub, this bumble-bee.

V i k t o r . We all communicate spiritually with you through our pictures...

A l e x a n d e r . When we die, if these pictures, photos are not thrown away, they will tell the people of the future how we felt, how we lived. My God it is all so simple and at the same time so magic. When I'm depressed I think that our time is measured, and in 100 years no one of us will be alive. And the miracle of beautiful late spring will go on forever.

Y u l y a . Why do people live if they die anyway?

A l e x a n d e r . To give each other 2 grams of Good or 2 grams of Evil.

S v e t l a n a . To love! This day is also coming to its end. To love!

A l e x a n d e r . But this is what Good is.

V i k t o r . When I die I would like my soul to stay in my landscapes for a while, and I think that this little immortality will be enough to fulfill my goal in this life.

S e r g e y . I keep thinking about my dead grandfather. He was a ship's doctor, used to tell me about Africa. My heart is aching...

V a l e n t i n a . Now you're sorry for yourself, not for him

V i k t o r . I would like somebody to grieve for me like this after my death. I think I would continue living in his grief.

S e r g e y and Y u l y a go to the proscenium, dancing.

S e r g e y . You shouldn't forget, little girl, that I'm nearly twice as old as you and I'm nearly a psychiatrist. You should show more respect.

Y u l y a . Sergey Prokofievich...

S e r g e y . Oh, It sounds so nice, so decent... Ok, go on.

Y u l y a . Is it true that if I had a dog and I stopped loving it could die 'cause of it?

S e r g e y . I think this contradicts Pavlov's theory of reflexes a bit. But there's something mysteriously beautiful in it, some meaning of life...

Y u l y a . It happened with my friend's poodle.

A pause.

Sergey Prokofievich, do you love me less than last year now?

S e r g e y . Here we go! The little girl has grown up! And she desires love now! (*Thinks.*) It's so interesting to study this everyday psychology. Even that of a child.

A pause.

Do you want love?

Y u l y a . Of course, I do. I do want to have my only one, my nearest and dearest one, to protect me. So that I could tell him of my worries. Mum and grandma do not listen to me, do not understand me. They are good, but they are already angry (with me that) because I won't come to their graves to plant flowers there. They don't let daddy come here. And I'm so fond of daddy. And of his pictures.

S e r g e y . And what will you do with your only one, little girl?

Y u l y a . At first we'll be like mummy and daddy, then like granny and grandpa. And then we'll die on the same day. I'll never turn him out of the house. Even if he goes mad. I'll hug him, kiss him - and he'll be fine again.

S e r g e y (*laughing*). How innocent you are! Think you never smoked a cigarette, never drank a beer. (*Kisses her on her head.*)

Y u l y a . Thank you, Sergey Prokofievich!

S e r g e y and Y u l y a come back to the dancers. V a d i m and V a l e n t i n a disappear to the lobby imperceptibly.

A l e x a n d e r . Okudzhava is more dear to me than Dassin. I don't have French light grace. My spirit is less clear, more complicated and heavier than the French one.

S e r g e y (*to Khasan*). I'm about twice as young as you are, but my spirit is stronger. I'm more of a fighter than you. I would put a lock of my own on the door of my room. How could my dear relatives dare to turn a man out of his own flat and hardly ever let him back! In the best houses of London in Paris one would be beaten with a bronze chandelier for such things!

K h a s a n . I'm but a coward in my soul. I start shouting and then shrink, start accusing myself and can't draw, can't even drink tea. Physically, practically I'm absolutely incapable of doing anything. Only in my soul, on the canvas, on the paper. I can write a letter to a person I love, for example.

S e r g e y . One more joke. Yulya is old enough for it. One Paris hooker is asking the other: What is it a pure love? And the

answer is: Russian men have invented it to avoid paying. (*They all laugh quietly.*) Change! Gentlemen invite ladies.

O l g a . Only letters keep my world tickling.

A pause.

S v e t l a n a . Here we are becoming more and more close to each other. And life is going on and on and on...

V i k t o r invites S v e t l a n a , S e r g e y invites Y u l y a ,
K h a s a n invites O l g a to dance.

A l e x a n d e r . Here with you I got better. The tension in my soul is weaker. I feel that it's me, myself at last.

O l g a . Dear Khasan, the May-beetle has already got out of the burdocks.

Y u l y a . Aunty Olya, do you see it in the window?

K h a s a n . The May-beetle is already flying to the birch tree.

S e r g e y . The dragon-fly on a pine has lost her hair.

S v e t l a n a . What is it, this wonderful abstract art?

S e r g e y . I switched to the ancient Japanese hokku again.

S v e t l a n a . You know so many things! And you're just a medical assistant!

S e r g e y . I'm an inspired assistant, a future psychiatrist. I'm just hiding behind all those jokes because of my inferiority complex.

K h a s a n (*to Olga*). It's hard for people to deal with me because I'm absent-minded, languid. I get lost in a cue when they say that it's not my place. My soul is revived only when I create, communicate with nature or with you, people spiritually close to me. And especially with a woman, whom I feel at a great distance as if she is living inside of me.

S v e t l a n a . That's not me, evidently.

K h a s a n . Not you, Svet. You're physically close. I go to your shop everyday.

K h a s a n and O l g a got to the proscenium, dancing.

O l g a . Khasan, my darling, I would die without your letters.

K h a s a n . You, Olga, and your letters and the dried herbs, flowers put into them, it's all in my soul. I do know now: I can not live without love.

O l g a . Neither can I, Khasan. Everyday I imagine you drawing. In summer drawing a May-beetle, a dragon fly, in winter a naked birch amidst snowdrifts. I met you here, and this will be enough for one more year.

K h a s a n . I also imagine many-many different things about you, about us, all the year round...

O l g a . I'm glad it's all as it is. If we lived together we would torture each other and this beauty that lives inside us would fade. And like this our Love will last forever.

Y u l y a *(to Viktor)*. Uncle Viktor, there's your photo portrait of a hedgehog above my bed.

V i k t o r . I'll take you a photo of a grasshopper using a magnifying glass, so that it looks like a horse.

Y u l y a . Thank you! You've put light into my soul!

V a l e n t i n a and V a d i m , excited, come into the room.

V a l e n t i n a *(trying to catch her excitement)* I just don't know what we should do with our immortal cockroaches.

S e r g e y . Catch them and bite them.

V a d i m *(his hands in his pockets)*. I'm fed up with these silly little jokes and laughs! Faces of dandelions! I got it all! Know that I hired a person just in case something happens to me. *(To Valentina.)* It was most nice of you, madam, to meet me at a parents meeting and to invite me to your place to show me to the racketeers. I recognized them at once, I'm no fool! I'm not staying here a second more, among those multicolored cockroaches... *(Points at Khasan's pictures.)* We'll see... *(Exits quickly.)*

A pause.

S e r g e y . I didn't have time to put on the adieu march from "Aida".

Noise and laughing among the others. Pairs separate. V a l e n t i n a is crying her head on the table. O l g a and Y u l y a are caressing her head.

Y u l y a . Mummy, don't cry. Why do I need a second daddy?

O l g a . Don't be sad, you'll find yourself another rich boyfriend.

V a l e n t i n a . Let him be as mad as a hatter!!! Worse than Khasan, Alexander, Viktor and even that paranoiac, but really rich, I want to justify my sufferings. To see the Canaries, Italy, Greenland from the plane to New-York... I'll go to Stepan to Tambov! (*Cries loudly.*)

S e r g e y . Uncle Stepa is certainly waiting to take you to Nizza, silly thing... Nothing doing! Well you are all such romantics from the psychiatrist's point of view. All except my dear aunt Seraphima Spiridonovna.

A pause.

Y u l y a (*rushes to Khasan, puts her arms around him*). Daddy, I don't want to live without you! Life without you frightens me!

Curtain

ACT 3

The same room about an hour later. All, except V a d i m , are sitting around a table with samovar and candles, drinking tea with cakes. V a l e n t i n a still has traces of tears on her face. Late twilight.

S e r g e y . In the college I was the only boy in the group. The girls laughed at my jokes but not a single one fell in love with me. They are all so infantile, like kids. But patients with inferiority complex or persecution complex always fall in love with me. I would like to be loved by a profound, depressed woman, about twenty years older than me, experienced in love and in life.

V a l e n t i n a . What on earth are you talking about?

S e r g e y . Well, I'm not loved by those whom I love, and so I feel very lonely, and trying to get away from it I tell jokes, I brag, I pretend that I'm enjoying my life, when in fact I'm not enjoying it at all.

A l e x a n d e r (to Sergey). At least you have been loved by someone. And I'm already 36... If a woman fell in love with me, considered me her only one would I think about the rope?

S v e t l a n a . You'll certainly be loved...

O l g a (to Alexander). Have you never-ever been loved by anyone?

A l e x a n d e r . Never in my life. Suppose it must be hard to love a man with a lot of ant-depressants in his blood.

V i k t o r . A man can not know for sure whether he's loved or not. He may be loved secretly.

O l g a . And then she thinks about him all the time and writes letters to him but never sends them.

A l e x a n d e r . But if I don't know about it, what's the use of it? No, I have never been loved and never will be. It scares me.

A pause.

Y u l y a (in a solemn voice). If you, uncle Alexander, have never been loved by anyone,

A pause.

then know, that in this case I love you very much.

Alexander. Oh, thank you, dear Yulya. (*Embraces her and kisses her on her head.*)

Valentina. One more lunatic... Bad heredity. What made you mention those racketeers?

Viktor. Be careful, I'll leave now and I'll never come back to repair your broken taps.

Olg a (*to Yulya*). Dear girl, how I love you for your kindness, your tenderness. (*Puts her arms around her.*)

Svetlana. He has seen Greenland from the plane! How very important!

Valentina. It has nothing to do with Greenland. You must understand me – I love life. Real French dresses, not this sack. (*Touches her dress with disgust.*) I want rich and beautiful freedom, and instead I have an ill mother and can't even get a grave site at the cemetery. It's all so silly...

Sergey. In our department we have just such a Vadim with a persecution complex and money-obsessed. May be ours also doesn't have any shops. Still I pity him. He left so frightened.

Olg a. Yes, the rich folk are being robbed and even killed now. It's better to be rich with the hidden treasures of one's soul. And just to have enough money for a pen, paper and envelopes.

Khasan. And for paints...

Svetlana. I can't be like that. I need both transparent tenderness of the soul and bright, *strong* feelings. Not black and white ones like Vitya's photos, but multi-colored, rich, magnificent like Japanese "Fuji" film. Feelings must be tender to madness, and then comes something dazzling, that can turn you into ashes. But not every man can extinguish this intoxicating fire from your own nature. And those who can are too lazy for it. This is the tragedy of someone who is unwanted. You go and beg for your life, but you never get it. (*Closes her eyes and cries.*)

Olg a. There may be other feelings – quite, tender-pastel, reflexive, but very strong in their own way. No intoxication, no dazzling but oh, so wonderful...

Khasan. I think everybody lives according to his own nature.

V a l e n t i n a . Love without blindness is poor, pitiful. But today wealth is the most important thing. A woman should be free and wealthy, she should have a lot of men. And then you are more likely to find this intoxicating fire.

Y u l y a . Mummy, why many men?

O l g a . To have more presents.

V i k t o r . Have you ever seen an Admiral butterfly? (*To Svetlana*) Svet, I could pay for you at an art studio. Near here.

S v e t l a n a . My poor silly darling! Oh God, what am I saying? What am I saying? Could anyone here say that we have been sort of engaged for many years? A regular client at the shop, a retired one, once told me: "I know, you live alone, I would marry you, but I warn you in advance, I'm only going to wash the dishes. And I told him: I have a fiancée, who will do the washing, who could repair the plumbing and electricity. Oh, my, I'm talking such rubbish! Think I'm more imagining all those bright feelings and emotions. I am not really capable of having them in reality.

V i k t o r . The lilac on our lawn has shed its blossoms, but in a week the lilac rose-bay will burn in the sunshine. Love has different faces. It can be just a quiet, modest Good.

A pause.

A l e x a n d e r . One should search attentively, without haste, some windows of spiritual harmony even in a deep depression. I agree with Vitya. Harmony, kindness must also be love.

V i k t o r . There's less and less of our life left. We should take more care of each other, do something good for each other. There will be no doing it in the grave... Little everyday good, isn't that so? (*To Alexander*) 2 grams of good – as an astronomer put it in one of your stories. Otherwise when you die – if you have lived without love, good, it's like you were never born.

A l e x a n d e r . I can't explain it, but I feel that real love somehow stays forever.

A pause.

O l g a . I can't leave my drunkard of a husband in Orenburg. He's the father of my little daughters and they love him. He also earns something, he's a carpenter. But there is a man I've been in love with for a long time. I won't tell you who he is. That's our mystery, in fact I've already betrayed my husband with him. But only in my heart, of course. So I'm not guilty towards my girls.

S v e t l a n a . How do you mean you have betrayed him?

O l g a . I have betrayed him in my thoughts, not physically.

S v e t l a n a . In your thoughts? Well, everybody does it everyday. (*Waves her hand in despair and laughs.*)

O l g a . My beloved is tender, soft, mysterious and full of light like a May beetle. We write long letters to each other. With simple words and with secret signs, characters that nobody knows, we enter into each others souls continuously. And nobody in this infinite Universe knows how close we are to each other spiritually. Nobody can prevent our profound, invisible unity in nature. Our wonderful feeling can not be separated from nature. Nature is suffused with Love, with that wonderful harmony. When my mad husband is beating me, I'm thinking about my beloved, my only one on this earth, in the Universe. It's funny, my husband doesn't have the least idea of how wonderful it is to think about it, to feel it, even through his slaps. I guess the meaning of my life is in this wonderful unity. Whatever good I do for my little girls, for other people, is enlightened by it. It's so simple and so important: I need him, I can't do without him, he needs me, he can't do without me. My whole life has become like late spring on our lawn.

V i k t o r (*seriously*). How good it is and how strange...

V a l e n t i n a (*crying*). Why am I crying? Why do I envy her? My sister is as mad as a hatter. She's completely flipped.

A l e x a n d e r . Don't cry, Valya. When you cry, Nephertiti is a bit like you. This shy peacock is a complete stranger to us, he's not capable of loving. And you're one of us, you're also miserable and weak , though silly, and you keep torturing Khasan. But still you're one of us.

Y u l y a . I fail to understand life. Can't understand why mummy and granny keep turning daddy out, do not let us paint

together. I'm scared to live without daddy. Can't understand why I'm living...

K h a s a n . Reasoning won't help, daughter. The sense lies in loving whoever you love, that is in doing different good things for him with a wonderful feeling in your soul, that cures you from all illnesses and difficulties.

A l e x a n d e r . Yes, all we can do is love some people, some animals, some plants. And live for the sake of it till we die.

S e r g e y . To love even if your love is unrequited?

S v e t l a n a . I can't understand this unrequited, platonical philosophy, but can feel something strangely good in it and even seem to be moving slowly towards it.

V a l e n t i n a . You're lucky, sister! You have a feeling for somebody, long letters to him, and money – you have enough for the train. And I have nothing, just nothing. Khasan earns so little. If you hadn't filled our fridge Yulya would have had nothing for dinner.

O l g a . I'm also trying to save money on everything. I just can't do without coming into this house at least once a year.

V i k t o r . Freedom of spirit is the main thing for me. I'll always have enough for porridge.

O l g a . Poverty is good in a way – nobody envies you or asks for money. There's no fussing with home improvements – you don't have money to do it.

Y u l y a . Love must be like when you think and think and think about him, and want to do something good for him all the time, but you don't have the courage.

S v e t l a n a . In our shop one may earn something. There's not only bread but also yoghurts, foreign ice-cream. Don't want to go back to the old life with its queues and wage-leveling.

V i k t o r (*embraces Svetlana*). I could love a woman only in case of spiritual harmony. Just like now.

S v e t l a n a . No, Vitya, something stronger connects a man and a woman – wonderful feelings, tenderness.

S e r g e y . The great instinct!

V a l e n t i n a . A man should also have money...

S e r g e y . As in that Georgian joke...

V a l e n t i n a (to Khasan). You used to write me such tender letters to Tambov, that I cried my eyes out over them like a fool. And went to the ravine to see the coltsfoot blooming just because you had written something about it. I was as nutty as a fruit cake.

A l e x a n d e r . Khasan does have something of a May-beetle, and at the same time something orientally-attractive. One may feel it in his sketches and landscapes.

K h a s a n . Thank you. I try to live according to my nature. And if I try to pretend some disgusting hysterical outbursts happen, depressions when I lie with my face next to the wall.

V a l e n t i n a . And you bad energy at these moments spreads through the flat. God, it was such hell when we were together here everyday.

K h a s a n . You know, Valya, at the beginning our love was like an intoxication and this made us blind to the incompatibility of our characters. However, love evaporated soon, our real nature showed itself and it turned out that we can't find a single window of harmony. It seems, one must never give up looking for these windows, but we have already lost all the hope of finding them. Like on the carpet of my childhood... The Crane is reproaching the Fox for not being a Crane and the other way round.

S v e t l a n a . Me and Vitya, we'll look for our window. Maybe this art studio. I want to learn to express myself with colours. Shall we look for our window?

V i k t o r . I agree.

S v e t l a n a . It's good that you do your washing yourself. I could never do a man's, a husband's washing. I don't know why.

K h a s a n (rises, to Valentina). So, I solemnly declare that I accept your proposal. You and your mother, Serafima Spiridonovna, can be buried next to my grandfather, my parents and me. In return, as it was promised, I'll be allowed to come here once a month to see Yulya, and when you have guests as today. (Sits down.)

V a l e n t i n a . This is a noble deed.

K h a s a n . I was there yesterday, at the cemetery. Fern has grown on grandfathers grave, greater celandine's leaves are so tender and silky. I planted pansies and lit three candles - three everlasting souls. I felt so clearly the souls of my grandmother and my parents when I was standing there.

V a l e n t i n a . Stop it, Khasan, I know you're still good.

S e r g e y . So maybe he could live here for a while in his room?

Y u l y a . Mummy, please!

V a l e n t i n a . No, this is impossible. Granny will die at once. Khasan will go in his pajamas to the toilet at night, and they'll meet each other in the corridor. Or he will be making tea at night... It is impossible.

A l e x a n d e r . These are hard times. I have to survive on bread with salt and porridge. There's not enough money for potatoes. The clinic gives you anti-depressants free of charge. It's amazing that maples, limes, forget-me-nots, all the nature still remains so wonderful despite all the difficulties of this new life. It calls on us to endure all hardships for the sake of our spiritual freedom.

K h a s a n . I'm ready to endure. This freedom is a real remedy to us.

V a l e n t i n a . Why do I need freedom without money?

V i k t o r . I have brought an old gipsy romance. Shall we listen to it? May be it'll be more dear to us than the French music. *(Puts the tape in the recorder.)*

S e r g e y . A gipsy one! It'll make me feel so nice!

It's a song by K Shilovsky "A Web", sung by Vera Donskaya. Everybody listens attentively and then sings all together, embracing one another.

We have been tied by the sound of the thunderstorm
By the smell of the raspberries
And by the thin web
Swinging in the wind

Olga is sitting next to K h a s a n , S v e t l a n a is sitting next to V i k t o r , Y u l y a is sitting next to A l e x a n d e r , V a l e n t i n a is

sitting next to S e r g e y . V a l e n t i n a with a mysteriously-silly face succumbs to the song's mood.

A pause.

S v e t l a n a . Normal, enterprising people don't need us, and we also find them boring... We should cling together amidst our wonderful nature.

O l g a . I do want this wonderful, colourful feeling of late spring to remain in my soul till the day I die, despite all the worries and fears. Not that of the young one, intoxicating and exciting, but that of the late one - soft, tender, full of the solemn readiness for love.

A pause.

The may-beetle has left the burdocks, Khasan.

K h a s a n . And it is already flying to the birch-tree.

S e r g e y . The dragon fly has squeezed her tail in the bushes.

A pause.

Y u l y a (*to Alexander*). Uncle Alexander, are you going to write me long letters now?

A l e x a n d e r looks at Y u l y a smiling. His face is shining.

Curtain

1996.