

Natalia Vorozhbit

GALKA MOTALKA

Characters

Sveta-Kometa, the champion
Galka-Motalka, the new girl
Mila-Batsila, their roommate
Fencers: The Foil, the Sabre
Footballers: Gena Hamlet, Andrukha Repin
The Sprint Coach

The unlucky shot-putter, another trainer, Auntie Tanya, the dormitory supervisor, the academic head.

MOTALKA. On my birth certificate it says Galina Motalko, with an O on the end. But everyone calls me Motalka with an A, of course. I've never been called Galina either, yet, so I've been Galka-Motalka all my life. You might think I'd be annoyed by that, but I'm not. The opposite in fact.

Not very long ago I became an athlete. I ran faster than everyone else in my class and my trainer spotted me. Now I'm at the Republic's Boarding School for athletes. I'm a sprinter. I still run slower than every one else in my group, but I reckon I will run faster because I'm going to train seriously.

The teacher at my old school gave me good marks on my report just to get rid of me. And that was fine by me. Now I'm starting a new life, because in the old one I was often a silly cow.

I really like it at the boarding school. It's all different from my old life. There are some great girls and some real blokes, I mean, amongst the boys. There are lots of really cute ones, but I'm not interested in all that anymore.

Athletes are different from ordinary school kids, probably because they're more grown up. They've already made their choice in life. Like, my old school friends are all smoking, doing their homework and sleeping around, but here everyone trains for five hours a day and competes in competitions. For the sake of their future. 'Cause in sport the earlier you start, the further you go.

This boarding school is paradise compared to the rest of my life. My life used to be grey. Now it's a bright blue colour, like the sky over our sports fields. I haven't been here long,

but they've already given me a free kit, including some Adidas training shoes... I mean, wow!

They feed us here five times a day and they give us, for example, red and black caviar and sometimes chocolate. My coach told me to put on some weight, so I'm eating enough for two.

They put me in a room with two older girls: Mila-Batsila and Sveta-Kometa. We all train with the same trainer. Sveta is amazing! She's only sixteen, but she's already got her KMS.

The school's in the same building as the dormitory, but in a different wing. You don't even need to go outside to get there. The girls live on the second floor of the dormitory and the boys live on the third, fourth and fifth floors. There's more of them.

When you leave here you can go straight into the second year at the institute of physical education, without taking any exams. That's my dream.

A Lesson in Discrimination

A sports hall. The sounds of whistles, shouts, instructions, running feet and other appropriate noises. MOTALKA and KOMETA are sitting on a mat, changing their training shoes for spikes. BATSILA is doing press-ups. MOTALKA is watching the fit bodies of the athletes with interest.

KOMETA. No, don't go eyeing them up – they're the stones.

MOTALKA looks at her questioningly.

KOMETA (*Patiently*). The stones are the light athletes. The knives thought that name up for them.

MOTALKA looks at her questioningly.

KOMETA. The knives are the footballers. The stones thought that name up for them – after they got called stones. Its like, 'cause they're sharp, like knives, I suppose. Never go with a stone. They're so thick! Go with the knives. They're always going abroad and they bring presents back for their girls. They're really generous. The stones are mean gits. They almost never leave the country. But the knives are really cute.

MOTALKA. How can you tell the difference? How can you tell stones from knives?

KOMETA. Well, for a start, the smell. If a group of blokes comes past and they all smell of sexy aftershave then they're knives. They always smell lovely. If a group of blokes comes past and you can smell sweat, then they're stones. They don't wash after training. Get it? You can tell the difference by their trousers, too. If a group of lads comes past and

they've got patches on their knees, then they're knives. If a group of lads come past with bits all over their trousers, then that's the stones. Get it?

MOTALKA. But what about the ones who walk around in ordinary trousers and not in groups? (*She points out of the window at someone*)

SVETA. Oh no – that's a fencer. We don't go with them. They're a bit strange. Galka, you just remember – go with the footballers. There's a future in that. Like my Hamlet – he's a great ??

MOTALKA. Why's he called Hamlet?

SVETA. Oh his Dad was a right idiot...

COACH'S VOICE. Right, up you get, girls! Three lots of a hundred! No sitting around! Three lots, three times, a hundred each! We'll time the last one! Kometa, off you go!

KOMETA goes over to the start and settles on the blocks.

MOTALKA. This sports school is so tough, I can't even tell you how tough it is! It's really difficult to get into, but really easy to get yourself chucked out. Like, for example I heard that one unlucky shot-putter got thrown out because of a love-bite on her neck.

They only take kids from third year upwards here. So there's only grown-ups here. I suppose the gymnasts study here from the first year onwards but they have different rules. Like Pedkina, she's a top gymnast at eleven, And Skaldina and Timoshenko - they even compete abroad! Kometa says that they're the most promising gymnasts. Gymnasts are really skinny. They weigh themselves before training. Like, when it's someone's birthday party, they stuff themselves with cake and mayonnaise salads and then they go straightaway from the table to the toilet and stick their fingers down their throat. Its so they can stuff themselves without putting on weight.

Those gymnasts have a short life. At most they compete until they're twenty and then they become trainers. But Kometa reckons she'll be running till she's thirty and she'll even be able to go to the Olympics in 2005. Of course, I can't imagine that.

The sports hall. The girls are at the finishing line after their hundred metre sprints. They take a long time to get their breath back.

KOMETA. How much, boss?

COACH. Not good, Kometa. Disgraceful, in fact. 12 and 3 hundredths.

KOMETA. Well the blocks were shaky... and then my back...

COACH. Excuses.

KOMETA. Honest, boss, the blocks...

BATSILA. How did I do, Andrei Nikolaevich?

COACH. Not bad, Butsilova. 12.42.

MOTALKA. And me? What about me?

COACH. Excellent, Motalka. 14 and one.

MOTALKA. Hundredth?

COACH. Tenth. But don't worry.

KOMETA (*Encouragingly*). Well done, Motalka!

COACH. Right, you've got your breath back. (*He massages KOMETA'S shoulders and she shrieks playfully*) Don't sit down Butsila. Fleas – three lots of fifteen. Get on with it! (*He leaves*) I'm watching you.

MOTALKA. What does he mean, fleas?

KOMETA. Watch carefully. It's this terrible exercise. Borzov invented it. It's really amazing for runners, but I bloody Goebbels hate it! (*She shows her*) One foot straight behind, the other bent in front, like that and then you jump up and down on the spot like that. The higher you jump the harder it is.

COACH (*From a distance*). I'm watching you.

MOTALKA. Right! I get it. (*She tries it once and then bends over*) Goebbels...!

KOMETA gets on with it. MOTALKA does a pathetic imitation.

COACH (*Hysterically*). Hips! I said, hips!

MOTALKA. Also, athletes are always being taken around to sports events. Right in the middle of the school term, or whenever they want. Like, in November they've promised us a trip to the Carpathians, and in spring we're going to Yalta. I never went anywhere before.

They turn the lights off at ten o'clock exactly in the dormitory. It's impossible to get to sleep that early. We lie there, chatting. Mind you, at quarter to seven they turn the lights on and start banging on the doors with the keys. The first time I dreamt that a war had started – but no, it was just time to go to exercises, then breakfast, then the first training session, then second breakfast, then to school, then to lunch, then back to school and after school to tea, then to second training, then to dinner. After dinner we can do what we like until ten o'clock. Me and the girls go to smoke in the stadium. The main thing is not to get caught.

The first aid rooms and sick bay are on the first floor of the dormitory. You can just go there to be treated. Like, if you don't really want to go to school you can go there and say you got a bad tummy from eating a cutlet. You don't have to prove it. You just have to drink several litres of manganese solution and puke it up in the nurse's presence. If you do that you're excused from lessons the whole day.

What else? Teachers are the same everywhere. Nothing to say about them. Load of nightmares. The academic head is quite funny, fat, and he looks kind.

I like this fencer here. I haven't told anyone about it yet, but I think he wants to go with me as well. Goebbels, I'm in shock! (*Explains*) Goebbels is what we say in the school instead of 'fuck'. So as not to get into trouble.

Smoking is bad for you

Room 217. REPIN is sitting on the bed, holding MILA BATSILA and feeding her tobacco. KOMETA and HAMLET are kissing. MOTALKA is sitting on her bed and pretending to be at ease with all her might.

REPIN. Eat it, you bitch!

BATSILA weeps and spits.

KOMETA (*Without conviction*). Leave it out, Rep – she'll choke.

REPIN. I told her that if I smelt tobacco, I'd feed it to her. Go on, chew, you bitch!

HAMLET (*Roaring with laughter*). Give over, why don't you!

REPIN keeps on shoving in tobacco until BATSILA stops resisting. At last she falls back on the bed, making strange noises in her throat.

HAMLET. Stop it, you idiot. We're off to 413...

MOTALKA. Can I come?

HAMLET. To 413? Bit young still.

KOMETA and HAMLET leave the room.

REPIN (*Shaking a packet of cigarettes, almost pityingly*). Are you going to smoke then?

BATSILA moans and shakes her head.

REPIN. They kill horses with nicotine. Did you know that?

BATSILA cries even more.

REPIN. Wash yourself and get up to 413 in ten minutes. Is that clear? (*He leaves and addresses MOTALKA as he's leaving.*) What is it, little one? Jealous? Don't you worry. One of my young friends has got his eye on you.

MOTALKA tries to smile gratefully.

BATSILA (*picking tobacco out of the holes in her face*). All the same, it's worth it in the long run. He's been invited to ???. So it's worth it for that. Besides Sveta's Hamlet is mean, but she loves him. He just doesn't want me to smoke, its like, he's worried about it. But on the whole it's worth it. I didn't want to go with him to start with. He asked me and I refused. Then all the knives threw cutlets at me in the canteen. Imagine! There I was all dressed up for the evening, made up, the works, even borrowed Fura's perfume without asking and I went down to the canteen. I was in a really good mood. I went in, hadn't even managed to speak to anyone, when cutlets came flying towards me from all over the canteen. I stank for a week after that. I had to agree. Otherwise I'd have been washing meat off me every day.

MOTALKA. Goebbels, Batsila!

BATSILA. So you watch out, if one of the knives fancies you...

MOTALKA (*Categorically*). I don't want that. I prefer the fencers.

BATSILA. Are you stupid or something? They're wild!

MOTALKA. But they're smart.

BATSILA. Smart?

MOTALKA. That's the nature of the sport they do – they have to think.

BATSILA. To think? No, they're wild... and a bit strange. You'd be better off with the swimmers, at least their figures are... anyway, I'd better wash and go off to 413.

A Lesson in Consistency

Someone's parents' flat, when the parents are away. On the table there are a few plates of snacks and a lot of empty bottles. Everyone has drunk everything and they've gone to the food store to get more. Three remain in the flat – a FOIL FENCER is playing on the guitar, and MOTALKA is trying to listen, but a SABRE FENCER keeps interrupting her the whole time.

SABRE FENCER. Come on, Motalka, I'll show you... *(He keeps tugging at her)*

MOTALKA. Get off! Stop getting in the way!

SABRE FENCER. Let's go into the bathroom – do you know what's in there?

MOTALKA. I wouldn't go with people from my class – go away!

SABRE FENCER. Well aren't you stropky! You don't want to? Well, you'll be sorry! I tell you, you'll be sorry.

He pours the contents of several bottles into a cup.

FOIL FENCER *(Singing all the time)*.

Snow melting behind the window, dropping on eyelashes
I wish you a dream of something new tonight
I'll tell you simply, as if we were hardly acquainted
As if there were no special feelings between us.

MOTALKA. I write poems, too. Could you learn to sing them?

FOIL FENCER. You've got to learn to drink first.

MOTALKA. I know how to drink. *(She swallows down vodka in mouthfuls – it tastes horrible, so she chases it down with something pink and something spreadable from a pot.)*

FOIL FENCER *(Sings)*.

I met a rose, it was in bloom, full of fragrant loveliness.
I told that rose – farewell, goodbye, don't forget, I'll be back soon.
To that garden I came once more, but found no lovely rose
They'd broken the stem, taken the flower, no thorns on it anymore.
O rose, rose! I cried out, why didn't I pluck you, rose?
I was scared of the thorns, and now my rose, you're not mine!
So listen friends, I tell you now, pluck the rose and take the girls
Pluck the rose and take the flower, take the flower when it's fifteen.

MOTALKA *(Admiringly)*. Will you teach me?

FOIL FENCER. Alright, listen – breathe in, then take a big gulp, then a sniff of bread or a bite of cucumber and only then breathe out. Never chase it down with another drink and never mix it with port.

Sporting love

Room 217. The COACH is sniffing. KOMETA is shaving her legs.

COACH. What's that smell, Kometa? I'm asking you what that smell is?

KOMETA. Perfume.

COACH. Do you think I'm stupid?

KOMETA. Oh, I don't know!

COACH. Someone's been smoking in here.

KOMETA. What are you talking about? Well, aren't you a joker, Andrei Nikolaevich!

The COACH finds an ashtray behind the blind and shakes it angrily. KOMETA is instantly in tears.

KOMETA. The knives were around here last night and I wouldn't let them, but they went ahead anyway – you know how arrogant they are.

COACH. Right. I want their names!

KOMETA. Don't shout at me!

COACH. I said I want the names of the stupid pillocks!

KOMETA. 'Cause if you're going to shout at me I'll have another attack, and we've got a competition in a week's time (*she weeps*).

COACH. Shameless hussy! Going on about the competition! Well if you're going to smoke...

KOMETA. I don't smoke!

COACH. Who was smoking? Tell me who it was? Motalko?

KOMETA. I've told you everything!

COACH. I want names!

KOMETA falls on the bed and pretends to have a nervous attack.

COACH (*frightened*). Stop it, Kometa! There's no need for that! I won't shout at you! Come on, sweetheart, I believe you, don't cry. It'll be the competition soon – you know how I feel about you, what you mean to me...

KOMETA. You don't love me!

COACH. I don't love you? In my sleep I'm still shouting 'hips, Kometa, hips!' Me and my wife aren't on speaking terms three weeks in the month!

KOMETA. Go back to your wife then, instead of knocking around the dormitory.

COACH. Don't cry! Sunday we'll go off to the park and have a ride on the roller coaster...

KOMETA. Will you let me have ice cream?

COACH (*indignantly*). Ice cream? Fat cow like you? No I won't.

KOMETA. I'm so unhappy! I'm overweight! I'm not even allowed ice cream! I want to go home to my Mum!

COACH (*decisively*). No, no ice cream. I'll buy you a frozen fruit drink.

KOMETA. 'Cause it's cheaper?

COACH. 'Cause it won't make your arse any bigger! Did you take your vitamins?

KOMETA. Yuk! (*Meaning yes*)

COACH. Lie down then and I'll leave you.

KOMETA. Miaou, miaou! (*Coquettishly waves a paw at him*)

COACH. Shall I tuck you up?

KOMETA. Stop fussing! Do you think I'm pregnant or something?

The COACH wags his finger at her and leaves happily.

The cupboard door opens. Hamlet is in there. He takes a running jump onto the bed and laughs like crazy.

KOMETA. Shhh! He listens at the door.

HAMLET. Nah... So what's all this calling me a pillock?

KOMETA. He calls everyone a pillock. It's instead of calling us 'kids'.

HAMLET. Let's have a smoke.

KOMETA. That's enough. I'm in enough trouble as it is.

HAMLET. Don't go on, you bitch. I want a fag.

KOMETA. I'm not going on. Auntie Tanya is on duty.

HAMLET. Then I'll go and see the dinner ladies in the canteen. You can do anything in there!

KOMETA. Get lost then!

HAMLET slaps KOMETA on the bum and she squeals. He grabs her by the hair, pushes her head between her legs and starts walloping her playfully on the bottom. They both have fun.

Passing Out for the first time

MOTALKA and the FOIL FENCER are on their own in the flat. The FOIL FENCER is sprawled on the sofa. MOTALKA is sitting on a chair with a glass of vodka in her hand. She looks utterly drunk.

FOIL FENCER. I'll explain it all again. I'm a foil fencer and there are epee and sabre fencers. Fencing with a foil is the most prestigious form of fencing. The epee is rated, too, but the sabre is a waste of time. The foil is a really flexible weapon. In foil fencing hits can only be scored with the point of the blade on the opponent's torso. The epee is a duelling sword with a bi-angular blade. Hits are scored with the point only, on any part of the body. With the sabre, hits can only be made above the waist, like how it used to be in cavalry battles.

He sits her down next to him on the sofa.

See, so the sabre is a wicked chopper, the epee pierces, but the foil is aristocratic. Like when they used to stand on a cambric and lace handkerchief. I'm a foil fencer. Understand?

He puts his hand on her shoulder.

MOTALKA. All fencers have got bent shoulders and legs. And then you're all a bit strange!

FOIL FENCER (*jumps up*). Look! (*He stands en garde*) We stand like that all the time (*he imitates fencing and becomes carried away*) Like that, and that and that's it! (*MOTALKA watches, enchanted*) That's it – got him! See – even the straightest of legs become bent, and your shoulders bend under the heavy jackets. Do you know how much all this equipment weighs? A load, honest!

MOTALKA. Bloody D'Artagnan you are. (*She drinks as he taught her to*) Aah!

FOIL FENCER. Do you know how epees and foils appeared? In the middle ages soldiers wore armour and it was hard to inflict a mortal blow through it. So they kept on making the blade narrower all the time. You had to hit the opponent by getting the blade's point through the holes and chinks in the armour plates. That's how the epee appeared, and it was the death of the sword. Spain became the home of the foil. The foil is beautiful. The guard is like a cup and it's like wearing a metal glove.

After this MOTALKA passes out for the first time. She is unconscious for a short time, but when she comes around briefly it is dark and she is lying on the sofa with someone above her, making a pleasant breathing noise.

FOIL FENCER (*in a hushed whisper*). Don't be scared Galka. I won't do anything to you. I'll just undo your button.

MOTALKA. This isn't my shirt! (*She tries to resist and passes out for a second time*)

When she comes around for the second time it is light and a radio is on. A voice on the radio is saying:

Fencing is sometimes called 'chess with muscles' because of its battle strategies and its athleticism. A fight between fencers really might be compared with a chess tournament where all the decisions are taken in split seconds and the smallest mistake may lead to instantaneous defeat. Fencing culture is used outside the sporting arena...

MOTALKA looks at her shirt carefully buttoned up to the top.

Vitamins

The sports hall. The girls are sitting on a mat.

KOMETA (*Jealous, but trying to be objective*). That Taranovskaya...she's beautiful, isn't she?

BATSILA and MOTALKA. Come off it!

KOMETA. But she runs like anything!

BATSILA. Yeah, but she's got hairs growing on her chest.

MOTALKA. How come?

KOMETA. Easy – little fringe around her nipples.

BATSILA. She shaves it.

KOMETA. No she plucks it – I've seen her.

MOTALKA. But why?

BATSILA. She takes a load of drugs, doesn't she.

MOTALKA (*shocked*). You mean steroids? Surely that's not allowed?

BATSILA. Yeah, but she runs like a horse.

MOTALKA. But that's terrible. It's not honest. You don't take any of that stuff Svetka, you work hard – but she gets all the medals!

KOMETA. She's going to compete internationally this year.

MOTALKA. Well that's good. They'll test her and disqualify her.

KOMETA and BATSILA laugh to each other patronisingly.

MOTALKA. Won't they test her?

KOMETA. Course they will. Only they won't find anything. She's not stupid.

MOTALKA. Kometa, what are those tablets our coach gives you at training?

KOMETA. Vitamins.

MOTALKA (*To BATSILA*). See – vitamins? That's what I said.

BATSILA snorts. KOMETA gives her a slap on the head as she passes.

KOMETA. Vitamins! Stupid cow!

Music

Room 217. MOTALKA is learning to play the guitar. After a long time and with unheard of determination she finally learns to play three chords and sing at the same time. You can tell this is the result of long hard work. Neighbours are banging on the door and walls.

This is the song she is singing:

You pass by, you pass by and greet me unkindly
In my eyes, in my eyes tears can be seen
I say farewell as if we barely knew each other
As if there were no special feelings between us.

And she carries on until everyone has learnt the whole thing by heart and come to hate the simple tune.

Sports camp in Yalta

The girls arrived only today at sports camp in Yalta but they have already managed to meet the wonderful Armenian boxers. The boxers are tiny with broken ears and noses. They treated the girls to cake, took them on the carousels and promised them a walk at night. But their killjoy COACH, sensing their joy, has confiscated the girls' shoes for the night – even their spikes, which you can only use on the rubber surface of the stadium.

It is dark. The girls are lying in bed and chewing nuts angrily.

KOMETA. The prick!

BATSILA. Killjoy!

KOMETA. Spoiling everything!

MOTALKA. Bastard!

KOMETA. He's even taken our spikes!

MOTALKA. We could climb out of the window.

BATSILA. Yeah, right – barefoot in February.

KOMETA. I'll get him back for this!

MOTALKA. Really?

KOMETA. I'll change to another coach when I've finished here.

MOTALKA. It would kill him!

BATSILA. The time he's spent on you!

KOMETA. I hate him, I wish he'd die!

MOTALKA. So do I!

BATSILA. Let him. But you'd never leave him.

KOMETA. Oh wouldn't I?

BATSILA. He's a good coach.

KOMETA. He's too honest. There's no point in staying with him. He can't even get me a scholarship! I'll leave him.

BATSILA. You won't!

KOMETA. I will!

BATSILA. Certain? (bit ruder)

KOMETA. I am!

BATSILA. Well, alright then.

For a while all that can be heard is the crunching of nuts.

KOMETA. Girls, what are you getting your blokes for 23rd February / Men's Day?

BATSILA. A card.

KOMETA. What about you?

MOTALKA. I don't know. He didn't get me a Christmas present.

KOMETA. Don't laugh you two but I've made up my mind to touch Hamlet's prick.

BATSILA. Yuck!

MOTALKA. I dunno – don't think I could.

KOMETA. You've got to get used to it!

MOTALKA. It's a bit disgusting somehow.

KOMETA. Yeah, but I'm curious.

MOTALKA. But I suppose I'm not going to spend any money on him either.

BUTSILA. Nah. I'll buy a card.

KOMETA. And what about if you were told you had a choice: either you'll be thrown out of the school or you touch Repin's prick?

BUTSILA. Stupid choice! So what about if your choice was either you take drugs, or you come second in races all your life. What would you choose, then?

MOTALKA. What about the hairy chest?

KOMETA. You can pluck the hairs.

BUTSILA. So you don't want to come second?

KOMETA. I haven't chosen yet.

BUTSILA. Choose then.

KOMETA. Get lost!

BUTSILA. Come on! I bet you'd take the pills just to come first.

KOMETA. Depends where.

MOTALKA. What do you mean, where?

KOMETA. Coming second where. If it was international then that'd be different.

BATSILA. And if it was first in the world? Would you do it?

KOMETA. And would you let your husband put his thing in your mouth?

BATSILA. What's that got to do with it? Course I wouldn't!

KOMETA. I would. Because it's my husband's.

BATSILA. You're a mad cow, you are – here's me talking about sport and she's...

KOMETA. And I'm talking about sport.

MOTALKA. Girls... Goebbels!

BATSILA. No, but I mean what's that go to do with it?

KOMETA. Right. Lets get to sleep. We've got a hard session tomorrow morning. 'Sleep in a new bed and you'll see your husband in your dreams'.

MOTALKA. 'Sleep in a new bed and you'll see your husband in your dreams'.

BATSILA. 'Sleep in a new bed and you'll see your husband in your dreams'.

MOTALKA (*gulping with joy*). That was the first sports camp I have ever been to. I've never felt so fantastic! I mean – Yalta, the sea... the fun. Our boss gave us a daily allowance. We went to the café and ate meatballs with vinegar and then we went and had jelly on the front and cakes on Sadovoy Street. And then poached fish in the supermarket. There's millions of fish there. Kometa likes fish a lot, and nuts. So do I.

And then we went, us girls, to a hairdressers and had a perm. Then we went to the chemists and bought peroxide and dyed our hair in our room. It looked beautiful! Even though Batsila's fringe fell out two days later and now she's going to have a little tuft there soon. The boss had a fit when he came into our room. He called us 'typhoid poodles'! And that coming from a man with a bald patch!

And we met these great blokes – boxers, footballers, local boys – the whole lot! I liked the musicians from Belarus, but Kometa said that they were a hairy load of yokels.

There were as many fags as we wanted. We just went out onto the front and scrounged loads. They got to know us by the end and just stretched out the packet to us.

I want to live like this for ever! But we're leaving tomorrow.

I cried over my foil fencer of course. I had a feeling that he was cheating on me. But Kometa said that she'll take me with her to Room 413 – and that's... wow!

We went on the chairlift – the one Bananan and Drubich went on. When I thought about them being on it...

I tried beer for the first time. I didn't like it.

The boss tried to ruin the fun, of course. He was always imagining things. Kometa even threw her spikes at him during training. She hit his head. He's pissing himself, now.

He took away all our shoes again tonight. The boys are down there, under our window at their wit's end, calling us. The boss is listening out under the door. Me and the girls are writing diaries, so there's something to remind us about it later. Because soon this will all be in the past.

Room 413

MOTALKA, trembling and reverential goes into Room 413. The room is crowded and people are sitting two and three to a bed, talking quietly and thoughtfully between themselves in an incomprehensible language. It sounds like complete rubbish, ravings. MOTALKA looks at them in horror and tries to catch KOMETA's attention. But KOMETA doesn't see or hear her.

MOTALKA. What's that smell? Hey! It smells of glue!

The SABRE FENCER appears from nowhere. He is holding a bag and a tube of 'Moment' glue. He squeezes the glue out into the bag and carries it to each person in turn. They attach themselves to it, like blind kittens to their mother, breathing in the air greedily and the SABRE FENCER'S task is to take the packet away in time, refresh it and carry it to someone else.

MOTALKA. Give it to me!

SABRE FENCER. You'll answer for my mate.

MOTALKA. Give it here, and stop going on!

MOTALKA breathes in the glue and tearing away from the packet she notices with amazement that the people around her are talking normally again, with kind, even voices, listening and understanding each other.

KOMETA. It's wonderful that you're here, Motalka.

BATSILA. I was just telling Kometa how much I envy her.

KOMETA. Don't. Things are difficult for me.

BATSILA. Everything works out for you. You have good results and even teeth.

KOMETA. That Taranovskaya always beats me – all the time!

BATSILA. I'll die if you beat her.

MOTALKA. You're a poor thing, Batsila.

KOMETA. You are...

BATSILA. And you. I envy you, too.

MOTALKA. What for?

BATSILA. You play the guitar, you suffer poetically, you've got beautiful hair and green eyes – and look at me!

MOTALKA. Yes, you're a grey mouse.

BATSILA. If only you knew how things don't work out for me! How hard it is for me to wash my socks after training every day, how hard it is for me to wake up in the mornings... much harder than it is for you. I keep pretending all the time that I'm all clean and tidy, but actually I don't even understand why I've got to wash my socks after training and my knickers every evening! There's never any stains, they don't smell! I just rub the soap around! And we're always swapping clothes – if you knew how squeamish I am! But then if I don't do it you'll go on at me!

KOMETA. We will.

MOTALKA. Course we will!

BATSILA. Are you having me on girls?

KOMETA. Yeah...

FOIL FENCER (*Tearing himself away from the bag*). Hey – Galka Motalka is here!

SABRE FENCER. Your Galka Motalka is a silly cow, but I fancy going out with her. I want to take her down to the stadium in the evenings. So everyone says 'what's he going around with that baby for?' And I'd say, 'out of boredom'. And I'd stick my tongue in her mouth all the time – even when she's eating.

MOTALKA. You might be older, but you're just like the ones in my class. You smell of dog and you've got a dribbly mouth. No one wants to go with you. I love your friend.

FOIL FENCER (*To the SABRE FENCER*). I'm sorry for her, but I'll definitely dump her. Listen Galka, I'm really fond of you! I'll never forget you, but I'll definitely dump you.

MOTALKA. I understand. It's always like that. You'll marry someone grown up and clever. No point in marrying a loser like me.

REPIN. I can't get rid of my acne. I've been treating it for years now. I even drank piss for two months. Nothing helped. Now I squeeze the spots with my dirty hands and I love it. Really puts everyone off.

BATSILA. Can see why. What does it matter, if you can't get rid of them anyway?

REPIN. I know one clever thing – if you want to be a real bloke you should pick your spots.

MOTALKA goes over to another group of people.

UNLUCKY SHOTPUTTER. Just once he gave me a love bite by the campfire and the next day it was like nothing had happened – just ‘hi there, zheka!’ I cut open my veins in misery. And so what? I need love, too.

AUNTIE TANYA. Shame that I saw it. I had to let the coach and the head know and they threw you out. Course, you could have used onion on it to get rid of it.

UNLUCKY SHOTPUTTER. Never mind. It’s your job. But I’m still coming back to get my revenge on you.

AUNTIE TANYA. So where are you now? What are you doing? Tell us about yourself?

UNLUCKY SHOTPUTTER. I went back to Zhmerinka, back to my parents. Tried prostitution, and yeah, that worked out. The men aren’t demanding round there. I drink a lot, smoke as many fags as I can get into my mouth and nick my Nan and Granddad’s pension.

AUNTIE TANYA. Well, there you are, look how you’ve settled down! Let me at least be pleased about that!

MOTALKA. Why are you here, Auntie Tanya?

AUNTIE TANYA. Keeping an eye on you lot, aren’t I?

MOTALKA. I’ve wanted to tell you for a long while that I hate you.

AUNTIE TANYA. I see.

MOTALKA. You’re a silly old woman.

AUNTIE TANYA. Who’d know it? I’ve been working with teenagers for thirty five years and I know all about you. You’re all crazy! You’re all bubbling away up here! I like young people when they’re over twenty – there’s something to be jealous of. But I don’t like you at all. Load of trouble from you...

REPIN. Shut your gob, you bitch!

AUNTIE TANYA. You wait and see...

The SABRE FENCER hands REPIN the bag.

KOMETA (*after accepting some more glue, with a decisive look and tone*). I love fish, apples and nuts... all my friends are nice.... I’ve got some velvet trousers...Dad drinks

Mum sews just running every day I wouldn't go back for anything just ?? on my legs
Hamlet wants my virginity I've got to lie to the boss, 'cause I always...

She falls onto the pillow. The SABRE FENCER covers her over with a blanket. HAMLET comes into the room, saying something in an incomprehensible language and gesturing. The SABRE FENCER takes the bag across to him. After the prerequisite sniff he joins in the conversation.

REPIN. You're having me on, Hamlet!

HAMLET. You're having me on, Repin!

They roar with amicable laughter.

REPIN. Nah – you're the one having me on!

HAMLET. Nah – it's you, you're the one – you're all of you having me on!

They roar with amicable laughter.

REPIN. You're having me on, Repin!

HAMLET. Me, Repin! Then you're Hamlet!

They roar with laughter again and hug each other.

The Sports Hall. KOMETA, MOTALKA and BATSILA are doing 'fleas' – three lots of ten.

Sporting Love Part Two

FOIL FENCER. We're in love.

MOTALKA. Yeah.

FOIL FENCER. Remember I told you about that one in the woods?

MOTALKA. When you did it for the first time?

FOIL FENCER. Yeah.

MOTALKA. Why wouldn't I remember? You went off for a pee and she's twenty five and all that and she follows you in and you're there naked and there you go...

FOIL FENCER. Well, it's all crap.

MOTALKA. What do you mean?

FOIL FENCER. The first time I did it was with some stupid cow at a party. She was under age and drunk and a big fat cow... So it doesn't count.

MOTALKA. Why did you tell me that, then?

FOIL FENCER. Well, you know, just so you know that it'll only count with you. If you're counting.

MOTALKA. So I'm like, jumping for joy here, am I?

FOIL FENCER. Whatever.

MOTALKA. Jump yourself. If you're counting.

FOIL FENCER. I am jumping.

MOTALKA. So what now?

FOIL FENCER. I've got my leaving exam in a month.

MOTALKA. And then what?

FOIL FENCER. I'm leaving.

MOTALKA. And what about me?

FOIL FENCER. Work hard, little girl, I s'pose.

The sports hall. KOMETA and BATSILA are doing exercises (The 'Pistol'). Three lots of ten.

The Unlucky Shot-putter

Room 217. MOTALKA is suffering on the bed. BATSILA and KOMETA are dressing up to go out somewhere.

KOMETA. Galka, give us your trousers and I'll give you ???

MOTALKA. Don't want a ??

KOMETA. Then I'll take Batsila's green cardy and give it to you and I'll give her my ??? and you give me your trousers.

BATSILA. Hey...

MOTALKA. Alright.

KOMETA. What the fuck are you getting worked up about?

MOTALKA. Give it here then, Motalka. What's that ??? you've got?

MOTALKA. You're all bitches...

The UNLUCKY SHOTPUTTER enters after knocking in a special way. She is large, freshly made up. The girls thrown themselves on her with squeals.

KOMETA. Zheka! Where did you spring from?

BATSILA. When did you get here?

UNLUCKY SHOTPUTTER. I've come straight from the train, girls. I came to register at university. Then after university I came straight here to see you. I've missed you, my sweethearts... Six months I've been writing letters to you and you never write back!

KOMETA. You know what its like, Zheka... with the training.

BATSILA. Love bite gone?

UNLUCKY SHOTPUTTER. It's just a reflex action now - if a bloke reaches for my neck I go for him!

KOMETA. I'll introduce you - this is Galka Motalka. She sleeps on your bed now.

UNLUCKY SHOTPUTTER. That's a happy bed!

MOTALKA (*Wearily*). It would be boring to tell you the rest. The usual girlie stuff. We went down to the stadium for a smoke. Zheka told us about her life. Seems like she's got everything sorted out – although she might be just making it up. Then we went into the

woods and started drinking wine. Zheka told us that she's been sleeping with grown up men. She says she can't have children now. Because if you sleep with more than seven men then you can't have children. The first time someone raped her in the woods when she was coming back from the beach. I told her about my problems. I didn't tell her about the new jeans, just about the Fencer. We all had a good cry. Then we took a knife to make ourselves blood sisters. I just cut my hand lightly, just so there was a little bit of blood, but Zheka slashed herself and there was gallons! I was sick on the spot. But we did manage to do it – now we're blood sisters, even Batsila.

Then we started to think about how we could get revenge on Auntie Tanya for Zheka. We had a good think and came up with something really excellent.

Doesn't matter

A bar. There is champagne on the table and a pair of jeans on the chair. MOTALKA is sitting on the lap of a different COACH and drinking champagne.

DIFFERENT COACH. You drink champagne like a little kid.

MOTALKA (*Offended*). What do you mean?

DIFFERENT COACH. I noticed you straight away, as soon as he took you into his group.

MOTALKA. What do you mean?

DIFFERENT COACH. Try the jeans on.

MOTALKA obediently changes into the jeans behind the bar.

DIFFERENT COACH. Wouldn't you like to be in my group?

MOTALKA. I've got no future.

DIFFERENT COACH. You have. Remember how I didn't report you for smoking?

MOTALKA. In Yalta?

DIFFERENT COACH. I reported all the rest, but not you. And why?

MOTALKA (*Comes out from behind the bar, disappointed*). They're too big by miles.

DIFFERENT COACH. Never mind, you'll grow into them. (*He sits her back on his lap*) My little doll. Those draft horses out there were made for work. Stupid workhorses. If only you knew how they irritate me! They can't string two words together. You arrive at training and there they all are. All around you. Hardworking, obedient horses – but ugly!

All they can do is work. That's what their Mothers gave birth to them for. But you were born for love. I can talk to you. Drink with you. (*He strokes her knees and her back*). I love a woman with a cigarette. Come into my group.

MOTALKA. But I don't run well.

DIFFERENT COACH. Why do you need to run?

MOTALKA. And I don't really drink.

DIFFERENT COACH. And you don't sleep with the boys?

MOTALKA. Aleksei Nikolaevich!

DIFFERENT COACH. Just think – you came in here in your old skirt and you'll leave in your new jeans! Eh? Have a think about it.

MOTALKA (*After struggling with her thoughts*). But they're too big for me!

DIFFERENT COACH. That doesn't matter.

MOTALKA. We went around to Auntie Tanya's house and threw shit through her windows. Zheka collected the most shit. It was harder for me because I puked up beforehand. We had to collect up dogshit in the park. It was amazing! Course, we didn't do it with our bare hands – it was all very civilised!! First of all we smeared it all over the doors. Then we chucked it through the windows in bags. Like bombs, I s'pose... So it probably sprayed on the walls and bed.

They're all Bastards

COACH. Why aren't you stretching Motalka?

MOTALKA (*coily, meaningfully*). I can't Andrei Nikolaevich.

COACH. Are you making fun of me or something? You couldn't last week either – you've got what monkeys got, down there?

MOTALKA. Well, you know what its like... everything's changing and its not regular yet...

COACH. You have it regular every week! Ten circuits instead of training!

MOTALKA. But...

COACH. Fifteen! Its you all lot getting constantly aroused in that dormitory together!

MOTALKA (*With unexpected anger*). You just don't understand women's problems! You reckon its all like its supposed to be, but its not, because we're not machines, we're real people and you're always on about your... That's why the kids don't like you!

She throws down her spikes and runs off along the track.

COACH (*Can't believe his ears*). Bloody hell!

Telling Tales

The Academic Head's office

ACADEMIC HEAD (*Reading the statement*). "Kometa, Motalka and I took it in turns to stand guard, even through we knew that she was on duty and would only be back in the morning. We put bags on our hands, so as not to get dirty. We took it and threw it in through the open window." What did you take and throw?

BATSILA. I don't know how its spelt.

ACADEMIC HEAD. Right, and your name, can you spell that?

BATSILA. No, I won't put my name.

ACADEMIC HEAD. Just here. Legibly. (*BATSILA isn't sure*) Don't worry. It's going into the files.

BATSILA (*signing*). You promised you wouldn't show anyone.

The ACADEMIC HEAD leaves the statement in a visible place.

ACADEMIC HEAD. So Batsila, what did Auntie Tanya ever do to you?

BATSILA. Nothing...

ACADEMIC HEAD. So why did you go then, with Motalka and the girl who was expelled?

BATSILA. Kometa was there, too.

ACADEMIC HEAD. I heard. But why you? You were in our good books.

BATSILA. What do you mean, 'was'? You promised you wouldn't expel me if I helped you to sort all this out.

ACADEMIC HEAD. I remember. But why did you go with them?

BATSILA. They're my friends.

Happy Birthday – fifteen years old.

A room. 'Happy Birthday – fifteen years old' is written on a large poster and some carnations are hanging out of a jam jar. Some loud teen-music is playing. GALKA is rolling about on the ground, beating her head against the wall, tearing her hair out, howling and weeping. She tried to suffocate herself with the scarf. Then she sits on the ground. She stares at some point in front of her and repeats, over and over again

Please... please...please...

Sporting Love – Part Three

REPIN is drunk. He is beating BATSILA 'melodically'.

REPIN. So you grassed, did you, bitch? Grassed on your friends?

BATSILA. I'm changing to a different coach.

REPIN. Maybe I should tell the girls about you...

BATSILA. I'll change rooms.

REPIN. You're a bitch – you dropped them in it!

BATSILA. They aren't chucking Kometa out – she's a KMS.

REPIN. They're throwing Motalka out 'cause of you.

BATSILA. She's no sportswoman – she's a fucking tart!

REPIN. And what are you? Got a nerve calling people names like that!

BATSILA. If I got thrown out it would be the end. The end of everything. Of life and everything else...

REPIN. And what is it now, you little grasser!

BATSILA. And so what? You looking down on me, yeah? Well dump me then! You don't mean anything to me! Dump people like me – that's it...ow...ow...

REPIN. Shut your gob! I'm not going to dump you, you cow! I'll follow you around wherever you go... no one will find out that it's you... I'm going to beat you into a normal human being! Or kill you in the process!

BATSILA (*bursting into sobs*). I don't want to live!

REPIN. That's crap!

Have a good journey

The ACADEMIC HEAD, AUNTIE TANYA and MOTALKA.

AUNTIE TANYA. Dear oh dear oh dear!

ACADEMIC HEAD. There's no way out...

AUNTIE TANYA. What you going to do now, you poor sod?

ACADEMIC HEAD. No, we can't have people like her around. Did everything we could, everything.

AUNTIE TANYA. And the coach doesn't want you.

ACADEMIC HEAD. See what you've descended to?

AUNTIE TANYA. And leave the boy in peace. He's a good boy. From a good family.

ACADEMIC HEAD. Sergienko? The fencer?

AUNTIE TANYA. She's ruining him. He's got his graduation, his final exams. Leave him be – he's not for you!

ACADEMIC HEAD. Dear oh, dear oh, dear...

AUNIE TANYA. Never mind. Perhaps you can get a job at the factory, or someone might marry you... And she's laughing still! Terrible!

ACADEMIC HEAD. Yes...

AUNTIE TANYA. Just look at her – dyed her hair – did you think it would add to your brain cells? Covered her nails in polish! You should be ashamed of yourself! You're still a little girl!

ACADEMIC HEAD. You're a monster, Motalko – this school is for the disciplined, the Olympic team and not for pro... ungrateful girl!

AUNTIE TANYA (*To the ACADEMIC HEAD, quietly and distressed*). Her poor Mother – how she wept and begged us!

ACADEMIC HEAD. We did everything we could, everything...

AUNTIE TANYA. This isn't a children's home or a charity place...

ACADEMIC HEAD. Well go on then Motalko, off you go...

MOTALKO. I'm packing my stuff. I haven't got much – just half a shelf in Batsila's cupboard. Its strange, but they've all started talking to me differently. Like they're sorry for me or something. But I already feel like I've left, set off. There's a long road ahead of me, like it says in the song. Its like I've been cut off. I can't imagine at all how they're going to live here without me, that they're going to put someone in my old bed. Its like without me everything should finish. Just close down. And its like only I could open it all up again... funny that...

A fortune teller told me that everything would turn out alright. If you look at things objectively you'd think that everything would turn out badly. But it's not like that. I just didn't make it to the Institute for Physical Education. And I didn't want to go anyway. Everyone has to choose for themselves.

Me and the girls went to Victory Park yesterday and a gypsy told our fortunes. She told Kometa she'd have three husbands, and one more rival who would always be in front of her. Batsila, she told she'd have a long happy life in a small town – Batsila called her all kinds of names for that. And me – she told me that everything would be OK. And she didn't take any money.

Then we went to sit in the Sabre fencer's room and talked and listened to music. You can see the fencing hall from his window. Big windows there. My ex-foil fencer is fencing. He knows I'm watching and he appeared. The Sabre fencer says, 'so where are we all going to be in five years time?' I don't care. I just know that that was the best year of my life. And the shortest.

But then I did learn to play the guitar and generally to work out lots about life and people and all that... And I don't believe in sporting love anymore.

Right. I'd would be better if I shut up and went to hand in all my equipment, 'cause I think I've been a bit silly this last... Hey, Batsila! Pull my old running shoes off!

In the stadium. The COACH is tying a car tyre to KOMETA. A rope is tied to the tyre and is strengthened with a belt. It is tied around her waist. KOMETA prepares herself for three runs. Running with a tyre is very hard – especially three lots of a hundred metres – but then when its untied....wow... It feels like there's a parachute floating behind you... it weighs nothing, that you're beating world records and flying like a bird.

It's a good exercise.