

Yaroslava PULINOVICH
A play

NATASHA'S DREAM

Character –

Natasha - 16 years old. Dressed in an athletic costume. Her hands are squeezed into fists. She often glances around her. She's missing one front tooth.

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NATASHA

See, that's all a bunch of crap that they're saying. None of that shit happened. Huh? You wanna hear what did? Anything else you want? Maybe you wanna quick fuck while we're waitin'? I'm not cussing. Those are regular words. (*Silent. Looks straight ahead. Quiet suddenly.*) All right. It happened... Huh? I'm not mumbling. I'm telling you normal (*talks a little louder*). It happened last year. September. We just got back from camp. I was even kinda happy that we were back. Because there was nothing but mosquitoes out at that camp and they put Cross-eyed Tanya in my room. So all night long I saw nothing but mosquitoes and her ass, and that's the last thing I wanted to see. The only funky thing that happened was when Vitya pantsed Alex and we all keeled over laughing. I felt a little bad for Alex – he probably didn't think it was so funny. Anyway. They said, pack up your things we're going home and when we were packed, I lifted Tanya's studded hair clip. What's a fat slob like her need with a hair clip? Then we got in the bus and I was kinda bummed out because I realized I can't even wear the thing. Tanya would sniff that out right away. I decided if I ever got a boyfriend I'd wear the hair clip on our dates. But until I get a boyfriend I'll just let it hang. But, man, it was like I knew something was going to happen! I mean, there was this guy. I'm not some scarecrow or something, but usually we just hung out at keggers. We even kissed a time or two. His breath stunk like potatoes all the time – I never realized how disgusting that is. I was kissing him at a dance once, we're kissing, and then I think – what if I stink like potatoes now but I just can't tell? Even if I didn't used to stink like potatoes I sure will now. So I ran into the bathroom and I stood there washing my mouth out with soap forever. Then a bunch of the girls dragged me into one of the stalls to light up and I went with them. Sveta's inhaling beer and she opens the window and says, "You chicken to jump?" I say, "You stupid twit, your brains fried? Where you gonna jump to? It's the third floor." Sveta's all huffy and says, "I know you won't jump." And I say, "Who says I won't?" Man, she's telling me I won't jump! I say, "What makes you think I won't jump?" So she's going – "Jump! Jump!" And I say, "Hey pillow-tits, is your head screwed on wrong?" And she quick goes and opens the window wider. No, I mean, naturally, right then I got scared some but there was no going back then – I couldn't flake out in front of Sveta! So I give her this look like, you fucking cow, and down I went. I don't remember what happened after that. But as I was flying I really started shittin' it 'cause I figured this was it. And I made a wish: I want real love. I want a bridal veil and chocolate candies. And I want all the girls following us in a line and I want 'em all dying of envy. Only that's not the main thing. The main thing is for him to love me, for him to come to me and say, "Natasha. You are the baddest damn chick on earth. Would you marry me?" I'd marry a guy like that right now.

It never occurred to me that jumping out a third-floor window would make your dreams come true. It totally does though. If you don't believe me, try it. Only you gotta make your wish really fast because there's almost no air time. I came to in the hospital. Right away they told me some smart-looking young man had been coming asking about me. First thing I think, is that Sanya? Sanya may be a certified four-eyes, but he's no smart-looking young man. And I don't know any other smart... smart-looking young men.

But then when he came I realized right now it was him because who else could have just up and come to visit me in the hospital? True, he didn't say anything about getting married. He said he was a reporter for the Pinecone Spark, that it was one of the oldest papers in the city and that he wanted to write about me in the paper. All I had to do was tell him about my life, nothing special, just shit like that. He wanted to know if the supervisors were mean to us, whether they fed us all right, how much money they gave us and stuff like that. And how come I jumped out the window – just for the fun of it or was I at the end of my wits? Actually, I was kind of ruffled because last year they did an interview with Irina G. when she won some wood-carving contest. And they didn't ask her any questions about supervisors. They asked about her creative plans for the future – that's exactly how they put it:

“Irina, what are your creative plans for the future?”

“My creative plans are to carve a bunch of airplanes and present them to all our supervisors on Victory Day.”

And there was a really classy photo on half the page. All the girls were choking with envy. I was a little envious, too, but then I thought – at least I'm a natural blonde and Irina dyes her hair and I forgot about it. Sveta was going around all shit-faced angry and she even kept slipping copies of the paper into the bathrooms in place of toilet paper so everybody would laugh. But nobody laughed. And that's when I even kind of started to feel sorry for Irina.

This reporter, Valery, came to see me on the second day with this thing – it's called a dictaphone. You can say all kinds of things into it and later it'll play 'em back to you. Valery asked me if the other kids in the orphanage treat me mean. Yeah, right! I can bust the lock off the washroom with one swift kick and I'm such a wimp I'm going to worry about them treating me mean? He asked about my parents – do I remember them or not and what happened and all? So I'm looking at this guy and I say, “Valery, my mother called me ‘her abortion that went and survived’.” That's how I am, see, I played the role of the experienced toughie so he'd know who he was talking to. What am I going to do, tell him about Vadim-the-pimp who snuffed out my mom? Then Valery asks me, “What's your dream, Natasha?” That's when I realized this was the guy. Because before that nobody ever asked me if I had a dream. And this guy just up and flat out asked me. I say, “Valery, we're grown-ups, what's this about dreams? We gotta keep our nose to the grindstone!” But I'm thinking the whole time – ask me again. Man, I must have lost my mind to answer him like that. I should have just blurted it out about my dream so he'd understand me and say, “Natasha. You are the baddest damn chick on earth. Would you marry me?” But I was scared by that thing he was holding. That recording thing. 'Cause, yeah, I go and tell him about my dream and then what if somebody else hears it? They'll have my hide! So I answered him the way I answered him and he didn't say anything, just said he hoped I got better and I should come see him at the newspaper office when I got out. They discharged me a week later and told me to avoid stress and lifting heavy objects. But there was this huge bruise still on my arm that looked just like a cat. I wore all my short-sleeved stuff then so everybody would

see it. As soon as I got back I get Sveta and I say, "Let's go have a talk and a smoke." We went into the washroom and I grabbed a fistful of her hair and I said, "What are you trying to do, you damn retard? You got your damn head on wrong? Do you know who you're messing with? Sveta's screaming and I'm mopping the floor with her hair. Then I got tired of that and went back to my room where I crawled under the blanket and pretended to go to sleep. And to myself I keep thinking, "Natasha, what is your dream?" "Natasha, what is your dream?" I kept repeating that over and over again until I fell asleep for real. I was still excused from going to classes. So I woke up and it was the middle of the day and all the girls were back from school, changing their clothes. One of the supervisors comes in and makes like she wants to check everybody's homework. But she's giving me dirty looks. "Sick, are you, Natasha?" she says. "Yeah, I'm sick, Mrs. Stepanov." "Not too sick to fight, though, are you?" she says. I deny the whole thing, "What fight, Mrs. Stepanov? Look at this bruise." "Then how come Tanya saw you dragging Sveta around by the hair?" Well that bitch, I think. That fat, stinking slob, goes around and rats like nobody's business. What, did she figure out about the hair clip or something? Nya-uh, I say. Nothing of the sort. And now Sveta looks up – she was standing there digging through her purse – and she says, "Nothing happened at all, Mrs. Stepanov. We were just kiddin' around." And she aims her little blue eyes at the floor. Now that's when I realize that Sveta, even if she is a zit-faced scabie-dog, she's still my best friend. In the cafeteria at lunch I call Sveta over. "I got something to discuss," I say. And I spilled all the beans about Valery. She was great, she understood right away that it was time to make tracks to the newspaper office. And she says, you shouldn't be going anywhere alone right now, so I'll go with you and then I can check this guy out myself, too. Then I'll give it to you straight, whether he's the one or not. Well, all right, fuck it then, if Little Red Riding Hood wants to troop along, let her, but I told her: "Don't go painting yourself all up, we're not going to a friggin' dance. We've got to let this guy know right off the bat that we're not chopped liver. Maybe we're not shit-hot high class, we may be orphan kids, but we know what we're worth. So we pulled ourselves together, I clipped on Cross-eyed Tanya's hair clip real quiet-like and we set off. We come in there all business-like and there's this guy there we ask, "Where might we find Valery?" He says, down there in that office. There's a sign outside the door there, all glam and slam, and it says, "Pinecone Spark Offices." So we go in and there are, like, seven people sitting at computers, their faces stuck in their monitors and everybody's smoking. There was so much smoke in there, at first I wasn't even sure where to go. But then I squint and look around and there he is, my throb, over in the corner by the window. I walk up to him and say, like, "Hi, Valery. How're you doin'?" And he says, "Hey, Natasha. Cool. You want a copy of the paper?" "Well, yeah," I say, "and to find out how you're doing." "Everything's great," he says and hands me a copy of the paper. At this point I realize if I don't spill the beans right now we're going to pass like ships in the night. "Valery," I say, "I didn't tell you everything. Do you think we could, like, talk?" He goes, "Yeah? Well then let's talk." And I go, "But not here. Can we go for a walk?" So he says, "Come to the park tomorrow at six, the one right here by the office, and I'll wait for you there." Man, my armpits started leaking from hearing that. I'll be there I said. And he says, "Good, then. Go on now. I'll see you tomorrow." And I left. It was like I was blind. I even ran flat into Sveta who was standing by the door shining her blackheads on the whole office. We're walking down the street and she goes, "So, what the hell? What the hell happened?" And I can't say anything. I'm walking down the street and my head's spinning with the words, "Natasha, what's your dream?" "Natasha, what's your dream?" Like a broken record. I don't even remember what happened the rest of the day. Every five minutes I ran out into the common room to look at the clock – when's it going to be tomorrow? When's it going to be tomorrow? And then when we got back

Cross-eyed Tanya saw her hair clip and, boy, did she hit the roof. Oh, go clam it, you stinking fat-farm, I said. I didn't even feel like cussing her out. I felt so good-natured I couldn't believe it. Another time I probably would have let her have it, but I didn't even feel like cussing. I just waved her off and went to my room. At least she doesn't live with me or I would have strangled her ages ago. I crawled into bed and after lights out I went to the bathroom and I pulled the newspaper that Valery gave me out of my pajamas. I decided to read about myself first and then I'd pass the paper around for the other girls to read. 'Cause since it was me they were writing about there I had to read it first. Sveta was whining at me the whole way home – "Lemme see it! Lemme see it!" – and I say, "Sveta, no way. Go learn how to read first!" I pull that paper out and I'm reading it all over – and there's nothing there about me! There's supposed to be, but there isn't. I read the whole damn thing, even checked out the crossword puzzle – nothing. Then on the last page, on the back side of the last page in little dinky letters there's this thing about some cop getting killed, two cars running into each other and me. Really, about me. There it was in black-and-white: (*squints as she tries to remember*) "The orphanage resident Natasha Banina jumped out of a window on the third floor. Responding to a journalist's questions, the girl replied that she had jumped inadvertently, with no intention of committing suicide. At present Natasha's state of health presents no danger to her well-being." But there was no photograph. That was kind of a bummer – my whole name and all but no photo. I couldn't help but think of Irina G. again – Sveta was right to go sticking that paper in all the bathrooms. On the other hand, I'm the journalist's friend now. You think he won't publish a picture of me?

The next day I counted every minute on the clock. I thought the time would never come. But I'm also thinking, if I do this right, I've got to be late, too. And then I think, yeah, right, I show up late and he doesn't wait for me because he thinks I'm not coming. I changed my mind on that one. In the end I got to the park at 5:30 and I sat on a bench. Didn't even light up a cigarette. Chewed mint gum instead. I don't know how long I sat there. I even got scared at one point that he wouldn't come. I'm sitting there it seems like forever and suddenly I hear his voice, "Hey, Natasha." I almost keeled over from panic, but I didn't show it. I turn around real calm-like. "Hey, Valery. How are ya?" Inside me, though, everything's all turning upside-down. Like I don't even remember how to breathe. My chest is pounding like a drum and I'm gasping for air with my mouth. "So, what's on your mind?" he asks. I'm sitting there rocking my head back 'n' forth like a horse. "Second," I say. "Lemme think." "Are they mean to you there?" he asks. And I say, "Well, anything can happen." "So how come you jumped out the window? Did you want to commit suicide?" Naturally I had no such plan. It was all Sveta's fault, that idiot. But I tell him anyway, "Yeah, I did." So he says, "Natasha, you want a glass of juice or something? Some soda?" So I say, "Yeah. And some cigarettes, too. If that's all right." He goes and brings back my juice and a beer for himself. Hands me the cigarettes, Parliament. We're sitting there smoking and I spill my whole life out. I have no idea what came over me – these jerks always complain all the time and, what am I, a jerk? When we were kids we used to grab morons like that and give them purple nurples, the creeps. You think life's hard, do you? But, man, I opened up the floodgates and it was like I couldn't stop. I'm telling him everything and I'm thinking, this guy's going to pop me one and then it's all over. Stupid orphan girl, he'll say, and then leave. But he's sitting there and listening and then he even took me by the hand real careful-like, just like if I was little. Nobody ever used to hold our hands like that even when I was in kindergarten. They only took our hands if they were dragging us to the principal's. I'm no little girl anymore but, man, my heart's going boom-boom-boom. You idiot, I'm thinking, you shoulda borrowed Sveta's hand lotion. What if your hands are scratchy?

We sat like that for a long time and I told him about all kinds of things. I told all about all our girls, about Irina G., about my best friend Sveta. About our dances. Then he says, all right, let's go. I'll see you back, Natasha. And we went together. And I'm thinking as we're walking, what a son-of-a-bitch town. How come it has to be so small? You can't even take a decent walk in it. If we were in Moscow we could walk all night long. I'd tell him everything I had to say and in the morning he would say, "Natasha, you are the baddest damn chick on earth. Would you marry me?" If we were in Moscow he would definitely say that, but not here. Because to say something like that you've got to build up to it and you need time. And where you gonna get time when you can walk across this whole damn town in an hour? When he was going, at the orphanage already, he gave me a hug and said, "Natasha, take care of yourself." Can you imagine that? Natasha, take care of yourself... Natasha, take care of yourself... I don't remember how I went in or how I went to sleep, or whatever I told the supervisor on duty. It was the first time I ever forgot everything. I've been to a lot of booze parties and I still remember everything. But here it was like I was sick. I'm lying there in my room after lights out and I can't get to sleep. Shadows are crawling all over the walls and I'm watching them and all I'm thinking is Natasha, take care of yourself, Natasha, take care of yourself, Natasha, take care of yourself... Then it started. Nothing ever happened like this before. Sure, Ruslan and I kissed a couple of times, but, hell, I never thought about him before. But this guy I can't get out of my head. I'm sitting in class and I'm thinking about him. I'm smoking in the bathroom with the girls and I'm thinking about him. I even got a B on a composition we had to write about some Ophelia chick from some book, whatever it was... Basically, I don't remember. Sveta even said, "What happened to you, Natasha? You're a total dunce. You talk to you and you keep rocking your head back and forth like a horse." Usually I'd pull her hair for something like that, but, man, I don't care. She's right. I'm totally out of it. And I keep looking out the window thinking maybe he'll come by. I mean, could I be any more stupid? Obviously he isn't going to come by. What's he know what room I live in? But still I'm looking out there so hard my eyes start hurting. All the girls are going, "What's your problem?" I just say, "nothing" and keep looking out the window.

Then one day I come back from classes and Mrs. Stepanov gave me this, "Natasha, come in here." I know right away I'm in it for something. I go in her office and she holds up this newspaper and says, "What is this, Banina? You want to get transferred to reform school?" She always threatens to send us to reform school but she had a look on her face this time that I understood she was ready to do it without thinking. She could dig up a couple of old referrals and it's, like, good-bye-girls. "What's the problem?" I ask her. And she's like, "I see you've got a real tough life here. Maybe you'd like it better in reform school?" And she grabs my hand, the bitch, and sinks her fingernails into me. Man, that stung. And she says, "Have you gone totally off your rocker? When did anybody ever hit you? When did anybody ever lay a finger on you?" Me, I'm thinking, yeah, you just try it and you'll be picking your pieces up in the corners. When I was ten years old I remember how Mrs. Stepanov whacked me on the head so hard I hurt for a week. What's the bitch think I forgot about that? I don't forget nothing and I'm not planning to forget anything. I'll eat shit if I have to, but just you go and try it... Then I start thinking, what's she talking about, though? So I ask her, "What are you talking about?" She holds out a newspaper and says, "Here. Take a look at this." And she stares at me like, oh, we've been so good to you, Natasha, everybody just loves you here. Man, I hate it when she talks like that, makes me wanna spit in her face. I take the newspaper into the bathroom and I sit there reading it. And it's all printed there, word-for-word almost, just like I told Valery. Son-of-a-bitch, I think, to go and write some crap

like that? I told that to you and nobody else, you got no sense of decency at all? I was really ticked. I'm sitting there staring at a spot on the wall. You fucker, man! And then I think – so what's he a fucker for? He just didn't know you can't write that crap because they'll kill me after. Maybe he wanted to defend me, to make somebody want to come and get me outta here. 'Cause he has no idea what it's like here. And then there was this one phrase (*tries to remember*): "This young girl in her short life has experienced more than is imaginable. And one is horrified to think – what else awaits her in the future? Will she survive?" And I just felt so good that he was horrified for my future. First time anybody's ever been horrified for my future. And then I felt really bad that I got pissed at him. I even kissed that newspaper right where his name was printed. I mean, who gives a shit about the supervisor? I've got some real influence on my side now. She sure as hell isn't going to go up against the Pinecone Spark! She wouldn't have the nerve! Maybe she doesn't give a damn about me, but Valery does. Maybe he'll take me to live with him, what do you think about that, you ugly old bitch? And then it hit me like a ton of bricks; what if she really does send me to reform school? She threatened me three times before, what if she means it this time? I go looking for Sveta and I say, "Man, they're sending me to reform school." Sveta's like, "So what? They sent Max there and he's been writing to Gulya that that place made him a real man. He loves the place. "Fuck," he says, "it's even cooler there. The gang is great. If you're a fuck-up you're a fuck-up anywhere. And if you're for real, then you're for real there, too." In'that true? "Yeah, man," I say. "That's what I always say myself." So, so what if they send you to reform school? Who cares? No skin off my teeth. Like, who cares if I can't go out? Everybody says that school's a lot cooler. Man you don't even have to go to classes, you still come out with a C. You can skip all you want even if you can't leave the grounds. Then I start thinking how am I going to see Valery then? And it's like tears come to my eyes. I duck into the bathroom and I sit on the pot and cry like a baby. Sveta knocks on the door and says, "Open up, man, what are you doin'?" And I'm like, go screw yourself, bimbo. And I sit there blubbering. I think, man, I'll kill that supervisor if she pulls any shit on me. And then I thought about my mom. She wrote me a letter once. I was four years old and my mom was sent to prison for six months. I went to live with her friend Anya. Anya never beat me like my mom did, but she always screamed at me and wouldn't let me touch anything, which I wasn't even doing anyway. She had this video machine and she was always worked up I was gonna break it. Then one day she comes home with this letter for me. "Dance," she says, "your momma sent you a letter." I said, "What do you mean, dance?" And she says, "Dance!" So I danced some. And then she says, "Now while you're dancing, start taking off your dress." And she laughs like a horse. She was really drunk. I said, "Screw that" and she says, "Then you don't get your letter" and she went into the other room. I waited, like, forever and then I go into her room. "Gimme the letter," I say. But she's just snoring already. I slipped the letter out of her pocket, opened it up and went to look at it. That's when I saw what was written there. What it said was, "Natasha, I love you and I miss you." Really. That's what it said. Even though I wasn't old enough to read yet. I used to pull the letter out and look at it all the time. When Mom came home I showed her the letter. And she took it away from me. I guess she figured I didn't need it anymore now that she was home again. And I also thought about two photos of Mom that I have. Only, one of them is in the office of one of the supervisors. Everybody was drinking once and the supervisors shook us down the next morning. They were looking for booze everywhere, the stupid cunts. So Mrs. Yuryev finds a jug of beer in my stuff and starts going through everything. When she finds my pictures she decides that's a good way to punish me – take my pictures away. I forgot all about 'em. But I remembered 'em just then. Figured, I oughta go get those back. Only Mrs. Yuryev wasn't on duty then, Mrs. Stepanov was. Well, fuck it, I think, you don't give 'em back to me,

you old cow, I'll fucking make trouble for you. I go to Mrs. Stepanov's office and say, "Gimme my mom's photos back." I'm all ready to smack her face, man, I don't care. They can send me anywhere they want, man, to hard labor. That's how pissed I was. And Mrs. Stepanov looks at me and says, "Where are they?" And I say look in Mrs. Yuryev's drawer. So she looked in there and hunted around and found them. She gave me back the pictures and she had this look on her face... like I wasn't used to seeing. She's definitely sending me to reform school now, I thought. I went into the washroom to look at the pictures. My heart really started beating. There was this one photo there, you know, of Mom sitting there all made-up fancy and pretty and all with some guy. There's a table next to 'em and it's got this great spread of food and drink on it. Say what you will, but my mom knew how to live life right. In the other photo she's just 14 years old. I never even bother looking at that other photo where she's with that guy. I look at this one, the one where she's 14. It's black-and-white and Mom's really small in it and a little bit scared. You'd think it was this one where she's all beautiful and everything with the guy – but it's the black-and-white one I look at, where Mom's real little and she has those scared eyes. She's standing there all nervous like, just like all the twerps around here, but I don't think of her like that because she's my mom. And anyway she's nervous somehow different and I keep wanting to feel sorry for her for that and give her a hug and say, "Mom, hey Mom, you remember when you wrote me that letter? You did write what I thought you wrote, didn't you?" And I look at the photo and I think, basically, my Mom was just really unlucky. Basically she didn't mean anything to anybody except me. And now I mean something to Valery. I mean, he's frightened for my future. And big fat tears started rolling down drop by drop. Man I was thinking about that all day long, all day long and I even went and fuckin' forgot about the dance.

Something like two weeks went by and the supervisor went and forgot about reform school. But I'm still walking around thinking about one thing – Valery. Where is he? I'm dying I want to see him so bad. And I don't know what to do about it. I call Sveta over and I say, "Sveta, I think I'm losing it. Some kinda unhealthy bullshit is happening to me." Sveta, though, she says, "What's your problem, man? What do you mean you don't know? Go see him, man. Say, 'Hi, cutie. I'm your cutie pie,' and all that shit. Make up your face and get all gorgeous. What are you waiting for, man? You only live once." You know Sveta's basically a jerk but every once in awhile she says stuff that, like, wow – I have no idea where it comes from. So I'm thinking, yeah, I've gotta make a move. I put on all my makeup and pinned on Cross-eyed Tanya's hair clip and I made a beeline for the newspaper. I get there all shit-hot and fancy like and I march into the office and I see him sitting there. He's writing something. So I say, "Hey, Valery." And he says, "Hi, Natasha. Wanna cuppa tea?" I'm like, "Yeah, sure." And he says, "Have a seat right here. I'll pour you a cup." I sit down and I sit there and I have no idea what to say. No, I mean, I understand perfectly well that he's this person of, fucking, you know, high education and stuff and with him you've gotta, like, talk music and movies and everything. What the hell movies have I ever seen at the orphanage? I try to say something about music and the only thing that comes into my head is, "Get me outta here, won't you please. Take me over the seven seas..." That's a song we all know. They play it at our dances all the time and we really go wild to it. But he pulls out this candy and says, "Here, have some, Natasha. Go ahead. Only I'm really busy, I've got to write," and he sticks his face back in his computer. But I'm sitting there sucking down candies and just zoning in on this guy. God he's cute. He's got eyelashes as long as a girl's. I never thought I'd fall for some stupid shit like that, but here I am, sitting and thinking he's got eyelashes like a girl. He just keeps writin' and I just keep lookin'. Finished my tea ages ago and, like, it's time to go now, but I just keep zoning in on him. Main thing, though, is I have no idea

what to say to the guy! First time this ever happened. Then he says, "Natasha, I'll bet the supervisors back there are already looking for you." I say, "Nah, they're not," and – whump! – I'm zoning on those eyelashes of his again. "You come back and see me if you have any problems," he says. I say, "Yeah, for sure. I will." And I think, yeah, this guy really is frightened for my future if he tells me to come see him if I have any problems. Then I realized I better go or he might get the wrong idea. And so I went. And on my way back I start considering – what kinda problems do I have? I gotta have some big ones, big enough so I can come back to see him. I get back and I tell Sveta, "Sveta, I gotta come up with a problem or I can't go back to see him." Sveta goes, "Man, I dunno – maybe you got AIDS?" "Idiot," I tell her, "what the hell are you saying?" And she says, "What's the big deal? People always pity sick people. When I was in the hospital with pneumonia, even the supervisor felt sorry for me, and my botany teacher even gave me a C instead of flunking me. What's so wrong with being sick?" "Let's do something else," I said. Sveta thinks awhile, goes to the head and then comes back and says, "I know what. What if somebody wants to adopt you? Spaniards! And you don't want to go. What if this future dad of yours is, what do you call him? A pervert. And you know that, but it's just your luck nobody believes you. And they're going to take you to Spain!" I say, "Sveta. What the fuck have you been smoking? What Spaniards? What the hell?! You been listening to too much Marilyn Manson." So Sveta and I keep thinking about my problem but when we don't come up with anything we go to bed. I couldn't stand it, though, and the next day I went to see him anyway, even though I didn't have a problem. And we drank tea again and he wrote and I watched him. Just like a novelist's wife or something. Novelists did have wives, didn't they? And that's when it hit home – he was mine. And I wasn't gonna give him up to anyone, because I'd never had anything before and now I did. What the hell should I have to give something up for if it's mine? Only it's not mine like something like Cross-eyed Tanya's hair clip or my jeans or my notebook or something. It's mine like something you can't put in your pocket and you can't throw away and you can't ever get sick of it. It's something like totally, totally mine and that's all there is to it. You can't even say why it's yours. It just is, that's all. And, man, that makes you feel so incredibly good. It's like inside your chest is all warm and fuzzy.

And then. And then I don't know. What's there to say? I started going to see Valery every day. We drank a lot of tea. He gave me a book, too. By some Alexander Kuprin guy. Story called "Olesya." It's about this beautiful witch and how this asshole Kuprin dumped her and then even went and wrote a story about it. Basically, I don't like reading books. I like music better. This one I read though. And I even wanted to look like Olesya so I could be a witch too. I mean is that cool or what? You don't have to pull anybody's hair, nothing – you just wave your hands and "Fuck you bitches! Don' move!" And everybody's paralyzed right now. Valery walked me home twice, too. Even though he has a really sick mother. He still saw me home! Basically, he was in college in another city and he wouldn't even be here anymore if it wasn't for his sick mother. So he lives here now. If that fucking pimp Vadim hadn't beat my mother to death I would never have left her either. My mom was really beautiful. Man, her makeup, like, sparkled. Made your eyes water. I used to climb up on her lap when I was a kid and she's, like, git offa me, I got my makeup on. You'll mess it up. And I'd say, "Will you give me your lipstick when I grow up?" And she'd say, "Sure I will." She was always promising to give me things – her lipstick, her dresses. Only Vadim took all her stuff somewhere after she died. He showed up in this car and hauled it all away. So I got nothing left. I'd kill that

fucker, Vadim! But he got killed later anyway, like, three years later or something. I told Valery all about that and I wasn't ashamed for him to hear it. I mean, it was like I even wanted to tell him or something... I dunno. And he says to me, "Natasha, you have beautiful eyes." Ruslan even told me once I had a pretty shit-hot ass, but this was the first time anybody ever said anything about my eyes. And so I was always waiting for when Valery would kiss me. But he just looked at me. He wouldn't kiss me. Maybe he was afraid because I wasn't 18 yet. It went on like this for about three months. Every day. I even skipped home-ec even though they're teaching us how to sew and I kind of like sewing. I can't even look at all those girls, to say nothing about talking to 'em. As for Ruslan I really nailed him, just let him totally have it. People were already calling me by name at Valery's office. They'd say, "Hello, Natasha." Valery kept buying candy for me and I'd come and he'd pour me a cup of tea. He'd push the bag of candy towards me and say, "Here, have some, Natasha. I bought these just for you." No, I mean, if somebody wants to blow you off, they don't go around buying you candy! Plus he taught me how to play solitaire on his computer.

And then. And then. Man, I don't want to talk about it. No, man. No. I'm not gonna do it. What are you looking at me for? What are you all looking at? What did I do? It's not my fault. I didn't want that to happen! It's just I came and they said Valery wasn't there. Some guy in the hall said that. And he wouldn't even let me in the door! So I'm, like, "Okay. I'm outta here." Next day I come and this guy, he tells me Valery's not there again. And then it happens again. I mean, he won't even let me in the door! He takes me by the hand and leads me out on the street. He's not being rude about it or anything. No, he's perfectly polite. But he won't let me go in! But I just kept coming back and coming back. They said he didn't work there anymore and that I shouldn't keep coming, but I didn't give a damn. I knew he was there!!! I could feel it right here, in my heart, my lungs, my guts! I started going out for walks alone at night and I figured, so what if somebody kills me right now, if some maniac jumps me and strangles me to death, or even if a car hits me and kills me? One night I didn't come home at all. I just curled up on this park bench and sat there half the night. That's when I saw him. With her. With that bitch. They were going along holding hands. And then, when they got to the doorstep, he, like, gave her this big hug and... kissed her. Right there I wanted to die, I wanted to shrink down into nothing. I wanted to be a dot, just a little tiny dot, like the math teacher draws on the blackboard. I didn't want to be alive or to remember. I didn't want anything to be, nothing, nothing at all. I didn't even cry. I just stood there looking. And I thought, "Momma, momma, momma – take me away from here, take me away." The next morning when I was going back I just went wild with hate for that cunt. What the hell right did she have to go kissing him? What right did she have to take him away from me? Who the hell is she? He's mine. He was mine. I had no intention of giving him away. And then she comes along and – wham! Bitch! Cunt! Slut! Slut! Slut! Slut-ass! As if that's all she's got! Man, she's got everything. She's got parents and a home. She's got earrings and cosmetics and lipstick and a mobile and all kinds of clothes. She probably eats cookies by the pound. What right did she have to take him away from me? Doesn't she have enough already? I found him first. I fell in love with him first!

And then. I don't even want to talk about it. Can I have some water? (*Drinks water.*) Basically, I got back and called some girls together, all the bitches, and I say, "We got a lesson to teach here." So we like hung around waiting for her for two days at that same doorstep. I recognized her right away, that slut, even though it was real dark. And then. You know, it's like, "We gotta have a little talk. Over there behind the garages." We didn't want it to be like *that!* It wasn't on purpose. I just pulled her hair a little and

Sveta scratched her face. It was Gulya who started kicking her in the head. I had no idea it was going to turn out like that. It never occurred to me she would be such a wimp. There was no premed... premeditational conspiracy like everybody here says! There wasn't! That's all not true! We didn't want her to go into a coma. We didn't want to inflict those aggravated things, those wounds, like they say. That's what the detective wrote down. Like that's what we were planning to do. And so I appeal to you, the court, to review the evidence again. (*Beat.*) I mean, she didn't die. She'll end up getting better, the bitch. What's she not going to come out of her coma with all her parents' money and everything? I heard she's gonna be fine. And now because of this cunt I'm going to prison? What am I guilty of? All I did was love Valery and want him to be mine. So that we'd go for walks and drink tea and then he'd come to me and say, "Natasha. You are the baddest damn chick on earth. Would you marry me?" Natasha. You are the baddest damn chick on earth. Would you marry me? Natasha. You are the baddest damn chick on earth... 'Cause I'll bet at least ten other guys will say that to her, to that cunt. I mean, look at the clothes she wears. But what about me? Who's gonna say that to me? Ruslan? Are you kidding? Ruslan doesn't have the brains to say that. Anyway I don't want Ruslan saying that. I didn't want to put her in a coma. I didn't want anything like that. I just wanted a bridal veil and candy. And I wanted all the girls to walk after us in a line and for all of 'em to be dying of envy. That was just a dream I had. Don't you have dreams? That's not fair to go around busting other peoples' dreams. If a person really loves, how can that be right? That just isn't fair. Plus, Cross-eyed Tanya's hair clip got busted in jail. All that's left are the studs. See?

Natasha unclenches her fist. A few sparkly studs lie in her palm. She looks at them. Smiles.

Darkness.

End.

*Translated from the Russian by John Freedman
First published in Real and Phantom Pains: An Anthology of New Russian Drama
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