

Playing Dead

by The Presnyakov Brothers

Translated by
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With
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CHARACTERS:

VALIA

FATHER (his father)

MOTHER (his mother)

UNCLE PETER (his mother's boyfriend)

OLGA (his girlfriend)

CAPTAIN (his boss, a Russian militia captain)

LIUDA (a policewoman)

SEVA (a policeman)

SISOEV (a murder suspect)

ZAKHIROV (a murder suspect)

VERKHUSHKIN (a murder suspect)

POOL ATTENDANT

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN A KIMONO

*Dim light. A bed. A young man
in a baseball cap with the
heroes of South Park on it.*

FATHER'S VOICE

Valia! Valia...

*The young man bolts up as a
figure appears behind the bed
in a long black wool coat,
bell bottoms, a sailor's cap
with an anchor on the brim,
carrying a duffel bag.*

VALIA

Father?

FATHER

Father...

VALIA

How did you -

FATHER

Mark me!

My hour is almost come -

Lend thy serious hearing to what I shall unfold...

I found my way to thee from out of the void,

From ice. Pain fired up that blazing strip

That guides the ships and planes home from elsewhere.

Hotter still the fire in my entrails

Smoldering in the hearth that you call home.

Is that you? It's you. I know:

I feel you're mine, of me, my color, my smell,

All mine. Everyone says: Give life to a child,

Raise him up, provide for him! It's all

A gift to you, so give it to another!

It won't be all for nothing, then, they'll say.

He won't have lived his life for nothing! Lived

His life - You were an excuse for me:

An alibi for a pathetic life...

Then the moment comes: Your own tiny

Scab-ling tumbles from that wound into

Your hands. His touch will make you melt and he'll

Be your excuse. You'll think: I'm part of it,

Part of the grand and incomprehensible order

Of things. Here it is, my seed, which,

When I disappear will still live on

To mess things up, reminding everyone
 That I was here and didn't live for naught.
 But soon enough this all will come to be.
 So plug up any hole that hears or sees
 Because where I am now, everything
 Is senseless...
 I came to tell all this to you, hoping
 You'd be deaf to me, asleep. But now
 There's nothing more except for grief and grieving
 Left for you, waiting quietly.
 Your minutes, overgrown with ivied years
 Of calm, will wait, in stillness: tranquilized...

Steps.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Valia! You're not sleeping, are you?

*A woman enters the room; the
 man disappears into the
 darkness.*

VALIA

Dad! What were you trying to tell -

FATHER'S VOICE

I was cast out to walk this road alone
 By my own wife -

(whispers)

And by a brother's hand...

VALIA

Who did this?

MOTHER

You're not still asleep, are you?

VALIA

Huh? Dad...

MOTHER

Dreaming about your father again? How many times do I have
 to tell you not to sleep in your hat!

VALIA

No - he was...

The woman cries.

MOTHER

He comes to my dreams too... Mine too.

VALIA

He's not in my *dreams*...

MOTHER

Stop it! You can't just - everybody has - a dream is just a dream.

Valia, what are you doing tomorrow afternoon?

VALIA

Working.

MOTHER

But it's the weekend!

VALIA

My week doesn't end.

MOTHER

Uncle Peter's coming over and I thought -

VALIA

Uncle Peter - you'll do just fine without me - why do you need me -

MOTHER

What do you mean "why"? He's a good man, he loves you, takes care of us...

VALIA

I can take care of myself. If you need somebody to take care of you, then Uncle Peter's your man.

MOTHER

But Peter, he's like family.

VALIA

Exactly.

MOTHER

Why do you - What? What are you upset about now?

VALIA

Nothing. Whatever.

MOTHER

Look. I've got to live. And better I do it with somebody we know, somebody close. You've got to live too - how long has it been since - we've both got to live our - what's happening to you?

And why doesn't Olya come around any more? Where do you stand with her? It's time to step up, stop dragging your feet.

VALIA

I'm not going to "step up."

MOTHER

Why?

VALIA

I'm not giving you an excuse.

MOTHER

Excuse?

VALIA

To think I'm still living. I'm not. So don't think you're allowed.

MOTHER

What are you saying? I've got to - I don't want to go crazy -
I need somebody to talk to, yell at, blame... somebody who will be there.

VALIA

Totally bizarre, right? Dinner like always except this time he's suddenly poisoned...

MOTHER

Yes. Yes, bizarre. It's all bizarre. Your birth was bizarre.

You shouldn't even have happened, but there you were. A freak of nature. I marked the calendar faithfully for when it was safe, and not a creature was stirring - but then you had to...

He had a weak stomach - you know that - he lived with that hose down his throat - they kept jamming it in: ulcers,

gastritis -

What?

Why do you have to tear at my heart like this?

Dined and died. Yes. It happens every day. It's not bizarre, it's perfectly normal. If your father was alive, he'd be the first to tell you - you keep piling up this shit in your head, you don't live your own life, and you don't let me live mine.

She stands up to go.

VALIA

Listen. Listen to me. How do people come to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to live together?

MOTHER

How do - what - now what are you going on about?

VALIA

Your life with dad. Was it a good life? Could he give you what you needed? Or maybe you wanted more than he had - and he was in the way. Couldn't you just agree to stay out of each other's hair, or couldn't you - couldn't you negotiate some sort of alternative arrangement, just live and let live?

Or did the deal fall through?

MOTHER

You know, Valia, it wouldn't be hard to get you some help. There are plenty of good-hearted doctors in those lovely rehab centers now. All I have to do is hint that you're hooked on something and right away all these little talks of ours will happen only on weekends and with a set of cold metal bars between us. You'll feel fine, I'll feel fine. I'm warning you...

She leaves.

VALIA

Forewarned is forearmed...

An apartment. A large window looks out on the road. Inside: a Russian militia captain, a policeman, a policewoman with a video camera, a man in handcuffs, and a young man in a baseball cap with the heroes of South Park on it.

CAPTAIN

(to the policewoman)
OK, Liuda, switch it on.

LIUDA

It's on already.

CAPTAIN

OK, so we start the reenactment for the Sisoiev case, number three hundred twelve...

LIUDA

Point ninety four.

CAPTAIN

Three hundred twelve point ninety four... OK, so, first things first: Who offered to take out the garbage?

SISOEV

Offered. You know a family like that? Who "offers" anything to anybody? "Offer." Shit. Crap piles up, somebody's got to carry it out...

CAPTAIN

Skip the attitude, OK? You're the one in the hotseat, got it?
Got it?

SISOEV

Yes sir...

CAPTAIN

Ok, one more time. Was it your idea or the victim's?

SISOEV

Mine...

CAPTAIN

Ok. Next. Where was the victim at this point?

SISOEV

My wife was cleaning the window...

CAPTAIN

This one?

SISOEV

This one...

CAPTAIN

Valia, go to the window.

*Valia goes to the window,
smiles, looks at the captain,
waiting for further
instructions.*

CAPTAIN

So how'd she do it: clambered up on the sill, from down on the floor?

SISOEV

Clambered up.

CAPTAIN

Was the window open?

SISOEV

Yes - the one on the right. She started with the outside.

CAPTAIN

Ok. Valia!

*Valia opens the window, waits
for instructions.*

CAPTAIN

Ok, what did you do?

SISOEV

I wanted to help her at first, told her let me help you, but she kept cleaning...

CAPTAIN

Meaning she didn't hear you?

SISOEV

Not exactly... I turned the TV down - it's just how she is when she gets angry - when she got angry - she'd pretend she was deaf. I'm lying there, watching TV, she jumps up and starts cleaning for no reason, I tell her let me help - not a word - I say what can I do? - not a word - Then she says I don't need anything, you live how you want, I don't want to live in filth.

CAPTAIN

Ok, got it, you mean you had a fight?

SISOEV

Not exactly... like always...

CAPTAIN

No, Sisoiev, what do you mean "like always" - had a fight like always or what?

SISOEV

Well, I mean for us this wasn't... it's not even really fighting... like always - I don't know - that's how every family is...

CAPTAIN

Ok, get this. Wives don't just wash windows and then drop dead in every family, got it? Every family. Like always is when everybody lives. So you just think back and show us what happened here between you two, and he's your wife, standing on the sill, washing the window,

(Valia is fooling around, like a mime doing "the window washer")

and you want to help her. You say, what, let me help? And she? Pretends she's deaf, right? What do you do next?

SISOEV

I tell her again.

CAPTAIN

OK.

SISOEV

Let me help.

OK.

CAPTAIN

Silence.

SISOEV

Silence?

CAPTAIN

Yeah - then I tell her louder - let me help.
(crossing to Valia)

Let me help!
(crossing closer)

Let me help!!

VALIA
(to the Policeman)
 Hey. Hey Seva, hold him back!

CAPTAIN
 Seva, stay on him.

*Seva takes Sisoev's arm,
 Sisoev pays no attention,
 screams:*

Let me help!!

SISOEV

OK...

CAPTAIN

Let me help!!

SISOEV

OK OK! And?

CAPTAIN

And... I go to the kitchen, get the garbage can... go to the door...

SISOEV
(calming down abruptly)

Yeah? So go - go on, show us, go to the door...

CAPTAIN

*Sisoev, followed by the
Policeman, stops.*

CAPTAIN

OK...

SISOEV

She turns to me, says you don't have to do a thing, get your precious rest...

*Sisoev gulps, falls silent,
looks through Valia at the
windowsill.*

CAPTAIN

Ok...

Silence.

CAPTAIN

Sisoev, go on. Go on...

SISOEV

I slam the door, get out on the landing, hear the crash, come back in... The window's shut. She's not on the sill...

CAPTAIN

So that's your story. Because of the draft she - I mean the window - it slammed because of the draft and pushed her out... right?

SISOEV

Yeah...

CAPTAIN

So slam it.

*Sisoev turns to him,
surprised.*

CAPTAIN

So slam it. Slam it. That's what a reenactment is, we reenact everything.

*Sisoev opens the front door,
about to slam it - hard.*

VALIA

Hey - Hey there - Comrade Captain, shouldn't I get down now?

CAPTAIN

So get down...

Sisoev slams the door, the window closes. Liuda takes her eye off the camera just long enough to query the Captain.

LIUDA

We should examine the precise degree of force.

CAPTAIN

Of what?

LIUDA

Of the window. Exactly how much force is pushing the window?

How do we know if it could shove somebody out or not, without further experimentation?

After posing her question, she dives back behind the camera.

CAPTAIN

Right... OK, Valia, climb up, open the window and stand on the sill. And Sisoev...

VALIA

Comrade Captain - what if he's right?

CAPTAIN

That's what we're going find out. OK, We need a belt. Seva, take off your belt.

SEVA

I don't have one.

CAPTAIN

What do you mean you don't have a belt? You're out of uniform - and out of line.

SISOEV

In my closet - on the pants - go ahead and take one...

*The Captain nods to the
Policeman, who goes to the
closet and rummages for the
pants.*

SEVA

No pants in here.

SISOEV

What do you mean no pants?

SEVA

No pants means no pants. A couple of pairs of shorts, some
pantyhose - that's it...

SISOEV

Who took them? Me - dragged away; my wife - shattered. Who
could have taken them - nobody else lives here...

CAPTAIN

Look, Sisoev, what are you whining about? You saw yourself,
the apartment was sealed up, who could get in here? You
just forgot where you put them...

SISOEV

How could I forget? I didn't forget anything - who sealed
it up?

CAPTAIN

OK, fine, Sisoev, I've had it. Seva, bring those pantyhose
over here. See if there's a pair with lycra, they'll hold
more weight.

*The Policeman rummages around
for a long time and finally
pulls out a pair of
pantyhose.*

SEVA

These look good...

CAPTAIN

What are you thinking? You don't even know what lycra is?
Those are wool - winter tights - lycra is shiny. Step

aside.

(The captain shoves the Policeman aside and goes rummaging in the closet himself. Finally he finds a pair of lycra pantyhose and hands them to Valia.)

Ok, go tie yourself up, one leg around your waist and the other one - to the radiator.

(Valia follows his orders.)

I hope you don't mind, Sisoiev, as long as you don't have any belts around...

SISOEV

I had a belt... more than one...

CAPTAIN

OK, OK fine. Valia, tie it tighter, with two knots, and watch out - if it slams and you fly out - tuck and roll so you don't hit the wall, and you Seva, start pulling him in right away, pronto, got it?

SEVA

Got it...

CAPTAIN

Liuda, pay attention. You're going to have to get everybody in the shot...

LIUDA

I'll get a panorama...

CAPTAIN

Right, yeah...

(She starts panning the room and everybody in it.)

Ok, on my signal - Valia, stand closer to the edge - turn around from there...

VALIA

I can't...

CAPTAIN

What you can't?

VALIA

I can't... look down. I better fall back forward from here so

I don't have to -

CAPTAIN

Which back are you talking about? How're you gonna tuck in if you're facing back -

VALIA

Right, then I'll fall back sideways forward...

CAPTAIN

What the - I don't even know what you're - back sideways forward? You do everything sideways forward. You live your whole life sideways. Ok. Sisoev, ready?

SISOEV

Ready.

CAPTAIN

So slam it!

*Sisoev slams the door hard,
the window doesn't move.*

CAPTAIN

What the...

VALIA

No draft.

SEVA

Hah!

CAPTAIN

Well, Sisoev. You lose that round.

SISOEV

What the - you saw it, it closed last time.

CAPTAIN

Well sure. It did. And this time it didn't. Try again. Let's see.

*Sisoev slams the door hard
again, the window doesn't
move.*

CAPTAIN

An unpleasant moment, yes, Sisoev?

SISOEV

Well no, how does that - You just saw it, right, you just saw how...

Sisoev, without asking for permission, hits the door. Hard. Again, the window doesn't move. Sisoev furiously slams the door a few more times. The window doesn't move.

CAPTAIN

Ok, that's it. Enough, Sisoev, enough.

SISOEV

The wind was blowing harder then. Yeah, right, the wind.

CAPTAIN

Sure. A typhoon. Liuda, did you get the shot?

LIUDA

Got it.

CAPTAIN

Good. Shut it down. Seva, take him away.

SISOEV

What? Wait. Let me slam it one more time. There was a wind - I tell you it was the wind.

SEVA

That's enough, that's enough, let's go.

Seva shoves Sisoev through the door, Liuda packs up the camera.

CAPTAIN

That's it Valia, untie yourself...

VALIA

Just a minute, captain, I tied myself... too tight...

CAPTAIN

Take this, burn them off, stop diddling around...

The captain pulls a lighter from his pocket and a woman's red thong bikini falls to the floor. He hands the lighter to Valia, who nods toward the captain, pointing at the thong.

CAPTAIN

What?

(grabbing and stuffing it back in his pocket)

Oh. I always do that - old habit - I always take a little something from the crime scene - a souvenir...

(Nervous, lighting a cigarette)

When I retire I'll write a book - line up all those little mementos and it'll all come back to me - you can't just call it up out of your head automatically, you know. Works better when you've got a physical reminder. That's what they taught us.

VALIA

I understand, Comrade Captain. Very trendy.

CAPTAIN

Is it?

VALIA

I mean a professional memoir, they could turn it into a TV series, maybe even a feature film... Can I take something? Maybe I'll write a memoir too - when I retire...

LIUDA

Crime and Punishment?

VALIA

No, well, you know...

CAPTAIN

OK, go ahead, take whatever- but not anything related to the case. Take something insubstantial. See what I took - just a memento of a life.

VALIA
Right... thanks...

CAPTAIN
Sure, make it quick.

*Valia rifles through the room.
Liuda smiles languidly at the
captain as he smokes.*

LIUDA
Should I go down?

CAPTAIN
(Flirting)
Go down...

LIUDA
And you?

CAPTAIN
Just a sec... one more drag...

LIUDA
I need to seal the place up...

CAPTAIN
You do?

LIUDA
I do...

CAPTAIN
So seal it up...

LIUDA
But you're in it...

CAPTAIN
So seal it up... with us in it...

LIUDA
Stop playing around, Comrade Captain...

CAPTAIN
Why should I? What size do you wear?

LIUDA

Of what?

CAPTAIN

(pointing to her hips)

Of those...

Valia has finally found something, and approaches the other two and their intimate little scene.

VALIA

I'm all set.

CAPTAIN

Huh? Oh... what have you got?

VALIA

Just... a book...

CAPTAIN

(Reading the title)

"Never Say Die." Is it any good?

VALIA

It says in the preface, it's about how you can reinvent yourself...

LIUDA

(taking the book from the captain)

Reinvent yourself...

VALIA

It's about a wrestler, a Judo Master who had rickets or muscular dystrophy or something - whatever - he was sick. He was sick and then reinvented himself - became a champion and even beat down some Turks... at the Olympics!

CAPTAIN

So what, Turks, what's so great about Turks?

LIUDA

You have no idea what kind of fighters Turks are. Five years ago I went on vacation to Antalya, met this girl, a guide, she said I could make some money with their soccer team, well, that's not the point, anyway, I was kind of

a... an interpreter there for two months... translating English for them...

CAPTAIN

Those were soccer players - these are Judo fighters.

LIUDA

So what I'm saying is they're strong. Turks are strong.

CAPTAIN

OK, so...

*Throws his cigarette butt
down, steps on it.*

VALIA

So what do you think captain, how did it all happen?

CAPTAIN

It's obvious... he pushed her.

VALIA

Just like that?

CAPTAIN

Just like that...

VALIA

He kills his own wife and then puts on this whole show for us?

CAPTAIN

Didn't we watch every act of his little circus? All three rings? She couldn't fall out by herself - you didn't.

VALIA

I just think if somebody decides to do a thing like that, what reason does he have to pretend - to play at being -

CAPTAIN

What are you talking about? What do you think people are like?

(Shoving the book at Valia)

He read it - so should you. Never Say Die. Got it? Whatever mess he's made of his life, whatever pile of crap he's in, he never says die. No matter what happens.

LIUDA

Listen, let's get out of here, huh?

CAPTAIN

Yeah, OK, let's go...

*All three exit. The captain
slams the door, making the
window slam shut with such
force that the glass breaks.*

A room. A bed. Valia is naked on the bed in his baseball cap, lying on a young woman dressed in an overcoat, tights, a skirt and high boots.

OLGA

It's hot in here - open the window.

Valia gets up to go to the window. A bald head in a sailor hat peeks out from under the bed.

FATHER

Sure, go on, open it. It's hot. And then, when you climb up on the sill to open the top part, she'll slam the door. Hard.

Go on. Go. It's hot enough.

VALIA

Chill out. You act like we're married.

OLGA

(babbling)

I'm chill. It's just that if you'd been thinking of me, even just a little bit, we'd have gotten married ages ago. But what am I saying? What do you care? Freedom. As if there's any such thing. And we have fun, right? After work we run to your bed or my bed, cum as quiet as little mice under our parents' noses, split up again to scurry back home and shower. Freedom. Right. How long can we go on like this - a year at most? Have you already figured out what you're going to say when you leave me? Don't bother, it only looks like we're together anyway. You pretend you're mine, I pretend I'm yours. And what's really pitiful: thirty-three and I'm going to have to start all over, go out for drinks again, fall in love again... It already bores me. I can't start meeting people again, making conversation - I was done with all that five years ago when I met you... I was all dried up - seen it all, knew it all. Nothing interests me any more... So who can I snag? You have to at least pretend to be interested in him, if you want him to marry you...

VALIA

Hey listen - can you strangle me a little...

OLGA

What do you mean - with my hands?

VALIA

No, you whack me off with your hands so that when I'm right at the edge there's not enough air, so I suffocate for real...

OLGA

Oh, scarfing...

VALIA

Scarfing?

OLGA

That's what they call it, but it's usually guys jerking off while they strangle themselves with a scarf... It's supposed to be really hot, make it all more intense.

VALIA

I don't know anything about scarfing. Hotter, no - I need the opposite - to snuff them out...

OLGA

Who?

VALIA

Feelings. Cut off their air supply. Come on - please.

OLGA

You know, a lot of people get snuffed out that way, period. I read about it in a magazine...

VALIA

Which one?

OLGA

Marie Claire.

VALIA

What did they say?

OLGA

They said it's sexy but dangerous, and showed how you can

strangle without choking to death...

VALIA

So you know how.

OLGA

How to do it?

VALIA

Well you read about it...

OLGA

Hey, I can figure it out...

She takes her scarf off and ties it around Valia's neck. He covers himself with a blanket.

She sits next to him and strokes his cock under the blanket as she tightens the scarf.

Valia's mother enters the room.

MOTHER

Oh Olga. I didn't see you there. Hello.

Olga nods, still strangling and stroking.

MOTHER

You could get up, you know, you lazy thing. And now with the scarf! Can you imagine, Olya - first he sleeps in that cap, now with the scarf. He's like that guy, the one his father was always playing from some bootleg... his poster was hanging right here on the door, before we repaired it... what was his name - oh - John Lennon, right? He had a scarf too. You look just like him. The Beatle? Am I saying it right? Get up, go get us some bread. Uncle Peter'll be here any minute, we'll have dinner. Come on, there's no bread in the house - go get us some.

VALIA

What kind do you want?

MOTHER

Get a loaf of Moscow rye from the bakery around the corner.

VALIA

What if they're out?

MOTHER

Then pick up some pita bread.

VALIA

Pita? Isn't that dangerous?

MOTHER

What's dangerous about it?

VALIA

Isn't it dangerous to buy pita?

MOTHER

Why? Pita's just bread. Tastier, even.

VALIA

Tastier... We ARE at war with them, you know.

MOTHER

Who?

VALIA

The guys who make pita.

MOTHER

So what? *These* guys live *here*, right?

VALIA

What guys?

MOTHER

The guys who make the pita, from the place we're at war with, they live here, right?

VALIA

Yeah, but they're *from* there.

MOTHER

They're not all bad guys, right?

VALIA

Not all of them, definitely not all of them. Not even most of the guys over *there*, but they stick together. That's why we can't beat them.

MOTHER

So what then? So I can't buy pita any more?

VALIA

I don't know, maybe we can risk it. But what if they suddenly get some secret signal to poison all the pita. And their pita, like you say, is even tastier than our rye, even better than from around the corner?

MOTHER

Sure, so?

VALIA

So everyone will buy it, all that poisoned pita, and that will be it. If they got some secret signal...

MOTHER

But everybody will know, as soon as they do it.

VALIA

Of course they will, *after*, everybody will know *after*, but if I know and can warn everybody *before*, we won't need to know *after*, right? After we've eaten all that pita of theirs...

MOTHER

I guess we can do without bread today. I boiled some noodles... Noodles are basically the same as bread and I can pick up some tomorrow...

VALIA

Whatever you want...

MOTHER

I guess I'll go get some tomorrow...

She stands up, smiling at Olga, who is still scarfing and stroking Valia. She wants to leave, but abruptly stops.

MOTHER

Do you remember in school... when they started taking you to the swimming pool?

VALIA

Yeah. So what?

MOTHER

In third grade they started taking you to the pool... and you were afraid of the water...

VALIA

I was afraid, was, but not any more...
(*coughs, suffocating*)

MOTHER

That's why you didn't want to go to the pool...

VALIA

Didn't want to, didn't go.

MOTHER

No, you did go, you did, you just never took a second pair of shorts to change into... and they wouldn't let you swim because you can't wear the same shorts in the pool that you wear outside...

VALIA

I never got that. Your shorts can be clean whether there's a pool or not, what's crazy is that you could be wearing clean shorts during the day - you could bring another pair to change into, but they could be the dirty ones...

MOTHER

You didn't forget, you pretended to forget... because you were scared...

VALIA

So what? Why bring it up now?

MOTHER

Because even as a kid you could squirm out of anything - make up any lie - pretend - you never could just spit out the truth. Not brave enough to take what the world dishes out. We're all waiting for you to make something happen, because you look like you're going somewhere, that something matters to you, but the fact is...

VALIA

And just what exactly is the world dishing out these days?
I have no idea what you're talking about.

MOTHER

Me? What do I know...

She exits.

*The sailor's head appears
from under the bed, as Olga
continues.*

FATHER

Feels good, doesn't it?

VALIA

Yes.

FATHER

Felt good to me, too. Especially when it seems like she's doing it with all her heart, that it's her greatest joy to play out your kinkiest freak. Putting her whole heart into it. But look. Look at her. She doesn't even look at you, she's off on some trip of her own... That's not right... Isn't this supposed to be mutual? She doesn't care. Doesn't care. You get sucked in, tell yourself it's only temporary, give her time and she'll begin to love you, understand you... but no... that's not gonna happen... you're choking and it feels good but nobody cares, as long as you both shall live... but then it's your call...

Valia coughs, suffocating.

A swimming pool. Standing on the edge: a policeman, a militia captain, a policewoman with a video, a pool attendant, a hairy man in a swimsuit and handcuffs, and a young man in shorts and a baseball cap with the heroes of South Park on it. The pool attendant is arguing with the captain, the hairy man in the swimsuit is cold, and the young man, wearing the baseball cap with the heroes of South Park on it, smiles broadly.

POOL ATTENDANT

No. I said no and that's that. He's gotta change into clean shorts or he can't get in the water.

CAPTAIN

What the hell.

(to the young man in shorts and South Park baseball cap)

Valia you asshole. Didn't I tell you we'd be in the pool, huh?

VALIA

I didn't know, Comrade Captain, that you had to bring a second pair. What's the problem? My shorts are clean, I promise, I just put them on this morning.

POOL ATTENDANT

No.

VALIA

No really, I mean I didn't even pee yet this morning.

POOL ATTENDANT

So?

VALIA

Look, not a spot.

POOL ATTENDANT

That's not the point. There are microbes, y'know.

VALIA

And some other pair are gonna be microbe-free?

POOL ATTENDANT

No! Swimsuits are for swimming. You don't walk around outside in them.

VALIA

But these are clean.

POOL ATTENDANT

How can they be clean if you're already in them? You know how many microbes there are out there? And we even chlorinate the pool to be sure. There are rules.

CAPTAIN

Ok. That's it. Ok. Then we do it here, on the shore, I mean at the edge of the pool. Ok, Liuda, switch it on.

LIUDA

It's on already.

CAPTAIN

Ok. Here we go, the reenactment for the Takhirov case...

ZAKHIROV

Zakhirov...

CAPTAIN

OK, yeah, Zakhirov Tahir..

POOL ATTENDANT

Don't even think about getting in the water.

CAPTAIN

Got it.

POOL ATTENDANT

I'll be watching. I'll see -

CAPTAIN

We got it! Ok...

The pool attendant leaves,

*the captain swears at her
under his breath.*

CAPTAIN

Ok. Zakhirov, so how did you get into the pool?

ZAKHIROV

Day passing.

CAPTAIN

Ok. And the victim?

ZAKHIROV

She was regular here...

CAPTAIN

Ok. So when you bought your pass, you knew she'd be here?

ZAKHIROV

Yes. Knowing she is...

CAPTAIN

Ok. You got in and the Vic was - where?

ZAKHIROV

Here lane making number two.

CAPTAIN

Ok. So did she notice you?

ZAKHIROV

No, to notice me I did not want her...

CAPTAIN

Ok. What did you do next?

ZAKHIROV

I waterboardjumping.

CAPTAIN

Ok. So. Jump - only here on the ledge, not in the water.

ZAKHIROV

(jumping in place)

I make like this. Maybe almost.

CAPTAIN

What a freakin' circus. Valia you asshole. Didn't I tell you we'd be in the pool, huh? How is this supposed to work now, huh? I've gotta close this case, hand in the report at the asscrack of dawn!

VALIA

But Comrade Captain, what am I gonna do? I didn't know, I wore clean shorts on purpose - didn't know you've got to bring them with you...

SEVA

So what if he jumps in, what can she do about it?

CAPTAIN

She'll raise a major stink with all the shit she'll throw at us... Ok... So Takhi - Zakhirov - Ok, so what's next, you're in the water...

ZAKHIROV

I'm making water. Look at her. She smile her girlfriends, she calling... I mean, I dive now quickly then, so she don't notice me...

CAPTAIN

Ok. You dive, so squat.

Zakhirov inhales deeply, as if he's really going to take a deep dive, squats in diving position.

CAPTAIN

Ok. Next?

Zakhirov exhales.

ZAKHIROV

Next I start swim to her...

CAPTAIN

Ok, how far do you swim?

ZAKHIROV

Well like ten, fifteen... not more than seven meter...

CAPTAIN

Ok. Valia, go stand about ten meters in front of him... Ok, Zakhirov, look, picture this guy is the vic and swim to her, I mean him, and do to him what you did to the vic.

ZAKHIROV

Hokey dokey.

Waddles, squatting, to Valia, his arms doing a swimmer's crawl through the air.

CAPTAIN

Valia you dick, we even got trunks for the perp, and you? You came here straight from home, not from some prison, and you couldn't guess?

Valia crosses to the prescribed ten meter distance, looks guiltily away from the captain. Zakhirov "swims" up to Valia and sits at his feet. The captain glances at the policewoman.

CAPTAIN

Nice pool, huh, Liuda?

LIUDA

Not too shabby...

CAPTAIN

Do you swim, keep yourself in shape I mean?

LIUDA

Well, it's hard to get in a regular workout with our schedule - we all go over and shoot off some rounds at the firing range once a month, but...

CAPTAIN

No, but a good... pool, right, swim a couple times a week, couldn't hurt...

LIUDA

What's up with this clown, is he tired or what?

CAPTAIN

So - what - Zakhirov, how much longer are you gonna sit there? Get on with it.

ZAKHIROV

I kinda don't remembering real good - so - I kinda swim up, she kinda plop in, make paw at the water like so... but then...

CAPTAIN

So, then, think harder...

ZAKHIROV

Well I kinda go make her leg, with all those other leg around - kinda - she had the green polishing on her toe, I saw green toenail... then she kinda... *(to Valia)* go ahead kick - splash air - like she did, helping me to remember.

CAPTAIN

Go on, Valia, earn your paycheck, what's with the stupid grin? Do it!

Valia starts kicking, as if performing a ballet fouetté.

ZAKHIROV

So I grab her and pulling her down to me and she diving. She kinda... just a sec...

He strokes Valia's legs, holding his head, pretending to conjure the details of the drowning.

CAPTAIN

Go on, grab him - drag him down as if you were in the pool...

ZAKHIROV

Just a sec... like this...

He lies down on the tile deck and clutches Valia's legs.

She flop - kinda - flop there, and then when she being still, I letting her away so and start swim inside the water to wall over there and climbing out. Then she come

surfacing, so everybody think she swim...

LIUDA

So he was under that whole time?

CAPTAIN

At least six minutes. First he swims to her, about ten meters, then he grabs her, drowns her, swims all the way back... Ok Zakhirov, so that's really your story?

ZAKHIROV

Yes... that is a story... more and less... I loving her, Comrade Captain, I loving her, and she don't, she don't loving me, she just playing at it! I do everything for her - she start with my brother living. What the hell. I beg her - beg - beg *him*, telling him, you are my brother, how can you doing this to me... and he is the elder one. Where I come from, you can not make argue with your elder one. So at first thing, I mean I could only talking to her... I give her present, everything wanting- you want Italian silk stocking, fine, only the best. Swiss chocolate? Lindidit. English? Cadboo-ree, three bar each one, to her, to her girlfriend...

CAPTAIN

Ok, let's stop with the song and dance Zakhirov, Ok? Just shut the hell up. Ok... fine... so for how long did he... Zakhirov, did you have a scuba tank?

ZAKHIROV

I well... I was being like this... no scuba tanking... just swimming short...

LIUDA

We'll have to check that out, something's not right here - what is he, a fish, a pearl-diver, even they can't stay under that long without air...

CAPTAIN

Ok, Zakhirov, I'll check the time, signal you, and you don't breathe, not a breath - hold it as long as you can, we've got to get it on record. Have you got that?

ZAKHIROV

Yes.

The captain looks at his

watch.

CAPTAIN

Ok, go!

A minute passes.

ZAKHIROV

What, no breathing at all?

CAPTAIN

You telling me you're breathing?

ZAKHIROV

I'm waiting for you signal me...

CAPTAIN

Shit. Ok, let's try that again

(He looks at the watch.)

Go on, hold your breath!

He signals to Zakhirov.

ZAKHIROV

Got it, nothing breathing.

Holds his breath.

A minute passes.

ZAKHIROV

How long not to breathe?

CAPTAIN

This day is killing me. Takhirov. I give you the signal, and then you hold your breath for as long as you can. As long as you can, that's how long you hold your breath. Clear?

ZAKHIROV

No.

CAPTAIN

What's not clear?

ZAKHIROV

I'm no Takhirov, I'm Zakhirov.

CAPTAIN

Listen, Zakhirov, get with the program or we'll duct tape your mouth and nose and rip it off in half an hour or so. Then we'll see what kind of diver you are, asshole.

ZAKHIROV

Explain what I must do - I do everything you need - I showing no resist.

CAPTAIN

Shut your trap and hold your breath, and tell me when you run out of air.

ZAKHIROV

I got it. Holding.

The captain looks at his watch and notes the time. 30 seconds pass.

ZAKHIROV

That's it, no more air!

CAPTAIN

Damn. Let's just bury the fucker. Can't even last one goddamn minute.

LIUDA

So maybe he's not our guy?

CAPTAIN

Then who is?

LIUDA

Well how could he drown her, if he can't even not breathe for 60 seconds.

CAPTAIN

No. No this is not - somehow he did it. Some freaking how. And now he's messing with us. OK, Zakhirov, did you tell us everything?

ZAKHIROV

Everything. Everything I am remembering. I don't know if I...

CAPTAIN

Idiot. Hell with him. We did the reconstruction, in theory - we've got the fingerprints on her legs, right? The Vic's girlfriends didn't see him in the pool because he was underwater, right? So it all fits. We're done here.

LIUDA

Well yes, in theory... He could also have worked himself into such a state that he didn't even notice he wasn't breathing - if he was so set on killing her - it all depends on the state he was in, I mean on his state of mind - he's got no compulsion, so now his breathing is just - and he's thinking about it now, and he didn't then. It's like superhuman, people can do anything you know - pull a kid from a burning car, save people - there was a story - some guy hauled two naked women out of the water - he didn't even know how to swim, just dove in, grabbed and dragged them to shore. And he can't even remember how he did it. Like our Colonel, Filipov, when my husband and I had our housewarming, he came over and drank, played guitar all night - gorgeous - Flamenco - some Spanish thing. Next morning we wake him up and we're eating breakfast - and we say please, Comrade Colonel, play us another one and he says fuck off I never touched a guitar in my life...

CAPTAIN

OK. So that's clear.

Stops and looks around.

Nice pool. So Zakhirov, how much did that pool pass cost you?

ZAKHIROV

No remembering, just day passing, if you take more, is cheaper, a discount - if you get month passing, is almost free. I pay for one day - I don't needing for more - just to drown and that's it - I figure one is enough...

The captain turns to Liuda.

CAPTAIN

Should we get a monthly pass? Go swimming, keep in shape - it's more fun to come with two, and I'd never end up coming by myself...

LIUDA

Get a family pass.

CAPTAIN

I can swim with them in the bathtub - why don't you keep me company?

LIUDA

Why not - Should I switch it off?

She gestures to the camera.

CAPTAIN

Was it still on?

LIUDA

Yes, but it's off now.

CAPTAIN

Go ahead and erase the ending - the story about the colonel - and the bit about the pool with all the uh...

LIUDA

Could be compromising, huh?

She laughs, so does he, and then he stops abruptly.

CAPTAIN

Ok, let's go, as long as we're here, come on, let's find out how much it is...

LIUDA

Let's go then.

CAPTAIN

OK, the office is over here? The pissy one, where did she head off to?

LIUDA

Over there, I think...

CAPTAIN

OK, Seva? Wait here - we'll be back in a minute. And Valia? Valia Valia Valia...

The captain and Liuda exit,

Valia sits on the diving board and smiles.

VALIA

Listen, Zakhirov, tell me, how could you not breathe underwater all that time?

ZAKHIROV

What do you care? Who are you?

VALIA

No, it's just - I'm interested - how did you do it?

ZAKHIROV

My ass.

He turns away.

VALIA

That's what I thought - so that's the trick. Why didn't you demonstrate for the camera how you breathe through your ass - you don't want us to learn how - your secret weapon, huh?

Zakhirov curses under his breath, using the most vile obscenities of his native language.

SEVA

Valia.

VALIA

What?

SEVA

I'm going back to school this year...

VALIA

Where?

SEVA

The University.

VALIA

You do that.

SEVA

You went there, right?

VALIA

Long enough...

SEVA

Listen, what would you say if - I was thinking about maybe a history major...

VALIA

What the hell do you want with the history department? You know what kind of chaos they've got over there - they're rewriting all the books.

SEVA

What for?

VALIA

Because of the new socio-economic order.

SEVA

Of what? Why?

VALIA

Because history books used to show very clearly why, for example, people unleashed wars on guys named Tahir, and to whose benefit these -

SEVA

And why did they?

VALIA

All the wars against the Tahirs of the world have economic roots, and have nothing to do with nationality; a nation is just an excuse to shovel crap into the heads of the carcasses piled up as walls to guard somebody else's money... So, Seva, what did you get in history class in high school?

SEVA

C minus.

Zakhirov looks at Seva and grins, starts to sing softly, a sad little song from his native land.

VALIA

And you want to major in history?

SEVA

Why not? It's not so hard. I didn't study back then, but I will now. What's so tough: you read about the revolution, memorize the dates -

VALIA

Right... But why the urge to enroll?

SEVA

What can you do these days with a high school diploma - why should I be stuck rounding up punks acting up in the subway?

VALIA

No, really, let's dig a little deeper and get to the root of this need for higher education.

SEVA

Dig away - I'd like to know myself...

VALIA

Well, you obviously want an education that doesn't require much effort, so it doesn't fuck up your free time.

SEVA

Uh, yeah, I guess...

VALIA

Right, so major in communications, study journalism or philosophy - you don't have to do shit, that's for sure, and the diploma's yours.

SEVA

And then what? What can I do with it?

VALIA

Ah yes, we've touched the essence of the conundrum. You want the big bucks, the hot car, the prestige?

SEVA

Uh - yeah - but what's so bad about -

VALIA

Not so bad, Seva, but why take a winding road to something that's right in front of you? Here he is, your obedient genie Takhirov, ready to grant your every wish, if only you release him - He's a captive of the lamp, and you, Seva, are Aladdin...

SEVA

But what - I mean how - you can't just...

Zakhirov stops singing and approaches Seva and Valia.

VALIA

What are you afraid of? We'll tell the Captain... he escaped - the worst they can do is fire you.

SEVA

No Valia, stop - how could I -

VALIA

Couldn't be easier - it'll all be over in a minute, he'll be on his way and poof! He's united with his motherland and you get a nice little something for your trouble - it's like Gorky said "he didn't go to college, but life itself became a university for him..."

ZAKHIROV

Listen, whatever you want, I getting for you - we got nice car, white, Yugo - money, I get as much as you needing, really - before they coming back, my brother, listen to you friend - word of honor, what you say, I will do, show my thanking -

SEVA

What are you guys saying... how...

VALIA

"What?" "How?" Don't fuck around - look, blink and his hairy ass will twinkle off at the speed of light, and you'll get a white Yugo and heaps of money.

SEVA

But how? When they come back, all hell will break -

VALIA

Crap. They'll fire your ass and you'll be embarrassed in

front of your friends. What a tragedy...

SEVA

And what's in it for you? What do you get out of this?

VALIA

I just want to help you. My greatest wish is for just one person -

(Looks at Zakhirov.)

No, two - if even just two little people could be happy in this crazy world - truly happy....

Valia looks deep in Seva's eyes, smiling broadly, paternally. Seva takes a moment to digest it all, resisting, suddenly digs in his pocket for the handcuff key, and goes to Zakhirov. Tahir is happy - he reaches out to Seva, hoping that his hairy hands will be free at last, and that the rest of his hairy body will follow them to liberty. But at the last moment, Valia knocks the keys out of Seva's hands.

SEVA

What the...

VALIA

I was kidding, Seva - they'd screw us to the wall, thanks to our little friend here. And if you let him slip away - you think, what - he'll stick around to thank us? He'll be the one to turn us in...

ZAKHIROV

No, on my honor, dear brother - beloved brother, do not listening to him now -

SEVA

And why did you drag me into this?

VALIA

I just wanted for you to - to understand the essence of morality...

SEVA

And that is?

VALIA

Morality, Seva, is rooted in the how of it - how you satisfy your needs. No matter how badly you want something, you must consider other people, the morés and rules of society, you've got to major in history, work your fingers to the bone, so that when you finally - in the end- get your reward, it will be well deserved. Takhirov didn't know that, and this is the result - handcuffs and shame. But now you know, you are hereby warned, and forewarned is forearmed. It's so easy to go down the wrong road, Seva, and I didn't want that to happen to you.

Seva, frustrated and disoriented:

SEVA

Fuck off, you - you...

ZAKHIROV

Seva, my brother, you can doing it, come on...

The captain and Liuda enter, Zakhirov starts wailing, understanding that there is no escape. Liuda is buttoning her uniform and the captain is checking his fly.

CAPTAIN

So that's that. And why's he wailing - what's with him?

VALIA

He's repenting...

CAPTAIN

Really?

VALIA

Yes, he just unburdened his heart to us - told us the whole story - how he suffered from an excess of pride; decided he must put himself to Raskolnikov's test: can he kill or will his fear hold him back?

CAPTAIN

Yeah...

VALIA

Yes, and when he saw that he could, in fact, kill, he understood that even with the purest motives, you can't do something like that to even the most useless piece of fluff with a green pedicure.

CAPTAIN

It's kind of late, Takhirov, for this sort of revelation...

*Zakhirov grits his teeth,
mutters something indecent in
his native tongue.*

VALIA

Begs us to send him to Siberia for spiritual reflection - while you were gone we witnessed quite the epiphany here...

CAPTAIN

That's OK, Zakhirov, you're not the first and you won't be the last - as for Siberia - that depends on the courts, where they send you - you'll get plenty of time for reflection, even if it's not in Siberia - we've got shitloads of little resorts like that in Russia... OK, let's move it.

They exit.

An apartment room: Valia and a man sit at the table. They both eat: Valia with chopsticks and the man with a spoon.

UNCLE PETER

Your mother left us alone so we could talk.

VALIA

Really? Wasn't my idea.

UNCLE PETER

No, she had her reasons.

VALIA

Maybe it's just one of those things a woman does - goes off to fix her make up, change her clothes - she used to leave like that when my father was alive, she'd haul off and disappear, we'd be on our own, but we didn't talk about anything in particular. It was just: she's gone, we can eat in peace - in silence.

UNCLE PETER

No, really, she wanted me to have a little talk with you while she's out - that's why she left. Kind of not exactly on purpose.

VALIA

I get it. You mean you knew she was going to take off in the middle of dinner - you were just chowing down and waiting?

UNCLE PETER

Well. Yes.

VALIA

It's always disconcerting, this purposeful manipulation of reality in the simplest of interactions, when it's all been arranged that this one gets up and leaves just as this other one does something else, and a third one does thing number three - so what's my role in your little scenario?

UNCLE PETER

We've got to talk.

VALIA

So talk.

UNCLE PETER

I think you know that your mother and I have been talking about living together...

VALIA

Really.

UNCLE PETER

Yes, she says you don't even try to understand her - us - our relationship - and you act so angry - it's like you've got something against it.

VALIA

Wow. It's like I do.

UNCLE PETER

So then let's talk - about it - us.

VALIA

Yes, let's.

UNCLE PETER

Why don't you eat like a normal person - where did you get those things - why are you using them?

VALIA

So that life is never too easy.

UNCLE PETER

I mean maybe if you were eating the food they're designed for...

VALIA

And what are they designed for?

UNCLE PETER

Well what - I don't know - raw fish, rice balls - whatever those slanty-eyed types feed on...

VALIA

It's not just the slanty-eyed types using them, half the world does - and you can eat anything with them, except for soup - and if you wanted to, you could even get the hang of that...

UNCLE PETER

You take an hour - I've timed you - me and your mother are done and you don't finish for at least an hour - drives us crazy. Why can't you use a spoon, like a human being?

VALIA

Do you know how long it takes until you actually feel full?

UNCLE PETER

How long?

VALIA

A half hour after you've started. You and mother overeat because you can't tell when it's time to stop stuffing yourselves. And with these, little by little, you're in control.

UNCLE PETER

But it's not us, they're not for us - why get used to what's not yours?

VALIA

Why do you say it's not us?

UNCLE PETER

In Russia, Valia, if you want to live, you gotta have one of these.

(He sticks the spoon in Valia's face.)

You gotta chow down in big scoops and chunks, not peck and poke one speck at a time, like some little yellow guy with tiny pointed sticks. Look, we evolved from stick to scoop because we don't cook stuff you can eat with a stick. How can you eat borscht with a stick? Ice cream? No way. Leave 'em in the east...

VALIA

You know, uncle, there hasn't been a line between east and west here since Genghis Khan.

UNCLE PETER

Maybe in your head there's no line - but there's certainly one in mine. And in your mother's head, too.

VALIA

That little burg you come from was occupied during the war,

right? Is that why you're so hung up on European culture so much? Maybe your mom had a thing for the German milkman?

UNCLE PETER

Get the hell out of here, you bastard. You don't like it, get your own place and your own family - your mother and I will be fine here without you.

(Valia crosses to the man, stares into his eyes and holds the chopsticks to his throat.)

What the hell are you doing?

Valia laughs.

VALIA

Nothing. It's just that you're a dead man.

The half-empty dining room of a Japanese restaurant. Standing in the middle: the captain, the policeman, the policewoman with the video, a bluehair waitress in a kimono, a man in handcuffs, and a young man in a baseball cap with the heroes of South Park on it.

CAPTAIN

So you sell raw fish here?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Yes.

CAPTAIN

And people order it?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Yes.

CAPTAIN

And they actually eat it?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Yes.

CAPTAIN

Well lah-dee-friggin'-dah. And what do people pay - how much is it?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

It depends. We've got fifteen different kinds of sushi, starting at sixty rubles a serving.

CAPTAIN

OK, well, yeah. No - I'm afraid of tapeworms. You get tapeworms from raw fish. And then they live inside you. I know a guy with a tapeworm, it's a monster, living in his gut. They're regular buddies now: when he drinks his kefir he says I'm feeding my worm.

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

You only get tapeworms in raw fish if you don't freeze it.

CAPTAIN

But it says here that your sushi is raw -

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Raw, but frozen.

VALIA

You know, in Japan, they bring it straight from the docks right to the restaurant.

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

When we have salmon in the Moscow River, then you can start worrying about tapeworm. There's no tapeworm in our fish, there isn't anything in it - it's totally sterile...

CAPTAIN

OK, fine, back to business. Your kimono - are you from Japan?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Nah, it's the manager. There's loads of sushi joints in Moscow now, running along fine until somebody gets poisoned. Everybody's got to have the exotics until the first Major Health Code Violation... If you want to know the truth, this whole business is dangerous, you should study for a long time to learn how to prepare all this crap. There's even one fish, if you cut it wrong, it secretes a deadly poison.

CAPTAIN

Really.

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

We've got it here - the most expensive thing on the menu. Vasya, our cook, made it recently. Downed a little liquid courage, sliced the sucker up, garnished it with a few greens, we served it - the whole staff was standing around, waiting to see what was gonna happen...

CAPTAIN

And how did it go?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Not bad. We ran out of sake, and that's probably what saved us. We were serving vodka, and that's probably why it turned out OK. We were on our last nerve, what a nightmare.

CAPTAIN

Yeah. But why the kimono, like I said.

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

I told you, the manager. Every corner sushi joint has Samurai standing around, and you, he says, will be a venerable aged geisha, that will be our trademark, our specialty, right? That'll bring 'em in.

*Her face suddenly contorts
like she's going to cry,
squinting, her lower lip
curling up to her nose as she
sings:*

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

The Japanese tea-house, blooms all 'round,
Like a ship long lost at sea,
Called to the English sailor, bound
For a glass of wine and a cup of tea.

Like every Jack Tar, afore and aft,
He went ashore to sleep
With his head on a pretty Japanese lap -
*(Stops and thinks, can't recall
the next line, continues...)*

And that's all it took.

The geisha loved him more and more,
But his sea-blood loved the water.
So he went running back from shore,
Into the arms of Neptune's daughter

Her sailor gone, she cried her tears
'Til she was near the grave,
But he was merry all those years,
As he sailed the sea from wave to wave.

Who is my father, mother dear?
The little boy asked his mama.
She held him, whispered in his ear -
(Can't remember the next line...)
Your father's an Englishman. Some sailor. I don't know.

So pour me tea and a shot of rum,
I'll drink my pain to joy -

(Losing herself in it...)

Blossoms fall all around me, piling up everywhere, I'm
drowning in them...

I'm still in love with my sailor boy

*A pause. The captain is
silent, staring at the
bluehair in the kimono. The
policewoman and Verkhushkin
are about to burst into
tears. Valia and Seva are
waiting for the next verse...*

CAPTAIN

Is that it?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

That's it.

CAPTAIN

OK. So Liuda, is it on?

LIUDA

It's on already.

CAPTAIN

OK, so Verkhushkin, one more time, why did you come here?

VERKHUSHKIN

Tenth anniversary.

CAPTAIN

Of what?

VERKHUSHKIN

Graduation.

CAPTAIN

From what? Charm School?

VERKHUSHKIN

High school reunion.

CAPTAIN

So the vic was in your class?

VERKHUSHKIN

Yeah - Me and Horse shared a lab table...

CAPTAIN

Horse?

VERKHUSHKIN

Well, that's his nickname. Horskov. Horse... we was homies.

CAPTAIN

OK, got it, you were friends...

*(The captain winks at the
venerable aged geisha, and she
bends toward him.)*

Bring me that menu, why don't you.

*She scurries off for the
menu.*

CAPTAIN

OK, so you sat together - at school - and where did you sit here?

VERKHUSHKIN

Together... Here too...

CAPTAIN

OK, Valia, go sit next to him.

*(The captain stands up, freeing up
the seat for Valia.)*

You'll be the horse today.

*The policewoman and the
policeman give a little
whinny.*

CAPTAIN

So you sat: what were you talking about? And go right to when, why, where to and where from you shot Horse... hell, I mean the vic.

*The venerable aged geisha
brings the menu, the captain
glances at it, raises an
eyebrow, but continues
listening.*

VERKHUSHKIN

So what, he's like, only one drink and he's already on my ass in front of everybody. So I've got my own carwash, The Montana, and he's like "yo, hurry up and finish", 'cause he's gonna roll his ride to the carwash and he wants me to wash it myself. And why's he the big man, huh? So he did a little time in the joint after school, so what - that's why he's doing so well, y'know, you can really network in there, where am I gonna make contacts like that? At least my business is legit - I pay my taxes, all the standard bribes, keep my nose clean, and this guy, this vic of yours, yo, you check him out - he's got quite the little biz. I know how it works, they send migrant workers up north, take five hundred from each of them for "official worker registration." Right. I saw them once, like over a hundred poor suckers with their little backpacks and thermoses, waiting for the nice Boss-man to escort them North to their dream job and the big money. Wifey and the kids kiss Daddy bye-bye and in three short hours they figure out they's all totally fucked.

CAPTAIN

And what's the difference between the hand-rolls and the sushi?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Same crap, but the hand-rolls have the fish eggs sprinkled on top.

Valia looks over at the captain and realizes he couldn't care less about what Verkhushkin is telling them.

VALIA

OK, so go ahead and tell us how it happened.

VERKHUSHKIN

So he's on my ass again about the car, right, and even Olga isn't bragging - and she has a salon, does all the bigwigs, not just their hair, but even picks out their ties - Image Consultant, or whatever - and Horse is giving her shit too, he goes, so which do they wear, boxers or briefs?

The captain tears himself away from the menu.

CAPTAIN

OK, so how did it happen?

VERKHUSHKIN

Well, I'm like stop neighing, and he like neighs - I'm like, yo, stop the damn neighing, and he's like -

CAPTAIN

So? What happens next?

VERKHUSHKIN

I'm like take it outside.

CAPTAIN

OK.

VERKHUSHKIN

He goes, you're on.

CAPTAIN

OK.

VERKHUSHKIN

So we stand up.

CAPTAIN

So stand up.

(Verkhushkin stands up.)

Did the Vic stand up too?

VERKHUSHKIN

Fer shur.

CAPTAIN

Valia, on your feet.

Valia stands.

CAPTAIN

OK, so how did you leave? Who was first?

VERKHUSHKIN

He did, then me - he passed by the bar, over to the... the china-doll there...

Verkhushkin motions to the venerable aged geisha.

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Yeah, he was just a few feet away when this guy shot him. And I knew it, knew as soon as they got here, that something was gonna hit the fan. I get these feelings, especially at Prep School reunions - these alumni parties -

CAPTAIN

OK, wait, OK, so he heads off - and where are you? You must have already been there.

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Oh, right - just a sec - let me get - just a sec -
(She gets into her position at the time of the murder)

I was the last thing he saw before he died...

CAPTAIN

(Deep inside, he feels for Horskov, whose dying vision was not so heavenly.)

Yeah - OK Valia, go stand next to her.

Valia does, as Liuda starts boogying down to some song in her head, shooting the whole scene like it's an MTV video

VERKHUSHKIN

He like said something to her, I drew my gun, and like popped a cap in the back of his head a couple of times -

CAPTAIN

Popped a cap. And not with some pop-gun, right? A couple of fucking idiot kids with real bullets. Holy goddamn hell. First they have to go out and buy the shit, idiot pussies. And we're the ones who have to mop up the steaming pile. Dickface morons. And where the hell did you get the gun? What asshole did you cocksuckers crawl out of? I never thought I'd live to see such a motherfucking asswipe pile of shinola. Which sewer did you all slither - I mean you all went to the same schools, same fucking teachers, your parents - shit - they're my age for Chrissake - where did they dig you up - how did you manage to - all of you! This dickwad forgets his swimsuit, this faggot blows away his little schoolmate - what the holy fucking fuck do you want from life? How the hell are you gonna get through it? And

this little cunt - look at him!

(He points at the policeman.)

What did you do yesterday?

SEVA

Well, Comrade Captain -

CAPTAIN

How is it that I can't fucking understand a thing about you? I'm not that goddamn old, and I can't understand your stupidass dickhead practical jokes, even. What the fuck is it, to get some poor beat-cop shitfaced - what's his name -

SEVA

Zavarov -

CAPTAIN

Get him shitfaced, dress him up like a whore and throw him in the cage with every low-life cocksucker - I just don't get it - listen: you're not kids anymore, you're almost thirty - at your age I already had the wife and kid - where did you even find them? Fishnet stockings, peekaboo bra, fuck-me-pumps?

SEVA

I went home and got my mom's -

CAPTAIN

His mom's. His *mom's*. And wasn't that just too goddamn much work, to go all the way to your mom's? Holy crap - and me - the worst I ever - so maybe on April Fool's I squeeze mustard into my wife's tube of toothpaste - a normal little prank - and what do you do? The point is, you couldn't fucking care less. And you don't fucking care that you don't fucking care. And yet you - your whole generation - you drive buses, fly planes, operate goddamn nuclear power plants. And my point is - why the fuck do you get the job? You don't fucking care, and you've got these positions of responsibility, and then the whole society is a goddamn clusterfuck!

LIUDA

Calm down, Stasick -

CAPTAIN

The hell I will - "popped a cap" - he totally blows this guy away - go get me that fucking fish and some fucking

sake - if I don't try it now, I never will -

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

You mean the one he -

CAPTAIN

This one!

(pointing at the menu)

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

All right, just a minute

She runs off, leaving everyone standing around not sure how to react to the captain's hysterics.

CAPTAIN

Get the fuck away from me. I don't want to see your goddamn idiot faces.

(He sits at the table, and takes off his service cap as the others stand at a distance, nervously watching him.)

How long has it - four, eight - I was a fan by time I was fourteen - twenty-six years. For twenty-six years the national team fucks me in the ass. So in the past, OK, there were a couple of wins, we squeaked through to the finals. But now, goddamnit, every cup's a fucking disaster - four years you wait - for what? Because all the players are just like you jerkoffs - They're not playing the game, they're playing with themselves - that's the fucking problem. It used to be a protest, a statement: "we don't give a shit and we mean it" - you know, "fuck the power." Now it's all very polite, no protest - they play the game to get what they want so that nothing is for real. You're just playing at life and the ones who play for keeps - they go crazy. And they suffer. And the soccer team - are they playing soccer? No. They play the game of playing the game. Every player has his own fucking team - for hair and makeup! It's raining like hell- the goalie should be re-setting his defensive strategy and instead he's re-setting his fucking hair. He's not listening to his coach, he's listening to his asslicking stylist.

(The venerable aged geisha brings back a small sake server and a plate of exotic sushi. The kitchen

staff enters to stand and watch from a distance.)

What the hell. Fill 'er up, granny.

(She pours the sake, he takes a swig and looks around for a fork to use on the sushi but finds only chopsticks sealed in a bag. He makes a face at the taste of the sake and starts tearing at the bag, finally skewering a piece with one of the chopsticks, using the other to guide it to his mouth.)

Shit, it's not food, it's a brainfuck.

And here's the thing - without a word, they do it all without a word.

And then this childish code - "popped a cap" - They get it that if they want the world to stop fucking them up the ass, they should just play along. The global fuckall, at every level...

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

So what else is new? It's yesterday, I'm on the 26 bus, I ask the driver: does this bus go to Malisheva Street, and he says, fuck if I know. The driver.

The captain stops chewing, thinks, pours himself another cup of sake, drinks it.

VALIA

They say that all that Japanese stuff, the far east, it's all about relaxation...

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

It is - do you know how much relaxation goes on in here every day? We run out of tables there's so much relaxing. It just looks a little different here than it does there. Just like the fish. For us, relaxation, even if you wear a kimono and eat with sticks - if somebody gets on your nerves, they get a bullet in the back of the head or at least a stick in the eye. We have our own way of relaxing.

CAPTAIN

And what did he say?

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Who

CAPTAIN

Horse!

BLUEHAIR WAITRESS IN KIMONO

Oh. Horse. I don't give a fuck. He said "I don't give a fuck." It's like he didn't give a fuck about anything. But he got himself blown to hell - by a relaxing classmate.

Room. Table. Valia, Mother, Olga and Uncle Peter sit at the table. Everyone is using chopsticks.

MOTHER

Good boy, oh baby, I'm so happy for you both, I'm so happy.

UNCLE PETER

Me too. I'm happy for you - stepping up like a man. It's scary at first, this thing of tying yourself to another person, that it's forever. But you get used to it, and in theory, it really doesn't matter at a certain point, who's tied to who - everybody just lives the way they want to, that's how I see it, so don't worry about it.

OLGA

We decided we're not going anywhere - I mean no honeymoon. No big wedding.

MOTHER

No, well, but - we've got to have a dinner -

OLGA

But just us - just family.

MOTHER

Good, that's good - better to spend your money on something you need.

OLGA

Yes.

MOTHER

Like a washing machine

OLGA

Yes

VALIA

Yes!

MOTHER

He's back from the dead! So are we eating right?

VALIA

Just right.

UNCLE PETER

And why aren't you eating?

VALIA

I'm listening...

UNCLE PETER

You're a decent guy, respectable, if only you'd get a decent job - kids, you know, they'll ask what do you do Daddy - so what'll you tell them?

VALIA

I won't have kids.

MOTHER, OLGA

What?

MOTHER

All your studies, five years at the University, how can you just go play a corpse all day - who wants to do that?

VALIA

I do.

MOTHER

Why?

VALIA

Because I'm scared.

MOTHER

Of what?

VALIA

Of death. I'm afraid of dying - it's like a vaccination, a tiny dose of the thing you don't want to get - that's why I took the job. Every time I play the dead guy in a reenactment - it's a vaccination, a tiny dose, to escape it...

UNCLE PETER

Death? Excellent. And don't forget, he doesn't drink or smoke.

MOTHER

So?

UNCLE PETER

So, I'd get it, if he was, I don't know - if he was on drugs, we would know what to do, how to help, but here - what - I saw a PSA, they show those for the parents, tell you to pay attention if your kid doesn't eat, sleeps too much, if he's sad all the time. Then he's an addict, you know what the problem is. But this one - jokes around, eats enough for three, last one to bed - how do you deal with that...

OLGA

Just don't pay attention. Or you'll go crazy. I figured it out a long time ago - just don't pay attention, and nothing will bother you.

Or else every time he freaks out, well, eventually you'll end up in a rubber room - or at the bottom of the river.

MOTHER

I'll go get the -

The captain enters the room.

CAPTAIN

Don't move - nobody went anywhere - Right, Valia?

VALIA

Not exactly, she was halfway up, she was heading for the kitchen, and her legs gave out and she fell down. Fell down here.

Points at a silhouette on the floor.

CAPTAIN

OK, ma'am - go lie down. OK, Valia, what happened next?

VALIA

Next, he rushed over to her

Points at Uncle Peter.

CAPTAIN

OK, so what are you waiting for, go rush already.

Uncle Peter goes to the woman.

VALIA

Then he stared at me like he was going to say something to me, started to turn and suddenly crumbled to the floor, too...

Uncle Peter lies down accurately into the silhouette drawn next to the woman on the floor.

CAPTAIN

OK, so what did *she* do?

VALIA

Her? She immediately got what was going on. Ran to the sink, started gulping down water - I was trying to explain, that it wouldn't help, that the poison was already taking effect, and that she shouldn't torment herself - she should just wait - but she was screaming and gulping and gulping, and then she went limp over the sink and that was it...

CAPTAIN

Go on, go limp.

OLGA

Huh...?

Valia's father appears from under the table, wearing a sailor's uniform and holding the video camera.

FATHER

What "Huh?" Lay down.

(To Valia)

Like that?

VALIA

Like that.

CAPTAIN

Ok, so what next?

VALIA

So what next... Actually, I wasn't sure - would they really be poisoned or not - but as it was, I was just watching,

remembering, to be able to play it out for you later on - to reenact it because you'd need to know how it was. Same as when I'd ask my father - how did it go between him and mom, how did they meet, how did they decide to have me - this all reminds me of one long reenactment of the crime of giving birth to a human being, dragging him into this life, telling him it will all be over soon, that nobody can help anybody else. Now that they're all gone, I know for sure that I don't actually exist, and that means there's no end to it, if I don't exist...

FATHER

Just like when you were a kid. Really. That was a terrific little load of crap - you've beautifully explained about all your fears, but you're just playing again, and you think you're the only one who's figured it all out? What about the guy in charge, what if he's just playing, too? Everybody's pretending. It's hard to be who you are - too much responsibility - it's easier to pretend, play along, hide out, disappear. But there's still that one guy who really knows his job, because nothing can ever really disappear.

(Hands sailor's uniforms to everybody laying on the floor, they begin to change clothes.)

When I was in the service, in the navy - we were out on a military cruiser, sailing along for ages on some kind of exercise - I was on watch. Suddenly - something glitters in the distance, sparkles, so I yell to the guys, they turn the cruiser around - we sail out to that sparkle. The Skipper went ballistic when we went off-course, howling we'd all be court-martialed, but everyone got into it - two months at sea and a sparkle is something to investigate... We sail up to it, and it's a can, a huge can of herring - in oil. Imagine, in the ocean - fish in a can! We haul it in, gorge ourselves. Two months at sea and everyone is bored, so we decide to try it and see what happens!

(Howls like an animal)

A week. One whole week we're shitting and puking. A week! We were waiting for death, we begged for it. We'd probably already died, and then forgot, because it was so bad. It seemed like it would never end.

So you're scared... You're scared of the wrong thing you know.. the scariest thing, the fear to end all fears, is what if it will never be over. What if it doesn't ever end. So...

Don't be sad..

*(Starts singing, as the choir in
sailor suits join the father in
song)*

The Japanese tea-house, blooms all 'round,
Like a ship long lost at sea,
Called to the English sailor, bound
For a glass of wine and a cup of tea.

Like every Jack Tar, afore and aft,
He went ashore to sleep
With his head on a pretty Japanese lap -
*(All stop and think, can't recall
the next line, continue...)*

And that's all it took.

The geisha loved him more and more,
But his sea-blood loved the water.
So he went running back from shore,
Into the arms of Neptune's daughter

Her sailor gone, she cried her tears
'Til she was near the grave,
But he was merry all those years,
As he sailed the sea from wave to wave.

Who is my father, mother dear?
The little boy asked his mama.
She held him, whispered in his ear -
Your father's an Englishman. Some sailor. I don't know.

So pour me tea and a shot of rum,
I'll drink my pain to joy -
Blossoms fall all around me, piling up everywhere, I'm
drowning in them...
I'm still in love with my sailor boy

The End.