

THE DOG

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Script (draft)

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INT. A TOWN SOMEWHERE IN RUSSIA. AN UNCOMFORTABLE ROOM WITH BARE WALLS.

The room is furnished with nothing more than a desk, a chair, and a bench. A dilapidated door leads into the dark interior of the building.

A WOMAN, wearing a shabby smock, is sitting at her desk. She is sewing a fancy evening dress. Every now and then she glances at a fashion magazine.

Enters a MAN holding a little PUPPY in his arms. The puppy is wrapped in a jacket.

MAN

Good morning.

WOMAN

(Tears herself away from the sewing machine. Gives him a dirty look).

How do you do?

(Resumes her sewing).

After removing his jacket, the man carefully lowers the puppy onto the floor. The puppy scurries nimbly about the room sniffing his unfamiliar surroundings. The man keeps shifting his stance. He obviously doesn't feel in his element and doesn't know how to strike up a conversation.

MAN

Sunny, don't you think? Too bad it's so damn cold out there! Who'd have thought?..

Woman goes on with her sewing without responding. Man sits down, reaches for his cigarettes, flicks his lighter.

WOMAN

No smoking on the premises.

(Points to "No Smoking" sign)

Man puts the lighter and cigarettes away.

MAN

Imagine! One day about six weeks ago I was sitting in my apartment with nothing to do... So I said to myself: "Why not go

to the store and pick up something?"

(Expressive gesture)

So I open the door to my apartment, and -- would you believe! -- this little puppy darts right in. You'd swear she'd been hanging around for just this. A little brown puppy with a white spot on her chest, intelligent little eyes, drooping ears. The cutest little thing. This wasn't a dog. It was a bundle of joy! But why am I going on like this? There is no need to describe her. Here she is right before your very eyes. Isn't she gorgeous?

Woman Glances at the dog, refuses to answer.

MAN

At first, I was sure she was an abandoned dog. Then, after looking a little closer, I changed my mind: She couldn't be a stray dog. She was so affectionate, so sleek, so fat, you could lick the soup off her lips. So I say to myself: "So long as no one comes looking for her, why not play with her for a while?" So I pour milk into a bowl, pat her -- and still no sign of the owner. So I say to myself: "How the hell is the owner supposed to know that his dog is here?" So I go outside, hang a "Dog Found" flyer on the front door of the store and at the bus stop, you know: DOG FOUND AT SUCH AND SUCH A PLACE ON SUCH AND SUCH A DAY. FOR DETAILS CALL SUCH AND SUCH, ETC. I return home, wait for someone to call, and -- would you believe it -- no one calls.

WOMAN

(Indifferently)

Abandoned.

(Goes on sewing)

MAN

(Indignant)

Abandoned? This cute little puppy? Impossible! Lost, I am sure, but... Anyway, I wait for awhile, then I say to myself: "No one's bothered to claim her, so I might as well give her a bath. After all, who knows what filthy gutters she's been hanging around... So I pour a little warm water into the bathtub, put her in. Suddenly, I'm terrified. What if she starts screaming? Or scratching? Nothing of the sort! She takes one look at the water, sniffs at it, laps it with her tongue for a minute, then stands there as calm as can be. Just stands there looking at me. So I pick up a bar of soap and say: "Bubbles, give me your paw!" And, would you believe, she raises her paw just like I told her to!

WOMAN

(Perplexed, listlessly)

And why "Bubbles"? What sort of name is this?

MAN

(Confused)

I really don't know... It just came into my head. She is a feisty little puppy... and she is little... and she is a girl. So there you have it: "Bubbles". Of course, it could've something to do with the bubbles in the bathtub. She's some bulldog, you know!

WOMAN

She's a boxer.

MAN

Boxer?! I thought she was a bulldog.

WOMAN

(Coolly)

No. Pure-bred boxer.

MAN

Now you tell me! And all this time I thought she was a bulldog!... Now, where was I? - Oh, yes, so I washed all four of her little paws, then her back and wrapped her in a towel. Then I put her on my lap, and all of a sudden, she starts licking my face... Then and there I knew I'd never give her up!

(Calling Bubbles)

Bubbles, come here!

The puppy runs up to her master.

MAN (CONT'D)

Shake!

The puppy raises its paw.

MAN (CONT'D)

Now the other paw!

The puppy offers the other paw. The man caresses his dog. Bubbles lies down at his feet.

WOMAN

What about the owner? Did he ever show up?

MAN

No, and thank God he didn't! Ever since then my life's changed around completely. No matter where I am, night or day, I rush home as soon as... I open the door and, would you believe, she is jumping all over, beside herself with joy. And me too, I am so happy I could cry. So I go

out and buy her own little rug  
and her own little bowl. I even  
start cooking soup for her...  
She's so full of life, so  
playful. And, boy, is she  
smart!...

(Reaches into his pocket  
and pulls out a little  
stick)

You don't believe me? Well, just  
watch! Bubbles, here Bubbles!

He tosses Bubbles a stick. She pounces on it, catches it  
in her mouth and returns it to her master, who takes the  
stick out of her mouth and pats her. He turns to the woman  
and says with pride.

MAN (CONT'D)

See what I mean?! There was a  
time when I knew nothing about  
them. In fact, I couldn't have  
cared less for these bulldogs...  
eh... I mean boxers then. It's  
those jaws, you know. Lots of  
people are scared stiff... And  
it's true -- on the surface they  
look so vicious. But deep down  
you couldn't find a gentler  
soul. And they really aren't  
that ugly... As a matter of  
fact, Bubbles' face has kind of  
grown on me. So what if she isn't  
the most beautiful dog in the  
world? To me, she is gorgeous.

WOMAN

And just why are you telling me  
all this?

MAN

Who else can I tell all this to?

WOMAN

Whomever you please.

MAN

Aren't you interested?

WOMAN

No, I'm not, and besides I am up to my neck with work. Can't you see?

Pause.

MAN

Everybody kept telling me: "A dog is nothing but trouble..." Trouble? What trouble? Joy! Nothing but! Except, of course, that she catches colds easily. But, don't worry! I have seen to that. I've knit her a little vest. In fact, I intended to put it on her today, but when I looked through the window, it looked so warm outside. The sun can really fool you. So I had to carry Bubbles in my arms all the way here. I'm walking along and suddenly I see her curious little eyes peeping from behind my jacket. Funny, isn't?

(Pats dog solicitously)

I hope she doesn't get sick.

(Takes off his jacket and covers the dog with it)

Pause.

WOMAN

Well, have you talked yourself out yet?

The man doesn't answer. The woman pushes her sewing machine aside, opens a big ledger on her desk, picks up her pen and says.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

First name, please?

MAN

I have already told you:  
"Bubbles"

WOMAN

No, not hers. Yours.

MAN  
(Reluctantly)  
Michail.

WOMAN  
Surname?

MAN  
Kovalyov.

WOMAN  
Do you have your certificate of  
registration?

MAN  
What certificate?

WOMAN  
Those are the rules. Every pet  
must be registered with the  
Veterinary Station in the  
owner's name.

MAN  
I don't have a certificate. Why  
do you need it?

WOMAN  
That's the way it's done. The  
dog could be somebody else's,  
you know.

(Starts writing)  
Your address, sir?

MAN  
For God's sake, could you please  
stop writing for just one  
minute... We'll think of  
something, won't we? Just look  
at her! So affectionate.  
Positively gorgeous? Don't you  
think?

WOMAN  
All boxers are affectionate.

MAN  
And, boy, is she smart!  
Positively amazing! Let me tell

you a story. You won't believe it. We were walking along...

WOMAN

(Cutting him off)

Please, sir, no more stories. When it comes to dogs, I assure you I wasn't born yesterday.

MAN

But please, Madam, just hear me out... We were...

WOMAN

Enough is enough! I'm not much for idle chatter.

MAN

Why on earth must you have such a stern look on your face?

WOMAN

Because that's just the way I am.

(Picks up pen)

MAN

That's a shame!

WOMAN

Why, am I being rude?

MAN

No, not at all, but...

WOMAN

Am I violating any rules?

MAN

No, of course not!

WOMAN

Or am I detaining you with long-winded conversations?

MAN

No, heaven forbid, nothing of the sort!...

WOMAN

Or perhaps you expect me to get up and offer you a cup of tea?

(Ironically)

"While you're at it, Ma'am, why not throw a piece of cake into the bargain?" -- Is that what you want? And to think, my goodness, that I forgot to express my profound gratitude for your visit:

(Ironically)

"Thank you, sir, for your gracious visit. Be sure to look in on us more often... It has been a great pleasure..."

(Sits down, regains composure)

MAN

(Pulling back)

Please don't blow your top, Ma'am!. I really didn't mean it the way it sounded. I was just carried away.

The woman picks up her pen silently and reaches for the ledger.

WOMAN

Address?

MAN

Don't you think she might qualify as a show dog? I am serious! I've trained her myself.

(Gives command)

Bubbles, sit!

Bubbles leaps up in the air and wags her tail.)

MAN

I said: "Sit!"

Bubbles rubs her nose against her master's feet and, looking him in the eye, tries to understand his command. The man addresses the woman apologetically.

MAN

She's just a puppy, you know.  
Just give her time, you'll  
see...

(To Bubbles)

Sit!

Bubbles sits down and looks up devotedly at her master.  
The latter, beaming with pride, continues

MAN

Did you see that? And look at  
the way she is sitting-- paws to  
the side, head tilted... Pure  
pedigree!

WOMAN

(Appraising the dog with  
her eyes)

Yes, she is purebred!

MAN

(Excited)

You bet! She's gonna win some  
medals all right!

(To Bubbles)

You will, won't you, honey?

(To the woman)

The Kennel Club will pounce on  
her!

WOMAN

No, they won't.

MAN

And why not? What do you mean?

WOMAN

She doesn't have any papers...  
As proof of pedigree.

MAN

So?... Take a good look at her  
and tell me she isn't pedigree!  
Besides, she isn't some fancy  
countess, so why does she need  
papers?

WOMAN

That's just the way it's done!

MAN

You mean there's no place for her here without a certificate?

WOMAN

None.

MAN

And why is that?

WOMAN

(Sighing)

For a dog lover, you are incredibly naive. I assure you the Kennel Club won't take her.

MAN

What's wrong with them? Aren't they human?

WOMAN

That's just the point. I mean, they are human.

(Pause)

MAN

Well, couldn't she be a watchdog someplace?

WOMAN

No, they only take German Shepherds for that. And only males. Yours is bitch.

Silence. The man reaches for a cigarette

WOMAN (CONT'D)

No smoking! Remember?

(Points to the sign)

MAN

I'm sorry.

(Thrusts cigarettes back into shirt pocket)

WOMAN

Why did you bring her here, anyway, sir? Was it your wife's doing? Perhaps the dog got in her way?

MAN

No, I live alone.

WOMAN

How is that?

MAN

The usual thing... Wife ran off with the kids.

WOMAN

Just got up and left, huh? Why, didn't she like you?

MAN

The hell with her! That... I don't want to say anything bad about her. And don't ask me to say anything good about her either. There isn't any.

WOMAN

Really? Nothing good?!

MAN

Please, let's not talk about her. OK.?

WOMAN

So, how are you getting along now?

MAN

Oh... So and so... I am sort of a loner. There's only one thing in the whole world that's mine... Come Bubbles, come!

(Pats the dog)

WOMAN

So why not keep the dog at your place?

MAN

And work at the same time?

WOMAN

Everybody works, sir. Why should a dog be a problem?

MAN

That depends on the kind of work. For example, I work for the railways. I'm always on the road...

WOMAN

Somehow, you've managed quite well till now, haven't you?

MAN

That's just it: "Somehow". At first I took vacation leave--three weeks worth. Then I got lucky: I caught a cold! So I called in sick... Finally, I had to drag myself back to work. Tried to tell them no, but... But I didn't go on the road, at least not right away... I worked at the depot. But this was no solution. Bubbles was home all alone, whimpering, howling. The neighbors swamped the Complaints Bureau with abusive letters, cursing, frothing at the mouth, threatening to beat her to a pulp-- and me too!

Momentary silence.

MAN (CONT'D)

And they'll do it, too, those swine! You know what sort of people we are dealing with here, don't you?

WOMAN

I certainly do!  
(Pause)

MAN

(Beseechingly)  
So what should I do? I'm at my wits' end.

WOMAN

It's not so bad. It's a little hard at first, but when she

grows up, she'll get used to staying home alone.

MAN

Yes, yes, but I can't be bothered forever with this business. They need me on the road. The crew is getting restless. They're saying: "Stop dragging your feet, Misha! Why don't you quit and let somebody else have your job?!" So you see, don't you, I'm at a dead end.

WOMAN

Couldn't you leave your dog with someone while you're away? You know, for a day or two?

MAN

For a day or two, maybe ... but not for a month or how about three?

WOMAN

Three months?! I've never heard of trips lasting that long. You could go around the world in that time. Are you serious?

MAN

(Helplessly)

I'm afraid so, lady. You see, we are refrigeration specialists. We work for the railroads.

WOMAN

Refrigeration specialists?

MAN

Yes. We're in charge of the refrigeration cars.

(With a hint of self-mockery)

It's our professional responsibility to maintain the appropriate temperature wherever needed. You know what I mean?

WOMAN

But why do your trips take so long?

MAN

How else could you do it? For instance, we load up with fish in Murmansk and unload in Tashkent in the south. In Tashkent, we stuff our cars with fruit and drive on to the Pacific. We then dump the fruit and load up on meat. From there, Moscow is only a stone's throw away. And so on. Sometimes we are on the road for six months at a stretch. So, tell me, who has time for a dog?

WOMAN

Have you tried finding a home for her with your friends?

MAN

(Dejectedly)

Yes, but nobody wants her. One person complains that his apartment is too crowded, another says he is going away for the summer. No one has time for a dog. Everybody puts up such a fuss...

WOMAN

I know... Nobody has any time.

MAN

There's this one kid on our block who hangs around the yard all the time. He pestered me for days on end: "Let me have Bubbles, Mister, please, pretty please!" So I gave him the puppy. He was in heaven.

WOMAN

So what happened then?

MAN

His mother comes running back with the puppy: "I'm sorry, sir, Bubbles is keeping my boy from his studies. I won't allow it!" While she raves and rants, the poor boy is standing right behind her crying his heart out.

Pause.

MAN (CONT'D)

So I take Bubbles to my sister's-- she'd been moaning about how she wants a dog for ages. Well, believe it or not, Sadie says no. Why not, you ask?

The woman shrugs her shoulder.

MAN (CONT'D)

You'd never guess! Pedigree! "A royal poodle I would take," she says, "but boxers, well... they're out of fashion these days." That's my Sadie for you. What do you make of that?

(Strokes Bubbles while talking to her)

Listen, Bubbles! You aren't in fashion any more! Did you know that? Sadie wants a poodle. Not just any old poodle, honey. A royal poodle!

WOMAN

It's true. Boxers are no longer in fashion.

MAN

In fashion?! What do I care about fashion? Bubbles isn't some piece of clothing!

(Pounds with his fist on the desk)

How can you talk about fashion when it comes to living things! Maybe you and I are out of fashion! Did you ever think about that?

(Jabs his finger into the fashion magazine lying on the woman's desk.

Sarcastically)

So what are those chic fashion magazines of yours saying about us? Ha! Sooner or later, we'll all end up in the dumpster!

WOMAN

(Recoiling from him)

Pipe down, sir, pipe down, please! Why all this rage?

Silence. The man reaches for his cigarettes.

Please, sir, no smoking!

The woman points at the sign. The man puts the cigarette away.

MAN

So I sweated over this business all week until finally last Tuesday I took Bubbles and rode with her to the other end of town. Well,... and I left her there... I said to myself: Someone will give her a home. Then I came back. Would you believe, the moment I stepped inside my apartment, I felt like howling. One look at her bowl and at the little ball she used to chew on and this horrible feeling comes over me... Three days pass. Late one night I hear someone scraping at the door. I open the door-- it's her! It's Bubbles! Thin as a rake, pooped out... and what's the first thing she does? She leaps all over me, licking and barking... I felt like scum... real scum...

When Bubbles senses that she is being talked about, she jumps up, wags her tail and curls up at her master's feet. Man's voice trembles.

MAN (CONT'D)

Tomorrow, it's back on the road.

Pause.

WOMAN

(Unexpectedly severe)

Now look here, sir! This is no place for heart-rending farewells! I have enough to do around here as it is.

MAN

Why, am I in your way?

WOMAN

(Spitefully)

No, why should you be? You're a great help!

Pause.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

So, have you decided to give up your dog or not?

MAN

(Flaming up)

Give up? Why, you dog! You bark and carry on... You just wait! Soon you'll be biting like a dog. Yes, you sound just like a bitch!

(Catching the woman's unfriendly glance, he proceeds a little more cautiously)

I'm sorry, Ma'am, but that's the only word that fits.

WOMAN

It's all right, sir. I really don't consider it an insult.

MAN

So much the better.

WOMAN

Of course, if you keep on running off at the mouth, I shall have to show you out. You can't conduct yourself here as

if you were at home. This is a respectable establishment.

Silence.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Well, sir, do you intend to sit here all day? Do you see that hallway?

(Pointing to side door)

I'll bet there's a line forming out there right now.

MAN

It's so hard for me to make up my mind. Do you understand?

WOMAN

If it's so hard, then you shouldn't have come. People are waiting, while you rattle on and on.

MAN

There wasn't anybody waiting when I came.

WOMAN

Yes, but it's almost closing time, so people are swarming in at the last minute.

MAN

Lady, you don't have a heart. That's what's wrong with you.

WOMAN

That's the way I am.

MAN

You could use a little feeling, you know.

WOMAN

(Ironic)

Why, what for?

MAN

(Surprised)

Why a little feeling?

WOMAN

Yes.

MAN

What kind of question is that?

WOMAN

And you -- you have this  
"feeling"?

MAN

Another strange question! Sure,  
I'll give you an answer! What  
I'm trying to say is that  
you're...

WOMAN

(Cutting him off)

Leave me out of this, please!

Pause.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Who is giving up the dog, you or  
I?

The man becomes silent.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Well, now that we agree on  
something, why don't we drop all  
this prattle about feelings, and  
get on with the business at  
hand.

Long pause.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Is your dog registered?

MAN

No, she's not.

WOMAN

(Maliciously at first,  
then with quiet triumph)  
In that case, I won't take her.

MAN

And why not?

WOMAN

Regulations, sir! First, you'll have to pay a five ruble fine for illegal possession of an animal. Then come and see me. And with a receipt.

(Slams the ledger shut)

MAN

(Confused)

Where do I pay the fine?

WOMAN

At the Third Veterinary Station.

MAN

(Exasperated)

Receipts, vets, shmets! What will they think of next?... Just to add to our misery!

The woman doesn't respond.

MAN (CONT'D)

What if I pay the fine directly to you?

WOMAN

No need for that, sir!

MAN

OK, forget the five. How about ten?

(Hands her the money)

WOMAN

(Sneering)

Aren't we being generous today?

MAN

(Disturbed)

What's the matter? Not enough? I have lots more where that came from.

(Again reaches into his pocket)

WOMAN

I've already said there is no need for that.

MAN

What difference does it make  
where I pay the fine?

WOMAN

For me-- a big difference!

MAN

Why should I've to drag myself  
from office to office?

WOMAN

That's your problem, sir.

MAN

You mean-- otherwise you won't  
take her?

WOMAN

Precisely!

MAN

(Sighing)

So where is this Vet Station of  
yours?

WOMAN

(Reluctantly)

It's close by. In the adjacent  
building.

MAN

Thanks.

(Prepares to leave. Stops  
in his tracks. Defiant)

No way, lady! I won't go! Here,  
take it!

(Again reaches into his  
pocket)

Do you have change for 100  
rubles?

WOMAN

(Laughing)

If I had that kind of money, I'd  
be married before you could say:  
"Come here!"

MAN

You mean you're not married?!

WOMAN

No, I'm afraid not.

The man ponders the situation for a moment. His face beams.

MAN

I have an idea.

(With delight.

Authoritatively)

May I respectfully propose that you take Bubbles home with you? You won't feel so lonely then.

WOMAN

And I thought you were about to propose... to me.

MAN

(Looks at her significantly for the very first time. With bravado)  
Now that you mention it, I'm all yours. Just give the word.

WOMAN

Just like that?

MAN

Sure, why wait? I've got a train to catch tomorrow.

WOMAN

I'll bet you would do anything for your dog, wouldn't you?

MAN

What makes you say that?... We'd make a great match, lady! You and me!

WOMAN

But I don't have a heart. Remember?

MAN

Maybe so-- but what character! I'll take the risk.

WOMAN

How brave you are! You aren't afraid of anything, are you?

MAN

Afraid? Of what? After putting up with my ex? Nothing could be more terrifying than her.

WOMAN

You must have been in love with her. You can't seem to get her out of your mind.

MAN

Well, to be frank, she really wasn't bad. She was just like any other wife. I could've lived with her, even if she did nag me to death... I'd just play deaf. I could forgive her an awful lot, but

(voice rising)

what I could never forgive her for

(pounding the desk with his fist)

is... leaving me. I'll never forgive her for that!

Bubbles jumps up, startled. The man calms her down.

MAN (CONT'D)

Sit down, sit down, honey. No need to be afraid.

Once again the dog curls up at her master's feet.

WOMAN

Why did she leave you?

MAN

Why don't you ask her yourself... I don't really know. I guess there was something missing in her life. We had a fine house crammed with everything under the sun. Everything worked like magic: the doors, the faucets, the

locks. As smooth as a machine. There were shelves and dressers and cabinets everywhere you looked. Would you believe, I made them all with my own hands!... And when it came to money... boy oh boy!... You know, lady,

(looking directly into her eyes as he leans over the desk)

I rake in more money in one month than a dozen poor stiff's in a year.

WOMAN

And where do you get this kind of money, may I ask? Do the railroads pay that much?!

MAN

(Satirical)

Of course! If you don't mind waiting till doomsday!...

(Haughty)

We manage very well on our own, thank you!

WOMAN

How is that?

MAN

(Slightly embarrassed)

Well, when we load up with fish in Murmansk-- we put away some of the action for ourselves.

WOMAN

"We"? Who is "we"?

MAN

The gang. The buddies I work with on the refrigeration cars.... We then dump the fish in Tashkent. They can never get enough of it. We then load up with fruit and off we go to Siberia.... That's how I earn...

WOMAN

Your daily bread?

MAN

Bread?

(Laughs)

Not only bread, Miss! Try bread and butter. And, you guessed it, everybody wants to get on our gravy train.

(Laughs again at own humor)

"Sure," we say, "you can join, but how about ten grand for starters."

(Boastful)

Even then, who knows, I may not want to give them a piece of the action.

WOMAN

You have done well for yourselves, haven't you?

MAN

(Proud)

Sure, a man has gotta make a living, don't you think? But, believe me, it's not been all downhill. We have problems, too, like everybody else. If you want to make a killing in this business, you gotta know how to manage. Nothing gets done by itself. Sometimes we come into a station and hang around for three weeks before they load the train. That smart Alec Director -- you know, of Warehouses -- well, he passes our cars like he doesn't know who we are. The bastard just keeps staring at the sky, while our precious goods are rotting away.

(Emphasizes with hand gesture while looking directly into the woman's eyes)

No grease, no action! Know what I mean, lady?! ... Then come the big shots. They all want their cut... But don't worry, I've been at this refrigeration

business fourteen years. I've got customers everywhere... The gang sticks to me like glue.

WOMAN

Why, are they children or something? Don't they know how to take care of themselves?

MAN

(With bravado)

Where would they be without me? They are greedy little bastards, but brains they ain't got. Just recently, we got stuck at a station in Georgia. So I went to investigate, to see what's what. Meanwhile, the guys get a whiff of brandy from some tank close by. They pick up their bottle... would you believe, a 20 gallon milk can...

(laughing)

we had this can put aside for just these occasions -- and then they fly off like a band of gypsies to pour themselves some. And -- you guessed it --they leave the cars unguarded. And I keep beating it into their heads night and day: "Never leave the car unprotected!"

WOMAN

(Cutting him off)

Wait a second! What do you mean by "pour themselves some"?

MAN

Well, there are all sorts of ways... In fact, by the time we're done with it, the can is full, but so is the tank!

(Laughs)

and no one is the wiser... so they "pour" it, all right

(Still laughing)

Then they turn around and go back. Just then I show up on the scene -- would you believe, no car!

WOMAN

And then?

MAN

The usual thing, you know... We run around in circles, some here, some there, until we wear our butts off. By a miracle, we found our refrigeration cars two kilometers away. Right next door we found a freight truck, and in this truck we saw a bunch of no-good crooks making off with carcasses -- I'm talking dozens of carcasses -- from our cars. So one guy grabs a crowbar, another grabs a monkey-wrench and, boy oh boy, we finally get our car loose. But the meat truck scampered off and the milk container is nowhere in sight. Must've happened while we were hacking away at the tow chains....

(Mocking)

"Are they children or something?" Is that what you just asked?! Are you kidding?

WOMAN

You do lead a strange life.

MAN

Not really, it's all quite normal.

WOMAN

And your buddies? Aren't they strange?

MAN

As normal as you and me. They're just a little more clever.

WOMAN

And you?

MAN

Well, I could teach them a lesson or two. As a matter of

fact, I'm sort of "leader of the pack". I've got to stay on top or else they'll chew me to pieces.

WOMAN

So what was it about you that your wife couldn't stand?

MAN

(Taken aback)

What?!

(Reflecting for a moment)

Well, you see, she was bored. I work my ass off like a mule. I dress her up from head to toe and she is "bored"! Do you have any idea how many dresses she's got, not to mention every other piece of junk she's managed to squeeze out of me? You could run a train for a whole year on her wardrobe. And all I ever heard from her was: "Give up your job! Quit that job of yours, honey!"

WOMAN

She didn't like those long separations, did she?

MAN

That, too. But even when I was home, would you believe, she wouldn't let my buddies come over to play dominoes. "It's enough," she'd say, "just trying to get you to see the kids." And I...

WOMAN

(Cutting him off)

Are the kids grown up?

MAN

Well, now they're grown up. My son just finished school, and my daughter is in ninth grade... No, I take it back, in eighth...

WOMAN

(Reflecting. Tinge of  
sarcasm)

I understand!

MAN

And, on top of that, she took offense because I wouldn't call or write. What is there to call about? It's always the same routine with us: we load up and get a move on, we move on and we unload.

WOMAN

I understand.

MAN

She didn't know how to wait, wouldn't stay faithful...

(Pats Bubbles)

Take a look at this bundle of joy with drooping ears! She's so loyal to me. She is just like... a wife to me.

WOMAN

You said it. I didn't.

MAN

(Making a fist)

The bitch... She was lucky, she got away with it. She ran off before I had a chance to... If I had caught her with that bastard... I would've beaten them both to a pulp.

(Silent for a moment)

...Anyway, good riddance! That's all in the past, and I'll never take her back now! But, why don't you tell me something about yourself?... So, why aren't you married?

WOMAN

Just like that? You expect me to spill out my guts to you? Just like that?

MAN  
And why not?

WOMAN  
(A hint of rudeness)  
Well, I'll have you know, sir,  
that I don't go around spilling  
my guts out to strangers.

MAN  
Boy, you are a feisty gal,  
aren't you?

WOMAN  
I'm sorry, but that's the way I  
am.

Pause.

WOMAN  
Well, are you giving up the  
animal or not?

With trembling fingers, the man reaches for his cigarette pack and thrusts it back into his shirt pocket.

MAN  
She won't feel anything, Miss,  
will she?

WOMAN  
No, don't worry. It won't hurt.  
A little jolt and it's all over.

The man looks at the dog. Catching his gaze, Bubbles wags her tail in delight. The woman picks up her pen and leans over the ledger.

MAN  
(Ill at ease)  
What are you writing there?

WOMAN  
I am recording your dog's...

MAN  
(Slams the ledger shut)  
Wait a minute! Why are you in  
such a hurry? ... For you,  
Bubbles is just another animal.

But to me she is a lot more...  
You may think it's funny, but -  
- would you believe -- she makes  
me feel like a human being  
again. At long last, somebody  
really needs me. But the main  
thing is that she doesn't love  
me for my money or my job... not  
even because I'm kind to her.  
She just loves me, that's all.

Pause.

MAN (CONT'D)

And how she waits for me  
everyday. It's such a joy to  
come home.... I turn on the TV  
and there she is lying at my  
feet. Such a cute, warm little  
creature. You know, we watch  
television together... In fact  
I've even given up drinking...  
Do you understand? I'm a god to  
her! I'm everything to her! And  
now you want to turn on the  
knife-switch on her?!

Pause.

WOMAN

In that case, why don't you wait  
for a while. Think about it for  
a day or two. Maybe you'll find  
a way out.

MAN

I can't wait any longer. I'm out  
of time already. I've gotta get  
back to work.

WOMAN

Can't you wait just a little  
longer?

MAN

No, I've already dilly-dallied  
long enough. I've already taken  
time off, changed shifts, asked  
friends to house-sit for me...

(Sighing)

I don't have any more strength  
left in me.

WOMAN

(Decisively)

Well, then, why don't you hand  
her over and be done with it?

MAN

But how can I live without her?  
I couldn't take it, coming home  
from work, with everything so  
damn quiet. Like a cemetery!  
Nobody to greet you, nobody to  
curl up next to you on the  
sofa...

From behind the wall we hear the muffled howling of dogs.  
Bubbles looks around uneasily, whimpers quietly and presses  
tightly against the man. The man listens intently as if in  
alarm.

MAN (CONT'D)

What's that?

WOMAN

(Reluctantly)

It's the dogs. They are howling.

MAN

What dogs?

WOMAN

The ones we catch.

MAN

Where?! Why?!

WOMAN

We have a special squad of dog  
catchers... They round up all of  
the homeless dogs at night and  
bring them here. Didn't you  
know?

MAN

And you kill them?

WOMAN

(Spitefully)

No, we tie little pink ribbons around their necks and parade them up and down Main Street.

Silence.

MAN

And what do they do with the dogs they kill?

WOMAN

They load them up onto a truck and send them off for salvage. The hides are used for fur, the carcasses for bone flour... They say that it makes good feed for the poultry farm. Very lucrative, in fact.

The man takes Bubbles in his hands and holds her close. The howl continues unabated.

MAN

And do they catch many of them?

WOMAN

On a good night-- a dozen or so.

MAN

Where on earth do they find so many homeless dogs?

WOMAN

(Dryly)

Don't you know? Somebody gets fed up with his dog, takes it some distance from his apartment and abandons it: "Well, maybe somebody will take it home." That's what they all say.

The man lowers his eyes.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

At night, our dog catcher drives around in his big truck with a net at the ready. For every dog he catches he gets three rubles...

The howling grows louder.

MAN

Why do they've to howl like that?

She doesn't answer.

MAN (CONT'D)

Don't you kill them right away?

WOMAN

The dogs that are brought in by their masters are killed right away. But the ones we catch ourselves we hold for three days.

MAN

What for?

WOMAN

That's just the way it's done.

MAN

(Listening to the howling of the dogs)  
You do feed them, don't you?

WOMAN

(With bitter sarcasm)  
Feed them? Feed them what?!

MAN

But why make them wait and suffer? Wouldn't it be better?..

WOMAN

(Cutting him off. Sympathetically)  
Don't you understand? We want to give the owners a chance to claim their missing pets.

MAN

And some people claim them?

WOMAN

Some. And you should see them when they do. They're beside themselves with joy. Not only the people. The dogs, too.

Momentarily silent. Adopting official tone.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Excuse me, sir, I really don't have time for conversations just now. Work is piling up, as you can see. Now, sir, let me have the dog.

The woman takes the carefree puppy by the leash and leads it into the interior of the building. Rooted to the spot, the man follows them both with his eyes.

MAN

(Coming to his senses)

Stop! Stop! Where are you taking Bubbles to?

WOMAN

I'm taking her... where you want me to take her.

MAN

For God's sake, I never meant to that place!

(Nods in the direction of the inner chamber)

I just wanted to find out, you know, what's what.

WOMAN

Well, you found out, didn't you?

The Woman tries to lead the dog away.

MAN

No! No!

(Tries to force the leash from her hand)

WOMAN

(Refuses to let go off the puppy)

You won't help matters with all this fine talk of yours. You made your decision -- there's no point in putting it off.

MAN

No, let me tell you!

(Grabs the leash from her hand)  
Bubbles -- as bone meal?! I won't let them!

WOMAN  
(Quickly)  
It's your affair. In that case, good-bye.

The woman pushes the man towards the entrance.

MAN  
Couldn't you be a little more courteous, lady?

WOMAN  
Get going! Get going!

MAN  
Don't you worry, I'm leaving. Maybe you can stand this business -- hanging around here for days on end -- but I can't!  
(Solemnly)  
It turns my guts inside out!

WOMAN  
Come on now, sir, please go!

MAN  
I'm going! I'm going!  
(Sarcastic)  
What a sweetie-pie you've turned out to be! And I'll bet you aren't even ashamed of rotting away in this crummy job of yours... So tell me, how many dogs have you killed this week?!

The woman winces from his words as if she had just been slapped in the face but doesn't answer.

MAN (CONT'D)  
You know, I've been trying to figure you out from the moment I got here. Just why the hell did you come here? So you can get rich on five ruble notes, is that it?!

The woman, cut to the quick, can barely control her emotions.

MAN (CONT'D)

So what's your angle, lady?  
What's the matter, can't you talk?

WOMAN

Please, my friend, be so kind as to leave...

MAN

I'm not your friend! But tell me: Aren't you ashamed of telling people where you work? Huh? Look at yourself! You know what you look like? You're a witch, an evil, clawing witch. I bet you forgot what it means to be a human being.

WOMAN

(Ominously)

Are you finished?

MAN

(Pulling back physically)

No, I'm not finished. Not quite!

WOMAN

Are you going, or am I going to have to throw you out?

MAN

(Contemptuously)

I hope I never lay my eyes on you again as long as I live!  
Phew! Let's go, Bubbles!

The man leaves with Bubbles.

WOMAN

Don't forget to have her registered! The Third Veterinary Station! Next door!

Silence. The woman makes her way slowly to her desk, thinks about something for a long time -- apparently having to do with herself -- then opens the ledger, studies the entries, puts on black protective rubber gloves and exits into the

interior of the building. A little later, we hear a droning sound, the light in the room turns dim, the tension drops and we hear the brief sound of a dog's scream. This procedure is repeated three times.

The woman returns to her desk more depressed than usual. She removes her gloves, tosses them on the bench, sits down at her desk, makes three entries in the ledger, reaches for her cigarettes and lights them up. She inhales deeply.

The woman finishes the cigarette, moves closer to the sewing machine and resumes sewing where she left off.

The man enters. He is without his dog. Silence. The woman greets him icily.

WOMAN

Where's your dog?

MAN

Over there! Behind the door. I left her in the hallway.

WOMAN

Don't forget to tie a stone around her neck when you dump her in the river. Dogs are great swimmers.

The man doesn't respond.

WOMAN

Why have you returned?

MAN

Why are you always talking to me like that -- as if you were condemning me for something?

WOMAN

Condemn? On the contrary, can't you see that I am trying to give you some good advice?

MAN

Thanks.

WOMAN

You're welcome.

The man sits down meekly on the edge of the bench.

MAN

I thought... since you are single, perhaps you'd be willing to take the dog....

WOMAN

No, I can't.

MAN

And why not? Just look at her! What a splendid creature. Doesn't bark, doesn't make any noise, really doesn't need any care at all. Just throw her a bone, take her for a walk twice a day, and you're done with it. She'll show her appreciation like never... You'll never regret it.

WOMAN

No, listen, please...

MAN

(Cutting her off)

And I'll show my appreciation, too. Just ask, and I'll give you all the money you'll ever need. Buy her the best that money can buy. And when I'm in town, I'll drop in and take her off your hands.

WOMAN

(Insistently)

I've already told you I can't! And, besides, why torture yourself? A dog is just a dog.

MAN

That's easy for you to say... You have a heart of stone. Boy, thank God I'm not like...

WOMAN

(Cutting him off)

So, it's the heart business again.

MAN

Well, you just said so yourself: "Why torture yourself?"... And, you know, you're right! Come to think of it -- what do I need a dog for? No, she needs me! She needs me to feed her, take care of her, etc. But what use is she to me? She's just a king-size headache.

WOMAN

You see what I mean!

MAN

Just the same... I felt a lot less sorry when me and my ex separated. Seriously. And what was there to be sorry about? I am a good cook. I do my own wash. When you're on the road as much as I am, you pick up a lot of things.

WOMAN

And is that all a wife is good for, in your opinion -- doing the laundry?

MAN

(Continues thinking aloud without responding to the woman's sting)

How strange! All my life I've tried to make life as comfortable as can be. I sweated, busted my behind, dragged my loot home like an ant-- so where the hell is happiness?... Sometimes I wonder if there isn't a crack somewhere.... Everything keeps slipping away. Before, I was positively content with my life... Now-- I don't know... There is something missing. But what? Could it really be a dog?

WOMAN

(Softens up a bit)

Are you really that attached to  
Bubbles?

MAN

No, I'm just pretending.

The woman turns on the electric teapot.

MAN (CONT'D)

So what should I do?

WOMAN

(Shrugging her shoulders)

How should I know?

MAN

Well, I don't know either.

WOMAN

Couldn't you change jobs? Don't  
tell me they won't let you quit  
the railroad?

MAN

Change to what?! It's become a  
habit, like smoking. Besides,  
it's all I know.

WOMAN

I understand that you are a  
refrigeration mechanic. Right?

MAN

You bet! And a damn good  
mechanic, too! Finished Trade  
School!

WOMAN

That's what I mean. They could  
use someone like you in the  
factories, in commerce... not to  
mention in household repair.  
Couldn't you settle down with  
some job?

MAN

But what about my seniority? You  
think I'd let it slip out of my  
hands? Besides, there is the pay  
boost, the pension... And where  
else am I going to find such an

easy job? We don't have to break our backs. Do you understand what I mean? We refrigeration specialists live on automatic... We change the padding once a week... The rest of the time we sit around playing cards in our cozy little den. The rails thunder and boom-- and the work takes care of itself... True, we have to work our butts off at the stations. But that's no problem. Everybody works like a dog then. It's for our own good and we all know it. I've tried to explain this to you once before. And, believe it or not, I have my pockets full for working on this health resort on wheels! Try making that kind of money in the big city, lady!

WOMAN

So that's what it's all about!

(Disgusted)

You're right, could anyone rake in that kind of money in the city? Sure, Bubbles, love me to death-- that's just dandy! But just don't get in my way. Right?

MAN

Why do you keep looking at me like that-- like a wolf? Like some Inspector-General. What am I? Some kind of criminal... or crook?! I'm just an ordinary person, like everybody else.

WOMAN

And you think that's enough?

MAN

(Defensively)

Well, if you are such a do-gooder, why don't you take the dog off my hands? Won't you please?

WOMAN

No!

MAN

You see what I mean!... It's easy to find fault in others, but when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, your kind chickens out.

WOMAN

We bring in hundreds of dogs every day from all over the city. And you want me to take them all home with me?

MAN

Who said all of them. Just Bubbles.

(With feeling)

I've gotta admit it. I'm pleading with you as a human being. I'll even get on my knees, if you like... What's the big deal, lady? You live alone.

WOMAN

I don't live alone.

MAN

But you just said...

WOMAN

(Cutting him off)

I do not live alone. I already have three dogs living with me. Three! Just buying meat scraps for them all has nearly ruined me...

(Nodding in the direction of the sewing machine)

If it weren't for the sewing, I'd have been a beggar long ago. Do you have any idea how little they pay me here?

MAN

You're already taking care of three, right? So what's another dog? Now the meat scraps...

(Reaches into his pocket)

You'll have thirty rubles daily,-- and that's just for starters.

WOMAN

Are you trying to buy off your conscience?

(Pushes the money away)

I don't need your pieces of silver. I've already told you I can't. I can hardly move around in my apartment as it is!

MAN

Come on, please take her! I'm begging you! Maybe money can't buy everything, but it can't hurt... By the way, why so many dogs?

WOMAN

"Why?"... Why so many dogs?!... Someone has to take pity on them, for goodness' sake! So every now and then I'll take some of them away from this place... I manage, somehow. I ring up my friends... You know I've already organized this entire Animal Protection Bureau... Otherwise, what's the point of my working here?

MAN

You can't save them all. Three dogs, even thirty, is just a drop in the bucket.

WOMAN

I know, I know. But we must do something... anything.

(Momentarily silent)

There is one awful thing, though. I'll never get them used to... you know what I mean... the knife-switch.

MAN

You've gotta leave this place!... You've got to get married.

(Surprised at what he's  
just said)  
You've got to find yourself a  
good man...

WOMAN  
You have somebody in particular  
in mind?

MAN  
Now that you mention it, how  
about me?

WOMAN  
(Bursts out laughing)  
You must be kidding!... Thanks  
but no thanks.  
(Still laughing)  
I haven't laughed this hard in  
ages.

MAN  
So what's so funny? You are  
single, and so am I. Why  
shouldn't we give it a try? Have  
you ever been married?

WOMAN  
Yes, I was.

MAN  
And how did it go?  
(Awkwardly)  
I mean... the lovey dovey stuff.

The woman makes a vague gesture.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Didn't quite work out, ha? And  
who was to blame? The husband,  
I'll bet. No?

WOMAN  
No, it was my fault.

MAN  
(Surprised)  
Your fault? Why? You didn't love  
him?

WOMAN

On the contrary, I loved him too much. Madly, blindly. Could never have enough of him.

(Falls silent)

You think it's funny, don't you? An old witch like me talking about love!

MAN

Nothing funny about it. So what happened?

WOMAN

Nothing. Who needs a love like mine these days? It's hard enough just tolerating it.

MAN

But I still don't understand why you blame yourself.

WOMAN

I am like Bubbles. Once I'm attached to someone, it's for good. Until I'm abandoned or killed. And I expect the same from a man. And this is so stupid. Where could you find someone today who'd not deceive or betray you, who would live only for you?!... No, I'd much rather love dogs.

MAN

But you mustn't... what are you saying?

Without saying a word, the woman turns off the boiling teapot.

WOMAN

Would you like some tea?

MAN

No, thank you.

WOMAN

It's piping hot.

MAN

All right. I guess I'll have some.

The woman spreads a tablecloth on her desk, then places the teapot on it along with cups, pastry and a can of preserves.

MAN (CONT'D)

I'll be right back. I just want to check on Bubbles.

The man exits as the woman prepares the tea. The man returns.

WOMAN

Well, how is she?

MAN

As usual... Keeps looking at everybody with those clever little eyes of hers.

WOMAN

At "everybody"?

MAN

Yes. There's already a line in the hallway... People with their dogs.

The woman's expression turns gloomy again. She picks up a piece of plywood on which CLOSED has been crudely inscribed in red ink and exits into the hallway. After a brief pause, the sound of discontented voices is heard, along with the woman's curt replies and the barking of dogs. Then silence. The woman returns to her desk.

MAN

So, a big crowd? Were they violent?

WOMAN

(Shrugging her shoulders  
resignedly)

No big deal.

MAN

You really can't blame them for being upset, can you? They come

here from all over and wait and wait when, all of a sudden, the door is slammed in their faces.

WOMAN

It's nothing. Believe me, they'll survive another day with their dogs.

(Momentarily silent)

Besides, someone might change his mind.

MAN

But how did you explain it to them?

(Looking at the clock on the wall)

It's not closing time yet...

WOMAN

I don't really have to explain anything to anybody...

Hesitating at first, the woman reaches for another piece of plywood with the inscription CLOSED FOR INSPECTION.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Go on, hang it on the door for me, please.

The man takes the sign and exits. The woman takes off her smock, puts on the evening dress and combs her hair before a mirror. Returning, the man stops dead in his tracks, astonished by the change that has taken place: Instead of the hard, cold, prickly "witch", he sees before him an attractive, youngish woman wearing a light-colored blouse. She, in turn, looks in puzzlement at the man.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Well, what?

MAN

Nothing.

WOMAN

Have they gone away?

MAN

Yes.

WOMAN

Splendid! Let's have some tea!  
(Picks up teapot)

MAN

(Tries to take the teapot  
out of her hands)  
Let me help!

WOMAN

No, that's a woman's job.  
(Pours tea into cups)

MAN

(Sipping the tea with  
pleasure)  
You know, you are really  
beautiful.

WOMAN

(Flirting)  
And why shouldn't I be  
beautiful?!

MAN

You are right. Why not?

WOMAN

Why don't you try some of the  
pastry?

MAN

Thanks.  
(Tasting)  
Did you bake this yourself?

WOMAN

Who did you think?

MAN

Tastes great!

WOMAN

Perhaps you'd like something to  
eat? I brought some sausage with  
me today.

MAN

No, thanks. I'm not hungry... Of  
course, I'll bet Bubbles...

WOMAN

In that case, bring her in! Why should she sit out there all bored.

The man exits. Meanwhile, the woman unwraps a roll of sausage. The man returns. Bubbles is at his heels.

MAN

(Uncomfortably)

You know, there is a man out there... sitting in the hallway. He looks kind of distinguished... He asked about you.

WOMAN

Did he have a dog?

MAN

No, a mustache.

WOMAN

(Laughing)

Ha-ha! A mustache. Ha-ha!... Please sit down.

(Offers the man a piece of sausage)

Won't you please have some?

MAN

(Takes the sausage.

Cheerfully)

Come here, Bubbles! Well, are you coming? Have we got something for you!

Bubbles runs up, sniffs the sausage, licks it, takes a bite and chews on it with delight.

MAN

You like it, hah? I knew you would! Good girl! Go ahead, eat it all! You'll grow up strong and healthy in no time, trust me!

The man offers Bubbles another piece of sausage. She takes another bite. Now the man takes a bite. They chew the sausage with hearty appetite. In due course, they manage

to consume a fair portion of the sausage. The woman, who has been observing them all this time, breaks out in a boisterous laugh.

MAN (CONT'D)

Why are you laughing?

WOMAN

You look so funny -- the way both of you are devouring that sausage!

MAN

(Puts down the remaining piece of sausage on the desk)

Oh, I'm sorry! We haven't left you a thing.

WOMAN

Don't worry about me! Eat all you want!

MAN

(Suddenly turning serious)

For the record, why do you hang around here?

WOMAN

For the record, just where should I be?

MAN

(Nodding in the direction of the hallway)

Well, for one thing, that fellow with a mustache... is waiting for you.

WOMAN

(Smiling)

Oh, don't worry about him. He can wait.

MAN

Maybe he's already left.

WOMAN

If you're that interested, why not go into the hallway and see for yourself!

MAN

(Takes a piece of the  
sausage)

Let's go, Bubbles, you'll finish  
it off in the hallway.

Using the sausage as bait, the man leads the dog into the  
hallway. A minute later he returns alone.

MAN (CONT'D)

He's still sitting out there!

WOMAN

Good! Let him sit!

MAN

And why won't he come in?

WOMAN

Because I won't let him in.

(Momentarily silent).

I'll be right back!

The woman exits. The man reaches into his pocket for his  
cigarettes, puts a cigarette in his mouth. Then remembering  
the ban on smoking, he returns the pack to his shirt-  
pocket. The woman has come back.

MAN

Well?

WOMAN

I showed him out.

MAN

And what about Bubbles?

WOMAN

(Smiling)

Standing guard. Do you want some  
more tea?

MAN

I won't say no.

(Brings his cup closer so  
the woman can pour the  
tea)

MAN

I can't help wondering how you ever ended up in a place like this.

WOMAN

What's the big deal? A job is a job.

MAN

You haven't always been an executioner, have you? You must be a vet or maybe a specialist or something.

WOMAN

You're getting warm. Actually, I'm a modeler by trade... Finished trade school...

MAN

A modeler? What's that?

WOMAN

A dressmaker... a very good dressmaker.

MAN

High class clientele, I'll bet. You must be swamped with orders.

WOMAN

It's true. I used to be swamped with orders all the time. That is, when I worked at the atelier de luxe.

MAN

Oh!

WOMAN

That's just the point: "Oh!" High class! Nothing but the choicest of the choice... Money, connections... what have you!...

(Resignedly)

In short, I lived then exactly the way you live now.

MAN

(On his guard)

Well, go on. So what happened then?

WOMAN

Nothing... I just couldn't go on with it anymore.

MAN

And why not?

WOMAN

(Sneering)

Don't you get it?

MAN

Get what?

WOMAN

In that case -- have a fine day!

MAN

No! You started it, you finish it! What weren't you happy with? An atelier! And a chic, high-class atelier at that! Doesn't that mean something to you?!

WOMAN

(Emotionally)

Sure it means something: High-class intrigues! High-class black marketeering! That's what!

MAN

What do you care? Let them play their little games. You just keep on sewing!

WOMAN

With what? Where am I going to get the materials I need? You can't turn out anything half-way decent without materials: buttons, trimmings, and so on. And where do you go for that?! -- to the black market! It all boils down to this: You have to

scrounge around for every little thing yourself.

MAN

What did you expect?

WOMAN

At the trade school they said I had talent. I was just a little girl then...

(Wistfully)

My big dream was to make all women beautiful... I came up with all these elegant designs...

(Somewhat indignant)

Those clients of mine were such brazen, high-class peddlers! It was like quicksand... Another step and I'd have been swallowed up...

(Looking uneasily at the man)

You aren't bored, are you?

MAN

Oh, no! No! Not at all!

WOMAN

I'd be pinning a cute little ribbon on some lady's enormous behind, and I'd ask myself: Whatever happened to all those simple, good women I dreamed of dressing up?...

(Pensive)

Of course, who can blame them? They don't bother hanging around these ateliers de luxe... So, I went on taking orders, cut out patterns, stitched, sewed and so on. But all this time one agonizing thought ran through my head: Is this really what I was meant for? Is this what my life is all about?

MAN

(Looking at her intently)

I guess you're not quite...

WOMAN

(Somewhat defiantly)

Normal? Is that you wanted to say? Haven't you ever asked yourself that question?

MAN

Me?... No.

WOMAN

(Ironically)

You mean it's all crystal clear to you?

MAN

Well, at least it's clear to me how you sank into this mire.

The man nods at the wall. From behind the wall we hear the rising chorus of the howling dogs.

WOMAN

(Upset)

You mean, how you sank into the mire.... I pulled myself out of it.

MAN

This kind of thoughts won't do you any good.

WOMAN

It all depends on what you mean by "good."

Pause.

MAN

OK, so that takes care of your work. But how about your husband? What was his problem?

WOMAN

Nothing. He turned out "just like the rest of them", to use your expression.

MAN

(Tinge of sarcasm)

So what's the matter with "just like the rest of them?" Maybe you want something out of the ordinary?

WOMAN

Out of the ordinary?... All I ask is that he really loves me... That'll do just fine.

MAN

(Reflecting for a moment)

So one fine day you just quit your job and left your husband. Just like that!... And for what? I just don't get it!

WOMAN

Well, maybe not "just like that!" At least not in one day... In fact, I probably wouldn't have made up my mind for a long time, were it not for...

MAN

For what?

WOMAN

(Changing her tone.

Letting down her guard)

Oh, what's the use?

MAN

Go on!

WOMAN

Oh, it's nothing. Really!

MAN

For goodness' sake, spit it out!

WOMAN

No.

Brief pause.

MAN

Forgive me, Miss, but in my opinion your whole problem is

simply that you don't have a...  
companion.

WOMAN

I am talking about the meaning  
of life, and all you can talk  
about is finding a husband.

MAN

Sometimes, it amounts to the  
same thing.

WOMAN

You might have a hard time  
believing this, but I have my  
share of admirers. I even get  
proposals now and then.

MAN

You mean-- like that mustachio  
over there...

(Nodding towards the  
hallway)

WOMAN

Maybe.

MAN

I bet he's really stuck on  
you...

WOMAN

Why, would you like to unstick  
him?

MAN

Always glad to lend a helping  
hand!

WOMAN

Forget it!

MAN

So what's this all about?

WOMAN

It's just that none of this is  
for real. I've already tried to  
explain it to you.

MAN

(Tinge of sarcasm)

And you won't settle for anything less than real. Right?

WOMAN

(Taken aback)

And what else should be there?

MAN

(Sympathetic. Waxes

"philosophical")

You've got to take life as it is. All of it -- what's real and what's not so real.

WOMAN

You mean everything? Everybody?

Is that what you mean?

(Ponders his statement)

No, no way! That's not what I was taught!

MAN

And that's precisely what's wrong with you, lady.

WOMAN

Perhaps.

MAN

(Momentarily silent)

So what do you want from me?

WOMAN

I want from you?

MAN

Isn't that why you invited me to have tea?... I'm an old hand at these things... You can't fool me. You need something from me, don't you?

WOMAN

Nothing, nothing at all... I assure you.

MAN

Come on, Miss, you don't really mean that!

WOMAN

Of course I do! I mean, nothing, I don't need anything from you. Just keep Bubbles away from here.

MAN

You feel sorry for somebody else's dog?

WOMAN

No, it's not the dog... It's you I feel sorry for.

MAN

Why on earth would you want to feel sorry for me?

WOMAN

If you give up your dog, you're doomed. Perhaps you're already doomed.

MAN

So you're writing me off? Is that it?

(A little angry)

I'll have you know it's you who are doomed, not me! Everything is hunky-dory with me. You bet!

Pause.

MAN

Of course, I do feel sorry for Bubbles. But when you come down to it, a dog is just a dog. If I feel like it, I can always go out and buy a new dog any old time. They say you can get the best puppy in the world for a few thousands rubles cash!

WOMAN

(Shaking her head)

I see... I guess there's no way to knock some sense into your head, is there?

MAN

Now, look, it's time you listened to me.

(Incoherently).

I really like you, Miss.... You're a good woman. A very good woman. But you are unhappy. There's something missing from your life. And what you don't have I do!...

(Thinks for a moment)

I've gotta admit, though -- I'm unhappy, too. There's something missing from my life, too. It's something different. But, just the same, something is

(pensive)

... missing. And Bubbles won't be any better off, either. Do you know what I mean?

WOMAN

Not quite.

MAN

Well, take, for instance, the refrigerator. It has three parts: the compressor, the coil and the frame.

WOMAN

(Completely confused)

So?

MAN

Each part is completely useless by itself. You might as well throw the whole contraption in the dumpster. But, put them all together, and you have a refrigerator! Now you understand? All of them working together!

WOMAN

So you are still proposing... Is that it?

MAN

(Overjoyed)

Yes! Yes! This time I'm for real. Honest!

WOMAN

No, I've had enough.

MAN

Why is that?

WOMAN

Because!

Coming up from behind, the man puts his arms around her shoulders. Empathetically.

MAN

Don't worry! You won't regret it. I'll take you away from this revolting place. We'll throw your smock into the fire. And, if you don't feel like working at all, be my guest! So don't worry, we'll be loaded! ... I'll dress you up like a doll...

WOMAN

(Sighing)

I've been trying to tell you... Oh, what's the use! You'll never understand.

MAN

(Ignores her)

I'm a hard-working fellow. I'm really not so bad. In fact, I'm rather obliging.

WOMAN

And where shall we live?

MAN

Well, we could live at my place. We'll live off the fat of the land.

(Suddenly inspired)

Come to think of it, I've just put the finishing touches to my apartment, and what a lovely

sight! The choicest furniture -  
- import -- picked it up in  
Italy, the finest carpets from  
Iran. A big home cinema-- you'll  
never be bored! A few more  
rubles, and I'll have a dacha...

WOMAN

(Tired)

No, you haven't understood a  
thing!

MAN

You'll have all you ever need...  
Then it's settled!... Let's go.  
Right now! I'll help you move  
later.

WOMAN

With four dogs?

MAN

Well, not exactly... that is a  
bit too many. Just Bubbles.  
That'll do.

WOMAN

(Insistent)

And what about the others? What  
am I supposed to do? Dump them  
here so they won't get in the  
way?

MAN

Well, I don't really know...

WOMAN

(Dryly)

That's just it: I don't know  
either.

MAN

Don't be so obstinate!  
Everything will work out.  
Believe it or not, I liked you  
the moment I first laid eyes on  
you. Really!

WOMAN

I, on the other hand, never liked you!... From the moment I first laid eyes on you!

MAN

(Cut to the quick)

But... why?

WOMAN

Because a good man would never bring a gorgeous little puppy like Bubbles here!

MAN

(Irritated)

Circumstances... you know, there are circumstances...

WOMAN

(Contemptuously)

What circumstances?

MAN

You know, it hurts me more than...

WOMAN

(Sarcastic)

Oh, you poor little thing!

MAN

Don't make it harder for me than it already is. Here you come along.... Besides, no one is more precious to me than Bubbles... Would you believe, I'd sacrifice everything for her!

WOMAN

(Venomously)

Sacrifice? Like what? Like shoving thirty rubles into my hand? Or a hundred? Or maybe a few thousands? Now that would be a pity, wouldn't it?! With that kind of money, you could buy yourself a new puppy, couldn't you? Well?!

MAN

(Threateningly)

Stop it! Stop it! I tell you. Or else, God forbid... I've got a real temper, I'll have you know.... I might knock you down...

(Making a fist)

WOMAN

Go ahead, knock me down!... Who do you think you are, anyway? Kill me if you must, but

(lowers her voice)

just tell me one thing: what sacrifices are you ready to make? Well? What sacrifices?

(Screaming)

What sacrifices?

MAN

(Recoiling from her)

You are a witch...

WOMAN

(Whispers under her breath)

So you are ready to sacrifice everything? Well, let me tell you something. I once had a dog, too. A long time ago. Every morning when I'd go to work, I'd leave her on the balcony.

(Voice rising)

She was so happy on that balcony!... One day, she looked down and saw me running to catch the bus. She must've thought somebody was chasing after me because she started barking... Of course, I couldn't hear her. And it was then that she jumped down from the fifth floor trying to help me...

MAN

Was she hurt?

WOMAN

(Spitefully)

And what do you think?... But she didn't die right away. And while there was still breath in her, she crawled towards me. About two hundred feet or so. Meanwhile, I jumped on the bus and drove off without noticing a thing. Later, my neighbors told me everything....

(Pause. Sneering)

Tell me, would you crawl to me if you were dying?

MAN

What's this got to do with me?

WOMAN

That's just it: Nothing. Or rather, you've nothing to do with it!

(Shaking her head)

And to think that for one fleeting moment I considered marrying this man.

(Talking more to herself than to him)

His wife waited for him, the kids were lonely without him, but he couldn't think of what to say to them on the telephone. He couldn't even remember what grade his daughter was in. All he can think of is playing God to his buddies.

(Contemptuously)

"Leader of the pack". Hah!

MAN

That's easy for you to say! You really think I'm happy with my life?

WOMAN

Of course, you're happy! You yourself said so. And why not?! No family to worry about, no obligations, no reason to feel bored at home... All you have to do is sit in the train car with your buddies, knock some dominoes around, guzzle up all

the vodka you want... You can believe it!

(Laughing)

It really is a health resort on wheels. And let's not forget the "gals"-- one at every stop, I'll bet!

MAN

Now you're going too far, lady. I won't argue with you about the vodka.

(Confidentially)

You know how the gang is -- they've gotta get their kicks sometime.

(Diffidently)

Now about the gals -- there ain't nothing to it! I assure you!

WOMAN

(Mocking)

Right you are! "There ain't nothing to it!" And how could it be otherwise? There's hardly enough time for business -- for haggling over fish, loading meat, dumping fruit -- right? Well, I've had it with making deals. And now you want to trade in your dog. For what? For the life of a wolf?

MAN

That's not true! That's not true!... And how could you talk like that about my family? It's my wife that's to blame! Nobody but her! Why won't you believe me?

WOMAN

(Cool)

I would believe you if you hadn't come here with Bubbles.

(Passionate)

Why does she have to take the blame for all this?

The man is silent.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You come in here slobbering all over, pouring out your heart, when all you really care about is yourself: "Look at me, folks! Ain't I wonderful? Isn't it grand how I feel for my dog?!"... You're just like the rest of them! All goody-goodies so long as they don't have to pay up.... Actually, none of us really cares. None of us really knows how to love. Besides, we don't need to be loved all that much, anyway...

MAN

We're all experts when it comes to blaming others. Aren't we? But take a good look at yourself: Are you any better than me? All right, so I don't know how to love. But what about you, do you know how?

WOMAN

(With icy contempt)

Don't worry, I do.

MAN

Sure, you know how to love, but who? love who?

(He yells unexpectedly)

You know how to love dogs, that's who! You don't love people... You love dogs! Because you yourself are a dog, a bitch! As a matter of fact, you hate people!

WOMAN

(Shaken)

What makes you say that?

MAN

What does it matter? The point is you don't love people.

WOMAN

(Dejected)

It all depends on what kind of people.

MAN

No, you don't love people, period! At work you found them all disgusting. You said so yourself. Your husband was good to you, but you left him. And the minute I walked in here, you found me disgusting, too. Take a good look at yourself in the mirror. Thank God you don't bite-- not yet, at least.

WOMAN

You want me to love every Tom, Dick and Harry?

MAN

Oh, yes, of course, you're looking for a "real man." You need a great, pure love. The ideal! Just like in the movies. It's easy enough to love the idea.

(Looks directly into her eyes)

Try falling in love with me! A simple ordinary man with flaws and wrinkles! But you've never learned how to love simple people. You lock yourself up in this slaughterhouse, in this convent, shut off from the world,-- and then you bitch about "the good and the true." So is that what life is all about?

Pause.

WOMAN

So tell me, what should I love you for?

MAN

(Exploding)

For nothing! Just for being me! What good is love if it's for

something? Just look at Bubbles.  
She loves me and never asks why!

WOMAN

And is this how you reward her  
for it?!

Man is silent.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Look, you just proposed that we  
live together. But, while we are  
living "together," you'll be  
running around all over the  
country. Isn't that right? And  
I'll be stuck with your color  
TV, trying not to get bored. But  
what if I do get bored-- and  
lonely? Or what if I get sick?  
Will you send me to the bone  
flour factory, too, so that I  
won't get in the way?

Man remains silent.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I have no need for the ideal.  
All I want is love. Can you give  
me that?

(Shakes her head)

No! You can't! You wouldn't even  
take my love if I handed it to  
you on a silver platter! You  
won't take anybody's love unless  
it's convenient for you to do  
so! Well, that's not good enough  
for me.

(Smiles bitterly)

A dog is just a dog. And that's  
just the way I am.... Well, so  
we had our little chat, after  
all. Didn't we? But enough is  
enough!

She removes the tableware from the desk, puts on her smock,  
sits down and leans over the registration ledger.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

So, are you giving up your dog?

MAN  
Listen, lady, ...

WOMAN  
I've already told you: Enough is enough! Are you giving up your dog or not?!

MAN  
(Hesitating, furious)  
No!

He walks out. The woman frowns, then smiles ever so slightly, slams the ledger shut, removes the teapot, puts the sewing machine away and tries to take off her smock. Just then, the man returns, leading Bubbles by the leash. Bubbles is as irrepressible as ever. Seeing the man, the woman questions him with her eyes. The man evidently feels uncomfortable.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Excuse me, Miss, I don't mean to disturb you again, but, you see, now that I got Bubbles, what... what I mean is... Where am I going to take her?

WOMAN  
What do you mean "Where?"... Home, of course!

MAN  
I know what you mean, yes, a home is a home, but...

WOMAN  
But what?

MAN  
But I have to leave tomorrow.

The woman sinks onto the bench. The man looks away while talking.

MAN  
Not tomorrow... Late tonight.

WOMAN  
(Confused. Sighing)

Oh, what's the use? Give her to me. I'll keep her with me for a while. We'll think of something when you come back.

MAN

No. There's no point in that.

WOMAN

Why?

MAN

Because! If I wanted to, I could just take more sick leave. I have a doctor friend... Sometimes, I send patients his way.... One phone call from me and, presto,...

WOMAN

So what's your problem?

MAN

I... just don't feel like it.

WOMAN

And why not?

MAN

I just don't feel like it.

WOMAN

Just like that, without any reason?

MAN

Everything was so normal before... Now, everything is screwed up. My sister is grumbling, the neighbors are snapping and the boss is breathing down my neck. To top it all off, my gang is driving me out of my mind!

WOMAN

(Softly)

Take it easy!.... No need to torture yourself!.. It'll all work out. Believe me!

MAN

No, it won't work out. Maybe you can take it easy, but I...

WOMAN

Would you like a cigarette? It's okay. You can smoke.

MAN

No... You see... I used to be in my element in those days, like a fish in water. Now everything is so strange, so different. The trips, the gang... And my big house, crammed with goodies... is empty...

WOMAN

So?

MAN

Oh, nothing. Why do you keep pestering me with questions?

WOMAN

I just want to know one thing.

MAN

What's it to you?

The woman looks silently at the man.

MAN

Don't look at me like that!

WOMAN

What's wrong with you?

MAN

I don't know. It's terrifying. One more day of this and I'll end up in the slaughterhouse myself. And I sure don't want to.

WOMAN

So you can't wait to go back to your gang, can you?

MAN

That's my business, lady!...  
(Quietly but obstinately)  
If it's all right with you, I'm  
gonna leave her here just the  
same.

WOMAN

(Severely)  
I'm sorry, sir. Come back  
tomorrow.

MAN

I can't. I won't be in town  
tomorrow.

WOMAN

It's too late. The work day is  
over. Can't you see?  
(Points at the clock on  
the wall)

MAN

(Hint of triumph)  
Not quite. There's still another  
fifteen minutes left on the  
clock.

The woman turns to the ledger, then pushes it aside again.

WOMAN

No, I'm not taking anybody else  
today.

MAN

Why is that?

The woman is silent.

MAN

You don't have the right to...

WOMAN

(Triumphantly)  
I'm sorry, sir, but your pet is  
not registered, and the  
Veterinary Station is closed for  
the day. I won't take you  
without a receipt.

MAN

But I did register her. Here, look!

(He shows her the receipt)

WOMAN

(Shaken)

When did you have time to reg...  
?

MAN

Right after I left. Remember. You ran into the hallway after me and yelled: "Don't forget to have her registered!"

WOMAN

(Barely audible)

Well, all right, then. Leave your dog and go.

MAN

Do I have to sign some papers or something?

WOMAN

No.

MAN

(Reaching into pocket)

What's the usual fee?

WOMAN

(In a tone of resignation)

Nothing. Nothing at all.... It's free.

The man takes the dog in his arms and hugs it.

MAN

Well, Bubbles, good-bye...

The dog fawns upon her master. Tears well up in the man's eyes.

MAN

Good-bye, Bubbles. I...

He sobs, lowers the puppy gently onto the floor and takes out his handkerchief.

WOMAN

(Angrily)

All right, that will do!

(Calls the dog)

Come here Bubbles! Come here!

Bubbles retreats in fear.

WOMAN

Bubbles!

The dog presses against her master's body.

MAN

(Petting the dog)

Don't be afraid, Bubbles!

(To the woman)

You'll be real quick, won't you?

(Sentimental)

Be gentle with her, will you?

She's such a sweet little creature...

WOMAN

(In a fit of temper)

For goodness' sake, go!

We hear once more the muffled howling of dogs. The man is very jittery.

MAN

Why are they howling like that?

WOMAN

(Furious)

Why?! My God! You innocent little thing! Don't you understand?!... "Why are they howling?!"... Because their masters have abandoned them! Because they're lonely and hungry! Because they don't want to die!... You would be howling, too, if they led you to the slaughterhouse.

MAN

But they don't understand...

WOMAN

They don't understand?! ... By God! They understand everything! They're just like you and me! In fact, they are better than you or me! Would Bubbles ever desert you for a scrap of meat? Would she send you to the deathhouse to make her life a little more comfortable? Why, she would do anything in the world for you... And you...

She picks up the man's jacket left behind on the desk, then hits him over the head with it. The man defends himself feebly. Growling, Bubbles courageously runs to her master's defense, jumps, tries to bite the woman's hand, then pulls her by her dress. The woman continues attacking the man without paying attention to the dog.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You are not killing your dog, you're killing your soul! I'd rather kill myself than... Get out of here, get out!

The woman kicks him out and throws his jacket after him.

Pause. The woman, breathing heavily, returns to her desk. Not noticing in the heat of battle that her master had disappeared, Bubbles sniffs restlessly around the room, runs up to the entrance and scrapes at it with her paws. The woman, in utter disbelief, repeats confusedly.

WOMAN

He's gone... Oh, God, he's gone... Really?

From behind the wall we hear the muffled howling of the dogs. We are reminded of a requiem. The woman sighs, picks up the receipt left by the man, moves the ledger towards herself and makes a little mark in it. She then puts on rubber gloves and opens wide the door leading into the interior. Instantly, the room is inundated with the deafening howls of dogs condemned to death. The woman walks up to Bubbles, who, in terror, clings to the floor. The woman takes her by the leash and drags her into the interior. The dog holds her ground obstinately.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Come here, Bubbles, come on!  
Here, here Bubbles!... What can  
we do? It just can't be helped.

Bubbles resists. The woman pulls harder. The puppy digs deep into the floor with all four paws. She's too weak and the rope drags her towards the dark chamber within. The woman drags Bubbles right up to the chamber entrance. But when she looks at the dog, the leash slips out of her hand, and she falls wearily to the floor. At first, Bubbles hesitates but then walks up to the woman, licks her face and sits down beside her.

FADE OUT

E N D