

By Mikhail Volokhov

## DEAD MAN'S BLUFF

*A one-act tragicomedy*

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Arkady

Felix

*The present day.*

*Room in the hallway of a secret medical unit. The stage is dark. Enter Felix and Arkady carrying large shopping bags. Felix turns on the light. Arkady immediately turns it off.*

ARKADY. You moron, you thick or what? First stash the food in the fridge.

FELIX. I'm tired.

ARKADY. You make me tired.

*They transfer food from the shopping bags to a fridge, a cupboard. A saucepan is placed on the table.*

*(Turns on the light.)* Those smart-Alec spook patients keep checking the bags. 'What you bringing from the kitchen, boys?' The KGB fucks spread black caviare on red, but they won't let us take a kilo of cabbage.

FELIX. Wait till the Chief comes and sees your 50 kilos of syphilitic cabbage bulging out the cupboard. You must be a fucking weightlifter.

ARKADY. That chief doctor from Ben-Edmund Square can suck my long fat one.

FELIX. You're gonna pickle the cabbage on the balcony?

ARKADY. You better do things my way. You steal dried apricots by the kilo, you swipe 3-litre jars of milk to anoint your stomach ulcer, but you never listen.

FELIX. Shut up, asshole.

ARKADY. Now you've been transferred to my shift, we got our own rules here. Try and use the space between your ears.

FELIX. I like you, man, that's why I arranged to be transferred. My dear Ukrainian friend, for all I care you can clean the whole hospital. It's all the same shit to me. You're the one with a temporary work permit – better keep your nose clean. I'm wise to you.

ARKADY. Yeah, so I'm not a Jew – I'm on a temporary permit. Hitler was fucking right. If it was up to me I'd have all you little kikes, you little Ben-Edmunds, fucking taken care of.

FELIX. That's what I'd do to the whole lot of you, fucking Ukrainian party bosses. As for that little kike crack, I could smash your face in.

ARKADY. That means you're a Jew for sure. You take Russian names like you put on fucking condoms and go round fucking everyone up the ass. Yids, kikes, fucking stinking Hebes.

*Felix quickly rises from his chair.*

Just try and smash my face in, dickhead, we'll see who lands the first blow. You can't defeat Mother Truth with fists, Felix Ben-Edmund. Let's eat.

FELIX. You need to have a stick screwed up your ass so your head will work proper. You read me?

ARKADY. Huh?

FELIX. Where's the meat?

ARKADY. You can stuff yourself with meat at home, you fairy. Here we eat these stinking cutlets. You think you're too good for that. How do the patients keep them down?

FELIX. Our patients get boiled chicken from home.

ARKADY. Bought with their KGB salaries, asshole. We're supposed to chew on these stinking cutlets. Don't shit yourself – we got some meat. I had Klavka liberate a piece for me. You're a Jew so you never get any meat. And that's the way it should be!

FELIX. Just wait till Klavka tries to pass the guardhouse – she'll have to bring me some meat.

ARKADY. That's what you think. She'll sneak out through the hole in the fence, like she did today. What will you do then, try to catch the slut? If you do, that

boyfriend of hers will grind your bones into dominoes. I knew a guy who tried to catch her – now he's swallowing worms 6 feet under.

FELIX. Her boyfriend can suck my dick. (*Opens the saucepan.*) Why the fuck did you put the meat with the stewed cabbage? Looks like a whore's cunt with crabs. Don't we have enough plates?

ARKADY. You want it on a plate, put it on a plate, rabbi. All the same shit to me.

FELIX. I've had it up to the eyeballs with you, you incontinent fucker.

ARKADY. When I give you up to the eyeballs, you'll know about it. I can always give you a nose job for free.

FELIX. Listen, butthead, I'm not going to argue with you. Just report you to the local KGB.

ARKADY. It's an open question who tells on who. I never doubted you're a snitch, Mr Ben-Edmund. You'd get fucking pleasure from shooting a man dead. You Jewboy sons of Edmund are all birds of a feather. Always slacking off, but ready to sign up for a Nobel Prize any time. No, Hitler was right. I'd send the lot of you to Dachau. Stalin understood the situation right, an' all.

FELIX. My little Ukrainian lapdog, you'd be the first he'd send on a trip to those hangouts Lenin loved so well. Look at you – moonlighting as a hospital guard and stealing carrots. Not exactly slaving away, are you, you fat-ass Ukrainian. How much capital did you accumulate from these rat-eaten vegetables?

ARKADY. So the fucking state cheats me when it pays my wages. What the fuck. I work daytime, too, I'm a welder in the taxi depot. If I had a place like yours, you slime, no fucking way I'd waste my time in this dump. I'd like to see you if in the camps. Me a thief, you a political prisoner sent down for breaking Article 58. I'd make you eat your guts, stuff waffles down your throat and hang you from the ceiling by your fucking ears.

FELIX. You think you're so cool, my little tail-wagging friend. You cleaned out Kuibyshev, then ran away to Moscow. You reckon you're too smart to get busted. But one day your clever ass will land in jail.

ARKADY. Well, it won't be you who puts me there, you pigeon-chested scribbler. You're a sad case – 37 years old, no wife, no kids. But you got a 3-room apartment downtown. What you want with three rooms?

FELIX. To enjoy the pleasures of dissipation, butthead. In the 1st room I fuck the lady, in the 2nd I gut-strangle her, and in the 3rd I hang her from the ceiling. Then

I can come into whatever hole I want: her mouth, her asshole. The lady screams, squirts blood – and I get a boner.

ARKADY. You sick fucker.

FELIX. Fancy a sexy pied-a-terre like that, my little chicken Kiev? Tell the truth – like the idea?

ARKADY. Sure I do.

FELIX. No fucking chance.

ARKADY. And you want to be a great Russian writer and humanist, you shit. You're a pervert, a fucking card-sharper, son of a whore. Think I'll let you write your poem here? You just try. You're here to work as a fireman for 100 rubles a month, a 100 fucking rubles, and that's all you gonna do – work for those crisp little bills. When your three rest-days come up you can scribble your decadent poem all you want. But here, if you clock in for a 24-hour shift you'll do honest work for the whole 24 hours. A fucking firefighter. You're a whore, not a poet. I'll teach you how to be a fireman. Imagine you ripping off the patients for hundreds of rubles every shift. We got people here who were seriously wounded on important missions, came back from Afghanistan, Chernobyl, from long-term intelligence jobs. Get my drift? Remember the soldier from Chernobyl you cheated out of three hundred and fifty rubles? They buried him three days ago.

FELIX. He croaked because of the radiation, not because he lost the dosh to me.

ARKADY. Listen, they buried the guy 12 feet under so the radiation won't rise to the surface.

FELIX. Anyway, he's got no use for three hundred smackers where he is now. And when we were playing cards you sat right next to him, my Ukrainian beauty. Might have caught a spot of radiation yourself. Thought about that?

ARKADY. What? You mean I could be contaminated?

FELIX. Chill out, old son. Your mates in Chernobyl got a much bigger dose and they don't complain. Or are the Kuibyshev Ukrainians more yellow than they are in Chernobyl? As a writer I would find that interesting. Up yours, buddy.

ARKADY. Why did I agree to play with you and your cronies? On top of that you won 101 rubles from me, your own colleague. And not a scrap of sympathy.

FELIX. You sat down with us of your own free will and asked for a hand.

ARKADY. I sat down with my frigging pants on but I left without them. You just try writing your poem here – I'll teach you the basics of fire safety, shithead. (*Eats stewed cabbage.*)

FELIX. If you try and swipe more veg from the kitchen I'll report you to the boys from Petrovka. No kidding. My pleasure.

ARKADY. What did you say, you fairy?

FELIX. It will be my supreme pleasure, you faggot!

ARKADY. Calm down, Felix old mate. Can't fucking take a joke? If your pome means so much to you, be my guest, go ahead and write it. You must know nobody gives a fuck about that shit. And you can play cards all you want. There's not much to do while we're on duty. You're one of us through and through. You never refuse to play cards when the public asks you. As for the fact you clean everyone out, it's a matter of luck. If you don't want to play, don't sit at the table. Nobody's forcing anyone. You even lose to Vitya sometimes.

FELIX. That boy Vitya's an expert. Just a word from me and he'll wring your scrawny neck, my little chicken Kiev.

ARKADY. Vitya-the-Warrior's a fucking great guy.

FELIX. That cabbage you're stuffing down stinks like a john. That meat in the cabbage stinks, too. I think I'll report you to Petrovka after all. Or I'll have Vitya teach you a few lessons. I see no other solution.

ARKADY. Felix, you're right, OK? Think I don't know the cabbage smells of shit?

FELIX. If it smells of shit why gorge yourself on it like fucking Gargantua?

ARKADY. Who's Gargantua?

FELIX. It's a fucking long story.

ARKADY. You don't have to explain. I might not understand. I'm a simple fellow, Mr Ben-Edmund, a man of the people. Now you say you write for the people. But when the people ask you a question, you're too busy. So what the fuck, busy means busy. For all I know, you might be a national genius. Another minute –another Nobel Prize. I understand, you know. I'm not offended. I'm a simple fellow, Mr Felix Ben-Edmund. You Jews like to make money from the sentimental feelings of the Russian-Ukrainian common man, but here in this joint you live and die as a 100-ruble-fireman. So when you trick us little people at cards it doesn't upset me all that much. Tell me, who needs your fucking poems? You told me

yourself you can't get them published. No water off my back – it's your fucking problem. There's one thing I don't get, why waste all that paper? Why don't you buy my bird Kesha instead – you know how decadently he sings. That's nature for you – just a little bundle of feathers, but when he sings it's a work of art, a fucking epic. As for your kind of art, Ben-Edmund, my dick is unmoved. Why not let me read something you wrote, or explain it in simple language?

FELIX. You're interested in art, Arkasha?

ARKADY. You think I'm a total idiot?

FELIX. Dear boy, I'd be happy to explain the meaning of my art. He who asks politely shall be told.

ARKADY. Happy to hear it.

FELIX. I'm not the first writer in the history of the world, Arkasha. Right?

ARKADY. Right.

FELIX. So you're not the first asshole who doesn't give a fuck about my work. Right?

ARKADY. No, Ben-Edmund, Hitler was definitely right. As a man of letters you may find this upsetting, but Hitler was absolutely on the ball.

FELIX. That's why I write – so there's fewer shitheads like you in the world.

ARKADY. As a reader I tell you, they should've shot you long ago, Mr Menachem Begin the Writer.

*Sound of an approaching car.*  
Open the gate, it's the Chief.

FELIX. I'm not paid to work the security gate, my Ukrainian friend.

ARKADY. Know what? You're an asshole. Fucking firefighting Hebe.

*Goes out. Opens the gate for the head doctor's car. Returns.*

Just wait, you fat-ass fireman, I'll get my own back. Don't expect no favours from me, you fucking synagogue-dweller.

FELIX. You get three days off for being a volunteer fireman, friend, I get fuck-all for working that frigging gate.

ARKADY. You could've earned my respect for helping me with the gate, freckle-face.

FELIX. I need your respect like I need a hole in the head, shitface.

ARKADY. You're heading for trouble, brother Abraham, that's for sure. Remember, the wind fans the flames. Ever thought what would happen to you if this whole syphilitic KGB hospital went up in smoke with all the people inside, with all its foreign-made, dollar-bought equipment?

FELIX. You can burn it down for all I care. My job's to call the fire brigade from the city.

ARKADY. Well you're the Jew, no doubt you'd wriggle your way out of it.

FELIX. A red-haired Jew.

ARKADY. What?

FELIX. The informers and KGB killers treated here in this super-secret KGB clinic, can burn for all I care. Get a taste of earthly fire. Otherwise on Judgement Day those pricks will go arrest all the devils in hell. They've got the know-how.

ARKADY. Aren't you afraid to tell me all this, Ben-Edmund?

FELIX. Aren't you afraid to hear all this, Arkasha?

ARKADY. You're an interesting guy. It's a pleasure to talk to you. When you work a straight 24-hour shift in this dump you can go crazy with boredom. That cunt Marinka left her job. Did you screw her?

FELIX. I screw whoever I want, dear colleague.

ARKADY. Marinka's been fucked by everybody. You're the only one who didn't get the pleasure. In this you're at odds with the collective. I get it: you take those sterilised little nurses to your three-room apartment, nail them by the ears to the ceiling so you can fuck them in every hole. You said your grandma left you the apartment? Seems Granny was too fond of picking and eating mushrooms, like all grandmothers.

FELIX. What if she did?

ARKADY. It's just that when someone swallows a toadstool, it's difficult to prove they were deliberately poisoned.

FELIX. That's the kind of thing I expected you to say, punk.

ARKADY. You expected it?

FELIX. Yeah.

ARKADY. Spoken like a rabbi.

FELIX. Exactly.

ARKADY. And now you screw the sterilised nurses in your rent-free apartment after nailing them to the ceiling.

FELIX. Yeah, the ceiling.

ARKADY. And you're writing a poem about how you took care of Grandma with a toadstool?

FELIX. That's right, Arkasha. Dostoevsky once wrote a piece along those lines. I'm following in his footsteps.

ARKADY. Then permit me to ask you another, Felix Ben-Edmund, great Soviet writer.

FELIX. Go ahead. A Soviet writer is open to all questions. I'm listening.

ARKADY. Tell me, Ben-Edmund, doesn't all that screwing make your dick sore?

FELIX. A question worthy of Socrates, my little Soviet friend. Permit me to give you an epicurean answer.

ARKADY. I'm all ears.

FELIX. Fucking makes my prick salivate with sperm – that's how much I like it!

ARKADY. It's the first time in my life I met a Jewish lump of shit like you. I tell you this as a friend.

FELIX. On my part, I already informed you as a friend that I never came across such a case of fire-pumping Ukrainian verbal diarrhoea. I never imagined Mother Nature could excrete such a stinking pile of shit.

ARKADY. For you, Felix, life's a fucking picnic.



FELIX. But not for you?

*Sound of howling dogs.*

ARKADY. You stuffed yourself with all that meat again. Didn't you leave any for the dogs, you greedy bastard?

FELIX. This way they'll guard the gate all night long while you snooze, contrary to regulations.

ARKADY. You also spend the night hours taking forty winks, contrary to regulations. If there was an emergency the dogs could help you too.

FELIX. That's why I got this control panel with the fire alarm.

ARKADY. So who's the shit then? Leo Tolstoy didn't eat meat but he could still get it up when he was sixty and became a father at that age. You may recall, he was a truly great writer.

FELIX. But you eat meat by the shitload, don't you, dickhead?

ARKADY. So?

FELIX. How do you know Tolstoy didn't eat meat?

ARKADY. In my taxi depot there's another fellow with a hobby – he's writing a fucking poem too. But at least he doesn't mind opening the gate once in a while, he's of some use to the other guys. Everyone screwed Lyuska the dispatcher and he screwed her too. Now look at you. A graduate of the Moscow Engineering Academy. You're a fucking space welder by profession. That's a great job. The state spent thousands of gold rubles training you. But what do you do? You decide to become a millionaire, a second Solzhenitsyn. Dickhead. You sent Granny to heaven and work as a fireman instead of getting a regular job, corrupting those cute little nurses, stealing milk, dried fruit and medicines. You win thousands from the common people playing cards, you're scribbling an anti-Soviet poem to cure your desiccated soul – as I recall, those were your own fucking words. No, you're the spitting image of a Soviet commie, you should be shot. And every month you get an easy hundred from the state. I'd like to see you in a uranium mine, you'd shape up quick. Answer me. Why is it you're not in Israel, Mr Shamir? But who fucking needs you there? They've got plenty of useless pricks to write poems. And there's no fucking way you'd be allowed to emigrate. Shit, I'm cracking up it's so funny. KGB officers are treated in this hospital. Our work is classified. Remember the First Section had us sign a paper mat we wouldn't reveal state secrets – means this is a KGB clinic. So we're kind of classified too, shitface. Cosmonauts, ministers, generals, they've all got

parents who die of fucking old age. Those bozos don't want to take care of their folks. I figure they don't know much about toadstools. You think an ordinary citizen could ever get inside this joint? Did you know, once upon a time there was a little Russian village nearby? Right next to this secret health-care clinic, asshole.

FELIX. Last year they tore down the houses and chased the old peasants away. The KGB was afraid the locals would tell the truth to the sharks of imperialism.

ARKADY. One thing's for certain, Comrade Polivailov-the-Jew. They'll never let you emigrate to Israel after working in this clinic. You can forget about it.

FELIX. Are you sure I want to go to Israel?

ARKADY. Well what can you do here in the USSR? Your poem will never get published. You've lost your engineering skills. You got a crappy job working as a fireman for 100 rubles a month. You're an intellectual, a schizophrenic and a Jew. Our Russian nationalists will squeeze your balls. If it was up to me you know what I'd do? I'd line up all you Jews in front of a firing squad without a second thought, the whole Marxist lot of you. Dirty fucking Jew. You'll be sorry you didn't emigrate, my Hebrew friend. It's too late now. Mark my words.

FELIX. I'm not afraid to live, Arkasha. I've got tons of cash, and I don't want to kill people anymore when I go abroad.

ARKADY. Huh?

FELIX. Zip up your dick, there's work to do. How about a game of cards?

ARKADY. Sure. But what about my bird? Want to buy it?

FELIX. A songbird, you say?

ARKADY. Sings decadently.

FELIX. How much?

ARKADY. 25 for the bird, with the cage thrown in. The cage alone is worth 15 rubles.

FELIX. What's that weird look on your face?

ARKADY. What look?

FELIX. Like your eyes are pricks that just saw a virgin cunt.

ARKADY. Oh that. Ha-ha. *(Laughs.)* I just feel like a drink. Who knows, perhaps the nurses will bring in a stiff today. I tell you this, Felix. You've earned my respect in some ways. Our very first shift you started wheeling stiffs to the morgue with me. And you give me your medical alcohol ration for free.

FELIX. I've got a painful ulcer.

ARKADY. An ulcer, huh? What kind of fucking writer are you if you don't drink? Knowledge of camp slang won't bring you fame and fortune. Tell me the truth. Did you do time? What were you in for?

FELIX. Murder. That's why I'm used to stiffs. *(Takes a pack of cards from his pocket.)*

ARKADY. *(Picks up the pack.)* A fresh pack. Great. Big spender, huh?

FELIX. I'd like to see you spend some money for a change. You keep saying I'm cheap, but you're pretty tight with a ruble yourself.

ARKADY. I need the money for my family. I don't go round winning millions every day, like some.

FELIX. Millions shmillions. *(Puts a ruble on the table as first stake.)* One to start. Shall we invite someone else, one of the attendants or Vitya?

ARKADY. Fuck 'em. They'll smoke the place up, make a noise and Vitya will fleece us. Is that what you want?

FELIX. Okay, I'll do the fleecing.

ARKADY. It's difficult to fleece somebody when you play one-on-one. One note. *(Puts a ruble on the table as a stake.)*

FELIX. I could try.

ARKADY. Poker's the kind of game where if you've got more money you win.

FELIX. Looks like you're loaded today.

ARKADY. Don't fuck around – let's play for who's gonna deal. *(Takes a card from the pack.)* A ten. You're gonna pull out a fucking king, I know it.

FELIX. No shit. *(Takes a card from the pack.)* King of spades.

ARKADY. I knew it. Deal, you bozo. What's the limit? A tenner?

FELIX. What about an even hundred? You've got plenty of cash today, you cheap prick.

ARKADY. No need to count other people's money. Ten rubles. *(Puts 10 rubles on the table.)*

FELIX. I'm always happy to bet a tenner. *(Puts 10 rubles on the table.)*

ARKADY. So tonight's limit is 100 smackaroos. Right?

FELIX. Okay, fine.

ARKADY. Well, a hundred it is. Another tenner. *(Puts 10 rubles on the table.)*

FELIX. Here you are. *(Throws his cards on the pack.)*

ARKADY. This isn't serious money. How about a 50-ruble stake?

FELIX. Sure.

*They place their stakes on the table.*

ARKADY. I always like it when you fuck up, Felix. *(Deals the cards.)*

FELIX. And I was wondering why my love for you was so tender, so eternal. A tenner. *(Puts 10 rubles on the table.)*

ARKADY. You must have some beauties there. I have a feeling I'm getting screwed. How about 25? *(Puts 25 rubles on the table.)*

FELIX. Like they say: Jews are verboten wherever the Ukrainians go. *(Puts 25 rubles on the table.)*

ARKADY. You'll skim the cream off, I know it. Here's an even 50. *(Puts 50 rubles on the table.)*

FELIX. How can I resist? *(Puts 50 rubles on the table.)* Looks like you've come into some money, dickhead.

ARKADY. Why are you always loaded, Rothschild? I wonder if I should show my cards? Well, all right, go ahead. Let's see you try and fuck over an honest man. Here's another fifty. *(Puts 50 rubles on the table.)*

FELIX. You know me: I never show my cards first when the stake's fifty rubles.  
*(Puts 50 rubles on the table.)*

ARKADY. I know you'll try to screw me, Jewboy. Take a load of this. 30 points on hearts. *(Puts 50 rubles on the table.)*

FELIX. 30 points on diamonds.

*They show each other their cards.*

ARKADY. Shit, that was beautiful. Let's draw for who deals.

FELIX. *(Pulls a card from the middle of the pack.)* An eight.

ARKADY. Mine will be smaller, that's for sure. *(Pulls a card from the middle of the pack.)* A six. I see I'm gonna get screwed.

FELIX. Scared, huh? *(Deals each of them three cards.)* Let's rock 'n' roll.

ARKADY. Fifty. *(Puts 50 rubles on the table.)*

FELIX. No shit. Here's a hundred. *(Puts 100 rubles on the table.)*

ARKADY. Fucking high roller. Tell me the truth – did you get 30 points? I can equal that. *(Puts 100 rubles on the table.)*

FELIX. Why is it you look so sad, I wonder. Holding out for the Three Kings? You're a fucking Mussolini of the card table. You can clean me out for all I care, motherfucker. I'll raise my bet. *(Puts 100 rubles on the table.)*

ARKADY. Money means nothing to me, that's the fucking truth. Here's another hundred. *(Puts 100 rubles on the table.)* I've a feeling in my balls, I'm gonna get screwed. You're always bluffing, dickhead.

FELIX. A Jew never beats a Ukrainian by bluffing. What kind of Jew would I be if I bluffed? *(Puts 100 rubles on the table.)*

ARKADY. Read'em and weep, dickhead. *(Puts 100 rubles on the table.)*  
Thirty-two.

FELIX. Thirty-three.

ARKADY. Let me see! You're a fucking miracle-worker, rabbi. I've lost five hundred fucking rubles in five fucking minutes. Thirty-three. It's not fucking fair. I got screwed again. Give me the pack, dickhead. *(Examines the pack of cards.)*

Three aces. I had a six of clubs, an ace and a queen of spades. A fucking queen of spades! (*Throws down the card in disgust.*)

FELIX. How about another round'

ARKADY. No fucking way. Go write your fucking poem, Jewboy. Just leave me alone, you prick.

FELIX. Next shift you'll win it all back. There's no point in getting upset. Money's just paper shit.

ARKADY. I lost five hundred rubles' worth of shit in ten minutes How can I not get fucking upset! That's how much I earn in six months, slaving away in this stinking job as a guard. You must be crapping yourself with joy.

FELIX. You know I don't give a fuck about money. The man who values this shit least wins the most.

ARKADY. No one values this shit less than I do. Screw you. I bet there's not one woman who loves you.

FELIX. Why do you say that? Women love me. They give me head, they let me fuck them up the ass. Know how delicious it is to fuck a lady up the ass? First – it's soft, second – your dick gets squeezed real tight, third – it sure is erotic.

ARKADY. Yeah, butt-fucking isn't bad, not bad at all.

FELIX. You tried it?

ARKADY. I'll do it right now. I'll strangle you, you little shit, and give it a try.

FELIX. Easier said than done.

ARKADY. Why the fuck did I come to stinking Moscow and take this shitty job? You should've seen me in Kuibyshev, I was raking it in.

FELIX. You stole more than enough there, you came here. All according to plan.

ARKADY. I'd swipe a truckload of potatoes every day. I'd net a grand, an even thousand, every job I did. You could only dream of that, you verse-scribbling card-sharper.

FELIX. Losing five hundred in ten minutes must've really upset you.

ARKADY. No sweat, motherfucker. Money means nothing to me. I lost – so I lost. I'm cool. My nerves are good. In my shoes you'd commit harikari for sure. Shame a little prick like you made such a pile.

FELIX. Yeah, with money it's easy come, easy go. Where did you get the five hundred? You had to work hard for it?

ARKADY. Made that five hundred only yesterday. Got paid for something you could never do, sucker. It was beautiful. A fucking work of art.

FELIX. I can see it was beautiful. You couldn't earn that much in six months of slave labour as a guard.

ARKADY. So go fuck yourself. Am I making myself clear?

FELIX. What the fuck do you mean?

ARKADY. You'll understand when I smash your face in.

FELIX. I'll smash your face in first. With an honest Soviet-made spade perhaps, or a crowbar, or a fire-extinguisher. I've got a shitload of this fire-fighting, Ukrainian-suppressing equipment. I could work you over with an awl, or a knife. Slit your throat with a razor.

ARKADY. What the fuck are you trying to say, Jewboy?

FELIX. Me?

ARKADY. Could you really do someone in? You're not shitting me?

FELIX. Couldn't you?

ARKADY. Your questions are kind of incomprehensible.

FELIX. You poked your nose into my soul first with your incomprehensible questions.

ARKADY. I was just asking, but your questions have some kinda poisonous hidden meaning.

FELIX. You've been pretty free with your own poisonous insinuations, you snake. The discovery of a new star in the constellation of the Shining Turd. Fuck you.

ARKADY. Sometimes I have a feeling it's all a fucking great mystery.

FELIX. What is?

ARKADY. Our reptilian life. So fucking hard to understand what it's all about.

FELIX. You must adopt a Leninist approach to life in Mother Russia.

ARKADY. I'm so fucking tired of your stupid jokes.

FELIX. You heard the latest? Early yesterday morning they killed a ginger-haired Jew. In one of the high-rises. They killed him in the entranceway. It was 7 in the morning. Still dark.

ARKADY. Fucking news to me.

FELIX. It was in the next block. Haven't you heard?

ARKADY. You mean the tower block? I haven't heard shit. A Jew got wasted?

FELIX. That's right. He had ginger hair. I know it for a fact.

ARKADY. So there's one Jew-bastard less in the world. So what?

FELIX. He shouldn't have worked as a fucking informer for the KGB. Now their source of information has dried up.

ARKADY. He was a KGB informer? No way. Who told you?

FELIX. As a writer I know plenty of people.

ARKADY. What the fuck did he want with the KGB? Why did the prick do it?

FELIX. You should've asked him. They say he started by selling books on the black market. He photocopied books that were difficult to get and sell them. Nietzsche, Berdyaev, Freud, Avtorkhanov, Solzhenitsyn, and so on. You know what I mean.

ARKADY. I never heard of them except Solzhenitsyn.

FELIX. Doesn't matter. Anyway, the KGB had him by the balls. They made him an offer: work for us or we'll pack you off to fucking Kolyma, to the uranium mine. So he said yes.

ARKADY. Said yes to what?

FELIX. He agreed to work for the KGB, to snitch on his pals.



ARKADY. What a prick. But I guess his friends were jerks, too. I got no respect for booklovers. I bought a copy of Dumas' Monte Cristo from some old bookworm once. Cost me forty rubles. Lost all respect for 'em.

FELIX. You're sweating like a pig, Arkady Vsevolodovich. You okay?

ARKADY. I'm fine. You mean I look the worse for wear?

FELIX. No, once you get used to it, it's not so noticeable. It was more noticeable at the beginning of the shift.

ARKADY. What was more noticeable?

FELIX. Well, your hands are trembling in your hands, weird. And your voice is kind of raspy, like it needs oiling, lubricating. Something the matter?

ARKADY. (*Clears his throat.*) Yesterday I had a few drinks with my mates. Lubricated my voice a bit too much.

FELIX. You mean you had a few afterwards?

ARKADY. Yeah, that's right. (*Pauses.*) When we found out someone wasted a ginger-haired Jew in the skyscraper we went to take a look. Then we went for a drink. I tell you, man, there was so much blood it was like the fucking Bermuda Ocean. They slit the guy's throat with a razor, so he wouldn't suffer too much. Now that's what I call humane. Don't you agree?

FELIX. So you were curious to see a man who'd been murdered.

ARKADY. Not a man, a fucking Jew. You get the difference? It's always interesting to have a look. There was a crowd of people. But no big deal: a stiff, some blood and dirt. The usual shit.

FELIX. Raskolnikov was tempted to have a look afterwards, too. It's only human.

ARKADY. What?

FELIX. Never mind, asshole.

ARKADY. I saw you there too, funny guy.

FELIX. When you were standing there with your friends you pointed your finger at me. I saw it.

ARKADY. You could have come up and said hi to my mates. Too proud to meet the common folk, Jewboy?

FELIX. So you got pissed afterwards?

ARKADY. Yeah, you could say that. I was out cold the rest of the day.

FELIX. So in the morning you went to take a look at the dead Jew, then went drinking? Right?

ARKADY. Yeah, so what?

FELIX. You were out cold for the rest of the day, right?

ARKADY. You got a problem with that?

FELIX. You just told me you made 500 rubles yesterday. While you were out cold? That's some trick. Something doesn't add up.

ARKADY. What's this, an interrogation?

FELIX. Don't you think I'd make a great interrogator?

ARKADY. You're pissing me off, Felix Ben-Edmund. I'm tired of your fucking bullshit. You got your 500, now lay off. What do you want from me? Collecting material for your pome, are you? I told you politely –lay off and go write that fucking epic of yours, you little pen-pusher.

FELIX. I don't want to write my fucking epic. I've got writer's block. I'd rather have a heart-to-heart with a nice guy from the sunny Ukraine.

ARKADY. Our conversation's like two dogs barking.

FELIX. You're the one who comes out with the crap first.

ARKADY. Says who? You're the one who's always carrying on like some camp gaffer. Still, it's not that side of you I object to. You're just a miserable little fuck. There's no other way to say it, Felix Felixovich. You're a fucking creative artist, writing some fucking epic for no fucking purpose. I don't understand your way of life, man. You don't drink vodka, you don't screw Marinka, like you think you're better than me. As for that red-haired bastard, he sold out to the KGB for sure. You know they don't accept Jews.

FELIX. When it needs to, the KGB even welcomes CIA spooks. Don't you watch the political stuff on the box? There was a programme about it.

ARKADY. Yeah, I saw that a CIA agent sold out to the KGB. What a way to go.

FELIX. So why are you so scared? Why're you always wetting yourself?

ARKADY. What d'you mean?

FELIX. I mean you're scared, man. It was you that dispatched the red-haired Jew. With a blade. Slit his gullet with a razor.

ARKADY. What?!!!

FELIX. Don't flip out. It was just another Soviet soap-opera. You wasted him, so what? You got 500 for the job. Your expenses were covered, everything was approved. No need to wet yourself.

ARKADY. I'll waste you, you little prick! Fucking fairy, I'll fucking kill you. *(He throws himself at Felix, who knocks him down with a karate chop.)*

FELIX. Fell down, did we? Be grateful I knocked you down tender-like.

ARKADY. Why did you hit me? What have I done to you? *(Gets up.)* How come you know everything?

FELIX. I work for the KGB, that's how. I have a feeling, my boy, this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

ARKADY. Get lost, you fucking card-sharper. You're looking to frame me for that stiff. No fucking way. I don't believe that red-haired kike was KGB. You can't bullshit me – I'm not stupid.

FELIX. He was with the KGB, then he started working for the CIA, selling out his KGB comrades for dollars. So we had to take him out. The mission was assigned to me but I re-assigned it to you. So now, Arkasha, you're one of us. A trusted colleague. But you still keep whining. That's human gratitude for you. Why do I try to be nice to people?

ARKADY. Huh? Thanks for nothing, motherfucker. You didn't re-assign nothing to me. Got that straight, creep?

FELIX. I was the one who left the envelope with the instructions and the 500 in your mailbox.

ARKADY. You? Fuck you, dickhead! I'll fucking kill you, you fucking Nazi!

FELIX. I knew you were a fucking coward and a chauvinist. I knew you'd do the job. You still got my letter, or did you throw it away?

ARKADY. I fucking burnt it.

FELIX. 'Forgive me, Ukrainian Arkasha. I have sad news for you. I was playing thimblery with another Afghan vet, a professional killer. The stake was your life, too bad I lost. Luckily for you an exchange is possible. A death for a death. If you cut the throat of Sashutka the red-haired Jew who lives on Ushakova Street, No.6, Apartment 18, you'll get 500 rubles. But if you back out on me, you sponger, by tomorrow morning your own throat will be slit. Here's a hint: Sashutka leaves the building to go to work at 7 am. Signed, a certain unlucky Afghan war veteran from Lyubertsy, the one you fucked over at the trial. I remember your Ukrainian ass and I hate your guts.' That ring a bell?

FELIX. Yeah.

ARKADY. Burning the letter was a smart thing to do. So what do you think? Didn't the text I composed have a certain artistic quality? You're the one who's always going on about how pointless my writing is. Well, this is what we call art, my Ukrainian friend.

ARKADY. Sure I was scared, jerk. The Lyubertsy Afghan veterans are the most vicious hired killers in Moscow. I know that.

FELIX. Many guys who served in Afghanistan became professional assassins after demob. During the war they got used to wasting civilians. But you managed the job fine, without the benefit of their experience. That I respect.

ARKADY. I made a speech at the trial about a guy from Lyubertsy. One night he cut the throat of a guy from the depot. For a few fucking kopecks. I figured his friends traced me. I told you about the trial, you son of a bitch.

FELIX. So I used that information.

ARKADY. You bastard!!! That's what you are – a fucking bastard.

FELIX. Well you're nothing to look at either, creep. You wasted the Jew like you've done it all your life. Or was it difficult?

ARKADY. What the fuck's difficult about it? I had a beer beforehand. After a beer I don't give a fuck about nothing. That's all I need – just one beer. I can get pissed later. I've got a wife, two daughters. I was thinking what would happen to

them if I wasn't around. There was no point asking the cops for help. It would have made matters worse. That was my reasoning.

FELIX. I was relying on your wisdom as a family man, Arkasha.

ARKADY. You're a real Nazi, you bastard. Because of you I'm a fucking murderer. But it's not like I killed another human being. The guy was a Jew, after all.

FELIX. I get your drift.

ARKADY. You get my drift? Have you killed anyone? Who? Was he a Jew?

FELIX. I killed many times. Jews, goys – they were all human beings.

ARKADY. But aren't you a Jew yourself?

FELIX. We're all Jews, according to Marx. Or Christ.

ARKADY. So you went around murdering people with your own hands?

FELIX. It's my profession.

ARKADY. That's a great profession. Now I understand why you're writing a poem and no one's allowed to read it. It's therapy. Your own KGB friends could do away with you any minute. Is that what you're writing about, how you kill people?

FELIX. Okay, Arkasha, I'll buy that bird off you. I like your decadent ways.

ARKADY. What about your own fucking ways, Ben-Edmund? What have I done to you? Were you pissed off because I told you not to steal milk from the kitchen? You were going crazy with those 3-litre cans. You were cheating the patients. You've won so much money from them at cards. From the very people you're supposed to take care of. You make enough to buy a whole cistern of fresh milk after every shift.

FELIX. It's always more fun to swipe something, if you can swipe it. Do I really have to explain that to you, my Ukrainian friend?

ARKADY. Of course it's more fun to swipe something if you can swipe it, Ben-Edmund.

FELIX. As for the 3-litre cans of milk, swiping them from under the noses of my own colleagues, those murderers, gives me a rush. It's like winning the lottery.

ARKADY. It looks like we're one happy family of murderers here.

FELIX. And now you're a member of our fraternity. Learn to use the proper terms.

ARKADY. Okay, okay.

FELIX. Your voice is trembling. Not a professional yet.

ARKADY. Why did you do this to me? Couldn't you find anyone else?

FELIX. I see you like to hide behind other people's backs, my Ukrainian friend. You think I made a mistake in picking you?

ARKADY. Yeah, you could say that.

FELIX. How about giving me a straight answer?

ARKADY. I don't think you made a mistake in picking me, comrade.

FELIX. That's better. We need freshly trained personnel. No perestroika for traitors. (He draws a line across his throat with his thumb.)

ARKADY. Yes, sir.

FELIX. If I give you another assignment, will you do it?

ARKADY. Yes, sir. What kind of assignment?

FELIX. Send someone to join his ancestors. Some prick, some Jewish parasite who gives the Soviet people grief. You're a loyal Soviet citizen, aren't you, my little chicken Kiev?

ARKADY. I'm a loyal Soviet citizen.

FELIX. So you'll do it?

ARKADY. I'll waste the anti-Soviet prick if you tell me to.

FELIX. You're a cool customer. I must buy that bird of yours. You say it costs twenty-five?

ARKADY. You know what, Ben-Edmund? I've changed my mind. You don't need to buy it, you can have the bird for free.

FELIX. Kesha, my friend! (*Embraces Arkady.*) I'm forever in your debt. You made me so happy!

ARKADY. Don't mention it, Felix Ben-Edmund. My pleasure. Listen, Ben-Edmund, my apologies in advance, you don't have one of those ID cards, do you?

FELIX. What sort of ID card?

ARKADY. A little red card. The one that opens all doors.

FELIX. Oh, you mean a membership card to the Union of Soviet Writers. I don't have one, Arkasha. I'm not yet an official member.

ARKADY. That's not what I meant, Felix. I'm talking about a little red card of a different kind.

FELIX. Like what?

ARKADY. A KGB card.

FELIX. Now I understand, you cunning bastard. What's it to you?

ARKADY. I'd really like to have a look. I'm curious. I've never seen one.

FELIX. Don't give me that, Arkasha. You've never seen one, sure. Every other patient here has shown you his card so he can boast he works for the KGB.

ARKADY. I never asked to see one. I've been here three years, but I never asked. I could have, but I didn't.

FELIX. You could have but you didn't. That's rich, you little peasant. You just want to find out if I'm really a KGB officer or just bullshitting.

ARKADY. Yes, Ben-Edmund, I want to find out. You hit the nail right on the head. Yes sir, you certainly have.

FELIX. I see you've got the makings of a true KGB virtuoso, my friend. You can see my little red card, you doubting Thomas. (*Takes a KGB identity card in a red cover from his pocket and shows it to Arkady.*)

ARKADY. (*Reads.*) 'Issued to Captain Felix Felixovich Polivailov.' There's the stamp. And your picture. A good likeness! Please forgive my minor doubts, Comrade Captain. It's a neat little card. So compact. So handy.

FELIX. It certainly is fucking handy, Arkasha. You'd never be able to buy one from your friend the bookworm.

ARKADY. And a pretty high rank, too. Great. My congratulations.

FELIX. To have a rank like that at my age is really something.

ARKADY. Please forgive me, Felix Felixovich. I thought the guy I was working with was just a useless scribbler, but it turns out you're a respectable man.

FELIX. Every KGB officer must be able to work undercover. I too was misled. I thought, dear colleague, you were just a petty Ukrainian pickpocket. Strictly small-time. Good for nothing. But it turns out you have certain talents. And you know how to hide them behind that moronic exterior.

ARKADY. I'm very talented, Felix Felixovich. I'll do whatever you say. From me according to my abilities, to me according to my needs. Right?

FELIX. As for rewarding ability, it's like we've got our own printing press. You won't lose out, rest assured.

ARKADY. I'm ecstatic.

FELIX. But tell me. If we don't pay you for your abilities, would you still consider wasting an anti-Soviet for us?

ARKADY. But why wouldn't you pay me for my abilities?

FELIX. What do you mean, why? Everyone in our outfit works out of conviction. Money comes second.

ARKADY. What kind of conviction?

FELIX. Communist conviction, my little lapdog. Where do you think you were born, my doggie friend? Where do you live? Is your brain totally fucked up, you fairy?

ARKADY. No, but the communists are now reforming themselves, so to speak. In view of perestroika, I mean.

FELIX. The old geezers are getting pensioned off, the young bloods are taking over. A tactical retreat. Then we'll go on the offensive and wipe out the fucking opposition. To fucking kingdom come!

ARKADY. For good.



FELIX. For all eternity. Anyway, whose fucking side are you on?

ARKADY. I'm on the side of the KGB.

FELIX. So watch your Ps and Qs.

ARKADY. No sweat. So I'm officially in the KGB now?

FELIX. Yeah, kind of. Is that what you want?

ARKADY. If you think I can do the job.

FELIX. We think you will more than do the job, my Ukrainian friend. And the pay is good. You'll get an apartment.

ARKADY. On a temporary residence permit?

FELIX. Our people are entitled to apartments on a permanent basis. It's the proletariat who get them on temporary permits. But we're the super-proletariat, so our apartments are permanent.

ARKADY. I understand the point you're trying to make, Comrade Polivailov. We're the super-proletariat.

FELIX. But tell me one thing, Arkasha. If we didn't pay you, would you still rub out for us (*mimes pulling a trigger*) those members of the toiling masses we've rubbed the wrong way? If we ordered you to (*mimes pulling a trigger*), of course.

ARKADY. What do you mean (*mimes pulling a trigger*), without paying me? I wouldn't get any money at all? Won't you at least give me an apartment with the right of permanent residence? I'm asking you as a friend, Ben-Edmund. Will they give me an apartment?

FELIX. Our outfit doesn't function on the basis of friendship, Arkasha. It's not fucking retail, where they let you swipe potatoes by the truckload out of friendship. The KGB is a serious organisation, dickhead. It's run with self-control, self-discipline and individual responsibility. The only thing we do out of friendship is make sure the hit is painless. Slit the throat with a razor. That's the way we work. If you have communist convictions you'll fit in, if not you won't. So look into your heart and tell me: are you a man of communist convictions or aren't you?

ARKADY. This is my considered answer, Comrade Polivailov. I say with all sincerity that my fucking communist convictions are in my blood, if you'll pardon the expression. They inhabit every one of my red blood cells day and night.

FELIX. You've put it beautifully, you little fucker.

ARKADY. True, when I wasted that red-haired hippy I wasn't thinking about all that. But now I am, and I can assure you I wasted him out of communist conviction. He was an enemy of our Soviet way of life.

FELIX. You're a fucking preacher, silver-tongued and all. A fucking fighter-pilot, an ace, that's what you are. Just carry on in the same way.

ARKADY. I'm a mortally dangerous kamikaze fighter-pilot, Felix Ben-Edmund. An ace. You were incredibly lucky to find me.

FELIX. I had a feeling.

ARKADY. Will they give me military rank? When I got out of the army I was a staff sergeant. Is that where I'll start with you?

FELIX. Where that's concerned we go by the book. You'll be rolling in dough with plenty of promotions to boot. And don't forget the apartment with right of permanent residence.

ARKADY. As a member of the super-proletariat.

FELIX. You got it. But if you truly are a man of communist convictions, the rest won't mean shit to you.

ARKADY. Have no doubts, I'll prove it with deeds. Will I go on working here or get re-assigned? I'm ready.

FELIX. Don't worry about that, Arkasha. There's something else that bothers me, though.

ARKADY. Like what?

FELIX. Like why the fuck did you go and waste a complete stranger in this cowardly fashion? Just like that, for 500 rubles. Why did that Afghan veteran from Lyubertsy scare you shitless?

ARKADY. I wasn't really scared of the Afghan veteran. I merely followed the instructions in the letter you wrote, Comrade Captain.

FELIX. Yes, but you didn't know the letter was written by me on behalf of the KGB. The way I figure it, the Afghan veteran freaked you out and you wasted the red-haired guy because you're a coward.

ARKADY. In that case it was all your fault, Ben-Edmund. You're the one who composed the counterfeit letter on behalf of the KGB.

FELIX. That was done on purpose, to see your reaction.

ARKADY. I think you made a mistake, Comrade Polivailov. You should've told me straight out you wanted this stranger, this Jewish piece of shit, fucking taken care of. Out of communist conviction. And I would've fucking taken care of him – out of communist conviction. No way was it my mistake. No fucking way.

FELIX. I see you're determined to defend your position, Arkasha. That's good. But in fact it's all the same shit to you whether you waste a guy out of cowardice or communist conviction, and that's not good, my little chicken Kiev. In fact, that's too fucking bad.

ARKADY. No, Ben-Edmund, I don't agree. As God is my witness, it's not the same shit to me. To waste a guy out of communist conviction, that's something special where I'm concerned. If I'm lying, call me a bastard. When you're doing it for that reason, you're benefiting all the people!

FELIX. As God is my witness, you're thinking along the right sort of lines, Arkasha. I'm really happy for you, Lieutenant. You're a true commie.

ARKADY. I'm honoured by your trust, Comrade Captain, by your trust and the happiness you've given me. If you'd told me I had to waste that little red-haired kike on behalf of the KGB, out of communist conviction, I'd have done it, Comrade Captain. Done it out of communist conviction, no two ways about it.

FELIX. That's enough of your bullshit. What if we made a mistake? We've plenty of things to worry about besides you, dickhead. Don't we have the right to make a mistake? Never before in the history of mankind was there a developing communist society. Historically speaking, we're the first to set off on the road to that special place where peace and paradise reign eternal. So we're entitled to make a mistake or two in the case of a little lump of shit like yourself.

ARKADY. And what about me? Don't I have the right to make a mistake?

FELIX. You?

ARKADY. Like you, I mean. After all, I'm in the KGB too now. So I too had the right to make a mistake and waste the little kike out of cowardice.

FELIX. You've confessed and recanted. But when you killed him you weren't KGB. When you took a razor and slit his throat you were just another Soviet-Ukrainian yokel.

ARKADY. But in my heart I was KGB, Comrade Polivailov. I swear on my mother's health, in my heart I was KGB.

FELIX. I'm getting tired of your bullshit.

ARKADY. You said yourself that every Soviet is like a living piece of history. I reckon every Soviet should have the legal right to one little mistake. It ought to be in the Constitution.

FELIX. What me fuck do you want with the Soviet Constitution, dickhead? This is what happens when you let a Ukrainian into the KGB. Listen, if what you're saying is true, then that red-haired Soviet Jew also had the right to make a mistake. He had the right to betray us, to sabotage us. And if that's so, we were wrong to rub him out. Is that what your dark philosophy of ingratitude means?

ARKADY. How the fuck should I know? How the fuck should I know?

FELIX. Now that's enough! Your incessant swearing is getting to me. I'm getting fucking tired of your incessant four-letter monologues.

ARKADY. What the fuck?

FELIX. Just use your brains for a second. Do you think we did a good thing when we terminated a Soviet who had the right to mistakenly sabotage us?

ARKADY. I don't want to think. I don't want to think for myself! *(Starts crying.)*

FELIX. It's okay, dickhead. Your tears are appropriate. Everything is fucking great.

ARKADY. It's okay? You're not shitting me? I'm accepted?

FELIX. I've taken a decadent liking to you, Arkasha, you little prick. Besides, it seems to me killing a man out of cowardice isn't a mistake. You did it because you're gutless by nature. I hope that with a collective effort we can drag that gutlessness out of you through your trembling asshole with an iron-hard shit-picking KGB dick. Arkasha, I love you. I honestly do.

ARKADY. I love you too, Ben-Edmund, honest I do. As for my cowardice – you can extract it from my ass with your iron-hard KGB dick. I want that. If you like, you can pinch milk from the kitchen in fucking 5-litre cans. I know you need it for

your ulcer. I won't say a thing. I'll even have a word with Klavka on your behalf. Klavka will do anything for me.

FELIX. You're fucking Klavka?

ARKADY. I stuck it in her all the way up to her liver. Was I right or wrong to stick it in her, Ben-Edmund?

FELIX. To stick it in someone all the way up to the liver is cool. Fucking all the way up to the liver is the private affair of every Soviet motherfucker.

ARKADY. That's what I thought. And you can scribble your poem all you want. No fucking sweat. Just clock in and go ahead, write your poem.

FELIX. No fucking sweat?

ARKADY. No fucking sweat. I won't say a word. I can even carry the fire-extinguishers to every floor for you.

FELIX. Well thank you, Arkasha, that's very sweet of you.

ARKADY. But this I don't understand, Felix, what the fuck do you want with that poem? After all, you're KGB. You could relax instead.

FELIX. Don't be a moron. The poem's a cover. An intelligence agent needs camouflage. Only just occurred to you? How thick can you get, you dumb fucker?

ARKADY. I'm a dumb fucker? I'd like to see you swiping goods by the fucking truckload. Don't slander me, Comrade Captain.

FELIX. You're a thief, a thief to the depths of your soul – is that slander too? Fuck you. But tell me this. Does the most serious organisation in the Soviet Union need thieves? What do you think?

ARKADY. Ben Edmund, brace yourself. I'm about to give birth to a profound and weighty idea.

FELIX. Let me see you give birth to your profound and weighty idea. Careful, you'll bust a gut.

ARKADY. If the most serious organisation in the Soviet Union finds thieves useful, buddy, this means it has a crying need for them.

FELIX. I said you were a frigging silver-tongued preacher.

ARKADY. Well that's my private opinion, Comrade Polivailov. But if it's necessary, if the Party and the people ask me to contribute my little bit to the great cause of building communism, don't you think I'd give up pinching carrots and cabbage from the kitchen? Especially if I get paid 500 for every job. That could be a pretty good cover, Comrade Polivailov. Here's a thief, a cheap potato pilferer – but in reality he's a full-time KGB agent.

FELIX. And still you keep going back to the question of money, Arkasha. You have a depraved psychology.

ARKADY. I'll correct that, Ben-Edmund. Was I a fucking jerk? I was. Rubbing out that red-haired guy was hard. I had to learn how to kill. But I did it. And I can also do righteous deeds, if that's what it takes. I know it's not going to be easy. But, Comrade Polivailov, I'm capable of carrying out complex, deadly missions. I'll be whatever you want me to be.

FELIX. These days following orders isn't enough, my little chicken Kiev. You've got to be able to think for yourself, improvise. You need to show initiative.

ARKADY. But that's what I'm telling you, dickhead – no offence. I've got plenty of initiative. A fucking shitload of it. I may be a thief, Ben-Edmund, but I'm an honest thief, I swear. I want to serve the Committee for State Security.

FELIX. Well never mind, the details can be straightened out later. Answer me this. When you killed that prick, did you enjoy it?

ARKADY. How the fuck should I know? Tell me what you want me to say and I'll say it.

FELIX. A KGB soldier must be able to think and decide for himself. He must be able to play cards like an expert, execute people, fuck both men and women, swallow his dose of poison whether it's vodka or cyanide. By the way, that's one thing you do with style. Initially, it was the ability to hold your booze that led our people to consider recruiting you.

ARKADY. I see.

FELIX. So did you enjoy killing the little kike?

ARKADY. I'm asking you as a friend, shithead, what do you want me to say? Pardon the 'shithead'.

FELIX. You still don't fucking get it, Arkasha. I've been trying and trying to make you understand there's no friendship in our classified outfit. That's as basic as ABC, my little Ukrainian friend.

ARKADY. I'll put it this way. Comrade Captain. If you can use me, give me a fucking job. If you don't think I'm suitable, we'll pass each other like ships in the night. I can always earn my daily bread in fucking retail.

FELIX. I've no doubts you'll earn your daily bread. You've got criminal talent. You're a fucking ace, I grant you that. But now you have the knowledge that you killed an individual as an assignment from us. And those who know more about us than they should sometimes have to be taken out. By some Afghan veteran who works for the KGB. He'll terminate you (*mimes pulling a trigger in a highly professional manner*). Out of communist conviction. You realise what could happen to you, Arkasha? Now I'm telling you this in all sincerity, as a friend.

ARKADY. So I'm a marked man now. Is that what you're saying?

FELIX. Who knows? I'm not the one who makes the decisions.

ARKADY. Well can you take me to whoever does? Or I'll go to the reception-room at KGB HQ and ask to see the big boss.

FELIX. That would be the worst mistake you could make, my Ukrainian friend. Suppose you go there, dickhead, and tell the story of how you killed the red-haired Jew. I'll say I didn't write the letter. I work alone, in great secrecy. When I'm ordered to put a team together I do it, based on my understanding of the supreme goal. You get the picture?

ARKADY. Yeah, I get the picture. But I did enjoy wasting that asshole! So there.

FELIX. So there. In that case, I have to know this: a) did you take pleasure in killing the Jew because you got paid for his ass, b) because you were scared shitless of the Afghan veteran, or c) did you forget about the dough and the veteran and get a rush from gently slitting the red-haired kike's throat? I want the truth, my Ukrainian friend. Only the truth can save you.

ARKADY. Generally speaking I was scared of the veteran and I was thinking about the dough. But when I gently slit the throat of that wretched little red-haired, freckle-faced Jewish creep I forgot everything. Yea-a-a-h!!! Mamma mia! I forgot everything. Was that good or bad?!

FELIX. Did you get a rush when you were killing him?! The truth, Arkasha!!!

ARKADY. I got a supreme, ultimate rush when I killed him!!! Was that good or bad?!

FELIX. It's incredibly good, Arkasha. And your sinless tears, the tears of a child – that's also good. The communist goal is: a) to experience the simple-hearted desire to kill your neighbour, b) when killing to experience rapturous pleasure, i.e. a rush, c) to wash oneself in tears of repentance that cleanse the soul, and d) to thereby gain a clear and definite understanding of the aim and purpose of your communist destiny.

ARKADY. Working for the KGB it's better to reach point f), I figure.

FELIX. You got it, Arkasha. F's the ticket. You're a clever little prick.

ARKADY. But if you follow those rules you could waste everybody. Forgive me if I'm wrong.

FELIX. I forgive you. So everybody gets wasted. So what. The nation needs to be cleansed of all the shit. Look at the wolves. They only cull the weak and diseased in a herd of antelopes. The strong and healthy antelopes survive.

ARKADY. I like that shit.

FELIX. It's medicinal shit.

ARKADY. The way I figure it you let the ones that are members of the KGB live, but the rest of the kinky-haired hooknoses can go straight to the ovens. Turn them into ash for fertiliser. Of course you don't feed all those losers to the meat-grinder. You'll need some members of the herd for cannon fodder. Otherwise those American bastards will occupy our fertile land without even using their neutron bombs. They'll establish a US of A on our soil. And as I see it, the main aim of the KGB is to prevent the United States from transplanting itself wholesale onto our cornfields.

FELIX. The main thing, Arkasha, is not to be one of the losers. Remember that. If you stay loyal to us, we'll help you.

ARKADY. Thanks. You know, Ben-Edmund, right now I have such a great feeling about you. Before I was always depressed for some reason, but now I feel kind of enlightened. It's fucking great. That herd of Hebes better watch out!

FELIX. Your soul is filled with the bewitching power of communism. Let it flow through you.

ARKADY. Yeah, I've got a wonderfully communist feeling. You express yourself with such sensitivity, such humanity, Ben-Edmund.

FELIX. Communism is a frigging science, man. There's no going against science.



ARKADY. Before I didn't give a fuck about science. Now I admire it enormously. No shit.

FELIX. You must respect science, Arkasha. Especially in this scientific country. Here every college-educated ignoramus scientifically learns that at any given moment in any given point of free space you may be scientifically taken by the balls for some unknown reason and sent to jail. And the criminals in the joint will put you on trial in their own scientific way. They'll fuck you in the ass scientifically. They'll dress you in nylon stockings and make you bend over with your face to the wall. Then a whole barrack of male dogs will squirt its diseased AIDS-infested sperm up your asshole. You'll get some in your mouth, between your teeth as well. You'll be filled up to your liver. Then they'll kick you round a bit, put you on a stool and strangle you with a cord to consummate the erotic sadomasochistic scientific act. You'll never be able to take revenge on anyone, that's why you take scientific revenge beforehand. Look at me. I've lived my whole life unable to understand why they didn't put me in the joint, dress me in nylon tights, fuck me in the ass like one happy Red Army choir, then strangle me with a cord. Or why they didn't decide I was a Jewish jerk who sold out and slit my throat in a doorway according to the principle 'kill thy neighbour'.

ARKADY. You won the lottery. You're lucky. So am I. But tell me, is it safe for us to have this scientific conversation here? Won't somebody put it on tape?

FELIX. I've enjoyed trust without any tapes for a long time, Pee-wee.

ARKADY. So you're letting me join your outfit, Ben-Edmund? You won't regret it. You shouldn't have any doubts about my spiritual qualities. I'm gaining such a fucking delicious appreciation of communism in my soul. You've no fucking idea how much I fucking love, value and respect Karl Marx and Lenin now.

FELIX. Why the fuck did you leave out Engels? Some commie you are.

ARKADY. I didn't fucking leave him out, Ben-Edmund. It's just they had their own fucking brand of communism...

FELIX. (*Interrupts him.*) What was that?

ARKADY. I mean scientific communism. But we've got our own fucking brand. What do we want with them?

FELIX. But how do you explain the fact that Karl Marx, the founder of scientific communism, was a Jew? How do you account for that contradiction, dickhead?

ARKADY. I account for it dialectically, Felix. In terms of dialectical materialism.

FELIX. I see you've got a scientific way of thinking, you little prick.

ARKADY. So will you let me join your communist hard labour brigade?

FELIX. In principle I find you acceptable. But tell me, Mr Philosopher, did you come across any unscientific bastards in the course of your life?

ARKADY. Sure I have. There's swarms of them all over the place. Like fucking cockroaches.

FELIX. Then tell me this, Arkasha. Why did you, to put it politely, let them live? Why did you let them continue their unscientific insect life?

ARKADY. Well Felix, I wanted to squash the whole fucking lot of them. On my own personal initiative. Including you, my friend. I mean, before our serious scientific discussion I didn't know you were such a scientific kind of guy. Anyway, you weren't the only one I wanted to rub out – and still want to, by the way. If it were up to me I'd exterminate the whole damned lot of those scientifically incorrect intellectual fucks. As for you, I apologise, of course. Because now I know you're in the scientifically correct KGB and you're sponsoring me scientifically. I fucking love you, Felix my friend, with a love that's fucking scientific.

FELIX. Too bad, my little chicken Kiev, that you didn't waste some scientifically incorrect fuck before, of your own free will. Too fucking bad.

ARKADY. Is it too bad I didn't waste you? Do you regret it?

FELIX. Who the fuck knows?

ARKADY. I tell you, I wanted to but I couldn't organise myself scientifically. You understand? Let me join your outfit, organise me scientifically - then you can criticise my professional performance.

FELIX. Arkasha, why don't you fucking wake up? How can you think I'm KGB? I work as a fucking fireman in this fucking dump for 100 fucking rubles a month. If I really was in the KGB do you think I'd go round carting fire-extinguishers from floor to floor, chasing smokers from the stairwells, swiping milk and dried fruit from the kitchen, wasting my nerves on you? Do you think I'd work my ass off like that, even as a cover, if I really was scientifically KGB? Don't you understand jokes, you fairy? And they say Ukrainians are smart. I'm an ordinary Soviet graphomaniac, Arkasha, who pisses himself because he could be busted as a social parasite if he doesn't have a job, even as a fireman. A graphomaniac who's never been fucking published. Perhaps it will happen after I'm dead, that's

the case with all great writers. You can't be a prophet in your own country. It's a scientific law of nature, motherfucker. And Russia is a prime example!

ARKADY. Huh?

FELIX. Zip up your dick – it's time to work.

ARKADY. Then why did you blow smoke up my ass?! And that was the least of it, you creep.

FELIX. Didn't you ask me to explain, you Ukrainian yokel, the meaning of art? I tried to give you a popular explanation, so that as a Ukrainian yokel you couldn't complain that an All-Union Soviet-Jewish-Russian-intellectual who deserves a Nobel Prize for every minute of his supremely Semitic suffering wouldn't give you the time of day.

ARKADY. And what about the instructions, I mean the letter you wrote? What about that hook-nosed kinky-haired freckled informer, that Jewish piece of shit?! And all that stuff you told me about the KGB? Your handy little KGB card? Gimme that card!

FELIX. Don't panic, Arkasha. It's my dad's card. *(Hands the KGB ID card to Arkady.)* My old man's a general in the KGB, I'm just his son – a useless bum, the son of a bum. See the year under the stamp? 1953. My old man was still a captain then. We've got the same mug. How about you? Do you and your old man have the same mug?

ARKADY. I'm a fucking portrait of my old man!

FELIX. All the men in my family were called Felix – grandfathers, fathers, and now his son. You should've inspected the card more carefully. After all, the state put you on guard duty, gave you a classified job. When you missed the date 1956 you fucked up good!

ARKADY. Okay, so I fucked up. I'm guilty. But if I had a dad like yours, I'd never be a useless bum. *(Returns the KGB card to Felix.)*

FELIX. To each his own. Render unto God that which is God's, unto the bum that which is his, and unto the Ukrainian what's fucking left. Anyway, don't shit yourself, there's plenty left. You just have to know how to take it.

ARKADY. You fucking creep! I hate you, you piece of shit! Because of you my clean hands are covered in blood, you bastard!

FELIX. My father told me in confidence that the red-haired guy sold out to the KGB and snitched on his two childhood pals – me and this other guy. He told them we were copying anti-Soviet books. My old man didn't let anything happen to me. But my friend Keshka, he committed suicide when they sentenced him to five years in a strict-regime camp. My father couldn't help him. The red-haired guy was our friend. Now I couldn't waste a friend with my own hands. Can you understand that? Even though he was a former friend. Plus I wanted to apply a scientific approach to life. I wanted to see how strong the desire to cut human throats is among the people. Aren't you glad you took part in a scientific experiment?

ARKADY. What did I ever do to you, you bastard?

FELIX. What have you done to me, my love? What have I done to you, my love?

ARKADY. Huh?

FELIX. That was Tsvetaeva. Know her poetry?

ARKADY. I know you. Fucking All-Union versifier. That's all the fucking knowledge I need for my self-education.

FELIX. Listen, buddy, you've only got yourself to blame for doing something as stupid as killing a man. I am truly and sincerely sorry that you did this, that you lacked the human strength to stand firm and refuse to cross the line. I fucking weep for you, my boy. I also think it's sad you want to sell yourself to the KGB, guts and all. For your information, the guy you murdered, our red-haired friend the snitch, was a Russian by nationality. 100-per-cent ethnic Russian – just like me, in fact.

ARKADY. Yeah, sure. I seen plenty of blond Russian Jews like that. I can smell your stink a mile away, motherfucker.

FELIX. And what about you, Himmler? Sure you're not a Jew? Perhaps your Jewish mother left you with a Ukrainian family when the other Ukrainian yokels got on her case. Some of the most notorious anti-Semites are Jewish. Your name, Arkasha, it's typically Jewish.

ARKADY. My mother was Russian. You got that straight?! And I was given the name Arkady in honour of my father's brother, he died in the war. He was Russian.

FELIX. In this fucking communist society we're all Jews, my Ukrainian friend. My daddy was Karl Marx, my mommy Josephine Stalin. Nations divide people into different categories of assholes, the people like that.

ARKADY. Well whatever you are, Felix, right now I'd really like to send you to join your dead friend.

FELIX. Who's going to take that bird off your hands for 25 rubles then, you Ukrainian dimwit?

ARKADY. I'll give the bird its freedom.

FELIX. That would be an admirable thing to do. But your bird wouldn't know how to fly about in the wild on his own, you know. He's been brought up in a cage from childhood. His outlook is caged, so to speak. In the wild the tiniest little caterpillar would scare him. You should keep him in his cage where he can peck at the seeds you pinched from the state. Otherwise the little caterpillar will make him piss himself, like the Afghan veteran did to you. He'll sell out to the caterpillar secret police and start flitting through windows into people's apartments where his captive feathery relatives drag out their days, and he'll drop lethal poisoned seeds into their feeders. The secret-police caterpillars are afraid of birds even when they're caged.

ARKADY. You sure have a way with words, Mr Writer. But what about you? Aren't you scared of me, I'm the one who knows everything about you, who crossed the line? And when you've crossed that line once you can cross it again, motherfucker.

FELIX. It's boring the second time and every time after that, Arkasha. The best fucking rush is when you do it the first time. Though with you it may be different, I don't know. We'll give it a shot, dickhead.

ARKADY. You're a prize prick! I never imagined anyone could be such a gigantic prick. You're an asshole. Your parents sure did a great job bringing you up.

FELIX. I hate my parents.

ARKADY. I'd fucking hate my parents if they'd brought me up like that. They weren't both in the KGB, by any chance?

FELIX. You hit the mark. Arkasha.

ARKADY. I don't fucking envy you, buddy. What did they do? So many different professions in the KGB. Did they waste people?

FELIX. My father wasted people abroad; my mother went to bed with diplomats and fucked them for secrets here in Moscow.

ARKADY. No shit. You were lucky to have such parents, brother. Sincerely.

FELIX. As for me, I'm just a bum. I spent my whole life photocopying and selling anti-Soviet literature. And I write shit knows what. In literary criticism there's no fucking definition for what I write. A poem. A modern Book of Job. A new Bible about the Russian Christ. Know what will happen at the Second Coming?

ARKADY. I don't know shit about that sort of thing.

FELIX. You're a dumb fuck, Mother Russia's son. If I was just some government minister's kid I'd have been sent to Siberia to take cold showers long ago. But here's a general in the KGB, who's spent his whole life bumping off people abroad. Nobody dared say a fucking word to him about his proud son. I can do anything I want. I work for a private company, I get paid in foreign currency. The firm I work for is a joint venture, or a society of queers – in the sense of who'll fuck who first. I was real nice to you, Arkasha. Do you think there's anything wrong in killing a snitch?

ARKADY. I didn't kill him for being a snitch. I killed him for being a man. I killed him as a coward. What would you do in my place?

FELIX. Exactly the same. Fortunately or unfortunately. I wrote the letter to myself, but I dropped the envelope in your mailbox. I tried to put myself in your fucking shoes, that's why it worked. We all live under the same hammer and sickle. Our souls have all been reduced to the same level.

ARKADY. You should've married, Felix, had children. Perhaps then you wouldn't go in for this kind of crap.

FELIX. Have children in this prison camp of a country? So they too can have a shitty life? Somehow the idea doesn't give me a hard-on, Arkasha.

ARKADY. Well it does for me. Why I don't know. I didn't consult any shrinks about it.

FELIX. Well that's the definition of happiness, my boy, when your dick creates life independently of your brain!

ARKADY. I still say you should have given married life a try. Perhaps then your dick would have followed the correct path.

FELIX. You mean I should've married some whore like my mother?

ARKADY. No, I mean you should've married for love.

FELIX. I murdered my love, Arkasha.

ARKADY. What do you mean, murdered your love?

FELIX. It's a decadent story.

ARKADY. Oh yeah? Tell me about it.

FELIX. I never tell this story to anyone.

ARKADY. Well tell it to me.

ARKADY. Why should I make an exception for you?

ARKADY. Because you already made an exception for me once. Come on, tell me. It may make things better, at least for me.

*A pause.*

FELIX. He who has ears, let him hear. I was on a mission. I was supposed to fall in love with a Jewish girl' living abroad and marry her. The girl's father was a political emigre from our country. He'd done great harm to the Land of the Soviets. I was twenty-five at the time. Just graduated from the Moscow Engineering Academy. I'd been playing footsie with the KGB since my second year. Secret operations, all that romantic crap. You've seen our movies about secret agents, right?

ARKADY. Go on.

FELIX. Well, those movies give you the wrong fucking impression. What they did was they examined my dick for two weeks. Subjected it to all kinds of tests to make sure it was strong enough to fuck that little Jewess. You're screwing a lady and a guy behind a screen counts how many times you come! I did it twelve times in one night. The first three without withdrawing.

ARKADY. You're a giant among men.

FELIX. They sent me to London via a third country. Arranged for me to meet the little Jewess in a restaurant. She was twenty years old. Her name was Katrine. Here's her picture. *(Shows Arkady a photograph.)*

ARKADY. She's pretty. You can see she's foreign.

FELIX. The bastards did a great job setting up the bit with the restaurant. She studied at Cambridge University. So they sent me to Cambridge as an exchange

student. I had a million in the bank. A legacy. It was all legit. My mother had me learn English as a child. Insisted I go to a special language school. Like she had a premonition it would come in handy one day. Katrine fell in love with me, madly. Never asked any questions, just loved me. She took me on vacation, to an Asian country on our border, so I could meet her father. He had a villa there. And the very first night I wasted the whole lot of them. Right then and there, every one of those innocents. Soundlessly. With a knife. There were eight people in that villa and I took them all out. Slit their throats to make sure there'd be no witnesses. You understand? And my true love, I did the same to her. She was the last one I stabbed her in the heart. She didn't even wake up. She didn't even know it was me. Died in her sleep. She was lucky. God loved her, as He is my witness. That same night I crossed the border on foot. 60 fucking kilometres in one night. They were waiting for me on our side. The operation was scheduled to the minute. I was immediately promoted to captain. So that's how I wasted eight human beings because of a single enemy of the people. I killed his wife, the grandparents, my true love and the little being starting to move inside her womb. That little being, my own blood!!! (*Cries.*)

ARKADY. Come on, Felix, calm down. Felix, calm down.

FELIX. I'm fucking calm, I am. After all, I'm a soldier of the Fatherland. I'm calm, Arkasha. And now I read in the papers that her father was posthumously rehabilitated. But what they didn't say is that he was killed by the KGB and by me personally. They're saying it was his own side, the CIA, that did it. Yesterday was the anniversary of the night I committed the murders. I celebrated this special occasion by wasting that aspiring KGB fuck with someone else's hands. That's their style. Tolstoy was right, you can't defeat evil with evil. But this Soviet life of ours has broken and perverted all human laws. So there. (*A pause.*) The poem I'm writing is about Katrine, how because of her love for me she unwittingly helped me carry out the treacherous Soviet mission for which I was made a captain. It's about what a dickhead I was not to stay with her abroad. Was it the desire to be a hero?! Love for rotting Soviet Russia?! The ideology that was implanted from childhood in my brains, my soul, my dick? Why did I do it? Why is life so fucking masochistic?! At the time I was scared of the KGB, just like you were scared of the Afghan veteran. True love is a special thing. As the years pass it doesn't go away, it grows stronger.

ARKADY. Very true, Felix, very true. But tell me, what's it like abroad? Life there must be beautiful.

FELIX. Yeah, it's beautiful. But I still missed Russia. I wanted at least to be able to die here. In my own land. In my own shit.

ARKADY. Yeah. Felix, tell me something. When you were abroad did you ever try it with a darkie? Between missions, I mean. You probably had spare time. They



stand on street corners, I'm told. One hour for the whole deal and you're free to go. You don't have to answer. I understand. You had a tragic love affair. It's just that I've always wanted to do it with a darkie. They say darkies move in a special way, like they're playing jazz or something.

FELIX. I'm talking to you about love and you ramble on about nailing some nigger!

ARKADY. I'm sorry, Felix. I said you didn't have to answer. I appreciate how difficult your life has been. Not everyone is tested to breaking point. Anyway, what happened next? Is there a sequel?

FELIX. What happened next? Next I couldn't sleep day or night. I landed in a hospital, this hospital, and cut my veins in a bathtub.

ARKADY. What? When? Don't bullshit, man.

FELIX. That was before my wife died of syphilis but after my son decided to become a writer. He'd already graduated from the Moscow Engineering Institute. My boy was the only one I told everything. It made such a strong impression on him he decided to become a writer. First he got a job as a camp guard and now he works in the hospital as a fire-safety officer so he can have spare time to commune with the people. It was during his shift that I cut my veins. It's more comforting when your son, your own flesh-and-blood, wheels the gurney with your body to the morgue, puts his warm hands around you and places you in the refrigerator. I'm grateful my boy forgave me before I died. But I cursed him for his literary ambitions. I never forgave him for wanting to be a writer.

ARKADY. It was your father died that shift? The general with the veins?

FELIX. Yeah.

ARKADY. Why wasn't his name Polivailov? It was different, as I recall.

FELIX. Because of his job, you stupid prick. His profession meant that all his life he went around killing people under a false name.

ARKADY. I remember now. You were really down that night, Ben-Edmund. Really down. And you took the next day off. You never told anyone you were burying your old man, that the guy with the veins they brought here was your father.

FELIX. That's my business, Arkady. It's between me and God.

ARKADY. So is that what your poem's about?

FELIX. Yeah.

ARKADY. If it were up to me, Felix, I'd publish your poem. I swear on my little daughters I would.

FELIX. It's sweet of you to say so, Arkasha.

ARKADY. No, really, the subject matter's very powerful. It has to do with real life. When a writer describes what happened to him, that's genuine art. No bullshit there. But what about me? Are you going to write how you fucked me up?

FELIX. I wrote about that a long time ago, my Ukrainian friend. I described the theory. What happened to you, asshole, was just the practical realisation.

ARKADY. You're a fucking expert.

FELIX. Yeah, that's what I am - an expert.

ARKADY. Like me to give you a real-life plot? With lots of theory thrown in? You might want to use it for a separate chapter in your poem, since you're writing about me as well.

FELIX. Go ahead, describe your real-life plot. You could become part of literary history.

ARKADY. It was when I drove trucks in. Kuibyshev. Now what would happen? You're in your rig going down the highway and somewhere on the curb there's always a girl standing. Hitching a ride. Well it's like she's pretending she needs a ride. What she really wants is a good fuck. Curb-side sluts.

FELIX. I heard about them.

ARKADY. Yeah, right. So one day I'm rolling down the highway. I see this little number standing at the side of the road. Waiting for a ride. A young, sweet-looking virgin. Decided to give her a lift. She said she was fifteen. An eighth-grader. We stopped after a while. Had ourselves a picnic. Kissed. I fondled her lily-white breasts. I felt her hairy little virgin cunt with my fingers. And suddenly it was like I'd been struck by lightning. The girl had never been kissed before. It was the first time she'd stood on the curb. She'd chosen me to pick her cherry, I mean, that's the way it turned out. So I took my hand out of her panties. And, Felix, can you believe it – I decided not to spoil such purity. God bless you, I said. When someone falls in love with you, darling, and you fall in love with him, he's the one who should fuck you, I told her. But in the meantime I've got a hard-on like a fucking crowbar. So later I jacked off in the cabin, I tell you, there was enough sperm to fill a fucking beer mug. Well actually I got the little virgin to

jack me off. I asked her politely, it was the first time she'd held a prick in her hand. Anyway, a hand-job's no big deal. It's not like I screwed her in the cunt. I never had so much sperm come out, and that's the fucking truth. But I let that lily-white virgin go in peace. Can you believe that?

FELIX. It's a pity no one was there to measure how much sperm you produced. You might have made the Guinness Book of World Records. Your iron-hard prick would have been a great find for the KGB.

ARKADY. I'm telling you what's in my heart, as one human being to another.

FELIX. Chill out, my Ukrainian friend. Thanks for the story. Unfortunately it's too primitive for my poem.

ARKADY. You want something more intricate?

FELIX. Sure, go ahead.

ARKADY. Well, you can write it up like this. First I left that lily-white virgin on the side of the road, then I went back, fucked her, raped her, shoved a bottle up her ass for sadistic pleasure, crammed some grass and earth into her mouth and left her, the cunt, to die under a bush! What the fuck! The little whore wanted to fuck around so I showed her, the slut, what it's all about. If not me, someone else would've snuffed her. Why don't you write it that way? Is the plot more suitable for your poem?

FELIX. Yeah, might be good for a chapter. Was that what really happened?

ARKADY. What's done is done. I'm offering you a plot, what really happened only God knows.

FELIX. So as it turns out, my Ukrainian friend, you're a murdering rapist as well. We are fellow-sufferers from tragic love, you and I. Suckers for fucking, you might say. Only you managed to get a family, while I couldn't bring myself to cross that particular line.

ARKADY. But you have your art. That's where you pour all your pus. Why don't you pour some of my pus into your poem? It'll be a work of genius. You'll make so much dough you can have every slut in Sovietland.

FELIX. No one has ever gotten rich from creating a work of genius, my Ukrainian friend. My little poem is as brilliant as they come, but there's no fucking way it'll get published.

ARKADY. To succeed as an artist you must be a fag, a Jew, or a member of a Masonic lodge. I know this. You told me so.

FELIX. So I'm a fag, a Jew, and a Mason. Those KGB censors, Arkasha, are fucking dumb animals. They can break your legs, squash your balls and not give a shit about your fag-Jew-Masonic art. But the CIA might buy my poem.

ARKADY. So sell it to the CIA.

FELIX. I already did.

ARKADY. You did?

FELIX. It doesn't take long if you know the ropes. I sold the poem and I fucking sold myself.

ARKADY. Cunning bastard! Well, good for you. It was a wise move. Don't piss yourself, I won't report you to the KGB. After everything you told me I couldn't do that. I've come to respect your tempered soul, Ben-Edmund. What kind of money do they pay you in the CIA?

FELIX. Dollars.

ARKADY. That's cool. What's the exchange rate now, 15 rubles to the dollar?

FELIX. More like twenty to the dollar.

ARKADY. That's fucking great. Anyway, what the fuck could you buy with our worthless scraps of paper? That's cool.

FELIX. You want to work for the CIA? I could get you a job – I've got influence there.

ARKADY. No thanks. You already offered me a job with the KGB. You had some influence there too, remember?

FELIX. Up to you.

ARKADY. Tell me something. Did you or your old man get one of those handy documents from the CIA saying you work for them?

FELIX. Your red-tape bureaucratic obtuseness is starting to piss me off, my little chicken Kiev. Can't you figure it out? If you live in the USSR and you work for the CIA, the CIA won't issue you with any handy documents. And they won't give you the dollars in cash – it all goes into a Swiss bank account. You have a fetish

about documents, you Soviet-Ukrainian yokel. Can't you feel the workings of my unique Jewish brains, which even my dick obeys? Don't you think my brains are worth a few shitty dollars?

ARKADY. If it was up to me, I'd pay. What the fuck!

FELIX. Fuck you. If you want to work for the CIA you have to learn that the West lives by the principle my word is my bond.

ARKADY. I can dig that principle. I agree with it.

FELIX. Listen, my little chicken Kiev. Try using your Ukrainian yokel's brains: why should a Jew-fag-Mason like me want to spend night after night writing this health-damaging life-threatening anti-KGB poem?

ARKADY. To sell it to the CIA, of course.

FELIX. Who made me a Mason, who told me to get a job as a fireman in this fucking KGB hospital?

ARKADY. The CIA, naturally.

FELIX. You butt-headed Ukrainian. It's a pity you don't have access to secret blueprints. Otherwise I might have got you a job with the CIA. No problem. Why the hell didn't you get a science degree, you dumb fucker? We could've got you into a secret research institute. You can't imagine the amount of money you'd make. In dollars!

ARKADY. Somehow my folks couldn't persuade me to go for a science degree

FELIX. Couldn't persuade you? Well, it's your own fault. So you're always waiting for someone to tell you what to do?

ARKADY. But you're not working in a secret research institute either. And you're a graduate of the Moscow Engineering Academy. You and me, we've got almost the same technical-grade jobs in this KGB joint. I'm the gate expert, you're the carbon-dioxide fire-extinguisher expert. I even moonlight as a fireman just like you. I get three extra days off for that.

FELIX. I'm trying to think what kind of mission to assign to you, my little chicken Kiev.

ARKADY. I could burn this crappy hospital down. Turn it into fucking cinders.

FELIX. That's fucking radical, man. But you see, some decent people would perish: the doctors, those sterilised nurses. The hospital's not to blame.

ARKADY. Well what's your CIA mission here? The CIA must want you to do more than just write poetry, even if it's against the KGB.

FELIX. Do more? Why should I do more? I penetrate in my soul-searching way into the hearts of today's KGB agents. I depict them in a literary and artistic manner. I'm like a scalpel-wielding surgeon, dickhead.

ARKADY. I'd love to be able to do something like that.

FELIX. What the fuck, Arkasha? You're not a writer. You don't know how to break into people's hearts. In your dreams, dipshit.

ARKADY. So what the fuck. But what could I do then? Do you have even a germ of an idea about me? You're the Jew, after all. Can't you come up with an idea for your Ukrainian comrade? Please? Pretty-pretty-please?

FELIX. Don't fucking rush me, my Ukrainian comrade. Every good idea must see the light of day naturally.

ARKADY. I can't believe there's no job in the CIA for me except stealing blueprints.

FELIX. Sure, there's plenty of jobs. Anything you fucking want. You could be a messenger, liaison, an informer.

ARKADY. I'd be no fucking good as an informer, Felix.

FELIX. Once in a while you could be asked to terminate someone. Some blond KGB fucker.

ARKADY. That's it! After all, I snuffed that red-haired hook-nose.

FELIX. You mean the Jew?

ARKADY. He wasn't a Jew, he was a KGB officer. It was me that did him. You can report it to the CIA. I was the one who wasted him. Will you do that?

FELIX. Arkasha, you ungrateful little fuck, don't you understand the depths of my insight when I gave you such a valuable leg-up?

ARKADY. Well thanks a bunch for giving me the valuable leg-up, Ben-Edmund. I can see you're looking out for me. I humbly kneel before you, press my forehead

against the Russian earth. But please produce another of your clever kinky-haired Jewish ideas. Pretty-pretty-please. I'll be your bosom buddy unto death.

FELIX. Don't rush me, Arkasha. I don't see any noble gentlemanly patience in you serf's heart.

ARKADY. Forgive me, Felix, for the love of God, forgive me. I could wait a little. Forgive your humble Ukrainian serf. But tell me, your Ukrainian serf, is the CIA a reliable paymaster? I won't get screwed, will I?

FELIX. You can rely on the CIA paying you. There'll be no screw-ups, my little chicken Kiev. They'll pay you a fucking pile and on the fucking nail.

ARKADY. What about promotions? No screw-ups there either?

FELIX. What's with all the questions?

ARKADY. I'm ready to give my life for the CIA. You understand? I'm ready.

FELIX. But Arkasha, in order to give your life for our side you must have democratic convictions. Now, do you consider yourself to be a man of democratic convictions or not?

ARKADY. As far as that's concerned I reckon I'm A-okay. What do you mean, anyway? What you on about?

FELIX. For example, are you in favour of a multi-party system or...

ARKADY. (*Interrupts.*) I'm in favour of a multi-party system!

FELIX. That's the right answer. Now tell me something else, dickhead. Are you in favour of communism or capitalism?

ARKADY. Capitalism.

FELIX. What the fuck. You've certainly got you head screwed on right, you little bugger. You're politically mature. Now answer me this. Which of the two systems will survive as the result of the struggle between them, capitalism or communism? Which will triumph in the end?

ARKADY. Capitalism.

FELIX. Tell me why.

ARKADY. How the fuck should I know? I feel it in my balls, that's all. Capitalism is communism without the transition period, i.e. socialism.

FELIX. That's fucking deep. Where did you learn that?

ARKADY. Well, is my colleague, the guy I work with, an intelligent person or an idiot?

FELIX. Listen, my Great Russian friend, you should publish your thoughts in a book.

ARKADY. All in good time, Felix Felixovich. Could be, American will give me my due. If it was up to me I'd have sent the entire fucking Politburo to the Kashchenko asylum for medical treatment long ago. And then to Paris, to live as fucking hobos under a bridge for about a year and a half. They could sleep in cardboard boxes in the street. Only then would I trust them with even a little bit of power. Because after all, Ben-Edmund, the Politburo is full of assholes. Those morons lord it over us while we blossom under their yoke. Enough to make you puke. You can't even take a crap in comfort: there's no toilet paper to wipe all that fucking socialist shit off your ass.

FELIX. I like it when you bark like that, my little lapdog.

ARKADY. Every day I bark to myself a thousand times. I couldn't do it more often. But tell me. If the KGB gets us by the balls, that means a bullet in the back of the head for the two of us. Am I right? I'm ready to risk it. It's a just cause!

FELIX. You'll be the one who gets the bullet in the back of the head. Not me.

ARKADY. How do you figure that?

FELIX. The KGB already knows I'm working for the CIA.

ARKADY. No shit. Does the CIA know you've betrayed them to the KGB?

FELIX. Everyone fucking knows everything. They always have.

ARKADY. You're fucked, man. Lights out for you, I reckon. I don't envy you.

FELIX. Everything's under control. I'm a channel of communication between the CIA and the KGB. After all, these two important organisations need a communication channel. Look at what's happening in the world. The USSR and the USA are holding hands.

ARKADY. I see. Now tell me, do the CIA and the KGB both pay you?



FELIX. Of course. After all, I'm doing two jobs at the same time.

ARKADY. You get hard currency from one lot, rubles from the other?

FELIX. Yeah, hard currency from one lot, rubles from the other.

ARKADY. You're a slick bastard. Only a Jew could fix himself up like that. No fucking way I believe you.

FELIX. Well that's the least of my worries.

ARKADY. I'd love to be in your shoes.

FELIX. You're a greedy little bugger, my Ukrainian friend, aren't you? You want it all at once. Just like a Jew.

ARKADY. No, not at once, not like a Jew. I'm prepared to start with a very modest position and assignment.

FELIX. So where would you like to start, the CIA or the KGB?

ARKADY. The CIA.

FELIX. That was quick. No calculating hypocrisy there.

ARKADY. I spoke the God's truth.

FELIX. Very well, my Ukrainian friend. But there's another thing. If you want to work for the CIA it wouldn't be a bad idea to become a Jew.

ARKADY. A Jew?

FELIX. That would give you a great leg-up with the CIA, my little chicken Kiev

ARKADY. No shit. Well, don't I look like a Jew? Take a good look.

FELIX. Go stand in the light. Let's see. As for your profile, your schnoz is kind of hooked. And your forehead looks like carved oak. Kind of protruding.

ARKADY. I could break down doors with my forehead.

FELIX. That's not necessary.

ARKADY. Well tell me what's necessary. My nose was broken in a fight. Do you think they'll know the difference? Don't I look just a teeny bit like a Jew? My name Arkasha's typically Jewish. You said so yourself. As for my last name being Russian, that's true of many Jews. Take you, for instance.

FELIX. Stop pointing your finger at other people! Do you feel in your guts that you're a kike?

ARKADY. All my insides are fucking Semitic, Ben-Edmund, I swear! There's nothing I ever wanted to be more than a Jew. We live according to the teachings of Marx, right? Do you know how the Jewish convolutions of my brain are trying to burst out of me?! They really are, man! Tell your friends in the CIA I'm a Jew. Don't worry, I can prove it with deeds. I hate Jews because I wasn't born one myself. Come on, Ben-Edmund, say I'm a Jew. I'll kiss your feet for the rest of my life! *(Kneels.)* Tell them I'm a classic example of a blond-haired Jew. Will you tell them that?

FELIX. I'll see what I can do, my little chicken Kiev. I might be able to help, you grovelling piece of shit.

ARKADY. Thank you, Ben-Felix. Thank you so much, my dear Ben-Felix.

FELIX. Don't mention it, my Ukrainian friend. One day you may have to do a favour in return. Tell me, could you make it with a guy?

ARKADY. You mean f-fuck?

FELIX. Yeah, fuck.

ARKADY. I never tried it. Will I have to do that too?

FELIX. It's as basic as ABC. A secret agent must be able to do anything. Especially an American one. You want to be in the CIA, huh, Jewboy? Want to be an American agent?

ARKADY. Well, I might give it a try. I might be able to f-fuck a guy.

FELIX. Don't shit yourself, my Ukrainian friend. It's no big deal. In fact, it's kind of nice. And to protect yourself from AIDS we use condoms. See? *(Takes a pack of condoms from his pocket.)*

ARKADY. *(Reads.)* Tro-jans. The writing's foreign. They're imported.

FELIX. Made in the fucking US of A. And here's some vegetable oil from the kitchen. *(Nods at a bottle of oil on the windowsill.)* With lubrication your prick will move easier. Like a fucking perpetuum mobile.

ARKADY. *(Picks up the bottle of oil.)* Fucking fresh, I see. Sunflower oil. Klavka gave it me so I could fry some eggs.

FELIX. We'll fry us some eggs, Arkasha. We'll have a real feast. It was like Klavka could see the future. She's alright. I have some silk tights with a sexy pattern. Here. *(Takes two pairs of tights out of a bag.)* One for you and one for me. *(Hands one pair of tights to Arkady.)*

ARKADY. *(Sniffs the tights.)* They smell American.

FELIX. *(Puts his hand on Arkady's shoulder.)* I knew a kid from the U. S. He was a great lay. Fucking communism without the transitional socialist period.

ARKADY. No shit.

FELIX. A friggin' poet's dream. You take off your clothes, like so. *(Starts taking his clothes off.)* Naturally, he's taking his clothes off as well. Strip, motherfucker!

*Felix and Arkady undress. Felix keeps his swimming trunks, Arkady his boxer shorts Felix puts on the tights. Arkady, looking at him, does the same, but awkwardly. He pulls on the tights up to his knees.*

Then you lie down on the bed: *(Lies down on the sofa.)* You lie down too, nancy-boy. *(Arkady lies down next to him.)* And then that little fucker Shurik starts kissing your toes, ever so tenderly. Then he licks your balls, licks you between the legs, licks your ass – that's a real fairy tale, I tell you. Fucking Siberian white nights. Then the little pervert licks your tummy, your chest, your neck, your lips. Then, my friend, he proceeds to tease your tummy and your balls with his cunning little tongue. The clever bastard never touches your dick! Then the artful little bugger waits for the moment when you're ready to come like sweet erupting Vesuvius. Yeah, Shurik-the-fairy knows his stuff! He's already kneeling between your legs. He opens his velvety mouth and your dick's like a fucking machine-gun. It shoots out a whole glassful of sperm that speeds across space in an arching trajectory, in between his teeth and into his gullet, splattering his glands and adenoids. Whoaaa!!! *(Grips Arkady's head and presses it into his crotch.)*

ARKADY. Whoaaa! *(Shakes his head in confusion.)*

FELIX. Was that good? Marx and Engels, or Lenin and Trotsky never fucking imagined that such real communism was possible. And Shurik's ass... He had

such a perfect ass, Arkasha. He'd put his prick inside me so tender-like. Softly-softly he'd go. And then he'd start pumping away! I've never known anything better than that kind of communism. I'd let him fuck me without a condom. The little fairy was clean. There were no germs on him. You see, I have an idea about the kind of work you could do for the CIA. For starters, during the trial period. You could fuck me while we're on the night shift to help me with my psychopathic meditations, so I can depict the souls of KGB officers in literary form. The next day the dollars would be transferred to your Swiss bank account.

ARKADY. Well I could try. To give you some pleasure, I mean. I agree.

FELIX. So let's try now.

ARKADY. Well I could try. To give you some pleasure, I mean. I agree.

FELIX. So let's try now.

ARKADY. We could try now, that's cool. But why don't we draw up an official document, an agreement, with regard to the fucking? (*Walks over to the table.*) I understand that over there they do everything on the basis of contracts.

FELIX. You cheap Ukrainian office rat. Fucking amateur lawyer. You get a hard-on from registering a sexual act. That's what makes you happy, huh? What kind of book-eating worm are you, you Ukrainian prick? Your fucking word's all I need.

ARKADY. You're right, Felix, of course. I'm a book-eating Ukrainian worm, I know. I'll change, I promise.

FELIX. Well make an effort, nancy-boy.

ARKADY. Listen, wasn't that red-haired guy, the one I did with the razor, also called Shurik or Sashutka?

FELIX. So was my friend. You're alert, you notice things. That's good. Well Sashutka-Shurik didn't want to work for the CIA. He had no use for dollars anymore. He stopped putting out for me. He says to me, why don't you fuck that Ukrainian peasant in your shift. He's got a great ass and he's kind of cute, alcoholism hasn't ruined his athletic body yet. And then Sashutka started going berserk. He could've landed in an asylum, in the Kashchenko clinic. He might have started snitching there. That's why I had to bury him nine feet under, send him to visit his maker without further delay. He was acting real crazy recently, Arkasha. He could have ruined the entire operation. I hope you're okay mentally.

ARKADY. Drink hasn't ruined all my mental powers. No fucking way!

FELIX. Still, if you snuffed Sashutka-Shurik in such a cool manner you must be okay mentally. Come here, baby. (*Embraces Arkady.*)

ARKADY. I can't. (*Frees himself.*) I can't.

FELIX. But why not?

ARKADY. Who are you?

FELIX. I'm me.

ARKADY. Where are you from?

FELIX. From life, my boy.

ARKADY. You're a fucking convict!

FELIX. I did time. I escaped. I've lived for five years on someone else's passport. I had a twin brother. He was such a fucking fine person. He's in queer heaven now. His life story's a poem in itself. Fucking music to your ears. Like to hear it?

ARKADY. I've had it up to here with you and your poems, you lousy con.

FELIX. My poems enjoyed great success in the camp. I recited my verse novels to the chief criminals by the dozen. They loved me. Saw to it that no harm came my way. Sashutka made a mistake. I got out. I got out with a thirst for life. You'll never betray me, my Ukrainian friend. I've tied the noose round your neck real tight. And it will get even tighter.

ARKADY. What if I cut it with my razor? (*Pulls a safety razor out of his pocket.*) I could earn another 500. How about that?

FELIX. Right here? You Ukrainian moron. There's no teaching you. (*A pause.*) The one who does it first – in the street or the doorway – wins the lottery.

ARKADY. You couldn't do it. You'll send someone else with a razor again!

*The phone rings.*

FELIX. Answer it. Answer it!

ARKADY. (*Puts the razor on the table, goes to the phone on the windowsill, lifts the receiver.*) Ah, Tamara. Hi. A stiff in Neurology1? No way, Tamara. For 300 grams of medical alcohol you can wheel him yourself. 400? We're on our way.

Okay, Tamara. (*Replaces the receiver.*) They've got a stiff for us in Neurology 1. It's worth 400 grams.

FELIX. Did he cut his veins?

ARKADY. She didn't say. (*A pause.*)

FELIX. Tomorrow at 7 o'clock I'll come out of the entrance to my building. You have the chance to surprise me with your razor. You see, tomorrow I'll only have my bare hands. I hope I don't change my mind. I hope. You've got a chance. (*He advances towards Arkady, brandishing the razor.*) I just can't fucking kill myself! Help me!!! You'll be the 10th if you don't help me. I'll make it a fucking jubilee if you don't help me!!!

ARKADY. What?!! (*Grips Felix's arm.*) Fucking intellectual!!!! (*The razor comes down. The lights dim.*)

**THE END**

*Paris*  
1987 - 1988