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The Fairytale Lives of Russian Girls (or, *девушки*)

Meg Miroshnik

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
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ISBN 978-0-573-70364-5

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THE FAIRYTALE LIVES OF RUSSIAN GIRLS is the winner of the 2011–2012 Alliance/Kendeda Graduate Playwriting Award and was first produced by the Alliance Theatre in February 2012 (Artistic Director, Susan V. Booth). The production was directed by Eric Rosen.

THE FAIRYTALE LIVES OF RUSSIAN GIRLS was subsequently produced by the Yale Repertory Theatre (James Bundy, Artistic Director; Victoria Nolan, Managing Director) in New Haven, Connecticut. The opening date was February 6, 2014. The performance was directed by Rachel Chavkin, with sets by Christopher Ash, costumes by KJ Kim, lighting by Bradley King, and sound design, music direction, and original music by Chad Raines. The Production Stage Manager was Hannah Sullivan. The cast was as follows:

ANNIE	Emily Walton
MASHA	Sofiya Akilova
KATYA	Celeste Arias
OTHER KATYA/NASTYA	Stéphanie Hayes
OLGA/PASSPORT CONTROL OFFICER/	
PROFESSOR/VALENTINA	Jessica Jelliffe
BABA YAGA/YAROSLAVA	Felicity Jones

CHARACTERS

ANNIE – 20, the American

MASHA – 19, the Girlfriend

KATYA – 19, the Mistress

One actress plays:

THE OTHER KATYA, 19, the Daughter/**NASTYA**, 20, the Whore

One actress, 40s, plays:

OLGA/PASSPORT CONTROL OFFICER/PROFESSOR/VALENTINA

One actress, older, plays:

BABA YAGA/AUNTIE YAROSLAVA

SETTING

Moscow 2005: the thrice-nine tsardom in the thrice-ten country.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Olga is the only character who speaks with an accent; everyone else is communicating in their native language. Transliterations of Russian words into English don't always correspond with the Library of Congress's Romanization system.

For Stan

1. “Masha and the Bear.”

(MASHA, 19, is getting dressed to go out. She zips up thigh-high fire-engine red boots and plays with long, thin cigarettes from a pack labeled “Vogue”.)

MASHA. *Zhili byli.*

In Russian means:

They lived, they were.

Once upon a time.

Start your stories with it,

spin your *skazki* on it.

Zhili byli.

They lived, they were:

a mother and her daughter in a one-room shack on
the edge of the forest.

The father?

I think he got killed in a hit-and-run when he stepped
off the breadcrumb path.

(This was very sad, of course.

But it also meant that the toilet seat was never left up
again.)

Now, the daughter, Masha...

(gestures to self:)

(Menya zavut Masha)

was, of course, always dreaming about running away
into the forest.

‘Cuz that’s where everything good –
meaning everything bad –
happened.

But shitty as her mother’s little shack was, Masha was
afraid to go out on her own.

Until, one day, two boys came by wondering if she could come out and play.

Now, Masha REALLY WANTED to come out and play.

She asked her mother;

Mozhno pozhalusta hodit v les?

So I can, uh...gather mushrooms and berries to feed to you, Mama?

And Masha's mother said: *Mozhno*.

They'd been sharing a single room for a really fricking long time and Mama had some personal things she'd like to attend to with some amount of privacy, too, y'know?

So, Mama said: *Mozhno*, but remember, Masha, to stick to the –

Masha was gone and off the path before the words came out of her mother's mouth.

She went deep in to the forest where those boys showed her how to:

Thrust into the earth to dig up mushrooms and part bushes to gobble up juicy berries...

Omigod.

These were the kind of chores Masha could get used to! After a few hours of hard work, the sky darkened and the boys stole away.

Said they were going on a "beer run".

And Masha was left alone in the forest where everything good –

Meaning everything bad –

Happens.

After dark. Off the path. Out of luck.

When Masha came upon a hut.

Actually not so much a hut as a cottage.

Hell, compared to the one-room shack? A palace.

With a cozy fire.

A pie cooling on the window sill.

(The best part:)

And it was empty.

So, Masha went inside and made herself at home.

(MASHA takes off her shirt and lounges in her red bra: The fantasy of what women do when they are alone. A huge, hairy FIGURE appears in silhouette.)

But all houses have masters.

And the *hozain* of this hut came home.

(The FIGURE takes a few heavy steps toward her, threateningly. It looms over MASHA, but she makes all the noises.)

It sounded something like: Grrrrrrrrrrlllllllllll.

Masha couldn't see anything, so she said: Grrrrrl?

Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrlllllllllllllllllll.

And Masha said: Girl?

GIRL.

(MASHA turns to see the FIGURE towering over her.)

DYE-VU-SHKA!

(Which means grrrrrrlll pa russky.)

Grrrrrl, what are you doing in my house?

I didn't know this house belonged to a bear!

Believe me, if I'd known a *medved* lived here –

It was just – it was after dark and I was alone and your house was so cozy and your bed looked just right –

Please! Are you going to eat me up?

Are you going to put your paws all over my body?

Run your claws through my soft flesh?

Are you going to shred me into strips and chew on the strings of me for hours?

(A beat.)

The bear thought for a moment.

(The FIGURE gets in her face.)

And the *medved* said to Masha.
No, *dyevushka*, I will not eat you.
I will keep you
in my hut.
You will stoke my stove.
You will cook my kasha porridge.
You will feed me my kasha porridge.
I will never, ever let you go.
'Til death do us part.

*(The **FIGURE** grabs her. **MASHA** looks at the **FIGURE**, disappointed.)*

Oh, god, Masha said.
A lifetime commitment?
Is your mind 100% made up?
I mean, are you sure you wouldn't rather just eat me?

*(Lights shift. The **FIGURE** is now completely visible. It is **ANNIE**, 20, a small girl in an enormous old and mangy hooded fur coat. She removes the hood before speaking.)*

ANNIE. Don't worry, I'm not a fuckwit.

I know fur is totally murder.

Blackmail was involved in making me wear it.

It's so ancient – my mom had it before she had me.

OLGA. Hhhhhhhoney.

2. “The sun’ll come up. Tomorrow.”

(Enter OLGA, 42, ANNIE’s mother. She wears a pastel velour tracksuit and has spray-tanned skin and highlighted hair.)

ANNIE. Mo-om, it’s so ugly and huge. I can’t wear it.

OLGA. Hhhhhoney, you haf to understand. It’s dark ages when I receive zis. Literally. In Soviet Union, KGB turns on sun only one hour each day. Zey had switch. One coat – it needed last you whole life: Pregnancy, fattening up, becoming old, stooping woman. One coat you haf to wear true all of it.

ANNIE. But, Ma, it’s June. I’m only gonna be in Moscow until August.

OLGA. When I am young, I see dead people standing in streets – it’s so cold zey freeze standing up to ground. And zis is July. You need fur, Annie. And you need zis.

(OLGA removes a safety pin from inside her tracksuit and pins it to the fur.)

ANNIE. Oh my god, an evil eye?

OLGA. You *father* evil eye. To ward off danger.

ANNIE. Ma, I don’t believe in evil eyes –

OLGA. He cannot be killed, you father Koschei the Deathless, because he is demon who has hidden soul separate from body.

ANNIE. C’mon, Mom. Dad moved to Tennessee with his second family.

OLGA. When he spirit away! You Russian go like rust. You lose words, you get accent.

ANNIE. I started calling myself Annie like the orphan.

OLGA. Now, you learn grown-up Russian, business vocabulary. You not little *dyevochka* any more.

ANNIE. You’re the one who’s always calling me a *djevushka*.

OLGA. Completely different thing. *Dyevochka* is little girl. *Djevushka* is girl under age of seventy.

ANNIE. I took women's studies. That's like, offensive.
Females over eighteen are women.

OLGA. Baby, in Russia, you girl until you senior citizen.
Consolation for hard life zere.

ANNIE. If it's so effing hard, why do I have to go?

OLGA. I come here for you – you sink zis effing easy?

ANNIE. We got religious asylum.

OLGA. This was gonna be country of happily ever after. Not
country of all day on feet washing stranger hair. Now,
I see on TV, all zeas Russian people (not Jewish) who
stay has so much mahnies. Zey get free apartments from
Soviet government, zen capitalist real estate market goes
crazy and everybody gets so rich, zey cover all toilets in
gold and use mahnies to wipe they asses.

ANNIE. What does any of this have to do with me?

OLGA. You *dyevrushka* in *skazka* who return home to Rus to
reap you rewards. You gotta take you legacy, baby.

ANNIE. Then why don't *you* return home to Rus? Doesn't
bad shit happen to girls who get sent into the forest?

OLGA. I'm too old. Plus, I never knew how to ask no
questions.

ANNIE. What?

OLGA. Exactly. You haf address?

ANNIE. In my pocket.

OLGA. You not-really-Auntie Yaroslava place was just like
you very own home –

ANNIE. My *not-really Aunt*?

OLGA. We not really blood.

She's not Jewish.

But you make her treat you good, baby.

ANNIE. Am I seriously going?

OLGA. I see you in *August*.

ANNIE. I guess.

(They hug.)

If I don't *die* first.

OLGA. What?

ANNIE. From, like, the heat exhaustion of wearing a family of beavers on my back.

(ANNIE starts to exit.)

OLGA. Annie, wait!

I need show you –

(OLGA starts to unzip her tracksuit jacket.)

ANNIE. Eew, Mom, keep your clothes on!

(OLGA grabs ANNIE by the wrist to stop her from going. She puts ANNIE's hand on a scar on her chest.)

What – ? Where did you get that scar?

OLGA. Russia.

(ANNIE looks.)

ANNIE. Mom, it's shaped like the Soviet Union.

(OLGA zips up her jacket quickly.)

OLGA. Watch out for witches. Wicked witches is crazy bitches.

ANNIE. Wait, *what?*

OLGA. Sleep wis one eye open, baby.

(OLGA disappears. ANNIE sets off, unsteadily.)

ANNIE. Once upon a time, a woman who was a girl who would always be a *djevushka*, set out on a journey.

(A rush of sound as ANNIE exits and the light shift and we are suddenly in Moscow, the thrice-nine tsardom in the thrice-ten country.)

3. “Baba Yaga with the Bony Leg.”

(BABA YAGA/YAROSLAVA *shuffles onstage.*)

BABA YAGA. Baba Yaga did not want to be disturbed,
so she found a hut far away from the tourist center.
Anything you have ever seen in a picture –
Red Square? Or the Kremlin? –
is located far away from the realm of Baba Yaga. in the
land of the Truly Dead.
Baba Yaga did not want to be surprised,
so she set that hut atop tall chicken legs
that run in wild circles if a stranger ever approaches.
The hut also lets out blood-curdling screams,
so that no one may ever sneak up on Baba Yaga,
especially little girls (those sneaky little bitches).
Baba Yaga did not want to be bothered,
so she surrounded the hut with a fence made of bones.
Each bone post is topped by a skull with eye sockets
that glow like coals in the dark.
Oh, did Baba Yaga mention? There is one empty bone
post.
In case a pretty little skull should happen her way.
To do her bidding and keep her company, Baba Yaga
has enchanted three flying hands.
But do not ask about them.
In fact, do not ask about anything.
For every time Baba Yaga is asked a question...
She ages one year!
This is one of the reasons she despises little girls.
They always ask questions:
Why do you look so old, Baba Yaga?
Why do you have such bony legs, Baba Yaga?
Why are you so mean, do you hate me,
Why do you hate me, Baba Yaga?

And just like that, little girl, in five seconds, Baba Yaga has aged five years.

(BABA YAGA's face becomes even more pinched.)

This is why she feels three hundred and three.

And she does not like it one bit.

(She feels her face, assessing the damage.)

But there are some things Baba Yaga does like:

Big bowls of borsch that have chunks of fatty beef in every bite,

giant dumplings stuffed with cheese and potatoes,

and hot loaves of bread fresh from her big brick oven.

You see, she may look like one of those brittle *babushki* begging on the Moscow metro,

but every night, Baba Yaga eats a meal large enough to feed four soldiers.

Yet she is never full.

She has never been satisfied.

And with her mouth full of jagged iron teeth,

there is *nothing* Baba Yaga can't eat.

(YAROSLAVA settles into a chair to sleep in a shadowy corner, one eye open and trained on the audience.)

4. "Annie at the Airport."

(The stage swirls with movement and sound as ANNIE enters.)

OFFICER. *(unseen)* Dyevushka!

(The stage suddenly parts to reveal the PASSPORT CONTROL OFFICER, a domineering figure in the Victoria's Secret version of border-control apparel.)

Passport, please.

Dyevushka!

(ANNIE pulls her passport out of the fur.)

Amerikanka.

(OFFICER opens up the passport.)

...named Anya Rabinovich.

ANNIE. Annie, like the orphan.

OFFICER. Born Moscow.

ANNIE. I was a little Soviet citizen.

OFFICER. A tiny baby Jew.

ANNIE. Oh, yeah, I guess.

OFFICER. And now you are back.

ANNIE. Three-month student visa. I've returned home to Rus to reap my rewards.

(The OFFICER looks up at her sharply.)

OFFICER. Then you should have a *skazochnaya* visa, not a student one.

ANNIE. Ha. A fairytale visa.

(beat)

You're serious?

OFFICER. Where are you living, foreign girl?

ANNIE. The address is on my migration card.

(The OFFICER looks at the card, then she looks back at the shadowy corner where YAROSLAVA sleeps.)

OFFICER. This is on the other side of the River of Fire.

ANNIE. The what – ?

OFFICER. Once you leave the land of the Truly Dead...

There's nothing your embassy will be able to do for you, *djevushka*.

You sure you want to make this trip?

ANNIE. Yes?

(The OFFICER stamps the passport with finality.)

OFFICER. *Dobra pozhaluvat.* A very friendly welcome to Russia.

(Another swirl of activity and sound as ANNIE walks toward YAROSLAVA.)

ANNIE. *(again, unsteadily)* Something is not right here. I haven't believed in *skazki* since the Soviet Union, but still –

When a *djevushka* is pushed from home to a land far, far away...

(ANNIE consults a scrap of paper.)

Building 99, Tower 7, Entrance 3, Apartment Number 57.

(ANNIE looks up.)

She should keep her wits about her.

(ANNIE refers back to the paper, then looks up.)

Building 99.

(ANNIE takes a step toward the building.)

Something is not right here.

It looks foreign...but familiar?

Tower number 7.

Like my very own home.

(ANNIE sees a figure in a hooded red sweatshirt MASHA step into the shadows.)

Hey!

(ANNIE *looks up at the door.*)

Entrance number 3.

(ANNIE *opens the door.*)

Sleep with one eye open.

5. “Auntie Yaroslava’s Apartment.”

(ANNIE looks at the door.)

ANNIE. Hello?

(YAROSLAVA cringes: Every time she’s asked a question, she ages one year.)

Anyone here?

(Another cringe. ANNIE reaches for the door handle hesitantly; it swings open at the lightest touch and ANNIE enters the apartment.)

Oh, ew. Gold toilets my ass.

(ANNIE sees the sleeping YAROSLAVA.)

Hello?

(She reaches out to gently nudge YAROSLAVA, who suddenly bolts upright and snaps at ANNIE’s hand. She misses, but her iron teeth make a loud metallic sound.)

Oh, SHIT!

YAROSLAVA. *Dyevushka!*

ANNIE. Yaroslava Yanovna, it’s me: Anya Rabinovich.

YAROSLAVA. What?

ANNIE. My mom told you I was coming?

YAROSLAVA. Who?

ANNIE. My mom, Olga Rabinovich.

YAROSLAVA. Ah, yes. Olga, Olga, Olga.

ANNIE. She *did* tell you I was coming?

YAROSLAVA. Oh, yes, dearie. I had forgotten that today was the special day. How is your mother?

ANNIE. Okay, I guess. She stopped being a mathematician when we moved to America. Now she works as a hairdresser in a fancy salon.

YAROSLAVA. And your father...

ANNIE. He left us, oh, I don’t know, ten years ago.

YAROSLAVA. An orphan.

ANNIE. I'm not an orphan. That's when your parents are dead. Both my parents are still alive.

YAROSLAVA. Oh, dear. My apologies.

ANNIE. How do you know my mom again?

(YAROSLAVA *winces at the question.*)

YAROSLAVA. Your mother and I were in the same class at school.

ANNIE. You were in the...you're the same age as my mom?

(YAROSLAVA *winces.*)

YAROSLAVA. To the day. We share a birthday as I recall.

ANNIE. I had no idea, Yaroslava Yanovna.

YAROSLAVA. I imagine there is a lot you can't understand as a happy American child, my sweet niece-*ichka*. We have known very hard times here. Now, sit down.

ANNIE. I don't want to put you out, Yaroslava Yanovna –

YAROSLAVA. Auntie, dear. Your mother promised you to me when you were born – before she ran to a land far, far away. She said I would be your *tyotya*.

ANNIE. I don't want to put you out... Auntie. I can just find a hostel –

YAROSLAVA. After that long journey? *Dyevushka*, you look like you've been to the underworld and back.

ANNIE. The airport was really confusing.

YAROSLAVA. Oh, dear, come here.

(YAROSLAVA *leads ANNIE over to the big brick oven.*)

ANNIE. It's embarrassing, I started crying like I'm not an adult or something –

YAROSLAVA. You don't need to be an adult, dear. Now, hop up –

ANNIE. What is this?

(*wince*)

YAROSLAVA. My big brick oven. It gets so cold in the apartment, even in summer. It's a good thing you have that heavy fur coat. I usually sleep up here myself.

ANNIE. I don't know...

YAROSLAVA. It's the coziest little *myesta* around.

(ANNIE *slips into place.*)

ANNIE. Ohhhhh, this feels just right.

YAROSLAVA. Are you hungry, dear?

ANNIE. Oh, I'm okay.

YAROSLAVA. I've cooked up a regular feast. Meaty borsch that will stick to your ribs, giant dumplings that will keep you warm for days and a hunk of my homemade bread.

ANNIE. Oh my god, yes.

(YAROSLAVA *begins to exit.*)

YAROSLAVA. (*offstage*) So what exactly brings you all the way here from America? Your mother mentioned school.

ANNIE. Oh, I'm going to be taking, like, Russian lessons.

YAROSLAVA. (*offstage*) But you're speaking Russian right now, dear. What will you learn?

(YAROSLAVA *re-enters and sets a plate down in front of ANNIE. She begins to eat, still reclining, greedily. The food is amazing.*)

ANNIE. I'm supposed to get rid of my American accent and learn more like grown-up words. Like business vocabulary. My Russian is like rust?

YAROSLAVA. You do sound funny. But I knew you were Russian before you opened your mouth. You have the *smell* of the Rus about you.

ANNIE. I wear a body spray.

YAROSLAVA. Oh, no, these were your bones I smelled, dear.

ANNIE. (*mouth full*) My what – ?

(A *wince* as YAROSLAVA *brushes a piece of hair out of ANNIE's face.*)

YAROSLAVA. No one's fed you in a very long time, have they, dear?

(beat)

ANNIE. No.

Thank you, Yaroslava Yanovna.

YAROSLAVA. Auntie.

ANNIE. Auntie.

Thank you.

6. "Seven-Year-Old Daughter."

(KATYA, 19, enters.)

KATYA. *Zhili byli.*

Once upon a time (they lived, they were)
Two brothers: One rich, one poor.
Because that's just the way it is:
All that emerging middle class stuff is propaganda.
One day, the brothers had an argument –
Something about a horse and a cart,
I won't bore you with old-fashioned details.
Things turned ugly fast and the brothers ended up in court.
Now, the rich man knew how the world works,
so he decided to solve the problem *pa chelovyeski* –
which means "in the human style" –
which means he slipped a few hundred rubles in his
passport before handing it to the judge.
(What can I say? Even fairytales involve bribes.)
The judge, of course, found for the rich man,
but the poor man appealed the decision
and somehow convinced the tsar himself to hear the case.
When the men arrived at the palace,
The Tsar said: I have four riddles for you to solve.
What is stronger and faster than anything on earth?
What is fattiest?
What is softest?
And what is dearer, sweeter, and lovelier than anything
else in the world?
Return to me in three days with your answers.
That night, the poor man returned home, crying
bitter tears.
As he entered his hut, he met his daughter, his *dochka*.

She was seven years old and her name was Katya.

(gestures to self:)

(Menya zavut Katya.)

And she said: *Batyushka*, little father, why are you crying?

And he answered: The tsar has given me four riddles to solve.

Katya, who was never one for bullshit, said:

Batyushka, dry your tears already and tell me the riddles.

She listened and sat quietly for a second, and then she answered:

The wind is stronger and faster than anything on earth.

The soil is the fattiest –

It doesn't grow, it doesn't live, it just sucks up nourishment.

A hand is the softest –

after all, no matter what else a man lies down on, he always puts his hand under his head.

And the thing that is dearer, sweeter, and lovelier than anything else in the world?

That is a dream.

Three days later, the poor man returned to the tsar and repeated to him the seven-year-old Katya's answers.

Now, the tsar also had a seven-year-old daughter.

Her name was also Katya.

(The OTHER KATYA enters. KATYA sizes her up.)

OTHER KATYA. *(Menya zavut Katya.)*

KATYA. The tsar said: Your Katya is a little sage.

Go home and repeat this riddle to her.

Ask her: Who is the happiest *dyevochka* in the whole world?

Return to me in the morning with her answer.

The poor man returned home, crying bitter tears.

When Katya saw him, she said:

Batyushka, don't cry.

She wanted to say: Pull yourself the fuck together.

She'd been functioning as the parent in this relationship since she was four –

and it was getting really old.

But she just listened and sat quietly for a second, and then began packing for the morning's journey.

(**KATYA** delivers the following to the **OTHER KATYA**.)

When Katya and her father arrived at the palace, they were at once granted an audience with the Other Katya and *her* father,

who raised an eyebrow at our little Katya and said: "Well?"

The happiest *dyevochka* in the whole world, Katya answered,

is your Katya, of course.

For she is the only little girl on earth to have a tsar as her father.

She will be the happiest *dyevochka* in the whole world until she is your 17-year-old daughter,

at which point the happiest *dyevushka* will be me.

You? The tsar asked.

Yes, Katya smiled, for you will be so impressed with me today, you will decide to take me for yourself.

To raise as a daughter with your Katya.

(**KATYA** takes the **OTHER KATYA**'s hand.)

And we two Katyas will be very happy together.

And when I grow up and am your Other 17-year-old Katya,

You will take me as your bride and make me *tsaritsa*.

This will make me, Katya, the happiest girl in the whole world:

The only *dyevushka* to have a tsar as a father and a husband.

(**KATYA** and the **OTHER KATYA** look at each other.)

OTHER KATYA. (*to KATYA*) The end.

(The PROFESSOR, a middle-aged woman in a frumpy jumper and huge, plastic-framed glasses enters. The past twenty years have passed her by. She refers to the KATYAs as an illustration.)

PROFESSOR. In Russian *skazki*, there are no fairies and there is no “happily ever after”. Endings are frequently happy and formulaic, as in the folktale “The Seven-Year-Old Daughter,” but that phrase is not used. Of course, there are also unhappy endings.

(The KATYAs exit; BABA YAGA enters as an illustration.)

This leads me to an examination of the figure of Baba Yaga with the Bony Leg. Depictions of Baba Yaga vary widely from tale to tale – when a prince encounters her on his hero’s journey, she is often a helpful, grandmotherly figure. But woe is the little girl who is sent to Baba Yaga’s hut atop tall chicken legs by a stepmother or stepsister – especially if that person claims Baba Yaga as a relative.

(ANNIE enters, hand raised.)

ANNIE. Um?

7. “Russian for Business.”

(ANNIE’s classroom. She sits in the front row.)

PROFESSOR. Yes, Anya? Our only *dyevushka* has a question.

ANNIE. Yes, I just wanted to say. Well, the guys and I –

(gestures to the men behind her)

Joe, Derek, Eric, and Alastair – were talking on the break.

About the fact that this was advertised as a Russian for Business class?

PROFESSOR. That’s true, Anya.

ANNIE. And we don’t seem to have really learned anything applicable to business?

PROFESSOR. There were good days, the Khrushchev days, when a class like this would not have existed.

Because everyone understood that literature has value –

and it did not need to be marketed as a means to more money.

That was a time when people read real books on the metro:

Turgenev, Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy.

And everything was free:

Art, education, museums.

Everything worth something cost nothing.

(beat)

ANNIE. That sounds...kind of beautiful, actually.

PROFESSOR. Well, the *skazka* is over now, thanks to your country. As I was saying, Baba Yagas...

Both evil and kind Baba Yagas use tasks – tedious chores that require magic for completion – to instruct or test their charges.

BABA YAGA. *Dyevushka!*

(**PROFESSOR** exits.)

ANNIE. Yaroslava?

BABA YAGA. *Dyevushka?*

ANNIE. Auntie Yaroslava, I'm right here.

(ANNIE is in YAROSLAVA's apartment. BABA YAGA is YAROSLAVA.)

YAROSLAVA. Did you reach your mama, dear?

ANNIE. I was gonna finish cleaning these poppy seeds for you first. I've got another kilo to go.

YAROSLAVA. What a good girl! I'm baking bread at daybreak.

ANNIE. Yum. But, um. I was thinking. Picking out each speck of dirt individually doesn't seem like the most efficient way to go about cleaning poppy seeds. What if I rinsed them?

(YAROSLAVA winces.)

Or what if I just bought you clean poppy seeds at the store?

(YAROSLAVA winces.)

I feel like someone added dirt to this bag you got.

YAROSLAVA. I'm sorry if my dirty food disgusts you...

ANNIE. No, no, I *love* your food. I just thought –

YAROSLAVA. This is the way it's done.

ANNIE. Yeah, yeah, totally.

(YAROSLAVA picks up a bag of trash leaking a brownish red liquid.)

YAROSLAVA. I'm going to go dispose of these remains in the garbage chute.

ANNIE. Let me get that for you, Auntie.

YAROSLAVA. No need.

ANNIE. No, Auntie, I insist.

(ANNIE grabs the bag; YAROSLAVA hangs on, remembering a second too late not to reveal her true strength. ANNIE looks a bit surprised.)

YAROSLAVA. All right, sweet niece. Just remember to stick to the path.

(YAROSLAVA lets go of the bag and exits.)

8. "Taking out the Trash."

(In the hall, MASHA is crouched in the corner by the garbag chute, smoking a cigarette. She wears a red hoodie over her nightgown and the red thigh-high boots from earlier.)

ANNIE. Hey, it's you!

MASHA. Shhhhhh!

ANNIE. Sorry, it's just, we both have red hoodies –

(ANNIE gestures to her sweatshirt.)

MASHA. *(angry whisper)* What don't you understand about: Shhhhhhhhhh?!?!

(ANNIE moves quickly to the garbage chute to throw out the bag and leave.)

ANNIE. *(whisper)* Sorry.

MASHA. C'mere.

ANNIE. Sorry?

MASHA. Over here.

(ANNIE, bag still in hand, walks quietly over to MASHA. MASHA gestures for her to come closer and ANNIE bends over a little to hear.)

I'm just trying to not wake him. I've been waiting for him to drink himself to sleep for four hours so I could come out for a smoke break.

ANNIE. Who's sleeping? Your father?

MASHA. I almost wish. My dad was a sorry bastard, God rest his soul.

(MASHA crosses herself, Orthodox style.)

But at least he was human, y'know?

(ANNIE stands up to go.)

ANNIE. Okay, well, good luck.

MASHA. Where are you going? You haven't had a smoke with me yet.

(MASHA pats the ground next to her and ANNIE sits down, excitedly.)

ANNIE. I was sure I saw you that first day I moved in –

(MASHA gives her a cigarette and lights it for ANNIE who takes a very inexpert drag on it. MASHA looks on in judgment.)

ANNIE. Sorry if this sounds weird, my Russian is like rust, but I've been kind of keeping one eye open for you –

MASHA. Why do you talk funny?

ANNIE. Oh, um, my accent is. We left when I was a kid. Now I'm American. From Los Angeles.

MASHA. You left? How'd you leave?

ANNIE. Oh, like? Religious asylum, I guess. I'm Jewish.

MASHA. Why?

ANNIE. Why am I Jewish? I don't know, I was born that way. My name is Anya, by the way. Or Annie.

MASHA. Masha.

ANNIE. So, who are you hiding from, Masha?

MASHA. Well obviously, Misha.

ANNIE. Misha is your boyfriend?

MASHA. Misha is a bear.

ANNIE. Sorry, my Russian's like rust. I thought you said Misha was a –

MASHA. *Medved*. He didn't used to be. Back in the day, we used to sit next to each other in class. And then I found out that he had his own apartment.

ANNIE. This is high school?

MASHA. His parents bit it when he was sixteen and he was the only one left registered to the place.

I got myself moved in six months later.

ANNIE. Wow.

MASHA. That's not even the wow part.

Zhili byli one night this April, I was studying for cybernetics...

when I heard a weird noise coming out of the bedroom. It was a deep, rumbling growl that shook the whole apartment.

I thought maybe something was attacking Misha, so I grabbed a pot from the kitchen and I opened the bedroom door.

(MASHA pauses. She is starting to enjoy the rhythms of storytelling again – it's been a while.)

ANNIE. And?

MASHA. And I saw...there, in the bed where Misha had been sleeping, a huge brown bear.

He was wearing Misha's shredded pajama top and was trying to eat the quilt.

ANNIE. No.

MASHA. Yes.

He took me by the throat and said: *Dyevushka!*

If you make a move or sound, I will eat you.

This was two months ago. I've been living with a bear ever since.

ANNIE. But how...how do you live with a bear?

MASHA. Well, I dropped out of university when Misha wouldn't let me go to classes. He had to withdraw, too...because, duh, he's a bear. Now, he sits in the apartment and drinks all day.

ANNIE. Masha, leave! You should leave.

MASHA. He'll eat my mother if I go anywhere.

ANNIE. That's crazy.

MASHA. I know! Cuz I should have held out for more, like my friend Katya. The guy she fucks, he's got so much money, we call him the tsar.

ANNIE. What does he do?

MASHA. Hell if I know. He was Soviet Minister of something, now he's President and CEO of that same thing. He got Katya an apartment in the center. You should see the toilets in this place: 24-karat gold.

ANNIE. Is he handsome?

MASHA. He's fifty. I don't know, I can't tell what's handsome when they get that old. But, really, it doesn't matter,

because I could cum just thinking about the handbags he gives her. I am so attracted to this new Louis Vuitton bag she just got. The buttery, pebbled leather, oh my god, it's beautiful. Katya's life is perfect. Except for the tsar's wife, Valentina. Fucking wicked witch.

ANNIE. Oh my god. Her boyfriend is...married.

MASHA. Yeah, of course. He's 50.

ANNIE. Right.

MASHA. My friend Nastya used to say: They all get married at 19, then spend the rest of their lives chasing after 19 year olds. And she should know. She's a whore.

ANNIE. Nastya is – are you really friends with a whore?

MASHA. *Was* friends. Nastya doesn't have a lot of free time anymore. But she's one tough cunt. If I was ever in real trouble, I'd know where to go.

ANNIE. Sure.

MASHA. Listen, can you go out? Does the lady in 57 let you go wherever you want?

ANNIE. (*indignant*) I should hope so. I'm twenty years old and, you know, I'm an American citizen.

MASHA. I ask because I've already got an alibi for Saturday night. Misha promised to let me go to church services this week. And I've got a bottle of the good shit I've been hiding, so he'll be hibernating, guaranteed. Plus, I want you to meet Katya, she'll be so jealous.

ANNIE. Of me?

MASHA. The tsar was planning to take her to L.A. last year when Valentina found out and got Katya's visa pulled.

ANNIE. Wow, I can't believe... Your lives are so, like...

MASHA. Mind-blowing, right?

ANNIE. Totally. I mean, this is pretty much the most fucked-up shit I've ever heard.

(*MASHA looks down at her nightgown and stumps out her cigarette.*)

MASHA. Listen, I think I made a mistake. About you.

ANNIE. Sorry, I didn't mean –

MASHA. Y'know, I don't usually dress like this, I was just making a quick exit.

ANNIE. It's not a big – I practically live in sweats.

MASHA. I just don't want you to think,
since you're not from around here –
I just don't want you to think *this* is who I am.

ANNIE. Oh, I don't think anything –

MASHA. Like they say, don't carry your garbage out of your own hut
if you don't want strangers rifling through it.

(ANNIE steps toward the garbage chute, blocking MASHA's exit. A challenge:)

ANNIE. But don't you – ? I mean, you gotta throw your trash out somewhere, right?

(ANNIE steps around MASHA to throw the garbage bag down the chute. It clanks down several stories. ANNIE walks back toward the door to YAROSLAVA's apartment.)

Anyway, it was nice to – maybe I'll see you around.

MASHA. Maybe.

(A beat.)

I mean, for sure on Saturday night.

ANNIE. What?

MASHA. You *are* going out with me, right? Y'know, to *(knowingly)* church services.

(ANNIE doesn't look at her.)

ANNIE. *Zhili byli.*

(ANNIE turns to MASHA.)

I guess.

MASHA. Cool.

(MASHA exits. ANNIE squeals silently.)

ANNIE. I've never gotten dressed for church before. I don't own a scarf. Or, you know, I own a scarf, but not the kind you put on your head.

9. "Post-lunch Lunch."

(YAROSLAVA's apartment. YAROSLAVA enters, wearing a headscarf, and carrying a frumpy outfit.)

YAROSLAVA. *Dyevushka, nashla!* I found it.

ANNIE. So, Russian Orthodox women cover their hair as a sign of modesty, right?

(YAROSLAVA winces; ANNIE covers her mouth in response.)

Sorry, Auntie. Are questions...not cool?

(YAROSLAVA cringes as she tips ANNIE's head down to put the scarf on her head.)

YAROSLAVA. Here you are, dear.

ANNIE. I just want to be respectful.

YAROSLAVA. Of course, dear.

(YAROSLAVA starts to help ANNIE dress.)

ANNIE. I mean, church is as new to you guys as the synagogue was to us when we got to L.A. Religion was illegal here and then, one day, everyone wakes up and not only had God come into existence overnight, but He's also like supposed to be the most important thing in your universe. I totally appreciate how weird that is.

(ANNIE looks down at the clothes.)

Oh, wow, this is –

YAROSLAVA. Chin down.

ANNIE. *Old.* Like older than my mom probably.

YAROSLAVA. The scarf has known very hard times here. Unlike your mother.

ANNIE. I've got like *history* on my head.

(YAROSLAVA looks at ANNIE in full garb.)

YAROSLAVA. (*approving*) Indeed. Very nice, dear.

Any, you should eat something before you go.

ANNIE. *Tyoty, I'm stuffed* – we just had lunch.

YAROSLAVA. You're a growing girl. Just a few bites of sweet *sloika*, a few crumbs of buttery, flaky pastry and a little bit of sticky strawberry filling.

ANNIE. Mmmmmm, I really do like your *sloiki*.

(YAROSLAVA produces a pastry from her pocket.)

YAROSLAVA. They're still warm.

ANNIE. Maybe just a bite?

YAROSLAVA. Of course.

(YAROSLAVA feeds her the pastry. ANNIE gobbles it up.)

ANNIE. (chewing) Mmmmmmm.

(YAROSLAVA takes a pastry out of her other pocket.)

YAROSLAVA. Oh, what's this here in my other pocket? Oh, dear, I'd almost forgotten. I made *sloiki* with chocolate filling, too.

ANNIE. (still chewing) Chocolate?

YAROSLAVA. Maybe just a bite?

ANNIE. Mmmmhshhhhhmmmmmm.

(YAROSLAVA feeds her the other pastry.)

ANNIE. (mouth full) So goood.

YAROSLAVA. Good, good, eat up. Good girl.

ANNIE. (mouth still full) Thank you, Auntie. This is so nice. I never really knew my grandparents, you know.

YAROSLAVA. (feeding her another bite) Most of the children I've come across didn't.

ANNIE. (chewing) You know, my dad's mom is still alive even. She moved to Tennessee with him. She has cuter grandchildren now. This is just...it's nice.

YAROSLAVA. Good, good, eat up.

(YAROSLAVA exits. ANNIE turns.)

ANNIE. *Dyevushki*, wait up.

10. "Running in Red Square."

(ANNIE is inserted into a postcard: Red Square, midday, St. Basil's Cathedral in the background. **KATYA** and **MASHA** enter, wearing headscarves, miniskirts, and little tops. They teeter in stilettos on the cobblestones; **MASHA** is wearing her red boots. They hold onto each other as they hobble, giddy.)

MASHA. (laughing) Annichka, hurry! He'll catch up!

KATYA. He'll put his grimy paws all over you if you don't run!

ANNIE. (not moving) Why are you running away from a guy we stood there and flirted with for twenty minutes?

MASHA. Ooooh, Anya, better move fast before he comes to gobble you up!

(**MASHA** and **KATYA** die of laughter.)

KATYA. Yeah, he'll eat you up. And then he'll digest you! The acid juices of his stomach will dissolve you and then he'll push you out through his intestinal tubing to his butt and then you'll come out as –

MASHA. (hyperventilating with laughter) Don't say it! Don't say it! Don't –

KATYA. She'll come out as –

MASHA. NOOOOOO! DON'T SAY IT!

KATYA. (whispers) Poop.

MASHA. No! You said it.

(beat)

ANNIE. I don't get it. That doesn't even make any sense.

(**KATYA** and **MASHA** double over with laughter as they try to run.)

What's the joke?

MASHA. Come HERE, Annichka! Quickly, run!

(**KATYA** and **MASHA** continue their mad, teetering progress. **ANNIE** takes a few easy steps in her flats and

catches up. KATYA and MASHA both drape themselves over her for support. The three start to move as one; ANNIE does all the work.)

MASHA. My sweet Anya!

KATYA. Little Annichka!

MASHA. You're so fast.

KATYA. And strong.

ANNIE. Not really. I'm just wearing sensible shoes.

(KATYA and MASHA look at her feet.)

KATYA. The shoes!

MASHA. Eeew, the shoes!

KATYA. Why are you wearing such ugly shoes?

ANNIE. I don't know, I thought I was getting dressed for church.

MASHA. We can't take her anywhere dressed like this.

KATYA. We'll walk to my apartment and get her better clothes.

MASHA. My feet are killing me. Let's get a car.

KATYA. But, Mashenka, our Anya is an ox. She'll carry us.

MASHA. Omigod, that guy was cute. I should have given him my number.

ANNIE. You're not seriously talking about the guy we just ran away from?

MASHA. You're right. Cute doesn't cut it anymore. Misha used to be cute. I need a tsar like in the end of *skazki*.

KATYA. *Zolushka*.

ANNIE. The Russian Cinderella?

MASHA. Or the best fairytale of all...

KATYA. Yes!

ANNIE. What's better than Cinderella?

KATYA. Poor Annichka, you've never heard of the *Supermodelskaya Skazka*.

ANNIE. The tale of a supermodel?

(KATYA and MASHA are so excited, their exchange is rapid fire. ANNIE can't quite keep up.)

KATYA. Not just any supermodel. *The* supermodel.

MASHA. Natalia Vodianova.

ANNIE. Who?

KATYA. Natalia Vodianova.

ANNIE. I don't really pay attention to who's in the picture.
They all look the same.

MASHA. Katyoshka, tell her!

KATYA. She's the fairest of them all.

MASHA. She used to work as a dirty vegetable seller at a dirty market. But she was so lovely that she was discovered at age fifteen and made a model.

ANNIE. That's nice.

MASHA. That's not the best part. She met an English lord.

KATYA. Which is not quite a tsar –

MASHA. But not bad.

ANNIE. And they lived happily ever after.

(In KATYA's apartment. KATYA starts throwing possible outfits at ANNIE. Clothing piles up in her arms.)

Oh, my god, this is a *makeover*!

MASHA. Try this. I love this.

KATYA. I've been thinking about it, though, and I don't think it's exactly happily ever after.

MASHA. Yeah, I heard divorce rumors.

ANNIE. This is still the Tale of the Supermodel?

KATYA. Marrying a lord is nice, but it would be better to be the daughter of a lord. That way, she is what she is just because she is who she is. You see? Not because she fucked her way into anything, but just because she was born.

MASHA. She had his kids. I think that's not too bad.

KATYA. But isn't it better to *be* his kid? You can take back handbags and apartments –

MASHA. Don't even joke about that!

KATYA. I wouldn't. But the thing is: You can never take back blood.

(ANNIE holds clothes up to herself, gauging size. She starts trying a few things on.)

ANNIE. This guy from class, Eric or Derek, I don't remember which, said that there's an old Russian saying about a man who asks a woman to sleep with him for a million dollars. She thinks about it for a second and then agrees. Then he asks her to sleep with him for a hundred dollars and she slaps him. So he says: What? We've already established that you're a whore, now we're just negotiating the price.

KATYA. Who said that?

ANNIE. (*nervous*) Um, one of the guys from my Russian for Business class.

They're just these loser guys who have come to Rus to reap their rewards and pick out a mail-order bride in person.

KATYA. These are Americans?

ANNIE. But they're total losers.

KATYA. See, that just doesn't make sense. That's not how you wear it.

(KATYA adjusts the garment ANNIE is trying on.)

ANNIE. Like I said, they're just asshole –

KATYA. No, I mean economically. *Dyevushki* are not dying to run off to – I don't know, South Dakota – for a few thousand dollars.

(KATYA starts undoing the piece of clothing ANNIE is trying on.)

That isn't right. Try on something else. I mean, what's the median household income in the U.S.?

ANNIE. I have no idea.

KATYA. If I remember correctly, it's about 45,000 dollars. In Moscow alone, there are at least twenty-five billionaires. Why would a *dyevushka* run after an American? Better to aim for a Russian billionaire.

ANNIE. Wow, you know a lot about income stuff.

MASHA. Katya was studying on the Economics *facultyet* at the University.

KATYA. Until the tsar decided that interior design was a more appropriate course of study for a girlfriend. This doesn't look right, either.

ANNIE. It's too small. I've gotten so fat lately.

MASHA. You're not fat.

KATYA. Medically speaking.

ANNIE. All the *dyevushki* here are so skinny. And my *tyotya* Yaroslava just keeps feeding me. She's been waking me up in the middle of the night with pieces of the most delicious gingerbread.

MASHA. You know, I've never seen her go out the door.

ANNIE. Seriously? There's always food.

KATYA. Maybe she doesn't go out the door.

ANNIE. What, she's flying out the window at night?

KATYA. That's what witches do.

ANNIE. (*joking around*) She does have a large broom.

MASHA. Russian witches don't fly on brooms. They sit on giant mortars and use giant pestles to paddle through the air.

ANNIE. So, there you go.

KATYA. No, they don't fly *on* brooms. But they do carry them to sweep away their tracks from the sky.

(**KATYA** pulls out a dress.)

Here, try this. This is oversized, but still sexy.

(**ANNIE** slips the dress over her head.)

ANNIE. (*dress covering her face*) So, what am I supposed to do? Sleep with one eye open to see if the old woman I'm living with is actually flying out the window on a giant mortar and pestle?

KATYA. I'd just be curious as to how she affords so much food. *Pensioniri* live on a hundred bucks a month in Moscow. How does that fit?

ANNIE. Better, I think.

(**MASHA** stands in front of **ANNIE** to finish the makeover, blocking her from view. A cell phone rings: *The theme from Sex and the City.*)

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