

Vadim laughs:

Is this your idea of hospitality? he yells from the kitchen but Olya doesn't answer.

In the other room we can hear a group of women being let into the apartment. The sounds of lips kissing zippers. Laughter. Dripping boots being removed. Someone's loud voice complaining about the cold...

That's them..., Vadim says, Your interrogators have arrived.

But they're women!

Don't let that fool you... they may be women but they're as cruel as

Customs officials.

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Vadim puts a kettle on the stove to boil, then sits to wait for it. Olya's kitchen has been renovated and Vadim can see that I am admiring it:

Nice isn't it? he says, Olya's done well for herself since she came back from America. She has a good job. She remodeled the whole apartment. You should have seen the place before... there were pipes *everywhere*.

What does she do for a living?

Vadim is rummaging around in a cupboard — he obviously feels at home here — and pulls out an unopened can of instant coffee:

She's some professional type.

A director?

No, she's not a director. She works in a western company.

It's strange... her apartment — I mean the layout — is exactly like yours Vadim, just backwards.

Yeah, these twelve-story buildings are all the same... they're as common as a Russian comma.

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When the water is boiled Vadim pours each of us a cup of coffee and lights a cigarette. We talk about nothing in particular... first superficially, then in great detail. After a few minutes Olya opens the door:

Okay guys, she says, You can come into the other room now.

Is everything ready?

Almost. Your future wife is getting dressed. But there is a certain matter of business that needs to be taken care of if you want to see her...!

Olya smiles.

I know I know, Vadim says and looks at me seriously: It's time James.

For what?

He laughs at my words:

For the worst...!

Without finishing our coffee we leave the kitchen. In the other room three women are sitting on a couch and Olya introduces each of them to me: