

# **The Death of Gogol and the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest**

A One-Person Play by Tim Luscombe

(Incorporating some adapted excerpts from the short story *The Diary of a Madman* by Nikolai Gogol)

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DRAFT SEVEN – As Performed June 2005

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This piece was commissioned by the Drill Hall, London

One actor plays everybody.

The chief characters are:

<b>Stuart</b>	A camp academic from London; intelligent and frenetic
<b>Lenny</b>	A female Dutch singer/songwriter; sweet but ruthless
<b>Pyotr</b>	Nikolai Gogol's servant; simple and benign (at first)
<b>Aksenty</b>	The hero of Gogol's story <i>The Diary of a Madman</i>
<b>Katie</b>	Katie Boyle, in her Young Conservative prime
<b>Laurita</b>	Laurita Valenzuela, a TV hostess; cheeky and sexy
<b>Father Matthew</b>	An old-school Russian Orthodox zealot

#### Changing between characters:

As an alcoholic reaches for a drink when he feels an uncomfortable emotion, so Stuart takes refuge in assuming another persona at the first sign of unease. These transformations can be triggered by pretty small-scale events, such as anxiety associated with procrastination, boredom or inertia, or by bigger feelings such as those to do with humiliation, anxiety, despair or fear of any kind.

Theatrically, the change can be illuminated by a very clear indication of light and sound, which tells us that location and time are changing. These shifts might be simple and stark. This might be the case when going into and out of the character of Aksenty. Maybe Aksenty's speeches are underscored by 'mad' sound, to indicate the state of his head: the sound, distorted and twisted, of his goose quill pens being sharpened, for instance. Perhaps Pyotr's contributions could be underscored by appropriate Eurovision music (orchestral).

Sometimes, however, the lighting and sound changes can be subtler or non-existent. This is the case when Stuart becomes Lenny, for example.

Sometimes a character, when telling a story, appears to become another character only for a line or two, for example when Lenny imitates Katie Boyle, or when Pyotr imitates Father Matthew. There should be no change to lighting and sound in this case, or else the whole thing might get too fussy.

There are no costume changes.

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The set:

*The set is a meagrely furnished room.*

*There doesn't need to be walls, but there is the following:*

- *A TV, video and CD player with their backs to the audience*
- *A sturdy table, and a couple of wooden chairs*
- *A dirty skylight which shows a tiny bit of the outside world, and helps to indicate that Stuart's flat is on the top floor*
- *A front door with a letter box*
- *A phone*
- *A metal bin*
- *A book written by Nikolai Gogol, in Russian*
- *An old, dog-eared diary and pencil*
- *An exit to a kitchen that we can't see, through which all the entrances and exits are made. (But this can be a curtain)*

*Also, depending on the musical abilities of the actor, there's a keyboard and a guitar. [The play was originally written for a particular actor, Duncan Wisbey, and it was envisioned that he would accompany himself on these instruments. Of course, there are other ways of making the play work musically]*

*As Stuart becomes other people, his flat becomes other places, for example:*

- *The Eurovision Green Room and Stage in Madrid*
- *Aksenty's head*
- *Wherever Pyotr happens to be (for example Madrid, Moscow etc)*

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*As the audience comes into the venue, alternately jolly, grand and romantic Eurovision music is playing.*

*As the lights come up on the stage, a Spanish Eurovision Song Contest entry, Yo Soy Aquel (1966), is playing, and fades from FOH speakers to the CD player on the set.*

*Stuart enters, clutching a thick brown A4 package. It's unstamped but there's a hand-written address on it.*

*Stuart's a manic, scruffy, demented man, on the verge of falling apart mentally and physically. Currently, he has a cold and has to blow his nose all the time. He's not especially youthful (he's around 40), and is rigorously running to seed. He's unshaved and shabbily dressed, perhaps in pyjamas or a sweatshirt and sweatpants, or something that suggests he doesn't bother with his appearance. Anyway, it's something fairly neutral, which will do for all the characters.*

*Stuart, clutching his big brown envelope, approaches the front door, as if he's going to leave through it, but something won't let him. He moves away from the door, looks at the package, smooths it down.*

*He paces, trying to summon up the wherewithal to leave the flat.*

**Stuart** Oh for God's sake, Rafael, shut up!

*(Stuart turns the music off)*

*(Apologising to the CD) Sorry. (Kisses it)*

*(Stuart turns to the audience, acknowledging its existence for the first time)*

Spain 1966. *Yo Soy Aquel* by Rafael. One of the greats, but a bit much when you're trying to concentrate on sending out your life's work to a publisher that isn't even expecting it...*(Getting breathless)*...and God knows what they'll say when they read it. Supposing they take ages to decide? Or what if they hate it, and don't want to publish it? Ok, Stuart, calm down. Breathe. Sorry. Bit of a state.

**Lenny** *You're in a bit of a state? What about me?*

*(Stuart looks at the audience, embarrassed, unsure if this needs an explanation)*

**Stuart** Ignore her.

*(He takes some deep breaths)*

Of course it wouldn't be the last time Rafael made an attempt at *La Festival de la Chanson*. *(Brandishing the CD cover)* 7<sup>th</sup> in '66 with *Yo Soy Aquel*, and 6<sup>th</sup> in '67 with *Hablemos del Amor*. Should have won both times in my opinion, but who cares about my opinion? In fact, Spain's been consistently glorious since Eurovision began. Who knows why? No one. In the same way that no one knows why Malta's consistently unpleasant or Finland's consistently weird. It's just a fact of life. Well, of Eurovision.

I'm not always like this. Mostly I'm worse. No. I'm just a bit tense, that's all. I've got to get this posted. 10 year's work. And now all I've got to do is brave the freezing streets of SW4 and send the damn thing off.

*(He moves towards the door, but returns. It's not entirely clear what his inability to leave is all about)*

When I say 10 year's work, I don't mean anyone's actually paid me. For money, I teach. TEFL. Teacher of English as a Foreign Language? Though my income is strangely pitiful. *(Back to the package)* This is what they call a labour of love.

Okay, I'll tell you what it is. It's a paper on the gay Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol. *Dead Souls? Government Inspector? Diary of a Madman?* See, extraordinarily, no academic up to now has fully acknowledged Gogol's sexuality. This is the first time it's ever been tackled.

Well, when I say 'gay', what I mean is he had a physical and emotional aversion to women and loved Cossacks. Though as far as I can tell, it was all romantic yearning and no actual rumpy-pumpy.

*(Stuart strokes the package and, when he looks up, he's become Pyotr)*

**Pyotr** He's a bit how's-your-father is the gov'ner, you know what I mean? Not that I mind really, long as he's got enough coming in to feed us, and we have somewhere to sleep at night. I don't fink he ever does it wiv no one, and he's never tried it on wiv me, but he's just a bit of a bender.

*(Stuart looks at the audience, meekly, reassuringly)*

**Stuart** That's Pyotr, Gogol's life long servant. See, it's written from Pyotr's point of view. Clever and unusual, eh? We've become quite pally, Pyotr and me. He chats away, and tells me stuff, and I've included it in the paper if it's useful.

**Pyotr** The other day, like, I was putting fings away after he'd had his breakfast and he calls me in to take a letter to the boy, and he's sitting there as bold as brass, wearing...well, I don't know where to start really... He has this girdle on made of velvet I fink it was, and a flannel camisole. A bloody enormous scarf round his neck of every colour you can fink of, and a great headdress fing on like them tribeswomen from Finland wear. Huge and crimson, all embroidered wiv gold.

**Stuart** See? Cross dresser – obsessed with embroidery patterns – wrote stories with Cossacks holding hands, sitting on each others' laps, and cutting each others' heads off. Self evidently a poof.

**Pyotr** Tell them about what happened to him in the end, Stuart.

**Stuart** No, Pyotr, not tonight. This is a happy evening.

**Pyotr** I will if you won't, mate.

**Stuart** No, Pyotr.

**Pyotr** You see, what happened was he was in such a terrible state about his funny urges that he threw himself into the arms of the church.

**Father Matthew** Purge yourself of inner filth, my son. Refrain from food and sleep, until your soul is cleansed in the eyes of God.

**Stuart** Pyotr! No! See, it's always been written about as a suicide. This (*referring to his parcel*) puts forward the argument that it was a ritual murder; priests and doctors trying to cure a great writer of being who he was. Anyway, listen, ten years later, and I'm in a frightening amount of debt. But if dying penniless is good enough for Nikolai Gogol then it's good enough for me.

So. Ok. Let's go.

*(He moves towards the front door, but he can't go through it)*

Maybe I should just stay. Yes, Andy's coming. Andy. Andy. Andy. Andy's going to be here in...*(Looking at an imaginary clock on the fourth wall)*...oh my God, where's the time gone? Three quarters of an hour! I have to stay. I'm not nearly ready for him. *(Sniffs under his arms)* No, I should definitely not go out. Wouldn't be sensible. Sod it. You're not going to get sent today. It's taken ten years to write; one more day won't make any difference. I'd better start getting dinner ready.

It's not that I have absolutely no life, but a date is not exactly a common occurrence. *(Excitedly)* Yes, Andy is a date!

**Lenny** Put on the *Eurovisie Songfestival*, Stuart, please. You know you want to.

**Stuart** *(Starting to lay the table for two)* If you don't pay her any attention, she'll get bored and go away. You see, what happened was, this morning there was a face at the window! I nearly died! But no! He's on the roof, mouthing to me through the skylight! 'Will I open the window', is that what he's asking? Yes! So I open it. Like this.

*(Stuart goes confidently to open the skylight, but feels sick and stops)*

Well, actually, do you mind if I don't? I just feel a bit...reaching up like that... Anyway, turns out he's a window cleaner. He's done Mrs McDermott below me, and do I want mine done? 'Do I want mine done?!' They've not been done since Switzerland won in '88. Celine Dion, *Ne Partez Pas Sans Moi*, 137 points. I should say I want mine done! It's freezing cold out there, so I ask him in for a cuppa. Gorgeous bod, cheeky grin and a very big nose. Aha! A Gogolian nose! Apparently, Gogol's nose was so long, it could get into a snuffbox unaided. And this man's nose is...*(Getting aroused by the memory)*...Well, it's...Phhhhwor.

Seems very nice. I ask him what he thinks of the Contest being in the Ukraine this year. He doesn't know what I'm talking about, poor love, so I explain: 50<sup>th</sup> Eurovision – taking place in Kiev, coz the Ukraine won it last year... Yes, that's how it works: if you win it, you host it. First time entries from Bulgaria and Moldova. Moldova! Holy Mackintosh! Can you bear the excitement?!

He was amazed that the Ukraine had won it last year, but I explained that just about everybody has now. Though I don't think Finland ever will, but it's nice they keep trying. And we just got along really well, and – what can I tell you? – he's coming round for dinner tonight!

**Lenny** It's time for the *Eurovisie Songfestival*, Stuart. It will sooth you, uplift you, it grip you!

**Stuart** Oh, go on then, Lenny. Just a bit.

**Lenny** 1969?

**Stuart** Of course. That's our favourite, isn't it?

**Lenny** Ah, Stuart, I love you! Let us go to Madrid!

*(He begins to search for the video, but gets distracted by the brown envelope that's lying there. He holds it)*

**Pyotr** The gov'nor's book came out in 'Peter'. Dead Souls it's called. Newspapers mostly liked it. Course, it's only the bad ones the bugger takes any notice of. Which is why we've made a bolt for it and gone south to Madrid.

**Stuart** Maybe I should just dash it round to the post box. Might shut him up.

**Pyotr** He bloody loves it here. Says it fills him with 'a desire to be turned into a nose' with great big nostrils so he can smell everyfing. All I can smell is that cabbagey stink you get in the back stairway of every house in Peter, so bad it makes yer eyes smart. We've come from one end o' Europe to the other and we've bloody brought it wiv us.

*(Stuart puts the envelope down)*

**Stuart** Maybe it's my favourite because it was my first. Everyone remembers their first, don't they? For me, apart from the exquisite music and the exotic languages, it was a door opening onto a strange and glorious new world; my introduction to otherness. It was the first time in a way I saw myself on telly. And I was positively *made* to watch it. My Mum was French, see. Ah! *(Finding the video)* Here it is. You'll love it. It's completely brilliant.

*(He puts the video in the player. The TV has its back to the audience, so only Stuart can see it playing)*

This is perfect. You deserve this, Stuart. You need to relax before Andy gets here. And this, this is better than a herbal essence bath with extra dermabrasion. *(Relaxing into the video)* So. 1969. This is before the days of 'douze points'. Oh yes. Very few points. Each country has ten jury members with one vote each. That's it! So we're in Spain, right? Oh, yes, Rafael may not have won it for them, but Castilian Massiel sure did in '68, with 'La La La'.

**Lenny** It was in London, the last year, the *Eurovisie Songfestival*, in '68. With Katie Boyle. She have no arms and a big jewel. I am sorry. *M'n* English is *niet zo goed*, but I try. I see it, I, Lenny Kuhr, singer/songwriter and virgin lesbian communist from the Netherlands, and I say to me, 'Lenny, you can sing next year in this *Eurovisie Songfestival*. You can sing and you can won it'. Now here I make a plan. I watch it with *m'n tante* and *m'n grandmoter*. And I say to them 'Grandmoter, tante, I will won this *Songfestival* next year in '69'. And they say 'Lenny, what you talk about? You study Russian literature at the Leiden *Universiteit*. You do not won this *Songfestival*! You study! You study good and hard, and you make us proud. We are just peasants from the water: water peasants, proud but wet. And you, you Lenny Kuhr, our great-daughter, our sister-daughter, will won a degree from the *Universiteit* and then you will be a doctor and a lawyer and a business woman and we will be proud and wealthy and not wet'. But I say, 'No *grandmoter*, no *tante*, I will write a song and I will won it'. So Katie Boyle, she say:

**Katie** Hello Netherlands. Are you there, and may I have your votes please?

**Lenny** She is so English. She have funny teeth and very charming; smiling all the time. And behind her *ogen* you see all the big black boots in the British Empire stamping out the little brown man underfoot with her very charming smile and her funny teeth.

Well, France she take an early lead with the big votes from Luxembourg and Monaco, with Ireland following. But then England, she make a little spurt, because of Sweden.

**Finland** I'm as happy as can be to give the results of the Finnish jury!

**Lenny** The funny little man from Finland, he give 5 to England! The crowd is wild!

**Finland** And that completes the voting of the Finnish jury. Thank you and nighty night.

**Lenny** 'Goodnight', Katie is correcting the funny little man from Finland. She say:

**Katie** We have the United Kingdom in the lead, by one vote.

**Lenny** I cannot believe it. A Eurovisie travesty. Cliff Richards in the lead with his stupid song and his stupid English country dance. (*Does a snatch of Cliff and the infamous knee dance*)

Katie say now it is, what you say, a three-house-race. England, France and Ireland. No one notice Spain one vote lurky behind in place four. And Katie take a big breath for the last country, and she say:

**Katie** Can we have the votes of the Belgian jury?

**Lenny** And they say:

**Belgium** Bonsoir, Londres. Ici Bruxelles.

**Lenny** And she say:

**Katie** Yes, good evening Brussels.

**Lenny** And you hear behind her smile 'Aah, you silly little Belgian people, why we even let you vote, it is much better if Mr Brown, the official European Broadcasting Union scrutineer, and me, we decide who wins. And it is Cliff Richards! Yes, Cliff Richards won the 1968 *Eurovisie Songfestival* here in the Albert Hall', and all the little English people go home happy to dream sweet dream of England rules the waves! But, no, this is not how it go. It go like this.

**Katie** Good evening Brussels, can we have your votes please?

**Belgium** *Ici les resultats du jurie Belge. La Swede, un vote.*

**Katie** *La Swede, un vote*, Sweden, one vote.

**Lenny** Nine votes left to give.

**Belgium** *L'Espansgne, neuf votes.*

**Lenny** The crowd go bananas! They are giving everything to one country! Mr Brown looks like he has a heart attack! Katie, she struggle to speak over the noise!

**Katie** *L'Espangne neuf votes*, Spain nine votes.

**Lenny** No one before get nine votes, ever! '*La La La*' by Castilian Massiel won it for Spain!

*(Lenny sings the chorus of Massiel's 'La la la', triumphantly)*

*(Sings)* La, la la laaaa,  
La la laaaa, la la laaaa,  
La, la la laaaa, la la laaaa laaaa!

*(Speaks)* And Katie say:

**Katie** Well, that's thrown the cat among the pigeons.

**Lenny** And, behind the control and the smile - yes we hear it, me and *m'n tante* and *m'n grandmoter*, the Dutch water peasants hear it in the swamps and the flooded farmlands of the low low countries – there is irritation! Katie is irritated! It not go all her way. Rule Britannia no more. Haha!

So this is my plan: I write a song. Something French, with little musical *dingetjes* from England and Spain in it, to get the votes from France, England and Spain and their capitalist allies and satellites, and I will win the *Eurovisie Songfestival!* And then *m'n grandmoter* and *m'n tante* at last will understand the genius that is Lenny Kuhr! Haha!

**Stuart** Will you stop bloody fantasising, Stuart, you soppy queen. Andy'll be here and you need to shave and clean your bits at least. *(Pulls the elastic of his sweatpants out and peers down, sniffing hard. He gives into Eurovision)* Oh, sod it. I've still got half an hour. Now, Spain in '69 was a Fascist military dictatorship, and this was a glorious opportunity for Franco to show it off. Austria gave it a miss. "We refuse to sing in eine fascist country." I don't suppose they saw the irony.

*(We hardly hear or see the join between Stuart and Pyotr at first)*

Austria, Germany, France. . . *(morphs into Pyotr)*

**Pyotr** . . .Switzerland, Burgundy, Savoy, Venice, Hungary, Bohemia, and back here to Madrid again. And now we're bloody off again! Jerusalem this time. Where's that then? The governor says it's in Palestine. Is that in Europe? *Dead Souls Part Two's* got to be written and he says he needs 'divine inspiration'.

**Stuart** *(Picking up the package)* Alright, Pyotr, alright. Tomorrow, I promise. *(Putting it somewhere where he can't see it)* So, yeah. Sixteen countries. You sing in your own language, and the whole thing lasts an hour and a half! See? I told you it was gripping.

And! Tonight, for the first time – and not entirely successfully – Spanish TV goes colour. And Salvador Dali has designed the set. Not many people know that, and even fewer believe it, but it's true. So there.

But then disaster strikes. All the colours become green. The orchestra, the set, even the hostess Laurita Valenzuela! It's a bloody farce!

*(Again the join is seamless at first)*

**Pyotr** Should've known by the way it started it was going to be a horror story. The gov'nor vomited all the way from Naples to Malta. We got to Palestine eventually and he suddenly fancies himself as a bit of a nature lover for some reason. He picked a poppy in Galilee, and an asphodel in Samaria. It rained in Nazareth and we was stranded under a tree, him and me and a soggy chicken, for two bloody hours.

*(Stuart picks up the package and hides it where he can't see it)*

**Stuart** Shut up, Pyotr. I'm not traipsing all over Europe merely to end up alone and dying in Moscow. I've got a date coming. And anyway Laurita Valenzuela's just making her entrance.

**Pyotr** Fair enough, mate. You'll be told when the time comes, alright?

*(This is interrupted by the Eurovision theme, and Stuart is immediately regripped to the video)*

**Stuart** The colours have calmed down now and Laurita Valenzuela is making her way between Salvador's pink flowerbeds. She's in beige with a bit of glitter here and there.

**Laurita** *Televisión Espanola saluda, desde el Teatro Real de Madrid, a todos los telespectadores de la catorceava edición de la Canción de Eurovisión.* Spanish Television has great pleasure in greeting you from the Royal Theatre in Madrid. Well. . . Welcome all viewers who are now looking in on the 14<sup>th</sup> Eurovision Song Contest. *Guten Abend.*

**Stuart** And on and on in 21 languages, including Czech, though Czechoslovakia isn't even taking part. But Moscow's suppression of the Prague Spring was only last August, and Laurita, glammed-up mouthpiece of fascist Spain, expresses Western solidarity. And you don't think Eurovision's political?!

Anyway, far more importantly, can you imagine what the tension is like in the Green Room! There's Lulu, surrounded by stylists and someone dour from the BBC who's trying to look festive. There's Salomé, the Spanish entry in blue, and the French singer, Frida. She of the underhung jaw. There's Duarte Mendez from Portugal – later to be incarcerated for his revolutionary lyrics, Louis Neefs from Belgium – who's privately worried about his tax return, not to mention the fact that he's got more hair in front of his ears than behind. Siw Malmqvist – Danish but representing Germany. There's Lenny Kuhr – *(waving at the TV screen)* Hello, Lenny! – singing for the Netherlands. 18 years old and studying for a degree in Russian literature at Leiden University – trying to calm her nerves, incredibly, by reading Nikolai Gogol's short story *The Diary of a Madman!* And there's Jean-Jacques who's singing for Monaco – or Monte Cristo as Pete Murray keeps calling it in the commentary – and is, in fact, only 15 and must sing a song about his mother, poor love.

*(Interrupting himself)* Shut up, Stuart! It is now definitely time to panic. Set the table, you stupid plonker. He's going to be here in twenty minutes. Flowers. Get the flowers.

*(Stuart exits, and immediately returns with a bunch of obviously plastic flowers and a vase. He bungs the flowers in the vase and puts it on the keyboard. He sits, but as Lenny)*

**Lenny** *Godverdoemen.* Plastic flowers. You think perhaps they bring real flowers to the green room, but no, we have the plastic flowers, and the *verdomd* fascist waiters who come all the time with the *vino blanco* and the *pulpo frito*. They do not know I am a member of the Rotterdam Youth Communist League. I am a fifth column. Maybe I tell that waitress. She is very nice.

The French thing I write the song about is a troubadour. I sing about the troubadour because I am like a troubadour. I go from place to place, singing out my heart and no one understands me, because I am lesbian and Jewish and communist and study Russian at the Leiden *Universiteit* and 18 and a virgin and I have no groovy clothes but a long red dress and a stupid clip in *m'n* hair and everyone else is stylists and dressed groovy.

I am too nervous. Twenty minutes and I must sing my song. So I try read *The Diary of a Madman*. (*Picks up the book by Gogol that's lying on the table but she's too nervous to read*)

*Godverdoemen*. But I am not the worst. No, no. Lulu look like she vomit. 'Boom bangy bang'. Children song. *Dom*. And she look like a stupid doll, with a little pink skirt and the big long orange hair. I have a red dress; it is very nice. It come down to my shoes. She is married to a bee gee. She has three stylists. I have no stylists. I come by train. She is flied here. With her *godverdoemen* stylists.

**Lulu** No, you stupid queen, brush gently! For I am Lulu!

**Lenny** But I am just Lenny Kuhr from the Netherlands. I have to be handing in *m'n* thesis to the *Universiteit* on Monday. It is called 'Nikolai Gogol: proto-realist champion of proletarian rights; a Marxist reappraisal of his short story *The Diary of a Madman* as an indictment of Tsarist Russia'. Singing in the *Eurovisie Songfestival* I do not think is being an excuse they will be accepting for handing it in late.

(*Applause from the television*)

It start! Ivan from Yugoslavia, he go first. Sadly, the only Communist song in the *Songfestival*. I must tell you, it is not good. His eyes roll back into his head when he sing, which make him look like an undead.

(*Sings*) *Dobar dan (Dobar dan)*  
*Buenos días, Buenos días,*  
*Good morning*

(*Speaks*) You see what I mean? Wait, it get worse.

*Nek' svi ljudi sad u kolu*  
*Pruže ruke prijateljstva*  
*U taj pozdrav, pozdrav svijeta*  
(*big finalé*) *Dober dan!*

(*Back to her book, speaking*) Best to not listen. He write about noses, Nikolai Gogol does. In the short story 'The Nose' a nose goes missing and start to run round Moscow on its own. And he write about his homeland; the whitewashed brick cottages of the Ukraine, hot spiced vodka with raisins and plums, *kalachi*, *krendels*, *kokoorki*.

But I choose to write *m'n* thesis on *The Diary of a Madman* mostly because in it Nikolai Gogol – amazingly – predict his own end. I love the character in it, Aksenty Poprishchin. I think myself like him. I do not mean I have a what-you-call-it stutter like him, and I do not mean he is an 18-year-old Jewish lesbian communist virgin singer-songwriter from the Netherlands like me, no. But he is a little man, a little cog, a little lost. He sit and sharpen goose quill pens for his Excellency the Director. He write in his diary what he do. I give you a little taste.

**Stuart** No Lenny, not Aksenty. Not the Madman.

**Lenny** If you can become other people, so can I.

*(There's a noise that accompanies Aksenty's diary entries. It's ugly and disturbing, though here it is only a shadow of what it will become later on)*

**Aksenty** *(Gabbing the diary on the table and writing in it)* D-D-D-December the f-f-f-fifth. There are strange goings-on in S-S-S-Spain. There's a k-king s-somewhere, but no one knows wh-where. Possibly he's right there, but s-some s-sort of family reasons, or fears about neighbouring powers, such as France, have forced him into hiding.

**Stuart** I am rising above it because I am festive and happy. And there's nothing you can do Lenny to bring me down.

Dinner, Stuart! For God's sake! He'll be here in five minutes! Get the dinner going!

*(He rushes off, and returns with sliced bread in a basket)*

**Stuart** Is this too naff? Bread in a basket. It is, isn't it? *Poshlost* as the Russians would say. Look at it. Hopeless. I'm never gonna seduce Andy with this. What shall I do with it? *(Getting hysterical)* Oh my God. Shall I just... Oh Christ, I don't know what to do with this bread! Calm down Stuart, it's only bread. Breathe.

*(He breathes)*

**Lenny** Spain is next. It is very jolly song, and she is very good singer. She is called Salomé. Well, yesterday in the lunch queue she answer to Dolores, but... She ask me what I wear for the *festival*. 'This', I say. 'It is my long red dress.' 'That?', she say. 'Yes, my mother is giving it to me for the *Nederlandse Songfestival* and I won it with *m'n* troubadour song, so it is *m'n* lucky dress'. She smile, and walk away, with her orange juice and her cantaloupe. Spanish cow. And now I feel like big fat Dutch pig. And she has an aquamarine trouser suit with furry tassels.

*(Music: the introduction to the up-tempo, happy Spanish entry)*

You must imagine the tassels, they move very sexy!

*(Sings) ¿Cuántas noches vagando por mil caminos sin fin?  
¿Cuántas noches callando? - Cuánto te quise decir  
Una profunda esperanza y un eco lejano me hablaba de ti*

*Desde que llegaste ya no vivo llorando - vivo cantando, vivo soñando  
Sólo quiero que me digas qué está pasando  
Que estoy temblando de estar junto a ti*

*Que estoy temblando de estar junto a ti  
Que estoy temblando de estar junto a ti  
Yeah*

**Stuart** Oh my God, how utterly glorious is that?! That song *is* Spain, isn't it? Cheeky and sexy and slinky. Like this *is* Greece. *(Plays a tiny snippet of a Greek Eurovision song, within which we hear something peculiarly Greek.)* That's why I became a TEFL teacher. I didn't want a proper job - I dreamed of travelling...to Greece or Spain.

*(Sings, becoming pensive) ¿Cuántas noches vagando por mil caminos sin fin?*

*(Speaks)* But dreams don't always come true.

*(Sings) ¿Cuántas noches callando? - Cuánto te quise decir...*

*(Speaks)* Well, I've been very busy with my paper on Gogol for one thing. I went to Madrid once, but... it was in Madrid that I started developing my fear of. . . *(He looks at the door)* So I came back.

I think what I really want, is to *be* Spanish, or French, or Italian, or Slovenian or... Anyway, to be...not me. Or if I can't be Spanish, then maybe, next best thing, to have a boyfriend who's Spanish or Austrian or... But I'm not 'cheeky and sexy and slinky' like that song is. Some Don Juan am I! I'm utterly crap.

Anyway, at the moment it's quite bad. Old Mrs McDermott downstairs is as antisocial as I am so I hardly see anyone. Anyway - look - Tesco's delivers and my students come to me! Well, when I say students... I've actually got *one* currently. Which is a little bit of a precarious position to find myself in, financially. But at least she's committed.

Anneli, from Finland. Dull but diligent. Like their songs. But...errr...I've got adverts on the Internet for more students. Which'll be, which'll be, which'll be, which'll be, which'll be lovely when I get reconnected to the Internet. And although the bank have decided not to extend my overdraft-

God, talking about money depresses me.

Last Thursday, we did the Passive Verb Form. You know the kind of thing: 'I wasn't invited but I went anyway'. 'You'll be told when the time comes'. And some 'Exclamations of Surprise and Annoyance', as a treat at the end. 'Damn it!' 'Sod it!' 'Bugger it! There's Mrs Halliday. I thought she was on holiday'. I think young Anneli got quite a lot from her lesson. Oh Christ, what have I done to the bread?

*(Indeed, he has been picking away at it through this. He chucks the bread on the table and heads for the piano)*

Need something jolly. Come on, Stuart. Let's do Monaco.

**Lenny** *(Sings) Maman, Maman, j'ai fait un rêve merveilleux  
Maman, Maman, et que j'étais devenu grand*

*Je marchais au pas, casque fusil et sac au dos  
Dans la lumière d'un matin, le soleil brillait tout là-haut  
Il me suivait comme un copain*

*Maman, Maman, j'ai fait un rêve merveilleux  
Maman, Maman, nous étions partis tous les deux*

*(Lenny sticks her fingers in her mouth – the vomit gesture – while the music morphs from the Monaco song to the Irish)*

*(Speaks)* Then there's Muriel Day for Ireland. She fling around the mic like a lion tamer whip!

*(Sings)* Look before you leap right into love, my friend  
It cannot be bought so very cheap, my friend

Love that makes you laugh, love that makes you cry  
Before you really understand it, it can make you live, it can make you...

*(Speaks)* Testicles, absolutely testicles. Always Ireland give us *twaddledipop*. Stuff this, get *me* on!

**Stuart** She's right. What the bloody hell that song has got to do with Ireland, I don't know. Apart from Muriel's bright green dress. About as much as Nikolai Gogol's Ukrainian stories had to do with the Ukraine, that's how much, i.e. nothing!

**Lenny** Not true! The Ukrainian stories are full of well-observed local detail.

**Stuart** Bollocks, Lenny, my friend. Anyway, I don't have time to argue with you. Come on, Stuart, this is serious. Andy's about to arrive.

**Lenny** No, he is not.

**Stuart** Look, you. Ghosts, balalaikas and *halushki* dumplings: he stole it all from his Dad's puppet shows, or he made it up!

**Lenny** You think he is, but he is not.

**Stuart** Nikolai Gogol a proto-revolutionary! He was just a big girl's blouse, and a miserable one at that.

**Lenny** Why would Andy want to come to see you?

**Stuart** Hey, oughtn't you to be on stand by? You're on in a minute.

**Lenny** (*Screams as she realises she's not where she's meant to be*) Oye, *m'n godverdoemen!* Only *la bella Italia* and England's boom bangy bang! Then me! Lenny's turn!

**Stuart** Maybe she's right. (*Aghast at his own stupidity*) Course she is! I'm seriously imagining that Andy's going to be interested in a ballooning old fool like me. Hah! He probably only said he'd come in the first place to shut me up.

Now, come on, Stuart, stop it. (*To the audience*) I do this. I project catastrophe. (*To himself*) Before you get completely hysterical, what are the facts? 1) You asked him to dinner. 2) He said yes. Right, now, let's stick to those facts and get some food on the go.

But why? Why would he want to come to dinner with me? He's about half my age, sexy as all get out, and probably not even gay. Did you establish whether he was gay? No. So he probably thinks you're simply mad. Asking the window cleaner to dinner! Oh my God, how humiliating. He's probably laughing with his friends about you now. That is, if he even remembers the incident. He's not only *not coming*, but he's actually forgotten you exist.

I wasn't invited but I went anyway.

You'll be told when the time comes.

Oh, for fuck's sake, this'll never get the *halushki* on the table, as Gogol might have said. If he's not here in a second, he'll be late.

(*Stuart continues to set the table with renewed vigour*)

I mean, who the hell would want to go out anyway? Have you been to Stockwell recently? Apart from a rare sighting of one of those beautiful men who just fill me with yearning and longing, which is completely useless, because I can never pluck up the courage to do anything about it.

I mean, all you see in magazines and on the telly is gay men finding the whole thing really easy. Well, I don't.

Maybe it's just me. Maybe I'm the only one who can't...

Anyway.

*(Stuart's rant is interrupted by the noise of the letterbox opening. A letter flutters through it and lands on the floor. He goes to the door, which gets trickier the closer he gets to it, and finally manages to pick up the letter)*

By hand... Who the hell...?

*(He opens it, and looks increasingly panic-stricken as he reads it)*

'Dear Mr Stuart, thank you for your excellent lessons in England. I am frightened. . . ? Oh, I am frightened that I will not be able to attend some more classes in your apartment as *I have been told* I have a family crisis and *I have been told* to return to Finland. Mine is the excellent use of passive, no? I am sad but life is sad. Bugger it. Anneli. P.S. Maybe Finland win next year'.

*(He has just enough composure for a swipe at Finland)*

**Stuart** Fat chance.

*(But then he crumples, and cries)*

Nooooooooo!!!! *(Through sobs)* Anneli, you can't leave me like this. What am I going to do without you?

**Lenny** Stuart?

**Stuart** What?

**Lenny** You want I sing Italy for you?

**Stuart** Yes, please.

**Lenny** Okay.

*(Music: Lenny sings the Italian song 'Due Grosse Lacrime Bianche'. It's a sad, slow song about tears. It's very dramatic and heartfelt. She uses it to express and then soothe Stuart's emotions)*

*(Sings) Il nostro cuore dicevi sempre  
Non è una stanza che si affitta*

*Noi ci lasciamo, la stanza è vuota  
La porta aperta resterà*

*Due grosse lacrime bianche  
Come due perle del mare  
È tutto quello che a me rimane di te*

(*Speaks*) Oh yes! That Iva Zanicchi, she is something! An Isadora! A Callas! And the song! At last, something to get into your teeth! She sing: “Two big white tears, like two pearls of the ocean, are all that is for me left of you. Love does not die, for not hearing your voice, the head under the cushion, I am reborn”. Well, ok, it sound better in Italian.

(*Sings*) *Due grosse lacrime bianche  
Come due perle del mare  
È tutto quello che a me rimane di te*

**Stuart** Eurovision. The best emotional Elastoplast known to man. So, now I have no students. That means no income. What the fuck am I going to do? No money coming in and no credit at the bank. No credit at Tesco's which means no more deliveries. No credit cards because they've all been cut up. I *had* friends. But none of them will speak to me till I pay back the money I owe. What the fuck am I going to do? Oh God oh God oh God oh God oh God oh God.

(*With uncharacteristic resolve*) Well, I'm just going to have to worry about it tomorrow. While Andy's coming, and Lulu's ready to go, life is boom-bang-a-bang and ding-ding-a-dong!

**Lenny** (*Sings*) Come closer, come closer and listen  
The beat of my heart keeps on missin'  
I notice it most when we're kissin'  
Come closer and love me tonight  
That's right  
Come closer and cuddle me tight

My heart goes –

**Stuart** It's because he's a window cleaner you're intimidated, isn't it? Admit it! You're frightened of him and turned on at the same time! You are so fucked!

**Lenny** *Godverdoemen*, what about *me*?! You are full of your silly worries. No more students, the window cleaner won't fancy me, blah blah blah. What about *me*?! I am on the standby!! I am in the wings, waiting for Lulu to get off the *godverdoemen* stage! I have to sing my song to 400 million people – now! – in this bloody red dress with a spazza clip in *m'n haar*!

(*Singing the end of the song*) Boom bang a bang bang  
Boom bang a bang bang  
Boom bang a bang bang  
I love you! Olé!

(Speaks) Yes, Lulu sing 'olé' at the end. She is not sophisticated. (As if she and Lulu are about to pass each other in the wings) Here she comes! She is all flushed and skippy like she's been slapped or just had sex. Oh I hate her, she's orange.

**Laurita** *Vamos a escuchar la cancion de los Paises Bajos. 'De Troubadour'. Intérprete Lenny Kuhr.*

**Lenny** And I am walking! With m'n guitar! Little Henketje follows! He will sit over there on the little stool with his guitar and play the difficult bits. Now I am reaching the microphone! They are clapping, all the beastly fascists in the *Teatro Real*. A glance with *Henketje*. And now I am playing!

(Music: the introduction to Lenny Kuhr's song 'De Troubadour')

Oh m'n tante and m'n grandmoter, look at your little Lenny! She is singing, singing for the Low Countries, singing for the wet lands, singing for the people whose language goes [Dutch] 'g' and [Dutch] 'ch'! (These are hard guttural gurgling sounds from the back of the throat) Here is the sound of my very own small corner of the great continent that is Europe! The voice of my country, adding to the voices of all of yours!

(Sings) *Hij zat zo boordevol muziek, hij zong voor groot en klein publiek  
Hij maakte blij, melancholiek - de troubadour*

*Voor ridders in de hoge zaal zong hij in stoere, sterke taal  
Een lang en bloederig verhaal - de troubadour*

*Maar ook het werkvolk uit de schuur hoorde zijn lied vol avontuur  
Hoorde bij 't nacht'lijk keukenvuur de troubadour, de troubadour*

*En in de herberg van de stad zong hij een drinklied op het nat  
Voor wie nog staan kon en wie zat - de troubadour, de troubadour*

*La la la la la la lei la la lei la la... la la la lei la la la...  
La la la la la la lei la la lei la la... la la la lei la la la...*

*Oh... la la la la la la lei la la lei la la... la la la lei la la la...  
La la la la la la lei la la lei lei la... la la la lei la la la...  
La...*

(The music is about to resolve when Stuart re-emerges)

**Stuart** Ok, so now he's definitely late.

(The final triumphant chord of 'De Troubadour'. Wild Applause. Lenny rushes into the "wings" after her spectacular performance)

**Lenny** (As if to someone passing) Ah, gefeliciteerd, *Henketje*, yes, you were very marvellous. (Bobbing up and down) Oh danke, Lulu. Danke, danke,

Salomé. Don't say a word about the dress, or I batter you with *m'n* guitar. Well done, me. I was brilliant! I am a European triumph!

Someone else is singing, but I don't care anymore about the competition. The next few songs fly over my head in a snowy blizzard. Finland, Sweden, Norway – but I do not have eyes and ears for them. I am too busy celebrating.

**Stuart** (*Trying to exert his existence over Lenny's. About himself*) Look at the state of you! Christ, better admit defeat on the shower-and-shave front. But at least get the food going!

*(Stuart determinedly exits, and re-enters with two plates that he puts down on the table, then becomes immobile, just staring at the plates)*

What the fuck am I going to feed him?

*(Stuart exits and re-enters with some random food items which he puts on the table)*

Anchovies, Piccalilli and cream. Ready, steady, cook.

Maybe I could get a takeaway sent over! What kind of dream world are you living in? No, go on! (*Gestures towards the phone*) See!

What's the point? You know it's dead. They might have reconnected you. Why would they do that? Have you paid a Bill recently? (*Picks up the phone, but the line's dead*)

**Lenny** While you argue about that, Stuart, it's time for Belgium! You will like this. It's modern.

*(Music: the Belgian song)*

*(Sings) Londen stad lag stil te dromen in de zon  
Van zitten dromen in de zon rondom mij  
Waar ik ging langsheen de zomen van 't gazon  
Stonden de bomen in de zon er zalig bij*

*En toen kwam jij -*

*(Lenny imitates Louis Neefs' little dance move. It's a rapid kind of flamenco gesture that lasts half a second, completely out of keeping with the rest of his stage act and the song)*

*- Jennifer Jennings -*

**Stuart** (*Suddenly gripped by an optimistic thought*) No, hang on, I see what's happening! He *intends* to be fashionably late! He's probably incredibly soigné and urbane and and and and and... Yes, yes, that's it. Or he's stuck on the

tube. There are a hundred reasons why he's not here yet. And when he gets here I'll charm him with my knowledge of the Eurovision Song Contest. No. Something a bit less weird; a bit more intellectual, perhaps. Nikolai Gogol! No, that's too abstruse. Other people are such a problem. Anyway, we'll talk and it'll be great, and he'll think I'm fantastic. And he'll say he's got a girlfriend, and I'll be depressed, but then he'll say 'But if I was ever gonna shag a bloke it'd be you', and I'll say 'Go on then', and he'll say 'Ok', and we'll go at like rabbits till dawn, haha! (*He can't help but do the Louis Neefs flamenco twist*)

(*Music: the madly jolly introduction to the Swiss song*)

**Lenny** (*Sings*) *Bonjour, bonjour, es ist schön dich mal wiederzusehen  
Bonjour, bonjour, grade heut' scheint die Sonne so schön*

(*Speaks*) And even a very jolly song from Switzerland is not denting Lenny's confidence!

(*Sings*) *Die Welt ist wunderbar-*

(*Suddenly, with all his strength, Stuart brings a halt to himself*)

**Stuart** Stop it! *Die Welt* is not bloody *wunderbar*. It's just a stupid fantasy! He's not –

(*Bangs the two plates on the table for emphasis*)

...bloody coming, is he? And even if he came, you have no bloody food to feed him and there's –

(*Hurls the phone at the wall, where it breaks*)

...no bloody way to get any. (*In despair*) Oh, God, oh God, oh God, oh God, this is too frightening. What the hell am I going to do?

**Lenny** *Kom op*, Stuart! Time for Germany.

**Stuart** No. No more songs.

**Lenny** I agree! We should cut to the voting, and crown Lenny queen of the *Eurovisie* -

**Stuart** (*interrupting*) NO! Stop! What is the point of all this? It's all just noise. Words, words, words. Words and sounds and rubbish. Oh, God, I long for silence. No more of this same old nightly journey. (*Grabbing the tape out of the video machine*) No more bloody Eurovision Song Contest. (*Grabbing the package from where he's hidden it and slamming it down on the table*) No more Nikolai Gogol

*(As he says the last words, we hear the hint of a strange noise, the same as we heard when Aksenty spoke earlier)*

I said no more. Enough.

**Pyotr** But we agreed: you'll be told when the time comes. And we're back in Moscow.

**Stuart** No, I'm not ready, Pyotr.

**Lenny** You know you love to hate the German song, Stuart.

**Stuart** Okay. You've got to break this cycle. There's got to be a way out.

**Lenny** *(Sings, unaccompanied)* *Du bist schön. . .*

**Stuart** Oh shit.

**Lenny** . . . *in deinem weißen Kleid*

**Stuart** I don't give a fuck about the German song. It's hundreds of years ago.

*(But Lenny wins the argument. Music: the introduction to the German song)*

**Lenny** 25 years after it try to kill all the Jews in Europe, Germany send to the *Eurovisie Songfestival*. . . Jewish music!

*(Sings)* *Primaballerina, Primaballerina, kleine Porzellanfigur, warum bist du allein?*

*Primaballerina, Primaballerina, tanz' auf deiner Spieluhr und muß immer einsam sein*

*Du bist schön in deinem weißen Kleid*

*Du muß dich dreh'n. . .*

*(Speaks)* And is it because they cannot find anyone in Germany to sing it that they send Siw Malmqvist, a Danish woman? Nothing wrong with her, she is great. But to have the German song sung by a Great Dane...

**Stuart** I've got to get out of here.

**Pyotr** So, yeah, we're back in Moscow. Fings've really slowed down. No more gadding about Europe for the guv'nor. All we ever see now are clergymen and monks. The guv'nor 'as these long meetings wiv a priest called Father Matthew.

**Father Matthew** Look inside you my son, that's where the filth lies.

**Pyotr** I listen through the keyhole, and I don't like him. He's one o' them old fashioned ones; the purging and praying school, you know what I mean?

**Stuart** No! We are not dragging ourselves through that.

*(With an almighty effort, he closes his eyes and breathes. At last, he believes he's beaten the others down)*

Ok, Stuart, just stick to what's real. That's the way out of here. Andy's not coming. *(Little pause)* Andy never comes.

*(Again, there is the hint of the strange Aksenty noise)*

What's that noise? No, maybe it was nothing. *(A little self-deception left)* There was a window cleaner. *(Squashing it)* Yeah, years ago, and you didn't do anything. You were too frightened to open the window. You just mimed "tea" at him and he looked at you like you were mad.

**Lenny** Time for another song.

**Stuart** No. Time for some serious action.

**Lenny** Another song while we wait for Andy.

**Stuart** No, Lenny, there is no Andy! I won't stay here with you. It ends tonight. That's it.

**Lenny** But we have the voting still, and the medals.

**Stuart** Fuck that. Fuck Eurovision. Fuck you, Lenny.

**Lenny** You cannot speak to me like that. I am Lenny Kuhr!

*(Stuart hears the same disturbing noise again)*

**Lenny** *(nastily, teasingly)* What's that noise, Stuart? What is it?

**Stuart** It's getting louder. What is it?

**Lenny** It's Aksenty Poprishchin. Gogol's Madman. Sharpening his goose quill pens. Writing in his diary.

*(The noise will underscore Aksenty's speeches)*

**Aksenty** *(Grabbing the diary and writing in it)* D-D-D-December the s-s-s-sixth. Ann-n-n-eli s-s-s-said I s-s-seemed very distracted. I hurled two china p-p-p-plates to the floor, and the s-s-s-stupid things broke.

**Stuart** Why do you torture me with this lunatic? I am not mad.

**Aksenty** (*Writing, triumphantly*) The year T-T-T-Two Thousand. S-S-Spain has a king. He has been found. I am he!! It's a g-good thing that no one thought of putting me in an ins-s-sane as-s-sylum.

*(Stuart pushes the diary away defiantly)*

**Stuart** No more words. I can't eat words. Words don't get me through the door.

*(He tries and fails to get through the door)*

Someone will knock. . . eventually. Who the hell're you kidding? No one ever knocks! Oh God! Is this. . . it?

**Lenny** Yes, Stuart. This is where we face reality. The French song is good.

*(Music: the French song)*

*(Sings) Un jour se lèvera sur trois branches de lilas  
Qu'un enfant regardera comme un livre d'images  
Le monde autour de lui sera vide, et c'est ainsi  
Qu'il inventera la vie à sa première page*

*En dessinant les branches d'une étoile  
Il trouvera, l'enfant, le chemin des grands  
Des grands qui ont gardé un regard émerveillé  
Pour les fruits de chaque jour et pour les roses de l'amour*

*(Speaks) Godverdomme.* She going to wipe me across the floor. Lenny no more queen of Spain.

*(The lights go out)*

**Stuart** What the fuck? *(As he realises what has happened)* Oh no. *(Reality driving itself home)* Oh God. Is it the whole street maybe? Please God, make it the whole street. *(Jumps up to see out of the skylight)* Oh shit.

*(Exits and re-enters with candles)*

**Pyotr** Father Matthew said the guv'nor's got to give up his writing...

**Stuart** Shut up Pyotr, not in the dark.

**Father Matthew** Make yourself busy with devotional duties, my son. Prepare your soul for the after life.

**Stuart** Get off! You're really freaking me out.

**Father Matthew** Filth!

**Stuart** Fuck off!

*(Stuart lights candles)*

**Pyotr** This feels just like Moscow. This is what it was like when 'e died. The cold night lit only by a candle.

**Stuart** Oh you are so fucking cheery.

**Pyotr** Listen, I think he must 'ave come clean about you-know-what, coz Father Matthew went all hellfire and brimstone and started shouting about *(Pyotr slowly morphs into Father Matthew)* diabolical temptation and the corporeal devil. 'Inborn passions are an evil. Make every effort of your rational will to eradicate them'.

**Father Matthew** Be resolute in your striving to foil the devils wiles. You will not disgrace yourself before-

**Stuart** *(Banging on the floor with a chair)* Mrs McDermott! Help! Mrs McDermott! Help! Mrs McDermott! Oh Christ, the old bag would have to be deaf, wouldn't she?

*(Sits back, exhausted)*

**Pyotr** *(slowly morphing into Father Matthew)* He's told the gov'nor to sleep less, talk less and pray more, eat as little and as rarely as you can, my son. Cut out tea, drink only cold water.

**Stuart** What the fuck is going to happen to me? I can't starve to death. Not in London. Not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Pyotr** It's a shame because if there's one thing you can say about the gov'nor it's that he's always enjoyed his food. He's sucked in more macaroni and stuffed more cherry pies down his gob than anyone else that ever lived.

*(The pencil sharpening noise starts again, which terrifies Stuart. This noise, which accompanies Aksenty's speeches, gets more and more disturbing as the play nears the end)*

**Aksenty** *(Writing)* The Eighty- S-S-S-Sixth of next year. They gave me a piece of paper to s-s-s-sign. I wrote "Ferdinand the 8<sup>th</sup>". You should have s-seen what reverend s-s-silence ens-s-sued; but I merely waved my hand and walked out. S-Spain is a s-strange land. W-w-w-w-when we entered the first room I saw lots of people with shaved heads. Wh-wh- wh-when they s-started dripping c-cold water on my head I thought I was going to go out of my mind. I s-s-s-started s-screaming s-so they had to put s-straps round me.

**Lenny** Stuart?

**Stuart** What?

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**Lenny** No more videos. No more electric keyboard. No more 1969.

*(Pause)*

But it's ok, Stuart, because we know it, don't we? We can do it anyway. We can sing the songs and do the voting and all the links in Spanish. We can be Laurita Valenzuela.

**Stuart** Oh Christ. I am going to starve to death while imitating a Spanish television hostess.

**Lenny** Come on, Stuart, let's do the voting.

**Stuart** No, for God's sake!

**Lenny** But it's time!

**Stuart** I'm gonna get out the door. If I don't, I'm dead.

**Lenny** *(On the verge of manipulative tears)* You mean you don't let me do the voting? What is all this singing for? I have made such an effort.

**Stuart** But we know who wins.

**Laurita** *Vamos a empezar la votacion. Un momento realmente emocionante.* Hello Yugoslavia.

**Stuart:** No!

*(Stuart tries to get to the door, by crawling on the floor on hands and knees)*

**Zagreb** Good evening, Madrid. Zagreb calling. Here are the results of the Yugoslav jury.

**Stuart** Oh, fuck.

**Lenny** And we're off! 10 countries have voted and I am in 6<sup>th</sup> place. It is a disaster. The United Kingdom is first. Stupid Lulu. Then Frida from France. Then bloody Jean Jacques and his silly marching song about his mother.

*(Sings) Maman, Maman, j'ai fait un rêve merveilleux...*

**Stuart** Oh, Christ...

*(Starting to cry, pathetically, reverting to a child, hunched up in a ball on the floor)* Maman, Maman... Get me out of here! I don't like it! I don't want to be here anymore. This isn't my fault. Don't make me stay here!

**Lenny** Stuart?

**Stuart** What?!

**Lenny** It's not all bad.

**Stuart** Really? If you've got some good news, now's the time.

**Lenny** The lovely Switzerland people give me four votes!

**Stuart** Tell me something real.

**Lenny** France gives me six! My plan. It work! I write about a Frenchman and they give me six. Suddenly, I am in the lead with only two countries still to vote!

**Stuart** I don't care. No one cares.

**Lenny** What you going to do? Sit there and starve to death? In the Green Room we are wide open mouths and holding hands. Portugal vote. Now we are all three in the lead. Me and Salomé from Spain and Frida from France. Only Finland left to vote! Things could not be more tight. Finland holds sway over all of Europe. That is not something you hear every day. Frida from France and Salomé from Spain cling to each other. Lulu has her head in her hand and I... I am sitting...calmly. CHEWING MY GUITAR.

**Stuart** (*exhausted*) Please Lenny, just stop.

**Pyotr** All he has every day is a few spoonfuls of watery oatmeal soup or sauerkraut brine; occasionally a few drops of wine he takes in a cup.

**Stuart** It's too painful.

**Pyotr** He's started to scream on and off. It's a whining, piercing sound that goes right through your 'ead. There's no escape from it. You can hear it in the street.

**Stuart** Why do you have to tell me this?

**Pyotr** Why not? This isn't about you. D'you fink you're gonna die screamin' in agony?

**Stuart** I won't listen to it anymore. I'll go mad.

**Pyotr** You are mad, already. Most of the doctors bleed 'im or drip acid on his 'ead. What wiv the icy baths and the worms on his nose that keep falling into his mouth, 'alf the time he finks he's already dead and gone to hell.

**Stuart** At least Gogol is remembered. No one's going to write about me.

**Lenny** *Godvedome*. Who cares about you? I am the famous one.

**Laurita** May we have the votes of the Finnish jury?

**Lenny** Finland – the last country of the night - give me no votes! No votes at all. So who do they vote for? The United Kingdom! Lulu is first equal place with me and Salomé from Spain and Frida from France! No one can believe it. The snobby *Madrileños* gasp in unison. Yes, now the stuffed shorts in the *Teatro Real* start to cheer and shout. We have all won! Everybody has won! Frida from France and Salomé from Spain and Lulu and me. I have won the *Eurovisie Songfestival!* I told you I would win it. And I have!

*(Lenny plays the Eurovision Song Contest Theme)*

**Stuart** I can't take any more of this.

**Lenny** Now I must reprise my song.

**Stuart** Listen to me!

**Lenny** I must reprise it. That is how it goes on the video.

**Stuart** If I starve to death, you'll die too.

**Lenny** But on the tape...

**Stuart** No. I'm going to leave through this door.

**Lenny** On the tape is the medals. We've got to do it. It's on the tape.

**Stuart** Forget the tape. We're never going to see it again.

**Lenny** But I can remember it! Laurita Valenzuela is calling out my name.

I walk on to rapturous applause. And look! My hairgrip now is more glittery than earlier, and who notices before that sexy slit up the back of my long red dress? I am transformed!

**Stuart** I am silencing you.

*(Grabbing the tape, and banging it against the table, to break it, Stuart pulls out yards and yards of tape from the cassette. He falls back exhausted, holding the broken video cassette)*

No food, no light.

**Pyotr** He called me in at 3 in the morning. At least I'd had a bit of sleep. He'd been up, praying all night. He asked for a cloak and his big portfolio. He wanted to go to the upper side of the 'ouse. So off we went, with him making the sign of the cross in every room on the way. He asked for the flue to be opened as quietly as possible so as not to wake anyone. He took all the

copybooks from the portfolio and put them in the stove. I knew what he was doing. That's all of *Dead Souls Part Three* and most of *Part Two*. It's what he's been working on the last 10 years. I fell on my knees and begged him not to do it. 'None of your business', he said. 'Better pray'.

But the paper wouldn't burn. He took it out, and just the corners had been charred.

*(Stuart picks up the brown envelope package and inspects it, as if he's Gogol inspecting the work that refuses to burn)*

So he undid the ribbons.

*(Stuart tears open the brown envelope package and takes out the papers inside)*

And laid the pages better for a fire.

**Stuart** Is this what you want? Will this silence you, Pyotr?

*(Stuart puts the papers in a bin, which is by his feet, and sets fire to them)*

**Pyotr** We both sat there watching and waiting.

*(Stuart sits and watches and waits for it to burn out)*

**Pyotr** When it was over he crossed himself. He went back to his room. I heard him crying. Later on I heard him shout out. 'A ladder! Quickly, a ladder!' That's what it sounded like. I ran in to his room. But he was dead.

*(Stuart moves to the door. Amazingly, this time, he reaches it. But he can't make it through. He retreats to the table, grabs the diary, but holds it to him rather than write in it)*

**Aksenty** I don't have the s-s-s-strength to bear this any m-m-m-more. God, the things they're doing to me! They pour c-c-c-cold w-w-w-water on my h-head! They don't listen to me, they don't s-s-s-see me. What have I done to them? Why do they t-t-t-torture me? What do they want of me? What c-c-can I give them? I have nothing. My s-strength has gone; I cannot endure all this t-torture. My head's aflame, and everything is s-spinning in front of my eyes.

*(Without a sharp change, the speech continues but Aksenty becomes Stuart, who gets under the table, taking the diary and pen with him but still not writing in it)*

**Stuart** Save me, someone! Take me away. Give me three horses, steeds as fast as the whirling wind! Get sat driver...ring out, little harness bell, let's go...wing your way up, and rush me out of this world. On and on, so that nothing, nothing is left. Far away the sky wheels its clouds; a tiny star glitters

way over there; a forest sweeps by, and the moon comes in its wake. There's the sea on one side, and Spain on the other. Is that my home looming blue in the distance? Is that my mother sitting there at her window? Beloved mother, save your poor son! Shed a tear upon his aching head. See, how they torture him. Press the poor orphan to your heart. There is no place for him in the whole wide world! He is a hunted creature. Mother dear, take pity on your poor sick little child...

**Aksenty** (*Writing in his diary*) And by the w-w-w-way, l-l-l-ladies and gentlemen, did you know that the Arch Duke of Algiers has a round lump growing right under his n-n-n-nose?

(*morphing into Stuart*) T-T-T-Talking of Algiers, Alg-g-g-g-geria has never entered. M-M-M-Morocco did. W-W-W-Once. Nineteen-S-S-S-Seventy-S-S-S-Seven. Came s-s-s-second to last. Well, at least they beat F-F-F-Finland.

The End