

Who's the Tzar?
By Katya Yurkovskaya

Setting:

- 1) An apartment in Moscow, Russia. Freshly renovated, unlike the rest of the building.
- 2) A bar in St. Petersburg, Russia, which hosts the Tzar of the Rhyme battle rap platform events every Saturday.

Time:

November 2017

Characters:

This play is to be performed with 8 female, non-binary, or trans actors. Each actor will follow two tracks: one female, one male. The actors switch between characters quickly (and sometimes there are conversations between two characters of the same actor), so the changes should be most of all physical and vocal. Costume changes to indicate a character switch should be minimal. The age of each actor should be closer to the female character of their track; however, all actors should be at least 18 years old.

The tracks are as follows:

TONYA, 17, and **MC SEVA SAVAGE (Seva)**, 32

LESYA, 15 and **MC YIN-YAN (Yan)**, 30

VALENTINA, 43 and **MC WIZZARD (Gena)**, 34

DASHA, 18 and **MC BEAR (Misha)**, 33

AMINA, 21 and **MC BEAT BRILLIANT (Max)**, 23

NADYA, 33 and **MC PARADOXXX (Timur)**, 35

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA, 71 and **MC COBALT (Kolya)**, 25

ZABAVA, 7 and **MC ANTSY ANT (Anton)**, 27

A note on language:

/ indicates interruption

(Text) is spoken as a side thought

Production notes:

All rap is performed a cappella

Feel free to use the play audience as the live battle rap audience, whenever applicable

1.

A bar in St. Petersburg. MC WIZZZARD speaks while being recorded for a YouTube video.

MC WIZZZARD: Ayooooooooo, this is MC Wizzzard, the greatest host in battle rap history, and you are watching

TZAR.

OF.

THE.

RHYYYYYYME.

Tonight we begin the first ever “Who’s the Tzar?” Championship.

This is going to be the

Toughest.

Bloodiest.

Craziest.

WAR

This country has ever seen.

Eight rappers who are deemed the best in Russian in 2017 traveled to St. Petersburg, each and every one of them ready to DEMOLISH the opponents and prove that

HE.

IS.

THE.

TZAR.

Hot-blooded youth and tough veterans, each man has a tongue so sharp they could murder just by licking your neck.

As he lists the names, each MC gets the spotlight and poses.

The roster includes legends, such as Seva Savage, the Bear, and Paradoxxx;

Young, brash, and absolutely unstoppable Beat Brilliant;

Cunning Yin Yan;

Our Latvian prodigy Cobalt;

The king of freestyle Antsy Ant;

And, of course, your humble servant.

Buckle up, my dudes, and get a lot of Spartan Beer who is the SPONSOR of Tzar of the Rhyme.

Or if you’re underage, suck on your mother’s teat, and get ready to find out

WHO’S

THE

TZAAAAAAAAR.

2.

We transition to: an apartment in Moscow. A living room of a mad scientist if battle rap was a science. Printed battle transcripts, with the best lines highlighted AND underlined, are scattered on the floor, couch, and coffee table. An enormous evidence board is stretched across the back wall, connecting pictures of what seems like every rapper in Russian history. The tiniest home studio in the corner. Underneath, a nice, well-decorated apartment grasps for breath.

TONYA and LESYA have just watched the video. TONYA cannot sit still. LESYA scrolls on her phone.

TONYA: Seva is obviously going to win. A hundred percent.

LESYA: Oh really? I think you should say it again. I didn't hear you the first million times you said it in the past twenty-four hours.

TONYA: Haha.

...

No but seriously, I don't understand why anyone would even consider somebody else. I mean yeah everyone is like the Bear this, the Bear that, and of course, he has had a good couple of years, but I PROMISE you the Bear is nowhere near Seva when it comes to a) flow, b) rhymes AND language in general to be honest, and c) content. So whoever is like omg MC Bear, the new face of Russian battle rap, JUST BECAUSE he got some hype in the last YEAR, is just so ignorant. Seva knows the game, he's been rapping since before you were born, so saying that some random guy can come in and win THE most important event in battle rap, just makes someone sound so, so dumb.

LESYA: Okay you're in love with Seva I get it.

TONYA: I'm not in...

Listen.

Fuckkkkk.

I'm not saying all of this because of "being in love." And Seva is like 32, you know? (Which is another thing, everyone pretends the Bear is some hot new artist, but that man is literally older than Seva and is married with a child).

ANYWAY, I am saying all of this because I've been ANALYZING the battles and can form an objective opinion and EXPLAIN with facts why I think what I think, as opposed to those stupid

commenters on YouTube who watch one video of the Bear demolishing Beat Brilliant and suddenly “oh he’s definitely going to be the Tzar.” You know?

LESYA: So are you saying Seva can call his opponent a faggot or tell stories of how he fucked their mom in a more intricate, professional way than everyone/ else?

TONYA: Ooooooh, you’re trying to provoke me but instead you’ve just revealed your ignorance.

So let me explain something to you:

That is not the way Seva WORKS.

Yes, if you are a dumb boy from some village and everyone you know has a total vocabulary of one thousand words, perhaps your rap IS all about saying the most outrageous misogynistic and homophobic shit and hoping that if you’re loud enough, you’ll get noticed.

But that’s not Seva.

Seva is a fucking genius and if not for rap, he could easily be a professor or a writer or a politician. Like he graduated from Yale, did you know? In America. He got a scholarship there. So, no, he doesn’t call anyone a faggot because he doesn’t need to. He can see right through his opponents. One line and they are done. That’s why he’s the real Tzar/ and...

VALENTINA enters. She is in a rush to leave the apartment.

VALENTINA: Girls, clean up this mess. Amina will be here any second.

LESYA: It’s all Tonya’s/

TONYA (*re: Amina*): Isn’t that literally *her* job?

VALENTINA: Now.

TONYA tries to murder LESYA with her gaze. Then, she begins picking up her stuff from the floor.

TONYA: By the way, mom, are you still cool if my friend comes over to watch the championship? It’s tonight and then next week and the week after.

LESYA: Wait what who

VALENTINA: Sure.

I might have questioned wasting time on *battle rap* when you’re months away from exams that will determine the rest of your life.

But good thing I have another daughter in case my eldest becomes a local drug addict.

TONYA: Are you kidding me

LESYA: Mom what the hell

...

I spent THREE HOURS studying today.

I'm top of my class.

All my teachers say they'd BET I'll get into Moscow State.

So can't I have a hobby?

A hobby that is, BY THE WAY, requires a very thorough understanding of linguistics, public speaking, literary devices, music, / and even history...

VALENTINA: Tonya.

I don't have the time to argue with you.

I have work to do.

VALENTINA exits.

LESYA (*walking on a minefield but also curious*): So who's the friend?

TONYA: Dasha.

From an online community.

I thought it would be nice to watch the championship with someone who UNDERSTANDS battle rap and not just my stupid idiot sister who knows nothing about it and can only make fun of people instead of getting a life.

LESYA:

...

Ok.

Deafening silence. LESYA scrolls on her phone, TONYA finishes picking up and organizing her stuff. A doorbell. TONYA gets the door. AMINA enters.

AMINA: Hi Tonya/. Oh hi Lesya!

TONYA: Hi Amina

LESYA: Hi

AMINA takes off her coat and begins cleaning the space. She mops, dusts, wipes the surfaces, etc. whenever she's on stage. The rest of the characters pay little to no attention to her.

More silence. After a while, TONYA gets a snack and brings it over to LESYA. LESYA honors her wounded pride for a while but eventually succumbs to the offering. TONYA and LESYA eat. They're fine now. Sisterhood.

3.

And we're back at the bar! But we can still see the apartment. TONYA and LESYA continue to watch.

MC WIZZZARD is interviewing the rappers before they go out. MC BEAR is first.

MC WIZZZARD: Yo-yo-yo, welcome, my old friend!

MC BEAR: Good to see you, man!

MC WIZZZARD: Introduce yourself.

MC BEAR *(to the camera):*

My name is Misha, but you might know me as MC Bear.

I'm God of Russian Rap so you better memorize your prayer.

MC WIZZZARD: That was good

MC BEAR: Thanks

MC WIZZZARD: Misha, many rappers and fans bet on you to win this championship/

MC BEAR: They're correct.

MC WIZZZARD: So you don't think anyone else stands a chance?

MC BEAR: Are you asking me if I'm afraid of Seva?

You sound like those teenagers who've been DMing me death threats because I said anyone who likes his rap should be admitted to a psych ward.

MC WIZZZARD: Do you still stand by that statement?

MC BEAR: Yes, but as long as they are *private* psych wards. I'm not paying taxes for that shit.

MC WIZZARD: To be honest, I was quite surprised to learn about your falling out with Seva. You two used to be tight/

MC BEAR: You know, some people get used to seeing you as a little dog. And when you grow up to be a bear, they have no choice but to turn into bitches themselves.

MC WIZZARD: I wish you the best luck in the quarterfinals.

MC BEAR: Thanks, Wiz.

He goes. AMINA exits the living room, going deeper into the apartment. TONYA mutes the video.

TONYA: Oh I hate him so muuuuuuuuch

LESYA: Why did he call Seva a bitch?

TONYA: I don't know, maybe he forgot Seva literally held him up throughout his entire career. Maybe he forgot that if not for Seva's friendship, he'd be a pathetic no one.

Doorbell. TONYA gets the door. Meanwhile, we can see MC WIZZARD interviewing COBALT.

DASHA enters.

DASHA: Damn, Tonya, this whole building is falling apart and your apartment is a fucking palace

She goes to the evidence board.

Or a museum, I don't know. THIS is a piece of art.

TONYA: Hi Dasha! We were just watching the Bear's interview.

DASHA: Oh he'll probably win.

LESYA (*kinda excited*): (oh my god fight)

TONYA (*to LESYA*): (shut up.)

(*to DASHA*): Are you, like, a fan?

DASHA: Nah, it's just common sense.

TONYA (*getting louder as she speaks*): Well, actually, I think Seva has more experience, is more prepared, and has been more consistent with his/ victories

DASHA (*also pretty loud*): Oh my god, are you one of his fangirls?

TONYA: Emmm I can APPRECIATE someone's art, thank you very much

LESYA (*yelling over them*): Guys guys keep it down

TONYA: I'M JUST SAYING

BANG BANG BANG from the ceiling. Meanwhile, COBALT is done with his interview; BEAT BRILLIANT takes his place.

LESYA: Great, you woke up the dragon.

TONYA: Fuck you.

LESYA (*to DASHA*): Tonya throws tantrums if you say a bad word about Seva.

TONYA: FUCK YOU.

Silence. Then, a knock on the door.

TONYA (*to LESYA*): Go get it.

LESYA opens the door. YAROSLAVA PETROVNA enters.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Hello girls. I just wanted to remind you that this is a residential building and people are trying to sleep.

DASHA: (Lol it's literally 7 PM)

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA (*angry*): Well, my husband is/ sick

TONYA: Yaroslava Petrovna, we're so sorry, my friend hasn't been here before so she didn't know, but we're going to be quiet.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Good, Tonya, but I will have a serious conversation with your mother if this continues. Have a good night.

TONYA: Goodnight.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA exits.

TONYA: We were NOT that loud.

DASHA: Yeah, what the fuck, old lady?

TONYA: She's just got nothing better to do with her life. Just sitting in her apartment with her husband all day. He is even worse than her. Coming here is like, the most exciting thing in her life.

Anyway, let's keep watching.

DASHA: Wait, did we miss Cobalt's interview?

TONYA: Yeah, but who cares about Cobalt?

They turn the sound back on.

MC WIZZZARD (*not mean, just very socially unaware*): And finally, Max, I gotta say. People are surprised to see you back in the game after your battle with the Bear. I mean, you lost your cool and nearly cried at the end! And then of course all the comments and memes. Kicking you when your face was dead planted in the mud. Oh, it was soo humiliating.

BEAT BRILLIANT: ...

Yes.

I remember.

MC WIZZZARD: I would never show my face in public after *that*!

BEAT BRILLIANT: Haha yeah...

MC WIZZZARD: But not you! Very excited to see your comeback.

(*Pats BEAT BRILLIANT on the back, to the camera*) We love an underdog!

But, Max, I have to ask

Rumor has it – and I saw it for myself last month in this very bar

That you and the Bear have become pals after the battle.

Mindblowing!

Why did you befriend someone who nearly destroyed your career?

BEAT BRILLIANT: I... Well...

I guess person Misha and rapper Misha are two different people?

And it's kind of childish to hate him in real life for just doing his job really well?

I'm choosing to learn from him instead

MC WIZZARD: Wow, spoken like a true fan!

But will you fuck the shit out of him if you both end up in the finals?

BEAT BRILLIANT (*suppressing a smile*): Without a doubt.

MC WIZZARD: And that's Beat Brilliant, everybody! We'll be back shortly.

Next up is Seva Savage!

BEAT BRILLIANT and MC WIZZARD exit.

TONYA suppresses her excitement. The girls sit quietly for a second. Then:

TONYA: See! I can be normal about Seva.

LESYA: We see.

VALENTINA enters, followed by YAROSLAVA PETROVNA.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: ...and then I ask them to be quiet, but what is even the point, Valentina? Your girls just don't care about / anyone

TONYA: Mom, we apologized!

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Oh, they apologized! Every day they apologize.

"Sorry, Yaroslava Petrovna"

"We will be quiet, Yaroslava Petrovna"

Nothing but lies, I'll tell you that, Valentina. Stressing me out. Raising my blood pressure. Do you think I have the health to run up and down those stairs five times a day? My heart won't take it!

You spoiled them.

Raised a pair of brats.

(*to TONYA and LESYA*) Are you two going to spend the rest of your lives wasting your mother's money? Listening to some vulgar music?

(*to VALENTINA*) How long until they drop out of school? Valentina, you were never like that, such a smart, studious girl. And they'll become prostitutes! At best!

DASHA: (Bars)

VALENTINA: Tonya, we need to have a serious conversation.

TONYA: Why is everyone against me today??? I am literally just trying to watch the championship, but all of you have a problem with me.

VALENTINA: It's BECAUSE you need to start taking responsibility for your actions and understand / that

TONYA: Okay! Fine!
I'm going to my room.
And hopefully I won't bother anyone there.

LESYA: But it's almost Seva's interview

TONYA: I don't care.

TONYA goes.

VALENTINA: Tonya!

VALENTINA follows her.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Well...
Be quiet, girls.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA exits.

DASHA: Damn.

LESYA: Welcome to the day of my life.

We see SEVA and MC WIZZAZARD appear in front of the cameras, muted.

DASHA: I didn't realize she was, like, clinically obsessed with Seva. I thought she just liked him

LESYA: No he's like the whole reason she got into rap. I think she went to his concert or whatever and then he was all she ever talked about. Kinda annoying.

...

Do you wanna watch?

DASHA: Yeah

They unmute.

MC WIZZAZARD: So, Seva, let me point out the elephant in the room.
For years you dominated not only the Russian battle rap scene, but you also were considered Russia's leading musical artist.

SEVA: Yes.

MC WIZZAZARD: But today the majority consider the Bear to be the strongest battler and your latest album was, unfortunately, a flop.
Did you decide to participate in hopes to save your career?

SEVA: No, I decided to participate after you guys paid me a million rubles, plus the PR commissions.

MC WIZZAZARD *(to the camera)*: Breaking news, Seva Savage is doing it all for money.

SEVA: Gena, listen.

The Bear got some hype, yes.

Hype fades.

My latest album did not get much hype – but it was my best work artistically.

My fanbase is as strong as ever.

And I haven't lost a battle in years.

So you can keep trying to create this great rivalry between me and Misha, but you might as well make rivals out of a teacher and a first-grader.

MC WIZZAZARD: I really hope you're right. Or else the fall's gonna hurt. Badly.

SEVA: Oh shut up, you will be the first vulture to arrive.

But don't worry.

I'm not Icarus.

I'm the Sun.

SEVA and MC WIZZZARD exit. DASHA mutes the video.

DASHA: Damn, sometimes you look at a person and think: I wish your parents beat you as a child.

TONYA reenters.

DASHA: Welcome back!

LESYA: You missed Seva's interview.

TONYA: ...

I streamed it on my phone.

Beat.

MC WIZZZARD and MC BEAT BRILLIANT appear on the screen, facing each other. MC COBALT stands in between them as the host.

TONYA: Oh my god, it's starting

LESYA: I thought Wizzard was the host and not one of the battlers

DASHA: Yeah, Cobalt's gonna host this one

TONYA: And if Wizzard wins, Cobalt will also do his semifinal

DASHA: Wizzard is NOT going to win, I don't even know why they are letting him battle. He's just a host.

TONYA: Well I'm not sure why they are letting Beat Brilliant battle either, but anyway LET'S WATCH.

Doorbell.

TONYA: We were not loud, were we?

DASHA: No.

LESYA: No.

TONYA opens the door. NADYA enters, followed by ZABAVA, captivated by an iPad.

TONYA: Hello?

NADYA: Hi! Sorry! Are you Tonya? I'm Nadya. This is Zabava.

TONYA: Yes? Do I know/ you?

NADYA: Sorry! Yes! No, I'm sorry, you don't!

I saw your post online about watching the championship.

I wanted to watch it, but also I feel like I don't understand a lot of it?

And you seem like you do.

So I'm here. I'm Nadya. Oh, and this is Zabava! She is my daughter.

Zabava, say hi.

Zabava!

So I'm here and I would love to watch it with you. Sorry I didn't reach out in advance. I'm so sorry.

TONYA: How did you know where I live?

NADYA: You put your address in the comments? Sorry. I thought it was an open invitation, and...

Oh god. You're way younger than I expected.

TONYA: I'm seventeen.

NADYA: Yes. Sorry.

...

Can I stay?

TONYA is unsure what to do. DASHA comes to her rescue.

DASHA: So why do you want to watch a battle rap championship? With your... child?

NADYA: Oh, sorry, (well, I don't think Zabava is going to watch it, I just couldn't leave her home alone), my husband is in it, and I just wanted to understand rap better? To understand him?

Omg tea.

TONYA: Your HUSBAND?

NADYA: Yes, sorry, my husband Misha.

MC Bear, I think, is his rap name?

He is pretty famous I think. But he doesn't tell me much about it. He doesn't talk to me much at all.

DASHA: Holy shit, so you're the Bear's wife??

NADYA: Yes. So could I please watch the quarterfinals with you? And ask questions?

TONYA: Ah, please! It's just getting started.

NADYA takes a seat. DASHA unmutes. They watch.

4.

The quarterfinals! A montage. Snippets of battles, rotating out of order. The crowd reacting and roaring. Lots of motion and emotions.

MC WIZZARD (to BEAT BRILLIANT):

If Max wins, his daddy will instantly buy him a villa.

If Max loses, he will have to wait for a year.

Dear judges, I beg you: please vote responsibly,

He needs this victory more than anyone here.

YIN-YAN (to SEVA):

Alright, you know me, I dig deep

So I found the number of Seva's mom and called her.

"Hi, I'm an old friend, I'm not some random creep.

Has Seva's fame made him any colder?"

And then she told me – I swear on my life –

"He got so distant, I doubt he will find a wife."

ANTSY ANT (to COBALT):

I'm Antsy Ant, the king of freestyle

I'll slit your throat and do it with a big smile

I heard your mom is easy to beguile?

I'll charm her and defile her meanwhile

I'll send your daddy into exile, then I'll

Fuck the entire nation of Latvia. Why?

Cause' raising a moron like you is a crime.

PARADOXXX (to MC BEAR):

One time this clown saw a circus bear
He got inspired and took it as his name, I swear

BEAT BRILLIANT (to MC WIZZAZARD):

You think you're the host?
No, buddy, you're the parasite.
I'll break your magic wand, Wiz
Then kick you hard and outta sight.
Your rap is shit. This league is yours. So you're in the Top-8?
Man, you are the easiest person to hate.
And you fucking hypocrite bark about my dad and his money?
Not one person thinks YOU deserve being here, you dummy.

COBALT (to ANTSY ANT):

Antsy Ant is not like other girls.
He freestyles because he's too good to prep.
I'm sorry, Anton, but I'll break the news.
You're not like us 'cause we can actually rap.

MC BEAR (to PARADOXXX):

You think you're the OG?
I agree!
If OG stands for "Overstaying Grandpa," dummy.
These rappers took you in. A refugee.
Years later, they display you as the mummy.

SEVA (to YIN-YAN):

Question!
How does it feel to be nothing but a worthless gossip?
You are so boring without rumors –
It's like I want to battle Jesus, but I'm stuck with Joseph!
Your dream of winning "Who's the Tzar?"
Just toss it.
And yes, you can air out my dirty laundry.
But afterwards please wash it, fold it, and put it in the closet.

ALL: Round!

The crowd cheers.

As MC WIZZARD speaks, we see the apartment again. AMINA has returned to the living room. ZABAVA is in the corner on her iPad. LESYA is on her phone. DASHA is sipping a beer. She offers one to TONYA who declines. She offers it to NADYA, and NADYA takes it.

MC WIZZARD:

Yo-yo-yo, this is a wrap on the quarterfinals. We'll be back with the judges' decisions momentarily.

DASHA:

Okay the Bear is moving forward for sure because Paradoxxx was just so bad. We'll see about the rest. Though Beat Brilliant might actually win.

TONYA:

Well, I think Seva will also win because/ he

DASHA:

No, Seva will lose.

TONYA:

No he won't!

DASHA:

Yes, he will.

TONYA:

NO/ HE

LESYA:

Tonya

She's teasing you.

TONYA can't help but laugh.

TONYA (to DASHA):

Okay so you agree he'll win.

DASHA chuckles.

TONYA:

So Nadya

Do you have any questions about the quarterfinals or anything?

NADYA:

Yes, actually, I was wondering...

Suddenly, MC WIZZZARD returns to the screen.

TONYA:

Wait, he's back!

NADYA:

Oh, sorry

MC WIZZZARD:

Alright, the judges have made their decisions.

He produces an envelope. Dramatically opens it.

The first semifinalist is... Beat Brilliant!

That boy beat me fair and square, but don't worry, fans, you'll still see my beautiful face on your screens.

DASHA:

Called it

She clinks beers with NADYA and takes a sip.

MC WIZZZARD:

And Beat Brilliant will battle against... Seva Savage!

TONYA:

Ha!

Wait, give me a beer.

DASHA passes her one. TONYA drinks.

MC WIZZZARD:

And on the other side of the grid, we'll have Cobalt...

TONYA:

Okay

MC WIZZARD:

Versus... you guessed it, MC Bear!

DASHA *(to NADYA):*

Yay! Your man!

NADYA attempts to look excited.

MC WIZZARD:

Same time, next week! Tune in to watch the four greatest rappers in Russia FIGHT. TO. THE. DEATH.

The quarterfinals will seem like a squabble in the sandbox in comparison to the bloodshed you'll see next Saturday.

Beat Brilliant, Seva Savage, Cobalt, and the Bear – one of them will conquer the Russian Rap Empire and become THE TZAAAAAR

The women cheer at the screen. MC WIZZARD exits.

TONYA:

Oh my god I can't waiiiiit

VALENTINA enters. TONYA rushes to hide her beer can, unsuccessfully. VALENTINA sighs but chooses not to care.

VALENTINA:

Is it over?

TONYA:

Yeah

NADYA *(getting up, beer still in her hand):*

Oh we should get going...

...

Oh I probably shouldn't drive.

I'll call a taxi.

VALENTINA:

I can drive you.

NADYA:

You really don't have to. We live kind of far / from

VALENTINA:

That's okay, I really want to get to know the people Tonya invites into this house without notifying anyone.

TONYA:

Mom/ it's

LESYA:

I'll come with!

VALENTINA:

Great!

VALENTINA, LESYA, NADYA, and ZABAVA get on their way.

LESYA:

Can we stop at McDonald's on the way back?

VALENTINA:

Fine

NADYA:

Zabava, please watch where you're going. Almost hit a wall!

They exit.

5.

TONYA and DASHA are alone in the living room. Except AMINA is also there, but that's of no interest to anyone.

TONYA: Man, this was good.

DASHA: Uh-huh

TONYA: Beat Brilliant's shown a lot of growth, you know? I mean there is no way he'll beat Seva in the semifinals. I'm just impressed with him in a way I can't be impressed with Seva. Seva just showed his usual genius, but everyone expected it anyway.

DASHA: Can I say something

TONYA: What?

DASHA: Most of them weren't that good

TONYA looks at her as if she's checking for any trauma to the head.

DASHA: Okay they weren't *bad*

But like

You'd expect more from the supposedly top eight rappers

But they were all like "oooh I'm the hot shit, I can just reuse the same old tricks and formulas, everyone's gonna eat it up anyway"

TONYA: I mean I don't think you can generalize like that...

DASHA: Oh shut up, you're too smart to say we just watched four perfect battles and everyone was perfect and you wouldn't change a thing.

TONYA: Of course not. As I said, the only person who delivers objectively flawless rap is Seva. So he is going to win the championship. Who cares about the rest?

DASHA: I don't think Seva...

Okay, anyway. According to you, it's perfectly fine for all those mediocre rappers to get all the attention, recognition, and so on?? Even though they suck?

TONYA: What are you getting at?

DASHA: What I'm getting at is: how much time do you think you spend on rap? Per day? Watching battles, writing, thinking about it, anything?

TONYA: I don't know, two? Three hours? More right now of course.

DASHA: Right. And when did you get into rap?

TONYA: Like three years ago?

DASHA: Okay, so right around when Beat Brilliant and Cobalt started rapping.

TONYA: I guess?

DASHA: So tell me why, if you all have spent the same amount of time practicing and you all are equally well-versed in battle rap, are the two of them in the semifinals of “Who’s the Tzar?” and you’re stuck here?

TONYA (*getting it*): Ah.

DASHA: Or me, for example.

I show up to Battle for Moscow every week.

I can predict every round, every theme, every punchline.

But when I asked “hey can I participate in ONE battle? Against anyone, even if it’s my opponent’s first time rapping and they’re reading the text off their phone?” they said, “sorry but we can’t do that.”

And at first I was just like “oh they are just dumb and sexist, so weird that those medieval pigs survived long enough to see 21st century Russia.”

I thought they believed my little feminine brain was simply incapable of writing good rap.

TONYA: Damn.

DASHA: So I decided to hit them when they least expected it.

I wrote a diss, about all of them, about how they do nothing but praise idiots, about how they should get on with the times.

I wrote it and I rapped it at them.

It was very impressive.

TONYA: So did they let you battle?

DASHA: No.

But they were very kind.

They said I was talented, and that I’d learned a lot by observing their work all these years. That they wished they could let me on. They DEFINITELY would have if I were a man.

So I was like, “what’s your problem then?”

“Dashenka, you need to understand. Let’s say you’re rather good, we let you battle – everything is good FOR YOU. But then other girls want to rap, too. Do you think THEY have spent that much time learning the craft? No! But all of the sudden we are on this whole equality ride and

we have to include everyone. And two months later, Battle for Moscow's reputation is "oh yeah, female rap" and then no respectable rapper steps a foot inside. Why would we want that? You're decent at rap, but you have to think beyond yourself, honey."

A silence hangs.

TONYA: I hope the system will change.
It would be better to have people like Seva in power.

DASHA:
(Oh my god)

TONYA:
He's more open-minded! He wouldn't let this happen.
And I mean he's already very respectable, but if he won, he could say anything and people would listen.
And I believe he would say the right things.

DASHA: First, how the fuck do you know that?
Second, yeah, let's sit around, like loyal dogs, waiting for a treat.
How do you expect to get any recognition ever for all the work you've been pouring into this?
You won't.
They'll never see you. Or me. Or any girl.

TONYA: Alright, what do you WANT from me? What do you suggest we DO?

DASHA *(with a sentiment of a fisherman who's just caught a huge fish):* Well funny you ask.
What if we battle in "Who's the Tzar?"

TONYA: ...

DASHA: Hear. Me. Out.
What if we inhabit the bodies of... Seva Savage for you, of course, and... I don't know, the Bear for me. And then we get to battle! In the biggest battle rap championship ever!

TONYA: That's a... wonderful fantasy, but Dasha what drugs are you on?

DASHA: The drug of YEARNING.
Please please please listen to me
I wanted to do this for the longest time, but if it's just me, it's so...

But now I know you and you're the first girl I know who cares about battle rap as much as I do.
So if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. We lose nothing.
But would be so cool, if we could just BE THERE
For a little bit
To know what it feels like

TONYA: Okay. Fine. So how the hell do you imagine we do that?

DASHA: Come here.
Okay, so there is this ancient witchcraft ritual...

TONYA: Are you for real?

DASHA: No no no no stay with me.
It hasn't been historically used for battle rap
But only because ancient witches didn't have battle rap
Doesn't mean we can't try

TONYA: (I swear to god)

DASHA: Okay so we'll need these!

She grabs the pictures of Seva Savage and the Bear from the evidence board. Then she takes TONYA's hand, pulls out a pocket knife, and pricks TONYA's finger. Blood.

TONYA: OW! WHAT THE/ FUCK

DASHA (*pricking her own finger*): I'd spend five years convincing you if I had asked.
Give me your hand.

DASHA places TONYA's bloody finger right on Seva's forehead, then puts her own finger on the Bear's.

TONYA: Fantastic.

DASHA (*speaking out, demonic*): OH THE HIGHER BEING LET US INHABIT THE BODIES
OF SOME OF THE FINEST RAPPERS IN RUSSIA. WE ASK FOR TWO WEEKS ONLY. WE
BRING OUR BLOOD AS AN OFFERING.

Something shifts in the room.

DASHA (*back to TONYA*): Okay so now we gotta rap.

In the ancient times, the witches were already possessed so they spoke whatever came to them in the moment, so I guess we have to freestyle. But if freestyling is too hard for you, / you can...

TONYA (*mortally offended*): I CAN freestyle.

DASHA: Okay then whenever you're ready

They freestyle, kind of awkwardly. As they rap, a wind picks up and blows through the room, messing up everything AMINA's worked so hard to clean up. AMINA is trying to mitigate the disaster, unsuccessfully.

TONYA:

All you people should clap,
'Cause I know how to rap
Fuck this, my finger hurts
I believe I was stabbed

DASHA:

I've been here for hours
And I've had a few beers
Oh my god, higher powers!
And to them I say "cheers"

TONYA: Oh my god

DASHA: See! It's working!

But then, things begin to return to normal.

TONYA: Why is it stopping?

DASHA: I don't know.

We might have to...

...

Yo, Tonya, you are a real fucking rapper
I'm trembling at your sight, waiting for demolition
But before we continue, I just gotta know:
For this battle, did you get your mommy's permission?

Ouch. The wind picks back up. TONYA considers for a moment.

TONYA:

Say it, friend, you are SO tough and rough
Independent and brazen, sometimes even cruel.

So you're just like a man? Not enough!
But keep begging for their rap stamp of approval

Suddenly, the wind picks up stronger than ever. The papers fly all over the place. Lights flicker. Paranormal sounds. Even AMINA has given up on trying to keep the space in order. Then, in the midst of it all...

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA (*barging in*): FOR CHRIST'S SAKE CAN EVERYBODY JUST SHUT UP

BOOM. A beam of light. Ultrasound. The whole world moves in slow-motion. The souls of TONYA, DASHA, AMINA, and YAROSLAVA PETROVNA travel through space.

They land in the bar. Into new bodies.

6.

Everyone slowly recovers.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA (*now in the body of COBALT*): Oh god oh god oh god what was THAT?

Taking everything in.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: WHO ARE YOU? WHERE AM I?

Looking at herself. Begins hyperventilating.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: WHAT HAPPENED TO ME? Oh, it's a nightmare, (it's a nightmare).

She begins to slap and pinch herself.

DASHA (*now in the body of MC BEAR*): Wait wait wait wait wait. What is your name?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Yaroslava Petrovna Soikina.

DASHA: Well fuck.

Noticing AMINA.

DASHA: Don't tell me you're Amina.

AMINA *(now in the body of BEAT BRILLIANT):* I am.

DASHA: Well so at least the plan worked!

TONYA *(now in the body of SEVA):* Dasha, what the hell, you didn't stab *them*.

DASHA: You and I are just that powerful, I guess. Carried half of the neighborhood with ourselves.

TONYA: And what are we supposed to DO with Amina and Yaroslava Petrovna here?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Can somebody PLEASE explain what is going on?

TONYA: Okay. So. I'm Tonya. This is Dasha, my friend you met earlier. We were performing a ritual to inhabit the bodies of two rappers, but APPARENTLY

She death stares at DASHA

you got sucked in as well. So now you're in the bodies of Beat Brilliant (that's you, Amina) and Cobalt (Yaroslava Petrovna). And all four of us are in the semi-finals of that battle rap championship we were watching. In St. Petersburg.

AMINA: Got it.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU SAYING GET ME BACK INTO MY OWN BODY RIGHT NOW YOU/ LITTLE

DASHA: WE DON'T KNOW HOW.

TONYA: I'm so sorry, Yaroslava Petrovna. But it should go back to normal in two weeks, right?

DASHA: Yes! It won't be long at all.

And in the meantime you can enjoy living the life of a cool twenty-five-year-old.

Above this bar is a five-star hotel where the rappers are staying, isn't that great?

OR! Or! Have you ever wanted to spend a night with a girl?

I bet girls flock to Cobalt.

You could spend his money, too.

WAIT do you guys think any of them has an iPhone X?

They check their pockets. They all do.

DASHA: (Oh my god wait I wanted to try Face ID so badly)

*They all try Face ID. A truly enthralling experience. It soon settles into them examining their new bodies and faces, either with a phone camera or a backstage mirror or by trying to move, doing push-ups, or *very subtly* examining their new genitals. After a while:*

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: I suppose it would be nice to live without arthritis for two weeks.

...

Oh god, but my cats are home! My husband! That fossil of a man is bed-ridden, he he he can't be without me.

DASHA: Well, our bodies are still at Tonya's apartment. I bet we are just unconscious so they'll figure we are in a coma and take care of everything for a few weeks.

TONYA: Fuckkk, my family is going to get so worried. The entire living room destroyed, the four of us unconscious...

Takes Seva's phone out again.

I have to warn mom/ or Lesya.

DASHA: No way! They won't believe you or if they do, they will either force all of us to go back to Moscow immediately OR call the police on us because we are involved slash know something. All of this would be for nothing! Let them be nervous for a few days, it's not like we're dead.

AMINA: I have a question.

DASHA: Yes, Amina?

AMINA: If our souls are in these men's bodies
Where are *their* souls?

7.

Back at the apartment. Yeah, the living room is destroyed. Four unconscious bodies on the floor and the couch. Slowly, SEVA, MC BEAR, BEAT BRILLIANT, and COBALT open their eyes and look around.

BEAT BRILLIANT (*waking up, now in the body of AMINA*): Where, where am I?

MC BEAR (*now in the body of DASHA*): Wait who are you? Who are all of you?

COBALT (*now in the body of YAROSLAVA PETROVNA*): Girls... OH MY GOD WHAT HAPPENED TO ME

All four discover their new bodies and massively freak out, except SEVA.

SEVA (*now in the body of TONYA*): This is a dream. I'm dreaming.

Gesturing to MC BEAR

Hey, you, slap me.

MC BEAR slaps him, lightly.

SEVA: Ah.

COBALT (*to SEVA*): Hold up. What is your name?

SEVA: Seva. Vsevolod Gordeyev.

MC BEAR: Should I slap you again? To be sure?

SEVA: Okay.

MC BEAR slaps him again, this time HARD.

SEVA: OUCH.

MC BEAR: This is the best day of my life.
Ladies or gentlemen, allow me to introduce myself:
MC Bear.

SEVA mentally stabs him 30 times.

BEAT BRILLIANT (*having fun*): Misha you've changed

MC BEAR (*to BEAT BRILLIANT*): And what is your name, princess?

BEAT BRILLIANT spins around like a girl in a dress and bats his eyelashes.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Max.

COBALT: And I'm Kolya. Cobalt. By the way.

SEVA: This still could be a dream.

I'm dreaming.

We're dreaming

Or tripping.

They contemplate.

COBALT: I don't think so. We were backstage, right after the battles, and then BOOM we're here. Magically.

BEAT BRILLIANT (*taking the apartment in*): What IS this place

MC BEAR discovers the blood-stained pictures of himself and SEVA.

MC BEAR: Seems like we've got big fans.

SEVA: Okay.

Okay.

Okay.

Okay.

Yeah.

What probably happened was...

They did some sort of ritual.

And swapped bodies with the four of us.

Which is not possible, scientifically, of course

But there is no other explanation.

MC BEAR: No I think we *are* tripping

They all think. Nope, this is real.

BEAT BRILLIANT: But we've got semifinals in a week!

SEVA: Max. Let me explain something to/ you

MC BEAR: Oh please the great Seva Savage enlighten us with your wis/dom

SEVA: Misha.

Dramatic reconsideration.

Oh, I was about to tell you to save your witticisms for the final, but I doubt you'll make it past the next round. Nevermind, continue.

COBALT: We are literally stuck in these bodies.
We might not even MAKE IT to the battles.

Chaos ensues.

SEVA: SO AS I WAS SAYING.

Chaos stops.

Thank you.

Kolya, I don't know why the hell a sixty-year-old grandma would want to swap bodies with a rapper, (especially you), and Max, I'm sorry to tell you, but your person might just be the cleaning lady.

But the bodies for Misha and me? Crazy teenage girls. Who throw themselves at me in packs. The worst of them believe they know something about rap and act all surprised when their opinions are not taken seriously.

Like "oh discrimination, women are not allowed to battle in any serious league, we need feminism blah-blah-blah."

And all I wanna tell them is "Saudi Arabia needs feminism. Afghanistan needs feminism. You just need to stop whining, baby girl."

COBALT: No yeah, it's not like we wouldn't let a woman battle if she was actually good. But like, historically, men went off to fight and women stayed home and cooked. Female brains are not wired to be aggressive.

SEVA: Exactly!

So, of course, in between drowning in their worthlessness and avoiding the math homework, these crazy girls attempted something like this.

I bet they are so proud of themselves on the other side. Made it to the semi-finals. Can finally showcase their talents.

BEAT BRILLIANT: No fucking way. I'm gonna call them.

They search for phones. MC BEAR finds one first and begins dialing his number.

SEVA: Let me talk to them. I know how to work them.

SEVA attempts to grab the phone.

MC BEAR: Fuck off

SEVA: What are you even going to say??

They struggle. MC BEAR breaks away.

MC BEAR: I'll ask them to fuck you in the ass.

Dial tones.

And then, LESYA enters through the main door. She takes in the mess.

MC BEAR cancels the call.

LESYA: What the fuck.

SEVA: We got into a fight.

LESYA: Who?

BEAT BRILLIANT: All of us.

MC BEAR: We couldn't decide if Seva Savage was the worst rapper of all time or just of our generation.

LESYA: Tonya, what the fuck is going on?

Also, mom is going to kill you.

SEVA: Where *is* mom?

LESYA: She ran into Auntie Galya downstairs. They're chatting. So she'll be up any second now in the next three hours.

SEVA: Okay. I'll explain everything. But first we need to clean up.

They all clean.

8.

DASHA is staring at the Bear's phone, ringing. TONYA, AMINA, and YAROSLAVA PETROVNA are looking over her shoulder.

DASHA: It's my number. They are calling me.

TONYA: Pick it up.

DASHA: No fucking way.

The phone stops ringing.

DASHA: Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck

TONYA: They might want to call off the championship. Like, call Wizzard and say "hey Gena so there's this situation... Can we postpone for a few weeks?"

DASHA: He won't believe them. He probably won't even answer the phone.

TONYA: Well then they'll call all their friends and relatives. Tell them something super private. I don't know. They'll find a way.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Bravo, girls, so well done.

DASHA: Okay can you maybe talk to Lesya and ask her to knock them out. Somehow. Or lock them up somewhere.

Awkward silence.

TONYA: I think we need to call it off.

DASHA: We can't!/

TONYA: We need to talk to Wizzard and ask him to postpone the championship by two weeks. Then call the guys and APOLOGIZE and then pray to god they won't come after us when this is over.

AMINA: No.

They see Amina for the first time. DASHA whistles.

TONYA: What?

AMINA: We can have the upper hand. If we play our cards right.

DASHA: That's what I'm saying!

TONYA: How?

AMINA: Blackmail. We have all their lives here.

She points at BEAT BRILLIANT's phone.

But that might not be necessary. We can first ask them nicely. Like, "hey we really wanted to battle, can we cooperate?"

DASHA: I don't think those men would want to cooperate on anything.
But I like the blackmail idea.

AMINA: Well, if they don't cooperate, you can be the first to blackmail them.

TONYA: Okay, fine, let's give it a try.
But why do *you* care about this at all?

AMINA: I don't want to clean apartments forever.
Though you guys are very fun.

TONYA: Fair enough.

Yaroslava Petrovna, are you on board?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: What the hell IS battle rap?

DASHA: You basically insult your opponent and make it rhyme.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA hides her excitement. She didn't realize how much she craved this.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: I'm in.

TONYA: Great!

Okay, I'm calling Lesya and we can figure out how we're going to prepare for the semifinals.

DASHA: What do you mean?

TONYA: Like when the rappers will send their text to us, how we're gonna practice, etc.

Oooh! I also have to ask if Seva's okay meeting with my physics tutor once a week. That should be fine, right?

AMINA: Definitely.

DASHA: Wait Tonya you're not serious, right?

TONYA: What do you mean?

DASHA: Like, I thought "cooperating" meant they say nothing, we say nothing, they leave us alone to battle?

TONYA: Oh, I mean...

But we don't actually know how to...

And we don't have their text. Like we don't know what to say about each of them/

DASHA: Are you kidding me?

Seva is a snob, the Bear is an asshole, Beat Brilliant is a brat, and Cobalt is a pussy. Boom. Done. Championship won.

AMINA: Tonya meant we're not as good as them, so if we write our own text, we'll just embarrass ourselves and drag the viewership down.

DASHA: Amina. Thank You for your contributions, but this is not your decision to make. And you're only here by mistake.

TONYA: Dasha/

DASHA: No, okay, okay, this is harsh. But I'm just saying that we just got this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and you're suggesting we throw it away and run back to men and then basically become their puppets for the next two weeks? Like is that what you wanted Tonya?

TONYA: I wanted to... I don't know.
But I... I think I want to call Seva and talk to him first. And decide what to do.

DASHA: Oh, right, Seva

AMINA: Yes. I will also talk to Beat Brilliant.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: And I'm not sure how to do rap.
Who do I call?

DASHA (to **TONYA**): You're just a fan girl. You're such a...
(To all): Have fun. Have so much fun.
I'm going to go write some rap.

DASHA exits. A short silence, then TONYA pulls out her phone and dials a number.

TONYA: Hello my lovely sister. How was McDonald's?
Alright alright I do have stuff to tell you.

9.

The end of this phone conversation. LESYA, SEVA, MC BEAR, COBALT, and BEAT BRILLIANT are now in a much cleaner apartment.

LESYA: Uh-huh. Okay. I see. Damn. And what did you say? Okay. Yeah. Oh my god. No yeah. Okay. I'll tell them. Yeah, right. Okay okay byeeee.

LESYA hangs up the phone.

SEVA: What did she say?

LESYA: They are going to assume your identities and battle in the championship./

BEAT BRILLIANT: No fucking way/

LESYA: And you all will be very nice about it and never give an indication that anything is wrong. Or else they'll blackmail you because they have all your lives at their fingertips.

COBALT: Oh there is nothing to blackmail us for.

The tiniest awkward silence from the other three rappers.

MC BEAR: That's fine. Whatever. It's not rocket science. We'll train them. Like parrots.

LESYA: Well, so, actually, all of them agreed to be in communication with you. Except for Dasha.

MC BEAR: Who's Dasha?

LESYA: ...

SEVA: Life is wonderful.

MC BEAR: The fuck? What is she gonna do, write her own rap, in my name?

SEVA: Lesya, I agree, I don't think it's fair if someone ghostwrites for Misha. Then his rap might actually be good.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Can we talk to her? Just for fairness' sake. I don't know, good sportsmanship.

(to SEVA): Unless you think you will lose if Misha writes his own text.

SEVA opens his mouth but changes his mind. He nods.

LESYA: Anyway, each of you also has a list of responsibilities while you're here. A failure to comply will lead to/

ALL: Blackmail.

LESYA: Exactly!

Seva, Max, and Kolya, expect a call from yourself first thing in the morning.

Misha... do you want to play Slither.io with me?

MC BEAR buries his head in his hands.

MC BEAR: Sure.

10.

Next morning. TONYA dials a phone number. Waits. SEVA picks up.

SEVA: Hello!

TONYA: Hi!

Oh my god!

Wow this is real.

I'm talking to you but also to myself

And oh god

Wow

SEVA: Yes, quite an experience, haha.

I feel so young though!

TONYA: Ah, yes!

...

Do you remember (me)...

I was at one of your concerts in Moscow a few years ago.

And we met.

SEVA: Oh my god, yes!

I did think my new face was familiar.

Oh but I'm sorry, I can't recall the specific conversation.

It's unfortunate, you know, that when you get so big, you stop remembering people.

Too many to keep in mind.

Though I try my best.

TONYA: Oh.

No yeah.

I understand.

That's okay then...

SEVA: I'll certainly remember you now!

TONYA: That's true.

...

Oh my god.

...

I'm so sorry.

...

I like totally fucked up your life now.

SEVA: Oh Tonya, we all are so stupid at seventeen.

I mean I'm not saying you're stupid!/

TONYA: No, no, no, I am. Stupid.

It's like what was I thinking, taking away *your* championship and *your* life.

SEVA: But was it your idea? To do this?

TONYA: No but I wanted...

But Dasha suggested it.

SEVA: And why did she want to do it?

TONYA: She wanted to battle, I guess. Said she couldn't do it because she was a woman.

I just kind of acted emotionally when she suggested we do *this*.

SEVA: Tonya, I'm not blaming you.

TONYA: You're not?

SEVA: Well, she manipulated you and it takes maturity to recognize manipulation.

I can't blame you for being young.

TONYA: What do you mean, manipulated?

SEVA: Took your love for battle rap and weaponized it?

Made herself a victim?

What did you say, brought up the whole "women can't battle" argument?

She sounds so convincing

But do you know who she *is*?

TONYA: We were online friends for a while...
But this was my first time meeting her.

SEVA: Right.
Well, I happen to know her.

TONYA: Really?

SEVA: Seen her around.
Battle for Moscow, mostly.
Avoided her.
She's so... despicable. Like some sort of invasive species of battle rap.
I don't know why they keep her around. Probably to collect the entrance fees.
Huge ego, for no good reason. Convinced she is excellent at rap, on the basis of nothing? Her own divine judgment?
Yin-Yan told me she tried to diss them and it was just so embarrassing.
But apparently instead of just banning her, Antsy Ant gave some semi-reasonable explanation.
Flattered her, I don't know.
And I said, this doesn't sound like Ant.
And Yan said, he just wants to get laid.
And I said, seems like the only thing she wants to do with men is hate them.
If you know what I mean.
But anyway, I didn't expect her to secretly possess witchcraft powers, you know?

TONYA: I mean she is right about women's lack of access to battle rap.

SEVA: Tonya, EVERYONE has a lack of access to battle rap.
You know how many submissions each platform has?
Thousands.
All obsessed teenagers, convinced they are the next me.
But sure, she specifically cannot break through because she's a woman.

TONYA: I haven't thought about it like that.
But I think you're right.

Unnoticed by TONYA, DASHA enters the room.

And you know, I have been feeling very off about Dasha this whole time.
Like she is just so aggressive? And rude? And inconsiderate?

And for a moment, I was like, wow, she's so cool, she doesn't care what people think.
But she just sucks.
I still blame myself for falling for this.
But I will do better.
I'm going to make it up for you.
I'll memorize all your lines.
I'll practice the rounds for hours and hours and hours.
I'll do my very best.
I promise.
Okay, bye for now, Seva.

She hangs up. After a moment, she feels DASHA's presence and faces her. The girls stand off. DASHA is holding back tears. TONYA is performing her best nonchalance. Then, DASHA storms off. TONYA stays.

11.

DASHA is alone. Trying to write, mumbling. Nothing works.

AMINA crosses the room, on the phone with BEAT BRILLIANT.

AMINA: Yes, I'm going to write it down. "A punchline is like punching your opponent in the face. With words." Understood, yes. Okay, so... Yes, I'm following.

She finds a pen.

Oh, here! Okay, I'm ready.

She exits. Shortly, YAROSLAVA PETROVNA enters, on the phone with COBALT.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA (reciting a line): "The Bear thinks he's the shit"

Oh my, do we have to use profanities?

Okay, okay, I'm learning.

"The Bear thinks he's the shit"

Less poetic, more aggressive?

"The Bear thinks he's the shit"

How was that?

Oh, hello Dasha

I should probably go somewhere else

"The Bear thinks he's the shit"

“The Bear thinks he’s the shit.”

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA exits. Soon TONYA walks in, sees DASHA.

TONYA: How is it going?

DASHA is silent.

TONYA: Heeey

Nothing.

TONYA: Wow okay.

I guess I’ll wait until the semifinals to find out what you the genius could come up with.
Seva is letting me give him suggestions, by the way.

DASHA: Did he also provide knee pads when he asked you to suck his dick?

TONYA: ...

You know I’m gonna go now.

I’m sure you will get very far if you continue to push people away because you think you’re better than everyone.

Good luck with Cobalt.

TONYA exits. DASHA thinks for a while. Then, she takes out her phone and texts something. In a moment, YAROSLAVA PETROVNA enters.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Dasha. Dasha. Can you look at this? It says there is an emergency virus or something on my phone/

DASHA (*fake concerned*): Oh my god, can I see?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA hands her the phone.

DASHA: Oh. Oh no. This is bad. This might break the phone forever. Did you do anything?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: No, no, I don’t think so, but also I don’t know how to use this thing really. Oh god, Dasha, can you do something?

DASHA: Oh Yaroslava Petrovna, this doesn't look good. But I think I can try. It will take me a few hours though. Is that okay? Did you finish with Cobalt?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Yes, he is just writing now. Oh, thank you so much! Goddamn technology.

DASHA: No problem. What's the password?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Six-nine-six-nine.

DASHA: I'll bring it up to your hotel room once I'm done, okay?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Yes! Thank you.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA exits. DASHA grins. She picks up her notebook again and begins going through Cobalt's phone and writing things down.

12.

SEVA and TONYA on the phone.

SEVA: What is the easiest thing to battle Beat Brilliant for?

TONYA: His dad is crazy rich. Everyone's talked about that since Max's first battle.

SEVA: Correct. And what does it mean for us?

TONYA: We won't mention it? Find something else?

SEVA: Tonya, if we don't mention it, it will be the same as walking into a grocery store and then deciding to go hunting for food instead. No, we have to take the ingredients and cook something delicious.

TONYA (*teasing him*): Will our round be full of these beautiful metaphors?

SEVA (*cracking a smile*): You're funny. But you know what I'm saying, right?

TONYA: Take Max's rich dad and go deeper with it?

SEVA: Attagirl.

Beat.

TONYA: Do you think I can maybe help you write some lines?

SEVA: Oh! Well, I'd be curious to see what you think, but it would be better to have a single voice for the round. For consistency. Plus, I really don't want to overburden you! You already have so much to memorize.

TONYA: Yeah, of course. I just really wanted to try writing stuff and I thought maybe with your feedback I could become better.../

SEVA: No, I hear you. How about this? I'll write the semifinal and then we'll see if there's an opportunity for you to get more involved in the final. Sounds good?

TONYA: Yeah...

SEVA: I really value you, Tonya. The Bear is crying in the corner right now because of your fucked-up friend and the other two are still explaining the difference between a battle and a rebuttal. So I'm glad I ended up with you in this whole mess.

TONYA: Thank you, yeah, I'm also very honored to work with you.

SEVA: I'll send you the text once it's done and a voice memo of the delivery. Cool?

TONYA: Yeah. Bye, Seva.

SEVA: Bye-bye.

SEVA hangs up. He's alone in the living room. He starts writing. Soon, the doorbell rings. BEAT BRILLIANT enters and gets ready to clean.

SEVA: Oh, Max! Wait, the apartment is not ready. I was just about to spill some milk on the floor and then shit on top of it.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Wow reckless girl, don't get yourself grounded.

He begins to clean. VALENTINA enters.

VALENTINA: Tonya, get yourself ready, we're going to your grandmother's for dinner.

SEVA: Mom, I would love to, but I have so much homework.

VALENTINA: Let me see.

She approaches SEVA's notebook. Reads.

VALENTINA: Semifinal against Beat Brilliant.

SEVA: This is private!

VALENTINA: Theme: Max's rich dad equals he fundamentally has no spine as/ a person.

SEVA: STOP IT.

VALENTINA: Question: How to approach the topic without repeating what everyone and their mother has/ already said?

SEVA: GIVE IT TO ME.

SEVA snatches the notebook. BEAT BRILLIANT is having the time of his life.

VALENTINA: I'll see you in the car in two minutes. And if you lie to me again, this weekend I'll let Amina rest and make you scrub the entire apartment instead of watching your rap. Is that clear?

SEVA: Yes.

VALENTINA: Thought so.

VALENTINA exits the apartment. SEVA picks up his stuff and moves it into the apartment, to Tonya's room, then comes back out and exits. BEAT BRILLIANT waits a few seconds, checks the rest of the apartment, and dials a phone number.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Hey, you can come up here now. Nobody's home.

He cleans for a bit. Then he sits down and writes his semifinal round: mumbles some lines, writes things down, etc. Eventually, the doorbell rings. He gets the door. MC BEAR enters.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Come on in.

MC BEAR (*affectionately*): Hey Cinderella.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Surprisingly, I don't really mind. I can place a mop in front of me and pretend it's Seva. Sometimes I can't tell the two apart. Great for practicing.

MC BEAR: Oh. Nice.

BEAT BRILLIANT: How are you holding up?

MC BEAR: I spent the past three days reading positive comments about my rap. Watching YouTube videos of fans analyzing my battles. You know, before they all disappear after that bitch does god knows what at the semifinal.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Hey, maybe she just does a mediocre round, and people will go "Ah, not the best day for the Bear, it happens" People will still think highly of you. Or if not, you'll bounce back! It's gonna be okay.

MC BEAR hugs Beat Brilliant.

MC BEAR: I hope so.

13.

The semifinal eve! MC WIZZARD is live on YouTube with YIN-YAN, PARADOXXX, and ANTSY ANT.

MC WIZZARD: Ayo! Ayo! Ayo!

This is still me, your favorite host MC Wizzard, and TONIGHT we are here to watch the SEMIFINALS of WHO'S THE TZAAAR?

Now I'm here with Yin-Yan, Antsy Ant, and Paradoxxx. These three shamefully lost the quarterfinals last week, but here they are again, eager to witness two of the juiciest battles this year.

My friends, what are your bets for tonight?

ANTSY ANT: The Bear will eat Cobalt alive and Beat Brilliant will finally put Seva in his place.

YIN-YAN: Maybe. Maybe not. I will say though, the four of them have been weirdly *private* all week. I tried to talk to Max like “ooh, how are you feeling, you ready for Seva?” and he was like, “Yes.” That’s it! And then I talked to Misha and he told me to fuck off.

PARADOXXX: Okay Yan, but you have to understand that the four of them are under enormous pressure. I remember how nervous I felt when I was just getting started in rap. So the boys will do their best tonight and then relax and grab beers with us after.

MC WIZZZARD: I personally will drink some Spartan Beer, who is still our most generous sponsor. And if you post a picture of yourself drinking Spartan Beer with a hashtag Beer for the Tzar, you will enter a lottery for two tickets for the FINAL next Saturday.

The four men produce four cans of Spartan Beer.

ALL: Cheers.

Back at the apartment, where SEVA, MC BEAR, BEAT BRILLIANT, and COBALT are watching the livestream.

MC BEAR: Girrrlls I want to go to the final so bad, let’s take a million selfies and post them all. Hashtag Beer for the Tzar, Hashtag I Love Battle Rap, Hashtag Wizzzard You Are So Cool.

He begins taking selfies in the most stereotypical Instagram “girl” poses you can think of. Everyone just stares at him.

MC BEAR: Y’all should relax a little bit. It’s not like you don’t have absolutely any control over your semifinal.

SEVA: Misha, if I win “Who’s the Tzar?,” I’m going to donate all my money to you because it sounds like you’re suffering more than all orphans on the planet.

BEAT BRILLIANT: So did you figure out how to talk about my rich dad without saying what everyone and their mother has already said?

COBALT’s phone rings. He picks up.

COBALT: Hi. Yes. What? Oh my god, are you in public? Go somewhere private if you’re gonna ask stupid questions. Yes, Yaroslava Petrovna, you should address the Bear directly UNLESS the line is a question for the crowd. Yes. Yes. And don’t call me now, you need to go socialize with everyone and stop acting weird. Are you memorized? Good. Okay, go.

Goddamn it.

MC BEAR: Somebody's nervous.

Doorbell. LESYA enters from inside the apartment and gets the door. NADYA and ZABAVA enter. ZABAVA is on her iPad.

MC BEAR: Jesus Christ!

LESYA: Hi *Dasha*! Nadya is back to watch the semifinals like she did *last week*. Nadya, do you remember everyone? Tonya, Dasha, Amina. Oh, and this is Yaroslava Petrovna, she's new this week.

NADYA: Nice to meet you!

LESYA: I'll join you all in a minute, but I'm sure I can trust you all to be on your best behavior with our guests, right?

SEVA: Very best.

LESYA goes back inside. Nobody invites Nadya to sit.

SEVA: So Nadya, can you please remind us all why you came here?

NADYA: Yes, sorry!

My husband Misha hasn't been involved in the family and I think it's because I'm not able to support him in his career and I know nothing about battle rap so I'm watching his battles and maybe if I can talk to him about them, he'll want to spend time with me. And Zabava.

SEVA: Really?

NADYA: Yeah, and since he went to St. Petersburg, we haven't talked. He hasn't replied to my texts all week. Hasn't picked up the phone either.

SEVA: Is that so!

MC BEAR: Okay Nadya, but maybe you should consider that he's under huge pressure right now and this championship is a big deal and you should respect that and not whine for his

attention like a newborn? That he should trust you to stay home and take care of the kid while he's literally making thousands to support the whole family?

BEAT BRILLIANT (*touching his shoulder*): Hey, easy

NADYA: It's my birthday.

Silence.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Happy birthday, Nadya.

MC BEAR: Happy birthday.

NADYA's on the verge of tears.

NADYA: Sorry, could I use the restroom?

SEVA: It's all the way down the hall.

NADYA goes into the apartment. The men are silent. ZABAVA is playing on her iPad.

14.

The semifinals! A moment backstage. TONYA, DASHA, AMINA, and YAROSLAVA PETROVNA finalize their prep in private. Rehearsing last gestures, checking the words. DASHA has a folder. Finally, a green light invites them to go out. They enter the stage and join MC WIZZAZARD, ANTSY ANT, YIN-YAN, and PARADOXXX.

MC WIZZAZARD: And here they are!!! Without further ado, the first semifinal, Seva Savage vs. Beat Brilliant.

TONYA and AMINA take their places.

MC WIZZAZARD: First, Seva.

The crowd cheers, then quiets. TONYA begins the round. She's killing it. "Oooh"s and "Yeah"s from the crowd all throughout.

TONYA:

Beat Brilliant, he's resilient,

He's resisting his pedigree's silhouette.
Silly exhibit, B, really. And
Your ceiling is these semis, see?
Feeling it?

Oh. I see you are confused.
My rhymes are hard to grasp without a tutor.
Okay, Maxim, I can slow down for you
And still destroy you like a fucking shooter.

I state a thesis: this trust fund rapper
Is either spineless or just dumb.
'Cause y'all remember well how
Misha destroyed Max in a massacre of one.

The Bear insulted all your family,
Brought you to tears to entertain the crowd.
But you're above it, am I right?
Best friends with "Person Misha" now and proud.

And I'm a rapper, not a shrink,
But could diagnose you in a blink:

You spent all your life getting all that you wanted.
For each of your whims, daddy rounded five servants.
Then all of a sudden, the Bear comes around.
Puts you in your place, mud kisses your face.

You hate, you resent him, but then realize,
"Oh, this is what humanhood's actually like."
To get disappointed, feel the range of emotions.
You'd had a puddle of feelings, the Bear gave you oceans.
So you substituted your daddy for him, and now I am chuckling,
At this perfect duo, the Bear and his Duckling.

And Max, nobody will mention your dad,
Or Misha the Bear, which I know I just did,
Once you grow up and become your own man,
Once you're interesting enough on your own merit, kid.

Round!

The crowd cheers.

MC WIZZARD: Give it up for Seva Savage!

The crowd cheers some more.

MC WIZZARD: Beat Brilliant, your response.

AMINA takes the stage. Not as strong and confident as Tonya, still she does her damn best.

AMINA:

Rumor has it, when Seva was a kid,
He was the smartest little boy in class.
Today I wanna smack your teacher in the face
For failing to call out your annoying ass.

Seriously, man, your fucking arrogance
Allows you to be a fine rapper, whatever.
But what's the point of having all of your fandom
If not one person is a fan of the real-life Seva?

AMINA: And...

Oh no, she forgot the words!

AMINA: And... smart boy...

The crowd murmurs. And then... she got it!

AMINA:

And deep-down, that little smart boy,
Still wants the love, the friendship, inclusion.
But you, psycho, are set on being the best,
And dismiss anyone who rejects your delusion.

You think you're the Sun, and I agree,
But not 'cause you help all of life from Day One.

A fact way more simple jumps into my mind.
Nobody wants to get close to the Sun.

Round!

The crowd cheers.

MC WIZZZARD: Give it up for Beat Brilliant!

The crowd cheers some more.

MC WIZZZARD: Without further ado, let's begin our second semifinal, Cobalt vs. MC Beaaaaaar!

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA and DASHA take their places. DASHA places the folder on the ground next to her.

MC WIZZZARD: Cobalt, start us off!

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA is ready. So ready.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA:

The Bear thinks he's the shit.
He walks like he's a champion already.
But here I am to show you all.
The only bear he is, is teddy.

Misha the Bear is a Perfect Man.
He's witty, fun, admired.
A gorgeous wife, a sweet, sweet child.
Hey, slug, so what the hell you hidin'?
All perfect guys like you, and let me tell,
Have trafficked drugs or killed a man.

Round!

The crowd cheers.

MC WIZZZARD: Give it up for Cobalt!

Misha, your response.

DASHA:

Ayooooo

(Begins poetic)

Kolya-Kolya-Kolya Cobalt.

Like the most boring opponent.

He's so forgettable that y'all

Think today I'm battling alone.

But no, Kolyan, I'll help you out.

After tonight, and you trust me,

Your name will ring without a doubt

Across all comments, homes, and streets.

Ready?

Let's start with some audience participation.

For all you rap experts I only have one question.

How would you describe Cobalt in one word?

Timur, you wanna start?

PARADOXXX: Young.

DASHA: Very true. Yan?

YIN-YAN: Friendly.

DASHA: Awwww

ANTSY ANT: Promising.

DASHA: Good one.

Promising, young, and friendly Cobalt.

You ask me, "Misha, how can you even find fault

With this extraordinary and kind human being?

Just seeing him in person feels like sight-seeing.

Yes, he might be boring and not quite have a personality,

But he's likeable and sweet, the rest is a formality."

My dear spectators I must admit,
At first I was like "Holy shit,
Well, how can I commit my wit
And write a bit to beat this twit?"
It was so hard I thought I'd quit!

But then one fateful afternoon,
Just as I left my hotel room
I turn the corner and here's BOOM
A phone.
Dropped on the floor, all on its own.

I look around. Good, alone.
Pick up the phone – it's Cobalt's phone
The picture's Kolya On A Boat.
My mind is blown. "Ah, what's the code?"
I try: six-nine-six-nine. Game on!

At first, I wanted to return it.
But then a text pops up. Maternal.
His mommy writes, and let me quote it.
"Kol', honey, find a job, I'm stern now."

I read more texts and let me tell
To be his mom's to be in hell.

His mom's a teacher, low paychecks.
She texts, hey Kolya, for the next
Month, the electric bill just wrecks
My savings, can you please, she begs,
Help pay for them with your rap checks?
Kolyan says no. He's gotta flex.
He buys himself an iPhone X.

My friends, when I was twenty-five,
My wife was pregnant with my child.
This imbecile still lives with mommy,
Does nothing but bad rap and spends her money.

In here he's tough, he'll murder his opponent,
But I'mma tell the truth because I'm on it
The only murder Kolya Slacker will engrave
Is grinding Mama Cobalt to an early grave.

I must admit! I mustn't lie!
He *wants* to move and say bye-bye
To living with his mom. This guy
Decided he must try, try, try
To get a laAady, god, oh my!

Who here wants to witness
This Don Juan charming a princess?

The crowd cheers.

Alright.

This loser spends his days and nights,
On hitting up all girls, online.
I checked his Tinder, then DMs,
And found trillions of gems.

Wizzard, can you role-play with me?

MC WIZZARD: Sure?

DASHA: I am Cobalt, you're a girl.

"Hey"

MC WIZZARD: "Hey"

DASHA:

"Send nudes."
Because who cares about preludes!

But no, my friends, don't think that Kolya
Has mating instincts of a border collie.
Sometimes this master of flirtation

Wants to have a true, deep conversation.

(to MC WIZZZARD) “Hey”

MC WIZZZARD: “Hey”

DASHA: “You wanna hear what I think about women?”

MC WIZZZARD: “Not really”

DASHA: “They’re weak, dependable, and ugly if not skinny.”
Your words!

And other times, he calls a girl a bitch
If she rejects him or says a gentle “maybe.”
Sometimes he texts them that he has an itch,
So “please come sit on my lap, oh baby.”

But Kolya is a real good Casanova,
So he deploys one secret ancient trick.
And when a girl is just about to block him.
He blesses her with his magnetic dick.

She picks up the folder.

Ladies and gentlemen, please witness a collection
That is so sexy, you will get an erection.

She takes out the first printed out dick pic and shows it to the crowd.

This masterpiece was presented to Natasha

She takes out the next one.

This one shot straight to the DMs of Sasha.

She keeps taking out and showing the dick pics and throwing them in the air once she’s done with them.

Laura. Nina. Olga. Lyuba.

Lena. Inga. Sveta. Yulia.

What, motherfucker, you're not having a blast?
Well, neither did the girls so you can kiss my ass.

She shakes out the rest of the folder over YAROSLAVA PETROVNA's head. The dick pics fall to the ground.

So listen here, you slimy waste of space.
Your rap career will disappear without a trace.
You'll never find love or be a good son.
Good luck in your next life, since you failed this one.

Round!

The crowd roars.

15.

As the crowd celebrates and congratulates DASHA, COBALT appears back in the apartment. He's highly disturbed. Eventually, we see SEVA, MC BEAR, BEAT BRILLIANT, NADYA, ZABAVA, and LESYA back at the apartment, but the focus remains on COBALT. MC WIZZARD appears on the screen.

MC WIZZARD: AYOOOO and that's a wrap on the semifinals!
Oh boy, tonight we witnessed something truly historic.
MC Bear... Oh, Misha, you're certainly going to go down as a battle rap legend.
It's not a secret that MC Bear advances to the finals. The judges didn't even have to discuss the decision.
As for the second finalist...

He produces an envelope, opens, and reads.

Ah, Seva wins because of better memorization.

But ANYWAY, stay tuned for the FINAL of WHO'S THE TZAAAAR. On your screens and here in St. Petersburg, same time, next week. But man, if I were Seva, I'd live in fear. Ahhh, I love battle rap.

MC BEAR: Wow, we all really underestimated MC Bear, didn't we?

SEVA: Oh so you think it's okay to do that? That morality or human decency don't matter?

MC BEAR: You're so right, I forgot that we are in a Sunday school and not a battle rap championship. But hey *Seva* can memorize well, he's got something going on for him too.

The world starts spinning around COBALT.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Can both of you chill out?

SEVA: No, actually, let's/ talk...

VALENTINA enters.

VALENTINA: What on earth is all this shouting about?

LESYA: All's good, mom.

COBALT begins getting up.

COBALT: I'm gonna go...

But he can't move. He begins struggling to breathe and collapses back on the couch. Chaos, as everyone tries to help him. NADYA begins doing CPR.

16.

Transition to: St. Petersburg! Backstage. Everyone enters. DASHA's on top of the world.

YIN-YAN: Two million views already! It hasn't even been an hour.

ANTSY ANT: You killed it, man.

PARADOXXX (*tapping YAROSLAVA PETROVNA on the back*): Kolya, damn, that was brutal. But don't worry, people will forget about it. Like in 2013 when I lost to Seva... You remember that, Seva? Yeah, but look at me now!

MC WIZZAZARD: Oh nobody's gonna forget *that*. Misha, thank you. Just thank you.

DASHA: Alright, alright, I'll meet you out there. First round on me!

The men cheer and exit.

DASHA: Well, well, well. Look at us! Bulldozed our way into the championship and they just. Ate. It. Up. Loooooosers!

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: You lied to me.

DASHA: What?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: You said my phone had a virus...

TONYA *(to DASHA)*: You did WHAT?

DASHA: Okay! Fine! My bad! But don't you turn into Cobalt defenders oh my god.

TONYA: No, I think it's more about, you know, not stabbing each other in the back?/

DASHA: Tonya, what?/

TONYA: Yeah, not turning against each other?/

DASHA: Oh REALLY? Says the girl who became Seva's little dog the second we got here./

TONYA: Little dog?

DASHA: Or no, who has ALWAYS been Seva's little dog without a single brain cell to think for her/self.

TONYA: Damn/ okay

DASHA: I go off and deliver one of the best rounds in battle rap history. And where did Seva get you?

TONYA: The finals.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA's phone rings. She picks up.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Hi, Lesya. What? Okay. Where? Okay. Oh god, okay. What do they say? Yes. Okay, thank you. Bye.

She hangs up.

TONYA: What happened?

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: Kolya had a heart attack. With complications. He's hospitalized.

She sits down.

DASHA: What.

TONYA: Right! Because the only way to win a rap battle is to destroy someone's life and make him so stressed he'd get a heart attack! Masterfully done, Your Highness.

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: I need to go to Moscow.

TONYA: Of course!

YAROSLAVA PETROVNA: I... I'm gonna go.

She exits.

TONYA: Congratulations on your Historic Round. I'm going to go help her pack.

She exits.

DASHA and AMINA are alone. A silence. DASHA drinks. AMINA cleans up the space. Eventually:

DASHA: Fuck this.
But it was a good round.

AMINA: It was.

DASHA grabs a couple of beers, exits. AMINA pulls out her phone, dials.

AMINA: Hi, dad. I'm good, I'm good. I lost. Nah, it's fine.

Listen, my friend's grandma just had a heart attack. It's pretty bad. Could you send her one of our doctors? Or put her in private care? Yeah. She's in Hospital Number Seven, I think? Last name is Soikina. Yeah, cool, thanks.

Also, how much do you usually pay housekeepers?

She hears a VERY good number.

Oh! Well, my other friend has this housekeeper and she's very good. So I'll ask if that's enough for her, but if we can hire her, that would be great. She can help with the garden, too. She loves gardening.

Okay, okay. Love you! Bye.

AMINA hangs up. Smiles.

17.

TONYA and SEVA on the phone.

TONYA: No, yeah, and then she was acting all smug while there was a literal life-or-death situation!

SEVA: Tonya, I agree. She crossed the line on so many levels.

TONYA: Yeah, and then she was all like "well, what did Seva get you? What did Seva get you?" like if my contributions didn't mean anything!

SEVA: Woah, woah, Tonya, you don't believe that, do you?

TONYA: No, but just because I didn't write the semifinal round, it doesn't mean I wasn't capable of it!

SEVA: Of course. But I want you to know, you delivered an outstanding performance that helped us win. The Bear did a dumb spectacle. That won't fly against us in the finals.

TONYA: Oh, trust me, I'm not letting your phone out of sight.

SEVA: Well, it's not like I wouldn't delete anything right away. Cobalt's an idiot for keeping all those texts in the first place.

TONYA: What would you delete?

SEVA: No, like, hypothetically.
Anyway, let's prep for the Bear.

TONYA: Yes! Oh my god, I have so many ideas. We could make a whole round about how he has this huge clown persona blah-blah-blah and how he seems so popular and surrounded by friends at all times, but his wife is miserable. His daughter is neglected. So, in the end, he is a huge hypocrite. We could really spin it off, I think. Like...

To make her forget she had a real dad,
The Bear glued his daughter to an iPad.

Something like that.

SEVA: Wow, a good start. There's a problem though.

TONYA: What problem?

SEVA: Well, it's a little bit naive to think those men give a damn about the Bear's family issues. *You* condemn him because you're a woman and because you've been raised right. But to them? "Oh, thank God, the Bear isn't wasting time on cooking dinners or doing laundry."

TONYA: Ah, you're right. Well, what if we double down on his clowning and show that, yes, he's good at knowing what to say and how to be liked. But he himself is empty and hiding behind a mask.

SEVA: Good thinking! And you know how we can show that?

TONYA: How?

SEVA: Okay, so the Bear and Beat Brilliant. Good friends.

TONYA: Right.

SEVA: So, after their battle last year, I was sure Max's career was over. I came up to the Bear and said, "Misha, this child probably hates you now. There is truly no way for him to recover from this." I made a joke that Max was going to ask his dad to hire a hitman or maybe fly to the Maldives for the winter to cure his post-defeat depression. We had a good laugh about it.

And yet, next time I saw both of them at the Cobalt-Paradoxxxx battle in Moscow, a month later, they were... friendly. Stood next to each other through the whole thing, Max even went to get two beers for them at some point.

TONYA: So that's when they became friends?

SEVA: Yeah, I thought, "Interesting," but didn't pay too much attention.

I came up to the Bear after the battle and asked if he wanted to go get drinks. Surely, he'd be happy to hang out with his good old friend Seva.

But no.

Turns out, he had to rush home because his kid was sick and his wife was mad and he was very sorry, but no, Seva, next time.

And for a brief second, I was pleasantly surprised that my friend was becoming a family man.

Sad, a bit, because our reckless youth was coming to an end but still happy for him.

Well, I am not a family man. I still wanted to go out. I made plans with Paradoxxxx, you know, to congratulate him. But you've met Timur, you know he wouldn't leave until every single person at that club complimented him and listed, in great detail, everything they loved about his rounds. So I waited outside for HOURS. And that was Moscow in December, might I add. At some point, I decided to go back in and drag Timur out. So I headed towards the building... And there was Misha. Coming right out of the doors. I thought, that's strange, he was in such a hurry to get home. Why is he still here at almost midnight? I was standing right next to his car, so I just waited for him to approach. But he didn't. He went in the opposite direction. I followed him. A couple of blocks, the streets got quiet. He stopped by a random apartment building. Made a call. Never saw me – I kept my distance. Five minutes later, a car pulls up. A Lexus. The driver got out, opened the backseat door for Misha.

I never saw who else was in the backseat.

I had no proof.

And yet I made a note of that beautiful line Max said in his battle with Wizzard...

BEAT BRILLIANT (*in a memory*):

I'm young and poisonous: I'll kill you worse than asbestos,

Take you out of this life like I take out chicks in my Lexus.

TONYA: Holyyyy shit.

SEVA: And then this past week gave me a front-and-center view into their forbidden love. I guess it became a lesbian relationship?

...

Anyway, at least this makes our job easier.

TONYA: Wait
Are you saying
Your plan is
To expose him?

SEVA: Well, isn't that the essence of battle rap?

TONYA: Yes but...
I don't know
It just seems...
I mean Dasha exposed a bunch of private stuff and look what happened.

SEVA: What happened? An old woman with preexisting conditions had a medical issue. Is that something extraordinary?

TONYA: No, but I meant content-wise...

SEVA: Tonya. Okay. I hear you.
However, there is a big difference between laughing at someone's dick pics and what we want to do.

TONYA: Really?

SEVA: Yes!
Because we're not being homophobic for no reason.
We're gonna do exactly what you suggested: unmask the Bear and show the rot underneath.

TONYA: Yeah, but...

SEVA: I'm not gonna go at the Bear with "oh look he's gay; how horrible it is to be gay."
No! I'll target his specific psychological shortcoming, which is, he is absolutely fake.
So, my plan is to use his affair with Max as a means-to-an-end. Nothing homophobic, just straight up facts: "the man you want to make the Tzar of battle rap is just a pathetic closeted cheater."
Simple as that.

TONYA: No, I get it, just maybe there's something el/se

SEVA: WHAT else?

I'm sorry but since when are you an expert on battle rap and not just a deranged teenager who kidnapped my fucking body and is now lecturing me on how to Do My Job?

TONYA: You said you valued my contributions

SEVA: Fuck.

I do.

I do value you.

I'm sorry, Tonya.

I'm just feeling anxious.

We can't lose this battle.

TONYA: I know.

But if we expose Misha, we will destroy his career. And Max's.

SEVA: What unbelievably sad news.

TONYA: Nadya will divorce him. She will keep the child away from him, too.

SEVA: Call me a homewrecker if you'd like.

I've seen them talk exactly once since we've been here. It was touching.

TONYA: The government might come after him. Censor him. Jail him.

SEVA: You forgot everyone jumping him, stoning him to death, and burning the body at the stake. It will be a tragedy.

Beat.

TONYA: I don't want to do this.

SEVA: Me neither. But what I don't want to happen even more is to have nothing to say against him in the final. You saw what they did to Cobalt. Well, Cobalt was just an appetizer.

TONYA: So you're okay with ruining Misha's life?

SEVA: He has ruined his life himself – I'm just a messenger.

We are, Tonya.

Beat.

TONYA: Okay. Fine. Let's do this. I don't care.

SEVA: Ah, wonderful! I knew you'd understand.

I'm sorry for lashing out. I didn't mean it.

You know, Tonya, I see you. I see your talent, I see how much you care. If we win, I'm happy to share the prize and also give you a leg up in the industry. So many teenage girls told me they wanted to rap, but so few of them have what it takes. You do. You do have what it takes.

TONYA: I... Yeah... Thanks, Seva.

...

Send me the text once you have it. Bye.

TONYA hangs up. She sinks to the floor and sits in silence, small.

18.

DASHA enters, sees Tonya, and busies herself on the other side of the room. After a long time:

DASHA: One of Yaroslava Petrovna's cats died.

TONYA: What?

DASHA: Yeah. Of old age. The bastard was like twenty years old.

TONYA: Huh.

Silence.

TONYA: How rough are you gonna go against us in the final?

DASHA: Against you? Against Seva? You two are perfect angels, I can't even think of anything to battle you for!

...

How rough are YOU gonna go against me in the final?

Silence.

TONYA: Did you know? About Misha and Max?

DASHA holds up MC Bear's phone.

DASHA: Why else do you think Misha was so quick to leave me alone?

...

I bet Seva is fucking in love with Misha. That's what I think. I think Misha broke Seva's heart. Or else he'd be married or at least had a girlfriend already.

Something shifts in TONYA.

TONYA: Dasha?

DASHA: Yes?

TONYA: Do you want to do the final?

DASHA thinks.

DASHA: Nah.

Not like this.

The Bear gets all the credit and I get all the blame. Is that fair?

Wait what if...

Should we just leave?

Oh my god, imagine if both of us just don't show up for the final!

Picture Wizzard's face.

He's gonna be all like, "Not all warriors survived in Sparta, but we still have Spartan Beer."

They laugh.

TONYA: Dasha

DASHA: Yes?

TONYA: Can I talk to you about something?

DASHA nods.

19.

ZABAVA is alone in the living room, playing on her iPad. LESYA enters.

LESYA: Hi!

ZABAVA ignores her.

LESYA: Where's your mom?

ZABAVA: I don't know.

LESYA approaches her.

LESYA: What are you playing?

ZABAVA shows her, then goes back to playing.

LESYA: That's a huge farm! Did you build it yourself?

ZABAVA: Yes.

I have twenty cows. And three cornfields. And these are my chickens and pigs. And here are the tomatoes.

LESYA: That's so cool! Do you wanna see my farm?

ZABAVA ignores her. LESYA pulls out her phone, opens the app, and shows her farm to ZABAVA.

ZABAVA: You're only on Level Five.

LESYA: Can we play together and you tell me how to build a big farm?

ZABAVA: Okay.

They play. BEAT BRILLIANT enters and begins to clean.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Hey Lesya, do you know where you guys keep extra rags?

LESYA: Should be in the kitchen under the sink.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Okay, thanks.

He exits. MC BEAR enters with a bunch of beer.

MC BEAR: Who's excited for the final???

He sees ZABAVA.

MC BEAR: Is Nadya here?

LESYA: I guess?

MC BEAR: Okay.

Where do you guys keep the beer opener?

LESYA: How would I know?

MC BEAR: Right. I'll look in the kitchen.

He exits. LESYA and ZABAVA keep playing. SEVA enters, distraught.

SEVA: Hey, Lesya, can you do me a huge favor? I've been trying to call your sister and she's just not responding.

LESYA: I'm kind of in the middle of a yard sale?

SEVA: Right. Right. It's just that your sister is holding my entire career in her hands right now and I need to make sure she knows what she's doing.

LESYA: And if I don't sell this wool, I won't level up for another hour.

MC BEAR and BEAT BRILLIANT enter from the kitchen.

MC BEAR: Seva! Happy finals! Are you ready to destroy me?

SEVA: You mean your little girl ghostwriter?

MC BEAR: Yes, I mean her. Do you think you're ready?

You look so stressed.

Have a beer.

SEVA does not take the beer.

VALENTINA and NADYA enter.

VALENTINA: Yes, yes, we'll watch Zabava. What time will you get back?

NADYA: Hopefully by ten. There's this nice young man Kolya who is helping out, so we've been switching every few hours. And the new doctor is incredible.

MC BEAR: Wait, Nadya, you're not watching the finals? It's your husband...

NADYA: Please don't tell him. He'll be VERY upset.

NADYA exits. We hear the championship starting.

BEAT BRILLIANT: Here we go!

Everyone looks at the screen, even ZABAVA.

VALENTINA: What's the deal with this championship?

LESYA: You should watch, Mom. The final's going to be epic.

They watch.

20.

It's the final aka the most important thing in the world right now. MC WIZZZARD, AMINA, ANTSY ANT, YIN-YAN, and PARADOXXX are on the stage.

MC WIZZZARD: Ayoooooooo, yeah, yeah, yeah!!!

Tonight is the FINAL of WHO'S THE TZAAAR?

Are you ready?

The crowd cheers.

MC WIZZZARD: Yeah, you should be.

The winner will not only get ten million rubles in cash, but he will also give a solo concert in St. Petersburg's biggest arena, collaborate on a track with any rap artist in the world, and, most importantly, become the UNDISPUTED TZAR OF RUSSIAN BATTLE RAP.

The crowd cheers.

MC WIZZARD: So without further ado, please welcome MC BEAAAAAR

Lights, music, cheers. DASHA enters.

MC WIZZARD: And his opponent, MC SEVA SAVAAAAAAGE.

Lights, music, cheers. TONYA enters.

MC WIZZARD: Alright, guys, show us how it's done.
MC Bear, start us off.

The crowd cheers.

DASHA:

Hey-yo!

I know, I know. You all expect,
A battle to the death, a war to end all wars.
But if you think that I can win, you're incorrect.
'Cause Seva is the one and only Tzar, of course.

The crowd chuckles.

And no, this isn't some smart setup
I'm not trying to deflect or just be clever.
I, Misha the Bear, secede this tournament.
You are the Tzar. Congratulations, Seva.

DASHA shakes TONYA's hand. The crowd murmurs.

Will you please honor us with your victory speech?
We'll add it to the bible and will forever preach it.

Round!

MC WIZZARD: Oh my, oh my, is this a prank?

DASHA: No, I'm dead serious.

MC WIZZARD: Alright, then...

Well, Seva Savage is the winner of WHO'S THE TZAAAAR?

Nobody reacts.

MC WIZZZARD: Misha, are you sure about this? (It's kind of anticlimactic...)

DASHA: A hundred percent.

MC WIZZZARD: Well, then/...

TONYA: Can I deliver my round?

MC WIZZZARD: Oh yes! Seva Savage, everybody, with his response to MC Beaaaar!

The crowd cheers, confused.

TONYA:

Misha, you are my one true friend.
Thank you for recognizing my excellence.
I'm glad to accept this wonderful title.
And I'll give a speech with my usual eloquence.

MC WIZZZARD: Oh, so you two planned this!

TONYA: We did.

MC WIZZZARD: Ohhhhhh

Well, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, this final is keeping everyone on edge and WE ARE HERE FOR IT.

Seva, PLEASE continue!

TONYA:

First and foremost, my title of the Tzar
Would not be possible without my fans.
They were there for me every step of the way
From tiny concert venues to huge arena stands.

And so, to acknowledge my biggest supporters,
I invited one of them to share their story
Of how being my fan changed her whole life
Please welcome Tonya, the most devoted fan of Seva alive!

TONYA's actor fully assumes the physicality and voice of TONYA from before the body swap.

TONYA:

H-hi. My name is Tonya, I'm from Moscow, I just turned seventeen.
And yes, I used to be the most devoted fan you've ever seen!
But now? I'm not sure, I'm sorry.
But here I am... So let me tell my story.

I was fourteen when I discovered rap.
Seva was the first artist I got into!
A year later I snatched a ticket to his concert.
It was going to be the best event I'd ever been to.

I bought a whole new outfit just for that night,
Did a full face of makeup, though looking back I did look like a clown.
I got front-row seats, which, at that moment,
Made me the happiest teen girl in town.

Not only that! After the show,
I took a photo with him and we started talking.
I said "I really like how in your last song
The ending is both inevitable and shocking."

He looked at me. Considered for a second.
Then said, "That's a smart thought for a girl your age.
I'd love to hear what else you have to say,
After I'm done with pictures, let's talk some more backstage."

You. All. I thought I'd die right there.
My life was now complete, without a doubt.
I got to meet my biggest idol, Seva,
And now we were just going to hang out???

And so, it's late, we're talking.
He opens up about the hardships of his life.
Says, after a show, I like to just relax a little.
He pours himself, then me a glass of wine.

I talk about my life and mention

That I myself have started writing rap
He listens to my bars, attentive,
Then at the end begins to loudly clap.

He asks if I want to know
How he feels in front of the crowd
We go on stage and face the empty stadium
With rows and rows of seats just all around.

Above us is the night sky,
I'm overwhelmed, amazed, delighted.
Then he touches my shoulder, so very gently.
Says I'm the prettiest girl he's ever sighted.

And then he looks into my eyes,
Leans in so close and gently whispers,
"So, can I kiss you?" And I nod.
And then he does. And it is blissful.

Then it's a blur. My shirt is off,
Then his, and then we're on the floor.
I bleed a little, but he says
It's 'cause I've not done this before.

At 3 AM, he calls a taxi,
Makes sure that I get home alright.
My mother's furious. She grounds me
'Cause where the hell was I all night?

But I don't care. Nobody knows
But now I share a special bond with Seva.
We found each other and we will
Be now together, for forever.

But I am dumb, 'cause I forgot
To take his number or give mine.
His managers ignore my emails;
For them I'm nothing but a fan online.

But I'm determined. I know that fate

Will make us one day reunite.
And when we reconnect, he must see
How much I've grown after that night.

So I spend days and nights perfecting rap,
I learn what a great rapper must be.
And two years later, we meet again.
And then he doesn't recognize me.

We talk some more and with each word,
All my illusions slowly shatter.
It hits me he just wanted sex.
Tonya, the person, didn't matter.

So Seva is the Tzar? Oh wow.
What can I say, congratulations, man.
But I was a wrong person to invite here
Because I am no longer Seva's fan.

TONYA's actor switches back to SEVA's physicality.

TONYA:

Oh. Wow. I've lost a fan. How devastating.
Please just give me a sec to check my stats.
Before this, five millions followed me on Insta.
Now it's... Five millions minus one!

Hey little girl, I know you tried to
Get Justice with your brave truth-telling.
But I'm a Tzar and you are no one.
But yeah, keep yelling, hon, keep yelling.

Now how the hell did you expect
I'd recognize you two years later?
After each concert, there is a Tonya.
Can't track all names. Can't track all faces.

But you wanna know what's funny?
Admitting this won't tarnish my career.
Worst case, some feminists will squeal

And call me Seva, Groomer of the Year.

Yet in the meantime, I'll continue to
Pay my team enough to make arrangements,
Tip all the music venue owners,
And host some private after-show engagements.

My fans will not go anywhere,
They'll shrug and say, "Well-well.
A crazy teenage girl wanted to fuck Seva,
And so – he let her. She can go to hell."

Our Wizzard here, the rest of Russian rappers
Will turn the other way, of course.
If Seva goes, so will the sponsors.
His clout is a very mighty force.

So! Welcome me, the Tzar!
And sing my praises 'til your throats go numb.
I, Seva, have the power of millions.
You, Tonya from Moscow, are just one.

Round.

Silence. Someone clears their throat. Then, a light wind starts blowing. It grows stronger and stronger, eventually knocking over everything. Then, BOOM. A beam of light, ultrasound. The world moves in slow-motion. The souls of TONYA, DASHA, and AMINA travel through space.

They land in the apartment, in their own bodies, startling LESYA, VALENTINA, and ZABAVA. The women sit in silence for a moment. Then, TONYA begins to cry.

END OF PLAY