

BREAKING THE SILENCE

By Jerry Rabushka

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BREAKING THE SILENCE

A Collection of Three Skits

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Do Not Copy

Bag of Chocolate

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NOTE TO DIRECTOR: While all these skits are of a very serious nature, there is still some humor to be found. Using it to break the tension allows the audience to feel more comfortable with the situation.

CHARACTERS

LORI, a volunteer for a local crisis shelter

SASHA, a recent Russian immigrant

VALERY, her husband (accent the second syllable for correct pronunciation)

SETTING

SASHA's living room in a small apartment.

(LORI has just shown up unannounced and is introducing herself.)

LORI: *(already in SASHA's living room)* Sasha?

SASHA: Yes?

LORI: Hi there! I'm Lori. I'm a friend of your friend, Olga. We work together at the phone company.

SASHA: Oh, Olga! Well any friend of Olga is a friend of mine. Come in. How nice of you to visit!

LORI: Well, I hope you think so. Look, maybe this isn't my business...

SASHA: Oh, Olga's like family to me! I'm sure-

LORI: I'm a volunteer with a local women's crisis center, and... well... Olga was telling me you had some trouble at home with your husband *(not sure how SHE should proceed)* I thought I could help out, maybe explain some of the options you have.

SASHA: *(her demeanor changes)* Everything's okay. Now go home. *(tries to steer her away; LORI won't be turned out)*

LORI: I want to help you, *(SASHA relents a little bit.)* but you have to be honest with me. Then maybe I can show you how to make some changes. *(trying to downplay her presence to get information)* I hate to barge right in. I know I'm a stranger, and here I am saying I hear things about you and your husband...

SASHA: *(after an expectant pause, SASHA begins to talk a little)* It's just the way things are. He's a good husband.

LORI: Is everything really okay? Anything you say will stay just between us.

SASHA: **(not sure what to say)** Look. I was 22. All the girls I went to high school with were already married. And once you are out of college, it is very hard to meet someone. **(jokes)** They think you're old! My younger sister got married and her husband moved in with me and my parents. Five of us in a two-room apartment. Valery already had his own apartment. And he thought I was pretty. **(laughs a bit)** Yes, me!

LORI: So do you love him?

SASHA: **(as if there's no difference)** He's my husband. **(realizes that's not enough of an answer to placate LORI)** And yes.

LORI: We had reports of him mistreating you.

SASHA: **(avoiding the question)** I do what he asks. Sometimes I don't understand what he wants, but I still try to please him. **(not telling the whole story)** I work all day – well, we need the money – but I work as much as he does.

LORI: **(SHE's used to this kind of situation, joking just a bit to try to get more information.)** He expects dinner to magically appear on the table the minute he walks in!

SASHA: Some days I get home ten minutes before him. So I rush around putting things together. But he doesn't understand **(VALERY enters.)** that it takes time for me to get dinner ready for him. **(trying to joke herself)** I only have two hands and two feet, just like everyone else.

VALERY: **(His presence is more of a flashback, so while LORI and SASHA speak, HE comes in more to illustrate her points than to be any part of the current action, although HE can also interact with the characters as well. VALERY also thinks HE's pretty funny, so HE says a lot of his lines with a good-natured sense of humor.)** I am a hard working man. A man is hungry when he comes home. **(addressing LORI and the audience, sort of as an introduction)** There's no dinner. There's no clean towels for a shower. There's no food in the cabinet either. **(more to SASHA, a bit threatening)** If you don't shop, and you don't cook, what good are you? **(HE pushes her away and exits.)**

SASHA: I have to give him my paychecks, of course. He says if not, I spend too much money and we don't have it for what we need. **(innocent, and explaining)** Well, one day I bought some chocolates – for the kids, and some for myself. Well, it was delicious – but it was sooooo expensive! It felt so special to walk out of there with a bag all my own. **(VALERY enters again, and SHE sort of addresses them both at the same time.)** But I guess I should have asked first. We are having trouble getting by. **(VALERY grabs SASHA roughly. LORI tries to stop this, but SASHA pushes her away.)** No, Lori! This is my business.

VALERY: **(to SASHA, roughly, but with a sense of humor at the same time, as if that makes it better)** I can't let you loose ever. Next time you won't go bargain hunting at the most expensive store in town!

SASHA: I can get a promotion at work, Valery. We'd have more money for good times. **(smiles, affectionate)** Then I could buy you some chocolate every now and then.

VALERY: I'm glad you have a job. **(pushes SASHA to the ground)** But what about your job as my wife? **(sarcastic)** I should cut your pay based on your performance.

SASHA: **(still on the ground, to LORI, as SHE gets up)** It's really not so bad. I have a place to live. If he threw me out, I would have no place to go.

LORI: What about family? Surely they could help you.

SASHA: All my family is still back in Moscow. I want to stay here in America. **(explaining, or sharing her experience as to why SHE might not leave)** My friend back in Moscow, she got divorced, and she had to stay with her husband because there was nowhere to go. Now he feels disgraced. Now he beats her more. There's no marriage vows, but she's still there like a wife. But she has to live there or be a beggar.

VALERY: **(enters and says kindly)** It's what my uncle used to say. "A beaten wife is a good wife." And then he'd take a swig of vodka and he'd laugh a bit. **(to LORI)** My uncle always had a sense of humor.

SASHA: **(defending herself, as LORI takes umbrage from VALERY's last speech)** I let you have everything your way. I never nag you like some women.

VALERY: You spend all our money at the market on frivolous things.

SASHA: What do I have that's frivolous?

VALERY: You probably went to some fancy restaurant with your work friends while I'm stuck at home eating cold cod and borscht. **(pushes her away, talks to LORI)** It's a man's job to keep control over the home. You could use a man like me, to teach you to mind your business. **(exits)**

LORI: Did you ever think of calling the police?

SASHA: In Moscow? Beating your wife isn't a police matter. They don't call it a crime. It's just part of a marriage.

LORI: Here the police can arrest your husband if he beats you.

SASHA: I can learn to do things his way. **(a bit aggressive)** The police don't need to know what goes on in my family. And the children! I don't know what he'd do to them, or to me, if I try to run away. **(a bit more quietly)** I think about it sometimes. But I'd miss him. He's a nice man. And a funny man, when he's nice.

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LORI: You can go to a shelter, and be safe. You can take the children with you. We can find someone who speaks Russian who can help.

SASHA: I don't need someone who speaks Russian. I've known English since I was five years old. **(still standing up for herself)** I'm not sure I trust this shelter, as you call it. And after that, who will provide for us?

LORI: You have a job.

SASHA: I don't make enough to live on my own and take care of the children. See? The whole thing will be my fault, because I'm the one who failed in the marriage. **(pause, then out of frustration)** You think this is easy. You don't understand.

LORI: You don't understand. You're in danger! We have statistics. In Russia, twelve thousand women a year are beaten to death by their husbands. Many more are injured. You could very easily--

SASHA: **(pushes LORI away, and tries to stop this conversation)** No! We've been married a long time. I'll learn his ways. People like you read three books and then you think you know about Russia!

LORI: Please, Sasha! *You* try to understand. He's committing a crime. **(SASHA turns away. LORI gets more insistent.)** It may not be a crime in Russia. In America it's a crime. Being married doesn't excuse it or make it legal. You should read the same three books, and you'd know what I know.

SASHA: I know it's wrong. **(This intrigues LORI, who is then disappointed with the rest of the speech.)** But, it's just part of life for me. What is the court going to do? Fine him? He's got no money. Put him in jail? How will I support myself then? **(almost laughing)** A man sitting as a judge is going to put another man in jail for beating his wife! *Now* who has the sense of humor?

LORI: You could work for that promotion you were talking about. You could go to school and work toward a better career. We have resources to take care of you and the children while you--

SASHA: **(exasperated, and tired of LORI's ideas)** My friend in Russia, she talked to a woman like you. Some woman from America or Canada or some place that thinks they're the center of the world came over and tried to change a thousand years in two minutes. So they took her husband to trial. In Russia it's no crime to beat your wife. The judge laughed her out of court. He didn't want to hear the case. He said if he heard one case of a beaten wife, he'd have to hear ten thousand of the same thing. He said it was boring. So I accept my life and think of the good things. There's more than just me to consider. There's the children.

LORI: **(but a bit more aggressive)** Sasha, you're making your own choices! You live as a slave in your own home. You aren't allowed to spend your own money. You have no life that he doesn't allow you. You let him run over you like-

SASHA: Women in Russia, we're not like women here. The men run things. We don't march down the streets making demands of them. We have too much work to do, both on the job and at home. We aren't rich and powerful. So if someone beats a woman, people just look the other way. **(resigned that SHE can't get help)** My mother and my aunt – they both worked at their jobs, and then stood in lines to get groceries, and cooked, and cleaned, and checked kids' homework. They managed to do it all. I have it much easier here. I should learn to manage it too.

LORI: Sasha. They're from a different world. And you're not part of that world any more.

SASHA: **(tired of this line of thinking, VALERY enters; SHE goes to him and HE holds her tenderly)** Who am I to question my husband's love? He takes care of me. Sometimes he's very good to me. We have good times. And I can see that he does love me.

(HE gives SASHA a kiss and some kind of chocolate bar, then glares at LORI, and exits again.)

LORI: **(exits very quickly and brings in VALERY, then gets authoritative)** It's time for you *both* to understand! It can't continue to go on this way. Valery, I don't care whose husband you are, or what violent tradition you bring with you. If you come to America, you need to obey American laws. If *you* want freedom, *she* gets freedom, too. She has every right to discover her dreams and pursue them as you do. Sasha, you need to file the complaint. Then we can do something about it.

(VALERY looks to SASHA to let her know that's not going to happen; they both unite against an intruder.)

VALERY: You people in this country, you think it's all about doing what you want all the time. We need order. We have our jobs, and women have theirs. And if she can't do her job, it's up to the man to point that out to her. My father taught that to me, and his father to him. **(to SASHA)** You still have dinner to cook instead of talking nonsense with this interfering shrew.

LORI: If you want to keep things the way they were in Russia, then you should have stayed in Russia.

VALERY: It's not safe in Russia. They murder you for a bottle of vodka.
They rob you on the streets in daylight, and there's no work.

LORI: You rob Sasha, and you beat her.

SASHA: **(to LORI, angry)** Who sent you here? You showed up at my door like you know more about my life than I do.

VALERY: It is the right of each family to live the way they choose, especially here in America. We have a good marriage. Sasha runs a good home. And when she doesn't, I show her differently. It works for us. **(exits)**

LORI: **(writes down a number on a card)** It's for a local shelter. You can call for help.

SASHA: I have a place. I live in America. I have more than I ever thought I could have.

LORI: You know this is wrong, don't you?

SASHA: Of course I do.

LORI: What can I do to convince you there's a way out?

SASHA: **(VALERY appears at the edge of the stage, watching her response.)** I have housework to do. If you weren't here, I'd have dinner started, and he'd be eating and quiet.

LORI: **(picks up her business card and tries to hand it to SASHA)**
You call me if you need-

SASHA: **(dismissing her)** Police, shelter volunteers, courts, you people are so meddling. **(SHE goes to VALERY, who holds her, but really isn't part of the action; i.e., it's more SASHA's mindset that SHE's making a decision to stay.)** It's just a family issue. One day I'll figure out how to be the wife he deserves, and then it will stop. I just wish he had a different way of speaking to me than through a raised hand.

LORI: We can help you.

SASHA: I stay. For my children. Perhaps you don't understand love the way I do. I'm not the one who matters here.

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