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Writer/s: [John O'Brien](#)

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I only have these pieces of paper. They are my only clues. Someone is speaking a Slavic language nearby. And I'm in this small room, floorboards, peeling-paint of a ceiling, rough brick walls, an open door that I know I dare not go through. And that woman speaking Russian—it's Russian, I'm sure of that now—next door, or in the hall, or whatever exists beyond the door, if anything exists except for a voice speaking upturned, upraised, unhappy Russian out there in the Russian-voiced void beyond the room I'm in. I wish I spoke Russian. Maybe it's Bulgarian.

I'm searching the pieces of paper for clues. It's my writing, I know it's my writing, but I can only understand fragments here and there:

'Vilnius violence violins violets.'

'Lithuania doesn't rhyme with anything.'

'She wore her heart on her sleeve, in her sleeveless dress that displayed virtually everything that mattered about her physically.'

'Russki is a vodka.'

'Where did the child come from?'

That's why I'm looking at the paper: because of that bit of writing. It's my writing, I've written 'where did the child come from?' It must be a clue because there *is* a child.

The child is sitting on the floor—no on a cushion on the floor—not far from me, reading a book in Cyrillic script. A calm patient child of about ten with knots instead of hair, a dirty sniffing child who doesn't look up at me. A girl? A boy? It's hard to tell.

Suddenly the Russian language is shouted through the door into our room. The voice has entered, just for a second, without a body. Shouted from Outside. The child looks up and answers and that's when I know it's a boy. He answered in Russian.

Now I think I have an answer too: I'm here for the child, I'm sure of it.

More Russian shouted in—the same Russian woman's voice, but sweet-toned despite its guttural qualities. It is a little spooky.

The child calls back in Russian. I consider the child, there's something about this child. This child is unflappable. She would never flap. It's a girl, I know that now. I was wrong about it being a boy. It's a girl.

My love walks out of the voice void, into the cold empty room, and holds me. She says something in Russian, in that Russian woman's voice. More pieces coming together. My love speaks Russian, did she ever tell me that? She takes the pieces of paper from my wet icy

shaking hands and puts them in her pocket. She tells me—in English—in Australian—in her sweet tones—that stories go in odd directions when something new is added to the mix.

'It's because I'm Jewish', she says. 'We were meant to pick up a package but then they found out I was Jewish and now there's a different package, a child. This child is an orphan, her parents were killed and now she is our new story. Do you understand?'

I ask her how they found out she was Jewish.

'You told them', she says.

I ask her why we are involved with the child.

'Because her parents have been killed and she is marked for death.'

I ask her why the Lithuanians can't do something about it.

'Because we left Lithuania three days ago, my love.'

I ask her what she thinks was in the original package, the one we were supposed to pick up. It's my way of changing the topic. I don't feel very tough at the moment. I feel fragile. I want to be unflappable like the child. I don't know how to do it, except by asking a stupid question and changing the topic.

She smiles and combs my hair with her fingers, giving my hair a Hitler part.

'Guns, drugs and madness', she says.

She looks at the child and speaks to her in Russian. The child answers back, calmly.

'We are going to Israel', she tells me, 'we are taking the child to Israel, as soon as our visas come through.'

But I tell her I don't want to go to Israel. It's been desertified by goats, the milk and honey have gone, all that's left is guns, religion and madness, and those terrible goats.

'It's not the goats we have to worry about', she says.

She calls the girl over and introduces us, in Russian, in English. Her name is Katya and she has never been out of Kazakhstan. She can't speak English. She has a pistol in her pocket. I wonder if it's a toy. I doubt it very much. Better than an AK-47, because then she'd be Kazakhstan Katya and her Kunning Kalashnikov. I should write that down. It might be important later in the story.

Wherever that is.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by John O'Brien.*