

Eastern Promises

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A conversation, somewhere in St Canard.

"You're joking. You must be joking."

"Do you see me smile, ducky?"

"But... Her? Really, actually her?"

"Listen to yourself. You come here to ask about buyers and sellers of souls. Now you balk at a name?"

"At her name? Of course I do! For Heaven's sake, she's in fairy tales!"

"So are winter and snow. So what?"

"But how can she be here of all places? In America?"

"You are here... I am here..."

"At least tell me she didn't come flying over in her mortar."

"..."

"....really?"

"..."

"Auugh..."

Another conversation, a little later. This one was preempted by the soft ringing of a phone tucked away into feathery cleavage.

"Malicia? Kachka here. Listen, I asked around about your little lost-and-found problem. If you want your boytoy's missing piece, I'm afraid you'll have to take it up with Baba Yaga..."

33 Comments



by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

"Ugh. *Seriously?*"

Evidently, Malicia was familiar with the name.

"HOW THE HELL DOES THAT IDIOT GET INTO THESE MESSES?" Kachka would likely be holding her own phone an arm's length away to protect her ear drums, yet her hair would probably still 'swoosh' dramatically.

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

How the hell did he keep getting out of it was what Kachka would like to know, but those were probably questions for another time.

Once the ringing in her ears subsided she added, "I have an address for you. Um. Would you like me to come with?"

From her tone she was torn between *Please say no and leave me out of this mess* and *Please say yes, or I'll never stop wondering how the hell this played out.*

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

"Yes, fine. If you want." Probably not what Kachka wanted to hear, but at this point Mal had stretched out all her own leads, and Kachka had been quite useful thus far.

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

"Joy."

And of course Malicia would make it sound like she was the one doing Kachka the favor here. For a moment she was tempted to just cough up that address and be done with this mess, but in the end her morbid curiosity won over spite.

"Alright, here's where she's at..."

'Where she's at' would turn out to be a suburban area that had seen better days and was slowly going through the painful transformation from 'good place to raise your kids' to 'you wouldn't want to be outside after dark'.

When Malicia arrived she would find Kachka already there, suspiciously peeking at the foundation of a small house, presumably looking for chicken feet.

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

"Not quite what I expected." The demonness said from behind her, glancing around at the urban sprawl.

"But I suppose if one doesn't want to be found..."

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

"Not like there are many deep dark forests around here."

Kachka rose and turned around to face Malicia with a morose expression.

"No doorbell as far as I can see. But at least the door is facing us, so nobody has to ask the house to turn around."

Presumably that last concern was rooted in certain childhood tales - not exactly perfect information but all she had to go on.

"Well. You want it, you knock for it."

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

And indeed that is exactly what Malicia did. Complete with a sassy saunter up the front steps.

KNOCK KNOCK "Helloooo?~"

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

"Keep it down out there, dammit!"

Unfortunately the enraged shout did not come from within the presumed witch-house but from an open window on the other side of the street. Baba Yaga's door, while it trembled under Malicia's knocks, remained very much closed.

"Maybe nobody is at home?" Kachka suggested, looking rather cheered at the possibility.

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

"If nobody is home then I'll just have to employ the same methods I use to get into the First National Bank when it's after hours." She cracked her knuckles and raised her voice.

"If nobody is going to answer this door, then I'll come in myself!" She seemed to be speaking more to the structure than whoever may have lurked inside.

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

And after a moment of silence it was the structure that replied. Moaning and groaning the small house began to move, tilting towards the visitors. For a second it seemed about to just keel over but then, with impossible speed, it rose from its foundation, unfolding a pair of chicken feet each the size of a small car and ropey with sinew.

Suddenly as high as a two story building the house swaying from side to side like a camel to find its balance, revealing an underside that looked like it was roughly nailed together from cut-down trees. Then it raised a foot – and began to laboriously turn around on the spot till its front door faced away from the street. Then, with what could only be called a disdainful wiggling of its backside, it settled down again.

As the wooden creaking that accompanied the house's movement died down it was replaced by the sound of a vaguely female voice within, muttering to itself in a Slavic-sounding language. The words were muffled but Kachka seemed to understand the gist of it anyway.

"She's home," the duck murmured to Malicia, looking a little pale around the bill. "We woke her. She is not happy."

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

The demonness was not remotely nonplussed by the sudden anthropomorphic undertaking of the seemingly inanimate structure. After all, supernaturals of all cultures seemed to share the common understanding that homes were more than just hollow structures for personal belongings.

This one in particular certainly had an attitude. Typical.

"Well I'M not happy." Malicia grumbled back to the FOWL agent. "And when I'm not happy, nobody else gets to be happy either."

Understatement of the century.

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

As far as the one-eyed duckette was concerned Malicia had certainly accomplished that goal.

"At least try with the politeness," she whispered as the back-door - well, currently the front-door - swung open.

A pair of huge yellow eyes appeared in the murk inside, quickly followed by their owner, an ancient owl-lady, clad in a plain housedress of fading black. Her bone-white headfeathers were done up in a severe bun and her face was framed by overly long eyebrows in the same color.

"Naughty children," she said by way of greeting, her voice dark and hoarse with age, her words carrying a pronounced Slavic accent.

"Bad girls, getting my house all worked up, waking a poor old *babushka* from her nap."

She glared down on them - straightbacked and proud as a queen she towered even over Malicia.

"Well? Don't just stand there like cows when it thunders, come inside!"

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

Arms crossed stubbornly, the demonness followed the owl into her humble abode, muttering under her breath something about having gone far past the 'babushka' stage in life.

"I'm here to discuss something you may have recently come into ownership of." She began casually. "As my cohort here." A motion to Kachka. "Tells me that you may have acquired a new soul recently."

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

The old witch led her visitors into her kitchen where she heavily sat on a wooden bench that groaned under her weight. Whatever magic the old owl had used to make her home blend in with the neighborhood, clearly she hadn't bothered with the interior; the place looked just like a sturdy peasant hut from a hundred years ago. The only nod towards the current century was a small white fridge in a corner.

"Um," Kachka made very eloquently when Malicia directed the owl's attention towards her.

Trying to not stare at the enormous copper cauldron in a corner of the room she cleared her throat.

"This mallard - short, huge bill, bad temper - he was looking for something. Pretty bad. Somebody sent him, uh, in your direction. Now he walks about with his soul missing..."

"And he got what he asked for," Yaga added sharply when the duck's voice trailed off. "Don't leave that out, it's bad advertising otherwise."

With a shrug she leaned back and began to stuff a pipe that looked suspiciously like it was carved from old bone.

"Yes, I have that soul. I keep it in the eye of a needle which I keep in an egg which I keep in the fridge. What of it?"

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

"Would you be interested in trade?" Mal decided to get straight to the point.

"I myself have a rather impressive collection of souls -- everything from your triple reincarnate up to celebrities and historical figures. I'm sure I have something that you might enjoy."

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

"I'm sure it's very impressive, *zhar-ptitsa*."

The owl produced a tinderbox - gold but covered with a patina of dirt that must have been decades in the making - and lit her pipe.

"Something nice in exchange for that soul, eh? What do you want it for?"

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

"Collection." She said rather casually. "I collect all manner of souls, even those of lesser value. It's a fun little side hobby of mine."

It was clear Mal didn't want to reveal her connection to Negs, and judging by the occasional glance shot in Kachka's direction, she assumed the agent was smart enough to do the same. Any desperation would raise the stakes -- after all, an item is only as valuable as the person makes it.

"I have money, jewels, ancient magical relics. I'm certain I have something that may be of use to you in exchange."

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

Yaga exhaled a plume of smoke and smiled, baring her iron teeth. It wasn't an altogether cheerful smile.

"Yes, I think you may have," she allowed. "But I think even you may find it hard to match what I gave its previous owner in exchange for it."

Lesser value, indeed.

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

"Oh? And what was that? A pack of cigarettes? A VIP backstage pass to every dirty burlesque show in the city? Used panties?" She crossed her arms.

"Really, it couldn't have been worth *that* much."

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

"Right on the first guess. How about that."

The words hung heavily in the air, almost as pungent as the dark smoke that rose like diesel fumes.

"And yet you would offer money and jewels and such to get it back. You wouldn't be trying to make a fool out of old Baba Yaga, hm?"

Without waiting for an answer she turned her face away and spat into the embers under the cauldron. When she looked back at Malicia, what little kindness she'd bothered to fake up till now was gone.

"Don't piss on my shoes and tell me it's raining."

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

"Oh it's going to rain, Old Woman." Mal sneered, eyes narrowing.

"I was merely suggesting items that *might* be of interest to you with little to no net loss for me." She continued coolly.

"But seeing as you apparently lack a taste for the finer things in life... what DO you want?"

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by [Kachka](#) 1 year ago

Credit where credit was due, Kachka thought, suppressing a wince. Malicia *had* tried with the politeness. And it seemed her new less-than-entirely-polite approach wouldn't land them in hot water - possibly literally going by the size of Baba Yaga's pot - just yet. The own just sneered at the demoness, unimpressed.

"Silly girl, don't you know how the game works? It's not about what I want, it's about what you would give. You think all the Yelenas and Vasilisas tell their sweethearts 'I won your freedom with little to no net loss'? *Tschah!* You want a soul from Baba Yaga, you do what they did."

The old witch turned to Kachka. This time the duck could not suppress her wince.

"You tell her. You know, don't you? You still have the smell of the old country on you."

"But..." Kachka swallowed and tried again, her voice a little less squeaky on the second attempt. "But those are just stories."

"No 'just' about it, Too-Skinny-For-Soup. There's power in stories. Tell her."

"Um. Usually there's some house-cleaning involved," she murmured, avoiding Malicia's eyes.

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by [Malicia](#) 1 year ago

Oh, god dammit.

"You *knew* this and didn't tell me?" She hissed at the agent next to her, and her tail lashed furiously, whapping against Kachka's leg.

Back to the old crone, more impatient than ever.

"Tell me about this 'house-cleaning' then."

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by [Kachka](#) 11 months ago

With an equally low "*Hey!*" Kachka swatted at Malicia's misbehaving tail like it was an oversized fly, missing entirely.

So she had heard about the housecleaning deal a few times. She'd also heard about sealing soul-pacts with blood, which was apparently not the done thing either.

Ignoring the byplay Baba Yaga took another deep drag from her pipe.

"It's housecleaning, what's so difficult to understand, eh? Either you do a good job and that's one step closer to what you want - or you don't and I get to eat your for dinner."

Once more Kachka's good eye wandered to the cauldron but before she could get anywhere with the mental calculations of fitting Malicia in there the old witch continued.

"At least that's how it usually works. But you don't look like you'd even know how to handle a mop. So before you trash the place and give me gas on top of it, let's just say you pour me a cold glass of vodka from that shelf over there and we're be done with that part."

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by [Malicia](#) 11 months ago

"You mean you *literally* get people to clean your house?" Blank stare. "And here I thought you were just using a euphemism for having hired help destroy your enemies."

A nonchalant shrug as she swiped the vodka from the shelf, taking a moment to inspect it. After all she was a (un)licensed liquorologist.

"Mmm... not bad. You have surprisingly good taste."

Bringing the entire bottle over, she conjured up a glass and began pouring the liquid.

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by [Kachka](#) 10 months ago

"I have no enemies," Yaga stated flatly, her tone suggesting she had no enemies in the same way a snow-crested mountain did.

With one greedy gulp she downed the glass of vodka and slammed the glass back on the table, the film of condensed water that had collected on the outside now broken by the marks of her finger.

"Well done. That's one out of three."

Smacking her lips the owl leaned back; the wooden bench creaked in protest.

"Now, we all know I won't get to eat you after the second task either. It's the third that really matters, that's how these things go. Still, an old *babushka* needs her lunch, eh?"

Without further preamble she pulled a small notepad from her dusty coat, ripped off the top page and handed it to Malicia.

"Your second task. Don't dawdle."

Rising on her tiptoes Kachka snuck a peek at what turned out to be an almost crushingly mundane grocery list.

“Aw.” She made a face. “Red cabbage?”

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by [Malicia](#) 10 months ago

"If that's anything like Devil's Cabbage, it probably smells like my grandmother's wart stew."
Was that... a good or bad thing?

Folding the list and tucking it into her cleavage she set out with Kachka.

"I can't believe we're doing basic errands for that idiot's soul. You do NOT breathe a word of this to him, you hear me?" A sharp jab at Kachka's chest.

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by [Kachka](#) 10 months ago

“Will you stop it with the poking! You are lucky I am coming with at all.”

Especially with cabbage about to enter the picture. The unspoken threat of ending up in a soup-pot was bad enough, but in a soup-pot filled with borscht? Ugh!

“And enjoy the easy riding while it lasts. There is still number three to do.”

Luckily there was a little grocery store just two streets down. Like the whole neighbourhood it had seen better times but it was clean enough. Aiming for the vegetable section, Kachka stepped a little awkwardly over one of the cowering patrons – an infamous supervillainess could have that effect on people.

“If it helps, if she does eat you I will tell him you eloped with someone handsome, rich and tall?”

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by [Malicia](#) 10 months ago

"She'd be LUCKY to have a taste of this." Giving her rear-end a smack, which caused it to wobble like jello. "Truly, I am a dessert among the paltry vegetables of the world."

Speaking of vegetables... they arrived at the produce section, where the alleged red cabbage was waiting for them.

She paused. "Is there... some sort of protocol for this? Do I pick the pinker ones or the deep red ones?"

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by [Kachka](#) 10 months ago

With a quizzical expression Kachka inspected the heap of cabbage heads. She picked up one, then another to get a feel for their weight. She put one down and gave the other a careful prod. Then she put down the other and looked at Malicia with a deadpan expression.

"How do you expect me to know? Do I look like home-cooker?"

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by [Malicia](#) 9 months ago

((Whoops totally missed this. All this time I was waiting on you, and it was my turn!))

"Uh." A beat. "Maybe?"

After a long moment of deliberation Mal decided to simply pick ALL of the cabbages -- a handful from each pile in the store. This, of course, led to a rather full cart.

...But certainly one of them had to be the red one, right?

Funny how neither thought to simply read the vegetable labels on the bins.

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by [Kachka](#) 6 months ago

((SO sorry for being AWOL forever!!))

"That is one way of problem-solving," Kachka admitted as they left the store. The duck kept her arms firmly folded in front of her chest to make it very clear that, no, she was definitely not paying the bill here.

As it turned out the gesture was very much wasted - as the cashier informed them in a bright and manic voice there was a giveaway on all sorts of cabbages, red or otherwise, what a lucky happenstance, have a nice day and don't mind her she was just cowering under the counter because she lost a contact.

Shopping with supervillains seemed to come with certain perks.

Back at Baba Yaga's hut (which let them and their cabbages in without demur this time) the owl peered at the result of their little expedition.

"You know, most people who get clever with the old 'you never said how much' use it to bring less than is sensible," she commented in a tone of grudging approval.

"But fine, fair is fair. Two out of three. That leaves the third task. Now what shall it be..."

She tapped a long, twisted claw against her beak, lost in thought for a minute.

"One comes to mind. Would be easy enough for you... too bad it only works to get the soul of a lover..."

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by [Malicia](#) 6 months ago

((No problem!))

"Oh just spit it out already!" She snapped impatiently. "You want me to do your laundry next?"

Perhaps give your hideous little hovel a makeover? I think I have the perfect pair of 6 inch party pumps that would look fabulous on its feet."

Not kidding about that last one. Those chicken legs would look *fabulous* in a pair of leopard print Duckolos.