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CONTENTS

Zoran Đerić

The New Serbian Drama > 5

Igor Bojović

The Damaged Ones. > 9

Marina Milivojević Mađarev

Beta Vukanović – One Summer Day > 52

Vojislav Savić

The Exterminator (drama) > 71

Ljubinka Stojanović

The Dovecote. > 104

T H E A T R E A R T S R E V I E W

Zoran Đerić

The New Serbian Drama

During the last two seasons (2012/2013 and 2013/2014), premiers of over 30 new Serbian dramas were held in theatres in Serbia and the Serb Republic. Among them is the new comedy written by Dušan Kovačević, the most significant contemporary Serbian dramatist, followed by a new drama of one of the most prominent domestic playwrights, Biljana Srbljanović, as well as new dramas written by younger playwrights who had been awarded at festivals and dramatic works competitions both in Serbia as well as abroad, in the region as well as in Europe (Igor Bojović, Uglješa Šajtinac, Olga Dimitrijević, Fedor Šili, Branislav Ilić, Vojislav Savić and others). Most of these plays have not been previously published in journals or special editions. On the other hand, some of the plays that had been published have yet to be realized on stage. Many theatrical plays were written to order, or were simply commemorative adaptations of certain literary works. This is often the case (which some might justify as a necessity) in children's theatres (puppet and drama alike). I have not taken such plays into consideration in this review of new, performed dramatic works of domestic authors. Some plays have been performed in student or amateur theatres. They too have not been included in this review. There are other plays written by Serbian authors which, of course, have also been performed in domestic theatres, but they have had their premiers in previous years and, for this reason, have not been included here. For some performances, there was insufficient data.

With this in mind, in two theatre seasons, 2012/2013 and 2013/2014, the following new dramatic works of contemporary Serbian playwrights have been put on stage in theatres in Serbia and the Serb Republic:

Igor Bojović, *The Emperor's New Clothes* (Kraljevsko novo odelo) (premiered September 15, 2012, "Pinokio" Puppet Theatre, Zemun, directed by Jaroslav Antonjuk)

Olga Dimitrijević, *The Folk Drama* (Narodna drama) (premiered October 20, 2012, "Bora Stanković" Theatre, Vranje, directed by Snežana Trišić)

Andrej Šepetkovski, *Walking with a Lion* (Šetnja sa lavom) (premiered November 5, 2012, "Puls" Theatre, Lazarevac, directed by Jovan Grujić)

Kokan Mladenović, *Zona Zamfirova* (musical based on the work of Stevan Sremac, premiered November 9, 2012, "Pozorište na Terazijama" Theatre, Belgrade, directed by the author)

Saša Radonjić, *Three Stolen Novels* (Tri ukradena romana) (premiered December 1, 2012, National Theatre in Kikinda, directed by Filip Markovinović)

Milena Bogavac, *Fifty – Fifty* (Pola-pola) (premiered December 13, 2012, National Theatre in Pirot, directed by Jelena Bogavac)

Uglješa Šajtinac, *You Speak Australian?* (Govorite li australijanski?) (premiered December 15, 2012, Kruševac Theatre, directed by Snežana Udicki)

Senka Petrović, *Young Santa Clause Saves the New Year* (Mladi Deda Mraz spasava Novu godinu) (premiered December 21, 2012, "Toša Jovanović" National Theatre, Zrenjanin, directed by the author)

Tamara Baračkov, *Fifty Blows* (Pedeset udaraca) (premiered January 18, 2013, "Atelje 212" Theatre, Belgrade, directed by Ana Grigorović)

Zoran Petrović, *A Princess and Riddles* (Kneginjica i zagonetke) (premiered February 2, 2013, Children's Theatre, Kragujevac, directed by Dragoslav Todorović)

Uglješa Šajtinac, *The Ugly Duckling* (Ružno pače) (premiered February 14, 2013, "Toša Jovanović" National Theatre, Zrenjanin, directed by Irena Tot)

Tatjana Kecman, *The Odd One Out* (Prekobrojna) (premiered February 14, 2013, "Vuk Karadžić" Cultural Centre, Belgrade, directed by Tatjana Kecman)

Fedor Šili, *The Wizard* (Čarobnjak) (premiered February 14, 2013, National Theatre, Sombor, directed by Boris Liješević)

Ognjen Obradović, *Sunday... Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (Nedelja: juče, danas, sutra) (premiered February 22, 2013, Belgrade Drama Theatre, directed by Milan Nešković)

Mario Ćulum, *Guarantors*, (Žiranti) (premiered February 26, 2013, Serb Republic National Theatre, Banja Luka, directed by Željko Stjepanović and Aleksandar Pejaković)

Dejan Stojiljković, *Constantine* (Konstantin) (premiered February 27, 2013, National Theatre, Niš, directed by Jug Radivojević)

Stevan Koprivica, *We're Expecting* (Mi čekamo bebu) (premiered March 6, 2013, Kruševac Theatre, directed by Vladimir Popadić)

Jelena Kajgo, *Realists* (Realisti) (premiered March 15, 2013, "Toša Jovanović" National Theatre, Zrenjanin, directed by Slađana Kilibarda)

Gorana Balančević, *Strengthened by Iron* (Ogvožđena) (premiered March 16, 2013, Belgrade National Theatre, directed by Đurđa Tešić)

Milivoje Mladenović, *Smelly Whammy / Eco Rangers* (Smrđa Zlopogleda / Čuvari prirode) (premiered March 16, 2013, Kraljevo Theatre, directed by Miodrag Dinulović)

Branislav Ilić, *The Body* (Telo) (premiered March 27, 2013, "Puls" Theatre, Lazarevac, directed by Stevan Bodroža)

Ivan Đorđević, *Love, the Ticket to Heaven* (Ljubav, karta za put u raj) (premiered March 27, 2013, "Sterija" National Theatre, Vršac, directed by the author)

Aleksandar Jugović, *Luna Park*, (Luna-park) (premiered March 30, 2013, Belgrade Drama Theatre, directed by Milena Pavlović Čučilović)

Vladan Savić, *Marriage, in Fact Love* (Brak u stvari ljubav) (premiered April 12, 2013, "Vuk Karadžić" Cultural Centre, Belgrade, directed by the author)

Vladimir Đurđević, *Perfect Cut* (Savršen kroj) (premiered May 15, 2013, Belgrade Drama Theatre, directed by the author)

Saša Radojković, *Rabbits are Fast Food* (Zečevi su brza hrana) (premiered June 8, 2013, Belgrade Drama Theatre, directed by Nina Džuver)

Jovan Mijalković, *On the Night of the Full Moon* (U noći punog meseca) (premiered June 25, 2013, Pirot National Theatre, directed by Uroš Jovanović)

Milena Depolo, Boban Skerlić, *Abused* (Trpele) (premiered October 13, 2013, Belgrade Drama Theatre, directed by Boban Skerlić)

Vojislav Savić, *Leaving for Krasny* (Odlazak u Krasni) (premiered December 18, 2013, “Sterija” Theatre, Vršac, directed by Žanko Tomić)

Jelena Popović, *Rain* (Kiša) (premiered February 9, 2014, “Boško Buha” Theatre, Belgrade, directed by Darijan Mihajlović)

Mirjana Drljević, *Sunflowers* (Suncokreti) (premiered February 10, 2014, “Sterija” Theatre, Vršac, directed by Jelena Bogovac)

Biljana Srbljanović, *This Grave is Too Small for Me* (Mali mi je ovaj grob) (premiered March 12, 2014, “Bitef” Theatre, directed by Dino Mustafić; first premier of this play took place in Vienna, October 15, 2013)

Dušan Kovačević, *Birthday of Mr. Nušić* (Rođendan gospodina Nušića) (premiered April 10, 2014, “Zvezdara teatar” Theatre, Belgrade, directed by the author)

In this double issue of *Scena* in English, we decided to present four authors and their new dramas translated into English.

Igor Bojović is the most performed playwright in children’s theatres. In previous seasons, his plays were performed in Serbia, Montenegro and Slovenia. His drama *The Damaged Ones* (Oštećeni, published in Serbian in *Scena* no. 1–2, 2012), is a metaphor for our times, not at all optimistic, the dark side of our everyday life, filled with a state of crisis, problems, violence and crime, with no respect for authority, no hierarchy of values and morality.

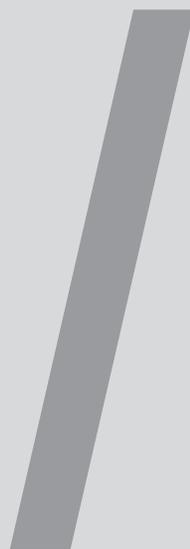
The Exterminator, a drama written by Vojislav Savić, has not been published in Serbian, nor has it been performed on stage. Skillfully written (closed drama, for three characters), it possess definite stage potential. His comedy *Leaving for Krasny* (*Scena* no. 1–2, 2012) was proclaimed “Best Comedy of 2012” at the *Sterijino pozor-*

je Competition for Original Dramatic Texts (premiered in December 2013).

Marina Milivojević Mađarev was awarded for her drama *Beta Vukanović – One Summer Day* (Beta Vukanović – jedan letnji dan) at the Serb Republic National Theatre Competition for Contemporary Dramatic Texts, and published in the *Agon* journal (issue 2, Banja Luka, 2012). Based on the biography of Beta Vukanović (1872–1972), a prominent Serbian painter (trend setter of the Impressionism Art Movement), and her painting “A Summer Day” (exhibited at the National Museum in Belgrade), this drama is an excellent example of how to weave threads of reality into stage fiction.

The dramatic texts of Ljubinka Stojanović have been published in *The Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Drama*, performed on stage and awarded at various international festivals in Sarajevo, Mostar, Zagreb, Bucharest and London. Her drama *The Dovecote* (Golubarnik) takes place in a home for children without parental care in Belgrade, covering a period of “the evil nineties”, as stated in the reference to the time and place. These are the years following the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the implementation of sanctions against the remaining parts of the country (Serbia and Montenegro), describing the crisis of society and the search for one’s identity and the meaning of life.

We have singled out these four examples of new Serbian dramaturgy because they reveal new, not as well known or insufficiently utilized dramatic potentials, pertaining to both subject-matter and methods, and above all disclose the names of authors whom the domestic scene has relied on for some time and which we would now like to recommend to others as well.



Igor Bojović

THE DAMAGED ONES

Igor Bojović



Bojović graduated from the Faculty of Performance Arts in Belgrade – Department of Dramaturgy (1995) and the International School for Playwrights at the Royal Court Theatre in London (1997). He was the director of drama and dramaturge at the Montenegrin National Theatre in Podgorica, and from 1998 to 2012 head of the “Pinokio” Puppet Theatre in Zemun. He has written numerous plays. Besides French, his plays have been translated into Bulgarian, Macedonian, Italian, English and Russian. His play *Divče (Happy End)*, translated by Mireille Robin, was published by the L’espac d’un instant publishing house in Paris in 2005. The text for children *Red Riding Hood* was included in the fourth-grade elementary school program and published in the *Reader*. Bojović was the selector of the 58th and 59th Sterijino pozorje (2013/2014), the Festival of National Drama and Theatre.

MORE SIGNIFICANT PLAYS AND PERFORMANCES: *Izvanjac, Happy End, Marriage of King Vukašin, Fairy Tale about a King and a Nightingale, Baš Čelik, Peter Pan, Puss in Boots, Šargor, Red Riding Hood, Cinderella* etc., which were performed on stages of almost all the theatres in Serbia. His play *Happy End* was performed in the Royal Court Theatre in London (1997), *Still Life* in the ATF Theatre in Sophia (1994), *Bosnian Pot in Paris* in the Gare Au Theatre in Paris (2001), and *Baš Čelik* in Vitebsk, Belarus (2005).

TV SERIES (SCREENWRITER): *Plywood Dreams* (TV Pink, 1995), *Good Evening, Children*, (RTS, 1996), *The Street of Good Hope* (Children’s Channel “Bonart”, 2000), *Wonder Has Wondered* (RTS, animated TV series for children).

FILM (SCREENWRITER OR CO-SCREENWRITER): *Knife*, based on the novel by Vuk Drašković, director: Miroslav Lekić, 1999; *War Alive*, director: Darko Bajić, 2000; *Labyrinth*, director: Miroslav Lekić, 2002.

RADIO DRAMAS: *Peter Pan*, director: Zlatko Paković, Radio Belgrade, 1995; *Beauty and the Beast*, director: Božidar Đurović, Radio Belgrade, 1997.

MORE SIGNIFICANT AWARDS:

Sterija Prize at Sterija's City for contemporary comedy text, for the heroic comedy *Puss in Boots*, 1995.

Sterija Prize for contemporary play, for the play *Izvanjac*, 1996.

The "Isak Samokovlija" Award for the play *Labyrinth*, 1985.

Award of the National Theatre in Belgrade for the play *Izvanjac*, 1993.

The "Branislav Nušić" Award for the play *John's Second Birth* (*Izvanjac*), 1993.

Award for best text at the Festival of Children's Theatre, Kotor, for the play *Marriage of King Vukašin*, 1998.

The "Josip Kolundžić" Award of the Faculty of Performance Arts in Belgrade for the play *Izvanjac*, 1993.

The "Božidar Valtrović" Award for the play *Baš Čelik*, 1993.

The "Dragiša Kašiković" Award for the play *Divče*, 1995.

Award for best text for the play *My Childhood Fairy Tales* at the 32nd Meeting of Professional Puppet Theatres of Serbia, Zemun, 1999.

Second Prize for the screenplay *Knife* at the Festival of Screenplays in Vrnjačka Banja, 1999.

Award for best screenplay adaptation for the film *Knife* from the Association of Russian Writers at the Festival "The Golden Knight" in Moscow.

Award for best text for the play *Marriage of King Vukašin* at the 33rd Meeting of Professional Puppet Theatres of Serbia, Subotica, 2000.

Award for best text for the play *Red Riding Hood* at the 36th Meeting of Professional Puppet Theatres of Serbia, Niš, 2003.

Zmaj Award for the overall contribution to playwriting for children, Novi Sad, 2004.

Award for best text for the play *The Ugly Duckling* at the Children's Theatre Festival "Pozorište Zvezdarište", Belgrade, 2007.

Lifetime Achievement Award, *Little Prince*, at the 17th International Festival of Children's Theatres in Subotica, 2010.

Award for best text for the play *The King's Nightingale* at the 42nd Meeting of Professional Puppet Theatres of Serbia, Novi Sad, 2011.

Igor Bojović

THE DAMAGED ONES

Drama | 2011. Belgrade

Translator > Petar Metikos

CHARACTERS:

STEFAN, 23 years old, the
best student at Oxford, dad's hope

VASA THE BULLDOZER, 42 years old, Stefan's father, businessman

ZANETA, 42 years old, Stefan's mother, long-legged attractive blond

CHASLAV, professional politician, 50 years old

DOLORES, 23 years old, Chaslav's daughter, graduated at Oxford, along
with Stefan and now working at SMIP

TSANE, THE STICK, 35 years old, the crook

THE THRESHER, 35 years old, Vasa the Bulldozer's crook

THE MUGGER, 35 years old, Vasa the Bulldozer's crook

THE PRIEST, 45 years old

MERCEDES CHICK, 9 years old, gold-digger

BMW CHICK

TSANE THE STICK'S BODYGUARDS

UNKNOWN GUY, 24 years old

The story takes place here and now.

THE WELCOMING

Luxuriously furnished living-room in the house of Vasa the Bulldozer. Enormous flat-TV dominates the wall. On the other wall, a smaller screen displaying the pictures taken by security cameras, positioned all over the house. Every room covered, we see chefs in the kitchen preparing lunch, front-yard with a swimming-pool guarded by a German Sheppard, the street and the access to the house... A large grand-piano in the middle of a room. ZANETA is in the living-room. She is nervously walking around, watching herself in the mirror etc. Vasa approaches the proscenium. He speaks to the audience.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

My name is Vasa and my last name is Dubajić. Friends, if that I may call those parasites all around me, call me Vasa the Bulldozer. And, why Bulldozer? Well, that will be revealed later, there will be time for that... Anyway, I want you to enjoy the play. Maybe it turns out well. Maybe I won't kill myself at the end. Maybe I won't put a 9mm in my mouth and blow my brains out...

ZANETA approaches the proscenium.

ZANETA

I'm Zaneta. You guessed, I'm Vasa's wife. I gave birth to his lovely son who has just graduated from Oxford. I have a Ph.D. in World Literature, I'm beautiful and educated, and my husband adores me. I had only a couple of interventions on my face and my body and so on... Do I look 35? Don't answer that.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I will try my best not to show any blood or killing in this play, as you're probably used to seeing in real life.

ZANETA

We wish you all the best.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And that's why we don't recommend this play for those under 14.

ZANETA

(Coquettishly showing off her legs.)

Or those with a weak heart.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

It all began one day when I was playing the grand-piano.

Vasa sits down at the piano.

ZANETA

To be honest, I have to say that it all began much earlier; it's just that Vasa never wants to admit it to himself.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And so I'm playing like this...

Vasa is seated at the grand-piano. Playing. Chopin, Liszt... Zaneta, reclined on the piano, is observing him fondly.

ZANETA

Your playing is so pleasant...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Darling, can I ask you something?

ZANETA

I know. Take down the curtains.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And so you know... I mean why did you hang them in the first place?

ZANETA

Well I'm sorry. It's because of the boy... I wanted to embellish the house for him, so that he could feel the warmth of his home when he returns.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

The only warmth he can feel, you see, this I too remember well, is the warmth of the smoke and fire coming out of his nose, and ears... Well, just remember the flame; remember the blushing of my cheeks when I first met you! Please, you know I can't stand them.

ZANETA

I'm sorry. Here, I'm taking them off... how lovely you're playing. You are evoking all those memories.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

So are you. Sit here. Let's do it four-hands.

ZANETA

I can't do it like you...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Just sit here and follow me. Let's welcome him in harmony. Like real parents do. Chopin, C-major!

ZANETA

Oh, I love you so much!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And I love you very much too! Allegro! Adagio! Give, give!

The door-bell rings. THE THRESHER, THE MUGGER and STEFAN enter the house. The Mugger and the Thresher are carrying Stefan's bags.

STEFAN

(To the audience.)

I wonder if they will even recognize me.

Stefan spreads his arms as he approaches his parents.

STEFAN (CONT'D)

Mom, dad, I'm home!

First Zaneta throws herself into his arms. Then Vasa embraces them both.

ZANETA

Son! My son!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Over Zaneta's shoulder, to the Thresher.)

What took you so long?

THE THRESHER

Well, it's the competition.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

?

THE THRESHER

Dime's firm is asphaltting the road to the airport.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Oh that, well, yes... well, I knew it, the works. Get these things to Stefan's floor.

The Thresher nods to the Mugger. They're off with the things. Vasa, Zaneta and Stefan barely separated themselves from each other.

ZANETA

(Scanning Stefan from head to toe.)

You lost some weight?

STEFAN

(Shrugs.)

I didn't, it just seems that way.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Even so, we'll fix that.

ZANETA

We'll rebuild both your biceps and triceps; you'll work out a bit with the guys, then some healthy food, proteins, some steroids, just to gain some weight... I'm afraid your presents won't fit you right away.

STEFAN

Presents?

(To the audience.)

Now, it's time for them to buy my love.

Zaneta is taking out various pieces of clothing.

ZANETA

BOSS suit, ZEGNA shirt, then TRUSSARDI jeans...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Roguishly.)

... BURLINGTON socks, LACOSTE, BENETTON, PACIOTTI sneakers – few pairs, NIKE as well, CAVALLI, ARMANI, VERSACE, DOLCE & GABBANA, LA MARTINA, BURBERRY, FERRE, GUCCI, ETRO, CERUTTI...

STEFAN

Is that some sort of haiku poem?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

That's mom studying world literature.

ZANETA

You guys are misbehaaaaving...

Stefan kisses Zaneta on the cheek.

STEFAN

Thanks, mom.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And here's something from your dad. To the best student at Oxford...

STEFAN

I'm not the best.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What do you mean you're not?

STEFAN

Well, there were better students.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well, of course! Would the English ever admit that some Serb is better than them!

STEFAN

It has nothing to do with that... It's not like that back there...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

But you're here now, not there, and I don't see a better student around here. What about you, mom? Do you see anyone better?

ZANETA

(Looking over to the audience.)

God forbid!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Taking out his car keys.)

To the best graduate at... Oxford... the keys to THE HARWOOD!

STEFAN

(Baffled.)

To what?!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well... to HEMERA!

Stefan takes the keys. Looks at them, confused.

STEFAN

Dad, I... don't know how to drive...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What do you mean you don't know? Haven't we gone through all that long ago?

STEFAN

We did the license.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

At your age, I had... Well, I've been driving ever since I was seventeen...

ZANETA

Just because you have, doesn't mean he has to...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

You're right, mom. He doesn't have to. That was a long time ago, a different time, a time when one had to struggle to get by...

ZANETA

We'll take some additional driving lessons, sweetheart, don't you worry...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

That's right.

(To Stefan.)

In the mean time, you can practice in the backyard.

ZANETA

(To Stefan.)

We have another surprise for you.

The living room brightens up with bluish rays of rotational lights coming in through the windows.

STEFAN

The police?!

ZANETA

Of course not, sweetheart. That's your girlfriend coming.

On the monitor, we see Chaslav and Dolores coming out of an AUDI.

STEFAN

(Delighted.)

Dolores!

ZANETA

We've invited her and her father to a luncheon, to celebrate your arrival.

STEFAN

(Delighted.)

Mom! Dad!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Aren't you a little in love with Dolores?

STEFAN

Well, dad... you see... I mean, I guess I am.

ZANETA

What do you mean – you guess you are? Isn't it normal to be in love with your girlfriend, without having to guess?

We hear the sound of the intercom. In the room, Zaneta is pushing the intercom button.

ZANETA (CONT'D)

Come iiiiin!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To Stefan.)

She's such a nice girl. And... Chaslav is a very good friend of mine... But, son... remember what I will tell you now. The world is divided into gamblers and casino owners. And only the owners win.

(He gives him a firm hug.)

You have to command the situation, always. Always stick to your guns. Especially tonight!

STEFAN

I don't understand, what is so special about tonight?

The door-bell interrupts them. Chaslav and Dolores enter the scene. Chaslav is carrying an elegantly wrapped present in his hands.

STEFAN

Dolores! Dolly! Dorothy!

DOLORES

Stefi!

They both rush into each other's arms. And then become aware of their parents' presence.

STEFAN

This is my dad, Vasa.

Vasa vigorously, as if greeting a man, clenches the girl's gentle hand, almost crushing her bones.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Vasa Dubajić.

Dolores takes out her hand, with difficulty.

DOLORES

Vasa the Bulldozer.

CHASLAV

(Dumbfounded and startled.)

Dolores!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Laughing.)

It's alright. Everyone calls me that. That's the nickname from my childhood days... when I was strong... like a bulldozer.

DOLORES

(To Stefan.)

And this is my dad Chaslav.

CHASLAV

Chaslav Stojkov, very pleased to meet you.

They shake hands.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

For fiends – Chucky.

CHASLAV

I prefer Chaslav. So, call me Chaslav.

ZANETA

(Coquettishly.)

I'm so happy to see you, Chaslav. You look much better in real life than on television.

CHASLAV

Allow me to kiss you hand, Madame Zaneta.

He kisses Zaneta's hand. Zaneta is "flourishing". Vasa hugs Chaslav. Then he pulls him aside.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What is it, Chucky? Why are you so tense?

CHASLAV

Well... you know that funny feeling when you believe you should be in one place instead of another?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I don't understand?

CHASLAV

Vasa... You know that we are friends, but being here together, it's not good for either of us.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Why? You're not some criminal that could compromise me.

CHASLAV

Man, they will connect us with tenders, privatization...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Do you even know all the people who come to see me?

CHASLAV

Who?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well, that's none of your business. You see, you know nothing.

CHASLAV

I don't know.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well, they don't know anything about you either. It's safe, man, chill out.

CHASLAV

Even if you're diagnosed with paranoia, it doesn't mean you're not being followed.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Hey, Chucky! Your daughter is getting engaged tonight. Come on, would you like some snow?

CHASLAV

Uh... Alright. But let's do it out of the children's sight.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Of course, just not in front of the children.

Vasa is taking out a puff box with cocaine. Chaslav sniffs.

CHASLAV

You don't want to?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I despise that.

CHASLAV

You don't know what you're missing.

(To the audience.)

Do you want some?

The Thresher, dressed like a bartender, enters the stage. He sweats, his bow-tie obviously tightened too hard. He's pushing a beverage cart. Chaslav buzzes the double SCOTCH WHISKEY.

CHASLAV (CONT'D)

(Encouraged.)

Let's go to the table now.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

That's right, to the table.

Chaslav brings out the present he prepared for Stefan.

CHASLAV

Dear Stefan, our dear son, let me congratulate you on your great achievement at Oxford, and in that name let me give you this small token of attention. Dolores suggested that you like nice and elegant things, so I hope I got it right.

Stefan opens the box, takes out the wrist-watch, and takes an impressed look at it. He puts it on his wrist.

STEFAN

(Amazed.)

VACHERON CONSTANTIN!

DOLORES

Bravo, dad! How did you guess!

STEFAN

It's just the one I wanted! Thank you so much.

CHASLAV

There is nothing to thank me for. I have to support youngsters, especially when they achieve the success you and my Dolores accomplished at Oxford. Anyway, supporting youngsters is also a part of the policy of the party I have been heading for years now, the only party that stands for true and fundamental, uncompromising changes in this society. And therefore I believe that you two also, like young lions, will become decent members of our new progeny.

STEFAN

Well, you see, I have just finished with my studies and politics is not exactly in the range of my interests...

CHASLAV

Oh, don't you worry about that. In this country you will become interested in no time.

DOLORES

Stefi, daddy's right. That is good for our careers. But, as you wish. No one is going to pressure you.

CHASLAV

Of course, I won't. Here, for example, I have never ever insisted on anything. Dolores wanted to study at Oxford on her own, to get a job at SMIP on her own and if our party wins...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To the audience.)

And it will have to win...

CHASLAV

She will want to be an ambassador on her own and she won't mind at all if it's in Finland, Norway or...

DOLORES

It's alright, dad, it's still cold over there.

CHASLAV

Well I guess they're warming that embassy somehow?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I'll take care of Stefan. Now, let's concentrate on the victory.

CHASLAV

That's right! And if we win, children, Chaslav will take care of your careers!

ZANETA

Only... you should know that our ambitions are not small.

CHASLAV

And why should they be? You have a capable son... Oxford is not some SEGA MEGA, or just another university.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I don't see my son taking a lower position than that of a minister... For the beginning.

STEFAN

Dad! That is an exaggeration. An utter exaggeration...

CHASLAV

I beg your pardon?! What do you mean an exaggeration? This is the country of our dreams. Man, if we win here, everything is possible, you can bet on it...

Vasa gets up and grabs Chaslav tightly by the shoulder with two fingers.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Come here, I want to ask you something.

Chaslav obediently gets up and follows Vasa.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

Why IF WE WIN? I don't understand. The deal is – to win.

CHASLAV

We are a small party with big problems.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

How big?

CHASLAV

Financially big.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I see.

CHASLAV

If only we could get the Arena for the convention. I mean, a significant item on the list are the extras we need to hire to do the cheering, and make the Arena look full to the people watching us on TV. Then I'm certain we'll make it to the second round.

Vasa hands Chaslav a briefcase.

CHASLAV (CONT'D)

(To the audience.)

Oh, how I love moneeey!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Here... for the Arena. And I will finance the whole campaign, too. Are there any more problems I could fix?

CHASLAV

One tiny little thing, just a dozen people, some of which are in the management of the party...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What about them?

CHASLAV

Well... they have risen up a bit against me... personal interests and stuff like that...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Names?

Chaslav hands him a note with the names.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

They will sing your tune starting tomorrow.

CHASLAV

(To the audience.)

Man, how I love control and power.

Chaslav hugs Vasa. Vasa gives him a slight pat on the face.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And as for my condition... You know it.

With his back turned, only for Chaslav to see, he points a finger at Stefan.

CHASLAV

Of course, you're aware how big of a bite this is, we must do this one step at a time...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Whatever. God willing.

CHASLAV

You're my biggest encouragement. You believe so strongly in my victory...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I do believe.

CHASLAV

Why?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Because you're one big piece of shit. The shit of shits.

They both laugh. And then hug.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Let's go to the table now. The children will think we're gays.

CHASLAV

Wait! Give me just another bit of that powder while they're not watching.

Chaslav again sniffs out of the puff-box. They go back to the table.

DOLORES

(Looking at the briefcase.)

What is that, dad?

CHASLAV

Oh it's nothing, some worthless business papers...

Zaneta's standing with a glass and a spoon in her hand. She starts tapping her glass, calling for their attention. Dolores listens to her carefully all the time.

ZANETA

My dears! Knowing that every one of us is blood-type B+ and that we all love to eat meat, tonight, we have venison on the menu.

CHASLAV

Well, now I'm fascinated! You even know my blood type.

ZANETA

How could I not know? I've been watching "BIG BROTHER" closely. Too bad they threw you out so soon. I have been supporting you the whole time. Anyway... As for the appetizers, there will be pheasant pâté, goose pâté...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Continues roguishly.)

... MANGALITZA gammon, wild-boar and venison sausage, common quail's eggs, bear's Prosciutto, bear paws, pheasant soup with noodles...

ZANETA

(Trying to be ironic with Vasa.)

... foliated cheese from the casks of Gornja Zminica, the oasis-village between Durmitor and Sinjajevina...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

... hard sheep cheese from Sharr Mountains, geymar from Zlatibor, special pork scratchings from Machkat, regular pork scratchings from Bajmok, crazy crabbily cabbage from Futog and, finally, BRAWN made out of bone marrow. Afterwards, we will have the main dish – a roebuck filled with wild-boar which is, also, filled with pheasants and partridges, which are, also, filled with wild-rabbit-hearts. All that, of course, is expurgated and without any bones, feathers, entrails etc...

ZANETA

Dolores! Honey! I have never ever imagined you'd be like that at all.

DOLORES

Madame, I bow to you in admiration. This menu is pure Haiku.

STEFAN

What did I tell you? That's my mom!

DOLORES

(To Stefan.)

Oh, you are my...

STEFAN

No, you are my...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well, since we've all chosen what we'll have for lunch, we'll turn now to main event. Son, take this and put it on her finger.

Vasa hands a little box to Stefan. Stefan opens the box. He sees the wedding-ring.

STEFAN

I don't understand. What is this?

ZANETA

It's the wedding-ring, son. Have you gone blind?

CHASLAV

And, you don't want to? For you, the relationship with my Dolores is some kind of a one-night-stand?

DOLORES

Daddy, please... He loves me, for God's sake.

STEFAN

Well, of course, it's just...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

It's just what?

STEFAN

Why didn't anybody tell me this?

ZANETA

And when do you think we could have told you? You've only just arrived.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To Stefan.)

There, there. You take it, put it on her finger and get it over with. You won't be under any obligation. This is just an engagement.

CHASLAV

Come on son, the assembly is tomorrow, I don't have time for this...

DOLORES

Stefan, no one told me a thing, either. I can understand you but, on the other hand, I'm kinda annoyed by your hesitation. It's as if you don't love me.

STEFAN

That's not true! I just thought we should have known all this.

DOLORES

You know very well my opinion on this matter: a paper as a piece of paper doesn't interest me at all, what I care about is your love! And so it's all the same to us, why shouldn't we agree to their arrangement?

STEFAN

Well... Let's do it then.

Stefan puts the ring on Dolores' ringer-finger. An applause. Vasa sits down at the piano. He begins to play. All eyes are fixed on him.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And now... The surprise of the evening...
ZDRAVKO COLIC!

Complete silence. Vasa stops playing.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

What? You don't believe me?

Vasa continues with the playing. He starts singing as well.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

You live high above the clouds, my darling...

ZDRAVKO COLIC enters the stage with a microphone in his hand.

ZDRAVKO COLIC

... And my voice cannot reach you over there...

ZANETA

Aaaaaaaaaaaa!

Chaslav falls on his knees in front of Zdravko. Vasa is playing. THE PRIEST enters the scene. And he too stares in wonder. Stefan and Dolores observe in astonishment. Zdravko finishes off with his hit-single, both for the actors, and for the audience.

ZDRAVKO COLIC

I wish you a happy engagement.

Zdravko bows. He takes the briefcase from Vasa. Leaves the stage.

THE PRIEST

This is the first time I've heard him singing live.

ZANETA

Oh, Father, you've arrived!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Son! My son! Look who's here! Look who's gonna bless your engagement.

ZANETA

(To Stefan and Dolores, in confidence.)

He's here only for the engagement. You'll be married by the Patriarch himself. We will arrange that later.

THE PRIEST

Our Son...

On the monitor we see a pickup approaching the front gate.

ZANETA

(To the monitor.)

Here it is! The roebuck has arrived. Woo-hoooo!

The pickup explodes in front of the gate. The explosion is tremendous. Everybody's down on the floor. Windows shatter. On the monitor we see a trained German Sheppard darting towards the gate in the front yard. He barks ferociously at the car-bomb. Vasa gets up, along with Stefan. Chaslav, sneaking, skulks out of the house.

CHASLAV

(To the audience.)

You haven't seen me.

(He grabs Dolores by the hand.)

We were never here!

He drags Dolores out. They are both out of the scene.

STEFAN

What was that?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Oh, it's nothing. Some teacher lives across the street. His students probably threw some firecrackers at his house.

He sits back at the piano.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

You know this one: *"Hey, teacher, leave those kids alone!"*

End of the scene.

THE CONSULTATIONS

Vasa's office. A massive worktable, antiquity, "NA-POLEON III", spacious library completely covered in glass... In front of the library, home exercise equipment – a track for running, where Vasa endlessly exercises while consulting with the Thresher and the Mugger.

THE THRESHER

We've wiped up everything. There are no traces left.

THE MUGGER

No police, no insight, no media.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To the audience.)

What has become of this world! Where is it goiiiing! Well, the end is coming soon, I know it is! I have never hurt a fly in my life. Why and who would ever want to kill me?

THE MUGGER

We couldn't identify him. The kid was so stoned that he activated the bomb too soon. He completely got mixed up with the roast.

THE THRESHER

We couldn't have compounded him even if we searched for the DNA.

THE MUGGER

But, that he wanted to kill, he did!

THE THRESHER

What did he want? You have no clue. That's a warning! They activated it by remote-control, on purpose, in front of the house.

THE MUGGER

They killed their own guy?

THE THRESHER

They got rid of the junkie so they could show us they're serious. That the warning is serious!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To the audience.)

A warning for what? For a parking lot? Well, my only sin in life is... Oh no, it cannot be... Because I've parked by mistake in front of someone else's gate... Oh, come on...

THE MUGGER

Whoever it was, we'll find out. And when we find out... (He touches his groin as if he's coming.)

Hrghhhh... We're gonna do him!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What do you mean – do him?

THE THRESHER

I'm thinking of selling his organs. I'm thinking of tearing him to pieces.

(He's scratching his groin.)

Oh, I'm getting a hard-on.

THE MUGGER

Action, bro!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

You two are not gonna do anybody. I have never ever hurt a fly in my life. And I never will!

(To the audience.)

Hell, a fly? Why I've built so many schools, made so many investments... then there's half of the Temple...

THE THRESHER

Well, exactly, and then, recently, in the earthquake...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

In the earthquake? I did not!

THE THRESHER

Well, in what then?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

In the readjustment after the earthquake!

THE THRESHER

Ok. Whatever. In the earthquake.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well, it's true. I have caused it so that I could invest in it afterwards. Well, that may be the reason for my execution. What on Earth has this world come to!

THE THRESHER

If they wanted to, they would do it. I have been dealing with explosives, I know the thing. It is a WARNING!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

But, a warning for what! And why me? Why meeee?

End of the scene.

STRIPTISE BAR "BALKAN", THE BIGGEST ON THE PENINSULA

The bar is empty. Stefan sits at the bar. Dolores dances around the pole on the dance-floor. MERCEDES CHICK and BMW CHICK dance with her. They are speaking on microphones trying to beat down the over-amplified rave music.

MERCEDES CHICK

I am Mercedes Chick. With good maintenance you could drive me as fast as you want, but I would forever be high-class. You could proudly show me off to your homies. Through all the curves I will ride very agile and you will feel cosy and safe.

BMW CHICK

I am BMW Chick. I'm more into sporty rides. I'm expensive in maintaining, too. But bro, entering a BMW is not a cheap thing! And as for quality, between the BMW and the Mercedes, that's just a matter of taste.

MERCEDES CHICK

Of course, Mercedes is preferred more by a serious...

BMW CHICK

... and way older clientele. Sorry kitty, BMW – sporty ride!

MERCEDES CHICK

(Dancing around the pole.)

You bitch.

BMW CHICK

(Not stopping with the dance either)

You asp.

Stefan points a finger at Dolores.

STEFAN

What about you? Are you a PEUGEOT chick maybe?

DOLORES

No. I work in SMIP.

BMW CHICK

So bro, a hoe.

STEFAN

You – I don't want to.

Stefan turns off the music.

MERCEDES CHICK AND BMW CHICK

(Dumbfounded.)

Her?

STEFAN

(Gesturing them to get lost.)
Come on, wrum, wrum! Out.

Mercedes Chick and BMW Chick are holding hands, noses up, getting out. Dolores, alone with herself, continues dancing around the pole. On a muted TV, we see footage from the Arena. Chaslav is holding a speech ferociously gesticulating the whole time. The crowd frantically solutes him.

STEFAN (CONT'D)

Bravo, Chucky! There's your dad on TV.

Dolores glances at the screen. At that moment, on stage beside Chaslav comes out THE PRIEST. He hugs Chaslav. The crowd sings and cheers.

DOLORES

Oh, it's the footage from the last night. From Arena.

STEFAN

Should I turn the sound on?

DOLORES

Don't. I know this speech by heart. I wrote more than half of it. Excuse me, but does anybody normal meet up in a striptease-bar at noon? Where exactly did you get the idea of meeting here?

Stefan turns off the television.

STEFAN

This is the last place on Earth where my parents would look for me. Man, you're good with the pole. Mmmm... A student girl from Oxford.

DOLORES

And why are you running from them?

STEFAN

They bug me.

DOLORES

And what if you really need them?

STEFAN

How much I need is just how much I get from them. I mean, the money, the love, the money and all that... A row of meat, then a row of bacon...

DOLORES

But why are we hiding? Why did they want to kill us? Because of your dad, or mine?

STEFAN

Neither of them. We have a buster gangster in the hood. You know how they like buying houses in our neighbourhood.

DOLORES

You're lying?

STEFAN

If my dad lies, then I'm lying too.

Dolores laughs. She stops dancing around the pole. Approaches Stefan.

DOLORES

Close your eyes. I have a surprise for you.

STEFAN

Mmmmmm... that's what I've been waiting for the whole time.

DOLORES

Close them!

STEFAN

Alright, I'm closing!

Stefan closes his eyes. Dolores gets a magazine from her purse. She taps him on the head with it.

DOLORES

“Quarry”, the culture magazine. They have published your poem.

STEFAN

My poem?

DOLORES

Your poem.

Stefan eagerly leafs through the magazine.

STEFAN

Look it’s here: “Stefan Dubajić, From Truth to the Light”. Are you sure they really wanted to publish my poem, or did you abet them a bit?

DOLORES

(Brassily.)

I fucked with the chef-editor so that they would publish it.

Stefan brings her closer. He picks her up and places her on the bar-chair.

STEFAN

And now I’m gonna thank you for that.

DOLORES

Stefi, we don’t have time for that, I’m gonna be late for SMIP. I just took a break here.

(To the audience.)

Oh, they can be so tiring, if only you could imagine. And especially now, when this new one is the Minister...

STEFAN

Let’s do the impromptu. You know how that turns me on.

DOLORES

The bartender will show up.

STEFAN

No, he won’t. I paid him not to show up.

DOLORES

Somebody will show up.

STEFAN

So what? My dad would fuck you here in front of the whole bar.

DOLORES

I don’t need your dad. You’re my bulldozer.

(To the audience.)

The boy is a bit green, isn’t he?

Stefan is very turned on by all this. He furiously sticks his cock between Dolores’ legs. Stefan is standing, while Dolores is sitting on the bar-chair.

STEFAN

What am I?

DOLORES

A bulldozer!

STEFAN

Who am I?

DOLORES

A bulldozer!

STEFAN

What am I?

DOLORES

A bulldozer!

STEFAN

Who am I?

DOLORES

A bulldozer!

Stefan is fiercely sticking his cock into Dolores. Behind him, TSANE THE STICK shows up with his two BODYGUARDS.

Dolores, over Stefan's shoulder, sees Tsane and his bodyguards. She's trying to break away, but in vain. Stefan is pouncing wildly.

STEFAN

What am I?

Dolores tries to break away again. She tries now to give Stefan a hint that they're being watched.

STEFAN (CONT'D)

Answer me! Who am I IIII?

TSANE THE STICK

You're a sheep's dick.

Stefan stiffens. Dolores finally breaks away. She adjusts her skirt. Stefan buckles his zipper.

TSANE THE STICK (CONT'D)

Well, look who's fucking in the middle of the afternoon and in the middle of the biggest striptease-bar on the Balkans? The little greenhorn. You think we have bad chicks here, so you brought your own, eh? Well, bro, you're such a dumb-ass!

STEFAN

Excuse me, but what exactly do you want from us?

TSANE THE STICK

You can fuck your own girl in your own house. You get out from the hole, you live in the hole, you live

for the hole, you pay for the hole, and you return to the hole! *Carpe Diem.*

Dolores picks up her stuff and quickly gets out.

DOLORES

I have to go now to SMIP.

(She shows her ID skilfully.)

Excuse me, I'm late.

(Very chastely, as if nothing happened.)

Good-byeeee.

Dolores gets out. Stefan now stands alone with Tsane and the bodyguards.

STEFAN

Who are you?

TSANE THE STICK

Are you hearing what I hear? He asks who I am.

The bodyguards laugh. Tsane grabs Stefan by the neck.

TSANE THE STICK

Come here then, let me explain something to you.

He drags Stefan into the men's room and sticks his head in the toilet; flushes and then pulls him out.

TSANE THE STICK

Tell your daddy – Tsane the King says hello. And don't mind this. It was nothin personal.

Stefan, throwing up, runs out without turning around.

BODYGUARD I

We should've fucked him.

TSANE THE STICK

That's alright, we have time for that.

The bodyguards exit the bar. Tsane abruptly turns to the audience.

TSANE THE STICK (CONT'D)

Just to let you know, I'm the most promising character in this piece! And do you know why? Because I'm still the mosquito who didn't get enough blood. I'm hungry! And I'm bad when I'm hungry!

The music starts playing. Snow begins to fall.

TSANE THE STICK (CONT'D)

I am the mosquito, mom,

That you cannot hide!

I am the mosquito, mom,

That will drink your blood...

I am the mosquito, mom!

... Or I won't abide.

I am the mosquito... yum... yummm...

Fuck, how this *horse* is doing me.

He lies down on the stage.

End of the scene.

THE PRIEST ANTE PORTAS

Vasa's living room.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

It's always a pleasure to see you.

THE PRIEST

I came here to beg you...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

You? To beg me? But you can only command me... In the name of the Father and Son...

THE PRIEST kneels down before Vasa. He embraces his knees with both hands. At that moment, Stefan enters the room. Stunned, he watches the Priest hugging Vasa's legs. Stefan turns and quickly gets out.

THE PRIEST

Please...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What are you doing! Get up! Let's go to the piano! Come on, Mickey!

THE PRIEST

It's – Father Miroslav!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Come along, Father Miroslav, let's do it four-hands.

They start playing and singing: "*I can't get no satisfaction!*" They both fiercely go into raptures over playing. The sound captivates them entirely. Suddenly, Vasa rises.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

How good would we look on the big screen, huh? Father Miroslav, you like the movies?

THE PRIEST

To be hones... No.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Then, what about the coat?

The Priest gives him a dumbfounded look. Vasa gets up from the piano. He returns with an expensive fur-coat and puts it on the Priest.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

It's a bit long to me, but it fits you perfectly! It's like TITO killed some bear of exactly his size. Let's return to the piano!

The Priest, wearing the coat, confused, follows Vasa. They sit at the grand-piano.

THE PRIEST AND VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Together.)

I can't get no satisfaction!

Vasa suddenly stops playing.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

We could play that good old one...

THE PRIEST

Which one?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well... The Drina March!

THE PRIEST

You... you... youuuu...

The Priest gets an epileptic-attack. He falls down and convulsively trembles on the floor, still wearing

the coat. Water comes out of his mouth. Abruptly, he stands up, as if nothing happened.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What was that?

THE PRIEST

Well, I didn't come here to play...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

?

The Priest takes off the coat. Hands it over to Vasa.

THE PRIEST

I hope you don't mind.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Oh, no... I don't believe this! Are you trying to insult me? Are you even aware of how it fits you? You look like the Russian Patriarch, for God's sake!

THE PRIEST

It's minus thirty degrees in Russia! And I'm serving in Serbia!

(A pause.)

If I wanted to wear a coat, I wouldn't have chosen the cassock!

He hands Vasa the coat. Vasa accepts it in an ambiguous manner.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I am sorry, I didn't mean nothin bad. Alright, I'll make another donation to the church, a more substantial one. Do you need any crosses for the Dome maybe... Is the 18-carat OK, or would the 24-one be just right?

THE PRIEST

I'm here on another matter, Vasa!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Aha. Well, come on then, Father, confess, what's troubling you?

THE PRIEST

I came to beg you to come to church on Friday, on Holy Friday...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

For what?

THE PRIEST

For a confession, my son and my brother, my SCHOOL-BUDDY!

They look at each other straight in the eyes. The Priest turns promptly. He leaves.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To the Priest.)

Don't you do that to me, Mickey. At least, you know! What's wrong with you? Why should I come to confession? I haven't even... the fly... Why meeee?

He kneels in front of the audience.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

When I was abusive,
 And when I was tender,
 Oh wasn't I attentive
 Not a fly did I hammer!
 There was a guy intrusive,
 So, I had to bother,
 I took a knife incisive,
 And turned him into chopper.
 But still I was attentive
 Not a fly did I hammer!

The end of the poem.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

(To the audience.)

And what are you staring at so romantically? What is it? I cannot understand everything right now, believe me. People, go to your homes, before something wicked befalls.

End of the scene.

THE ENCOUNTER

Vasa is in a cafe. He taps with his fingers on the table. He waits. Finally, Tsane the Stick appears with the bodyguards. The bodyguards have their hair up in pony tails. Tsane, as if not noticing Vasa, passes by to the proscenium.

TSANE THE STICK

(To the audience.)

You all know that one dog year equals seven human years. But, what you don't know is that, in our business, one human year equals seven dog years. You see the one who taps with his fingers over there... Well, that nervous guy has lived way too many human and dog years... That guy lives the life of a sea-turtle, and with the speed of an ostrich! And he knows everything! I remember when he taught us how to pull out a knife from a body without even catching the ribs, so that we could stab another one right after... While other kids baked cookies out of flour and mud, he kneaded plastic explosives... That's how he played when he was a kid. And he always had answers to all of the questions; he always knew how to show us off when we were all young, always... But biology works for me! Even if his dog years come to an end, *no pasaran*. I'm ready for everything.

He abruptly turns to Vasa.

TSANE THE STICK (CONT'D)

(To Vasa, shocked.)

Bro, you came alone.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And how would I? You're one short Tsane the Stick...

TSANE THE STICK

I'm Tsane the King!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Ohhh... Yeah, yeah... The King of hookers and faggots...
Do you even know why people call me the Bulldozer?

TSANE THE STICK

Well, you're like, the heavy one...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

It's because I've buried busters like you with the bulldozer. And you're asking me, why I came alone. And I'm not asking you why you came with your gay pride parade? Do you even know how people come to me... Do you know how much I...

Vasa suddenly gets up with scissors in his hand and chops the pony tails off the bodyguards.

TSANE THE STICK

How do you say... conservative?

The bodyguards take out their guns.

TSANE THE STICK (CONT'D)

(To the bodyguards.)

Get out!

The bodyguards reluctantly and threatening get out.

TSANE THE STICK (CONT'D)

Bro, are you a bit nervous? Here, we're even now, alone, eye to eye.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well, come on then, jump! I don't have time to waste.
What do you want?

Tsane chuckles the whole time.

TSANE THE STICK

Let's cooperate a little.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

On what basis? I deal with legal business, only. I won the Tender and you lost, remember?

TSANE THE STICK

But wasn't I transparent enough?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

More than you should be. That's exactly why we are having this conversation now.

TSANE THE STICK

Fuck, I'm sorry 'bout the kid. He just popped into my cup. How do you say... collateral damage.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Yeah. And what do you want?

TSANE THE STICK

To negotiate.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Sneeringly.)

You and me? About what?

TSANE THE STICK

Ah! You and me! How splendid that sounds. When I remember how you got me out of trouble... How you taught me...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I don't have time now... don't have the patience... To see you, or hear you. Speak-up! Scratch where you itch!

At that moment, a tiny infra-red dot moves across Tsane's body. Stops at his forehead. Vasa nervously shakes off his hand. The dot disappears.

TSANE THE STICK

In the Road Tender, my firm came only barely after yours. You beat us disloyally.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And? You want a cut?

TSANE THE STICK

That would be a gentlemen's agreement.

Vasa takes an envelope out of his pocket; throws it in front of Tsane. Tsane smugly puts it in his pocket.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

That's it?

TSANE THE STICK

Ah no. Now you've just paid the ticket for the movie. The next tender is the one for building on Neimar? You've heard of that, right?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Of course I have. And?

TSANE THE STICK

Well, as you know, my firm is not solvent enough...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I don't know my friend, how to help you in these tough times, except financially.

TSANE THE STICK

(Chuckles.)

Ah no. There is something even bigger than the money.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I'm listening.

TSANE THE STICK

Not showing up for the Tender.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Just that?

TSANE THE STICK

Well, we need to legalize it a bit too...

Vasa offers his hand.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Consider it done.

TSANE THE STICK

Vasa, brother, you're the King. You gave us, the little ones, a piece of the big cake, too. We will always respect you. You will always be the King! Let me kiss your hand.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

There, there.

Tsane rises. He leaves satisfied. As soon as he leaves, the Thresher and the Mugger run in with HECKLERS in their hands. The infra-red spots of their optic sights run all over the stage.

THE THRESHER

Why didn't we whack them, Boss?

THE MUGGER

All that money they took...

THE THRESHER

I don't believe this! You gave them everything they wanted...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Enough!

At that moment Tsane the Stick returns with the, now shaved, bodyguards.

TSANE THE STICK

Listen, you sissies, where's my BMW?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

BMW?

TSANE THE STICK

(Starts crying.)

My black seven?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Seven, like – on the lottery?

TSANE THE STICK

(Through tears.)

Don't fuck with me!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

As far as I know, you came by public transportation.

(To the Thresher and the Mugger.)

Guys, have you seen a BMW somewhere?

THE THRESHER AND THE MUGGER

(At the same time.)

Noooooooooo...

Tsane's bodyguards, with missing ponytails, take out the guns.

TSANE THE STICK

(To the bodyguards.)

Get out!

Tsane takes out the envelope he took from Vasa. His hand trembles. He returns it to Vasa. Vasa takes the envelope. He quickly and skilfully counts the money. He puts the envelope back into his pocket.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Wriggling the ring on his erected middle-finger.)

It's coming to me, a black BMW seven is just parking in front of your house. You are a very happy man. How do we say that?

TSANE THE STICK

BINGO, you mother-fucker!

He gets out.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To the audience.)

Have you heard of the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare? Well, if you haven't... I certainly won't tell you about it.

Dark. End of the scene.

NEGATIVE REVIEW AND THE VICTORY OF RIGHTEOUS POLITICS

The living-room. Zaneta screams hysterically.

ZANETA

Aaaaaaaa! I will kill him with my bare hands! I could chop off his head right noow!

STEFAN

Mom, don't. I will write a new, better poem.

ZANETA

Your poem is perfect. I know that, I am the one who studied world literature! This reviewing piece of shit, to trash you like that! Why didn't he write poetry like that?

Vasa enters, frowning.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What the hell is this Kazachok! One cannot live without you two howling around.

STEFAN

Sorry, dad. Mom is upset...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Why is she upset?

STEFAN

Well... I wrote a poem and...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Dumbfounded.)

What did you do?

STEFAN

A poem... I wrote...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And now I'm really gonna freak-out! I'm preparing you to be a minister, a something! And you... you're writing some ditties. Excuse me, who will read that poem?

STEFAN

Nobody.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What do you mean – nobody?

ZANETA

It's because that's poetry! It is a poem to read, to recite, to whisper, to ponder, to analyze in the classroom... And I'm infuriated because of this shitty critic, and this article he wrote about your son...

She's showing the magazine "Quarry".

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Beastly.)

What did HE write about my son?

ZANETA

(Reads from the "Quarry".)

Obsolete form filled with naive nihilism in an attempt that indicates, on a quasi-Nietzschean platform, terrors of a divided personality...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

He wrote that?!

ZANETA

Yes!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

That's somebody setting me up. Me! Is there anything else terrific that I could hear today?

ZANETA

What else happened?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

That jerk Chucky! He wasn't elected.

ZANETA

What?! All that money...

Chaslav enters. He's a bit tipsy and holds two Champagnes in his hands. He's quite cheerful.

CHASLAV

Victory! Victory! Victory!

(To Vasa.)

Man! We got three minister mandates!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Do you want me to kill you, right here and right now?

CHASLAV

Don't you get it? That's even better than a majority in parliament. Without our three raised hands nothing could be voted. Now everybody will trade with me. Now Chaslav will be asked for everything!

Only then did he notice that all of them were frowning.

CHASLAV (CONT'D)

Madam Zaneta, Stefan, our son? What's the matter?
Has something horrible happened?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Not a thing! Except our son, instead of thinking about
his career, he writes ditties.

CHASLAV

Well, that's splendid! That is wonderful! Congratula-
tions! He's pursuing his career, as he should.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Somebody's nuts around here.

CHASLAV

(To Vasa.)

Leave the politics to the professionals.

Chaslav hugs Stefan.

CHASLAV (CONT'D)

Stefi and I know that's good for his curriculum vitae.

Vasa makes the sign of the cross.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Holy Christ, crucified and blessed, that You're in Heav-
en...

CHASLAV

Many presidents of the world, ministers and all the
others, used to write plays, novels and poems once.
Now they have all the power in the world, the money,
and they don't have time for writing anymore. And
why the hell would they need it.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

We don't curse in this house!

ZANETA

I really didn't expect this from you.

CHASLAV

Alright, alright, my apologies.

(Continues with Stefan.)

Son, nannies from "Crazy Horse"...

(Makes an indecent gesture with his mouth.)

... **read** to them before sleep. They pay for models,
artistes and whores with the State money!

ZANETA

(Dumbfounded.)

I mean, really...

CHASLAV

But, let's agree! Stefan, my son, we're both serious
men, and now that we have won, you and I have to
talk about business.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

So, Stefan, my son, because of your victory, you can
choose which minister you'd like to be for now.

STEFAN

Do I have to choose this instant? I would like to try
writing another poem and represent it...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

That's enough! Can't you see you're not good at that?

STEFAN

Alright, dad. If I have to do it now... Maybe the Min-
ister of Culture?

ZANETA

Bravo son! How lovely! That's how you can immedi-
ately take a revenge on that piece of critic-shit.

STEFAN

Mom!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Certainly not! You know what kind of people work
over there...

CHASLAV

Just take it easy, easy. I wouldn't do it exactly that way. That is nice, it sounds nice, maybe even sweet in a way, but...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

So the marmalade is sweet, but I won't eat it!

CHASLAV

(To Stefan.)

The fact is, there is no money in Culture... that's the lowest budget for which everybody scrambles. As a wise man once said: "Even the rabbit sharpens his dick on an orphan".

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Chaslav, please! Stefan did not study at Oxford to listen to that kind of "aphorism"!

CHASLAV

(To Vasa.)

Alright, alright, I apologize.

(Continues with Stefan.)

And still everybody mocks you, it's always your fault... and you, as soon as you think you have some authority, they take you down, and bring you to your...

(Reads the title of the magazine.)

... "Qu-a-rry" to write your poems. And over there, everybody hates you because you had some power and you did nothing for them...

STEFAN

Alright. Then I don't want to be the Minister of Culture.

CHASLAV

Let's be reasonable. Assistant to the Diaspora Minister.

ZANETA

And why not the Minister?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To Chaslav, through his teeth.)

I expected more from you.

CHASLAV

(To Vasa.)

Take it easy. On that position he won't be exposed to the assaults and he will learn the business. In the meantime, our three little minister hands will wiggle in the Parliament, and then we will move him to where?

(To the audience.)

Let this be our little secret.

Vasa gives Chaslav a hint to follow him. They go aside.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Look, if that don't come out as you say...

CHASLAV

Me, to fuck-up? If I were in your place now, I would be celebrating. Give me that puff-box. We should be treating ourselves. We won, damn it!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Gives the puff-box to Chaslav.)

Just watch out for the kid. You know how delicate he is?

CHASLAV

Of course. Don't worry.

Chaslav "treats" himself frantically. Then he takes an electric guitar.

CHASLAV (CONT'D)

(To the audience.)

This is what you didn't expect.
FENDER STRATOCASTER!

The riffs start. Chaslav sings as if he's alone on stage.

CHASLAV

Oh, I am – the Unshaven Barber!
I cut your hair and I cut your throats
And on you, I... Oh, God, what am I singing...
After all, I am... I... I, I, I...
The Unshaven Barber!
Who is rebel, gets in jumble,
What is given, it is taken,
Sex and drugs and rock-and-roll!
Son of a bitch–
That is me – the Unshaven Barber!
Always slimy, always with manners,
Who can it be than – The Unshaven... oh yeah!
It's all my brain and body need!

He ends up on his knees facing the audience. Vasa approaches him, tapping him with the magazine on the shoulder. Chaslav snaps out of it.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Chucky, let me ask you something.

CHASLAV

Ask me.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Who is financing these yellow pages... This "Shame-ary"?

The end of the scene.

CHASLAV CRITICIZES

Chaslav, Vasa and Stefan in Vasa's office.

CHASLAV

Sorry! Friendship is friendship but everything has its limits! I am very angry!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Son, why is Chucky angry?

STEFAN

Well, dad... you said I should study there. And I know how to study; after all, I graduated from...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

We all know where you graduated. Why is Chucky angry?

STEFAN

30,000 EUROS is a lot of money for this country, and especially for that Ministry. And there was only one man who wanted all that for himself, and by one contract only...

CHASLAV

And he didn't sign that!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To Stefan.)

What's the matter with you! Have you been attacked by some sort of sense of morality?

CHASLAV

Of course, all that would be fine if you got the point. It's alright for you to fight against crime. But, only inside the system! And our system says: Only the law makes us free! And our law... What am I talking about? I am very angry!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

He's right!

STEFAN

But I hold an important place now over there, from which I had to point out... At least that's what you told me, and after all, that is what I read in my job description...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

You are there to advance, not to be a cop!

CHASLAV

Well, son, why didn't you ask me? My third phone is always turned on just for you. I would have told you immediately what to do.

Vasa grabs Stefan by the lapels. He gets in his face.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Do you know what the favourite verse of your mother is? It always touches me...

STEFAN

I know.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Which one?

STEFAN

"I don't have to know everything".

VASA THE BULLDOZER

So?

STEFAN

So, nothing. I made a mistake. I'm sorry.

CHASLAV

But I am still angry!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(To Chaslav.)

And how about you slow down a bit? He's still my son!

CHASLAV

Sorry, mate. I'm so tense. Maybe I went too far.

He drinks whiskey. Calms down.

CHASLAV (CONT'D)

But not to sign the contract... My contract! I mean, I am angry, still! You know me! I'm able to kill, too!

(He takes out the BOWIE-KNIFE.)

Do you know what this is? It's a bowie-knife! It's made only for killing! Do you know who gave it to me?

(He plunges the knife into the table.)

The most famous assassin in the country! Just look how many jags it has on the handle!

Vasa pulls out the knife.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

(Into Chaslav's face.)

Do you know the price of this table?

CHASLAV

It's probably lower than what I have lost because of it! Give it back.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

It's not for you. You could hurt yourself.

CHASLAV

Give me back the knife! I am angry!

Vasa puts the knife in the table drawer. He locks it, grabs Chaslav's shoulder with two fingers and takes him aside.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Stop acting like some puffed fool and concentrate on the problem. What are we going to do with him now?

CHASLAV

How do you mean – what? You know that he can't survive here. Let's put him in the SMIP, at once! He will be the chef adviser to the Foreign Affairs Minister there! But he will have to listen!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I think you're right. So, let it be. Into the fire, straight away! And let him realize it won't be always as he wants!

CHASLAV

(To Stefan.)

Did you hear that? From now on, you call me for everything! And on the third phone! Reserved only for you! You got that?

STEFAN

I got it. On the third phone.

End of the scene.

PLAYING GAMES

Stefan and Dolores in Stefan's room.

STEFAN (CONT'D)

And so, he says to me: "Call me on the third phone?" Well, awesome.

DOLORES

I don't get it, what's awesome about that?

STEFAN

Well, only criminals exchange phone numbers like that. Therefore, my dad has the same number since the beginning of cell-phones. And you suspect that my dad is a felon...

DOLORES

Are you sure that's not the number he kept only for you for years?

STEFAN

You just keep turning me on. Do you know how my dad fucks? He's a famous fucker.

DOLORES

Why can't we fuck just once without playing games previously?

STEFAN

Maybe we can, but not now, please.

DOLORES

And why not now?

STEFAN

Because I just came up with something new. I have a surprise for you, actually.

Stefan takes out a disc.

DOLORES

What's that? Some porn?

STEFAN

Not "some" porn. I found it in dad's desk. It must be the one where he fucks, I'm positive.

DOLORES

Hey! Excuse me, but that's a bit freaky for me.

STEFAN

Please, just this time. It will be insane! Let's fuck while watching my dad fucking.

DOLORES

Promise me we'll stop doing that. Promise...

Stefan kisses her on the mouth passionately.

STEFAN

I promise.

DOLORES

(Insolently.)

Alright then, let's see how your dad fucks.

Stefan eagerly puts the disc into the DVD player. On a flat-TV we see an amateur video. In the video, Vasa the Bulldozer, wearing a masked-uniform, ten years younger, covers some ditch with a bulldozer. The bulldozer's shank-ripper picks up the dirt and drops it on the camera. Darkness.

STRIPTease BAR

Stefan drinks whiskey at the table. Mercedes Chick and BMW Chick are busting their asses dancing around the pole. Stefan watches the news on TV.

SPEAKER

And now, crime report. Police have discovered that the headless, armless and legless corpse, which was found yesterday in Kosutnjak, belongs to the literary critic of "Quarry", Petar Milovanović. As the victim had no criminal record, it is assumed that he was killed by mistake in a gun-fight of the local gang.

Stefan, shocked, cries. Tsane the Stick approaches Stefan. He hugs him. Turns the TV off.

TSANE THE STICK

Check out the kid! Hey, did you know that I bought this place, too? So I'm the boss here too!

STEFAN

I want to work for you.

TSANE THE STICK

Don't you bullshit me. To be a waiter? To carry crates?

A pause. They're looking each other.

STEFAN

Good night then.

TSANE THE STICK

Jesus, you're just like your dad, why do you have to sulk right away?

(To the Mercedes and BMW Chicks.)

Come on pussies! What am I paying you for?

MERCEDES CHICK

Well, what can I do...

BMW CHICK

... when he won't.

Stefan rushes out. Tsane runs after Stefan. Grabs him by the hair.

TSANE THE STICK

Where do you think you're going! You want the toilet again?

STEFAN

I won't! I'm sorry, I'm sorry!

He starts crying.

TSANE THE STICK

There, there. It's no one's fault.

STEFAN

Well, it's not!

TSANE THE STICK

I want to work with you, too! I know what you're going through these days. But... You have to listen. Or you'll get the toilet!

STEFAN

I'm listening.

TSANE THE STICK

It is time for you to become a man, to make something of your life. And with your own ten fingers!

STEFAN

I can do that! I want to do that!

TSANE THE STICK

Then you have to beat him!

STEFAN

(Sobs.)

How, how, how...?

TSANE THE STICK

You're in the right place. What do you think... You and me do some serious work. Diplomatic post, you could do it, easily. And then...

STEFAN

Then what?

TSANE THE STICK

Look, I've been in the porn business a long time too.

STEFAN

And?

TSANE THE STICK

Well, for example... by chance, I happen to know how you do it... I watched you, over this very table! Remember?

STEFAN

But I can't get a hard-on anymore!

TSANE THE STICK

Oh come on! Well, I was there. Sylvester Stallone, against you? A baby! Listen, you fuck Mercedes, or BMW, whatever. And?

STEFAN

And what?

TSANE THE STICK

We send the video to your dad. Do you think you will get a hard-on again if you know that your dad's gonna watch how you fuck in the most famous of all the striptease-bars in the Balkans?

STEFAN

I want 'em both! Booooth!

He sobs. The end of the scene.

STAY HERE

Stefan and Dolores in bed.

STEFAN

I can't, I can't, I can't...

DOLORES

It's nothing terrible, Stefi. We will solve that.

STEFAN

No, we won't.

DOLORES

It can happen to anybody.

STEFAN

I'm not anybody!

DOLORES

I know... You are bulld...

She bites her tongue. Stefan gives her an icy look.

STEFAN

I'm NOBODY.

DOLORES

And how about you take something to read, write a poem, wash your hair for a change... start going to work?

STEFAN

I can't get a hard-on.

DOLORES

We will run away. Far away. Out there, they have hospitals for that... Well, it's curable, for God's sake.

STEFAN

There is no hospital that can cure me from him, there is no place to hide... You know what? You go. I will come after you, as soon as I get myself together.

DOLORES

I'm not going anywhere without you. I cannot watch you destroying yourself any longer. Where's that lovely guy from Oxford? Here, we will play various games or we won't play games or we will... do whatever you want...

STEFAN

I can't get a hard-on anymore.

DOLORES

Stefi, that's our only way out. We have to run away together.

STEFAN

We weren't born together, you know.

DOLORES

What are you saying?

STEFAN

Do you think we'd ever meet if your dad hadn't wanted to suck up to my dad?

DOLORES

Or maybe the other way round? Stefi, please, let's get out of here, as far as we can! I will arrange everything.

You jerk, I don't care if you could get a hard-on or not, I love you!

STEFAN

Look, we can solve this by me saying to you how I don't love you or by insulting you so that you leave or simply realize that... I'm not going!

DOLORES

You can't just stay here, after all that we've...

STEFAN

Of course I can.

(He gets into her face.)

Understand that this thing between us was never good. I won't take part in this pathetic reality-show that our fathers arranged for us. Now it's the end! You got that? The end!

Dolores hides her face behind her hands. End of the scene.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE PRIEST

Stefan goes to the Priest. He kneels before him, as soon as he enters the doors. He embraces his knees. The Priest recedes. He gets uncomfortable.

THE PRIEST

You are here for your dad?

Stefan starts crying. THE PRIEST holds him. Stefan sobs.

STEFAN

No, for me.

(A pause.)

I can't make love anymore.

THE PRIEST

Well, I will tell you everything about your father. And then you will heal, for certain.

STEFAN

Oh, please. Please do.

End of the scene.

THE DIPLOMATIC POST

Office of Vasa the Bulldozer. Vasa and Chaslav present.

CHASLAV

We can't arrest Tsane the Stick!

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Well, it's public knowledge that he did it! Who do you work for, anyway? For him or for me?

CHASLAV

Don't you get it? The drug was found in the Diplomatic Post of our Consul.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

So?

CHASLAV

So? Your son has been involved in that! And involved badly!

End of the scene.

A BLOODY TISSUE OF LIES

Chucky and Dolores.

DOLORES

Do you remember when I was a little girl, when I didn't know what a tissue of lies was and you made me a promise? Did you know that, even now, I believe that tissue of lies really exists somewhere.

CHASLAV

Theoretically maybe, but...

DOLORES

And so, daddy, I'm going on a short study tour... to try and find it and... I will never come back.

CHASLAV

I hope you didn't take any drugs or something like that... You know, if you try that stuff once...

DOLORES

I've never been more conscious.

CHASLAV

If this has anything to do with that Vasa's video... I assure you, I know everything about it! He has been set up before... it's nothing more than a simple amateur photomontage!

DOLORES

Dad, my taxi's waiting for me.

CHASLAV

I have to know where you're going! If nothing else, tell me – how to send you money! I am a responsible man! I have to take care of you. Now that mother is gone...

DOLORES

Mother's been gone for almost twenty two years! And you keep repeating: "Now that mother is gone!" She's gone because you banished her!

CHASLAV

Your mother was a woman with a diagnosis! What woman in her normal mind would leave her husband with a six month old child in his hands... And with a female child!

DOLORES

Newspapers wrote a different story.

She takes out the dingy yellow newspapers from her bag.

CHASLAV

Hugh?!

DOLORES

Hugh! Back then I didn't know how to read, but now I can spell a little, you know... You took me away from her! You set up the whole lawsuit... you could do that, even then.

CHASLAV

Journalistic sensationalism! So? You want to leave because you believe in all that?

DOLORES

Ah, no! I don't know what to believe, or whom to believe... you're all one bloody tissue of lies and I only know that I have to go!

CHASLAV

You have been cheated by a boyfriend? Well, I'm gonna... Just relax, we'll fix that.

DOLORES

You've fixed all you could fix. Would you be kind enough to just hold my coat...

CHASLAV

Please, help me. Tell me, how can I deceive you to stay?

DOLORES

Deceive me?

Dolores hugs her father.

DOLORES (CONT'D)

Dad. My dear dad. Have you ever been loved by anybody?

CHASLAV

(Shrugs, plainly.)

And why would I?

DOLORES

Daddy! Tatty!

CHASLAV

Are you crying?

DOLORES

I have to go.

CHASLAV

But where are you going? What are you going to do, how are you gonna earn your living? Child?

DOLORES

Everything is going to be fine. Just don't search for me... never and nowhere and NOBODY! I love you, dad. Goodbye.

Dolores runs out with a suitcase in her hand. Chaslav, dumbfounded, watches her go. He pours a full glass of whiskey. Sits on the floor. Goggles in his reflection inside the glass.

CHASLAV

Chill out, man. The peace is always in the centre of the whirlpool. The most important thing is that you always know how to explain everything to yourself.

So I suppose this will be exactly the case. Good things come to those who wait, Chaslav, just take it easy.

(He looks at the glass as if into a crystal ball.)

There's big things ahead of you... Maybe even new children, maybe... Baby, baby!

He drinks whiskey. End of the scene.

FATHER SON

Vasa's office. Vasa and Stefan present.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Have I made a mistake somewhere? Have I?

Stefan's not speaking.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

Do you know that this buster is my bitter enemy?

STEFAN

I know.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And you found who you're gonna work for legally? With an ape who stuck your head into the toilet! Is it possible? Did he make you to do this? Did he scare you?

STEFAN

No. You wanted that.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I wanted what? I wanted you to be a minister, you and me to work together, legal business, to conquer the world! And you're smuggling weed with my enemy! My son! My blood!

STEFAN

If I wish now to leave this place... to start a new life... to try do something on my own... Would you let me?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

If you try to escape the security once more, I'm gonna kill you with my bare hands! You got that?

The Thresher enters, carrying a disk in his hand.

THE THRESHER

Buster the Stick sent you some disc.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Give me that!

(Takes the disc. To Stefan.)

I asked – you got that?

STEFAN

It's ok, dad.

Stefan, hastily, jumps through the closed window. Glass shatters.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Get him! Arrrgh, with these bare hands! Get hiiiiim!

The end of the scene.

CONFESSION

Vasa's making a confession in the church.

THE PRIEST

(To Vasa.)

I am glad to see you. God is great. Calms your soul.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I did everything for my child. And he stabbed the knife in my back. Miroslav, he's doing drugs with my enemies.

THE PRIEST

You're here to confess your sins not his.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I paid for his nannies, schools, universities, drivers... I even bought him a HAMMER-PAPER, everything! And this is what he does! To me, to me, to me...

THE PRIEST

We won't praise now. Make your confession. Vasa, brother, why do they call you the bulldozer? Haven't you ever committed a sin?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I have.

THE PRIEST

Which one?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I parked the car once in front of my neighbour's gate.

THE PRIEST

And?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

That's all.

THE PRIEST

What kind of a man are you? Don't you even in this sacred place... Do you have any goals in your life, any wishes...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I have only one – to get my son away from bad company.

THE PRIEST

Well, man, make a confession then.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

I parked the other day... my car... in front of my neighbour's gate, and later he threw a bomb into my yard.

THE PRIEST

I am a mortal man. You can bribe me with a fur-coat, but God, hardly. My School-Buddy, I cannot be of much help to you any longer, let the All-Mighty be.

The Priest rises. He leaves. Vasa takes out the puff-box.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

God, Devil, Devil, God, God, Devil...

Vasa takes a long sniff from the puff-box.

LET'S PURGE SERBIA

Striptease-bar. A party. Everyone is sniffing cocaine, dancing to the loud music. Mercedes Chick and BMW Chick cuddle. The bodyguards, also, caress and dance. Tsane the Stick dances with Stefan around the pole. He hands the puff-box to Stefan.

STEFAN

I've never tried this.

TSANE THE STICK

There's always the first time.

Stefan sniffs out of the puff-box. Tsane passionately kisses him in the mouth. Stefan cuddles up to Tsane. Suddenly, like some commandos, Vasa the Bulldozer, the Thresher and the Muggger, invade the bar. The Thresher and the Muggger kill the bodyguards and the girls with snubbed-hecklers. Vasa kills Tsane stabbing

him in the neck with a knife. Stefan takes out Tsane's bowie-knife.

STEFAN

You're all insane! You want to kill me too, dad? And then bury me with a bulldozer?

He swings the knife at Vasa. Vasa recedes.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Put that knife down! Put it down when I say!

STEFAN

(To the Thresher.)

And you? You wanna kill me too?

He swings the knife at the Thresher. The Thresher mechanically shoots at Stefan.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

What are you doing, you maniac? It's my son! It's my son!

STEFAN

It's not him, dad. You... you killed me.

Stefan falls dead. Vasa grabs the heckler out of the Thresher's hands. The Thresher watches him numbly. Vasa shoots at the Thresher. Turns to the Mugger.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

And you? What are you looking at?

He shoots at the Mugger, too. Then throws down the heckler. Kneels beside Stefan.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

Where did I go wrong? Where did I go wrong, Steefaan! My sooooo!

Dark. End of the scene.

**WHAT'S VASA TO HECUBA,
AND WHAT'S HECUBA TO VASA**

Living room at Vasa the Bulldozer's. We see Zaneta in the bathtub through the open doors of a large bathroom. Properly stoned and mumbling, she reads out loud the review of Stefan's poem.

ZANETA

Obsolete form filled with naive nihilism in an attempt that indicates, on a quasi-Nietzschean platform, terrors of a divided personality...

Zaneta succumbs. Her hand, with slashed veins, drops out of the tub.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Do you see now why I hate curtains? The easiest way to burn down a house is to set the curtains on fire. A hundred times I've...

Vasa sits in front of the screen on which we see images taken by the security cameras. He sniffs and stares into the monitor. The whole house is ghastly empty. There are no chefs, no attendants, no security. Chaslav enters the house. He climbs up the stairs. Enters the living-room.

CHASLAV

Not a living soul. Where's your security?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

The dispensable got fired, the dependant got killed.

(Looking ahead with an empty stare)

Treason is just a matter of time.

Chaslav notices Zaneta's body in the bathtub.

CHASLAV

Zaneta!

He runs to the bathroom. Instead of Zaneta, he embraces the toilet. We hear heavy vomiting. Distracted, he goes back to the living-room.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

You brought me the fake passport?

Chaslav takes out the passport from his pocket. Vasa immediately checks it out under the light of the lamp.

CHASLAV

It's original. You have to run at once. I'll tell you a highly confidential secret – the country firmly decided to start the final battle with organized crime.

Vasa brings two glasses full of whiskey. He hands one to Chaslav.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

In that name...

Chaslav drinks it all before they raise their glasses.

CHASLAV

(Shudders.)

Bourbon? You know I hate bourbon.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

It's whiskey. With the taste of bourbon.

CHASLAV

I hope we'll never see each other again. Besides, everything is clear now for you, so there's no need to...

VASA THE BULLDOZER

We won't. Don't worry. Ever again.

(A pause.)

I have just one more little wish.

CHASLAV

I'm listening.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

Please go to the park across the street, sit on the bench, and die.

CHASLAV

What?

VASA THE BULLDOZER

In five minutes you will have a heart-attack, from which you won't recover. I think it would be better for you, your reputation, your ambassador daughter and so on, to die in the park rather than here.

Chaslav spins the glass in his hand. Suddenly, he throws it at Vasa. Of course, he misses.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

(Taps Chaslav on the shoulder.)

There... I knew you were a brave guy. Come along now.

Chaslav goes to the exit.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

It's clear when I say it's clear.

At the door, Chaslav falls down on his knees. He holds on to his chest. Dies.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

Well, you really are one piece of shit. Now I will have to carry you.

Again, he takes a look at the passport. Satisfied, he puts it in his pocket. He makes a phone call.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

(Into the earphone.)

All the money has been transferred. Of course it's all legal. I'm catching the first flight.

He hangs up. Alone with himself.

VASA THE BULLDOZER

There goes Dubajić to Dubai. Boreholes, oil... From white to black, a new empire! New investments! A new life, finally! How much does one need to realize... A legalist!

He takes a look at the picture in the passport. Attaches the beard and moustache. Takes a sniff from the puff-box. A white cloud around him.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

I have had enough of this domestic patriotism. Let somebody else finance this Banana-Country. I did not betray the country, the country betrayed me!

He takes the suitcase. Moves. On the way out, he gives Chaslav a hard kick.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

You want me to carry you, you piece of shit. Rot, you stupid nit!

He throws the suitcase on Chucky. Sits on it.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

(To the audience.)

And so, I sat on him. I put the barrel of a gun to my mouth and...

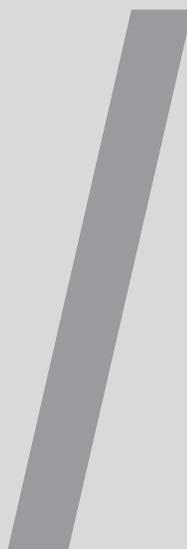
He puts the barrel of a gun to his mouth. A shot. Darkness. Lights again. Vasa stands with his suitcase in his hand.

VASA THE BULLDOZER (CONT'D)

And maybe... Maybe I didn't. Maybe I'll live under a false name in some faraway country, maybe I'll make money again, and maybe I'm hiding somewhere right in your neighbourhood, and you never even thought it could be me... Maybe, maybe, maybe...

Darkness again.

THE END



Marina Milivojević Mađarev

BETA VUKANOVIĆ
– ONE SUMMER DAY

Marina Milivojević Mađarev



She received her doctorate from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade with her dissertation on *Directing Styles in the Yugoslav Drama Theatre: Dejan Mijač, Slobodan Unkovski and Dušan Jovanović* (mentor: Prof. Dr. Petar Marjanović). She is the author of the book *Biti u pozorištu* (Being in Theatre), which was based on the doctoral dissertation.

She has served as a dramaturge at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre (1999–2012). She collaborated with directors Slobodan Unkovski, Dušan Jovanović, Dejan Mijač, Paolo Magelli, Egon Savin and Radoslav Milenković. And edited theatre programs.

She was co-author of a serial about theatre, *Kolektivne senke* (Collective Shadows), as well as host and editor of the Bitef Chronicle for TV Belgrade. Marina's dramas for children have been performed in numerous children's theatres across the country. Her drama *Tvrđava* (Fortress) was publicly read as part of the Need Circuit Stage Reading program at the Accidental Festival, 2008 (ICA, London).

She writes radio dramas, dramas, TV dramas, children's dramas and studies in the area of teatrology. She is an associate at the Academy of Arts Drama Department in Novi Sad.

Marina Milivojević Mađarev

BETA VUKANOVIĆ – ONE SUMMER DAY

Translated > Persida Bošković

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Woman in black
Woman in red
Beta Vukanović
Anton Azbe
Rista Vukanović
Model
King Milan Obrenović
Advisor I
Advisor II
Female student I
Nadežda Petrović
Girl (doing the serving)
Officer
Girl (sitting next to the officer)
Older lady
Female student II

Summer day. The stage set is the scene from the most famous painting of Beta Vukanović: “A Summer Day”. Two ladies, we will call them Red (sitting) and Black (standing), exactly like in her renowned painting. Beta is at her easel. We can hear the rustling sound of leaves coming from a treetop, unusual chirping of birds, perhaps crickets – nature filled with vigor and activity, and then the sound of coffee being poured into cups from a tea-pot. This sound disturbs the rhythm of the natural sounds.

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WOMAN IN BLACK: What are you painting, Beta?

WOMAN IN RED: Let her work.

WOMAN IN BLACK: Will the two of us also be in the painting? Will you include the house, garden...? Will anyone be able to recognize us? (*Pauses*) When children draw I can guess what will be in the picture after only a few strokes, but when you the professional artists paint I'm not quite sure what the painting represents, even when it's finished.

RED: We promised Mrs. Vukanović we would help her. We should keep still. Please be silent.

BLACK: All I see in Beta's painting are blotches of various colors: red, yellow, green... One day some girl will stand before this canvas of Mrs. Beta Vukanović. What will be the name of the painting?

BETA: “A Summer Day”...

BLACK: ... “A Summer Day” and she will see a girl in a black dress, wearing a hat and pouring coffee, while the girl in the red dress works on her embroidery with her back turned to the artist. But that woman in the painting with the hat, in the black dress with a white collar, white stockings and white shoes, she won't be me because no one will be able to recognize me.

RED: Well, do something. Read a book or do some embroidery like me.

BLACK: Oh, you will be anonymous as well.

RED: Whether people recognize me or not is of no importance to me. I am posing because of Mrs. Vukanović. All that matters is that she is satisfied with the painting.

BETA: I'll be satisfied if in my painting people recognize the atmosphere of a summer day, if they see the summer glow and colors, and sense the feeling it arouses within us while doing simple tasks like embroidery or pouring coffee... I'm certain this is what they will see my dear “lady in a black dress with a white hat”. I think you're being too hard on my painting. You should see the paintings of those new artists in Paris... You would be surprised, extremely.

BLACK: As far as I'm concerned, Paris is the hat capital.

BETA: For me, Paris is the graveyard where my Rista lies. I thought I would never return to Serbia.

RED: Serbia is both Rista's and your home. This is where your house is, your school. You both fought for this country in the Balkan Wars and the Great War.

BLACK: Was he in good health before passing through Albania?

BETA: Not a trace of tuberculosis.

RED: What an enormous sacrifice!

BLACK: What did your parents say when you decided to leave Munich and go to Belgrade? That must have been some adventure!

BETA: That was love.

BLACK: But still, in Serbia there was nothing.

BETA: I know that for you young people in love with Peter the Great Liberator and his sons it's difficult to understand, but King Milan was a great gentleman and he supported the arts.

BLACK: I heard he was a womanizer.

BETA: He was simply a hedonist. He loved life and its pleasures. He loved art.

RED: Did he ever purchase any of your paintings?

BETA: King Milan purchased Rista's painting "The Dahias", gave us financial support, allowed us to run an art school... I am German but nevertheless, I would not be able to have all that in Germany.

BLACK: I didn't mean to offend you.

BETA: I take no offense. I have never been interested in politics.

BLACK: Where did you and Rista meet?

BETA: Where else would two painters meet but in an art school; of our dear Professor Anton Azbe, way back in 1896.

.....

Flashback: 1896. Anton Azbe's school of painting in Munich.

A space similar to the impressionistic interior of someone like Degas, only without the ballerinas. Instead of the ballerinas stand the painters. They are also wearing white, like the ballerinas.

Anton Azbe and Beta.

.....

ANTON AZBE: Young lady, you are full of spirit. You are talented and diligent. In the last four years that you spent in my studio, I believe you have mastered everything I am able to teach you, and not only that, you have learned everything that one can learn in the other schools of painting in Munich as well. It's time...

BETA: I know the time has come for me to begin working on my own, to begin earning an income and with your consent I would like to become an assistant here at your school or, with your recommendations, at some other school in Munich.

ANTON AZBE: You have spent all these years studying to become a teacher. That was what you wanted? I thought you wished to be a painter!

BETA: Well, yes...

ANTON AZBE: Then, my dear, be a painter! You cannot be a good teacher if for you this is something short-term, a temporary solution, if you have a guilty conscience or a feeling of inferiority because you are a teacher. You must become a painter first. Only then, if this is still what you want, God willing, and if the circumstances are right, you can become a teacher as well, and I have no doubt an excellent one at that! It's time you went to Paris.

BETA: I don't have the financial means.

ANTON AZBE: My dear, do you intend to stop before every obstacle in life and search for an excuse not to do something you must do? There, there, do not fret. I know you are having difficulties. I know you were left without a father at an early age and that your mother is struggling to support you and your family. After all, I suspect your mother sent you to art school with the hope that you will one day be in a position to earn an income and help her as well.

BETA: I would like to help her.

ANTON AZBE: What do you think, which way will you be able to help her more? By earning a measly salary in some girls' school in Munich as an art teacher or by waiting a little longer and trying to do something truly significant? And as far as the financial part of the problem is concerned, how do you feel about joining forces with some of the other students from the school, it would be easier for you all to handle living in Paris as a group.

BETA: None of the girls are even considering going to Paris.

ANTON: What about that young gentleman from Serbia, the one who is always so eager to place his easel next to yours?

BETA: Mr. Vukanović is my friend, my good friend, the best in the school. We engage in long conversations, share the same opinions about painting, visit exhibits together, exchange experiences, the fact that he is a foreigner...

ANTON: Beta, I have nothing against foreigners! I too am a foreigner here, given that I'm Slovenian by nationality. I'm sure you have noticed that in my studio there are many young painters from Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia... I'm certain that the South Slavs will soon play a very important role in Europe. The Kingdom of Serbia is a country of numerous possibilities. I believe it's good to have friends from Serbia. You are a young and ambitious woman.

BETA: I don't understand.

ANTON: I think a young woman like yourself should walk boldly through life. I anticipate that you are a pioneer of a long line of future women who will support themselves, choose their own friends, husbands, profession, place of residence... You have been given the opportunity to choose, so choose! Go to Paris and fear not any challenge life serves you. Remember, you are Babette Bachmaier, a bold and determined painter.

Music.

.....

Flashback: 1896. Anton Azbe's school of painting in Munich.

Colors are trembling, shapes are dissolving – impressions of love – Rista Vukanović and Beta, still Babette. They are working on a nude study of a lady who is lying down, leaning back slightly and looking at them impudently like the girl in Manet's painting "Olympia".

.....

RISTA VUKANOVIĆ: Miss Babette...

BETA: Call me Beta.

RISTA: Beta, I wanted to say... I hope you will not misunderstand...

BETA: Yes...

RISTA: ... I very much like the light in your new painting.

The model yawns from boredom, fidgets.

BETA: Other young men tell a girl she's pretty, that she has beautiful hair, eyes... but you Mr. Vukanović...

RISTA: Please, you need not be formal with me...

BETA: And you tell me how beautiful the light is in my paintings.

RISTA: But it's true.

Beta laughs.

MODEL: Bitte?

BETA: Bitte beachten Sie die Richte.

MODEL: Ja, ja...

The model smiles, assumes her former position, only now she is obviously interested in the people she is looking at.

BETA: Stop talking and work, the model is watching us.

RISTA: But she doesn't understand us. We can say anything we wish, if we don't let it show. You are so shy Babette and I... it took me so long to realize you were learning Serbian because...

BETA: I like Monet's sentence: "What I want to represent is what lies between the motif and me." But on the other hand, I don't like the first part of his motto: "The motif is insignificant for me." Do you agree?

RISTA: It would be good to talk about that with Monet personally.

BETA: It would be wonderful if it were possible.

RISTA: I spoke to the professor about going to Paris at the end of the semester.

Beta is surprised and disappointed. She turns abruptly towards him.

RISTA: No, don't turn around. She's watching you.

Beta returns to her work. She is silent.

RISTA: Aren't you planning to go to Paris as well?

BETA: No, I don't have any plans, I don't even have any money; I haven't prepared anything for Paris except my good will.

RISTA: Money isn't a problem for me, because I don't need much, but I wouldn't like to go alone, and it isn't easy to find the right companion for such a long journey.

BETA: That's true.

Pause.

RISTA: I've spent a long time observing your paintings and thinking about why you paint light so well...

BETA: And what is your conclusion?

RISTA: The light is within you, that is why it's so easy for you to paint light. Really! If you don't believe me stand before a mirror and see for yourself: look at that hair and the way it reflects light, then those two stars in your eyes, and that white complexion...

BETA: If you continue my face will turn flushing red. It will look silly. She's watching us. Let's just talk about work.

RISTA: I don't want to talk about work with you in Serbian. I can do that in German!

BETA: Bitte, dann in Deutsch sprechen.

The model laughs.

RISTA: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be inconsiderate. Please forgive me Beta. I didn't mean to order you about. I only wanted to tell you... Now I'm stumbling in my own native language... I have to tell you that I don't want to lose you... I'm asking you to go with me to Paris. (*Beta is silent*) Do you want me to say it in German?

BETA: Don't... I'm afraid that's impossible. I need to find the money first.

RISTA: We'll find the money.

BETA: I can't borrow money from anyone, especially not from you.

RISTA: I would give it to you. No strings attached.

BETA: I can't accept it. (*Pauses*) And why would you...

RISTA: Because I'm convinced you are going to become a great painter.

BETA: That's the only reason?

RISTA: Well... I would like you to visit Serbia with me after Paris.

BETA: I didn't even say I would go to Paris with you.

RISTA: Fine, fine, I'm not asking for anything, it's just a dream of mine... Serbia has magnificent landscapes, monasteries, beautiful folk costumes. In short, a country created for *plein-air*.

BETA: I believe you will reveal it to us as such.

RISTA: Serbia is skeptical towards new aspirations in any form or shape, even in the art of painting. Realism has only now been adopted in my country! A painter with avant-garde ideas would feel very lonely in Serbia. Knowing this, the thought of going back completely alone horrifies me.

BETA: You're not alone. You have your friends. The studio of our Professor Anton Azbe is filled with your friends, Slovenes, Serbs, Croats...

RISTA: They will each go their own way. Beta, I would love to show you Serbia. If you could only see the rocks above the Gornjak Monastery, sail down the Danube River through the Iron Gate, see the reflection of the sun on the water of the Morava River...

BETA: These are all your images. You should be the one to paint them.

RISTA: I can't. I don't have the gift of capturing the light. You do. (*Pause*) Beta, don't be offended by my sudden and abrupt candor, but... I would like you to paint the light in Serbia... Of course, if you are willing... If not,

I will understand... from the perspective of Munich, Serbia is the end of the world... you can stay in Paris, with me or by yourself...

The model stretches lazily.

BETA: I don't want your money.

The model slowly circles around their easels. She is looking at what they have painted.

RISTA: Beta, please come to my apartment, so that I could explain...

BETA: Explain what?

RISTA: Everything. Let's go now please. I beg of you. I can't speak freely here, in front of this... persona, not in Serbian nor in German. Babette... Ich bitte dich.

The nude model approaches them and claps her hands.

MODEL: Die Klasse ist fertig! Gehen!

.....

Rista's apartment.

One more nude, but this time without the insolent attitude – Renoir could have painted it. Renoir is not in this scene. The only available painter is Rista Vukanović, who is not painting the nude – Beta Babette. Instead, he is writing a letter.

.....

RISTA: Now we must get married. I have to write a letter to my mother and ask her for her blessing. She's good and sensible; she'll understand the situation and give us her blessing. The break starts next week. We can catch a train to Budapest on Wednesday; from there a train leaves for Serbia every three days. We'll be in Belgrade (*calculates*)...

BETA: Have you lost your mind!

RISTA: Beta, what's wrong my darling, what are you saying? Why... I took your virginity.

BETA: And because of that I have to immediately leave my entire life behind and go to Serbia at once?

RISTA: That would be for the best... if you're pregnant.

BETA: And if I'm not? If I cannot bear children? Was wird mit uns sein?

RISTA: Mochten Sie in Deutsch sprechen?

BETA: No, our language is Serbian.

Rista goes to her and gently takes her in his arms.

RISTA: I will do anything you say.

BETA: How can we be sure this is the real thing? How can I know that as soon as next year we won't become bored with each other? How can I know what you want and if it's the same thing I want? What do you want?

RISTA: I want everything you do.

Beta is getting dressed.

RISTA: Where are you going? Don't go! You are my wife now.

BETA: I'm not your wife! I'm a painter!

RISTA: So be a painter!

BETA: And I will! But then I can't have a housefull of snot-nosed children right away!

RISTA: I'm terrified of snot-nosed children!

BETA: I want to be a plein-air painter! And I can't sit at home and cook dinner and play the piano! I have to be outdoors, where there's life!

RISTA: Very true! The way these new house are built today, a person can easily contract tuberculosis! One should go out for some fresh air!

BETA: I have to visit exhibits, discuss painting with other people, men, women... I have to be free!

RISTA: That's the kind of wife I need.

BETA: I need a man whom I'll be able to love for the rest of my life.

Rista falls silent. He looks unhappy. Tears up the letter he began writing.

BETA: What's wrong?

RISTA: I already said you were my light, and I would... I can't say I'm just a painter, I am a man first, I would do anything for my light... I would go to Paris, return to Serbia, live in Munich forever with you, and if that wouldn't be enough for you, if nevertheless you grow bored of me, I would let you go – I would go mad – but I would let you go. Light is not kept in a cage.

BETA: Rista, are you in love with me? Tell me, plainly and honestly.

RISTA: I can't be more honest than this, be it in Serbian or German.

BETA: Ja oder nein?

RISTA: Yes. Always and forever.

.....

Summer day. The stage set is the scene from the most famous painting of Beta Vukanović – “A Summer Day”.
Red woman, black woman and Beta.

.....

BLACK WOMAN: And so you came to Serbia.

BETA: No. Actually, the journey to Serbia took a little longer. First, we worked in Paris for almost two years, and then we both returned to Munich. This is where we were married, in August of 1898. Rista arranged for our mutual friend Simeon Roksandić, a sculptor, to organize our joint exhibition in the courtyard building of the National Assembly in Belgrade. This was in September, at the very end of that summer.

RED WOMAN: It seems summer is a fortunate time of year for you.

BETA: I love summer.

RED WOMAN: And after this exhibit the two of you captivated Serbia.

BETA: I didn't think very much about that at the time, but if you asked me now, I would say they accepted us because we were novel in the art of painting as much as Serbia was able to accept novelties from Europe. King Milan purchased Rista's painting, “The Dahias”. I think he possessed a deep understanding of his aesthetics.

.....

Belgrade, 1898. The Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Serbia.

Interior: polished bourgeois decor, almost luxurious, a slightly lascivious atmosphere, provocative, like in Manet's painting “Luncheon on the Grass”, only without the grass and with a lady in the announcement...
King Milan, Advisors I and II.

.....

KING MILAN: Who is that German lady? Beautiful girl, attractive...

ADVISOR I: A painter, Mrs. Beta Vukanović Your Majesty.

KING MILAN: I would like to see her paintings.

ADVISOR I: Mrs. Vukanović came to Serbia with her husband Rista Vukanović. She is an honorable lady, very dedicated to her husband and work. They are preparing an exhibit here in Belgrade. Such art exhibits have been organized in Europe for decades now, but this will be the first European exhibit in our country.

ADVISOR II: With all due respect to my fellow advisor, but it appears to me, Your Majesty, that Serbia sometimes tends to support Europe to excess and non-critically.

KING MILAN: Young ladies with a European demeanor are welcome in Serbia!

ADVISOR I: The young couple will send a formal invitation for Your Majesty to attend the first art exhibit in independent Serbia! All of the paintings at the exhibit will also be available for purchase.

KING MILAN: So, they even expect me to pay for their painting. I knew the invitation was not due to my good looks alone.

ADVISOR I: With all due respect, I would like to show you one of their paintings...

KING MILAN: The lady's?

ADVISOR I: No, the gentleman's. Come this way if you please...

ADVISOR II: With all due respect, I must remind the King that our modest treasury is already greatly burdened by the requirements of the army. Our poor soldiers are fed only beans and corn...

KING MILAN: The Serbian peasant also lives on beans and corn! Let us see this painting! (*The easel is turned away from us, but when the cover is removed, the music signifies the mood of the painting "The Dahias"*). This painting... I've already seen such paintings at the Royal Court of Vienna, but then again it's still ours... They are...

ADVISOR I: Dahias, Your Majesty.

KING MILAN: Dahias...

ADVISOR I: We should support our young countryman who is acquainting Europe with Serbia in such a comprehensible manner.

ADVISOR II: A strong army on our borders, a diligent craftsman in the city and a hard-working peasant in the field; that is what's going to bring us closer to Europe. Vienna is wealthy and that is why it can afford to spend money, but Serbia...

KING MILAN: Serbia is poor and will be for a long time! (*Pause*) I prefer what Paja Jovanović and Uroš Predić do.

ADVISOR II: They are genuine, established artists who are familiar with the spirit and needs of our people, who know what beauty is and how to express it on canvas.

KING MILAN: Precisely, my dear advisor. That is true Serbian art.

ADVISOR I: King Milan knows best.

KING MILAN: That's right, I always know best. Let that Vukanović know I will visit his exhibit, and buy the painting.

ADVISOR II: But why Your Eminence, if you do not like the painting?

KING MILAN: I don't know, but perhaps future generations will. Besides, that's how it's done in Vienna. But tell me, Mrs. Vukanović will also be at the exhibit. I'll be able to see her paintings as well?

Music.

.....

Summer day. The stage set is the scene from the most famous painting of Beta Vukanović – "A Summer Day". Red woman, black woman and Beta.

.....

BETA: A year later, when Kiril Kutlik passed away, this was the year 1900, we were offered to take over the school.

RED: I remember the school building on "Kapetan Mišina" Street. What a beautiful building it was!

BETA: It was designed by Milan Kapetanović, an architect who also completed his studies in Munich.

RED: The building had four large studios, two spacious auditoriums for night classes and a terrace for plein-air painting. On the outer wall there was a stunning fresco portraying three Muses, three beautiful girls surrounded by iris flowers and peacock feathers...

BETA: I painted it.

RED: That painting was also on the postcards of Belgrade from that period.

BETA: Those were the happiest days of my life.

Music.

.....

Flashback: 1900. The school in Belgrade.

Plein-air – a view from the terrace – spring, everything is sparkling with colors, but only in the eyes that can see them and find them important.

Beta, Female Student I and Rista.

.....

BETA: What is light?

FEMALE STUDENT I: Light is the sun, the color yellow, perhaps even white, like in Turner's paintings.

BETA: That's it? What about the objects which reflect light? What about the shadow? What color is the shadow?

FEMALE STUDENT I: Black.

BETA: Do you live in a black and white world? Why, you're a painter! A painter has an eye for the play of colors, light and shadows. Go home now. Sit in your garden and make a sketch of a treetop rustling in the wind. Try to capture every quiver of every leaf, the play of light and shadows in the treetop, discover all the different shades of green hidden in the treetop.

FEMALE STUDENT I: Are people going to understand what we are painting?

BETA: That is something that the people looking at the painting will discover for themselves. Your task is to convey your vision on canvas as precisely as possible and with the outmost passion. Off you go now, my dear. Rista...

RISTA: All the students of the Serbian School of Painting will become pleinairists.

BETA: All our students will know and appreciate new art techniques. They will always be open to new things, they'll be inquisitive...

RISTA: Just like their teacher.

BETA: Like the schoolmaster.

RISTA: In all seriousness, I think we shouldn't insist so much on the things we as students grew to love. After all, most of them will become art teachers, craftsmen... only one of ten will try to continue their studies in Munich or Paris. Most of them paid the tuition to learn the basics of drawing and painting.

BETA: I think the best way for them to learn these techniques is to introduce them to what we know best. What's more, I wanted to suggest that we organize an exhibit of our student's works, a large, public exhibit which would throw a new and strong light on the work of our school. Will you support me?

RISTA: Why do you think people would be interested?

BETA: Because we are the only school of painting in Serbia. I'm sure people will show an interest. Trust me. Besides, when the students learn that their works will be exhibited it will give them an additional incentive to make an effort. Remember how our Professor Azbe worked with us in Munich.

RISTA: Oh, yes! I'd like to introduce you to Nadežda Petrović. She just recently returned from Munich where she spent five years studying under our mutual professor, Anton Azbe.

Music.

BETA: Miss Petrović...

NADEŽDA PETROVIĆ: Please, call me Nadežda...

BETA: Nadežda, my husband told me that you were also a student of Anton Azbe. How is my professor?

NADEŽDA: He is well and he sends his regards. The atmosphere in his classes is wonderful.

BETA: During my last year of studies at Azbe's studio the students were taught by Kandinsky, the painter.

NADEŽDA: I was fascinated by the Slovenes, Jakopič, Grohar and Jama. These three Slovenians are the heart of Azbe's studio. Tall, strong, dark, covered with thick brown beards... They looked down at that colorful

group of people in the studio who converged from various parts of the world. A real Noah's Ark or Babylon!

BETA: That's exactly how it was when I was his student!

NADEŽDA: Did you know that this isn't the only thing we have in common? I was also a student of Kiril Kutlik, whose school you and Mr. Vukanović are now running.

RISTA: Small is the world of painters!

NADEŽDA: Especially in Serbia. If all the Serbs here and abroad gathered together, there would be just enough of us to fill an ample Serbian village.

BETA: We have never gathered to form our own ample village.

RISTA: That's artists for you! Painters who strive towards modern art are not aware how special they are, they don't collaborate; here every man is an island...

BETA: I suggested we establish our own art association. We should organize a large joint Yugoslavian exhibit where we would present not only the new, modern tendencies on the Serbian art scene, but also point out that our aspirations are a part of broader Yugoslavian and thus also European artistic trends. Only then will we stop feeling isolated and detached.

RISTA: I don't think we would be able to find very many people in Serbia interested in Impressionism, but the idea of uniting artists from South Slavic countries in one exhibit could very easily gain wide support from higher education students and other politically progressive, pro-Yugoslavian groups in Serbia.

NADEŽDA PETROVIĆ: I support your idea wholeheartedly. I am convinced that young people, the bearers of new political ideas, will also support new art.

RISTA: The fact that an individual is young and politically progressive does not mean they are also ready to accept modern aesthetics.

NADEŽDA: I don't understand, what is it you're saying?

RISTA: I'm saying that in this small nation we have to throw a very large net, we must convince every Serb that everyone, truly everyone can contribute to the progress of the people.

NADEŽDA: Under the condition that he's not a scoundrel or crook. It is extremely important for our cause to maintain authentic purity. We need to gather forces who are prepared to boldly blaze the trail towards the future of the Serbian people on a daily basis and without compromise.

RISTA: I'm afraid an uncompromising attitude may lead us directly into war in the future.

BETA: My dear, I think you have misunderstood Nadežda. The young lady is referring to things in general. Besides, peace, order and prosperity prevail in Europe, and Serbia is a stable kingdom whose respectability is growing with each day. It would be nice to introduce the Serbian customs to Europe.

NADEŽDA: Which custom do you like best Beta?

BETA: The Patron Saint Day!

.....

Flashback: 1900.

Scene from the painting "Patron Saint Day" by Beta Vukanović. A maiden dressed in a Serbian folk costume serving an older lady. An officer is sitting next to her and next to him, a young lady.

.....

OLDER LADY: Well, happy Patron Saint Day and may you celebrate it for a long time to come, and may you marry...

GIRL (*Doing the serving*): Thank you, aunt.

BETA: My dear, will you stand like that for just a moment, please?

GIRL (*Doing the serving*): I will aunt, is this alright?

BETA: Perfect!

OLDER LADY: Come a little closer to your aunt, why are standing there like a statue.

GIRL (*Doing the serving*): Aunt, may I?

BETA: Yes you may.

GIRL (*Doing the serving*): Alright.

OLDER LADY: (*Turns towards Beta*) What are you...?

BETA: I'm drawing a sketch for a painting if you don't mind.

OFFICER: Turn around aunt and look straight ahead. That's an order!

The older lady would like to sneak a peek, but the officer turns her towards the girl who is serving. The girl moves closer to the older lady and stands there for an unnaturally long time, pretending to be serving her.

OLDER LADY: (*Whispers*) Listen child, what is she doing back there?

GIRL (*Sitting next to the officer*): (*Whispers*) That is Mrs. Vukanović – the painter, she's German.

OLDER LADY: German?

OFFICER: For Pete's sake aunt, so what if she's German, she's not Turkish!

GIRL (*Sitting next to the officer*): And she's a good woman! Married to a Serb, my uncle on my grandfather's side – Rista Vukanović, the one who went to school in Munich. That's where they fell in love and she grew to love Serbia...

OLDER LADY: And do they have any children?

GIRL (*Sitting next to the officer*): Well, that I don't know...

OFFICER: Keep silent and don't disturb the lady while she's drawing.

OLDER LADY: What is she drawing?

GIRL (*Doing the serving*): Why, us – Patron Saint Day. Aunt, will I have to stand like this for much longer?

BETA: Only a few seconds more.

GIRL (*Doing the serving*): I don't mind, but the guests are waiting – it's our Patron Saint Day.

Two men come in. They greet everyone boisterously and open-heartedly. The officer would like to stand up and join them.

BETA: Please, stay seated just a little longer.

The officer returns to his previous position in a disciplined manner.

OLDER LADY: She definitely doesn't have any children.

OFFICER: Oh, now, "she doesn't have children", where do you get that from!

OLDER LADY (*Whispers*): If she did have children, she would be running after them instead of sitting in the corner and...

OFFICER: (*Whispers*): The woman is sitting and drawing. That's how it's done – she's a painter for Pete's sake!

GIRL (*sitting next to the officer*): (*Whispers*) Auntie, she is a grand lady from Europe and she wants to show Europe our finest customs, isn't that nice and patriotic of her, regardless of being German or not having children?

OFFICER: Let Europe see what Patron Saint Day looks like!
Everyone crosses themselves.

GIRL (*Doing the serving*): (*Pleads with Beta*) Aunt...

BETA: You may go dear. Thank you. You may all move now. Thank you all for your patience.

The girl with the serving tray leaves. Everyone is moving.

OFFICER: Thank you Mrs. Vukanović for honoring us by portraying us in your painting, but then send it to Europe and let Europe see what Serbia is like.

BETA: It will, it will...

OFFICER: May I throw a glance at what you...?

BETA: Of course, by all means.

Everyone looks with curiosity.

GIRL (*Sitting next to the officer*): Is this me?

BETA: Yes, that's you.

GIRL (*Sitting next to the officer*): Well, very nice.

OLDER LADY: It is very nice child that you want to show Europe a painting of Serbia, but I think it's all in vain. They don't care about us or our Patron Saint Day. They don't understand such things. They're haughty and wealthy, and we are a poor and always will be. All that trouble and effort is in vain.

.....

First Yugoslavian exhibit. Many guests, ladies in white ball dresses, and gentlemen in black suits, lots of lights, lots of people, but all somehow distorted, caricature-like... This scene could have been painted by Toulouse-Lautrec.

Advisor I is speaking. Rista and Beta are listening to him.

.....

ADVISOR I: At this first Yugoslavian exhibit, our brilliant artist Mr. Paja Jovanović pointed out the direction one can take and remain a great artist while at the same time contributing to the grand idea of Yugoslavian unification...

BETA: And that is how Paja Jovanović became the most contemporary painter at the beginning of the 20th century.

RISTA: There is a good side to this. With respect to politics and culture, we are all on the same side, only we perform our tasks in different ways. Paja Jovanović spreads the spirit of the cultural rebirth of Serbs and South Slavs among our people, while modern art presents Serbia as a modern and progressive country. Everything will work out fine. You'll see, my darling Beta.

BETA: Whom among our artists here do you favor?

RISTA: I very much like the paintings by Marko Murat, especially "Spring". That portrait of a girl in plein-air, with the delicate colors... What do you think; should we invite him to teach at our school?

BETA: I'm so glad at least one painting by Nadežda Petrović was included in the first Yugoslavian exhibit.

Nadežda comes in.

RISTA: Oh, there's your protégée. Go to her.

BETA: Dear Nadežda, it makes me so happy to meet you at such an event. I think it's wonderful that paintings of young artists such as you were also included in this exhibit.

NADEŽDA: When I hear you talking that way I feel like you're much older than me, while in fact you're only a year older.

BETA: Really? I didn't know...

NADEŽDA: You are already married, and together with your husband and best man, Simeon Rokсандić, you were the first in all of Serbia to have an art exhibit, and not only were you not criticized but the King purchased your painting. You opened the first real school of painting, your painting "Patron Saint Day" presented Serbia at the World Exhibit in Paris, you are a participant of the first Yugoslavian art exhibit...

BETA: Mein Gott!!! So are you...!

NADEŽDA: No, I'm not saying all this out of some sort of feeling of resentment. I'm just sad.

BETA: Why?

NADEŽDA: I look at Paja Jovanović, Uroš Predić ... And I realize why people love them... They are on their own terrain... Their technique, their way of thinking and their art are in perfect harmony... While these modern, impressionists...

BETA: Why, you must consider yourself as one of them?

NADEŽDA: A lack of harmony is sensed in everything we do. In Paris, Impressionism is already slowly becoming a part of the past, and we are complaining because it hasn't truly taken root in our country. We can analyze light and shadows, explain value till doomsday, and still we will never attain French Impressionism. French Impressionism is the art of French cities. Our artists will never paint ballerinas, horse races, taverns, squares filled with people and traffic, cabarets... we simply don't have such things in Serbia. Our Impressionism is stuck in a provincial garden. We need to immerse ourselves in Serbia, its village, its folk customs and reveal them completely. I dream about an art colony in the southern part of Serbia. Would you be willing to join me?

Music.

.....

Summer day. The stage set is the scene from the most famous painting of Beta Vukanović – "A Summer Day".
Red woman, black woman and Beta.

.....

BETA: She actually did organize an art colony in Sicevo. The first art colony in Serbia. This was one of the rare "firsts" in the artistic life of Serbia where I wasn't the first. (*Laughter*) I didn't go. At that time, Rista and I were dealing with a huge disagreement we had with another professor at our school of painting, Marko Murat. He wanted to reform the school program according to which Rista, the founder of the school, would teach only the lower grades, and I would be at the school only periodically.

RED: But you supported the idea of him coming to the school, and that's how he repays you.... We have a saying in Serbia: feed the puppy so that he could bite you.

BETA: I was also very angry at the time. I thought the new teaching program was sheer nonsense. I handed in my resignation.

BLACK: And what happened then? I heard they pleaded with Mr. Vukanović to come back to the school.

BETA: What later happened to the school somehow became completely irrelevant. All those discussions we were so preoccupied with became completely irrelevant. All of us, the modernists and traditionalists, strived towards unification, an artistic, cultural alliance of Yugoslavs. A war erupted. We, the so-called youth, were prepared to help the political and national idea we had embraced in any way we could: We were prepared, every one of us, to replace our brushes with guns and die, die...

.....

Vukanović family house – the framework for a historical composition.

Who could have painted this? Perhaps the family friend and associate Marko Murat?

He probably could have, but only if it portrayed a crowd of people, a ceremonial occasion, solemnity... But there was none of that. Only great fear and an even greater love between two people – Rista and Beta.

.....

RISTA (*Handing her a stack of bills.*): This is all our money. I'm going to war and have no need for it. You take it!

BETA: I will Rista. I'll look after it.

RISTA: If you're ever in need, use it. I've placed mother's and your jewelry in the safe. Here's the combination. Keep it locked in a drawer of the writing desk, but even there don't leave it just like that, put it in a box, but not too conspicuously so as not to attract attention. Do you understand?

BETA: I do Rista.

RISTA: I've made arrangements with our best man, Sim-eon, to bring you ten steres of firewood. You'll be able to heat the house for the entire winter if needed!

BETA: Do you think the war is going to last until spring?
Rista stops for a moment.

RISTA: Would you like us to invite aunt Dobrila to move in, so that you're not alone?

BETA: There's no need, Rista.

RISTA: I'll call her right now. It's not good for you to be alone. That would definitely not be good. First of all you're a woman and secondly you are

BETA: Ich bin Deutch.

RISTA: A great hue and cry has been raised, anything and everything has crawled from under the rock.

BETA: You must worry about yourself now. I packed three pairs of long underwear for you, five pairs of socks, two shirts and undershirts. At the bottom of the backpack you'll find a clothes brush and a shoe-polish brush, and in a separate box tooth dust and a tooth brush, so that you'll always be neat and tidy.

RISTA: Beta...

BETA: I don't want to listen anymore about firewood, safes... You're going to war now. Promise me you'll be careful!

RISTA: Beta...

BETA: Because, if you can't take care of yourself, I'll have to come with you and do it for you.

RISTA: War is not for women. I'm going to leave now.

They kiss passionately.

RISTA: Take care of yourself Beta.

BETA: Ich liebe dich.

Rista leaves. Beta is alone. She takes out a hidden suitcase with the sign of the Red Cross and a nurse's cap and apron. She puts on the cap. Ties the apron. Now Beta is

a war nurse. She picks up the suitcase with the sign of the Red Cross.

.....
Poland, military hospital – 1915.

Beta and Nadežda. Beta is writing a letter. Nadežda is not painting although the landscape is just like in her paintings – a muddy Serbian road and on the side of it, two women (who would not be in the painting because compared to that road, their extreme anguish was very small).

.....
NADEŽDA: How long has it been since you've seen Rista?

BETA: Too long. That's why I'm writing to him.

NADEŽDA: Don't make him sad!

BETA: Oh, never! I'm writing only about the nice things, about how I met you again... I regret now for not coming to Sićevo.

NADEŽDA: We'll organize such gatherings again after the war. The Walachia Mountains are quite remarkable. That's where the next gathering will take place, right after the war. You must come, both you and Rista. Write that in your letter.

BETA: I will. I've heard that Ohrid is very beautiful.

NADEŽDA: Heard, but not seen. I'm not criticizing you. Many born Serbs know even less about Serbia than you. Those born here think it's enough to be a Serb to know your country. You had to get to know the Serbs and Serbia to be able to call yourself a Serb. That's something! Do you paint?

BETA: No, I don't have the time or the material.

NADEŽDA: During peacetime painting was my passion, my life, a way of exploring the dark values of my being, and now in wartime, painting is relaxation, my light in the overall darkness.

BETA: When we met in Azbe's school, Rista would tell me he loved me because he loves the light in my paintings. What is my Rista doing now? Where is he?

NADEŽDA: Don't worry, he's fine. Think only nice thoughts and the two of you will be together again. Everything will be fine again! You'll see!

.....

Summer day. The stage set is the scene from the most famous painting of Beta Vukanović – "A Summer Day".

Red woman, black woman and Beta.

.....

RED WOMAN: It's sad to think Rista crossed Albania and Thessalonica, and still didn't make it home.

BETA: It was his destiny to die in France, and at the very end of the war, in 1918.

Music.

.....

France, the end of the war, plein-air – an impressionistic study of winter – smeary, blurred, maybe even slightly leaning towards Expressionism... A new time has arrived.

A deck chair. In the deck chair Rista. Next to him Beta.

.....

BETA: Are you better now that you're lying in the sun? They say that mild sunlight is very beneficial to the lungs.

RISTA: The sunlight warms me when you're next to me...

BETA: Don't talk like that...

RISTA: Why do say "don't talk like that"? Remember when I told you that the light was within you...?

BETA: Yes, but I'm not the sun, I can't help you. Would like me to bring you another blanket?

RISTA: No.

BETA: I'll make some tea.

RISTA: No need.

BETA: I'll call the doctor.

RISTA: Just sit there next to me. I want to look at you – my sunshine.

BETA: When you talk like that I'm afraid you're giving up, that you want to die...

RISTA: Just sit here next to me.

BETA: I must help you!

RISTA: I love you Beta.

BETA: You'd better take your medicine.

RISTA: Don't be afraid. Just look at me.

BETA: I have a thousand questions in my mind. I'm afraid. You're not?

RISTA: Think about how wonderful it was, how we loved each other, how our whole life was a wonderful, exciting, warm summer day.

Music.

.....

Summer day. The stage set is the scene from the most famous painting of Beta Vukanović – "A Summer Day".

Red woman, black woman and Beta.

.....

BETA: We buried him in January. Cold, freezing... nowhere near a summer day. January is the month which is farthest away from a summer day.

RED: And after his death you still decided to return to Serbia.

BETA: Not right away. I lived in Germany for a year, giving art lessons. I thought I would never return. I engaged in long conversations with my students which were healing to me. In fact, I returned with the last convoy of refugees.

Music.

.....
 School of painting. Two women (student and Beta) and one large, white canvas – white on white just like Malevich.

.....
FEMALE STUDENT II: Your Serbs are returning to Serbia...

BETA: I'm German. I lived in Serbia for about ten years. I was married to a Serb.

FEMALE STUDENT II: You loved him?

BETA: Very much, and he loved me. He used to say I was his light.

FEMALE STUDENT II: You had a house there?

BETA: We had our own house, our school of painting.

FEMALE STUDENT II: In your home?

BETA: In my house with several studios and a terrace for plein-air. I had students, painted a beautiful fresco of Muses, similar to Secession, I also had friends who supported me, with whom we organized joint exhibits, and I had one friend...

FEMALE STUDENT II: What happened to the friend?

BETA: She died of typhus. My husband also died, and our house was destroyed...

FEMALE STUDENT II: Then it's completely understandable that you have no wish to return. What sort of country is Serbia?

BETA: I did a painting. It was called "Patron Saint Day" and everyone said it was a beautiful portrayal of Serbia, but I don't think that's quite true. I only painted what I saw, but did I understand anything? I don't know anymore. When I was a nurse in the Serbian military and when we retreated with the army through Serbia and across Albania... That was when I saw more of Serbia, but it was wartime, it was something com-

pletely different. I actually never really got to know the country of the people I loved.

FEMALE STUDENT II: One can live that way as well. How many people have you known without, for example, ever meeting their families?

BETA: I think I might still return to Serbia.

FEMALE STUDENT II: Why?

BETA: To see what had remained of my love, at least for a short time.

Music.

.....
 Summer day. The stage set is the scene from the most famous painting of Beta Vukanović – "A Summer Day". Red woman, black woman and Beta.

.....
BETA: My life is like a summer day. Everything was so bright, so clear, warm, fertile and then suddenly BAM! An unexpected storm blows everything away. The hail destroys the harvest... Was this the reason for the bad day?

WOMAN IN RED: The war is over, thank God!

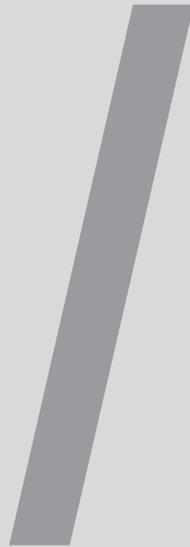
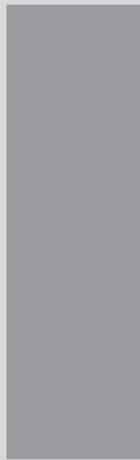
BLACK: Look, we are sitting in a garden, drinking coffee, the weather is nice...

BETA: That is precisely what I would like to portray in this painting – "A Summer Day" bright, clear, as if it's going to last for all eternity and on such a day, two women, it doesn't matter which, drinking coffee till the end of time.

BLACK: Would you like a cup of coffee, my dear?

An atmosphere of a summer day – a lot of yellow, some green and red here and there and much... much peace.

THE END



Vojislav Savić

THE EXTERMINATOR

(drama)



Vojislav Savić



Born in 1971, in Belgrade. Graduated from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Dramaturgy Department, in Belgrade. His plays *Mom, Do You Hear My Cry!?* (Čuješ li, mama, moj vapaj!?) and *Kangeroos* (Kenguri) have been performed in theatres throughout Serbia (National Theatre in Belgrade and Kragujevac, “Pozorište mladih” Theatre in Novi Sad and so on) and the surrounding region (Serb Republic, Slovakia...). For his play *Mom, Do You Hear My Cry!?*, he received the Best Comedy Text Award (Jagodina). The Slovakian version of the *Cry* (“Aleksandar Duhnovič” Theatre, Prešov) was included in the official selection of *Sterijino pozorje* in 2000. His drama *Leaving for Krasny* (*porn ritual in two acts*) (Odlazak u Krasni) won in the 2011 Contemporary Domestic Dramatic Text Competition of *Sterijino pozorje*. This drama was performed in the “Sterija” National Theatre in Vršac.

His dramatic texts, poetry and articles were published in literary journals and related publications (*Teatron, Književna reč, Savremena srpska drama, Travel...*). He received the “Dunav film” Award for the movie script *Indifference* (Ravnodušje) and the once “Oktobarska nagrada” Award of the city of Belgrade for poetry.

He worked/works for various television stations, marketing agencies and on TV productions as editor, screenwriter or playwright. He teaches dramaturgy at Artimedia Secondary School. He is the author of ten new and not yet performed dramatic texts.

Vojislav Savić

THE EXTERMINATOR

(drama)

Translated > Marija Gičić Puslojić

CHARACTERS:

GUEST (40-something)

MAID (40-something)

STRANGER (50-something)

*Most people's deaths are a sham.
There's nothing left to die.*

(Buddha Chinaski)

ACT 1

(Single hotel room. Coffee table and two armchairs in the middle, wardrobe on the side. To the right, a door leading to the bathroom, straight – the entry. Nothing on the bed but a bare mattress and a pillow.)

It's late in the afternoon.

There's nobody in the room when a key jingles in the lock and the door opens. GUEST enters in a worn out suit, all sweaty and unshaved, carrying a small suitcase. Immediately closes the door behind him and locks it shut.

He lingers by the door listening for noises in the hall. That goes on for a while and then he pulls out a handkerchief from his jacket, wiping the sweat off his face and neck.

He takes the jacket off, folds it over one of the two armchairs and walks up to the window. Barely moving the curtain he peeks through and takes his time looking outside. With a look of relief he moves back to the armchair and sits.

Somebody outside jiggles the door handle and the guest jumps to his feet, watching the door in fear. There is knocking but he only stares at the door silently. Knocking repeats itself as he stays silent.)

MAID (off): It's me sir! I brought your bed sheets!

(GUEST silent.)

MAID (off): Will you open or I should I leave the linens at the door?... Are you asleep?... If you are, tell me, I can return later?

(GUEST goes to the door, slowly unlocks, then carefully slides the door open an inch. Only once he's made sure who's there, he opens wide.)

GUEST: Come in.

(MAID enters. A robust forty year-old in a washed out single piece hotel uniform which used to be pink. Carries linens: blanket, sheets, pillowcase.)

MAID: Did I wake you?

GUEST: No.

MAID: Well if I did, it wasn't on purpose.

(Goes to the bed.)

What's wrong with you?

GUEST: Nothing. Why do you ask?

MAID: What are you afraid of?

GUEST: Me?

MAID: Yes you, I don't see anyone else around here.

GUEST: I'm not afraid of anything.

MAID: You sure seem that way.

GUEST: What way?

MAID: Well scared! When you were downstairs just now asking for a room, you didn't seem that way. *(Puts the linens on the mattress. Starts making the bed.)*

There's no one around here my dear sir. Except for the manager who pops in every now and then, and myself. *(Pause. Makes the bed.)* I'm your one woman show around here. I used to be just a maid, and now I'm also the cook, the waitress and the doorman. *(Pause.)* You're the first guest we've had in the last two years. And this used to be a well-known mountain resort, you know. We had nice folk staying here, you'd have to book a room for months in advance and we had to hire tow trucks to supply us food. In the winter people would come here to ski and break their necks, and in the summer to bathe in the lake and breathe our famous mountain air...

GUEST: And?

MAID: And what?

GUEST: What happened then? Why did they stop coming?

MAID: How the hell should I know. *(Pause.)* New and more luxurious hotels appeared I guess, better service and all. *(Pause.)* We grew old-fashioned you could say, may-

be that's it, plus people grew poor. We have restaurants sitting empty, walls crumbling, makes you sick to look at. Sometimes at night I feel like the silence will drive me mad.

GUEST: Why didn't you just close?

MAID: If it was up to me, that would've happened ages ago. But it's not my call is it, it's the management's. *(Pause.)* They keep hoping for a miracle, something that would bring the guests flooding back. You know when that will happen, huh? Do you?

GUEST: When?

MAID: When pigs fly. God himself has forgotten us in this ditch. *(The bed is made, the pillow is cased, and so she stands up straight.)* There. Now you can sleep like a man. Will you be coming downstairs for dinner or should I bring it up to your room?

GUEST: Bring it to my room if it's not a problem.

MAID: Why would it be a problem, I've got nothing better to do anyway. Most of the time I just aimlessly wander through these rooms and halls. Who are you running from?

GUEST: I'm not running from anyone. What gave you that idea?

MAID: Is it the wife? Or the kids? Someone you owe money?

GUEST: I told you woman, I'm not running!

MAID: So why are you here then?

GUEST: I just wanted to be as far away from people as possible, that's all.

MAID: Well, you came to the right place then, there's not a living soul round here, you won't be disturbed. How long were you planning to stay?

GUEST: Don't know. A week at the most.

MAID: Can you afford to stay that long?

GIEST: Of course.

MAID: We've kept our prices high, you know, regardless of everything, and you don't exactly look like someone who's got money to burn.

GUEST: If you don't believe me, I can give you some money in advance.

MAID: It's not that, I'm just saying. Even if you can't afford it, no matter. At least you can keep me company. Are you married?

GUEST: I am.

MAID: It would be better if you weren't. *(Pause.)* Have you got any kids?

GUEST: Two.

MAID: So what happened, you walked out on them?

GUEST: Only for a short while. Once I pull myself together in here, I'll go back.

MAID: So you gave your missus the slip? Did she cheat on you and you were the last to know, with the whole town already brewing about it?

GUEST: It's nothing like that.

MAID: Don't you mind women, there's plenty of fish in the sea, all you need to do is put in a little effort. With some of them, not even that, they come on their own. *(Suddenly the phone rings in a sharp tone and they both twitch in surprise. Startled, they just stare at the phone as it keeps ringing.)*

GUEST: There's no one who'd be calling for me.

MAID: How do you know?

GUEST: No one even knows I'm here. *(Silence.)* Up until five minutes ago I didn't even know I'd be staying here. *(Pause. Phone keeps ringing.)* Maybe it's for you?

MAID: No it isn't.

GUEST: Maybe you manager is looking for you?

MAID: How would he know I'm in your room all the way from down town?

GUEST: Well pick it up!

MAID: You pick it up, this is your room!

GUEST: I just got here...

MAID: I just got here myself.

(They both go on staring at the phone which keeps ringing; then MAID walks up to it carefully and carefully picks it up.)

MAID *(Into the phone):* White Pine Hotel, how may I help you? *(Pause.)* Hello? *(Pause.)*

Can you hear me?... I can't hear you, can you hear me?... Try phoning again, perhaps you'll be better luck next time! *(Slowly hangs up the phone.)*

GUEST: Who was it?

MAID: Well you heard it yourself: no one!

GUEST: No one?

MAID: Nothing, no voice, just a weird noise.

GUEST: Maybe a wrong number?

MAID: Why should I care, like I have nothing better to do.

(Stares at the GUEST intently.)

GUEST *(Uncomfortable):* Is there something you wanted to say?

MAID: Well as a matter of fact there is.

GUEST: What is it?

MAID: Ah, never mind. Besides, you could take it the wrong way.

GUEST: Tell me.

MAID *(After hesitating for a moment):* Well, if you must know, I am a divorced woman! Two years now! When the hotel went downhill, so did I! My now ex husband found someone else: younger, prettier! While I was taking care of guests round here working my legs off, he was back there taking care of her. By the time I found out what he was up to, it was too late, he al-

ready moved her into our apartment and simply told me never to come back. He sent me some of my clothing through our driver, he'd probably keep those too but I guess they didn't fit her. I hear they live a good life now, they even have a daughter, God bless her, she did no wrong by me. And to tell the truth I never even came close to a man since then!

GUEST: What do you mean?

MAID: Don't play dumb with me!... I mean in bed! Naked!...

(GUEST feels uncomfortable so he just gives out a small cough.)

MAID: Did you say something?

GUEST: No.

MAID: So why the hell are you coughing like that?... Don't tell me you caught a cold in this heat?

GUEST: Of course not.

MAID: And boy, I sure need one... No wonder, it's been so long... Sometimes, especially at night, this strange heat comes over me!... I could almost scream, I feel like I'm going to burn!... How long since you left home?

GUEST: Six months.

MAID: If we're gonna be honest, you're in no better position than I am. Unless you're one of those queer types.

(GUEST silent.)

MAID: Are you?

GUEST: Definitely not!

MAID: Silly me, asking that. How could you be if you've got two kids... Although that doesn't really make a difference these days, at least children are easily made. *(Walks towards the door.)* So I bring your dinner here, is that right?

GUEST: That's right.

MAID: Something to drink with that?

GUEST: Nothing, thank you.

(MAID opens the door, stands there thinking.)

GUEST: Did you forget something?

MAID: Well, I didn't bring anything to forget, did I? Aside from the linens. I just wanted...

GUEST: Yes?

MAID: Once you're well rested...

(Goes silent.)

GUEST: What then?

MAID: If you feel like it... And if you're in the mood... And of course if you think I'm at least a little bit attractive. After all, that is the most important thing, right?

GUEST: I don't know if I understood this right...

MAID: Do you think I'm a little bit attractive?

GUEST: I never thought about it.

MAID: That's not something you have to think about, it's something you know!

GUEST: Even if I did think that... I'm too tired... I could hardly wait to get upstairs and get some rest.

MAID: I don't think you're attractive, to be honest.

GUEST: That I believe you.

MAID: You don't seem like much of a man.

GUEST: I know.

MAID: If times weren't so rough I wouldn't even give you the time of day. But here in these remote woods, after two years of forced abstinence...

(GUEST silent.)

MAID *(Sighing)*: So, I bring dinner to the room?

GUEST: We already agreed on that!

MAID: That we did! *(Gives him another intent stare.)*

GUEST: Excuse me?

MAID: I didn't say anything.

GUEST: I'd like to lie down... Maybe only for an hour... just to come to my senses.

MAID: Well lie down then, who's stopping you. One can tell right away you're exhausted.

GUEST: The door's still open.

MAID: That's because I was just leaving.

GUEST: If you're leaving...

MAID: Well I am I tell you! You never said what you wanted for dinner?

GUEST: Anything will do.

MAID: No special requests?

GUEST: As long as I'm fed. As a matter of fact, bring whatever you're making for yourself, it's all the same to me.

MAID: Maybe something nice from the grill? Our freezers are full.

GUEST: Feel free to choose, I honestly have no idea.

MAID: Then I'll be going... Nothing else for me to do... If you want me...?

GUEST: You? For dinner?

MAID: Don't be silly... I mean, you know... as a woman.

GUEST: What should I do then?

MAID: Oh, nothing special. Just open the door and call for me. Where ever I am I'll hear you.

GUEST: All right.

MAID: And I will come.

GUEST: Fine.

MAID: Don't you hesitate... We're both grown ups here.

GUEST: I'll keep that in mind.

MAID: I know, perhaps I shouldn't have said anything... I suppose I've been a bit too forward, but after those two years of drought... You see what I'm trying to say?

GUEST: Of course I do, I'm not that thick!

MAID: Don't you yell at me.

GUEST: I'm sorry.

MAID: It's all right. You don't think I'm being ridiculous?

GUEST: I don't.

MAID: Perhaps you're thinking something's wrong with me? ... I'm a bit cuckoo?

GUEST: I think no such thing.

MAID: I haven't lost my marbles yet, you can be sure of that.

GUEST: I know that.

MAID: I can tell you're not at your best. There's something eating away at you. Otherwise you wouldn't be here. But still, if you want to, I'm here... I guess we'll both feel relieved afterwards. I know I will, and who knows, maybe you will too. Good bye.

GUEST: Good bye.

(MAID finally leaves. GUEST spends a while observing the closed door then tiptoes towards it and listens again. When he's done listening he reaches for the lock but he's interrupted by the phone ringing. Stiff and increasingly frightened he stares at the noisy phone. He doesn't have the courage to pick it up. This goes on for some time and ultimately he makes up his mind: he goes to the phone and picks up.)

GUEST *(Into the phone, quietly, fearfully):* Hallo?... *(Waits.)* Hallo! *(Pause.)* Can you hear me? ... Hallo?

(Hangs up, goes to the window, discreetly moves the curtain, stares outside. Remembers he forgot to lock the door so he quickly makes his way there, turning the key twice. Then he walks up to the bed and lies down fully dressed.)

ACT 2

(Three hours pass. Dusk. Final traces of daylight can be barely made out through the window. Guest is asleep. Fully dressed, the same way he first laid in the bed. There is a knock at the door but he doesn't hear it. Knocking repeats itself, guest is still asleep.)

MAID *(off):* It's me sir! ... Are you asleep? ... *(Starts banging at the door.)* Wake up man, I've brought you your dinner! ... Can you hear me!?

GUEST *sits up straight barely awake.*

MAID *(off):* Are you awake?

GUEST: Yes!

MAID *(off):* Well open up then, what are you waiting for!

GUEST: I'll be right there! *(Gets up. First he turns on the light then places one hand on the handle and one on the key.)* Are you alone?

MAID *(off):* Of course I'm alone! I already told you there's no one here except you and me.

(GUEST still hesitating.)

MAID *(off):* Are you going to open or not? I've been standing here like an idiot for a half an hour already!

(GUEST unlocks the door, opens, MAID enters carrying a tray with two meals, two glasses and a bottle of wine.)

MAID: Good grief my man what is going on with you!?

GUEST: What would be going on? Nothing.

MAID: Well if it's nothing why did you keep me waiting for so long? Nearly lost my arms to all this weight, I'm not made of iron you know! Did I wake you?

GUEST: Yes.

MAID: Just as well. You've slept enough, a full three hours. Have to leave something for the night. *(Puts the tray on the table.)* You slept in your clothes?

GUEST: Sleep caught me before I had a chance to change.

MAID: The linens have just been washed, they still smell fresh.

GUEST: It won't happen again.

MAID: Oh, it doesn't matter. He have tons of 'em. We used to change linens round here twice a day. I brought you dinner.

GUEST: I can see that. (*Points to the bottle of wine.*) I didn't ask for that.

MAID: It's on the house.

GUEST: And I don't drink.

MAID: Well, keep it, it won't ask you for money. As a decoration, if nothing else. You don't even drink wine?

GUEST: No, no alcohol. For years now.

MAID: I like to have a sip or two, just to get in the mood. But I can't drink alone. It doesn't really make sense if you're alone. (*Points to herself.*) Can't you see I dressed up a little?

GUEST (*Checks her out, she did dress up: changed her clothes, put on some discreet make up, fixed her hair, looks quite decent now.*): I do see.

MAID: You honestly didn't notice before?

GUEST: Honest I didn't!

MAID: Some man you are.

GUEST: I just wasn't paying attention.

MAID: I used to like to put on a nice dress, go out with my ex in the evening... I won't brag but I sure turned some heads. I never thought of going away with another man, but it felt nice to be noticed. Once he left me I was quite frustrated and I let myself go. Besides, who should I dress up for in this God forsaken nowhere! Here, take a seat. (*Guest sits down.*) Please, help yourself. (*Guest takes a bite, she curiously glances at him.*) Well, how do you like it?

GUEST: Good. (*Pause.*) Tasty.

MAID: I made that for you myself.

GUEST: I know.

MAID: How do you know?

GUEST: Well who else? ... You're the only one here!

MAID: You notice something on the tray? (*Guest looks at the tray.*) You don't? Really?

GUEST: I don't know what it is I'm supposed to notice.

MAID: It's set for two! Two plates, two knives, two forks, two glasses. The food is also for two, even more, I saved no expense!

GUEST: Why did you do that when you know I'm alone?

MAID: In case you invited me to join you. I can't remember the last time I shared a meal with someone, and as far as I can see, it's the same with you.

(*GUEST silent.*)

MAID: You're not in the mood to share a meal? (*Guest is silent.*) If you're not, just say so, I'll leave straight away. I won't get offended. Well maybe I will, but that's no concern of yours.

GUEST: Take a seat.

MAID: Thank you.

(*Sits in the armchair across from him.*)

GUEST: Help yourself, please.

MAID: Thank you, you're so kind. (*Takes a knife and a fork, pulls some meat onto her plate.*) You're a difficult man you know.

GUEST: That's hardly a news flash. The worst of it all is I'm most difficult to myself.

MAID: You don't know how to relax.

GUEST: I forgot how that's done a long time ago.

MAID: Even when you get a chance to enjoy a little, you run from it.

GUEST: I can't even remember the last time I had a chance like that. I have forgotten what it means to eat in peace and enjoy food ... I have forgotten how it feels to sleep like a normal human being, to live like a normal human being.

MAID: That means something truly bad is happening to you.

GUEST: It is.

MAID: And you can't seem to get away from it although you're trying your best. Am I right?

GUEST: You're right.

MAID: Should I open the bottle?

GUEST: If you feel like drinking then open it.

MAID: A glass of wine won't hurt you, and it will lift your spirits.

GUEST: No wine! I told you already!

MAID: Then I won't have any either! There!

(Puts the bottle down loudly. Both eat in silence. They occasionally raise their heads for a quick glance at each other.)

MAID: Did you take a shower?

GUEST: I didn't get a chance, sleep got the best of me.

MAID: Still, you don't smell. *(They eat.)* Your feet don't stink either, which really surprises me. *(Silence. They eat.)*

MAID: I did.

GUEST: You did what?

MAID: I took a shower! *(Pause.)* I put some perfume on too. Can't you feel it?

GUEST: No.

MAID: It's a nice discreet fragrance. *(Pause.)* French. A guest left it here two years ago.

(Silence. They eat.)

MAID: Well, enjoy your meal.

GUEST: Thank you, you too.

MAID: Thank you.

Silence. They eat.

MAID: We just can't seem to get it off?

GUEST: Get what off?

MAID: Well, the conversation. It's like we are blocked somehow. Well, you are, actually. You're so very suspicious. Although there's not a single reason for it. I'm not the suspicious type myself but I fear I may say something stupid... It's probably because I haven't sat like this with anyone for such a long time.

(Unexpectedly the phone rings again. Just as sharp as before. They stop eating, look at it.)

GUEST: You are certain there's no one in the hotel but you?

MAID: Of course I'm sure. I'm not that daft for Christ's sake.

(The phone keeps ringing. They keep staring at it.)

MAID: Should I get it?

GUEST: Don't.

MAID: But it can go on like that forever!

GUEST: I guess they'll give up when they see no one's answering.

MAID: We can only hope so.

(The phone keeps ringing. They keep staring at it.)

MAID: It's no use, they're not giving up. I'll pick it up. Can I?

GUEST: Suit yourself, I know no one's calling for me.

MAID *(Stands up, goes to the phone, picks it up.):* You have reached the White Pine Hotel, how may I help you? *(Pause.)* What was that? *(Pause.)* Excuse me? *(Pause.)* Honest to God, sir, I just can't believe it! *(Pause.)* All right, all right, I'll be with you in a moment. *(Pensively hangs up the phone.)*

(GUEST Stares at her inquisitively.)

MAID: I must say this is quite odd.

GUEST: Who was that?... Who were you talking to?... The manager?

MAID: For Christ's sake, I told you the manager isn't here, he's gone to town and he'll stay there drunk out of his wits for at least a week! His daughter is seven months pregnant, knocked up to her teeth and she won't say who did it.

GUEST: Well who was it on the phone then?

MAID: A gentleman who, like yourself, wants a room in this hotel!

GUEST: Where is he now!?

MAID: Who?

GUEST (*In a nervous tone.*): Well him! ... This gentleman who, like myself, wants a room in this hotel!?

MAID: What's wrong with you man, why are you yelling at me?

GUEST: I'm sorry.

MAID: I'm not your wife! Or your servant girl!

GUEST: I'm really sorry. Forgive me.

MAID: A lot I care for your apology... You break a man's neck and then you apologize, like that's gonna make it all better. (*Pause.*) He's downstairs.

GUEST: Downstairs where?

MAID: At the front desk! Waiting for his room key! He asked me to hurry up and here I am discussing things with you! I'm going down to see to him and then I'll come back so we can finish our meal. (*Goes to the door, turns around.*) I'm really curious to see who he is. Not because he's a man, but to see why he also chose this hotel. Could this mean the good old days are back?

GUEST: How should I know?

MAID: I wasn't asking you, I'm just talking to myself. (*Leaves.*)

(*GUEST starts nervously pacing around the room. Remembers the door, hurries to it and locks it twice. Goes back to the table, looks at the food. Sits down, tries to eat, but can't focus. Keeps suspiciously glancing at the door. Jumps to his feet, goes to the door again, listens. Someone on the other side presses the handle again and then knocks.*)

GUEST: Who's there?

MAID (*off*): Jesus, it's me, who else would it be? I told you I'd be back!

GUEST: Are you alone?

MAID (*off*): No!

GUEST: Who's there with you?

MAID (*off*): My dead grandfather! Come on man, open the door and stop goofing around!

(*GUEST unlocks the door, opens it, and MAID enters.*)

MAID: Why the hell do you keep locking the door, it's not like someone's gonna snatch you!

GUEST: I don't know... just a habit, I guess...

MAID: I'm not gonna eat you, for Heaven's sake! You're not afraid of me, are you?

GUEST: That man...

MAID: What man are you talking about?

GUEST: The one who was waiting for you downstairs?

MAID: Well? What about him? Just a man.

GUEST: You gave him a room?

MAID: Why wouldn't I, the entire hotel is utterly empty! He even brought his own linens, he says he'll make his own bed!

GUEST: What does he look like?

MAID: Like you.

GUEST: What does that mean?

MAID: Plain. Very low-key. I'd never notice him in the street, nothing stands out about him. He even kinda looks like you!

GUEST: Looks like me?

MAID: Well not really, but both of you have a certain something... You don't share any facial features, yet it's like you could be twins.

GUEST: How come?

MAID: How should I know how come! I can't explain it myself... There's something about both of you, something you have in common and you can see at first glance! ... Should we continue our dinner?

GUEST: Please, take a seat.

MAID: Thank you very much. *(Takes a seat.)*

GUEST: Help yourself.

MAID: Don't mind if I do. *(Takes a bite, eats.)* You're very kind and well mannered, I appreciate that.

GUEST: What did he say?

MAID: The new guest you mean?

GUEST: Did he say anything?

MAID: Not much. Nothing other than what one normally says in these situations. Wouldn't even order dinner. I offered but he refused, says he's got a couple of sandwiches. Stale ones. But he'll eat them all the same. He's also in the pinch, like you. Maybe even in a bigger one. Back in the day when this hotel ran full steam we used to call such guests good-for-nothings. *(Pause.)* Never had much of 'em anyway. *(Pause.)* Stale sandwiches... God knows how long he's been carrying them around, they're probably all stinky by now. *(Silence. Both eat. Guest does it listlessly, raising his head every minute to look at the maid who is fully committed to her food.)*

MAID *(With her mouth full.):* He's right there.

GUEST: Where?

MAID: Room next door.

GUEST: No!?

MAID: Yes! He specifically asked for that room. He's close by, so if you wanna meet him...

GUEST: I don't!

GUEST: All right, don't get so worked up! You know what, I'm gonna open this bottle after all.

GUEST: Well then open it, you brought it anyway.

MAID: You won't mind if I have a glass of wine?

GUEST: Why would I mind! Have two!

MAID *(Opening the bottle.):* Well, you know you're right. Although men usually don't like it when women drink. My ex sure didn't like it, I couldn't even take a sniff of the stuff in public. Wasn't even allowed to think about it. I always had to sneak out when he wasn't looking. And I had to take special care that he doesn't smell it on me, otherwise he'd beat me silly.

GUEST: He beat you?

MAID: Damn straight! Like I was a felon!

(GUEST looks at her questioningly, as if in disbelief.)

MAID: But after that we loved each other like never before. Passions would roar... we would rip each other's clothes off like animals. *(She had filled her glass and raises it up.)* Cheers.

GUEST: Cheers.

(MAID takes a sip and giggles.)

GUEST: What is it?

MAID: Oh, nothing. Never mind. Your ears are too refined for such things.

GUEST: Tell me.

MAID: All right, suit yourself! ... Sometimes I could barely wait for him to smack me! In a real manly way, you know, make me see all colors of the rainbow!

GUEST: How come?

MAID: So we'd love each other so passionately afterwards!
It was our thing! Like foreplay! (*Takes a sip.*) And he
went off with somebody else. That piece of scum!...
You really don't want a glass?

GUEST: For the love of God, woman, I told you I don't drink!

MAID: All right, no reason to get so mad.

GUEST: I'm not mad!

MAID: Yes you are, I'm not deaf! Otherwise you wouldn't
be yelling at me!

GUEST: I don't drink and that's final! Stop offering!

MAID: All right, I won't!

*(Silence. She drinks. Eats. She hears something so she
stops chewing.)*

GUEST: Now what?

MAID: Please be quiet.

(GUEST silent, also listening.)

MAID: It's him.

GUEST: I didn't hear anything.

MAID: He's over there, in his room. Pacing up and down.
He must be nervous. How did you get up here when
you don't have a car and the bus lines to the hotel are
out of service?

GUEST: I walked.

MAID: Good God man, that's a six mile walk!

GUEST: I had no choice.

MAID: He also came on foot. (*She eats. Takes another sip
of wine.*) I could tell by his shoes. They were all dusty.
(*Silence.*) I bet he's gonna wipe them off with one of
our towels!

GUEST: You think?

MAID: I know his kind. (*Silence.*) Would you like me to
stay here for the night?

GUEST: Where?

MAID: Here in your room! With you!... Do you think you
could manage that? (*Guest is silent.*) You can tell me.

GUEST: You mean...?

MAID: Yes, that's exactly what I mean! Maybe we'll never
see each other again, you'll leave, I'll stay here for
a couple more years to wait for retirement... It will
be a nice memory for both of us. An unexpected en-
counter, a night of passion and loving... You've had
your sleep now, you're well rested...

GUEST: I'm not ready for something like that yet.

MAID: You're not?

GUEST: No, I'm not.

MAID: We could give it a try. (*Guest is silent.*) Even if it
doesn't work out... No big deal... The world won't
end... (*He's still silent.*) Failures come and go... You
and I, we're not in those years when such things seem
like a tragedy.

GUEST: Leave it be. Maybe another time.

MAID (*Sighs*): All right. It was just a question. For the sec-
ond time since you got here.

GUEST: I'm sorry.

MAID: It doesn't matter. It's not the first time I've been
blown off.

GUEST: I just don't feel any need for a woman. Been like
that for months now. Since all this started. Like I'm
not a man at all.

MAID: It's all right, I get it. You don't need to give me
excuses.

GUEST: I'm not, I'm simply trying to explain.

MAID: Well, don't bother, I get the picture without your
explanations. After my divorce, I wasn't up for any-
thing either, and for quite some time. But in these last
few months... I've had this growing urge to feel loved...

sometimes the desire is driving me nuts. *(Pause.)* He brought a gun.

GUEST: Who?

MAID: The guy in that room! I saw it, he carries it under his armpit, like in the movies. What does he need a gun for? I never trusted people with guns. If they have it, they're gonna use it, it's not something you carry around just for decoration. You don't carry a gun?

GUEST: I never carried one. I never even had one...

MAID *(Interrupting him.):* Hush now.

GUEST: Now what?

MAID: Be quiet.

(GUEST is silent, MAID turns her ear to the door. He does the same.)

MAID: He's right there, at you door.

GUEST: What's he doing there?

MAID: How should I know. Ask him, not me.

GUEST *(Slowly standing up, his expression growing apparently frightened.):* I don't know him... why would he be at my door...

MAID: Maybe he wants to introduce himself!

(There is a knock at the door. They silently stare at the door as it opens slowly and in comes the STRANGER. He's a man of about fifty, in a worn out suit, looking quite run down and tired.)

STRANGER: Good evening.

MAID: Please, join us. Take my seat, I already ate, and there's plenty left. If you're not squeamish, you can use my utensils.

STRANGER *(Looking at the guest quite conspicuously.):* Good evening, sir.

GUEST: And to you.

MAID: What have you decided, you want my utensils or should I get a clean set?

STRANGER: No need, I had my dinner already.

MAID: You finished off those stale sandwiches of yours?

STRANGER: As soon as I stepped foot into my room. I hadn't eaten all day.

MAID: A glass of wine then?

STRANGER: I don't drink.

MAID: You too?

STRANGER: I never did.

MAID: The gentleman also.

STRANGER *(To the GUEST):* Is that true?

GUEST: Alcohol doesn't sit well with me. I haven't even tasted it for years.

STRANGER: We have that in common. **(TO THE MAID):** You can go now.

MAID: What do you mean?

STRANGER: The gentleman and I would like to be left alone!

MAID: You two know each other?

STRANGER: For a long time. But that's none of your business.

MAID: I should've known. You arrived at the hotel practically together. *(Takes the tray. Turns to the GUEST.)* You won't be needing it?

STRANGER: Leave it.

MAID: As you wish... Makes no difference to me... Besides, if the gentleman gets hungry in the night... I can pick it up in the morning. *(She's at the door.)* Well... *(GUEST and STRANGER just keep looking at her silently, waiting for her to leave.)* If you need anything... Just call... I have a TV downstairs, but it's not working, the manager promised he'd call the repair man months ago. You know when he'll actually get round to it?

STRANGER: I do.

MAID: When?

STRANGER: Never.

MAID: Precisely. You seem to be a genius of sorts.

STRANGER: Good night.

MAID: Good night. In the morning you'll tell me what you want for breakfast. There's flower, eggs, marmalade, bacon in the freezer... *(They again wait for her to leave. Her eyes fall to the stranger's shoes.)* Your shoes are no longer dusty. Did you wipe them off with a towel?

STRANGER: Is that relevant?

MAID: Not really. Much classier guests used to do that long before you. *(Pause.)* Well, if that's the case, there's nothing else for me to do but leave... I hope you're not some two gay lovers getting at each other's throats... We never cared much for that in this hotel... I know it won't make much difference if I say I am deeply disappointed. By both of you! Good night. *(Leaves.)*

(STRANGER keeps staring at GUEST intently, but GUEST keeps avoiding his eyes. Finally, STRANGER goes to the door, locks it, pulls the key out of the lock and puts it in his pocket.)

GUEST: That's a precaution you won't need.

STRANGER: You never know.

GUEST: I've got nowhere to run.

STRANGER: I thought so too on many occasions, yet you managed to give me the slip.

(Sits down, points to the food.) Is it any good?

GUEST: I have no idea, I lost all sense of taste.

STRANGER: And I upset my stomach with those stale sandwiches. Still, they're my best bet, being the cheapest solution, especially since I make them myself. May I?

GUEST: By all means, help yourself.

STRANGER *(Eating from the tray.)*: It's good. *(He eats.)* Delicious. *(He eats.)* Actually, anything is delicious after what I normally eat...

(Suddenly he springs to his feet. Pulling GUEST's bag onto the bed, he opens it. He starts taking things out: pajamas, shaving kit...)

GUEST: There's nothing there of interest to you.

STRANGER: You can never be too careful. *(Silence.)* After all, that's part of my job. *(Puts the things back into the bag, closes it and puts it back on the floor.)* Many of my colleagues paid dearly for their lack of caution. Lift up you arms.

(GUEST lifts his arms up; STRANGER starts feeling him up to see if he's armed.)

OK, now we're both at ease. Our victims usually act as helpless little sheep, but sometimes, in moments of despair and seeing there's no way out, they can get pretty dangerous. *(Sits in the armchair and points to the tray again.)* You're really done?

GUEST: Yes, I've had my fill.

STRANGER: So did I, but it's a shame to let all this food go to waste. *(Continues eating.)*

GUEST *(After watching him for a while.)*: Here we are.

STRANGER: Yes, here we are. Finally. It was no good delaying this for so long. *(Pause.)* A full six months. Didn't bring anything to either of us. *(Pause.)* Why did you torture us both for so long?

GUEST: It's a matter of life and death! My own life!

STRANGER: But you knew I'd catch up with you sooner or later!

GUEST: I kept hoping I'd manage to escape.

STRANGER: That would be a first. For me and my colleagues.

GUEST: Still, it's my gain.

STRANGER: What gain?

GUEST: Well, I did live six months longer.

STRANGER: You think that's a gain?

GUEST: You think it isn't?

STRANGER: Under the circumstances? Constantly on the run, always in fear? Getting no sleep, not having a moment of peace! That's no life! And there's no gain in it, my friend!

GUEST: We're no friends!

STRANGER: We're not, that's true. But we're no enemies either.

(Stands up, starts walking about. Makes a circle around GUEST.)

If you think I hate you, you're badly mistaken. I've never hated any of my victims! Quite the opposite, if there ever was a feeling involved, it was love.

GUEST: Love!? You've got to be kidding me!

STRANGER: You don't understand.

GUEST: Oh I don't?

STRANGER: And you never will. But I will try to explain it to you.

GUEST: Explain what?

STRANGER: The whole thing about my feelings. Maybe it's not love, but it certainly is respect! I have respect for you, sir! As my victim! As the one I depend on in a manner of speaking!

GUEST: You depend on me?

STRANGER: Not just me! My wife as well! Not to mention our four children who need to be fed and clothed. If there weren't for you, they'd have nothing to eat, let alone wear. See what I mean?

GUEST: No, I don't.

STRANGER: I'm really trying to put this in plain words. What exactly don't you understand?

GUEST: Why don't you change your job?

STRANGER: This is the only thing I know how to do. It's how I started and it's how I'll finish. I'm good at it, used to be the best once, and now when I'm no longer

in my best of shape, I'm still good! Especially seeing how the competition is getting bigger by the minute.

GUEST: What competition?

STRANGER: The number of professional hitmen is multiplying by the minute. There used to be just a handful of us, and now it's a top ranking career choice. Younger and more competent guys just keep coming. Believe it or not, new generations decide on this job in their elementary. What can you do, kids like blood... And the market is getting smaller. Prices have plummeted to a disgraceful degree. Do you want to know the price on your head?

GUEST: How much?

STRANGER: You'd be very disappointed to know what your head is worth to the man who ordered the hit.

GUEST: Can you and your family make a living out of it at least for a couple of years?

STRANGER: Who's talking about years, man, are you out of your mind? Not even a couple of months, my dear man! And once I settle all of my debts not even a couple of weeks!

(Silence.)

GUEST: I'm that cheap?

STRANGER: Others are no better. If that's any comfort. But even then, I have to respect you. If there weren't for you, I couldn't even earn that pittance. *(Pause.)* And seeing how you've been dodging me for half a year now, which also caused me great expense... which my employer won't reimburse me for, since he thinks it was my own fault I let that happen... I'm afraid you weren't worth my while.

GUEST: So why'd you keep trying, why didn't you just give up?

STRANGER: Well I have to take some money home to the wife and kids! They're waiting for it! More eagerly than they're waiting for me! Plus I have to maintain

my reputation in front of my colleagues. Even in front of myself, if you will. What would be there for me to do after giving up? Nothing but suicide. How would I repay the advance my employer gave me? *(Pause.)* And what, leave my family in debts? My wife and kids would never forgive me, and they'd be right not to.

GUEST: Now tell me, who wants you to kill me and why? Who was it that wanted me dead?

STRANGER: I honestly don't know. I get a call from the perspective employer, he orders the hit, we agree on a price and then he sends me the advance. I've been in this business for thirty years now and I've never met a single employer face to face. These are the basic rules of the job. That way we're both safe from unwanted consequences.

GUEST: Never in my life did I think I'd live to see something like this... that I'd spend months running from a professional hitman... I'm just an office clerk! Who'd wanna have me killed? Who would bear such a grudge against me? ... Listen to me, maybe this is all just a big mistake?

STRANGER: Impossible! Nothing like that has ever happened!

GUEST: And what if you have spent all this time on the wrong person? Maybe it's a case of mistaken identity!

STRANGER: That's out of the question! *(Takes two photographs out of the inner pocket of his jacket.)* Take a look.

GUEST: What's that?

STRANGER: Just a couple of photos. Take a look.

(GUEST takes the photos and starts looking at them.)

STRANGER *(Points to one of them.)*: That's you, isn't it? In the street, among passers-by. Is it or isn't it?

GUEST: It is me.

STRANGER: If you don't believe it, look at the other one. There's a close up of you.

(GUEST stares at the picture.)

STRANGER: There's no mistake about it, is there?

GUEST: No.

STRANGER *(Takes the photos, puts them back into his pocket.)*: What sort of professional would I be if I killed the wrong person? My career would be over, such mistakes are unforgivable! Who would ever count on me again? My colleagues would resent me and the employers would just keep away. None of us would gamble with something like that.

GUEST: Then who?... Why?... Who had a problem with me?... I did my office job for twenty years, never stepped on anybody's toes... I owe no one and no one owes me.

STRANGER: One can't really tell these days why someone would want you gone. *(Pause.)* Of course, it's none of our business, we never get into those matters. Otherwise we wouldn't get anywhere. *(Pause.)* Besides, when you think about it, even the best ones can give you a reason to kill them.

GUEST: What reasons? If they're the best?

STRANGER: Simply by being the best, isn't that reason enough? *(Pause.)* Maybe someone bears a grudge against them and they don't even know it. Maybe one of your colleagues wants to climb the company ladder and thinks you're in his way. *(GUEST is pensively silent.)* Maybe you unwittingly checked out a woman in the neighborhood and her jealous husband saw it and thought God knows what. *(GUEST is silent.)* Somebody may simply dislike your face, doesn't want to look at you anymore, and has enough money to turn to us.

GUEST: Is that reason enough to have someone killed?

STRANGER: Anything's a reason, my dear friend. How many times have you wished death to a stranger just because he accidentally stepped on your foot in a crowded bus or elbowed you? The difference between you and whoever ordered your hit is that he had the will and resolution to seek me out. And of course, the

means to pay for it. You know, it's no accident that my line of business is in bloom! Hitmen don't just multiply on their own, they are created by those who choose this way to get rid of the people around them. You are the ones exterminating each other out, we are just the executioners, nothing more. Please don't tell me it's the executioner's fault that his victim is sentenced to death?

GUEST: That's what you say to yourself to justify what you do for a living?

STRANGER: I have no need to justify myself, that, my friend, I leave to those who hire us.

GUEST: What about your conscience?

STRANGER: That's also a matter you'd have to clear up with them. Although in your case I'm afraid it's too late, your end is approaching without delay.

(Awkward silence stretching for a long while.)

STRANGER *(In a melancholy tone.):* My finest customer was a gentleman who ordered hits just to eradicate the vermin from the earth... By this, of course, he meant people... He confessed this to me at my urging only after fifty phone calls. He looked forward to each kill like a child. I worked for him for three years.

GUEST: Why did you end this magnificent collaboration?

STRANGER: One day he sent me his own photo and the entire fee.

GUEST: He ordered his own hit?

STRANGER: He held himself to be vermin as well.

GUEST: Did you do it?

STRANGER: Of course. I'd have done it for free if he asked me to, after all, he deserved that much after three years. I'll never forget him. And I never even saw his face, he asked me to shoot him from the back. *(Long pause.)*

GUEST: I would still like to know who wanted me dead. And why. So much as to pay for it. *(STRANGER is silent.)* I'd like to look him in the eye...

STRANGER: From what I could gather out of the few phone calls we had, he's one of those guys who spend hours on end standing at the window watching people go by. You were one of those he'd see every day.

GUEST: And?

STRANGER: He liked you least of all. He doesn't wanna see you anymore. He took your picture and sent it to me along with the advance.

GUEST: That makes no sense whatsoever.

STRANGER: I know. But thanks to that lack of sense, I'll be able to make some money. Besides, it's not as pointless as it seems. There was no other way for him to stop you passing by where you did, if he had asked you nicely you'd simply think him nuts and would've said no.

GUEST: You never said what my life was worth. If I offered you more money...?

STRANGER: For what?

GUEST: For you to kill him instead!

STRANGER: Kill who?

GUEST: The one who ordered my kill.

STRANGER: How could I, I don't know who he is... First you'd have to give me an advance which you can't cause you're broke... Then there's his basic info and a photo, and neither one of us knows who he is. I'm afraid you're too late. *(GUEST is silent.)* And even if you did know him, it would be out of the question.

GUEST: Why?

STRANGER: It's a matter of honor. And professional code. The one who asked for my services first always has the upper hand. If the arrangement was made, then all the money you're offering, regardless of the amount, simply makes no difference.

(Someone jiggles the door handle in the hall, then knocks. STRANGER goes to the door, pulls out his gun. Knocking repeats.)

STRANGER: Who's there?

MAID *(off):* It's me, who else would it be, why are you also playing dumb with me now?

STRANGER: What do you want?

MAID *(off):* Well open first!

(STRANGER puts the gun back in his holster, pulls the key out of his pocket, unlocks the door, opens, and MAID enters.)

MAID: Why on earth do you keep locking yourselves in?... What are you scared of?... Two grown men!... You're not exactly all muscle, I'll give you that, but between the two of you, you should be able to take a guy out! And on top of it all, there's not a living soul in here besides the three of us!

(GUEST and STRANGER just look at her in silence.)

MAID: Are you honestly scared of someone? *(GUEST and STRANGER are silent.)* Is it me? *(They keep silent.)* Silly of me to ask, nobody's afraid of me.

STRANGER: What do you want, madam?

MAID: Nothing. Do I look like someone who wants something?

STRANGER: Why are you here then?

MAID: What do you mean why?... You called for me!

STRANGER: Who called for you?

MAID: You did. Or the other gentleman, how should I know.

STRANGER: Nobody called for you.

MAID: Oh, is that so? *(Turns to GUEST.)* You didn't call for me?

GUEST: Not me!

MAID: But I heard you calling? *(They look at her in silence.)* I heard you call my name and ask me to come upstairs!

STRANGER: How could we've done that when we don't even know your name? You never gave it to us. Not to me at least! *(To GUEST):* Do you, sir, know this lady's name?

(GUEST shakes his head.)

STRANGER *(To MAID):* As you very well know, you never told us your name. Isn't that right?

MAID: I guess it is.

STRANGER: Well then?

MAID: I must have imagined it.

STRANGER: Has that happened before?

MAID: Not that I recall.

STRANGER: I get it, you want company, the solitude is killing you, but that, madam, is no reason to come bothering us! Or to deceive us! Now we've cleared it all out, you can leave.

MAID: True. It's all clear now. I only imagined it... Or I just wanted to come sit with you for a while... Sit with two men in one of the many rooms of a desolate hotel. *(Starts shifting her gaze from GUEST to STRANGER. They're both silent.)* Well maybe it would be interesting? *(To STRANGER):* What do you think about it, sir?

STRANGER: About what!?

MAID: About this idea of mine.

STRANGER: What idea of yours!?

MAID: Well the two of you... and me... in this room... I hope that notion doesn't seem too perverse or anything?

STRANGER: It doesn't!

MAID: Well in that case... I mean...

STRANGER: It's preposterous!

MAID: Why preposterous?... Wouldn't it be nice... Although I have no experience...

STRANGER: You can go now.

MAID: Of course I can, why couldn't I?

(Inquiringly stares at GUEST.)

GUEST: You should leave. Try to get some sleep, it's already late. We'll try not to wake you, but if we need something...

MAID: Just open the door and call.

GUEST: I know.

MAID: Don't be mad but it looks more and more like the two of you...

STRANGER *(Nearly shouting.):* We're not!

MAID: You're not what?

STRANGER: We're not gay! We're just business partners. Can you understand that!?

MAID: All right, no need to get so worked up if you've got nothing to hide, you can lower your voice! ... Good night to you both.

(They also wish her a good night. She waits several moments then slowly leaves the room. STRANGER locks up after her stuffing the key in his pocket.)

STRANGER *(Turns to GUEST opening his arms.):* What an idiot that woman is.

GUEST: She's only in need of some company.

STRANGER: We're all in need of company but still we just keep getting lonelier. It's almost as if we're being punished in our old age for the youth we've once wasted. *(Pause.)* I didn't only waste my youth, I squandered all my money as well. This job used to bring in a good buck once, and one single kill could keep me sitting pretty for a couple of years. I was so swamped in work I often had to hide from potential customers and decline their orders on the pretense of being busy or away.

GUEST: What'd you do with all that money?

STRANGER: Spent it on all good times, partying around. Later on the wife joined in so we squandered away relentlessly together... I know now what I should've

done but it's too late for that now... I'm about to hit rock bottom. *(Pause.)* When my colleagues advised my to watch it, I only laughed...

GUEST: You wife knows what you do?

STRANGER: Why wouldn't she?

GUEST: And your kids?

STRANGER: Them too.

GUEST: How do they react?

STRANGER: They, my friend, couldn't care less what I do, all they care about is living easy and spending money. The more there is, the happier they are. Hell, they'd be happiest if I'd go around killing two people a day. They wouldn't mind if I exterminated the entire world as long as it satisfied their needs.

GUEST: It's getting late.

STRANGER: You mean to say I'm talking too much, huh? You're the first victim I've ever spoken to. There were dozens before you and I never uttered a single word, wouldn't even let them see me.

(Phone starts ringing again. They both watch it listlessly.)

GUEST: It's not for me.

STRANGER: I know.

GUEST: Nobody knows I'm here.

STRANGER: I know.

GUEST: Was it you on the phone a couple of hours ago?

STRANGER: I just wanted to see if you arrived.

(Phone keeps ringing.)

GUEST: Maybe it's for you.

STRANGER: It is for me.

GUEST: Well pick it up.

STRANGER: Let him wait a little for a change. I'm tired of jumping in fear worrying he'll get angry and change his mind.

(Phone keeps ringing.)

GUEST: It's the guy who ordered the kill?

STRANGER: That's the one.

GUEST: Should I talk to him?

STRANGER: There's no point. He doesn't know you. All he wants, if I understood it correctly, is that you never show up under his window again. Besides, even if you persuaded him to change his mind, I couldn't just give up, I accepted the advance and I need the rest of the money. (*Picks up.*) Halo?... Yes, sir, it's me. All is in order, we're at the hotel now, in the same room, I'm looking right at him as we speak, getting ready to finalize the deal. He's quite harmless I tell you, and for the life of me I can't understand why you have it against him so badly. If you ask me... You are quite right, that is none of my business. (*Pause.*) I'll get round to it straight away, sir, as soon as we finish the conversation and I put the phone down. You can send me the rest of my fee in the morning. (*Pause.*) Yes, I'm fully aware you'll never hire me again. What's more, I know I don't deserve it. This wasn't my best work and that's a well deserved punishment... No need to yell. (*Pause.*) You have every right to be angry, six months is a really long time for a man like that, but that's no reason to get offensive and call me names... Still, should you ever need me again and if you can forget this whole ordeal, give me a call, I'm happy to be of service... Goodbye sir. (*Hangs up in disappointment.*)

GUEST: He gave you the treatment?

STRANGER: Like you wouldn't believe.

GUEST: You couldn't talk back?

STRANGER: No. I might need him, and he'll never need me, he can always get someone younger. (*Pause.*) And better. For the same price.

GUEST: Not easy being a professional hitman is it?

STRANGER: Hasn't been for a long time. Besides, I told you about it already.

GUEST: When will you kill me?

STRANGER: In the morning. Once I get a good night's sleep and before I leave. Can't stand corpses around me. (*Carefully takes his jacket off and folds it over the other armchair.*)

GUEST (*Pointing to the nickel-iron handle of STRANGER's gun.*): Nice piece you got there.

STRANGER: The best. I always had the best. It's the tool with which I make my bread and I never spared any expense on it. (*Takes the gun out of the holster, lovingly holding it in his hand.*) There were other guns, carbines, special aim snipers, but this one is something special...

GUEST: How many people have you killed with it?

STRANGER: A lot.

GUEST: How many is a lot?

STRANGER: I didn't exactly keep a record. (*Pause.*) And it never failed me. It's precise, the bullet never gets jammed, it doesn't require any special maintenance. I also have a silencer for it, although I rarely use it, only if the job needs to be done in the middle of the street, in broad daylight, when there's people around. Although I usually avoid such situations, I like hearing the gunshot really, it sounds like music coming out of this piece... If I ever wanted to commit suicide there's no other weapon I'd do it with. Or if someone ever got an order to kill me, I'd ask them to use my gun. Although a real professional would never go along for such a thing, we each have our own special tool which we love and respect. And we avoid replacing it unless we're absolutely forced to. (*Lost in thought, he puts the gun back into the holster, walks to the bed and sits on it.*) My son is about to turn eighteen in a couple of days.

GUEST (*Silent, waiting for him to go on but since it doesn't seem likely.*): What about him? (*STRANGER is silent.*) Your son I mean? (*STRANGER is silent.*) Is there something wrong with him?

STRANGER: He's an invalid since birth... He lives in a wheelchair... And he loves guns, for years he's been dreaming about taking over the business... what irony.

GUEST: And your other kids?

STRANGER: Daughters. The wife usually looks after them... Do you know what he told me when I called in a couple of days ago? (*Pause.*) Dad, he says, I've been thinking, since I'm like this, I can be your secretary. Sit by the phone and take your calls. Write down the names of your victims, set up execution timetables and notify customers that the ordered job is done. You know what I replied?

GUEST: What?

STRANGER: That it's a great idea! Practically ingenious!

GUEST: Well it's not a bad one. He'd have some work, could keep his mind off his misfortune...

STRANGER: It's a disgusting idea, my friend!

GUEST: Why?

STRANGER: Because you're my last one! You couldn't save yourself, but by running so persistently and eluding me, you have utterly ruined me. Who's ever gonna hire me once word breaks out I've spent six months chasing after a harmless clerk? No one! It's like calling a bad plumber to come fix your pipes after he's clogged them the last time.

(*With his lips pressed, he nods for himself in disappointment.*)

GUEST: Maybe you could disappear for a while until the whole thing blows over?

STRANGER: People will forget the whole thing, but they'll also forget me. For good. Not even a few weeks will go by and no one will remember I exist. (*Stretches across the bed with his clothes on. Takes the gun out of the holster and places it under the pillow.*) Don't try anything.

GUEST: Try what?

STRANGER: Don't try to take the gun, it won't do you any good, I'll kill you before you even touch the pillow. I have the room key and if you try to jump out of the window, you'll die, the third floor is too high for you. You'll still die and I won't get my money. Not to mention the embarrassment: a professional hitman whose victim jumped out of the window right in front of him.

GUEST: You plan to sleep?

STRANGER: I wanna be well rested when I do this. I also want you to be well rested. Go sit in that armchair and try to get some shut-eye. (*GUEST hesitates.*) Do as I said.

GUEST (*Goes to the chair.*): You mean this one?

STRANGER: The other one. Keep you further away. (*GUEST goes to the other chair and sits down.*) We're both in need of sleep.

GUEST: Should I turn off the lights?

STRANGER: I don't mind, do you?

GUEST: Me neither.

STRANGER: Then leave it.

(*Silence. Both are trying to fall asleep.*)

STRANGER: I'm truly tired, my friend. (*GUEST is silent.*) Oh chasing you, of this job I frittered away, of my family, of my wretched son who gives me headaches... And most of all, I'm tired of all the suspense.

GUEST (*Without opening his eyes.*): What suspense?

STRANGER: I'm fifty and my future is hanging by a thread... What will I do, how will I make a living? (*Pause.*) How will I ever face my family, how will I tell them not only I'm broke but that I've got no options left? (*Pause.*) So many of my guys are gonna retire and none of them will starve, most of them actually have a nice nest egg, they thought of things in time... I'm the only one making ends meet... I've been wearing this suit for years my friend, and I used to change them daily!

My shirt reeks of sweat because I've got no other, my shoes are falling apart.

GUEST: I'm afraid that's your own fault.

STRANGER: I'm not blaming anyone else. *(Pause.)* Good night, my friend.

GUEST: Good night.

STRANGER: If you're still asleep in the morning I won't wake you.

GUEST: Don't.

STRANGER: They say the best thing is to die in your sleep.

GUEST: So I've heard.

STRANGER: It's the least I can do for you.

GUEST: I'm very grateful for that. Now I can sleep peacefully.

STRANGER: You should. You never know who the real winners are: the ones who stay or the ones who leave for good. If you ask me, I'm rooting for the other ones. *(Silence. They both try to fall asleep. Outside, from the woods, an owl hoots.)*

ACT 3

(Dead of night. STRANGER sleeps on the bed, on his back, GUEST in the chair. GUEST wiggles a little and wakes up. Spends a while intensely staring at STRANGER who's deep asleep, barely breathing. He coughs, but STRANGER doesn't react. He gets up slowly and tiptoes to the bed. Watching STRANGER from above he ultimately reaches under the pillow and carefully pulls out the gun. This instantly causes a change within him: now he's the one holding STRANGER's life in his hands.)

GUEST *(Repeats the gun, points it at STRANGER's face, and speaking in a forceful tone.):* Wake up!

(STRANGER sleeping.)

GUEST: Do you hear me!?

(STRANGER sleeping.)

GUEST *(Roughly shaking him up.):* Hey you! Murderer!

STRANGER *(Waking up quite indifferent, the new situation seeming to bear no effect on him.):* So you did it?... How did you manage to pull it off?... I thought you for a bigger coward. *(Tries to get up, but GUEST's hand lands on his chest shoving him back into bed.)* Of course, it's all in your hands now, you're the boss.

GUEST: You motherfucking piece of shit.

STRANGER: No need for name calling, I didn't do it to you either.

GUEST: You though I'd wait around to die like an idiot? Is that what you thought?

STRANGER: We all do, whether it comes naturally or violently.

GUEST *(Pulling the barrel directly into his face.):* Now what?

STRANGER: You decide. *(Pause.)* If you're gonna do it, don't hesitate, shoot. *(Pause.)* You could've done it without this charade, you didn't have to wake me. Didn't we agree it's best to die in your sleep?

GUEST: Then you wouldn't know your life's in my hands now! (*Holds the barrel in his face for a while, then steps back.*) Six months I've been running like a dog!... Six months I haven't seen my wife and kids, half my life you've drained from me in the process! Who gave you the right to kill people you don't even know, people who've done you no harm?

STRANGER: That, my friend, isn't something you get, it's something you take.

GUEST: I walked out on my job, family, friends! All cause of a madman whose profession is killing people! How many lives have you destroyed so far, how many families have you ruined? Did you ever think about that?

STRANGER: Never.

GUEST: You should have!

STRANGER: You haven't killed anyone, but have you thought about how many people you've ruined by sitting in your cushy little office stamping all those termination papers?

GUEST: I only validated decisions somebody else made!

STRANGER: It's the same with the fate of my victims, it's all in somebody else's hands, I only validated those decisions with my gun!

GUEST: Did you also kill women?

STRANGER: A few.

GUEST: What did they do wrong?

STRANGER: How should I know. They were unfaithful to their husbands and they wanted to get rid of them. Or the other way around: the husbands were unfaithful to them so again they wanted to get rid of them.

GUEST: What about children?

STRANGER: What children?

GUEST: Did you kill them too?

STRANGER: Never.

GUEST: You never had orders on them?

STRANGER: No.

GUEST: And if you had? Would you've killed them then?

STRANGER: I don't know. I never thought about it.

GUEST: Yes or no?

STRANGER: Yes probably. For a nice fee.

GUEST: You're a piece of scum.

STRANGER: Children are just little people. The sooner they leave this world the better, they won't live to see themselves filled with hatred and suffering.

GUEST: Back at the office they fired me after only five days of missing work, my wife threatened to get a divorce months ago unless I returned home immediately! I've been scared to dial home, fearing no one will answer! (*STRANGER is silent.*) What am I now?

(*STRANGER is silent.*) Where do I go back to?... How do I start living again?... All because of some idiot who watched me go to my office from his window every day!... And a mangy professional killer! Just look at yourself, man!

STRANGER: Don't insult me. I didn't do it to you when that gun was in my hand.

GUEST: Have you looked at yourself in a mirror lately?

STRANGER: Unfortunately, I have.

GUEST: And, what did you see?... Who did you see?

STRANGER: I know a lot better than you what and who it is I saw.

GUEST: An old man!... In a ragtag suit and a dirty collared shirt!... Who reeks of sweat and cleans his dusty shoes with a towel!... Who, like me, had to walk on foot for miles because he couldn't afford a cab! When's the last time you washed your socks? They must be disintegrating of all the sweat and dirt!

(*STRANGER peacefully silent.*)

GUEST: Who eats stale sandwiches he makes for himself!...

STRANGER: Friend, none of that's necessary.

GUEST: What's not necessary?

STRANGER: Your words... You're just wasting time. Actually we both are. If I talked to every one of my victims like that, I'd never get anything done. Get down to business.

GUEST: What business?

STRANGER: Kill me.

GUEST: That's not a business for me!

STRANGER: Call it what you will... business, payback, self defense... Just pull the trigger, that's so easy. (*GUEST is silent.*) Do it twice.

GUEST: Do what twice?

STRANGER: Since you're an amateur, shoot me twice. Make sure the second bullet goes to the forehead.

GUEST: Why?

STRANGER: So I don't live. If that happens, I'll be a cripple for life, and I wouldn't want that. Or I'll fully recover and will only go after you again, this time not because I'm hired to do it, but out of vengeance, and that will be much worse for you.

(*GUEST approaches him, again shoving the barrel into his face.*)

STRANGER: It's not hard. (Pause.) All you do is pull the trigger. (Pause.) Deadly weapons are easy to handle, people intentionally made it so user friendly. (Pause.) Did you repeat it? (*GUEST nods.*) Then twenty percent of your work is done, everything else is a mere formality.

(*Pause. GUEST is still holding the gun at STRANGER's face, who's calmly lying down, watching him.*)

GUEST: It's like you looking forward to it. (*STRANGER is silent.*) Do you wanna die?

STRANGER: I don't know if I want to die, but I don't feel much like living.

GUEST: Well I don't wanna die! That's why I kept running from you so badly!... I wanna live, even if it truly means I have to start all over again!

STRANGER: You'll live. You've made that possible for yourself, and you did it all on your own, which I honestly never thought you would, you seemed kinda feeble. Which is probably why I was so careless and let you catch me off guard.

GUEST: You made a mistake.

STRANGER: I know.

GUEST: You were stupid.

STRANGER: More than that.

GUEST: Now it's too late to make it right.

STRANGER: I know that too. If you'll let me sit up? ... This position is making me stiff...

GUEST: Sit up.

(*Takes two steps back but keeps the gun pointed at STRANGER's face. STRANGER Sits on the edge of the bed, stretches his back.*)

GUEST: Not another move.

STRANGER (*Laughs.*)

GUEST: Why are you laughing?

STRANGER: Well, this move you mentioned. Do you think I honestly care, now that I have to die and my life's in your hands, whether it happens now or five minutes later? (*GUEST is silent.*) Don't be ridiculous. Besides, the longer you hesitate the funnier you look not only to me but to yourself as well.

GUEST: There's nothing funny about this! This is the end! Your end!

STRANGER: Hesitation will make you doubt. You'll start wondering whether you're doing the right thing. (*Pause.*) Your role now is that of a killer, and a killer mustn't think, feel or waver.

GUEST: Don't act like you're my teacher.

STRANGER: You have a better one?

GUEST: Any last requests?

STRANGER: Oh please, that's Hollywood nonsense. Last request, give me a break! Don't you know any dying man's last request isn't to smoke a cigarette, it's not to die! And you know who gets that wish? *(Pause.)* Besides, I'd like you to tell me how it is you saw me when I waited for you in the alley that first time?

GUEST: I didn't see you, I saw your shadow, standing in the sunlight with a gun in your hand.

STRANGER: How did you know I was waiting for you?

GUEST: There wasn't a living soul there that day except the two of us. That's why I immediately started running.

STRANGER: Just another sign I'm getting old. And that maybe I'm no longer cut out for this job.

(Silence. STRANGER, elbows to his knees, stares at the floor as GUEST looks at him with growing tension.)

STRANGER *(Finally lifts his head, spreads his arms.):* What are we waiting for?

GUEST: Are you in that big of a hurry?

STRANGER: You're the one who ouhgta be in a hurry!... This will of course be your first kill?

GUEST: And my last! And in self-defense!

STRANGER: First is always the hardest. Not because of the guilt but because of the fear you'll miss and let down the people who entrusted you with the job. Many failed that test, and there's no second take, nobody ever trusted them again. You've got the upper hand there, nobody's breathing down your neck waiting for my kill.

GUEST *(Starts walking about the room).*

STRANGER: Is there something wrong?

GUEST *(In a nervous tone.):* All's well, don't you worry about that.

STRANGER: I'm not worried.

GUEST *(Shouting.):* Shut up then!

(Silence. GUEST keeps walking more and more nervously as STRANGER calmly watches. He shifts his body and GUEST fiercely turns pointing the gun.)

GUEST: Don't provoke me!

STRANGER: Nothing happened.

GUEST: Don't try anything!

STRANGER: I wasn't.

GUEST: You were!

STRANGER: No, I wasn't.

GUEST: Yes, you were!!!

STRANGER: You only imagined it. I only shifted my body a little, because of my leg, it goes numb if I keep in the same position for too long, I've got varicose veins.

GUEST: Stop lying!

STRANGER: I can show you.

GUEST: I swear if you try something one more time!...

STRANGER: You'll kill me, is that it? That's what you're about to do anyway...

GUEST: Shut up!!!

STRANGER *(Raises his arms in consent).*

GUEST *(Holds the gun pointed at STRANGER for a while longer then lets his arm fall to the side of his body and he continues pacing up and down.)* Dear Lord why is this happening? *(STRANGER is silent.)* I was just an office clerk, did my job, waited for my paycheck... And then everything changed out of the blue, just like that. *(Pause.)* Because of an idiot I never met in my life. *(Pause.)* And now I have to do what I never even imagined... kill someone...

STRANGER: That's no good.

GUEST: What?

STRANGER: If you go on like that you'll make both of us cry.

GUEST: So what? To cry is human.

STRANGER: But useless. You'll only feel sorry for yourself and maybe even me and you'll give me the gun back.

GUEST (*Keeps silent, all disappointed.*)

STRANGER: You have to worry about yourself now. Only one of us will walk out of this room alive. Do you want it to be me? (*Pause.*) Who are you betting on? (*Pause.*) You gotta decide fast, I'm afraid time is against you.

GUEST: Lie down!

STRANGER (*Looks at him, not understanding the point.*)

GUEST: Lie down, lie down!

STRANGER: OK.

(*Lies down, puts his arms under his head.*)

GUEST (*Shoving the gun into his face again.*): You're right, this needs to be done quickly.

STRANGER: There's one more thing.

GUEST: What?

STRANGER: A small favor. I believe you can do as much.

GUEST: What kind of favor?

STRANGER: Wait till I fall asleep. Sit in your chair and wait for me to fall asleep. We already agreed the best thing is to die in your sleep. Do you have enough patience to wait till I fall asleep?

GUEST: I'll wait.

STRANGER: Thank you.

GUEST: You're welcome. (*Goes to the armchair, sits.*) And if I fall asleep first?

STRANGER: I'll wake you.

GUEST: Don't mock me.

STRANGER: Who knows, I might, miracles do happen sometimes. (*Pause.*) Have you started liking it?

GUEST: That's quite irrelevant.

STRANGER: Good night, friend.

GUEST: Good night. And remember: we're no friends!

(*Silence. STRANGER is staring at the ceiling, GUEST is sitting in the armchair with a gun in his hand, not taking his eyes off STRANGER.*)

ACT 4.

(*Early morning. Daylight has already entered the room but the light is still on. STRANGER and GUEST are asleep. STRANGER is sleeping on the bed, GUEST in the chair, gun in hand. STRANGER wakes up. Still lying down he looks at GUEST, then slowly gets up, sits on the bed and continues looking at him for a long while. Then he gets up, goes to the door, takes the key out of his pocket and puts it in the lock. Turns the lights off. Then calmly walks to the bathroom leaving the door open. Sounds of running water are heard followed by him washing his face. He comes back with a towel, wiping his face. Throws the towel on the bed, slicks his hair back, then walks up to the window, slides the curtains and opens wide the window: bird singing bursts into the room. STRANGER watches outside for a while, takes a few deep breaths and finally goes back to GUEST who is still sound asleep. He slowly takes the gun out of his hand without making an effort. He waits a while and then wakes him up, gently grabbing his shoulder.*)

GUEST (*Wakes up, jumps up in fear once he sees the gun in STRANGER's hand.*)

STRANGER: Sit own, sit down. (*Gently pressing his shoulder he makes him sit down.*) Gather your senses first.

GUEST: You tricked me.

STRANGER: I've never seen anyone sleep so peacefully. (*Pause.*) Ten minutes passed since I woke up. I even washed my face. Do you wanna wash yours?

GUEST: So the whole talk about dying in your sleep was just to deceive me?

STRANGER: Well I did fall asleep, but you shouldn't have.

GUEST: I don't know how that happened.

STRANGER: You were tired – like me. And more so: my death scared you. I told you that would happen. Go to the bathroom. (*GUEST hesitates.*) Once you wash your face your head will clear out. Come on, we haven't got much time.

GUEST (*Stands up, goes to the bathroom then stops, hesitating again.*)

STRANGER: Been a long time since we had such a beautiful morning. You can only have something like that in the wild. Can you hear the birds? Is it them greeting life, you think? Or just a rehearsed morning ritual? Like our first coffee, first cigarette, getting dressed...

(*GUEST goes to the bathroom. He also leaves the door open. Sounds of water running and splashing are heard again.*)

STRANGER: Did you have any dreams?

GUEST (*off*): No.

STRANGER: Me neither.

GUEST (*off*): Maybe you didn't sleep at all!

STRANGER: What on earth gave you that idea?

GUEST (*off*): You waited for me to fall asleep so you'd take the gun back.

STRANGER: I did sleep. Like never in my life.

GUEST (*off*): You're lying!!!

STRANGER: On my honor, I swear!

GUEST (*Walks back in, wiping his face with a towel.*): Your honor?... The honor of a professional killer?... A man who's been leaving dead bodies in his wake for decades?... Whose children eat the bread delivered by corpses?...

STRANGER: Don't get so melodramatic. It's just a job like any other.

GUEST: Yeah, I heard that story before.

STRANGER: There'll be no more fighting and fussing, it's too late for that. (*Pause.*) It's time for us to part ways. For good.

GUEST (*Throws the towel on the bed.*): If that's the case, don't hesitate. I did and look where it got me. (*Pause.*) Just don't torture me unnecessarily.

STRANGER: You won't ask me to wait for you to fall asleep?

GUEST: I've had my sleep. That game's over.

STRANGER: True, it makes no more sense now we've both had our sleep.

GUEST (*Sits*): Do it.

STRANGER (*Smiling silently.*)

GUEST: Do you have a silencer?

STRANGER: It's over there, in my room.

GUEST: You didn't wanna bring it?

STRANGER: No need, I can do without it.

GUEST: I meant because of the noise. So you don't wake that woman downstairs.

STRANGER: I don't see it as noise. And I couldn't care less about her.

GUEST: I'm ready.

STRANGER: Are you?

GUEST: Can't you tell?

STRANGER: I can. Finally you plucked up the courage to face your own death. I'd like to tell you something before we part ways for good. May I?

GUEST: To me? But that makes no sense, any wisdom you share I'll take to my grave.

STRANGER: Perhaps not.

GUEST: You mean I'll still somehow live? Or come back from beyond the grave?... What is it you wanted to tell me?

STRANGER: Not only I wasted so much time with you, I also made a huge mistake.

GUEST: What kind of mistake?

STRANGER: I never should've gotten to know you. I never did that before. I never had what is – for my line of business – a stupid urge like that. But once I got to my room over there I felt the need to get close to you.

GUEST: What need? And why me?

STRANGER: I wanted to get to know you. To speak to the man who spent six months clinging to his dear life with so much vigor. To hear your side of the story, but also to tell you mine, to tell you what I've been through in all this time.

GUEST: Well, I did hear your story. Although I'm afraid you weren't telling it to me, you were telling it to yourself.

STRANGER: That's precisely the point. Once I heard my own words right here in front of you, once I faced some truths, I realized I was in a much worse position than I actually believed. Do you see?

GUEST: I do. But come on, lets not waste our time on stories and put an end to it all. There's no reason for you to keep torturing me by delaying my death.

STRANGER: Listening to myself I realized that for me there is actually no way out. That maybe there never was, but I kept running from that truth. I ran like hell.

GUEST: Is that what you wanted to tell me as our word of parting?

STRANGER: That's the essence of it.

GUEST: Nice. An executioner confessing to his victim, instead of the other way around. Is there anything else?

STRANGER:No.

GUEST: Then be done with it. Do your job like any other.
(*STRANGER keeps silent, calmly looking at him.*)

GUEST: Shoot man, what are you waiting for!?! Why are you torturing me!?! Are you enjoying this? ... Do you

want me to kneel in front of you and beg for mercy you won't give me!?! Is that what you want? To humiliate me as well!?

(*STRANGER lifts the gun pointing it to GUEST's head.*)

GUEST: Come on!

STRANGER: Goodbye, friend.

GUEST: Screw you, you're not my friend!

(*STRANGER slowly points the gun to his own head. Presses it against his temple. Pause.*)

STRANGER: I look around after fifty years. And you know what I see?... I see nothing... Staring back at me, grinning... Sounds familiar? (*Gives out a short desperate laugh.*) Where did my life go, my friend, where?

GUEST: What are you doing? Is this another one of your games?

STRANGER: I hoped you'd do me this favor, but I failed there too.

(*Pulls the trigger, gunshot blasts and he falls to the floor. Confused, GUEST stands up, runs to the door, opens it in an attempt to flee, but he changes his mind, closes the door and goes back to STRANGER. He kneels beside him, taking his hand to check if he's alive. Holds his hand like that for a while, then lets it drop, lifeless. Phone rings virtually bursting through the silence.*)

GUEST (*Slowly goes to the phone and picks up.*): Halo?... Yes, sir, it's me... Maybe my voice sounds a bit off, I'm afraid I've caught a cold – nights are particularly fresh in these mountains, almost cold... Yes, the job is done, your guy is dead, send me the rest of my fee the usual way... I know you'll never hire me again, I've heard that story already, but you should also know I'd never work for someone like you again either, especially since I have so many orders these days... Just you laugh, sir. (*Slams the phone. There's a knock on the door.*)

MAID (*off*): It's me sir.

(*GUEST silent, staring at dead STRANGER.*)

MAID (*off*): Something woke me! ... Was that a gunshot in your room or the other gentleman's?

(*GUEST silent.*)

MAID (*off*): Can I come in?

GUEST: Come in.

MAID (*off*): Unlock the door first.

GUEST: It's open. (*MAID enters in her nightgown.*) I'm surprised you didn't lock the door... Maybe you were hoping I'd come, maybe you were waiting for me? (*Takes a look at the corpse.*) I would've come you know, but I fell asleep... (*Points to the corpse.*) What happened there?

GUEST: Are you blind!?

MAID: Don't yell at me!

GUEST: I'm not yelling I'm just saying!

MAID: You are yelling, I'm not deaf! Did he do it to himself? ...

GUEST: He did.

MAID: Well is he dead?

GUEST: He's dead.

MAID: Did you check?

GUEST: Check for yourself if you don't believe me.

MAID: It's all right, I believe you... (*Points to herself.*) Look at me standing here in my nighty... completely naked underneath... not even my panties... I always sleep like that...

GUEST: So what?

MAID: Well I would've put some clothes on if I had known what I was about to find... I thought it was you calling me... or him...

GUEST: With a gunshot?

MAID: Why not, we all have our quirks... There's all sorts of people... We had a guest who called his wife to bed with a trumpet... the entire hotel would echo... (*Points*

to the corpse again.) What do we do now? Should I call the police?

GUEST: That won't be necessary.

MAID: Somebody has to bury the man.

GUEST: We can do it.

MAID: The two of us? ... Where? There's no cemetery round here! This is our first death since we opened the hotel! There was no dying here even when the whole thing was swarming with guests! One had a heart attack but he died in the ambulance on his way to the hospital.

GUEST: We'll bury him in a field near by.

MAID: Maybe you're right. Why bother with the police, I never liked them much, and besides, who knows what'd they think if they'd see the two of us here like this, they'd probably interrogate us for days... You two didn't...

GUEST: What?

MAID: I mean, there wasn't anything going on between the two of you... which made him take his life? ...

GUEST: Stop being stupid, woman! He was my friend! That's all!

MAID: Thank God... Well, I believe you and I'm happy that's the way things are... We'll give him a proper burial and you can stay so we can commemorate his passing... it's usually done on a first Saturday... and then after forty days... then half a year... that's the custom round here... You should stay, on the house, I'll sort that out with the manager once he calls or comes back... I can handle him... Maybe we could even find you some work, that would settle everything... Would you be interested in a job round here?

GUEST: That would be all right.

MAID: Are you out of work?

GUEST: A couple of months now.

MAID: Excellent!

GUEST (*Absent-mindedly.*): What's excellent?

MAID: Well, the whole job thing, that's what we're talking about!... It would be good for you! ... And I wouldn't mind... Speaking of which... your unfortunate friend never paid for last night...

GUEST: I'll settle his bill.

MAID: Oh, no need, I'm just saying, keeping my mouth busy... Should we stand like this for a while, pay our respects, and then I can go downstairs to make you breakfast?

(GUEST silent.)

MAID: How about that?

GUEST: What?

MAID: Breakfast? ... For the two of us.

GUEST: All right.

MAID: What would you like to have?

GUEST: It doesn't matter, whatever you'd like.

MAID: I'm not very picky either. Then after breakfast we can bury him. Is that OK?

GUEST: OK.

(Silence. They are watching the corpse on the floor. Curtain.)

THE END

NW

Ljubinka Stojanović

THE DOVECOTE

Ljubinka Stojanović



Born in 1979, in Belgrade. A playwright and screenwriter. She is an assistant professor at the Academy of Arts in Belgrade, Dramaturgy Department, where she teaches film and television screenwriting. She is a PhD student at the Faculty of Philosophy, module of study: Culturology.

The dramatic texts of Ljubinka Stojanović have been published in *The Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Drama*, performed and awarded at various international festivals in Sarajevo, Mostar, Zagreb, Bucharest, London... She has written numerous feature programs and documentaries for RTV Serbia, among which the most challenging, professionally, was her work on the series *Forgotten Minds of Serbia* (*Zaboravljeni umovi Srbije*), as well as the collaboration with Siniša Kovačević in writing the screenplay for the television series *Bitter Fruit* (*Gorki plodovi*). In addition to writing for adults, she writes for children as well.

She wrote the screenplay for the film *A Stone in a Shoe* (*Kamen u cipeli*), for which she received an award from the Film Centre of Serbia. The project is in the preparatory stage of production.

Currently, she is developing a team auctorial project for theatre and preparing a screenplay for a television series.

Ljubinka Stojanović

THE DOVECOTE

Translated > Tijana Veljković

TO ALL THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS...

SNEZANA, age 15, the sister

ZELJKO, age 17, the brother

ALISA, age 17

ZIKRA, age 17

RADE, age 16

NEBOJSA, age 18

RUZA, age 46, the warden

BRANKA, age 43, the aunt

This drama takes place in a home for homeless children in Belgrade, Serbia, during the evil 90's.

NOTE

Snezana and Zeljko speak with an Eastern Herzegovinian dialect. Snezana's speech mutates from time to time, assimilating to the so-called Belgrade accent. Zeljko's speech, on the other hand, remains relatively unchanged, except when using slang.

SCENE ONE

A dorm room with stale walls and cold, neon lighting that is constantly blinking. The room looks like a gall-bladder of a dying animal, and everyone inside it has to look sick and miserable. On the stained walls, there are posters of cars, football clubs and naked movie stars. On the left side of the room, near the window, there is a grey, metal bed, similar to those in hospitals, and on the other side of the room, rusty bunk beds. All three beds are tidy, almost military-style tidy. The beds are separated by an old wardrobe, a desk and two chairs. There is an audio-tape player covered in stickers on the desk, a can of Coke and some snacks, too. Zikra is sitting at the desk and smoking. Alisa is standing and watching the rain through the window. They hear the wind blowing and raindrops hitting the window glass. Rade is sitting in the chair in the corner, biting his nails, and Nebojsa is sitting on the top bed, wearing a military uniform.

ALISA: What an awful day.

Nobody reacts. She writes her name on the window with her finger and then nervously wipes it off.

ALISA: I wouldn't even let my dog outside.

Rade spits his nail out and looks at her.

RADE: Well, you ain't got no dog, so you got no problem.

Alisa leans her head on the window.

ALISA: I will never let my dog outside in this weather.

RADE: But you ain't got no dog.

Rade grins ironically, as if she doesn't understand the simplest logic. Alisa comes to him, grabs his neck, he squeals.

ALISA: But I WILL, you moron! Got it?

RADE *(While gasping for air):* Got it.

ALISA: Good!

She goes back to the window and continues watching the rain. Rade stretches his neck, coughs, looks at Nebojsa, then at Zikra, and eventually squeals quietly and hoarsely, like a beaten street dog. No one is reacting; they are all just staring at each other. Zikra sighs and nervously takes a drag from his cigarette, then looks down. Nebojsa looks at Alisa.

NEBOJSA: Alisa, will ya take care of Zikra?

His question sounds more like a plea. Alisa answers imitating his tone.

ALISA: Hey, Liver, will ya take care of yourself?

Nebojsa looks at his military trousers, and then at Alisa, but she turned her back to him.

NEBOJSA: Alisa...

She turns around and looks at him with tears in her eyes.

ALISA: Of course I'll take care of him; he's... now... my boyfriend...

She comes to Zikra and kisses him on the mouth, Zikra pushes her away. Alisa then comes to Nebojsa, who is sitting on the top bed. She puts her hands on his thighs and slowly goes towards his crotch. Nebojsa takes her hand off. Zikra turns the music up.

ALISA: Don't go...

Tears start going down her face, she goes to the window and quickly wipes her tears. Rade comes to her but she pushes him away harshly. He sits on the floor next to her feet and starts biting his nails.

RADE: Chill out, Alisa.

ALISA: I'm off now.

ZIKRA: Don't go... Not yet.

Zikra looks at Nebojsa.

ALISA: I have to, they'll catch me.

Alisa comes to Nebojsa and looks at him. He tries to hug her, to get down from the bed, but she stops him. She goes to Zikra, kisses him on the cheek and goes for the door.

ALISA: See ya... You promise.

NEBOJSA: I promise.

She turns to Zikra.

ALISA: And you got so lucky that Liver liked you so much. Remember how it was when you first got here?

She gives him a cheeky smile and blows him a kiss. She leaves the room carefully closing the door. Zikra gets up, takes a paper bundle out of his backpack, throws it on the desk and sits down. Rade jumps up to see what's on the desk, but Zikra just gives him one look and he sits back down. Then he turns to Nebojsa.

ZIKRA: This is for you.

Nebojsa looks into the bundle and smiles.

NEBOJSA: You're insane!

ZIKRA: No, man. You're insane.

RADE: And what's that?

No answer. Zikra takes a long drag from his cigarette and then puts it out in a can of Coke. Rade stands up and grabs the can.

RADE: Dude, what the fuck? There was a sip left!

ZIKRA: So?

RADE: So, I coulda drunk it.

He turns to Nebojsa.

RADE: Hey, Liver, it's really not OK, dude, we got ya half the stand: the Coke, and chocolate and all... And you? Nothing! And you know how everything's empty; we spent ages finding a place that has... something... All the stands are empty, and we don't even go to the stores anymore... They're like deserts!

Nebojsa is looking at Zikra.

NEBOJSA: OK, here, I want a smoke.

Zikra doesn't react.

RADE: Thank God! Zikra, give him a smoke.

Zikra is staring at the floor and then he turns the music up.

RADE: Come on, Zikra, what the fuck, the warden will bust in!

Rade turns the music down, Zikra just looks at him and he turns the music up, but still not as loud as it was before, and he smiles at Zikra.

RADE: Give the man a smoke...

Zikra takes a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and hits Nebojsa on the head with it, Rade moves back.

RADE (Quietly): What the fuck is wrong with you, Zikra?

NEBOJSA (To Rade): Leave him alone.

He takes a cigarette out of the pack and starts searching his pockets looking for a lighter.

NEBOJSA: Zikra, pass me the lighter!

ZIKRA: Get it yourself!

NEBOJSA: Give me the lighter, man.

ZIKRA: Get it yourself.

Rade gets up, takes the lighter from the desk, takes it to Nebojsa and lights his cigarette.

RADE: Hey, what's that in the paper?

The door opens, Ruza enters and Zikra and Rade stand up.

EVERYBODY: Good afternoon...

RUZA: What's this all about, I can hear you all the way down the hall! I give you some freedom and you go wild!

She looks up and sees Nebojsa on the bed, which causes her to pause. Nebojsa tries to get off the bed but she gestures him to sit down, staring at his uniform.

RUZA: Nebojsa, my dove...

She is pointing at his uniform. He is smiling, he's uncomfortable.

NEBOJSA: I just came to say “Goodbye,” we’re leaving at noon, so I just stopped by... Just till the rain stops...

RUZA: And where are you going?

NEBOJSA: Well... to war.

RUZA: What?! Me best pupil? You just turned 18... Do you even know what you’re doing?! My dove... My son?

NEBOJSA (*Quietly*): I know.

RUZA: And?

Nebojsa can’t look her in the eyes.

RUZA: What would your parents say?

Nebojsa is scanning the room trying to find some back-up, but Zikra is standing next to the window, looking outside, and Rade is sitting down looking at Ruza.

NEBOJSA: I don’t know, I don’t have parents... My mother would be like any other mother, dunno. And my father, him, I’m going to find! I know that my old man is in the military and he must be down there now... I’ll recognize him, I’m sure!

He manages to smile, but that smile fades away when Ruza looks at him.

NEBOJSA: I’m gonna prove that my name is mine for a reason!

He bows his head and wrinkles his trousers.

RUZA: Go on, talk to your friends... And then come to my office.

She leaves the room with a shrug.

RUZA: Maybe it’s not too late yet...

NEBOJSA: OK, I’ll stop by.

As she is reluctantly leaving the room, Ruza pauses at the door turning to Nebojsa.

RUZA: Don’t go without saying goodbye! I’ll kill you!

Zikra laughs ironically at Ruza’s words and turns to Nebojsa.

RUZA: And no smoking in the rooms!

She closes the door. Zikra and Nebojsa are looking at each other. Zikra is nervously shaking his head, twisting a lock of his hair.

NEBOJSA: Stop it! (*Zikra doesn’t stop.*) Leave that goddamn hair alone, Zikra!

ZIKRA: What are you, my old man? Give me back my smokes...

Nebojsa puts the lighter into the pack and throws the pack on the desk. Zikra picks it up and lights a cigarette.

RADE: Give me one...

ZIKRA: Get your own!

RADE: I ain’t got my own, bro.

ZIKRA: Yes, you do, today I took three from your secret stash.

NEBOJSA: Give the man a smoke.

ZIKRA: He’s no man. He’s Rade.

NEBOJSA: OK, give ME the smoke!

ZIKRA: Yeah, right, and then you’ll give it to him! He’s got a whole pack in his dirty socks!

NEBOJSA: Give me the smoke, bro.

Zikra puts the lighter into the pack and throws it to him, Nebojsa lights a cigarette, takes one smoke and passes the cigarette to Rade.

RADE: No, bro, it’s cool... I dunno what’s his problem. Me, having a secret stash? Yeah, right...

Rade pretends to be upset, Nebojsa offers him the cigarette.

RADE: No, thanks.

Nebojsa is still offering the cigarette.

RADE: Thanks, dude, he totally pissed me off!

Rade is walking across the room, chewing his finger, but still takes the cigarette. After inhaling the smoke, he coughs a little.

RADE: I mean, you know me much longer than you know Zikra... And we're awesome friends, right? And I dunno why...

ZIKRA: Shut up, you asshole!

RADE (*To Nebojsa*): Why do you let him talk to me like that?

NEBOJSA: Because.

Zikra goes to the window, smoking and looking outside. Rade comes to the desk and looks at the bundle, yet he doesn't dare open it.

RADE: Hey, what's in the paper?

ZIKRA: A farewell present.

Rade unwraps the bundle, takes a look at the present and bursts into laughter.

RADE: Liver!

He laughs and looks at Nebojsa, who also laughs. Zikra is looking through the window. Rade's laughter amuses Nebojsa, which encourages him, so he takes the liver and starts masturbating.

RADE: What is that, like... you fuck for the last time?

He keeps on laughing, but Nebojsa doesn't. Rade realizes that he's the only one laughing, so he immediately stops.

RADE: Sorry, bro, I was joking...

Zikra jumps at Rade, grabs his T-shirt and throws him to the door. Nebojsa jumps off the bed and separates them.

NEBOJSA: Get out!

RADE: I'm sorry, dude, it was a joke!

NEBOJSA: I know, I know it was, now beat it.

Nebojsa opens the door and pushes Rade out but holds Zikra. He closes the door, Zikra tries to push him away, the wrestling turns into a lovers' hug.

Darkness

SCENE TWO

Ruza's office: there is a big desk covered in papers in the middle of the room. Neon lighting. In the corners, on the window and on the desk, there are ugly plastic flower pots with plants. That very detail makes the room unlike an office. Ruza is sitting at the desk. In front of her, Snezana and Zeljko are sitting on school wooden chairs. They are cold and soaking wet. They are huddled in the chairs, covered like two freezing grey doves. Their backpacks are on the floor, next to their feet. Snezana is holding her Barbie doll.

RUZA: Has it come to this? The police bringing you back... Look at you, you're freezing!

The children huddle tightly; Snezana holds her doll to her chest.

SNEZANA: We were just waiting for our aunt. They weren't home.

ZELJKO: We're in a hurry. Our aunt might be back.

Zeljko picks up their bags and takes his sister by the arm, so she stands up.

RUZA: Sit down, where do you think you're going this soaked? Wait, easy...

The children sit down, somehow looking tired and old.

SNEZANA: Miss, we really have to go... (*She turns to her brother.*) Auntie must be waiting for us right now!

Ruza raises her arm, as if she is pointing at the very idea of the home.

RUZA: THIS is your temporary accommodation... Until the conditions change...

Zeljko interrupts her.

ZELJKO: How are you going to find her?

Ruza lowers her head and writes something down.

RUZA: Don't you worry about a thing. Your case is being processed and their location will soon be found.

She looks at the children.

Don't you worry, ok? You'll be just fine here. My Home is one of the best! We have children with straight A's, too! You're good pupils, too, right?

Snezana looks at her brother.

SNEZANA: Well, yes... We were...

ZELJKO: We are... Sneza just started vocational school and I'm in high school.

RUZA: There... You'll share rooms with children your age; those are fine children, not like some people outside think... Here, I grew up in the Home and look at me now! I'm just fine, I survived...

Ruza stands up, goes to the window and looks outside.

My brother and I came here when we were even younger than you two... Except there was no one to come for the two of us...

She goes to the children, strokes Snezana's hair, looks at them, takes off her jacket and wraps it around Snezana.

Oh, little doves.

She sighs and then snaps out of it.

Is that better, now?

The girl nods automatically.

We'll find your aunt, don't be so worried. And when we do, you won't want to leave this place!

Ruza smiles and sits down at the desk. Snezana holds her Barbie doll under the desk, Zeljko looks out the window.

OK, this is what we'll do. Until your relatives come, I'll take care of you. If you need anything at all...

She smiles.

Lose the frown, you don't wanna leave, trust me!

SNEZANA: And do you happen to know when you will find auntie? At least approximately...

RUZA: Very soon, I'm telling you, your care is already being processed...

She changes her tone and speaks quickly as if she was reading. The looks on their faces touch her heart so deeply, the memories of her own childhood are pressing down on her. She is tired. How many similar destinies... And that is exactly why she changes her tone, so she becomes but a warden, it's easier that way.

So, the rules of the Home are very clear and you will have to follow them. You're allowed to stay out until nine on weekdays, and until eleven on weekends. The lights are out at midnight. There are TV rooms, separate bathrooms for boys and girls, and the library is open till eleven. Breakfast's at seven, lunch at one, snacks at four and dinner at eight. That's about it! And don't you try running away searching for your aunt! That kind of behaviour is punished round here. Your case is being processed, so don't worry.

ZELJKO: Thank you.

RUZA: Oh, yes! One more thing. While you're here, you won't need your refugee ID cards.

She reaches her hand out and confused Zeljko takes two cards out of his pocket and hands them over.

RUZA: They're safer with me.

She opens the cards, puts her glasses on and reads out loud.

Snezana Obradovic, born on March 16, 1977, in Bratunac... OK... Zeljko Obradovic, born 1975 in Bratunac, OK, fine. Now, your refugee ID numbers... Snezana...

She writes the data in her papers.

So, Snezana's number is 7015705835... and Zeljko Obradovic is 7096403186... There. That would be it.

Ruza looks up, takes her glasses off and smiles at the children. They pick up their bags and stand up.

Hey, wait, we're not done yet, sit down. You, Snezana, are in the left, female wing, you'll share the room with a very nice girl, and you, Zeljko are in the male wing with two other boys.

Snezana and Zeljko look at each other and sit down. Snezana takes her brother by the hand.

SNEZANA: My brother!

ZELJKO: But...

RUZA: Those are the rules, and we have to stick to the rules. I know you're brother and sister, but we make no exceptions. After all, you're not miles away, there's just a backyard between you.

Somebody knocks at the door, Rade comes in. Ruza looks at him and gives him a warm smile.

RADE: Good afternoon!

He steps back when he sees Snezana and Zeljko.

I'll come back later, then...

RUZA: No, no, it's good that you're here, these are your new friends. Why don't you show them around? Snezana is with Alisa in 22 and Zeljko will be in your room.

RADE: In our... but... there's no room there...

RUZA: Of course there is, what are you talking about?

RADE: But...

RUZA: Zeljko is taking Nebojsa's bed.

Ruza starts writing something down not noticing them anymore. Snezana and Zeljko get their things, and Rade leads the way. Ruza looks up.

RUZA: Do you have some clothes?

ZELJKO: Just what we're wearing and jackets in my bag. We didn't have the time to...

RUZA: And what's in your bag, Sneza?

SNEZANA: Just some memories...

RUZA: You better leave those here, they're safer with me.

SNEZANA: No, thanks.

RUZA: Fine, as you wish.

Ruza goes back to her paperwork; the children leave the room and close the door. Ruza looks at the door, puts her glasses on, picks up the phone and dials a number.

They're here!

Darkness

SCENE THREE

The boys' room. The lights are out and the only thing that can be heard is Zeljko having a nightmare, breathing heavily, almost suffocating, then he screams.

ZELJKO: NO!

ZIKRA: Now I'm gonna fuckin kill you!

There is a commotion. Rade turns the light on. Zikra had pulled Zeljko out of his bed and is hitting him on the floor.

Shut up! Shut up!!!

Rade runs over there and kicks Zeljko, laughing. He is having fun. He is looking at Zikra.

RADE: Stop, Zikra, please... You'll kill him.

ZIKRA: D'ya know why they call me Zikra, huh? Zi-kra/Cri-sis, get it? Well, that's the thing, you can't make me go into crisis mode! And you keep doing that! You getting on me nerves, man!

Zeljko is holding his stomach, moaning.

ZIKRA: Shut the hell up, you make me sick!

RADE: Yeah, shut up, you stinky pig!

Rade spits at Zeljko and laughs vengefully.

ZIKRA: Since you came I can't get any sleep, you scream at night, you moan...

He goes to Zeljko.

You're crazy, aren't ya? Moron?

RADE: He pissed himself!

Rade is laughing, Zikra goes to the window and lights a cigarette.

RADE: Check him out! He pissed himself!

Zeljko gets up, wipes his face and sees blood, then he goes to his bed.

ZELJKO: You think I'm afraid of you?

Zikra is looking through the window and smoking. Rade pulls back and sits down on the chair. His whole hand is practically in his mouth, he's looking at Zeljko. Zeljko is laughing.

I'm not afraid of you, Zikra, no way! Just so you know! I'm not afraid of anything anymore.

RADE: So why did ya piss yourself, then?

Rade bites of a piece of his nail and spits it out.

ZELJKO: I don't know... I can't remember.

Rade is pretending not to be interested.

RADE: What? Can't remember what?

ZELJKO: My dream... When I fall asleep, I know it's a dream and that I'm having that same dream all over again, but when I wake up... I remember nothing.

Rade giggles, proud of being Zikra's accomplice.

RADE: Alisa told me that his sister is a nutcase, too. She too screams, in her sleep. And when she's alone in the room, she talks to her doll.

ZELJKO: You leave my sister alone!

ZIKRA: Nobody's messing with your sister, man, chill out, Boske... And when did you and Alisa talk anyways, huh?

RADE: Come on, Zikra, the other day, you know...

ZIKRA: And when was that?

RADE: Well, when we were waiting for you in the park.

ZIKRA: Oh, when I stole that kid's sneaks?

RADE: Yeah, then.

ZIKRA: Nice sneaks, huh? Nike, air max 4, huh?

RADE: You could lend them to me some time...

ZIKRA: No, dude, your feet stink like hell, I can't wear them after you!

RADE: But you can after the kid, huh? Like his feet don't stink?

ZIKRA: Well, that's why I pick the ones with brand new sneaks.

RADE: You take some new ones, let me have those...

Zikra becomes serious.

ZIKRA: What do I look like to you, dude, huh? If you need new sneakers, get them yourself! And stop hanging around my girl Alisa, got it?

RADE: Got it.

ZIKRA: Where the hell are you, Liver, bro, if only you could see what's going on when you're gone. Rade's making a move on my girl, that guy's pissing in your bed... Disaster, dude...

Zeljko gets up to leave the room, Rade and Zikra are looking at him.

RADE: Hey, turn off the light so we can sleep in peace.

ZIKRA: Where are you going?

No answer.

RADE: To put on his diaper!

Zeljko comes to Zikra.

ZELJKO: This is the last time you came anywhere near me, understood?

Zikra gets up, Zeljko grabs his arm and holds it tight. Zikra makes a painful facial expression and Zeljko looks at his arm and then at him. Zikra pulls back his arm and

Rade lights a cigarette. He is amused by this new situation. He will adjust in any case. He has to.

ZELJKO: It's not my fault that you live here and that your friend went down there...

Zikra is looking out the window.

ZIKRA: My friend went to fight for your home and you are here, pissing in his bed. Where's the justice in that, you tell me...

ZELJKO: There is no justice, get it?

Zeljko wipes his face, goes towards the door and looks at Rade.

Don't you ever touch me again!

Rade smiles and touches his chest with his finger, as if it was a gun. Zeljko look at "the gun" that is a bloody hand, then looks at his face. Rade puts the hand down. Zeljko leaves the room, Zikra is still looking out the window. Rade blows at his finger, like it's a gun. He is imitating Zeljko's accent.

RADE: Don'cha ever touch me again.

He stops joking.

His sister is cute, she is...

Zikra goes to bed and pulls the covers over his head.

ZIKRA: Turn off that goddamn light, I wanna sleep!

Darkness

SCENE FOUR

Girls' room. It is small and claustrophobic, and it looks more like a hallway than a room. There is a bunch of colourful things on the desk, a small mirror, some decorations and make-up. Across the room there are bunk beds. Snezana is sitting on the top bed, singing some children's song about a wolf and a sheep. Alisa is sitting at the desk, putting on her make-up.

ALISA: Why don't you ever wear make-up?

SNEZANA: I didn't bring my make-up.

ALISA: Like you wore make-up in Bosnia? For who, the bears?

She continues, Snezana is still humming the song and holding the Barbie doll.

You need to grow up!

SNEZANA: What do you mean?

Alisa mocks the way she speaks.

ALISA: "What do you mean?" I mean leave that Barbie doll, get off that shitty bed and come with me to have some fun.

Alisa smiles, but then she covers that beautiful smile with her hand, completely unconsciously and automatically, and she does that every time. Snezana puts the doll down and looks at Alisa putting on her lipstick.

SNEZANA: But... That's my memory, my dad bought it when he went to Germany.

Alisa turns to Snezana.

ALISA: So?

SNEZANA: So, that's all I took with me, that's all I have left of him, of my childhood, that's a memory... You wouldn't understand that.

ALISA: No, Snezana, it's you who don't understand. Memories are here... Here.

Alisa points at her head.

Those memories are real and you take them everywhere with you, whether you like it or not.

Snezana jumps off the bed.

SNEZANA: I know... I know that very well. That's why I carry my Barbie around, to keep my good memories, and not that horror that's constantly in front of my eyes.

Snezana throws the doll on the floor and then falls down herself.

Where's my aunt, my sweet auntie...

She starts to cry, Alisa puts down the lipstick and comes to help her get up.

ALISA: Come on, get up... Fuck the aunt, here, I'm here for you...

She picks Snezana up and sits her on the chair.

Stop crying. I can't stand it when someone is crying.

Snezana is trying to stop, she wipes off the tears and takes deep breaths.

Wanna know a secret?

Snezana looks at her and nods like a little girl. Alisa wipes off her tears.

SNEZANA: Tell me.

ALISA: I don't have memories anymore. I erased them all. All I have is this moment right now. After that I forget it all. That's why I can do whatever I want.

SNEZANA: Liar, you have nightmares all the time, you sweat and cry, so I have to cover you and calm you down.

Startled, Alisa steps away, picks the Barbie up and strokes her hair. She sits on the bed.

ALISA: It was you...

SNEZANA: What?

ALISA: I thought it was my...mom.

Alisa puts the doll on the pillow, gets up, shakes off the sorrow and her hair, and she comes to Snezana carefree and smiling.

SNEZANA: Those are just stupid dreams. Nobody can sleep here. This place gets the noisiest at night.

Alisa starts putting the make-up on Snezana.

ALISA: Alisa, why are you here?

Alisa keeps on putting the make-up on, but Snezana pulls back.

SNEZANA: Because I don't know why I'm here! I have my aunt, I have my parents, I have never stolen anything in my life and...

ALISA: Nobody wanted me and didn't have anywhere else to go... So they sent me here.

Alisa puts down the make-up and goes to the wardrobe, trying to find something to wear.

Look at this! All rags! They give us this garbage, all stained and torn, and you're supposed to thank the noble people! Assholes!

She takes out the clothes, throws them on the floor and takes some tight blouse and puts it on. Snezana is looking at the mirror.

SNEZANA: But we do have somewhere to go to! I don't know why we are here...

Alisa comes to her and fixes her make-up.

ALISA: Snezana, I'm outta here!

SNEZANA: I know!

ALISA: No, you don't! I'm outta here for good. I'm leaving.

SNEZANA: Now?

ALISA: Not now, but soon.

SNEZANA: How?

Alisa sits down on the bed and takes the doll.

ALISA: A cute guy is gonna get me out.

SNEZANA: How do you know him?

ALISA: Well, I met him through a friend... But that's not important.

She tosses the doll from one hand to the other.

Anyways, he told me that I have a really cute ass and that he can't be without it and... there, I'm going to his place.

SNEZANA: What about Zikra?

ALISA: What about him?

SNEZANA: Well, he's your boyfriend, right?

Alisa laughs and puts down the doll.

ALISA: Zikra is stuck in here. He'll never be rid of this place, but I will. I have to. Nothing is keeping me here anymore.

Alisa stands up, opens her arms, takes a deep breath as if she is smelling some flowers, and then she looks at Snezana.

Come on, we'll be late! I told that friend of mine that I'll take you, too. There'll be some cute guys, come on...

Alisa claps her hands, checks Snezana's make-up, goes to the wardrobe and takes out a short skirt and a sweater.

SNEZANA: You know I can't go.

ALISA: I know, you're waiting for that aunt of yours. The end of war... Well, you'll grow old waiting. Wars don't end easily round here and relatives don't really love each other all that much... All of us here are the perfect example.

Snezana gets up and Alisa puts the clothes into her hands.

Come on, we're already late... Girlfriend!

Alisa smiles at Snezana, looking at her changing her clothes.

You're hot, you know. And pretty, too! And so is your brother. He's really smart, we talked once. Too bad he's here, really. Such a shame...

SNEZANA: Hey, we're not "here" ok? This is only temporary!

ALISA: Until your aunt comes, I know... Come on, hurry, we're late.

SNEZANA: And that guy of yours, how does he plan on getting you out of here?

ALISA: Well, he's gonna kidnap me! You know, he lives alone, he built a huge house, and I'll be hidden there, like a princess in a castle. Get it?

SNEZANA: But what if the police come to look for you?

ALISA: The police can't do shit to him.

Snezana got dressed, Alisa checks her out, she is satisfied with the way she looks.

SNEZANA: Let's go.

They are about to leave the room but Snezana stops at the door.

Alisa, why are you here? I mean, for real?

Alisa answers casually, as if she's gossiping.

ALISA: Well, I tried to kill my stepfather. Classic, he tries to rape me, my mom doesn't believe me, she thinks I'm crazy, now they're in Germany, living a happy life.

SNEZANA: And how did you...

ALISA: How did I what?

SNEZANA: Well, you know...

ALISA: How did I try to kill him? While he was sleeping, of course.

Snezana turns the light off, they leave the room.

Darkness

SCENE FIVE

Ruza's office. Ruza is standing at the door, Branka is sitting in a wooden school chair. She is obviously uncomfortable, that can be seen by the way she is sitting.

RUZA: Let's go.

Branka jumps off the chair and reaches out to Ruza, but takes her hand back. She sits back down, devastated, putting her fist on her chest.

BRANKA: Stop, Ruza, wait...

Ruza shuts the door and stand over Branka.

RUZA: You seriously don't want to see them?!

BRANKA: I can't.

Ruza steps back and sits at her desk, takes a deep breath and starts tidying up some papers. Branka takes a small package out of her bag.

Here, I made them pie and something... If you could give it to them...

Ruza piles the papers and doesn't even look at the package.

RUZA: They don't need your package, Branka...

Branka slowly puts the package on the desk.

BRANKA: I'm off now... I have to take Una to her piano lesson. She has a concert in a week. Would you like to come?

Ruza doesn't even look at her.

I have to take her to school so she can practice.

RUZA: Why doesn't she practice at home?

Branka smiles.

BRANKA: We sold the piano.

Ruza looks at her.

We sold that first. Oh, well, easy come, easy go. He won it gambling, he lost it gambling.

RUZA: But Una is amazing, she shouldn't miss...

BRANKA: I know. She never left it for five years. The poor child used to play all day long, just to run away from the misery in the house.

RUZA: My brother is insane. He is completely insane! Why did he let them have it? How could you let that happen?

BRANKA: And what was I supposed to do, huh? Some men came in the middle of the night asking for money, or else they'd cut off Una's fingers! I told them they better cut off my tit, just to leave her hands alone.

RUZA: Why on earth didn't you call me?

BRANKA: Like you don't have enough to worry about... Plus we owe your man, too, and he's not just anyone... He can be your brother all he wants, but he mustn't ask of you anymore!

RUZA: To MY Miroslav you owe nothing. I took care of that.

Branka lifts her head, except that it is not really up, but somehow cramped. That position became a part of her. Branka approaches Ruza, trying to kiss her cheek, but Ruza keeps her distance.

Why didn't he call, if he only called, I'd take care of it all!

Branka's voice cracks.

BRANKA: Oh, then his conscience kicked in. He started gambling even more and losing even more. He has been drunk ever since. We sold our apartment to pay the debts.

RUZA: Why didn't you pack your bags and child and get the fuck away from him?

BRANKA: And where was I supposed to go, my Ruza, huh? To Bosnia? To that slaughterhouse?

She moves her bangs off her face and continues in a more cheerful manner.

It's getting better now, he gave half of the money to Jezda's and the other half to Dafina's bank.

She quickly prays.

Two or three more payments with interest and we'll be all set. Only that can save us!

Ruza prays, too.

RUZA: Thank God almighty, at least he did one thing that makes sense.

Branka moves her chair closer and holds Ruza's hand.

BRANKA: Just a few more rounds of interest....

Ruza is waving her head, Branka is almost kneeling in front of her.

Where am I supposed to take them, to that basement? There's no room even for us...He even got some dog, he says he's training him to fight, and he's scared too, he won't leave the house, just to walk that damn dog and that's it.

Ruza pulls her hand back.

RUZA: Branka, is that why I gave you the kids' papers... To feed a goddamn dog?! That little girl is going crazy without you, I can't lie to them anymore, Branka. They'll find you themselves, you'll see.

BRANKA: And where can I take them, huh? Where?! Should I take all three of them and then either to Bosnia or to the Danube?

RUZA: Get them out of here, woman! They're not cut out for this place!... Nobody is!

Ruza is shaking Branka by the shoulders, as if she's trying to wake her up, to explain.

Those are your own brother's children, for God's sake! Do you know how he got them to Serbia? Do you?

Branka is resisting, crying, trying to defend herself.

BRANKA: Don't, please, don't! I beg of you! Please, understand...

Ruza lets her go, standing above her.

RUZA: Your brother got them here in a tractor tire, across the Drina! Do you understand that? There wasn't

enough room in the boat! And he didn't have enough money for the boat anyways! Are you aware of that? He sent them to you! To you, his own sister, so you would take care of his children. And now they are rotting in here.

Ruza goes to the window, lights a cigarette and looks outside. Branka shrunk in the chair, crying silently.

RUZA: I just hope it's not too late... You married a man from here. Look at you and look at me... Can't you see what this place has done to us? It has crippled us. There are no winners here...

Ruza turns to Branka.

BRANKA: Yeah, where are you and where am I? You live in the fancy neighbourhood, in luxury! Every day after work, there's a limo waiting for you. The limo for Mrs. Warden!

Ruza pulls her sleeve up, showing her scarred underarm.

RUZA: You see this, Branka?

Those are marks – home trademarks! My brother has those, too.

Branka looks away.

BRANKA: I know.

RUZA: They tie you down and mark you for the rest of your life. Long sleeves, every single day, be it summer or winter!

Pause.

And those kids don't have them yet! Yet! And as for the fancy neighbourhood... The price I have to pay for that, my dear. Every time the *limo* is waiting, I am ashamed, I betray myself, my children... And where does that limo you talk about take me? To a dungeon, just like this one, with slight changes. I am a home kid and I can't escape that! Because it's inside my heart... Understand that?

Forces herself to smile.

RUZA: And the house is big, just like my Home.

Shows the building. She's disgusted, she shakes it off and closes her eyes.

I was so young and... I wanted to escape so badly!

Looks at her office, smiles and tears start coming down her face. She slowly opens a drawer, takes out a bottle and pours a drink.

They saved their bare lives, you save their souls.

Branka stands up, puts the package on the chair and starts toward the door.

RUZA: Come to the window to see something.

Branka stops.

BRANKA: Don't show them to me, I can't see them.

RUZA: They don't go outside much, the backyard means nothing to them. I want to show you something else, come here.

Branka approaches carefully, and looks outside.

RUZA: Look.

Branka leans and looks.

BRANKA: Yes?

RUZA: And? What do you see?

BRANKA (*Confused.*): Kids...

RUZA: And what are they doing?

BRANKA: I don't know... Nothing.

RUZA: They're walking around, sitting, smoking, fighting... But nobody is playing. No one has ever played in that backyard.

All of a sudden Branka moves away from the window.

BRANKA: There they are!

Branka leans against the wall next to the window, with her eyes closed, shivering as if she was about to be executed.

Please God, forgive me.

Darkness

SCENE SIX

Snezana and Alisa's room, clothes all over the room, Snezana is sitting at the desk, Zeljko is standing next to her. He is wearing a sweatshirt tucked into his tracksuit and brand new Nike air max trainers.

ZELJKO: Where is it?

SNEZANA (*Crying*): I don't know...

ZELJKO: Liar! Tell me where it is?

SNEZANA: I don't know!

Snezana is crying, shrinking in the chair. Zeljko is throwing things on the floor, he finds Snezana's Barbie doll, throws it. Snezana quickly takes the doll off the floor and sits in her time-out seat, holding her doll tightly. She is shivering.

ZELJKO: You better tell me where it is.

Snezana cries even harder. Zeljko looks closely at the clothes.

How didn't I notice it... Earlier.

He turns to Snezana, holding a piece of lace lingerie.

Where did you get this?

SNEZANA: That's not mine.

ZELJKO: What do you mean it's not yours, I found it in your bag.

SNEZANA: Well, those aren't your sneakers either, but you're still wearing them.

Zeljko raises his hand to hit her, but then lowers it.

ZELJKO: You put whore panties with mum and dad's pictures, our memories?

Zeljko throws them at her feet; Snezana picks them up and puts on her lap next to the Barbie doll.

SNEZANA: Those aren't memories.

Snezana stands up and puts the things on the desk and goes to her brother.

Your memories are in your head and you can't escape them. What's your last memory?

ZELJKO: When dad and I went to...

Snezana pushes him.

SNEZANA: Liar! What do you see when you go to bed, before you fall asleep?

Zeljko looks down, looking at his new sneakers.

ZELJKO: A tractor tire. Night. Freezing Drina and dad holding us so that we don't drown... And him going back... There... That's what I see.

SNEZANA: And slaughtered people and rotten cattle, that's what you see!

ZELJKO: Those aren't our people.

SNEZANA: Oh, and who is? Are these here our people?

Zeljko lowers his head and sits on the bed. Snezana is standing in the middle of the room with her arms wide open.

Well, where are they? Why didn't our aunt come? Because she's ours, right? Because we are hers... Or because those ours don't give a fuck about finding us, go on, say it! And why they all call you Boske...

Snezana imitates the children mocking him.

Hey, you, Boske...

Holds his head and looks at his face.

Who are our people, huh? I had my first kiss with Safet, and to me, he's mine. Get it?

Imitates Alisa's gestures. Turns away and goes to her chair and sits down. Tired, she puts her head on her knees. She is almost whispering.

I wanna go home.

ZELJKO: What home?

Snezana is surprised by this question, but she's just too tired.

SNEZANA: Our home. Our real home. To mum and dad! We waited for auntie long enough, we can't wait anymore. We don't belong here, anyways. We have mum and dad!

Zeljko sighs, strokes his sister's hair.

ZELJKO: We aren't home kids, they'll find auntie in no-time. And even if they don't, soon the war is going to end and... It's a good sign that we're here, and not at the orphanage.

They are almost whispering.

SNEZANA: Brother, don't be scared, you've got me, and I know that mom and dad are waiting for us back home... You'll see... And they are so relieved that we're here... safe....

ZELJKO: If mom only knew what I've done...

SNEZANA: You didn't do anything, we'll just wait for auntie, and if she doesn't come by the end of war... Well, fuck it, we'll go home ourselves... But our aunt will show up, you'll see...

Snezana wipes her tears and starts picking things up from the floor. Zeljko covers his face with his hands.

ZELJKO: You even started swearing... That's all that Alisa's work...

Zeljko gets up.

If it wasn't for that stupid Alisa, my little sis wouldn't have become... Where's my baby sis Snezana...

Snezana lowers her head, Zeljko holds her.

It's my fault, sorry, Sneza...

Snezana hugs her brother, Zeljko holds her tightly. He tries to hold her and protect her from the world. The door opens. Alisa comes in. Her hair is messy, she has a black eye, bloody lip. She is shaking. Her clothes are dirty, barely covering her body.

SNEZANA: Screams and covers her mouth with her hand.
Alisa!

Alisa puts a finger on her lips to keep her quiet. Snezana holds her not to fall, Zeljko is confused and stares at Alisa.

ALISA: Hi...

ZELJKO: What happened?

ALISA: I got raped a little... No big deal...

Snezana screams. Alisa gives Zeljko a numb look, then slowly turns her head to Snezana, smiles at her and waves her hand. She slowly goes to her desk, sits down and looks at herself in the mirror.

Liver is back...I'm back too... We're back.

Zeljko sits down on the bed, and holds his head, Snezana comes to Alisa.

SNEZANA: Come on, lie down, you are shaking...

Alisa slowly lifts her head, looks at Snezana, tries to smile, but her torn lip hurts.

ALISA: It's good that you didn't come with me today.

Snezana hugs Alisa, the girl falls into her arms. Zeljko covers his face with his hands.

ZELJKO: *He's not looking.*

And how do you know Liver's back?

ALISA: We all come back. (*She pauses.*) They brought him just now... He looks better than me.

She tries to laugh at her own joke, but her lip still hurts.

ZELJKO: But, where am I gonna go then?

Darkness

SCENE SEVEN

The dining room. There is a long table, put together of old tables from pubs. Its pieces (probably collected from all sorts of diners and pubs) make an uneven, yet dynamic piece, and the whole table resembles some sort of a centipede. The children are sitting down, having dinner. They are set like in Leonardo's "The Last Supper", except this one is slightly different: an unintentional, accidental composition. Nebojsa is sitting in the middle, with no facial expression, staring at nothing. He is silent, with no reactions whatsoever, his mind is lost on some frontline in Bosnia. Maybe he's not looking at anything, he might be looking at something horrible and bloody... It would be pretentious to try to describe that look and its meaning. He is drooling, saliva is dripping down his chin. A thin transparent line stretches down to his plate, merging with the beans. That's all the contact with the food he has. Children are sitting on his left and right. They are eating. All of them are secretly looking at him. All of them, except for Rade. Maybe that's why this dinner resembles that ancient, famous meal so much. Zikra is sitting on Nebojsa's right, wiping his mouth, trying to feed him. Unsuccessfully. Rade is sitting next to him, halfway turned away. He doesn't look at Nebojsa, he is eating quickly, bent over the plate, he bites off a piece of bread. Snezana is sitting next to Rade, she is crumbling bread into the beans. She brings the spoon to her mouth, sitting up, trying to see Nebojsa. Alisa is sitting on the left. She is secretly looking at Nebojsa, a bit disgusted. She is slowly eating small bites. Next to her is Zeljko, sitting with his arms and legs spread. Just like his sister, he is crumbling bread into the beans. His left sleeve is rolled up above his elbow. On his arm, there are fresh scars, made by real, deep knife cuts. A few decades earlier, Ruza and her brother got those same cars, in that same home...

ZIKRA: Do you see this, Nebojsa, what's happening in here... While you're off in war, some people do whatever they

want... But what goes around comes around... Our friend is now upstairs with the small kids, Ruza needs some time to figure out who belongs where, right?

ALISA: Zikra stop it.

ZIKRA: Someone gets a nursery, another gets a medal.

ALISA: Oh, please, no one here has a medal.

RADE: And I think we all here deserve a medal! Liver deserves at least three!

ALISA (*Quietly*): Yeah, one for each body part.

Zikra taps the plate with his spoon and speaks in an unnatural tone, like a cheap quiz host, unsuccessfully trying to wake up catatonic Nebojsa.

ZIKRA: May I have your attention, please! This morning, my friend and I made a deal: from now on, we won't call him Liver anymore. That nickname doesn't suit him at all!

RADE: When did you make a deal, he hasn't spoken since he came back.

Zikra looks at Rade.

ZIKRA: No, he's just stoned all the time. He gets high every morning, it helps with his pain...

He changes his tone again.

And we also agreed that Rade is no longer Rade, he's Badluck.

Alisa applauds.

RADE: Why me, Badluck, no, dude, I don't wanna! No way!

Zikra tries to feed Nebojsa, but he doesn't take the food. The beans fall down his chin. Zikra throws the spoon.

ZELJKO: How did they take him back? I mean, he's no longer a minor...

SNEZANA: Why did they release him from the hospital?

RADE (*Between bites*): Because some general got hurt, something like that, so they had to make room. They didn't know what to do with him, so they dumped him...back

here... He's not seriously wounded, I mean, he's not missing anything...

He realizes that he got all the attention and he wants to show off.

SNEZANA: Except for something inside him... That's much worse.

She bows her head and puts the spoon down. She's sick of it. Of everything.

RADE: And do you know the funniest thing in the whole story?

He is laughing as if he's telling a joke.

The craziest thing is that the general is actually his old man!

Everybody except Nebojsa turns to Rade. Rade instinctively puts the spoon down, desperate for a friendly look.

ZIKRA: And how do you know that?

RADE: Liv... Nebojsa told me.

ALISA: You?! He told you? He didn't tell me or Zikra, but you?

ZIKRA: And when was it that you two talked... I mean, he doesn't talk to me, so that's why I'm asking...

Zikra reaches out across the table to hit him but Alisa stops him.

ALISA: How do you know that?

RADE: What's up with all of you? Give me a break... I made it up.

Zikra looks at Zeljko and then at Snezana and then down.

ZIKRA: Why, man?

Rade is silent. He shrugs. Zikra slowly puts the spoon down.

You're fucking dead, traitor.

Zikra jumps off his seat; grabs Rade and throws him on the floor. Zikra is punching Rade. At first, Rade isn't de-

fending himself, but something snaps inside him and he throws Zikra off, amazingly easily. He starts kicking him, taking revenge for every single offence he ever got. He is strangling him, screaming and shouting. Zeljko jumps in, trying to pull Rade off Zikra. Rade pulls Zikra's shirt, tearing it. Zikra is screaming. Zeljko hits Rade and Alisa joins him. Snezana is terrified, but approaches the pile of bodies. Nebojsa is sitting, swinging and staring at the ceiling. Someone suddenly screams and everybody backs off. Zikra is on the floor, all bloody and beaten up. His shirt is torn and pretty, small girl's breasts are showing. Zikra is trying to hide them, not knowing what to cover first: the breasts or the face. Everybody is frozen. Zeljko comes to him/her, helps her up. Snezana gives her her sweater, Zikra puts it on and slowly sits down on the chair.

ZELJKO: But, how?

Zikra sits next to Nebojsa and starts crying. Alisa lights a cigarette and gives it to Zikra. She takes it carefully. She is completely bare, unprotected and broken now.

ALISA: You were always suspicious to me. Somehow, you know... Too much...

SNEZANA: How?

Alisa lights a cigarette for herself and laughs.

ALISA: Well, she didn't want to fuck me!

Rade sits down at the end of the table, biting his nails. his look is furious and blurry. Zeljko is standing behind Zikra, all confused. He sits down next to his sister.

SNEZANA: And I had fallen in love with him...

Ruza enters the dining room. Everybody sits down pretending to eat. The atmosphere is weird and Ruza would have sensed it earlier, but right now she was too preoccupied with another problem. Rade, all beaten up, wet and bloody, looks at her, the only person he has real feelings for, and she doesn't notice him now, at this very moment, when he needs her the most. He's all alone!

RUZA: Enjoy your meal, my doves...

Everyone except Nebojsa looks at Rade, but Ruza doesn't notice that. She comes to Zeljko.

She's here!

Darkness

SCENE EIGHT

Ruza's office. Ruza is standing next to the window, looking outside and smoking. Branka is sitting in a chair, distressed, all dressed in black.

BRANKA: You tell them.

A knock on the door, Snezana and Zeljko enter, Branka stands up. Snezana stops for a second and then runs into her aunt's arms. Zeljko and Ruza look at each other.

SNEZANA: Aunt! Auntie!

They hug, Branka reaches for Zeljko.

BRANKA: Zeljko, my son...

Zeljko insecurely comes to Branka, she holds him and hugs him, she cries so loudly it's almost a shout. She calms down a little, pushes them away slightly, to see them or to defend herself.

Is it possible... You got so big! And I remember you when you were this big!

She holds them again.

My poor little ones...

ZELJKO: We're no longer little, auntie.

BRANKA: I know, I just say that.

RUZA: And you grow up twice as fast in here.

Branka looks at Ruza, but she is turned away, looking out the window.

SNEZANA: We're ready to go!

Branka holds her tighter.

We didn't have much to pack, just a few things, nothing important... We waited for you for so long!

ZELJKO: I thought you wouldn't come. I really did.

He smiles, stops for a second but still comes and hugs them both.

SNEZANA: Where's Una? Look...

She quickly takes the doll out of her bag. She is shaking. She gives the doll to her aunt.

This is for her. I don't need it anymore; I'm no longer a little girl.

Branka takes the doll; she doesn't know what to do with it and puts it on the desk. Snezana looks at it a bit confused, but still smiling.

BRANKA: She couldn't come today; she'll come some other time.

Zeljko steps back pulling Snezana with him.

SNEZANA: Let's get out of here...

Branka steps back, looks at Ruza, she's avoiding to look back at her, crying and smoking. Branka helplessly sits back in the chair.

BRANKA: I didn't come to take you...today.

Snezana takes a step towards her. Zeljko pulls her back.

SNEZANA: Well, when are you coming?

Branka stands up.

BRANKA: We're struggling at the moment... There's four of us in a small flat.

SNEZANA: Four.

BRANKA: Your uncle, Una, Hector and me.

ZELJKO: Who's Hector?

Ruza stands in front of Branka, looking her in the eyes.

RUZA: Hector is your uncle's dog.

SNEZANA: What? Hector's what?!

Snezana grabs her brother's hand. She feels sick.

ZELJKO: There's no room for us because of a dog.

Snezana throws up, Zeljko is holding her. Branka looks away, ashamed.

BRANKA: We'll come to get you, as soon as we can...

SNEZANA: I understand.

She says that as if she is saying "I don't understand" because she wipes the vomit off her mouth. Snezana looks at Ruza.

ZELJKO: We're sorry, really, it wasn't on purpose... We'll clean it up.

Ruza just nods. The children head for the door, Snezana can barely speak.

SNEZANA: Brother, why is auntie wearing black?

Branka covers her mouth with her hand, bursting into tears. Ruza jumps off her chair, banging her hand on the desk.

RUZA: Tell them, Branka. You've caused enough pain, just tell them.

Branka is crying, picking up her things, goes for the door. Snezana stands in her way.

SNEZANA: Wait, auntie, don't go! You forgot Una's Barbie doll, I don't need it anymore...

Snezana runs to the desk, takes the doll and puts it into her aunt's hands. Branka is avoiding it, crying, pushing it away. She doesn't want to touch the doll, she pushes away the girl, she's afraid she'll lose her mind.

BRANKA: It's Ok, honey, leave it. Una has no time to play with it, she needs to play the piano... You keep it...

Branka is trying to get through and run away.

SNEZANA: Auntie, why are you wearing black?

Snezana looks at her brother, Branka is still trying to escape without looking at her.

RUZA: Oh, just tell them, stop being such a pussy like my crazy brother, damn it! Tell them!

Branka stops. A long pause.

BRANKA: They're dead. Both of them.

Snezana looks at Zeljko, Ruza sits down.

SNEZANA (*Quietly*): Brother....

Zeljko looks around and falls on the floor. He screams.

ZELJKO: NO!!!

Darkness

SCENE NINE

The boys' room. Nebojsa is on the bed, playing with Snezana's Barbie doll. Next to him, on the chair, Zikra is sitting, dressed like a girl, wearing make-up. She strokes his head and calms him down. Zeljko is sitting on the bottom bunk bed, looking at Alisa sitting across from him. Snezana is on the top bed, humming a children's song, putting on lipstick. Her arms are wrapped in dirty bandages. Rade is sitting in the corner and smoking. They look like dolls thrown around a room.

ZIKRA: Stop playing with that stupid doll... Please.

She grabs the doll and puts her head in its place. She smiles but Nebojsa shows no reaction. Zikra lights a cigarette. Alisa is flirting with Zeljko, chewing bubble gum, popping balloons.

ALISA: Zikra...

ZIKRA: Yes?

ALISA: I'm out of here.

ZIKRA: Really...

ALISA: Yeah, I got a plan, and all...

RADE: Yeah, like you did the last time, and you came back all fucked up...

ALISA: You shut up, Badluck! No wonder you're here, your own mother gave up on you... Since when have you been here?

Alisa is still looking at Zeljko. Rade lowers his head and bites his nails until they bleed. Snezana is humming.

RADE: Forever.

ZELJKO (*To Rade*): Hey traitor, do you know when the new warden is coming?

ALISA: I heard he's a badass!

Zeljko and Alisa look at each other and smile.

RADE: He's about to come any minute.

He starts crying. Snezana turns to him and smiles.

ZELJKO: She was a really good woman, a real fighter. She covered for Zikra, she got the whole story... She was looking for our aunt, too. I feel bad she got fucked up because of us!

ALISA: I'm not worried about her, her big fish husband will get her out of it... To save his own ass, of course!

Rade is crying.

SNEZANA: You really loved her, huh?

RADE: She was the closest to a mother that I ever had... You all had yours, at least for a while. She couldn't take it anymore. She snapped. I understand her.

ZIKRA: Nebojsa is not gonna get better, is he? Ever...

SNEZANA: And why do you think we will?

ZIKRA: I wish I could save him... To return the favour.

SNEZANA: And how did he save you?

ZIKRA: By protecting me. From the older kids. They wanted to rape me in the bathroom, and he figured it all

out... And he protected me. He's the only one who knew I was...

SNEZANA: ... A girl.

RADE: Yeah, but after the third fuck... Or fourth.

ALISA: You shut up, Badluck. We're not taking you with us.

RADE: Look who's talking...Murderer. I wouldn't wanna go with you, anyways.

ZIKRA: And that's when I promised myself I'll never get raped again.

ZELJKO: What are we gonna do now?

Snezana gets down on the floor next to Rade, Zikra leans her head on Nebojsa's chest, Alisa sits in Zeljko's lap, caressing his ear with her nose.

RADE: Nothing, we'll wait for the end!

Snezana stands up and grabs the Barbie doll.

Oh, fuck it.

Darkness

The sound of children laughing, like on a playground.
Somehow carefree, yet spooky...

THE END

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