EIGHT PLAYS

Drama of Smaller European Languages

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CONTENTS

7 DRAMA OF SMALLER EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

11 INTRODUCTION TO THE EIGHT PLAYS

21 Eneko Sagardoy: **MOTO – MEMBRA JESU NOSTRI**
translated into English by Justin Peterson and Tim Nicholson

49 Dora Šustić: **PIČMAN**
translated into English by Vladislav Beronja

89 Lon Kirkop: **A MOON OF OUR OWN**
translated into English by Kat Storace

125 Lluïsa Cunillé: **THE DONKEY AND THE STONE**
translated into English by Dustin Langan

181 Maša Pelko: **FÜR OPHELIA (A Mythology of Drowning)**
translated into English by Barbara Skubic

277 Jeton Neziraj: **THE ADVENTURES OF THE BOSCH FAMILY IN UNMIKISTAN**
translated into English by Alexandra Channer

327 Ekaterina Georgieva: **FREE FALLING**
translated into English by Atanas Igov

387 Piret Jaaks: **DO ANIMALS KNOW HOW TO COUNT?**
translated into English by Justin Petrone

DRAMA OF SMALLER EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

This anthology marks the end of one story—the story of the Drama of Smaller European Languages (DoSEL). At the same time, I hope it also serves as a prologue, the beginning of an exciting new journey for each of the texts collected here, as well as for the idea that brought them together.

What is DoSEL?

It is a consortium of eight partner organizations (Prešeren Theatre Kranj; Teatro Arriaga Antzokia, Bilbao; Estonian Theatre Agency, Tallinn; Ivan Vazov National Theatre, Sofia; Kosovo National Theatre, Pristina; the National Agency for the Performing Arts, Teatru Malta, Valletta; Sala Beckett, Barcelona; and the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb) that, over the course of two years, have joined forces to strengthen the international visibility and development of contemporary dramatic writing and to improve the conditions for its production and circulation. This shared endeavour has been made possible through the support of the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

The greatest strength of DoSEL lies in its cultural and linguistic diversity. At a time when global dynamics increasingly shape channels of communication and erode the richness of difference, and when smaller languages and cultures often retreat into themselves out of a sense of vulnerability, DoSEL represents an ambitious act of openness—a gesture of cooperation and a commitment to building lasting forms of artistic dialogue beyond Europe's dominant cultural centers.

We are convinced that outstanding drama can be found everywhere: in Slovenia and Bulgaria, in Kosovo and Malta, in Croatia and Estonia, and in the Basque Country and Catalonia. Yet while Europe celebrates its linguistic diversity, many dramatic works written in smaller European languages rarely cross national borders. Their circulation remains limited, not because of a lack of artistic quality, but because of structural barriers, limited translation opportunities, and unequal access to international cultural networks. Great dramatic writing does not belong exclusively to major languages or large cultural markets; it emerges wherever artists engage critically, imaginatively, and courageously with the realities of their time.

As Umberto Eco famously wrote—and as we heard many times during this project—"The language of Europe is translation." Translation is not merely a technical process of transferring words from one language to another; it is an act of encounter, curiosity, and mutual recognition. It allows stories to travel, ideas to resonate across borders, and cultures to discover one another.

The eight plays gathered in this volume are the result of that belief. Through translation, they have found a shared space in which they can be read, discussed, staged, and reimagined by audiences and theater professionals across Europe and beyond.

Throughout the project, consortium partners have collaborated on a wide range of activities, including artistic residencies, translation workshops, professional exchanges, public presentations, and international showcases. These activities have not only fostered new professional relationships and creative partnerships but have also contributed to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by theaters working in smaller language environments.

This publication is therefore more than a collection of translated plays. It is a testament to the value of international cooperation, artistic curiosity, and cultural solidarity. It reflects the commitment of all project partners, playwrights, translators, and theater professionals who have contributed their expertise, creativity, and enthusiasm to making these works accessible to wider audiences.

We hope that the plays collected here will inspire future productions and translations, new collaborations, and continued dialogue among theater practitioners across Europe. But above all, we hope that it will spark other artistic connections among smaller European languages and cultures, while encouraging readers to discover the extraordinary diversity of stories that emerge from Europe's smaller languages and to recognize them as an integral part of our shared cultural landscape.

May this be a wonderful ending and a great beginning.

Rok Bozovičar,
Managing director of the Prešeren Theatre Kranj

INTRODUCTION
TO THE EIGHT PLAYS

Despite all the changes in media, technology, and society, theater is an art form that, for more than two millennia, has remained grounded in language: in the stories exchanged between performers and audience. These stories travel not only across time, across territories, and across nations, but also across languages—both large and small, living and dead, dominant and suppressed.

DoSEL—Drama of Smaller European Languages—has brought together playwrights, translators, and theater organizations, placing at its center precisely the promotion, translation, and international circulation of contemporary drama written in so-called smaller European languages. Perhaps we should approach the term "smaller" chiefly through the question of visibility and representation. Plays written in dominant languages, such as English and German, are easily encountered in translation and on repertoires of metropolitan and national theaters across Europe. There is an unquestionable privilege that comes with writing in a dominant language: the texts travel more quickly, are more easily translated, and more effortlessly find their way to agents, festivals, awards and, finally, to the stage. A consensus on taste, accessibility, and visibility has already formed around these works.

On the other hand, plays written in less-represented European languages have a much harder time finding their way into other theater milieus. Even texts that come from linguistically proximate spaces rarely leave their home stage, let alone those that have to travel across the entire continent, often by means of a third language. But perhaps precisely those stories—from the margins, from the periphery, from spaces not too far from the center, yet far enough

for us not to hear them—could resonate more strongly with our audiences. Perhaps precisely they are the ones that could outline similar problems, reveal unexpected connections, or offer new critical perspectives.

The partners gathered around the DoSEL project attempted to interrogate how to build bridges that would facilitate the exchange of dramatic texts written in smaller European languages. Participants in the project included the Prešeren Theatre Kranj, Slovenia; the National Agency for the Performing Arts, Teatru Malta, Valletta; Teatro Arriaga Antzokia, Bilbao; Sala Beckett, Barcelona; the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb; the Estonian Theatre Agency, Tallinn; Kosovo National Theatre, Pristina; and Ivan Vazov National Theatre, Sofia. One part of the program was devoted to showcasing performances based on contemporary dramatic texts. The other, perhaps especially important for the readers of this book, was dedicated to establishing a network of translators and organizing translation workshops for a selection of contemporary dramatic texts. This process resulted in the first translations of contemporary dramatic literature originally written in languages that are rarely given the chance to circulate internationally.

Each partner set out to find an original contemporary dramatic text that had not been translated or staged in a broader international context. This was the sole criterion for selection. In this process, the dramaturgs, agents, and theater professionals of the partner institutions were led by their own professional compasses: they looked for a text representative of their own contemporary theater context, but also one that points in some way toward the future direction of local repertoires, while also having the potential for a life in an international context. Eight plays were selected, all written in the period between 2019 and 2024: Lluïsa Cunillé's *The Donkey and the Stone* in Catalan, Maša Pelko's

Für Ophelia (A Mythology of Drowning) in Slovenian, Ekaterina Georgieva's *Free Falling* in Bulgarian, Dora Šustić's *Pičman* in Croatian, Piret Jaaks's *Do Animals Know How to Count?* in Estonian, Jeton Neziraj's *The Adventures of the Bosch Family in Unmikistan* in Albanian, Lon Kirkop's *A Moon of Our Own* in Maltese, and Eneko Sagardoy's *MOTO – Membra Jesu Nostri* in Basque. Each of the four female and four male authors is at a different point in their literary career: from Dora Šustić and Ekaterina Georgieva, whose texts represent their debut as playwrights, to Lon Kirkop from Malta and Jeton Neziraj from Kosovo, who are already established and widely translated writers. Šustić's and Georgieva's plays, as well as those of Piret Jaaks from Estonia and Maša Pelko from Slovenia, have received awards or important recognitions for achievement in contemporary drama.

MOTO – Membra Jesu Nostri is a poetic monologue skillfully intertwined with Buxtehude's cantatas on the theme of Christ's Passion. The protagonist, who bears the same name as the author, enters the space of remembrance by recalling his lover, who had survived childhood abuse and later tragically passed away. Memory in this text is translated through the body: the body is a site of love, a geography of recollections, and a map of loss. Even trauma is inscribed in the body, in its segments, its wounds, and its absences. The author asks what remains after love, and the text itself transforms into a choreography of mourning.

Mourning is also the central motif of Dora Šustić's play *Pičman*. The text is almost completely stripped, reduced to brief replies, words, and sentences that trickle down the page, without a clear indication of the speaker. In its basic form, *Pičman* is a two-act play. In the first part, a young woman is having an ordinary, almost commonplace conversation with her father about her

work, her boyfriend, her frustrations, and her creative obsessions. In the second part, in the context of a therapy session after her father's suicide, she tries to reconstruct that same conversation, to understand it, and, at least, to slightly transform it. Similar to *MOTO – Membra Jesu Nostri*, *Pičman* also asks what remains after a loved one disappears from one's life. However, while Eneko maps the body, Šustić transcribes and maps words: uttered, forgotten, and, most unbearably, those that remain unspoken.

In the play *A Moon of Our Own*, Lon Kirkop takes us to a rehabilitation and recovery center for people with drug addiction, where Nik and Steve, two men in their mid-thirties, reunite after years of absence. They were once young lovers who met in a similar place, almost twenty years before. Nik is now returning as a patient, while Steve is an employee of the clinic. Their renewed encounter opens the space for an almost psychodramatic return: the recollection of youth, of two lost young men who, during the darkest period of their lives, recognized each other and found sanctuary in an embrace, on a moonlit night under the starry sky. Now, as grown men, Steve is married, with a child and a life that appears to be under control, while Nik is still lost in the labyrinths of desire, shame, and addiction. Kirkop creates an intimate space between memory and reality, between the love which could not survive in its initial form and the love which, despite everything, never ceased to exist.

Somewhere between life and death, between presence and absence, Lluïsa Cunillé builds her placid hotel in the play *The Donkey and the Stone*. Her characters do not have names. Instead, they are defined by their functions and relations: an old woman, a receptionist, a traveler, a father, a brother. The hotel is quiet and empty, while the streets outside are dangerous, milling with hooligans and football fans in search of a fight. In this hotel, time stands

still. The audience is not sure if it exists as a real place, a space of trauma, a courtyard of death, or some sort of purgatory. The arrival of a traveler, likely the only guest at the hotel, opens the space for play and theatricality. He begins to occupy the place of the old woman's lost daughter, or the place of the receptionist's unknown partner. Cunillé, playing with the metatheatrical aspects of the dramatic text, interrogates the instability of our roles and identities in the fragile web of interpersonal relations.

Maša Pelko, in the play *Für Ophelia (A Mythology of Drowning)*, weaves a dense web of identity, violence, and inherited silence, interwoven with metatheatrical and intertextual elements. Inspired by Raymond Carver's short story "So Much Water So Close to Home," Pelko writes about what happens after the story ends, when the men on a fishing trip find the body of a dead woman, but instead of canceling their trip and reporting the death, they continue with their plan. *Für Ophelia* is a complex play about violence toward women, both explicit and implicit, about paranoia that may not be paranoia at all but precise recognition of social reality. The central figure is, in fact, an actress who plays the daughter: she both exists and does not exist as a character, occupying a dramaturgically complex position as a witness. Through inheritance, written documentation, transgenerational trauma, and an entire series of motifs about women whose testimonies were discounted—from Cassandra to the titular Ophelia—Pelko writes a text as an attempt at a literary diagnosis of a social pathology that gives rise to femicide.

Myth is also a site of encounter and growing intimacy for the characters in *The Adventures of the Bosch Family in Unmikistan*, a play by the established Kosovo writer Jeton Neziraj. This satirical drama follows the Western European Bosch family, who move to the imaginary but painfully recognizable country

Unmikistan, where Mr. Bosch has been offered a lucrative position to build a wind farm. From the perspective of Mr. and Mrs. Bosch, Unmikistan is a dangerous, backward, and exotic place where even the wind blows in the wrong direction. The text interrogates the West's relationship with the developing world: seemingly an object of aid, this world is in fact exploited for profit and continues to be perceived through fear, prejudice, and paternalism. But this sharp satire also contains a miracle. The Bosch daughter meets a local boy, Dan, who takes her on an adventure in Unmikistan—on the other side of the fence, in the space of the local community, culture, imagination, and freedom. At the same time, their mythological avatars grow increasingly close: the world-famous Cinderella and the great warrior Muja the Lionheart. Neziraj, although writing in the genre of satire, opens a gentle space where characters can recognize one another through stories, even if those stories, at first glance, seem worlds apart.

Ekaterina Georgieva's *Free Falling* is a painfully comical, dystopian, and satirical vaudeville in which the author leads us through the near future and an alternative present. This is a world obsessed with its own freedom, while existing at the same time almost without any actual free will. Through a series of tableaux and dramatic interludes, Georgieva shows a world inexorably sliding into violence: communication is almost impossible; individuals and their identities disintegrate amid futuristic fascism, technology, self-help, and the constant demand to remain functional. It seems as if the only remaining freedom consists in choosing the time of one's death, but even this choice can result in punishment. At great speed, *Free Falling* leads us through a series of bioethical and social dilemmas: from almost eugenic self-help rituals, robotic slaves, and technologically advanced modes of denying motherhood, all the way to suicide, control of the body and violence as the only remaining social

and individual response to reality. This is a fragmentary play about a world in which freedom has been transformed into an obligation, happiness into a requirement, the body into a project, and individual responsibility into a form of violence—until the collective feeling of emancipation shows itself as an unstoppable free fall without a parachute.

And finally, Piret Jaaks's *Do Animals Know How to Count?* creates a dystopian world of the near future. Although the text was written in 2019, Jaaks's play reads almost prophetically today. The world has been overtaken by a mysterious virus that spreads from wild animals to humans, and society, as a result, has segregated itself. In the country of Egeron, there are those who are deemed undesirable—those who were either infected or are politically and socially unsuitable to the new system—and those who remain within the city's walls. There are gargantuan differences between these two groups. The undesirables are forced to work in inhumane conditions, while those inside the system still sustain an appearance of normalcy, even though culture, history, and personal memories are constantly being erased and written anew, as in all totalitarian systems. At the center of the play are Klaire, Hans, and their daughter Helga, a family that apparently tries to live a normal life in accordance with the regime's demands, but just beneath the surface of their lives lurk fear, control, and systemic violence. After Helga gets sick, the lives of Klaire and Hans change dramatically. They suddenly find themselves in spaces Michel Foucault has so well described: isolation, surveillance, discipline, and forced labor. Helga ends up in forced isolation, even though she no longer shows any symptoms of illness. Hans is led to a labor camp on the other side of the system, and Klaire to a psychiatric institution. A family which has been close to the regime gradually becomes part of the resistance. Motivated by the desire for reunion, Klaire and Hans, each from their own side of the regime's

margins, find comrades in arms in the fight for truth and, finally, freedom. Piret Jaaks constructs a world that is terrifyingly close to ours: a world of control, uncertainty, and fear, yet one in which resistance can still be imagined.

The eight selected plays differ in form, tone, and dramaturgical procedure: from a poetic elegy to a tragically departed lover in *MOTO – Membra Jesu Nostri*, across the hyperrealist reconstruction of conversations and a therapy session in *Pičman*, to the Beckettian cabaret dystopia of *Free Falling*, and the political-ecological dystopia of *Do Animals Know How to Count?* Still, it seems to me that in different ways all eight authors, scattered across Europe, returned to the stories that are foundational to theater as an art form. All of these plays are connected through the concept of family—biological, chosen, lost, destroyed, or just imagined. At their crux is some form of desire for communication: the yearning for hope, for renewed encounter, for forgiveness, or at least for the possibility of finally saying what has remained unspoken. Maybe the playwrights were prompted by the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which we were forced once again to confront the relationships which formed us and, not infrequently, damaged us.

Almost all the plays possess a therapeutic impulse. *Pičman*, *Free Falling*, *Do Animals Know How to Count?*, and *A Moon of Our Own* occupy—overtly or indirectly—spaces of therapy, psychiatry, rehabilitation, isolation, and institutional care. The eight selected plays delve into a world that, in the absence of catharsis, as in psychotherapy, attempts to offer consolation and hope. At the same time, they are not so much a form of autotherapy for the authors as they are precise depictions of worlds in the wake of tragedy: worlds that yearn for renewal, for the establishment of new foundations, for the creation of a community at the site of its disintegration.

These plays critically dismantle the cruelties which led us to our current point in time—intimate and personal, no less than political and social. In them, individuals attempt to heal themselves, to reestablish relations with others and construct a shared place of consolation. In this way, the collection delves into the crux of the project out of which it originated. Here we encounter characters who want to tell their story and thus resist the power of oblivion; characters who are searching for conduits and bridges between one another, struggling through misunderstanding, barriers, and noise in communication, led by the foundational desire for encounter. Not infrequently, in a state of revolt and defiance—and despite trauma—they attempt to build a shared space of hope.

What else is the purpose of the stories that we stubbornly keep telling and, even more stubbornly, keep going back to, again and again?

Dino Pešut

Editor

MOTO – MEMBRA JESU NOSTRI

Eneko Sagardoy

Original text written in Basque (Euskara) and Spanish

Basque text translated into Spanish by the author

Translated from Spanish by Justin Peterson; revised by Tim Nicholson

Author's note

The roles of ENEKO and JOSU will be played by the same actor. In the original version of the play, ENEKO and JOSU speak in Basque and Spanish, respectively.

The cycle of seven sacred passion cantatas *Membra Jesu Nostri*, BuxWV 75 (1680) was composed by Dieterich Buxtehude (1637–1707).
Translated from Latin by Justin Peterson and Tim Nicholson.

0. WHEN A TREE FALLS

Beginning of cantata: **Ad pedes "To His Feet"**

"Behold, upon the mountains
the feet of one who brings good tidings
and proclaims peace."
Hail, salvation of the world,
Hail, hail, dear Jesus!
Thy cross would I truly
like to take up, Thou knowest,
Give me Thy strength.

when a tree falls you hear the first fan of leaves the whirlwind-fluttering of
hundreds of birds' wings first the longer branches, then the shorter ones
break when they hit the earth
the bones **and then the trunk hitting the ground the dull thud of one who rests for the first and last time**

The nails in Thy feet, the hard blows
and so grievous marks
I embrace with love,
Fearful at Thy sight,
Mindful of Thy wounds.

shortly after, unhurried
you hear leaves and branches still floating

in the air falling on top of one another

in a timid

echo

plaintively

as if unwilling to accept

their fate landing

Sweet Jesus, merciful God,

I cry to Thee, in my guilt

Show me Thy mercy,

Although unworthy, cast me not away

From Thy sacred feet.

and before you know it

an immense silence

the time of

the secret

at last

the fear over

the scurrying forest animals

that are not there, but the insects are

the flow of the river that seemed stagnant

and the crying of a naked child

"Ecce super montes pedes evangelizantis

et annuntiantis pacem."

Hail, salvation of the world,

Hail, hail, dear Jesus!

Thy cross would I truly
like to take up, Thou knowest,
Give me Thy strength.

End of cantata: **Ad pedes "To His Feet"**

1. THE ESTUARY

ENEKO: it all exploded overnight
when we met one Thursday night in the old quarter, no face masks
anymore I don't know how, but suddenly your mouth on my neck
my mouth on your ear on your neck
our names in a single phrase
Josu and Eneko Eneko and Josu

I didn't know this was possible Josu that everything would take fire and everything would spread like this
you and me you and me with a backpack and it would all be so real so big that it would take up so much like in a movie how soppy how exaggerated they said
what's wrong? it's love our first love
to meet each other was to quench our thirst to slake a thirst we didn't even know existed and what a thirst! if we swim in the estuary it will dry up we used to say
and we'll drink we'll become intoxicated like those duathlon swimmers but

that won't happen to us Josu

the ambulance won't come for us we'll drink we drank
and we could see the entire course of the empty estuary there side by side at least from Santurtzi to Bilbao
this land until now underwater is now a great road full of seagulls metals moss a highway we could cross on your motorbike a highway we could cross on your damn motorbike without fear or precaution or anything else because there in the distance there at the end is the wide open sea
a welcoming sea a merciful sea a sea I thought was infinite till I met you because after that it all seemed small
small because we we and this thing we had was so so big the biggest the widest the most infinite we used to text each other on whatsapp "forever together" because if you write it in English you can always say it was just a joke
forever together forever together with numbers like 4ever 2gether
all that nonsense oh please just kill me now what are we like but isn't it good? but what are we like
we met at full throttle Josu at 100 km per hour though there was something I don't know in what part of your body but there was something
a strange noise in the engine

that stirred me fear of an accident or a feeling of risk I could see you in slow motion however fast you moved
no that's all nothing Eneko but there was something a dry meadow that is about to burn
I'm tired Eneko I want to sleep I love you
but there was something a minefield though you still had all the parts of your

body I know your whole body by heart

Beginning of cantata: **Ad genua "To His Knees"**

your feet your knees your hands your side your chest your heart your face
but there was something torn off or torn from you like a tooth from a mouth
like a calf from a cow
there was something no longer in you or removed from you I noticed it why
didn't I say anything? why didn't I say anything?

sometimes the absence was so clear I never told you it was so obvious I didn't
want you to get defensive
or maybe it was fear Josu I didn't want to see for myself the destructive force
behind that void because you were speeding as fast forward as inward and
then I looked at you impressed but scared
as if that secret keeping that secret would protect you and in
protecting you it would protect us
just like the nails holding to the cross

"You will be brought to nurse
and dandled on the knees"

Hail Jesus, King of Saints
Hope of sinners' prayers,
like an offender on the wood of the cross,
a man hanging, true God,
Bending on failing knees!

What answer shall I give Thee,
Vile as I am in deed, hard in my heart?
How shall I repay Thy love,

Who chose to die for me,
Lest I die a second death?

Seeking Thee with pure heart,
Be my first care,
For it is no toil neither burden,
But cleansing and healing,
to embrace Thee.

"Ad ubera portabimini, et super genua
Blandientur vobis."

End of cantata: **Ad genua "To His Knees"**

2. BEAUTY

JOSU: the day your nephew was born we missed the train to the hospital to see him our faces reflected in the windows of the carriages moving off without us you say look Josu how beautiful our faces reflected in the windows and all I can see are the flowers we've bought withering
we just missed the train and you're enjoying our wilted faces in the reflections you think that's beautiful you say beautiful that ability of yours to transform everyday life into something inspiring
I ask "do you think a worker who misses his train perceives the beauty of his face reflected in the windows?"
no nooo he'll think fucking hell I missed the train I'm late

fucking Euskotren because Euskotren doesn't work for beauty Eneko
beauty is a story invented by privileged people what do I know
a fly that drowns in a cup of coffee how beautiful how cruel but how beautiful
a mountaineer who freezes to death 80 meters from the summit how
beautiful what a pity but how beautiful
the pollen in the spring look you can see it in the air and you sneeze and your
eyes shine all the brighter how beautiful how beautiful
it's not beautiful Eneko it's an allergy to mites and if you say how beautiful
again I'll throw myself on the tracks
seeing beauty is not a question of attitude of willpower no to have willpower
there has to be some hope
and hope is a thing for the privileged people those who remain intact
those who do not bleed those who do not remember those who have no
memory can see beauty more often and more intensely
and believe in it and believe in everything in general

ENEKO: when we got to the hospital the baby was bawling inconsolably
kisses flowers crying nurses Josu you're sitting still in a corner you're a rabbit
that's been placed in the lions' cage
want to hold him? my sister asked you I want you to say no because I see
you tremble
so weak so unknowing but you say yes you hold out your arms to the
newborn who keeps crying like you're offering him a bed you're so
handsome! and to everyone's surprise — yours too, I think Josu
you fall silent for a long time looking at the child so at ease you stroke the
baby's rosy little body from top to bottom
timidly at first like a pedestrian who doesn't know the city and then with all
your love his little feet the rolls of his thighs his soft little head

that movement of your hands is new to me your hands look newborn too
you staring at the baby the baby staring at you and little by little he settles
and so do you right now your eyes seem more alive than ever and it's not an allergy to mites
it's as if you understood the meaning of everything in this newborn baby
the jigsaw piece you were missing the peace you could not find a clear sky
your eyes have filled with tears as if you had taken from the baby the hospital
in silence everyone silent
the time of the secret

Beginning of cantata: **Ad manus "To His Hands"**

half embarrassed half surprised you said
he's so peaceful he's so peaceful he's so
peaceful how beautiful he is isn't he?

What are those wounds in the midst of Thy hands?

Hail, Jesus, good shepherd,
wearied in agony,
tormented on the cross
and nailed to the cross
by Thy sacred and outstretched hands.

Holy hands, I embrace Thee,
and, lamenting, I delight in Thee,

I give thanks for the terrible wounds,
the cruel nails, the holy drops,
mingling tears with kisses.

Washed in Thy blood
I wholly entrust myself to Thee;
may these holy hands of Thine
defend me, Jesus Christ,
in my last hour of need.

"Quid sunt plagae istae in medio manuum tuarum?"

End of cantata: **Ad manus "To His Hands"**

3. THE SECRET

ENEKO: the day we first saw my nephew we started watching a movie before dinner but I fell asleep when I woke up it was two in the morning and you were no longer by my side you
weren't in bed either but the shower was on
on my way to the bathroom I find your clothes on the floor stained with mud and smelling of petrol I tripped over the motorbike helmet it's in the middle of the hallway sometimes you take the motorbike and get away
normally to your summer home half an hour from Bilbao I knocked on the bathroom door Josu? where did you go? where have you been?
and all of a sudden I heard sobbing over the noise of the water from the tap a disconsolate cry

almost like a child's yes like a small child's eventually you opened the door for me and you're standing in front of me
amidst the steam naked dripping your eyes red
JOSU: I shouldn't have gone to see your nephew I shouldn't have gone
did you see how slowly he wiggled his fingers? as I looked at him
I thought I wish I could become a cave or a tree so that no one
could ever hurt him
and he could stay white tiny and innocent with those sweet eyes with that peace of mind so harmless but so willing and I thought here it is
here is everything they took from me

I come from the summer home I set it on fire well a little fire then I changed my mind and put it out it was a disaster but it was there that they stuck this arrow in my side

I'm naked but I'm in disguise look at my feet my knees my hands my side my chest my heart my face
my whole body is lying my skin and bones have spread so harmoniously that they appear to belong to me
but this whole body is lying if I stepped in the mud, my footprint would be that of a small child aged exactly 5 like this hand of mine that's still white tiny innocent holding an expectant trembling cutting
at my summer home I planted tomatoes and it was the most beautiful thing in the world tomatoes not like the ones in the supermarket not the perfect ones tomatoes so authentic you'd want to give them names

that's why I run away to my summer home because there I can perfectly feel my hand white tiny innocent

always those three words white tiny innocent in the moist fertile earth of the summer home now that was peace
my mother said you don't get this in Salou or Jaca or Benidorm the river the mountain the orchard and the sun
there's nowhere better than here and there was so much happiness
Eneko until the arrow happened until The Hairy Hand happened

when that happened those same three words white tiny innocent
became a drought condemnation barbed wire and I don't like them anymore
I don't like them because they wrap around my temple and feed the stain
a stain from the earth that is neither fertile nor moist nor summerlike earth
that tears that cuts that pierces me
earth that does not sustain me that plunges me swallows me and chokes me

earth that rots my hands that are no longer
white tiny or innocent because a bigger hairier hand
more powerful though more cowardly has covered everything since then
Eneko has covered everything

and I no longer want anything I don't want anything I'm 5 years old I pick all the tomatoes and throw them into the river that runs past the summer home so that the shame guilt and disgust are carried away with them so that the water turns red cloudy and stagnant
so that the adults notice and ask what the hell is wrong with this river with this kid why is this river so quiet this kid so quiet what is this river hiding this child hiding?

I didn't say anything and no one noticed one word would have been enough

or nails in my feet and immersing myself in the river
so that the fish floated up opening their mouths pleading for help screaming my name

Beginning of cantata: **Ad latus "To His Sides"**

if fish could scream that is
but if they could scream they would shout my name if fish could scream that is because fish don't scream
but neither do children when they don't know they should
a drowning child doesn't scream he just waves his little arms
it looks like he's dancing my he doesn't stop moving how funny how naughty
but I am a child I don't know how to scream I only know how to wave my little arms

"Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away,
my dove among the clefts of the rock, and the hollows of the cliff."

Hail, side of the Saviour,
in which the honey of sweetness lies,
in which the power of love is,
exposed, from which gushes the
spring of blood that cleans the soiled hearts.

Lo I approach Thee,
Spare me, Jesus, should I sin,
With humbled forehead
freely I come to Thee
to behold Thy wounds.

At the hour of death, may my soul
Enter, Jesus, Thy side

Hence dying may it go with Thee,
Lest the cruel lion seize it,
But let it dwell with Thee.

"Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea, et veni
Columba mea in foraminibus petrae, in caverna maceriae."

End of cantata: **Ad latus "To His Sides"**

4. THE ABUSE

JOSU: my body cringes when a deep breath a paralyzing breathing stalks me
and I don't know why
it's come then a familiar but unfamiliar hand familiar but unfamiliar strokes
my head and my neck reaches my belly closes the door
come here let's make a deal sit down he says
a warm feeling two knees under my little legs under my little bottom I look
away and observe reflected in the window my little pink body eclipsed by
another body neither as small nor as pink another larger body, its breathing
accelerating a motorbike at 100 per hour in its chest
and my heart parked does not drive does not know how to be driven
outside my cousins are laughing and playing there's a fair in town
and inside in this room a heart about to
be broken

The Hairy Hand advances slowly quietly friendly but persistent
come here stay still this is a game I go first
I look at the closed door I look I look I look open please open
The Hairy Hand's movements increasingly resemble those of a snake damp and strong slithering into my yellow and blue-striped t-shirt my swimsuit with giraffes and ostriches I didn't know you could enter a body like that that you could be entered like that
I just want to play hide-and-seek count to ten be the best and for nobody to find me and then take my yellow motorbike
throw myself on the ground at the summer home over and over again to cover myself in mud and clean myself forever
I pray I pray that none of my cousins steal my motorbike while I am quiet in this room as an arrow pierces my side
does this happen in Salou in Jaca in Benidorm? do children there stay quiet like this?

sometimes I think I'm making it all up remembering and believing in something so hidden is almost an act of faith but that's bullshit if only that's bullshit because
when the night falls when a child runs when summer, heat, or good luck comes or when someone loves me the pain becomes so real
it's as if I were bleeding from my feet knees hands side chest heart face
all of them so pretty I look at them I look at myself you're my only witnesses
you remember you remember these nailed feet these unformed knees these obedient unmoving sleeping hands
this side about to be pierced by an eternal arrow
I am 5 years old I wish there were a plastic bag over my head I wish there were a plastic bag from Eroski supermarket over my head

they'd say poor child he died young but he rested raped and suffocated with an Eroski bag on his head
people shocked horrified appalled the whole town taking recyclable bags to the supermarket that would be a good campaign against plastic
how can I say these things
this face that looks less and less like the face it could have been
this face that looks more and more like this room with stippled walls fuck like that door that seems to scream shut up kid what pain how it hurts shut up shut up kid shut up a pain I don't feel because it's unfamiliar a pain I don't feel because it's unfamiliar

but what pain how it hurts shut up shut up kid shut up that silence this silence this silence that I am this silence that has saved me and that has condemned me who decided on this silence and this memory so twisted so unfair
if memory can be fair if it were as easy to forget as to remember
at least to be able to fake dementia at least to enter the side of the child I was
let me be in you ah the child I was the child I am because everything else is an invention I don't know how to be here anymore
I can't tell pleasure from pain desire from sin I relive death the shadow the eclipse

and I ride on dangerous roads and then I race I race as fast as I can I spend a fortune petrol is two euros
but I race I race even if I want to go slow awkward new like on the little yellow motorbike at the summer home
at the summer home that saw me fall like a tree falls and I feel that my torso slow awkward new is still there

but then where do these fast heavy fierce branches grow from these branches that pierce me these branches that sprout dry without flowers without fruit that look like plastic

Beginning of cantata: **Ad pectus "To His Breast"**

I am a piece of furniture
if my name had two dots I'd be a piece of furniture from Ikea how terrible to grow dying to die growing for he that dies when he dies does not know that he has died but he who lives when he does not live knows that he is dead

"Like newborn infants,
long for the guileless milk of reason,
that by it you may grow into
salvation,
if indeed you have tasted that the
Lord is good."

Hail God, my salvation,
sweet Jesus, my beloved,
hail, breast to be revered,
to be touched with trembling,
dwelling of love.

Give me a clean breast,
ardent, pious, moaning,
an abnegated will,
always conforming to Thee,
with an abundance of virtues.

Hail, true temple of God,
I pray, have mercy on me,

Thou ark of all that is good,
grant me a place among the chosen,
rich vessel, God of all.

"Like newborn infants, long for the guileless milk of reason,
that by it you may grow into salvation,
if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is Good."

End of cantata: **Ad pectus "To His Breast"**

5. JOSU'S LAST RIDE

ENEKO: the steam has gone from the bathroom the whole house is full of mist

I hugged you tight not knowing for sure where the snake bit you but
determined to extract the venom

your body still smells of smoke and petrol before closing your eyes lying on
the bed you put your forehead against mine and you told me
I'm leaving in peace Eneko
where to? I asked and you left a long pause the time of the secret
sleep now
but when I awake you're not here

that was the last time I saw you it must have been around noon when they
said on the radio there'd been a motorbike crash

JOSU: I ride fast to the summer home that earth that scenery those meadows
I feel them like an answer to a question I could not even pry from
my tongue to the summer home to the summer home I would repeat
as a child
I wonder if I repeated it as insistently after what happened after The Hairy
Hand after that disaster to the summer home to the summer home it was
because of the swings and the sunsets and the crickets and the worms
the swims in the river the blackberries and the fire bull I don't know if I was
happy or just a child

the motorbike is loud I told you once this is the sound that most closely
resembles tranquillity peace oblivion with every acceleration the landscape
becomes more promising more whole more relevant
the broken lines are suddenly one uniform coherent line

I think of my life small and difficult though sometimes bright like when I
found you for a moment I take you on the pillion we ride along the estuary
bone dry from Santurce to Bilbao full of moss metals
seagulls those things we used to say a road full of
beginnings full of your body against mine of new
sweat together brave fast
give me your hand give me your hand till the night comes to me
forever together forever together all those things we used to say when you
knew how to love me

but I am depleted soil and depleted soil yields nothing I just want to go
back race back to the land where I was born where I died where I want to
disappear

I want everything to be make-believe again I want to go back to when I didn't know that life was also death
I want to go back to the land of summer to Nivea cream to my mother's arms taking me out of the water or putting me in I don't know
don't even think of asking anyone anything keep my horror so your tongue does not learn its language
gobble up my pain because if you show it it could multiply why talk why tell why ask why open your mouth your chest your side the secret dries me but sustains me
if I speak I will be a snake if you talk I will slither

don't talk stand firm because if you don't you'll tire out your feet your knees your hands your side your chest your heart your face

I'll rest now in a place where there will always be fish I will not rise again even after three days or three months
look for me in the rivers I'm going back to mine the one that saw me grow and shudder let it rock me until I disappear

Beginning of cantata: **Ad cor "To His Heart"**

forgive me Eneko forgive me someday you'll find it so hard to remember me that you'll forget me and that will be alright but don't forget that with you for a moment I believed everything could at last exist again

"You have wounded my heart,
my sister, my bride,
You have wounded my heart."

Heart of the highest king, I greet
Thee, I greet Thee with a joyous heart,
it delights me to embrace Thee
and my heart aspires to be
impelled to dare to speak to Thee.

Through the core of my heart,
sinner and culprit,
may Thy love be conveyed
by whom Thy heart was seized,
languishing through the wound of love.

I call with the living voice of the heart,
sweet heart, for I love Thee,
to incline to my heart,
so that it may commit itself to Thee
in the breast devoted to Thee.

"You have wounded my heart,
my sister, my bride,

You have wounded my heart."

End of cantata: **Ad cor "To His Heart"**

6. THE ARROW

ENEKO: there's a bunch of flowers on the guardrail between your summer home and the road they look like you I see you more than when I saw you

I expected thousands of pieces of glass on the ground in the air debris from the motorbike on the ground in the air
I even thought I would hear the sound of the crash

I have lain down in the meadow by the house it's dry no
insects no river only the place where the water was

I took a stone and threw it at a window in the summer home to see if a light would come on and you'd appear as if in a dream
but in the very instant the stone broke the window in the middle of the meadow

a fire started a huge fire I saw how the birds that had been asleep took flight once the glare of the fire faded
I realized it didn't burn and suddenly the fire split in two
clearly showing a path as I approach the fire fades and disappears
but its light is not gone it is as if the earth itself radiated light

it illuminates something I can't see clearly in the meadow that has not caught fire half-covered in leaves lying on the ground new your little yellow toy motorbike just as I bent down to look at it up close a muffled thud like when a tree falls

Beginning of cantata: **Ad faciem "To His Face"**

when a tree falls you hear the first fan of leaves the whirlwind-fluttering of hundreds of birds' wings first the longer branches, then the shorter ones break when they hit the earth
the bones as if unwilling to accept their fate landing
an immense silence the time of the secret the forest animals the scurrying insects the flow of the river that seemed stagnant
full of red water as if overflowing with tomatoes and the crying of a naked child

"Let Thy face shine upon Thy servant,
save me in Thy mercy."

Hail, bloodied head,
all crowned with thorns,
beaten, wounded,
struck with a cane,
the face soiled with spit.

When I must die,
do not then be away from me,
in the anxious hour of death

come, Jesus, without delay,
protect me and set me free!

I put my hands in your river Josu put your hands together feel
my knees feel how my sides swell seeing the shape of my face
your face
I love you I'll stay here in the earth our earth
with no surface no explanations no skin

but don't ask me to be quiet and give me that arrow that was driven into
your side I want to return it to that Hairy Hand that took your voice
and your life

When Thou commandest me to depart,
dear Jesus, then appear,
O lover to be embraced,
then show Thyself
on the cross that brings salvation.
Amen.

End of cantata: **Ad faciem "To His Face"**

About the Author

Eneko Sagardoy Mujika (Durango, 1994) is a multifaceted Basque actor, playwright, and director working in Euskara, Spanish, and English. With over twenty theatre productions, he has collaborated with directors Pascal Rambert and Calixto Bieito. His playwriting debut, *MOTO – Membra Jesu Nostri* (2022), commissioned by Teatro Arriaga, blends baroque music and contemporary theatre to explore beauty and the human condition. In cinema, his role in *Handia* (2017) earned him the Goya Award for Best New Actor; recent credits include *Irati* (2022) and Roland Emmerich's *Those About to Die* (2024).

About the Translators

Justin Peterson (California, 1969) is an award-winning American translator based in Madrid, with over 20 years of experience translating between Spanish and English. Bilingual and bicultural, he holds a BA in History from Washington and Lee University and an MA in Spanish Language and Literature from UNC Chapel Hill. His extensive literary work includes novels, non-fiction, and scripts for major productions such as HBO's *30 Monedas* and Netflix's *1992*. Peterson produced the initial English translation of *MOTO – Membra Jesu Nostri* by Eneko Sagardoy, originally intended for surtitling the production, which was subsequently revised by Tim Nicholson.

Tim Nicholson (Ireland) is a translator and linguistic adviser based in the Basque Country, holding a BA in History from Trinity College Dublin. In nearly four decades of professional experience, he has worked across an exceptionally wide range of fields, including screenplays—among them, the Netflix hits *The Platform* and *The Platform 2* and the Goya-winning *Birdboy*—art criticism, exhibition catalogs, philosophy, graphic novels, and theatre scripts, including *Calixto Bieito's Orgia*. Nicholson revised Peterson's translation of *MOTO – Membra Jesu Nostri*, producing the definitive English-language version of Sagardoy's text.

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Please contact: informacion@teatroarriaga.eus

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Please contact: informacion@teatroarriaga.eus

PIČMAN

Dora Šustić

Translated from Croatian by Vladislav Beronja

This text is a reconstruction of three conversations: the conversation I had with my father on February 14, 2023, at our kitchen table; the conversation, over several sessions, from February until October 2024, that I held with my therapist; the conversation with my father that never took place, though I wish it had.

This text is an attempt to not miss out on another chance for a conversation.

For the performance of the text, it is important that the audience be seated in a close circle around the stage and that the stage be occupied by two chairs, facing each other, one meter apart. It's important that there be contact with the audience. It's important that the performance last one hour and that it be subdued, so that the audience has the impression of eavesdropping on intimate conversations.

The text references parts of the book *The Suicidal Mind* by psychiatrist Edwin Shneidman and entries from Branko Čopić's diary.

(Gently, with love)

What's Saint Adrian texting you?

Nothing. He's being funny.

Did he wish you a Happy Valentine's Day?

Yep.

Want a glass of wine?

I'm good.

You should relax.

I don't feel like drinking.

Okay.

Adrian says it's snowing in Zagreb.

Where's he from?

Slavonia.

I don't believe you.

Okay.

You've always been with exotic guys. A Turk, a Palestinian. What's next, an African woman?

A Slavonian man, as it turns out.

What team does he root for?

I don't know, Dad.

He must be a bit of a dummy.

Why?

Well, he's with you.

I'm not sure what you mean by that.

You sure you don't want a glass of wine?

I'm going to sleep.

Stay up with me a bit longer.

I don't feel like it, Dad, I'm tired.

It's not even nine.

I'm cold.

Do you want me to turn up the heat?

No.

How's it going with that text of yours?

Which one?

Haven't you been working on something?

I have. I'm working on it now.

How's it coming along?

Slowly.

What I read was good.

Really?

Yes.

I revised the parts that you highlighted.

The part with the architectural drawings works well.

I ended up rewriting that.

It makes sense to show the blueprints over the voiceover.

That's not really the issue, that works.

Then what's bothering you?

The format. We don't get to find everything out in a single episode.

Write another episode, then.

Yeah, I'll have to split the material somehow.

Put the part with the drawings in the second episode.

Maybe.

The Belgrade Post Office is interesting.

It is. The second episode could then cover the Cultural Center project in Sušak.

You should also mention the Hotel Continental.

Why?

It's an interesting project. His idea was to build a parking garage underneath the hotel terrace, as far as I know. Nobody had seen anything like it at that time.

I could include it in the second episode.

Yeah. That way, you're not limited to just using exterior shots.

Exterior shots. Are we going to start talking in film lingo now?

I dabble in all sorts of things.

I can see that. Did you know he was in love with the painter Beba Vilhar? The mayor's wife?

I did not.

Some say this was the reason his project was stalled.

Because he was screwing the mayor's wife?

Dad.

Yes.

I didn't know that. That's good.

Yeah, it is.

So, you'd have someone play Beba Vilhar?

I don't know, it's up to the director. I'm only writing the script.

Too bad.

They'll probably show some archival footage.

And you wouldn't be the one directing it?

No.

It's your project.

I have to see what the production team says.

Screw the production team, Ena, this is your project.

That's not really how it works.

I know how it works with research projects.

I know you know.

You submit one hundred applications, and the hundred-and-first one goes through.

I know.

You work for years on a single project and then realize that you've been off the whole time—

And then it's back to the beginning, fuck it all and start over from scratch.

I know, you've told me this a thousand—

I know I told you, so what? I have to say something. (*a longer pause*) What interests you about this architect?

I'm interested in the circumstances of his death.

That is interesting.

I'll send you the new draft when I finish it.

Do that.

Just please try not to write in the document but open "Markup" in Word and put your comments in the margins.

I know what "Markup" is. What's the final title?

Zagreb, February 7.

No good.

Or *Pičman*.

Better. What's Adrian texting you?

Nothing. He's going out.

You in love?

I don't know.

What do you mean you don't know?

I just don't.

It should be obvious.

Well, it's not to me.

You are special.

Yes, I am.

With your mom, I knew right away.

Mom said that you avoided her for six months until she finally approached you.

I was scared shitless.

I'm being cautious.

You like him?

I don't want to fuck things up for myself.

You're no longer kids.

There's always some tension between us. Like, we both really want this to succeed.

Of course you do. The guy is 40, he's also tired of looking. Does he have kids?

No.

I had two when I was his age.

You're from another generation, Dad. Adrian lives with his roommates.

Does he at least have a job?

He's in a band.

No comment.

We're not that old, Dad. I'm 32.

That's half your life already.

And where are you according to that logic, deep in the grave?

I'm almost sixty, Ena. Where else would I be but deep in the grave?

You're 52. I party with people your age.

That's just sad.

You're not old.

I am old.

You're not old, you're just tired.

I feel old.

You're tired, and you don't feel like doing anything.

I feel like talking to you.

(A longer pause, Ena is silent.)

(Father continues.) I've just about had my fill, Ena.

Then go to bed.

I've had my fill.

(A longer pause.) I know. I can see it.

I'd like to slowly move on.

I think you just need something new, Dad. A change. You said you'd start writing.

I have a title.

And? I told you mine.

(Father is silent.)

So, what have you been working on?

Nothing.

A memoir?

It's far from a memoir.

You should write a memoir. A sentence or two every day.

We'll see how far I'll get.

Stop saying that.

Saying what?

Get where?

I told you I won't be around much longer.

I really don't feel like listening to this.

Then go to bed.

I just don't feel like having the same conversation with you every time. You've said the same thing a thousand times. Last Saturday, Mom was making crêpes, and you were talking about how suicide is a humane way to die. I mean, I don't get it, how are we supposed to respond to that? Mom told me that when you went to visit Grandma's grave, you said you wanted to be buried next to Grandma.

I do want that.

And what am I supposed to say to that?

Nothing, I'm just telling you. I won't be around much longer.

How much longer will you be around?

A year, maybe two.

You really are an asshole.

Is this how you talk to me now?

What about you? What do you expect me to say?

Nothing.

How would you feel if I told you, *hey, I'm not going to be around much longer, I'll off myself in a year or two, just letting you know*.

(Father laughs.)

It's not funny.

It is a little bit.

Answer me. What would you say to me?

You're not that stupid, I hope.

I'm not stupid?

Yes. You haven't done anything in life, Ena. That would be a stupid thing to do. You're young.

You just told me a second ago that I was halfway through my life.

I'm just saying that I'm exhausted and that my mind is on some other things.

What things?

I'm imagining what it's going to be like.

Death? Everyone does that. I do it all the time.

Fine.

There's nothing on the other side, Dad, you die, and that's it.

And how would you know? Have you come back from the dead?

Yes, I have.

Weren't you into reincarnation?

I was also into Harry Potter at one point.

Now it's just basic materialism?

Yes.

The body gets devoured by worms, and it's sayonara for you?

Pretty much.

What about the soul?

This is getting uncomfortable for me, Dad. I'm your daughter.

You can tell me whatever's on your mind.

No, I actually can't.

Damn it, Ena, I've had enough. You can do with it what you will.

Do you get how selfish this is? You're sick of being here with us.

You're the one who's sick of being here with me. We haven't had a normal conversation for two whole years. The whole time you've been glued to your phone texting with some morons, and you couldn't give a flying fuck about me.

That's not true.

I don't see how it's not. But that's okay, Ena, you have your own life, I don't want to be a burden.

You're not a burden.

I am. I'm a burden. I've had enough of this torture.

This is torture to you?

Ena, you are the love of my life. Everything else is torture.

(Pause.) I need you.

You don't need me.

I think you should go to therapy.

You've told me that already.

You should go then. Just to see what they're going to tell you.

And what are they going to tell me? *You are depressed, here take these two tiny pills, that'll be 50 euros, thank you and goodbye.*

Your problem is 50 fucking euros? Want me to lend you the money?

What are they going to tell me that I don't already know?

I don't know. You're not smarter than everyone.

Neither are you. Ever since you started therapy, all you've been doing is lecturing others. Your generation could be a little more grateful. Christ, if you'd lived through the same shit as we did, you'd be less prone to bullshit.

Yeah, that's why we're in therapy. Because your generation isn't.

I'm 60, kid, I think I'm a bit smarter than you.

You're 52, Dad. Guys your age still have kids.

Well, I'm certainly not having any more kids, since I can't even get it up anymore, excuse my language.

A specialist can help you.

With my erection?

(Pause, Ena is laughing. They look at each other with tenderness.)

Fine, so how are you going to do it?

With Grandpa's gun.

When?

I told you, two to three more years.

Before, you said a year or two. You've already postponed it. Where?

In a hotel.

The one where you worked?

That's where I got laid the first time.

Why don't you get help? Please get some help.

Nobody can help me. I've done my part.

And grandkids?

What about grandkids?

Aren't you looking forward to grandkids?

And where are the grandkids? *(A longer pause.)* Can you even imagine me with grandkids? In all honesty?

(Ena is silent. She lowers her gaze to her hands.)

Go to bed, my love.

I'm going.

I'll smoke another cigarette.

Okay.

Say hi to your Slavonian.

I will.

I love you.

Love you too. A lot.

I love you more.

You should go somewhere.

Where?

To Colombia.

Hmm.

You said you wanted to visit the birthplace of Márquez.

I want to, yeah.

You should go on a trip.

I can't sit in an airplane for fifteen hours, Ena. I'm fat.

Go to the gym.

Go to bed.

I'm going. Good night.

Are you taking the car tomorrow?

I'm taking the bus.

Why don't you drive? Your car has been parked in the same spot for months.

When I can park there for free.

You're letting that car go to waste.

I'll sell it.

You could also drive like a normal person.

I don't know how to park, Dad.

What do you mean you don't know how to park?

I forgot.

That's not something you forget.

Are you going to show me?

Adrian should show you.

Adrian doesn't drive.

No comment. Go to a parking lot and practice.

(She's in deep thought. A long pause.) Okay.

Do you want me to drop you off at the station tomorrow?

I'll walk.

I don't mind it.

I'll walk. Good night, Dad.

Good night.

(Father exits the stage. The female therapist sits down in his place—in his chair.)

How are you feeling today?

I was thinking on the way here what answer to give you.

And?

I haven't come up with anything.

What's your body telling you?

The thing with the heart has calmed down. I slept well all week.

How's the writing coming along?

Slowly.

You're still working on the same text?

Yes.

Are you going to make the deadline?

Well, it will be crap, but I'll make it.

Does that bother you?

I'm tense. The whole thing is pretty overwhelming.

What exactly?

This text. Pičman. I'd like to write something that's not only about him, that touches on a broader context without turning it into a manifesto. I think I'll fall into a trap, though.

What trap?

The trap of clichés. I'd like it to be somewhat poetic, but I don't know how to achieve that. I've never written a play.

Last week, it was a screenplay.

Now it's a play.

Maybe you should stick to what you know. Make it easier on yourself.

That's how I started: two characters, one conversation. Have you seen the Louis Malle movie *The Fire Within*?

I haven't. What's it about?

The main character gets out of rehab, though, at first, he doesn't want to leave because he thinks he'll start drinking again. Finally, at the doctor's insistence, he does leave, with a loaded gun in his possession, and spends the day wandering around Paris. July 23. Paris, July 23. He visits old friends: some of them have managed to get it together and now lead a settled life. One of them is writing a book about ancient Egypt. He has a wife and kids and has given up partying to devote himself to writing. While others are still getting wasted in their fifties and actually seem pretty miserable. Jeanne Moreau is one of them. Anyway, the main character has the same name as my dad.

And how does the movie end?

(Ena is silent.)

It's interesting that he has the exact same name as your father.

I guess so.

And now you'd like to write something in a similar style?

Yes. His final day.

Whose final day?

Well, Pičman's. It occurred to me to summon him.

Pičman?

Yes, like in the movies, with a Ouija board.

To summon him?

Yes. I watched an interview on YouTube with Helena Bonham Carter, and she did the same thing for her role in *The Crown*. She summoned Princess Margaret.

And what did she say?

Princess Margaret?

Helena Bonham Carter.

Well, she said it was really useful.

And where would you summon him?

In his apartment.

In Josip Pičman's apartment?

The apartment where he lived, yes, the one he jumped from. Ilica 17, fifth floor. It's an Airbnb now. Sixty euros a night. I thought I'd book the place during the full moon.

You're being serious?

It's just a joke. I don't know.

And what would you ask him?

I mean, I don't know how familiar you are with the story. In any case, Pičman, one of our most promising modernist architects, killed himself a day before he was awarded the funds for his big project, the construction of the Cultural Center in Sušak. A single day. If he had waited one more day, he'd have gotten what he wanted. He was simply tired of waiting.

What exactly are you trying to say?

I read somewhere that exhaustion is the only real reason for suicide.

Is that true?

Depression is the real reason for suicide. And the reasons for depression are many. What would you like to ask him?

I don't know. I haven't gotten that far in my text.

Let go of the text for a second. If he were sitting right here in front of you, what would you like to ask him?

… *(Ena's eyes are tearing up.)* …

Maybe you need a break from this project. Set it aside for a few months.

I don't want to set it aside. It's an important project for me.

We're always talking about projects.

We've talked about Dad a thousand times already.

And Dad is now the project. What are you feeling in your body?

Anxiety.

Where?

I'm quivering all over.

Is it a light or heavy feeling?

Heavy. I'm angry.

At him?

At myself.

Why?

I got wasted again.

You need to blow off some steam occasionally.

I'm not sure what I'm looking for out there.

Distraction?

Someone to talk to.

You're lonely?

I'm hungover.

And where is he in this whole story?

Adrian?

Your father.

I become unpleasant when I drink. I feel like getting into a fight with someone.

Something clearly wants to come out.

What idiot came up with the option to delete messages on WhatsApp? Adrian saw eight of my deleted messages.

Let's stick to your father today.

Why?

We talked about Adrian for six whole months.

Sometimes I think you just want to see me cry.

I do want to see you cry, yes.

That probably makes you feel like you're doing your job well.

You're right.

I cry when I'm alone.

In your room?

Yes.

And in front of other people?

No.

Even as a child?

Yes.

How did your father feel about crying?

Dad refused to go to the movies because he didn't want anyone to see him cry.

Did he cry often?

All the time.

In front of you?

In front of me, too. He cried during football matches. During *The TV Calendar*, whenever one of his favorite writers showed up. He cried whenever he talked about some book he liked, even if it wasn't particularly sad, and when he read my first attempts at writing, which were terrible and not at all sad. He kept an excerpt of my first published story in his wallet.

He was proud of you.

He was sentimental. He broke down in tears watching a video of our dog playing with a turtle.

And you, in front of him, did you cry?

He would send me to my room.

How do you feel when you cry in front of other people?

And you, how do you feel when you cry in front of other people?

I feel relieved.

I try to stay functional.

That must be exhausting.

Maybe.

What do you do when you're alone?

I look at photos of him.

What's he like in the photos?

Youthful. He is always youthful. In my memory, he's a young man. I make him look younger, to justify him, I guess.

Or to accentuate the closeness between you.

Twenty years old.

He was very young.

A 20-year-old. When I was that age, I was rolling on ecstasy in Berghain and living off scholarships. At 20, he'd just gotten a child and enlisted to fight in a war.

What are you trying to say?

That I understand why he felt like an old man at 50.

He said this to you?

But I had missed it somehow. I always saw him as a young man.

What was he like as a young man?

Handsome.

Describe him to me.

A wide smile, dark eyes, very long eyelashes, like on a doll. He was trim, an athlete, a sports fan. He liked to travel. He read an awful lot. He'd finish a David Foster Wallace novel in a single day. His eyes would be bloodshot from strain, and he'd still keep on reading. He was shy. He'd always trip up ordering food at restaurants, especially when speaking in a foreign language. He was terrible at foreign languages. He'd make up words. One time, we were in Spain, and he just kept adding -os at the end of all the Italian words he knew. The waitresses were dying of laughter. He would, in all seriousness, be recounting something or ordering food and then suddenly turn red when he realized they were laughing at him. Then he'd recount this as an anecdote from his trip, how he was able to find his way around in a foreign language, but he wouldn't admit how embarrassed he'd been. He'd often turn red when he didn't know something.

He was sensitive.

Very much so. He had jitters before every meeting. He'd shit his pants. Literally. He'd lock himself in the bathroom and wouldn't come out for hours. He'd be hiding from people in the bathroom. It's no coincidence that the bathroom is also where he killed himself. *(A longer pause.)* I don't understand.

Understand what?

Where did all this aggression come from? I mean, suicide is an act of brutal aggression toward one's own body. If he was capable of doing something

like this, then he was also capable of doing physical harm to others. But he wasn't an aggressive person. Or he was, I don't know. Clearly, this had been smoldering inside him. Actually, the whole idea of suicide—duels, shootouts, cowboys, knights, Russian roulette, Westerns—is a show of pure machismo... After all, it's mostly men who kill themselves.

You're intellectualizing.

Every time I mention patriarchy, you tell me I'm intellectualizing.

Well, when you are doing exactly that.

Those things are inseparable, right?

He was an emotionally wounded and sensitive man. You said he'd lost his father at a young age. He was a veteran. He was a successful doctor, a public figure, yet he always had to hide his wounds.

Actually, he was completely fucked up.

But he clearly knew how to show tenderness, if you felt it so much.

(Ena sinks into thought.)

What are you thinking about?

When I was 12, I got my first period. I was crying on the couch. He cut up some apples and cheese into slices and brought them to me on a plate with two toothpicks. Then we sat together and watched TV while skewering the apple and cheese on toothpicks. We were making little kebabs out of them.

You know that your father loved you.

Absolutely.

Do you know how rare that is in our society?

I do.

Do you write about him?

Writing is not therapy.

But it can have a therapeutic effect.

I don't know what I'd write about. I don't remember a whole lot.

Smell is helpful. Music.

I remember his face.

Where do you see him most clearly?

In the car. As soon as I sit in a car, I think of him.

Why?

He taught me how to drive.

Describe it to me.

I was terribly afraid of driving. I was 17, I'd just passed my driver's test, on the fourth try. I didn't want to drive. He went with me to a parking lot just above the city, and for hours we practiced parking, driving, especially hill starts. He was impatient, he had a short fuse, but he was persistent. He simply wouldn't let me go until I learned. And I did learn, but then I forgot because I hadn't driven for a long time. I'd left his car in some parking lot and... he washed it and cleaned it... for me. He'd always sneak some toy into the car. A knick-knack from the gas station. A raccoon or a squirrel stuffed toy. He knew I hated those pine air fresheners... He'd greet me at the train station with a bottle of water

and a coffee, and then we'd drive and talk. That's when we'd talk the most. Probably because we didn't have to look each other in the eyes.

Did he confide in you?

Too much, even. I kept his secrets from Mom. I still keep them.

And did you confide in him?

I did, yeah. We talked about everything. I mean, once I called him from a bathroom stall while I was taking a pregnancy test. I was sure I was pregnant. I was maybe 22 at the time. I had completely lost it, in a foreign country, still a student. I told him I wanted to have an abortion.

And what did he say?

You're neither the first nor the last.

And how did you react to this?

It completely calmed me down. I had the feeling I was a part of some larger experience, that I wasn't alone. Then later, he called me and told me I was retarded and that he would break the legs of that idiot who didn't know how to put a condom on his dick. Turns out, I wasn't pregnant after all.

He was a great resource for you.

I mean, I adored my father. We laughed all the time. We only had to glance at each other across the table to know something that nobody else did, neither my mom nor my brother. Mom was sometimes jealous of us. We had our own private language. He made me laugh. He knew how to listen to me, not toward the end, toward the end, he didn't listen to or see anyone but himself, but before, when he was younger, I would sit in front of him in the kitchen or in the

car and prattle for an entire hour without stopping, and he would listen to my monologue. He would ask me how I was doing. He'd notice when I was feeling down. He would say that I seemed nervous. That I was in my head too much. That I was thinking only of myself. Sometimes he'd guess what was on my mind, whether it was my career or love life. I don't know if it's just that we were similar, so he recognized himself in me, or that he had an incredible capacity to listen. Even though he didn't listen to Mom. I don't know. Sometimes I feel like he loved himself in me. He loved having a daughter.

He was interested in you as a person.

I think I started to separate from him when I started going to therapy. Because I no longer talked about my problems to him, but to you.

Because he was your problem. You were in a pretty bad state when we started, do you remember?

I remember.

You had to distance yourself.

Did I?

Yes, you had to.

Otherwise, you wouldn't have survived.

The American psychiatrist Edwin Shneidman says that language with a suicidal person has to be simple and direct. That the person who is hurting only wants that to be seen.

We all want that.

I never asked him that.

Asked him what?

Where does it hurt? I thought it was something that was assumed.

That's a therapist's job. Not that of a daughter. You were his child.

Ana was telling me about her friend who jumped from the 12th floor of a building. The girl fell on the cars parked in front of the building located like 20 meters from a playground. Ana had seen her a few days earlier in some restaurant with a big group of friends. When I asked her how she had looked, if she had noticed any signs, she told me there was no light in her. That's exactly how my dad looked when we last saw each other, six days before his death. He stood at the door of my room while I texted with my boyfriend. And he had somehow shrunken into himself, grown small. No light. That friend of Ana's had called her therapist a couple hours before she jumped. The therapist scheduled a session with her for the following day. She called Ana, too, but she didn't answer because she was at a shoot. What would have happened had she answered? I had a bad hunch. I was nauseous, I was feeling physically ill days before. I thought I had eaten something bad.

Everyone blames themselves, Ena, not only with suicide.

I could have texted him.

When?

More often.

Ena, your father did not tell you about his death because he expected help from you.

Then why?

To make it easier for himself. Once a person makes this decision, everything starts to fall into place inside his head. The drama of a suicidal person takes place exclusively inside his own mind. Everything becomes connected, everything tells him that he has made the right decision. The focus is so narrow that he doesn't see anything except for his plan. And then he starts to feel better. This elevates him, this feeling that he has a plan.

Fuck his plan. Why did I have to be part of it? I am his child. He could have told others, not only me.

You fulfilled his expectation. You did what he wanted.

Obedient daughter.

You didn't betray him, Ena, it's important for me that you know that.

How do you know? How do you know this, how do you know what went on in his head? We were close. We emailed each other, read each other's writing, I sent him my stories, and he sent me his articles for proofreading. We kept in touch every day, and then in the last few years, we just stopped, we didn't write to each other, we weren't in contact. We hardly ever talked. I was annoyed with him. He talked only about death. He drank. He became stupid when he drank, kept repeating himself. He was lonely. He was terribly lonely. He didn't have anyone to talk to about things that interested him, about books, about art, anyone except me. His friends were his drinking buddies. When I asked him why he didn't stop drinking, he told me he would lose all his friends. It's just so sad... how alcohol tied him to his friends. The friendships were only façades. How do you know I didn't betray him?

I don't, Ena. But you could ask him yourself.

Ask him what?

Well, that. If anything would have changed, had you texted him that day?

How do I ask him?

You'll imagine a conversation with him. I will get up and sit to the side. You'll imagine him in front of you in this chair and answer for him.

I don't know. This is weird.

Yes, it's weird. But you wanted a séance.

Yes, but not with Dad.

Whatever you wish.

Is he dead or alive?

It's up to you. Whatever you need him to be. He can be alive, if you want to tell him something that you didn't get a chance to say. Or he's already dead, if you want to talk to him about the suicide.

(Ena is thinking.) I want to, yes.

Shall we try?

Yeah.

At any moment, if it becomes too much for you, we will immediately stop.

Okay.

(The therapist goes and sits in the audience. Her chair remains empty.)

(This section is acted out slowly, with long pauses between replies.)

So, he is now here, sitting in front of you.

Okay.

Where are you?

In the kitchen.

What's on the table?

A wine glass and an ashtray. And my phone.

What's the lighting like?

Dim.

Outside?

Night.

What sounds do you hear?

Traffic. The television from the living room. The clock.

What time is it?

Eight in the evening. I finished watching a movie. He's home from work and has just had dinner.

What did he have for dinner?

Stuffed peppers.

What is he wearing?

Pajamas.

What color?

Blue.

What's his posture like?

Relaxed. His legs are crossed. A slipper hangs from his foot. He's smoking a cigarette. His other hand is twirling a wine glass by its stem.

How old is he?

Young.

What's his face like?

Gentle.

His eyes?

Smiling.

His scent?

He smells like snow.

(A long pause.)

What do you want to ask him?

I want to know the circumstances of his death.

Ask him. What do you want to know?

This is weird.

I know it's weird. But now is your chance to ask him whatever you've been wanting to ask, and he will respond to you.

Okay. I want to ask him...

I want to ask you...

I want to ask you... *(A long pause.)* How are you?

And what is his response?

Good. Better.

(A long pause.)

Do you want to ask him anything else?

Why that day? What had happened that day?

(A long pause.)

And what is his response?

Nothing. A day like any other. I'd just had enough.

(Ena poses the question to herself.) Had something happened?

(Ena answers her own question.) No. I came home from the night shift at the hospital. Took a shower. Had breakfast. Then I went out for a drink with a friend. We met up in a neighborhood bar. I walked the dog. Came back home. Went to the bedroom and pulled out the gun.

(Ena, to herself) But why that exact day?

(Ena, to herself) Why not?

(The therapist) If it hadn't been that day, it would have been some other. He simply wanted to go.

(A longer pause.)

Do you want to say anything else to him?

I learned how to park the car. To parallel park. I drive almost every day. But you already know that.

(A longer pause.)

Are you angry?

And what is his response?

No. I could never be angry at you.

(A longer pause.)

Ena?

Would anything have been different if I'd sent you a message that day? If you'd seen my message on your phone?

(A long pause.) And what is his response?

(Ena starts crying.) It wouldn't have.

(The therapist confirms.) Yes, it wouldn't have.

Too bad.

(Ena remains sitting in silence. She watches the empty chair.)

We'll have to wrap up soon, Ena. We can continue next time.

Okay.

How do you feel now?

Terrible.

What's your body telling you?

I have no idea.

Would it help to do a little grounding?

I'm grounded.

Is next Friday good for you?

Yes.

The same time?

Sounds good.

Then we'll make this your regular time for this month, okay?

Okay, yes. Friday afternoon.

It's 55 euros starting this week, did you receive my notification?

I did.

I'm sorry. Inflation.

All good. I have the exact change.

Perfect, thank you. Here's your receipt.

That's that, I guess, see you next Friday.

See you soon.

(Ena leaves the stage. The audience is left looking at the two empty chairs.)

About the Author

Dora Šustić is a Croatian playwright. She holds a BA in political sciences from the University of Ljubljana and an MA in screenwriting from FAMU Prague. She publishes short stories, poems, articles, and essays in Croatian, Slovenian, and English and works as a screenwriter and script editor in film and TV projects. Her debut novel, *Psi* (Fraktura 2023), translated into Italian and Slovenian, was awarded the Drago Gervais Literary Prize. Her drama *Pičman* received the Ministry of Culture's Marin Držić Award for the best dramatic achievement in 2025.

About the Translator

Vladislav Beronja is a literary translator, writer, and independent scholar based in Zagreb. He holds a PhD in Slavic Languages and Literatures from the University of Michigan and has taught at the University of Texas at Austin. He has translated novels by Slavenka Drakulić and Dino Pešut, among others. His work appears in international journals, and he is co-editor of *Post-Yugoslav Constellations* (2016).

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Staging rights: Dora Šustić
Please contact: dosustic@gmail.com

Translation rights: Vlad Beronja
Please contact: vladberonja@gmail.com

A MOON OF OUR OWN

Lon Kirkop

Translated from Maltese by Kat Storace

CHARACTERS

STEVE Thirty-five years old, official inside a drug rehabilitation center

NIK Thirty-five years old, resident inside the same drug rehabilitation center

STONEY Fifteen years old, resident inside a drug rehabilitation center for youth; Steve, 20 years ago

LYLE Fifteen years old, resident inside the same drug rehabilitation center for youth; Nik, 20 years ago

SCENE 1 – PRESENT DAY – NIK'S ROOM

(An empty space except for a single, iron-frame bed in the center, smartly laid with paper white sheets and a neatly folded pile of clothes.)

(The sound of a vehicle coming to a stop on gravel. The door opens and after a few seconds closes again with a slight bang. In the distance, STONEY can be heard quietly sobbing, not out of desperation but calmly, resignedly. The snap of a Polaroid camera.)

LYLE: What time are they picking you up tomorrow morning?

STONEY: Around nine.

LYLE: Let's sleep out here tonight.

STONEY: We'll freeze.

LYLE: Freeze? In May?

STONEY: It still gets damp, doesn't it?

LYLE: I'll hold you close all night, and you'll see how you won't feel cold.

(STEVE and NIK appear. STEVE is showing NIK around, trying to familiarize him with the place. STEVE is dressed in his smart uniform, dark blue jeans and a light blue polo shirt with a logo on the left chest. NIK is wearing heavy, baggy trousers, which are filthy and stained, especially at the knees, and a black t-shirt that's seen better days.)

STEVE: This is where you'll sleep.

NIK: *(His head down and his arms crossed, as if comforting himself.)* Great.

STEVE: There's some space opposite for you to store any personal items. We ask you to keep the door open as much as possible, except, of course, when getting changed or if you need some privacy.

NIK: *(Nods his head.)*

STEVE: That door leads to the so-called "bathroom," but it's actually just a shower and toilet. It opens onto the room next door, but there's no one in there at the moment, so it's all yours. You're lucky.

NIK: Very.

STEVE: *(He knows this moment isn't easy, so he tries to be a bit more humane and less officious.)* It's always difficult at the start, until you get the hang of things. Tonight, during dinner, I'll introduce you to the others – you'll soon start making friends and helping each other out.

NIK: I know. I know how these centers work.

STEVE: Our main concern here is your well-being. Our approach, this program's approach, is holistic and personalized to focus on the improvement...

NIK: As you yourself know, I've spent my entire life in and out of these centers. You can save your breath by not going over the things I've already heard a million times before in my life.

STEVE: *(Had it been the first time, he'd have been embarrassed by these words, but he was accustomed to these reactions by now.)*

As I was saying, you've got room to store your personal belongings. It's imperative that the roo...

NIK: As you can see, I've come empty-handed. I haven't got anything to put away.

STEVE: We're going to provide for you ourselves, Mr. Agius.

NIK: *(Smiles and looks into his eyes for the first time.)* Mr. Agius?

STEVE: *(Feels himself blush and turns his eyes away to look at the ground.)* Nik.

NIK: Do I have to call you Mr. Camilleri, or can I call you Steve?

STEVE: Whatever you're comfortable with.

NIK: *(Approaches him.)* Can I call you Sir? *(The emphasis on the word Sir is somewhat seductive, playfully mischievous.)*

STEVE: Steve is fine. As I was saying, it's important to keep the room spotless...

NIK: Did it make you uncomfortable when I came close to you?

STEVE: *(Feeling uncomfortable.)* Frequent checks are carried out, where the state of your room and your belongings gets reported on and noted down ...

NIK: *(Imitates him and circles the room with authority.)* "Is noted down in your profile and can determine the next steps in your therapy." As I said, I've heard these words a million times before, Steve.

STEVE: *(Continues as though Nik had never interrupted him.)* Dinner is at six. Obviously, you need to be there earlier if you're on kitchen duty. Have they told you which duty you're starting with?

NIK: Definitely not the kitchen, that's for the elites. No one wants scum like me sticking my grubby fingers into the food. For now, at least, until I get rid of some of the filth, inside and out.

STEVE: I'll have a word with Samantha for you...

NIK: She's already spoken to me, I'm starting in the garden.

STEVE: The garden, that's great.

NIK: Depends on how you look at it.

STEVE: Trust me, the garden's great. They're refurbishing the upstairs rooms at the moment, they could've sent you there. Believe me, you're better off planting and seeding than plastering, sanding, and painting.

NIK: That's where they were going to place me, but then they realized that the smell of paint might encourage certain... how shall I put it, certain memories that might trigger me. They were worried I'd end up spending my time with my head in a bucket inhaling that toxic smell until it went to my head.

(He starts approaching him again, as before.)

That's why they preferred to have me planting and seeding, although personally, I prefer mucking.

STEVE: *(Doesn't feel at all comfortable with him so close, not because of the foul smell on him, but for other reasons. He fixes his eyes on the ground again.)*

Dinner is at six...

NIK: You said.

STEVE: I'm reminding you.

NIK: And you're going to remind me, once again, where I should store my personal belongings, aren't you?

And I'm going to remind you, once again, that I've got nothing, I've brought nothing with me but the clothes I have on, as well as grime, and pain and horrific stories. And some memories, too.

STEVE: *(Wishes to say something to him, but he's lost for words.)*

NIK: Look at me.

STEVE: Nik.

NIK: *(Takes his face into his hands sweetly and lifts his eyes up to meet his.)* Why won't you look at me?

STEVE: I'm looking at you, aren't I?

NIK: Not like that, like before.

STEVE: I don't know what you're talking about.

NIK: Do you find me disgusting?

STEVE: *(Speaking mostly to himself, somewhat teary.)* I don't know what you're on about.

NIK: Hold me then? Or would you like me to wash myself first? Come into the shower with me and watch me, the way you would back in the day.

Or do you want to hold me like this, filthy? Maybe, who knows, though you've grown up and look like a completely different person, maybe you're still the same on the inside. Maybe my smell has the same effect on you as the smell of paint has on me.

(After a few moments lost in each other's eyes, NIK draws away and moves toward the bed. He examines the room with his eyes. STEVE remains fixed in place, distracted.)

NIK: *(Removes his t-shirt and holds it in his hand.)* Where shall I put this?

STEVE: *(Startles.)* What?

NIK: This, where shall I put it?

STEVE: If it's for throwing away, I've got a bag. Let me see where I left it. *(Roots around inside all his pockets and finally feels it in the last pocket he searches.)*

NIK: Well, I'm not hanging onto it, that's for sure.

STEVE: *(Starts trying to open it, but it happens to be one of those bags that seems to be sealed with glue.)* Where the hell is the opening?

NIK: *(Smiles and approaches him. He snatches the bag from his hands.)* Give it here, you're best off opening these ones at the corners. *(He hands it back and smiles at him.)* Here, see, done. *(He throws his t-shirt in it while Steve holds it open.)*

STEVE: Is this all you've got to throw away?

NIK: Now I've got the clothes you've prepared for me, I'm going to bin everything I've got on because it's all gross, and even if it hadn't been, I don't want to hold onto anything from before.

STEVE: I'll leave it here for you then, bring it with you when you come down for dinner, and I'll take care of it myself.

NIK: No need, give me a second.

STEVE: *(Tries to hand him the bag.)* No, no, there's no rush.

NIK: *(Takes a few steps away from him and starts removing his trousers.)* I'll just be two seconds.

STEVE: Jesus, Nik.

NIK: Jesus Nik, what?

STEVE: *(Turns away slightly so he isn't facing him directly.)* All good.

NIK: *(Takes off all his clothes and moves to throw them into the bag Steve's still holding.)* You can go now, I'll see you soon.

STEVE: *(Looks at him and glimpses lots of marks and bruises all over his body.)* Nik, those marks you've got...

NIK: The nurse has already checked me in the clinic. Nothing that won't pass.

STEVE: I'm sorry.

NIK: Why?

STEVE: For what happened to you.

NIK: I wanted them.

STEVE: Still, I'm sorry.

NIK: *(Faces him.)* You don't need to be. Or are you sorry you didn't cause them yourself?

STEVE: What are you saying?

NIK: You know what I'm saying.

STEVE: I thought you didn't recognize me.

NIK: How could I not recognize you?

STEVE: Because I've changed a lot.

NIK: You're still the same in my eyes.

STEVE: *(Laughs.)*

NIK: You recognized me immediately, I noticed. Your eyes still can't hide anything.

STEVE: Then maybe I haven't changed as much as I think.

NIK: *(Grabs a pair of shorts and a towel from the bed and moves toward the bathroom door.)* If you want to come in, like you used to.

STEVE: I'd better go, I've got stuff to do downstairs. And I need to get rid of these, too. See you at dinner.

NIK: As you wish.

STEVE: Nik. It's nice to see you again. As in, I wish we'd met under different circumstances, but at least if you're here, then I'm glad you've found me.

NIK: Found you? *(Feels the need to laugh because he isn't sure what reaction he should have. He isn't sure what he should feel.)*

STEVE: Aren't you glad I'm here?

NIK: If I'd known you'd be here, then I wouldn't have come. Your smell is worse for me than the smell of paint.

(NIK leaves, but STEVE remains there for a few moments longer, looking at the bathroom door as though NIK was still standing there naked in front of it. He moves toward the bed, hugging the bag with NIK's clothes in it and cries.)

SCENE 2 – YEARS AGO – IN STONEY'S ROOM

(An empty space except for a single, iron-frame bed in the center. STONEY is sitting on the bed, crying and cradling himself, wearing white shorts and a t-shirt. LYLE enters after some time. He's wearing light-colored overalls that are slightly smeared with soil, mainly at the waist.)

LYLE: Still here?

STONEY: Leave me alone, I don't want to talk to anybody.

LYLE: You're not going to do well in here with that childish attitude.

STONEY: And what?

LYLE: Try to get settled in as soon as you can. It all seems bad at first, but you soon get used to the place. I prefer being here to being at home, if I'm honest.

STONEY: I don't want to stay here.

LYLE: That's what they all say during the first few days, then you won't want to leave.

STONEY: I don't care how much time goes by, I don't want to stay here.

LYLE: We'll see.

STONEY: I told them I wouldn't do it again, I don't know why they've done

this to me.

LYLE: We all say we won't do it again, and most of the time...

STONEY: And why would you assume that you and I are the same?

LYLE: I mean, we've both ended up in here. It's likely that the reason why is either identical or very similar. Tell me, why are you here?

STONEY: None of your business.

LYLE: You arrived yesterday, right?

STONEY: Yes.

LYLE: Between us, it's not going to look at all good that you missed your first day of duty. That's why I'm here. They sent me to get you.

STONEY: Tell them I'm not coming. Tell them I'm sick. I don't know, that I'm vomiting or something.

LYLE: I can tell them that you're crying like a baby, too.

STONEY: Are you for real?

LYLE: What, so I'm meant to lie for you? I don't even know your name. I'm Lyle.

STONEY: What sort of a name is that?

LYLE: It's the family nickname. Actually, it's my grandfather's nickname. My mother's father. I never met him because he died before I was born. My mom, when she was still speaking to me, had told me that when I was born, I looked just like him, so she started calling me by his nickname from the very beginning. Between us, though, from the couple of photos I've seen of him, I don't think I look anything like him. I think it's more that my mom got it into her head to convince herself that I didn't come out looking like my father, who, according to her, had screwed her against her will when they'd barely been going out for one week.

What did you say your name was?

STONEY: I haven't told you yet.

(LYLE gestures that he's waiting for him to tell him.)

STONEY: Steve.

LYLE: Fuck, you're never going to believe it. My grandfather, the same grandfather my mother says I resemble, was called Steve.

That's right, isn't it, because it's Stiefnu. Isn't that what it is in Maltese? *(He's about to throw himself down onto the bed next to him.)*

STONEY: *(Stops him because he's soiled and will dirty his sheets.)* Whoa, whoa, stop there, you're filthy.

LYLE: Jesus Christ, it's not like I've got lice. God, you get grossed out easily. You'd freak out if you were to visit my mum's place, she's got so much dirt and rubbish. And the sheets haven't seen any love in years. Or at least, that's how it was when I left, though I can't imagine that in the eleven months I've been here, she's turned the house upside down and scrubbed it clean.

STONEY: You've been here eleven months?

LYLE: On the sixth of the month, when's that, tomorrow? Or in two days, anyway. Not that I'm counting, but it happened to be my little sister's birthday when I came here. *(Begins removing his overalls.)* Do you have any brothers or sisters?

STONEY: *(Catches him undressing and is taken aback.)* What are you doing?

LYLE: I'm taking this off so I can sit down next to you on the bed. I'm wearing shorts and a t-shirt, you know, I'm not going to sit here naked. *(He undresses and collapses next to him as though the bed were his own.)* Fucking hell, this mattress is comfier than mine. I'm going to start coming here to nap in the afternoon.

STONEY: How about you fuck off?

LYLE: *(Laughing)* Finally, you're coming out of your shell.

STONEY: *(Smiles too.)* Who do you think you are?

LYLE: Whoever you'd like me to be. Listen, let's find you a nickname then – you don't look like a Steve. Why are you here? I think it's good to find you a

nickname that matches your personality.

STONEY: I've already told you, it's none of your business.

LYLE: Alright, take it easy. Make something up then.

STONEY: Do what? So I'm meant to lie for you, I don't even know your name?

LYLE: *(Realizes he's pulling his leg.)* You're getting the hang of this, aren't you? Good, that's what I like to see. I'm Nik, Niklaus actually, but that's fugly, and those who don't call me Lyle know me as Nik. My star sign's Leo. As I've already mentioned, I have a sister who's younger than me. According to my mother, my father's a cunt, a fucker, and a swine. I've been here eleven months, and many say that I talk too much and love the sound of my own voice. What do you think?

STONEY: From what I've observed, you enjoy invading other people's space.

LYLE: Jesus Christ, all this because I lay down on your bed? What else?

STONEY: It's up to you.

LYLE: Anyway, after my mother had my sister, she sort of became messed up. I'm not saying she was a perfect mom before or anything, she was always a bit grubby, but after my sister was born and she got stuck with my sister's father, things got worse. She began drinking, smoking like a chimney, and taking drugs. I'd often get home from school and find them both wasted. I mean, it was better when they were both wasted, at least I wasn't subjected to their fighting or the sound of them fucking with the door open, or him pacing around the house in his underpants like he owned the place. When I was around thirteen, he started drip-feeding me alcohol. At first, it felt like he was forcing it on me, but it wasn't long before I started seeking it out myself. I used to feel good with him. I felt that I'd finally found the father I'd always wanted. In the evening, when my mom was wasted, and my sister had fallen asleep, he'd call me to join him on the sofa. We'd drink together like a pair of men. When he popped out to go to the toilet, I'd rush to prepare a line of whatever

he had on the small table by the sofa and sniff it quickly.

Very often, I'd fall asleep before him, there on the sofa. One time, I woke up and as I opened my eyes, just a crack caught him watching a blue film and jerking himself off. He noticed me and quickly slid his cock back into his trousers and flipped the channel immediately. From that day forward, I often pretended to be asleep so that I'd keep my eyes open just a slit in the dark and watch porn while he touched himself.

Anyway, I ended up a total mess. Every time I came across a trace of coke at home, I'd sniff it, and things got so bad that I was constantly crushing up paracetamol and polos at school, mixing them together and sniffing them. They didn't have the same effect as coke, but it was always better than nothing. As you can imagine, it wasn't long before I started floundering at school, both in my attitude and academically, until they discovered me in the courtyard one day, taking a line while I was supposed to be in a French lesson. And that's how I ended up here.

Do you know me well enough now?

STONEY: You ended up here because you've had a difficult life. I've ended up here through my own arrogance because I wanted to rebel.

Because when you've got everything, you want to do the only thing they forbid you to do.

Let's just say they caught me many times with weed.

LYLE: Aaah, yes, you shifty little stoner.

STONEY: *(Laughs.)* Oh, shut up, idiot. Don't you dare start calling me that!

LYLE: Stoner, mmm, not bad. But not exactly right. How about Stoney?

STONEY: How about you fuck off?

LYLE: That's it. Stoney. Oh, come on, Stones, it's always better than Steve, ugh.

(STONEY lies down next to him, and the two look up at the ceiling, smiling. As

though finally, they've found someone they could be themselves with.)

STONEY: *(A little bit shy about what he's about to ask.)* Listen...

LYLE: Tell me.

STONEY: When your mum's boyfriend watched blue films, what was he watching exactly?

LYLE: Please don't tell me you've never watched one.

(STONEY shakes his head.)

LYLE: *(Gets up and stands on the bed because his enthusiasm has sent shockwaves throughout his body.)* I'm gonna blow your fucking mind!

SCENE 3 – PRESENT DAY – IN THE CENTER COURTYARD

(Nik is sitting down smoking a cigarette and lapping up the final few rays of sunshine of the day. He doesn't know how he's feeling. He wishes to leave because he knows it's pointless for him to be there, he knows it won't be long before he falls back into being who he was before. He's already starting to feel the craving within himself to intoxicate his body, undress, and throw himself into a room illuminated only by neon lights and to allow God knows how many men to do whatever they want to with his body until they satisfy themselves.)

STEVE: *(Enters and sits down by his side with a small bag in his lap.)* I've brought you something.

NIK: *(He had barely noticed STEVE coming out and sitting down beside him, thigh pressed against thigh.)* What is it?

(STEVE hands him the bag.)

NIK: *(Takes the bag without knowing exactly whether to thank him and accept it, or to refuse it.)* I think we're not supposed to have anything of our own in here besides the basics, am I right?

STEVE: *(Smiles at him because he finds him cute. He smiles at him instead of kissing him.)* Let's just say that when you're "me" in here, you get to bend the rules a little bit.

NIK: If I start breaking the rules from the off, I don't think I'll survive exceedingly long in here.

STEVE: Oh, come on, it's only small. I know what I'm doing.

NIK: *(Opens the bag and takes out a Polaroid camera. He feels happy and wants to cry, even though his face remains expressionless. He wants to cry not because he now has a Polaroid, but because after all these years, Steve still remembers.)* Oh my God, I don't know the last time I used one of these.

STEVE: Do you like it?

NIK: Thanks.

STEVE: You've got two films in the bag. Do you still know how to load them?

NIK: *(Takes out one of the films and starts taking it out of the box to load it into the camera.)* I can even load you with them, if you like.

STEVE: *(Feels himself blush, it still has the same effect on him when he talks dirty to him.)* Come now. I'll bring you some more films later on.

NIK: Do you give everyone who comes here a gift like this?

STEVE: Obviously not.

NIK: I didn't know I was so special.

STEVE: Everyone here is special in their own way, Nik.

NIK: But not everyone gets presents from you.

STEVE: Don't make such a fuss about it. It means nothing.

NIK: Nothing?

STEVE: *(Realizes what he's referring to and doesn't reply.)* Go on, are you going to

load that film then and take my photo, or what?

NIK: *(The camera's ready now to start taking photos.)* I'm done, I'm done. Come on then, strike a pose.

STEVE: *(Feels shy.)* I'm not posing, we're not kids anymore. Take a natural one.

NIK: Oh, come on, but give me some kind of pose because you look weird like this.

STEVE: Thanks, eh.

NIK: Come on, Stones, Madonna.

STEVE: *(Becomes serious when he hears him call him "Stones." No one else calls him that. For a moment, he'd forgotten this. A silence falls between them. The two stare into nothing to avoid each other's eyes.)*

NIK: Thanks.

STEVE: It's just a little thought, really.

NIK: For remembering. Time passed, and you still remembered. *(Nik catches him staring and takes his photo. The sound of the film processing startles Steve.)*

STEVE: You see, I didn't need to pose.

NIK: *(Takes the photo from the camera and fans it about to help it develop, like they used to do before.)* Let's see if I managed to catch you looking cute.

STEVE: *(When he sees him waving the photo, he approaches him swiftly and snatches it out of his hand.)* No, no, you don't need to fan these like the old ones.

NIK: I had no idea. Why?

STEVE: Because, apparently, they don't make them using the same chemicals as before, and you can damage these new ones. Leave it face down and wait.

NIK: I didn't think you were so invested.

STEVE: Oh, it's my daughter, she's obsessed with them…

NIK: *(Taken aback that he has children. Could it be?)*

STEVE: *(Realizes he's taken aback when he mentions his daughter. He's been careful until now not to mention his family.)* These won't take long to develop because

they're black and white.

NIK: I didn't know you had kids.

STEVE: One.

NIK: Huh?

STEVE: I've got one daughter.

NIK: That's still kids. Are you married?

STEVE: Oh, come on, Nik.

NIK: What's so wrong with me asking? With us talking?

STEVE: You and I are supposed to talk about your life, about how you've ended up here again and not about my personal life.

NIK: *(Hurt by his words.)* Wow. About how I've ended up here again.

STEVE: That's not what I meant.

NIK: It doesn't matter, that's the worst thing anyone's ever said to me.

STEVE: Honestly, that's not what I meant.

NIK: Sure, okay.

STEVE: This is why I didn't want to tell you anything.

NIK: Tell me what?

STEVE: About my family.

NIK: Why not?

STEVE: If you could see yourself right now, you'd understand why.

NIK: Understand what? What would I see? What can you see?

STEVE: How you changed when I mentioned my daughter...

NIK: ...I haven't changed, though.

STEVE: ...Your face, the way you're behaving. I know you much better than you think. I know what all this means.

NIK: Oooh, what do you know...

STEVE: Now you're going to go on the defensive and scrutinize every word for something to cause a fuss over. And with that stubborn head of yours, you

know where all this leads.

NIK: Things have changed, everything's changed. I've changed, too, you know.

(STEVE laughs because, in his eyes, Nik was still the same exact person he knew before.)

NIK: You've changed, too. You've grown up, become a man. You've overcome life's struggles and...

STEVE: You think that just because I have a daughter, I've overcome life's struggles?

NIK: You know what I mean.

STEVE: No, no, I don't.

NIK: I'm talking about our struggles. The ones we spoke about, you and I, God knows how many times all those years ago.

STEVE: Those struggles don't mean anything anymore.

NIK: Because you're married to a woman? You really think that this way, your desires...

STEVE: Nik, I'm married to a man.

NIK: *(Feels like he's dying on the inside. To a certain extent, he'd accept if he were with a woman, he had no reason to be jealous, but not a man.)* Lucky.

STEVE: *(Feels offended but doesn't respond.)*

NIK: Him, I mean, to have you.

STEVE: And I, him.

NIK: Do you love him?

STEVE: What a question.

NIK: A simple one.

STEVE: Of course, I love him.

NIK: As much as you loved me?

STEVE: We were just kids.

NIK: I loved you.

STEVE: We were just kids.

NIK: I still love you.

STEVE: You don't know what you're saying. Time's passed and now I'm...

NIK: You're married to the man of your dreams, you have a daughter together, the perfect life...

STEVE: —

NIK: May I see them?

STEVE: Nik, even though you and I ... you and I, in here, we have to keep our relationship as...

NIK: I only asked you to show me a photo of them, not to fuck me up the ass.

STEVE: Knock it off, Nik.

NIK: *(Realizes that next to his husband and daughter, he was nothing. Maybe all those years ago, yes, but not today.)* I'm off to my room, I'm not having dinner tonight. You can hang onto the camera.

STEVE: *(Stops him from leaving. Takes out a Polaroid from his wallet.)* Jesus, Lyle, stop.

NIK: *(Stops when he hears him call him Lyle. He still remembers everything, too. He turns and glimpses the Polaroid in his hand.)*

STEVE: Here, take it.

NIK: *(Approaches and takes the Polaroid into his hand. He stares at them, his daughter was lovely, and his husband was... attractive and looked like a good person.)* Your daughter's very sweet. So is ... what's his name?

STEVE: David.

NIK: Been together long?

STEVE: Eleven years. I met him by chance, I think it was destiny.

NIK: My own destiny can't stand me.

STEVE: Don't say that, Nik, God willing...

NIK: What God, Stones? What God? How did you two meet, anyway?

STEVE: I had a blind date with some guy. We were meant to meet by the sea, at St. Thomas Bay, and he left me waiting there like a dick with my feet in the sand and my sandals in my hands. And instead, there he was, by himself, spread out on a towel staring up at the moon. His eyes sparkled as they fixed on it. He reminded me...

(NIK feels small knowing he'd reminded him of himself. Back in the day, they'd spent long hours looking at the moon. His jealousy soon turned into anger toward the person who'd not only taken his love from him, but had also taken the moon, which should've belonged to only them. He handed the photo back to him.)

STEVE: He reminded me of you.

NIK: —

STEVE: Christ, I can't stop thinking about you. I'm crazy about you.

NIK: I haven't done anything.

STEVE: I'm not saying that you have. I don't even know what I'm doing at the moment. I thought I'd forgiven myself, I thought that, after all this time... Have you forgiven me?

NIK: I could kiss you.

STEVE: *(Wants to, but decides he won't let him. Because of David, because of his daughter.)*

Don't say that, Lyle.

NIK: Why not?

STEVE: Because you know I want to.

NIK: One kiss.

STEVE: I can't.

NIK: One.

STEVE: No, not here, Lyle.

NIK: Here is perfect ... Look up, the moon's come out to gaze down at us. Maybe this moon above us right now belongs just to the two of us.

(They kiss.)

SCENE 4 – YEARS AGO – IN THE CENTER COURTYARD

(STONEY is shirtless, sprawled out on the floor, and LYLE is standing over him, taking his photo using the Polaroid from above.)

LYLE: Don't move because I haven't got many photos left in this film, and it's my last one.

STONEY: Relax, I'll tell my mom, and she'll bring us a few more films.

LYLE: *(Takes his photo and throws himself down on the floor by his side, fanning the photograph for it to develop.)* Let's see how you turned out.

STONEY: Good obviously.

LYLE: Oh my God. You've really started to feel yourself, haven't you? And here they all say that I really feel myself, but they really don't know you at all.

STONEY: I'm cold out here.

LYLE: Oh, come on, let's stay a bit longer. I love watching the sky.

STONEY: I really don't know what you see in them.

LYLE: What?

STONEY: The stars.

LYLE: They fascinate me. And today, look at the moon, it's so beautiful.

STONEY: *(Starts getting up.)* I'm going in, I'm freezing.

LYLE: *(Stops him.)* Stop there, will you? Here, take my sweater. *(Removes his*

sweater and passes it to him.)

STONEY: And you?

LYLE: The cold doesn't bother me.

STONEY: *(Puts on the sweater.)* Hey, listen, when are we going to watch another one, huh?

LYLE: A blue film?

STONEY: Yes.

LYLE: You enjoyed it, didn't you, you swine.

STONEY: Well.

LYLE: I mean, I've only got one tape, and if we're going to lock ourselves in the TV room in the middle of the night, we're going to have to watch the same one.

STONEY: Where are we going to get a different one?

LYLE: Why don't you ask your mother to bring us a couple of new ones along with the Polaroid films?

STONEY: Very funny, idiot.

LYLE: Well, if we want to have a good time, we can always use our imagination and have fun just the same.

STONEY: It's not the same.

LYLE: We can have even more fun than that if you like.

STONEY: What do you mean?

LYLE: You know what I mean.

STONEY: I'm not like that.

LYLE: *(Turns to face him and places his hand on Stoney's belly, wanting to touch him.)*

Like what? It's between us. When we were jerking off during the blue film, I saw you looking at my cock as I was about to come, and you're always walking in on me when I'm washing or changing, it's never bothered you.

STONEY: That's not the same thing.

LYLE: Can I kiss you?

STONEY: No.

LYLE: Why?

STONEY: Because I'm not a fag like you, maybe?

LYLE: And does it make a difference to you that I'm a fag?

STONEY: No. I don't think so. But the others are always talking about you.

LYLE: The others can talk all they like, they can suck my cock. You don't want to kiss me because you don't want to, or because you don't want the others to talk about you the way they talk about me? Have you ever dreamt of me?

STONEY: What's that got to do with anything?

LYLE: Have you ever dreamt of me?

STONEY: Yes, but it doesn't mean anything.

LYLE: Have you ever dreamt that we were messing around, or anything like that?

STONEY: Oh, cut it out, will you?

LYLE: Have you ever?

STONEY: Yes.

LYLE: And woken up with a stiffie?

STONEY: I always wake up like that.

LYLE: *(Grabs his cock and feels it hard in his hand.)* Like this?

STONEY: I'd like to, but I'm scared.

LYLE: Of what?

STONEY: That if we do it, then it makes it real. Until now, it's just a doubt in my mind. If we go so far, that doubt will become a reality.

LYLE: I want you, Stones. I want you to do to me the things we saw in the film.

STONEY: To kiss you and...

LYLE: More than that.

STONEY: More how?

LYLE: I want you to hit me and pull my hair while you're kissing me and shoving

your cock inside me...

STONEY: Are you for real right now?

(LYLE kisses him, and although at first STONEY doesn't reciprocate, he cannot resist the desire he feels for him.)

STONEY: Is the photo done?

LYLE: *(Laughs.)* Let me check. *(Grabs the photo from the floor and looks at it.)* Look how cute you are.

STONEY: *(Snatches the photo out of his hand.)* Let me see. Not bad.

LYLE: How are you feeling?

STONEY: What do you mean, how am I feeling?

LYLE: Now you're officially a fag.

STONEY: *(Feels embarrassed by his words.)* Shut up, will you. Carry on looking at the moon you love so much.

(LYLE lies back down, looking up at the star-filled sky, filled with the moon in between them. STONEY lies down beside him after some time, and it isn't long before he turns to face him and holds him in his arms.)

STONEY: Lyle, I want it too.

LYLE: You want to kiss me?

STONEY: Not just that.

LYLE: Tell me, what do you want to do to me?

STONEY: I don't know exactly.

LYLE: Like in the film?

STONEY: Well, I wouldn't mind it.

LYLE: Shall we go to my room?

STONEY: Why not here, under the moon?

LYLE: Here? And if they catch us?

STONEY: That's the risk, it's exciting.

LYLE: Then do whatever you like with me.

SCENE 5 – PRESENT DAY – IN NIK'S ROOM

(NIK is curled up on the bed, not feeling well. He knows his days in there are numbered. Besides the fact that his previous cravings have gotten worse, not better, there's Steve, too. He wants him too much.)

STEVE: *(Enters but keeps his distance. It's best if he doesn't get too close.)* Nik, you can't stay here.

(NIK doesn't move. He doesn't want to look at him, he doesn't want to talk to him.)

STEVE: Everyone has off days. The therapist's told you many times that you'll have bad days.

NIK: I've had enough, Stones.

STEVE: Doesn't everyone feel they've had enough sometimes?

NIK: No. I'm leaving.

STEVE: *(Feels upset because he knew that this day would come eventually. He isn't surprised.)* What did you say?

NIK: *(Sits up on the bed but doesn't look at him.)* I'm leaving. I can't stay here.

STEVE: *(Moves toward him, sits, and takes his hand in his.)* Come on, Nik, be brave.

NIK: *(Jumps up. He doesn't want to be brave, he wants him.)* I don't want to. I don't want to be brave. I don't want to keep on fighting. I'm going to give in, Stones, I'm going to give in.

STEVE: It's a shame, you were doing so well. Even in the report...

NIK: Lay off that fucking report, Steve. There's a gaping sea between the words written down on a piece of paper and what's really going on inside me. On

paper, they write down what I tell them myself. If what I say isn't what I'm feeling, the report is fucked.

STEVE: But why? Maybe the program isn't the right one for you? That's not a problem, the program can be adapted and changed according to the individual's needs.

NIK: There's nothing wrong with the program, Steve.

STEVE: Later today, during your session, tell her what you're telling me now. Tell her the truth...

NIK: I can't...

STEVE: No one's going to judge you here, you know that.

NIK: What will I tell her, that I don't want to stay here because of you?

(A heavy silence falls between them.)

NIK: I have to leave, it's better this way. For you and for me.

STEVE: You don't know what you're saying.

NIK: I know what I'm saying. I've joined a million of these programs. I get better for a while, then I fall back off the wagon. As long as I'm in here, I find a way to control myself, but as soon as I'm back out there, what will I do? How long am I going to go on feeling alone? How long will it take for me to succumb and make a phone call, and for what I want to find me easily? A few drops will revive me.

STEVE: You don't have to.

NIK: Yes, I do, Steve. It gives me life. When I'm on it, I can fulfill my desires and not feel dirty and rotten. Sex without chemicals no longer means anything to me.

STEVE: *(Moves very close to him, his face to his, wanting to kiss him and so much more than that.)* You know that's not true, when we were...

NIK: We were just kids.

STEVE: Maybe we can be the same kids we were before to each other.

NIK: We can't, Steve, we've lost what we had. Look at you and look at me. You're a married man, a father, you've got a career... And me? I'm nearing forty, and I've got nothing.

STEVE: I love you, Nik, don't leave.

NIK: You can't.

STEVE: *(Kisses him.)* I can.

NIK: *(Pulls back.)* I can't, then I can't after you've managed to get to where you've gotten, to drag you down into the muck with me.

STEVE: You're not going to drag me down anywhere.

NIK: You don't know what you're on about.

STEVE: Maybe I want to be dragged down into the muck with you.

NIK: I told you, you don't know what you're on about.

You think that all I want from you is a stolen kiss? Or for you to hold me the way you would for nights on end under the moonlight?

Do you want to know what I want from you, Steve?

STEVE: *(Doesn't respond. He looks at the ground because he can't bear to look at him.)*

NIK: I want you to start drugging me, and when I'm high, up there with the angels, I want you to use me, to fuck me like you're an animal, to pound me black and blue, to tie me up and bring other men to fuck me and for you to watch them loading me up like a pig. That's why I've ended up here. How many times have you asked me?

This is the reason. When I had to start whoring around to earn some money, I started taking G—cheap, accessible—and just a few drops would transform me. Before G, whenever I had rough clients, they'd hurt me and make me sick. But on G, I want them to rough me up even more.

STEVE: Stop.

NIK: No, Steve, if you really want me, then you have to take me as I really am.

With all the rest who've used me, with all that I am today.

If you think the moon still means anything to me, you're mistaken. You can keep your moon and savor it with your husband and your daughter.

STEVE: Leave my family out of it, they've got nothing to do with any of this.

NIK: Your family has everything to do with this, Steve.

When some weeks ago you let me taste you again, I was a fool to think that... I don't know, I thought you and I...

I don't even know what I thought. But what the fuck did I expect, that you'd leave them for me, a piece of shit like me?

The next day, you came asking how I'd got on with the Polaroid camera you'd just given me. I thought you'd come back to kiss me, to touch me, to continue where you'd left off the night before under the moon. But you did nothing but talk about them.

STEVE: You were keeping your distance from me. You didn't want me.

NIK: What choice did I have, Steve? What choice have I got? To break up everything you've built these past few years?

STEVE: You're not going to break anything up.

NIK: Of course, you come here, and we make love, travel back twenty years. So then, in the evening, you go back home to your family, and it's like I don't exist. I'm not ready to share you with them.

STEVE: You're not going to be shared with anyone, Nik. It'll be you and me, just you and me.

NIK: If I had to tell you to choose, between me and them, who would you choose?

STEVE: You can't ask me that.

NIK: Better not answer, right? So let me answer for you. You'd choose them. You think I blame you? You think I'd hate you for that decision?

STEVE: *(Moves very close to him, speaks to him in a low and broken voice.)* You

don't know who I'd choose.

NIK: Even if you wanted to choose me, I wouldn't let you. *(Pushes him.)* I've got too much guilt in my life, I'm not going to add the weight of your family to it. I'm not ready to break you and your family. I'm not ready to fuck up your daughter's life and for her to end up in my position twenty years from now.

STEVE: *(Starts undressing.)*

NIK: What are you doing?

STEVE: It's my life, I make my own decisions. *(Moves closer and grabs him roughly by the hair.)* Isn't this what you want? *(He grabs him by the neck with the other hand and starts kissing him.)* Where do you want me to bruise you?

NIK: *(Feels himself melting in his arms. He feels like he's back twenty years ago. He drops his trousers and exposes his backside.)* Wherever you want to, Stones. Do whatever you want with me.

(STEVE turns NIK around and continues taking off his trousers himself. He pushes him onto the bed face down. STEVE approaches him, drops his trousers down to his knees, spits on his hand, wipes it on his cock, and climbs onto him.)

SCENE 6 – YEARS AGO – IN THE CENTER COURTYARD | PRESENT DAY – IN NIK'S ROOM.

(NIK and STEVE are sleeping on the bed in each other's arms, their clothes in a pile on the floor.)

(STONEY and LYLE are in the yard in the light of the moon. STONEY is standing up, wearing boxers, and he's putting on a top while LYLE is sitting bare-chested on the

floor in a pair of short shorts, studying the bruises on his body.)

LYLE: Look at this pair of marks on my arm.

STONEY: You wanted them.

LYLE: I'm not complaining.

STONEY: *(Sits down beside him and kisses his bruises.)* They're beautiful.

LYLE: I don't want them to fade. They'll remind me of you when you're not here.

STONEY: Don't remind me.

LYLE: I told you you're not going to want to leave.

STONEY: I wish they'd kept me on a bit longer.

LYLE: You're lucky you're leaving. Now make sure you steer clear of any shit. I don't want to see you back here, got it?

STONEY: Got it. Except to see you.

LYLE: To see me, is that all?

STONEY: Well, and if your bruises have faded, then I can give you a couple of new ones.

LYLE: Bruises are going to start reminding me of you.

STONEY: So now it's not the moon, is it, that reminds you of me?

LYLE: That too. The moon, the bruises, this place. Everything reminds me of you.

STONEY: One day, we'll look back on these times and laugh at the childish shit we got up to in here. Can you imagine?

LYLE: What?

STONEY: Growing old together, having kids.

LYLE: And how are we making those kids in your view?

STONEY: Oh, I don't know. What's wrong with dreaming?

LYLE: You talk about the future as though it's already ours.

STONEY: It could be ours, if we make it that way.

LYLE: *(Kisses him.)* Don't abandon me when you leave, I want to keep seeing you.

STONEY: I won't. I promise.

LYLE: Oh yeah, let's see. You'll meet someone, marry her, and then we'll see whether you still want to see me.

STONEY: I don't think marriage is for me.

LYLE: Even if it's me you're marrying?

STONEY: *(Laughing.)* I can just see you walking into the church wearing a veil. *(They laugh and kiss. They lie down in each other's arms.)*

LYLE: You see how you weren't in here for long? You arrived long after me, and you're leaving ahead of me.

STONEY: I'm leaving because my parents told them they're going to keep an eye on me 24/7.

LYLE: You're leaving because you've made huge progress.

STONEY: That too.

Have they told you when you're leaving?

LYLE: I'm not in a hurry. I worry that if I leave and go back to my mum's, it won't be long before I end up back in here.

STONEY: *(Searches his surroundings for the Polaroid.)* Where's the camera?

LYLE: Here, next to my top.

STONEY: *(Gets up and grabs the Polaroid camera.)* Pose, let me take your picture.

LYLE: It's usually me who takes your photo.

STONEY: Come on, so I can keep it, to remember you by, so I won't forget what you look like.

LYLE: They say the first thing you forget is the voice.

STONEY: I'm sure I won't forget yours, you talk at a million words per second. Go on, pose for me.

LYLE: *(Puts his hand on his shorts.)* Do you want me to get it out for the photo?

STONEY: Stop messing around. A decent one. *(LYLE poses, and STONEY takes his photo. He puts the photo on the floor, turns the Polaroid to face himself, and takes a*

photo of himself. He puts this photo on the floor and passes it to him.)

STONEY: This is for you, a souvenir to remember me by.

LYLE: I'd prefer one of your cock though.

STONEY: *(Laughs because he enjoys it when they talk like this.)* Do you want one?

LYLE: Don't worry, I've got one. I've taken some while you were sleeping. *(They lie down in each other's arms again.)*

STONEY: Be careful they don't find them while they're carrying out checks on you, nutjob.

LYLE: Oooh, like I'm bothered.

STONEY: I'm going to miss you, Lyle.

LYLE: Me too.

STONEY: Oh well, it's only for a bit, right?

LYLE: We'll see.

STONEY: We'll soon start going to the beach together, what do you reckon?

LYLE: *(Dryly, because he knows that none of this will happen.)* Yeah.

(NIK slowly gets out of bed without waking STEVE, puts on the clothes lying on the floor, and looks at STEVE for a moment while he's sleeping. He takes the Polaroid camera STEVE'S given him, lifts the sheet off him and takes a photo of his naked body. He puts the photo into his pocket. He turns the camera on himself and takes a photo. He covers STEVE with the sheet again, leaves the camera and the photo of himself by his head, kisses him, and leaves.)

LYLE: What time are they picking you up tomorrow morning?

STONEY: Around nine.

LYLE: Let's sleep out here tonight.

STONEY: We'll freeze.

LYLE: Freeze? In May?

STONEY: It still gets damp, doesn't it?

LYLE: I'll hold you close all night, and you'll see how you won't feel cold.

STONEY: Every evening, I'm going to start going up to the rooftop and looking up at the sky, at the moon.

LYLE: You've taken to it, haven't you?

STONEY: It reminds me of lots of nice things.

LYLE: Like the number of times I sucked you off out here under the moonlight?

STONEY: Oh, cut it out, idiot. Promise me?

LYLE: What?

STONEY: That every evening you'll go outside, wherever you are, whoever you're with, and that you'll spend a few moments looking up at the moon.

LYLE: Yes, and I'll think of you.

STONEY: The years will pass by, and it'll be our tradition. Both of ours. And if on some night, when we're old, you look up at the moon and I'm not beside you, close your eyes and think of me, of these moments, and smile for the beautiful times we spent together. And if we're still in each other's lives, hug me and hold me in your arms like you're doing today, and we'll spend the entire night admiring our very own moon.

About the Author

Lon Kirkop is a Maltese novelist, playwright, and multidisciplinary artist. His work often explores themes of identity, social media, queerness, and the blurred lines between personal and public life. In 2021, Kirkop published his debut young adult novel *Mitt Elf Isem Ieħor: HappyVeganGirlJules*, which won the Literary Contest of Novels for Youth. As for his plays, after debuting at the Cospicua Short Play Festival in 2019, he went on to publish *Fil-Ħajja li Jmiss u Drammi Oħra tat-Triq*, which won the National Book Prize for Drama and earned him the Best Emergent Author Award in 2023.

About the Translator

Kat Storace is a Maltese editor, publisher, and literary translator from Maltese into English. She holds an MA in Publishing from the Oxford International Centre for Publishing. She has worked in numerous publishing roles in London, principally at Faber. She is a co-founder of Praspar Press. Her first full-length translation *of what will it take for me to leave* by Loranne Vella was shortlisted for the Society of Authors TA First Translation Prize. Her translations have appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation, The White Review Writing in Translation Anthology*, and *Hotel*.

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Staging rights: Lon Kirkop

Please contact: lonkirkop@gmail.com

Translation rights: Kat Storace

Please contact: kat@praspar.com

THE DONKEY AND THE STONE

Lluïsa Cunillé

Translated from Catalan by Dustin Langan

CHARACTERS

OLD WOMAN (age 75)

RECEPTIONIST (female, age 22)

TRAVELER (male, age 45)

FATHER (age 60)

BROTHER (age 25)

POLICE OFFICER (female, age 50)

(The scene is divided between a guest room and the reception area of a two-star hotel. The RECEPTIONIST and the OLD WOMAN are in the guest room. The RECEPTIONIST is standing, and the OLD WOMAN is sitting in an armchair in front of a television with the sound off. A crutch is leaning against the armchair. In the room, there is also an upright piano with a bench, a chair, a floor lamp, a folded wheelchair in the corner and a pillow on the floor. At the start, the only light in the room comes from the television.)

OLD WOMAN: What is it?

RECEPTIONIST: You called me.

OLD WOMAN: Well, it took you so long that now I can't remember why.

RECEPTIONIST: I couldn't come until everybody had left.

(Long pause.)

OLD WOMAN: So there's no one left at reception?

RECEPTIONIST: No. Nobody. *(Pause. She approaches the OLD WOMAN.)* Would you like me to take you to your room now?

OLD WOMAN: Not yet.

RECEPTIONIST: Then I'll turn on the light. *(She turns on the floor lamp.)* Just let me know when you want to go up. *(She starts to leave the room.)*

OLD WOMAN: Won't you sit for a little while?

RECEPTIONIST: I can't leave reception unattended...

OLD WOMAN: Didn't you just say that everybody had left?

RECEPTIONIST: Someone could come in or call in the meantime.

OLD WOMAN: You can hear the doorbell and the phone from here.

(Pause. The RECEPTIONIST sits in the chair.)

RECEPTIONIST: Wouldn't you rather watch a movie?

OLD WOMAN: I've already seen them all. Besides, I like watching all these people together.

RECEPTIONIST: What about the sound?

OLD WOMAN: I like watching all these people, but not listening to them.

(Pause. The RECEPTIONIST's cell phone rings.)

RECEPTIONIST: I'm sorry.

OLD WOMAN: Go ahead and answer it.

RECEPTIONIST: *(Looking at her cell phone.)* It's my father. I'll call him back later. *(She locks her phone and puts it away.)*

OLD WOMAN: How is your father doing?

RECEPTIONIST: He's fine.

OLD WOMAN: Is he working?

RECEPTIONIST: He's getting by.

OLD WOMAN: Do you still live with him?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

OLD WOMAN: I guess my son doesn't pay you enough for you to move out.

RECEPTIONIST: I don't want to move out.

OLD WOMAN: Do you want to live with your father forever?

RECEPTIONIST: No, not forever.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Do you miss your mother?

RECEPTIONIST: Of course.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: What did your mother do?

RECEPTIONIST: She sold fish.

OLD WOMAN: Ah, right. You told me that once. She had a stall at the market...

RECEPTIONIST: She worked at the market, but she didn't own the stall.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: And what was her closet like?

RECEPTIONIST: She kept her closet in the front hall. She only used it for her work clothes. She could wash her clothes every day, but they still stank of fish.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Did you help her sell fish?

RECEPTIONIST: She didn't want me to.

OLD WOMAN: She didn't want your help?

RECEPTIONIST: She wanted me to study instead.

OLD WOMAN: So did you?

RECEPTIONIST: My brother and I studied English and French on our own. We got degrees in English all by ourselves without ever going to a language school.

OLD WOMAN: I didn't know you had a brother.

RECEPTIONIST: I told you when we first met.

OLD WOMAN: Really? I don't remember that.

RECEPTIONIST: He's older than me.

OLD WOMAN: Does he live with you?

RECEPTIONIST: No. He's in the army.

OLD WOMAN: He's a soldier?

RECEPTIONIST: He also studies telecommunications. In fact, he joined the army to get a degree.

OLD WOMAN: Is he married?

RECEPTIONIST: Not yet.

OLD WOMAN: Do you mean that he's engaged?

RECEPTIONIST: No. He's not engaged.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Do you want to get married?

RECEPTIONIST: I've never really thought about it.

OLD WOMAN: How old are you?

RECEPTIONIST: Twenty-two.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Do you want to have children?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Do you like working at night?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes...

OLD WOMAN: But you must miss going out at night with your friends... Or don't you have any friends?

RECEPTIONIST: I do, but many of them have moved to other countries.

OLD WOMAN: I had to go abroad too, when I was young. People shouldn't complain so much. Everything used to be much worse than it is now. When my mother was little, she had to hide in a closet to read a book because her parents thought that reading was a waste of time. And my mother's mother could never go out alone. Can you see where I'm going with this?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

(Pause. The OLD WOMAN suddenly looks uncomfortable.)

OLD WOMAN: Could you hand me that pillow?

(The RECEPTIONIST picks the pillow off the ground and helps the OLD WOMAN to put it behind her back. Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: Are you all right?

OLD WOMAN: Yes.

RECEPTIONIST: Would you like a glass of water?

OLD WOMAN: No need.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: Would you like to go up to your room?

OLD WOMAN: I suffocate in that room.

RECEPTIONIST: It's bigger than this one, and it has a window.

OLD WOMAN: And that cross?

RECEPTIONIST: Excuse me?

OLD WOMAN: Why do you wear a cross?

(The RECEPTIONIST is wearing a necklace with a little cross.)

RECEPTIONIST: It was a gift.

OLD WOMAN: Are you a believer?

RECEPTIONIST: A believer? No. I wear it because I like it.

OLD WOMAN: But do you know what it means?

RECEPTIONIST: The cross? I think so.

OLD WOMAN: You think so?

RECEPTIONIST: You don't want me to wear it at work?

OLD WOMAN: Me?

RECEPTIONIST: Has your son said anything about me? Is he going to fire me?

OLD WOMAN: Fire you?

RECEPTIONIST: I get new resumes at the reception desk every day.

OLD WOMAN: My son runs the hotel. You'll need to ask him.

RECEPTIONIST: Your son hasn't been to the hotel for days. He doesn't come at night.

OLD WOMAN: How many days?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: I speak with him every night on the phone. Do you want me to say something?

RECEPTIONIST: No. It's okay.

OLD WOMAN: Do you have his number?

RECEPTIONIST: Excuse me?

OLD WOMAN: Do you have my son's telephone number?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

OLD WOMAN: So call him.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: I was thinking about writing him a note tonight and leaving it on the desk in his office.

OLD WOMAN: His office is open?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes. He never locks it.

OLD WOMAN: Then he must not keep anything valuable in there. Otherwise, he'd lock it so that neither of us would be able to snoop around in there.

RECEPTIONIST: I never open his office door.

OLD WOMAN: Then how do you know it isn't locked?

RECEPTIONIST: Everyone knows.

OLD WOMAN: Everyone?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes. Everyone at the hotel.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Now I know why I called you earlier... I want you to go get me two packs of cigarettes. *(She takes some money from a coin purse that she pulls out of her handbag and sets it on an arm of the armchair.)*

RECEPTIONIST: Does your son know that you smoke?

OLD WOMAN: My son doesn't mind if I smoke a couple of cigarettes in my room with the window open.

RECEPTIONIST: So why don't you ask him to bring you cigarettes?

OLD WOMAN: Because he never remembers anything. And now he seems to have forgotten that he has a hotel. At least he still calls me every night, for now.

(The OLD WOMAN checks her cell phone. The shouts of football fans are heard coming from the street. They are getting louder and louder. Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: I should go back to reception.

(Pause. The RECEPTIONIST stands up.)

OLD WOMAN: Don't forget to go buy me cigarettes.

RECEPTIONIST: I can't just pop outside and leave reception unattended.

OLD WOMAN: Just go to the corner store. It'll only take a moment.

RECEPTIONIST: And what if it's closed?

OLD WOMAN: They don't close until twelve.

RECEPTIONIST: A lot of stores closed early today because of the football match.

OLD WOMAN: There's bound to be one open around here... What's going on with you tonight?

(The RECEPTIONIST takes the money and leaves the room. At the reception desk, the RECEPTIONIST hesitates about leaving the hotel. The TRAVELER appears in front

of the glass door to the street. The RECEPTIONIST removes the bolt lock and opens it. The TRAVELER enters the hotel, and the RECEPTIONIST hands him the key to his room while they speak. The beginning of their conversation is inaudible due to the shouts coming from the street.)

RECEPTIONIST: ...Would you like us to wake you at a certain time tomorrow?

TRAVELER: No, that won't be necessary. Thank you.

RECEPTIONIST: I hope you rest well. Good night.

TRAVELER: Good night. *(He checks his cell phone.)* Would you mind if I sat here for a moment? There's no coverage in my room.

RECEPTIONIST: All the rooms in the middle of the building have coverage problems. I'm sorry. If the hotel weren't full, I'd change your room to one facing the outside.

TRAVELER: It'll just be a moment.

RECEPTIONIST: You can stay as long as you like.

(The TRAVELER sits in an armchair in the reception area while the RECEPTIONIST organizes something, then leaves through the door behind the reception desk. Long pause. The landline phone on the desk rings a few times. Finally, the TRAVELER gets up and answers the phone.)

TRAVELER: Hello? (...) She's not here right now... (...) Yes, I'll tell her... (...) Good night. *(He hangs up the phone. Pause. The RECEPTIONIST enters.)* Your father called.

RECEPTIONIST: My father?

TRAVELER: On the phone... I'm sorry, but since it didn't go to voicemail, I took the liberty of answering it.

RECEPTIONIST: I'm sorry that I didn't get here in time.

TRAVELER: Your father said he wants you to call him back as soon as you can.

RECEPTIONIST: Thank you.

(The TRAVELER keeps looking at the RECEPTIONIST, who looks like she has been crying.)

TRAVELER: Are you all right?
RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

(The TRAVELER sits back down, and the RECEPTIONIST remains standing, not quite sure what to do, until she picks up the phone and hangs it up again. Pause.)

TRAVELER: Does your father live alone?
RECEPTIONIST: No. I live with him.
TRAVELER: I live with my father, too.
RECEPTIONIST: Ah.
TRAVELER: But we never speak to each other. Not in the house and not even on the phone. Though I did write him a letter once.
RECEPTIONIST: To your father?
TRAVELER: I wrote it out by hand and explained my point of view about us. *(Pause.)* Do you want to know what it said?
RECEPTIONIST: Yes...
TRAVELER: *(Reciting from memory)* "Dear Father: Once, not long ago, you asked me why I was afraid of you. I didn't know what to say, as usual, partly because of my fear of you and partly because there are too many details on which this fear is based.

You think that things have pretty much gone like this: you've worked hard all your life, sacrificing everything for your children and especially for me. As a result, I've had an easy life. I've had the freedom to study whatever I wanted, and I haven't had to worry about making a living, nor have I had any serious problems.

You've never asked me to thank you for anything, but at the very least, you have expected some closeness or some expression of sympathy. Instead, I've always avoided you, locking myself in my room and entertaining crazy friends with extravagant ideas. I have never had an open and honest conversation with you. I have never known what it means to take care of a family, and I have never been interested in your business or in any of your affairs.

And if I summarize how you judge me, it seems that you don't reproach me for anything awful or particularly bad—just coldness, distance and ingratitude. And you reproach me as if it were my fault, as if with a mere shift of the rudder, for example, I could have changed the course of everything, whereas you are not to blame for anything, except for having been too good to me…"

I don't remember what came after that, because the letter was really long.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: Did your father answer you?

TRAVELER: I never sent it to him in the end.

RECEPTIONIST: You didn't send him the letter? *(The TRAVELER shakes his head no.)* Why not?

TRAVELER: Because he wouldn't have understood. Does your father understand you?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know…

TRAVELER: How about your mother?

RECEPTIONIST: My mother died seven years ago.

TRAVELER: I'm sorry to hear that.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: Why do you still live with your father?

TRAVELER: I haven't always lived with him. But for a while now, I've had no

choice but to accept his charity until I find work.

RECEPTIONIST: What do you do?

TRAVELER: I'm an actor. In fact, the letter I just recited to you is from a play in which I performed a few years ago. It's the only monologue I've ever done as a professional actor.

RECEPTIONIST: You mean you didn't write that letter to your father?

TRAVELER: You'll have to forgive me. I thought you wouldn't believe it and that maybe it would make you laugh. I'm used to theater audiences who don't take anything seriously anymore—not even the most authentic or the most exquisitely recited lie.

RECEPTIONIST: Well, I believed the whole thing.

TRAVELER: Really?

RECEPTIONIST: Really.

TRAVELER: I'm sorry. I hope I haven't upset you.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: Have you come to town to perform?

TRAVELER: I've never performed here. I don't even know if there's a theater in the area.

RECEPTIONIST: There's one in this neighborhood. I went there to see a play once.

TRAVELER: Just once?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes, with school. It was a long time ago.

(The OLD WOMAN accidentally drops the television remote control on the floor.)

TRAVELER: Actually, I came to audition for a movie, though it didn't go very well.

RECEPTIONIST: Which movie?

TRAVELER: I don't even remember the title. But I must have the scene I had to do somewhere around here... *(He searches in his coat pockets.)* Or at least I had it... I must have misplaced it...

My character was a vampire who worked as a doorman in an apartment building and sucked the blood of everyone in the neighborhood at night. I don't know what else was going on because they only gave me this scene to perform.

RECEPTIONIST: *(Faintly)* It was a horror movie?

TRAVELER: Excuse me?

RECEPTIONIST: I asked if it was a horror movie.

TRAVELER: Horror? I guess so. *(Pause.)* Do you like horror movies?

RECEPTIONIST: Some of them.

TRAVELER: Do you ever go to the cinema?

RECEPTIONIST: Not really.

TRAVELER: Aren't there any in the neighborhood?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes, but with my work schedule, I'm always tired, and I don't have time for anything—not even for studying.

TRAVELER: What do you study?

RECEPTIONIST: Right now? Nothing.

TRAVELER: Nothing?

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: I started studying law three years ago, but in the first year, between studying and working, I saw that I wasn't getting anywhere, that I wasn't making progress, so I had to quit. But I want to go back to it because it's what I like the most.

TRAVELER: Law?

RECEPTIONIST: Being a lawyer.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: I played a lawyer once.

RECEPTIONIST: In a movie?

TRAVELER: No, on television. I was an alcoholic lawyer in a series.

RECEPTIONIST: Which one?

TRAVELER: That was a long time ago.

RECEPTIONIST: I might have seen it.

TRAVELER: I'm sure you hadn't even been born. Anyway, I don't remember the title. I don't even remember my character's name.

RECEPTIONIST: Have you played any other roles on television?

TRAVELER: A few. But they were always supporting roles. I'm the best supporting actor on television in the last twenty years.

RECEPTIONIST: Have you won any awards?

TRAVELER: They don't give awards for supporting roles on television. They only give them to the leading actors.

RECEPTIONIST: I didn't know that.

TRAVELER: Tell me the name of the first supporting actor on television that comes to your mind right now.

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know... I don't have a very good memory.

TRAVELER: Well, if you're going to be a lawyer, you'll need to have a good memory.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes, I know.

TRAVELER: Just like an actor.

RECEPTIONIST: Anyway, I don't watch much TV these days. Before, though, I never missed a single series or film about lawyers or court cases. The ones I still like the best are 12 Angry Men and To Kill a Mockingbird. Have you seen them?

TRAVELER: Of course. But those are really old.

RECEPTIONIST: I've seen them both over fifty times.

TRAVELER: Fifty times?

RECEPTIONIST: Or nearly fifty.

(The OLD WOMAN rings a bell with the help of the crutch leaning on the chair she is sitting in. The bell can be heard at reception, but neither the RECEPTIONIST nor the TRAVELER seems to hear it.)

TRAVELER: I played a role in 12 Angry Men when I was still doing amateur theater.

RECEPTIONIST: Which role?

TRAVELER: I was the man who wanted the trial to end quickly so he could go see a baseball game.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes, that's jury member number 7, one of the nastiest characters of all.

TRAVELER: You think he's nasty?

RECEPTIONIST: You don't? He's the first person who wants to sentence the defendant to death, just so he can get to the baseball game on time and not waste his ticket.

TRAVELER: You seem quite sure about that.

RECEPTIONIST: Sorry?

TRAVELER: Maybe he acts that way out of fear.

RECEPTIONIST: Fear?

TRAVELER: Fear of getting involved in anything more serious than baseball. Deep down, the character is weaker than he is perverse.

RECEPTIONIST: Really?

TRAVELER: Lawyers and actors defend the same weaknesses in the world, don't you think? The difference is that actors do it on stage, in fiction, and

lawyers do it in real life. The audience is ultimately responsible for acquitting or convicting the characters, just like a judge or a jury does in a trial.

RECEPTIONIST: If I ever become a lawyer one day, I won't defend just anyone, not even for all the money in the world.

TRAVELER: And who would you defend?

RECEPTIONIST: Anyone who really needs it.

TRAVELER: Everyone needs to be defended at some point.

RECEPTIONIST: But to defend someone, to stand by their side with conviction, to the end, you really have to believe in their cause.

TRAVELER: Whatever that cause may be?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes, of course. *(Pause.)* I'm not a lawyer yet, and here I'm already talking like one.

TRAVELER: You'll be one soon.

RECEPTIONIST: I'm not so sure about that.

TRAVELER: Why not?

RECEPTIONIST: Almost all my friends and people I know have gone abroad to study or work, but I've never moved from here or done much of anything.

TRAVELER: You're still very young.

RECEPTIONIST: I'm not that young. I'm older than I look.

TRAVELER: How old are you?

RECEPTIONIST: Twenty-two.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: What's your name?

RECEPTIONIST: Me? Laura.

TRAVELER: Is your name really Laura?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes. Why?

(Pause. The TRAVELER glances at the street.)

TRAVELER: Look around you, Laura. What do you see? A world full of vulgar people! All of them were born, and all will die! Which of them has one tenth of your virtues? Or of my own? Or of anyone else's? Each individual stands out in some way from the rest... Do you understand? Well, some even stand out in more than one way. Take me, for example.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: You?
TRAVELER: I thought you weren't listening to me. Were you really listening to me?
RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Did you know that you're different from every other young woman I've ever known? Does it make you uncomfortable that I say that? I'm serious. I feel something like... I don't know how to put it. I usually express myself quite well. I wish you were my sister. I would teach you to have confidence in yourself. You don't have to be ashamed of feeling different. Because the rest of the people aren't that wonderful. There are hundreds of thousands of them, but you are unique! They walk all over the Earth. And you stay here... They're as vulgar as... weeds. But you, well, you're...

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: What? What am I?
TRAVELER: Excuse me. I was reciting something again, from a role I played in the theater quite a long time ago, when I must have been your age or a little older. *(Pause.)* You're not angry with me, are you?
RECEPTIONIST: I knew.

TRAVELER: You knew?

RECEPTIONIST: That you were playing a role. I may have been tricked before, but not this time.

(The OLD WOMAN rings the bell again, more insistently than before. Pause.)

TRAVELER: What's that?

RECEPTIONIST: It's the lady of the house.

TRAVELER: What lady of the house?

RECEPTIONIST: A while ago, she asked me to go get her some cigarettes.

TRAVELER: Who?

RECEPTIONIST: The mother of my boss, who owns the hotel. *(She puts on her jacket.)* Would you mind if I left you alone here for a moment? I'll be right back.

TRAVELER: You're leaving?

RECEPTIONIST: I'm going to get her cigarettes.

TRAVELER: You'll be cold in just that jacket.

RECEPTIONIST: I'm not going far. *(She opens the door to the street.)* If the telephone rings, don't answer it.

TRAVELER: Would you like me to go with you?

RECEPTIONIST: What?

TRAVELER: To get the cigarettes.

RECEPTIONIST: No. I have to go. *(She leaves the hotel and immediately sticks her head back through the doorway.)* Would you mind locking the door with the bolt? Wait… It's better that you don't, because otherwise I won't be able to get back in.

TRAVELER: I'll wait until you come back if you like.

RECEPTIONIST: You don't have to.

TRAVELER: How long will you be?

RECEPTIONIST: I'll be right back.

TRAVELER: Then I'll wait for you.

RECEPTIONIST: Thank you.

(The RECEPTIONIST leaves. The TRAVELER stays where he is for a few moments, then goes to the front door to lock it with the bolt when his cell phone rings.)

TRAVELER: Hello? (...) Yes, it's me. (...) What? (...) Really? (...) Me too. (...) I understand... (...) It's not my first time here. (...) It's quite all right, you've explained yourself enough. (...) My train is leaving any minute now. (...) Yes, I'm really sorry about it too. (...) I also hope there will be a next time. (...) Thank you. Good night.

(He locks his cell phone, and the FATHER suddenly appears on the other side of the door. The TRAVELER opens the door to let him in.)

FATHER: Good evening.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: The hotel is full.

FATHER: Where's the receptionist?

TRAVELER: She had to pop out for a bit.

FATHER: I'm her father. Nice to meet you. *(He extends his hand to the TRAVELER, who shakes it.)* I think we spoke briefly on the phone.

TRAVELER: Yes.

FATHER: I've called my daughter a few times on her cell phone, but she isn't answering.

TRAVELER: She's very busy tonight.

FATHER: Where did she go?

TRAVELER: To get cigarettes. She'll be right back.

FATHER: She went out alone?

TRAVELER: Yes.

FATHER: Because of the football match, there are fans all over the place, totally out of control in the streets.

TRAVELER: Is the match over?

FATHER: Not yet. But there are a lot of people who came without tickets, and they've been drinking in the streets for hours. I came across a bunch of them on my way here. She shouldn't have gone out alone. My daughter's job is to work reception, not to roam the streets.

TRAVELER: You're right.

FATHER: So you agree with me?

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Why don't you have a seat?

FATHER: Didn't you say she'd be right back?

TRAVELER: Yes, but you don't have to wait for her standing.

FATHER: Where did she go to buy the cigarettes?

TRAVELER: Right nearby.

(Pause. The FATHER sits in one of the armchairs in the reception area, while the TRAVELER stays by the door, peering outside. Long pause.)

FATHER: Aren't you going to sit? *(The TRAVELER looks at the FATHER.)* I want to speak with you about something before my daughter gets here. *(The TRAVELER sits. Pause.)* Do you have children?

TRAVELER: No, I don't.

FATHER: My daughter just turned twenty-two. She doesn't really discuss the details of her life with anyone, not even me. But I know her pretty well. *(Pause.)* I'm asking you to come clean with her. Don't string her along. Just let her go if you need to.

TRAVELER: Let her go?

FATHER: If you don't, she'll keep coming here with false hopes.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: You're asking me to do something that's not within my power. At least not right now.

(The OLD WOMAN rings the bell. Pause.)

FATHER: What if I tell your wife? I know you depend on her financially and that she paid for all the businesses you've had so far, which, as far as I know, haven't gone very well. What would she think if she found out that you were involved with a girl who could be your daughter?

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: How do you know I haven't already told my wife everything?

FATHER: Because you're the kind of man who wants it all without ever having to risk a thing.

TRAVELER: You're very convinced of what I'm like.

FATHER: Listen, I've wanted to come and talk to you for days. I thought about asking you for an appointment... I didn't expect it to go like this. I'm not an impulsive person. I like to think things through, even if it may not seem that way right now.

TRAVELER: I'm just the opposite. All my life, I've let myself get carried away by people who are stronger and more determined than me, with a stronger will than mine, which isn't that hard because, at the same time, I'm too lazy to resist.

FATHER: What do you mean by that?

TRAVELER: Nothing more than what I said.

FATHER: Are you trying to hold my daughter responsible for this situation?

TRAVELER: Not at all. That wasn't my intention.

FATHER: Look, she's starting her vacation next month. You could take advantage of that to let her go, if you can't do it now... I'm sure it won't be hard for you to find another receptionist. I mean, there are a lot of people looking for work now.

TRAVELER: Aren't you afraid that she'll go abroad?

FATHER: Abroad?

TRAVELER: If your daughter loses this job, maybe she'll go abroad like her friends and other people she knows.

FATHER: That would no longer be any of your business.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Are you sure I don't love her?

FATHER: If you loved her, you wouldn't have let things get to this point.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: What if I told her everything you've just told me?

FATHER: How would that benefit you?

TRAVELER: Maybe it would speed things up in a way that you haven't considered.

FATHER: What things?

TRAVELER: I can lose her, but so can you.

FATHER: I already lost her a long time ago. Don't you know that? She hasn't trusted me since her mother died.

TRAVELER: So who does she trust?

FATHER: Right now, you. Just you.

TRAVELER: And you're asking me to leave her overnight?

FATHER: What I'm asking is for you to stop hurting her. I'm even willing to cut a deal with you if I have to.

TRAVELER: A deal?

FATHER: I'm willing to sell my business to you. As my daughter probably told you, I have a bicycle repair shop. Right now, I could get about sixty thousand euros for it. I've already checked. I'll give it all to you on the condition that you never see my daughter again. Of course, we'd draw up a contract, and if you breached it, I'd show it to my daughter right away. *(Pause.)* What do you think? My daughter will be here any minute... *(He gets up, goes to the front door and looks out.)* Why is it taking her so long? *(He looks at the TRAVELER.)* Where did she go to get the cigarettes? *(Pause.)* You don't know? *(Pause.)* I'd better go find her. *(He opens the door.)* I'll call you in a few days, once the contract is finished and you've thought it over.

(The FATHER walks outside. The TRAVELER stays motionless until the OLD WOMAN plays the keys of the piano with her crutch. The TRAVELER enters the room where the OLD WOMAN is.)

OLD WOMAN: *(Without looking at the TRAVELER.)* It's about time... The remote fell on the floor. *(The TRAVELER picks the television remote control off the floor and hands it to her.)* Who are you?

TRAVELER: A guest here at the hotel.

OLD WOMAN: A guest?

TRAVELER: I checked in today.

OLD WOMAN: Where is the receptionist?

TRAVELER: She had to go out for a moment.

OLD WOMAN: She's still outside?

TRAVELER: Yes.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Do you have a cigarette?

TRAVELER: I don't smoke.

(Long pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Have a seat.

TRAVELER: I don't want to be a bother.

OLD WOMAN: You're not a bother.

(The TRAVELER sits in the chair. Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Do you like football?

TRAVELER: Not really.

OLD WOMAN: Me neither. But I find it fascinating how all these people shout and sing. I'm not interested in what they say or whether they win or lose—just the enthusiasm they show for their team.

TRAVELER: And against the other team.

OLD WOMAN: That too. Do you know what Churchill said about success?

TRAVELER: No, I don't.

OLD WOMAN: He said it was the ability to go from failure to failure without ever losing your enthusiasm. *(Pause.)* I'm assuming you know who Churchill was.

TRAVELER: I do.

(Long pause. The TRAVELER picks up some sheet music from the piano.)

OLD WOMAN: I didn't give you permission to touch my sheet music.

TRAVELER: It's yours?

OLD WOMAN: Yes.

TRAVELER: Excuse me.

(The TRAVELER leaves the sheet music where it was. Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Do you play the piano?

TRAVELER: Sometimes.

OLD WOMAN: Sometimes?

TRAVELER: I'm an actor, and I also studied music.

OLD WOMAN: For how long?

TRAVELER: A few years.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Do you have the heart to play this piece?

TRAVELER: *(Picking up the sheet music again.)* This one? *(Looking at it)* It's pretty tough.

OLD WOMAN: I know it's tough. *(Pause. The TRAVELER sits in front of the piano and plays the sheet music until the OLD WOMAN interrupts him.)* Thank you. You don't need to go on. The piano isn't tuned well enough anyway. I've been waiting for days for someone to come tune it.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Why did you ask me to play?

OLD WOMAN: I merely asked you if you had the heart to play the piece.

TRAVELER: Isn't that the same thing?

OLD WOMAN: You could have said no, and it would have been fine. *(Pause.)* Would you mind closing the piano and leaving the sheet music on top, with the others? *(Pause. Instead of closing the piano, the TRAVELER finishes the piece from where he stopped. At no point does the OLD WOMAN interrupt him. Pause.)* I hope you're a better actor than you are a pianist.

TRAVELER: I'm the best actor in the country.

OLD WOMAN: The best?

TRAVELER: And if not the best, at least the most versatile. I can play any role,

from a donkey to a stone.

OLD WOMAN: A stone?

TRAVELER: That's the hardest role of all.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Have you played a stone many times?

TRAVELER: Just once, in the theater.

OLD WOMAN: I don't go to the theater much.

TRAVELER: It was a play in which I had to stand in a dark corner the whole time, without saying a word, watching over everyone who was with me on stage, from the beginning to the end. I admit that I didn't do very well. But I was very young then.

OLD WOMAN: And did you do well playing the donkey?

TRAVELER: Much better than playing the stone.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Are you really an actor?

TRAVELER: I can show you my unemployment benefits card if you want.

OLD WOMAN: You're unemployed?

TRAVELER: Yes. It's fairly common in our profession.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: And what do you earn?

TRAVELER: What do I earn?

OLD WOMAN: How much are you paid for your work?

TRAVELER: It depends.

OLD WOMAN: It depends on what?

TRAVELER: On whether I'm working for theater, film, or television.

OLD WOMAN: Which do you like best?

TRAVELER: It depends on the role. The medium doesn't matter to me.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Would you like to act for me?

TRAVELER: For you?

OLD WOMAN: *(Grabbing her handbag.)* Tell me how much you charge for a theater performance, or for film or television, if you prefer. I should have enough money here. *(She opens her coin purse.)*

TRAVELER: You want to hire me?

OLD WOMAN: Of course, I'd pay you in advance.

TRAVELER: And where would I perform?

OLD WOMAN: Here.

TRAVELER: Right here?

OLD WOMAN: Yes.

TRAVELER: Are you serious?

OLD WOMAN: Do I look like I'm joking?

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: What do you want me to do?

OLD WOMAN: Play a role.

TRAVELER: Which role?

OLD WOMAN: I want you to play my daughter.

TRAVELER: Your daughter?

OLD WOMAN: If you've played a donkey and a stone, I'm sure you can play my daughter. *(Pause.)* Do you want to do it or not?

TRAVELER: Now?

OLD WOMAN: Yes.

TRAVELER: I don't know your daughter.

OLD WOMAN: Do you have to know a character personally to play them?

TRAVELER: To a certain extent, yes.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: My daughter must be about ten years older than you.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Do you have a picture of her?

OLD WOMAN: No.

TRAVELER: Then tell me something about her.

OLD WOMAN: What do you want to know?

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Does she live with you?

OLD WOMAN: I don't know where she lives. I don't know what she does for a living or whether she's married. I haven't heard from her since she was born. I don't even know her name.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Actors work from a play or a script. It's our sheet music.

OLD WOMAN: Oh, yes. Sheet music...

(Pause. The OLD WOMAN picks up the crutch. Refusing the TRAVELER's help, she gets up from the armchair, sits down at the piano and plays the same piece as before, but it sounds much differently than how the TRAVELER played it, not only because of the quality, but due to some improvisation that she does. As she plays the piece, the RECEPTIONIST enters the hotel, listens to the music next to the room door for a few moments, then leaves through the door behind the desk. When the OLD WOMAN has

finished playing the piece, she stays motionless for a moment, then closes the piano and puts the sheet music in order.)

TRAVELER: Are you a pianist?

OLD WOMAN: I'm an orchestra conductor.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Have you come to conduct a concert?

OLD WOMAN: No. I live here at the hotel. *(Pause.)* A year ago, I became ill, so I decided to come and live in my son's hotel. He wanted me to go and live in his house, but I've lived half my life in hotels, in all kinds of hotels all over the world, so I'm used to it.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Does he know that you have a daughter?

OLD WOMAN: Nobody knows. My husband knew, my son's father, but he died a few years ago. *(Pause.)* When I was twenty, I decided to be an orchestra conductor. It is the most difficult musical profession of all, and even more so for a woman. How many female orchestra conductors do you know?

TRAVELER: You're the first.

OLD WOMAN: For a young woman, having a child then meant taking a few years off from your career or giving it up completely. Later, after my career was established, I was lucky enough to marry a man who loved me more than his profession, though I could never reciprocate in the same way.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: And my father?

OLD WOMAN: Your father?

TRAVELER: Who is he? Is he still alive?

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Your father is also a musician. I never told him I was pregnant. A few years later, he got married too, and I think he had a couple of children.

TRAVELER: You think?

OLD WOMAN: He's been living abroad for years now. Almost all of us musicians have had to go abroad at one time or another. This country doesn't care about music or musicians. It has never cared about them.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: So you and my father haven't seen each other since then?

OLD WOMAN: There was no reason for us to see each other. Our professional paths never crossed.

TRAVELER: Why didn't you tell him you were pregnant?

OLD WOMAN: Because neither of us was thinking about having children at the time. We were very young.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: So why did you have me if you didn't want children?

OLD WOMAN: I wasn't brave enough to get rid of you at first or to stay with you later. And in the end, the decision I made turned out to be the most painful of all.

TRAVELER: The most painful for whom?

OLD WOMAN: For me, obviously. I can only speak for myself.

(Long pause.)

TRAVELER: What illness do you have?

OLD WOMAN: I'm very old. That's my illness. The crutch and the wheelchair are because I sprained my ankle. Once I don't need either of them, I don't rule out conducting again.

TRAVELER: Can't you conduct in a wheelchair?

OLD WOMAN: Yes, I can. But I don't want to. We listen to music sitting down, but it can only be conducted standing up, with authority, above the entire orchestra. *(Pause.)* Until recently, I knew all the music I had to conduct by heart. I didn't have to look at the score even once, as if the music came from within me, as if I had written it myself. Only from the whole can you grasp and understand every detail of a score, and not the other way around. *(Pause.)* Have you ever been to a concert?

TRAVELER: Yes.

OLD WOMAN: You can feel very lonely in front of an orchestra of a hundred musicians. I know a few conductors who down a couple of drinks before the first rehearsal with a new orchestra, whether it's a good orchestra or a mediocre one, as most of them are all over the world.

TRAVELER: Have you conducted many orchestras?

OLD WOMAN: Quite a few. More than I would have liked.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Do you also drink when you have to conduct?

OLD WOMAN: No, but I always go to the first rehearsal without my glasses on, so I can't see anyone's face clearly—not even the leader. *(Pause.)* I have a reputation for paying no mind to the musicians during rehearsals. However, that's not only absurd but impossible. Anyway, I don't do many rehearsals. More rehearsals don't make concerts sound any better. I've never been able to stand the notaries of music: those who meticulously calculate each and every effect, note by note, with a mortal dread of the audience and of any momentary inspiration.

TRAVELER: You're not afraid?

OLD WOMAN: From the beginning of my career, I've had to prove to everyone

that I could conduct an orchestra just as well—or just as poorly—as any of my colleagues. A female conductor is still exceedingly rare, and people are really skeptical, even the most sophisticated audiences, who are also the most hypocritical and prejudiced in the end. Of course, there have also been times when I was hired for the opposite reason: for the novelty of seeing a woman conduct a large orchestra... As if I were some kind of circus act.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: So what's it like conducting an orchestra?
OLD WOMAN: I don't know.
TRAVELER: You don't know?

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: The best conductor I've ever known led a provincial orchestra that never played outside its city. Over the years, he had managed to get his musicians to stop adding notes and make real music. How did he do it? I don't know. *(Pause.)* He barely moved his body or his arms... You could say he conveyed everything through his hands, with just his fingertips...

(The OLD WOMAN closes her eyes. For a few moments, she acts as if she were conducting an imaginary orchestra, making subtle gestures with one hand. Meanwhile, the BROTHER enters the reception area, wearing headphones. He glances at the desk, then knocks on the door behind it. He tries to open the door, but it is locked. Then he approaches the panel where the keys to the rooms in the hotel are hanging and changes all of them. Finally, he sits in an armchair in the reception area and closes his eyes.)

OLD WOMAN: What do you do for work? *(Long pause. She stops moving her hand and opens her eyes.)* Do you mind telling me what you do?

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: I'm a lawyer.

OLD WOMAN: A lawyer?

TRAVELER: Yes.

OLD WOMAN: Why did you become a lawyer?

TRAVELER: Because that's what I always wanted to be, ever since I was little.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Go on.

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: We didn't have much money at home, so from a young age, I had to start working to pay for my education.

OLD WOMAN: You worked and studied at the same time?

TRAVELER: It was hard at first, but I achieved it in the end.

OLD WOMAN: What did you achieve?

TRAVELER: I finished my law degree and found a job as a lawyer.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Is it going well for you?

TRAVELER: As well as it can these days for an employment lawyer who also does legal aid work.

OLD WOMAN: So, you keep busy?

TRAVELER: There's always work in this profession. Whether you get paid for it properly is another matter. *(Pause.)* Before I started working, I thought I wouldn't defend just anyone and that all my clients would have to deserve all the time I'd spend and every ounce of effort I'd make to save them. Now I give a sign of the cross to case files. I only have a few minutes to skim before I go

and stand before the judge.

OLD WOMAN: Have you lost a lot of cases?

TRAVELER: A few. At first, I used to cry over every case I lost, but now…

OLD WOMAN: Now what?

TRAVELER: I don't cry anymore.

OLD WOMAN: You never cry?

TRAVELER: Hardly ever.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Did you ever get married?

TRAVELER: No.

OLD WOMAN: Why not?

TRAVELER: When I was young, I went out with men much older than me who were already married.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Who are you going out with now?

TRAVELER: Now I'd rather go out with men younger than me.

OLD WOMAN: Do you like that better?

TRAVELER: I can't complain.

OLD WOMAN: So you don't have children?

TRAVELER: No.

OLD WOMAN: You don't regret it?

TRAVELER: Sometimes.

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Why did it take you so long to come?

TRAVELER: I didn't know anything about you until now.

OLD WOMAN: Nobody ever told you about me?

TRAVELER: No.

OLD WOMAN: Your parents were supposed to tell you when you turned eighteen. That was the deal we had.

TRAVELER: What deal?

OLD WOMAN: All these years, I thought you already knew and that you had decided not to meet me or to find out anything about me.

TRAVELER: I don't know if I would have come to see you when I was eighteen. In fact, I don't know why I came today.

OLD WOMAN: You really don't know?

(Pause.)

TRAVELER: Maybe I just came for the money. For your money.

OLD WOMAN: I've thought about that.

TRAVELER: You've thought about it?

OLD WOMAN: I've split everything I have between you and your stepbrother equally. It's all in my will. I left you both an apartment that you can sell and some money that I have abroad. It's less than I would have liked, because I haven't worked much in the last few years. My style has been out of fashion for some time.

TRAVELER: Your style?

(Pause.)

OLD WOMAN: Nobody looks to heaven or hell anymore, not even to see for just a moment that there are no gods or demons left. Today, the most gifted and virtuoso musicians cling to technique and effect. They have lost their soul,

and audiences no longer feel a need for music inside. You only have to listen to all this music that is being recorded now. Most of it is hollow. Utterly hollow. There's nothing there. *(Pause.)* I wanted to serve music, to devote myself to it fully from the start. Still, I've barely managed to conduct a couple of truly good orchestras. Most have ranged from mediocre to awful, made up of civil servants who all played Beethoven, Scarlatti and Stravinsky in exactly the same way and would glance sideways at the clock during rehearsals, just waiting for lunchtime or a coffee break without ever playing a single authentic note to stir the slightest emotion... Who knows if I've secretly been hiding behind their mediocrity to justify what I haven't achieved and very well may not ever achieve... If, as they say, a conductor is only as good as their orchestra, then I... *(A cell phone rings. Pause. The OLD WOMAN takes her phone out of her handbag.)* It's my son. *(Pause.)* Would you like to meet him?

TRAVELER: Your son?

OLD WOMAN: Yes.

TRAVELER: Now?

OLD WOMAN: When you come back another day.

TRAVELER: Do you want me to come back?

OLD WOMAN: I'm not asking you to commit to a date right now. I don't expect you to love me at this point either. *(The OLD WOMAN speaks with her son on the phone.)* Yes? (...) Yes? (...) No, I was in the bathroom. (...) On the TV, of course. (...) I don't know... (...) What? (...) Not yet. (...) It's not that late. *(The TRAVELER stands up. The OLD WOMAN hands her coin purse to the TRAVELER and speaks to him.)* Take what I owe you. *(To her son)* What? Speak louder. I can't really hear you. There's so much noise... (...) Yes, I can hear you better now. Where are you? *(The TRAVELER doesn't take anything from the coin purse and leaves it on the chair while the OLD WOMAN continues talking on the phone with her back to the TRAVELER. The TRAVELER listens to her conversation for a moment*

before leaving the room. Once in the reception area, he climbs the stairs that lead to the guest rooms. The BROTHER is still sitting in the reception area with his eyes closed.) A what? You know I don't know anything about football. (…) I'm fine. (...) I'm not tired yet. (...) I don't want a nurse, and especially not at night; we've discussed that to death. (...) What? I can't hear you. (...) This weekend, like always. Also, I have to talk with you about something. (…) No, not now. During the weekend. (...) I can't tell you on the phone right now with all this noise. Oh, by the way, the girl at reception has wanted to speak with you for days now... (...) The girl at reception... (...) I think she's afraid you're going to fire her. (…) Oh really? (…) A code? (…) Then it wouldn't be a hotel anymore… (…) Well, it'd be a hostel or some guesthouse. (…) Even if it's only at night, it doesn't matter. (...) Look, if you don't want to or can't run a hotel properly, you'd better shut it down and start another business. It wouldn't be the first time. Just don't count on my money... (...) I haven't a clue. How would I know? (…) Wait… what about the tuner? Did you call him? (…) I'm asking if you called the tuner. (...) No, I'll find one myself. I can't play Brahms, Chopin and Beethoven on an out-of-tune piano. It's bad enough that I play them on a tuned one, because… (…) What? (…) Yes, we'll speak on Saturday. (…) Hello?

(Pause. The OLD WOMAN locks her cell phone and goes back to watching television. The RECEPTIONIST enters the reception area through the door behind the desk, carrying a sheet of paper and two packets of cigarettes and leaves them on the desk. The BROTHER's eyes remain closed, and he is still wearing headphones.)

RECEPTIONIST: Who let you in?

BROTHER: Nobody.

RECEPTIONIST: The door wasn't locked?

BROTHER: No.

RECEPTIONIST: Then I forgot to lock it.

BROTHER: Don't worry. I won't tell a soul.

(Pause. The BROTHER removes the headphones from his ears and opens his eyes.)

RECEPTIONIST: Why are you here?

BROTHER: Can't you guess?

RECEPTIONIST: Dad?

BROTHER: He called and asked me to stop by.

RECEPTIONIST: He made you come here specifically?

BROTHER: Anyway, I was at a bar down the street, watching the match. Apparently, Dad's been trying to reach you for ages.

RECEPTIONIST: I'm really busy. The hotel is full.

BROTHER: It doesn't look like it.

RECEPTIONIST: Everyone's at the match. *(She sticks the sheet of paper she is holding to the front door.)*

BROTHER: What does that say?

RECEPTIONIST: That the hotel is full. It's the first time in a long time.

BROTHER: Do a lot of foreigners stay here?

RECEPTIONIST: Not really. There are so many hotels all over, and the further from the center, the worse it gets. They're less likely to come all the way out here.

(Pause.)

BROTHER: "Peindre d'abord une cage/ avec une porte ouverte/ peindre ensuite/ quelque chose de joli/ quelque chose de simple/ quelque chose de beau/ quelque chose d'utile pour l'oiseau/ Placer ensuite la toile contre un arbre/ dans un jardin/ dans un bois/ ou dans une forêt/ se cacher derrière l'arbre/ sans rien dire/ sans bouger…" *(Pause.)* What came after that?

RECEPTIONIST: "Parfois l'oiseau arrive vite/ mais il peut aussi bien mettre de longues années/ avant de se décider…"

BROTHER: *(Interrupting her.)* Whose cigarettes are these? Can I have one?

RECEPTIONIST: They belong to the lady of the house.

BROTHER: What lady of the house? Now there's a lady of the house?

RECEPTIONIST: She's the mother of the hotel owner. She's not much of a spender, and she sends me out to buy her packs of cigarettes two at a time. She's been living here for a few months. Just a while ago, she was playing the piano.

BROTHER: I didn't hear anything.

(He points his headphones in the RECEPTIONIST's direction. Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: Is the match over?

BROTHER: Which is your team?

RECEPTIONIST: Neither. I don't like football.

BROTHER: What does that have to do with anything?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't even know which teams were playing today.

BROTHER: You still have time to pick.

RECEPTIONIST: Pick what?

BROTHER: Right now, both teams are playing thirty minutes of extra time to decide the match.

RECEPTIONIST: Why didn't you stay to watch the end?

BROTHER: Why do you put your phone on silent every night?

RECEPTIONIST: Dad's got insomnia, and he'll ring me three or four times a night about the slightest thing.

(Pause. The BROTHER approaches the RECEPTIONIST and holds the cross hanging around her neck between two fingers.)

BROTHER: You're wearing the necklace I gave you.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

BROTHER: I found it in an abandoned village where we were practicing shooting.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes, you told me.

BROTHER: It was in the only house in the village that still had its walls standing straight and a couple of paintings hanging. It'll bring you good luck for sure.

RECEPTIONIST: Why didn't you keep it for yourself?

BROTHER: Because I always lose everything. You know that.

(The RECEPTIONIST touches the BROTHER's face.)

RECEPTIONIST: What happened to you?

BROTHER: *(Backing off.)* Nothing...

RECEPTIONIST: Did you get in a fight?

BROTHER: Why would I get in a fight?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know...

BROTHER: I walked into the slot machine at the bar.

RECEPTIONIST: Which bar?

BROTHER: The bar where I was watching the match.

RECEPTIONIST: You were playing on the machine?

BROTHER: I wasn't playing. I was watching the match near the damn machine. *(Pause.)* Why are all the keys switched around?

RECEPTIONIST: *(Looking at the keys hanging behind the desk.)* Did you swap them out?

BROTHER: Me? Why would I swap them out?

RECEPTIONIST: I hope you didn't go up to any of the rooms.

BROTHER: Are you really asking me that?

RECEPTIONIST: Did you go up or not?

BROTHER: I'm not going to say another word without my lawyer present. Will you permit me to call my lawyer right now, Madam Prosecutor? The law fully entitles me to do so. *(The BROTHER picks up the landline phone, and the RECEPTIONIST puts the keys in order.)* And if you won't, then I'll defend myself.

(He hangs up the phone.) Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I plead not guilty. The opportunity just fell into my lap... How could I pass it up? I admit, I didn't have enough willpower. Who hasn't wanted to snoop around in the rooms of a hotel at some point and pocket a souvenir? Anyway, I didn't take anything of value, or at least it didn't seem like it. Nothing in that hotel seemed to be worth much, ladies and gentlemen of the jury. Something may have had some sentimental value for its owner, but I assure you it had no monetary value. *(Pause.)* You were quicker at sorting the keys than I was at switching them.

RECEPTIONIST: Did you move anything else around?

BROTHER: No, but this hotel could clearly use quite a few urgent changes, as well as a fresh coat of paint. Don't you think? You should also have a serious talk with your boss.

RECEPTIONIST: About what?

BROTHER: About getting a raise, of course. I'm sure you're still getting paid the same as you did three years ago.

RECEPTIONIST: That's none of your business.

BROTHER: You need to stand up for your rights or have your union do it for you.

RECEPTIONIST: What union?

BROTHER: Whatever one stands up for you.

RECEPTIONIST: Things have changed quite a bit since you joined the army.

BROTHER: Do you want me to talk with your boss?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't want you meddling in my life.

BROTHER: Then let's go together to talk to the union.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: You'd better go home.

BROTHER: I can't.

RECEPTIONIST: Why not?

BROTHER: Dad told me to wait until you've finished work. He nearly ordered me to.

RECEPTIONIST: When did you start obeying him?

BROTHER: I've got nothing else going on tonight.

(The BROTHER sits in an armchair. Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: Are you really going to wait for me? I won't finish until seven tomorrow morning.

BROTHER: You don't want me to wait for you, do you?

RECEPTIONIST: Do whatever you want.

(The BROTHER rests his feet in the other armchair and closes his eyes. Long pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: There's a sofa over there... You can stretch out there for a while if you like. *(She opens the door behind the desk, which opens onto a hallway.)* The toilet is through the door on the left, and the door on the right leads to an office with a sofa.

BROTHER: Is that your boss's office?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

BROTHER: What would he say if I stretched out on his sofa?

RECEPTIONIST: He's not here. He went to the match.

BROTHER: Which is his team?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know. *(The BROTHER enters the office and is never seen again.)* Just don't touch anything and take off your shoes.

(Pause.)

BROTHER: Don't you have anything to drink?

RECEPTIONIST: Here? No.

BROTHER: What about in the guest rooms?

RECEPTIONIST: Not in the guest rooms either. This is barely a two-star hotel.

(Pause.)

BROTHER: Do you remember how we used to secretly drink cooking wine when we were kids? Where do you two hide the wine now?

RECEPTIONIST: Dad doesn't cook much, and neither do I. It's cheaper to buy lunch at the corner restaurant. We split a set menu.

(Pause. The RECEPTIONIST starts to close the door.)

BROTHER: No, don't close it.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: What's wrong?

(Pause. The BROTHER speaks from inside the office, and the RECEPTIONIST speaks from the threshold of the door behind the reception desk that opens onto the hallway.)

BROTHER: Are you angry with me? *(Pause.)* Yes, you're angry.

RECEPTIONIST: You'd better sleep it off.

BROTHER: I hardly had anything to drink. *(Pause.)* Dad says you're seeing someone.

RECEPTIONIST: He told you that?

BROTHER: But he wouldn't tell me who.

RECEPTIONIST: He doesn't know anything.

(Pause.)

BROTHER: So, are you seeing someone?

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: He's an actor.

BROTHER: You're going out with an actor?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

BROTHER: Where did you meet him?

RECEPTIONIST: At the theater.

BROTHER: He's a stage actor?

RECEPTIONIST: He also does movies and TV. He's always traveling for work.

BROTHER: What movies has he been in?

RECEPTIONIST: A few movies and some TV series, too. But he's mostly a stage actor.

BROTHER: Is he any good?

RECEPTIONIST: I've only seen him perform once.

BROTHER: How long have you two been going out?

RECEPTIONIST: Not long.

(Pause.)

BROTHER: Do you have a picture of him?

RECEPTIONIST: A photo? No.

(Pause.)

BROTHER: Will you introduce me to him?

RECEPTIONIST: You never introduce me to any of the girls you go out with or show me any photos, either.

(Pause.)

BROTHER: Dad also told me you'll be on vacation in two weeks.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

BROTHER: Will you come visit me? *(Pause.)* You can bring your boyfriend if you want.

RECEPTIONIST: He's not my boyfriend.

BROTHER: Then come alone.

RECEPTIONIST: You won't be on leave anymore?

BROTHER: My leave ends the day after tomorrow. *(Pause.)* So, will you come?

RECEPTIONIST: This is the first time you've ever asked me.

BROTHER: Don't come if you don't want to.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: Sometimes I think you joined the army because of me.

BROTHER: Because of you?

RECEPTIONIST: To get away from me.

BROTHER: You could have enlisted with me. There are many women in the army now.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: You said you would quit when you finished your degree.

BROTHER: And I will, but it won't be easy. Can I count on you to help me?

RECEPTIONIST: Help you? How?

BROTHER: By believing in me and supporting me.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: What about Dad?

BROTHER: Dad?

RECEPTIONIST: Will you ask him for the same?

BROTHER: No. Just you.

RECEPTIONIST: So what do I have to do?

BROTHER: For now, don't tell anyone about this. *(Pause.)* Can you do that?

RECEPTIONIST: Do what?

BROTHER: It'll be a secret.

RECEPTIONIST: If it's a secret, you'll let it slip before I will.

BROTHER: Definitely not.

(Long pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: "Peindre d'abord une cage/ avec une porte ouverte/ peindre ensuite/ quelque chose de joli/ quelque chose de simple/ quelque chose de beau/ quelque chose d'utile pour l'oiseau/ Placer ensuite la toile contre un arbre/ dans un jardin/ dans un bois/ ou dans une forêt/ se cacher derrière l'arbre/ sans rien dire/ sans bouger…/ Parfois l'oiseau arrive vite/ mais il peut aussi bien mettre de longues années/ avant de se décider/ Ne pas se décourager/ attendre/ attendre s'il le faut pendant des années/ la vitesse ou la lenteur de l'arrivée/ de l'oiseau n'ayant aucun rapport/ avec la réussite du tableau/ Quand l'oiseau arrive/ s'il arrive/ observer le plus profond silence/ attendre que l'oiseau entre dans la cage/ et quand il est entré/ fermer doucement la porte avec le pinceau/ puis/ effacer un à un les barreaux/ et ayant soin de ne toucher aucune des plumes/ de l'oiseau/ faire ensuite le portrait de l'arbre/ en choisissant la plus belle de ses branches/ pour l'oiseau/ peindre aussi le vert feuillage et la fraîcheur du vent/ la poussière du soleil/ et le bruit des bêtes de l'herbe dans la chaleur de l'été/ et puis attendre que l'oiseau se décide à chanter/ Si l'oiseau ne chante pas/ c'est mauvais signe/ mais s'il chante c'est bon signe/ signe que vous pouvez signer/ alors vous arrachez tout doucement/ une des plumes de l'oiseau/ et vous écrivez votre nom dans un coin du tableau."

(Long pause. The RECEPTIONIST remains at the threshold of the door that connects the reception area to the hallway, looking towards the office, until the POLICE OFFICER knocks on the front door. The RECEPTIONIST closes the office door and

the door behind the reception desk where she had been standing, then approaches the front door. Standing on the other side, the POLICE OFFICER shows her badge to the RECEPTIONIST, who opens the door. The POLICE OFFICER enters the reception area.)

POLICE OFFICER: Good evening. Where is the hotel manager?

RECEPTIONIST: He's not here now.

POLICE OFFICER: How many employees are here besides you right now?

RECEPTIONIST: Nobody else. Why?

POLICE OFFICER: What's your name?

RECEPTIONIST: Me? Laura.

POLICE OFFICER: Laura?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes. *(Pause. She starts walking towards the door behind the reception desk.)*

POLICE OFFICER: Where are you going?

RECEPTIONIST: To get my ID.

POLICE OFFICER: That's not necessary. *(Looking at the hanging keys.)* I see that only one key is missing.

RECEPTIONIST: Everyone's at the football match.

(Pause.)

POLICE OFFICER: The key to room 215 is missing.

RECEPTIONIST: Yes. That's the only guest who didn't go to the match.

POLICE OFFICER: Is he upstairs?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

POLICE OFFICER: Since when?

RECEPTIONIST: He arrived a while ago. What's the matter?

POLICE OFFICER: Can you show me his check-in record? *(Pause.)* Will you show it to me, please? *(The RECEPTIONIST searches for the check-in record on the computer.)* Did you enter the details?

RECEPTIONIST: No. I work the night shift, and he checked in this morning.

POLICE OFFICER: From the street, you can't see any windows on the second floor with the lights on.

RECEPTIONIST: The room is in the middle of the building, not facing the street.

POLICE OFFICER: What's back here? *(She opens the door behind the reception desk.)*

RECEPTIONIST: An office and a toilet. *(The POLICE OFFICER prepares to cross the threshold.)* Here's his record.

(The POLICE OFFICER stops and looks at the computer for a moment.)

POLICE OFFICER: Are you absolutely sure that this man is in his room right now?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

POLICE OFFICER: Why is the elevator here? Did he walk up?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know.

POLICE OFFICER: You don't know?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't remember.

POLICE OFFICER: Where does that door lead?

RECEPTIONIST: To a private room.

POLICE OFFICER: Private?

RECEPTIONIST: There's a lady watching TV in there. She's the hotel owner's mother.

POLICE OFFICER: You told me there was nobody else here besides you.

RECEPTIONIST: I forgot... Besides, she lives here. She isn't a guest or an employee. *(The POLICE OFFICER opens the elevator door and leaves it open, then approaches the door of the room where the OLD WOMAN is and prepares to open it.)* Please try not to frighten her. She's old, and she's not well...

(The POLICE OFFICER looks around the room while the RECEPTIONIST closes the door behind the reception desk that the POLICE OFFICER had left open. The OLD WOMAN has had her eyes closed for a while. The television is still on. The POLICE OFFICER locks the door to the room.)

POLICE OFFICER: She's sleeping. It's best we don't wake her. *(She leaves the room key on the desk, walks to the front door and looks out at the street.)* The individual upstairs is suspected of killing a man in a street fight this evening. A few men who were there followed him here to the door of the hotel and immediately called the police. That's why I'm here. *(The landline rings.)* Is that coming from upstairs?

RECEPTIONIST: No. It's the outside line.

(The POLICE OFFICER picks up the handset and immediately hangs it up.)

POLICE OFFICER: Did you speak with him?

RECEPTIONIST: What?

POLICE OFFICER: Did you speak with the guest in room 215?

RECEPTIONIST: I just gave him the key when he arrived.

POLICE OFFICER: What time did he arrive?

RECEPTIONIST: A while ago...

POLICE OFFICER: How long ago?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know.

POLICE OFFICER: Try to remember.

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know exactly.

POLICE OFFICER: Approximately how long?

RECEPTIONIST: I didn't look at the clock... I don't know...

POLICE OFFICER: Did he seem drunk?

RECEPTIONIST: No.

POLICE OFFICER: Are you sure?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

(Pause. A signal is heard, and the POLICE OFFICER checks a portable communication device she is carrying, approaches the door and looks out at the street.)

POLICE OFFICER: We're short-staffed tonight because of the match. There have been riots near the stadium. We've never had so many officers in the city, and we still can't keep up. If it weren't for that, I wouldn't even be here. They'd have sent someone else.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: *(Faintly.)* Who died?

POLICE OFFICER: Excuse me?

RECEPTIONIST: Who died this evening?

POLICE OFFICER: The victim hasn't been identified yet. It just happened a while ago.

RECEPTIONIST: On what street?

POLICE OFFICER: What?

RECEPTIONIST: On what street did they die?

POLICE OFFICER: That, I can't tell you.

(The BROTHER's cell phone rings in the office. Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: That's my phone. It's in my bag... *(Pause.)* It must be my father. I'll call him back later. *(Pause. The phone stops ringing.)*

POLICE OFFICER: What will you tell your father?

RECEPTIONIST: Excuse me?

POLICE OFFICER: About all this... What will you tell your father when it's all over?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know.

(Pause.)

POLICE OFFICER: I'm going to have to ask you to do something, Laura... *(Pause.)* Are you listening?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

POLICE OFFICER: When I tell you, I want you to call his room. The room of this individual in 215.

RECEPTIONIST: Why?

POLICE OFFICER: To be absolutely sure he's there, and because we need to catch him off guard when we arrest him. When is he supposed to leave the hotel?

RECEPTIONIST: Tomorrow morning.

POLICE OFFICER: Call him and ask him if he needs you to wake him up at a specific time tomorrow.

RECEPTIONIST: I already asked him that.

POLICE OFFICER: When?

RECEPTIONIST: Earlier, when I gave him his key.

POLICE OFFICER: So ask him again. Tell him you forgot.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: I should speak with my boss first.

POLICE OFFICER: Your boss?

RECEPTIONIST: With the hotel owner about all this…

POLICE OFFICER: Where is he?

RECEPTIONIST: At the football match.

POLICE OFFICER: He's at the stadium?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes.

POLICE OFFICER: There's no time. After you make the call, I want you to take this key and lock yourself in the room with that lady, and neither of you can leave until we tell you. Everything is going to be all right. You'll see.

(Pause.)

RECEPTIONIST: *(Faintly.)* What about the guests?

POLICE OFFICER: What?

RECEPTIONIST: The hotel guests.

POLICE OFFICER: We're restricting access to the hotel. Nobody will be allowed in or out until the entire operation is finished. *(Pause. She turns on a small flashlight to signal outside, on the street.)* Do you dream about your job, Laura?

RECEPTIONIST: What?

POLICE OFFICER: I asked if you ever dream about your job.

RECEPTIONIST: No.

POLICE OFFICER: Never?

RECEPTIONIST: If I dream about it, I don't remember.

POLICE OFFICER: *(Still watching the street.)* My son is studying cooking. What do you think a chef dreams about at night?

RECEPTIONIST: I don't know...

POLICE OFFICER: Well, he dreams about kings, princes, heads of state and businesspeople. He dreams that everyone gets full from eating what he cooks, and that at the end of the meal, they call him to the table. They make him come out from the kitchen to congratulate him and thank him, with tears in their eyes. *(Pause.)* So, will you help me?

RECEPTIONIST: Help you?

POLICE OFFICER: Will you call the room like I asked you?

RECEPTIONIST: Now?

POLICE OFFICER: Yes, and you have to do it the same as you always do, just as you would normally call any guest... Do you have the heart for it? *(The shouts of football fans coming closer can be heard. The POLICE OFFICER makes another signal with her flashlight and approaches the stairs.)* You can call now, Laura. *(Pause.)* Call now, Laura.

RECEPTIONIST: *(Picking up the handset and dialing the number.)* Hello, I'm calling from reception. Do you need us to wake you up at a specific time tomorrow morning? *(The POLICE OFFICER climbs the stairs and disappears.)*

Really? (...) At what time? (...) All right, then. Good night.

(Pause. After the RECEPTIONIST hangs up the phone, she takes the key from the desk and enters the room where the OLD WOMAN is, who still has her eyes closed. The fans' shouting is getting louder and louder. The RECEPTIONIST stands still for a moment, motionless, then approaches the OLD WOMAN, bends down, looks at her and touches her hand. The OLD WOMAN's eyes are still closed, and she is in the same position as before. The RECEPTIONIST doesn't know what to do and ends up using the OLD WOMAN's phone to make a call, but what she says is drowned out by the loud shouting from the street.)

About the Author

Lluïsa Cunillé is one of the most important contemporary Catalan playwrights. Her plays have been staged in prominent venues in Barcelona, Madrid, and abroad. Around fifty theatre productions of her plays have been staged. Among them, the most notable are: *The Meeting* (1999), *Barcelona, Map of Shadows* (2004), *Après moi, le déluge* (2007), and *Iceland* (2017). She has received, among others, the National Theatre Prize from the Catalan Government (2007) and the National Prize of Dramatic Literature from the Spanish Ministry of Culture (2009).
For more information, see www.catalandrama.cat/en/autor/lluisa-cunille-en.

About the Translator

Dustin Langan is a translator and interpreter. Born in Honolulu in 1974, he holds an MA in African History from Northwestern University. He speaks English, Arabic, French, Wolof, Spanish, and Catalan. He has translated books, academic papers, museum catalogs, and plays, including the award-winning *Archimedes' Principle* by Catalan playwright Josep Maria Miró. The author of *Freedomization*, a novel about the Iraq War, he lives in Barcelona, Spain.

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Please contact: www.sgae.es

Translation rights: Dustin Langan
Please contact: dustin.langan@gmail.com

FÜR OPHELIA
(A Mythology of Drowning)

Based on motifs from Raymond Carver's short story
"So Much Water So Close to Home."

Maša Pelko

Translated from Slovenian by Barbara Skubic

CHARACTERS

SHE

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW

HER HUSBAND

OTHERS:

FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD MAN

POLICE OFFICER

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER

LAWYER/DOCTOR/PLUMBER/GUEST/SALES ASSISTANT

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER

NOTES

The text consists of drama scenes, images, directions, notes, sound recordings, and commentaries. The use of them is, of course, arbitrary. The recommendations are merely a guideline that the sequence of scenes is never the actual, chronologically accurate sequence.

The same is true for the selection of music pieces. These are recommendations, not obligations.

If they are used, and considering the way they are implemented, the notes are meant to be the material for the role of HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.

There are no names in the texts. Deliberately. They can be left as empty spaces or filled as per choice. The only important thing is that THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER uses her own name in the beginning.

IMAGE ONE

(SHE enters the stage, murmuring "Remember Me" by Diana Ross.)

SOUND RECORDING

(THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER presses play. We hear the recording. It has the voices of SHE and HER DAUGHTER.)

- Mom, this is now recording.
- Is it?
- Yes. Yes, I think so.
- Okay. Which one do we start with?
- With Cassandra.
- Of course, with Cassandra. Okay. Cassandra was the daughter of the Trojan King Priam and his wife, Queen Hecuba, a sister to the princes Hector and Paris. She was outstandingly beautiful, and god Apollo fell head over heels in love with her. In order to be allowed to sleep with her, he gave her the gift of clairvoyancy. So, she had the ability to see everything that would happen in the future. But Cassandra did not like Apollo at all, so she used her gift to see where he'd try to catch her and deftly avoided him. Once Apollo figured that out, he got furious and, as a punishment, he changed the gift into a curse. She would still make correct predictions, she would see the future of humankind clearly, but, as revenge for trying to escape him, absolutely no one would believe her. Cassandra, for example, warned everyone that the Trojan horse was a trap that would destroy the entire city, but nobody listened to her. In the end, with Troy defeated, she was taken home by Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, as a mistress and a slave. There, Cassandra foretells their deaths. They are murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra.

(Phone ringing.)

HER HUSBAND: Don't answer.

SHE: It might be the preschool.

HER HUSBAND: Why would it be the preschool?

SHE: Well, why wouldn't it be the preschool? What kind of question is that?

HER HUSBAND: But you have their number saved, no?

SHE: It could be a different teacher calling. *(Picks up.)* Hello? Yes, speaking.

(A longer pause.)

No, no, I would not, thank you. *(Hangs up.)*

HER HUSBAND: I told you not to pick up. It might be the preschool, sure, sure. Geez. Where did they get your number? What are you going to tell them?

SHE: I've no idea.

HER HUSBAND: Don't you go around talking to them. I mean it. I know you'll try to be kind, but they'll use that, do you hear me?

SHE: Do you really think I'd go and talk to the press?

HER HUSBAND: We didn't do a damn thing wrong, not one. We found her, literally just found her. We could have pretended we hadn't seen her and gone somewhere else, but we called the police. We did everything right. The hell? What is it? Can you look at me? I haven't done anything!

SHE: Okay.

HER HUSBAND: "Okay" what? What do you mean by that?

SHE: That you should know what you're saying.

HER HUSBAND: Yes, I should! I do! Now you're getting on my case, too, as if I didn't have enough people who can't mind their own fucking business.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: My name is [redacted] and in the text, my role is called "THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER". Except for one scene, I never appear as a character, either, always just as stage directions or commentary that uses direct speech. It is never fully explained why.

This is the play about her parents, the parents of the girl I'm playing, so for clarity, in this case, the play about my parents, about my parents' marriage and relationship.

In the list of characters, my mother is listed as SHE. She is clearly the protagonist; the rest of us are listed in relation to her: there's HER HUSBAND, meaning my dad, and HER MOTHER-IN-LAW, my grandma. This play was inspired by the short story "So Much Water So Close to Home" by American author Raymond Carver. His short story also tells the story of a marriage. This text is a daughter's gaze—that is, my gaze—on her parents' marriage.

The first scene in the chronology of their history is decidedly simple. It begins as any other grand romantic story. A man and a woman in their early twenties accidentally find themselves in the same space, on a summer Saturday night. Around 40 minutes pass between their arrivals, they sit at tables that are approximately 7 meters, or 23 feet, apart. They are significantly younger than the actress and the actor on stage, but to avoid bad makeup or double-casting, one has to imagine these things. They arrive in different groups, sit at entirely different tables, and drink entirely different drinks. They don't even meet when they order new drinks at the bar, nor when they go to the restroom. But what is true for every romantic story is also true for them—they will meet at the exact moment they're supposed to meet. They will be brought together by a simple duet by Diana Ross and the Supremes with the Temptations. What

exactly happened is not yet really relevant at this point. What matters more is how the evening ended.

(The man and the woman each stand at one side of the stage, laughing, looking at one another. The music is unbelievably loud. "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me", by Diana Ross and the Supremes with the Temptations. At a certain moment, they run toward each other, jump into each other's arms and start kissing uncontrollably.)

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: One thing needs to be remembered here: this is, of course, not a romantic story.

INSTRUCTIONS

"Bend your knees, place your feet, a big circle, and stop, one, two, bend your knees, place your feet, a big circle, and stop, one, two. It's like drawing eyeglasses, one, two. One more time: bend your legs, place your feet, a big circle, just like that, yes. Let's go, stop, one, two, bend your knees, place your feet, one more time, a big circle, and stop, one, two."

SCENE TWO

(The phone is ringing. The phone is ringing. The phone is ringing. At the police station, the officer on duty picks up.)

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: Police, how can I help you?
Sir, slow down, let's go from the start. What death, what's happened? Fine, sir. So, you've found a body?
I understand. Great. Can you tell me who I'm talking to?

Mr [redacted]. Great. Do you know the people whose names you have just listed? Excellent.

So, you've found a body?

Where did you find it, sir? Okay, are you still there?

Fine. Here's what we'll do: we'll send over a patrol car, can you give me your exact location? Very well, the car is on its way, I'd like to ask you to stay put.

Sir, do you know who the deceased is?

So it's a woman?

Are you sure she's dead?

She's naked?

Have you noticed any sign of injury to her body, perhaps a weapon nearby?

Who told you?

Alright, sir. When exactly did you find the body?

Aha, but you're calling today?

Fine, I'd like to ask you to stay on the phone with me until the police arrive.

But still. Could you please provide me your information? Date of birth, place of residence.

No worries, sir, just standard procedure.

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: The timeline of this play has no real, clear logic, so only one thing matters: the watershed moment is a death, a death that leaves a mark on the entire happening. Like in life, the events are split into before and after. So before and after the event. Everything else is up for interpretation and intuition. Simply, your choices. In the end, everything will be almost completely clear, I promise.

NOTE

"No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river, and he's not the same man."

—Heraclitus

SCENE THREE

(Three men. One of them, HER HUSBAND, has just retreated. They came here to fish. Everything is as it should be: the sand, the shrubbery, the reeds, the mosquitoes. It's getting dark; they're far from home.)

THIRD MAN: Where did he go?

FIRST MAN: To take a leak, I think.

SECOND MAN: The best thing to do is to go piss when there's work to be done.

THIRD MAN: Into the river?

FIRST MAN: I don't know. I guess so, yes.

SECOND MAN: And he couldn't go to the bushes?

THIRD MAN: Shall I stretch it here?

FIRST MAN: Yeah, I think so. Tie the upper tarp to the tree, in case there's a storm.

SECOND MAN: Fuck.

THIRD MAN: What?

SECOND MAN: Nothing, I forgot my smokes.

FIRST MAN: Take mine, here.

SECOND MAN: Do you have a lighter?

FIRST MAN: What?

SECOND MAN: A lighter, do you have one?

FIRST MAN: I don't know, I might have matches somewhere.

SECOND MAN: Do you have a lighter?

THIRD MAN: I don't know, maybe somewhere at the bottom of my backpack. Wait a moment.

SECOND MAN: Can you go look for a lighter, please?

THIRD MAN: Can you light up once we're done setting up...

FIRST MAN: I'm gonna go get some twigs.

THIRD MAN: Wait, here's charcoal.

SECOND MAN: Neither twigs nor charcoal are of absolutely any use if we don't have a lighter.

THIRD MAN: [redacted] has one for sure.

FIRST MAN: [redacted] obviously went for a swim.

SECOND MAN: Or to take a dump.

THIRD MAN: Here, can you hold this, please?

SECOND MAN: What if we all smoked one in peace, and then set everything up? A beer, a smoke, we've walked a lot.

THIRD MAN: It'll get dark any minute now.

SECOND MAN: So what, we have flashlights.

(HER HUSBAND comes back. He's not quite himself.)

THIRD MAN: Everything sorted? We were kind of worried you'd gone swimming.

SECOND MAN: Do you have a lighter?

HER HUSBAND: *(feels his pocket.)* Aha. Here.

FIRST MAN: Thank god.

HER HUSBAND: Hey, come over here.

SECOND MAN: We've just agreed to have a smoke, haven't we? Sit down.

HER HUSBAND: Come on, just come here.

FIRST MAN: Where?

HER HUSBAND: To the water. Something... Come.

NOTE

(The phone is ringing. The phone stops ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing endlessly, nobody picks up.)

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: My mother wanted to be a writer. She had a degree in literature. As a student, she started teaching at a swimming pool. She didn't get a job in her field. Slowly, the swimming lessons turned from a few times a month to a few times a week, then every day. She started reading less, and she stopped writing. One of the things she retained from her student days was the obsessive need to structure her life into lists. Therefore, this text assigns lists to each of the four protagonists, and these lists have meaning for them within it.

My mother had two. The first one was called "this year's watershed moments" with four items on it, and the second, "???", also with four.

SOUND RECORDING

(SHE, narrating to HER DAUGHTER on the recording.)

- Hades, the god of the underworld, became obsessed with Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, the goddess of fertility and the earth. Fearing she would turn him down, he decided to kidnap her and take her to the underworld by force. There, he forced her to become his queen. Demeter mourns her daughter and becomes depressed, and, because in her grief she has completely neglected the earth as the goddess of fertility, people started dying of hunger. Despite all the pleas, Demeter withdrew into her grief. To prevent humanity from becoming extinct, Zeus struck a deal with Hades under which Persephone can spend half a year with her mother on the Earth's surface, but for the other half of the year, she has to stay underground as the queen of the dead. So, for six months, Demeter mourns her daughter, and that's when winter envelops the earth, making it barren, and the second half of the year, when Persephone returns home, she brings back life, crops and prosperity. The myth claims that when Persephone was returning to the earth for the first time, Hades demanded that she eat some pomegranate seeds. According to legend, the seeds have the power to bind her to the underworld forever, she will never be able to escape it and will be forced to return to him every six months.

SCENE FOUR

(The phone is ringing. Four men standing by a car, they're nervous, they smoke. They all look at HER HUSBAND, who has his phone touching his ear and is waiting for someone to pick up on the other side.)

HER HUSBAND: Yes, yes. Hi, there. I mean, good afternoon… Yes… I'd like to report, I mean, we'd like to report, we, we'd like to report a death. Um, how do I describe that? We have found… Well, a dead person.

A corpse. Yes, we found a corpse, and this is why we're calling you.

I'm [redacted], with me are [redacted], and [redacted].

Yes. We're friends, and we're on vacation together.

Yes.

In the river [redacted], right, lodged in some branches there, here, a two-or-so-hour hike from [redacted], where there's a fishing point, I mean, I don't know if there is, I think there is, we fish here every year, in short, the road from the village to the river and then straight on for another hour or so, I don't know, that's the best description I can give you.

No, there's no signal there; we're now in the village nearest to where we parked, we have a signal, and that's why we're calling. Yes, there's a bar, [redacted] we're waiting here now.

(to the other men) She says we have to wait here for the cops… Yes, alright. What? No, how are we supposed to know that? She was just lying there.

Yes, a woman.

Lying naked, motionless, head in the water.

Hard for it to be anything else.

Yes.

No, nothing. Oh, she has some kind of bruises on her arm. Well, I didn't see

that, they told me.

[redacted] told me. *(Looks at the other man, who starts to get angry.)* Well, what, when she asked?

Yes, the day before yesterday. No, yesterday. Yes, yesterday we saw her when we went fishing for the first time. So, we arrived the day before yesterday, set up camp and went to sleep, and in the morning, when we went fishing, we saw her. Well, a storm was coming, and it's a tricky trail, so we didn't dare.

Aha, yes, my battery is about to die, I haven't charged my phone in three days. Yes, yes. Why do you need this? I mean, we'll wait here. We haven't done anything wrong, we're calling you straight away.

NOTE

"So much water so close to home, why did he have to go miles away to fish?"
—R. Carver

IMAGE TWO

(We hear "God Only Knows" by the Beach Boys playing very loudly. SHE and HER HUSBAND are at a party, dancing, laughing, occasionally kissing. They're feeling good, they're happy.)

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: My grandma is my Dad's mother. We share three scenes in this text. They all belong to the future, that is, to a time after the event. Grandma is the only one who doesn't have a list while the play is going on. She only starts one after the event and continues to

write it until her death.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I'll wear this.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: These are pajamas.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I know.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You can't have pajamas.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Why not?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Pajamas are for sleeping, you know that. We have to put on something else to go out.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: This.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: No.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Why?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Because these are also pajamas, and you can't walk around in pajamas all day.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Why not?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Because they're made for sleeping. You can't wear them outside. And you'll be cold. What about this tee?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: This one? You like this one.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Fine, anything else. Literally anything else, just take off these pajamas.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: This.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Stop playing around, please.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Why?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: This is a swimsuit.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Is it pajamas?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: No.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Well then. You said anything else? This.

NOTE

"Police blotter, [redacted]. [redacted]. [redacted]

Female Body Found in the [redacted] River

The police were notified on Monday afternoon that [redacted] had found a female body on the riverbank near [redacted]. The incident was allegedly reported by fishermen who were there on their annual trip. The crime scene examination was conducted by the investigative team of the Criminal Police Sector of the [redacted] Police Directorate, in collaboration with the officers from the CCC Precinct. The investigative judge and the district state prosecutor were also present at the scene. The Police Department stated that the investigative judge ordered a judicial autopsy. The press release confirmed that [redacted]'s death was a result of foul play and added that collecting information, reviewing security cameras, checking telecommunication devices, the crime scene investigation and other activities are currently ongoing. The public will be informed of the progress in due course."

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: My other grandmother, my Mom's mother, died two years ago. In the course of three weeks, my mother, who had not written a single thing in a decade, writes every evening, finishes a novella about her relationship with her mother, and enters it in a radio competition. Her story is among the five selected from the 800 entries, and its excerpt is read in the evening program sometime in winter. The radio also sends the selected excerpts to all the state-owned book publishers, and one of them contacts my mother that same day. They offer her a contract and publish her novella as a book. It wins the award for the best debut at the book fair and the nomination for the best literary work of the year. At the same time, she signs a contract for two more literary works in the next two years. Dad is the biggest champion of her work.

SCENE FIVE

(After breakfast. SHE and HER HUSBAND are at the table together.)

HER HUSBAND: She was dead, what do you want from me now?

SHE: That's exactly it, she was dead. You should have helped her.

HER HUSBAND: What are you talking about, how was I supposed to help a corpse?

SHE: By calling people who'd take care of her!

HER HUSBAND: Are you out of your mind? She was dead. D E A D. How is one going to take care of her?

SHE: And what would you do? If somebody found your body, lodged between

branches, in ice-cold water? Wouldn't you want to be treated with respect? Wouldn't you want your family to find out as soon as possible? For them to identify you, dry you off, figure out why you died? Bury you?

HER HUSBAND: My family? You mean you?

SHE: Yes, me, yes. Wouldn't you want me to know as soon as possible what had happened to you?

HER HUSBAND: What were we supposed to do? A two-hour walk to the car, it was getting dark, there was no signal. We all agreed to wait a little.

SHE: You waited for two days! You were right next to her, fishing.

HER HUSBAND: We decided together, do you understand!? We wait the entire year for these couple of days. We came back three days early, didn't we?

SHE: Do you even hear yourself? Congratulations, really. I hope you're proud of yourselves. Of course, a tiny corpse won't ruin your male vacation. Right? You work yourselves to death, don't you!

HER HUSBAND: Honestly, there's no point. You haven't even tried to understand me. You're just glaring at me—

SHE: Glaring?

HER HUSBAND: Yes, glaring and nagging. Instead of protecting your family. Particularly with all that's going on!

SHE: And what is going on?

HER HUSBAND: All this between us, this entire last year, instead of sticking up for me, instead of being a team, no, you go right against me, as if I did something wrong.

SHE: What if it were me?

HER HUSBAND: What?

SHE: If it were me, lying in that water, naked, and some guys were fishing next to my body.

HER HUSBAND: Will you please stop?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: My father was a relatively successful designer who, at some point, handled all the major accounts of the company where he worked. But above all, he was charming, and people loved him and loved working with him.

Realistically, the entire company was carried on his accounts. When they wouldn't give him a raise, he set up his own firm and took the clients with him. He was doing well. Good money, some creative work. And I think he genuinely enjoyed his job. He was important.

My father's list in this text is decidedly concrete:

Tent

Sleeping bag

Playing cards

Cooking utensils

Food

Flashlight 2x

Tins of peas, corn, tomato paste, couscous, pasta, potatoes

Energy bars

Baked beans/Minestrone (tin)

Bottled water

Whiskey, beer (from the gas station)

Fishing rod + extra hooks/fishing line + setup equipment

Folding chair

Fishing pants, poncho

Radio transistor (?)

Cooler

Rope

Plastic bags

Toilet paper/tissues

INSTRUCTIONS

"Stretch your arms, then leave them, let's go, stretch your arms, leave, like that. Bend your knees, heels to butt. Arms still. Place your feet, we're flexing. Heels to butt, pull. Listen, turn your feet like ducks or penguins. Set them. Turn, yes. Wait in this pose for two seconds, now, legs together, one, two. Like that, super, keep your arms stretched, where are your feet. Bend, bend, to the butt and set."

SCENE SIX

(A man climbs into bed next to a woman. He embraces her. It's late at night. She wakes up and gets scared.)

HER HUSBAND: It's me, it's okay.

SHE: Why are you home already? Didn't you say you were staying until Wednesday?

HER HUSBAND: We had enough. The weather was bad. You smell nice.

SHE: You don't.

HER HUSBAND: How have the two of you been?

SHE: Okay. What time is it?

HER HUSBAND: I don't know, around four.

SHE: Why are you home already?

HER HUSBAND: I've told you.

SHE: But you have never returned early because of bad weather before.

HER HUSBAND: I'll explain tomorrow, it's a little complicated.

SHE: Is everybody okay?

HER HUSBAND: Yes, yes, don't worry.

SHE: Okay. I'm going to the living room.

HER HUSBAND: No, stay here. Just today.

SHE: I don't know if that's a good idea.

HER HUSBAND: Please.

SHE: Okay. Good night.

HER HUSBAND: Good night.

NOTE

Actress Natalie Wood, best known for her role in *A Rebel Without a Cause*, in which she played James Dean's great love, often spoke publicly about her fear of water. She would refuse films that required swimming or diving. In her biography, her family members speak about her premonitions that water would be what would kill her. Natalie Wood dies on November 19, 1981, when, in unexplained circumstances, she falls from a boat, where she was with her husband and a friend, and drowns.

COMMENTARY

My gran used to always say that what you fear most is actually your destiny. And she also used to say that if you weren't ready for change, the possibility of a change wouldn't even appear.

One time after the event, still a child, I'm sitting on the floor of my room.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Are you hungry?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER shakes her head.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Are you coming to the living room?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER shakes her head.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Everybody's gone. We can watch a movie or something.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER shakes her head.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: This dress is really pretty.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Yes, Mom bought it for me.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: It suits you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER nods.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Here, I brought you a little cake anyway.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Come on.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Please, just a little bit. It's really good.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I won't.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You haven't eaten anything.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I'm not hungry.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Should I leave it here for you?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: For later, maybe.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Come on –

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER interrupts her: I won't eat this stupid cake, it has fruit.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: What?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I don't eat fruit cakes. Desserts with mushy fruit baked in them are disgusting.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: I'm sorry, I didn't know.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I know you didn't know. Can you go now, please?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Yes. I'm sorry. Will you have something else?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

NOTE

"Your shelled bed I remember.

Father, this thick air is murderous.

I would breathe water."

—S. Plath

NOTE

(The phone is ringing. The phone stops ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing endlessly, nobody picks up.)

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: My father had always been the greatest supporter of my Mom's writing. But at the same time, the chronology of events makes it clear that from the moment when Mom actually writes something, publishes something, and gets recognition, things start to change. The first event on my mother's *"watershed moments"* list is marked *"award"*, and she enters it when they return from the awards ceremony for the most promising design studios.

SHE: I'm sorry.

HER HUSBAND: Excuse me?

SHE: I'm sorry.

HER HUSBAND: For?

SHE: This situation. It sucks. For you.

HER HUSBAND: You don't have to be sorry for me.

SHE: You know what I mean.

HER HUSBAND: Mhm. But there's no need to feel so patronizing.

SHE: No, I'm not. I'm really not.

HER HUSBAND: Fine.

SHE: I'm sorry if it came out... Although... I'm sorry, I don't actually know what the problem is, why are you now angry with me?

HER HUSBAND: I'm not angry.

SHE: No, just passive-aggressive?

HER HUSBAND: I don't need this as well right now.

SHE: Can we just talk? I really didn't mean anything—

HER HUSBAND: I think you enjoyed it.

SHE: Excuse me?

HER HUSBAND: You enjoyed being the center of attention.

SHE: I'm sorry, but what are you talking about? We were at the awards ceremony where you were a nominee.

HER HUSBAND: Yes, but who cares about that, you're the star now, you actually have an award.

SHE: An award from the city book fair, my love. It's not the Nobel Prize. But also... I don't even know why I have to explain myself. What are we actually talking about here?

HER HUSBAND: Realistically, even if I weren't there today.

SHE: I honestly don't know what the matter is with you, really. Is this an ego

thing? I'm truly sorry you didn't have a win today, but that has nothing to do with me.

HER HUSBAND: Of course it does. Look, I'm totally proud of you—

SHE: Are you now?

HER HUSBAND: Yes, of course, but do you really think that everybody doesn't suddenly simply see me as the man from your book—

SHE: What? You appear in one chapter, and without a name, as an unknown child? Who connects that?

HER HUSBAND: Everybody! You've written just enough for the people to start talking about it.

SHE: Honey, people don't care. Nobody's talking about you.

HER HUSBAND: Ouch, thanks a lot.

SHE: What? I don't understand.

HER HUSBAND: Nobody's talking about me. Cool. But they're talking about you?

SHE: I'm sorry, but we wouldn't be having this debate if you won the award tonight.

HER HUSBAND: Fuck you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: That night, he didn't sleep at home. The next day, they talked. And apologized. But this discussion stayed somewhere.

NOTE

"There's a level of feeling like a fuckup, of failure, that kills. Despair is like a flood.

It can pretend to be Julianne Moore in *The Hours*.

Kirsten Dunst in *Melancholia*. Let it fucking pour!

He'll never have the budget to stage something like that or shoot it."

—D. Pešut

SOUND RECORDING

(SHE, narrating to HER DAUGHTER, her voice on the recording.)

- Orpheus was one of the best musicians of the ancient world, deeply in love with his wife Eurydice. One day, Eurydice was bitten by a snake. Orpheus couldn't get over her death, so he set off on the impossible journey to the underworld to bring her back. According to some myths, Eurydice begged him not to do it, but he never gave up and, with his music, finally convinced Hades and Persephone, the king and queen of the underworld, to let her go. They promise Eurydice's return to the world of the living, on the condition that he, until they reach the Earth's surface, doesn't turn back and simply trusts that she's walking behind him. Although Eurydice begs him to believe, Orpheus is overcome by doubt and becomes uncertain, so he, just before they return home, turns. Eurydice, who was standing there, disappears and returns to the underworld. She remains there forever, and Orpheus never stops lamenting her death.

SCENE SEVEN

(The MEN are sitting on the ground around tents that have been half set up. It's getting dark. They're passing an open bottle of whiskey. Silence.)

FIRST MAN: Are we at least going to start a fire? It's getting cold.

(Silence.)

HER HUSBAND: Do you have signal here?

THIRD MAN: No. Shall we go to the village? And call from there.

SECOND MAN: It's almost dark.

FIRST MAN: And cold.

(Silence.)

THIRD MAN: We can't just leave her like that and sit here next to her.

SECOND MAN: Can you pass me the whiskey?

(Silence.)

THIRD MAN: Should we take her out of the water?

SECOND MAN: Are you insane?

THIRD MAN: Well, how should I know?

FIRST MAN: Let's just leave her as she is.

(Silence.)

HER HUSBAND: We should report her.

(Silence.)

THIRD MAN: Is it certain that she's dead?

SECOND MAN: You really are insane.

THIRD MAN: And you're so fucking smart!

SECOND MAN: She's naked, head in the water, lodged in the branches. What would she be doing there if she weren't dead? Idiot.

THIRD MAN: Fuck off.

HER HUSBAND: Come on, let it go.

THIRD MAN: I really think this is no joke. There's a dead body over there. We need to do something. It must be an offense not to report it right away.

SECOND MAN: Look, any minute now, it's gonna be nighttime. It's getting cold.

We're exhausted. The trail is not clearly marked. And we've had a bit to drink already.

FIRST MAN: I'm afraid to go back now.

HER HUSBAND: I also think it could be dangerous.

(Silence.)

THIRD MAN: Give me that. *(Leans over to grab the whiskey.)* So what now, are we going to set up camp and sleep next to the dead body?

(Silence.)

HER HUSBAND: We'll go tomorrow morning. The moment we wake up. We'll tell them we arrived at dusk already and didn't see her.

SECOND MAN: Fuck, I've been looking forward to this all year. These five fucking days. All year. Fuck all of it, really.

(Silence.)

FIRST MAN: Not like she's going anywhere.

THIRD MAN: Do shut up.

SECOND MAN: All I'm saying is that nothing more can really happen to her. That's all. Whether we report now and the police arrive, or in three days, nobody can help her. That's all.

THIRD MAN: Stop.

(Silence.)

FIRST MAN: I agree with you. We really can't help her.

HER HUSBAND: Let's just stop. Fine, we'll go back tomorrow morning. Let's set up the sleeping thing now, before we finish the whiskey.

(Silence.)

FIRST MAN: Do you think it was an accident?

SECOND MAN: What, that she went swimming? The water is ice cold.

THIRD MAN: Maybe she tripped and hit her head on a rock, lost consciousness and simply drowned.

SECOND MAN: And what, stripped naked just before?

HER HUSBAND: What if she did it herself?

SECOND MAN: I think, if you want to kill yourself, you go somewhere where it's at least a little bit more certain.

FIRST MAN: That's true, there are no currents here, and the water is only five feet deep, max.

THIRD MAN: I would just like to emphasize once more that we've decided not to go and report a dead body, for which we are almost certain is a consequence of a murder.

SECOND MAN: Hey, what's the difference between a murder and a manslaughter?

THIRD MAN: What is the matter with you?

FIRST MAN: Has anyone thought that her killers might still be around? Could we be in danger?

SECOND MAN: Yeah, for sure, a person who killed a young girl, stripped her naked, and chucked her into a river can't wait to attack four adult dudes.

(Silence.)

HER HUSBAND: I can't believe it.

SECOND MAN: Don't say a thing.

THIRD MAN: Pass me that whiskey, please.

IMAGE THREE

(SHE and HER HUSBAND, we hear "Baby It's You" by the band Smith playing very loudly. They are talking quite agitatedly; it's hard to say that they're fighting, because we cannot discern the voices, but in any case, there's tension between them, and they're upset.)

NOTE

(The phone is ringing. The phone stops ringing.
The phone is ringing.
The phone is ringing.
The phone is ringing.
The phone is ringing.
The phone is ringing.
The phone is ringing.
The phone is ringing.
The phone is ringing.
The phone is ringing endlessly, nobody picks up.)

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: After Mom started writing more and working more, they started arguing more. And because they didn't want me to hear them argue, they always played music loudly when they started shouting.

Which was unbelievably ironic for two reasons: first, because it made me even more certain about when they were fighting, because the music was absolutely too loud, and second, because they always played music they loved, the 1970s pop love songs. Of course, it was completely at odds with the logic of the

situation: using that kind of music so they could scream at each other
The scenes in which Mom and I appear have neither a temporal nor a spatial frame. They can belong anywhere. According to your personal preference.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Mom, wake up.

SHE: What is it?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Can I lie next to you?

SHE: Of course, come. What is it?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Nothing.

SHE: Were you dreaming?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Yes. You.

SHE: Was it horrible?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I don't know.

SHE: Are you sad?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Yes. I didn't find you.

SHE: I'm here. It's all good.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: You're cold.

SHE: I love you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I know, yes. Don't go.

SHE: I'm not going anywhere.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Okay. Come back.

SHE: I'm not going anywhere.

NOTE

Set design description: a construction, slightly pushed back from the proscenium. Spaces, built of planks, six-feet high, their width depends on the width of the stage. Spaces in the ratio 2:1:2, in the following order from right to left: first, a nursery, built down to details. A child's bed with a modest canopy, laminated floor, yellow rug. An IKEA table, a wall with children's illustrations. A large wardrobe, half with drawers, half with books. Toys in a basket on the floor. Comfortable, cozy. Warm light. A window.

Then, a cold, impersonal corridor reminds one of a hospital/prison/police station corridor.

This third space is a segment of a riverside landscape. A river bank, sand, reeds, bugs, fauna and flora, as realistically as possible.

All three are constructed as living installations, inhabited, used. The construction is surrounded by spotlights and mikes. The reference is a film set.

The construction is leaking water. It is slowly seeping down the stage and filling it with water. The actors establish no relationship to this fact. At the front, between the proscenium and the construction, is a desk with chairs, dictating machines, evidence. Just as a suggestion to help with the structure and interpretation of the material.

An important staging rule: No scene plays out in its actual natural space.

Everything written here is absolutely non-binding for the production's creative team.

Bottom line: Any similarity with the set of the production [redacted] (... [redacted]) is coincidental.

"Stretch your arm out, and we're gliiiiding. Hands together just under your chin. And switch, careful, arms, legs, arms, legs. Stretch the neck, head above the water. Slowly, first arms, then legs. We're gliiiiiding, now, arms, legs, arms, legs. Slowly, careful with the head, lift it. We're gliiiiiding."

SCENE EIGHT

(HER HUSBAND is at the lawyer's office.)

HER HUSBAND: I don't know whose idea it was...
LAWYER: It is very important that we're precise about that –
HER HUSBAND: But why? I really don't understand. We haven't done anything to her. We just didn't want her to float away.
LAWYER: Why?
HER HUSBAND: Listen now, whose side are you on?
LAWYER: Yours, of course, but these are all questions that keep posing themselves.
HER HUSBAND: You're just like the police. Nobody's even trying to understand.
LAWYER: I am trying. But these are key questions: Why didn't you call the police immediately? Why did you tie her? What were you doing next to her body for two more days?
HER HUSBAND: When you say it like that, we come across as complete psychopaths, but in the given moment, it was the most logical thing.
LAWYER: Well, exactly, let's go over this logic, so I can understand it, too.

HER HUSBAND: We didn't call the police because we were exhausted. It would take at least two hours to walk back to the car. It was getting dark, we'd already had a few, we were knackered.

LAWYER: Fine. So you're knackered, and you see a body in the water. Now what?

HER HUSBAND: Well, she was obviously dead. Her head was in the water. She was naked. I don't know, it was all so weird. So, we went back, decided we wouldn't go anywhere, not that night, and it got dark, so we pitched our tents and started drinking.

LAWYER: And then you went and tied her?

HER HUSBAND: Yeah. I mean, a little later, yes... yeah.

LAWYER: Whose idea was it?

HER HUSBAND: I don't know, I've already told you, I don't remember.

LAWYER: Yours?

HER HUSBAND: No. Not mine. No.

LAWYER: Whose, then?

HER HUSBAND: I have no idea. We drank a lot, I have very little memory of it all.

LAWYER: Alright. Why?

HER HUSBAND: Huh?

LAWYER: Why would you tie her?

HER HUSBAND: Oh. We got scared.

LAWYER: Scared of what?

HER HUSBAND: Well, that she'd float away.

LAWYER: And so you went and tied her?

HER HUSBAND: Yes.

LAWYER: I don't understand.

HER HUSBAND: Yes, it's not logical, I know. But at that moment, we felt we'd have massive problems if she did float away. How would we call the police

then, what would we say? We'd be even more suspicious… At least that's how we saw it. And perhaps we left a trace or so… I don't know. What if they found her a lot later, and they'd be looking for someone who knows something about it, and we'd come forward just to say that we didn't do anything. I don't know. Try to understand, though, we were four guys next to a dead woman. That in itself is totally suspicious, you know what times we live in.

NOTE

A dance number:

(The back side of a body, naked. A light from a torch dances on the skin.)

Shoulder

Ear

Fingers

Front vertebrae

Knee joint

Buttocks

Scapula

Elbow

Hand

Neck vertebrae

Thighs

Foot

Lower back

Calves

Hair

Repeat, twice

Applause.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: All the events from my mother's list happen before the central event in the text. Actually, they all lead to this event. The second list is called "????" It has four events from last month that had a great impact on my mother. First, the faucet.

PLUMBER: What exactly is the problem? It's not leaking?

SHE: No, no. Just dripping. All night long, inside.

PLUMBER: Dripping where?

SHE: No, nowhere. Inside, it rumbles in the pipes. Do you know what I mean? There's this constant sound—plink, plink, plink. From the pipe.

PLUMBER: Aha.

SHE: Yeah. So, plink, plink, plink. I can't sleep. It's like torture. The same rhythm all the time.

PLUMBER: Yeah, nothing to be done here. These are old pipes. Once hot water gets into them at night, when you heat them, the pipes expand and are too big for the holes between the floors through which they travel, and then this dripping can be heard. You can sleep with earplugs.

SHE: I have a child, I don't dare to, in case she calls me at night. And to widen these holes, is that possible?

PLUMBER: That's these old buildings, ma'am, there's nothing to be done. In winter, you just put up with it. Or you can sleep in a sweater instead of naked, haha.

SHE: Yeah. Okay, right. How much do I owe you?

PLUMBER: Nothing. I'm glad to serve such pretty ladies for free.

SHE: Mhm, thanks.

PLUMBER: That's it? Do you want me to check something else now that I'm already here? Do you need a check-up, some fine-tuning, haha?

SHE: No, thanks.

PLUMBER: No harm in joking, eh? I'd just wash my hands if you don't mind?

SHE: Of course, the bathroom is the first door on the left.

PLUMBER: *(from the bathroom)* Has it been like this for long?

SHE: What?

PLUMBER: This faucet, there's no pressure.

SHE: Yeah, about a month. It just needs to be cleaned, I know, but I can't get down to it.

PLUMBER: Where's your husband? If you were mine, I'd get down to it immediately.

SHE: Mhm.

PLUMBER: Here, let me fix this for you, it'll be done in a sec.

SHE: No, you really don't have to.

PLUMBER: Ma'am, there really is no point in your calling someone separately. When I'm already here. And you can tell your husband that you fixed it yourself. Here, two screws need to be replaced.

SHE: Thank you, but I am rushing to get to work, I need to leave in five minutes, or I'll be late.

PLUMBER: Five minutes and I'm done.

SHE: Fine.

PLUMBER: What do you do?

SHE: I teach swimming, to children.

PLUMBER: Oh. All day in a swimsuit? Lucky children.

SHE: Yeah... let me go get ready, and then we should leave, please.

PLUMBER: Of course.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: As Mom is changing in the bedroom, she sees his reflection in the mirror. She covers herself, and when she looks again, he's no longer there. She doesn't know if she'd made the whole thing up.

PLUMBER: Look here, like new!

SHE: Thanks. How much do I owe you?

PLUMBER: We've already had this conversation, when it comes to beauties like this, I only accept alternative forms of payment, haha.

SHE: Yes, fine. Thank you. I have to tidy up a few things before I go, so thank you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: The plumber stays in the parking lot, in his parked car, for ten minutes, and until he drives off, Mom doesn't dare to leave the house. Of course, she's late for work.

NOTE

Drowning is death by suffocation caused by the airway blockage or pulmonary malfunction due to immersion in liquid. The consequence of this blockage is hypoxia that soon leads to brain damage and cardiac arrest.

We know several phases of drowning. The first phase is the so-called "dry drowning," which most often occurs in non-swimmers, but also in swimmers who overestimate their knowledge and physical stamina. In this phase, the vocal cords constrict to seal the airway so the victim cannot breathe and instead swallows water. The victim tries to remain on the surface and calls for help. This phase lasts at most two minutes. In the second phase, the muscles that sealed the airway in phase 1 relax, and water enters the victim's trachea and lungs. It lasts up to 1 minute. In Phase 3, the victim, because of exhaustion, loses consciousness and drowns.

If we're pushed under the water surface by force, the body at first attempts to hold breath to stop the water from entering the airway. However, when breath is forcefully held and, at the same time, a physical sensation of oxygen deprivation occurs, the body's survival instinct responds with panic. Because a person can no longer hold their breath and the need for air becomes too

strong, they inhale reflexively, which allows water to enter the airway. This reflex is part of the body's natural defense response that activates when a person suffocates. Water aspiration causes suffocation because the water displaces air and prevents the lungs from absorbing oxygen.

The signs that indicate drowning during autopsy include presence of water in lungs, blue shadows on the skin, particularly around the mouth, ears and fingers that indicate the lack of oxygen, an elevated level of chlorine or salt in the blood that could indicate that the person died in fresh or salty water and the presence of foamy liquid that can appear in the mouth and nose as a consequence of suffocation and aspiration of water into the airways.

COMMENTARY

These things, apparently, happen relatively imperceptibly. Relationships falling apart. Slowly, my parents started to talk less and less. They argued more and more. I think they both believed it was a phase. Mom started working on another text, and she always wrote at night, usually on the couch. Every now and then, she fell asleep there. About six months before the event, she brought a blanket and a pillow to the couch in the evening.

HER HUSBAND: What are you doing?

SHE: I'll sleep here.

HER HUSBAND: Why?

SHE: I'll just sleep here, I want to write—

HER HUSBAND: You can write here and then come to bed.

SHE: No, here's good.

HER HUSBAND: Because?

SHE: Because I need to be alone for a bit. Because I need to think for a bit.

HER HUSBAND: I won't even... I won't even comment anymore. Do what you want. I don't care. Just don't come apologizing to me later.

NOTE

(The phone is ringing. The phone stops ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing endlessly, nobody picks up.)

SCENE NINE

(Daughter and father at the kitchen counter, leaning over a pot that contains fish. Mother enters.)

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Mom, look!

SHE: Put that away.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: But Mom, look, they're so big.

HER HUSBAND: And slimy, here, caress them.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Ewww, no!

HER HUSBAND: Come on. Boo!

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No, come on!

SHE: Put them away.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Mom, can we have them for dinner?

SHE: No, we're not eating this. Put them away, I said.
HER HUSBAND: Calm down, will you, they're just fish.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Mom, why not?

HER HUSBAND: We can prepare them, okay? Perhaps on a grill.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Or sushi?

HER HUSBAND: Since when do you eat sushi?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Since never!

HER HUSBAND: Agreed!

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Mom, have you heard?

SHE: For the last time, put the fish away.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Mom, come on, why are you so annoying, come see, yesterday, these were swimming. SHE comes over to the pot with the fish, grabs it and chucks it in the bin.

SHE: Go get dressed, we'll be late for preschool.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: But, Mom –

SHE: Quiet. Get dressed. I'm counting to three, and then I'll take your bike away for the day.

HER HUSBAND: You really aren't normal.

SHE: Why didn't you tell me right away?

HER HUSBAND: What?

SHE: Why didn't you tell me the moment you came home?

HER HUSBAND: Because you were asleep and I was exhausted.

SHE: Not exhausted enough to not want to have sex.

HER HUSBAND: I didn't want to have sex—I wanted to hug you.

SHE: I don't understand, isn't that the first thing you tell me?

HER HUSBAND: Would that make any difference?

SHE: Huge difference.

HER HUSBAND: I didn't want to upset you. Particularly considering the phase we're in.

SHE: That's exactly why you should have told me the second you walked through the door. Not that I wake up to the police in my living room.

HER HUSBAND: I've already told you, they're overreacting. And mostly that you're overreacting. We haven't done anything.

SHE: One more time: You left her there. You tied her. You slept by her side. You caught fucking fish. And now you're bringing these fish home to me and forcing them on our daughter for dinner. You're the one who really isn't all there.

HER HUSBAND: Forcing them on whom? What are you saying? Enough. I'm serious. You're trying to guilt-trip me for something that has absolutely nothing to do with me. You have no idea what you're talking about. Listen, take the afternoon off. I'll call my mother to pick her up from preschool and take her to the playground, you get some rest. *(Goes to hug her.)* You're just in shock, no wonder, it's truly horrible.

NOTE

Mom often told me she believed that any small decision can completely change the course of your life. The butterfly effect, she really believed in it. That everything has its own specific consequence. She liked to say that Diana Ross was the key to my existence. Even more, she claims she was convinced to the very last moment that she would sing her "Remember Me" at the karaoke. That's her favorite song. But just before she wrote down the title of the piece of paper, her intuition told her to put down her duet with The Temptations instead. Diana herself whispered it in her ear. Because if they hadn't, she was convinced, that she and Dad would never have found each other.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Can you stop whistling?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Of course. Now what, are you just going to stand here? Go a step lower, come on.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I want armbands.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: But you know how to without them.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I don't.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Sweetie, of course you do. You were swimming last year without anything, you even went underwater.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I don't.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Put your head under, come!

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Or jump. You can jump today, go, do a cannonball, I'll watch you!

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I don't want you to watch me.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Or a somersault! Can you show me a somersault?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I want to get out.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: We've been filling this pool all day, come on, it's hot, enjoy!

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I hate this stupid water, you keep pushing it on me! You jump in, if you like it so much, just leave me alone. Mom and you, constantly this stupid water.
Leave me alone!

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Honey—

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Stop watching me!

IMAGE FOUR

(SHE and HER HUSBAND onstage, we hear Stevie Wonder's "For Once in My Life", really loud. They're screaming at each other; although we cannot discern the words, it is clear that this is a very intense fight.)

NOTE

"At the end of the 1880s, they pull a body of a drowned girl from the Seine at the Quai du Louvre, who, based on the quality of the remaining skin, was only sixteen years old at the time of her death. Her body shows no signs of violence, so the Paris morgue concludes that the girl committed suicide. The pathologist is so taken by the beauty of the unknown girl's face—the drowned

girl is smiling, her expression is peaceful, content, happy, even—that he prints a death mask. The copies of the death mask of the unidentified young woman, nicknamed *L'inconnue de la Seine*, the Unknown Woman of the Seine, become a very popular piece of décor in the bohemian salons of Paris and morbidly oriented artistic abodes of the late 19th century.

The Unknown Woman of the Seine becomes an erotic ideal of her era, inspires many French and other literary works, and with her looks influences the image of an entire generation of German girls."

—E. Mahkovic

SCENE TEN

(The MEN around the fire playing cards, smoking, drinking whiskey.)

HER HUSBAND: Fuck, this water is ice-cold, just rinsing your hands makes you hurt all over.

FIRST MAN: Yeah, don't even talk about it.

SECOND MAN: Tell it to the honey in the water.

THIRD MAN: How can you call her a honey, you have a daughter.

SECOND MAN: What?

THIRD MAN: Will you just play already?

HER HUSBAND: Please, can you two not start again.

THIRD MAN: We're really stupid, we're still here.

HER HUSBAND: Your turn, concentrate.

FIRST MAN: I believe this cold water functions as a refrigerator, which is why the body is so well preserved.

HER HUSBAND: But at the same time, it washes off all the evidence, doesn't it? Fingerprints and whatnot.

THIRD MAN: But that's what I've been telling you, the longer we're here, the cleaner the body will be, and the fewer the traces.

FIRST MAN: You have no idea how long she'd been lying here before we arrived.

SECOND MAN: Hey, perhaps her bottom half has been completely eaten by the fish.

THIRD MAN: Have you really been saving this till the end? Have you not been counting the tarocks?

HER HUSBAND: Go, count.

THIRD MAN: Eaten by the fish, god love you, honestly.

SECOND MAN: She looks quite young.

THIRD MAN: Does it matter?

SECOND MAN: I don't know, does it?

FIRST MAN: How closely did you look at her?

SECOND MAN: Ten-point difference.

THIRD MAN: We're still here, this is so against the law.

FIRST MAN: Why would it be against the law?

THIRD MAN: Just imagine somebody came now? How would you explain that we've been camping next to a corpse for the second night?

SECOND MAN: By telling him that this is the only fucking vacation we take all year, and because there's no signal here and because it's been looking like a storm all the time, and we didn't dare to go back.

THIRD MAN: It's literally been clear skies ever since we got here.

SECOND MAN: Exactly. The unpredictable spring storms. They're the most dangerous. Pass.

FIRST MAN: Pass.

HER HUSBAND: Three.

THIRD MAN: Two.

HER HUSBAND: You've got it.

THIRD MAN: Spades.

SECOND MAN: She has bruises on her arm. Have you seen that?

FIRST MAN: Seriously, how closely have you checked her out?

SECOND MAN: Just before, when I was doing the dishes, I looked.

THIRD MAN: You were doing the dishes next to her?

FIRST MAN: Fucking morbid, mate.

SECOND MAN: But fishing next to her isn't morbid?

THIRD MAN: It really is sick what we're doing.

FIRST MAN: Drink some more, you'll find it less sick.

HER HUSBAND: We can say it was shock.

SECOND MAN: What?

HER HUSBAND: If the police ask why we didn't head straight back. Shock. To see a body, dead, in the water. A corpse. And nobody really knew how to react.

FIRST MAN: We should probably have some sort of a plan.

THIRD MAN: No plan, we tell it as it happened.

HER HUSBAND: Yes. Exactly. A shock.

THIRD MAN: Are you in shock?

HER HUSBAND: Yes, I think I am. This is the first dead body I've seen in my life.

SECOND MAN: Same here.

THIRD MAN: Not here. I found my father.

FIRST MAN: I saw one by the motorway, on a stretcher. Bloody, a complete mess. Before they zipped up the bag.

SECOND MAN: You were driving on a motorway and had the time to see a body, completely fucked up, before they put it in a bag?

FIRST MAN: Yeah, there was bumper-to-bumper traffic.

THIRD MAN: I'll kill you with this Pagat, I swear.

SECOND MAN: I didn't even see it.

THIRD MAN: What did you say?

SECOND MAN: It's dark. I wasn't saving it, I just didn't see it.

THIRD MAN: I'll kill you.

FIRST MAN: Do we have any more bottles?

HER HUSBAND: Two more.

SECOND MAN: One and one more for the road.

FIRST MAN: Ha ha ha.

THIRD MAN: We'll take down the camp tomorrow morning, and we'll call from the village, right?

SECOND MAN: Yeah, we catch a few more, have coffee and leave.

HER HUSBAND: Five-point difference.

NOTE

"They didn't look at the girl again before they left."

—R. Carver

INSTRUCTIONS

"Careful with the knees, stretch, stretch the knees. We're kicking, faster, faster. Elbows, where are they? Bend. Let's go, kick, kick, kick. Lean your head on the arm when you inhale, don't hit, gently. Let's go, two strokes, inhale. Look to the side, look back at the arm, not up. Not at the ceiling, neck to the side! Keep kicking, power, go, go, go. Blow bubbles into the water, inhale to the side. One, two, inhale. Lean, lean your head, exactly like that, yes. Let's do some more, look out for your knees and elbows.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: My mother often said that she had more luck than talent. At the very same time when she got those few positive reviews, the Writers' Association was changing its board. They wanted a completely new face, someone young, with a different approach. She ran for the Association's president and won. Overnight, she became extremely busy, swapped swimsuits for shirts, started bringing work home. She managed a creative team of nine people. But the biggest difference was actually that she started to enjoy her work and the responsibility it brought, immensely. When she and my father found themselves in the same room, they, for the most part, either argued or ignored each other. My father still claimed to be immensely proud of her. At the same time, he kept reminding her all the time that the world didn't revolve around her.

Point two on her *"watershed" list*: cheating. Morning, a few months before the event.

HER HUSBAND: Is there someone else?

SHE: Come on.

HER HUSBAND: Answer, please.

SHE: No. No, there is not. Although I would want there to be one, so much, at this moment.

HER HUSBAND: Excuse me?

SHE: It would be easier, no? Because then I wouldn't have to think about what isn't working here and how to fix it, but only about how I deserve something better to wait for me on the other side.

HER HUSBAND: Something better?

SHE: You know what I mean. Something different.

HER HUSBAND: You said better.

SHE: But I meant different.

HER HUSBAND: Right. And?

SHE: And what?

HER HUSBAND: What's your conclusion? Do you deserve something *different*?

SHE: I don't know. Honestly, I don't know.

HER HUSBAND: Just don't do anything stupid.

SHE: Stupid how?

HER HUSBAND: You know.

SHE: No, I don't know. Please, tell me.

HER HUSBAND: You've changed.

SHE: Isn't that kind of the point? The point of time passing? That you change.

HER HUSBAND: Aren't you satisfied with what we have?

SHE: That's not what this is about.

HER HUSBAND: Then what is it about? Or, can I guess?

SHE: Well, go ahead.

HER HUSBAND: You actually think that you're better than me.

SHE: No, I really don't.

HER HUSBAND: No? Ever since you've felt you've made it?

SHE: With writing?

HER HUSBAND: Yes.

SHE: But, isn't that a good thing? That I succeeded in something? I don't get it. Aren't you my biggest fan and the one happiest for me?

HER HUSBAND: Yes, but I didn't know it would change you this much.

SHE: It hasn't. It's just your attitude toward me that has changed.

HER HUSBAND: Oh, really. Then why do you feel you can do whatever you want?

SHE: What? I can do whatever I want.

HER HUSBAND: You know what I mean by that.

SHE: No, no, I don't. Explain. Are there things that you won't let me do?

HER HUSBAND: Actually, yes.

SHE: Really?

HER HUSBAND: Yes.

SHE: For example?

HER HUSBAND: Fuck other people.

SHE: And that's really the only thing that worries you? Wouldn't that be the smallest possible problem? If it was just about me hooking up with someone else?

HER HUSBAND: So you are hooking up with someone else?

SHE: You're not normal.

HER HUSBAND: No, you're not normal. Listen to me: you're not going to destroy this family. Do you hear me?

SHE: Don't talk to me like that.

HER HUSBAND: Oh, but I will. You're not going to make decisions about my family.

SHE: Our family.

HER HUSBAND: Exactly. Our family. It won't be anyone else's, no matter how well he fucks you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: That night, he took her computer. He went through all her emails, her messages, her contacts, photos, everything. And he printed out everything he found a little, but really even a little objectionable and put it on her desk. They never talked about it.

NOTE

(The phone is ringing. The phone stops ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing endlessly, nobody picks up.)

SOUND RECORDING

(SHE, narrating to HER DAUGHTER on the recording.)

- After Eros, the god of love, meddled in his love life, Apollo fell head over heels in love with a nymph named Daphne. Daphne, the daughter of the river god Peneus, loved freedom and the wilderness of the forests and thus promised she would remain unmarried forever. But Apollo, heedlessly in love and overflowing with passion, started to stalk her relentlessly, declaring his love and pleading and blackmailing her to reciprocate. Daphne, who was ready to fight for her future but was increasingly afraid of Apollo's obsession, had to flee. When he came so close to her that he almost caught her and possessed her, she, desperate, asked her father for help, and he, to save her, transformed her into a laurel tree. Her arms became branches, her skin bark, her hair leaves. The moment Apollo caught her, he was holding a tree.

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: After her mother passed, my mother went for a breast check-up every six months. The second point on her "???" list is her consultation with a doctor who was filling in for her regular doctor. Naked from the waist up, she's sitting on the examining table.

DOCTOR: *(begins the examination)* Have you noticed any changes lately?

SHE: No, nothing special.

DOCTOR: How many children do you have?

SHE: One. A five-year-old.

DOCTOR: Did you breastfeed?

SHE: Yes, ten months.

DOCTOR: It's a pity that women have so few children nowadays. Mostly just careers. Well, it's not too late yet. Maybe you'll decide to have another one, right?

SHE: Yes, maybe, yes.

DOCTOR: A son or a daughter?

SHE: A daughter.

DOCTOR: If she looks like you, lucky boys. Lean your arm against me.

SHE: It's okay, I'll hold it up in the air.

DOCTOR: Don't be afraid, we're already close, I've seen you almost naked, haha. Are my hands cold?

SHE: No, it's okay.

DOCTOR: Good thing that breasts are not like penises, right, and don't shrink when it's cold. Haha, I apologize, I just say it like I see it, directly, I hope you don't mind.

SHE: No, no.

DOCTOR: I can't feel anything unusual. I'll feel around some more, just in case. More is more in this case, they say, right? *(Feels her breasts for a long time, passes over them several times. It's becoming more and more awkward.)* Nothing, it all looks fine. *(He puts his hand on her hip and leaves it there.)* You can stop worrying. It all looks great. You have beautiful and healthy breasts. Get an appointment with the nurse in six months. *(He pats her a little and moves away.)* I look forward to meeting you again. And good luck.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: The doctor leaves the room. My mother remains seated on the examination table. Her body is still naked from the waist up, she breathes deeply. She doesn't move for a long time.

SCENE ELEVEN

(HER HUSBAND enters the front door, SHE's by the kitchen counter.)

HER HUSBAND: You're home already?

SHE: Yes, yes. You didn't go to work?

HER HUSBAND: No. I took a day off. In case they call me again. You?

SHE: It's weird. It's all weird. Other mothers at the preschool practically didn't look me in the eyes. They were just murmuring something. Same at work. As if I didn't exist.

HER HUSBAND: Well, that's what I'm trying to tell you! People will always form their own opinion, half of them think that we did it. That's why we have to stick together. Do you understand me? That's why we need to be a team, and you have to believe me when I say I did the best I could. Alright?

SHE: Mhm.

HER HUSBAND: You know what would help us right now? *(Approaches her and kisses her neck.)*

SHE: Sorry, but no. There's so much going on. I'm just not in the mood.

HER HUSBAND: You haven't been in the mood for a really long time.

SHE: Oh, please. Not this, too.

HER HUSBAND: Sure, fine.

SHE: Come on, let's go out. For a drive, out of town.

HER HUSBAND: Fine. Deal.

SHE: Come on, let's take my car. I feel like driving.

HER HUSBAND: Yeah, good idea. Shall we take whiskey, too? Indulge a little. It'll be alright.

NOTE

On March 28, Virginia Woolf filled her coat pockets with rocks and marched into the Ouse River near her home in Sussex. She left a letter at home for her husband, Leonard Woolf, which said: "I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been." Her body was found several weeks later.

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: You have to understand something: my parents' love story is not a fateful love story. That night, when they met at the karaoke bar, both slightly tipsy, they selected the same song by pure coincidence. What is actually interesting is that it was a relatively unknown song and, above all, it was a duet. But when they sang it, at around three in the morning, their "happily ever after" didn't begin. Far from it. That night they shared a drunken hook-up, as befits *twentysomethings*, and then didn't see each other for a long time. Over the next couple of years, they ran into each other at different events, but nothing came of it. They were acquaintances, relatively fond of each other. And then, at some opening, six years after they first met at the karaoke, they started talking and went to the next event together. And then more and more events, and soon they became a couple. A very classical beginning of a relationship. But they were a match. And they always referred to that evening as if their meeting was fate. As if the scene in which they pick the same song was the cutest meet-cute in the history of romcoms:

HER HUSBAND: That's bizarre, isn't it?

SHE: Somewhat, yeah.

HER HUSBAND: Would you prefer to sing it alone?

SHE: Well… no. I mean, it is supposed to be for two. I just didn't expect anyone to even know it, let alone pick it.

HER HUSBAND: Yeah, same. Do you listen to this music?

SHE: Mhm, pretty much. Diana Ross is kind of my thing. You?

HER HUSBAND: Yeah, that era's my thing too.

SHE: Do you want to sing it alone, by the way?

HER HUSBAND: No, no. It just seems like a crazy coincidence.

SHE: Yeah. Well… I guess it was meant to be.

HER HUSBAND: Oh, you're that girl?

SHE: What girl?

HER HUSBAND: The one who believes everything happens for a reason.

SHE: Oof, no, far from it. It's just that every action has a consequence. Honestly, I'm kind of a shit singer.

HER HUSBAND: Same.

SHE: See? It is fated. Fated that we offer these people in the middle of the night a truly crap duet.

HER HUSBAND: Very much in favor of it.

SHE: Cool.

HER HUSBAND: Will you be singing the female vocal?

SHE: Am… Yes, that would kind of be logical, no? I mean, I can sing both.

HER HUSBAND: Whatever you prefer.

SHE: Yes, yes, I'll take Diana. Queen.

HER HUSBAND: Princess! Fuck, what, whatever, I'm sorry.

SHE: Pretty bad, yes. Are you nervous?

HER HUSBAND: Yes. But not about the song. About you.

SHE: Why?

HER HUSBAND: I like you. And you have a sense of humor and good taste in music.

SHE: Okay, calm down. Ready? *(To the technician.)* Okay, we're ready!

(The karaoke scene, with the exact amount of the romance overdose that we imagine. It ends with crazy, fatal infatuation.)

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: What defines a story as romantic? Is it the beginning or is it the ending?

SCENE TWELVE

(HER HUSBAND is at the police station.)

HER HUSBAND: From the top of my head, I don't know. Five years, I guess... Yes, let's say five years. Since we've had children, I believe.

POLICE OFFICER: Always the same dates?

HER HUSBAND: Yes, the weekend and a couple of days before Memorial Day Weekend. It's already warm, tons of fish, but no tourists yet.

POLICE OFFICER: Always the same group?

HER HUSBAND: Yes. But I've told you a hundred times... The four of us, always, unless something comes up. If someone gets sick, or something happens with the children, work, I don't know, if something comes up. Why does that matter?

POLICE OFFICER: A human being has died, sir. Everything matters at this moment.

HER HUSBAND: Okay, fine.

POLICE OFFICER: And otherwise, you're friends?

HER HUSBAND: Who?

POLICE OFFICER: The four of you?

HER HUSBAND: If we're friends? My god, I can't believe what we're talking about.

POLICE OFFICER: Please, answer.

HER HUSBAND: Yes, we are. We are. We're friends. Very good friends. We met in college. We drank and partied through a lot, and now we get together for family parties and this one week a year. Life, that's how it is.

POLICE OFFICER: Are you faithful?

HER HUSBAND: Excuse me?

POLICE OFFICER: Would you say you're faithful as friends?

HER HUSBAND: To whom?

POLICE OFFICER: Each other.

HER HUSBAND: I don't understand the question.

POLICE OFFICER: If something happened that would put any one of you in trouble or danger, would you stick with each other?

HER HUSBAND: I'm not going to answer that. None of us hurt her, do you understand me? We don't know who this woman is. We found her. What the fuck is actually going on here? Shouldn't you be looking for the person who did this to her?

POLICE OFFICER: And as husbands?

HER HUSBAND: What?

POLICE OFFICER: As husbands, are you faithful?

HER HUSBAND: Fuck off.

NOTE

French poet Paul Celan and Austrian novelist Ingeborg Bachmann had one of the most complex and intense love relationships known to the literary world. In her novel, Malina, Bachmann depicts their relationship—in all its cruelty, beauty, and pain—in intimate detail. On April 20, 1970, at the age of forty-nine, Celan dies by suicide—after jumping into the Seine and drowning. Upon his death, Bachman writes: "It's not you I've lost / but the world."

INSTRUCTIONS

"Look up, look at the lights. Nothing will happen; the water is supporting you. Like that, hips high, lift your butt. Arms stretched out, knees stretched out. Knees lower, they shouldn't stick out. Kick stronger, more, make some foam. Breathe, nose is outside all the time. And knees in, I don't want to see them, under the water, like this, yes. Up, up, don't drop your chin to the chest, stretch your neck, otherwise water will get into your nose. Like that, arms stretched, powerful, like that, yes."

SCENE THIRTEEN

(SHE and HER HUSBAND are sitting by the pond.)

SHE: Couldn't you come fish here?
HER HUSBAND: Come on. You know they don't bite here. At least not edible fish.
SHE: The preschool teacher said she doesn't want to play with others. That she plays alone all the time.

HER HUSBAND: A phase.

SHE: Not everything with a child is a phase.

HER HUSBAND: But you know she's sociable. She has so much going on. She still isn't fully used to the new group.

SHE: It's been six months.

HER HUSBAND: She likes her quiet. You like your quiet sometimes, don't you?

SHE: Did you touch her?

HER HUSBAND: What?

SHE: The woman in the water? Did you touch her?

HER HUSBAND: Will you stop? Haven't we agreed to drop this?

SHE: Yes, sorry.

HER HUSBAND: Do you want a sip?

SHE: I can't, I'm driving.

HER HUSBAND: We could go to the seaside. For a long weekend? We take an extra day off, and we take her out of kindergarten? It's not warm enough to swim, but it might still be nice?

SHE: How about going far from any body of water altogether?

HER HUSBAND: *(laughs)* Yes, I guess you're right. Listen, I know this hasn't been easy for you, either. But it will calm down in a couple of days. It'll pass. They'll find the man responsible, and everything will be as it was before.

SHE: At first, everyone claims they didn't do it.

HER HUSBAND: What?

SHE: When you watch documentaries about these guys, the murderers, they all say they aren't guilty at first. Many report the murder so as not to look suspicious.

HER HUSBAND: This is pointless. I'm trying, I'm really trying. But you have clearly made up your mind, and I've no chance. Come on, let's go home.

SHE: I'll stay here for a bit.

HER HUSBAND: No, we're leaving.

SHE: You take the car, and I'll get the bus home.

HER HUSBAND: Stop fucking about, what is the matter with you?

SHE: Nothing, just –

HER HUSBAND: Have you ever thought of ? You have a child, do you hear me? A family! You're not alone, with your fucking stories and delusions. You've spun god knows what in that imagination of yours. You've completely lost touch with reality. You only think of yourself, damn, you don't care if you break up your family, if you break your daughter—

(She slaps him, hard. She is startled by herself. He looks at her. As if he wanted to pounce and return the blow, but then he calms down.)

HER HUSBAND: *(very calmly)* Let's go.

SHE: No.

HER HUSBAND: *(suddenly starts crying)* I'm sorry. Sorry for everything. I don't know how we ended up here, what's happened to us. I swear I had nothing to do with all this. All I want is for us to find each other again. That we can somehow start anew. Just tell me what I can do. I'll do anything!

SHE: *(looks at him for a long time, in silence)* It's always a family member anyway.

HER HUSBAND: What?

SHE: Well... In almost all cases, it's a partner or a lover or a father or a son or a brother or a husband. Why would you hurt an unknown woman? I know. But... Too much has piled up. I can hardly breathe.

HER HUSBAND: What are you trying to say?

SHE: I don't know. Let's go.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: My lists are unfinished. And they look like this:

Point one: The ways that I take after my father:

Smile, eyes, hand gesticulation, taste in films, no eating while walking, sleeping while watching TV, I eat preserves with a spoon, the way I prop up my head when I drive, drinking coffee after dinner, ashamed to dance, eager to please, ambitiousness, fear of bats, the way I fold the edges of a book, the ability to –

Point two: In what ways do I take after my mother:

Chin and ears, the timbre of the voice, I keep losing my phone, my brow gets sweaty, smile, a taste in books, the way I scratch behind my ears when I'm nervous, love for Japanese food, love for the sea, for swimming, musical ear, a feel for words, patience, insomnia, public appearance anxiety, commitment to –

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER stares at the dish rack and says: It has to be in order.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: What order?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Like Mom used to put it.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: I don't understand.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: So that it makes sense and that everything dries well. First, the cutlery. Forks together, spoons and knives. Then the glasses. Upside down. Then the plates. And the pots over them. Do you get it?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: I get it.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No, you don't get it, if you did, you wouldn't be putting them your way.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Does it really matter that much?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Yes, it does matter. It does. I'll do it myself.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: I'll help you, come on.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No, I've told you I'd do it myself.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You can't reach it.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I said, go away. (She tries to push her away and knocks over a glass that falls on the floor and breaks.) See what you've done now!

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: It's nothing, it's just a glass. We'll clean it up.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I want to go home.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Yes, I understand.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I want to go home. I don't want to be here anymore. May I?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You may.

IMAGE FIVE

(SHE and HER HUSBAND, we hear, "You Keep Me Hanging On" by Vanilla Fudge playing really loudly. Although we cannot discern their words, it is clear that they're upset, but their argument includes more and more pauses. As if they were a bit fed up with the same fight over and over.)

SCENE FOURTEEN

(HER HUSBAND is at the police station.)

HER HUSBAND: I don't understand what you want from me. I've told you everything, and not just you, the twenty police officers before and after you. We haven't done anything wrong. We called you straight away. These interrogations have been going on for a week now, don't you have some actual suspect you could debate that with?

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: Not straight away.

HER HUSBAND: What?

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: You didn't call us right away.

HER HUSBAND: As soon as we got the signal back.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: After three days.

HER HUSBAND: No, after two nights. Because a storm was forming and because we were in shock. We didn't know what to do.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: Who saw her first?

HER HUSBAND: I don't know, I don't remember.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: Was it you?

HER HUSBAND: Yes, it's possible.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: Possible? Surely that's something you'd remember, isn't it?

HER HUSBAND: Look, we were all so upset, it was all so abnormal. I've told you the same thing so many times that I've mixed it all up, it all seems like a single long day. So yes, it's possible. It's possible that I saw her first when I went to piss in the river, yes.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: Tell me again, who was with you? And what were you doing there?

HER HUSBAND: I've told you a hundred times.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: Then it won't be a problem for you to repeat it once more.

HER HUSBAND: I've had it with you. I haven't done anything wrong.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: You say that a lot.

HER HUSBAND: Because it's true.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: Or because you're trying to convince yourself it's true?

HER HUSBAND: This is pointless. Can you call my lawyer, please?

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER: What do you need a lawyer for?

HER HUSBAND: I don't know, you tell me.

NOTE

(The phone is ringing. The phone stops ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

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The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing endlessly, nobody picks up.)

NOTE

(Ophelia, running on the beach.)

"They bore him barefac'd on the bier
(Hey non nony, nony, hey nony)
And in his grave rain'd many a tear. Fare you well, my dove! [...]
You must sing 'A-down a-down, and you call him a-down-a.' O, how the wheel becomes it! [...]
There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts. [...] There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace o' Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a difference! There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father
died. They say he made a good end."
—W. Shakespeare, Hamlet. Act IV, Scene 5

SCENE FIFTEEN

(HER MOTHER-IN-LAW touches her. SHE lifts her head from the pool, barely manages to catch her breath.)

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Are you okay?
SHE: Yes, yes.
HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You really scared me. I understand it's not a deep pool, but you can't just stay under for that long. I thought you'd drowned in my front yard.

SHE: Everything's fine, I was just... thinking.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You were thinking in the water?

SHE: Yes... Yes. I'm sorry if I scared you.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Is everything okay?

SHE: Yes. I said it was.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: No, that's not what I mean... Are you okay? Are you two okay?

SHE: What?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: At home, is everything okay?

SHE: Yes. It's nothing. Don't worry. Where's [redacted]?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Inside. She's watching cartoons.

SHE: Great. I'll just change, and we'll be off.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You can stay for dinner.

SHE: No, no. We're going home. Thanks for your help.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Of course, anytime.

SOUND RECORDING

(SHE, narrating to HER DAUGHTER on the recording.)

- Menelaos, the king of Sparta, was married to Helen, considered the most beautiful woman in the world. But it was her love that the goddess Aphrodite had promised to the Trojan prince Paris if he bestowed her with the title of the most beautiful among goddesses. When Paris arrives in Sparta, he falls deeply in love with Helen and convinces her to flee with him to Troy. This event triggered one of the greatest wars in Greek history, as Menelaos, together with his brother Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, attacked Troy. The Trojan War lasted ten years and killed thousands and thousands of soldiers.

Troy finally defeated, Menelaos repossesses Helen and takes her home. Some interpretations state that the only reason he didn't have her killed was to force her to prove to him every day that she loved him and not Paris, and that she had made a mistake that could not be made right.

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: And then there's point three on the "key" list. When she writes it down, Mom feels she finally understands what is going on. And what is the only thing she has left.

Point three: Sleeping. A couple of days before the event.

SHE: Why are you sleeping there?

HER HUSBAND: Why are you sleeping on the couch?

SHE: That's not the same conversation.

HER HUSBAND: Isn't it, though?

SHE: No, it really isn't. My sleeping on the couch is related to me and our relationship. Our marriage. You're sleeping on the floor in our daughter's bedroom, I'm not entirely sure what that relates to.

HER HUSBAND: I'm guarding her.

SHE: From what? From who?

HER HUSBAND: From you.

SHE: From me?

HER HUSBAND: Yes, in a way.

SHE: In what way? Please, explain why you should protect my daughter from me?

HER HUSBAND: I don't know what's going on with you. This sleeping in the living room, in the afternoon, you go to the playground, and you don't tell where you are. You go to my mother's, and you stay there until dark. Even she

called me to say she's worried about you being completely in your own world. You don't even talk to me, you don't take my calls. As if I'm not there. I actually want to protect her from you doing something stupid.

SHE: Something like what?

HER HUSBAND: Something like going somewhere without telling me.

SHE: You mean running away?

HER HUSBAND: For example.

SHE: Aha. You're afraid that at night, while you're asleep, I would take our daughter and run away with her?

HER HUSBAND: Yes.

SHE: Where would we go?

HER HUSBAND: I don't know, you're the one who's been unpredictable lately.

SHE: Fine. There's no point.

HER HUSBAND: No, there really isn't.

SHE: Do we have a reason to run away?

HER HUSBAND: I don't know, I have no idea.

SHE: No, I'm the one asking you now. Am I supposed to be afraid of something?

HER HUSBAND: Of course not. I'm just saying: please watch what you're doing.

NOTE

If possible, we begin mouth-to-mouth resuscitation while still in the water, as soon as we feel the ground. As soon as the drowning victim is on dry land, they should be undressed to the waist. In any case, we undo their collar and loosen the belt. If we notice obstructions in the victim's upper respiratory tract, we quickly remove mud, sand or algae from their nose, mouth and throat. We lay the drowning victim on their back to release the airways and immediately begin mouth-to-mouth rescue breaths for adults, or mouth-to-nose-and-mouth

resuscitation for children. If the heart doesn't start beating and the victim does not begin to breathe independently, the resuscitation must continue with rescue breaths and chest compressions. We begin by administering five rescue breaths followed by a combination of chest compressions and rescue breaths in the ratio of 30:2. After one minute of resuscitation, we call 112 and continue chest compressions and artificial respiration. We continue resuscitation until the victim shows signs of life or the EMS team arrives. A victim who has regained consciousness should be dressed or wrapped in dry clothes or a blanket, because they have lost a lot of body heat. We keep a close eye on them until the medical professionals take over. (Adapted from *policija.si*)

SCENE SIXTEEN

(SHE, in a retail clothing store.)

SHE: Hi, excuse me, do you have this one in black?

SALES ASSISTANT: I can go check. What size?

SHE: Forty, thereabouts.

SALES ASSISTANT: Let me check, one second.

SHE: Thank you.

SALES ASSISTANT: Sorry, we don't, there's either beige or grey.

SHE: Okay, thanks.

SALES ASSISTANT: Is there anything else I can help you with?

SHE: Do you have time?

SALES ASSISTANT: Yes, of course, it's a very slow day today.

SHE: In that case, I'd need something similar to this one, but in black?

SALES ASSISTANT: *(scans the hangers)* Hm... Let's have a look, something like that perhaps?

SHE: No, it's too revealing. Perhaps a bit more... discreet?

SALES ASSISTANT: What's the occasion, if you don't mind me asking?

SHE: Yes, of course. It's for a funeral.

SALES ASSISTANT: Oh, I'm sorry. My condolences.

SHE: It's okay. I didn't really know her. I don't even know if I'll attend the funeral. I'll just sign the condolence book. She was young. And I feel sorry.

SALES ASSISTANT: Of course. *(lifts a dress.)*: How about something like this?

SHE: Yes, maybe, are these two pieces?

SALES ASSISTANT: Yes, but worn together.

SHE: I'll try it. *(They both look forward.)* She was killed, you know. Someone killed her. That makes it... different. It's weird. I'd never known anyone who died like that before. Well, I didn't know her, either. Have you ever known anyone who was murdered?

SALES ASSISTANT: No. I mean, killed, yes, but not on purpose.

SHE: Yes... Well, it's not sure here, either. They don't know who did it. Not yet. But I doubt it was an accident. Well, even if it was, if nobody confessed to this day, that's telling in itself.

SALES ASSISTANT: *(lifts a black suit)* Something like that?

SHE: No, that's too tight. Or they already have him, but it's not yet known. They don't want to tell. Anything's possible.

SALES ASSISTANT: Yes... *(holding a simple black dress in her hands)* Would you try this one as well?

SHE: Yes, this one is beautiful. Can I ask you something?

SALES ASSISTANT: Of course.

(On this spot, Carver uses dialogue that is impossible to write in any other way. Or a better way. So here, I am copying them almost verbatim.)

SHE: "Did you ever wish you were somebody else, or just nobody, nothing, nothing at all?

SALES ASSISTANT: I can't say I've ever felt that, no.

SHE: Why is that?

SALES ASSISTANT: If I was somebody else I'd be afraid I might not like who I was."

SHE: Good answer.

SALES ASSISTANT: You think?

SHE: Mhm.

SALES ASSISTANT: Try this one, too, I think it'll suit you nicely.

SHE: Thank you. I apologize. For having... For having attacked you like this with my... ideas.

SALES ASSISTANT: It's alright, don't worry.

SHE: I'll go try it on. I beg your pardon, one more thing... What if you liked yourself more?

SALES ASSISTANT: Excuse me?

SHE: If you were somebody else... What if you liked yourself more than you do now?

SALES ASSISTANT: I don't know. I guess it's a risk.

SHE: Yes. Yes, of course.

SALES ASSISTANT: No problem. If you need anything, holler.

NOTE

Three contemporary interpretations/reimaginations of the story about the Water Man:

1. A thriller or a crime story: a man kills women by drowning them in the Ljubljanica River. In the end, it is revealed that he is a man, a "righteous one" who feels called to decide which woman seems sexually promiscuous to him. If he can seduce her, she is too available, so he kills her. The case is resolved once it becomes apparent that all the murders have a link to the Water Man (which becomes his alias in the media): he finds his victims, for example, in the Water Man Bar, the Urška Café, the Prešeren Tavern, etc.

2. A similar genre: A woman moves abroad, falls madly in love and gets married. Then she returns to Slovenia with her husband, who realizes that she had a lot of sexual history before him, that she enjoyed sex. He becomes obsessively jealous and, in the end, strangles her by the Ljubljanica, on the spot where she had a lot of fun with men as a young woman.

(The Water Man, in short, is in both cases someone who punishes women's pleasure, freedom, sexuality.)

3. A weird mix between a fairy tale and a love story, like *Shape of Water*, the opposite of *The Little Mermaid*: a man who lives in the Ljubljanica River, a half-water creature, falls in love with a woman who plays by the water every day with her child. He sells his sight to the devil so that he can assume human shape. He is washed ashore as a blind man, and he slowly searches for this woman. He becomes a guide to the Ljubljanica, he finally finds her, and they fall in love, but she decides against leaving her husband and child. The man finds love with a tour guide who is by his side from the start, but he is out of his element on land, so he returns to the Ljubljanica by suicide.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: The third situation that finds itself on the "???" list is set in a bar, a watering hole, on a parking lot overlooking the church where people are gathering. She, sitting at the table, alone. Dressed in a black two-piece suit, staring into the void.

GUEST: May I join you?

SHE: No need, thanks.

GUEST: Everything alright?

SHE: All good, yes.

GUEST: Sure?

SHE: Yes, just a little headache.

GUEST: You know what they say the best cure for a headache is. *(She smiles, pulls out her phone. He sits down at her table.)* What are you drinking?

SHE: Whiskey.

GUEST: A bit early, isn't it? No wonder your head hurts.

SHE: I'm sorry, I really am not... If I may, please.

GUEST: Yes, of course, you looked lonely, so I... You know.

SHE: Mhm. Thanks.

GUEST: Are you from around here? *(She shakes her head.)* What's so interesting on this phone?

SHE: You know what, I should be calling someone.

GUEST: Of course, go ahead.

SHE: Can you please—

GUEST: It's not like I want anything from you.

SHE: Fine. *(Downs her drink and gets up to pay.)*

GUEST: *(grabs her hand)* Hey, no need to get all hysterical, calm down, all I wanted was to talk—

SHE: Please, do not touch me.

GUEST: Oof, sensitive, are we? Come on, I'll buy you another whiskey, drink it in peace.

SHE *whispers*: Fuck off.

GUEST: What?

SHE: Fuck off. Fuck off. FUCK OFF! Get the fuck away from me. Leave me alone, please.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Mom stands perfectly still. Any time before, she would have probably run out, quickly, just so she could hide, but not this time. She stands still, stares at the man in front of her until he becomes uncomfortable and leaves first.

NOTE

"I want to smother," I say. "I'm smothering, can't you see?"

—R. Carver

IMAGE SIX

(SHE and HER HUSBAND are sitting, silently, looking in opposite directions because they have nothing to say to each other anymore. We hear "Try A Little Tenderness" by Otis Redding playing very loudly.)

SCENE SEVENTEEN

(SHE is sitting at the table, a bouquet in her hands. HER MOTHER-IN-LAW is opposite her.)

SHE: Thank you.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You know, anytime. Are you leaving?

SHE: We're leaving. Was it okay?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Everything okay.

SHE: Super.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Do you want some coffee?

SHE: No. Or yes. Yes, please. Thanks.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: *(looks at the flowers, smiling)* Are these for me?

SHE: *(laughs)* No. Sorry.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Pity. Are these daisies?

SHE: Yes, and violets.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: *(after a long silence)* Very well, then, I will ask you: who are they for?

SHE: For a... For a funeral.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Oh, I'm sorry.

SHE: No, it's... just...

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Whose funeral? Anyone I know?

SHE: No. Of that woman. The one [redacted] found in water.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: You went to her funeral?

SHE: Yes. I mean, I wanted to go sign her book.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Why?

SHE: I don't know. It felt like I owed her as much. I don't know. But it doesn't matter... I ended up not going anyway.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Not going?

SHE: No. I brought to yours, got dressed in black, picked up the bouquet, drove for two hours, had a whiskey in front of the church, stood at the door, watching people going in and... I couldn't. Suddenly, it seemed unfair that I was there. There were children, parents. All broken... All grieving, and I was doing what, exactly? Cleaning my consciousness? So I went back to the car.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: I understand. Do you need anything?

SHE: Why?

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: Just asking.

SHE: No. *(Stays silent for a while.)* But do you know what the truth is? That I didn't dare enter. I didn't dare, because I was afraid I'd see myself in that coffin. I swear. I had this feeling that I'd get inside and everybody would be there, everyone I know, all of you, tight, and I'd be there, dead. That's how I feel. I don't understand anything anymore. Something... Something broke. That's it, yes, something snapped, and I no longer know how to proceed. I can't put it back together and go on. And nobody cares. Everybody pretends that it's nothing, that time will pass, and everything will be like it always was, but no. Some things happen, and then everything is, in fact, different.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: I know.

SHE: I don't know why I'm telling you this. I'm sorry.

HER MOTHER-IN-LAW: It's okay.

SOUND RECORDING

(SHE, narrating to HER DAUGHTER on the recording.)

- Theseus, the prince of Athens, was one of the Athenians who were sent to Crete every seven years, where Minos was the King, to be sacrificed to the Minotaur. The Minotaur was a monster, half man, half bull, who lived in a

labyrinth from which no one who entered returned alive. But when Ariadne, Minos's daughter, laid eyes on Theseus, she fell in love with him and promised she would make sure he survived the test. In return, he promised to take her home to Athens as his bride.

Ariadne gave him the sword with which he'd kill the Minotaur, but more crucially, she gave him a ball of thread with which he could find his way out of the labyrinth. And Theseus did kill the Minotaur, saved himself from the labyrinth and took Ariadne with him. But on the voyage home, something unexpected happened, he learns about her unbelievable power, courage and intelligence, which scares him. Worried that she might take his power or in any way threaten his position of power at home, he leaves her on the island of Naxos and never looks back.

COMMENTARY

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: There's a single photo left from that first night, when they met at the karaoke bar. An extremely overexposed Polaroid, with my mother in a red dress, laughing, and somewhere in the background, a tiny black dot that is supposedly my Dad's head. The photo, taken before they sang together. Fate.

Ever since I can remember, that photo had hung in the living room, in a brown frame. When things started to get complicated, I took it. Nobody said anything. They didn't notice. I used to hide it under my pillow. Then one night, I lay awkwardly on it, broke the glass and cut myself on the shards. Mom was not angry, she just changed the sheets and threw the photo away, together with the shards and the frame. Father still hadn't noticed that it was no longer hanging on the wall.

SHE: Why are you crying all the time?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I'm a child. I have a right to cry.

SHE: Have you read this somewhere?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: What?

SHE: That you have the right to cry?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Why don't you ever cry?

SHE: I do cry.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Yes, but not in front of me.

SHE: No, not in front of you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Why not in front of me?

SHE: So that you don't worry.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Do you worry if I cry?

SHE: Yes.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: But wouldn't you be more worried if I never cried?

SHE: Probably, yes.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: See?

SHE: You're a little too smart for a five-year-old, aren't you? What's going on? Are you okay?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Yes. Are you okay?

SHE: You don't have to ask me that. You don't have to worry about me.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Okay.

SHE: Do you want to go somewhere?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: No.

SHE: Come on.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Where to?

SHE: Ice-skating.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: Mom, it's summer.

SHE: It doesn't matter.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I don't have skates.

SHE: You don't need them.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: You do.

SHE: No.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I don't have my beanie.

SHE: You don't need one.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER says: I'll be cold.

SHE: It's summer.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER starts to laugh. They laugh together. The daughter leans on her mother. They embrace.

SHE: It passes. Whatever it is, it passes, I promise.

SCENE EIGHTEEN

(We hear the song "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me" by Diana Ross and the Supremes with the Temptations.)

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: The scene that follows marks point four on both of my mother's lists. Fourth, colon, two words: the end. That simple. The words are twice underlined. It happens a little bit before the event around which the entire drama revolves. Perhaps only a few moments before. Perhaps parallel.

That night, my Dad takes me to his mother, then he cleans the apartment, prepares dinner, puts on a suit and welcomes Mom by candlelight. When she comes, he plays the well-known music on the radio and asks her to dance.

SHE and HER HUSBAND dance. Embraced.

SHE: I'm sorry.

HER HUSBAND: I know. Me too.

SHE: No, I think you don't understand. It's true... Yes. I'm sorry.

HER HUSBAND: For what?

SHE: I feel like I don't even remember my life.

HER HUSBAND: What do you mean?

SHE: I mean, there comes a moment when you realize that it's too late. That you've waited, years of your life, you waited for something to happen. But you know what? In the meantime, it all happened. Everything. And nothing changed. Nothing is decisive anymore. Everything is permissible, we allow each other everything. Look what we've allowed to happen between us. What we're really doing to each other—it's violence. And through all of this, I've become some woman who is a consequence of decisions I don't remember making.

Decisions that I am horrified to have made. And a cluster of compromises to which I did not consent. And I no longer want to be her.

HER HUSBAND: What is it that you want to say?

SHE: That I want to leave. That I want a divorce. That's what I want to say.

HER HUSBAND: No.

SHE: Okay. I can even understand why. But that's not your decision. It's mine. I don't know how to tell you, but everything that comes… the future. There, I don't see you in it anymore. I'm there, [redacted] is there with me, and you're not.

HER HUSBAND: No, I've told you I won't let you. I've been telling you all the time.

SHE: Come on, please, let's talk rationally.

HER HUSBAND: Rationally? You've just told me you were leaving, that you'd take my child from me, and you want me to behave rationally?

SHE: I'm not taking anything from you.

HER HUSBAND: Really?

SHE: Look, this might be the ideal opportunity, timewise, I mean. You're going away with the boys for a couple of days, we can both think it over, get organized, and when you get back, tell [redacted]. And then we continue from there.

HER HUSBAND: I don't know how I can be any clearer, but no. You're not going to do this. We're not getting a divorce.

SHE: But why do you want to persist in this? We haven't been able to have a conversation without getting into a fight for over a year, we're not sleeping together, we're either avoiding each other or ignoring each other. We really stopped liking each other. Can we stop this before we end up hating each other? I don't understand why we'd want to continue.

HER HUSBAND: Because. Because that's what I've decided, and we're taking this one till the end.

SHE: Okay, have it your way. My lawyer will call you. I'm sorry. I really am.

HER HUSBAND: Yes, I can see that. *(She moves away from him, goes to put on her shoes.)* I swear I'll make sure you never get to see your daughter again if you leave now.

NOTE

(The phone is ringing. The phone stops ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing.

The phone is ringing endlessly, nobody picks up.)

SOUND RECORDING

(SHE and HER DAUGHTER on the recording.)

- Mom, please, just one more.

- No, please, enough.

- Only the one about Io and Zeus? Or Odysseus and Penelope? Please?

- No, this is unhealthy. You're five. Why can't we record, I don't know, Hansel and Gretel.

- Mommy, please.

- Or we could sing something. That would be nice. A song together. Not just these horrible stories. One is worse than the other.

- I don't want to sing.

- Okay, an interview. Hello, what is your name? Who are you?

- Mom, no, this is so uncomfortable.

- Okay, then what? Shall we play lists?

- Okay.

- Fine. Five things you're most excited about this year?

- The final night party at the kindergarten, holidays, birthday, beginning of school, a dog.

- A dog? Yes, you will buy me a dog.

- Really? That we will buy you a dog?

- Yes, you'll see.

- Okay, I can't wait.

- You'll see. Your list!

- Go on!

- Five things that you can't wait to see?

- When?

- Forever!

- Oof. You, growing up. Your Dad when he's not cranky. Books to read. Books to write. And... and potted plants.

- Potted plants?

- Yes, that's what I want to start doing. Growing house plants.

- Except my dog will eat them, do you know that?

- Do you know that you need to water plants once a week? But you need to take the dog out three times a day.

- You keep telling me I don't spend enough time in the open air.

- Do you have a retort for everything?

- Yes.

- Okay. Can we stop recording now?

- I think it's more likely that your plants will die than my dog.

- Stop, or I'll... Turn that off.

NOTE

"So much water so close to home, why did he have to go miles away to fish?"

—R. Carver

SCENE NINETEEN

(SHE and HER DAUGHTER sit at the kitchen table, looking at each other.)

SHE: How is it going?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Good. Now it's good, yes.

SHE: And the girls?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Good, yes. Both healthy.

SHE: I've missed you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: I've missed you, too.

SHE: Can I see a photo?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Of the girls?

SHE: Yes.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Mhm.

SHE: They look like me.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: They don't.

SHE: When I was younger.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: They don't, they're the spitting image of their father.

SHE: I guess.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Isn't it funny that this is always our first response?

SHE: What?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: That whenever you see a child, in a photo or in person, everybody first comments on similarities. Or differences. As if it mattered. I mean, as if it told you anything about the child. My colleague's hands are identical to mine. The barista has the same eyes. So what? I mean... Is that something we should want or fear? I don't get it.

SHE: Yeah.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: I have a feeling that it never ends. So many people still tell me that I'm a copy of you.

SHE: Right, but that's also so that... People try to get closer to you in this way, I think. That's all.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: I guess. We're roughly the same age now, aren't we?

SHE: Roughly.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Do you ever think about what it would be like if things had played out differently?

SHE: If I were somebody else?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Let's say so.

SHE: No. I might not like that someone *(they both smile)*. I once read somewhere that when children are born, they look very much like their father for the first few months. That nature allegedly makes sure that the father bonds more easily with the baby when they see themselves in them. And, of course, that the evolution protected the mother from the outbursts of a father doubting

that the child was his. That by design, everything about the baby reminds one of the father, so that there's no doubt about paternity.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Apparently, this isn't true.

SHE: No?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: No. Apparently, bonding with the child operates on completely different principles: scent, physical response, voice. This is why sight develops later than hearing and the sense of smell, because it is secondary to the bonding process.

SHE: Interesting.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Yeah, I guess.

SHE: Can I ask you something?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Of course.

SHE: When did you figure out that I was the one?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Which one?

SHE: The one from Carver's story. That it's actually his wife, that it was she who was lying in that water and not some random woman?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER *(smiles)*

In the part where it says that they go to the river, and you're looking at the book and find yourself there. In it. I know it by heart: "I look at the creek. I float toward the pond, eyes open, face down, staring at the rocks and moss on the creek bottom until I'm carried into the lake where I'm pushed by the breeze. Nothing—"

SHE: *(takes over)* "Nothing will be any different. We will go on and on and on and on. We will go on even now, as if nothing had happened."

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Yes. It's always like this.

SHE: What?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: As if nothing happened. Again and again. They're killing you with impunity, one or so every minute,

and nothing changes. *(Silence, it lasts for a while.)* Had you ever thought before that he could do something like that?

SHE: No.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Do you think about why?

SHE: I used to.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: And?

SHE: Does it change anything if you know why?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Do you think he was gonna do it to me, too?

SHE: No. I think he was trying to protect you, in his own way. That's why he sent you to his mother's. That's why he told her he'd come pick you up himself and not to bring you back to the house under any circumstances.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Do you think he did it because of me?

SHE: What do you mean?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: To stop you from taking me?

SHE: I don't think that had anything to do with anyone but him.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Okay. I'm sorry.

SHE: For?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: For what happened to you.

SHE: I don't think that's your apology to make.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: I know. But I think that it's true. That nothing else is decisive anymore. That nothing else can be done, we just no longer care. We somehow try to survive, find our own bubbles within all this violence we're living in and flee as unhurt as possible.

SHE: Do you think it hasn't always been like that?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: No idea. I guess.

SHE: Now what?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: In fact, what I miss the most is your voice. This bonding. I think that for us, it went through the voice. Closing my eyes and hearing you, that's what I've missed the most. I could picture you, even your scent lingered, and touch, but the voice disappeared. That's why I obsessively listened to the cassette tapes.

SHE: What cassette tapes?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: The Myths of Antiquity, do you remember?

SHE: Ah, of course, you were crazy about them.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Yes. I think they were the ones that taught me most about relationships.

SHE: That's kind of morbid.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Well, so is my life, isn't it?

SHE: At least you've kept your sense of humor.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: That I have.

SHE: Is this the first text you've written?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Second. Or third. Besides those in college. Nothing worth mentioning.

SHE: Yet! Nothing worth mentioning yet!

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: We'll see.

SHE: Anything fun?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Not really.

SHE: Pity. Nobody writes comedy anymore.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: That is true. A disaster.

SHE: Well, it is.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: I don't think that's the ultimate problem in the world right now, to be honest.

SHE: What is?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: The ultimate problem in the world?

SHE: Yeah.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: How much time do you have?

SHE: An eternity.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: When I dream about you, you always look like you did in the photo that hung in the living room. Not like you were when you died. So, not like you look now, but a lot younger. Younger than I am now. I don't know why.

SHE: Me neither.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: I thought about what happened a lot. And I have a theory. I think. It's not terribly developed, but it's something. Are you interested?

SHE: Always.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Do you know what all these guys have in common in these classical myths? That they lead the game. As long as they have the feeling that they're the ones making decisions, it's all good. Up to that point, it's all wonderful. But once this feeling is shaken, when the feeling of control slips away, they become someone completely different. Because by you becoming something, they feel they have lost something. And in the end, that's all there is: the need to control. Jealousy doesn't anger them, nor envy, nor... no, they get angry when they lose control. And then, well, then all bets are off. I think they truly understand everything as a power relationship. Regardless of all the equality, no, to them, one is still stronger. One always controls. And there is no option, in no world, that it wouldn't be them. Then it's better that the world is not here. Yes. *(pause)* I think I should be going soon.

SHE: Yeah? You don't want another drink?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: No, I'm tired. It'll soon come to an end.

SHE: I understand. I'm always happy to see you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: I know. Take care.

SHE: Hey… do you remember who your favorite woman from classical mythology was?

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: When I was little?

SHE: Mhm.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: No. I'm sure it was a problematic one, Electra or something.

SHE: No. No, far from it. It was Cassandra. Speak the truth, even when no one believes you.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: So that in the end she was made a sex slave to a man who— to win the war of his ego—had his daughter killed, then killed innumerable people and finally brought her home to parade her in front of his wife, who in turn, slaughtered them both. A great moral.

SHE: Or not. According to some modern interpretations, Clytemnestra let Cassandra go once she revealed the future of womankind to her.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: No way? Like, she believed her?

SHE: Maybe.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: And? What is this truth?

SHE: You tell me.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Bye, Mom.

SHE: Bye.

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER: Usually, in life, it is really about one moment. A second. The butterfly effect, one flutter of its wings. One decision creates a completely different future outcome.

My mother decided in the last moment that she'd sing "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me". I don't know if she'd ever thought of where she'd end up if she had put Diana Ross and her "Remember Me" on that piece of paper.

I spent most of my younger years thinking about what would have happened if that woman in the story weren't my mother. If all these news articles in the papers didn't talk about my parents. If it were simply some story about some woman somewhere else, to whom something happened that had no influence on me. But that wasn't the case. When my father uttered the last sentence, he really meant it, and when my mother turned to leave, she did what he had promised to do. He didn't let her go. He grabbed her by the hair and slammed her head against the kitchen counter.

He repeated that twice more. She bled out right there, in the middle of the kitchen. Then he called his friends and canceled the fishing trip for the next couple of days, claiming he had learned that the area was completely flooded due to strong downpours that year. He cleaned the kitchen, carried my mother to the car and drove there, to the exact location where they set up their camp every year. He parked where he always used to park and then carried her corpse to the pre-selected spot. He put up his tent and sat by the water for two days. He washed my mother in the water and tied her. Nobody has any idea why he took her there and what he was doing there. His phone was unreachable, because there's no signal there. When she was unable to reach him by phone for a full day, my grandmother went to the house, and when she found no one there, called the police. Then she started calling my mother. He left Mom's

phone in the car, and I think it was ringing non-stop until the battery went flat. This is actually the only clear picture I still have from that time: Grandma, on the phone, calling and calling, and nobody picks up.

And then, after two nights, Dad decided at some point that that was it. He went to the car, called the police himself and turned himself in. He confessed everything, told it exactly as it happened.

There's no story that I didn't try to spin to convince myself that this was a story of someone else. This story by Carver comes the closest. But the truth always catches up with me.

My grandmother, my father's mother, died a couple of months before I had my first daughter. And when she was in the hospital, very close to the end, she asked me if I could bring her a single thing from the house, a big dark green box from her bedroom. When she opened it, it contained a list. A list of 682 men. From this country alone. Men who had killed their wives. Everything she found on the internet, in newspapers, in archives, everything, collected, cataloged, organized. That was her list.

She said she was doing it to figure out why he did that. She wanted a concrete explanation of the case of my father, her own son. What are these collective anomalies, experiences, traits, anything that would connect them, that would explain what he did. But the more cases she discovered, she said, the clearer it became that he wasn't an exception. Far from it. That he was simply one of, a statistic, almost something normal, a man who had killed his wife.

And then she added: "I know you think a lot about it, but no. No worries. You're not even remotely like him."

THE ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY HER DAUGHTER will fall silent for a moment. As if she might want to say something else, but she will change her mind. This is the final monologue in the text. The author of the text thinks it would be great if it weren't also the final scene of the production.

She suggests that SHE, her mother, sing the number she wanted to do that night at karaoke before she changed her mind at the last second.
Maybe.
It's up to the production's creators to decide.

FINAL IMAGE

(Mom sings "Remember Me" by Diana Ross at the top of her lungs. The daughter and mother-in-law can join her.)

About the Author

Maša Pelko is a Slovenian theatre and radio director, playwright, and dramaturg. A graduate of the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television Ljubljana, she has directed at major Slovenian theatres, including the Slovenian National Theatre Drama Ljubljana, the Slovene National Theatre Maribor, and the Slovene National Theatre Nova Gorica. Her work has been featured at leading theatre festivals, and she has received numerous awards for theatre direction. Pelko also received the Young Playwright Award (now Zofka Kveder Award) in 2018. In 2025, she was nominated for the Slavko Grum Award for the Best New Slovenian Play with her play, *FÜR OPHELIA (A Mythology of Drowning)*.

About the Translator

Barbara Skubic is a Slovenian dramaturg, writer, and translator with a BA in Dramaturgy and an MA in Sociology from the University of Ljubljana. She has worked as a freelance translator from Arabic and English since 2000. She won the Young Translator Award in 2005 (now the Radojka Vrančič Award) for her translation of the novel *Bayn* al *Qasrayn* by Egyptian author and Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz. She was also nominated for the Sovre Award in 2025. She translates Slovenian drama into English and writes for the screen and stage.

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Staging rights: Maša Pelko
Please contact: masa.pelkoo@gmail.com

Translation rights: Barbara Skubic
Please contact: barbaraskubic@yahoo.com

THE ADVENTURES OF THE BOSCH FAMILY IN UNMIKISTAN

Jeton Neziraj

Translated from Albanian by Alexandra Channer

CHARACTERS

JANA

DAN

MR. BOSCH

MRS. BOSCH

MUJA

DOG

CINDERELLA

CAT

A short play about the unprecedented courage and commitment of all those European men and women who sacrificed their knowledge, effort, and comfortable lives for just a small amount of money (about 10,000 euros a month, to be exact), to contribute to humanitarian missions in the world's poor and traumatized countries.

Act I

1.

(In the office of MR. BOSCH. There are lots of sketches and tools. MR. BOSCH is in front of the mirror.)

MR. BOSCH: Oh, mirror, magic mirror, who is the cleverest in the world?

(Then speaking with a different voice.)

Oh, you are, MR. BOSCH. You are the cleverest, and most handsome, and most brave.

(MR. BOSCH feels proud.)

Sometimes I surprise myself with just how clever I am.

(A knock at the door. MR. BOSCH becomes serious. He opens the door. On the other side, the voice of a man is heard.)

VOICE: Working hard, Mr. Bosch!

MR. BOSCH: I enjoy working!

VOICE: Our company needs hard workers, and we reward them well.

MR. BOSCH: I don't work for the money. I work because, as the Japanese say, whoever works hard... works hard.

VOICE: Well, Mr. Bosch, it seems to me that, now, the time has come for you to be rewarded. Take this letter and read it!

(MR. BOSCH takes the letter; the door in front of him closes with a surprising bang.)

MR. BOSCH: *(reading) "... a large tender from the European Union, for the construction of 10 wind turbines in Unmikistan... Eh, eh, eh... .... you have been selected as the chief engineer... Eh, eh, eh... You will live in Unmikistan for one year and earn a salary... 10 thousand euros... Eh, eh, eh... Unmikistan is... Eh, eh, eh... It has high mountains and... Eh, eh, eh.... The sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening."*

Oh, no, I'm not ready for such a big adventure, although... 10 thousand euros!

(MR. BOSCH slaps himself.)

I must be dreaming. But I am not....

(Then he reads the letter again.)

... salary ... 10 thousand euros... Eh, eh, eh...

(MR. BOSCH goes back to the mirror. He smiles at himself.)

2.

(In the Bosch household. JANA is with her imaginary friend, CINDERELLA.)

JANA: *(reading from a book) The Cinderella Complex is an unconscious desire for others to take care of you. It is based on the idea of femininity portrayed in that story, in which the woman is beautiful, kind, and polite, supportive, hardworking, and independent, and criticized by other women, but also powerless to change her situation alone, thus she needs the help of an external force, and that is usually a man.*

Oh, Cinderella, this is me, totally.

CINDERELLA: What's with all these fairytales, Jana, why this fixation? Don't read everything made up by Freud's friends, who have nothing else to do, but invent all sorts of things that do and do not exist. I wouldn't be surprised if

one day they fabricate a "Red Riding Hood" complex, about girls who, in their subconscious, want to be eaten by a wolf. Nonsense, from start to finish.

JANA: *(continues reading)* A woman with this complex dreams of living a fairytale life; in which she meets a prince, and they fall madly in love with each other, and then live in a magical fantasy, happily ever after.

CINDERELLA: But this is every girl's dream. In my case, this became reality. All my fantasies came true. A charming prince came to save me, we had a magical kiss under the stars, and then he took me to his castle to live happily ever after.

JANA: Cinderella, you're not just a girl from a fairy tale. In reality, everything is much more complicated.

CINDERELLA: So what if I come from a fairy tale? And that's enough of this pointless chat, come on, you should get started on your homework for tomorrow.

JANA: You're so annoying. Why do you always have to remind me about my homework? I'll do it later.

CINDERELLA: If you don't want to do your homework, then go out into the garden, do something. You can't stay inside all the time.

JANA: I don't have anyone to play with. Kim doesn't want to play with me on Thursdays, and I don't want to play with Barbara because she told me one day that I was fat.

CINDERELLA: Well, naturally, if you spend all your time inside, you can't make new friends. And listen up, you are not fat. Not at all. Whoever told you that was being silly.

JANA: Really?

CINDERELLA: Really. You are very beautiful, Jana.

JANA: You're so nice. If only you existed in reality, too.

3.

(In the Bosch family home. They are eating supper.)

MR. BOSCH: Now that all the family is here, I'd like to discuss something together, something serious. What if we went somewhere else for a while!

MRS. BOSCH: What a good idea. We could go to the park tomorrow and stay there all afternoon!

MR. BOSCH: I'm talking about going somewhere further away!

MRS. BOSCH: That's an even better idea. We could go to the zoo!

JANA: Or we could go and eat ice cream at "*Sahara*."

MR. BOSCH: I meant let's go "further away," for a longer time!

MRS. BOSCH: Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful to go to see Aunt Maria for a few days!

MR. BOSCH: I'm thinking, what if we were to go somewhere even further away, for about a year!

MRS. BOSCH: To... Africa?!

JANA: Oh, I've always dreamed of going to Africa.

MR. BOSCH: No! I was not talking about Africa.

MRS. BOSCH: Italy?

MR. BOSCH: No!

JANA: Madagascar?

MRS. BOSCH: To...

JANA: To...

MR. BOSCH: To Unmikistan!

MRS. BOSCH: Where?

JANA: It sounds very *sexy*!

MRS. BOSCH: Jana, watch your language! I've never even heard of the place. No, we are not going.

MR. BOSCH: They've offered me five times the salary that I earn now.

MRS. BOSCH: Who cares? I couldn't get used to living in a country that is certainly so different from here.

JANA: I want to go. This town is so boring, just like these *potatoes* we're eating right now.

MR. BOSCH: I agree, Jana... about the *potatoes*. *(To MRS. BOSCH)* Darling, I'm talking about a short period of time... One year and a few months, not a day more.

MRS. BOSCH: And what about my job?

MR. BOSCH: You can work there too!

MRS. BOSCH: As a lawyer?

MR. BOSCH: Yes, of course!

MRS. BOSCH: In primitive countries, the concept of justice is unknown. In our jurisprudence exam, we learned that among the wild tribes of Africa, it is the eldest in the village who resolves contested issues. He decides who is right and who is not. I don't think the word "lawyer" exists, even in the dictionary.

MR. BOSCH: But we're not going to Africa, we're going to Unmikistan.

MRS. BOSCH: They sound the same to me, frightening. No. I'm not coming.

JANA: Dad, we could go alone, just you and me.

MR. BOSCH: We're going, all three of us. Listen, darling, I'll ask the people from the company what conditions they offer. There will, of course, be a school that Jana can attend, there must be some basic conditions.

MRS. BOSCH: No.

JANA: What job will you be doing there, Dad?

MR. BOSCH: I'll be leading a project to build 10 wind turbines that produce electricity. But so that the stupid residents don't damage them, they'll need to be well-protected. The boss told me that I'm the only one who can do the job. No one in the company has more award certificates than I. I've received the award for the "Most Distinguished Employee" for 27 years in a row.

JANA: Mama, please say yes, it sounds like important work.

MR. BOSCH: Last night, I had a dream I was on Mother Teresa Street, in a park where they feed the pigeons. It was a sign that I should accept this deeply humanitarian duty. This country needs my help.
MRS. BOSCH: I don't believe in dreams. No.
(MR. BOSCH takes out a book. He reads in a pathetic tone.)

MR. BOSCH: Perhaps you'll believe in books then. The guys from the company gave me this one: *Unmikistan, the Country Where Tears Have Dried Up*. I'll read you this part that I read earlier in the office, and it broke my heart.

(He opens it and starts to read.)

"Unmikistan is a place that is so poor, so miserable, that it is difficult to describe it in words. Trees there do not produce green leaves, but yellow ones, a sign of their eternal grief. Indeed, there, leaves bud in autumn and die back in spring."

God, how sad.

(MR. BOSCH wants to cry.)

Can you imagine, leaves that bud in autumn?

JANA: Oh, I've fallen in love with that country, without even going there.
MRS. BOSCH: Go on, since you started, keep reading.

MR. BOSCH: (reading) "Only a few people wash once a week – and that is mostly on Sundays. Most wash once every two weeks, or once a month. Indeed, there are those who never wash at all. There is no McDonald's, there isn't even an IKEA. Their children have large stomachs and staring eyes because they are starving. When a baby cries, the mother, who has no milk to feed it, calms it down by giving it marihuana, which they cultivate in their gardens. Their dinner table has just bread, salt, and love."

(MR. BOSCH cries. Then JANA starts to cry, and in the end, even MRS. BOSCH can't contain herself, and she bursts into tears. They cry like a choir.)

MRS. BOSCH: How very sad. How can those poor people survive without IKEA, and even without McDonald's! O God, how terrible.
JANA: You've got to do it, Dad, you must save that country!
MR. BOSCH: *(continues to read) "The electricity is on rarely. Their traffic lights only have one color: red. The sun rises later and sets earlier there. The moon is only ever in the form of a sickle. On Friday, everyone goes to the mosque to pray, and on Sunday, the same people go to church to pray. Their national hero is the scientist who discovered Viagra. And for their president, they have a 90-year-old woman, who can neither see nor hear."*

(They all burst out crying. The plates of potatoes fall onto the floor. It creates a mess.)

MRS. BOSCH: A blind old woman, as president! Oh Lord, how very sad.
MR. BOSCH: A country that only has red traffic lights!
JANA: What is "Viagra," Dad?

(MR. BOSCH bursts into tears again, and MRS. BOSCH follows him.)

4.

(In the garden of the Bosch's home. The atmosphere is serious. JANA and MR. and MRS. BOSCH go to a small podium. MR. BOSCH tests the microphone.)

MR. BOSCH: Test, test, test... One, two, one, two...! Dear friends, welcome to this farewell party of ours. I know that you're curious about the details, but I'll reveal all shortly.
JANA: Hi Barbara, hi Kim... I'm going to miss you.

MRS. BOSCH: It wasn't an easy decision. In truth, it wasn't at all easy. But we have decided to make this sacrifice for a deeply humanitarian cause.

MR. BOSCH: You will be proud of us, friends, very proud.

JANA: Over there, where we're going, Dad will earn a salary that is five times bigger than what he's been paid here, up to now.

MRS. BOSCH: Jana... private matters are not shared in public.

MR. BOSCH: Jana... there are other motives that have drawn us to set off on this mission.

MRS. BOSCH: We'll be going somewhere far away, to a country I never imagined we would ever visit.

MR. BOSCH: It's such a poor country you'd never believe it, and so the job that I'll do there, it'll be something important, something that will change the future of that country for the better...

JANA: No, Barbara, it is not Africa, or India. It is called...

MR. BOSCH: Wait, Jana. So, I've been invited there to build ten wind turbines that will produce electricity.

MRS. BOSCH: In the beginning, I was shocked, in fact, I'm still shocked. Nevertheless, isn't it incredible to think that the fate of an entire people depends upon us?

JANA: We're going to Unmikistan.

MR. BOSCH: Yes, dear friends, we are going to Unmikistan.

MRS. BOSCH: For a short time, at most a year, and a few months.

MR. BOSCH: *(to a guest)* Ms. Barbara, what's wrong? Oh, you look so pale. Please, drink some water. Someone, give her some water. Careful, stay strong... Oh, she's fallen onto the flowerbed. She's fainted. Water, please, give her some water. And someone call the ambulance.

MRS. BOSCH: I knew that it would be very shocking for most of you.

(Chaos ensues.)

5.

(In the room, there are three bulletproof vests. JANA and MR. and MRS. BOSCH pick them up and try them on.)

MRS. BOSCH: Let's go over the "risk scenarios" once more!

(MRS. BOSCH, MR. BOSCH, and JANA, "act out" various risk scenarios as if they are encountering the risks.)

MRS. BOSCH: *"Here, take my money, just don't do anything bad to me."*
MR. BOSCH: *"I am European, a friend of Unmikistan."*
JANA: *"I need your help."*
MRS. BOSCH: *"Hello, police? Someone has entered my garden."*
JANA: *"I need help, but I don't need help."*
MRS. BOSCH: *"Please don't kill me. Here, take this necklace, it is pure gold."*
MR. BOSCH: *"Thank you, but I do not have time for coffee."*
MRS. BOSCH: How safe are these vests?
MR. BOSCH: They can withstand a mortar shell. That's what the shopkeeper told me. They were the most expensive ones I could find.
JANA: We look ridiculous in them.

(They continue their "exercises.")

Act II

1.

(On a hill in Unmikistan.)

MUJA: You see those mountains over there? They are called the accursed mountains. I was walking over there, near a stream, when I heard a baby's cry. I gathered my courage and approached, and I saw two babies crying. Because I didn't know what to do, I started to lull the babies to sleep. Just before dawn, I was woken up by a dazzling light. There in front of me was a wild mountain fairy, ready to tear out my eyes and rip me to pieces. But then, one of the babies spoke. *Mother Fairy*, it said, *this man soothed us and fed us*. Then the mountain fairy gazed at me lovingly and said that she would give me whatever I wanted. I dithered and then asked her to give me force. She gave me such force that I can move a large hill, with only my breath.
DAN: You've told me this story a hundred and one times.
MUJA: And I'll tell you every time we meet because you're a coward.
DAN: I'm not. I can eat glass. Can you?

(DAN takes out a piece of glass from his bag and starts to eat it.)

MUJA: Eh, that's nothing. Lots of people can eat glass.

(An airplane flies over their heads.)

MUJA: Did that airplane shake a bit, eh?
DAN: Oh, don't do that, why do you have to do that?
MUJA: It's fun. When you think that half of them will be pooing their pants in terror.

(MUJA turns his head from the sky and starts to blow lightly in the direction of the airplane.)

MUJA: Look, look, see how the airplane is shaking.
DAN: When I was very young, I remember that we'd come out here, and when an airplane passed, we'd sing and then make a wish:

"Airplane, airplane, I have one wish."

I'm thinking of a wish.

MUJA: What wish?
DAN: It has to be secret, otherwise it can't be fulfilled

(MUJA blows again toward the airplane flying above their heads.)

DAN: Can't you tell me the secret of your power then?
MUJA: You have to do a good deed, and then, the mountain fairy will reward you, like me.
DAN: One day, I helped an old man cross the road.
MUJA: Yes, and then you broke four of his windows.
DAN: How could you know that?
MUJA: Well, I know everything about you, naturally, am I not your secret friend?
DAN: This thing about windows, I don't want to do it, but I just can't resist. When I see a beautiful window, I feel my mouth water, and then, I find myself throwing a ball straight at the glass.

(Another airplane passes above their heads. MUJA stands up and again starts to blow toward the airplane.)

2.

(In the airplane. There is turbulence.)

MRS. BOSCH: What do you say, shall I take another flight pill, or not? Eh? Better to take it. To hell with this turbulence.

(MRS. BOSCH takes a pill.)

JANA: Is there long to go, Dad?

MR. BOSCH: No.

JANA: How much longer?

MR. BOSCH: Just a little.

JANA: How much longer is just a little?

MR. BOSCH: Just a little, which means, just a little.

JANA: Why is it shaking so much?

MR. BOSCH: There are air currents, it's normal.

MRS. BOSCH: Oooh, it's better not to look out of the window.

JANA: Why, what are you looking at?

MRS. BOSCH: It's awful. The earth here seems to be a different color!

MR. BOSCH: What color?

MRS. BOSCH: It's terrible. Black… red and blue.

JANA: I didn't understand, what color, red or blue, or black!

MRS. BOSCH: Oh God, what is that thing there below? It looks like a dinosaur!

JANA: I can't see anything. Where?

MRS. BOSCH: There, over there!

MR. BOSCH: It can't be a dinosaur. Dinosaurs only live in Africa. And we are still in Europe. It could be a kangaroo, or a giraffe.

MRS. BOSCH: Oh, if you'd seen it! It had long arms, a thick neck, and it was so tall that I had the impression that its head reached the tail of the airplane.

JANA: It must just be a mountain peak, Mom. What pill did you take?
MRS. BOSCH: Fine, there's no need to believe me for now. But you'll see later. It might not have been a dinosaur, but it was a huge man, terrible, extraordinary, no one will convince me otherwise.

(Airplane bounces.)

MR. BOSCH: It's windy! Very good. That means, exactly, that lovely breezes blow here. I'm going to light up this country, I will light it up beautifully!
MRS. BOSCH: What's that smell?
JANA: Smells like someone has shat themselves.

(The voice of the stewardess is heard: "Ladies and gentlemen, we have now begun the airplane's descent. Please put on your safety belts." They sit on top of each other. The airplane shudders.)

3.

(A street in the capital of Unmikistan. DAN, holding a soccer ball, has paused in front of a house.)

DAN:

No, don't do it
No, no, Dan
You don't break windows
Don't you dare do that

Oh, God, why is my heart beating so fast
Boom-boom-boom
Like a wedding drum

No, Dan, don't

You promised yourself

Close your eyes, think of something else

Not windows, Dan

Never glass

Think of a bicycle

Oh, why is my mouth watering

Yum-yum-yum

If only I had a window right now

I would eat it like... like... glass

But no, Dan

You don't break windows

You don't eat glass

You will not do that

Will you, Dan?

Boom-boom-boom, heart

Mouth watering

Boom-boom-boom...

(DAN throws the ball. The sound of breaking glass is heard. DAN runs, picks up a shard of glass from the window he has broken, and then starts to eat it.)

4.

(JANA has climbed onto the table and is screaming very loudly.)

JANA: A mouse... a mouse in the kitchen.

(Enter MRS. BOSCH.)

MRS. BOSCH: Where, where is it?

JANA: Look, look over there!

(MRS. BOSCH also jumps onto the table in fear. Enter MR. BOSCH.)

MR. BOSCH: What's all this drama?

JANA: A mouse.

MRS. BOSCH: A horrid mouse.

MR. BOSCH: Really? Don't move an inch.

(Exits and then returns with the bulletproof vests.)

MR. BOSCH: Put these on, it could be dangerous.

(All three put on their bulletproof vests.)

MR. BOSCH: And now, I'll show you, Minnie Mouse. It's as if I had a premonition, I bought a box of mouse poison today.

(Takes the box of poison out of his pocket. Reads the description.)

MR. BOSCH: First, it is necessary to catch the mouse.

MRS. BOSCH: How? How do we catch it?

MR. BOSCH: That's what it says in the drug description. First, catch the mouse, then put three drops of poison in its mouth. The poison reacts after 12 hours. Strange, but that's what it says. So, we have to catch it first.

(MRS. BOSCH gets down from the table, picks up a broom, and gets ready to hit the "mouse.")

MRS. BOSCH: Right, I'll sort it out.

JANA: No, don't kill it, I don't want you to kill it.

MR. BOSCH: Get down from there now. It's already gone. It realized that we were serious. Mice are some of the most intelligent animals, they can smell danger.
MRS. BOSCH: Jana, wash your hands.

(JANA goes to the sink.)

JANA: There's no water.
MRS. BOSCH: Pah, it must be off again. How can we live like this!
MR. BOSCH: Don't exaggerate, it'll come on again in a few hours. We just have to get used to it.

(The power goes off. JANA jumps onto the table again and starts screaming, and then MRS. BOSCH also jumps onto the table. Chaos ensues.)

MR. BOSCH: Don't panic, don't panic. It's not the end of the world if the lights go out. Lights go off and on again. The first wind turbine is ready, soon we'll build the other nine, and power cuts in Unmikistan will be a thing of the past.

5.

(In the background, one raised arm of the wind turbine is visible, draped in red cloth, along with the flags of the EU, the United Nations and Unmikistan. MR. BOSCH, wearing a bulletproof vest, addresses the crowd. He is emotional.)

MR. BOSCH: Honorable President of the Republic of Unmikistan, honorable ministers, EU representatives, honorable ambassador, media representatives, people of Unmikistan.

I am deeply honored to have been given this opportunity today… that we today, we are donating this project to the people of Unmikistan… this wind turbine that… I will construct… we will build nine more wind turbines and… we will

bring a smile to the faces of the long-suffering people of Unmikistan, we will return the light to their eyes… I… The EU has contributed… thus, European taxpayers' money. I hope that we have beautiful, powerful winds. Long live the wind, long live the wind turbines, long live the European Union.

And before we officially inaugurate the wind turbine, I have begged the local residents not to fire guns. I know that in your culture, you fire off guns on occasions of celebration and joy, but please don't do it on this occasion.

Please, young man, put down that Kalashnikov.

(Applause and then solemn music. MR. BOSCH pulls down the red cloth, revealing the arm of the wind turbine. The applause intensifies. Fireworks explode in the sky, and then, gunfire begins. MR. BOSCH is frightened.)

6.

(JANA is playing alone in the garden. She looks bored. From inside the house, MRS. BOSCH's voice is heard.)

MRS. BOSCH: *(off)* Be careful, Jana, don't stay out in the sun too much.
JANA: It's not sunny.
MRS. BOSCH: *(off)* Even worse. Come inside, you might catch a cold.
JANA: It isn't cold.
MR. BOSCH: *(off)* Is the wind blowing?
JANA: No Dad!
MR. BOSCH: *(off)* Tell me if it blows, eh!
JANA: Yes, Dad, you told me that a thousand times already!
MRS. BOSCH: *(off)* Come here, Jana, come and see the new shoes that I bought!
JANA: I don't want to. You buy new shoes almost every day.

MRS. BOSCH: *(off)* We need to do something, otherwise we'll go mad! I, for one, am going crazy. If there weren't any shoes to entertain me a bit, I don't know how I'd cope with this country.

JANA:

And while I was doing a "hop"

jumping from one garden flagstone to another,

something that went "bommmm" fell loudly onto the grass.

A tattered ball.

My heart started beating faster.

They were both telling me something

about "wind," "shoes," "flu," "snow,"

and I was just so overwhelmed by curiosity

that, I don't know, I don't know... it hypnotized me.

Someone's ball fell into our garden.

Cinderella, what shall I do?

(CINDERELLA appears quite suddenly.)

CINDERELLA: Don't get carried away by your emotions. Take a deep breath and then throw that ball back.

(JANA picks up the ball and throws it back. But the ball, after a while, returns to her feet again.)

CINDERELLA: No, don't touch that ball again, go back inside the house. Do you hear me?

JANA:

I want to go inside the house,

but my legs send me the other way.

I want to stop, but I can't.

I shout, but instead of a cry,

Out of my mouth comes, "No, Dad, it's still not blowing."

And then, I approach the garden door,

I open it, slowly,

like the door of a castle that has a witch inside.

In front of the door, just by my feet, it is him.

(In front of her is DAN, and behind DAN is MUJA.)

MUJA: *(whispering to DAN)* You speak, go on, you speak first.

DAN: *(gathers his courage)* Hi!

JANA:

His eyes are different colors.

One is blue, the other is green.

How... kind

DAN: Hi.

JANA: *I've never seen eyes like that!*

MUJA: *(whispering to DAN)* Go on, introduce yourself, don't be a coward.

DAN: I'm Dan.

CINDERELLA: *(whispering to JANA)* Don't talk to him, don't speak to someone you don't know! What does it matter if he's the same age? Don't talk to him, run away inside.

JANA: I'm Jana!

MR. BOSCH: *(off)* Is the wind blowing?

JANA: No, Dad... no, no Dad, it isn't blowing.

DAN: Did I break a window with the ball?

JANA: What shall I say, Cinderella?

CINDERELLA: I don't want to talk to you. You ignore my advice anyway.

DAN: Do you want to play with me?

JANA: I don't know, not... Perhaps later?

He is looking at me so sweetly

I'd like to go, to go out with him

But I'm not brave enough

I don't know, don't know...

MRS. BOSCH: *(off)* Jana....

(JANA leaves. DAN is moved.)

DAN:

Muja, where are you

Can you hear me, where did you disappear

I'm stuck, I can't move

I can't take a single step

What the hell is happening

My knees, my knees are shaking

Help me, help...!

7.

(MR. BOSCH examines some wind turbine designs and then writes something in his large notebook. Outside the wind blows.)

MRS. BOSCH: I was at one of their ballet performances. That's what they were calling it, ballet, just like us. But really, it was not ballet at all, at least not as we know it.

MR. BOSCH: *(not listening, focusing on his designs)* Oh, really?

MRS. BOSCH: It was a primitive dance between some men who were courting

some women, until the men fell for one of the women, who, according to them, was the most beautiful. She wasn't at all pretty. She was quite fat and tall. I have heard, however, that their concept of beauty is medieval; they call fat women beautiful and feel sorry for thin women. According to them, they are thin because they have not been adequately fed.

MR. BOSCH: *(not paying attention)* Really! How terrible!

MRS. BOSCH: So those male dancers fell for the "beautiful" female dancer, but in the end, they butchered each other with their swords. I swear it looked like real slaughter. Someone might have thought it was a game and that the red liquid on the stage was paint, but no, it was slaughter, and there was blood on the stage.

MR. BOSCH: Blood, but how come?

MRS. BOSCH: Oh, it was awful. I will never forget. It was like watching a bullfighting competition in Spain, not a ballet. I can't get over it. I'm shocked. Someone should go and show these people how to dance on stage. Someone has to stop these dances that end up in a massacre.

MR. BOSCH: Interesting, very interesting!

(MRS. BOSCH now realizes that MR. BOSCH is not paying any attention to her at all. She goes and turns the designs over.)

MRS. BOSCH: What's interesting?

MR. BOSCH: What you just said.

MRS. BOSCH: What did I say?

MR. BOSCH: You were talking about… you were saying. Yes, so, you were saying. Sorry, darling, but I'm so stressed. It seems like a curse. Imagine, today, when we turned the wind turbine blades to the north, the wind started blowing from the east. We've changed the blades 10 times so far, and never once in the right direction.

MRS. BOSCH: Let's forget this cursed project, leave it, and go home. I can't stand by and watch you destroy yourself a little more every day! Can't you see what you've become?

MR. BOSCH: I've never given up on a job once it's started. I go all the way to the end. I don't dare give up so easily, that's what Mother Teresa asked of me in that dream I had. I would rather give up my own head than this project... You know, I read in a book that they have a strange legend.

MRS. BOSCH: I don't want to hear it. I've had enough of all the legends and stories in this place. A country cursed with legends.

MR. BOSCH: It's about a castle that is built every day and ruined every night.

MRS. BOSCH: Castle... ruins... darkness... Dracula...!

MR. BOSCH: And so, do you know what they did to keep it standing?

MRS. BOSCH: Something stupid, as usual.

MR. BOSCH: They immure a woman inside the wall of the castle.

MRS. BOSCH: That's enough, enough, this is morbid.

MR. BOSCH: And she begs them to leave one nipple outside, so that she can still feed her little baby. How tragic.

MRS. BOSCH: Tragic? Comic, I'd say! A primitive society that still sacrifices people to please the gods. Like two thousand years ago.

MR. BOSCH: It's just a legend. I enjoyed it when I read it.

MRS. BOSCH: And why did you mention that now? I hope you don't intend to immure me in the blades of this wind turbine of yours. Let me put it this way: the only sacrifice that needs to be made is for you to give up and pass on the job to a more skilled engineer. That's it, nothing else.

MR. BOSCH: What do you mean by this criticism? How long have you doubted my abilities? Eh, for 37 years in a row, I was declared "Most Distinguished Employee"! The boss himself told me that if I couldn't do this project, no one else in the world could. You've all turned against me. People and gods. But no,

I will not give up. Never ever. The wind turbine is perfectly designed. It's the first time in the world that a wind turbine has been built, with blades that can be turned in any direction necessary.

(MRS. BOSCH, who is looking out the window, is horrified by what she sees. She rubs her eyes in disbelief.)

MRS. BOSCH: Damn it, either I'm going crazy, or that mountain is really moving!

MR. BOSCH: Go to sleep, darling. The mountain cannot move.

MRS. BOSCH: But it moved, I saw it with my own eyes.

MR. BOSCH: Good night. Sleep well.

MRS. BOSCH: I must do something, otherwise I'll go mad.

MR. BOSCH: I have an idea.

MRS. BOSCH: I've had enough of your ideas!

MR. BOSCH: No, really. Why not, for example, establish an international women's club? You could call it the *International Women's Club in Unmikistan*.

Act III

1.

(DAN and JANA are sitting on a concrete wall. They look down on the city.)

DAN: Look, here is the *border* dividing locals and internationals. On the other side of this street, the real city begins. This area, where you live, is the most boring part, where nothing ever happens. Come, let me take you to an interesting place.

JANA: I don't want to cross to the other side.

DAN: Why?

JANA: My Mom and Dad told me not to dare to go beyond this street.

DAN: Why?

JANA: Because they said that over there, people are different.

DAN: They are the same, like me, like you.

JANA: But we are not the same. You have different colored eyes.

DAN: Are they bad?

JANA: They are a bit unusual. But I like them.

DAN: Come, and you'll see what wonderful neighborhoods there are on that side.

JANA: I don't dare. I'm frightened.

DAN: Oh, come on, don't be scared. I go there every day. Over there, between those two tall buildings, those ones with the dilapidated façades, that's where Muja lives.

JANA: Who is he?

DAN: He's my friend, and the strongest man in the world. He has a muscular body and a long mustache. When he breathes out of his mouth, he can move any building in the city.

JANA: Oh, now I'm even more scared.

DAN: But he is very nice.

JANA: I don't know, I must ask Cinderella.

DAN: Who is she?

JANA: My best friend. She is the prettiest and nicest person in the world.

(DAN takes out a piece of glass from his bag and starts to eat it.)

JANA: Is that real glass?

DAN: Of course!

JANA: How can you eat it? Doesn't it cut your tongue?

DAN: No! It melts in my mouth like ice cream. I know, it is a bad habit. Everyone tells me I should give it up, but I can't. I stop for a few days, but then I start again. My Dad has promised to buy me a bicycle if I stop eating glass. I'm considering it.

JANA: You could eat chocolate instead of glass!

DAN: I don't like chocolate that much.

JANA: Me neither.

DAN: And you, do you like chocolate?

JANA: I just said that I don't like it that much.

DAN: Me neither.

JANA: If I come with you to the other side, do you promise that you'll bring me home?

DAN: Of course, whenever you want.

JANA: But not today, perhaps I'll come another time.

(DAN eats glass.)

2.

(In JANA's room. She is with CINDERELLA.)

CINDERELLA: What are your Dan's eyes like?

JANA: Green and blue.

CINDERELLA: Green or blue?

JANA: One is green, the other is blue.

CINDERELLA: How strange. But in Unmikistan, this is probably the least of all surprises. How do you feel when you're with him?

JANA: I feel good.

CINDERELLA: That's all?

(JANA looks around her, as if she wants to be sure no one else is nearby.)

JANA: Oh, Cinderella, when I see him, my whole body trembles, it's like I have a lump in my throat, my legs feel foreign, I feel weak, and my saliva dries up, my ears roar, and all I can hear is something like, "boom-boom, boom-boom" inside my body, the palms of my hands are sweaty, and my hair stands on end, I can't catch my breath, and I think: here, right now, now I'm going to collapse, on the ground, I will faint, I will swoon before him.

CINDERELLA: Oh, but you are in love!

JANA: Sssshhhh, or they'll hear you below! And I'm not in love. I'm just a little...

CINDERELLA: A little...?

JANA: I'm sleepy now. Good night.

CINDERELLA: Wait, don't go. What was that muscular man called, the one you said was Dan's friend?

JANA: Muja! Don't even think about it. He comes from some very strange fairy tales full of blood and violence. He didn't seem that interested in women.

(Enter MUJA.)

MUJA: What are you saying, Jana! True, the fairy tales that I come from are bloody, but the bloodshed happens precisely because of women. For example, in at least two of the fables, I kill the monster, Bajlozi i Zi (the Black Baloz), because of a beautiful woman.

JANA: Now things are getting complicated. I'm leaving you alone. I don't want to listen to your conversation.

(As she leaves, JANA winks at CINDERELLA.)

CINDERELLA: I don't know what to do now. To ask for help?

MUJA: With all due respect, ma'am, I'm afraid no one could help you, even if you screamed until morning. I can move a mountain with just the breath that comes out of my mouth, let alone one hand or two.

CINDERELLA: Oh, you're destroying the date, sir.

MUJA: Call me Muja, for short. I am the most powerful man in Unmikistan. I come from some ancient fairytales and fables from these parts. In most of the stories, my brother and I fight against enemies who kidnap our sister, Ajkuna. What about you?

CINDERELLA: I am Cinderella. I imagine you know the fairy tale about me.

MUJA: I think so. Are you that girl with the red riding hood who takes cake to her grandmother, and then her grandmother eats a wolf instead of the cake?

CINDERELLA: Oh, you're a comedian. That's Red Riding Hood. I'm the girl with the shoe. Remember, I'm leaving the ball, and one of my shoes is left behind, on the stairs?

MUJA: I haven't heard of it.

CINDERELLA: It doesn't matter. Do you like dancing?

MUJA: No.

CINDERELLA: What do you like?

MUJA: I like to make things move! If you like, we could go out onto the balcony, and from there, I'll blow at the mountain, and you'll see how it moves. I do it almost every night.

CINDERELLA: Really, you can do that!

MUJA: I could flatten the entire city if I wanted to, in just one breath.

(MUJA exits, and CINDERELLA follows him.)

3.

(In the Bosch home in Unmikistan. Everywhere is a mess. MR. and MRS. BOSCH are bewildered by the chaos.)

MR. BOSCH: Something doesn't feel right here.

MRS. BOSCH: It's a mess everywhere, upstairs, in the basement, there are things that have moved from their place everywhere.

MR. BOSCH: Perhaps Jana did it?

MRS. BOSCH: How could she have moved all these heavy things, like that big table over there, for example?

MR. BOSCH: I don't know, really, I don't know.

MRS. BOSCH: What about you, maybe you did it in your sleep, delirious.

MR. BOSCH: Of course I didn't, I don't think... I don't remember. But even if I did sleepwalk, I still couldn't have moved that huge table.

MRS. BOSCH: I know, but now that your head is so full of wind turbines, it isn't so hard to believe that you could do impossible things.

MR. BOSCH: To move that heavy table, you'd need a strong man.

(Enter JANA.)

MR. BOSCH: Don't you notice anything?

JANA: New shoes, Mom?

MRS. BOSCH: They aren't new, I bought them three days ago.

MR. BOSCH: Can't you see all our things in a mess, turned upside down, ruined!?

JANA: It wasn't me.

MR. BOSCH: I'll be on guard from tonight. I'll stay awake.

(MR. BOSCH's mouth gapes.)

MR. BOSCH: How humiliating, as soon as I said I would stay awake, I started to

fall asleep. Of course, I won't be able to stay awake.

MRS. BOSCH: Jana, who was that boy you were with yesterday?

JANA: He lives in the neighborhood over there.

MRS. BOSCH: Why are you hanging out with him when you don't even know him!

JANA: I didn't know him, but now I do. He is called Dan.

MRS. BOSCH: Eh, see, when you go out with people you don't know, the house ends up like this...!

JANA: Why is it my fault?

MR. BOSCH: All right, we mustn't point the finger at anyone without being sure. I mean, he is Jana's age, he couldn't have done this.

MRS. BOSCH: I've begun to believe that everything in this place is possible. A few nights ago, I saw a mountain moving. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.

(The doorbell rings. MR. and MRS. BOSCH are surprised.)

MRS. BOSCH: Who could it be so early in the morning?

MR. BOSCH: Can someone get the bulletproof vests?

JANA: It must be Dan. We agreed to meet again.

(JANA rushes out. They are in shock.)

MR. BOSCH: Jana, you can't just go out whenever you want. We won't permit it.

MRS. BOSCH: Oh god, what is happening in this house?

(MR. BOSCH follows JANA.)

MR. BOSCH: Jana, Jana...

(MR. BOSCH returns again.)

MR. BOSCH: Give me a bulletproof vest. I can't go out like this.

(And while MR. BOSCH puts on the vest, JANA enters with DAN.)

JANA: I invited him inside. We're going up to my room.

(MR. and MRS. BOSCH look at DAN as if he were an alien. JANA and DAN go upstairs.)

MRS. BOSCH: Did you notice his eyes?
MR. BOSCH: No.
MRS. BOSCH: Oh god, I've never seen such scary eyes in all my life.
MR. BOSCH: I didn't notice his eyes, but I saw something even stranger in his hands. I can't be sure, but it looked as if he had a shard of glass.
MRS. BOSCH: A shard of glass?!

(MRS. BOSCH faints. MR. BOSCH tries to revive her.)

4.

(MRS. BOSCH addresses a group of women from different countries. She holds an egg in her hand.)

MRS. BOSCH: I feel very privileged that, in our meeting tonight, you have given me this opportunity to address you with a formal speech. Dear ladies of the International Women's Club in Unmikistan. Last time, we all tried the local tea. It was an extraordinary experience. Of course, as we all discovered that day, the taste of that tea was entirely different from ours. It lacked bitterness, and as Doctor Smith quite rightly noted, it was more calorific than the tea we drink in Europe.

Today, dear international women, we're going to take a step further, an even bigger step. Today we will try the local eggs. So, not the eggs that come to us packaged in Europe, but the eggs that the local residents call "village eggs." They have neither a production nor an expiration date. There's no information about the condition the chickens were in when they laid the eggs; however, as usual, we have Dr. Smith in our club, who can help with any problems.

Since I'm first in line to try the eggs, I would like to let you know that I have left my will with my husband.

If I die, please remember me at the next meeting.

(MRS. BOSCH gets ready to eat the egg she is holding. She is emotional. She cracks it open, examines it, and then eats it. Applause is heard in the hall.)

I'm fine! No change at all. Well, ladies, help yourselves and eat an egg.
Let this be a sign of our love and respect for the local culture of Unmikistan.

5.

(Evening. A road in Unmikistan. Thin smoke is coming out of a container. DAN is holding JANA's hand, she looks amazed, and every now and then, she takes photographs. The silence is broken by the voice of the CAT singing.)

CAT:
When on Unmikistan darkness falls
Speckled cats come to the window
They meow, shed tears, lift up their tails
Calling the handsome tomcats to return
Nothing is like it was before

Oh, friends, let me tell you, nothing is like it was before

JANA: She has a good voice.

DAN: That's Igo, the best-known cat in town.

CAT: I was, but not anymore. I'm a useless creature who suffers for love.

JANA: I don't believe it! A cat that talks?

DAN: This is the quarter of talking animals. All the residents here are very beloved.

JANA: Isn't it just like a fairy tale? Animals that speak!

(From the rubbish container, a red DOG raises its head.)

DOG: We speak, but it would be better for us to be silent. Greetings. I am Red Dog. I have only three legs. Do you want to know why I have only three legs?

JANA: I'm dying of curiosity.

DAN: He was a soldier in the brigade of Che Guevara. I'll tell her everything, Red Dog, don't worry.

DOG: Be careful, tell her the whole story, don't forget the part when I step on four mines, just to save the commander's life.

DAN: Of course, that is the most wonderful part of your story, how could I forget it?

CAT: Such a boring story. It's time to think of a new one, you lazy Red Dog.

DOG: Shut up, or I'll come and eat you.

DAN: Please, be a little more polite, can't you see, we have a guest.

(DAN and JANA continue onwards.)

JANA: Whoa, what's that thing up there?

DAN: She's a mermaid? Half-fish and half-woman.

JANA: You have mermaids here too!

(JANA and DAN leave. CINDERELLA enters behind them, panting.)

CINDERELLA: Janaaaa! Jaaannaaa! You're too far away, and I can't catch you up. This is a place where I can't take care of you. Jannaaa... come back!

(CINDERELLA runs after them. One shoe falls off her foot. MUJA enters and picks up the shoe in his hand.)

MUJA: Your shoe, your shoe fell off, Cinderella!
CINDERELLA: *(off)* Give it to me later, I don't have time now!

(MUJA exits with the shoe in his hand.)

6.

(MRS. BOSCH and MR. BOSCH have put on their bulletproof vests and are standing by. MR. BOSCH is holding JANA's bulletproof vest.)

MR. BOSCH: How could she dare to do such a thing? I've told her a hundred times never to leave the house without this vest on.
MRS. BOSCH: Where the hell are the police? Why don't they tell us anything!
MR. BOSCH: *(At the window. Talking to someone on the other side.)* Good evening, Mr. Smith. What? I can't hear you. The Queen? Queen Elizabeth has a cold. Tell her to drink tea and not to leave the house. We're fine, but Jana, our daughter, is missing. We don't know where she went, she left the garden and disappeared. It looks like someone kidnapped her. Have you seen her by any chance? I notified the police, of course. Let us know if you see her around. We are so anxious.

The English are so annoying.

MRS. BOSCH: Oh, I hope they don't torture her. Do you think they'll give her something to eat and drink? My poor daughter. My dear Jana.

MR. BOSCH: We shouldn't have left her to play in the garden! Did she at least have her bulletproof vest on?

MRS. BOSCH: You are holding her bulletproof vest in your hand.

MR. BOSCH: Of course. I don't even know what I'm talking about!

MRS. BOSCH: You talk and think about those damned wind turbines all the time. You don't see us or hear us when we talk. Go on, talk like a madman to your wind turbines now.

MR. BOSCH: Jana will come back; she's not a child anymore. She understands that we worry about her, and she will come back.

MRS. BOSCH: Why don't you go out and look for her?

MR. BOSCH: I don't know where to go. Even if I went out, I wouldn't know which way to go. There are dozens of roads, how do I know which one she took?

MRS. BOSCH: Well, since you don't know where to go, then I'll go out myself.

MR. BOSCH: Don't do it, you can't... don't... it's dangerous.

(MRS. BOSCH takes off her bulletproof vest.)

MRS. BOSCH: I can't walk with this horse saddle on me.

(MRS. BOSCH exits. MR. BOSCH is shocked.)

7.

(In the capital of Unmikistan. It is dark. MRS. BOSCH wanders around looking for JANA. In the darkness, the voices of people who are talking to her can be heard.)

MRS. BOSCH: *(calls)* Janaaaa.... Janaaaa....?

A MAN'S VOICE: You look upset. Can we help you, ma'am?

MRS. BOSCH: *Please don't kill me! My daughter, JANA, is missing.*

A WOMAN'S VOICE: Where's your coat, ma'am? Here, take mine, put it on!

MRS. BOSCH: *Take my money, but just please don't hurt me.*

A MAN'S VOICE: A young girl is missing, let's go and look for her.

A WOMAN'S VOICE: Ma'am, take this lantern, so you can see better.

(MRS. BOSCH takes a lantern that someone gives her.)

MRS. BOSCH: Jeez.... Where are you... Jannaaaa!

A WOMAN'S VOICE: A young girl is missing, close the city gates...

A MAN'S VOICE: Take this water and drink it, ma'am, it'll make you feel better.

A WOMAN'S VOICE: She'll be found, don't worry. No one ever gets lost in this city.

A MAN'S VOICE: We'll help you, ma'am.

(MRS. BOSCH drinks the water that someone gives her. Then she puts her arms into the coat that someone puts around her. More people with lanterns come out into the street.)

MRS. BOSCH: I can't believe it. It feels like I'm in a dream. I've never come across such kind and helpful people in all my life. Are you really going to help me find my daughter?

8.

(MR. BOSCH is still in the house. A noise is heard outside. MR. BOSCH picks up a kitchen knife and prepares for an attack. The door opens, JANA enters.)

JANA: Mom? Dad?

MR. BOSCH: Where are the kidnappers?

JANA: What kidnappers? What happened?

MR. BOSCH: What happened? Where have you been until now?

JANA: In town!

MR. BOSCH: What do you mean, in town?

JANA: In town, Dad, I went for a walk with Dan, my friend.

MR. BOSCH: Don't tell me you dared to cross the border!

JANA: I might have crossed it. I didn't notice any border.

MR. BOSCH: This is unacceptable. You crossed over to the area where the locals live!!!

JANA: You know, it was the prettiest area. I had such a nice time.

MR. BOSCH: We told you that going to that area is dangerous.

JANA: Yes, because people there have sharper teeth and bigger ears. They all carry guns and use them like toys. Instead of fireworks, they fire guns on holidays. They kidnap children and eat chickens alive. Oh yes, and they never wash more than once a week. Fairy tales. Fairy tales. I did not see any of this on the other side. The people were very friendly, and the children played the same games as we did. They even had some games that were more fun than ours. I have never seen more people smiling than I did today. They were poor, but much more generous than we were. An old lady invited us into her garden and gave us hot pie. A little girl on the street gave me her necklace. At the hospital entrance, I saw a man carrying his sick mother on his back. A wedding caravan stopped in the middle of the city, and the guests began to dance in a circle, and then everyone else in the square joined in and danced with them. I saw many other things, but mostly I saw love, a lot of love. And no one told me that I'm fat.

(MR. BOSCH is in shock.)

MR. BOSCH: You must see an international psychologist tomorrow.

JANA: Where is Mom?

MR. BOSCH: Outside, looking for you.

(JANA looks guilty.)

MR. BOSCH: I wanted to ask you something else, on a different topic—which, when you calm down, we should discuss seriously. Was the wind blowing?

JANA: Yes!

MR. BOSCH: From which direction?

JANA: I think from the north!

MR. BOSCH: Damn it. This morning, we turned the wind turbine blades to the south! I told those damn workers that it might blow from the north today, but they didn't listen. I'll deal with them tomorrow.

9.

(At the wind turbine. Night. It's raining and windy. MR. BOSCH is sleepwalking in a delirium, and he approaches the wind turbine in his pajamas. He has sketches and other documents in his hand. He speaks frantically.)

MR. BOSCH: As you can see, Mr. Thompson, everything is functioning. The blades are moving perfectly. Yesterday, it lit up the "Mice" neighborhood. Production capacity is beyond our expectations. Of course, I could not fail. Yesterday, some residents told me that they had asked the President of Unmikistan to erect a monument to me. No, I said to them, I couldn't accept such an honor. But they insisted. So, in two weeks, mine will be there too, next to Mother Teresa's memorial, in the city center. I'm happy that the European Union will also be happy. We should celebrate, of course. Call whomever you want, and I will invite the whole international neighborhood. We must tell the local residents to take their weapons with them. Let them fire off as many guns as they want. Let it be a big party.

(Enter MRS. BOSCH and JANA. MRS. BOSCH throws a blanket over MR. BOSCH.)

MRS. BOSCH: He's sleepwalking, sleepwalking.

JANA: How could he have walked all this way with his eyes shut!

MR. BOSCH: Mr. Thompson, now that this wind turbine is working, we can immediately proceed with the construction of the other nine. I propose we build even more than forecast in the project. Why not build another 90 wind turbines? Unmikistan would be able to export the electricity as well.

MRS. BOSCH: Come on, dear, come on. Everything will be all right.

JANA: How do we wake him up!

MR. BOSCH: It's working, it's working.

JANA: Yes, Dad, but wake up now, wake up.

(MRS. BOSCH shakes him, then slaps him in the face. MR. BOSCH wakes up.)

MR. BOSCH: Where am I? What's going on!

JANA: You were delirious, you sleepwalked all the way here, Dad.

MRS. BOSCH: Come now, you're all wet, you're soaking.

MR. BOSCH: Did anything happen to the wind turbine?

JANA: Nothing happened. It's just there, behind you.

MR. BOSCH: I'm cold, I'm cold. I feel like I'm going to have a fever again tonight. Why is nothing working as I planned? Damn it, I did all the measurements correctly, all the testing, and everything should work in theory. But it doesn't, in practice. In practice, everything is not going according to plan, as if there is someone behind it all, who is pulling down and ruining everything that we build during the day. I pray to God to blow, and he blows. Oh, I say, look, the wind is blowing. But that very night, when the wind blows, the blades of the wind turbine are on the wrong side. And so on, the next time, and the next time. It must be a curse, there's no other explanation. But no, damn Unmikistan, you're not going to ruin my career. I will never leave. I will triumph.

JANA: Yes, Dad, we will triumph. But come now, let's go back home.

(They exit.)

10.

(In JANA's room. She is with DAN. The voices of MUJA and CINDERELLA can be heard from outside.)

MUJA: *(off)* Are you ready? We can't stay here guarding you all day.
CINDERELLA: *(off)* They could come any second, hurry.
DAN: They're so annoying.

(DAN eats glass.)

JANA: Please don't do it in my presence. It makes me sad.
DAN: But this isn't glass!
JANA: Of course, it's glass.
DAN: No, they're sweets made locally. My father went to the chocolate factory one day, and told them about my habit, and after that, they started making sweets that looked like glass. Do you want to try one?
JANA: It really isn't glass?
DAN: Really. Try it.

(JANA tries one. She likes it. They start dividing the remaining sweets into small pieces and eating them. Then, they get very close to each other and are about to kiss. But they stop when they hear MUJA's voice.)

MUJA: *(off)* They're coming, they're coming. Go, Dan.

(MUJA and CINDERELLA put their heads in the bedroom window.)

DAN: Damn it, why did they have to come at exactly this moment? Listen, do something, keep them away.
MUJA: What can we do, how can we do it?
CINDERELLA: I can't think of a single clever idea.
JANA: Muja, could you create some mist, so they lose their way in the yard?

DAN: Good idea.

(The room begins to tremble.)

JANA: What's happening?

(DAN goes to the window to look.)

DAN: We're detaching, detaching from the ground... The house is rising into the sky.

(JANA also goes to the window and looks down.)

JANA: How did he do that? It's so misty down there, you can't see a thing! Oh, there's Dad and Mom in the yard, lost in the fog.

(The voices of MR. and MRS. BOSCH can be heard from "below.")

MR. BOSCH: *(off)* Wait, have we entered someone else's backyard?
MRS. BOSCH: *(off)* I can't see anything, I can't take a single step forward.
JANA: Do you still have any invisible sweets left?
DAN: Some crumbs perhaps.
JANA: That'll do...

(They are about to kiss. CINDERELLA and MUJA again put their heads in the window.)

MUJA: We can't hold you in the sky for much longer. Finish your conversation as soon as possible.
CINDERELLA: And don't even think about kissing.
JANA: We hadn't even thought about it.

(MUJA leaves. They start to kiss again, but the house starts to "fall" down and they barely hold on.)

JANA: It's falling, the house is falling down again...

DAN: Mujaaaa... Don't bring it down so fast, you idiot.

(The house hits the ground again. DAN kisses JANA on the cheek and then escapes through the window.)

MRS. BOSCH: *(off)* Jana, are you at home!

JANA: No, Dad... yes, Mom... I'm here. In the bedroom.

MRS. BOSCH: *(off)* We're coming right now; we just need to find the door. It's so foggy. I don't know how it came on so suddenly.

MR. BOSCH: *(off, shouting)* A cat, a cat on the perimeter wall.

JANA: *(to herself)* It's a tomcat, Dad, and it has beautiful, multi-colored eyes!

Act IV

1.

(Dusk-evening. MR. BOSCH, alone, holding some sketches and documents, stands by the wind turbine.)

MR. BOSCH: Blow, blow, damn it! Didn't the anemometer say that it would be windy today? It must be windy now. Come on, move the blades, lazy turbine. You're not here for decoration. Come on, do it. Do it, or I'll pull you down, idle, useless creature.

To hell with it, it's a curse, I'll never produce electricity.

Farewell, you hills of Unmikistan. I'm leaving you to your cruelty and sadness. It seems it was not written that I should light up this place.

(A light breeze blows. MR. BOSCH's letters and sketches scatter across the field.)

The wind is blowing, but not where it should. It's blowing in the wrong direction. Shame, shame, you cursed wind. You've tested me enough. I surrender; I can't take it anymore. Tomorrow, I am going back to my homeland. Get lost, may you blow like a winter wind from Siberia. See you, windless wind.

(He tries to gather the documents that are being scattered by the wind, but then, tired, he piles them up on the ground. Enter JANA and MRS. BOSCH.)

MRS. BOSCH: Oh, that's enough, I can't do this anymore. Tomorrow, tomorrow we are returning. I can't watch you wasting away in this damn place. That's it. It's over.

MR. BOSCH: It's not fair, it's not fair. I did everything appropriately.

JANA: I don't want to go home. No, Dad, don't give up.

MR. BOSCH: There's no point in staying in this damned place anymore. It's all my fault. I know. I forced you to come. I didn't think about you, only about my career. Forgive me.

MRS. BOSCH: Get up now, don't be silly. Get up. Everything is fine. We'll go back home and start all over again.

JANA: Why doesn't anyone listen to me? I don't want to go home. I want to stay here. I like this place.

MRS. BOSCH: *(to JANA)* I, too, would have liked to stay even if for a few more weeks, but things are not going well.

MR. BOSCH: Tomorrow, then... tomorrow.

(MR. BOSCH gets up and goes out with MRS. BOSCH.)

MRS. BOSCH: *(exiting)* Come on, Jana. We have to pack our suitcases.

(JANA is left alone. DAN enters.)

DAN: So, we won't see each other again?

JANA: And all because of the wind, which did not blow, or did not blow in the

right direction. If only the blades of the wind turbine had moved, things would have been quite different.

DAN: Well… Goodbye, Jana.

JANA: Well… Goodbye, Dan.

(JANA, desperate, prepares to leave. All of a sudden, the blades of the wind turbine start to move. JANA turns around, she can't believe her eyes.)

JANA: This isn't possible! The wind is blowing from the opposite direction, how can the blades move without being pushed by the wind?

DAN: *(smiles)* Well, it's possible.

JANA: But how?

DAN: In Unmikistan, everything is possible. Look who is behind them!

JANA: Muja?

DAN: I begged him, and he did it for me.

JANA: I have to tell my Dad.

(JANA exits. MUJA approaches DAN.)

MUJA: What do you think? Did it work?

DAN: Go back and keep blowing. Her dad is coming back now, and he needs to see the blades of the wind turbine moving.

MUJA: Okay, okay, but I won't be blowing forever. Maybe a few months or years, that's it, no more.

DAN: A few years is enough, then you can go and meet Cinderella. Didn't you agree to meet after 100 years?

MUJA: Yes, that's how we left things. But isn't that a bit long?

DAN: Ah, don't be an idiot. 100 years in a fairy tale are like one day in reality. Go on now.

(MUJA leaves. The blades of the wind turbine begin to move again. DAN looks into the distance.)

DAN: Wow, how wonderful, the "Mice" neighborhood is completely lit up. And look, the "Quarter of talking animals" and the "Rhinoceros Quarter" are lit up too...

(Enter MR. BOSCH, followed by JANA and MRS. BOSCH.)

MR. BOSCH: Oh, fantastic, it's a miracle. But I don't understand, the wind is still blowing from the west, yet the wind turbine blades are moving, even though they are facing the opposite direction! But, in the end, what does it all matter!
DAN: In Unmikistan, anything is possible.
JANA: Dad, we're not going back home, are we?
MR. BOSCH: No, Jana, I will now continue planning the construction of other wind turbines. Unmikistan is a wonderful country!
MRS. BOSCH: I didn't even intend to go back. Today I sent my CV to a law office, I am waiting to be invited for an interview. How beautiful the illuminated city looks. I can't believe my eyes, look over there, in the square, people have formed a big circle, and they're dancing with drums and kettle drums. How beautifully they dance.

(DAN takes out a piece of glass and begins to eat it.)

MRS. BOSCH: Oh, God, don't tell me that Dan is eating his glass!
JANA: Of course not, Mom. It's the local sweet; they look like pieces of broken glass. They're called invisible sweets.
MRS. BOSCH: Oh, is that so? I couldn't believe it.
DAN: Come on, Jana, let's go somewhere else.
JANA: Where do you want to go?
DAN: To the quarter of talking animals.
MRS. BOSCH: Where did you say you were going? Did you say talking animals? Have the children lost their minds?
JANA: Mom, that's the name of the section of the city library where the

children's books are found. That's where we're going, to the library.

(JANA and DAN exit holding hands.)

MR. BOSCH: *(to himself)* And now, Mr. Thompson, you can come and inspect the works whenever you like. The European Union will be proud of me!

MRS. BOSCH: There's no way it could be otherwise. We are all proud.

(MR. BOSCH starts to dance around the wind turbine. After a while, he shouts in horror.)

MRS. BOSCH: What happened, why are you shouting?
MR. BOSCH: A monster, I saw a monster nearby.
MRS. BOSCH: You imagined it, my dear. Come on, you're tired, you need sleep.
MR. BOSCH: I'm sure it was a...
MRS. BOSCH: Everything ended as it should. Look how beautifully the arms of your wind turbine are moving. Come, let's go down to the square and dance with the locals!

(They exit. After a while, CINDERELLA passes by. When she sees MUJA, she intentionally leaves one shoe on the field. MUJA sees it.)

MUJA: Cinderella, your shoe, you lost a shoe!

(CINDERELLA pretends she doesn't hear him and leaves. MUJA doesn't know what to do; he can't decide whether to keep blowing on the wind turbine or to follow CINDERELLA. In the end, he leaves the wind turbine, picks up CINDERELLA's shoe, and follows her.)

MUJA: Cinderella, your shoe, you lost a shoe!

End

About the Author

Jeton Neziraj is a Kosovan playwright and founder/director of Qendra Multimedia. His plays, translated into 20+ languages, have been staged over 70 times across Europe and the US, including at La MaMa (New York), Volksbühne (Berlin), and Piccolo Teatro (Milan). He was Artistic Director of the National Theatre of Kosovo (2008–2011). He received the 2020 Europe Culture Award and the 2021 International Theatremakers Award, presented by The Playwrights Realm in New York. He has also received numerous awards for his plays. He is also a regular contributor to both local and international magazines and journals, writing on cultural and political topics.

About the Translator

Alexandra Channer began translating in Kosovo in 2009 while conducting research for her doctoral thesis on Albanian national self-determination movements. She worked as a freelance translator in Kosovo for four years, translating a variety of political and technical documents. Her collaboration with Jeton Neziraj began at this time, and she has since translated and edited many of Jeton's plays into English. She has also translated plays, prose, poetry, and film scripts by various authors from Kosovo. Her work covers both creative literature and historical and political analysis. Channer has her own consultancy in the UK providing human rights due diligence services to businesses, charities, and international organizations. Her professional background is in politics and human rights.

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Staging rights: Jeton Neziraj

Please contact: info@jetonneziraj.com

Translation rights: Alexandra Channer

Please contact: adrchanner@gmail.com

FREE FALLING

Ekaterina Georgieva

Translated from Bulgarian by Atanas Igov

CHARACTERS

The Chosen Ones – WOMAN, CROWD

An Ordinary Man – FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST, ORDINARY MAN

A Free Woman – YOUNG WOMAN, FEMALE FRIEND, AGENT

Iron Chain – YOUNG BOY, YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR

Cradle Swing – MOTHER

A Pressing Matter – PRIZE WINNER, FEMALE JOURNALIST, FEMALE MANICURIST

Cinderella – OLD MAN

The Freedom Room – FEMALE RECEPTIONIST, IDEALIST

The Madman – FEMALE DOCTOR, MADMAN

In the Interludes

Rotten – FIRST COUPLE, SECOND COUPLE

Creativity – THE ONE (MALE), THE OTHER (MALE)

Flying – GIRL, BOY

Poetry – FIRST ONE (MALE), SECOND ONE (MALE)

Earthquake – THE ONE (FEMALE), THE OTHER (FEMALE)

An Easy Solution to Complex Problems – MR. ONE, MR. TWO, MRS. ONE, MRS. TWO

Blah-Blah – FIRST ONE (MALE), SECOND ONE (MALE), THIRD ONE (FEMALE), FOURTH ONE (FEMALE)

Free Falling – FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE), SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE), THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE), FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE)

(All roles (except for the OLD MAN) are played by four actors: two men and two women. The CINDERELLA scene has been shot in advance and appears on a video wall. At the director's discretion, the interludes may also be shot in advance. The action takes place in an alternative present time.)

THE CHOSEN ONES

(An empty stage with a video wall displaying some free-falling bodies. Loud "epic" music. A WOMAN enters. Applause breaks out. The WOMAN wears heavy makeup, she's dressed in a body-hugging artistic costume: a modern blend of leather, vivid colors, high heels. She bows down ritualistically along the stage. Upon her entry onto the stage, the video wall displays her photos and videos in which she looks authoritative, brave, and sexy. The images resemble shots from extravagant fashion shows, in which she walks determinedly towards the camera, or climbs some stairs, or stands atop a very high building; she looks like a superhero. The WOMAN turns her back to her audience, the CROWD. The voices of the CROWD are on playback. The WOMAN raises up her hands, urges the CROWD to clap in a rhythm that gradually intensifies. When it peaks, the WOMAN abruptly puts her hands down, turns to the CROWD, and shouts loudly towards them. Her cry lasts until it gets to the air. The CROWD erupts. The WOMAN repeats her cry until she has no strength left. The CROWD also shouts "liberatingly." The WOMAN gestures to get the reactions. She quietly stands up. She whispers, as if officiating.)

WOMAN: The Earth needs beautiful, smart, healthy beings. May we be!

CROWD: May we be!

WOMAN: The one who keeps things bottled up is a toxic traitor. The one who does not purify oneself is guilty of the others' troubles. *(She kneels, closes her eyes, puts her hands on her chest as if she's whispering a prayer)* Your actions do matter. You ought to be uncompromising with yourself! *(She points at the CROWD.)*

CROWD: You ought to!

WOMAN: *(stands up, speaks threateningly, sounds like a gladiator)* How many times have you missed your workout? Devoured a whole chocolate bar? And a greasy doner kebab? You have been chosen by Mother Earth! You must shine! Shame on you for looking like a gray rag covered in vomit?!

CROWD: Rag!

WOMAN: How many times have you dared fall into a depression? You have been chosen by Mother Earth! She gave you happiness! Don't whine! Don't be sad! Stand up! Otherwise, you are a piece of shit spreading its stink all around!

CROWD: Shit!

WOMAN: How many times have you dared fall sick? Going to the hospital? How did you end up here? You have been chosen by Mother Earth! She gives birth to us so that we may live! Don't you embarrass us with your helplessness! Worm food!

CROWD: More! More!

WOMAN: How many times have you dared to be penniless? Why do we have to be responsible for your failure? Earn! Get qualified! Adapt! You have been chosen by Mother Earth! She gives abundance! Shame on you for being buried in poverty?! Parasite!

CROWD: Parasite!

WOMAN: We hate parasites!

CROWD: We hate parasites!

(The WOMAN unexpectedly collapses and bursts into tears. Exclamations of concern are heard from the CROWD.)

WOMAN: When I was on my way into this temple today, I saw... I saw one of you putting money in the hands of one of those parasites! Helping him!

(The CROWD is indignant.)

WOMAN: There's no way I could identify him among all of you here... But I can't figure out why! ... Why does he dare doubt the Idea? Does he really think there's something unfair?! We don't need your selfish mercy! Everything is as it is because there are sacred laws and order. Traitor!

CROWD: *(getting out of control)* Traitor! Come out! Traitor!

WOMAN: Enough! *(The CROWD obeys.)* A traitor should not disrupt our balance! *(Pauses. Continues reinvigorated.)* How many times have you trusted anybody else? Everybody takes care of themselves! Nobody owes you anything, and you don't owe anybody anything! And how many times have you prayed to some invisible God? How dare you leave everything in the hands of some ancient fable?! Shame on you!

CROWD: Shame on you!

WOMAN: How many times have you dared not defend your interests to the end? Even when hundreds turn against you, do not flee! Defend yourself! You are the master of your life!

CROWD: You are the master!

(WOMAN loses control, sounds increasingly offensive and aggressive.)

WOMAN: How many times have you dared to let others tell you what to do? And what to be? Shame on you! You are free to be who you are!

CROWD: Be!

WOMAN: All the cowards – we don't need you!

CROWD: We don't need you!

WOMAN: All cowards will be sent "THERE."

CROWD: "THERE!"

WOMAN: Be free! You ought to! You ought to, fucking cowards!

(The CROWD goes into raptures. The WOMAN attempts to take the floor, but it is too noisy now.)

WOMAN: Quiet!

(The CROWD erupts in cries of approval.)

WOMAN: *(shouts hysterically)* I said, Quiet!!! Nobody needs the emotionally unstable people! Control your feelings. Breathe in. *(The CROWD does so.)* Breathe out. One more time. I want everybody to shut up! I don't want to hear your crappy breath! *(The CROWD gradually goes silent. The WOMAN gets a grip, she's calm again.)* That's it... Listen to Mother Earth... She wants you to be perfectly free. I love you. Are you ready for the next ritual of liberation?

ROTTEN, AN INTERLUDE

(Two couples. The FIRST COUPLE is visiting the SECOND one. The SECOND COUPLE keeps their eyes shut.)

FIRST COUPLE: It smells rotten.

SECOND COUPLE: It does.

FIRST COUPLE: Would you check it?

SECOND COUPLE: We can't.

FIRST COUPLE: Open the windows.

SECOND COUPLE: We've walled them up.

FIRST COUPLE: You've walled them up?

SECOND COUPLE: We walled up the ones to the right.

FIRST COUPLE: And the ones to the left?

SECOND COUPLE: They've been walled up by those to the left.

FIRST COUPLE: So, you don't have any windows.

SECOND COUPLE: We don't. It's safer.

FIRST COUPLE: We see.

(Pause.)

FIRST COUPLE: Any door?

SECOND COUPLE: We can't find the door.

FIRST COUPLE: We entered through it, didn't we?

SECOND COUPLE: And can you see it now?

FIRST COUPLE: *(They look around.)* Oh! It's not here.

SECOND COUPLE: We won't lie to you, see.

(Pause. The FIRST COUPLE looks around.)

FIRST COUPLE: And shall we sit here like that?

SECOND COUPLE: Haven't you gotten used to it?

FIRST COUPLE: No. We want to see where the smell comes from.

SECOND COUPLE: You must close your eyes.

FIRST COUPLE: What does that have to do with the smell?

SECOND COUPLE: When you can't see, you smell less, and you get used to it.

(The FIRST COUPLE close their eyes.)

FIRST COUPLE: Oh! It really does. This method works.

SECOND COUPLE: Sure, it does, we won't lie to you.

AN ORDINARY MAN

(There are soft, color circles changing on the video wall, a human body roams freely in outer space, etc.—standard videos about meditation. The sound of Alpha waves. The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST and the ORDINARY MAN sit facing each other. The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST is smiling, warm, calm. The ORDINARY MAN looks like a little kid caught in the act, conscious-stricken.)

ORDINARY MAN: I don't want to waste your time.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: You are the employee of the year. In case of such an outburst, we have to take care of you.

ORDINARY MAN: Exactly, an outburst. It will never happen again.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: I would like to make sure it won't.

ORDINARY MAN: *(lowers his head)* I see.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Are you angry?

ORDINARY MAN: No! I'm just ashamed of what I did.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: *(softly, compassionately)* You have used an ancient technique of anger release. The whole office is smashed to pieces. You indulged in your impulse for 3 minutes and 18 seconds. You experienced pleasure.

(Pause. The ORDINARY MAN is ashamed.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Is that so?

ORDINARY MAN: I don't know, maybe you're right.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: So, you admit you were angry?

ORDINARY MAN: I must have been... Although I can't remember what exactly anger means...

(Pause. The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST stares at him probingly.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Tell me what happened before that episode?

ORDINARY MAN: Everything was as usual. I came back after the lunch break and... it just happened. My body did it.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: What did you do during your break?

ORDINARY MAN: I had lunch, and I had a walk.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Where?

ORDINARY MAN: In the area.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: *(still softly but admonishingly)* So you passed through

the area of the protests?

ORDINARY MAN: Well... It's almost impossible to bypass them.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: You have violated the official advice.

ORDINARY MAN: I had my earphones on.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: *(waves her thumb as if pointing at a little kid that has done some mischief)* Even if you can't hear the slogans they are chanting, you feel the energy of the protesters. We are still humans.

ORDINARY MAN: Yeah. Well, honestly speaking... *(hesitates)*

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Yes?

ORDINARY MAN: The protests have been going on for so long that we've got used to them. I don't think this has anything to do with them.

(Pause.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: *(with a thin smile)* You think?

ORDINARY MAN: *(candidly)* Well... Perhaps inadvertently.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Ahem... Did you feel threatened?

ORDINARY MAN: No. The perimeter has been secured... It's safe for people like us, the police are doing their job.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Did you feel attracted?

ORDINARY MAN: No. Absolutely no. I was just doing my mandatory walk in daylight. *(Pauses. Grows pensive.)* Maybe...

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: What?

ORDINARY MAN: The walk was a bit shorter.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Why?

ORDINARY MAN: I didn't feel like walking.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Why?

ORDINARY MAN: For no reason. Just one of those days.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: *(smiles)* Ahem...

(The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST circles around his chair.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: What is your typical day like?

ORDINARY MAN: I get up in the morning, I work out, I have breakfast, take a shower, come here, perform my duties, treat others the way I would like to be treated myself, get home, pour myself a glass of wine or beer, play a film, and go to bed. That's it. On weekends, I go out with some friends, have sex as scheduled ... I don't do anything other than the ordinary. Really. Nothing special. I am quite an ordinary man.

(Pause. The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST gets behind him. She kneads his shoulders.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: That's exhausting, isn't it?

ORDINARY MAN: What?

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: That... ordinary daily grind as you call it.

ORDINARY MAN: I don't complain.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: In your opinion, is it worth living your life the way you do?

ORDINARY MAN: And what's the alternative? I have security. I am privileged. The ones who shout all day long on the squares close all doors to their future. I am not like... *(hesitates)*

(Pause.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Like?

ORDINARY MAN: It doesn't matter.

(The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST squats down at his eye level.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Everything matters. You matter, and everything that happens to you matters. You are not like whom?

ORDINARY MAN: I have a childhood friend. Actually, we haven't been in touch

for a long time... But I saw him at the protest the other day. The policemen had caught him, and they were dragging him towards their van. He was shouting and pushing all along. They were kicking him... Our eyes met. We recognized each other... And... he spat in my face. And we grew up together, you see? What have I done to him? Maybe he didn't recognize me, but I haven't changed much... I don't know... He has always been a free bird. He wrote short stories when he was a kid; he was talented... And he spat at me...

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: And after your break, you came back here, sat at your desk, and...?

ORDINARY MAN: *(lowers his head in shame)* It just happened, I already told you, as if it wasn't me.

(Pause. The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST stands up. She moves aside.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: We live in strange times, don't we?

ORDINARY MAN: But this is the best time to live in, isn't it? Who would trade it for the Middle Ages or the Wars?

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Do you feel insignificant?

ORDINARY MAN: No. As early as my teens, I realized that the world does not revolve around me. I know that I don't build time, I am just a product of that time.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: So, you don't believe in the power of personality?

ORDINARY MAN: I am powerless as an individual. There's no me. There's we.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: And what do you think about the maxim that history is made of personalities?

ORDINARY MAN: A dangerous maxim... Some personalities have brought catastrophic consequences to the entire world...

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: So, you think you'd better fit in rather than stand out?

ORDINARY MAN: I definitely have no extravagant propensities.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: *(shouts all of a sudden)* But the other day, everybody

noticed when you smashed up the office?

(The eyes of the ORDINARY MAN widen in genuine surprise. He's scared, he puts his hands on his head.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Hah!

(The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST makes a victorious move, meaning "I got you!" She beats her chest, cries out "liberatingly.")

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: You did it to stand out!
ORDINARY MAN: *(he is sincerely sorry)* You're right! How terrible. I assure you that it won't happen again! I must have been tired, I had a nightmare!
FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: *(shaken)* You've been dreaming?!
ORDINARY MAN: Just once. Horrible. I'm sorry!
FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: What dream did you have?
ORDINARY MAN: I have no clear recollection.
FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Remember it, now!
ORDINARY MAN: *(suddenly he remembers, and he's horrified)* I had a dream that my face was in blood, that I was dragged along the square, that they took me into a van. There were inscriptions drawn all over me...
FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: What inscriptions?!
ORDINARY MAN: Freedom. Justice. Peace. And the following day, while I was having a walk, I saw my childhood friend in almost the same situation! And he spat at me, and... and then I smashed the office! Terrible! What's going on with me?! Help me!
FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Repent!
ORDINARY MAN: I repent! From the bottom of my heart!
FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: And you are guilty, aren't you?
ORDINARY MAN: Yes!

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: And you will never behave like that again, won't you?

ORDINARY MAN: Never! Never! Never!

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: And the company has nothing to do with your behavior, right?

ORDINARY MAN: Right! I am responsible for my actions!

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: And you will not have dreams anymore!

ORDINARY MAN: I won't!

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Do you swear on your life?

ORDINARY MAN: I swear.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Repeat it!

ORDINARY MAN: I swear!

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Thrice, for good luck!

ORDINARY MAN: I swear!

(Pause. The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST breathes out loudly and liberatingly. He follows suit. She hugs him like a mother.)

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: *(in soft, loving tone)* You did wonderfully. Bravo. I know it was fearsome.

ORDINARY MAN: Very fearsome. My cordial thanks. Am I all right now?

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: You can go.

(The ORDINARY MAN does not want to disengage from their embrace. The FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST has to pull back by force.)

ORDINARY MAN: *(panics)* I just... What if I have a dream against my will?

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: Nothing can happen if you don't want to. You are the master of your life.

ORDINARY MAN: Ah, yes. I forgot. Yes. That's right.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: You give up dreaming and that's that.

ORDINARY MAN: Yes. You're right. Thank you.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: You're welcome. I haven't done anything. Everything is in your own hands.

ORDINARY MAN: Well, you're really good. You really got me!

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: That's what they pay me for.

ORDINARY MAN: I admire you.

FEMALE PSYCHOLOGIST: And I admire myself.

CREATIVITY, AN INTERLUDE

(THE ONE walks ahead. THE OTHER stops him by giving him a whistle. THE ONE freezes in his tracks.)

THE OTHER (MALE): Hey, you, where to?

THE ONE (MALE): There.

THE OTHER (MALE): You may not go there!

THE ONE (MALE): Why?

THE OTHER (MALE): Because you may not.

THE ONE (MALE): And that way?

THE OTHER (MALE): Don't you dare!

THE ONE (MALE): One may not go that way even more, right?

THE OTHER (MALE): Exactly.

THE ONE (MALE): That way?

THE OTHER (MALE): No!

THE ONE (MALE): That way?!

THE OTHER (MALE): No!

THE ONE (MALE): That way?! That way? And what about that way?

THE OTHER (MALE): No. No. And no.

THE ONE (MALE): So, what's left for me?

THE OTHER (MALE): You may only go where you're allowed to go.

THE ONE (MALE): You give me no choice.

THE OTHER (MALE): Be creative.

(Pause.)

THE ONE (MALE): *(points at the earth and at the sky)* What's left is this way and that way.

THE OTHER (MALE): So, there's a way, after all?

THE ONE (MALE): There is. Sorry for bothering you.

THE OTHER (MALE): You are forgiven.

A FREE WOMAN

(A YOUNG WOMAN stares at her phone. Its display is screened on the video wall. She has texted the YOUNG MAN, "Are you coming?" He has not answered, but he has seen her message and is online. A new message appears on the screen. It is from her FEMALE FRIEND: "R u ok?" The YOUNG WOMAN closes the message. She opens her chat with the YOUNG MAN. She checks the chronology. The chat contains mostly exact appointments and photos that they have exchanged. She receives a new message from her FEMALE FRIEND: "I see you're online." The YOUNG WOMAN goes back to her chat with the YOUNG MAN. The notification that he has seen the message zooms up on the screen. The text starts pulsating persistently until the video

wall finally blinks like a flashlight. The YOUNG WOMAN lets out a "liberating" cry. She gets a video call. The ring sounds like a distress signal. We see her FEMALE FRIEND on the video wall. The YOUNG WOMAN reluctantly answers the call.)

YOUNG WOMAN: Speak. What?

FEMALE FRIEND: You tell me! You don't answer! You haven't posted anything for three days! I was thinking the worst!

YOUNG WOMAN: What do you want?

FEMALE FRIEND: Why do you act like this? I should be the angry one. You haven't even congratulated me!

(Pause.)

YOUNG WOMAN: I forgot... Did it hurt?

FEMALE FRIEND: No, they use lasers. Here's my tag.

(The FEMALE FRIEND shows a sign on her inner wrist: a crossed-out image of the female reproductive system. Pause.)

FEMALE FRIEND: What's going on with you?

YOUNG WOMAN: I don't want to talk about it.

FEMALE FRIEND: I only want you to be fine... What time shall we come by to pick you up?

YOUNG WOMAN: I have an appointment.

FEMALE FRIEND: With him, again?

(Pause.)

FEMALE FRIEND: And you will miss my unchilding party because of him?

YOUNG WOMAN: I forgot. I'm sorry.

FEMALE FRIEND: Cancel your appointment.

YOUNG WOMAN: I'll join you later.

(Pause.)

FEMALE FRIEND: How many times have you seen him?

YOUNG WOMAN: I don't keep a count.

FEMALE FRIEND: Be careful.

YOUNG WOMAN: Why?

FEMALE FRIEND: Having fun with someone. Once. Twice at most. Then it gets different.

YOUNG WOMAN: So what? We just have good sex!

FEMALE FRIEND: Hey, hey, I haven't said a thing ...

(Pause.)

YOUNG WOMAN: I'm sorry. I should not take it out on you. I'm fine. To your great relief—we might not meet at all. He's hiding. And he's online...

(Pause.)

FEMALE FRIEND: There's more. Come on. You have to bring it out of your system, you know?

(Pause.)

YOUNG WOMAN: The last time we did it, I took off my bra.

FEMALE FRIEND: What?

(Pause. The YOUNG WOMAN looks down. The FEMALE FRIEND is startled.)

FEMALE FRIEND: Why?

YOUNG WOMAN: It itched. It was a new bra, apparently made of poor-quality material. I didn't know my skin would react, it was driving me mad, so I took it off.

(Pause.)

YOUNG WOMAN: Say something...

FEMALE FRIEND: Did you tell him why you did it?

YOUNG WOMAN: While we were doing it? I would have screwed up everything. Not that I didn't screw it up anyway. As if looking someone in the eyes while you are doing it .

FEMALE FRIEND: And what happened next?

YOUNG WOMAN: He turned me over.

FEMALE FRIEND: Did you manage to come?

YOUNG WOMAN: Me, yes, on my own.

FEMALE FRIEND: And what about him?

YOUNG WOMAN: I think he came, too. With the app.

FEMALE FRIEND: I see... Well, it doesn't sound so bad.

YOUNG WOMAN: Please... I know it's quite stupid.

FEMALE FRIEND: He'd seen some breasts before. He'll live with it.

YOUNG WOMAN: It's one thing that he'd seen them in photos, it's quite another thing when I undress in front of him.

FEMALE FRIEND: Well, and you didn't tell him anything?

YOUNG WOMAN: I muttered, "I'm sorry... my bra is new, and it was making me itch." Or sort of... Say something.

FEMALE FRIEND: I don't know what... I have never fully undressed in front of a man... What's the feeling?

YOUNG WOMAN: I didn't even realize that I'd done it. It happened by itself. It was not until he gave me his startled look that I realized I was stark naked.

(Pause. The YOUNG WOMAN bursts into tears.)

FEMALE FRIEND: Has he rated you?

YOUNG WOMAN: No. My rating hasn't changed since the last time.

FEMALE FRIEND: So, everything's OK.

(Pause.)

FEMALE FRIEND: That's why I did the unchilding thing. It's clear who I am and what I don't want.

YOUNG WOMAN: You sound like the ad on the website.

FEMALE FRIEND: Well, it's true. And that's why I chose it.

YOUNG WOMAN: But is this choice actually yours?

FEMALE FRIEND: What do you mean?

YOUNG WOMAN: Nothing. Forget about it.

FEMALE FRIEND: Why isn't this choice mine?

YOUNG WOMAN: Because I think we are being suffocated, there's so much publicity, as if it's for the good of us, while they actually manipulate us and profiteer from us. "Girls, be free, you are the most important thing, you don't have to carry the female burden your entire life," and so on and so on... The whole philosophy of "we resolve your female problem, girls"... How come it is a problem now? *(Pause.)* Aren't you afraid that you'll regret it one day?

FEMALE FRIEND: No. Now I can do whatever I want.

YOUNG WOMAN: But you can do so in principle, too.

FEMALE FRIEND: That's not true. You know that men withdraw when they find out...

YOUNG WOMAN: So, they are the wrong men... /

FEMALE FRIEND: I know that I am not fit to be a mother. For me, that's an opportunity. I had a terrible family, a terrible example, and I don't want to be the cause of someone's fucked up life. So, no! I will never regret it. Not becoming a mother is for the good of the planet.

YOUNG WOMAN: Save the planet, don't become a mother. They should make you a spokesmodel.

FEMALE FRIEND: Nobody makes you do it! I'm happy, and I'll celebrate. You know where we will be if you want to come.

YOUNG WOMAN: I know.

(Pause.)

FEMALE FRIEND: And don't overthink it, do you hear? He's just one of the many men. Part of the crowd.

YOUNG WOMAN: Mm-hmm...

FEMALE FRIEND: Love you.

YOUNG WOMAN: Me too.

(The FEMALE FRIEND disappears from the screen. The YOUNG WOMAN opens the chat with the YOUNG MAN. He is still online, but he has not answered. She goes to the website of Quick Permanent Unchilding. She is offered the option of calling a team to her place. It says the procedure is painless and short. "In 10 minutes, you can resolve your female problem forever, in the comfort of your home." She goes back to the chat. She resolutely records a voice message.)

YOUNG WOMAN: I hope you're dead, and that's why you don't answer. It's a joke, naturally. But the appointment is off.

(A notification that the message has been read appears, but there is still no answer. The YOUNG WOMAN quietly breaks into tears. She receives a video call from an unknown number. She answers. An AGENT OF THE PERMANENT UNCHILDING COMPANY appears on the screen. He's a smiling and lively employee.)

AGENT: Hello. We saw you looking through our website. One of our teams is a block away. We'd be pleased to drop by your home.

(Suddenly, the YOUNG WOMAN raises her blouse and shows her breasts to the AGENT. This is accompanied by a wild cry. The AGENT is frantic with fear, shouting. The YOUNG WOMAN "waves" her breasts in front of him! The panicked AGENT ends the call.)

(A BOY and a GIRL. The GIRL meditates in the full lotus pose. The BOY leads the meditation.)

BOY: Relax. Imagine that you're flying. You're flying.

GIRL: I like it.

BOY: You're flying above the sea, above a snow-covered mountain peak. Above the desert.

(The GIRL sighs with pleasure.)

BOY: You're going up very high. You're getting into outer space.

GIRL: Wow.

BOY: Your body is weightless. There is no gravity. No direction. You're just roving. You're completely loose. There are only stars around you. It's quiet. You merge with the universe. You get immersed in her secure embrace.

(The GIRL laughs with happiness. She breaks into tears.)

BOY: Come on now, you're falling down!

GIRL: Pardon?

BOY: You're falling, you're falling.

GIRL: I don't want to!

BOY: You're falling. You have no control.

GIRL: That's enough!

BOY: You're falling so quickly that your skin starts peeling off your body!

GIRL: No! What?!

BOY: You're falling, you're falling, you're falling!

GIRL: *(covers her ears)* Stop it!

BOY: *(uncovers her ears)* You'll smash into the ground in a while!

GIRL: No!

BOY: To a pulp!

GIRL: I won't!

BOY: Nothing will be left of you! You're going to splatter!

GIRL: No!

BOY: You're splattered!

GIRL: No!!!

BOY: Ready. We're done for today.

(Pause.)

GIRL: What the fuck was that?!

BOY: Wanna fly all the time, ah? You must always be in suspense! No relaxing!

GIRL: Psycho!

IRON CHAIN

(Night. A neighborhood in shades of gray is displayed on the video wall. Old, uniform tower blocks. It's misty. The wind blows. The YOUNG BOY and the YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR shiver with cold in front of the block. Each of them holds a plastic cup.)

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: I'm cold.

YOUNG BOY: Get my jacket.

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: I want to go home.

YOUNG BOY: *(puts the jacket on him)* Take it! I feel fine. How long is it since we've been together, just the two of us, best friends, mate? Cheers.

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: I don't want to.

YOUNG BOY: *(looks at his plastic cup)* Well, is that all you've drunk for the whole evening?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: The pills make me dizzy.

YOUNG BOY: Maybe I should try them? Ha-ha.

(Pause. The YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR does not laugh.)

YOUNG BOY: Bro, does it hurt?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: I feel nothing.

YOUNG BOY: Well, at least that's cool.

(Pause.)

YOUNG BOY: Bro, when the Big Shot called to tell me you'd jumped, I told myself, "He's joking."

(Pause. The YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR turns his eyes to the other side.)

YOUNG BOY: You won't do anything stupid like that again, will ya? *(Pause.)* Will ya?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: I won't.

YOUNG BOY: I know how you feel. Honestly, I do. If I tell you something, will you keep it to yourself?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: *(shivers of cold)* What?

YOUNG BOY: Hey, why are you shivering? I gave you my jacket, remember?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: I'm freezing.

YOUNG BOY: It's still perfect outdoors. What else do we need? The last time I went to the Central [Zone], they didn't even let me in. They scan your clothes for spots, and they don't let you in if the stuff is not first-rate. Bastards. I'll never set foot in there again!

(Pause. The YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR is silent, looks down.)

YOUNG BOY: Bro, say something. What's wrong? ... It's been shit for me, too, mate. But I'm getting a grip on myself... I... I wanted to jump, too. But I did something else. I took some pills from my grandma when I visited her in the Elderly Zone. Pills of any color: pink, blue, yellow, white, and even some turquoise pills. And I swallowed a fistful of them, mate. I looked in the mirror, and in two seconds, I told myself, "What are you doing, you fool? Life is great! Don't get depressed!" And I began vomiting. And my mother squealed from the other room: "You fucked up my life in vomit, you worthless piece of shit! If I only knew what would become of you, I'd never have given birth to you!" And I told her, "Shut the fuck up, cow! As if I'd begged you to give birth to me!" Bro, I threw up all colors, and I checked out : all the yellow, green, blue, pink, turquoise pills were out! And I instantly came to you, to my people. And everything was fine, great. *(Pause.)* So, I know perfectly well how you feel. But you jumped 'cause you grew isolated. Always holed up in those online rooms, mate, and at home.

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: I'm sorry.

YOUNG BOY: For what?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: That you wanted to... /

YOUNG BOY: Don't you understand that everything is fine with me? Here it is, treat yourself to my leitmotif. When you feel bad, you must go out with the gang immediately. Being with the gang is the best thing. Isn't it?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: Probably.

YOUNG BOY: *(pushes him, friendly)* Don't tell me "probably"! Why are you so apathetic! Tell me it's great with the gang!

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: It's great.

YOUNG BOY: You see? You gotta live it, mate, not suffer it. And you gotta stop hanging out on that crappy internet! Here's the real life! They banned us from the Central Zone, so what? They are afraid of us. When they see the whole group in black clothes, they shit up their pants, mate. Everybody knows who

we are. And they steer clear of us. 'Cause if we decide to, we'll smash up anyone who annoys us, mate. Like the guy we beat up in the store, remember? The one who started to give us shit for pushing the shelves and the Big Shot kicked him right in the head. Remember? *(laughs)*

(Pause.)

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: Will you take me upstairs?

YOUNG BOY: *(points at his cup)* Will you drink that?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: No.

YOUNG BOY: We won't waste it! Give me that... *(takes his cup out of his hands)* Bro, your mistake is that you stayed in your place way too long. When I'm home, I have lots of fights with my mother. She's squeezing my brains, mate, "Sit and learn how to use your computer!" I tell her, "You're dumb! Computers don't need people anymore!" When I listen to her, my head starts pulsing, mate, my hands sweat, my legs grow numb. As if I have one of those long, iron chains they used to put on the guard dogs in the village houses back then, tied around my neck, and I can't move. But that's better 'cause if I really move I'll knock out her teeth! Sometimes I imagine that I take one of these iron chains and I gag her with it, just like that. Ha-ha-ha. *(Pause.)* I had an arts teacher at the elementary school who told me that I could see things like pictures, that I had visual imagination, and I could have become an artist... I don't know, the weed might have triggered my fantasy. Ha-ha-ha. I'm looking forward to sending my mother to the Elderly Zone! Then I'll get her room! ... *(Pauses, stares at the YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR's face. His eyes are closed.)* Hey, mate, are you sleeping? *(shakes him)* Really? I am unburdening my heart to you, and you are sleeping?! It's a shame, man.

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: I don't feel like listening.

(Pause.)

YOUNG BOY: That's not cool, mate. What's going on with you?

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: Why do I have to listen to your bullshit? Can't you see that nothing is OK!

YOUNG BOY: Hey, hey! You'd better take your pills.

YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR: *(shouts)* Why was I born here?! Why can't I get rid of it all? You'd better tell me this! *(bursts into tears)*

(Pause.)

YOUNG BOY: You have no will, mate. And you whimper a lot.

(The YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR cries out "liberatingly." Pause.)

YOUNG BOY: That's why I don't like talking. There's no point.

(The YOUNG BOY drinks up the remaining content of the cup and throws it on the ground. He pushes the wheel of the YOUNG BOY IN A WHEELCHAIR.)

YOUNG BOY: Come on. I'm taking you upstairs. Just don't get stressed, mate. You're quite stressed. Life is beautiful.

POETRY

(The FIRST ONE and the SECOND ONE. The FIRST ONE has closed his eyes. The SECOND ONE gawks, goggle-eyed, with an exaggerated puzzled grimace.)

FIRST ONE (MALE): Somewhere, someone is still dreaming.
Somewhere, someone has closed their eyes.
Somewhere, someone is still sad.
Sad about a cosmos with many stars.
A body that roves calmly.

A child's little hand, the child is laughing.

A blue sea, swimming, and swimming.

Somewhere, someone is still dreaming.

And hears. A blue jellyfish. A caress on the cheek.

Somewhere someone is still dreaming... /

SECOND ONE (MALE): *(interrupts him, with exaggerated irony)* What's that bullshit?

CRADLE SWING

(A MOTHER talks over the phone with a female friend of hers. A night sky with falling stars is displayed on the video wall.)

MOTHER: No, I'm not complaining. Few women have the luxury of giving birth to a healthy child and raising it on their own... The mere recollection of what we had to endure to obtain the fitness certificate... I told you that they failed us twice on the relationships exam? We had a terrible fight, but finally they assured us that our child deserves to be born, especially given my husband's position. Had I given up after all that, it would have been unforgivable. However... does it have to be so difficult? Honestly, I have to admit, I wanted us to stop. My husband told me that one day I would look back and I'd regret it. That's what we're supposed to do for the planet. Why did he play the planet card, I didn't get it. "Let's give some quality material for the future." Is that what children are? Stuff...? I've read somewhere that children are life's craving to be lived and we merely help them embody physically... Anyway, don't get me wrong, I don't regret that my little one came to be. She's lovely... *(a baby is heard crying from the other room.)* Yeah. She's crying... Yeah, yeah, of course, go. I just seized the

chance to call you while she's sleeping... Her sleep has changed a lot recently... Yeah, yeah, I know that's normal for the growth... Yes, yes, go... You should have left a long time ago, and I keep chatting and chatting. *(laughs nervously.)* Sometimes she's crying for hours. I don't know, did your children cry so much when they were young... In some periods, yeah... Well, but back then, there used to be children's centers. Now it's different, after they closed them down. Certainly, they had to... Nobody had any idea what happened there. No wonder it's full of aggressors. The children are not to be blamed. Never. It's always the adults ... Well, yours are not like them! You caught the last train while it was still a good generation ... *(the crying gets louder.)* Well, that's nothing, there were times I wanted to cut my ears off. *(laughs.)* Once, I was home alone again, she was screaming... She didn't sound like a baby, she sounded like some screaming monster, to be honest. *(The crying continues.)* You can put me on speaker in the car, I won't disturb you... I'll see her in a while, yeah... By the way, do you know the old research from our mothers' books that showed that if a mother is unhappy, the child feels it. When she was crying that time, I told myself: "I have to calm down." Do you remember the children's playground in the center of the village where we all gathered? Where we played hide-and-seek until it was so dark that we really could not find each other. There were no lights, now it's so well-lit that you can't hide anywhere, even if you want to. Back then, there were only stars and the Moon! And silence. We all talked and laughed, but that was merely a background noise for the silence. *(The crying gets louder and louder.)* OK, ok, I'll go. And you know what I did when she screamed at the top of her lungs? I went out in my slippers and dressing-gown, I stopped a taxi, and I told the driver to take me to the village! I was looking out the window, the city was receding, my heart would explode with excitement. I burst into tears, probably because of the hormones, the taxi driver asked me if I was OK, at some point, I think I cried aloud, but it was my voice, my

crying, not my child's, I could not hear her crying anymore! We arrived, I got out of the car, and the driver asked me how long he should wait for me. I told him to shut up, I wanted to hear that silence. He started bargaining about the money, I threw my wallet at him, he stopped talking, turned off the engine, lit a cigarette, or so I think. I went to the swings, they were rusty, but they were still standing! I sat down, closed my eyes, relaxed, and just listened... as if I was in the past, in the present and in the future simultaneously! A bliss. However, it was getting darker, the driver insisted that if we didn't hurry up, we wouldn't manage to enter the Zone, the protesters would block our way in. He shoved me in the car. I regretted not waiting for the night to come there, in the square, so I could see the stars again, but I had no desire to argue, I didn't want to break the silence. At the entrance to the Central Zone, the driver had a long talk with the controllers, and finally, they let us in. I heard the baby crying from the first floor, but it was just background noise, I could hear the silence. The neighbor was waiting for me in front of the door: "I work from home." She said it was impossible to work because of the crying, she would call the child scouts. She said my little girl had the right to choose where she wanted to live, she didn't have to torture herself with me. I have never even raised my voice, no matter how difficult it was for me. I have never hit her! And she threatened me with the child scouts! I slammed the door in her face! ... My husband had not come back home from work, so I called to order some food, I asked them to leave it in front of the door, he would pick it up. I went straight to my baby girl, I kissed her, I hugged her, she warmed me immediately, her smell put a spell on me, and I fell asleep right next to her, and I slept like a baby... *(Pause)* Hello, can you hear me? ... Why? Your appointment has been canceled? No, please, there's no need... And I have no food for lunch... And what about your job? ... Well, be my guest, but you should know that my baby cries a lot, you can hear for yourself... I'll be waiting for you... Yes, yes, I'll go to be with her.

(The ONE and the OTHER walk towards each other with their eyes fixed down. They collide.)

THE ONE (FEMALE): You, too?

THE OTHER (FEMALE): Yeah.

THE ONE (FEMALE): How many times today?

THE OTHER (FEMALE): At least ten.

THE ONE (FEMALE): How long was it for you?

THE OTHER (FEMALE): Ten seconds. And for you?

THE ONE (FEMALE): The last time I sank for 15 seconds.

THE OTHER (FEMALE): Did everything disappear?

THE ONE (FEMALE): Everything. What about you?

THE OTHER (FEMALE): The people who know me sank, and everything we've built together sank with them.

THE ONE (FEMALE): Everything is so fragile.

THE OTHER (FEMALE): Made of glass.

THE ONE (FEMALE): Like thin ice.

THE OTHER (FEMALE): For a couple of seconds.

THE ONE (FEMALE): And just because of a thought.

THE OTHER (FEMALE): "Now, an earthquake may happen. There's a chance of one happening." What a fucking obsession.

(The TWO tremble and shake themselves loudly.)

THE ONE (FEMALE): It's good, that's merely a thought.

THE OTHER (FEMALE): It's good that we aren't sinking, actually.

(A television studio. The live participants are the BLACK EYED PRIZE WINNER and the FEMALE JOURNALIST. The video wall images alternate between a beautiful, orderly, and sunny city and happy, smiling people.)

FEMALE JOURNALIST: This prize was established especially for you. Weren't you supposed to accept it out of respect?

PRIZE WINNER: I returned it out of respect for my freedom.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: This is a huge recognition from all of us.

PRIZE WINNER: "Us"?

FEMALE JOURNALIST: The journalists, the colleagues.

PRIZE WINNER: You are not my colleagues.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Even if we don't work together, we are among the first at the Rating platform.

PRIZE WINNER: I don't care about the ratings, what I care about is the stories I tell. And you are not a journalist, but a supermodel of precise diction and infectious expression sponsored by mobsters and corrupted politicians.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Wow. It's no coincidence that you are famous as a provocateur.

PRIZE WINNER: My temper is perfectly calm.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: If I am not really a journalist, who would let me host such an important program? I host influential personalities from all over the world—every day, at that.

PRIZE WINNER: Your question contains the answer to the bigger question.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: *(bored)* The media are sellouts, everything is just a matter of rating, and viewers have no choice because they're being fed the

same thing again and again...? Blah, blah, blah, blah. Yap, yap, yap. Don't you think that's got banal?

PRIZE WINNER: No, I don't. That's the truth.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Or it could well be just your personal opinion?

PRIZE WINNER: The paradox is that you are precisely among those who placed personal opinions on a pedestal and displaced the truth criterion.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Now I don't even have the right to express my opinion, is that so?

PRIZE WINNER: I see what you're doing. You want to provoke me because of the rating.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: So, in your opinion, I am just a rating slave. A pawn? Me? *(She stands up and makes a demonstrative move in a circle, like models do. Applauses.)*

PRIZE WINNER: Probably you're doing it to provide your relatives with financial security, and you have made great efforts to get here, sitting in this chair. And you might even believe your mediocre messages. But in both cases, I cannot support you. Your actions are harmful.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: *(has a tantrum, sobs)* Whatever I say, I hit a snag, and the conversation doesn't work out.

PRIZE WINNER: Do you think we must necessarily get along?

FEMALE JOURNALIST: *(sobs)* We are still human beings after all. Do you really support enmity? *(Some "sad music" starts playing.)* Is war really better than peace?

PRIZE WINNER: You are trying to carry this conversation into the zone of easily triggered feelings. Feelings that most people cannot even name now because they have lost any touch with themselves. Your tantrum is humiliating for yourself.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: *(quickly becoming sincerely upset)* I just wanted us to

have a nice conversation, to bring some joy to the poor people.

PRIZE WINNER: That won't happen with me.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Excuse me, will you allow me one more question?

PRIZE WINNER: You still have the right to ask me a question, without my permission. Thank God.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Are you a believer?

PRIZE WINNER: Sure.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: What is your proof of the existence of God?

PRIZE WINNER: The fact that every morning I find a reason to get up, and I don't harbor any hatred in my heart. Let's get back to the point.

(The sad music stops. Other music full of tension and suspense starts playing.)

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Given that you dislike my work so much, why did you accept being my guest on my channel?

PRIZE WINNER: That's not your channel, it's your sponsors'.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: *(ironically)* Those ones? The mobsters?

PRIZE WINNER: Exactly.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Then why are you here?!

PRIZE WINNER: I believe in the right to speak the truth and to stand your ground. Everywhere. It turned out I am a stubborn mule who simply cannot live any other way. By the way, in the beginning, they offered me to host a similar show.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: And?

PRIZE WINNER: I am unable to pretend. I imagined it. Where I would live, how much I'd earn, how I'd take care of my parents when they get old.

(The FEMALE MANICURIST enters and gets busy with the fingernails of the FEMALE JOURNALIST.)

PRIZE WINNER: Wonderful.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Everybody is listening to you carefully. Go on.

PRIZE WINNER: I felt like my chest was constricting. I could hardly breathe. I even started stammering. And I figured it out. My conscience would not allow me. So, it was a matter of survival.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: So, you refused to host such a program, but now you do participate in one. This is hypocrisy. You've come here to promote your position at my expense?

PRIZE WINNER: You wouldn't be here without me.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: And why are you so important to us?

PRIZE WINNER: I am the camouflage of the mock freedom we live in. I tell the truth, and that's why the public still has some intolerance to the whole mockery. I am the consolation for those like me. Yes, they beat me up *(points at his black eye)*, they arrested me for a couple of days, but they still need me. If they kill me, everybody will know who did it and why. And then there will be no alternative. So, you won't be needed either. Now, there are places like that around the world, and we can see what happens there. But for now, they still need me. Maybe for at least 10, 12 more days, and that's it.

(Merry disco music starts playing. The FEMALE JOURNALIST gets up and dances vigorously. The FEMALE MANICURIST bows down and exits by doing some dance steps.)

PRIZE WINNER: Oh, I see. At what intervals do they oblige you to dance?

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Nobody obliges us. The whole team loves dancing. Dancing triggers endorphin production. And our guests always dance.

PRIZE WINNER: I will abstain.

(A booing sound. The FEMALE JOURNALIST incites the audience to dance. She

dances in front of them. She goes back to the PRIZE WINNER. She dances provocatively around him, fawns over him.)

PRIZE WINNER: Please, don't, it would look like everything is staged, like we've been paid to do a show while actually we are having sex behind the curtains...
FEMALE JOURNALIST: Everybody knows exactly who I have sex with. Be careful not to get in trouble.
PRIZE WINNER: No wonder.

(The FEMALE JOURNALIST takes a pill out of her pocket. She swallows it ceremoniously. While she is speaking, she displays some special physical skill—perhaps she's doing a side split, or a headstand, or a backbend, or a front walkover.)

FEMALE JOURNALIST: The new rejuvenating pill. Rejuvenin. For every lady. For every gentleman.
PRIZE WINNER: Where's your self-respect?
FEMALE JOURNALIST: In my back pocket.
PRIZE WINNER: Have your brain scanned. Certain brain centers might not be functioning. You can be helped.

(The FEMALE JOURNALIST sits on the ground, she's exhausted. Applauses.)

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Don't you think this conversation has started to close in on what is happening with us now, and that this is not important compared to the pressing topics of the day?
PRIZE WINNER: On the contrary. It is precisely what's happening with us that is a pressing matter. At each and every moment.
FEMALE JOURNALIST: Are we that important? More important than the landmark changes in the world today?
PRIZE WINNER: Yes. Exactly. The human being is the most important thing. Not people. The human being.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: I am sorry, but I will have to sharply distance myself from your words. This is selfishness. I keep asking you about the stupidification, dehumanization, nazification, aggressification, and you keep harping on the same string. You didn't say anything serious. I even think this live broadcast has run its course.

PRIZE WINNER: I agree. Have a nice evening.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: You too.

PRIZE WINNER: Where will your husband ambush me?

FEMALE JOURNALIST: His men should be at the back entrance by now.

PRIZE WINNER: I see. Thank you.

FEMALE JOURNALIST: Goodbye!

PRIZE WINNER: Goodbye.

(They head in opposite directions.)

AN EASY SOLUTION TO COMPLEX PROBLEMS, AN INTERLUDE

(Two MISTERS. In a while, two LADIES join them.)

MR. ONE: It must be done this way!

MR. TWO: This would only complicate the matter!

MR. ONE: And what do you suggest?

MR. TWO: First things first, then the next.

MR. ONE: You can't see the big picture.

MR. TWO: You can't see the small things.

MR. ONE: They can't be seen. One must use the big brush.

MR. TWO: You are a big fool.

MR. ONE: And you are a little, insignificant man.

MR. TWO: I hate you. I don't even know you, but I hate you.

MR. ONE: I hate you too. Very much at that.

MR. TWO: I also hate your children.

MR. ONE: And I hate yours.

MR. TWO: I don't know them either, but I hate them.

MR. ONE: Me too. I hate yours very much.

MR. TWO: I also hate your country.

MR. ONE: And I hate yours.

MR. TWO: I haven't been there, but I hate it.

(Enter MRS. ONE and MRS. TWO.)

MRS. TWO: Why are you insulting my husband? He has rights!

MRS. ONE: And we too have rights!

MRS. TWO: We have more rights!

MRS. ONE: Your rights are not like ours!

MRS. TWO: Because you are not like us! Our rights are more powerful!

MRS. ONE: I would kill you for our rights!

MRS. TWO: You can't! We have the right to life!

MR. ONE: She's right.

MR. TWO: Of course, she's right.

(Pause.)

MR. ONE: What shall we do then?

(Pause.)

MRS. ONE: I have decided! I decided to kill you.

MRS. TWO: How come?

MRS. ONE: So that you can see that our rights are more powerful than yours.

MRS. TWO: And I will kill you!

MRS. AND MR. ONE: Freaks! Die!

MRS. AND MR. TWO: Die!!!

(The two couples attack each other with savage cries.)

CINDERELLA

(A live show commences on the video wall. An OLD MAN about 70 appears on the screen. CINDERELLA, his robot cleaning lady, remains off-screen. Only the sound signals she emits are heard.)

OLD MAN: *(tired)* Good evening. Can you hear me? *(approaches the screen)* Nobody's watching... I see. *(sighs, gets energized)* I start live show number 1531. Whoever wants to watch it can see it later, everything remains for the generations to come... *(turns aside)* Is that right, Cinderella? *(towards the screen)* She's silent, so she agrees. *(points aside)* This is Cinderella, for those who don't know yet. My robot cleaning lady. *(Cinderella's signal sounds twice)* Sorry! *(to the screen)* No, not a cleaning lady. A housewife. She's very good. Everything shines. *(aside, with a wide smile)* I'm praising you, Cinderella ... Come on, wink for me... *(his face is lit twice in red light)* That's it. *(looks at the screen)* Since they don't allow me to choose a film on the TV, I don't turn it on, and she is the only one who makes noise at home. For those who will watch us one day: now there are certain films for my age. I have no idea what it will be like in your time... *(a longer sound comes from Cinderella, accompanied by a blinking red light)* OK. I'll tell them. *(Pause.)* They had the Conversation with me... They entered, checked

whether the appliances are in good repair, and whether I am complying with the mandatory instructions. They play the instructions every three hours so we can be independent, they say we are very forgetful... But I do remember. Whatever I want to. I don't listen to them. I let Cinderella clean, and when she starts singing, she drowns them out *(another sound comes from Cinderella)*. OK, right now. *(towards the screen)* She wants me to tell you about the inspection. They made her angry. They twisted her up and down, they opened her, then she totally lost her marbles when she learned about the date... *(Cinderella lights him in red, blinks several times)* She circled around for three hours. *(A loud noise resembling a scream comes from Cinderella)* Easy, they won't come again soon ... *(Cinderella calms down)* They examined me, everything was fine, and that's why I didn't expect it at all. But they told me, "Choose." We have promotional packages: supper, bathing, dressing, injection, cremation. A very lucrative deal. *(Cinderella makes a sharp noise.)* And they did it in front of Cinderella, with no prior warning. I told them, "Quiet, her system will overheat!" They told me, "Choose." "I won't accept the offer. I have a son, when the right time comes, he will take care of me." "No. It is a must in the Elderly zone. Your son might disavow you. He might have chosen a date before your date. We had enough trouble with the generation before you. There were some cases of deceased men forgotten for years in their homes. We cannot let that happen again." I told them, "I count on my son, and I am sure he has not chosen a date." They checked. He hadn't. I felt relief because he might not have told, how can I know. "Why are you in the Elderly Zone since you can count on your son?" they asked, mockingly. As if they won't end up in my shoes... I don't want to be a burden, I told them. And they said, "The Reform for Solidarity is precisely for people like you." When the whole thing began, I told myself, "These are fabrications, fake news, they cannot be the overlords of life and death. And look what happened... It turned out to be true... "Sir, choose a date and time.

We make no exceptions." I chose. I wanted it to be after at least 50 years, but they didn't allow it. There is an upper age limit. You don't have the right to reach it. I told them, "Well, if a miracle happens? You cannot outsmart death." "Men can do everything," they snapped... *(A loud noise comes from Cinderella, as if she cries. She anxiously changes her colors: red, yellow, blue, green.)* Calm down, Cinderella. I'm still here. Do you know how many stories I want to tell you? *(Cinderella calms down slightly)* Have I told you how, once, I saw a blue jellyfish, that big! Honestly. Its tentacles were that big, each a meter long! We faced each other. The current was shaking it slowly. From one side to the other side. *(Cinderella calms down.)* It had no eyes, yet it seemed to be looking at me! And I was looking at it. A great beauty. It looked like my wife. And even though we weren't really talking, I got what it meant... /

(A loud ring startles the OLD MAN. The long instructions for the elderly commence. A clear, calm female voice speaks.)

INSTRUCTIONS: Hello. Your personal code is 346297653. When you wake up, enter it into the system ...
OLD MAN: *(turns his back to the screen, exits the frame.)* Cinderella, sing.

(A loud sound of cleaning is heard blending with the voice of the instructions.)

INSTRUCTIONS: ... Your room number is 231. Your pieces of furniture are called a bed, a chair, a wardrobe, a table. The bathroom door is right next to the entrance door. When you wake up, you must go there. You must turn the water on to wash yourself. Your home robot takes care of your safety. Its signals are programmed to keep you in the mood...

THE FREEDOM ROOM

(An unrealistically big, ancient wooden gate surrounded by some mystic light is projected on the video wall. One can hear the sound of the wind. The FEMALE RECEPTIONIST sits in front of the gate. She plays on her phone. She seems as if she's been playing for days, her eyes are wide open, she does not blink. She wears winter clothes, with a hat and a shawl. A knock on the door. The FEMALE RECEPTIONIST looks around, startled. The knocking repeats. She gets more startled.)

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Come in.

(The IDEALIST enters. He looks pensive. Tired. Somehow despondent.)

IDEALIST: Hello. Is it vacant?
FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Depends on what you are looking for.
IDEALIST: *(points at the big door)* The freedom room.
FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Are you sure you are not for the Solitude Room? It is next door.
IDEALIST: I am sure.
FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Argh, just a moment. *(She goes through her pockets, finds a booklet entitled "Instructions.")*... It's been a long time since anyone visited...
IDEALIST: There used to be a line stretching up to the neighboring Zones. At least that's what I've heard.
FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: *(reads from the Instructions)* "The freedom room, hello. You are your own master here, come and make sure on your own, make yourself at home." I'm listening.
IDEALIST: I want to come in.
FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Is this your first time?
IDEALIST: Yes.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: I will have to warm it up.

IDEALIST: No need, I don't mind the cold.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: It's windy, the window frames are old.

IDEALIST: No problem.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: One of the windows is broken. Some little boys broke it years ago with a ball.

IDEALIST: I'm not choosy.

(Pause. The FEMALE RECEPTIONIST is not pleased because of the work she has to do now.)

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: There are many more interesting attractions nowadays. I have no idea what you have heard about the Room, it's terribly boring inside. It's empty. You will be alone, between four peeling walls. Alone. All alone.

IDEALIST: That's what I need. I want to go in.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: *(genuinely bored)* I have to read you what's written in the leaflet... *(reads)* "The freedom room is a cultural landmark and a symbol of man's eternal pursuit of freedom, although the latter has always been restricted by our personal and common walls."

IDEALIST: Wonderful. Splendid. Even beautiful.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: How long are you staying?

IDEALIST: I am not sure.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: You have to choose! We offer five-minute to one-day stays, but... that's not recommended.

IDEALIST: I don't know how much time I'll need.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: What are you going to do inside? No perversions, OK?

IDEALIST: *(with a bitter smile)* I'll go in to die.

(Pause.)

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Oof...

IDEALIST: You look disappointed?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Go right in.

IDEALIST: Why the attitude? You are the last person I'll see.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: So what? What do you want me to do, a funeral service?

IDEALIST: No. But yet. Show some respect...

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: How are you going to die?

IDEALIST: Injection.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Fine, at least I will not have to clean up.

IDEALIST: You won't. I've thought about that.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: And have you called the journalists?

IDEALIST: You will have to do that. I don't know when I'll feel the exact moment.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: *(moans with disapproval)* Is this one of those performances, how do they call them..., a social statement? Or you're merely deranged?

IDEALIST: An act with a message. To trigger the global processes.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: I see. Do you have a last statement that I have to forward?

IDEALIST: The act of my dying in the freedom room will suffice.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Well, I don't know if it will.

IDEALIST: Why?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Didn't you read what they wrote about the previous one?

IDEALIST: I'm not the first one to die in the freedom room?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Not at all.

IDEALIST: No! I didn't know that.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: You are not.

(Pause.)

IDEALIST: And what did they write about him?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: A heterosexual with male genitalia dies for show in the freedom room. Nothing ensued from that death.

IDEALIST: Nothing?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Nothing.

IDEALIST: Nobody protested?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: People protest. So what? They cannot drill people's heads. Mine is bulletproof. My heart, too. I won't even mention my soul.

IDEALIST: When did it happen?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: I don't know what day it is today.

IDEALIST: And nothing has changed since?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: I don't follow much of what happens outside. But the way I see it, nothing has changed since you haven't heard.

(Pause.)

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Well? You froze? Are you going in?

IDEALIST: I have to think for a moment.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Well, this is not a waiting room. You go either in or out.

IDEALIST: Do I bother you?

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: You interrupted my game.

IDEALIST: Wait a second! It's a matter of life and death after all.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Exactly! I was just about to pass the level. It will take at least two minutes before I get into the rhythm, and these two minutes are fatal.

IDEALIST: Shut up, please! You're hampering my thinking.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Oh, and pretense on top of that. I'm sick and tired of hoity-toity guys like you.

IDEALIST: I'm not hoity-toity.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: You're. Hoity-Toity. Mr. Hoity-Toity. You don't keep your word!

IDEALIST: Let me think about it!

(Pause.)

IDEALIST: Fuck! You confused me.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Are you going in?

IDEALIST: You'll do whatever it takes with the sole purpose of not letting anyone disturb your comfort, won't you? I don't like such people! You are the reason we're in this mess.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: And whose comfort am I supposed to look after? Yours? You yourself have no idea what you want!

IDEALIST: I know! Because of people like you, I'm going in. Thanks for reminding me.

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: Then, go in!

IDEALIST: I won't even enter!

(The IDEALIST takes a syringe out of his pocket. He hesitates for a moment.)

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: *(mockingly)* Do you want me to do it for you?

(The IDEALIST administers the injection with a loud cry. In a couple of seconds, he collapses. He dies. The FEMALE RECEPTIONIST grabs her phone, plays.)

FEMALE RECEPTIONIST: *(shouts)* No!!!! I'm dead!!!

(FOUR ONES. They wag their tongues.)

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): Let's bla-bla.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Let's do it.

FIRST ONE (MALE): This is happening now, right?

SECOND ONE (MALE): No, it is about to happen.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): You're wrong. All of that has already happened and will never happen again.

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): No. You're wrong. It has never stopped happening.

FIRST ONE (MALE): Well, in any case, that's bad.

SECOND ONE (MALE): Look at you. Who says what's good and what's bad.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Everything is relative.

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): Is it?

FIRST ONE (MALE): Well, if it's not, then things are very bad.

SECOND ONE (MALE): Come on, let's not say "bad." Let's say "improper."

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): It's relative. I would say: that's simply unheard of.

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): I'd say: How's that possible?

FIRST ONE (MALE): No shame at all.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Shame is relative.

FIRST ONE (MALE): Oh, that's right. I apologize.

SECOND ONE (MALE): No consciousness.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Hey-hey!

SECOND ONE (MALE): Is consciousness relative, too?

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE) AND THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Sure.

SECOND ONE (MALE): Excuse me. I am confused.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Let's try with questions: Where are we going?

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): Or with warnings: If we keep going this way, we'll destroy ourselves.

FIRST ONE (MALE): Or with predictions: the planet will destroy us.

SECOND ONE (MALE): The best way is to try with facts: the planet will nevertheless be destroyed sooner or later.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): You're right about that. Let's try with philosophy. So, we have no problem with the planet.

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): The planet is not our problem. We ourselves are our problem.

FIRST ONE (MALE): But who are we?

SECOND ONE (MALE): All of us together?

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): I don't know.

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): I have no problem with myself.

FIRST ONE (MALE): How did you do it?

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): Well, what's wrong with me?

SECOND ONE (MALE): You like yourself?

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): Absolutely.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Let me tell you this: you're far from perfect.

FIRST ONE (MALE): Let's take it to a global scale. So, we are not our own problem individually.

SECOND ONE (MALE): Exactly. Everyone is OK with themselves. However, when we get together, it gets bad.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Well, how come? This is a contradiction. There's no way that you can be OK on your own, and that we are not, when we are together.

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): You're right about that. We've hit a snag. (to the FIRST ONE) Say something, it's your turn.

FIRST ONE (MALE): Today, I saw a very old man, at least ninety, he was walking and eating pizza.

SECOND ONE (MALE): That's outrageous!

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Terrible.

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): Probably he's deranged, a fugitive.

SECOND ONE (MALE): Probably.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Or he might simply be enjoying it.

(Long pause. Each of them takes out a phone and starts scrolling.)

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): *(gets bored, to the FIRST ONE)* Won't you say something, you missed your turn.

FIRST ONE (MALE): I'm done with the blah-blah.

SECOND ONE (MALE): I'm done, too.

THIRD ONE (FEMALE): Well, me too.

FOURTH ONE (FEMALE): Tomorrow, we'll do it again.

THE MADMAN

(There is a sofa on the stage. Many different, beautiful flowers are displayed on the video wall. The MADMAN—a man wearing a suit, holds a suitcase in his hand. His eyes move restlessly, apparently, he's tense. The FEMALE DOCTOR enters, a woman wearing a white uniform, looking impeccable. They shake hands.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: Thank you for the generous donation.

MADMAN: I want you to hospitalize me immediately.

FEMALE DOCTOR: I don't get your joke.

MADMAN: I'm not joking. I'm crazy.

(The FEMALE DOCTOR bursts into laughter. She laughs longer than what is natural. Her laughter is slightly feigned, but she tries to sound genuine.)

MADMAN: *(screams)* I'm begging you, I'll lose control!

(The FEMALE DOCTOR stops laughing.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: Sorry. Is this not yet another extravagant joke of the extravagant super-rich?
MADMAN: No.

(Pause.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: Then I don't get it. You look healthy.
MADMAN: Examine me, and you'll see for yourself. I have absolutely no idea how I got here. Who has allowed that? What was everybody looking at?
FEMALE DOCTOR: Everybody looks after themselves.
MADMAN: And I have become an ape. With no morality, no spirituality, and no conscience, but with dark thoughts and huge opportunities? I surrender. Hospitalize me.

(The FEMALE DOCTOR smiles awkwardly.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: You must be overloaded. You need sleep, good food, sex, and a walk in nature, your wealth can take you to any wonderful place on earth.
MADMAN: *(screams)* I'm suffering, don't you understand?!

(Pause.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: OK. *(points to the sofa, they sit down)* Now, tell me. What's wrong with you?
MADMAN: Isn't there any healing music, or something? Aroma candles, etc.

(The FEMALE DOCTOR claps her hands. Some relaxing music starts playing. A candlestick with burning candles appears on the screen. The MADMAN sees it and bursts into tears. He lies down in the FEMALE DOCTOR's lap. She caresses his head like a little child.)

MADMAN: I am a terrible man. I am a danger to the people around me.

FEMALE DOCTOR: Why?

MADMAN: I only care for my pleasure, I feel a manic need to satisfy each impulse, irrespective of how that affects others.

FEMALE DOCTOR: Mm-hmm...

MADMAN: I suffer from dangerous self-deception, I escape responsibility, I degrade people, I'm angry, everything drives me crazy.

FEMALE DOCTOR: Mm-hmm...

MADMAN: I have perverted desires related to hurting other human beings, perverse sexual fantasies.

FEMALE DOCTOR: Go on...

MADMAN: I lose the sense of reality, I have megalomania and despotic inclinations, I hate people.

(Sobs uncontrollably.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(with genuine compassion)* Is there anything else that bothers you?

MADMAN: I am a step away from a big promotion. The biggest one, you see? And if you don't hospitalize me, I'm sure that it will have catastrophic consequences for everyone.

(He stands up. Brushes his tears. Grabs his suitcase.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: If that's all, I'll calm you down. Everything you told me is perfectly normal.

MADMAN: What do you mean?! I am not OK! For example, now you are driving me crazy, and I want to strip naked, break the window, take a piece of glass, jump down, and flay the little doggie I saw in front of the entrance, wrap its skin around my waist, paint my face with ancient symbols, come back here, and

be punished by you by fucking me while singing the Ode to Joy. The only thing that stops me is the fact that you will hospitalize me, and everything will be fine!

FEMALE DOCTOR: The symptoms you describe are inherent in any normal person out there. I experience the same things, to a lesser or greater extent...

MADMAN: What are you talking about?!

FEMALE DOCTOR: For example, now my disgust at you is rising so much that I count in my mind all numbers divisible by 37 because otherwise I will vomit on you or I will hit you in the head with the heavy vase over there.

MADMAN: But this isn't normal!

FEMALE DOCTOR: Yes, but now it is.

MADMAN: You are crazy, too!

FEMALE DOCTOR: Yes, but in this case, no.

MADMAN: And what are you supposed to be to get hospitalized?

FEMALE DOCTOR: We admit patients only in emergencies. Otherwise, everything outside will have to stop working. Society would disintegrate, there would not even be one free man.

MADMAN: But that's not humane!

FEMALE DOCTOR: Look, I know it's not easy for you. But I really cannot admit you to the hospital based on those complaints.

MADMAN: Damn it, I told you I am just a step away from a very responsible position, and I am raving mad! I count on you to put a stop to that madness.

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(explains to him, bored, as if she's talking to an idiot)* Even if I judge you are crazy, nothing depends on my opinion.

MADMAN: How come? You are the professional, aren't you?

FEMALE DOCTOR: Nothing depends on it.

MADMAN: Then, send me to someone whose opinion matters.

FEMALE DOCTOR: Such a person does not exist.

MADMAN: How come?!

FEMALE DOCTOR: Nobody would hospitalize someone as important as you.

MADMAN: Why?!

FEMALE DOCTOR: Anyone who dares will be immediately torn apart by your followers. Anyway, nobody would let him do it. That would mean that our opinion is more important than the positions of the superiors, which is simply false nowadays.

MADMAN: But that's what I really want. Give me some papers to sign, some consent form?

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(gets genuinely angry at him)* Nothing depends on us!

MADMAN: Have some faith in yourself!

FEMALE DOCTOR: No way! We always find a reason to give up!

MADMAN: What are you telling me? That I should leave here and go out there raging on the loose?!

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(cries out)* Yes! Leave my office! *(Pause, regains composure.)* I'm sorry. If things were different, if we could have caught you in time... My personal opinion is that the problems must be dealt with in the bud. Perhaps your parents should have never conceived you... When did you first experience any signs of your deviation?

MADMAN: When I was a kid. Yes! I hated my parents, they beat and humiliated me, to punish me, they made me stand in the dark, all alone in the toilet for hours.

FEMALE DOCTOR: That's too much for a kid. By the way, I grew up in a dysfunctional family, too. My parents only looked after my physical needs. But they didn't understand me. I think they didn't love each other, they didn't love me, either. I developed an eating disorder, I'm destroying my body daily. And my soul. I don't look after myself. I repeat their mistakes. And I blame others for them. That's why I am in this position. I can do nothing to save all of us from you. First, I have to do something for myself. But... I fail.

MADMAN: I'm sorry.

FEMALE DOCTOR: Thank you. And how did you manage to rise so quickly, you're very young?

MADMAN: I found other people with the same problems. Then I was very active online. I disseminated distorted, fanatic ideology, I secretly acted for my own benefit. I relish my triumph and the oppression of others. I pay a lot of followers, and now I am a step away from the point of no return, and I'm really desperate.

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(with genuine compassion)* Yes... Your condition is far gone... Do you intend to commit suicide by any chance?

MADMAN: No, I have a very strong spirit, I have never wanted that. I just want somebody to take care of me! I want some basic human compassion.

(Pause.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: Well... I can offer you something, but...?

MADMAN: *(hopeful)* What?

(The FEMALE DOCTOR hesitates.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: No. You will not want to.

MADMAN: I will, of course, I want to! I am a terrible person!

(Pause. The FEMALE DOCTOR hesitates again.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: No. You won't be able.

MADMAN: I can do everything! Tell me!

FEMALE DOCTOR: Well... No. It won't work.

(The MADMAN seizes her by the throat.)

MADMAN: Tell me!

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(with a powerful voice, an echo effect appears.)* Only you can cure yourself. You know that, don't you?

MADMAN: No.

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(with an echo effect)* Don't you know?

(Pause. The MADMAN releases his grip. He grabs his head and curls up into a ball on the floor.)

FEMALE DOCTOR: I knew it wouldn't happen.

MADMAN: OK! I know. I know that only I can! But isn't it too late?

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(with an echo effect)* These are excuses.

MADMAN: Yes. You're right!

(The MADMAN ponders.)

MADMAN: But I have all the reasons to be what I am.

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(with an echo effect)* Do you?

MADMAN: Well. I don't. But I'm lazy. It's more comfortable this way!

FEMALE DOCTOR: That's true for everyone.

MADMAN: OK. Let's say that I'll try. Where shall I start from?

FEMALE DOCTOR: *(with an echo effect)* Repent. Take responsibility for your actions.

(Pause. The MADMAN gets up off the floor, he dusts off his suit, and draws himself up.)

MADMAN: I don't want to. It seems too difficult.

FEMALE DOCTOR: I told you so...

MADMAN: I won't do it.

FEMALE DOCTOR: I understand you. You have the right. It's your life.

MADMAN: Unfortunately, I will smash yours and everyone else's to pieces.

FEMALE DOCTOR: So, it was meant to happen. We all will have to clench our teeth and endure what lies in store for us. Everything is exactly as it should be. We need you to get to the point from which we can only move upward. You are the leader we deserve. Thank you.

MADMAN: I thank you. I am sorry with all my heart for what lies in store for you.

FEMALE DOCTOR: Me too.

MADMAN: Well, have a nice day.

FEMALE DOCTOR: You too have a nice day!

FREE FALLING

(A loud helicopter sound. FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE), SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE), THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE), AND FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE) prepare to perform a free-fall style dive. The FIRST PARACHUTIST looks at the height-measuring device on his hand to see how high they have ascended. The video wall shows what is below them: clouds, green lawns, a city in the distance.)

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): 4100 meters.

SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE): How small is everything!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Magic!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Are you ready? A little more!

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): Fantastic!

SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE): 4200 meters.

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): 300 meters more!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): 200 more!

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): 100!

SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE): 50!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): 20!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): 10!

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): 5!

SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE): 2!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): 1!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Ju-u-u-u-mp!

(Everybody jumps with loud cries. The stage goes dark. The helicopter sound changes to the sound of the strong wind characteristic of free-falling. Images of free-falling bodies are displayed on the video wall. First, the images of the parachutists. Then, all sorts of bodies "rain" down, from all sides. They are smiling.)

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): Wow! Great!

SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE): Aaaaaaa!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): That's real life!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Wow! We're falling very quickly!

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): I want to open my parachute, I'm scared!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): *(to the FIRST PARACHUTIST)* Hey! You don't have a parachute! Where is it?

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): No! I must have forgotten it! *(to the THIRD PARACHUTIST)* Hey! You don't have one as well!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Mine is full of holes, I left it at home, I hoped you'd have one! *(to the FOURTH PARACHUTIST)* Hey! You don't have one either!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): I don't, it was stolen!

SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE): Calm down, I have one. Hold on to me.

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): I'm coming!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Wait for me!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Come on, fast, we'll crash to the ground!

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): It's done, we are all here!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Open it! *(Pause.)* Hey!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Open it!

SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE): I can't!!!

FIRST PARACHUTIST (MALE): What?!

THIRD PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Try again!

FOURTH PARACHUTIST (FEMALE): Faster!!!

SECOND PARACHUTIST (MALE): They sold me some crap! It doesn't work!

ALL: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

(The cries resemble the liberating shouts of the CROWD from the "CHOSEN ONES" at the beginning of the play.)

END

About the Author

Ekaterina Georgieva is a Bulgarian actress and playwright. She graduated from the National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts. In 2014, she joined a group of the Stoyan Bachvarov Drama Theatre in Varna. Since 2017, she has been an actress at the Aleko Konstantinov Satirical Theatre in Sofia. Her first play, *The Lucky One* (2019), was followed by *Free Falling* (2022/2024) and *Pine Cones* (2023), for which she was awarded the national Icarus Award for Dramaturgy and was nominated for the Askeer Award for Contemporary Bulgarian Dramaturgy. In 2025, she was awarded a certificate from the Ministry of Culture for her contribution to Bulgarian culture.

About the Translator

Atanas Igov is a Bulgarian translator. He graduated in Philosophy from the University of Sofia in 2002. Since 2003, he has been working as a freelance translator (English-to-Bulgarian and vice versa) for private translation service providers, Bulgarian and EU institutions, academia, and NGOs in the fields of Philosophy, Humanities, Theatre, Art Theory and Criticism, Fiction, Law, Public Administration, Finance and Business, Popular Science, etc. His published translations include 17 books and more than 60 texts published in periodicals, collections of papers, and websites, among others. He is also the author of a book of philosophical essays (2002).

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Staging rights: Ekaterina Georgieva
Please contact: ekaterina.georgieva89@abv.bg

Translation rights: Atanas Igov
Please contact: atanasigov@gmail.com

DO ANIMALS KNOW HOW TO COUNT?

A Dystopia

Piret Jaaks

A work recognized by the 2019 Estonian Playwriting Competition

Translated from Estonian by Justin Petrone

CHARACTERS

KLAIRE LOOP

HANS LOOP

HELGA LOOP

MR. WONDERNAME

DOCTOR

NURSE

MRS. TOROK

HANNA

ARMANDA

NURSE WARSAW

ADMINISTRATOR

PRIME MINISTER

AGENT 1

AGENT 2

AGENT 3

AGENT 4

SUPERVISOR

MAN IN THE WORK CAMP

DR. ANDALUSIA

TAMBUR

THE ECOLOGIST

NYARA

ABDUL

WOMAN AT THE LIBRARY

JESUS

ACT I

1.

(Time has come to a standstill. A family is seated around a kitchen table. A woman, her husband, and their child, dressed formally. They have stopped moving in mid-action: an arm is raised, scratching a head, another is lowered, and someone else is setting the dishes on the table. The screen behind them shows the interior of a beautiful home. Suddenly, they come to life.)

KLAIRE: Should we start eating?

HANS: Let's wait a little longer.

(They sit at the table in silence. HANS swings his leg nervously. They wait.)

KLAIRE: Did he say what time he'd arrive?

HANS: At seven o'clock on the dot.

KLAIRE: Well, it's seven o'clock. It's past seven, actually.

HANS: I know it's past seven.

KLAIRE: Is he a punctual person?

HANS: A very punctual person. He can't stand it when someone is late for work.

(They wait.)

KLAIRE: But maybe something happened? A train accident! I'll check the news.

HANS: There's no point. You know very well that they don't report on such things anymore.

KLAIRE: Yeah, you're right.

HELGA: Could I please have something to eat?

KLAIRE: Not yet, dear.

HELGA: But why not?

KLAIRE: Because a guest is coming to visit.

HELGA: Who?

HANS: Just a man.

HELGA: Is he your friend?

KLAIRE: Your daddy's friend. A very important man.

HELGA: Okay. I can wait.

KLAIRE: Thank you, dear.

HANS: *(to KLAIRE)* Hey, did you see her?

KLAIRE: Who?

HANS: Helga, her lenses...

HELGA: What's wrong with my lenses?

KLAIRE: Nothing at all, darling. Relax! *(whispering to HANS)* Quickly...

(HANS takes out a machine that makes blue light and holds it over HELGA's eyes.)

KLAIRE: Perfect. Her lenses are beautifully blue again.

HANS: If I hadn't noticed it, she wouldn't have been allowed into the schoolhouse tomorrow. We have to be more careful.

KLAIRE: Was that remark intended for me? She still has two parents, after all...

HANS: For the moment...

KLAIRE: That's not funny at all...

(The doorbell rings. HANS goes to get it.)

HANS: Hello there! Yes, please come in. It's very nice to see you, Mr. Wondername.

WONDERNAME: Thank you!

HANS: You don't have to take off your shoes. This is my family, Klaire, our daughter Helga.

WONDERNAME: I'm sorry I was late, although it wasn't my fault. There was an emergency at the ministry. You know how these things are.

HANS: Of course. We completely understand. Don't we, dear?

KLAIRE: It's really nothing. Please have a seat. We have been waiting for you.

WONDERNAME: Many thanks. It looks wonderful. You must be a wonderful cook, Klaire.

KLAIRE: I prepared a few things. It's not always possible to get everything. But the carrots and peas are organic. The chicken, too. Hans helped, actually. He's very good with animals. Cooking is our shared passion.

WONDERNAME: Hans is indeed good with animals. I know that from my own experience. But that it's not possible to get something, I can't say I agree with that statement entirely. Egeron offers us the best possible reality.

KLAIRE: Naturally!

HANS: Of course it does. We never claimed otherwise.

WONDERNAME: But... in any case, you've pulled off a small miracle.

KLAIRE: At least try it before you start praising it.

WONDERNAME: Men don't need to be told that twice, do they, Hans?

HANS: They don't, indeed.

(HANS folds his hands in prayer. Everyone else follows his lead.)

HANS: Please, you say it.

WONDERNAME: Surely I cannot take that honor from the man of the house.

HANS: *(closing his eyes)* Oh, Lord, everyone's eyes are on you, and you always give them their meals in due time. You open your hands and fill all that lives with your blessings. Amen.

EVERYONE: Amen.

KLAIRE: Who would like some chicken?

HANS: I'd love some, please.

WONDERNAME: I refuse none of the gifts that the savior and the government provide us with. I am grateful and accept everything humbly.

KLAIRE: That's nice to hear. Here, have some peas, carrots, and sauce.

HELGA: I don't want any.

HANS: Pardon me?

HELGA: Thank you very much, but I don't want any.

(HANS nods approvingly.)

KLAIRE: Peas? They're from closed farms, organic.

HANS: Yes, please.

WONDERNAME: I'll have some too, thanks.

KLAIRE: Would you like some?

HELGA: *(earnestly)* No thanks. I don't want any of those delicious peas. Maybe some other time.

(Everyone nods approvingly. They eat.)

WONDERNAME: On the 12th, there will be another interministerial meeting. I feel we should show them why the 36th Act is necessary.

HANS: But it is very necessary. Is there any remaining doubt about it?

WONDERNAME: It seems so. Even in the ministry, there's no consensus. It looks like the Nature Conservation Department is sabotaging us.

HANS: But there's already a permit from the ministry, with the deputy minister's signature. It's entirely clear that the 36th Act should be implemented in full.

WONDERNAME: One might think so. Fortunately, we will benefit from the problems with the wild animals. Now, even the wild birds are infected. But not this chicken, of course. It's very delicious!

KLAIRE: Why, thank you.

WONDERNAME: That was supposed to be my own little joke.

KLAIRE: Oh, yes. Of course.

HANS: Aha... "Of course, not this chicken." Chickens are also birds. But not wild birds. A terrific joke!

(They all laugh earnestly.)

WONDERNAME: In the Nature Conservation Department, there's an ecologist named Nimmermitt, whom we cannot completely trust. He's a regressive thinker. He sees the problems but has decided to ignore them. If he's allowed to keep operating, then he might draw attention to the wrong things, and we'll be on the verge of a real catastrophe.

HANS: I've probably heard of him, but I've never met him personally.

WONDERNAME: It's better not to bother with such aged officials whose only goal in life is to hang on to their seats. We have seen it already—he doesn't care about what's really useful to the state. You're a teacher, aren't you, Klaire?

KLAIRE: I am.

WONDERNAME: What subject do you teach?

HANS: Klaire teaches literature.

WONDERNAME: How are things at school? Do you have these same kinds of regressive types? Those who ignore the set curricula and force old methods of instruction on the children? Who, instead of teaching compulsory literature, advise them to read writers who have long since been declared traitors to the state or, even crazier, share underground literature with their pupils?

KLAIRE: I haven't met anyone like that...

WONDERNAME: That's good. That's very good. Traditions are important, but only within clear boundaries. People need their boundaries. Life's much easier that way. Am I right?

HANS: Precisely!

(KLAIRE nods along quickly. They eat in silence.)

WONDERNAME: *(to HELGA)* How are you doing in school?

HELGA: Fine, sir.

WONDERNAME: There's no need to be so formal. Tell me what you did in school today, for instance?

HELGA: We had vaccinations in school today.

WONDERNAME: Really? For what?

HELGA: I don't know. We've had them before.

KLAIRE: Interesting that I didn't know anything about this.

HELGA: They didn't vaccinate any of the kids in your class. It was only for the second graders.

KLAIRE: Interesting.

WONDERNAME: But you weren't afraid of the injection, right?

HELGA: I wasn't afraid.

WONDERNAME: That's what I thought. The daughter of such a fine man has nothing to fear.

HANS: Helga really is a good girl.

WONDERNAME: She only gets As, right?

HANS: Some Bs too.

WONDERNAME: But still a fine girl.

(He pats HELGA on the head.)

WONDERNAME: That's how it should be. Yes, my boys also got the occasional C in school... Then I took out that thin rubber tube, the kind they used to use for enemas, and gave them a proper whipping. After that, they only got Bs and As. They even thanked me for it.

(KLAIRE stands up quickly.)

KLAIRE: I'll bring some more... carrots.

WONDERNAME: This pasta salad is exquisite.

HANS: That's Klaire's homemade pasta; it's not from a box. She cuts the pasta dough, and I crank the machine. That's how things work here. Isn't that right, dear?

KLAIRE: Yes. Hans is a very good cranker.

WONDERNAME: That I believe. How many family points do you have altogether?

HANS: Two hundred and forty-six and a half!

WONDERNAME: Bravo. And you're still a young family?

HANS: We certainly don't have as many as you…

WONDERNAME: Old veterans like me have thousands of points stored away in the ministry's database.

KLAIRE: We got organic food thanks to our family points.

WONDERNAME: Surely you didn't use them just for me? You could have bought something else, something you really needed.

KLAIRE: No, we really have everything we need. Since we have collected so many, we can allow ourselves to splurge a little on behalf of such an important guest.

(HELGA drops her knife; she picks it up and quickly kisses it. HANS and KLAIRE look startled.)

WONDERNAME: Well, well. It seems some old traditions have lived on in your family.

HANS: Why did you do that?

HELGA: The teacher told us that if you drop a knife, then a man will come to visit you. But if you kiss the knife, he will even marry you!

(Silence.)

WONDERNAME: *(wiping his mouth, smirking)* So, it was, once upon a time.

HANS: Which teacher?

KLAIRE: Let's talk about something fun.

HANS: I just wanted to know which teacher.

HELGA: We were supposed to be talking about something fun.

HANS: Helga, please tell me now which teacher it was.

(HELGA is silent.)

HANS: You do understand that these are just some old, stupid folk beliefs, the kinds that only stereotypical people believe. We don't believe in them. Is that clear?

HELGA: Then why does the teacher believe in them?

HANS: Teacher... Which teacher? *(to KLAIRE)* What is going on at school?

WONDERNAME: My dear colleague, there is no need to be so hard on the girls. They have other tasks in this life... Girls do think about boys, they want a home and to take care of it. Only stereotypical women don't want these things. There are all sorts. But considering your family's points, it's no wonder that your child wants to think about her future prospects. Even in such a context.

HANS: Absolutely. I just don't understand... Is this something we should report to the Ministry of Education?

WONDERNAME: In another situation, you certainly should. The reporting of suspicious activity would be your civic duty. But, in this case, seeing as you are an employee of a competing ministry... This would not be looked on favorably. It would give off the impression that you were trying to distract attention from something else. Let's try to get those acts sorted out first.

HANS: If only those animals would stop getting infected...

WONDERNAME: In the given situation, it's even useful to us. But only within certain limits.

HANS: Yes. But may I ask why?

HELGA: *(while looking at her father)* Mommy, do animals know how to count?

KLAIRE: What kind of question is that, dear?

WONDERNAME: Your child has an interesting question.

HELGA: I remember that when I was small, we went to the zoo, and there was a monkey in a cage. The monkey lined up some small sticks in such a nice way that I thought... Well, does he know how to count them, to count how many sticks were there?

KLAIRE: They don't know how. They are animals, you know. Think for yourself a little.

HELGA: But I thought that...

HANS: Your mother just told you that they can't!

HELGA: Can I go to my room?

HANS: You haven't eaten.

HELGA: I'm not hungry.

KLAIRE: Helga... Come back this instant. I'm sorry.

(KLAIRE goes after HELGA.)

WONDERNAME: I think it's time for me to go too.

HANS: So soon?

WONDERNAME: Yes. My responsibilities await. Work for the benefit of Egeron never ends, even in the late evening hours.

HANS: Of course. I hope you liked the food.

WONDERNAME: Everything was wonderful. Thanks for the invitation.

HANS: Yes. I thought it would be nice... considering that I have been working at the ministry for 16 years now, and since we just had the dining room renovated, it would be nice to invite you to visit.

WONDERNAME: Of course, of course. Everything is very nice. Oh, yes... I'll need you to draft a few new documents on the basis of the 36th Act for tomorrow.

HANS: Most certainly. I'll do it in the service of Egeron!

WONDERNAME: I knew I could count on you. There is also the hope that some

new positions will free up. Just reminding you that those who are obedient have the most hope. Please say thank you to Klaire on my behalf.

HANS: Certainly, I'll tell her and a thousand pardons... She's speaking with our child.

WONDERNAME: Completely understandable. Good evening! Let's all serve Egeron.

2.

(HANS goes into the bedroom. They speak in subdued, hushed voices.)

KLAIRE: Did he leave?

HANS: Yes.

KLAIRE: I didn't get to say goodbye!

HANS: No worries.

KLAIRE: And we still have dessert... Did he like it here?

HANS: He was very impressed by your cooking, dear.

KLAIRE: Then why did he leave so suddenly?

HANS: Something came up at work...

KLAIRE: I made it clear to Helga that this is not how one behaves in front of guests. That this was a very important guest of Daddy's.

HANS: Did she understand?

KLAIRE: It seems she did. I don't understand what got into her. She isn't usually like this.

HANS: Sorry that I was a little irritable before. That teacher stuff really got on my nerves.

KLAIRE: I know, but we have to make an effort for Helga. She should have some kind of childhood at least, where she can express herself freely.

HANS: But you do agree that that teacher overstepped her role, right?

KLAIRE: Yes, she should have… controlled herself more.

HANS: You don't do anything like that, right?

KLAIRE: Me? Of course not. I'd never dare to in my life. Maybe I'm a coward. Each time the list of forbidden and permitted literature arrives at the school… my heart skips a beat, to see what has been added to the blacklist. In the end, there will be nothing left to teach.

HANS: See, if you can manage within the given limits, then why can't she?

KLAIRE: You're right, dear. We all have to control ourselves. I'll talk to Helga again tomorrow.

HANS: Maybe we should file a report…

KLAIRE: On the teacher? Under no circumstances! You know what it will lead to.

HANS: I know. But if she keeps on like this, then she'll get our child in trouble, too. Today was just one example of it. And… and… We know all too well what happens to people who are different. They're all sent over the wall to the stereotypes' settlements. As a ministry official, I am obliged to pay attention to such incidents.

KLAIRE: Listen to yourself! Sometimes you can be a real bureaucrat… We're not going to report on anyone! The main thing is not to get in anyone's way.

HANS: And the one who gets in the way is the teacher who talks of old folk traditions.

KLAIRE: It might have just slipped her lips. What should she have said?

HANS: "Egeron provides us with daily security in the newest and best possible reality."

KLAIRE: I understand that you're afraid…

HANS: I'm not afraid.

KLAIRE: You're not going to turn into… one of them?

HANS: I'm not going over the wall with my family! I do what's needed to main-

tain our position in society!

KLAIRE: Even if it endangers our lives?

HANS: You can't be serious.

KLAIRE: Calm down, dear. Even if your boss thought it wasn't a good idea. Unless he goes and reports on it somewhere himself now...

HANS: Certainly not. He's a businessman.

KLAIRE: What do you mean?

HANS: It's not spoken of openly, but there are burning plants in the sixth district. They get additional work by killing animals.

KLAIRE: But... is a ministry official even allowed to have private interests?

HANS: Under the new law, yes. But even now, it's not looked upon kindly. He definitely doesn't want to draw attention to anything that might endanger his position. By the way, there was one interesting thing...

KLAIRE: Yes?

HANS: He hinted to me that I might get a promotion.

KLAIRE: Really? But that's good news indeed!

HANS: Yes, dear, there's hope for a breakthrough. Exactly what we've been waiting for so long!

KLAIRE: All the more reason to keep quiet. Seriously, Hans, use your head. Everyone is trying to live after the catastrophe... sorry—the climate agreement—in the best way they can. What good would it do to send one teacher over the wall?

(HANS sits on the bed and starts to take off his tie.)

HANS: I just feel from time to time that if there's a new law, then I want to follow it to the letter. That there would be some semblance of legality.

KLAIRE: You know very well that legality is just an illusion!

HANS: You're not permitted to speak in such a way...

KLAIRE: I'm not permitted to do a lot of things. But you aren't some kind of free thinker, you're a scientist. You should still believe in the truth... but okay... Let's abide strictly by what we're told to do, especially now, when your boss has given you such hope.

HANS: You know, sometimes I've wondered if there's some other way to limit the spread of that damned plague. I once brought it up at the ministry, but it was quickly shut down. I have a feeling that...

KLAIRE: Yes?

HANS: That Wondername will look into it...

KLAIRE: I wouldn't be surprised. He's the kind of man who loves power in all its forms. That whole story about beating his children? Horrible!

HANS: You're right about him! But I stay within the limits. Don't ask, don't tell, don't think!

KLAIRE: Everything will be fine as long as we have each other, dear. You haven't forgotten that, have you?

HANS: Of course not—that's what helps me stay sane.

(They kiss.)

HANS: I love you...

KLAIRE: As much as what?

HANS: What do you mean?

KLAIRE: Or as much as whom?

HANS: Like a seagull loves a fish, or a wild boar loves a mud puddle.

KLAIRE: Are you really comparing me to a mud puddle?

HANS: No...

(They laugh quietly.)

HANS: I'll buy something beautiful with our family points tomorrow.

KLAIRE: Such as?

HANS: An aquarium. With a huge, transparent pipe system, you know the type... that flows inside the wall... Then we'll have a room full of colorful fish.

KLAIRE: Is it really worth the expense?

HANS: We've earned it.

KLAIRE: Right now, there's barely enough to buy food. Today I spent half the day going around trying to get carrots and peas. Everything in town is starting to run out. In the past, you could at least get some information from internet groups, before they closed all the channels. Although the kids in school were talking about something interesting... There's something called the Dark Net—like the internet, but secret.

HANS: What a ridiculous story! What did you do with those kids?

KLAIRE: What did I do? I asked them not to talk about it anymore. Although it was rather interesting, was it not?

HANS: Don't worry yourself so much about food. Soon, we'll get the animal issue under control, and the settlements will start sending supplies again.

KLAIRE: Was it the right decision that we didn't leave when Egeron came to power?

HANS: *(pauses)* Yes, of course. Everything is fine, really. You worry too much.

KLAIRE: You always manage to calm me down... Remember when we were at university?

HANS: You were the most beautiful girl in the library...

KLAIRE: And you were the most arrogant boy. But I told my girlfriend at once that I like that boy who is so full of himself. And then you sat beside me and asked me what I was reading...

HANS: One could say that we owe our happiness to education and science.

KLAIRE: But not out loud.

HANS: We'll say it quietly, whisper it.

(They kiss. Through the door, a soft voice is heard.)

HELGA: Mommy?

HANS: *(to his wife)* Wait...

HELGA: Mommy...

KLAIRE: I'm coming right now!

3.

(At the hospital.)

KLAIRE: We didn't plan to come to the hospital at all. But she had such a high fever, and it just wouldn't come down...

HANS: We really tried, but you understand, don't you?

NURSE: I still have to fill out a report.

KLAIRE: Please. I beg of you.

HANS: Then give the child something!

NURSE: We will. But I still have to fill out a report. Surname?

HANS: Loop. Hans Loop.

NURSE: Workplace?

HANS: The Ministry of Environmental Management.

NURSE: Your spouse's occupation?

HANS: Schoolteacher.

NURSE: Family points?

HANS: Two hundred forty-six and a half.

NURSE: Child's gender?

HANS: Female.

NURSE: Age?

HANS: Eight.

NURSE: When did the fever start?

KLAIRE: I don't know... around 10? We had a visitor...

NURSE: *(to HANS)* When did the fever start?

HANS: It was, yeah, probably around 10 at night.

(The family DOCTOR arrives. HANS and the DOCTOR greet each other with hand symbols.)

DOCTOR: What do we have here?

KLAIRE: Her fever is over 40 degrees, and it's not going down... We really did everything that was advised in the family guidebook...

DOCTOR: There are no sick people in our country. Everyone is vaccinated. Egeron offers us the best possible reality.

KLAIRE: We are... honestly, we're all vaccinated.

HANS: Could it be... that there's a small chance a person could get infected?

DOCTOR: No. Think carefully. Where could you have contracted the disease?

KLAIRE: I really don't know. They're kids... Sometimes they just get sick.

DOCTOR: Sometimes they do. But usually, they don't. Those whose children get sick are stereotypes. They do completely different work outside the city... *(to HANS)* You're an official, right?

HANS: I am.

DOCTOR: Exactly. The last time a government official's child got sick was six years ago. You know what times were like six years ago... I hope you understand the seriousness of the situation.

HANS: I understand, but...

DOCTOR: *(to NURSE)* What vaccines have they received?

NURSE: Diphtheria-tetanus, polio, whooping cough, mononucleosis, hepatitis B, chickenpox, rotavirus, all forms of flu... Even hereditary diseases were previously investigated and ruled out via gene correction.

DOCTOR: Measles?

NURSE: Done.

DOCTOR: Then we don't know what it is?

NURSE: At the moment, no. We're going to run some analyses.

DOCTOR: Have you recently been given permission to travel?

HANS: No. We haven't been anywhere.

DOCTOR: Not in any developed country?

HANS: No, we really haven't.

DOCTOR: Sometimes people forget to mention travel if it was to a developing country. Developed countries are still considered safe places. Although it's clear that the wave of immigration 20 years ago brought many unknown diseases even to developed countries.

HANS: We really haven't had any points of contact! It's not even possible. Egeron immediately separated immigrants from ordinary people with a strictly guarded wall...

DOCTOR: Do you want to argue or discuss politics? Right now? *(to the NURSE)* Give the child an IV, take a sample, and isolate her.

KLAIRE: Are you going to keep her in the hospital?

DOCTOR: *(to HANS)* Your wife must remain with your child in the hospital.

KLAIRE: Me? For how long? I need to inform my school.

DOCTOR: For as long as is necessary. Or do you want to run around the country with a disease we know nothing about?

KLAIRE: No.

DOCTOR: Very good.

HANS: *(to KLAIRE)* I'll come to see you.

DOCTOR: *(to the NURSE)* Total isolation for 28 days. Extended if necessary. After complete cessation of symptoms, quarantine for another 60 days.

KLAIRE: You're going to keep us here for three months?

HANS: I have to see my family.

(KLAIRE is escorted behind a glass door by two burly men.)

NURSE: We just can't risk it.

HANS: But visits? They're still allowed, right?

DOCTOR: We cannot take the risk. You can come back in three months.

NURSE: Please leave now.

HANS: This isn't...

NURSE: Please go.

HANS: You don't know what I'm capable of!

DOCTOR: Are you threatening me?

HANS: No, no. Of course not.

DOCTOR: Very good.

NURSE: Goodbye.

4.

(A large sign reads, Ministry of Environmental Management (MEM). HANS enters the ministry. Upon entry, his irises are scanned over by a blue-white light. He sits at his desk and opens his computer. A very plump MRS. TOROK sits across from him, fanning herself.)

MRS. TOROK: The word on the street is that organic vegetables are out of stock for the year, and all that's left are those made with glyphosate.

HANS: A certain percentage of glyphosate in plants is not dangerous to humans, though.

MRS. TOROK: Yes, I know, but I'd still like the organic ones. Like we had at my grandmother's place when I was a child. Just for nostalgia's sake.

HANS: Nobody uses pesticides above the limit.

MRS. TOROK: That's how it is. Egeron offers us the best possible reality.

It hasn't been possible to get anything recently. I wanted to go to the market to get some apples, but there weren't any, because apples don't grow in this heat. But I am very sure that they're feeding them to the stereotypes. Can you imagine what enormous masses live in the settlements... They also want to eat. It's no wonder that there's nothing left over for city people.

HANS: Do you mind if I listen to some music?

MRS. TOROK: If you must...

HANS: It helps me concentrate.

(HANS puts on Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata No. 14. He starts to type the information from the paper on his desk into his computer. We can see on the screen what he's doing. Soon, the following appears:)

Animal Extermination Act No. 36.

Wild boar *(Sus scrofa)*—461 units.

Deer *(Cervus nippon / Cervus elaphus)*—298 units.

Moose *(Alces alces)*—202 units.

Hedgehog *(Erinaceus europaeus)*—116 units.

Badger *(Meles meles)*—21 units.

HANS: *(to himself, looking at the paper)* Strange.

(Typing into his computer:)

Domestic chicken *(Gallus gallus domesticus)*—ca. 16,000 units.

(The phone rings.)

A VOICE ON THE TELEPHONE: Mr. Wondername would like to see you in his office.

HANS: But I'm only half done with the report...

A VOICE ON THE TELEPHONE: Please come now.

MRS. TOROK: Rumors are going around that the boss intends to promote someone.

HANS: So, you've also heard.

MRS. TOROK: Is there anything I haven't heard? I wish you only luck.

5.

(HANS enters WONDERNAME's office.)

HANS: Hello, sir.

WONDERNAME: Have a seat.

HANS: So, what's up?

WONDERNAME: How is that act coming along?

HANS: Wonderfully.

WONDERNAME: Very good.

HANS: Is something wrong?

WONDERNAME: There's just more work to be done. It seems that the chicken farms are also infected.

HANS: The chicken farms? The ones on the edge of the city?

WONDERNAME: It appears so.

HANS: I noticed it immediately. Strange that we received a directive about the chickens.

WONDERNAME: There's no sense in wondering. Wondering disturbs productivity. A decline in productivity disturbs the fulfillment of objectives.

HANS: I understand, but... But how did it happen?

WONDERNAME: Does it come as a surprise that wild animals can infect domesticated ones?

HANS: No, it doesn't.

WONDERNAME: This is your response.

HANS: So, they will all be incinerated?

WONDERNAME: Certainly.

HANS: I've been wanting to ask you something for a long time. It's about those incineration plants. People say that you have... *(searches for words)* some involvement.

WONDERNAME: Who told you that?

HANS: It's just what I've heard.

WONDERNAME: And you believe this neighborhood gossip?

HANS: No. But...

WONDERNAME: We have much more important things to talk about, Hans. You've been a good official. You do your work diligently. It's in my power to sign off on something that would help you get promoted.

HANS: That would be very nice, sir.

WONDERNAME: Yes, it would, but I can't do it anymore.

HANS: Why not?

WONDERNAME: You'd need to have your family points in order for that.

HANS: We have almost 300 family points!

WONDERNAME: Your wife has been taken to the hospital's psychiatric ward.

HANS: What the heck?

WONDERNAME: She didn't know how to behave herself.

HANS: What do you mean?

WONDERNAME: Started to argue with the doctors.

HANS: I don't understand.

WONDERNAME: She didn't accept modern treatment options. She demanded the end of isolation; she claimed that your sick child is completely healthy.

HANS: Helga is healthy?

WONDERNAME: Who is Helga?

HANS: My daughter. You met her... at dinner a week ago.

WONDERNAME: Oh, yes. Helga... Little Helga continues to be in isolation at the hospital. I don't have any more information than what I was told on the phone.

HANS: Might I ask who called you?

WONDERNAME: I'm not at liberty to say.

HANS: Was it a family physician?

WONDERNAME: The call came from someone in the Ministry of Health.

HANS: Why would the ministry get involved in something like this? This is a family matter.

WONDERNAME: *(quietly)* No one told me that, of course, but that's what I gathered. That the illness your daughter has... It's an illness that has been spreading among the stereotypes for years. They're asking me how it could have reached an official of our ministry.

HANS: Disease? She just had a fever.

WONDERNAME: *(quietly)* Apparently, it wasn't just a fever. I was instructed to reduce your family points. For negligence.

HANS: But we haven't done anything wrong.

WONDERNAME: You haven't been traveling?

HANS: No. Certainly not. We haven't even left the city.

WONDERNAME: Well, I already knew that. As an employer, I would have had to write you up a travel pass. I hope you understand that I have to ask this, but you haven't been in communication with any stereotypes?

HANS: No. Absolutely not!

WONDERNAME: I understand. But I still have to take some points off. It's my duty as an employer. I cannot neglect my duties.

HANS: I have to see them!

WONDERNAME: I'm afraid that's not possible. But they're just fine. Egeron offers them the best possible reality.

HANS: But I must! Don't you understand! You can reduce my family points, but it won't change the fact that I have to see my child and wife!

WONDERNAME: They're seriously ill. It's better to just let them be.

HANS: Imagine it was your own child!

WONDERNAME: Unfortunately, I can't help you... And I'm telling you... Please don't get yourself involved in an even bigger mess. Be diligent, obedient... It's in your and your family's best interests.

6.

(HANS returns to his office. He's visibly shaken.)

MRS. TOROK: Did you get it?

HANS: Get what?

MRS. TOROK: A promotion?

HANS: Oh... no. There wasn't any kind of promotion.

MRS. TOROK: What did he want then?

HANS: He told me my child is in the hospital.

MRS. TOROK: Yes, of course, poor thing. But that isn't really news. She's been there for some time already. Is she still sick?

HANS: It seems so. It was very confusing. My wife thinks that she's healthy.

MRS. TOROK: Look... I'm not some kind of gossip. I don't like spreading such stories, but I've heard that they sometimes isolate people in the hospital for no reason.

HANS: In some ways, that would be nice to believe.

MRS. TOROK: In what way could that be nice? *(looks around, whispers)* Do you think they are running some kind of experiment? By just keeping healthy people locked up?

HANS: What are you saying? That's anti-government talk!

MRS. TOROK: Of course, of course... You don't have to believe me at all.

(HANS opens the Act on his computer again and starts to work on the half-finished text but then stops and stares out into space.)

7.

(The Neuropsychiatric Hospital. KLAIRE walks down the corridor accompanied by a nurse. She holds a pillow wrapped in plastic against herself. They enter a room. There are already two women—ARMANDA and HANNA—in this clinical room with two beds. KLAIRE is very shy.)

NURSE: This is your room.

HANNA: Hey, new girl. Have a seat.

KLAIRE: *(pointing to the bed)* Is this one free?

HANNA: It depends.

KLAIRE: On what?

HANNA: It depends on how good a friend you are to me.

KLAIRE: But we just met.

HANNA: So what? Do you usually tell your friends that they aren't good enough because they're new?

NURSE: Number 8148, please be nice to 8591.

KLAIRE: My name is Klaire with a K.

NURSE: Your name here is 8591.

HANNA: Klaire? Your name is Klaire with a K?

NURSE: *(to KLAIRE)* This is your bed. This is your pillow. Remove the plastic. Put the cover on your blanket.

HANNA: I've never heard of anyone being named Klaire with a K. Claire with a

C... yes. But Klaire with a K? No. Maybe it isn't a real name?

KLAIRE: Of course it's a real name.

HANNA: If you say so. I just haven't heard it before.

NURSE: This button is for situations when you need help. For emergencies. 8148—You will not press this button anymore today, is that clear?

HANNA: Maybe.

(KLAIRE takes the NURSE by the sleeve.)

KLAIRE: Nurse...

NURSE: Yes?

KLAIRE: Do I really have to stay in the same room with them?

NURSE: Similar cases are always put in the same room.

KLAIRE: But they're... different.

NURSE: Similar cases are always put in the same room. Please let go of me now.

KLAIRE: I'm sorry...

(The NURSE leaves.)

HANNA: There's no point complaining about Armanda or me to Nurse Warsaw. She knows us inside out. Isn't that right, Armanda?

(The woman in bed nods.)

KLAIRE: Is your name Armanda?

ARMANDA: My name is Armanda. I'm eighteen years old. My parents' only child. I only got As in school, but I did get a B in chemistry on my final report card. Patient number 8299.

KLAIRE: Very nice, Armanda. But why did you call her Nurse Warsaw?

HANNA: Because that's her name. All of the workers here are named after cities. They're afraid, I guess.

KLAIRE: Of what?

HANNA: They're afraid that when we get out of here, we'll hunt them down and... *(She makes a gesture of what might happen.)* Do you have any forbidden items with you?

KLAIRE: What kinds of items?

HANNA: Something you could kill yourself with. I've had enough of this. It would be nice to be free of it.

KLAIRE: No.

HANNA: How unfortunate. And very stupid of you. Where did you come from?

KLAIRE: The Central Hospital.

HANNA: And you didn't manage to take anything with you? An IV tube, a scalpel, a syringe, even a doorknob, or some little screw?

KLAIRE: No.

HANNA: Or something else, like one of those nose aspirators? You can make all sorts of things out of those.

KLAIRE: Unfortunately, not.

ARMANDA: I had a pen when I came here. But Hanna took it away.

HANNA: Amateur. *(HANNA stretches.)* Why were you brought here?

KLAIRE: It was said that I had psychosis...

HANNA: Welcome to the club. I'm also crazy. Armanda is crazy. Armanda actually is a little crazy. We're all crazy. But what was the real reason? Listen! You're not an informer, are you?

KLAIRE: What kind of informer?

HANNA: A secret government informer, of course. It seems you aren't one. An informer wouldn't be so stupid.

KLAIRE: Why are you insulting me?

HANNA: It doesn't help to be so sensitive. This place is for the strong.

KLAIRE: I can't be strong anymore.

HANNA: This is how psychosis starts... Listen, tell us exactly what you did to them. Did you fight back? Attack them? With your nails or teeth?

(KLAIRE is silent.)

HANNA: *(to ARMANDA)* She doesn't trust us. Which is right. It doesn't pay to trust anyone in the end.

(KLAIRE starts to make her bed.)

HANNA: Do you keep a diary?
KLAIRE: No.
HANNA: Too bad. Then at least you'd have a pen.
KLAIRE: Why do you need a pen?
HANNA: One could use it to stab Nurse Warsaw in the throat at night, and then we could tie a spring around her neck.
KLAIRE: What are you talking about? *(to ARMANDA)* Did she do that with your pen?

(ARMANDA shakes her head.)

HANNA: It's a joke! You can write with a pen. They have this rule. They give you one sheet of paper a day, but no pen. Too dangerous. It's your choice whether you wipe your ass with it or try to slit your wrists with the paper edge.
KLAIRE: Do they let you use the internet?
HANNA: Oh, yes... You can watch the government's daily news as much as you want on the computer. You can even comment on it if you want to praise Egeron or say something bad about the stereotypes. But everything goes through the censor, of course.
KLAIRE: How sick...
HANNA: Sicker than sick. I can see that you are also a sick animal. I've worked with animals my entire life. I can tell right away if someone's soul is sick.

KLAIRE: Why were you working with animals?

HANNA: I was a veterinarian.

KLAIRE: You?

HANNA: Me. Are we starting to become friends? Although it's now your choice whether you want to believe me. Lunatics can say all sorts of things.

KLAIRE: It seems so.

HANNA: Since you're such a little pitiful creature, I'll give you a few tips, Klaire... First, keep a low profile. But you already know how—you've had plenty of practice. Second, everything here works on barter. And third—don't get on anyone's nerves.

KLAIRE: Of course. Thank you.

HANNA: Don't be so submissive. My god! Find the strength in yourself to resist! You might have to stay here for the rest of your life.

(A hatch opens, and three small bowls are placed inside.)

KLAIRE: What is this?

HANNA: This is our food.

KLAIRE: My god.

HANNA: God is certainly not going to help you. Help yourself. Gourmet à la carte.

KLAIRE: It's like glue.

HANNA: You could try to send it back. But I don't know what will happen to you after that. They'd probably knock your teeth down your throat with a spoon and then funnel their powdered puree down there. They'd like us all to be full, then we're more docile.

(HANNA drinks up her soup in one gulp and then starts banging the bowl against the door. ARMANDA eats quietly on her bed and doesn't react to the banging at all.)

KLAIRE: Why are you doing that?

HANNA: Because I feel like it.

KLAIRE: You yourself said that we shouldn't upset them.

HANNA: I said that we shouldn't upset them too much. But, yes, it's better when we're really apathetic and docile. But you know, I'm bored. And my mind is constantly full of all kinds of good ideas. If I don't act on them, I can get unpredictable—and we wouldn't want that, would we?

KLAIRE: No.

HANNA: Then let me bang away. You can rest and enjoy it. Learn from Armanda. She used to be a diligent, brilliant girl who graduated from school with flying colors, but now she takes her medicine just as diligently and is the way she is. *(She yells at ARMANDA.)* Armanda, what's your dog's name?

ARMANDA: *(after a long pause, apathetically)* Bonifacius.

HANNA: See, that's what she's like.

A VOICE BEHIND THE DOOR: Finish up. Put the bowls here!

HANNA: Isn't it funny! Hey, did I see you smirking? You're adapting faster than I thought.

KLAIRE: I don't believe it's possible to adapt to this at all.

HANNA: Why not? A person even gets used to being hanged. At first, you jiggle a little, but then the calm arrives.

(HANNA starts to laugh at her own joke. KLAIRE pulls the blanket to her eyes.)

8.

(HANS is at home in the evening; he selects the number for the Central Hospital from the wall screen.)

ADMINISTRATOR: This is the Central Hospital.

HANS: Could you please connect me with the isolation ward?

ADMINISTRATOR: May I ask who's calling?

HANS: I'm an... official.

ADMINISTRATOR: Are you from the Ministry of Health? What's your name? Position?

HANS: Hans Loop.

ADMINISTRATOR: I can't find that name in the system.

HANS: My official ID number is 16741.

ADMINISTRATOR: *(typing into the computer)* This is a number from the Ministry of Environmental Management...

HANS: I'm acting on behalf of the Ministry of Environmental Management. This is connected to the infection cases, which are believed to be coming from the stereotypes' settlements.

ADMINISTRATOR: I understand. I'll connect you at once.

NURSE: Isolation ward.

HANS: Excuse me, but I'm calling regarding a certain patient... Helga Loop. Is she there?

NURSE: Yes, my apologies... but we're not allowed to share that kind of information.

HANS: I'm calling from the Ministry of Environmental Management. It's connected to her disease. It seems that we're on to something.

NURSE: Oh? May I ask what that is?

HANS: It seems that the animal plague has started to infect domesticated animals... And we're afraid, people as well... We have to bring Patient Loop to our laboratory for further analysis.

NURSE: Sorry, but I have to speak about this issue with our department head.

HANS: This is an emergency. We must come at once.

NURSE: I don't have the right to discharge anyone.

HANS: You have to understand the seriousness of the situation...

NURSE: Oh... Come in then. But I definitely want to talk to the department head first.

HANS: See you soon!

9.

(In the Neuropsychiatric Hospital. A quiet sobbing can be heard. The door opens.)

NURSE: What's going on here?

HANNA: Oh, nothing. The new girl here is a little... She'll get over it.

NURSE: Quit crying!

HANNA: Well, what can you do?

NURSE: She can be quiet. She's upsetting the other patients, too.

HANNA: I'm sure she'll stop.

NURSE: I won't leave until she does.

(KLAIRE quiets down.)

NURSE: See that it doesn't happen again.

HANNA: Y-yes. She'll stay quiet. You can leave in peace, nurse. Home awaits, a warm pot of soup for the table. The children need clean stockings. Don't worry, I'll take care of her.

NURSE: Fine, and no more tricks!

HANNA: Naturally! Egermoron offers us the best possible reality!

(The door closes.)

HANNA: *(imitating NURSE WARSAW)* "See that it doesn't happen again."

KLAIRE: Thanks.

HANNA: For what?

KLAIRE: For standing up for me.

HANNA: Well, just look at what a wretch you've become.

(HANNA takes a book out from beneath her bed and starts reading it.)

KLAIRE: What are you reading there?

HANNA: Nothing.

KLAIRE: I didn't know that we were allowed to read anything here.

HANNA: But nothing is allowed here.

KLAIRE: But you're not afraid?

HANNA: Of what?

KLAIRE: That they'll take your book away.

(KLAIRE shows her the book cover.)

HANNA: Let them take it. This is The History of Egeron. Totally allowed.

KLAIRE: What's that symbol there?

HANNA: This? This is just... a symbol. What does it remind you of?

(ARMANDA interrupts.)

ARMANDA: It's a person with both hands raised. Not in surrender, but as a sign of victory and freedom.

HANNA: Do you agree with what my crazy colleague says, Klaire?

KLAIRE: It could be interpreted that way, sure...

ARMANDA: Hanna... I can't sleep. Would you read me something?

HANNA: *(opens book)* "Egeron's well-directed politics contributed to its powerful rise. The successful suppression of the climate agreement resulted in the use of segregation measures in immigration policy. A nation once dissatisfied now lives on in happiness and harmony, faithfully serving our state, Egeron!"

KLAIRE: What crap.

HANNA: What do you mean?

KLAIRE: It's total nonsense.

HANNA: Such careless words!

KLAIRE: It should say that the ignoring of climate problems caused a wave of immigration, which resulted in a change of government. A third of the population wanted those who had crossed the border to return to where they came from. Populist politicians saw an opportunity to fuel public anger and divide the public into two camps. They announced that all who did not support patriotic values should be sent over the wall. The wall became very high and thick. Values became rigid, black-and-white if needed. And thus, Egeron was born. People had to convince their children that everything would continue as before, that nothing would change. And yet everyone knew everything had changed. They had to stay silent where they had once been allowed to speak. Where there had been a plurality of opinions, there was now but one. Each day, dozens of directives were issued on what people could and could not do. The news only reported cases where newcomers killed natives but never the other way around. People over the wall were forced to do slave labor just to stay alive. In public places, people began whispering. Nobody dared to express their opinions out loud anymore. The masses on the other side of the wall only grew larger, not only because newcomers were sent there but also because those who thought differently were sent there: scientists and doctors, philosophers and environmental activists, and so on. And so it still goes! Because of overcrowding, diseases broke out. Because of hunger, hatred intensified. There were rumors that someone, out of desperation, had even released the plague among the animals to wipe out those living so comfortably in the city. The rumors were silenced. And quickly. Internet channels were shut down one after another. Nobody knew anymore what was true. Everywhere but one single slogan reigned: "Egeron offers you the best possible reality." The only possible reality.

HANNA: And I thought you were just a meek little lamb...

KLAIRE: I've been a lamb for long enough.

(HANNA imitates a sheep.)

HANNA: I'm a lamb. A brave, little lamb. Listen to me!

KLAIRE: Is there any chance that they're listening to us?

HANNA: So what? We're crazy after all. We're just telling crazy stories.

KLAIRE: How did you wind up here, Hanna?

HANNA: The usual way. I went crazy, so I was sent here.

KLAIRE: I mean, really... You aren't actually... So crazy.

HANNA: I was once diagnosed with depression. It was very easy for them to declare me insane.

KLAIRE: Why were you depressed?

HANNA: You shouldn't pry so much.

KLAIRE: Sorry. I thought that since we're being kept here together, we might know something about each other.

HANNA: I'm not sure what's crazier, being here or in prison. I imagine that there are plenty of normal people doing time in prison today.

KLAIRE: Are you sure?

HANNA: Don't be so naive! Don't you remember how they started to declare totally normal people to be "stereotypes."

KLAIRE: They didn't declare any teachers to be stereotypes.

HANNA: Teachers are too dangerous. They could start planting ideas in the stereotypes' settlements. It's much better when the fools in the settlements just do their work and don't ask too many questions.

KLAIRE: But scientists? Don't they also plant ideas?

HANNA: Nobody believes the scientists. Their ideas are too complicated.

KLAIRE: I should talk to my husband...

HANNA: Bah, men... I don't trust men anymore. Only women. Men are weak, do you hear me? Weak!

KLAIRE: What do you have against men?

HANNA: Something...

ARMANDA: One day, I wanted to call my mother to tell her... I'm a big girl now, and I finally understand that I love you more than anyone in the world and... I wanted to tell her that as a big girl, not just as a child. So that it would be the truth. Children fantasize; adults' words are taken more seriously. But they wouldn't let me.

HANNA: You can't call anyone here.

KLAIRE: My child... is somewhere in this hospital. I don't know in what condition... I would like to know that at least my husband and child are okay.

HANNA: Let me tell you something... You can go and ask for permission to call them. Then see what happens. It would be smarter if you didn't try to do things that way.

KLAIRE: How should I do them then?

HANNA: How did your child get sick?

KLAIRE: She had a fever. We went to the hospital, and suddenly they told us she had to be kept in isolation for three months. But after a week, she was completely healthy. She was running, talking, eating... I mean, completely healthy! So, I demanded they release us at once and end the isolation. But they refused. They said something about secondary symptoms. Then one day, after eating, she was given an injection of something and became very drowsy. She slept the whole day. The same thing happened the next day. In the morning, she was lively, and after the injection, she collapsed.

HANNA: I think they're experimenting on us.

KLAIRE: Experimenting?

HANNA: Experimenting to see if they can keep people under control this way.

KLAIRE: You're crazy!

HANNA: No crazier than you.

(HANNA looks at KLAIRE for a while.)

HANNA: I'll help you out, new girl.

KLAIRE: How exactly?

HANNA: Let's just wait and see. The opportunity will come. *(whispering)* Let's just say that I have connections. I'm pretty talented when it comes to technology.

KLAIRE: Why should you help me, though?

HANNA: I must admit, although I'm a doctor—an animal doctor, yes, but still a doctor—and someone who might be considered part of the elite, I've always felt an affinity with the working class.

KLAIRE: A lot of it depends on who your parents were.

HANNA: My parents were very simple people, deeply religious. Mother was a baker, and father was a veterinarian. I'm a veterinarian who loves to bake and invent new things! You wouldn't believe what a delicious chicken breast I can serve up. You'd be licking your fingers clean.

KLAIRE: My parents were also just simple people... They quietly did their jobs, but then came the division of the stereotypes, and now they are stuck in the settlements with those criminals...

(KLAIRE grows sad.)

HANNA: The food here is just terrible.

(HANNA presses the doorbell.)

KLAIRE: Why do you keep pushing that?

HANNA: Because I feel like it. Let them run...

(An angry NURSE WARSAW arrives.)

HANNA: Baked chicken breast, please.

NURSE: Plain yogurt is all you get at mealtime. Stop this constant button pushing!

HANNA: Don't you see... Nobody is taking care of us.

NURSE: Do you know that we have the right to put you in an isolation room?

HANNA: I might have heard something about that...

NURSE: Then please take note that you are still, for the moment, in a fortunate situation...

HANNA: I've heard the isolation room is nothing but a small concrete shed, with no toilet, no water, and no windows, where people are kept starving and thirsty for days against their will...

NURSE: I can neither confirm nor deny it.

HANNA: See, I'm on top of everything. You can't surprise me.

(NURSE WARSAW storms off, fuming.)

HANNA: Damn puppets!

KLAIRE: Hanna... Do animals know how to count?

HANNA: Heh...why do you want to know?

KLAIRE: My daughter asked me... and I didn't know what to answer.

HANNA: Some know how.

KLAIRE: Really?

HANNA: Some, yes. Monkeys, for example. There was a study once that showed monkeys could count items on a screen just as fast as 80% of schoolchildren. Or bees... they can count up to four landmarks at a time. There have been lots of experiments. Baby chicks can tell the difference between larger and smaller amounts of food... and some fish can tell which shoals have more fish and which ones have less.

KLAIRE: And I told my child that animals can't count. I was so angry with her that day.

HANNA: Really? Why?

KLAIRE: Oh. I don't even want to talk about it.

HANNA: Why?

KLAIRE: Because it's embarrassing. Because of my husband's boss. He came to visit us. My husband works in the ministry, and it all seemed so important.

HANNA: Isn't it?

KLAIRE: None of what once seemed so important matters anymore.

HANNA: But what does matter?

(KLAIRE is silent.)

10.

(A meeting at the Superministry. Three similar-looking men sit in an office—AGENT 1, AGENT 2, and AGENT 3. Among them, we see the familiar WONDERNAME. All quietly tap their pens on the table. Waiting. Bored. One begins tapping a rhythm; the others glare at him. The door opens and in walks a stern-faced man—the PRIME MINISTER—noticeably shorter than the rest. Everyone stands.)

EVERYONE: Greetings, Mr. Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: Please read out the daily agenda.

AGENT 1: Meeting lead—a representative of the Ministry of Security. Agenda according to submission time: Item 1—The spread of the plague. Item 2—Labor issues in the stereotypes' settlements. And one additional item from the Ministry of Education, off-agenda. The Ministry of Education's representative will be late and sends his apologies. Absent is the Minister of Health, currently on foreign assignment. Where would you like to begin, Mr. Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: Let's just go in order.

AGENT 1: Of course, Mr. Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: So, Ministry of Environmental Management... Has the spread of the plague been contained?

WONDERNAME: I can't say... all extermination acts for wild animals have been carried out. Of course, that's causing problems in the ecosystem. The Hunters' Association sent a letter saying game is now so scarce they can't even hunt trophies, let alone meat.

PRIME MINISTER: We don't hunt for meat during a plague, do we?

WONDERNAME: Of course not. We'll send a notice to the Hunters' Association. But in any case, the bad news is that new outbreaks have appeared... Domestic animals are now infected. More specifically, poultry farms, which are the city's main food source.

PRIME MINISTER: What have we done to limit the spread?

WONDERNAME: We think an error was made somewhere... From a sustainable management perspective, we've been considering whether maybe... maybe we should temporarily limit the killing of wild animals and focus on domestic ones. Because there aren't many wild animals left. Hunting is one of the few forms of entertainment the wealthy still allow themselves. Maybe the problem is more with domestic animals?

PRIME MINISTER: What's more important right now? From the long-term and the short-term perspectives?

WONDERNAME: Getting the plague under control is our priority.

PRIME MINISTER: Quite clear. Then there's nothing more to discuss here. Continue with the extermination acts as necessary and make exterminating the domestic animals a priority.

AGENT 1: What should we tell the people?

PRIME MINISTER: Let's encourage vegetarianism.

WONDERNAME: Understood. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.

(He sits.)

PRIME MINISTER: So, let's move on... Please.

AGENT 3: The Ministry of Labor has become aware of some issues in the stereotypes' settlements... Settlements that by now are all located outside the city...

PRIME MINISTER: What kinds of issues?

AGENT 3: Complaints about poor living conditions... that the general poverty rate exceeds 90 percent, and the excise money is going to the wrong places... But we're used to it and managing the messaging accordingly... A new problem is the general acts of resistance. There have been uprisings in some of the more distant settlements...

PRIME MINISTER: Would you care to elaborate?

AGENT 3: Essentially, it means strikes. They've stopped working, they don't obey even after the harshest punishments. We've cut off their food, and as a last resort, restricted access to drinking water... hoping the strike would end, but... Now there was an attack.

PRIME MINISTER: An attack? Against whom?

AGENT 3: In the Vao settlement. Against the supervisors.

PRIME MINISTER: Have there been any fatalities?

AGENT 3: No, but several people have been hospitalized.

PRIME MINISTER: Where did they get their weapons?

AGENT 3: Well, they didn't use weapons exactly...

PRIME MINISTER: Then how did they attack?

AGENT 3: Something was in the supervisors' drinking water, some kind of biological weapon.

PRIME MINISTER: How do we know it wasn't something like a stomach flu?

AGENT 3: The stereotypes are also vaccinated. But of course, we can't be certain.

PRIME MINISTER: Why do you think that the stereotypes are responsible?

AGENT 3: Because it was so strange. A leak was found in a water pipe... We suspect it wasn't accidental. That the pipe was deliberately used to insert some sort of...

(Another minister enters with a briefcase under his arm. This is AGENT 4.)

PRIME MINISTER: I don't understand. Take charge of your area. Isolate the stereotypes more clearly from the supervisors and restrict their access to the supervisor rest areas. This is clearly an internal matter that we're discussing only because it escalated. Take matters into your own hands, do you understand me?

AGENT 3: We don't want to be too harsh... Eighty percent of our GDP is generated by the stereotypes' labor. If we punish them any longer, it will start to affect...

PRIME MINISTER: Exactly! That's why you must get these strikes under control. If necessary, take harsher measures. Forbid workers from going home to their families if they don't end the strike, separate children from parents, establish weekly childcare centers if needed, so they can work more... A strike is the sign of a weak system. Demonstrations lead to rebellions, and rebellion always leads to violence. This is your chance to support national security.

AGENT 3: Yes... That's how it is. You're correct.

PRIME MINISTER: Sort it out then. Next please...

AGENT 4: The Ministry of Education has received complaints that teachers' mental health is unstable. There's been a lot of depression and anxiety disorders, apathy. The job satisfaction index is low. They cannot teach according to the prescribed plan, and there are deviations in the content and quality of teaching. They are teaching banned curricula or outdated truths.

PRIME MINISTER: What does the Ministry of Education plan to do?

AGENT 4: We sent specially trained support staff to schools. They are called "Soul

Keepers." These are young men and women dressed in our special uniform for easy identification—a white polo shirt and a black scarf. They strictly monitor adherence to the curriculum and report any mental irregularities. Some teachers are sent away for compulsory treatment. Those who do not comply are relocated to stereotypes' settlements for manual labor, where they can be useful for the benefit of Egeron.

(A soft beep sounds from AGENT 1's wrist.)

PRIME MINISTER: Excellent work, Ministry of Education! Let this be an example to all of you—how efficiently the Ministry of Education solved the problem! In the future, I want to hear only about such effective measures.

AGENT 4: Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: Can we say the agenda is completed now? So, we may proceed to the most important thing—our daily work, which includes providing the best possible governance for our country.

AGENT 1: Excuse me... Before we leave, may I make a proposal?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes?

AGENT 1: I propose one more emergency item.

PRIME MINISTER: And what would that be?

AGENT 1: I know the agenda is supreme, but I just received a message and... the person involved is a high-ranking ministry employee.

PRIME MINISTER: Go on.

AGENT 1: It concerns a certain ministry official. His name is Hans Loop.

WONDERNAME: Loop?

PRIME MINISTER: Please, Ministry of Security, explain the basis of the problem.

AGENT 1: This actually is the Ministry of Environmental Management's responsibility, but it also affects us. Namely, we were informed that our workers caught an employee of the Ministry of Environmental Management

at the Central Hospital, where he had entered illegally.

WONDERNAME: It's not possible. He was at work at the time.

AGENT 1: He was at work, but that didn't stop him from calling the hospital at some point and claiming he needed to have a patient moved due to certain circumstances.

WONDERNAME: Absurd. He's one of our best employees.

PRIME MINISTER: How long has he worked at the ministry?

AGENT 1: For 16 years.

PRIME MINISTER: What about his family points?

AGENT 1: He used to have 250, now he has 46.

PRIME MINISTER: According to his points, he's not exactly the most exemplary citizen. Wondername, if he was under your supervision, why does he have so few points?

WONDERNAME: His child was in the hospital. In quarantine... his wife is a teacher. For some confusing reasons, she was taken to the Neuropsychiatric Hospital. They're fine people, really.

PRIME MINISTER: Fine people who break the law. Our state security is our utmost priority. What did the Ministry of Health have to say about it?

WONDERNAME: I really don't know.

AGENT 1: The Ministry of Health reported a gross violation. All citizens who have experienced illness must be placed in quarantine for three months. This is not up for discussion. From a public health standpoint, it was a necessary decision.

(Silence.)

PRIME MINISTER: What's the solution?

WONDERNAME: We have to deal with it, first thing tomorrow...

PRIME MINISTER: Do you think our state will be satisfied if you start dealing with a state security problem "first thing tomorrow"? You do understand that

when a ministry worker behaves in such a way, and word gets out about it, soon everyone will think that they can challenge Egeron!

WONDERNAME: I'll write a declaration of dismissal at once... along with a directive to send Mr. Loop to the settlements.

PRIME MINISTER: Will that satisfy the Ministry of Security?

(AGENT 1 nods.)

PRIME MINISTER: All is clear! Then this meeting is adjourned. And don't forget what is most important... What's the most important thing, Ministry of Environmental Management?

WONDERNAME: That Egeron offers us the best possible reality!

(All nod along in agreement.)

ACT II

11.

(A filthy farm, where people in protective suits heave animal carcasses into carts and throw them into incinerators.)

SUPERVISOR: Faster, new boy!

HANS: I'm doing it as fast as I can.

SUPERVISOR: No barking back!

HANS: They're still animals, not firewood. You can't just throw them in a pile.

SUPERVISOR: That will be six points off! Once you hit zero, then you'll understand what it feels like to be on the same level as the stereotypes. Softies like you have it the hardest.

HANS: Just a few days ago, I could have been your boss.

SUPERVISOR: *(snorts)* But that was a few days ago, wasn't it? Now use those muscles.

(The SUPERVISOR walks away. A MAN approaches HANS.)

MAN: There will be a break soon.

HANS: So what?

MAN: Then we can eat. It's slop for sure, but it does help. I advise you to eat.

HANS: I just lost some points.

MAN: My points have been in the minus for a long time, but they still feed me.

(The SUPERVISOR notices them.)

SUPERVISOR: Back to work! He who doesn't work gets no food!

MAN: Wait, not like that. I'll show you.

(The MAN helps HANS lift animals onto the cart. There's the sound of a piercing whistle.)

SUPERVISOR: Everyone gets one mug of water!

(Everyone takes a small bowl of food from a large pot and a mug of water from another. HANS sits next to the MAN who spoke to him earlier. They eat in silence.)

MAN: What did they send you here for?

HANS: I tried to get into a hospital. And you?

MAN: Let's just say that I drew attention to the wrong things.

HANS: Are you a stereotype?

MAN: What do you think stereotypes look like?

HANS: In our ministry, it's said that they are the lowest form of the working class... People who have lost all of their family points... Basically, completely asocial, those who have lost all their humanity. And immigrants, too, of course. But you can recognize them on sight... based on their appearance.

MAN: Ah, so the supervisor is correct. You really are a fallen angel.

HANS: What do you mean?

MAN: That's what they call the ones who have fallen from grace. People here communicate carefully with such fallen angels. I wouldn't speak too loudly about my former position around here if I were you.

HANS: Why?

MAN: They're afraid that the ministry is planting traitors among us.

HANS: No traitor would do this kind of work...

MAN: How strange that you believed those stories about stereotypes. You don't seem so dumb.

HANS: Maybe people just believe what they need to, what's useful for them. What are these stereotypes like then?

MAN: Just regular people like you and me. Regular people whose rights have been taken away. If you feel like the filthy bottom layer of society, you can be that, too. But you should accept that you're one of us now.

HANS: But they say that the stereotypes attack and kill people.

MAN: How stupid! No one has been killed yet.

HANS: Yet?

MAN: Why do you think the animals are dropping like flies?

HANS: Everyone knows why. There's a plague.

MAN: Yes, everyone knows why. But why is there a plague? The plague was brought under control in the 19th century.

HANS: It just happened... Sometimes old diseases resurface or are brought in from other countries! Not too long ago, there was a plague outbreak on Madagascar.

MAN: Based on your story, we could assume the Ministry of Environmental Management allowed them to drill too deep into the earth, and something old was released. Then they shut the borders to keep the plague out of the city. In their fear, they isolated everyone who had traveled abroad, lived in the countryside, had contact with animals, or simply got sick. Naturally, the

stereotypes were blamed for everything.

HANS: But everyone is vaccinated!

MAN: Another version is that the plague was created artificially, to keep people scared.

HANS: Is that possible?

MAN: Anything is possible.

HANS: Who were you before?

MAN: An official, just like you.

HANS: Funny, I never ran into you.

MAN: The Superministry has tens of thousands of employees. How many of them do you really know?

HANS: I know some...

MAN: Everyone scurried quietly to their cubicles. Eyes down, no questions. All in brown suits. I didn't even know who worked in the office next to mine. At first, I thought it was a dark-haired man, but a couple of months later, I noticed he was blond. But you, I remember.

HANS: Me?

MAN: You know those screens they had in the corridors? Of course you do. Your picture was up there several times. Employee of the Week.

HANS: How embarrassing.

MAN: A week ago, you certainly wouldn't have been embarrassed.

HANS: That's true. A week ago, I had completely different plans for my life.

MAN: A person makes plans, and Egeron laughs. It's a popular saying among us here.

(A gong sounds.)

HANS: Be careful that he *(points to the SUPERVISOR)* doesn't hear you.

MAN: What do we have to lose? Of course, the pain isn't worth the price.

SUPERVISOR: Everyone, back to work!

(The MAN gets up and grabs the cart handles.)

MAN: Who did you have in that hospital?

HANS: My wife and child.

MAN: Maybe we can help you.

HANS: How?

MAN: There are many of us here, but many have nothing left to live for. We help those who still do.

HANS: Who should I trust?

MAN: You don't have to trust anyone. Not even me. But you can hope. Hope is a balm for souls like ours. See, look—there's Tambur. She's one of ours. That over there is Abdul, and the one with green stripes there is Nyara. We're all connected by this... *(He shows HANS a symbol of a figure with raised arms on his palm.*

(The sound of a piercing whistle.)

SUPERVISOR: Back to work! No chit-chat!

MAN: Let's talk later. I'll seek you out.

12.

(The Neuropsychiatric Hospital. Morning. The patients wait in line for their medication.)

NURSE: Next. *(handing out medication)* Next.

HANNA: I'm missing one Zoloft.

NURSE: You're not missing anything, and you've never been given Zoloft.

HANNA: But isn't this a totally new medication? I remember everything. I've always been given two yellows, two blues, and one white. But now there's no white. There's pink.

NURSE: Pink suits you.

HANNA: No, no, it isn't the same!

NURSE: Stop arguing! Next.

HANNA: *(to KLAIRE)* Look carefully at what they're stuffing you with.

NURSE: Next.

(ARMANDA gets her medication and takes it right away in front of the NURSE.)

NURSE: Next.

KLAIRE: Pardon me, but am I allowed to know what these pills are?

NURSE: Mostly sedatives and antidepressants.

KLAIRE: But I am already quite sedate. I don't need any sedatives or antidepressants.

NURSE: Patient 8591, are you a doctor?

KLAIRE: No.

NURSE: Then don't question our methods.

KLAIRE: But if I were one?

NURSE: One what?

KLAIRE: If I were a doctor, could I question them then?

NURSE: Knock it off. Or I'll press the red button.

KLAIRE: So, what happens when you press the red button?

NURSE: You don't want to find out.

KLAIRE: Will you take me away to the isolation room?

NURSE: Then we'll have to administer your medication by injection. If you resist, we'll be forced to restrain you. For that, we can use this. *(The NURSE shows KLAIRE an electric whip, glowing blue.)*

(KLAIRE takes the medication, pretends to put it in her mouth, but keeps it in her palm. She walks toward the lounge area where HANNA is sitting. The door opens; TWO NURSES enter with a MAN. They speak quietly. KLAIRE sits next to HANNA.)

KLAIRE: Who's that?

HANNA: Where? Ah... That's Dr. Andalusia.

KLAIRE: Nice name...

HANNA: Oh, he seems harmless, but... actually, he's crazier than a rabid dog.

KLAIRE: Does he come here often?

HANNA: No, only when there's an emergency.

KLAIRE: Interesting. What's the emergency today?

(HANNA shrugs her shoulders.)

NURSE: Everyone over here! Form a line. Yes, everyone! You too!

(Everyone lines up. The NURSE walks before them with her electric whip.)

DR. ANDALUSIA: We found something.

(DR. ANDALUSIA lifts up HANNA's book.)

DR. ANDALUSIA: You can see that The History of Egeron is indeed printed on its cover, but inside, there's actually something that's forbidden here. Does it look familiar?

(Everyone looks down.)

DR. ANDALUSIA: It was hidden behind the toilet. Would anyone like to confess? *(Pause.)* That's what I thought. No one. Nurse, now it's your turn.

(NURSE WARSAW turns on her electric whip. It buzzes.)

Does anyone have any idea who this might belong to?

(Silence. The NURSE strikes KLAIRE with her electric whip. KLAIRE howls.)

HANNA: Stop it!

ARMANDA: It's mine!

HANNA: Shut up, Armanda.

ARMANDA: It is mine. But I didn't know what to do with it.

DR. ANDALUSIA: There's always someone who opens their little mouth. Where did you get it?

ARMANDA: I've had it with me all along. No one took it from me.

NURSE WARSAW: That's not true. Patients undergo a full-body scan to ensure nothing is hidden inside their cavities.

DR. ANDALUSIA: Where did you get this?

ARMANDA: I can't say.

DR. ANDALUSIA: Nurse, fit her with the reins.

ARMANDA: Please, no.

DR. ANDALUSIA: In my opinion, you don't leave us with many other options.

(NURSE WARSAW fits ARMANDA with reins resembling those used to control horses. They give off mild electric shocks. ARMANDA moans.)

DR. ANDALUSIA: You'll have two weeks in the isolation room to think and give us a preferably truthful explanation.

HANNA: Please don't send her in there!

DR. ANDALUSIA: Do you have anything to say, Patient... *(reading her name tag)* 8148?

HANNA: No.

DR. ANDALUSIA: Everyone to their rooms! Egeron offers us the best possible reality.

(Everyone quietly repeats the same phrase. They leave.)

13.

(In the Superministry. The PRIME MINISTER is devouring some crispy chicken in his office. There's a knock at the door. In walks WONDERNAME.)

PRIME MINISTER: Come on in. I don't have time to eat out.

WONDERNAME: Yes, of course.

PRIME MINISTER: So, it's the chickens, is it?

WONDERNAME: Chickens, goats, pigs... all kinds of domesticated animals.

PRIME MINISTER: How acute is the problem?

WONDERNAME: Domestic production is no longer consumable. We must start importing. Some products are already in quarantine. The stores are demanding goods.

PRIME MINISTER: I've heard some complaints about food shortages.

WONDERNAME: There's also a fear of food itself.

PRIME MINISTER: And with imported goods comes the fear of their origin... There's always one fear or another. Have you considered any remedies?

WONDERNAME: We feel that since the plague is local, it is... I don't know how to say this; it sounds like a conspiracy theory... It appears to be artificially created.

PRIME MINISTER: And why do you think that?

WONDERNAME: This strain has never existed before. It's impossible that it reemerged from an old source. The lab says it's entirely new.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

WONDERNAME: You're not surprised?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not.

WONDERNAME: You knew about it?

PRIME MINISTER: Not exactly, but I have had my suspicions... Recently, a device was discovered in one of the hospitals. Something very interesting, somewhere between a computer and a telepathic encoder. It seems to be crafted by skilled engineers... But what was more interesting was what it could do. Apparently, among the stereotypes, there's a resistance channel called "the Dark Net." They exchange information from the outside world there.

That's harmless enough... But we have logs showing clear conspiratorial plans against Egeron. I wouldn't be surprised if your so-called plague were one of the tools of the resistance movement.

WONDERNAME: Oh my...

PRIME MINISTER: The question is actually how to explain this to the public?

WONDERNAME: Would it be enough to just say that the stereotypes have become a danger to society?

PRIME MINISTER: And if they don't believe us?

WONDERNAME: They will. Just mention diseases and violence, and they'll hang the stereotypes themselves from the branches of the nearest trees. And then when you offer up a solution, that you'll take care of the problem, they'll even be more grateful... That's how the mass mind works.

PRIME MINISTER: The mass mind doesn't seem to be of high intelligence.

WONDERNAME: A leveled mind can't be, sir. Do you know what would be even better?

PRIME MINISTER: Well?

WONDERNAME: If we could show them someone real. Someone who would embody their fears.

PRIME MINISTER: Who do you have in mind?

WONDERNAME: Someone who has lost all their faith and dignity. Someone who embodies everything they fear: losing their position and, above all, losing control over themselves. Leave it to me. I'll have someone selected from a settlement. We must make sure there's no room for empathy.

PRIME MINISTER: We should involve the Ministry of Security. But it's still a one-time solution. It will work for those who are on the fence. Those who haven't come over to Egeron's side yet.

WONDERNAME: It's a one-time solution, but I feel it will be effective, sir.

PRIME MINISTER: One idea has crossed my desk... I'll try it out on you. If all

animals infected by the plague are taken to an extermination site, then what should we do with those who are infected with hostility to Egeron?

WONDERNAME: They are already in the settlements... And that's why we're organizing this show... demonstration.

PRIME MINISTER: Let's start at the beginning. A plague can be both physical and mental. What do we do with those affected by physical plague?

WONDERNAME: We send the animals in for extermination.

PRIME MINISTER: Exactly.

WONDERNAME: So, you want to kill all the stereotypes?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, not all of them, but those who we suspect of participating in the Dark Net... We could take out one specific group, those working in a settlement we have data on. If you like, let's treat them like animals.

WONDERNAME: Animals that know how to read and write. I think our previous idea of a single public show execution is better.

PRIME MINISTER: I do believe both ideas have merit. What do you think of nerve gas?

WONDERNAME: Oh, god, I don't know. What if we don't get involved? This is a security issue.

PRIME MINISTER: But you're already involved, Wondername. In addition, refusing to contribute to Egeron's success is considered treason.

WONDERNAME: Yes, of course.

PRIME MINISTER: So... We have the support of the Ministry of Environmental Management *(looks at the screen)*. I need to start preparing.

(He presses a button that opens a door to let WONDERNAME out.)

WONDERNAME: Good day, sir...

(WONDERNAME quickly leaves the office. He's breathing heavily. He feels unwell.)

14.

(The Stereotypes' Settlement. A break room during off-hours. It is very hot. The men look dirty and battered. A voice from the loudspeaker is heard: "All rise!" The anthem of the superstate begins: "Oh Lord, watch over our souls, in our new world order, in our new news order, in our new family order." Some people get up from their beds. Most don't. HANS tosses in his bed. The loudspeaker after the anthem announces: "Fifteen minutes until serving Egeron!")

MAN: Are you tired?

HANS: I'm just not used to physical labor...

MAN: You'll get over it. You might even start to enjoy it.

HANS: I doubt that...

MAN: It offers you moments when you don't have to think about anything. You just do it and wait for your lunch break and for when you get to go back to sleep.

HANS: But you... what should I even call you?

MAN: Everyone here calls me "The Ecologist."

HANS: Seriously?

(TAMBUR enters, a woman in men's clothing.)

TAMBUR: So... I heard that you worked at the Ministry of Environmental Management.

HANS: That's true.

TAMBUR: Tell me truthfully, did it seem normal to you?

HANS: What do you mean?

TAMBUR: The way they managed our natural resources? The forests and...

HANS: Well... at first, when they cut down the forests, it was just to get more farmland. There were a lot of people. A lot of immigrants by that time... Everyone needed food.

TAMBUR: But the climate agreement? What did the ministry do about that?

HANS: They said the agreement was a bluff to increase the benefits for third countries and should be tanked.

TAMBUR: A bluff. *(She spits.)*

HANS: I did voice my opinion when they started trading mineral resources. But they said that something had to be given to China in return. And... that's sort of true...

TAMBUR: Refusing the climate agreement was a bluff... All of Egeron is one big bluff.

THE ECOLOGIST: Calm down...

HANS: To us it seemed that...

TAMBUR: It seemed?! Man! You work there, you're educated, and you say nothing while people destroy the world right in front of your eyes.

HANS: I'm sorry.

TAMBUR: Oh yeah. The civil servant gentleman is "sorry" now. But now we have to use radical methods just so the government even understands what's going on... So, the people understand...

HANS: What kinds of methods?

TAMBUR: You know... You're not yet in a place where I can tell you. If you get as far as this man here, then maybe we'll talk...

ANOTHER MAN: Tone it down, Tambur.

TAMBUR: Look, this man here used to be a professor of ecology. His research group studied the effects of climate warming... Then he went to work at the ministry and got in someone's way. This shit needs to stop.

HANS: I agree.

THE ECOLOGIST: Do you agree?

TAMBUR: Guys, this guy agrees. The shit needs to stop.

ABDUL: Good to hear. Does Tambur have any news for us?

TAMBUR: Two days ago, they brought a load of dead badgers here. They don't have the plague; they were just killed. God only knows why. Someone probably needs to keep those furnaces running. Okay, just kidding. Maybe not. And let me stop anyone from asking stupid questions. Those badgers died simply because their habitats were destroyed.

THE ECOLOGIST: What are you trying to say?

TAMBUR: You can produce a biological weapon from a badger's pineal gland... It doesn't do anything horrible, but if you put it, say, in the supervisors' drinking water, then... let's just say they'll be very sick for a few days. Very, very sick.

NYARA: Good idea. Let's do it!

LOUDSPEAKER: Ten minutes to state service!

THE ECOLOGIST: But we're not animals. We won't do such things. We have to approach this intelligently.

TAMBUR: Even animals know how to count. We're the same, just a more advanced form. Calm down, old man.

THE ECOLOGIST: Our principle has to be as clear as the doctors', to not upset the balance.

TAMBUR: Too late! You don't know everything either, Ecologist. The Dark Net acts faster than you might think.

NYARA: And where has this "more intelligent approach" gotten us, huh? Throwing crap around... No one wants to hear what we have to say. This whole place is full of scientists... And we're piling carcasses onto carts alongside criminals.

ABDUL: What do you have against criminals?

TAMBUR: Your "offense" isn't any offense at all, Abdul. It could've happened to anyone.

HANS: What happened to you?

ABDUL: Oh, I just tried to escape across the border.

HANS: In a way, I did too.

TAMBUR: See.

HANS: I agree with the Ecologist. Let's not become animals ourselves.

TAMBUR: You agree... But with my idea, we'd be guaranteed success.

THE ECOLOGIST: I'd like to propose an idea. If it doesn't work, then we'll go with the badgers.

NYARA: I don't feel like messing around with some discussion. Tambur's idea is very good.

HANS: Let's just hear him out, okay?

TAMBUR: Fine then. Go on and talk.

THE ECOLOGIST: As you know, there's a man called Atolla working as a supervisor at the chicken farm. He's one of us. He can let us in through the supervisor's room door. He himself wouldn't be on duty at the time, to avoid suspicion... If this man here, this civil servant, logged into his account and showed people that they're slaughtering all the animals, not just the ones with the plague, and that they're not actually checking, and that our food and natural wealth all end up in the incinerators, then that could help us bring down the government.

TAMBUR: *(to HANS)* Genius! And we'll send that info straight to the Dark Net! *(to HANS)* Do you think you could do that?

HANS: I think so, if they haven't closed my account.

TAMBUR: Very good! Then let's get to work. I'll set myself up at the chicken farm and talk to Atolla. Then we'll go save the world with the civil servant.

THE ECOLOGIST: Maybe I should go too?

TAMBUR: Why?

THE ECOLOGIST: I think I might notice things in the documents that others wouldn't.

NYARA: Are you trying to "politely" say that we're stupid?

LOUDSPEAKER: Two minutes until service for the benefit of Egeron. Everyone,

leave the room!

THE ECOLOGIST: Not that, it's just... this is my field.

TAMBUR: Good idea. Let the Ecologist go!

(A SUPERVISOR enters the room and starts putting everyone to work.)

15.

(KLAIRE and HANNA are in their room in bed.)

HANNA: We're awaiting inspection.

KLAIRE: Yes.

(They pretend to sleep. NURSE WARSAW enters and checks that the patients are sleeping facing the door, so they can be observed through the hatch. She taps KLAIRE on the head with her finger to make her turn her head toward the door. When NURSE WARSAW turns her back, we see HANNA reach out her hand and take something off of her. NURSE WARSAW leaves.)

KLAIRE: Hanna, what did you do?

HANNA: Each time Nurse Warsaw comes in, something is attached to her coat. We patients exchange information that way. Yesterday I got this.

(HANNA shows two cards.)

KLAIRE: What are these?

HANNA: One is a key. To the basement.

KLAIRE: Where did you get it, Hanna?

HANNA: There are a lot of talented people here. We have a little network, and we help each other get things and do things. But guess what this is?

KLAIRE: Another key?

HANNA: It's like an ID card. With it, you can get into the main library, the manuscripts section, and the rare books department. My cousin works there. She always says nobody ever goes in. No one cares about what happened in the past. Even less about what the future will bring. Everyone only cares about what's happening right now.

KLAIRE: But how do we get out of here?

HANNA: Our friend Armanda has a hobby... Every time she's put in the isolation room, she works on digging a passage into the basement.

KLAIRE: How? With a spoon?

HANNA: Honestly, I don't know. Look at her. I wouldn't be surprised if she dug it with her bare hands. The basement is right under the closed room.

KLAIRE: Our lovely, wonderful Armanda!

HANNA: Remember? From the basement, you can get into the isolation room. Armanda will help you up, and with the key, you can open the door.

KLAIRE: And then?

HANNA: Then you have to go to the very back corner of the yard, to where the big larch tree grows.

(HANNA peeks out the door.)

HANNA: All right, the coast is clear.

(They sneak toward the basement door. Footsteps begin to sound. One of the nurses approaches.)

KLAIRE: They saw us!

HANNA: You go. I'll hold them off.

KLAIRE: Please come with me, Hanna!

HANNA: No. This is the best thing I can do for your working class. Go find your child. Oh, and take this.

(She gives KLAIRE a sheet of paper.)

KLAIRE: What's this?

HANNA: Could you do me a favor?

KLAIRE: Of course!

HANNA: If you ever manage to reach the city, read aloud, right in front of the government building, the passage written on this paper. It's important to me.

KLAIRE: Fine then. I'll read it. But what is it?

HANNA: It's from a forbidden book. But be careful that someone doesn't shoot you.

KLAIRE: I'll be careful. Thank you, Hanna!

HANNA: Just go!

(KLAIRE leaves via the basement. HANNA runs to the other end of the corridor and starts to draw attention away by singing in a loud voice. HANNA is captured; she's beaten and taken away.)

16.

(HANS and THE ECOLOGIST hide near the supervisors' room. They wait for the SUPERVISOR to leave.)

THE ECOLOGIST: He'll go get coffee soon, then we can go. I've been watching him for several days now. He always takes a large coffee and dumps in about five spoonfuls of sugar, even though only half a spoon is allowed.

HANS: Everyone steals from Egeron...

THE ECOLOGIST: Oh, I think they themselves don't see it as stealing. More like "benefits."

HANS: I remember when I was a little boy, my father always took me with him to work. It was terribly boring, but I was allowed to play with his stationery.

He had this pen that let you select different ink colors. I really liked it. I took it home without my father seeing. At night, I felt so bad about it. The very next day, I brought it back.

THE ECOLOGIST: So, you're an honest lad?

HANS: I just don't like lying.

THE ECOLOGIST: Who would? It's just that sometimes you have to...

HANS: Even scientists?

THE ECOLOGIST: Scientists are idealists. They stand for the truth.

HANS: Then why won't anyone listen to them!

THE ECOLOGIST: You want to know why? Because scientists make things complicated. People expect black-and-white solutions. Take this very sugar the supervisor puts in his coffee. We all know that sugar is harmful because overconsumption leads to obesity. That's quite clear. So, it would be super easy to declare sugar a poison and ban all products containing sugar, right? But then along comes the scientist, who starts putting forth arguments like: "Sugar, more precisely, glucose or fructose, is a natural component of fruit, and we don't want to ban fruit because we all know it's beneficial, containing many other substances. Twenty-five percent of the energy needed for basal metabolism is used for brain activity, so if the body is deprived of sugar, a person can't concentrate, the brain becomes lethargic, and more. Sugar, here specifically lactose, is an essential part of breast milk that infants must receive; so, we cannot ban that. Without sugar, human brain activity, blood formation, and eyesight become impaired." So, when someone comes out with a black-and-white solution like "Let's ban sugar," the scientist comes out and ruins everything.

HANS: Then maybe we should ban only the worst one, sucrose?

THE ECOLOGIST: But what if I tell you that sucrose breaks down in the stomach into glucose and fructose?

HANS: Then I'm completely baffled.

THE ECOLOGIST: Exactly!

HANS: How do you even know all this?

THE ECOLOGIST: Déformation professionnelle. For a while, I wanted to become a food technologist, but nature needed me more than people did.

HANS: And people need nature.

THE ECOLOGIST: You're finally starting to understand some things. One of the main problems in our society is that people think that nature is at their service. In reality, it's humans who need nature to exist.

HANS: Isn't one of the goals of science to subdue nature, to make the climate suitable for us humans?

THE ECOLOGIST: Unfortunately, that's how it's turned out. Scientists can do a lot of harm when they fall into the service of business interests.

HANS: So, the solution is... a harmonious way of life? Living with nature and animals without disturbing each other.

THE ECOLOGIST: Whenever possible, yes. Of course, throughout history, there have been different approaches, but in philosophy, there are no animals. Only human problems.

HANS: But not everyone can move from the city to the countryside...

THE ECOLOGIST: Quiet! He's getting up!

(Through the office's glass window, they can see the SUPERVISOR stand up from his chair, coffee mug in hand.)

HANS: I hope he won't turn off his computer.

THE ECOLOGIST: He'll never do that. Their kind's carelessness is our kind's opportunity.

HANS: Should we go?

THE ECOLOGIST: Not yet. Let's wait until he reaches the end of the corridor. Now!

(They run into the SUPERVISOR'S room. HANS logs in and starts to type.)

THE ECOLOGIST: Where are those files... where are they...

HANS: Got 'em!

THE ECOLOGIST: Give me that. Let me see. *(He reads them over quickly.)* Half the signatures are missing.

HANS: They came with the minister's approval...

THE ECOLOGIST: But they still have to follow procedure. Well. Here they are! Print them out.

(The printer starts whirring. HANS grabs the papers as they come out and stuffs them into his shirt.)

HANS: Come on, let's go.

THE ECOLOGIST: You go on ahead. I'll come soon. There must be something else hidden here. Aha! That's what I thought! There it is... They're going where they need to.

HANS: Should I wait for you out there?

THE ECOLOGIST: Yes. I'll be right out...

(HANS hides. The SUPERVISOR returns.)

SUPERVISOR: What's going on here?

17.

(KLAIRE walks through a long corridor between high shelves full of books. There is total silence. Suddenly, a book drops in front of her. KLAIRE looks up and sees a WOMAN standing high up on a ladder.)

KLAIRE: Sorry. I'm usually not so clumsy.

WOMAN: It's nothing. I just missed.

KLAIRE: I can see that you missed. That could have been fatal, too.

(The WOMAN climbs down. KLAIRE picks up the fallen book.)

KLAIRE: But this is...

WOMAN: This is the manuscripts and rare books section. In other words: the forbidden books section.

KLAIRE: Isn't it dangerous to be here?

WOMAN: No one ever comes here. The books were locked in, the room was locked and forgotten. Which begs the question, how did you get in?

KLAIRE: Hanna sent me.

WOMAN: Hanna... How is she?

KLAIRE: Not very well. But she gave me a contact lens to get in... apparently, it's yours.

WOMAN: Mine? *(laughs)* Probably a fake. Hanna has always been very skilled at impossible things. As children, we called her MacGyver. It was no problem for her to build a raft or an explosive device out of tape and a couple of bottles. Whatever she wanted to do, she learned how to do it. Egeron has lost a true technical genius.

KLAIRE: She told me she's a veterinarian.

WOMAN: A person has to do something... Her parents didn't allow her to study at the institute, saying it was a boys' field. They told her to do something more feminine. That was her compromise.

KLAIRE: How are you allowed to be here, if I may ask?

WOMAN: The state's chief archivist is always allowed. Are you interested in books? Please, have a look around.

(KLAIRE runs her finger along the spines of the books.)

KLAIRE: All the world's science fiction is probably here... and our country's old constitution.

WOMAN: A useless, dusty old document.

KLAIRE: And all of those lovely children's books. I'd so like to take them to school and give them to the kids to read.

WOMAN: Are you a teacher?

KLAIRE: Yes. I was.

WOMAN: You poor thing. I think only teachers and scientists have it worse.

KLAIRE: It's not so bad...

WOMAN: Don't try to downplay it...

KLAIRE: How did it all come to this?

WOMAN: It happened because some people started to put the present ahead of the future. They were offered quick and easy perks. Supposedly, the old desires of the people were at last being answered. They supposedly dealt with important matters, but that which was truly important in the long run was ruined... When food became scarce, they told us that immigrants were eating everything; when the epidemics came, they said that the immigrants and their supporters caused them. When those arguments no longer worked, they began blaming their own people. The main point was to find someone to blame; no one ever dealt with the causes.

KLAIRE: Now we're knee-deep in a swamp, without enough dry ground to get out of it.

WOMAN: Some people are satisfied to this day with the half-truths they are served up. You were probably one of them, too, until recently.

KLAIRE: I really tried to do something...

WOMAN: But you did nothing. You did nothing, your partner did nothing, your friends did nothing... and that's what happened.

KLAIRE: I'm sorry.

(The WOMAN takes out a small machine that looks like a computer.)

WOMAN: Tell me who you're looking for.

KLAIRE: My child. Her name is Helga Loop. I don't know how to get into the hospital. And I want to call my husband Hans.

(The WOMAN taps on the device.)

WOMAN: Your child is in the hospital. In a closed zone. I don't think you can do anything about it right now. But your husband has been sent to the stereotypes' settlements. I think that makes things even easier.

KLAIRE: Why is he there?

WOMAN: There is a note here that he has broken the law.

KLAIRE: Oh God!

WOMAN: Do you really think that God helps people like us? You have to do things yourself. "The creator seeks companions, not corpses, nor shepherds nor believers. The creator seeks co-creators, those who write new values on new tablets."

KLAIRE: It's from that passage Hanna asked me to read.

(KLAIRE takes a piece of paper from inside her blouse.)

WOMAN: Put that away. You need to go find your husband.

KLAIRE: Yes, but how?

WOMAN: I can see from here where he is. But that alone won't help. I'll help you get over the wall. I have good acquaintances who owe me a favor from long ago.

KLAIRE: Thank you.

WOMAN: Today, then, once you've arrived.

KLAIRE: Why are you doing this? Are you also one of them, one of the Dark Net users?

WOMAN: Let's say I'm part of the force that will soon rise up.

KLAIRE: Faust.

WOMAN: Intertextuality is somehow especially charming in our time. I'll send you to a certain place. You'll be expected there. The main thing is not to be afraid. Is that clear?

KLAIRE: I'll try.

WOMAN: Trying isn't enough, you have to endure. And forget about me. If anyone asks, you've never seen me. You've never been here. Here, leave through this door.

(A door slides out from inside the wall.)

KLAIRE: Actually... Hanna stayed behind.

WOMAN: That's her way of resisting. Good luck to you.

KLAIRE: Goodbye and... thank you!

18.

(A crowd has gathered in front of the government building. Men and women in white polo shirts with black scarves around their necks. They look toward the podium where the PRIME MINISTER arrives, greeting everyone with a hand sign. Everyone returns the sign. The people have blue lenses, signifying the privileged status of urban citizens. They shine in the darkness. Huge screens surround the PRIME MINISTER for better visibility. Next to him, at the podium, they bring in a man with a sack over his head.)

AGENT 1: The speech will be given by the Prime Minister of Egeron. Please welcome him.

(Applause.)

PRIME MINISTER: We have risen spiritually above the animals. We have learned to use tools, eliminated the rudiments of animal-like thinking in

ourselves, we do not fornicate, we make love; we do not gobble up, we dine; we do not run around fields, we walk consciously through them toward a brighter future!

Yet there are people who do not respect humanity at its highest level. Who do not respect the state, which is the greatest creation of humankind! These are the people who stand against Egeron! And as Louis XIV said: "I am the state." That is, you and I—we. Such human creatures stand against us, against our greatest and invaluable creation, our hard-won state! They are dissenters, perverts, immigrants! People who no longer deserve to be called human, whom we have, out of the goodness of our hearts, our humanity, kept in settlements, but who, despite this mercy, have decided to oppose us and attack the honest supervisors who work in the settlements with dedication and who serve Egeron in good faith.

Language, speech, the wearing of clothes, consciousness, and counting—these are human qualities! Qualities that must be respected and preserved. Qualities that distinguish us from animals and their instincts. And what do we do with instinct-driven beings who have not managed to rise to the level of humanity? What do they deserve?

CROWD: Punishment!

PRIME MINISTER: This morning, a supervisor was killed, and this animalistic creature here is responsible for it! He raised his hand against a human who was one of us. He attacked him with animalistic madness, eyes blinded by a lust to destroy. They say man is a wolf to his fellow man! But we know that is not true. We know that with rules and regulations, even the least developed person can fulfill their civic duty and be a loyal state subject.

(The hood is pulled off the MAN brought to the podium.)

PRIME MINISTER: What will the punishment be for this creature here?

CROWD: Death, death, death!

PRIME MINISTER: Then so shall it be, as the people—the highest governing body of Egeron—wish!

(THE ECOLOGIST is executed.)

PRIME MINISTER: Egeron offers us the best possible reality.

CROWD: Egeron! Egeron! Egeron!

19.

(The Stereotypes' Settlement.)

LOUDSPEAKER: Break time, five minutes.

TAMBUR: Did you hear?

HANS: What?

TAMBUR: The Ecologist is gone. They shot him like a mangy rat.

HANS: What?! Are you sure?

TAMBUR: It was a public execution, everyone knows. The bastards! The whole square was full of disciples watching it and doing nothing. Bah!

HANS: Horrible. It's my fault. I should have dragged him out of there when I still had the chance.

TAMBUR: In our situation, we have to expect things like this. He was a good man.

(They bow their heads briefly in mourning.)

TAMBUR: Well, how did it go for you there?

HANS: We got the materials and... we got onto the Dark Net.

TAMBUR: Seriously? What did you find?

HANS: We sent out a message saying we're here and in trouble. We showed the people that they're killing animals for no reason... That there's no real cause.

Only a small portion of the animals were infested with the plague!

TAMBUR: Very good! I was afraid the Ecologist's death would be in vain.

HANS: It was in vain either way.

LOUDSPEAKER: Everyone, line up!

TAMBUR: Something's wrong. They don't usually organize lineups during work hours.

(All the workers are lined up in pairs.)

NYARA: Does anyone know where they're taking us?

ABDUL: Security has been reinforced.

TAMBUR: Well, boys! Now those badgers will finally come in handy!

(Everyone walks in a line toward a large door.)

SUPERVISOR: Stop! You two stay right here.

(TAMBUR and HANS remain behind the door.)

TAMBUR: But we haven't done anything.

SUPERVISOR: Silence. On your knees. Faces to the wall.

(The SUPERVISOR stands beside them until the room is empty.)

SUPERVISOR: Stand up! Strip, quickly.

TAMBUR: Why?

SUPERVISOR: Here are your lenses and shirts.

TAMBUR: Wait, what?

SUPERVISOR: *(shows the mark on his arm)* The Children of Freedom are waiting. Hurry!

(TAMBUR and HANS change clothes. Now they resemble the same people who were just standing in the square in white shirts and black scarves.)

SUPERVISOR: With the lenses, you'll be able to get out through the gate. I'll escort you. Wait here, I'll be right back. I'll see if the coast is clear.

HANS: Well, I wasn't expecting this.

TAMBUR: It does seem the Dark Net works like a well-oiled doomsday machine!

HANS: Where is he taking us?

TAMBUR: Probably to the badgers.

HANS: The badgers?! We agreed not to use them!

TAMBUR: You're like a little baby! Do you think Egeron will collapse on its own? We have to show the people that the government is not on the side of the people. The plague has been helpful in that regard, but we need something else. Something more. Something that will threaten them directly.

HANS: And badgers are this "brilliant solution"?

TAMBUR: We've tried the badgers before. We put pineal extract into one of the vaccines... Later, it turned out that it was injected into schoolchildren.

20.

(A small chapel, above the inner door, the words "Go forth and sin no more" written in Gothic letters. KLAIRE stands before the altar and looks at it. On a digital display, JESUS CHRIST appears bleeding with his eyes closed. For a moment, a faint buzzing is heard.)

KLAIRE: Who's there?

(An echo. Silence.)

KLAIRE: I was sent here to meet with someone. Are you the one I'm supposed to meet?

(Silence. KLAIRE begins to feel a little frightened. On the digital panel, JESUS opens his eyes and raises his lowered head.)

JESUS: That was me.

KLAIRE: What?!

JESUS: I am the one you're looking for.

KLAIRE: But you're...

JESUS: I'm an image. Well, yes and no. I am a collective consciousness too. Programmed to store information. I am a memory. And wherever there is memory, there is always life.

KLAIRE: I don't understand.

JESUS: Before Egeron took over, people donated their memories to a large digital bank out of a sense of foreboding. Nobody knew what would happen or how much history would be changed. News began to be controlled, internet channels were shut down, Egeron's intranet emerged—a giant echo chamber—but this memory storage continued. It's called the Dark Net. A semi-telepathic bank for storing memories and exchanging information. Inside of me are all the experiences, the books read, the births, deaths, and emotions ever experienced... That means that everything can be restored with my help.

(On the display appear people's memory images and the symbol of a person with raised hands.)

KLAIRE: I know that symbol!

JESUS: Your task is to take me and insert me into the government's information systems. That way, I will spread everywhere. That way, people will regain access.

KLAIRE: But I...

JESUS: You doubt. You think that your child is in the hospital and your husband is God only knows where. But if we could show the people what is happening, what people have shared on the Dark Net, what they have discovered, we could overthrow Egeron.

KLAIRE: Who is this "we"?

JESUS: We who believe that Egeron is not the right solution. We who believe that humanity is not only speech, clothing, and counting, but also ethics, culture, and freedom.

KLAIRE: Do your people believe that we could teach the truth in schools?

JESUS: Yes.

KLAIRE: I guess there's nothing to lose. Except my life. Where do I have to take you, and how?

(JESUS reaches out from the display, offering his hand with a small chip in it.)

KLAIRE: Can't the Dark Net interact with the Egeron intranet?

JESUS: No. The Dark Net is treated as a virus and comes under attack if it tries to enter from the outside. We must be inserted directly into the government's information system. The important thing is to get access to an unsecured computer or know someone who has access.

KLAIRE: But how? I don't know anyone... and I'm probably a wanted person myself.

JESUS: People do help one another. Take this in your hand.

(KLAIRE takes the chip. The church door opens. Two people in white shirts and black scarves start walking toward her.)

KLAIRE: Those are Egeron's disciples!

(The people come closer.)

KLAIRE: That woman in the library—she fooled me! And you, too!

JESUS: Peace.

(KLAIRE hides under a church pew.)

HANS: Klaire! Is that you?

KLAIRE: Hans? Hans!

(They run to each other. They embrace.)

KLAIRE: Did you break the law?

TAMBUR: This is only the beginning. He's only starting to break the law.

HANS: This is Tambur. We got out together.

(TAMBUR shows the mark on her arm.)

HANS: How did you already get that?

TAMBUR: I drew it. With a pen. I'll get it tattooed as soon as I can.

JESUS: There isn't much time. They're searching for you. Start moving.

HANS: Here, put these clothes on, and here are your lenses. With them, we can get through the city gates.

TAMBUR: Yes, put them on and try not to look at yourself in the mirror. I'd never have guessed I'd have to wear something so ugly.

HANS: I thought you felt comfortable in men's clothes?

TAMBUR: In men's clothes, yes, but these are... I don't even know. But they're dreadful!

KLAIRE: I'm ready.

JESUS: Good luck to you.

KLAIRE: Thank you. I hope I won't disappoint you.

JESUS: I hope so, too. People are counting on you.

(JESUS closes his eyes.)

TAMBUR: Enough dillydallying, let's go!

21.

(HANS, KLAIRE, and TAMBUR go through security control to enter the city. They wait in line.)

HANS: Aren't you a little nervous?

KLAIRE: A bit. Or, well, completely.

TAMBUR: Should we be?

HANS: The lenses are made to precisely match each person's shape and eye color, and any anomaly is suspicious.

TAMBUR: By the way, they observe people at security control. Anyone who's nervous or behaving suspiciously faces more scrutiny.

KLAIRE: Okay, calm down. Let's not discuss this now.

SUPERVISOR: Next, please.

(KLAIRE steps forward.)

SUPERVISOR: Stand over here.

KLAIRE: Do I need to take off my scarf?

SUPERVISOR: No. Look over here.

(On the screen, the following appears: "Linda Haare. Age: 32. Sex: F. Residence: Egeron City.")

SUPERVISOR: You may go, Miss Haare.

TAMBUR: Linda Haare, pretty good. I wonder what my name will be?

SUPERVISOR: Next.

(HANS steps forward.)

SUPERVISOR: Stand here. Look here. Stand straight.

(On the screen appears: "Vanditten Hoven. Age: 41. Sex: M. Residence: Egeron City. Notes: diplomatic immunity.")

SUPERVISOR: Have a nice day in Egeron, Mr. Hoven. Next!

(TAMBUR steps forward.)

SUPERVISOR: Stand here. Look right here. Stand straight.

(The machine scans TAMBUR's eyes but fails to "read" any information.)

SUPERVISOR: Look exactly at the blue dot.

(The machine scans again for a long time, then sounds a red alarm.)

SUPERVISOR: Please step aside. Do you have your own lenses?

TAMBUR: Of course!

SUPERVISOR: The procedure is as follows: we remove the lens from the eye, place it in the machine, and check its correspondence with the documents and the information known about you. Your lens, please.

(TAMBUR hands over the lens.)

SUPERVISOR: Your documents, please.

(TAMBUR acts as if searching through pockets.)

TAMBUR: Sorry, but... it... seems that I forgot them at the hotel.

SUPERVISOR: Traveling without documents is forbidden.

TAMBUR: I've long since gotten used to the fact that my eyes always work, I didn't pay attention to it. You should understand.

SUPERVISOR: We'll need to check the compliance of your eyes. Your name and age?

(TAMBUR is silent.)

SUPERVISOR: Name and age.

(TAMBUR is silent.)

SUPERVISOR: Where are you from? Are you even a citizen of Egeron?

(TAMBUR looks at the inspector, suddenly shoves him, and bolts toward the security gates, where KLAIRE and HANS are waiting on the other side. An alarm goes off. As she runs through the gates, they activate and shoot TAMBUR from both sides. TAMBUR falls. She is clearly fighting to stay awake and confused. She seems to be short of breath.)

LOUDSPEAKER: All exits closing.

(TAMBUR tries to keep going. To keep herself awake, she starts to count.)

TAMBUR: One little sheep, two little sheep... Three little sheep... Four little sheep... Five... Five... Sheep... Six... Seven... Eight... What animal... Six. What...

(TAMBUR collapses. Security personnel carry her away. KLAIRE and HANS have watched everything, paralyzed with fear.)

LOUDSPEAKER: Alarm terminated. All exits reopening.
KLAIRE: How horrible! What will they do with her?
HANS: Best-case scenario, they'll take her to one of the settlements.
KLAIRE: And the worst case?
HANS: I don't even want to know.
KLAIRE: Let's go! Let's see if we can take the metro from here.
HANS: I can't just leave her here!
KLAIRE: Do we have a choice?
HANS: It doesn't seem so. We just don't.

22.

(The metro station. HANS and KLAIRE sit side by side on a bench. People walk by. From time to time, the wind from passing trains ruffles their hair.)

HANS: If we take the No. 6, we could go straight to the hospital.

KLAIRE: If we go there, we'll get caught immediately...

HANS: But Helga is waiting for us! I don't know what condition she's in, or what they've done with her.

KLAIRE: I know... I can't even think about it without going crazy... We need a plan.

HANS: How have you become so calculating?

KLAIRE: I started to understand things when I was in the hospital.

HANS: Like what?

KLAIRE: That if you can't find a way out, think about what got you there in the first place.

HANS: Yeah. *(thinks)* I have some papers.

KLAIRE: I have something even better.

(KLAIRE opens her palm.)

HANS: What's that?

KLAIRE: It's the Dark Net. We have to insert it into the government databases, and it will start working on its own.

HANS: And that will help us?

KLAIRE: Jesus said so.

HANS: Jesus? Ah, from the church...

KLAIRE: We just have to figure out how to get it into the right computer. I guess there's no point in taking the risk of you trying to get into the ministry?

HANS: No. Absolutely not. *(Thinks for a moment.)* I know what we'll do.

KLAIRE: What then?

(HANS grabs a bunch of The Egeron Herald newspapers from next to the bench.)

HANS: Let's take the No. 2 line.

(They get on the metro.)

23.

(An apartment house. HANS knocks on a door, holding a newspaper in front of him. MRS. TOROK opens the door.)

MRS. TOROK: I already get The Egeron Herald delivered...

(MRS. TOROK is already going to shut the door.)

HANS: *(whispering)* Could we please come in? Pretty please. It's really important.

(MRS. TOROK opens the door.)

MRS. TOROK: Oh, it was you... Come on in, Hans.

(They come inside.)

HANS: Mrs. Torok... We, my wife and I, need your help.
MRS. TOROK: Shouldn't you be in the settlements? You're putting me in grave danger.
HANS: I don't know what they said about me, but... It wasn't true... We shouldn't be in the situation we're in right now.
MRS. TOROK: Of course, you shouldn't.
KLAIRE: Mrs. Torok, Hans is a good person. He hasn't done anything wrong. Honestly.
MRS. TOROK: I heard that this "good person" misused his official ID.
KLAIRE: Our child is in the hospital, and we couldn't just leave her there! He would never have done anything if they had let her out right away...
MRS. TOROK: I'm aware of that. I'm always aware of all the rumors. But whether they're always true, I don't know.
HANS: I had to do it, believe me.

(MRS. TOROK looks at them for a long moment.)

MRS. TOROK: Several people have been replaced at work again. I heard some were hospitalized, and one was sent to a settlement. There was a public execution in the square.

HANS: So, you know?

MRS. TOROK: Everyone knows, but no one dares to utter a word.

HANS: That ecologist who got shot. We met him in the settlement... He was a good guy.

MRS. TOROK: "That ecologist" was Mattias Nimmermitt. My classmate at university. A talented climate scientist.

(MRS. TOROK opens a bottle of pills and takes one.)

MRS. TOROK: They give these out at work now, for free. After the execution, there was a bottle on everyone's desk. Strictly recommended. They think that if they numb us, we'll be more acquiescent.

KLAIRE: But you mustn't take them!

MRS. TOROK: We can't deny that they help, can we?

HANS: Mrs. Torok, you mustn't give in. That's exactly what they want.

MRS. TOROK: But what can we do?

KLAIRE: There is one thing you can do, Mrs. Torok.

(KLAIRE shows her the chip.)

MRS. TOROK: What's that?

KLAIRE: I'll show you.

(KLAIRE puts the chip in the computer.)

KLAIRE: It's the collective memory. If we could somehow get it broadcast... maybe with your help? It could show what kind of people actually run Egeron.

HANS: We're all being manipulated. You too, Mrs. Torok. I have documents that prove that all our work involving animals was a pointless waste of resources.

(HANS hands the documents to MRS. TOROK. She looks at them.)

MRS. TOROK: You do realize that I'll be fired if I do this? In the best case, they'll dismiss me; in the worst...

KLAIRE: The worst won't happen! You have to believe that. Somewhere out there are many people who already believe change is possible. They're just not visible.

MRS. TOROK: When would I have to do this?

KLAIRE: As soon as possible. It's the only way we'll get our child back. So everyone sees that what they see every day... isn't real!

MRS. TOROK: Everyone knows that anyway.

HANS: Not everyone. Not those who *(shaking his scarf)* wear these.

MRS. TOROK: They won't believe it anyway.

HANS: But those who are on the fence, they can always be persuaded... You have to help us. Please. I know I wasn't exactly the best colleague one could wish for, Mrs. Torok. I never talked to you; I was so fixated on my own ideas.

MRS. TOROK: You were ambitious. I understand that.

HANS: Yes. And I'm very ashamed of it. Please forgive me, Mrs. Torok.

(A pause.)

MRS. TOROK: All right, I'll do it. For Mattias.

KLAIRE: Thank you. You can't imagine how important this is to us!

MRS. TOROK: Not just to you.

HANS: One more thing... could we stay here for the night?

MRS. TOROK: I'd rather you didn't...

KLAIRE: But we have no place to go.

MRS. TOROK: Fine. Then you must leave early in the morning and make sure no one sees you. Because if I get caught, this will be the first place they search.

KLAIRE: We don't have the words to thank you enough, Mrs. Torok.

MRS. TOROK: And I don't have the words to describe the world we've ended up in. Everything is connected to everything, yet everyone lives in isolation... Paranoia, broken dreams... Sometimes I want to go out on the street and scream at the top of my lungs: is this what you signed up for?! But there's no point... nothing has any point. No one signed up for anything. No one chose this life. This life happened to us because somewhere, first there was one... then several... then a critical mass of people who stood by... and did nothing.

(MRS. TOROK enters the data into the computer. A loud knock is heard.)

MRS. TOROK: No worries. I just ordered some food.

24.

(On all the screens, a film from the collective consciousness of repressed people is projected. We see footage of life in the settlements, hard labor, mismanagement of natural resources, violations of human rights, and more. Over the films, one sees the text: "Egeron took your rights away. Only you can take them back!")

(The PRIME MINISTER closes the laptop.)

PRIME MINISTER: I have only one question: How long is this bullshit going to last?

AGENT 1: We shut down Egeron's intranet, but it started spreading to other channels.

PRIME MINISTER: What other channels? There is no access to other channels in Egeron!

AGENT 1: They continue operating... on the Dark Net. When the video went up... we couldn't remove it immediately, and at the beginning, some codes were visible showing how to access the Dark Net... Essentially, it can be said that access has been opened to everyone.

PRIME MINISTER: Then shut down the damned Dark Net!

AGENT 1: We... cannot, sir. We brought in the six best IT specialists from the settlements, but most of them refuse to cooperate.

PRIME MINISTER: Did I hear the word "cannot?"

AGENT 1: It's being transferred telepathically. Somewhere, there is a collective memory fighting against it. If we could locate its position, then it would be possible.

PRIME MINISTER: Why can't we find it then?

AGENT 1: Because such things are usually hidden and we don't know where to look... Not yet. At this point, we must admit... our own incompetence. And maybe also a bit of poor leadership style, too.

PRIME MINISTER: Have you figured out where this virus came from?

AGENT 1: At the moment, it looks like it came from the Ministry of Environmental Management.

PRIME MINISTER: Where's Wondername?

AGENT 1: I haven't managed to find him. One thing the film shows is some documents indicating that animals have been burned for no reason, to keep the incineration plants running, plants in which Wondername has an interest.

PRIME MINISTER: Who authorized them?

AGENT 1: I'm afraid that they bear your signature, sir.

PRIME MINISTER: Bloody hell! Bring that Wondername in here at once!

AGENT 1: One more thing, Mr. Prime Minister, sir. A strange symbol has been painted on the facade of the government building. I don't know if it looks familiar to you.

(The PRIME MINISTER goes to the window.)

AGENT 1: It's a sign of rebellion. You can find it all around the settlements.

PRIME MINISTER: Those primates have gotten into the city!

AGENT 1: There are disturbances in the streets. More of these symbols are appearing.

PRIME MINISTER: What are our followers doing?

AGENT 1: Fighting. They are sending messages through our channels claiming the film is a hoax. The proper family people are just frightened.

PRIME MINISTER: I don't understand what is wrong with these people. This isn't France, where they protest everything!

AGENT 1: That's exactly what worries me. There's an uprising in the settlements.

PRIME MINISTER: What do you want me to do?

AGENT 1: Try to talk to the people. Many of them are still on Egeron's side.

PRIME MINISTER: Do you really think that I should go out in front of that raging rabble?

AGENT 1: Well, if you're afraid of them.

PRIME MINISTER: Egeron fears nothing!

AGENT 1: But you alone aren't Egeron.

PRIME MINISTER: It was my idea! Before everyone else.

AGENT 1: Naturally.

PRIME MINISTER: And you supported it.

AGENT 1: Do you have any new ideas?

PRIME MINISTER: *(pauses)* Let's just do as you say.

(The PRIME MINISTER leaves.)

25.

(WONDERNAME steps out of the ministry's back door. He lights up a cigarette and tries to inhale deeply, to calm himself. It's obvious that he plans to leave quickly.)

MRS. TOROK: Mr. Wondername?

(WONDERNAME is startled.)

WONDERNAME: Ah, it was you, Mrs. Torok.

MRS. TOROK: I have something for you.

(MRS. TOROK gives him the documents.)

WONDERNAME: What are these? Where did you get these?

MRS. TOROK: Someone brought them.

WONDERNAME: Who brought them? Why?

MRS. TOROK: They just arrived... they seemed important enough to give you.

WONDERNAME: *(looking at the documents)* These are forged. You can see it yourself.

(HANS steps out from behind the corner.)

HANS: They're not forged. Yes, it's me here. Not there, where you sent me.

WONDERNAME: I didn't send you, truthfully. It was the opposite, I protected you. I did everything in my power... You were a successful civil servant.

HANS: It's interesting that you bring up the "truth." I have a few questions connected with that. Do you know Mattias Nimmermitt? The ecologist?

WONDERNAME: It's the first time I've heard the name...

HANS: Maybe you should refresh your memory... He found out something about you, got in the way, as they say... You tried to shut him up but couldn't. The man was a scientist.

WONDERNAME: He was executed because he resisted. He was a rebel. A danger to Egeron. You do understand.

HANS: He got in your way; you even told me at dinner. At my place. Remember?

WONDERNAME: He had problems in the settlements. Or so I was told. I only did what was in my power. I'm sorry, but I really must go now.

HANS: He didn't fit into your schemes. You wanted to bring your dirty little directives to life and exploit your employees' trust within a culture of fear.
WONDERNAME: These papers have caused us too many problems, Citizen Loop.

(WONDERNAME tears the documents into pieces in a peaceful, demonstrative way.)

HANS: Why do you think those are the originals?

(WONDERNAME pulls a gun from his hip.)

HANS: Too late. They're already in the collective memory, and everyone knows all about them.
WONDERNAME: What do you both want from me?
HANS: For you to apologize.
WONDERNAME: My apologies. Now, please, let me go.
HANS: You also have to promise not to send any more people to the settlements.
WONDERNAME: You're really a naive idealist... That's why you were so useful to Egeron. But what you're asking of me is unfortunately not in my power.
MRS. TOROK: You also have to promise that you'll stop killing animals.
WONDERNAME: Please be sensible. I'm merely an employer. I have people I'm responsible for. They get salaries, and they have families.
MRS. TOROK: Responsible? For me? Well, you've done a beautiful job... You took away all of my basic rights.
WONDERNAME: I'm leaving now. My favor to you is that I won't say another word about either of you. I'll remain silent, to use one of your expressions.
HANS: You need to make a call, right now, and cancel all the acts. And it would help me a lot if, as a gesture of goodwill, you could help me get to the hospital.
WONDERNAME: That I will not do.
HANS: You're not going anywhere until you do.
WONDERNAME: Then you leave me with no choice.

(WONDERNAME shoves HANS. HANS rushes him. WONDERNAME shoots at him. HANS knocks the revolver out of his hand. MRS. TOROK jumps in and shoots WONDERNAME in the leg. WONDERNAME groans.)

WONDERNAME: You're all animals...

HANS: Here's an interesting fact: animals know how to count. Didn't you know?

WONDERNAME: Go to hell...

HANS: *(to MRS. TOROK)* I used to like him, you know.

MRS. TOROK: I wasn't entirely put off by him either.

HANS: What will we do with him?

MRS. TOROK: I'll take care of him... We're certainly not the only ones looking for him. I can point them in the right direction.

26.

(Cheers grow louder. On the screen, footage from in front of the government building shows hundreds of people standing. KLAIRE and HANS push into the crowd. On the building, someone has drawn the symbol of the resistance movement—a person with raised arms.)

KLAIRE: There are very... different kinds of people here.

HANS: Egeron's disciples are cowering at home in fear.

(The PRIME MINISTER appears at the podium. The crowd roars. A shot rings out, then another. The PRIME MINISTER leaves. Part of the crowd begins quarreling among themselves.)

KLAIRE: So, this is...

HANS: It worked!

KLAIRE: Amazing how many people go along with it.

HANS: The critical mass was on our side. Let's go to the hospital now.

Where are you going?

KLAIRE: I promised Hanna something earlier... Since we're already here...

HANS: Now?

KLAIRE: It's important!

(HANS watches KLAIRE climb onto the podium. When she gets there, she takes out a sheet of paper and reads, unaware that she is reciting an excerpt from Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Her face is on all the screens. People fall silent and listen.)

"I call it the state where everyone is a poison-drinker, both the good and the bad: the state where all lose themselves, both the good and the bad: the state where slow suicide is called 'life.' Look at these superfluous ones! Look at these superfluous ones! They are always sick; they vomit up their gall and call it information! They devour one another and cannot even digest themselves! The time of the most despicable man is coming, the time of the one who can no longer despise himself. Behold! I will show you the last human. He begins where the state ends... There begins the man who is never superfluous!"

(There's thunderous applause. KLAIRE climbs down from the pedestal. Somebody shouts: "Down with Egeron!" Others join in.)

KLAIRE: *(to HANS)* Come on, let's get Helga!

27.

(The action has stopped. A woman, a man, and a child stand before a crumbled wall. As if they were just running or moving. Behind them, a screen shows people pouring through the broken wall with cries of freedom. Or are they only dreaming that it could be so?)

THE END

About the Author

Piret Jaaks is an Estonian writer, playwright, dramaturg, and director with a BA in Theatre Studies from the University of Tartu and a PhD from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Her work spans from plays and prose to children's literature and television scripts. She made her directorial debut in 2019 and has published two collections of plays: *Sirens* and *Other Plays* in 2022 and *Dark Matter* in 2025. She won First Prize at the Estonian Theatre Agency's New Drama Competition in 2011 and 2019, and received a special mention in the same competition in 2019 for *Do Animals Know How to Count?*. She also received the 2024 Medal of Merit of the Estonian Heritage Conservation Society. Jaaks is also a screenwriter for a popular Estonian TV series.

About the Translator

Justin Petrone is a native New Yorker, writer, and journalist who has been living in Northern Europe for more than 20 years. With a dozen books to his name and hundreds of articles, he specializes in travel memoirs and experimental dream fiction. He has also translated several Estonian plays into English.

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