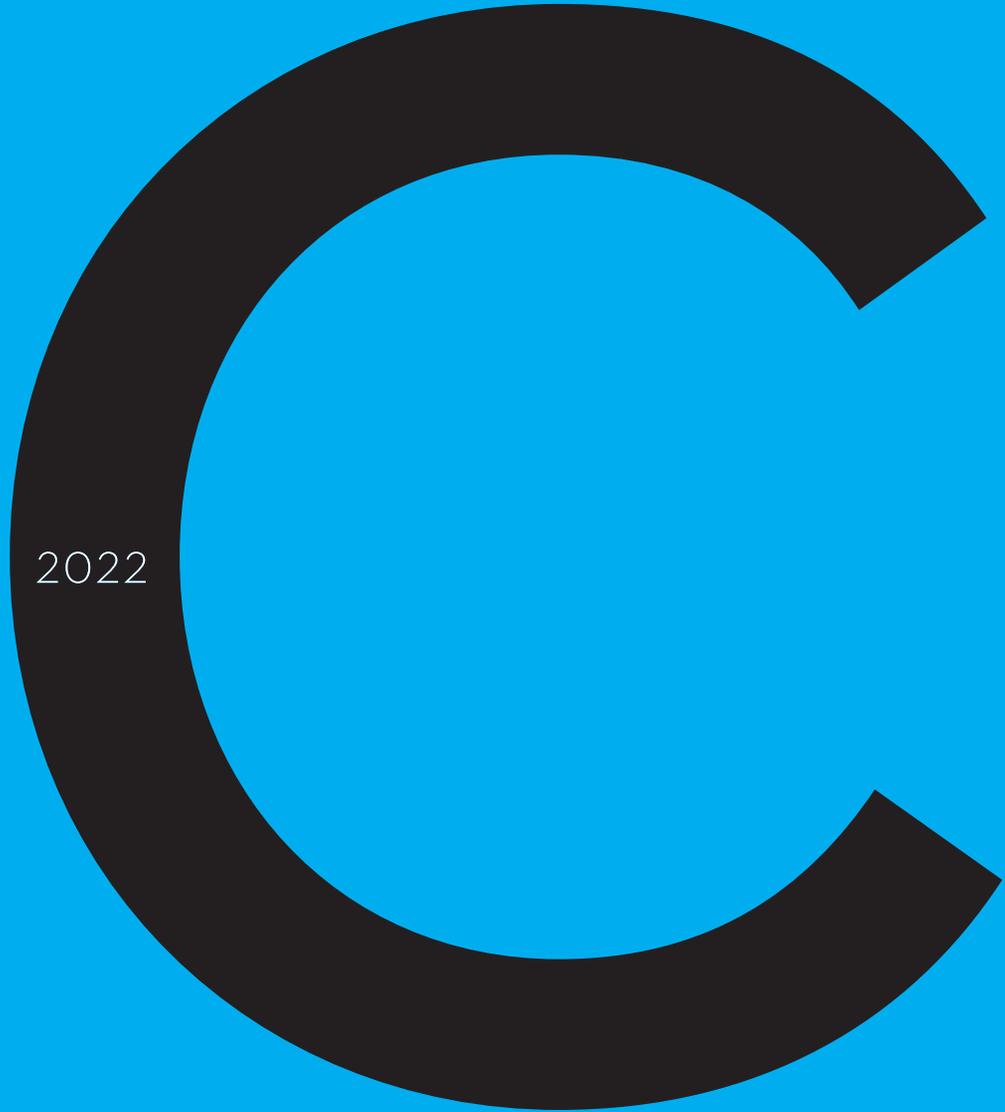


2022

**CROATIAN
THEATRE**



2022

C O N T

HOUSE

Filip Jurjević

06

35 SQUARE METRES OR NEVERLAND

Lucija Klarić

24

THE SIEGE OF THE IVORY TOWER

Ana Perčinlić

54

YOU CAN BE ANYTHING

Ivana Vuković

76

FAR AWAY, KANDAHAR

Anita Čeko

88

CROATIAN CENTRE ITI, GOETHE INSTITUTE

108

To get a chance to work on your own play and try it out in different environments and in diverse workshops is something truly rare among Croatian playwrights. This is what makes Goethe Institute's international project New Stages Southeast so immensely important and I am glad to be part of it as a mentor to five participants.

Even before the workshop kicked off, I was surprised by the number of candidates and sincere motivation letters which only confirmed that Croatian drama is in dire need for such projects since it, in addition to mentorship over the course of one year, also gives opportunity for different residencies, enriching a play in such environment with different artistic influences. In selecting playwrights, we opted for the general theme of poverty, be it spiritual, social, economic or political. Such a theme is broad enough not to discredit anyone, whilst inspiring the participants to actively re-examine contemporary social issues. In our selection process we didn't analyse who addressed poverty as a theme to a greater or lesser extent, but rather we selected those playwrights who seemed the most interesting and whose texts in a way focused on the life we live here and now. The project's international concept inspired us to seek the plays that could portray us to others in an original and authentic way.

E N T S

All the involved playwrights are already established creative personalities and working with them was conditioned by the selected texts and the goal of finishing the already started plays as authentically as possible. Fostering authenticity, obstinance in seeking one's own aesthetic, sparking motivation time and again - these seemed to me to be my most important tasks as a mentor. Throughout one year we have engendered different plays that depict these authors in the best possible light, through themes close to them and their very own style of writing.

Filip Jurjević finalised his play *house*, lavishly addressing different issues, from friendship and family, to the very notion of being human. Through different genres, introducing even elements of horror, a text arose, illustrating in the best possible way all the lavishness and eclecticism of this particularly interesting author.

Lucija Klarić worked on the play *35 Square Metres or Neverland*, about a generation at the turn of the millennium. When the government of an unnamed country puts to practice a social housing measure for people younger than 33 years of age, five unknown tenants end up in the same space, in only 35 square metres, where they start residing squeezed and forsaken by the system and the world. A play about young

people today, told in a claustrophobic way, without much hope, but with a lot of humour and empathy.

Ana Perčinlić has worked on the play *The Siege of the Ivory Tower*. The idea for this play was inspired by the burning issue of unemployment among Croatia's young population. An interesting structure intertwines a broad range of characters lost in the present time. These characters wonder where and how to live and, most of all, how to survive.

Ivana Vuković in *You Can be Anything* focuses and the same time challenges the so-called women's issue. Questioning linguistic discrimination and chauvinism on the very conceptual level, she wrote a powerful play in which, page after page, we are forced to face our own prejudices.

Anita Čeko submitted her text *What We'll Leave in the Frame*, about the girl Luce who returns to her family home in Split to make a documentary about her father and her family. Her father Franko has spent years working as a peace corps member around the world, leaving his family alone. In an extremely interesting structure, Anita toys with the theatrical form, introducing elements primarily used in cinema. Because of the complexity of the material, the play is still unfinished and here we are presenting

her play *Far Away, Kandahar*, finalised during the workshop - the play with which she was originally admitted to the workshop. *Far Away, Kandahar* is also a family drama about separation because of the father's absence. In a way a prequel to the text *What We'll Leave in the Frame*.

All these texts powerfully and uncompromisingly speak about the reality we live; for that reason I hope that this presentation is only the beginning of their path.

Ivor Martinić



WHAT

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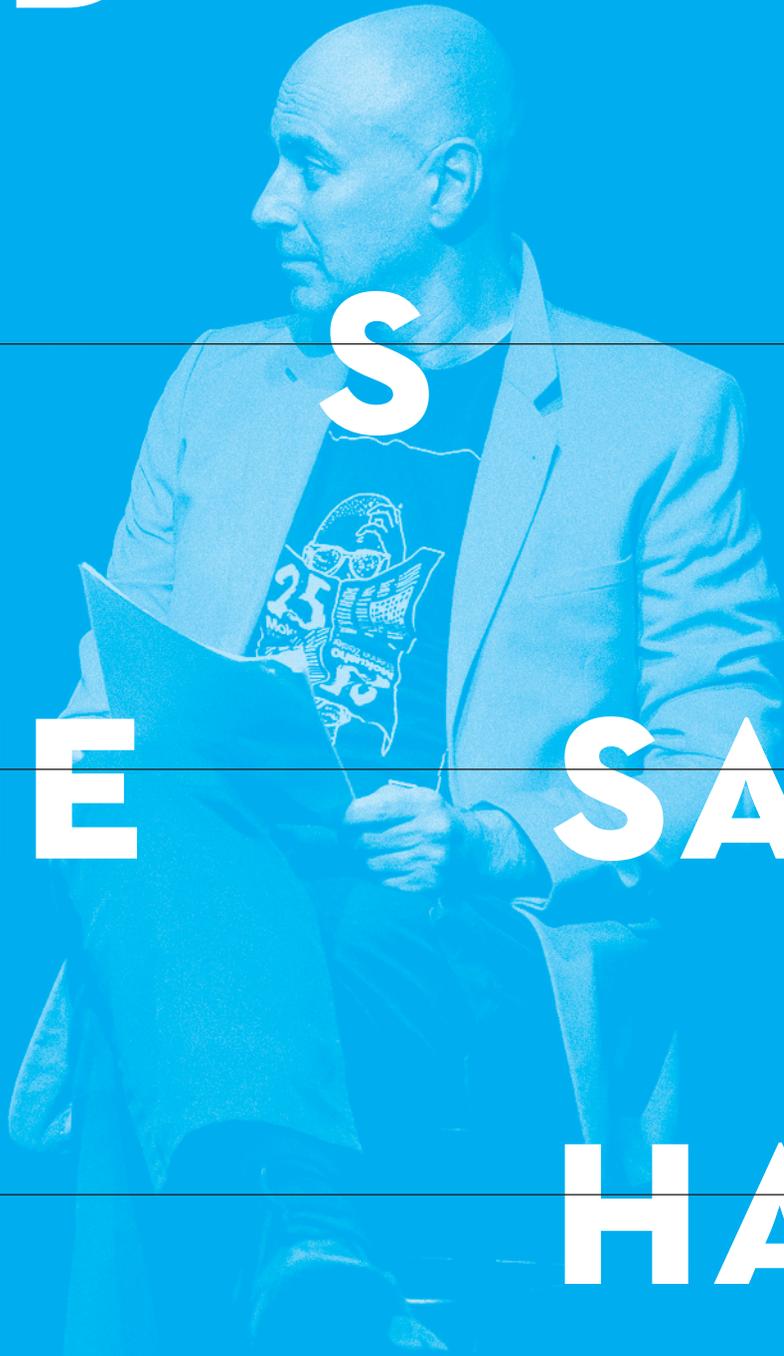
HE

SAID,

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HAVE

ROAM?"



FILIP JURJEVIĆ

(ZADAR, 1994)



Filip Jurjević graduated in Dramaturgy from the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. As a playwright and dramaturge he collaborates with the Zadar Puppet Theatre, Dubrovnik Summer Festival, Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Kerempuh Satirical Theatre, Fort Forno Theatre, Trešnja Theatre and many others on their projects. A member of the Croatian Screenwriters and Playwrights Guild (SPID).

HOUSE

TRANSLATORS

Vinko Zgaga, Paddy Burton

*"What kind of house is this",
he said, "Where I have
come to roam?"*

*a desert.
a doorframe, with a door in it.*

CHARACTERS

MAN, neanderthal
PROFESSOR, sapiens
WOMAN, volunteer
DAUGHTER, misunderstood
JOKER, older teenager
THIEF, younger teenager
HIPPIE, lover
GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT,
manager

HIPPIE, *dirty, crying and out of breath, enters, carrying a guitar slung over his back; he is gasping for air, has trouble swallowing he is obviously thirsty. he picks up a scalp of long hair from the ground, and squeezes it.*

HIPPIE *i've been walking through this desert with a parakeet on my shoulder. my feet sink into the blistering sand. i walk towards an oasis, but when i reach it, it disappears. i'm out of water.*

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT *walks across the stage.*

HIPPIE *i've walked to many an oasis, but none of them were right. i'm thirsty. i need water.*

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT *walks out again, carrying a notepad. he observes the stage, marks things in his notepad, as if making an inventory of the props. he walks away when he is finished.*

HIPPIE *i've been dreaming of a coconut, fresh off a tree. i've been dreaming of a tropical island. i've been dreaming of poor people's colonialism. so thirsty. my shoulder*

aches and collapses. i look at the parakeet. (looks at the scalp) i look at it, but i see nothing in its eyes. i grab and bite it. (bites the scalp) i plunge my teeth into its white feathers and i taste the flesh and blood in my mouth. (bites the scalp, keeps talking with his mouth full) i chew it, suck on it and eat it, and then i become sickened. (starts fighting the sensation, perspiring) the horizon is the same on all sides. the sand in my mouth is a dry bloody lump. (choking) the sand sticks to me.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT *enters, walks to the side, sets up the spotlight on HIPPIE.*

HIPPIE *i fight and grab the parakeet again, but he has no eyes now! everything rots and decays faster in here. the fragments slip through my fingers. i don't know how i came here. i am thirsty. i need water. i don't know what i am doing. i don't know what i am looking for. I just want some water. (starts crying) my head is not right. i want to start over. i don't know what i wanted to find. i can't think. i don't know where it is. i don't know how i ended up here. i can't remember. (weeping) i don't understand!*

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT *approaches HIPPIE and looks at him. he surveys the stage, jots down another note, then walks to the side and flips the switch.*

professor and the cudgel

gloomy light. green linoleum. a brown room, merging with a kitchen. MAN, unshaven, sits in an armchair. around his feet, behind his spine, around the armchair and lodged within the folds of the armchair, lie empty liquor bottles, mostly beer.

the atmosphere is drunken. MAN has been wronged, and he has been enduring it.

PROFESSOR, *calm, neat and cleanly shaven, is walking around the room.*

PROFESSOR did you know that only neanderthals used to live in this area?

MAN does not answer.

PROFESSOR of course, not only here, but they did live here. only they... and they were not stupid. they had big brains. they took care of their families, of their elderly and infirm... they hunted in parties, moved in packs, used weapons and tools, lived in communities. civilization, an anthropologist once said, civilization starts with the first healed bone in history, because that is proof that people cared about one another. that means our civilization started with the neanderthals.

MAN looks at professor. *he is uninterested. he keeps drinking.*

PROFESSOR it's interesting, really... do you know what *homo sapiens* means?

MAN no.

PROFESSOR "wise man". that is what we call ourselves, and the neanderthals were stronger and hardier.

MAN so how come they're not around anymore?

PROFESSOR we drove them to extinction. but we also crossbred with them. every one of us has some neanderthal genes in them. not much, just a couple of percent, but still. all of us. me. you, for example... even though we're sapiens, we have inherited quite a lot from them. caring about our children, caring about the weak, the infirm, the elderly... it's just that, perhaps it's not our inheritance; it's a remnant.

MAN what are you talking about?

PROFESSOR about us, of course.

MAN leave me be. *(takes a swig)* i'm just here at my waterin' hole.

PROFESSOR think about it. the neanderthals did these things because they cared. we do it out of convenience. why do we have communities? because we know it's useful. that is how we conquered the world. and the neanderthals.

MAN didn't you just say that they were still around?

PROFESSOR just a couple of genes. and only accidentally. but you have to ask yourself what would have happened had we stayed on this planet together. both calculated and honest, both simple and wise. you've got to ask yourself... would we have adapted?

MAN *breathes in, but shallowly, as if he can't get enough air in his lungs. he finishes the bottle. he places it on the floor and fumbles around for a new one without even looking.*

PROFESSOR you can't just keep drinking.
MAN says you.

MAN *grabs a new bottle and twists the cap off with his teeth. he spits it. he drinks.*

PROFESSOR *stares at him.*

unspoken

blue light. a bedroom. a small make-up table with a mirror is in the middle of the room. two metal hooks hang from the ceiling. WOMAN is sitting in front of the mirror. she is dressed in a nightgown. she is combing her hair.

DAUGHTER enters. **WOMAN** does not react. **DAUGHTER** approaches her, but not too close. she observes **WOMAN**.

DAUGHTER what are you getting ready for?

WOMAN does not reply.

DAUGHTER you said you needed help with tidying up the closets.

WOMAN still does not reply.

DAUGHTER why do you have so many clothes? it's as if you never throw anything away, and yet you've been throwing away clothes all the time.

DAUGHTER *hesitates, and then plucks up the courage.*

DAUGHTER why did you go to war? you were a volunteer, right? you went there of your own accord. but why? was life with grandma that miserable, or did you believe in something? did you do it for your ideals? or for the escape?

WOMAN *watches herself in the mirror.*

DAUGHTER why didn't you go back to college afterwards? was it so bad out there that you did not want to do anything anymore? did it make you realize what was really important in life?

WOMAN finishes combing her hair. she starts applying make-up.

DAUGHTER how was it after the war? how long were you in the army? i remember this newspaper article that said that the only woman on the frontlines did not want to be treated any differently. but you did let them treat you differently, right? Just a little bit, right? that's what i would have done, and i'm just like you. i take after you. but lately you sometimes act like me. you make dumb decisions. in fact, you just do whatever you feel like. that's the most important thing now. your wishes. everything else is secondary, none of your concern. was it because you used to be too forgiving? although... it seems to me that you never forgave any of it. maybe in the beginning you tried, but afterwards you kept swallowing it, enduring and waiting... i don't mean to say you planned it, but it's as if, somewhere deep inside, you knew you'd make them pay for it. for all the humiliation, all those insults.

WOMAN gives her a quick glance, then continues putting on make-up.

DAUGHTER why don't you ever talk to me? you talked with my brother all the time. whenever he asked you something, you'd tell him more than he wanted to know. did you tell him too much, and that's why he's autistic? or was it because of the fact that he's like that that you were able to tell him everything? why won't you ever answer me? mum?
did you choose this new guy because he's weak? he knows his theory, but in theory dad should have been good. in theory the two of you could have made it. in theory he wasn't supposed to cheat on you. in theory he wasn't supposed to leave you. in theory everything should have been...

WOMAN stop it.

DAUGHTER you'll have to tell me, sooner or later.

WOMAN these things you're saying, they're not supposed to be said.

DAUGHTER you'll have to answer me.

WOMAN i should have let you go with that guy of yours.

DAUGHTER i would have had the decency to leave, instead of bringing him over here.

WOMAN you don't know what kind of things he used to do to me.

DAUGHTER how can I know when you won't tell me!

WOMAN you don't know what I've been through.

DAUGHTER how can I know when you won't tell me!

WOMAN you know it.

DAUGHTER does not reply.

WOMAN you're weak, and that will come back to haunt you.

DAUGHTER why one and not the other?

WOMAN does not reply.

DAUGHTER why are you doing this?

WOMAN you have no right to judge me.

DAUGHTER why can't you see that this isn't going to get better? it will only get worse!

WOMAN looks at daughter.

WOMAN that man has quit smoking. that's not something a weak person would do. (to herself) things will get better.

DAUGHTER but they won't.

WOMAN does not answer. she keeps putting on make-up. **DAUGHTER** watches her.

DAUGHTER Do you want me to help you tidy up the closets, then, or not?

WOMAN finishes putting on make-up. she stares at the mirror.

WOMAN i'm not sure which earrings to wear. (turns around to **DAUGHTER**) these? (picks up a pair and lifts them to her ear) or these? (picks up a different pair)

DAUGHTER show me the first ones again.

WOMAN shows her the earrings. daughter looks at them, frowns and thinks about it.

WOMAN shows her the other pair again. they keep picking out earrings.

joker and thief

a bright yellow room. **JOKER** and **THIEF**, dressed like 90s rap kids in baggy jeans - **THIEF** wearing an oversized shirt, **JOKER** an undershirt. **THIEF** is sitting on a bed, **JOKER** is standing up, stretching and warming up.

THIEF it's hard to bury things. even when they're already dead.

JOKER you think too much. thinking leads to memories. memories lead to emotions. analyzing emotions won't help you. suffering creates even more suffering, that's an endless circle. it's simple. realize this. realize the principle. step outside and step away. subvert the expectations.

THIEF i think it's hard for me to let things go.

JOKER what's so hard about that?

THIEF i first need to understand them.

JOKER you need to understand that life will pass you by while you're stuck in the same rut. take what's yours. laws and rules

do not apply to those pure of spirit. i tried following them. and what came of it? i was told one thing, and different rules applied to everybody else. what happened afterwards? everybody treated me like an idiot. coddling me and helping me out. they were pretending that they were not part of this system which is broken. they tried to break me. well, i would have none of it. i went to the headmaster's office and i quit.

THIEF you've really given up?

JOKER they gave me the answer sheets to the exams. who do you think i am? i'm not retarded, they don't need to pander to me. it disgusts me. would you take an exam if you had all the answers given to you?

THIEF i might.

JOKER school is important. a fair system is important. you're too soft. you bend too easily. why do you still listen to that music?

THIEF rap?

JOKER yeah, that thing. the way you dress. what is that? you think you're tough? that's not your world. or mine. we've got nothing to do with that.

THIEF it's just music.

JOKER rap is dumb. the music is stupid. you're just posturing.

THIEF the lyrics are important.

JOKER the lyrics are played out. the beat is what you listen to. why do you think all of this exists?

THIEF all of what?

JOKER music. from the cavemen drumming all the way to stravinsky, rock'n'roll and that mumbling of yours? why does it exist?

THIEF does not reply.

JOKER give it a shot. it's simple.

THIEF because of demand?

JOKER because of pussy. pussy and entertainment. it's a timeless trend, it's just that every era dresses it up a little differently. what did you do today?

THIEF when?

JOKER today, last night, the night before. what did you do?

THIEF lots of things.

JOKER did you get laid?

THIEF what?

JOKER did you get laid?

THIEF why are you asking me that?

JOKER did you get laid?

THIEF no.

JOKER but you prayed for it. did you jack off?

THIEF what's wrong with you?

JOKER answer me. did you jack off? you're embarrassed? that's normal. these are our formative years, relax. overcome your shame. listen to me... *(leans in towards him)* how about we go somewhere... and get some pussy?

THIEF pussy?

JOKER pussy. women on the prowl. girls that will spread their legs for you, and you'll say *(using his palm to modulate his cries)* wah, wah, wah, wah, wah – like an indian – and then, like a real redskin, you'll charge at them with a cry!

THIEF but i'm white.

JOKER so? you're white, but you're into rap.

THIEF you said that rap was just posturing.

JOKER so is this. but it's useful. are you trained in the ways of the ancient Indians?

THIEF no.

JOKER their jam was, if a husband was a good husband, he would also get his wife's sister. the old chiefs knew what they were doing. it's our duty now to bring their beliefs to life. i got this girl last night; she did everything i told her to do. want to know why?

THIEF why?

JOKER because i know what i want, unlike her boyfriend, the dirty hippie. *(imitates him mockingly)* "my darling, our love, isn't it great..." this sort of shit makes me want to puke. and it makes her want to puke, only she doesn't know it yet on a conscious level. but the subconscious... the subconscious is key. you need to work on yourself. you've got to get to know yourself. you need to bang out those push-ups, physical and mental. you've got to pump iron to get pussy!

JOKER drops down into a push-up pose.

JOKER *(does a push-up)* one! *(does a push-up)* two! *(does a push-up)* three! *(does a push-up)* four! can you do a push-up? *(does a push-up, waits for an answer)*

THIEF maybe.

JOKER try it! *(does a push-up)* if you can't... *(does a push-up)* ...then do an assisted push-up... *(does a push-up)* that's also something... *(does a push-up)* that's a start! *(does a push-up)*

THIEF watches the **JOKER** and then drops down into a push-up pose as well, shifting and getting ready. he is struggling. **JOKER** stops exercising, kneels and looks at **THIEF**.

JOKER when I think about it, you don't want pussy you want some cock.

THIEF grunts unintelligibly.

JOKER work it! *(starts doing push-ups again, talking all the way through)* come on! let's go! work it, until you turn red! come on, do the push-ups! until your face turns red with effort! then people might not see you for what you are – work it!

THIEF *barely manages to do one push-up. he stands up in a planking pose, shaking.*
JOKER *(keeps pumping)* yeah! that's it! let's go!

JOKER *bounces off the floor as if his life depends on it.* **THIEF** *struggles to do a second push-up.*

the desert with the doorframe again.
HIPPIE *looks better than before.*

HIPPIE when I'm with you, the feeling is unbearable. my head itches, right back here *(points to the back of his head)* and my ears are burning. i feel like i'm about to burst. i feel like I'm happy. and I am. i'm happy. and I love you. i love you more than i love myself. but something is haunting me. too much happiness can make a person go insane. did I scare you? don't be afraid.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT *walks to the door and checks if the frame is sufficiently wedged in the sand, pushes it in a bit, checks whether it is still loose, then decides that the whole structure is firm and sound. he looks around the space, walks to the spotlight and points it unerringly at the doorframe. he observes it from several angles, adjusts the lights as needed, until he decides that he has accomplished the desired effect. once he is finished,* **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT** *leaves.*

HIPPIE don't be afraid. i'm not afraid. i've seen huge shelves overflowing with books, glowing with a vivid light. the whole room was designed so their glow would dominate, just like a house in which everything is subservient to the light of the truth. the essence of things reached my consciousness through light stimuli passing over my

retina and the undeniable truth was that the glow was more pronounced in some books than in others. one of them drew me in. i had to look at it. the light was unbearable. i thought it would melt my corneas, but my eyes became more accustomed to it and i saw, squinting at first, and then with a clear gaze i saw the empty pages.

i love you but we can't be together now. i need this time. i need it for myself. i need to leave.

can you understand me?

i'm leaving. i have to leave. i know you think that i'm free to choose. i know that this is a freedom that others may envy me for, but that is an illusion. the world is waiting for me. i am no more free on this earth than a bird is free from the shackles of the sky. i hear the bells of distant lands. they are calling my name. and I have to leave. i have to move on. you stay here. wait for me. i will come back for you. i will come back, i promise.

HIPPIE *walks off.*

escalation

MAN *is drinking.* **PROFESSOR** *is calm, just like before.*

PROFESSOR you have to come to terms with how things are. countries fall apart, people die, children are born, they rebel and disobey, your friends betray you, and women leave you. that's just how it goes. come to terms with it; as long as your paycheck's not late, you're fine.

MAN i remember you from before.

PROFESSOR we know each other.

MAN i used to look up to you. you were older. always driving some fancy car. always with a pretty girl by your side. you were the man.

PROFESSOR yes, i was.

MAN and then you lost it all. you lost it all and disappeared. you were gone.

PROFESSOR i went away.

MAN what are you doing here, then!? what do you want from me?

PROFESSOR i want to help you.

MAN by sleeping with her?

PROFESSOR joseph...

MAN you disappeared. *(burps)* why are you here now?

PROFESSOR times change, matthew.

MAN you lost it all. everything fell through for you. and i was building...

PROFESSOR the martyrs enter the arena holding hands, but they are crucified alone.

MAN no.

PROFESSOR everybody crucifies themselves. nothing in this world is truly yours; all you can do is position yourself as best you can in accordance with your capabilities. surround yourself with people you know will bring out the best in you.

MAN best for who?

PROFESSOR i'm begging you, as a friend.

MAN since when are the two of us friends?

PROFESSOR we are bound by circumstance.

MAN i have no friends. i had them, and then one day i woke up and they were no longer there. there was just her, and along with her i got you, with all your bullshit that a normal person would not stand to listen to. where are my friends?!

PROFESSOR probably in the same shitty situation you are in.

MAN how come you're not there as well?

PROFESSOR i'm different, i suppose.

MAN everything you're saying is worthless. it's just literature, books... theory.

PROFESSOR that's icky for you, is it, you ape?

MAN what?

PROFESSOR andrew. if you've been a bad husband - and you have - and if you've been a lousy father - and you have - accept it. don't try to fix what cannot be fixed; just save whatever you can.

MAN i never had any time for myself.

PROFESSOR you spent your time drinking and whoring around.

MAN that's what she told you.

PROFESSOR it's what I know.

MAN i spent my time working.

PROFESSOR just like everyone else.

MAN putting food on the table.

PROFESSOR they were yours.

MAN then why aren't they mine anymore?!

PROFESSOR it wasn't enough.

MAN i was taking care of her...

PROFESSOR you were always a slave to money. that was just your way of doing time.

MAN i wouldn't have had to work so hard if i hadn't been with her. who would i have worked for?!

PROFESSOR for yourself. one always works for oneself. that's how it goes.

MAN and now i hardly do anything.

PROFESSOR because you're pathetic. just as you would have become a long time ago had you not met her.

MAN that life does not exist anymore.

PROFESSOR have I told you how i quit cigarettes?

MAN no.

MAN *finishes the bottle, throws it away. he starts looking for a new one, but all the bottles are empty.*

PROFESSOR when i lost it all, as you say, or at least all that i knew at the time, i realized that there was nothing left tying me down to what i thought was my life. nothing. not a single thing. everything disappeared. and so i thought to myself, if i can exist without everything that defined what i used to be, if

in spite of everything the sun still rises and sets, and i am still breathing, well, then i can live without them as well. so i crushed that pack of my little companions. not without regret. but i did it. i did it and moved on.

MAN onto my wife.

PROFESSOR john.

MAN shat, is it not true?

PROFESSOR she made her choice.

MAN i hope she burns in hell!

PROFESSOR peter...

MAN what?! (*tries to get up suddenly, but is too drunk*) what do you want?!

PROFESSOR you're drunk, gordon.

MAN no.

PROFESSOR you can't even get up.

MAN i can.

PROFESSOR do it, then.

MAN i can't, not right now. i'll do it later... i don't care about her anyway. that's over and done with. or about that thing that calls itself my son. that was over before it began.

PROFESSOR what do you care about, then?

MAN my daughter.

PROFESSOR your daughter?

MAN my daughter. my baby.

PROFESSOR *looks at him.*

MAN i have to get to her. i have to save her. (*tries to get up but can't*) i have to save her.

PROFESSOR who are you saving her from?

MAN from you. and from them. you are evil. she is good.

MAN *tries to get back up again, but he cannot.*

MAN i'm not the father i'm supposed to be! (*calms down*) but i will be. just a bit later (*fumbles through the bottles, realizes that they are all empty*) we need more. we've drunk all of it. (*takes some money out of his pocket, throws paper bills at him*) Take

it. bring some more. we'll be who we're supposed to be later.

PROFESSOR *looks at MAN. he looks at the money on the floor.*

PROFESSOR chimpanzee.

MAN what?

PROFESSOR orangutan.

MAN i can't understand what you're saying.

PROFESSOR did you ever go to the zoo when you were a kid?

MAN there was a school trip, but i wasn't allowed to go.

PROFESSOR too bad, you would have met your relatives.

MAN i couldn't go. i had to work.

PROFESSOR you hungry?

MAN no.

PROFESSOR *takes a banana out of his suit pocket.*

PROFESSOR want a banana? they restore your energy levels and help with digestion. they're chock full of potassium.

MAN i don't want a banana; i want my daughter.

PROFESSOR eat something first, and sober up.

MAN fuck you.

PROFESSOR have a banana.

MAN i have to get there. i have to get to her.

PROFESSOR why?

MAN because she's my daughter... you can take the two of them. i've got nothing to do with them anyway. take them. i'll take my daughter. okay? because i have to get to her. i have to save her. (*tries to stand up again, fails again*) if only i could get up... (*gives up*) will you help me? i can't do it alone i have to get to her.

PROFESSOR watches him.

MAN will you?

PROFESSOR sit down, have something to eat, calm down. i'm going to get more beer.

MAN will you help me?

PROFESSOR i won't get in your way. sit down, relax.

PROFESSOR places the banana on the armrest, picks up several empty bottles, stops, then picks up the money from the floor and goes out. **MAN** sits down, breathing; he notices the banana and picks it up. he somehow peels it and starts to eat it. he chews that banana as if it were a beefsteak, struggling with it. he finishes it, and then tosses the banana skin on the floor. he gets up, gathers his strength, leans against the armrests, and then pushes himself up and somehow gets onto his feet. he stops for a moment, gathering himself. he notices the banana skin.

MAN you won't screw me over. (takes a couple of steps) you won't screw me over, i'll fuck you up... (staggers to the kitchen) i did not work this hard just to get screwed over. we'll make it yet. don't you worry. i'm coming. i'm coming. just let me tidy up a bit.

he leans against the kitchen counter. he takes a rest, then grabs the electric kettle. he pours some water in, then places the kettle back on its base and turns it on. the electric kettle starts heating the water; eventually it starts simmering the sound gets increasingly louder, the water finally boils and the kettle makes a clicking sound.

questioning

dusky twilight. candlelight. incense sticks. ritual.

JOKER, tense and naked, ties a ribbon around his head, then attaches a feather to the ribbon, breathing deeply. he heats a knife on a candle flame, and then presses the blade against his skin, which starts to sizzle. he breathes in.

JOKER back when i was a schoolboy i would lie on my bed, staring at the ceiling and wondering is this the life that awaits me? is this the life i've been waiting for? for days. motionless. inert. but one morning, just like a falling star, like a comet, like a living flame, a feeling came over me, and i felt it. i feel it even now, pulsing inside me. beating. i sleep with it. i wake up to it. i go through my days and my nights with it. i know that life cannot be more than what it is. a rhythm. i feel a beat. i can feel the pulse of the world. i can feel the beat of the world within me. i can feel it beating. the essence of things. the rhythm. in my body i can feel the energy of the world coursing through me.

THIEF you really think we can pull this off?

JOKER looks at him.

THIEF i mean, I believe you, but... i would just like you to tell me. i know you've already told me, but... i would feel better if... if you told me once more. if you repeated it, because... i feel guilty about all of this... won't you tell me?

JOKER when they kicked me out, i told my folks, i looked them in the eye, him with one eye, her with the other - and my eyes seemed to get some special power; i looked at them and told them and swore - never

again! never again will i obey society's norms. i am something else. from now on i will bend all the rules. the rules that apply to normal men do not apply to me. every morning i wake up with those dead people. i watch them drink their coffee and wait for the concoction to stimulate their bowels and i wonder, are they aware that their bowel movement is the only thing moving inside them? is it possible that their heads are so empty that they can't even see that? is it possible that they, being what they are, despise me? is it possible that i am a failure in their eyes? it is possible. you accept the paradox and move on.

THIEF didn't you leave of your own accord?

JOKER what?

THIEF you just said that they had kicked you out, but earlier you said that you quit.

JOKER walks over to thief, pats him on the shoulder. **THIEF** is clearly afraid of him, but he tries to hide it. **JOKER** watches him with a smile, and then slaps him with all his might.

JOKER red in the face! you need to get red in the face! let's go! on the floor! work it, work it, work it!

THIEF drops down, tries to get into a push-up pose, but he cannot do any more. he starts weeping, bawling.

JOKER that's the problem with you fatsos! once a softie, always a softie! chubby! work it, work it, work it! work until you can't see! work it! work it until you can't see that soft centre work it until you stand upright! work it until you're sharp! work it until you're strong! work it until you're no longer repulsive to everyone!

THIEF (crying) i can't.

JOKER get up, get up, get up!!

THIEF somehow manages to get up.

JOKER take it off!

THIEF what?

JOKER take it all off! take off the pants, take off the shirt! come on, red-face, take it off! (starts hitting **THIEF**, who takes everything off. **JOKER** keeps hitting him anyway, and **THIEF** drops to the floor. **JOKER** keeps hitting him) until you turn red!

JOKER keeps hitting him, mercilessly, slapping and punching, and **THIEF'S** skin really turns red. **JOKER** kicks him, slaps him with open palms all over his body. **THIEF** starts to cry, and then finally falls silent. **JOKER** stops, out of breath, and gasps for air as he stands above the whimpering **THIEF**.

JOKER do you feel better? (**THIEF** does not reply, breathing heavily. **JOKER** slaps him.) do you feel better?!

THIEF squeals.

JOKER (tired and content) good. this is good. you've done well... (**THIEF** whimpers again, and **JOKER** sighs as if after a job well done.) you'll see now. we're going... (yawns deeply and widely) all i've told you. you'll see it now.

JOKER rests for another moment, and then gets going, getting dressed. he puts on an oversized suit, the ribbon with the feather still on his head. he finishes getting ready, looks at the **THIEF**, who is still sprawled on the floor, whimpering intermittently.

JOKER come on, let's go.

THIEF mumbles something unintelligible from the floor.

JOKER let's go.

JOKER starts to move. **THIEF** cries out, and then starts crawling after him. the red marks on his skin are not fading away. **JOKER** stands next to the exit. he waits for thief, who is crawling slowly. **JOKER** becomes impatient, grabs **THIEF** and throws him out. he comes back in to see if he has forgotten anything, and when he is satisfied that he has everything, blows out the candles and the incense sticks, and walks out. **THIEF** whimpers once more, off-stage.

twist

MAN is drinking tea. he is sobering up. **PROFESSOR** comes in carrying bottles of beer.

MAN i remember you.

PROFESSOR we've already done that bit.

MAN stands in **PROFESSOR'S** way.

MAN no. i remember you.

he steps aside and lets the **PROFESSOR** pass. he sets aside the beer bottles. he looks at **MAN**. he grabs a bottle. he looks around for a bottle opener, but cannot find one. man takes the bottle from his hand, twists the bottle cap off with his teeth, politely spits it out back into his hand and places it on the countertop. he hands the bottle to **PROFESSOR**. professor takes a sip.

PROFESSOR what do you want now?

MAN i've told you.

PROFESSOR fine.

MAN what's that?

PROFESSOR nothing. (drinks)

MAN where are you hiding them?

PROFESSOR i'm not hiding anyone. you must have me confused with someone else.

MAN tell me.

PROFESSOR how am i supposed to know that? this is your house, too.

MAN this is my house. you're the intruder here.

PROFESSOR yes...

MAN professor, my ass.

PROFESSOR suit yourself.

MAN take me there.

PROFESSOR where do you want me to take you?

MAN take me to her.

PROFESSOR i don't know where she is.

MAN i will crush you.

PROFESSOR looks at him.

MAN i have to get to her. take me there.

PROFESSOR you know where you need to go.

MAN i don't know the way anymore.

PROFESSOR this is your house.

MAN i can't find my way.

PROFESSOR you can't find your way?

MAN everything's gone strange. take me to her. we need to get out of here.

PROFESSOR there's nowhere to go.

MAN there is. somewhere healthier.

PROFESSOR (takes a sip) no such thing.

MAN i'll find it.

PROFESSOR you?

MAN me.

PROFESSOR you don't have it in you.

MAN and you do?

PROFESSOR i'm a realist.

MAN and i'm not?

PROFESSOR you're a neanderthal.

MAN take me to her.

PROFESSOR that's not going to solve anything!

MAN i have to get to her. take me there.

PROFESSOR fine. have it your way.

MAN i have to get to her.

PROFESSOR you will.

MAN right now.

PROFESSOR all right.

MAN take me to her.

PROFESSOR as you wish. (finishes the bottle of beer) as you wish... this way.

PROFESSOR shows the way to **MAN**. he lets him walk ahead of him. **MAN** looks at **PROFESSOR**, then walks ahead and off. **PROFESSOR** sets down the bottle, reaches for another one, but does not know how to open it. then he has an idea – he places the bottle cap on the edge of the kitchen counter, hits the bottle and it pops open, the beer foaming and spilling everywhere. ignoring that, he takes a few hasty gulps, and then sets the bottle down and hurries after **MAN**.

a bright light shines on the doorframe.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT is sweeping the sand. he keeps doing it until the desert sands resemble a tidy square lawn. this goes on for a while; he is meticulous. **HIPPIE** crawls in, his guitar slung like a rifle over his shoulder. he looks around, out of breath. he squints at the door. the light is too bright, so **HIPPIE** looks away. he is crawling on his elbows, sweating. he takes his guitar and rolls onto his back. he starts playing a melody, but he cannot seem to get it right. he keeps trying for a while, but it is really not working out. he gives up. he starts laughing. he breaks down in tears.

HIPPIE god...

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT watches him as he sweeps.

HIPPIE god.

HIPPIE turns around once again. he gets up slowly, barely managing it. he is unsteady and shaking. he squints at the door.

HIPPIE it's like I remember something. like it already happened. they say that you have to be in a good place to get the feeling of *déjà vu*. i don't remember this place. but I know it. i know it. i am close and... (laughs out loud) i don't know what I am saying.

HIPPIE covers his eyes to shield them from the light, as he approaches the doorway.

HIPPIE i don't know what i'm saying, but i feel... like i've been here before. (pauses) it's funny. (puts his hand on the doorknob, smirks) it really is.

HIPPIE twists the doorknob and pushes the door. nothing happens. he twists again, this time pulling the door. the door opens and the entire frame falls on him, like a picture frame. **HIPPIE** disappears. **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT** keeps sweeping. he finishes sweeping, sets the broom to one side, and exits.

reckoning

blue light. bedroom. a make-up table with a mirror is placed in the middle of the room.

WOMAN is wearing a dress. she is looking at herself in the mirror, trying to see, from all angles, how the dress fits her.

DAUGHTER is standing next to her.

DAUGHTER my boyfriend will come and rescue me.

WOMAN that's why he left.

DAUGHTER your boyfriend is not here either.

WOMAN my partner has serious business he must attend to.

DAUGHTER mine does too! he will come and take me far away from here. far away from you. he is exploring the world now. he is seeing things that you can't even imagine.

WOMAN and you're not worried about that?

DAUGHTER why would i be worried?

WOMAN my darling. relationships are the name of the game.

DAUGHTER i wanted to go with him.

WOMAN i'm sure you did. what do you think, which shoes? (shows her two pairs)

DAUGHTER those.

WOMAN takes a look at the shoes. she picks the ones that her **DAUGHTER** did not point to. she puts them on.

WOMAN he wasn't right for you anyway.

DAUGHTER how would you know?

WOMAN you were too good for him.

DAUGHTER we're still together!

WOMAN where is he now?

DAUGHTER he will come.

WOMAN he's not right for you, leave him be. these artistic types have never been any good. he's too unstable. my dear, you've lost your mind. why else would you stay?

you need someone solid. someone who knows what he wants. somebody traditional. right for you. someone who can stand you.

DAUGHTER what are you talking about?

WOMAN you could have gone with him, but you didn't. it's done now.

DAUGHTER you make me sick.

WOMAN you have everything i never had, and instead of making something of it, you whine, fidget and roll around like a common pig. get out, please.

DAUGHTER looks at her.

WOMAN get out. i've got nothing to say to you.

DAUGHTER and what will you do?

WOMAN i'll get by.

JOKER, wearing a suit and with a feather tucked in the ribbon around his head, and **THIEF**, red and sore all over, barge into the room. they stop. **WOMAN** notices them. she studies them.

WOMAN good evening, boys. what are you wearing?

DAUGHTER mum!

WOMAN that's your brother and his friend. be polite.

THIEF whimpers.

JOKER we didn't want to disturb you.

WOMAN you're not.

JOKER we were planning on going for a night out. we want to go out.

WOMAN studies him.

WOMAN out?

JOKER yes.

WOMAN trying to get some pussy?

JOKER pauses. **THIEF** whimpers.

JOKER yes.

WOMAN well, look no further. there she is.

DAUGHTER mum!

WOMAN thanks, honey, i'll take it from here. have fun.

JOKER looks at **DAUGHTER**. he approaches her hesitantly. **THIEF** stays behind. he just stands there.

JOKER do you want to dance?

WOMAN the boy's got manners.

DAUGHTER i have a boyfriend.

JOKER so?

WOMAN he's a go-getter.

THIEF whimpers.

JOKER that's new.

WOMAN and he takes care of your brother.

DAUGHTER looks at **WOMAN**. she looks at **THIEF**.

DAUGHTER he's retarded.

WOMAN where do you see yourself in ten years?

JOKER i'll be a C.E.O.

WOMAN gives **DAUGHTER** a meaningful look, then looks back in the mirror. she keeps looking at herself.

JOKER That's your mum?

DAUGHTER does not reply.

JOKER what a hot bitch.

WOMAN smiles.

DAUGHTER what's wrong with you?! what's your problem?

WOMAN i think i've made myself clear.

DAUGHTER why did you become like this?

WOMAN you don't understand anything.

DAUGHTER gives her a look. she looks at **JOKER**. **THIEF** whimpers.

DAUGHTER make him stop.

JOKER shut up.

THIEF whimpers again.

DAUGHTER he's not listening to you.

JOKER he had better start.

DAUGHTER or you'll do what?

JOKER what am i supposed to do?

DAUGHTER i don't know. i'm not the man here.

JOKER you're teasing me.

DAUGHTER only if you feel that way.

DAUGHTER puts her hands around **JOKER'S** neck. he takes a step toward her.

JOKER do you want this?

DAUGHTER no.

JOKER and **DAUGHTER** dance softly.

WOMAN (addresses **THIEF**) have you eaten yet?

THIEF shakes his head.

WOMAN you have to eat. you'll get sick.

JOKER becomes a bit rougher, starts fondling **DAUGHTER**.

DAUGHTER what are you doing?! let go of me! (tries to step away from him, he holds onto her, pulls at her, grabs her) let me go!

JOKER (*growling*) You wanted this!

DAUGHTER go away...

WOMAN kill her.

JOKER stops.

WOMAN that's what you want, isn't it?

DAUGHTER (*crying*) my boyfriend will hear about this!

WOMAN my dear, we all have to fight for ourselves.

DAUGHTER you're the one who gave birth to me!

JOKER *lunges at DAUGHTER and takes her down.*

WOMAN (to **THIEF**) you don't look so good. your skin colour is all wrong.

THIEF watches **JOKER** and **DAUGHTER**, petrified. *he is terrified.*

WOMAN there are leftovers from yesterday. want me to heat them for you?

THIEF *does not reply. he whimpers.* **JOKER** bites **DAUGHTER** and she screams.

WOMAN You can decide for yourself.

JOKER *keeps biting DAUGHTER. he is eating her.* **WOMAN** *is looking at her reflection, like before.* **THIEF** *is shivering every now and again he whimpers.*

DAUGHTER *is gurgling, limply resisting until even that resistance stops.*

WOMAN i never really felt like she was really mine. i didn't. or maybe i really did, and it was too much. i gave her, we gave her too much. more than she has done with herself, and she had all the advantages. she

had everything. he never made a scene around her. she never saw his outbursts. she never had to see any of his shit. and what did she do with all the opportunity she had? nothing. my poor boy, you're better off this way than if you had taken after him. but he never loved you. and you can feel it. sometimes i just feel happy that i will die first. we might put you in a home. you'll probably end up in a home. but don't beat yourself up about it. it's not your fault. this was all wrong even before you came. i just never knew how to say stop. i didn't have the heart to leave. i did not know that life can be changed that way as well. and now i know. and i have the strength to do it. and it will be wonderful. it will be good. i can already see the outlines; i just need to follow through on this. i think i've earned myself a couple of years of peace and leisure, before the end comes. what do you think? i'm not asking for too much, am i? i gave everyone a chance. i really did. be on your way and let me be. when the war broke out, we fought for our ideals at first. there were psychos as well, of course. we did not know a lot, but the ideals were there. after our first tour of duty, they sent us to specialist training. it did not end quickly, like we thought it would, and this is where things started bubbling to the surface. murderers. looters. ours, theirs, everything. they saw no difference. like always, you can very quickly see what your options are. stay and join them. stay, look away, and hope nobody will think - she knows too much. some got killed, some got rich. i saw an opportunity, i seized it and disappeared. any wealth acquired that way is no wealth at all. any ideals defended this way do not deserve that name, and i would not change any of my choices then. but now i feel differently.

MAN and **PROFESSOR** come in. **MAN** *sees what is happening.* **JOKER** *scampers away from DAUGHTER on all fours, like an animal. his mouth is bloody. he is licking his lips.*

MAN what is going on here?

WOMAN you have a son as well.

MAN what is going on?

WOMAN your daughter ate herself alive. you should have been here.

MAN this is your fault.

WOMAN *stands up. she approaches MAN.*

WOMAN you're nothing.

MAN what are you doing?

WOMAN are you afraid?

MAN *is uncomfortable.*

WOMAN did you tell him he could leave?

PROFESSOR *nods.*

MAN what are you doing?

WOMAN (to **PROFESSOR**) honey?

MAN what?

WOMAN (to **PROFESSOR**) honey?

PROFESSOR *also looks uncomfortable.*

WOMAN honey, it's time.

PROFESSOR *gets fidgety, fumbling through his suit pockets.*

WOMAN (to **MAN**) that there is your son. he's retarded, just like you, but he's more decent than you. don't be nervous. just accept it. accept what has to happen. it's inevitable.

PROFESSOR finally finds the piece of wire he has been looking for. **WOMAN** looks **MAN** in the eye. he can't bear to look her in the eye. **THIEF** whimpers. **JOKER** seems to instinctively assess how this will turn out, so he approaches **DAUGHTER** once again. **DAUGHTER** is gurgling; bubbles form on her lips. **MAN** looks at her.

MAN my baby...

PROFESSOR approaches **MAN** from behind, wraps the wire around his neck, squeezes it tight, wraps it around a couple of times and squeezes again.

MAN is suffocating and waving his arms. **PROFESSOR** pulls him back. **WOMAN** pulls in the hooks that are hanging from the ceiling, and then helps **PROFESSOR** wrap the wire around **MAN'S** neck. **MAN'S** feet barely touch the floor. he is suffocating and bleeding. he is trying to escape their grasp, but he cannot do it. the wire is cutting deep into his skin, and he starts twitching.

DAUGHTER makes gargling noises, just like the electric kettle.

PROFESSOR notices this and takes out a pack of instant coffee, surveys the scene, and determines that it would be inappropriate. Although he is intrigued, he decides to put the pack back in his pocket.

MAN twitches a couple more times, and then goes still. he is out.

JOKER looks at **MAN**, and bites **DAUGHTER** another couple of times. he gathers his courage, takes out a knife and starts to scalp her.

lecture

PROFESSOR takes centre stage. **WOMAN** sits to the side.

PROFESSOR just look at this neanderthal here. (points to **MAN**. stops.)

WOMAN watches **PROFESSOR** with interest. **THIEF** is shivering, wetting himself and whimpering. the water starts to fade from the places where he wet himself.

PROFESSOR (tries again) look at this neanderthal here... (he pauses, at a loss for words, does not know what to say) this neanderthal right here! this guy... (as if apologizing) you know, i thought i'd have so many things to say when this moment arrived, but actually... it's pretty clear all by itself. he couldn't bear to be apart from them. (points to **WOMAN** and **DAUGHTER**) he couldn't accept...

JOKER nibbles on the scalp, making slurping noises.

PROFESSOR stop it! sit down!

JOKER winces, then obeys him. he sits down and looks at **PROFESSOR**.

PROFESSOR do you have anything to add?

JOKER just shakes his head, like a humanoid dog. **WOMAN** watches this with interest. **PROFESSOR** nods.

PROFESSOR fine. like I said, it's all pretty clear. he has not developed. he has not evolved. (emphasizes this) he did not realize what all of this is really about. it's about thinking and cooperating. it's about calculating and making the best choice. but there's

only one choice, really. the only possible choice if we want to survive and evolve. if we want to move forward from what we have here. do we want to?

JOKER and **WOMAN** nod in affirmation. **THIEF** whimpers.

PROFESSOR unfortunately, i don't have the slides that i've prepared. but if i had them, i would show you the evolution of monkeys, and you would see his (points to **MAN**) progress in comparison to them. now, it is our duty to evolve in comparison to him. we simply must evolve in comparison to our little ape, this guy here. (points to **MAN**) we are the next logical step. of course, i am not claiming that the instinct that drives him does not exist in all of us. it definitely does, of course. but we should aspire to be better than that. that is all.

WOMAN gets up. she walks to **PROFESSOR**. she kisses him on the cheek.

WOMAN you're wonderful. (takes his side vocally, so that everyone can hear) i agree with you from the bottom of my heart!

PROFESSOR smiles. he takes out a pack of cigarettes and lights one.

WOMAN didn't you quit?

PROFESSOR i did.

WOMAN watches him. he smokes his cigarette.

PROFESSOR i'll light one sometimes, but i've stopped buying packs.

WOMAN looks at the pack in his hand. he hides it in his pocket.

JOKER approaches professor.

JOKER i agree as well.

JOKER uses his hand to wipe the blood from his mouth, but traces remain, only fainter. he glances at **DAUGHTER**.

JOKER i try, but sometimes i just kind of lose control.

PROFESSOR lays his hand on **JOKER'S** shoulder.

PROFESSOR it's not easy.

JOKER it's not. (adjusts his suit) i'm usually an a-student.

WOMAN looks at **DAUGHTER**.

PROFESSOR don't beat yourself up (to woman) you said it yourself, she was always a bit off.

WOMAN yes...

JOKER nods. **PROFESSOR** looks at **WOMAN**. he is pleased. he exhales a puff of smoke.

PROFESSOR have you considered college already?

JOKER no. i mean, it's not that i haven't, i have. but i still haven't made a decision.

PROFESSOR as long as you're considering it, that's good enough. college is big, important business. i went to college, and look at me now.

PROFESSOR smokes his cigarette, enjoying himself. **JOKER** stands next to him.

WOMAN walks to **THIEF**. she pats him on the head and sits on a chair. **THIEF** is sitting at her feet. he lays his head in her lap. he keeps shivering and whimpering.

WOMAN runs her hand through his hair.

WOMAN i thought i would feel differently now.

PROFESSOR takes out another cigarette and starts lighting it with the first one.

JOKER seems to be waiting for something from **PROFESSOR**. **PROFESSOR** is smoking his cigarette and enjoying it. **THIEF** is shivering; he whimpers. **HIPPIE** walks in.

PROFESSOR and **JOKER** stiffen. the tension mounts.

reckoning 2

HIPPIE enters. **PROFESSOR** and **JOKER** look at him.

THIEF squeals. **HIPPIE** observes the scene. at first he does not notice **DAUGHTER**.

HIPPIE what are you doing with that indian over there?

PROFESSOR what Indian?

HIPPIE you're abusing him.

PROFESSOR oh, no. you've got it all wrong.

HIPPIE you can't treat him like that!

PROFESSOR you've got it all wrong. that's no Indian. (looks at **WOMAN**) honey... (to **HIPPIE**) that's our child. he dresses like that because...

JOKER that's my brother. (walks to **THIEF**) it's just the way we play. (points to the feather)

PROFESSOR he likes it like that. (quieter) he's a little bit, you know... but he likes it like that. (yells at him) isn't that right, son?!

THIEF keeps whimpering. **WOMAN** keeps stroking his hair.

PROFESSOR he thinks he's a mouse... or that the indians communicated this way... who can tell anymore...? don't believe me? look, look here.

PROFESSOR walks to **THIEF**.

PROFESSOR see how he wet himself here. (touches his thighs, where the dye has faded away, rubs his fingers on it and presents them to **HIPPIE**) it's dye, that's all, just dye...

HIPPIE nods, looks around the room. he looks at **MAN**.

PROFESSOR it's just a family quarrel... every family has them.

HIPPIE it's a good thing that he's not...

PROFESSOR an indian?

HIPPIE a redskin, really.

PROFESSOR of course, of course...

HIPPIE notices **DAUGHTER**. he is stunned. he watches her. he approaches her. he kneels next to her. he touches her. **WOMAN** gets up and walks up to him.

WOMAN did you become an artist?

HIPPIE no.

WOMAN did you see the world?

HIPPIE yes.

WOMAN what's it like?

HIPPIE i don't know.

WOMAN did you find anything?

HIPPIE i should have married her.

WOMAN you should have.

HIPPIE would things have turned out differently?

WOMAN who knows?

HIPPIE bursts into tears. he holds **DAUGHTER**. **WOMAN** squats next to him.

WOMAN today, you're one of us, even though tomorrow you might only be a neighbour. today, we're in this together. would you like to play a tune?

HIPPIE no.

WOMAN there is nothing else you can do.

HIPPIE i don't know what to play.

WOMAN it doesn't matter, you have a guitar.

HIPPIE i do...

WOMAN play something nice. please.

HIPPIE looks at **WOMAN**. he moves away from **DAUGHTER**. he grabs the guitar from his back. he notices the scalp. he takes it in his hand, studies it, squeezes it as if that will bring her back, then kisses it and places it on his own head. he starts picking the strings.

everybody joins in. **JOKER** is barking.

THIEF is whimpering. **PROFESSOR** is tap-dancing. **WOMAN** is snapping her fingers.

MAN starts to twitch and shuffle the chains. even **DAUGHTER** looks up, and then lets her head drop to the floor. she repeats this. **HIPPIE** plays his guitar. the living and the dead all participate in this. The ad-lib escalates.

somebody claps their hands.

everybody freezes. everything stops.

talk show

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT walks out onto the stage. thief breaks from his frozen pose. the others stay as they were. **THIEF** wipes the dye from his body. now he is just smudged with red.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT walks to the edge of the stage and sits there.

THIEF follows him. he sits next to him.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT looks at **THIEF**, then pulls out cue cards from his jacket pocket. he gives them a brief look.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT it's all because of an unrequited love. that's what you said, right?

THIEF yes, you see, while i was writing this... the process was rather intense.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT intense? what do you mean?

THIEF i was sitting at home one night and the idea just came to me...

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT it just came to you??

THIEF yes.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT just like that, out of nowhere?

THIEF no, i... the scene came to me. the scenes came to me, and i tried to catch them, and not let them escape...

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT uh-huh...

THIEF and i did not contemplate their meaning that much. i mean, i did. it always goes hand in hand. but i did not focus on it.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT so that the scenes would not escape?

THIEF right.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT that's intriguing. and you say you don't know where the scenes had come from?

THIEF no, i... of course i know. i mean, i know to a certain extent.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT would you like to share it with us?

THIEF pauses.

THIEF no.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT don't be shy now. i am sure everyone here would like to hear this.

THIEF seems embarrassed. he looks at the floor.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT because of an unrequited love...

THIEF traumas!

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT traumas?

THIEF all these individual traumas are holding back our world. this is my vision of the hell that we all live through and that awaits us yet if we don't change. but, of course, here it is condensed a bit.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT intriguing. you think that this world is not hellish enough as it is, and we need to put it in front of a mirror, so it can see itself?

THIEF to bring about change!

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT gets up. he walks into the scene in the background, rummages through **PROFESSOR'S** pocket and takes out a pack of instant coffee. he grabs a cup and walks over to the spot where **DAUGHTER** lies sprawled. he pours the contents of the pack into his cup, then stoops down next to her, tips her head to the side and makes himself a cup of coffee. he stirs it with his finger and then licks it.

THIEF is bewildered. **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT** watches him.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT change requires active effort.

THIEF gets up. he is nervous. he tries to find a way out on all sides of the stage, but there is no exit. **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT** watches him.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT are you feeling better?



I PHOTO BY KATARINA ZLATEC

THIEF is still looking for a way out.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT as a form of psychotherapy, did it work? are you a better, healthier member of society, now that you have communicated your trauma?

THIEF realizes that there is no way out. he steps away from **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT**.

THIEF who are you?

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT just someone asking you this on behalf of others. now, are you?

THIEF looks at him. **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT** takes a sip. there are red marks smudged around his mouth. he smiles. entertained, **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT** claps his hands.

the scene around thief comes to life. the song rings out, just like before.

THIEF looks at **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT**, then at the scene. he hiccups, against his will.

the song goes on. **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT** watches the scene. **THIEF** whimpers, all the while looking at the **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT**. **MAN** shakes the chains.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT takes a sip from the cup. **THIEF'S** gaze follows him. he is no longer in control of his body. he is bewildered. **GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT** sets aside the cup, then stands the doorframe with the door upright. he arranges it like it was in the start, and then walks over to **HIPPIE**. with one hand he removes the scalp from his head, and with the other he grabs him by the hair. he pulls him away, to the door at the back of the stage. he throws **HIPPIE** out.

he throws out the scalp as well.

a desert.

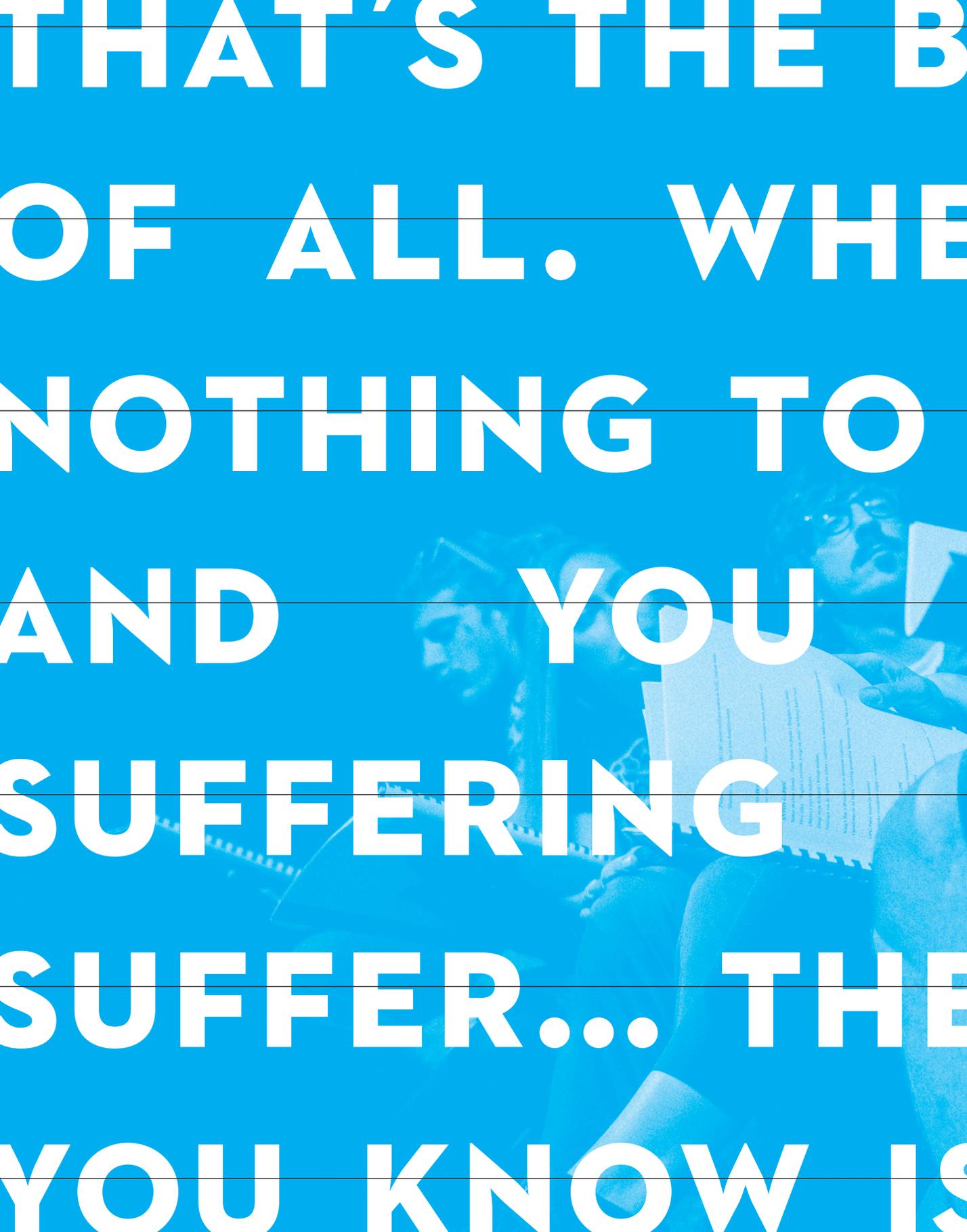
a doorframe, with a door in it.

HIPPIE, dirty, crying and out of breath, is gasping for air, has trouble swallowing. he picks up the scalp, looks at it, touches it with both hands. he squeezes it tight, clenching his jaw as well. he looks as if he is about to go insane from the pain. he spasms.

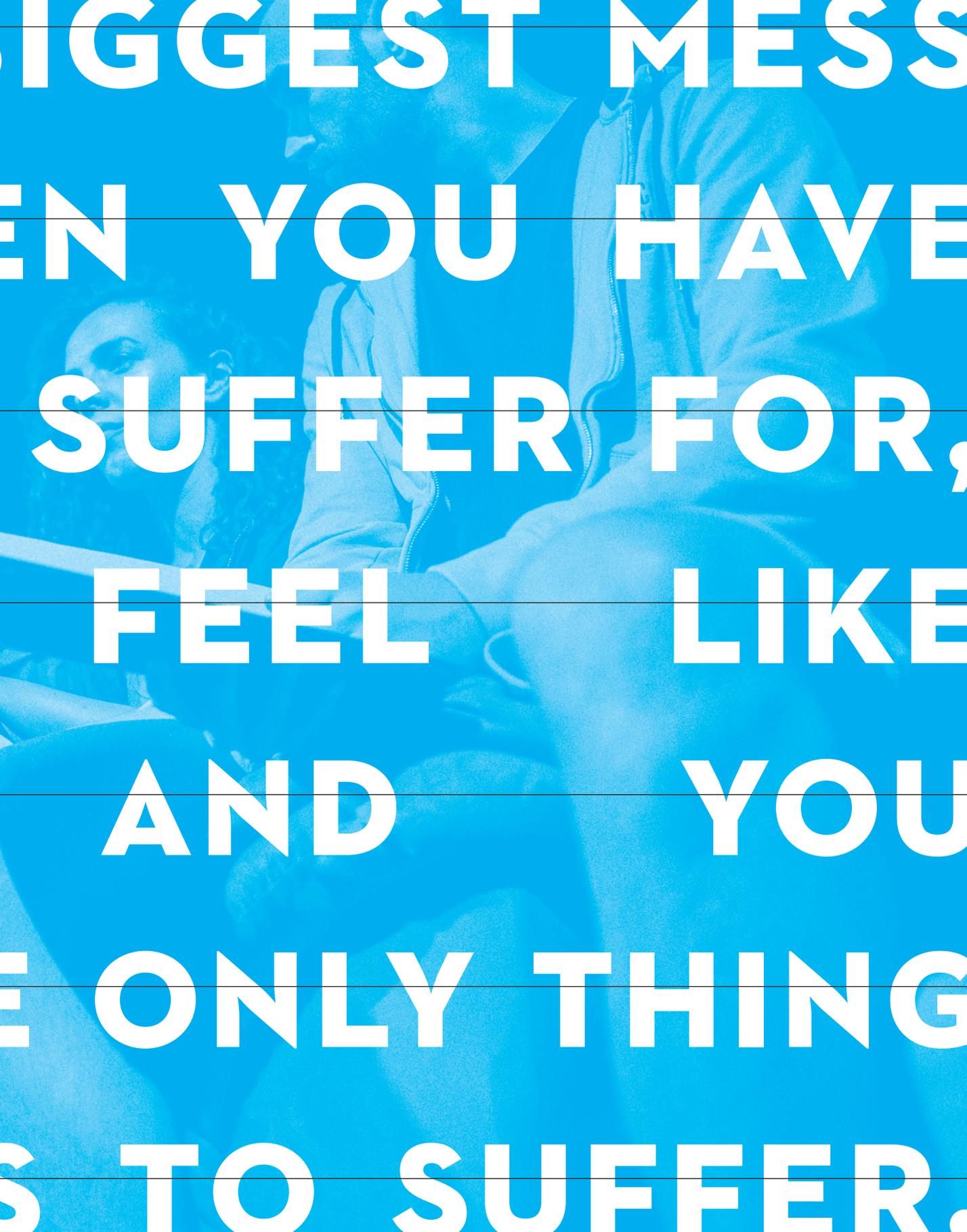
he closes his eyes, opens them up again.

DAUGHTER walks in. she approaches **HIPPIE** and kneels next to him. she touches him, and he looks at her. **DAUGHTER** takes the scalp from his hands and places it on her head, where it belongs. she embraces him, and he embraces her back. they hold each other as if they will never let go.

GENTLEMAN IN THE PINK SUIT enters. he watches this scene. he walks over to the side and flips the switch. dark.



THAT'S THE B
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**LARGEST MESSAGE
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IS TO SUFFER.**

LUCIJA KLARIĆ

(ZAGREB, 1994)



Lucija Klarić holds an MA degree in Dramaturgy from the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. In addition, she was twice an Erasmus intern in the UK, working with Royal Exchange, Manchester and Bush Theatre in London. Her original plays have been read at the Academy of Dramatic Art, at Young Section Days of the Croatian Association of Dramatic Artists and the *óglumicatražiautora* initiative. An Odyssey programme resident for 2021 and a winner of the Mali Marulić First Prize for *Elidino galaktičko putovanje*, developed at La Chartreuse, Velleneuve-lez-Avignon. She writes screenplays for children's serials, works as a playwright and dramaturge on the independent theatre scene, teaches drama workshops, writes reviews and is a huge fan of video games so in her work she pursues the interdisciplinary field bordering on gaming, drama and theatre.

35 SQUARE METRES OR NEVERLAND

TRANSLATORS

Ivana Ostojčić,
Domagoj Čavrak

CHARACTERS

MALE TENANT 1 – ŽUTI

(32 and a half, but he says he is 27)

FEMALE TENANT 2 – IVA

MALE TENANT 3 – SINIŠA

FEMALE TENANT 4 – BELLA

MALE TENANT 5 – ANTON

PARENTS SET – MOM + DAD,

recycled for all the Tenants

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

FACEBOOK, DAILY NEWS, TV NOISE IN THE BACKGROUND, INSTAGRAM – THE SURROUNDING WORLD, appearing with asterisks (*) – subject to changes as the world around us is in constant change and news (the make-your-own-pizza principle).

SYNOPSIS

When the government of an unnamed state on the margins of Europe activates the social housing measure for people younger than 33, five unknown tenants from 1 to 5 end up in the same living space, in only 35 square metres. The five characters gradually reveal their faces and we learn their names: Žuti, Iva, Siniša, Bella and Anton. We are introduced to their social profiles while they, cramped in only 35 square metres, become part of a story about a generation which doesn't know what to do with either themselves or the future of the planet, and on paper they should.

1. PRELIMINARY CALCULATION

Numbers drying on the clothes line. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Music for audience welcome, pleasant and neutral, lounge.

SIREN SOUND!

In 3, 2, 1... Without even knowing why, the tenants feel invited to stand in a line underneath their numbers – from Tenant 1 to Tenant 5.

They are standing at the start line, waiting to hear a sound in low start, not talking to one another, but rushing all the time, in one place.

MALE TENANT 3 The average height of a man... Counting out pituitary gland diseases and NBA players, 160-185 cm. Depending on the gender. The Residential Building Act standardises the height of a residential unit to 2.5 metres. Which means that, regardless of one's striving to elevate oneself, the man is not tall. Even if you're selling at attic apartment, the low ceilings don't necessarily make its price... low.

FEMALE TENANT 2 In line with the hierarchy

of needs, besides food and water, shelter is quite low. Ergo, it is a necessity and should be assumed as such, just like drinking water.

MALE TENANT 3 According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs physiological needs such as excretion come first. The next step is safety... which includes property, but doesn't define it as an 'apartment' or a 'house'.

MALE TENANT 1 In America it's totally cool to live in a car or a trailer. It's like, you're a nomad, you're free, everything is mobile and so are you.

MALE TENANT 5 You mean, you live like a Gy... a Roma.

MALE TENANT 2 You didn't fucking just say that.

MALE TENANT 1 When you give it a though, in fact, why would someone today want to drop the anchor and become rooted in one place? Man, you have the world at your fingertips, and you to build a what?, a little house of a few dozen square metres?

MALE TENANT 3 The Earth's area is 510 million square metres. 71 per cent is water. Evolution-wise we're no closer to gills and fins than we were a million years ago. Over 50% of that area is used for food, 33% are deserts, 24% mountains. Meaning, 37 million square metres for mankind. 7.7 billion people so... 0.00481 square metres

of the Earth per man. Without high-rise. Ding. A winning number pops out somewhere.

MALE TENANT 5 Work is proportionate to force and is multiplied by path – therefore, you force yourself, you do something and you get somewhere. That’s how it’s supposed to be by the laws of physics. Because everything in life needs to be earned, and the more you work, the farther you should get, right?

FEMALE TENANT 2 This is all culturally conditioned, we’ve been convinced we should, right!, we want this space, and we didn’t even deign to focus on the essential: what is this living space anyway?

FEMALE TENANT 4 Fine, you’re born and you get a body and now you’re somehow materialised in this world and fuck, what-cha gonna do, you simply occupy a space from the beginning.

*Bang. The race pistol fires.
The tenants run around the stage and take space.*

*They push for it, blend with it, solidarize then grow upwards one on top of the other, they stand still, collide, gather...
Chaos persists. Someone can turn on the stroboscope.*

Then one of them shouts: STOP!

And the scene stops. Work light turns on.

FEMALE TENANT 4 I think we should try something else.

MALE TENANT 5 I’m fucking tired. Too much work.

Male Tenant 3 has an idea. He starts walking along the edges and corners of the room in big steps and counting.

MALE TENANT 3 and the number of square metres is – 35!

There is chalk in his pocket. He pulls it out.

He approaches all the tenants and draws a square for each of them to stand in. Tenant 1 tries to step out of the square, but Tenant 3 immediately stops him. He also draws one square for himself.

MALE TENANT 3 We all begin in a square. Because you exist as matter bla bla bla... You can’t help it but to disintegrate. What more do you need?

MALE TENANT 5 You need a place to lie down.

Male Tenant 5 lies down so Tenant 3 outlines him in chalk.

MALE TENANT 3 Fine, so, 6–8 hours you occupy at least one more square since you’re lying. Next?

MALE TENANT 1 You need to relieve it someplace.

MALE TENANT 3 Excretion, the bottom of the pyramid... goes to the corner to draw a quadrant... Every intelligent animal knows you do that away from other things.

FEMALE TENANT 2 What about washing your hands? Washing yourself? What does Maslow say about hygiene?

Male Tenant 3 comes to Female Tenant 2. He suggests she should spread her arms and legs wide, she is confused. He draws a large rectangle around her.

MALE TENANT 3 This is the average size of a bathtub you can squeeze in, let’s say. What else?

FEMALE TENANT 4 Food?

MALE TENANT 3 Hm, does food really need to have a space of its own?

MALE TENANT 5 You’re fucking kidding me, even pigs in the pigsty have that feed thing.

Male Tenant 3 draws another square next to his square.

He looks around so...

MALE TENANT 3 When you take a look at it, realistically, a man doesn’t need much.

He starts running around unmarked surfaces careful not to cross the line.

FEMALE TENANT 5 Be careful not to step on the line!

MALE TENANT 3 There is plenty of space, for anything you want.

Male Tenant 3 jumps into his square. For a while everyone is still. Silent. They don’t move, they don’t occupy space.

FEMALE TENANT 2 What about our things?
... and everyone turns to her.

MALE TENANT 3 What do you mean – things?

...so Female Tenant 2 looks at all the others.

FEMALE TENANT 2 If someone starts to convince me now that things are just a by-product of a materialist world view and capitalist economy, I already have a counterargument: – – – who here possesses only one pair of underpants?

No one raises their hand.

Female Tenant 2 proudly steps out of her square, takes the chalk from Male Tenant 3 and draws a 'closet' on the floor.

FEMALE TENANT 2 There. Let's not exaggerate, one closet can be deemed a 'necessity'. Fine, maybe another small one by its side. For the shoes. We're not animals, after all.

She draws another small square for the shoes.

MALE TENANT 1 If we go down that road, you need to have a place for your crew. At least an old couch. What the purpose of shitting and sleeping if no one is around? You can bury me straight away, that makes only two squares of worry.

Male Tenant 1 takes the chalk and draws a hang-out zone.

MALE TENANT 5 That was easy, but what about health? That must be on that Malovlych pyramid as well. You need to have a plant for oxygen. And you need to have some space to work out.

He takes the chalk to circle a plant and define a workout area.

FEMALE TENANT 4 Guys, this is pathetic, where are our souls? How many square metres does your spirit take? To accept the fact that you don't have a place to work, to be creative... Pardon my French, but fuck that shit.

Female Tenant 4 then takes the chalk and draws a nice big studio across half the stage.

MALE TENANT 3 But the excretion corner is over there. It's not really convenient -

Female Tenant 4 goes, erases it and squeezes it someplace else. There is no more room left.

FEMALE TENANT 2 Fine, say whatever you want, but I can't help myself... I'm really troubled by the fact that we don't have a washing machine here.

And she quickly takes the chalk and makes a square for the washing machine. She writes it out: W-A-S-H-E-R.

MALE TENANT 1 Wait, I want a fridge for the beer.

So he draws a fridge.

MALE TENANT 5 You know what, I'm long-legged and I like a good sleep.

Male Tenant 5 expands the sleeping area, but penetrates the studio.

FEMALE TENANT 4 You crossed the line, see? Sleeping where you work is not good. I read that somewhere.

MALE TENANT 1 I also think we need a bigger kitchen. I couldn't cook a thing here.

Everyone nods when Male Tenant 1 expands the food area.

FEMALE TENANT 2 Watch out, you just stepped inside the bathtub.

Male Tenant 1 moves a bit to the other side so...

MALE TENANT 5 No, not here, there's a yoga mat here.

He starts to move backwards and almost bumps into Male Tenant 3.

MALE TENANT 1 Sorry, man.

FEMALE TENANT 2 Look, there's a place there, just the size for...

All of a sudden, shouting, everyone except Male Tenant 3 yells their ideas: for a bookshelf, for a dog's house, for a PlayStation, for a garden, for mushroom growing, for meditation, then Female Tenant 2 spontaneously bursts out: FOR A BABY!

Everyone stands still.

FEMALE TENANT 2 Oops... I mean: For a cat! For a goldfish! For a hamster! FOR A BIRD CAGE!

The arguing continues.

At the same time Male Tenant 3 like a Gaul counting steps goes to the edge of the stage.

He looks to the audience. Counts them. He looks behind, then again at the stage... All until he says:

MALE TENANT 3 People, know what? It seems there's just too many of us.

The other stop. They approach him. Everybody is looking straight.

Light change.

7. HOW MANY TENANTS DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB?

A light bulb is out. The tenants play in the dark.

Male Tenant 1 jumps onto the couch to be closer to the burnt-out bulb. He touches it, burns himself and gets an idea.

MALE TENANT 1 When I was little, I told my Mom that when I grow up I won't be old because no one likes to talk to old people. Then my Mom told me I was naughty and shouldn't be saying such things, and I asked her why then she always tells grandpa, when she calls him, that he shouldn't be bothering his GP or the lady in the grocery store. She said that one day we will all be old and that I should go and watch a cartoon, and I thought about why Ash Ketchum from the Pokémon is always the same age and he can do this and I can't.

Male Tenant 5 presses the switch as if to make sure that it is only the burnt-out bulb.

ANTON Nothing.
IVA Maybe it's the fuse?

Male Tenant 3 turns on his lighter and waves it in the air as if he were at a rock concert.

MALE TENANT 3 When I was five, my grandma told me I was big enough to pray to God. She said I didn't have to say all the prayers – both Our Father, and Hail Mary, and Apostles' Creed, but that I should at least pray to my guardian angel before sleep because we all have our guardian

angels watching over us. Then once outside a church I saw a one-legged man with black scattered teeth, sitting on a piece of cardboard with an empty yoghurt cup which had inside less coins than my piggy bank. He kept repeating "God bless". I asked my grandmother – where is his angel?, and she gave him a coin and said he was watching and taking care of him. I no longer prayed to fall asleep faster. I didn't know what I'd be when I grow up, but I was mad at my grandmother who always said I'd be the president.

Male Tenant 1 opens the fridge, there is light inside.

ŽUTI Wait, if the fuse is out, then the fridge can't work, right?

Female Tenant 4 scours the apartment with her hone flashlight. She is looking for something.

BELLA Do we have any candles to light?
ŽUTI Well done. A good idea. A bit of atmosphere.
SINIŠA The power is not out. It's just a burnt-out light bulb.

Male Tenant 3 wants to remove the bulb.

IVA Careful! You can be electrocuted? (to Anton) Is the switch on the right side? It should be facing downwards.

Male Tenant 5 rolls his eyes, although no one sees that because there is so little light.

ANTON That's not important... – Is it?

Male Tenant 3 bravely removes the problematic light bulb.

Female Tenant 2 takes it and looks into it like a crystal ball.

FEMALE TENANT 2 When I was little, we lived in an apartment right across Tomislav's. He was five years older and didn't mind if we played with Barbie dolls, and for my birthday everyone always gave me Barbie dolls. The real ones. My Mom and Dad didn't like us to play at Tomislav's place because it 'smelled of damp' and they had their old grandmother living with them who thought everything was too loud. Tomislav once said he hoped his grandmother would die soon because he was angry that she was the only one who had her own room, and they didn't. Then Tomislav's Dad died. I tried to cry over Tomislav's Dad, but I couldn't. Tomislav didn't cry either so I was glad not to be the only person not crying. When I told Tomislav I liked him in five years' time, he said I was like a sister to him and then I cried all day. I used to imagine making clothes for Barbie dolls when I grow up.

ŽUTI What now?

SINIŠA We need another bulb.

ANTON (to Bella) Did you find something?

BELLA No, I was looking for candles. But we don't have that either.

Female Tenant 2 is making a grocery list in the dark.

IVA So, we need: ...a light bulb, candles, even better – scented candles, oat milk for the coffee, what else?

ŽUTI A screwdriver?

Male Tenant 5 rolls his eyes, but this is barely visible since there is no light.

ANTON We don't need a screwdriver to change the light bulb... – Right?

Female Tenant 4 places her cell phone underneath her chin, like she is telling a camping horror story.

FEMALE TENANT 4 I wasn't even that little when I ate mud in the garden. My Mom let me eat mud because she thought it was good for immunity. Later she said nothing because she wanted me to stop doing it 'at my own pace', although I was no longer building immunity. I didn't even like mud and I don't know what I was eating it after all. I was in hospital only once, but not because of the mud, but because I had my tonsils removed. There was a boy in the room with me who was 18 and I thought he was a giant. He was expecting heart surgery. They put me to sleep in a cot although I was already six and almost couldn't fit inside. The nurse yelled at me in the evening because I wouldn't sleep, and I closed my eyes firmly and fell asleep straight away. The giant told me not to worry, because after tonsil surgery you can go home soon. When Mom and Dad came to pick me up, I wouldn't go, even though they told me that without the tonsils I could eat tons of ice cream. The giant wasn't in the room. Then the nurse came and said I had to go home so I got out of the cot. I always wanted to be a pirate when I grew up.

Male Tenant 3 shoves his nose in the light bulb tube.

ŽUTI What, broken?

IVA Broken? No, I can't believe this, this is beyond human level where they placed us –

SINIŠA No, I'm just looking to see what kind of bulb we need.

BELLA Wait, there is more than one kind of bulb?

ŽUTI Well yes, don't you remember they passed that law that now we all have to

have those with UV radiation so that we could all get cancer?

BELLA That can't be true, you're kidding?

SINIŠA In fact, those bulbs are now getting off the market.

BELLA That means we're already radiated?!

Male Tenant 5 puts his jacket over his head to play a monster.

MALE TENANT 5 When I was little, everyone told me my name was Ante like my grandpa, even though I'm really Anton. I said that to everyone, but no one listened to me. My grandpa went fishing every morning, but I didn't like going with him because he had coarse and rugged hands and the smell of freshly caught fish made me sick in the stomach. Most of all I hated my grandpa munching at his breakfast and slurping coffee. When I once vomited into the sea, my grandpa said I wasn't a man, although I already knew I was because men had weenies, and girls had fannies. I was in a fight with Josip who lived just around the corner when he called me a pussy 'cause I didn't like playing football. I gave Josip a bloody nose, and my grandpa then slapped me; it hurt even more because of his coarse hands. No one ever called me a pussy again. I had a dream I'd be a shark when I grew up so I could eat all the fish from the sea and chew Josip's ball in pieces.

Male Tenant 5 starts chasing all other Tenants around the apartment who hide and scream like children.

As they run around and giggle:

MALE TENANT 3 When I'm big, no one will need angels because everyone will have all their legs and teeth and houses to sleep inside.

FEMALE TENANT 4 And my Dad said that on Tuesday morning they arrested the man who killed as many as five homeless people on the streets of New York and Washington.

MALE TENANT 5 And when I'm big, no one will ever say anything bad to anyone and everyone will be good to each other. And no one will fight. – Or go to war!

MALE TENANT 1 My Mom told me that as many as thirty people a month die from explosive remains in Syria.

FEMALE TENANT 4 When I'm big, everybody will have somebody to look after them and take care that they don't eat too much mud, and broccoli will taste like chocolate.

FEMALE TENANT 2 When I'm big... I'll be living in a world where no one is ever sad because everybody always gets what they want. – And little boys don't pull little girls by the hair.

MALE TENANT 5 My Dad says in Afghanistan they sell little children and body parts because they have nothing to eat. And that their ec-eclα-economly is collapsing.

MALE TENANT 1 Eh well, I, one day when I'm big, everybody will always be children and play all day. And no one will have wrinkles and be old because they'll be without a care in the world. And I couldn't care less what Mom says!

Female Tenant 2 trips and falls down.

The game is immediately over. Female Tenant 2 refrains from crying like a baby.

ANTON We can't live like this, this isn't normal. We have to do something about this light bulb.

9. WARRIOR 2

The couch is pushed deep and squeezed with all the things in the background.

A space is cleared in the front for Iva and Bella to do yoga. They are alone in the apartment. They practice with a video.

IVA (*in a downward-facing dog pose*): You have no idea how much I needed this.

BELLA (*in chaturanga*): You, like, do this every day? – Like, when you watch a video it looks like some kind of stretching, and in fact it's... a killer.

Bella's arms are shaking – she is somehow managing it, but barely.

IVA Normally yes, but since I'm here, I don't have much chance.... Or room. I no longer go to yoga studios so time can pass without doing anything. Which is bad. (*exhale then...*) – You don't know how happy I am that the others are gone.

BELLA Why?

IVA I'll be honest with you: I can no longer stand this male energy. Smelly socks on the couch, dirty glasses and sticky table from beer and coffee.

BELLA (*glances at the couch*): Sorry, those are my socks.

IVA A-aha. Sorry, don't get me wrong, I'm not a prude or anything. That was our grandmothers' thing. It's more that they – and I don't mean to nurture stereotypes, but – they simply don't understand things. For starters, let's just say that no one ever designed torture shoes for men.

BELLA Aha. Fine, but that's not what I meant.

IVA What did you mean?

BELLA I meant why don't you go practice in a studio? When there's no room here.

IVA (*incredibly calmly although she is moving*): Oh that. First of all, it's expensive.

BELLA Yes, right, yes, yes –

IVA (*continues*): But it's not even a matter of money... I started doing yoga on my own, with YouTube and I started because I needed a way to... channel my negative energy. Relax. Then I went to a studio because I meant – fine, if I want to take it a step up, I need professional guidance. I needed an external eye to see where I am compared to others.

BELLA (*panting*): And?

IVA Then it became relevant who can put their leg over their head or stand on a hair, and when I realised I was the only one who didn't match her legging with her mat, I gave up.

BELLA OK, why do you care?

IVA What do you mean?

BELLA Why do you give a shit, you wear mismatched leggings and mat and you have your own thing.

Bella stretches on her stomach like a stranded whale.

BELLA Sorry, this is too hard for me.

IVA (*planking*): I understand your point, but really, you don't know how stifling this can become – literally. All of a sudden they're all around you as if you're disabled all because you can't make a headstand. "Don't be afraid, I'll hold your legs."

Iva glances at her belly hanging in downward-facing dog.

IVA Look at how neglected myself, look at this.

BELLA Don't know what I'm looking at.

IVA (*in warrior pose*): – That's definitely a stand that makes things easier, what you call "do your own thing", but we don't live in a society where this is possible.

BELLA (*still dead on the floor*): Why not?

IVA I'll give you an example. Now, first of all, bear in mind when I'm telling you this that this is my third university study, and not elementary school where we compete whom the teacher will ask first.

BELLA Um, in elementary school I always used to hide from the teacher and pray not to be asked anything, but fine.

IVA Yes, well so did I, if I wasn't one hundred per cent sure I knew the answer. I'm just saying, I'm not naively mesmerised with the word 'seminar' and when someone calls you 'a smart colleague'.

BELLA I hear you, yeah... (*she has no idea what Iva is talking about*) Well yes, this is your what, third degree?

IVA Yes. And yes, people asked me "what are you going to do with a third college degree", but I afforded myself Fashion Design because I wanted to express my creative side, be the change in the industry contaminated with fast fashion, non-ecological practices and uniformity of femininity.

BELLA Yeah, that's fucking awesome... Wait, really, didn't you have enough of this?

Iva for a moment loses balance in the tree pose.

IVA What? What do you mean? Studying? I don't know. No. I like to be at the source of knowledge. In a structure.

BELLA An eternal student.

IVA Fine, well, simply... Why not if you can? Maybe this socially-subsidised education wasn't the best, but the price-quality ratio is not bad. So why not gather as many skills as you can for the *future*?

BELLA The future as in grown-up life, job, career, all that?

IVA Yeah, that...

Iva exhales, relaxes her head and arms to the floor. Bella barely gets up from the floor. She continues to follow Iva.

BELLA So, what, how are things at this Fashion Design?

IVA Fine. I'll be writing my final paper soon.

BELLA You happy?

IVA Don't know. Yes. And no. Didn't even blink and it's over --

Iva stretches:

-- That's what I'm trying to tell you. You're always on a scale of sorts. When I proposed my mentor a sustainable cotton collection, he subtly informed me that there is a Lara, almost a decade younger, who has already launched her brand of handmade clothes made of old ragged fishnets, delivered all over Europe, plus with a minimum carbon footprint, on which she's writing her thesis.

BELLA Oh, wow.

IVA Yeah, exactly, wow. To office consultations she brings her own quinoa and broad beans salads in beeswax wraps, while I live on a budget and stuff myself with cherry strudels because it's the only thing on non-animal origin in the bakery and slowly but consistently build this orbit around my belly.

Iva once again desperately glances at her saggy skin. She has to refrain herself from ripping it off.

BELLA OK then, why all the stress, is the strudel at least good?

Iva lies on her back. Blows out.

IVA Don't know, it's not bad.

Bella happily joins her, they rock like babies hugging their knees - yes, it's a yoga pose.

IVA All I wanted to say is, every original thought is not original, and once you think you got the hang of it, you realise someone already has it at home as a pet.

BELLA Sorry, I don't know what to say.

IVA Nothing. It doesn't matter.

Iva decided to try to make a headstand before the end. Before lying down and playing dead.

BELLA Wait, let me try it too... So, what, elbows on the floor and legs up?

Iva squeezes out a "mhm". She can't pull up her legs, but Bella can.

IVA I can't believe this... ..

BELLA What are you saying?

IVA Nothing, nothing. Look, my finger nail broke.

Bella is back to sitting position.

BELLA Ouch, I was just about to say they're so so great. Let me see, maybe we can save it?

IVA No.

Iva lies down to corpse pose. Bella lies down next to her. A strange silence until the end of the video. Namaste.

10. TOMORROW IS (NOT) ANOTHER DAY

*The owner's son said for the Daily that they "had bad experiences with homosexuals from Hungary, who had orgies at the hotel and left a big mess, after which they made a decision not to admit homosexuals anymore".

Male Tenant 5 is getting ready for a serious job interview - he irons his suit, puts it on, painstakingly ties his tie, puts a good aftershave on...

He turns on some winner music, there is a beat - bambambam.

Tenant chorus:

MALE TENANT 1 Tomorrow... I'll see how to start a company in Sweden.

FEMALE TENANT 2 Tomorrow... I'm starting to learn Chinese. This is the future.

FEMALE TENANT 4 Tomorrow... I'm looking at places in Berlin. It's the place to be.

MALE TENANT 3 Tomorrow... I'm calling a dealer.

S2 Tomorrow... I'm deleting my Tinder. One-night-stand is primitive distraction.

S1 Tomorrow... I'm writing a script for that brutal film I thought of when I was having a beer.

S4 Tomorrow... I'm making a portfolio and applying for a residency. I have time till midnight.

S3 Tomorrow... I'm closing my bank account. What can they do to me?

Male Tenant 5 is ready - he'll kick ass at this job interview and tomorrow is the first day of the rest of his life. He snorts another line of coke and goes out.

Fast forward.

Someone brings a pizza box. Someone forgets to water a plant. Someone brought an unnecessary piece of furniture on the stage.

Anton comes back, enraged.

Siniša is on the couch. He is composing a new song on his ukulele. Behind the couch, on the floor, Žuti is taking a nap – we'll realise that only later.

Anton walks in, almost trips over Žuti (although no one knows it's Žuti yet). He swears. He arrives to the table on the left. Takes a pizza box and throws it somewhere. Takes another one and tries to break it over his knee. The cardboard doesn't break.

He throws himself on the couch next to Siniša. Siniša is done composing and takes a joint out of his ukulele bag.

He lights a smoke.

He looks at Anton. Offers him a smoke. Anton inhales. They smoke weed.

ANTON This is strong.

SINIŠA Mhm.

Silence for a while.

ANTON (inhales): This motherfucking world.

SINIŠA Yup.

Anton unties his tie.

ANTON Fuck them all –

SINIŠA Yup.

ANTON Is it my fault you couldn't get out of the closet 30 years ago –

SINIŠA Fuck.

ANTON Plus you have kids in the meantime. What, to have someone to embarrass in 20 years' time when you flip out and you come to realise you can't get it up looking at your wife's tits? –

SINIŠA Tits are not for everyone.

ANTON Then what, then I lose a job, the best possible fucking chance, me!, for pouring drinks, for pocket money, to young idiots he paid for sex?

SINIŠA Jesus, such a pile of corporate shit.

ANTON I wish you could see his eyes open wide when I entered the room. He remembers alright... He wanted to get in my pants too, but I told him I'm not into daddies. How was I supposed to know that the guy works as a court interpreter to the hottest lawyers in town. I wish I knew, I'd have that brandy alright.

SINIŠA Whatcha gonna do, still no time travel.

ANTON How could I not put two and two together. I'M SUCH AN IDIOT!

Žuti wakes up.

ŽUTI Man, what's fuss?

SINIŠA The court interpreter is a closeted gay and Anton didn't get internship.

ŽUTI I don't get it?

ANTON Come on, turn your brains on.

Žuti is looking at Anton for a while, trying to understand.

ŽUTI I still don't get it.

Žuti continues to solve the crossword puzzle in his head while getting into focus after his afternoon nap.

ANTON I was the best candidate. My CV is impeccable, I have more references and recommendations than others can imagine.

SINIŠA I know.

ANTON You don't know a thing. If you're so smart, do you know who got the job then?

SINIŠA No.

ANTON The main judge's nephew.

SINIŠA Oh well, then you didn't really stand a chance.

ANTON If I had given him what he had wanted back then, there's no blood thicker than –

SINIŠA Want the last smoke?

Anton inhales the last smoke and coughs.

SINIŠA Take it easy, it's just work. It's like getting mad at playing 'Ludo'.

ANTON You sound like my mother.

SINIŠA I don't know what your Mom's like, but this is pure system oppression. You've been brainwashed to think you need to have a 'big job'. And the only way to 'feel good' about yourself is to toil for the rotten system.

ANTON And, please, what do you suggest? I should lounge until I starve to death? At the end of each month we had to scour our piggy banks for bread. Our bank accounts were always in red. I wouldn't dream of it.

SINIŠA Being in red definitely not. You're again unnecessarily giving money to the magnates.

Siniša rolls another joint.

ŽUTI Hey man, would you bring me another Royal Cheese menu after your shift?

ANTON So working for McDonalds is fine? That's not corporate shit?

SINIŠA McDonalds is better than Big Pharma.

Anton all of a sudden bursts into laughter – the joint got to his head.

ANTON You're crazy. Besides, what would BigPharma hire you for, to make sandwiches in the canteen?

ŽUTI (*looks at Siniša*): Yes, sandwiches. They'd allow Siniša to mix all kinds of stuff.

Anton has several question marks above his head.

SINIŠA (*ignores Žuti*): I don't see a problem, everything's clear about McDonalds. You know you'll work for a minimum wage and people are at least aware that they're buying shit. No one claims McDonalds is healthy, you can say the same about meds, and we know what they promise.

ANTON I'm not one of those idiots who think headache is cured by meditation, not Aspirin.

SINIŠA Okay.

ANTON And I'd defend a pharmaceutical giant in court, wouldn't even scratch my head if it was good for me.

SINIŠA Why?

ANTON What do you mean why? Because with their money I could buy a two-bedroom apartment in cash and go on vacation in the Bahamas.

SINIŠA What do you need all that for? That's just material nonsense.

ANTON So it's better I live here, right?

ŽUTI What's wrong with here?

Žuti also wants a smoke, but no one perceives him.

SINIŠA I have to go to work.

Siniša puts it out. He goes out.

ANTON Maybe McDonalds has a corporate position, ha? Maybe you could send a job application. They're a foreign company, they like to employ all kinds of people, maybe they wouldn't mind.

ŽUTI (*realises only now*): Man! You're a fa... gay!

Anton bursts into laughter.

12. RED ALERT

Sounds of ambulance and the police. Something is going on in the street, but the stage-apartment doesn't have a window.

Bella, Žuti and Siniša are in the apartment.

ŽUTI They're not just passing by. It's somewhere close.

BELLA What happened?

SINIŠA Some kind of accident. (*and he shrugs*)

BELLA I'll Google it.

They wait for Bella to do a Google search.

BELLA It says nothing.

ŽUTI Man, I think they're like here. A block away.

Žuti is looking for a way to see through the walls – without success.

BELLA Wanna go out? See what happened?

No one moves.

SINIŠA Probably a car accident.

ŽUTI Right! The other day, I was walking from Lijevi after the beer, wasn't even that late, and I was crossing the street and this guy – wroom – like this (*indicates the closeness*), we came this close, he almost ran over me. Man, I saw my entire life in a flash.

BELLA Horror. What did you do?

ŽUTI Nothing, came here and took a nap.

Another emergency service.

SINIŠA It's the fourth. Weee-weee. Firefighters.

Siniša plays some tones on his ukulele.

BELLA You think it's a fire?

SINIŠA Does it really matter? Like we could do anything about it.

Anton enters.

ANTON Oh the chaos, guys.

BELLA What's going on?

ANTON Don't know, there are some cars, looks like a car crash. It's so crowded, people came flying like seagulls, I just wanted to get away from the mass...

BELLA Was it something like really terrible or just a little fender bender?

ANTON I can't tell, the traffic is jammed, can't see a thing, and I wouldn't dream of going into this rabble and press my nose against the window. I have plenty of my own stuff to worry about.

ŽUTI (*to Bella*): Check it out on the internet now, maybe someone sent them a pic for 500 kuna.

Bella finds nothing.

Iva enters. She gives everyone a wave and stays silent. All eyes on her.

IVA What?

BELLA Didn't you see what's going on outside?

IVA Oh that. I passed down the street, I saw the ambulance take someone. It was a pile-up.

BELLA Was the person conscious or?

IVA I really don't know. I think I saw their eyes open. – And maybe not. I didn't want to look at it too much, I don't have the stomach for it.

ŽUTI That means nothing – if they can look or not. My friend had a concussion, we walked him to the hospital on foot and at the end of the day he had to have an urgent surgery. They had to open his skull.

BELLA Man, this gives me the creeps.

IVA Wait, you had a car accident?

ŽUTI No, we got drunk and my friend fell over a park bench. He bet he could jump over it. He lost big time.

IVA But he's fine now, right?

ŽUTI He is, he just can't look at the light a long time, Christmas lights, that sort of stuff.

Bella is the only one to open her eyes wide.

Siniša plays a few chord arrhythmically on his ukulele.

Still panic sounds from the street, but no one pays any attention to it – Anton lit a cigarette. Žuti is laughing at the internet, and Iva accidentally got caught in a cobweb and is not trying to shake it off.

Bella is standing in the middle of the room. She is thinking about going outside to see, maybe even to help?, takes her jacket, opens the door and ... stays by the door.

She turns around on her heel and slams the door.

She sits next to Siniša who is casually 'playing'.

All of a sudden...

ANTON Guys, have you seen this email from the Ministry?

Everyone is checking their phones. They got the mail.

In accordance with Art. 30 of the Law on Socially Subsidised Youth Independence, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of _____ made the following decision:

NOTICE
on the second cycle of state incentives for subsidised youth housing

We would like to inform all young people of the Republic of _____ and current beneficiaries of subsidised housing measures that the following tender has been approved in the Parliament to encourage the independence of young people in terms of housing.

On this occasion, we inform all current and future beneficiaries of the measures that, with the aim of common good and the possibility of approving more requests, it is possible to restructure the current division of state housing and additional system load so that all our young people have the opportunity to live independently.

Beneficiaries who have reached the age of 33 from the first to the opening of

the second tender, can send a special request to the Ministry proving the continuing inability to independently provide housing in order to exceptionally extend their stay in subsidized housing for 3 months.

Everybody is stunned.

Žuti looks at his watch. He's not feeling alright. He goes to the fridge. Drinks an entire beer in one take.

BELLA Ant, can they do this?

ANTON I don't know, I can't find this Law online.

IVA What does this mean, they can restructure us out in the street?

ANTON No, we're protected unless...

IVA You don't turn 33 tomorrow, that part I understand.

Žuti goes for another beer. No more left. He starts pacing around the apartment madly, keeping quiet.

BELLA But they can relocate us to other places, right?

ANTON In theory... Yes. But it doesn't seem likely –

IVA Perfect, great –

SINIŠA even better, we could get –

ANTON most probably, a new tenant.

Curtain?

13. CUTTING THE EXCESS

Žuti is sleeping on the couch. The only one in the apartment / on the stage.

Iva and Anton are watching him snore blissfully.

IVA I think we overcomplicated the matter. We just need to grab him – you by the arms, me by the legs, gently take him out the door and put him down, he won't even know it. And when he wakes up, he'll see he's in the street, shrug and face the music.

ANTON Oh cut it out. You don't always have to be do decent and rational. We shouldn't underestimate the enemy here. It's like having cockroaches in the apartment, you won't solve anything if you just hit them with a slipper, you need to put poison in every pore they can crawl out of, to avoid...
IVA Fine, but what are we going to tell others?

ANTON Very simple: The next one who eats the last slice of pizza without permission... signed his own death sentence.

Iva is uncomfortable. She ate the last slice of pizza last week.

IVA But what are we going to tell his parents? What if his Mom comes to see if he's alive, what he's got, and we just open the door and then... what? Shit, man, it makes me sick juts thinking about this. Shit, great, now I'm also swearing.

ANTON Then next time she should give birth to someone who's not a stupid piece of shit who can't even brush the toilet after taking a dump.

IVA My stomach churns –

ANTON You're damn right! Me too when I remember how it smells after this guy taking a dump after a night of cheap wine. And

then he doesn't even clean up afterwards, you wouldn't feel sick after this piece of shit –

Anton screams the last words into Žuti's ear. Žuti just snores and munches, he feels really fine.

Siniša joins in. All this while he was listening to music in the corner so he wasn't particularly important for the scene. Now he is going to the bathroom and is about to pass between Iva and Žuti.

A moment of silence. Toilet flushing. Siniša returns and put his headphones back on.

Iva and Anton continue to whisper just in case.

ANTON Shit... I though you at least had some balls.

IVA What's your point?

ANTON Very simple. If others can't count, I though at least you, all so smart and with ten degrees under your belt, could.

IVA What, you're scared I don't know $2 + 2 = 4$?

ANTON No, I'm scared you don't understand that if you have 2 apples and want to be fair, you can only divide them into 4 equal parts. And if you have the 5th mouth to feed, then everyone's hungry and the worst of all – you won't be able to divide it right. All the parts will be unequal.

Žuti farts. Loudly. It stinks. It stinks so bad that they need to close their noses. Yes, Iva and Anton continue to talk with their noses closed.

IVA OK, you got me, I'm in.

ANTON Where's the pillow?

Unless we realised by now, now we're certain that Iva was holding a pillow behind her back all along.

ANTON I'll hold him still, you just press the pillow over his nose.

IVA Why should I do all the dirty work?

ANTON Really? You wanna stand by his feet?

He mimics to make it clear to us how Žuti's feet smell.

IVA Fine, you're right, yes, let's go –

Suddenly...

SINIŠA Did you know the level of cortisol in wolves raises when a pack member dies? It's literally the only situation when they're willing to take even a loner wolf into their company.

Iva freezes, the pillow is still behind her back.

ANTON What are you talking?

SINIŠA I'm listening to a podcast on behaviour of a pack. Clearly, packs exist to keep control over a territory, but I like this romantic idea about crying wolves. Predators mourning a friend. Auuuuuuu!

Siniša cries like a wolf. For a moment it seems like the howling will wake Žuti up. But then Siniša stops.

ANTON He's next.

IVA Wait, you didn't find this poetic?

ANTON What? As far as I heard, everything revolves around territory. You take it and then you defend it. Well, this morning I found this guy casually slurping coffee from my thermos flask, like it was his and it wasn't... He thinks he can piss on my

turf and I won't smell him, but he doesn't have a clue -

Yes, Anton would like to strangle him with his bare hands.

IVA What if we just called the police?

ANTON "Hello, police, yes, we have a small place and this guy's shit, can you come urgently?"

IVA Can we call his Mom?

ANTON I'm not sure. If only she'd raised him, he wouldn't have been such a rotten piece of shit.

Iva becomes nervous. She is looking at Žuti, she knows he is a piece of shit, but she doesn't know what to do with it.

IVA Shit, there, a piece of shit -

ANTON Yeah, that's right, he's a piece of shit. Come on. Knock yourself out. Just remember what he was telling you the other day, right here on this couch -

An instant eruption in Iva.

IVA Fuck you, you stupid piece of shit! You can't bring a girl down to get her. That's not a seduction technique, that's an idiot technique! AAAAAA!

Iva squishes Žuti with a pillow. Anton is cheering. Siniša pays no attention - maybe he can't hear them, maybe he just doesn't care.

Iva puts her heart and soul into this task, but nothing seems to happen: Žuti is still blissfully sleeping when she removes the pillow off his face.

IVA ...Is he dead?

Anton checks his breathing.

ANTON He's breathing... What did I tell you? A cockroach.

IVA Perhaps this pillow thing doesn't work?

Bella is here too. She appears behind Iva's back.

BELLA Hey guys, what are you doing?

Iva screams, frightened.

BELLA Sooooo-rryyyy, why so jumpy?

ANTON Where did you come from?

BELLA I fell asleep in the bathtub. I only now woke up.

IVA Didn't Siniša just a second ago...?

BELLA Yeah, yeah... gets close to Iva... and I took a peek. It's this big... she points to enviable centimetres... You had a point alright.

Iva nudges Bella to be quiet.

BELLA I'm starving, is there any pizza left?

ANTON NO, THERE'S FUCKING NOTHING LEFT BECAUSE THIS DRUNK PIECE OF SHIT ALWAYS EMPTIES THE FRIDGE WHEN HE'S HUNGOVER AND NEVER BUYS A SINGLE DAMN THING!

Anton jumps onto the couch and tries to smother Žuti with a pillow.

Finally, Žuti wakes up and fight. Everybody is watching what's going on. In fact, Siniša still has his headphones on, so it's not clear if he is paying any attention.

ŽUTI Man, what's gotten into you?

Anton cools off immediately. He gets off the couch like a gentleman and pulls himself together.

ANTON No, you know what? I know better than this. Even Štefa from the job service typing her counselling report with one finger knows that. You clear?!

He walks to the door elegantly. He slowly pushes the doorknob, wants to open the door, but shit - the door is jammed.

He tries to calmly shake it, once, twice, but the third time he pushes it with his leg, the fourth he is banging. The door doesn't open.

BELLA Hey, it's fine, we'll order another pizza.

A moment of silence then...

IVA Can we order a veggie?

**Researchers estimate that according to Earth's current population and previous pandemics we can expect 3.3 million deaths from zoonoses every year in the future.*

14. SATURDAY AFTERNOON: TOO LATE FOR COFFEE, TOO EARLY FOR BEER

Siniša walks into the apartment, throws himself headlong onto the couch.

All the other tenants are occupied by their screens. No one even noticed Siniša came back from his shift.

This is evident since he is still wearing his McDonalds uniform on.

Anton starts to shake his laptop and suddenly:

ANTON Go... yourself, you old piece of... laptop. Can't die on me now. Duh!

IVA Could you keep it down? Other people are trying to work here too.

ANTON I can't! I can't because this piece of junk deleted my entire cover letter.

ŽUTI Why the fuss, old man? Your second version can only be better than your first one.

ANTON "Why the fuss?" Of course, there is no fuss if you're sitting on your ass all day. Not everyone had the privilege of doing nothing, you know.

ŽUTI Eh, while I was sitting on my ass, my BitCoin did the work for me and grew 3.5%.

Žuti shows him his screen in green.

ANTON Congrats, you earned exactly...

Suddenly:

BELLA Shhhh!

ANTON What's the matter with you?

BELLA Can't you see? Siniša is asleep. Could you keep your voice down?

Iva in the meantime put her headphones on and is walking around the place reading from her laptop:

IVA What is often missing in the ecological critique of fast fashion is the social imbalance of harmful environmental impacts which is a constituent part of the fast fashion production chain...

Bella sneaks on her carefully behind her back and taps her on the shoulder. Iva jumps for fear like a character from Tom & Jerry.

Non-verbally they communicate they have to be 'vevy vevy quiet' because Siniša is asleep.

The mood around the place changes.

The place becomes Siniša's nightmare, and the tenants characters from his repressed traumas.

Only Siniša is Siniša in his dream.

ŽUTI You call this ice-cream, man?

SINIŠA Pardon?

Žuti shoves a plastic cup under Siniša's nose.

ŽUTI What? You call this ice-cream? All melted down.

SINIŠA It's normal, towards the end it mel -

ŽUTI You're calling me a liar? Look, old man, I paid for ice-cream, I want ice-cream, not - like - milk. Do I look stupid to you?

SINIŠA No, Sir.

ŽUTI Look, maybe I didn't go to college, but I'm smart, man. Dude, this is not ice-cream, this is spit.

SINIŠA I can only give you from the same machine as before -

ŽUTI The fuck are you waiting? You pay and then some school dropouts wanna swindle you.

Žuti shoves the cup in his plexus. Siniša is breathless.

Next scene.

BELLA Wait, this is not your student job?

SINIŠA No.

BELLA You're on a break to make a little money?

SINIŠA No.

BELLA Looking for another job?

SINIŠA No.

BELLA I don't get it. You didn't go to college?

SINIŠA I did.

BELLA And you work here?

SINIŠA Yes.

BELLA Geez, man, I though these are just clickbait stories... So sorry. That's why I took up pharmacy. To make sure I have a job once I graduate.

Next scene. With a lot of screaming children:

IVA Lovro, what do you want? - OK, one Fanta. One vanilla shake. That's with hamburgers.

SINIŠA That's not on the menu.

IVA The gentleman says no shake. You can't have a Coke and a shake. Dora, stop acting out in public. - And there's no way you can charge her that instead of Coke?

SINIŠA No.

IVA There, did you hear this, Dora? Dora! You can't call the gentleman stupid. Apologise right now.

SINIŠA It's okay.

IVA Okay, okay... So, for Luka one hamburger, no pickles. Lovro, since when don't you like pickles? OK, two burgers, no pickles. Are you writing this down?

SINIŠA I can remember, thank you.

IVA Oh, I forgot to ask. - Kids, wait, soon you'll get everything. Take it easy! - Did you put away the cake?

SINIŠA The cake?

IVA Yes, we said we don't want your cake, my husband will bring ours.

SINIŠA But, madam, no... We can't -

IVA Jesus Christ, you didn't put away the cake!

SINIŠA But the cake's included in your pri...

IVA There's no need to explain to me what I'm paying for. I want my kid to have his own Spiderman cake, and now you're telling me this isn't happening. Do you know the tears we'll see, huh? Will you be the one to put out the fire, huh? - Dora, please, I already told you, the gentleman won't

give you shake. Yeah, the gentleman is a bit stupid. We won't be coming here again. Oh please, stop whining, of course you'll go to McDonalds again. Yes, but not here with the evil gentleman.

Cut.

Anton approaches Siniša who is scrubbing the floor around the urinal, with a name tag and a shift manager title.

ANTON Are you going to lock then? Don't forget the disabled restroom. Make sure you flush and check the bowl, you know they always clog it with condoms.

SINIŠA No problem.

ANTON Thank you, Siniša.

...he's about to leave, but then he stops, turns and smiles.

ANTON O-kay, I should probably wait for the branch manager tomorrow to tell you this, but I'm overexcited.

SINIŠA What's the matter?

ANTON I have great news.

SINIŠA Yes?

ANTON The branch manager and I agreed that you're the only employee we can always rely on and -

SINIŠA And?

ANTON Since we found out you have a university degree, it was clear we simply had to promote you. Congratulations, Siniša, you became the first deputy shift manager!

SINIŠA No.

ANTON What do you mean - no?

SINIŠA I'm declining your offer. No.

ANTON Siniša, I'm sorry, but I have to insist, a responsible and educated person like you can't...

SINIŠA No. No. No, thank you.

ANTON Siniša, I beg you to reconsider -

SINIŠA Leave me alone! NO! What's not clear? I don't want to! NO!

Siniša hits the floor with the wet mop. Drops of dirty water splash.

Static.

Iva and Žuti are figures from the Parliament. Two-dimensional. In a TV set.

ŽUTI According to our findings, over 2000 opted for our package of measures -

IVA And how do you explain the fact that the residential unit pool is growing, but the stats still show overcrowded homes on the rise?

ŽUTI Please, madam MP, what exactly did your party do for the young people in this country?

IVA You didn't allow me to finish, sir. Your government is letting this bubble inflate until it bursts... Real estate prices are growing unfounded, and you squeeze people to live like sardines and speak about some kind of benefits -

Blackout.

Siniša's Mom and Dad appear from the abyss in a cloud of smoke.

MOM I don't know what exactly do you want, son.

DAD Please, stop embarrassing us and pull yourself together.

MOM Or we'll have to -

DAD we'll have to insist -

MOM That you give up on your inheritance.

The final episode before Siniša wakes up sweaty and delirious. Iva is over him.

IVA Siniša. Hey, Siniša! Are you OK?

Siniša says nothing. Everybody is looking at him.

17. THE PARTY OR EVERYTHING'S A F***ING MESS

**It started at 8pm, with shooting on Seitstettengasse. Several armed terrorists performed the attack. The attacks occurred on six locations. One person died, several are injured, including one police officer. One attacker was killed by the police.*

Bella is alone. She arranged a circle of expensive liquor bottles around her, like for an exorcist seance. Alcohol attracts other tenants like moths to a flame.

Bella spins a bottle, and if the cork doesn't face her, she arranges it to face her. The first part of the evening began, drowning sorrow in alcohol.

BELLA Truth or dare, Bella? / Truth. Only truth to you. / There, I'm a fucking mess. I don't have a particular reason why I feel like that. That's the biggest mess of all. When you have nothing to suffer for, and you feel like suffering and you suffer... The only thing you know is to suffer.

Glances at Bella, more or less interested.

ANTON The truth is that I didn't fall asleep without alcohol or a pill since I was 16.

IVA No, the truth is that I don't know how to feel happiness or pleasure.

ŽUTI No, watch this, the truth is that I was once so depressed 'cause my girlfriend dumped me that I needed a stomach pump.

BELLA The truth is, guys, that I sometimes can't breathe out of panic that tomorrow is a new day.

SINIŠA The truth is that I don't have the energy to walk out of this door.

ANTON That's nothing, the worst thing is getting out of here, getting on a bus and feeling anxiety over what happened last night.

BELLA Even worse is rolling on the bed, sweaty and fantasising about getting a call and finding out something weird like – someone you love is now braindead and you'll finally have a good reason to whine.

IVA No, even worse is to have no emotional capability for any kind of intense sensation because you're dead inside.

ŽUTI The worst is when everyone is a mess, and you have no idea what they're talking about because you really don't let such things get to you. – People, we need more alcohol.

**XXX adds something to their story: This is a biosafe, pharmaceutically guided agenda that will enslave humanity and launch us all into a dystopian nightmare where apocalyptic forces of ignorance and greed will guide our lives and destroy our children.*

The second half of the evening. When you're the drunkest and the most talkative.

In the meantime the bottles are almost empty and the contestants are ready for...

ŽUTI Good evening and welcome to tonight's edition of JEO-PAR-DY!

Studio applause?

ŽUTI With us tonight we have not three but four amazing contestants – Iva, Siniša, Anton and Bella. A round of applause for them.

They applaud themselves.

ŽUTI Let's give a brief introduction of our daring candidates.

A close-up of Iva, then onwards. Iva waves.

ŽUTI With us in the studio tonight is Iva, a young intellectual with two degrees under the belt and the third on the way. She loves whatever smart women love, so Iva spends her time watching European films and studying vegan cookbooks. Iva's favourite hobby is second-hand bargain hunting, and she relaxes with cat videos hoping she'll find the time to "be a Mom to a furball girl!". Next to Iva is Siniša. Although quiet, Siniša is a favourite among his friends who appreciate his musical abilities (or better yet, inabilities). *(forced)* Hahaha. Siniša currently works for the fast-food industry and makes songs for YouTube, but all this can change tomorrow because Siniša is a *magna cum laude* graduate in molecular biology. Isn't that right, Siniša?

Everyone turns to Siniša in disbelief. No one had a clue. Iva is trying to cover her sweaty forehead, then says:

IVA Wow, congrats.

SINIŠA On what? I didn't graduate now.

ANTON What are you waiting for, dude?

Anton pats him hard on the back, but Siniša doesn't react.

BELLA *(more the herself):* I really thought he was a bit of a lowlife, like Žuti, but would you look at this.

Siniša ignores everything and Žuti soon takes over the situation.

ŽUTI We have with us Anton as well, an ambitious graduate law student, every mother would love to have him as a son-in-law, but she can't.

Anton COUGHS.

ŽUTI A former Student Body president, a showstopper, like fruitful discussions and indoor plants. One day he'd like to have his own garden and a robot to clean his house. And last but not least tonight's contestant, the youngest among us, Bella! Bella graduated from the School of Applied Arts and since her father gave her her first camera at the age of 13, she does photography and cinematography. Bella's passion is Asian cuisine, although she can't cook herself, her online and offline friends and, of course, video games. A round of applause for our contestants!

They applaud themselves.

ŽUTI Let's present tonight's categories! Especially for you, GLOBAL DISASTERS, POWDER KEG, APOCALYPSE NOW, LOCAL TRAGEDIES and GENERAL CHAOS. Iva, which category do you choose?

Iva thinks.

IVA I'm choosing... POW DER KEG!

ŽUTI For 300 – Iva, the Third World War breaks out thanks to one event.

The clock is ticking. All the time.

IVA What is Israeli-Iranian War and oil standstill on the global market?

ŽUTI Correct! Siniša, your category?

SINIŠA General chaos, for 200.

ŽUTI World famine.

SINIŠA What is temperature growth and lack of water supplies?

ŽUTI Correct, Siniša. But we'd also accept simply - climate change.

IVA Just a sec, but climate change cannot be the answer to everything.

ŽUTI Maybe it can, maybe it can't. Anton, you're next.

ANTON Local tragedies, for 200.

ŽUTI Corruption which devoured and entire economic powerhouse and drowned it in garbage?

ANTON What is India?

ŽUTI Well done, bravo Anton. Bella, you ready?

BELLA Mhm. Apocalypse now, for 300.

ŽUTI The world ceases to exist in half a year's time, and the cause doesn't come from outer space?

BELLA What is a deadly virus and the global market?

ŽUTI Studio and control room, do we accept this? Well done, Bella, this is correct.

IVA How about Global disasters?

ŽUTI Disastrous protests all over the world.

IVA What is artificial intelligence replacing labour?

ŽUTI That's right. Siniša?

SINIŠA Apocalypse now.

ŽUTI People lose control over technology they used to 'improve the world'?

SINIŠA What is bioengineering?

ŽUTI Seems that tonight we're perfect.

ANTON And how could we not be when the bell tolls all the time.

Silence. For as long as it can last.

**The famous Russian molecular biologist Alexander Sasha Kagansky was found dead in St Petersburg, says M1. Kagansky (45), closely connected with the University of Edinburgh and famous for his efforts in the fight against cancer, on Saturday fell of the 14th floor of a residential building, claim British and Russian media. He was in his underwear and had a stab wound on his body.*

Third part of the evening - when we all love each other, no matter what.

Someone broke the plant pot, soil is scattered on the floor. One bottle is rolling on the floor and no one picks it up. Bella, Anton and Žuti lie like sardines, one next to the other and stare at the ceiling as if they're looking at stars. At the other end, a metre or two away, Iva managed to be alone with Siniša who is not letting the ukulele.

BELLA The feeling of helplessness, I think it never ends.

ANTON People think that if you put a suit on, you like become something. Which is good. Like you're Superman, your costume's on and everything is great.

ŽUTI OK people, don't worry, we're young.

ANTON You're right. We should go to that after party. Where's my phone?

BELLA Well yeah, what are the chances that the end of the world will come?

ANTON Big, but who cares.

IVA (to Siniša's ear while he's poking at the ukulele): You know, I never felt the need to limit myself. Male, female, monogamy, institutions, these are all useless barriers. Right?

BELLA This, this makes life worth living. These great moments when you stare at the ceiling and you realise you're insignificant and you couldn't care less. Art, that's

the only thing that makes sense. - GOD NO!

ŽUTI What? What happened?

BELLA Shit, I forgot the flash batteries again. And I really wanted to snap a picture of you under the stars. While we're here. Now.

ŽUTI Guys, people are the best thing in the world.

ANTON Yeah, totally, we wouldn't have a single thing if it weren't for mankind.

BELLA I mean, we all try, like, separate paper and plastic waste, take care of life.

ŽUTI Come one, it's not that bad, look how technologically advanced we are, we'll manage.

IVA (still whispering): I have a confession to make, but you can't tell others, okay? I like them all more or less, but I have a feeling you and I really understand each other. We're intellectually on the same level.

BELLA I got it, I don't feel like going anywhere. I'm really OK in this corner of the universe.

ANTON Where would you even go?

BELLA I don't know, everybody's going somewhere.

ŽUTI You guys are fucking awesome to me. A good crew and what more do you need? Besides beer.

BELLA I'm just scared -

ANTON I know what you're gonna say.

BELLA Come on, what?

ANTON That someone will wreck this for us.

IVA (a bit closer to Siniša who keeps ignoring her): I'm not into superficial stuff like looks or stupid stuff like money. I'm really turned on by someone's intellectual capabilities. That turns me on right away.

ŽUTI No one can wreck anything for you unless you allow them to. Willpower, that's the only thing that matters.

ANTON Mhm, and when the state sends you an official letter, and the bank blocks your account, then you also use willpower, right?

BELLA I'm chronically scared of new stuff.

ANTON I browsed through this law and there is no limit. They can do what they please.

ŽUTI (*doesn't know if he is certain or not*): Relax, old man, no one is going to be checking on this.

ANTON Wanna bet, this is almost their election campaign.

BELLA I checked on the news just now, by accident, and watch this – an explosion in Beirut.

They watch the video, shocked. At least for a second.

IVA If you're worried that we're here, in the same apartment, this doesn't need to limit you. I'm not one of those typical girls who'd want to tie you down because of one night together. Fine, maybe we click, but we don't need to worry about that, tonight we could just love each other a bit.

ANTON Does it say anything about the open call?

BELLA No.

ŽUTI (*comforting himself*): They're not even gonna publish it, who's going to apply in the summer? We all know what we do in the summer. Booze and chicks.

BELLA Guys, I'm scared.

ŽUTI Nothing to be scared of, we're here.

Žuti would love to get to Bella, but Anton is in his way.

ANTON That's all I need, for someone to swoop in and wreck it all. Just when I stopped caring about Žuti's feet. They can take me out of here over my dead body.

BELLA We'll stick together.

ŽUTI I'm telling you, you worry too much –

BELLA Look, if it happens, just so you know, I really love you.

IVA (*Siniša finally turns to her, but he's almost not blinking*): You know, I find it sooo sexy that you're so... private. Makes me feel so safe when I'm around you. To that end, I too can be really discreet. Take this.

Iva discreetly puts her panties in Siniša's lap.

IVA I have everything planned. I'll go to the bathroom again, we'll tell everyone I have a stomach-ache and you'll go in there with me to give me a hand... Then I'll do whatever you want. Just so you know, the back door's an option too.

Iva winks at Siniša. She gently bites his ear. He looks at her. She gets up and goes to the bathroom.

SINIŠA Iva, I think you forgot something. You'll need it after you relieve yourself.

He wants to give her the panties back, but Iva did not hear any of it. Siniša continues to play the ukulele.

BELLA No, really, I'm having such a fucking awesome time with you guys. I could have gone three times by now, but somehow here I feel... I don't know, safe.

ANTON Where the hell? Where the hell could we possibly go even if we wanted to?

ŽUTI True, dude, we're like really at home here. Just the number of dirty underwear changes, which is also kind of routine.

ANTON Apart from the craziness when you open the door, that's always surprising.

While they're star-gazing, Siniša composed a song. He's ready for recording, he turns his phone camera on, angry Iva just stormed behind him.

Iva spent all this time in the bathroom alone. She got out crying and angry, but no one noticed that.

Iva packs her suitcase while the others slowly close their eyes.

18. BREAKFAST, THE MOST IMPORTANT MEAL IN A DAY

**Squeezing through the beginning of the century, with an avocado toast in their hands, the millennials have demonstrated that the grieving theories are true. During the recession, half of the graduates wasn't able to find work, the formal unemployment rate among the millennials was 20 to 30 per cent. High unemployment rate, low wages and stagnation in profit followed them throughout the decade. The big Pew study established that millennials with a degree and a full-time job earned until 2018 as much as the Generation X earned in 2001. But millennials without university degree and education were poorer than their Generation X counterparts or Baby Boomers.*

Iva's stuff is currently no longer in the apartment – she travelled to Italy on an Erasmus exchange. The apartment nevertheless seems equally claustrophobic, although there is a person missing.

The apartment is muddy because no one cleaned up the scattered soil. The laundry basket is full.

Žuti is asleep behind the couch – we can't see or know that yet.

Siniša is gone, he is probably working his shift. Bella is sitting in a one-piece,

fluffy pyjama on the couch. She is eating ice-cream out of a box. She is surrounded by piles of 'food'.

Anton is coming out of the bathroom. He's wearing a pyjama to. He sits on the couch next to Bella. Together they literally gorge on food.

ANTON What day is it today?

BELLA No idea, Tuesday?

ANTON Shit, I was supposed to have that job interview today.

BELLA When is it?

ANTON Quarter past three.

BELLA It's one now, you can still make it.

ANTON I don't feel like it.

Anton takes out a small bag with white powder out of his pants. He sprinkles it over a spoonful of Nutella, licks it and gives some to Bella.

BELLA I really think you should go.

ANTON I'll write to Štefa from the employment service that I couldn't go today for health reasons. No need to panic.

BELLA Not that. You should go to get a job.

ANTON Oh, right? Like every other I got?

BELLA Okay, but you never know.

ANTON But I do know. Been camping at the employment service ever since I moved to this apartment and where did it take me?

BELLA I don't get it, your resume is...

ANTON Yeah, impeccable. But what good is that when there are almost no jobs. I can work outside my profession, but why did I study then? I could have worked the seasons since my armpit hairs started to grow and earn pocket money until I became bald, but I didn't. No, I said to myself, I'll go study, aim to buy a suite, not wash dirty linen in one.

Bella wants to say something, but Anton is on a roll.

ANTON And I did my fair share of studying, I did fuck around, but I never fucked up my grades. But what good is that when all they're interested in is if you have connections, political ambition or if you'll sell out like a whore. Ever been to a job interview?

BELLA (*shyly*): M-m.

ANTON Then you don't know what kind of hell that is. Hell my ass, it's even worse because in hell you can scream, and here you have to keep smiling. How do you handle stress? Do you see yourself as a team player or a solo player? How many languages do you speak? One? Are you ready for lifelong learning? How would you explain to my five-year-old nephew what a court process is?

BELLA They asked you all that?

ANTON And then when you say you'd rattle on fellow lawyer to your boss, they don't like that, and the fact that they'd like to send you to a liver exam and poke around your childhood traumas to employ you full time, they don't see a problem in that. Any more Cheetos?

Bella gives a Cheeto to Anton who throws it into a Nutella jar and continues to eat this specialty with a spoon.

ANTON You know what, best if I find an old hag living alone, someone who's no particularly good so not even her distant relatives wanna take care of her, but also not that bad that I'd flip out with her. And do whatever it takes, even the stuff no one talks about.

BELLA Yuck.

ANTON I give her a wash, pluck out her moustache, the thick beard hairs... I go get her spinach from the greenmarket, read her

the latest gossip from Story magazine with coffee because her prescription glasses and her eyes no longer match... I wouldn't even try to put her out of her misery, I'd serve my thing so no one can take me to court when I inherit her house and savings. And I'm independent for life.

BELLA You're crazy. Maybe I could help you somehow?

ANTON And how could you help me? You can do my job interviews instead of me, but you seem to not handle stress particularly well.

Anton demonstrates the junk food empire in front of them.

BELLA That's something else. I realised my creative blockages are best sold by grieving whatever needs to be grieved over.

ANTON Mhm. O-K.

BELLA But, seriously, I can help you. I can get you a recommendation, maybe even a real interview.

ANTON (*finds it funny*): I'm all ears.

BELLA It's not funny, you idiot. What do you think my Facebook last name is my real one?

ANTON And it's not?

BELLA No, my name is... *and Bella utters a 'famous' last name.*

ANTON GET-THE-FUCK-OUTA-HERE!

Anton almost drops the Nutella jar on the floor.

BELLA Keep your voice down, someone will hear you.

ANTON What are you doing here then, you freaking nutcase?

BELLA Look, it's more the name than anything else, my folks are not that loaded.

ANTON Idiots, it should have been clear to us all when you came with that MacBook. Which other starving artists orders food

through Wolt? I mean, I knew, I could smell money, but I didn't expect this...

BELLA Ant?

ANTON Speak up, Bellitos, I'm listening.

BELLA First of all, sorry to be the one to tell you this, but you love money much more than me. And second of all, I don't want to succeed in life because of my last name, but I can at least do something for others, right? Like, for you! And it wouldn't be cheating, because you'd still have to take the interview and your resume is –

ANTON impeccable.

BELLA You have to promise me one thing –

ANTON I can't tell anyone who you are?

BELLA Please.

Anton 'muses', but we all know pretty well what he'll decide. The official handshake is interrupted by a SUDDEN frightening appearance of Žuti's hand on the couch.

Anton and Bella scream.

BELLA What the –

ANTON Fuck

ŽUTI Why didn't you wake me up?

BELLA We didn't know you were here!

ŽUTI Motherf... My phone's dead.

BELLA Fine, don't panic, sit with us, there are donuts. With Linolada!

ŽUTI What time is it?

BELLA Almost two.

ŽUTI What, I slept all day?

ANTON Wouldn't be the first or the last time, right?

ŽUTI No, you two don't get it. I slept over my entire shift.

BELLA Your buddies are still in Lijevo, don't worry.

ŽUTI My job! I slept over my job!

ANTON You have a job?

Bella and Anton look at each other, confused, then they burst into laughter.

BELLA Man, if Žuti has a job, then we urgently need to get you that deal, Ant.

Bella and Anton are watching Žuti running around the place in panic and putting haphazard clothes on. Žuti storms out of the apartment.

Bella and Anton laugh at Žuti for a while, but then the laughter starts to grow into big depression.

ANTON Turn on your Instagram, let's go laugh at other people's life fails.

Bella immediately says yes. They scroll.

After the first scroll they already found Iva's photos from Italy.

BELLA io amo la bella italia e il suo sotto voce cantando a me. imparo cosi tanto sulla moda e sulla vita. #inamore #viaggtoredelmondo #ispirazione. Now she even speaks Italian? What else?

ANTON Oh no, my dear Bellitos, this is the best possible example of fake-it-till-you-make-it.

BELLA But the sunset is beautiful at... La Pelosa, you have to admit that.

ANTON Look at her, she's already tanned.

BELLA Hey, Ant?

ANTON Hm?

BELLA What if we're now actually scrolling through pictures of new tenants? And we, like, give them a little heart for their photo.

ANTON If such an option existed, I'd give them a broken heart.

BELLA Wow, look at this photo from a refugee camp in Greece. Terrible.

ANTON God, look at how people live...

BELLA A heart, definitely.

And so, Anton and Bella are staring at the picture.

20. THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEvised

Bella took over the apartment-stage with banners... they're full of slogans from Bella's posters.

It's not exactly clear what she means by them, but they rhyme. All but the last.

GOVERNMENT GO AWAY,
FACADES ARE HERE TO STAY
BIGGER AREAS FOR OUR HYSTERIAS
STOP YOUR RACE, WE NEED A PLACE
TO RIGHTS I VOW, I'M NOT A COW
(P.S. MEAT IS MURDER)
AWAY WITH THE CURTAIN,
A HOME SHOULD BE CERTAIN
A DOOR KEY OATH IS KEY TO GROWTH
I DIDN'T WASH MYSELF TO SHRINK!

Žuti is also here, taking care of the poster aesthetic and painting little triangles in 'A's.

ŽUTI I had no fucking idea you're such a poet.

Bella is on a roll, quoting her heart out...

BELLA We should all get out. Yes – all of us – and – and – enough already! Simply, enough! They can't do it to all of us if we're all out in the streets.

ŽUTI I'm not sure, it doesn't seem that bad –
BELLA No, you see – that's it, you're brainwashed... You think this is normal because you don't know any better. That's that

Stuttgart... Sorry, I mean -- Stockholm syndrome.

ŽUTI I don't think I have that.

Siniša comes out of the bathroom, toilet flushes are heard. He was there with the ukulele.

SINIŠA I support you, Bella.

BELLA Really? Will you come?

SINIŠA No.

ŽUTI Why not, dude? It's gonna be a great party.

SINIŠA No. Sorry, Bella, it's against my beliefs.

BELLA What? You wanna say this is humane, this is how a country is allowed to treat its working-age, fertile generation? Like, like... chickens on an egg farm?!

SINIŠA Did I say something?

BELLA Well yes -- there! - you just said it! No one's ever said anything. That's the problem!

Iva was in the corner the whole time, trying to focus, make some room among Bella's posters, but...

...suddenly it hits her neuralgic spot so she starts to trample over Bella's posters. She wants to avoid them, but she can't and she won't.

IVA And what, you think one protest is gonna solve everything? Someone will wave their magic wand and the universe will expand and every rock will have its place under the sun?

SINIŠA In fact, the universe is constantly expanding -

IVA These are political struggles over the long run, not *ad hoc*.

BELLA But what? Maybe I should write like a super smart essay, that's like so fuckin' constructive?

IVA As constructive as taking photos of empty bottles on the street.

ŽUTI Meow!

Anton arrives just at the right moment with the mail. It came down the ropes.

ANTON Guys, this is shit, you won't believe this -

ŽUTI Geeez, you give me the creeps, speak up -- ???

ANTON Our water bill went up. No more special rate. They sent us the official letter from the Agency with a bill.

ŽUTI What about internet?

ANTON What about internet? What are you talking about?

ŽUTI Is it the same rate or it went up? Dude, I can't fall asleep without YouTube -

ANTON Idiot, your internet is paid by Siniša's draining the fries from the deep fryer, not the State.

SINIŠA Internet doesn't take my whole salary, we can afford water too.

Anton silently and expressively shows Siniša the bill.

SINIŠA Aha.

A few moments of silence...

IVA OK, what's going on?

SINIŠA Nothing, we'll have to organise a shower schedule.

ANTON It's out of the question!

Iva checks out the bill...

... "FUCKME!" facial expression.

IVA That has to be a mistake. We'll call the Agency. We'll call the water company - this is crazy, who spends all that water?

Bella is suspiciously silent, doodling all the while on her papers.

ŽUTI I don't, I don't take a shower every day.

ANTON Žuti --- --- eek.

ŽUTI What? That's not good for the skin.

IVA They can't do this to us. This is really inhumane.

ŽUTI That's what Bella said too. Right, Bella?

...everyone turns their eyes to Bella.

Only Siniša is glancing around the place.

Bella coughs.

BELLA Yeah, hm -- mhmhhm-that's right! That's right!

Anton only just now realised he has nowhere to stand in the apartment from all the banners.

ANTON What kind of trash is this?

IVA Bella is organising a protest.

ANTON Over water?

BELLA Over everything! And not just me. We're not the only ones - this is bigger than us.

ANTON Good luck with that.

IVA That's what I said.

BELLA You're not coming?

ANTON Will it pay our water bill?

BELLA Maybe - I don't know - we have to do something -

ANTON Yes, WE HAVE TO pay our water bill. Where are this morning's cookies, you little pigs?

...yes, he's ignoring her.

A change of atmosphere in the apartment which becomes Bella's stage. She shouts her slogans at the audience.

GOVERNMENT GO AWAY,
FACADES ARE HERE TO STAY
BIGGER AREAS FOR OUR HYSTERIAS
STOP YOUR RACE, WE NEED A PLACE
TO RIGHTS I VOW, I'M NOT A COW
(P.S. MEAT IS MURDER)

AWAY WITH THE CURTAIN,
A HOME SHOULD BE CERTAIN
A DOOR KEY OATH IS KEY TO GROWTH
I DIDN'T WASH MYSELF TO SHRINK!

All of a sudden she is very small in this world.

Cut.

We're at the apartment again... everyone is somewhere here.

Bella turned her back on them.

IVA The police officially counted between one and five hundred protesters.

SINIŠA That's very accurate.

ŽUTI That's really a lot! I once went to my cousin's wedding with like 200 people and that was really crowded. The guy earned like ten thousand euros.

IVA Yes. That's why the article is on the regional news. Because it's a 'crowd'.

ŽUTI I told you to go --

IVA And why didn't you?

ŽUTI I fell asleep. Fuck.

Anton arrives with the mail at the right time. Down the ropes.

ANTON They're off the hook.

SINIŠA Makes sense.

IVA Who?

ANTON The water company notified us that they received our request for the change of beneficiary...

IVA Ha? What does that mean?

Žuti in the meantime got a screenshot text from a friend. It can also appear as an onstage picture.

ŽUTI Geez, have you seen this?

A collage of two Bellas.

One is a picture from an opening night, a premiere, a petit-bourgeois reception in a neo baroque building where Bella, 'decently dressed' stands squeezed between her parents.

The other is a picture of Bella in a hippie 2.0 aka hipster parade, marching down the street while even the police are yawning at how insignificant they are.

IVA (browsing the text): The granddaughter of a famous... hhmhmm... daughter of an entrepreneur and a professor... hhmhmm... caught at yesterday's space protest. Her grandfather is suspected of... hm-mm... We learn exclusively that... m--mmm... she is the future inheritor of at least three apartments in the city centre.

ŽUTI Geez, she's some kind of jet setter? --- What is she doing with us?

IVA I knew it! I could feel it in my stomach... It's typical establishment behaviour. To them the entire life is just one big rollercoaster.

ANTON Oh cut the crap. I didn't know they had that much money -

IVA What didn't you 'know'?

ANTON Nothing -- nothing.

IVA I'll report her. Yup, right now, I'm going to write an email.

SINIŠA I think this is commendable.

ŽUTI What, the thing with her grandfather?

SINIŠA Her being with us. Just imagine it - she actually chose this.

IVA You can't jump on the wagon where you don't belong. Plus, watch this! To protest!

She doesn't even know what hegemony is, and she wants to make revolutions. It's not fair! NOT FAIR! FUCKING NOT FAIR!

The dart hit Iva's neuralgic spot.

ŽUTI OK, I mean, it would be like cool if we had more room here to invite someone over... to be able to invite some friends...

ANTON Well, look, I like her, but it would be fair to get out if you can get out.

ŽUTI We could fucking fit a bigger fridge!

IVA SIMPLY - NOT - FAIR!

Bella turns to them - she's suddenly in the apartment.

BELLA Guys, I have a confession to make -

Silence. Palpable tension.

BELLA I am the one who boosted our water bill. I'm really sorry -- I feel so stupid, but when I'm stressed out then I like to fill the tub to the brim and lie down inside. It helps me to clear this - wueeee - chaos. And it was a shitty month and I overdid it - sorry...

Everyone is silent.

BELLA I really hope you can forgive me? There, I swear on my flash I'll find a way to cover that bill, OK? You guys don't worry about it! Huh, what say you? Still friends?

Everyone is still silent. The scene ends in a typical theatrical manner.

22. A VIRAL HIT

Siniša is relaxing with his laptop after a hard day at work. Žuti tried to clean the place up, but he's not skilled in cleaning so the apartment probably looks even worse. Besides, his underpants and socks are hanging all over the ropes because he just washed them.

ŽUTI I gave everything a little thought and I realised I'm actually over it.

**Facebook is liquidating Irish holding companies that it used to transfer billions in profits to avoid paying taxes in the US, the UK and hundreds of other countries. Facebook companies around the world have paid an Irish holding company to use Facebook's intellectual property. Facebook International Holdings I Unlimited recorded a revenue of \$ 30 trillion in 2018, more than half the revenue of Facebook's global profit of \$ 56 million.*

ŽUTI No, I'm serious. It's not that I'm singing a different tune - I'm really happy I lost that job. It was a blind alley on my road to success. See, I'm not into working for others. Build someone else's brand. I'd be working there, get hooked on my salary and bam, before I knew it, I'd forget everything I planned. So I kind of chickened out a bit because I thought I'd end up in the street or even worse, to have to pay for rent. I thought, now that the Ministry announces that open call for subsidies it's all over so I applied. But what's the deal? If you wanna start a real business, your own business, you need to be ready to take chances. Experience doesn't matter that much, you don't have to be an expert in the business you're running - you can sell

tractors, without knowing how to drive one. The most important thing is to have a vision. Somehow real estate seems like the thing now, there's always someone needing a room, an apartment, a roof over their heads - maybe that's the market I could try to jump in. You know best how you shouldn't allow this system to hold you down, to shackle you and enslave your mind.

Žuti finally notices Siniša turned on a song at some point. The song he recorded himself.

A minute of silence for Siniša's two-chord song about a toilet brush and chewing gums stuck in public transportation.

ŽUTI What's that, dude?

Siniša shows him the video. It has 323,698 views on YouTube.

ŽUTI 300+ thousand views? Sinito, you're a true viral hit!

Fade out with Siniša's ukulele song and the overexcited approval "fucking brilliant, fucking brilliant" coming from Žuti.

23. SUNDAY - THE DAY OF THE LORD

**A Photoshop wizard shared two photos of herself: one that hasn't been edited and where she has only a pinch of make-up and the other where this relatively normal-looking teenager has been drastically transformed into an extremely skinny copy of Angelina Jolie. Although digital tricks were used in the photo, the committed double admitted to having*

nose surgery, lip fillers and liposuction. Tabar weighed only 39 kilos when this photographic feat was made. Unfortunately, Tabar's online activities were the subject of a lawsuit for corruption of young people and disrespect of the Islamic Republic, which was initiated against her.

'A Sunday rest', i.e., all the tenants are either lying down or sitting and their gaze is directed at a screen of sorts. Suddenly, from the right, Iva walks in, the only one who hadn't been in the apartment.

IVA EVERYBODY OUT!

ANTON The hell is wrong with you, Iva?

IVA I SAID - OOOUUUUUT!

The tenants realise they haven't got much choice, so they start walking to the door. Iva grabs Bella by the shirt and pulls her inside.

IVA Except you, Bella. I need you.

Bella is confused, but doesn't defy her.

ŽUTI Someone's in PMS.

SINIŠA Žuti, please, be quiet.

ANTON I'll throw her out, the state won't even need to come get her.

Everybody is out except Bella and Iva. Iva takes out a pregnancy test.

BELLA What's that?

IVA What do you mean "what's that"?

Bella reads what the box says.

BELLA Geez! You're not...?

IVA I don't know. Maybe. I hope not. I'm almost a week late.

BELLA It's usually on time?

IVA Yes. I don't know. I know I'm stupid and irresponsible, but I sort of keep track of that.

BELLA What do you mean 'sort of'?

IVA I'm definitely late.

BELLA Shit.

IVA I fucking don't know what to do. Bella, I can't do this alone. It's too stressful. Are you okay with being here? You're really the only one in this place I can share this with...

BELLA Sure, of course.

IVA OK, that's fine. I think with all this testosterone around I wouldn't be able to pee a single drop now.

BELLA All clear.

IVA OK, inhale-exhale. You can do it, Iva. Besides, it's better to know than not to know.

BELLA And whatever you decide to do, we're there for you.

IVA This just fucking raised the pressure, please don't say that to me. No, Iva, for starters, there is a chance that the test is negative. And even if it's not, there are plenty of options today.

BELLA And it's your right to choose.

IVA Of course it is! Of-course-it-is. Okay, I'm ready.

BELLA What's it gonna be, you want me to go out to, or stay in the room?

IVA I'll do it here, can you just turn your back on me for a second?

BELLA Mhm.

Iva is getting ready to pee on the test, but she can't.

IVA Can you make a rustling noise, like 'sssh-hhhh'? It's easier for me if I have a sound.

BELLA Shhhhhh, sssshhhuuuuusshhh. You done?

Iva lets go a stream on the test. She buttons up her trousers and takes the test to the table. Bella and Iva hunch over the table.

BELLA What now?

IVA Nothing, if it's positive, a plus will appear, if it's negative, a minus. You never had a... false alarm?

BELLA No. To be brutally honest, I don't know when it was the last time that I -

IVA You're a better person than me.

BELLA What, who's the guy who dishonoured you?

IVA Valdemar, an Erasmus guy.

BELLA Valdemar, sounds like a sexy Viking.

IVA Almost. Second generation Vikings. His parents are in fact from Nigeria, but he was born in Europe. They gave him a local name to show that they've assimilated. He's kind, he studies cultural diplomacy. He's always kidding that they took him as a token student because his university chronically lacks darker skin tone people...

BELLA That would make a good movie.

IVA What?

BELLA To give birth here to a boy or a girl whose grandparents are from Nigeria. A small dunk!

IVA You're stupid. No, you don't understand, I can't do this. Have a child now. There, there, I'd rather slave in an abandoned mine in Britain for the rest of my life.

BELLA Slave... *(and bursts into laughter)*

IVA No, it's not funny, I'm completely unprepared for this situation. There are too many things I want to do for myself in life, and once you have a kid - it's over. No more self-improvement with such an important job as raising a child. I'm not even mentally mature enough to take another amorphous creature and shape it.

BELLA How old are you exactly?

IVA The fuck's wrong with you, are you possessed by my Mom's spirit? I'm 29, but that's completely irrelevant 'cause I - apart from not being ready to devote all my energy to raising a mammal - don't see a reason why anyone would bring kids into this world.

BELLA I just thought, there are worse and more incompetent people who have kids.

IVA That's the problem, people think their gene pool is key, and the Earth is overpopulated. If we're not the generation suffocating for a lack of oxygen, then our children are definitely the ones to get microchipped if they want their consciousness to survive.

BELLA You can't know that. Maybe your child will save the humanity with a super invention that will restore the ozone layer.

IVA Maybe. But you know what? I know they won't. And you know why? Know why?

A grand silence and then...

Because that's what kids who are loved by their Moms do. And I don't know how to love. I'm not even sure this child exists, and I already hate it.

Iva starts to stretch the skin on her stomach...

BELLA You don't hate it...

IVA Yes, I hate it! Because it will search to find whatever's wrong with me so that one day it can cry at therapy sessions. I hate it, because one day if it gets out of my body, I won't be able to love it, like I don't -

And while Iva is retelling a dystopian story from her mind, Bella saw that...

BELLA Iva... It's negative.

IVA Well, yes, it is - everything is dark inside me, Bella. No bright spot for humanity here - true, it's negative.

BELLA No, I mean, your test is negative.

Iva jumps, suddenly leaves the pool of panic and self-pity.

IVA Thank God.

BELLA What, you promised to become religious if you get out of this danger? – It might not be a bad thing, Iva. Wouldn't be the first time that one has found comfort in God.

Bella tries to give Iva a hug, but Iva doesn't want that.

IVA No, I don't know why I said that. If God had wanted to help me with anything, he could have done that a long time ago.

Žuti barges in.

ŽUTI Sorry, I can't take it anymore, I'll pee in my pants.

*LOGISTICS CHALLENGE

The vaccine is secured by police officers armed with machine guns: "It's a matter of national security." It is also a lot of money, which attracts criminal groups.

24. THIS IS SINIŠA SPEAKING

Siniša is alone in the apartment and on the stage with a ukulele in his hands. He is terrorising us by playing his YouTube hit which has managed to reach as many as 400.000 views over a glitch in the matrix.

The song became a hit because it's that bad.

At the same time, buzz-buzz, Siniša gets messages from others that interrupt the song:

*"Don't be a p*ssy, come for a drink."*

"Party pooper, what are you doing alone in the apartment after all?"

"You're not gonna believe what just happened. Žuti got kicked in the balls by a boomer."

"Sorry, Žuti forced me to write this. He says the woman is not that old and she just punched him in the groin because he ducked."

"Yeah right. He cried for 15 minutes because she just punched him in the groin, go figure."

Notification: Watch the Government session LIVE: Presentation of the new Real Estate Tax Law and Socially Subsidised Housing Law. Opposition: bigger taxation won't create more room for young people.

Buzz-buzz, the texts still arrive, but Siniša no longer reads them.

After a few moments, he gets up. He turns down the music and turn his phone camera on. He directs it to himself and starts to make a video of himself as an Instagram story.

SINIŠA Wanna make a quick calculation? If a person earns an average monthly income, only to cover essential needs they need to spend around two thirds of their salary. Speaking about essential needs, we can agree that those are food, water and living space, right?

Although it's not prescribed and it manages to be flexibly small, a certain area is necessary to make a living space. For the market to give it a blessing and say: this is now an apartment worth so and so.

In order to own this fantastic thing called an apartment, this smallest possible area where you can urinate, wash hands and make a sandwich afterwards, without promising your left kidney to a bank, you'd have to work without food and sleep on the street next to your office for nine whole years. Next to your office because, of course, you can't afford transportation. That's the only way to gather the so and so amount of money without the help of a bank.

If you live on the street and have nowhere to live, you in fact shouldn't even have a job because in order to get a job first you need to have an address.

If you don't have a job, you can't even make money for a place to live. Or for food. And if you eat, it is scientifically proven that, at some point, slowly but definitely – you will die.

Of course, people don't like being hungry. Or in the street. For the safety of a roof above your head and a full stomach, an average person lives with a minus.

Truly absurd, right? You live off the money you don't have, you never had and, most probably, you never will be able to possess. Hence the minus.

And the banks? The banks give us their blessing. They make a bet that you, as an average user of their services, never will have enough money. If they lose this bet, what's the worst thing that can happen? They'll

simply get their money back. With a plus.

If you don't accept this bet... You're an outlaw. People jump over your body in the street and swear 'cause you're in their way. Because you take the space which is not yours, but everyone's, and everyone's means theirs.

No, no... It's not sad. It's not even unfair. It's the way it is. It's a one big daily nothing.

Two days ago I launched this video. In it I sing and play this song...

We listen to Siniša's viral hit for the last time.

Today it officially reached 400.000 views.

Today is the day I will kill myself.

I started playing because I knew I was tone deaf. I started doing this because I knew I couldn't make any money out of it. Because nothing breeds nothing.

You should do what you're good at. What you'll be paid for. So you can eat and not freeze to death as a vagrant in the streets. The other option is to do whatever people don't want to do and are willing to pay you to do it instead of them: unclog traps, you pick garbage, build houses without scaffolding, pack their online orders...

But if you want meaning, you need to do what you're good at, and what someone would pay. If you want some place under the sun with a *meaning*, then it's not enough to do something, you should do something *meaningful*. Why would this world just give you a place, for what?

Siniša reads comments out loud:

Jazzilla20: "This dude's so bad that he's good."

Chillexxx3: "Man, this guy is a genre in himself. And the genre is a disaster."

Gaby: "Cathartic cringe. Can't stop listening. This is too good."

Ping. Notification - someone wrote a new comment. Siniša checks, but doesn't read.

I realised that the only thing I can do is... kill myself.

My last wish is that someone publishes my death online. I know you like that.

***Office of the Croatian representative:**
By rejecting the claim the court did not conclude that that Croatia was responsible for the death of the little girl Madina.

Like, share and subscribe.

Siniša snaps his fingers and a rope comes down beside him from above. He pulls it, tests it to see if it's strong enough. He starts to make a knot around his head. It's not as easy as it seems.

He is finally ready. He climbs a chair. He is trying to balance holding his phone and putting the rope around his neck. He is pulling it as tight as possible. He is trying to keep the phone in his hand the best he can. He takes his last breath and...

BAM!

The four other tenants barge in like Kramers - Anton, Žuti, Bella and Iva, giggling and swaying. They see Siniša with the rope on the chair. A few moments of disgusting silence and then...

ŽUTI Dude, I had no idea people did that over here... That they're into erotic suffocating. That's really hardcore.

Everybody looks at Žuti now. Silent, silent... And then they burst into laughter. Siniša takes the rope off his neck, puts the chair away, takes the ukulele and his phone and walks out of the stage.

BELLA Fuck... I wonder what you others do when you're alone here.

Everybody laughs, drunk and silly.

25. CHAMBER DRAMA 5 / HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Little piles of swept dust, a full laundry basket, two types of garbage by the door... A cleaning action is in progress and all the tenants are involved. Nobody yet knows what to expect after that.

Žuti is taking a break, he opens a beer and sits on the couch. He is looking at his phone because he's expecting a video call from Mom and Dad when finally...

MOM Son, can you hear me?

DAD Can he see us? Move this camera away.

ŽUTI I'm here, I can hear you.

MOM But can you see us?

Mom and Dad wave to the camera like lunatics and the call freezes.

ŽUTI I can see you, but I think your connection is bad, it keeps breaking –.

DAD What did you say, son?

ŽUTI It's bad –

MOM HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SON!

Mom and Dad start singing HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

Žuti listens to this snappy version of the happy birthday song catching internet all over the place to keep the call going.

ŽUTI Thank you!

MOM I hope you're not angry for being a little late –

DAD We arrived on the island yesterday –

MOM We barely had any signal.

DAD And we were knackered. If only you could hear your Mom snoring...

MOM You know what, I thought this jetlag was noting, but it's no picnic, I can tell you.

ŽUTI Dude, you're in the same time zone.

DAD Did you have a good time yesterday? Bought your friends a drink?

ŽUTI No, I didn't celebrate.

MOM Sorry, son, we didn't hear you, it's breaking.

DAD Grandpa said he wants to put some money on your account for your birthday. Did he get hold of you?

ŽUTI Yes.

MOM Did he say yes? I didn't hear him.

DAD I think he was nodding.

MOM Or was it just image breaking?

DAD Listen, son.

ŽUTI I'm here, I hear you.

DAD We're off now. Tell grandpa you're fine.

ŽUTI We heard –

MOM We're off to the beach. You should see the perfect weather over here...

ŽUTI Great, have fun.

DAD Okay, son, have a good one.

MOM Say hi to your friends.

DAD Happy birthday again.

MOM Happyyyyy biiiiirth –

Bang. The connection broke. The only thing left is a frozen image of Mom and Dad waving to the cell phone screen.

Even if they weren't eavesdropping, the other tenants heard everything given the loudness of the conversation (like yelling from the Himalayas to the Urals). And they couldn't help but interrupt their 'spring cleaning'.

**Venice activates flood prevention system: "Monday is the moment of truth"*

BELLA Žuti?

ŽUTI Do tell?

IVA Why didn't you tell us it was your birthday?

ŽUTI It's not. It was like a week ago.

Everyone is perplexed, they have no idea what to say.

BELLA Are you sure?

IVA We're sorry.

SINIŠA Žuti, you're the last person who would keep quiet about something like this. When I think about it... the last person who would keep quiet about anything.

ANTON Or miss a chance to get hammered.

IVA Sorry, we didn't know –

BELLA Yeah, it's not like we forgot or anything (Bella covers her mouth – she wasn't supposed to say this, oops).

SINIŠA Why didn't you tell us?

ŽUTI OK, what is this, an intervention?

BELLA Žuti? Are you OK?

ŽUTI My name is Karlo.

IVA Seriously? I'd never tell. There was a Karlo in my class in school and he never –

Iva realises it's not the time for this story when she sees Karlo's expression.

IVA Forget it.

Bella sits on the couch by Žuti.

BELLA I can totally hear you. I spent my last birthday shooting fireworks alone in a video game.

SINIŠA I don't know why you, otherwise as indestructible as a cockroach, distanced yourself over... a birthday? Why do you even bother with this pastry holiday.

ANTON I think it will be better if you just celebrate it. Pull lit off like a band aid.

IVA (grows very serious): Leave him alone, I understand you want to stop counting your age at some point, I categorically claim this as the oldest among us.

ŽUTI You're not the oldest.

BELLA Yes, I've been feeling for three years like I'm in my sixties.

ŽUTI No, officially, Iva is not the oldest.

A big confession ahead...

ŽUTI My thirtieth birthday was drowned in plum brandy ages ago.

BELLA Wait, what does that mean?

ŽUTI People, yesterday I turned... Thirty-three.

ANTON Jesus, it's the Jesus age.

This confession remains suspended in the air creating a dead silence. All until Siniša bursts into laughter.

SINIŠA We're all quiet as if you have six nipples and come from the planet Z.

BELLA I don't get it.



| PHOTO BY KATARINA ZLATEC

IVA Just a second, if you turned thirty-two yesterday -

ŽUTI That means I can officially say good-bye to this apartment.

Silence.

SINIŠA You have a place to stay?

Žuti nods away as in "no". "Not really."

ANTON Can we write a petition to the Ministry? I can help you. Maybe.

ŽUTI What good will it do? It's only temporary.

BELLA We should celebrate. This might be our last chance. If you agree, Žuti?

Žuti is silent.

IVA I have an idea. Žuti, what was the last number you were happy to celebrate?

ŽUTI (thinks then says...): 25?

ANTON Happy 25th birthday, KARLO!

ŽUTI Thanks, but you can call me Žuti. Everyone calls me that.

Everybody sings happy birthday to Žuti. Melancholia fills the apartment, the typical melancholia of yet another trip around the Sun. And again, no one cleaned the place up properly.

| EDITOR'S NOTE: SCENES FROM THE PLAY
SELECTED BY ITS AUTHOR LUCIJA KLARIĆ

BEING

B _ E _ C _ C

BORING

TOO



OLD

D - M E S

SOON...

SOON.

ANA PERČINLIĆ

(TRAVNIK, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, 1989)



Ana Perčinlić graduated in Comparative Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and Dramaturgy from the Academy of Dramatic Art. A former associate at the Institute of Art History and Croatian Audiovisual Centre. She collaborated on art projects with the Jastrebarsko Civic Theatre, Kinorama and Kinoteka production companies, and Croatian Radio and Television. Selected for short film competition at Trieste International Film Festival. She writes scripts, plays and prose.

THE SIEGE OF THE IVORY TOWER

TRANSLATOR
Ana Ćurić

THE ILLNESS, THE FIRST TIME IT WAS SEEN

The border is visible. Something is emerging over the border. It is slowly spreading, coming closer. It has its own sound and its own smell. As it advances, people are putting things away so that it does not devour them.

Is that it?

We don't want to wait to find out, move what you can.

The woman is packing a suitcase, throwing things in it, putting it away.

It will be here sooner than we think, let's go.

The man grabs his tools quickly, almost losing them to the Illness.

What should I take, what's important?

The man looks around, grabs a TV and takes it away.

Here are some books and bread, this we need to take.

Chose whatever the f... you want.

The man reaches out for a book.

The fuck with the book, you can't eat it for breakfast.

He changes his mind, he takes the bread instead, while the Illness is devouring the books.

The woman observes the arrival of the Illness.

It is almost beautiful.

The man is appalled.

It's disgusting.

The woman fixes her posture in front of the man.

Yes, it's horrible, but it seems as if it's... flickering. It reminds me of better days.

The woman pushes away a wheelchair with the man sitting in it.

Take that child away from there!

This should be filmed, remembered.

The journalist and the cameraman are approaching the Illness. Quickly, they set up the camera, trying to capture the dramatic scene.

THE JOURNALIST Is it time?

THE CAMERAMAN Yes, wait...

THE JOURNALIST I am waiting.

THE CAMERAMAN No, there is something wrong with the camera.

The Illness takes the camera. The cameraman is taken aback.

THE CAMERAMAN We still have the sound, we can transmit it.

THE JOURNALIST Without the image?!

THE CAMERAMAN What else can we do?

THE JOURNALIST How pathetic are we?

Ok, fast, let's do it with the sound.

The cameraman signals they are on air, she can start with the news report.

THE JOURNALIST We are now at the Bregana border checkpoint and even though we are only 30 minutes away from Zagreb, soon this border crossing towards Western Europe could be closed. Information from the neighbouring countries about the penetration and quick spread of the Illness have been reported daily and now we can testify to its dramatic breakthrough.

The Illness grabs the microphone from the reporter's hands.

THE CAMERAMAN The last sentence didn't come through.

THE JOURNALIST To hell with it.

The cameraman pulls the journalist from the Illness, in the last moment, just before the camera gets swallowed.

Now, people are no longer moving things away, but each other, while retreating from the Illness. It is progressing. People are hiding behind each other, faster and faster, it all becomes a loop, the ones who are in the back are pushed up front, facing the Illness.

Does anyone know what it is?

Curses and blessings.

The new things always are.

They change us and there is no return.

Don't talk nonsense. It's nothing other than...

The space is shrinking. No more steps back. The Illness is here.

THE MIDNIGHT MEAL

VIDA, ER nurse

MARTIN, a doctor on duty

SLAVEN, a patient

ZDENKA, a patient

GORAN, Vida's husband

PETAR, Vida's brother

ŠIMUN, a doctor

Doctors, other staff, patients

The Illness has settled down in Goran in this story and is making him wither.

1

VIDA, MARTIN, ŠIMUN, patients

In the hospital, ER hall

Vida is sitting in front of a computer, surrounded by doctors, an eager discussion is taking place. Vida has an old computer mouse that is making squeaky noise.

MARTIN Check number two first.

VIDA I am. 9, 1030, 12, 13, 14, 1530...

ŠIMUN It's jam-packed.

MARTIN How is this noise not bothering you?

VIDA You get used to it. What about another room?

MARTIN I'd like number two.

VIDA But you can't have number two.

ŠIMUN Check number three.

Vida scrolls the mouse down, the squeaky sound is unbearably enduring.

MARTIN We must be able to squeeze it in somehow. Here you go, the carpal one does not take that long, it will be over sooner, and we can push the mastectomy back...

ŠIMUN Doctor Skoko's one? No way he'll allow it.

MARTIN Damn it.

VIDA And what about this slot at 6 o'clock in number five?

MARTIN Too late, there are no anaesthesiologists then.

VIDA And doctor Šarić? It's her shift.

MARTIN Only if I clone her.

ŠIMUN And Ivek, where is he? I can't find his name on the list.

VIDA He is on a sick leave.

ŠIMUN Is it his eyes infection again?

MARTIN Eye infection, nervous breakdown...

ŠIMUN Burnt out?

VIDA We have to go, we've kept them waiting long enough.

MARTIN No, find me a slot!

The mouse squeaks again.

VIDA It's beyond full.

MARTIN What about a swap?

VIDA Depends on you charm.

MARTIN And charm I have, so just find me the ideal candidate.

VIDA Solomun?

MARTIN No, a woman.

VIDA Well. Marijana has tendon ruptures in number three.

MARTIN Not enough time, Marijana hates me.

VIDA A cholecystectomy?

MARTIN Yes.

VIDA Doctor Kajić?

MARTIN Yes!

VIDA Number two?

MARTIN She has no idea what I have in store for her.

VIDA Poor woman.

Šimun exits. As he opens the door, the patients are pouring in, lying down on the beds. Vida and Martin are accommodating them.

VIDA I am afraid to even think how this will end.

MARTIN Maybe it will get better.

VIDA You're crazy.

MARTIN Maybe it all stops because of fear. It has happened before.

VIDA Maybe it will stop, but it won't get better.

MARTIN Is this why you are leaving? Because you think it will be better in Ireland. We'll be dying all over the place.

VIDA Not better, but maybe different.

MARTIN Different for you?

VIDA I don't care, my job is the same everywhere.

MARTIN Is he looking for a job there?

VIDA He'll work in a warehouse first.

MARTIN If they don't close everything down.

2

VIDA, MARTIN, SLAVEN, ŠIMUN

Šimun rushes in pushing a hospital bed, Slaven is on it. Vida and Martin approach.

ŠIMUN We have a fall from a balcony. Open fracture of the foot, upper leg, and left arm. Possible backbone injury, possible internal bleeding. The patient is conscious.

VIDA Name and surname?

ŠIMUN Slaven Robić.

MARTIN Are you with us, sir?

SLAVEN You're damn right I am.

MARTIN Which floor?

ŠIMUN Fifth floor.

A moment of silence, they can't believe he is still alive.

MARTIN A fifth floor?

SLAVEN Don't look at me, I don't understand it either.

MARTIN Do you feel pain anywhere?

SLAVEN Should I?

MARTIN That means no. Vida, take him to MRI, now.

3

VIDA, SLAVEN, MARTIN, ŠIMUN

The sound of CT machine can be heard. Vida is standing next to Slaven. Martin and Šimun are in the background throughout the scene, getting dressed and ready for the surgery.

SLAVEN The lights are too strong.

Vida puts her hand over his eyes, to shield them.

VIDA Do you have a headache?

SLAVEN No, I am in no pain.

VIDA Legs? Hands?

SLAVEN Nothing.

Vida sees that Slaven is starting to tremble from crying, but she keeps holding her hand over his eyes. Slaven is crying, but soon he calms down and sighs.

SLAVEN I'm sorry.

VIDA That's ok. It's all good.

Vida is getting Slaven prepared for the surgery.

SLAVEN I have six kids.

VIDA Really?

SLAVEN I was changing the window frames tonight. In the children's rooms.

VIDA So, you are you a carpenter then? My husband is one too.

SLAVEN Who is he working for?

VIDA For my brother. He just helps out a bit. It's not his occupation.

SLAVEN It's not mine either. It's easy to jump into it, from one thing to another.

VIDA Yes, my husband did that too.

SLAVEN I change everybody's windows. This evening there was not enough light. It was too late to do it.

VIDA Were you working the whole day?

SLAVEN Yes.

VIDA And then some moonlighting. And then a favour or two. And, in the end, a bit more around your own house.

SLAVEN Correct.

VIDA A day is not long enough for all the work that has to be done.

SLAVEN No, it's not. Life does not fit in...

VIDA The doctor will come soon. Don't be afraid.

SLAVEN My son is downstairs.

VIDA Yes, I have seen him. Don't worry, we'll keep him informed.

SLAVEN Nothing hurts... That can't be good, right? I can't live like that.

Slaven starts crying again. Vida approaches him soberly.

VIDA A human being inhales approximately 15 times in a minute, and if somebody upsets them, then the number of inhales increases. It is likely that the ones who will upset you the most will be your children, especially since you have six of them... so, I believe that you will spend the rest of your long life living to the fullest.

Slaven is weeping quietly. He then stops and loses consciousness. A moment after, Slaven is dead.

Vida, Martin and Šimun pause for a moment, shocked. Then they perform CPR.

4

MARTIN, VIDA

Martin is writing down data on the computer. Vida is looking at her phone, holding it tightly and anxiously.

VIDA Goran was reading a book.

MARTIN What did she just say, how many beers did she have? You are lying, my dear, it was not just a drink. What did you say?

VIDA What I wanted to say is, not that I understand it, it all seems vague, but Goran was reading a book that says all existence is pain.

MARTIN Nonsense.

VIDA You think?

MARTIN Of course. That one has tried his best to be unhappy.

VIDA But all those who come to us, they are all in pain. It is hard to watch sometimes.

MARTIN Well, yes, but that's what we do. They come to us because we know how to handle their pain. If our job was to move levers in a theme park, they would all leave dizzy with nausea from all the cotton candy and the feeling of absolute happiness from the adrenaline pumping around their bloodstream. They leave the hospital feeling dizzy with nausea from the hospital food and the feeling of absolute happiness because they are alive... or because their condition is drastically better than when they first came in.

VIDA But that happiness comes from avoiding terror. That's not happiness as happiness.

MARTIN But I still think each of us would choose that kind of happiness – the happiness of dodging death over the happiness of a great wheel ride.

VIDA And what about us?

MARTIN What about us?

VIDA Every time you saw somebody's wound, you are hurting them. How should we deal with it, with what we have to do?

MARTIN Are you joking? I hope we are not having some moral discussion on whether it is more right to not hurt and thus not help somebody or to hurt while knowing they will be better. We can have it, but you'll lose.

VIDA No, we are not. I am just saying, sometimes it is hard...

MARTIN Look, I know everything is strange now, and it always is when somebody... goes this way. But that is not our problem. We are trying to prevent the worst, but sooner or later the worst can't be prevented. It's over. No need to cry about it.

VIDA It's not just that...

MARTIN You better focus on your job interview because that's the future you can control.

Vida remains silent.

MARTIN What do they even want from the interview?

VIDA They want you to show up.

MARTIN The bar sure is low. And what do they offer?

VIDA A bit of everything.

MARTIN I hope it includes a new non-squeaky computer mouse.

5

VIDA, PETAR

A phone call. Vida is obsessively cleaning the office while being on the phone.

PETAR Gosh, you really are persistent.

VIDA Pero, what brings you here? Is Goran with you?

PETAR He was at my place, he left his phone.

VIDA Damn it.

PETAR He went half an hour ago. Is it something important?

VIDA Not really. Did you have work to do?

PETAR Nope, Lucija has some fair tomorrow at school, selling flowers, some shit like that. She didn't tell us on time, so we spent the whole evening, Mirela and Lucija and me and Goran making flowers out of crepe-paper, they sure look like crap.

VIDA Who looks like crap?

PETAR The flowers! The flowers look like crap. As if we chewed up the shitty crepe-paper and spat it out.

VIDA Pero, can you take the phone back to Goran?

PETAR Now?!

VIDA Yes, now.

PETAR No, Vida, I can't, it's 2 am in the morning. (pause) Are you really worried again?

VIDA It depends on how much you drank.

PETAR Not much.

VIDA Right.

PETAR Not much, I swear, a few beers.

VIDA He didn't drive that way, I hope, did he?

PETAR It's all fine. Why the hell do you worry all the time? Jesus, if Mirela kept on nagging like that, I'd throw myself off a cliff.

VIDA You are such an idiot, really...

PETAR I don't know how much he drank, I know how much I did. Here, I am counting the bottles, one, two, three, four, five, six, I had at least four, so... he had two, leave him be. We wanted to hang out, one last time, before the end of the world. (pause) I won't go and give him back his cellphone, he'll get it tomorrow. He went, he is not drunk, he is sober and ok, he is probably already in bed sleeping the sleep of the righteous, and righteous he is.

VIDA Ok. Good night.

PETAR Vida?

VIDA Yes?

PETAR Just so you know. The windows we installed at Šoićs' place. Goran did not want to take the money again.

Vida stops.

VIDA Ok.

PETAR I told him he was a fool.

VIDA Ok.

PETAR I love you sis.

VIDA I love you too, you little shit.

6

ZDENKA, VIDA, GORAN

VIDA They are all tiny, don't worry. Not one needs to be stitched, it will all heal naturally. It won't even show.

ZDENKA I put my hand in front of my face. My reflexes are still working... even if my sight is deteriorating.

VIDA Don't be mad. The body is what it is.

ZDENKA That's because you are young. Being old becomes boring soon... too soon.

VIDA That's what youth is for, to jump in and help.

ZDENKA I really hope you will not have to stitch me again... I hope this is the last time.

VIDA Whenever needed. I am glad to see you again, even if the circumstances are like this...

ZDENKA I won't do it again, I promise. (to herself) Stupid.

VIDA There, there. I am afraid to ask what you tell yourself when you do something on purpose. This is just an accident. I'll put some ointment on it. It will heal quickly, and you'll look like a girl again, you'll make the boys turn their heads on the street and whistle, you won't be able to get rid of them.

ZDENKA What do you think? Should I be scared?

VIDA Of everything that has just happened? One should be cautious.

ZDENKA Isn't it better to just let the old ones die?

VIDA No, it's not.

ZDENKA But look at us, look at me, I can't do it on my own.

VIDA You don't have to.

ZDENKA We're just a burden.

VIDA I know it's difficult to lose your independence, but it's just a body. Your family needs you for other reasons.

ZDENKA The body carries it.

VIDA And let it carry it for as long as possible.

Vida finishes bandaging Zdenka, Goran comes in. Zdenka looks as if she's seen death itself. Vida follows her gaze.

VIDA It's ok, he's my husband.

Vida helps Zdenka leave the stage, then she comes back.

7

VIDA, GORAN

Goran is sitting and folding the paper flowers, red poppies. Vida is observing her husband while he folds the paper. Next to him is a heap of red paper and a plastic bag with a Tupperware container, which he takes out of his pocket and puts it next to Vida.

Goran is a tired-looking man, death is in his case a matter of decision. Vida refuses to admit it.

VIDA Poppies?

GORDAN The easiest to fold.

VIDA And the most beautiful.

GORAN Yes. I don't really know what I'm doing. We watched some You Tube videos on how to fold it. We're all lousy, but when you put it all on one heap, it doesn't look that bad.

VIDA Are you all doing poppies?

GORAN Pero is making daises... Making... He cuts them out of paper and then Lucija paints the petals. Mirela is making roses, she is the only one not completely useless...

VIDA Why are you helping her in the first place? It's her own fault she didn't announce it on time.

GORAN Luci? C'mon, she is a child.

VIDA She is twelve. She can talk, walk, go to school, she knows her responsibilities.

Goran seems indifferent.

VIDA You left your cellphone at Pero's place.

GORAN Yeah, I figured it out when I opened the fridge.

VIDA I called you. For no specific reason, just to see if you were back home. I wasn't checking on you, just so you know...

GORAN (uneasily) I was looking for... Nevermind, I checked the fridge... I saw you had forgotten...

Goran is giving her the Tupperware. Vida knows he is the only person in the world who would do such a thing for her.

GORAN And then I realized I had forgotten the cellphone.

VIDA You didn't have to drive here, I'd figure something out.

GORAN I didn't drive.

VIDA You walked? All the way down here?

GORAN It's fine. Better to be outside, than inside.

VIDA Why didn't you take the car?

Vida notices his embarrassment. It's clear to her now.

VIDA If you needed money for gas, you should have told me.

GORAN It's not that at all, really, I just wanted to walk a bit.

VIDA Pero told me you worked your guts out, and that you again refused to take the money.

GORAN I'm not really working, I am just helping Pero, it's not my job, I don't do it very well and shouldn't be paid for it.

Vida has heard it all before, but she still can't believe it.

GORAN I am sorry... I am sorry I don't contribute...

VIDA It's not about that at all.

GORAN It's obviously a problem, but Pero is a trained carpenter, he does magnificent work and deserves the money for it.

VIDA Pero has no complaints about your work. On the contrary.

GORAN Pero talks nonsense, I just do the simple tasks, and if I could lift more, I would be more useful, so I failed as a heavy lifter too.

VIDA Have you had any sleep today?

GORAN I was just lying down.

VIDA I wanted to ask you to pick me up after that interview, but...

Goran seems to have no idea what she is talking about.

VIDA For a hospital in Dublin...

GORAN Yes, when does it end?

VIDA Nevermind. Stay at home and get some sleep.

GORAN No, I'll come pick you up...

VIDA You can barely keep your eyes open.

GORAN Yes, but I can't fall asleep...

VIDA Why don't you take a sleeping pill...

GORAN I don't want to, no more pills...

VIDA Maybe they'll help this time.

GORAN Nothing helps...

VIDA In a month, we could be in Ireland.

GORAN We could.

VIDA We will spend time with Kristina and Marjan.

GORAN They have a child now.

VIDA So what? They are still your friends.

GORAN They are, I am just saying, things are different now.

VIDA It will be different for us to.

Goran gets unsettled by the thought of it.

GORAN Is that what you want?

Vida cannot believe Goran is asking her the question she thought was answered long time ago.

VIDA Yes, and what do you want?

GORAN I don't want you to carry the burden of life for the both of us.

VIDA You just need to get some rest.

GORAN Not a single grown up should expect being taken care of. Not to be able to carry the daily burdens on one's shoulders. The blessing of life is that one doesn't really have to carry it all on one's own. But we have to be able to, if that is required of us.

VIDA I am not asking anything of you. And I don't really understand you when you talk like this.

GORAN You are too patient.

VIDA You can find all the excuses for everyone else, and not even one for yourself.

GORAN This has been going on for too long.

VIDA Is that so? Because I have not had enough.

Vida takes him in her arms, as if she is trying to keep him there forever. But Goran is somebody who has not belonged to this world for quite some time, he cannot respond back, so she has to let go. She is shattered.

VIDA I am sorry...

Goran lights a cigarette. Vida takes out the Tupperware and looks inside.

GORAN Is that dinner or breakfast? How do you call your midnight meal?

Vida is not thinking about food, but about what she has just lost.

GORAN I must go.

VIDA My break isn't over yet.

GORAN I have to finish those flowers. 37 to go.

VIDA Until when?

GORAN Until tomorrow.

VIDA How much time do you need to do it?

GORAN Two more days.

VIDA Fuck it. You didn't even finish your cigarette, did you?

GORAN I didn't even feel like smoking.

VIDA Will you come pick me up?

GORAN I will.

Vida takes out some money from her pocket.

VIDA It's for gas.

Goran is looking at the money and his hands are shaking. He has no other option but to accept it. He takes it, puts it into his jacket, turns around in a ghostly manner and goes away.

8

VIDA, MARTIN, other hospital staff, a patient

Panic at the ER.

Vida is with Martin and the other staff. A patient is unconscious. They are trying to save her, Vida can barely see her with doctors blocking the view.

She doesn't seem well. Vida is looking at her long hair falling from the bed, with locks matted with blood. She has one shoe on one foot, the other cannot be seen from this angle.

Vida responds quickly to what she has been told by doctors, she seems gathered when they address her, she does her chores, but she cannot come closer because too many people are around her.

She is looking at their backs while they are frantically doing their jobs, fighting time. At one moment, Martin walks angrily away from the bed, takes away his glows demonstratively, and starts swearing. Vida sees the faces of other doctors, they are defeated. They all look at the clock at the same time.

It is already 6 in the morning.

9

MARTIN, VIDA, ŠIMUN

Vida is sitting gloomily, Martin is walking around like an animal in a cage, Šimun is eating cookies, distractedly.

MARTIN I don't understand it...

Martin screams from the bottom of his lungs, everybody else shudders.

ŠIMUN What's the matter with you, you fool, you Dalmatian idiot?

MARTIN I need to go and run. I can't breathe here.

ŠIMUN Run where?

MARTIN Anywhere, I just want to feel the pain in my lungs. Like there is not enough death around. I don't know why we are trying to save them in the first place. If they want to jump off a cliff, shoot themselves... let them, no need to bring them here for us to fix them.

ŠIMUN It's not certain yet...

MARTIN You've heard what the policeman said.

VIDA The policeman said they didn't know yet.

MARTIN He said that officially they can't make any comments, but that it seems...

VIDA But, yes, you are so certain.

MARTIN You have blood all over your hands.

VIDA Get out.

Martin is not moving.

VIDA Get out!!!

Martin and Šimun get up, both silent, they don't understand her breakdown.

Vida sits motionlessly.

A whimper comes out of her throat.

After some time, she hears Martin calling her from somewhere afar.

She stands up, washes her hands, holds on to the sink with her hands. She is trying to calm herself down.

She takes off her nursing uniform and puts on her own clothes. She stares at the uniform.

Martin walks into the room again, sits beside her and starts singing "Dirty Old Town". He kisses the crown of her head, like she is a child. Vida lets a sound out, half laughter, half mockery.

MARTIN When is the interview?

VIDA At 9.

MARTIN Can I visit you?

VIDA Only as a tourist. We can grab a beer.

MARTIN Or five. Good luck.

They say bye to each other, and she goes out.

10

MARTIN, ŠIMUN, an orderly

Martin goes back to work, into the operating room. He washes his hands. The orderlies are bringing in the stretchers.

MARTIN What do we have?

ŠIMUN Unfortunately, it's too late. Actually, let's go downstairs, immediately.

Martin looks at a man covered with sheets. He moves the sheets slowly away and as he does it, red paper flowers under them start falling out.

THE SIEGE OF THE IVORY TOWER

VLASTA, a nurse, in her late thirties
MIRJANA, Vlasta's colleague from work
BRUNA, Vlasta's colleague from work
ANA, Vlasta's colleague from work
NEVEN, a waiter working for a catering service and Vlasta's brother
RATKO, Neven's superior
A PORTER in the hotel
THE INTERVIEWER, in the Ivory Hospitals panel
FIRST WAITER
SECOND WAITER
FIRST NURSE
SECOND NURSE
THIRD NURSE
MR. LEARY, the manager of Ivory Hospitals

1 NEVEN, RATKO, other waiters

The hotel's kitchen. This time, the illness is in Neven, he is constantly on the verge of collapse.

Ratko outranks all the waiters, but he is not their manager. However, today he is in charge. Neven is the scapegoat of the day. The other waiters do not dare to say a thing.

RATKO I don't know what you were thinking.
NEVEN I don't know how they showed up so quickly.
RATKO I never park there.
NEVEN But there were no free spots.
RATKO Of course.
NEVEN We had to stop by...
RATKO Do you think I care?
NEVEN I still don't understand how the tow truck came so quickly.

RATKO They called.
NEVEN Why...?
RATKO Are you really so dumb?
NEVEN But we are only doing the job we were given...
RATKO And those guys weren't...
NEVEN That's not our fault.
RATKO Do you think I care about their feelings? You should have thought of that. So, what now, wise guy?
NEVEN Josip has a friend who works at the impound, he will let us know as soon as the van arrives there, and we can go pick it up. It should be there any minute, so we can probably go straightaway...
RATKO Are you going somewhere now?
NEVEN It doesn't have to be me, maybe...
RATKO It won't be you.
NEVEN Ok, what should I do?
RATKO Find something that needs to be done. Do I have to tell you everything?
NEVEN Ok, I'll... I'll arrange the tables.
RATKO What will the others do then?
NEVEN They can't do anything, not until the van is back.
RATKO Josip can go to the impound. The others, arrange the tables. And you, there should be a broom somewhere, take it and sweep the floors.
NEVEN But that's not something we...
RATKO Let the local boys see we mean well.
NEVEN Makes sense.
RATKO Don't be a wise guy. You think you are either too intelligent or too beautiful for this job.
NEVEN That's not true.
RATKO It was not a question, but an observation. I can see you are constantly making trouble... You like the money, without the effort...
NEVEN That's not...
RATKO It's not? Because now, because of you, nobody is working. We can just sit on our asses and let the time pass.

Neven's knees twitches from weakness, he has to hold on to something to remain standing.

RATKO You don't have to go on your knees, begging won't make any difference.

Ratko comes closer so that only Neven can hear him.

RATKO There is a list. If they start tightening the grip again, if they force us to stay at home, as far as I am concerned, you'll be the first one to go.

Neven takes the broom and goes away.

2 VLASTA, her colleagues

In front of the hotel, Vlasta approaches her colleagues.

VLASTA What's up ladies? You look as you are ready for a cigarette break, the only thing stopping you is your conscience.

MIRJANA I'll have one. I don't know about you, but I can't handle it.

Everybody but Vlasta lights one.

ANA Wait a minute, you've encouraged us to take a break, and now you are not taking one?

VLASTA It's not my fault you are easy to influence.

ANA C'mon, really, no ciggies? Didn't you stop breastfeeding anyways?

VLASTA Yes, I did, but I must admit, I don't miss the smell. And the girls are now old enough to understand, and I don't want to give them excuses for arguments we are going to have when they start smoking.

MIRJANA Yes, all of mine started to smoke too early. And I couldn't tell them anything...

The good thing is I can now borrow theirs.

BRUNA We'll see how long it lasts.

She puts a cigarette into her pocket.

ANA What do you think, how long will this last?

MIRJANA Not too long, I hope, I have to be there at 12.

BRUNA Wasn't Tomislava supposed to take your shift today?

MIRJANA Yes, but her kid got sick.

They exchange a meaningful look.

VLASTA Well, for her kid's sake, I hope she's not telling the truth.

ANA I would never lie about my kid being sick.

MIRJANA God forbid such a thing backfiring.

BRUNA Why the hell do they have the interviews in the hotel?

VLASTA They want to show how rich they are. Look at us, loaded, we can buy your entire labour force. They'll be underpaid but will earn more than in this shithole of a country. Let's go ladies, let's go.

BRUNA Do you think they offer poor salaries? Are their nurses low-paid?

VLASTA Their people are going to America and Australia. Something must be the problem.

BRUNA I've not heard anything about it.

MIRJANA They are going there because they are sick of the rain.

ANA They are going there because they can't smoke in bars.

MIRJANA Damn it, is that how it is?

ANA What do you think they will ask us?

MIRJANA How soon can we board the plane?

VLASTA I don't care.

BRUNA What do you mean?

VLASTA I'm not sure I want to go.

BRUNA So what, are you staying here?

VLASTA Yes, why not, what do I need that I don't already have?

BRUNA Everything.

VLASTA Money.

BRUNA So, everything.

VLASTA You sound like my Vlado.

BRUNA Vlado is right, you should listen to your husband.

VLASTA You have a good reason to go. Vlado thinks he will be welcomed as a king, they will bring the red carpet and say "thank you Vlado, for helping the Irish economy with your dilettante talents". Things don't work that way.

MIRJANA Why are you here then?

VLASTA I told him I'd go. I didn't tell him I'll get it.

ANA Anyways, what's the procedure if they take us? Who do we need to report it to?

MIRJANA You log into your e-citizen profile, there is a form there called "I am leaving this country," you write down your fiscal number, then you sign it and send it to the local police administration office... there are a few optional parts of the form, such as "list the reasons for your departure," there you can write down "is this really a question?"

BRUNA We could go inside.

MIRJANA You mean, out of this country?

BRUNA I mean, inside for the interview.

ANA Does anyone have a gum?

VLASTA I have some candy.

ANA Yes please.

Vlasta is giving candies away. At one moment, she notices Neven. She freezes. The others leave, while Vlasta continues to watch Neven who is sweeping the floor in front of the hotel.

3

NEVEN, VLASTA

Neven is feverish and his temperature is increasing. He is sweating, despite being cold. Vlasta is watching him. He takes a break because he knows something is not alright.

She is watching him and when he looks back at her, she sings a melody. Neven is looking at her as if he is dealing with a crazy person, he is not sure if it is real. Vlasta continues to sing.

VLASTA I forgot the rest of the tune. Do you remember? Do you?

NEVEN Are you ok?

VLASTA Are you ok? I think not, you're sweating.

NEVEN It's nothing.

VLASTA It looks like flu to me, or something worse.

NEVEN How would you know?

VLASTA I am a nurse.

NEVEN Who are you nursing?

VLASTA Good question.

She is singing the melody again.

NEVEN Are you driving the disease away?

VLASTA Most of what you have is not contagious. Except maybe the disease you've just mentioned, but that I can't really dodge because I have three kids.

NEVEN It's only a cold.

VLASTA It's probably something more serious.

NEVEN I can't afford anything more serious, so it's not serious.

VLASTA Because of work.

NEVEN Yes.

VLASTA A job is not everything.

NEVEN Other things are, and you don't have them if there is no job.

VLASTA And what's the point of work if you are not there? You should take care of yourself, go home, rest.

NEVEN Sometimes taking care of oneself is the last thing one can do.

VLASTA Yes, you are probably right. But who will then? And when? Our parents didn't look after us, we don't look after us, my kids probably won't, even when they will be able to. They'll send me to a nursing home, and I'll be ok because I know somebody will cook me three meals a day and give me the drugs I need when I start to forget the important things in life.

Neven looks at her suspiciously because he is not sure what she is talking about.

VLASTA Did you send your old mother to a nursing home?

NEVEN My mother is not old.

VLASTA I did with mine. She complaints but she's ok. She'd complain even more if she stayed with me. But I just can't, what can I do. You can't babysit both your kids and your parents at the same time. And if they forbid us from visiting the nursing homes when this illness starts misbehaving, nobody will be happier than me.

NEVEN I'm sorry, but I have to work...

VLASTA Where is your old man?

NEVEN That's none of your business, and I don't care.

VLASTA Yes, neither do I. But he died, just so you know.

NEVEN I'm sorry, but what?

VLASTA Your father died. Though, yes, my father died then too. Maybe your mother would like to know.

Neven is standing, stunned, trying to remember. He might know who Vlasta is.

VLASTA It's not that big of a deal. I'd like to hug you, but it doesn't seem appropriate until you remember me. You were a boy, it's understandable.

Vlasta leaves.

4

VLASTA, her colleagues and other nurses

The lobby of the hall where the interviews will take place. A small crowd. They are waiting.

THE INTERVIEWER Dear candidates, first off, I would like to thank you for your patience and interest to attend this meeting. Unfortunately, you will have to wait a bit more because some of the committee members are not here yet. They are stuck in traffic jam, on their way to Zagreb from the airport. I would like to apologize for that on behalf of the Ivory Hospitals consortium.

VLASTA What did I miss?

MIRJANA Another 'please wait' announcement.

VLASTA Like we are waiting to see a doctor.

MIRJANA What about you? You just disappeared.

VLASTA I was trying to cure someone.

MIRJANA What from?

VLASTA Repressed memories. (after a pause) Do you think our kids will have it better? Better than us?

MIRJANA I think I will have it better and somehow that's what matters.

VLASTA I know, but... they can't complain, they are better off than we were. But some things can't be solved sometimes... And I don't know if better living conditions could help, if it's already too late. I'm curious, when a corrupted man goes to a good

place, does that place make him better? Or is it otherwise? Does he corrupt the good place?

MIRJANA Are you afraid we might ruin Ireland?

VLASTA Who cares about Ireland.

MIRJANA What are you talking about then?

VLASTA About my brother. About my parents. About family. If you bring a bad person into a good family, would that person ruin the family or would the family help the person.

MIRJANA From my years-long experience in soup making, if you put some cold water into a boiling thick soup, you lose both the cold and the hot, only the lukewarm remains.

VLASTA What do you get with it?

MIRJANA More soup.

VLASTA I will pretend that this was the answer to my question.

MIRJANA You turned out alright, despite your family... If that's what worries you. They didn't...

VLASTA Yes, you can't make a dull knife duller. They didn't affect me. But not all of us had it like that.

5

RATKO, NEVEN

The kitchen. Neven is sitting on the floor, with his back against the wall. Quite weak and catatonic.

RATKO Boy, you are a plague. A bacterium that starts an epidemic. Today you are sick, tomorrow the other seventeen will be. I told Renato, I told him, don't hire this pussy, he'll be sick after a week.

NEVEN I hadn't been sick for eight months.

RATKO But now you are. Now we have a problem. Now when things need to be done. And tricks no longer work.

NEVEN It's not my fault...

RATKO It's never your fault. That's the way you are. That's your mother's fault. "It's not your fault, honey."

NEVEN Don't.

RATKO I told Renato not to take people like dogs off the street, he takes one because he has seven kids that need to be fed, he takes another one because his sight is not good so he can't drive and all that after he hit three people, he takes you because your mother is sick. When does it end?

NEVEN Why are you telling me this? You should call Renato and complain to him.

RATKO All of you here, you're all wise guys. To give unasked opinions - that's all you know.

Neven is thinking about Ratko. He decides to give his honest opinion. But Ratko is not able to handle it because he expects resistance. He gets madder and madder with every response from Neven.

NEVEN You are good at your job.

RATKO Are you pulling my leg, you little dog?

NEVEN You really are good at it. You could be our role model.

RATKO Get up!

NEVEN You are never sick.

RATKO Get out of here!

NEVEN You are always on time. Your shirt is always ironed.

RATKO I couldn't care less what Renato thinks, don't come back to work after today.

NEVEN You always do the right thing, no mistakes.

RATKO Get out of here!

NEVEN It's no surprise Renato put you in charge of us, I haven't seen you slack once.

Ratko is now so livid that he cannot control himself. He kicks Neven.

RATKO Go to hell!

NEVEN I will. Easy now.

RATKO Don't ever come back! Get out of my sight!

NEVEN I am going.

6

THE WHOLE ENSEMBLE

The nurses are waiting in the lobby of the interview hall. Nothing is happening and they are becoming impatient. There is a sound of buses arriving.

MIRJANA C'mon, sit down.

VLASTA I won't, my butt hurts. Our friends have arrived.

BRUNA Dalmatian girls?

VLASTA I can't see the license plates.

BRUNA Which company is it?

VLASTA Kroacija Transport is the name of the company. Maybe they are from Slavonia.

MIRJANA Exodus.

Vlasta sees Neven barely moving towards the toilet. She follows him, but he is already inside. She keeps her eyes on the toilet doors.

Two men in suits show up at the main entrance.

BRUNA Our Irishmen are here.

One heads towards the toilets immediately, the other one goes towards the interview room.

VLASTA Aaaand they have prostate issues.

BRUNA C'mon already.

MIRJANA This interview is making me nervous.

VLASTA Why?

MIRJANA Well, what will they ask me?

VLASTA They'll ask you your name and surname. Education.

BRUNA Just that?

VLASTA They'll ask you why Ireland?

MIRJANA This all sounds simple. Ask me something difficult.

VLASTA What do you mean 'difficult'?

MIRJANA Something that makes me think.

VLASTA What defines your relationship with money?

MIRJANA Now, this one is too difficult.

VLASTA Is there something in your everyday life or at your job that defines what you are, which happens to be penniless scum?

MIRJANA Why would anyone ask me that?

VLASTA To check how desperate you are.

BRUNA What would you say?

VLASTA I'd say, sir, I am defined by the disgust I feel towards the food leftovers in the kitchen sink that I have to collect with my hands while it is soaking in water and because of this I dream of being able to afford a dishwasher, so that I never have to do it again. And you madam, what is your answer?

BRUNA Then I am defined by the working hours, morning shift from 7 am to 3 pm or the afternoon one from 1 pm to 9 pm.

MIRJANA Why?

BRUNA When my husband's shift overlaps with mine, then we see each other after work, but then there is no one to take our children to and from school. That's why he always asks for the opposite shift, so that I can take the kids to school and he can bring them back from school in the afternoon. But also, if our shifts are different, we say goodbye to each other at 5:30 am when I am taking the train, and we see each other at 10 pm when he gets back from work. If I have the afternoon shift, he is usually already in bed by the time I'm back. Then I want to shake him and

wake him up to tell him about the shitty, or sometimes, rarely, good day that I have had, or to eat something together at least, but it would really be selfish to wake him up just because I miss him.

Vlasta and Bruna are waiting for Mirjana's reply.

MIRJANA My kids. A fight over the house they'll inherit from me even though I am not dead yet.

Ana is coming.

ANA Something is going on with the waiters. I heard one yelling. The shit he said.

VLASTA To whom?

ANA I don't know, someone got fired. May I be damned, they are worse than the ones in the hospital.

BRUNA There is not enough of them around, how do they dare treat them like that. They should keep them in cotton wool.

MIRJANA Oh c'mon, why is this taking so long? This is really rude. Does taking a piss really require this much time? Maybe it's diarrhea.

VLASTA They are still in the toilet.

MIRJANA Who?

VLASTA The Irish guy and Neven.

MIRJANA Who is Neven?

VLASTA One of the waiters.

MIRJANA What are they doing inside?

VLASTA We should call the porter.

Bruna knocks at the toilet door, while Vlasta goes to call the porter. The porter comes and tries to open the door with a key but fails.

THE PORTER It's not possible to squeeze out the key on the other side. We need a locksmith.

THE INTERVIEWER What's going on? Where is Mr. Leary?

MIRJANA It seems like a waiter has locked himself in with him.

THE INTERVIEWER (confused) Why?

BRUNA He's obviously a psychopath, we should call the police.

ANA Can somebody knock the door down?

MIRJANA Why would they do that when they only need to dismantle the lock. The doors are expensive. I gave two and half fucking thousand for mine.

ANA Look, I don't give a damn, I just want to do the interview. Can't they do something about it?

VLASTA They are doing something, they called the locksmith.

BRUNA What are they doing inside, why aren't they answering?

Ratko comes and knocks on the door. The other waiters are behind him.

Ratko starts to knock forcefully. He lets out a shower of swear words, he becomes difficult to listen to. When he starts kicking the doors with his foot, disapproval appears on everybody's faces. One of the waiters comes and pulls him away from the door.

BRUNA (to the waiter) Let him knock the door down, why are you meddling now?

RATKO (to the waiter) Take your hands off me now! Would you like to get fired too?

FIRST waiter They called the locksmith, there is no point in kicking the door down...

RATKO As far as I am concerned, you can go home. Whoever wants to keep their job, better get back to work.

Ratko leaves.

SECOND WAITER What's the point, the catering is for them anyways... (points towards the toilet) If their boss is locked in, I don't think they'll be eating...

THE PORTER I called the locksmith, he'll be here in an hour, an hour and twenty minutes...

FIRST NURSE So take an axe and break the door down, we can't wait that long...

SECOND NURSE We have to go to work in the afternoon.

THE PORTER What the hell is wrong with you? Swinging an axe in the middle of the hotel. After all, where would I get one...

SECOND NURSE What a bunch of useless men.

THE PORTER If you want to kick the door down, go ahead.

The porter goes away. One nurse knocks on the door.

THIRD NURSE Hey, what are you doing inside? C'mon, let the Irish out. How are we supposed to get a job when there's a fool sabotaging us? (to the waiters) Okay, what's wrong with him? Is he soft in his head?

SECOND WAITER He got fired.

BRUNA What's that got to do with us?

FIRST WAITER What's anything got to do with you? When the drivers protest? When the teachers protest?

BRUNA Is this supposed to be a protest? What a bunch of morons.

ANA But he is your friend, why don't you ask him to open the door?

SECOND NURSE I'm calling the police, this is a hostage crisis.

The nurse takes out her cellphone, enters a number, all the waiters jump on her, they are trying to get hold of her cellphone. She starts screaming. They take her cellphone away, she is upset, as are the other nurses. Mirjana is hitting one's back with her purse.

VLASTA Calm down, please, calm down! Give her the cellphone back! Give it back!

The waiters are watching her suspiciously.

VLASTA Give it back, she won't call anyone.

NURSE The hell I won't.

VLASTA The hell you will. We'll wait for the locksmith and that's it.

Vlasta gives her the cellphone. Ratko comes back again.

RATKO Have I not told you to go back? Stop embarrassing me in front of everyone. (to the first waiter) Go and get me that Pulaski axe.

The waiter laughs back, he doesn't move.

RATKO If you don't, you can all take your things and go.

First waiter moves a bit, it seems like he might head towards the restaurant, but instead he just slowly walks towards the toilet and stops right in front of the door to block the entrance.

The porter comes with a toolbox.

THE PORTER We'll try to take the door down by removing it from the hinges, maybe that'll work.

BRUNA Finally.

THE PORTER (to the waiter who is standing in front of the door) I can't do it with you standing there.

SECOND NURSE They are protesting.

THE PORTER Against what?

FIRST WAITER (he points towards Ratko) I am not moving until our boss comes and gets rid of this fool.

THE PORTER I have nothing to do with this, I just want this chaos to stop.

One of the nurses throws herself on the waiter who is still standing in front of the door.

THIRD NURSE Can you just move away from the door!

The waiter grabs her, but gets distracted for a moment, so the porter quickly approaches the door and starts unscrewing it, but the other waiter grabs him and pulls him back, the thrusting starts, but soon enough everybody manages to calm down, nobody wants a physical confrontation.

The porter is standing with his arms up.

THE PORTER Boys, c'mon, hold your horses.
ANA Or, even better, fuck off.

But now even more waiters are standing in front of the door, blocking it. Nobody can get closer.

SECOND WAITER (to Ratko) Renato is on the way. Either you go, or the seventeen of us do.

Ratko finally loses his nerves and jumps on him, the other waiters react and surround Ratko, they make him move away from the waiter at the door, they grab him around his neck, they try to retain him. The doors are now accessible again, the nurses take their chance and they go for it, they all start kicking it in order to break it down. Mirjana and Vlasta remain standing.

MIRJANA Dear God, this is crazy.

7

VLASTA, NEVEN

Vlasta approaches the bathroom from the other side, while everybody else is trying to knock the door down. They all - nurses, waiters - have gathered in front of the door, and in the background, in silence, Vlasta leaves the war behind.

Mr. Leary is unconscious. Neven looks exhausted, sitting on the floor, sweating heavily.

VLASTA If the nurses get you, they'll tear you to shreds.

NEVEN I don't know what's taking them so long.

VLASTA Nobody thought of the window.

NEVEN They prefer demolishing the doors.

VLASTA They want everybody to know how angry they are. Simple solutions don't count.

NEVEN Naturally, I'd do the same.

VLASTA Would you? See, I am not so sure. How is he?

NEVEN He doesn't look good. I don't know what's wrong with him. The moment he came in, he lost it. I just helped him sit down.

VLASTA You should both go to the hospital. Just to get checked.

NEVEN We will, as soon as they break in. In a moment or two.

VLASTA They'll take you somewhere else.

NEVEN I deserve everything I have coming.

Vlasta is singing her melody again, distractedly. Suddenly, she stops.

VLASTA I would like you to go home with me.

NEVEN What home?

VLASTA I know they erased all your memories - which is better, who is to say - but I am still five years older than you and I remember what you forgot.

NEVEN I think you have mistaken me for...

VLASTA No, no. Your mother is not my mother, and my mother is not yours. But my father is your father too. That I remember. I remember our mothers are not the same person, but at the same time they could have been. There wasn't much of a difference. Mine would take that old rubber hose from the shower and beat us over our backs with it until we crawled out of the house. Your mother did the same. A coincidence. They didn't see it one from another, it came naturally to them. The things they did felt natural. Do you remember?

Neven remembers.

VLASTA Our old man died a natural death. He fell into a stream and drowned because he was too drunk to get up.

NEVEN How is this...

VLASTA It is natural for his kind. It would be very strange to see him die in a bed.

NEVEN Where is your mum?

VLASTA In a nursing home. Tit for tat. Yours?

NEVEN In a hospital.

VLASTA Is she dying?

NEVEN How can you...

VLASTA If you feel the need to cry for them, cry, but don't think that any of them would shed one tear for you.

NEVEN They wouldn't. I know they wouldn't.

VLASTA This means you remember, don't you?

They recognize each other. Now they know who the other is.

VLASTA I am taking you home to meet my family.

NEVEN Home? Aren't you going to Ireland?

VLASTA (looking at the Irishman) Am I?

NEVEN I didn't do it. I swear.

VLASTA They called the police.

NEVEN Maybe the Irish will tell them it wasn't me.

VLASTA He probably will.

NEVEN They will break in any minute.

VLASTA Yes.

Vlasta is singing her melody and again fails to finish it.

VLASTA Do you remember?

NEVEN No.

VLASTA Try.

The door is broken. Everybody goes for Neven. Vlasta holds out her hand, she is trying to keep him from being taken away, she is singing the melody to him.

VLASTA And now? Do you remember now?

NEVEN No.

The mob has taken Neven and is pulling him away, she stays, still trying to get hold of him.

VLASTA Please remember! So that we can go home, finally.

Behind him only the Illness remains. Vlasta is observing it fearfully, she lights a cigarette. She watches the buses coming in, one after another, and another, and another...

FOUND AND LOST AGAIN

MIRNA, a young nurse, 19-years-old
MATIJA, Mirna's brother, in his late twenties
KATARINA, Mirna's colleague from work
Other people on the bus, the younger ones are part of Katarina's clique

THE DRIVER

VLASTA

VIDA

1

Lights alternate between grey and green, as if the vehicle is going through a forest. It is fierce and claustrophobic at the same time, because there is no escape and also comforting as the light is always better than the darkness.

Mirna appears looking like a small black figure. The Illness is trying to take her over, but she has been resisting it so far. Matija is right behind her back.

Matija shrugs his shoulders.

MATIJA That's what they said in the hospital.

MIRNA But not a single case has been recorded.

MATIJA That doesn't mean nobody is sick. Maybe he was the first case.

MIRNA But dad never leaves the house.

MATIJA Maybe you brought it.

MIRNA Why me?

MATIJA Well, you work in the hospital.

Mirna doesn't know what to say.

MATIJA C'mon, I'll give you a lift to where you need to be.

MIRNA And where is that?

MATIJA What kind of question is that? Home, of course. Mirna, how many times have

we told you? Our folks are old, you can't expect them to work. They are falling apart.

MIRNA I don't expect...

MATIJA (he interrupts her) And to leave us now with all the shit that's been going on...

MIRNA It's not my fault.

MATIJA And now with this disease, what if something happens? What if somebody dies?

MIRNA It would be easier if someone else also found a job.

MATIJA You mean me?

Mirna refuses to answer.

MATIJA Are you really this selfish?

MIRNA I do what I can.

MATIJA And we don't? Do you think it makes me happy seeing everything fall apart, when it should have been wonderful?

MIRNA There are other options, they could...

MATIJA You live in a dream world, as if you don't see the way things are. We have to find some kind of a solution.

MIRNA Singular, not plural.

MATIJA What?

MIRNA I have to.

MATIJA (sarcastically) Holly Mirna, the mother of God, pray for us. To you we send up our sighs. Have mercy towards us, pay our bills. If only you were funny because of your jokes, but you are funny because you talk nonsense.

MIRNA If you want a joke, I can tell you one.

Matija remains silent, so Mirna continues.

MIRNA How many bills can one salary fit?

Matija looks up at her quietly. Mirna's voice is trembling.

MIRNA If electricity is 270 kune per month, water 150, reserve is 130, garbage 63, heating

600, TV 80, internet 150, cellphones 250, medicine 186, cigarettes 720, the loan 1100 kn, food around 2000, how many bills is that?

Matija shrugs his shoulders.

MIRNA It can't fit them all. They are too many.

MATIJA That's not a very good joke.

MIRNA It's not funny to me either.

Matija is quiet. Mirna takes a breath, she is trying to keep the waters still.

MIRNA I've been thinking. The only thing we can do is... stop sending money to Robert in Zagreb...

MATIJA Hey...

MIRNA That's mum's pension and dad's disability benefit. If we used it to cover all the utilities and food, we could make it work...

MATIJA C'mon, we'll figure it out somehow, but Robert has to finish his thing.

MIRNA He is 17. If a club wanted him, they would have taken him already.

MATIJA Shut up, Mirna.

MIRNA We send money to Robert, while Tajana is the one breaking records, nobody asks her what can be done about it.

MATIJA What record, what are you talking about?

MIRNA A month ago, the cadet one.

MATIJA That wasn't official.

MIRNA It still happened, and nobody was interested.

MATIJA Because it's useless. What can a female athlete get, nobody cares about that.

MIRNA She's really good. She just needs a good coach...

MATIJA We can't deal with them both, Rob is our hope.

MIRNA You are just hoping you'll be living off his money.

Matija loses his nerves, he can't control himself, he smacks her in the back of the head. The gesture is more humiliating than painful. Mirna clenches her teeth and slams her fist on the table out of fury. But she must continue.

MIRNA I'm going to Ireland.

Matija starts to laugh sarcastically.

MIRNA I would have three times more money on a monthly basis than I have now.

Matija continues with his artificial laugh.

MIRNA I could pay off all the debts, I could cover all the bills... Everything would be fine.

MATIJA You could leave, and we could never see you again. I would really miss you, sister.

Mirna is anxiously looking at Matija as if she is done. Suddenly, she throws herself on the floor and rolls away. Matija is trying to catch her, but she is already out of reach, in a wild run.

2

MIRNA, THE DRIVER, VIDA, VLASTA, PASSENGERS

Women and girls are standing and smoking. The seats are all pointed in one direction, two seats in a row. The driver comes up front and puts out the Ivory Hospitals sign. He takes his place and waits for the passengers to get in. He is watching them, but they continue to smoke.

DRIVER Shall we?

ONE PASSENGER (continues to smoke with the rest of the group) Shall we what? You

were 15 minutes late and now you would want us to hurry.

While the passengers are throwing their cigarettes away and are slowly getting on the bus, Mirna is running in circles on the scene, from wider to more narrow ones, faster and faster, like she is bewitched by some unknown force, only to stop suddenly right in front of the driver who lets out a piercing scream, and all the other passengers are shook around as if the bus has just come to a screeching halt.

The driver is looking at Mirna who is still standing in front of him, red-faced, like a cat caught in front of a car.

DRIVER Girl, are you out of your mind?

MIRNA I'm sorry...

The driver takes the list with the names of all the passengers.

DRIVER Who are you?

MIRNA Mirna Ladić

DRIVER Yes, you are. (he raises his voice)
C'mon, go on and sit down.

Mirna sits down. There are silent murmurs everywhere. Mirna is trying to calm down, she is sweaty from running, she takes off a few layers of her clothes.

Vida and Vlasta are sitting close to her. They both look run-down, as if they don't belong to this group. They are not talking with anyone but Mirna.

Grey and green lights are again obscuring the stage for a few short seconds, everybody is hurt by their force, they are covering their eyes, but it all passes by quickly.

Mirna is taking her things out of the backpack, among them, there is an English language book. She is trying to make herself comfortable so that she can learn, but the book falls on the floor, Vida bends down and gives her back the book.

MIRNA Thank you...

VIDA Smart move, taking the book with you.

MIRNA It's a study book, for English, not something to shorten the ride with.

VIDA That is still better than looking out the window. Only dark green and grey exchanging. Green, then grey. Mostly grey.

MIRNA Is that how Ireland looks?

VIDA Greener and greyer, I think.

3

MIRNA, KATARINA, (EVERYBODY ELSE IS ON THE STAGE)

Mirna is immersed in the book. Katarina sits next to her.

Katarina is only a few years older than Mirna but looks more mature, while Mirna looks like she just got into high school, Katarina is dressed as a mature woman.

KATARINA Be careful not to erase everything you wrote with your nose, all the effort will be in vain.

Mirna is taken aback.

KATARINA I was joking, you silly cow, you don't have to look at me like that...

KATARINA takes a cigarette from behind her ear and puts it in her mouth.

MIRNA You can't smoke here.

KATARINA Do you think we'll stop anytime soon?

MIRNA I doubt it.

Katarina takes the cigarette, crossing over it with her fingers.

KATARINA Fuck them, they have no mercy. What's that big book?

MIRNA English language.

KATARINA Jesus, you really are preparing

MIRNA They will check our English.

KATARINA If we go for real.

Mirna doesn't understand what she is saying.

KATARINA So, you work in surgery?

Mirna nods.

KATARINA When you go, I presume they'll need somebody else.

MIRNA I suppose so.

KATARINA Sure so. Is there a chance you might recommend me there?

MIRNA Why? Aren't you going to Ireland?

KATARINA I won't, I might marry in the meantime.

Mirna looks at her hand, she sees a silver engagement ring on her finger, while Katarina is rubbing the cigarette between her hands.

KATARINA So then, would you recommend me?

Mirna is thinking, the world is passing her by. Grey and dark green, and she is sick of it.

Vida and Vlasta are observing her intently, they are waiting for her decision. Katarina has interpreted her silence well.

KATARINA So, you'll stay the jealous piece of shit you always were. By the way, your brother was looking for you.

Mirna now feels agitated.

KATARINA He told me your folks don't want you to go. He told me he would have grabbed your greasy hair and have taken you back if he had found you.

MIRNA Luckily, we missed each other.

KATARINA Luckily, I have his number so I can tell him where you are.

MIRNA Go ahead, it will be too late anyway.

KATARINA It will be too late for many things, if you don't learn your place.

MIRNA As long it's not where yours is.

Katarina stands up and goes back to her seat, surrounded by her clique.

4
MIRNA, VLASTA, VIDA, (ALL THE OTHERS ARE PRESENT IN THIS SCENE)

VLASTA The courage to take care of yourself is the first thing your parents make sure you lose.

MIRNA Yes, for your own protection.

VLASTA Yes, for your own protection because you don't know, because you are not aware, because you haven't seen enough of the world to draw your own conclusions. And what about when you are and you have? How do you know when you have crossed the border to where your courage becomes more important than their upbringing?

MIRNA (thinking) When their protection becomes a burden.

Mirna feels the weight of her situation on her shoulders, she's collapsing under it. She is trying to gather herself.

MIRNA I don't know how you are tackling it, but I am tired of this Illness.

VIDA Some would say that you are too young to be tired of anything.

MIRNA But not you. Because you know there is no cure.

VLASTA Every decade has its own illness, and we need at least two decades to recuperate.

VIDA A break, that's all we need.

MIRNA (gives a paper to Vlasta) Tell me, do you know where this shop is in Zagreb?

VLASTA No, unfortunately, I don't.

VIDA (looking at the paper) Size 39?

MIRNA My sister Tajana is an athlete, a very good one. She needs some equipment.

VLASTA Long-distance runner?

MIRNA She sprints, I was doing long-distance running. I was not good enough. She is much better. She could win championships. I hope she will.

The world is again comprised only of light.

MIRNA I have four brothers, and Tajana is my only sister.

VIDA Won't you miss her when you're gone?

Mirna is broken.

MIRNA I will miss her... my sister.

Vida holds out her hand.

MIRNA My sister...

Vlasta joins them.

MIRNA My sisters...

The Illness fills the space, slowly swallowing them all.

5

MIRNA, THE DRIVER, KATARINA, OTHER PASSENGERS

THE DRIVER 10 minutes everyone.

The passengers go out of the bus. Mirna with the others. They form a queue for coffee and pastry. Mirna is the last one in the queue. From the back Katarina approaches her with her gang.

Katarina grabs her hair and pulls it back, Mirna falls down to the ground. There is a stir, and the girls all grab Mirna's hair and pull her further away, they start hitting her. After they see Mirna is not getting up, they all move back and turn away. With them, all the other passengers disappear.

Everything is grey and green.

Mirna stands up and sees no one around, she is alone.

Mirna stands up on her trembling legs, she starts to move slowly, circularly, faster and faster, she starts to run again, faster and faster.

Grey and green.

Mirna disperses the Illness with her speed. She leaves everything behind.

She is struggling, losing her breath while running savagely.

She continues to run, she does not stop.

The Illness is almost gone.

Mirna slows down, she lets her muscles recuperate, she then stops.

She is breathing heavily, she is looking around.

Mirna shows people the paper with the name of the store, asking where it is.

Mirna walks around, still searching.

MIRNA It's for my sister. She needs it...

Mirna is standing, tired, on her trembling legs.

MIRNA I hope she'll run faster than me.







THE ONLY
WATCHING
PERFORM
ARE
AND IF THE
WOMEN. THE



Y PEOPLE
THIS
R M A N C E
WOMEN,
HEY'RE NOT
Y'RE SISSIES.

IVANA VUKOVIĆ

(SPLIT, 1992)



Ivana Vuković holds an MA in Dramaturgy and is a graduate student of Comparative Literature. She writes for theatre, film and occasionally TV. Her texts have also been performed as radio dramas. A frequent collaborator on different performances for both the independent and institutional scene and film screenplays.

Her first play *Otok* was presented as part of *Mala noćna čitanja*, published in the *Kazalište* magazine, performed as a radio drama on Croatian Radio and finally staged in 2019, directed by Helena Petković. *Marta i sedam strahova* was staged the same year, directed by Natalija Manojlović and co-produced by KUFER&KunstTeatar. Her play *55 kvadrata* won the 2018 Marin Držić Third Prize and in 2022 it was staged at the Croatian National Theatre in Split, directed by Ivan Plazibat.

For the Split Puppet Theatre she wrote an original text in 2020 under the title *Miš u toću*, which earned her the Mira Muhoberac Award for best original text at the Naj, naj, naj Festival organised by the Žar Ptica Children's Theatre in Zagreb.

YOU CAN BE ANYTHING

TRANSLATOR

Tomislav Žilić

A hot summer afternoon. Everyone's asleep. Except the girls. They're at play. But the day is too hot for that kind of play, so they play by passing familiar words back and forth.

But first, Lenu waits for Mara to come outside. And waits. She mumbles to herself while waiting. She's practicing the game.

LENU What happens when a woman falls down the stairs? Nothing, as long as the beer's intact. And you know what a woman is doing with a blank piece of paper in her hand? Reading her rights! A guy walks into a bar and asks this other guy: "What's this International Women's Day?" And he says: "It's basically Halloween, the witches just come out during the day."

MARA My mom says we should tone it down.

LENU (*whispers*) Don't trust anyone who can bleed for five days and survive!

MARA She does bleed a lot.

LENU and Mara mimic someone bleed-ing profusely.

Lenu bursts out laughing.

LENU You don't think it's funny?

MARA No.

LENU Why?

MARA Not convincing.

LENU I'm not convincing?

MARA Yeah, you're not convincing.

LENU What should we play then?

MARA Something easier.

LENU Do you bleed?

Mara doesn't respond.

Lenu and Mara languorously go through children's rhymes.

LENU AND MARA Eenie meenie sicileeny, Ooh ah zambalini, Achi cachi Liberache, I love you, Take a peach, Take a plum, Take a stick of bubble gum, Not a peach, Not a plum, Not a stick of bubble gum.

They laugh.

Hickory Dickory Dock The mouse ran up the clock The clock struck two The mouse went "boo!" Hickroy Dickory Dock. Baa, baa black sheep Have you any wool Yes sir, yes sir Three bags full. Incy wincy spider climbed up the water spout, Down came the rain and washed poor Wincy out. A sailor went to sea, sea, sea To see what he could see, see, see But all that he could see, see, see Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea! Head, shoulders, knees and toes, Knees and toes. And eyes, and ears, and mouth, and nose. Head, shoulders,

knees and toes, Knees and toes. I'm a little teapot Short and stout Here is my handle Here is my spout. Hey diddle diddle, The cat and the fiddle, The cow jumped over the moon. The little dog laughed to see such sport, And the dish ran away with the spoon. Five little ducks Went out one day Over the hill and far away Mother duck said "Quack, quack, quack, quack." But only four little ducks came back. There was a young man from Leeds Who swallowed a packet of seeds Great tufts of grass Grew out of his arse!

Lenu and Mara burst out laughing at "arse". They poke at each other with their feet for a while.

LENU Mara?

MARA Yes, Lenu?

LENU Do you know how boys pee outside?

MARA How?

LENU They whip it out and pee. Do you know how girls pee?

MARA How?

LENU They hold it in.

MARA You have to say "piss".

LENU Why?

MARA Only little girls say "pee".

LENU Do you know how girls take a piss?

MARA Firmer!

LENU Do you know how girls take a piss!?

MARA With determination!

LENU DO YOU KNOW HOW GIRLS TAKE A PISS??

MARA Don't yell! With more nerve!

LENU (*in a man's voice*) Do you know how girls take a piss?

MARA What was that all about?

LENU I dunno.

MARA So, do you know what this is?

LENU Ibuprofen flavored condoms.

MARA And you know what they're used for?

LENU For what?

MARA When she has a headache.

LENU (*adultlike*) My mom needs those, she always has headaches. (*in her own voice*) More convincing?

MARA Keep it up. Who told you that?

LENU Women have headaches all the time.

MARA Really?

LENU Wanna hear a joke?

MARA Sure.

LENU Do you know what Halloween is?

MARA No, what?

LENU It's the same as the International Women's Day, but in the dark.

MARA Give me another.

LENU Why don't old ladies wear mini skirts?

MARA Why?

LENU So their boobs don't slip out.

MARA Another one!

LENU You'll have to do it with me.

MARA OK.

LENU (*issues a warning*) It's a serious one.

MARA But is it funny?

LENU Very. You ready?

Mara gives a childlike nod.

LENU Marija and her husband Omar are sitting down. A nurse approaches them and says: (*plays the nurse*) We have a new package deal. It's new so there's a promotional price. A real bargain. It includes delivery, inoculation, ear piercing, and circumcision.

MARA/OMAR (*in a man's voice*) Oh, so what's the hitch?

LENU He wouldn't say hitch, it makes him sound... like a pussy, I mean girly.

MARA/OMAR Oh, so what's the rub?

LENU/NURSE You have to buy it during the first trimester.

MARA/OMAR Why so?

LENU/NURSE Well, what if the child doesn't get born? Should we bear the blame? There's your "rub". We have to make a living too.

MARA/OMAR But this is a public institution.

LENU/NURSE That's right. This is a public institution.

MARA/OMAR Okay, okay... and what about this ear piercing business? If we lose that, how much is it then?

Lenu is satisfied with Mara's playing.

LENU/NURSE It doesn't work without it, it's a package deal.

MARA/OMAR But what if I don't want it?

LENU/NURSE You still get it.

MARA/OMAR Don't you have package that only includes delivery, inoculation, and circumcision?

LENU/NURSE We do.

MARA/OMAR Then we'll take that one.

LENU/NURSE But that one's pricier.

MARA/OMAR How can it be pricier?

LENU/NURSE The first one is a new package and we offer it at a promotional price.

MARA/OMAR All right, we'll take that one, but we'll skip the ear piercing.

LENU/NURSE But it's nice having their ears pierced, then everybody knows it's a girl right away.

MARA/OMAR This inoculation, is it compulsory?

LENU/NURSE Yes, it's required by law.

MARA/OMAR In Indonesia, they'd pay me 80 000 rupi to bring in my little girl for circumcision. Do you know, madam, how much that is in kuna?

LENU/NURSE (*bursts out laughing*) Oh, about 37 kuna.

MARA/OMAR Is something funny?

LENU (*with a laugh, in her own voice*) You couldn't buy a cup of coffee and a pack of cigarettes with that.

MARA/OMAR That happens to be my salary...

Mara can't control herself either, so she joins in Lenu's laugh.

MARA (*serious, in her own voice*) And what about Marija?

LENU Nothing, she's from another joke.

MARA What's that joke about?

LENU She thinks she's entitled to a free abortion.

MARA That one's even more funny. I like that part with the ear piercing, so everyone knows it's a girl... Where did you get that from?

LENU Off of TV.

MARA You were convincing.

LENU You too.

LENU pulls her hair down across her face.

LENU Guess who!

MARA Marija from Croatia?

Lenu shakes her head.

MARA Oh, I know! It's Farzaneh from Afghanistan!

Lenu shakes her head.

MARA It's your mom!

Lenu shakes her head.

MARA It's Nia from Africa!

Lenu brushes the hair aside.

LENU From Africa?

MARA What?

LENU Where in Africa?

MARA Africa's Africa, wherever.

Lenu pulls her hair down across her face again.

LENU Chen Jie, a twenty-year-old doctoral candidate from China.

Mara turns serious.

MARA You sure?

LENU I'm sure!

MARA *(in a high-pitched female voice)* You know what they say, in China there's three genders; male, female, and doctoral candidate!

LENU *(in unison with Mara)* ...female and doctoral candidate! Come one!

MARA Let's do Africa first.

LENU You got cold feet?

MARA I need to warm up for that one.

LENU *(emphasizes Morocco)* Khadija from Morocco?

MARA/RADIO ANNOUNCER *(imitates a female radio announcer)* The Moroccan court has disclosed that Mrs. Khadija, daughter of Ahmed, is searching for her husband Muhammad, son of Muhammad, who disappeared three years ago... *(in her own voice)* Listen, here, listen, that's you!

LENU Why do I always have to be the suspended wife?

MARA That's how we play it.

LENU I think it's silly we always play it the same way.

MARA But you already know her.

LENU She's boring.

MARA Wanna switch?

LENU You have to be convincing. You have talk really slow. Your life is over if you don't find him, you'll forever be the wife whose husband left her...

MARA I know everything.

Mara gets into character.

MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE *(slowly, wearily)* I've no money left to search for him.

LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER *(in the radio announcer's voice)* You have no other options, Khadija, you have to find him.

MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE They've told me he's living with some other woman.

LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER Do you know for sure, or is it just hearsay?

MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE They all leave because of that, don't they?

LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER It's your duty do find him if you want a legal divorce.

MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE I have nothing left to search with.

LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER And now what? You give up, Khadija? Remain the suspended wife forever? Without rights? Without a man to protect you? Without children? Huh? What does that make you, Khadija?

MARA/SUSPENDED WIFE I would like to ask all your listeners to let me know if they know where he is!

LENU/RADIO ANNOUNCER Dear listeners, you've heard, if you know the whereabouts of Khadija's husband Muhammad, son of Muhammad, contact our radio station! Khadija, hold on for at least another month, the court has to see you're doing your best. What's three years, right? I'm sure you're still young, even though your voice sounds old...

Lenu approaches Mara and gives her a hug.

MARA Khadija!!

They both burst out laughing.

LENU/TEACHER *(suddenly)* Why are you provoking him?

MARA/STUDENT *(goes along with it)* But I was just sitting here...

LENU/TEACHER Just look at you, making faces...

MARA/STUDENT It's because he...

LENU/TEACHER I don't want to hear it. Why aren't you minding your own business?

MARA/STUDENT But I was doing my homework...

LENU/TEACHER Why are you dressed like that?

MARA/STUDENT Like what?

LENU/TEACHER Where's your camisole? Would you just look at this!

Lenu lifts Mara's t-shirt, revealing her bare, white belly.

LENU/TEACHER Were you making eyes at him? Huh? Were you? She wants to know why he's touching her, and she's provoking him, not wearing a camisole! You should be ashamed! Say: I'm sorry, I won't do it ever again.

MARA/STUDENT I'm sorry, teacher, I won't do it...

LENU/TEACHER Not to me, him!

MARA/STUDENT I'm sorry, I won't do it...

LENU/TEACHER What's that?

MARA/STUDENT I'm sorry, I won't provoke you anymore, I won't laugh, I won't... do anything anymore.

LENU/TEACHER Do you forgive her?

Mara is looking at Lenu, who's staring eyes front.

Mara takes over her character.

MARA/TEACHER Your teacher has a solution for everything. Hey, be quiet! Everybody, look here. What do you see?

LENU/CLASS (*children's voices in unison*) Two bananas!

MARA/TEACHER Two bananas, that's right. What kind of bananas?

LENU/CLASS Two identical bananas!

MARA/TEACHER That's right! Two identical bananas! Do we all agree that the bananas are starting off on equal terms?

LENU/CLASS Yeeees!

MARA/TEACHER We'll put the two identical bananas next to each other on a shelf.

LENU/CLASS Okaaaay!

MARA/TEACHER We will never touch one of the bananas!

LENU/CLASS Neveeeeeer!

MARA/TEACHER The other banana we'll give a slight touch every time we pass by!

LENU/CLASS We wiiiiiii!

MARA/TEACHER Squeeze it!

LENU/CLASS Grab iiiit!

MARA/TEACHER Caress it!

LENU/CLASS Pet iiiiii!

MARA/TEACHER Pinch it!

LENU/CLASS Grope iiiiii!

MARA/TEACHER Smack it!

LENU/CLASS Whack it oooff!

MARA/TEACHER In a week's time...

LENU/CLASS Rape iiiiii!

MARA/TEACHER Hey, settle down!

LENU/CLASS Huuush!

MARA/TEACHER In a week's time we'll see how one banana looks, and then the other. And that's how we'll learn the difference between girls who have been touched and those who haven't...

LENU/STUDENT (*interrupts her*) Miss, miss, he's touching me right now!

MARA/TEACHER Well, dear, you're a model student, and he's a mischievous boy! You should extend a positive influence on him, not the other way around!

LENU You're horsing around.

MARA I'm not horsing around.

LENU Sure sounds like you're horsing around. It's not convincing.

MARA I don't know how to.

LENU Try a man's voice.

MARA/MALE TEACHER Well, dear, you're a model student, and he's a mischievous boy! You should be extend a positive influence on him, not the other way around!

LENU That clears it up.

MARA/TEACHER (*in a man's booming voice*) Dear!!!

LENU We have to quiet down, we'll wake up my mom!

Absolute silence.

MARA I've got a joke.

LENU Go ahead.

MARA They called her a whore. They called her a whore because she gave a blowjob to a fourth-grader. No, because they said she gave a blowjob to a fourth-grader. And that's what whores do, y'know, only whores give blowjobs. And then they called her a slut and said they did her mother and that her mother is a bitch. And that's even worse than a whore, because being a bitch means they did her from behind, y'know. And then they told her they'll fuck her. Then they told her she needs a good fuck. I don't know what that means, but it's what they told her. And then they said she has an ugly clitoris. Just like her mom. And d'you know what a clitoris is used for?

LENU Nothing.

MARA You already knew that one.

LENU Yeah.

MARA Why didn't you say so?

LENU It has a second part.

MARA What is it?

LENU They lunged at her, tore her t-shirt and her skirt and her head scarf and disheveled

her hair and made it down to her clitoris and they liked it and they rubbed it really hard, and then she was in pain and she screamed: "no!". But they have a hard time dealing with rejection so they kept on, even stronger and rougher, and clawed at her and held her hands while shoving at each other, taking turns.

MARA I don't believe it, it's no good, you're exaggerating.

LENU I just only made it up.

MARA I could tell.

LENU I have a better one.

MARA Is it convincing?

LENU Yeah. Margaret (*Lenu points at herself*) and Jelena are sitting in a waiting room. (*Lenu points at Mara*) And a nurse approaches them.

MARA That one's new!

LENU Yeah. I've heard it from my mom and our neighbor, whose mother-in-law's sister's colleague had someone up there. It's fresh!

MARA You be the nurse.

LENU Sure.

LENU/NURSE (*hysterically*) Congratulations, it's a boy!

LENU/MARGARET (*timidly and quietly*) But I'm here for... I'm not giving birth.

LENU/NURSE Oh you're here for an abortion?

LENA as Margaret nods.

LENU/NURSE (*still hysterically*) Oh, in that case, I apologize.

LENU/MARGARET It's a baby boy.

LENU/NURSE Then you'll have to wait for a bit more, the doctor's just gone out for lunch. Have you filled out the form?

LENU/MARGARET Yes, yes.

Lenu as the nurse gives a faint, slightly awkward smile, then sits down next to Mara, as Margaret, and they sit in silence for a while. Mara casts glances at Lenu, or Jelena at Margaret, and smiles at her affectionately.

MARA/JELENA (*chattily*) You're so lucky. Carrying a baby boy. A son.

LENU/MARGARET Yes, but I can't, I'm not supposed to. I mean, I'm allowed, but I can't afford it without child benefit.

MARA/JELENA You come from a decent country, aren't you entitled to child benefit?

LENU/MARGARET No, not for a third child.

MARA/JELENA In my country, only the unemployed receive child benefit. The socially disadvantaged.

Lenu as Margaret merely smiles.

LENU/MARGARET It's nice here. They've decorated the place really well. The plants and everything.

MARA/JELENA Yes, it really looks fine. You should see some of the clinics I've been to. Good grief.

LENU/MARGARET Yes?

MARA/JELENA Well all right, it must be a lot nicer where you come from.

Lenu nods at Mara, signaling she understands a monologue is due. Lenu as Margaret switches between a childlike and an overly adultlike air.

LENU/MARGARET Back home, it's gray and raining. And it pours and pours and pours for days and days. Sometimes you're positive you'll never see the sunlight again. All you see is the concrete and the gloom and rows and rows of identical houses and office wallpapers and unwashed windowpanes, because who'd wash those in the constant rain. And then you ask yourself, why? (*to Mara as Jelena*) It's nice here too.

MARA/JELENA I'm sorry to ask such intimate questions, but is it legal for you to have an abortion?

LENU/MARGARET Yes.

MARA/JELENA Despite it being a boy?

LENU/MARGARET What do you mean?

MARA/JELENA And you can do it in any hospital?

LENU/MARGARET That's right.

MARA/JELENA And nobody asks any questions?

LENU/MARGARET You just fill out a form.

MARA/JELENA And the doctors do the procedure?

LENU/MARGARET I don't quite follow you.

MARA/JELENA And how much does it cost?

LENU/MARGARET It's free.

MARA/JELENA Free? Well, lucky you.

Mara as Jelena and Lenu as Margaret just sit and wait. Mara notices Lenu is serious.

MARA/JELENA I've just read in the papers that your princess is pregnant again. And it's her third. Oh, I think they're all so adorable. And she's wonderful, the way she dresses and that smile of hers. I sometimes have this dream: princess Jelena. Imagine; me, a princess?

LENU/MARGARET And what would you do as a princess?

MARA/JELENA First, I'd throw away all indoor clothing. I hate indoor clothing. But my mother's to blame, she never let me buy indoor clothing. What for? I never feel pretty at home, and it's not fair, you know. Do you work?

LENU/MARGARET Yes.

MARA/JELENA Well then, you must dress nice. Like now, I was just eyeing that blouse of yours, it's so elegant.

LENU/MARGARET Oh, this, just an old rag.

MARA/JELENA It's how old rags should look. And not like... you know what I like to wear? Oh, I'm too embarrassed to say.

LENU/MARGARET Please, go ahead. (*to herself*) This one's probably already had an abortion. Her husband must be supportive

and waiting for her and when they go to bed tonight all relaxed he'll take her head on to his lap and caress her hair until she falls asleep. Look at her, all uninhibited, not smothered by the anxiety enveloping me, that's inside of me and squeezing me, pressing on my pelvis, my insides are crushing my lungs, I won't be able to endure this. I don't want them to burrow inside of me, rip out a part of me and throw it in the trash. I just want him to come up to me and tell me everything will be all right, that he'll find work, that he'll contribute, that I'm not alone. Tell me I'm not alone, you idiot! (*to Jelena*) Please, go ahead.

MARA/JELENA You're too kind. But don't tell anyone. I wear my husband's old shirts. And, sometimes, when my husband's at work and the kids at school or their grandma's, I get dressed and just sit there. And enjoy myself. There, that's the first thing I'd do. I'd forbid women to save clothes for special occasions.

LENU/MARGARET Who are we saving it for in the first place, what for?

MARA/JELENA Who knows.

LENU/MARGARET Have you already had an abortion? I'm sorry I'm asking that.

MARA/JELENA Yes, two times now. I hope I won't have to have a third one. Keep your fingers crossed!

Mara laughs at her own quip.

LENU/MARGARET And does it hurt?

Mara laughs at Lenu's quip.

MARA/JELENA You'll manage, don't worry.

LENU/MARGARET I'm really scared.

MARA/JELENA (*as if jokingly*) I'm more afraid of my husband. If I told him he's about to have another daughter... oh my, oh my.

LENU/MARGARET He doesn't like girls?

MARA/JELENA Of course he does. He has two daughters.

LENU/MARGARET So what's the problem?

MARA/JELENA He has two daughters.

LENU What kind of a man is he?

MARA A pussy.

LENU A girl shouldn't swear like that.

MARA (*in a man's voice*) Pussy!

LENU Better.

MARA I thinks the nurse should come up to them again now and tell them: It's a girl, I'm sorry.

LENU/NURSE (*hysterically*) It's a girl. I'm sorry.

Mara as Jelena grabs Lenu as Margaret by the hand.

LENU/MARGARET I'm sorry.

Mara gestures she should continue.

LENU/NURSE (*hysterically*) It's a girl. I'm sorry.

LENU/MARGARET I'm sorry.

LENU/NURSE (*hysterically*) Will you be staying for an abortion then?

MARA/JELENA Yes.

LENU/MARGARET I'm so sorry.

MARA/JELENA Imagine us switching, me carrying your baby boy...

Silence.

LENU/MARGARET Would you like me to get you something from the vending machine? Some coffee?

MARA/JELENA Tea might be better.

LENU/MARGARET We could have a cigarette now that we're both... since we're not going to...

MARA/JELENA That would be nice.

LENU as Margaret gets an empty cup, for the pretend tea, and gives Mara as Jelena a real cigarette.

MARA/JELENA I can't remember the last time I could finish a cigarette during the day, in peace.

LENU/MARGARET I don't usually smoke.

MARA/JELENA No? How come you are now?

LENU/MARGARET Well, just seems like one of those smoking moments.

MARA/JELENA You look good with it.

Lenu takes a drag and coughs.

MARA (*under her breath*) You don't have to inhale it!

LENU I have to! To make it more convincing!

LENU/MARGARET Do you have any kids, any other kids, from before?

Mara as Jelena takes a drag with confidence and exhales it.

MARA/JELENA Yes. There's Milica, she's four, and Sara, she's about to turn two.

LENU/MARGARET I have John, who's nine, and David, who's five.

MARA/JELENA Two sons? Just like princess Diana.

LENU/MARGARET Yes. I've always wanted a daughter. I'd call her Frances.

MARA/JELENA Isn't that a boy's name?

LENU/MARGARET No. Francis is for boys, Frances is for girls. It means, "free one".

MARA/JELENA Oh, Francis. Just like the pope, you know? In our language, that would be Franka or Francika. My third daughter is called Ljiljana, and my fourth is Dragana. And this one... we'll call her Francika.

LENU/MARGARET Francika!

MARA/JELENA ...

LENU/MARGARET And, does your husband know you're here?

MARA/JELENA Of course he does. I don't have the money to pay for this, do you know how much for this test alone? Chorionic villus sampling, that's what it's called. 350 **EURO!** That's how much a stroller costs. And now an abortion! That's another 150, 220 euro. (*pause*) Your husband doesn't know? **LENU/MARGARET** Uhm... I'm, we're actually divorced.

MARA/JELENA Oh. But... is it his?

LENU/MARGARET No. A colleague from work.

Mara has trouble finding the words, she doesn't quite understand, but she wants to and so she goes on playing.

MARA/JELENA Oh, well, it's not, you know, unusual or wrong or, it happens every day.

LENU/MARGARET Actually. I didn't want to.

MARA/JELENA Of course you didn't want a baby, I mean, who would, being without a husband, no safety net, but...

LENU/MARGARET I didn't really want to...

MARA/JELENA But you slept with him?

Lenu or Margaret is silent. Mara jumps up enthusiastically, she's figured it out, so she elatedly goes on as Jelena.

MARA/JELENA But, but, that means you could have the baby, you just need to prove you didn't want it, that you didn't want the baby, that he'd, I mean, that he'd raped you, right? Yes, it's not your fault, you just need to prove you didn't want a baby and you can have the baby and you're entitled to child benefit. You don't have to be afraid of the... of the abortion.

LENU/MARGARET But you see, he didn't exactly rape me, we had dinner and we were kissing and snuggling and everything and, we didn't have a condom, you know, but he'd already, you know, had an erection and couldn't hold back anymore. I mean, I still didn't want to, but...

MARA/JELENA He couldn't hold back? You know, I often have a headache when my husband can't hold back. But easy for me to say, he's my husband, I have nothing to..

Mara can't help but laughing, she's really amused by the whole headache business.

MARA (*under her breath*) What happens when her husband finds the ibuprofen flavored condom? What then?

Lenu is not amused with Mara dropping out of character.

MARA/JELENA I have nothing to complain about...

LENU You don't get it. The joke's about him not being able to hold back.

MARA Oh. Well that's circumstantial. But it's still rape.

LENU Just a little rape.

MARA/JELENA But isn't it rape? At least in your country that should be recognized as rape!

Lenu gives up playing.

LENU She didn't report him. Tough for her.

MARA Jelena would also add that her friend said something in the lines of: I have three daughters and it doesn't matter - we think of them as our sons.

LENU Daughtersons!

MARA Listen to this: In every woman there lies a devil which needs to be killed either by work or childbirth or by both; and if a woman eludes both, then she should be put to death.

LENU That's not a joke. That's a quote.

MARA So what, isn't it funny? Or is it? Oh, I've remembered an oldy, wanna hear?

LENU Go ahead!

MARA How much does an abortion cost? - It depends; do you need a receipt?

LENU Well you need a receipt, how else are you supposed to file a complaint if they leave something inside your womb, if they don't clean you up properly, if they leave half of the fetus, if they don't stitch you up, if...

MARA Why're you taking everything seriously all of the sudden? A joke - quick!

LENU How do you call a men's theater performance?

MARA How?

LENU A theater performance. How do you call a women's theater performance?

MARA A women's theater performance.

LENU You already knew that one.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 Well this is a women's theater performance.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 It is. The text was written by a woman, it can't be anything else but a women's theater performance.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 Well, sure. There are women in the creative team.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 If they're not women, they're pussies.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 It's played by women, and if they're not women, they're fags. The only people watching this performance are women, and if they're not women, they're sissies.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 Wimps.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 Snowflakes.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 Wussies.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 Doormats.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 Momma's boys.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 The text won an award. Because there were women on the panel. Of course.

PERFORMER 2 This text really sucks dick.

Mara laughs at the swearword.

PERFORMER 2 What? The author's female so she can't write "dick"?

PERFORMER 1 I'm an actress so I can't say "dick"? Pathetic. And selfish.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 The text didn't win an award because it's littered with swear-words, I mean dicks. Only real men can write texts littered with dicks and win an award. Only real men can put chauvinistic remarks in Adam's mouth, yeah, yeah, that's right, his mouth, and make it subversive and masculinely powerful.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 This is a women's performance, but it might even be performed by men.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 Because we're pussies!

MARA/PERFORMER 1 Wait, wait, as in "I'd like to have me some of that pussy", or as in "stop being such a pussy, or are you afraid of being in a women's theater performance"

LENU/PERFORMER 2 Pussies as in losers. Pussies as in inadequate men.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 I could create a women's theater performance played entirely by men because I'm a woman.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 I'm allowed to make a women's theater performance played entirely by men because I'm a woman.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 Why is this called a women's theater performance?

LENU/PERFORMER 2 Because it's about women and women's issues.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 Does that mean it's not intended for a male audience?

LENU/PERFORMER 2 It means it's not intended for men on either side of the stage.

PERFORMER 1 Why do we call theater performance created by women "women's theater performances"?

PERFORMER 2 So we don't bother the men.

PERFORMER 1 How do you stop a theater performance from being degraded to a "women's theater performance"?

PERFORMER 2 With men.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 Actors are fags anyway, I mean pussies, I mean women.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 We're women! We really are women.

MARA/PERFORMER 1 This theater performance is actually being performed by women.

LENU/PERFORMER 2 So, we are women, and this is the theater performance "You Can Be Anything".

MARA You really can be. Barbie can be anything she wants to be, and so can you.

LENU Barbie? This is stupid. Let's try the Chinese doctoral candidate, that one's really funny.

LENU/CHEN JIE Chen Jie, twenty-seven-year-old doctoral candidate from China.

MARA/ANCHOR (*in a male TV anchor's deep voice*) Chen Jie! You're a, you're a, what we'd call a "sheng nu"...

LENU The voice is wrong!

MARA/ANCHOR (*in an even deeper voice*) Chen Jie! You're a "sheng nu" or "leftover woman"...

LENU No, it can't be a man's voice.

MARA Why?

LENU It's kinda chauvinistic.

MARA Then we'll do a woman's voice.

LENU Then it won't be chauvinistic.

MARA/ANCHOR (*voicing a female TV anchor*) Chen Jie! You're a, you're a, what we'd call a "sheng nu"... or "leftover woman". Ladies and gentlemen, the leftover woman... Chen Jie came here to fulfill her familial and social, not to mention political, duty to get married! To finally get married to one of the 20 million available men outnumbering the women! Chen Jie, tell us a little something about yourself, please!

LENU/CHEN JIE Chen Jie, pleased to meet you. I hold a doctoral degree in...

MARA/ANCHOR No, no, no...

LENU/CHEN JIE What?

MARA/ANCHOR No! You shouldn't say that at all, no one will have you. Rather pretend you're a second-class woman.

LENU/CHEN JIE Second class?

MARA/ANCHOR Yes, if you want a first-class man.

LENU/CHEN JIE But I can't lie!

MARA/ANCHOR You have to lie, otherwise no one will have you! You know the saying, there's three genders in China: male, female, and doctoral candidates!

LENU You know, this is just a lousy story. I'm going to go to university.

MARA Don't take it too seriously.

LENU Mara?

MARA Lenu?

LENU I'm having the painters.

MARA What?

LENU You know.

MARA No I don't.

LENU It's the painters. I'm having the painters in.

MARA What painters?

LENU You know... my aunt is here.

MARA What aunt?

LENU My aunt Flo.

MARA I didn't know you have an aunt Flo.

LENU Well neither did I, Mara!

MARA So she just showed up and brought some painters along?

LENU I have the blob!!

MARA They painted a blob?!

LENU Mara, I'm bleeding down there!

MARA Oh!

LENU How about you?

MARA Oh, sure.

LENU Why didn't you tell me?

MARA Why does it matter all of the sudden?

LENU Aren't you in pain?

MARA No. Why?

LENU No pain at all?

MARA No. Why?

LENU Aren't you ashamed?

MARA Ashamed?

LENU Yes, ashamed.

MARA Ashamed ashamed?

LENU Ashamed.

MARA You feel ashamed?

LENU We all feel ashamed.

MARA I wanna feel ashamed!

LENU Mara, why were you lying?

MARA My grandma told me it's time I start bleeding and that I shouldn't play with Barbies anymore, but that I'll lose interest in them when I start to bleed anyway.

LENU Is that a joke?

MARA I'll go again. You be me.

MARA/GRANDMA Have you started to bleed?

MARA And her huge boobs are hanging down to her navel.

LENU/MARA No.

MARA/GRANDMA When are you going to start?

MARA And she's walking around all stooped, I think her boobs are pulling her down.

LENU/MARA I don't know. Is it something you can tell?

MARA/GRANDMA It's high time you start. All the other girls have stopped being girls, you're the only one still playing with those ninnies.

MARA Then she lifts up her t-shirt because she thinks her boobs are funny.

LENU/MARA Lenu is not a ninny!

MARA/GRANDMA Nobody said Lenu is ninny, you ninny! Those 29.21 cm tall plastic dolls of yours.

MARA That's how she plays with us. She shows us her boobs.

LENU/MARA They're not ninnies. I can be anything with them.

MARA/GRANDMA Mara, this is a big deal.

MARA Then she grabs the Barbie by her hair.

LENU/MARA What?

MARA/GRANDMA You can buy this plastic ninny who can be anything, but you can't be anything.



| PHOTO BY KATARINA ZLATEC

LENU/MARA Yes I can!

MARA/GRANDMA No you can't!

LENU/MARA Yes I can!

MARA/BAKA No you can't!

LENU/MARA Yes I can!

LENU Your grandma is right.

MARA Lenu!

LENU/MARA (*unconvincingly*) I can be anything!

MARA You're not convincing.

LENU This game is not convincing.

MARA Oh, c'mon Lenu, why're you acting up now!

LENU/MARA (*more convincingly*) I can be anything I want!

MARA/GRANDMA You can't even start bleeding! What could you possibly do with that girlish body of yours?

LENU AND MARA Why would I need a body to be anything I want to be?

MARA/GRANDMA What, do you think this silly Barbie can be anything?

LENU/MARA Well, she listens to her mom like I do mine, she studies, does her homework,

is mindful during class, she doesn't provoke anyone, she's persistent...

MARA/GRANDMA Because she has nice boobs and she married rich and divorced even richer.

LENU/MARA Barbie's divorced?

LENU Your grandma told you that?

MARA My brother says that.

LENU Your brother's good-looking.

MARA My brother's dumb. According to him, Divorced Barbie costs three times more than all the others?

LENU Makes sense.

MARA How?

LENU She gets Ken's car, Ken's house, Ken's dog, Ken's cat, Ken's furniture, and Ken's yacht.

MARA But that's hers as well. Isn't it?

LENU Do you think Barbie bleeds?

MARA But she doesn't have a hole down there.

LENU When you start to bleed it really hurts!

MARA I don't want to be a woman after all!

LENU You'd rather be a boy?

MARA Yuuuuuuuck! Boys are rough!

LENU Interesting!

MARA Ugly!

LENU Mischievous!

MARA Dumb!

LENU Fun!

MARA We never used to play like this.

LENU I don't wanna be here anymore.

MARA But here you can be a boy and everything.

LENU Really?

MARA You can be anything.

LENU Really?

MARA So, what do you want to be?

LENU What do you want to be?

MARA My mom's calling me.

LENU You're a momma's girl.

MARA Don't go right now, Lenu.

LENU I have to.

MARA Tell me another joke.

LENU Stop being such a girl, Mara.



I AM A
EVERYTHING.
THE LAST TIME
ALONE? WHAT
EVEN DO WE
A L O

ALONE...

IN

WHEN WAS

ME YOU WERE

WHAT DO YOU

WHEN YOU'RE

N

E

?



ANITA ČEKO

(ZADAR, 1987)



Anita Čeko is based in Zagreb, where she earned an MA degree in Dramaturgy from the Academy of Dramatic Art and Psychology from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. She works as a writer, dramaturge, psychologist and filmmaker. Her staged plays are the evening-length *Kakahaika* and short plays *Nenad X* and *Nasukani*. Her play *Far Away Kandahar* won the 2021 Marin Držić Third Prize and an award at Eurodram's 2021 competition for original drama.

FAR AWAY, KANDAHAR

TRANSLATORS

Ivana Ostojčić, Marija Andrijašević

CHARACTERS LIVING ROOM

LUCE (15)

TONI (14)

MOTHER (42)

FATHER (45)

GRANDMA (70)

The story is set in 2014 in a town
in Dalmatia.

Mother, Luce and Toni gather around a laptop. They're trying to take the best possible angle and get a video call through with the father who is at the other side of the world.

Wait, press camera.

Hello?

Move.

Hello? Heeey!

Turn the mic on.

Dad?

Hello!

I can hear you!

What's up?

Just did a bit of working out... a day off...

How are you?

... blackout...

Dad?

We're losing you.

I'm right here!

Your beard's grown!

Is it dangerous there?

... signal...

Looks great on him.

Looks great on you!

... truck...

We can barely hear you.

... chicken... rice...

Dad!

Turn the camera off! It slows it down.

How's it been over there?

... laughed... cow...

We asked how it's been?

He can't hear a thing from us.

...our driver... Ha-ha-ha...

He's laughing.

Dad, we have no idea what you're talking about.

He can't hear you.

Dad?

Come on, write to him.

What am I supposed to write?

It's gonna freeze. Write!

Where?

Down here.

What?

To call us when he gets a better signal.

...

TONI God, please make his signal better so that he can call us... Here, I'll donate my stickers to the organization. If nothing happens to him by summer, I'll also donate my soldier box. All the soldiers. Of course I will, what do I need that for. My Liverpool scarf? My box or my Liverpool scarf? Both? How about right now all the extra stickers and the entire album. What else? Or should I leave that for the summer? Liverpool's scarf for the summer. The box? The box first? Or the stickers now, then the box in

the summer. The scarf in the winter? When should I decide?

KITCHEN

Mother is setting the table for lunch, expertly. Luce is in the living room, taking photos with her cell phone of her tight biceps, collar bone, cheeks. There is a sports bag by her feet. Grandma enters the place, panting. On her head she is wearing a colourful foulard, a hat, sunglasses, with a handful of asparagus in her hand.

Mother looks at her in disbelief.

GRANDMA My doctor told me walk, you should walk more.

MOTHER But not in the high sun. You could have called me. Luceeee!

Grandma puts the asparagus on the table, she picked them up on the way here. Mother puts a casserole on the table, Grandma takes a peek inside and breathes in the smell of the food.

MOTHER Luuuuce!

GRANDMA Whenever we feast like this, I wonder whether he eats anything down there, poor soul...

MOTHER He has people cooking for him. He's fine...

GRANDMA It's different when you're home.

MOTHER Luce!

LUCE What's the fuss about? I'm right here!

MOTHER Lunch is ready.

GRANDMA Look at our beanpole...

Luce rolls her eyes, puts the bag down by the table. Grandma is adjusting her foulard, her bald head glimpses underneath.

MOTHER I used to be skinnier than her. (to Luce) It's just that I ate, and you're not eating at all. I would have given anything back then to put some weight on.

GRANDMA Your Mother was as thin as a stick, plus the crooked spine.

MOTHER Got married at 90 pounds. How much do you weigh? Not less than a hundred.

LUCE A hundred and three... A hundred and five...

MOTHER I loved to see the girls' thighs touching on the inside, you know, the way they rub against each other when they're walking.

LUCE Hideous.

MOTHER To me it was a wish unfulfilled. Poor me, I always had this tunnel between my thighs.

LUCE I know, I heard the story, you were too skinny, you wanted to gain weight! Wow!

MOTHER There is no need for you to yell.

An uncomfortable silence settles between Luce and Mother. All three women are sitting and eating their soup.

GRANDMA I was watching the news last night, they were showing those poor people in orange suits kneeling...

MOTHER (Luce) Is it too salty?

GRANDMA Two guys stand by their sides with machetes, masked, and the third one records everything. The poor men cry, beg, drool... They are Danish or French, I think...

LUCE (to Mother) It sure is better than being tasteless.

GRANDMA What do you say to that?

MOTHER (to Grandma) Mom, please. Can we have lunch in peace?

GRANDMA I wasn't saying anything, just saying... Poor people.

LUCE (to Mother, quietly) The van is here in five minutes.

MOTHER (quietly) Take some food, please.

GRANDMA What? She's not eating again?

MOTHER She has a competition. Apparently, there's no time to eat.

Luce gets up, takes her sports bag, grabs an apple, leaves.

GRANDMA (to Mother, whispering) All that running she does, she'd better be paid.

LUCE (shouting) Too bad, my medals are worthless even for a pawn shop!

Mother shakes her head in disbelief. Grandma looks at Mother, feeling guilty.

MOTHER Let her be.

GRANDMA (remembers) We didn't even say graces.

MOTHER Well, Toni's not here.

GRANDMA Where is he?

MOTHER With his lot.

Silence.

GRANDMA I really can't understand why he's helping those nitwits...

MAMA What an ugly thing to say.

GRANDMA I just wanted to say I'm sorry he's wasting his time.

...

It's nighttime. Luce is back home and she is sitting on the floor tiles, in her sports shorts and a T-shirt. She is eating cake.

LUCE I gave it my best, I really did, but the last fifty meters it was like someone was weighing my legs down, like I was just standing in one place. My coach went ballistic, he yelled at me and at all of us in the locker room. He yelled he'd be the happiest to quit, he doesn't know why the fuck we train because we always fuck up when it's the most

important, that we chickened out and just we wait for it to backfire – generally speaking. Then he kept giving us the shit about eating too much (we were eating bananas!) and that we should stop because we're not seals, swimmers are seals, they need fat to keep them afloat. We? We're supposed to be cougars... Sanja flipped out and started grinning. He let her laugh it out, and then he told her to keep bingeing, her head will soon merge with her neck from all the fat. I felt like saying something to him, but I didn't...

Luce is eating like there is no tomorrow, talking breathlessly, with her mouth full.

LUCE Sanja and I were at the hotel bar in the evening drinking Coke with swimmers from Slovenia. They invited us. The coach would have killed us if he had seen us. Fortunately he drinks his pills so no one can wake him up by morning. Later this Primož guy, cute, long blond hair, ask me my number. I gave it to him. I mean, I know I don't want a relationship, I'm not into that. Of course, the guy didn't even mention a relationship, but you know, neither did I... I'm only a second grader, what am I supposed to do? Sanja's sister was already fingered by two (!) guys. They shoved their fingers inside her. The horror. One of them was Rico¹, the lowlife of the elementary school all the girls drooled over, but not me. He's two years older and he was classmates with Sanja's sister... Is she a virgin anymore? I don't even know how it gets inside of you. The worst thing of all is that Sanja said she'd also allow it if she like the guy! I fuckin' like someone too every now and then, but I won't let him shove stuff into me. Why can't we just simply enjoy sports practice and life?

1. Rico means curly in the Dalmatian dialect.

Light turns on, Mother unexpectedly enters in her nightie, with a book in her hand.

MOTHER When did you come back?

Luce jumps, tries to hide traces of food around her.

MOTHER I didn't hear you... What are you doing?

LUCE And why are you awake? It's two in the morning.

They look at each other. Mother shows her the book, she has a little left to read.

MOTHER Do you know what happened last night? Didn't Toni tell you?

Luce just keep looking at her, Toni told her nothing.

...

Toni is carrying the laptop in his arms and parading around the apartment. He is talking, coming into the kitchen where Mother and Luce, who is typing, are. Toni puts the 'Dad-laptop' on the table. Luce puts her phone away. Mother and Luce join the conversation.

I'm fine, I'm fine!

How far?

About two kilometres, everything's fine.

Oh, that's not that far... It's like from here to the market...

How many dead?

Not many... A few protesters. Don't worry! Our car is bullet-proof.

LUCE (to herself) Mother was making lunch when Breaking News came. A 19-year-old

kid blew himself up in the square. She started shaking. Toni was here and saw it all. Luce! How was the competition?

MOTHER (to herself) I called him straight away, we talked. We talked for half a minute, he tried to laugh by force. It was bad. We came fourth in the relay race.

TONI (to himself) I took the stickers yesterday and good thing I did. Who cares, the important thing is to hang out and have a good time! Look, look at all the photos I took. Wait...

Dad sends pictures of girls and women, only their faces are visible.

Wow... Look at those big eyes.

That's how they walk the streets?!

Where did you take those photos?

Badakhshan. It's a province.

Is it dangerous?

It's good when they're walking on their own, they weren't allowed before.

How? Ba...

It's not dangerous!

TONI (to himself) It's dangerous.

Badakhshan. Hey, the poverty... You should see that...

How old are these women?

They're Luce's age.

What?! They seem more like Mum's age!

MOTHER (to herself) His deployment never lasted less than two months, and never more than two years... For now... USA, Germany, Ukraine, Somalia, Indonesia, Afghanistan. We have 17 folders on our laptops with the photos he sent us – Luce counted them. We have six boxes of souvenirs down in the basement, and a whole bunch of that around the place. Half of that should be given out.

Most of them are already married...

Already?! That's disgusting!

How did you manage to take their photos?!

Well, no husbands were around, so... You don't need to wait long. Ha-ha-ha.

Dad? How often are the attacks?

MOTHER (to herself) The attacks are all the time.

The attacks are rare.

Wow! You can't even see their eyes!

What is this?

Want a burka as a souvenir?

TONI (to himself) Luce told me that Mom couldn't sleep at all last night.

Please, don't bring us a burka.

Get us one!

Come on, delete those photos so no one finds them! We'll save them.

Father sends photos of Afghan children.

They're so cute!

Toni, this one's just like you!

He's not just like me...

Why is he carrying a bucket on his back?!

He's carrying water. He's working...

Poor kids.

LUCE (to herself) These photos rock!

What's up with you? I miss you guys.

Luce is in training, and Toni is still with the organization...

I'm going to a birthday on Saturday.

Toni is hanging out, can you believe that?

That's great, son! With whom, where?

This girl from the organization is having a birthday party so she invited me!

The camera turns on. Toni, Luce and Mother strike a pose, try to get in the frame. Finally everyone is visible.

So good to see you... Your Dad misses you. How's Grandma?

Her usual self... She says hi.

So much sand (!)

It's interesting, but I miss the Mediterranean a bit.

Luce takes the laptop and goes to the window with a lot of greenery underneath.

Hey! Where are you up to!

Look! Does it hurt? Everything's in bloom!

That's the way to enjoy life! Ha-ha-ha.

Give it back! Luce!

Luce is showing him the greenery.

Here, look!

Mom, tell her! Give it back.

She's impertinent.

WiFi dies near the window!!! Luce!

Beep beep beep. The connection broke.

My, you're really selfish.

Luce feels a bit embarrassed.

...

MOTHER As if one war wasn't enough for him... War zone (!) "a humanitarian in a war zone", that's "his name" now. He's not in a war... He dropped out of college because of the war and one part of him feels sorry about that, but he'd never admit it. He's always saying how 'lucky' he's been compared to others and how he spent only four years in the field around Dalmatia, while others did five and how apart from those two shrapnel pieces... he has nothing else 'visible'... I met him a month after... He was smoking like a chimney and as a souvenir, he immediately boasted, he got these two wounds below the spleen and two wisps

of grey hair... He never tells the kids about the war. He never tells me and I never ask... It's enough to remember it... It was never as close to me as it could have been... I only saw it on the news, although there were people dying a hundred kilometres away. My classmate's father, my elementary schoolteacher and her daughter, Mom's first cousin...

...

Toni puts little soldiers in the box.

LUCE I sent Primož some of Dad's photos, he was like stunned.

...

TONI Green soldiers, brown soldiers, they were all around the living room... I played with them a lot. Sometimes we played war, so they shot, and sometimes we just explored and crept around climbed mountains, went diving underneath the carpet or flew to outer space discovering planets - then I climbed the table and put them inside the chandelier. Sale told me he never played war, he keeps saying that war is 'the lowest of the low' and that he can't believe it exists... But if you have soldiers, you don't have to play war, they can do something else.

I met Sale at the organization and we hit it off straight away, with some people you just click. He's just a year older than me, but sometimes it seems like five. He's wise. Last year he moved to Split from an island and his new class was really dreadful, but luckily his aunt introduced him to volunteering in the organization straight away (*Kids for Kids*)... They gave him little Megi, she just lost a volunteer. She has that, you know... she's retarded. She looks Chinese

with her eyes and stuff. But she's too cool, she laughs all the time and keeps making jokes, she's so much fun. She confessed to me that she has a crush on Sale and all the time she's using me as a middleman she draws little hearts for him, writes him messages, letters. Can't believe a child can develop a crush like that... They really adore you straight away. No one ever told they loved me as little Juraj did the other day. He was so lovable. He was so happy that we came to his house that he kept clapping his hands, hugging us, shouting and doing his crazy faces. Sale and I were laughing our hearts out! ... The coordinator would kill us if she found out, we're not supposed to go their homes, she keeps yelling "Contacts are limited to the organization exclusively!"... But why should we care, uncle Toma asked us and we said yes, but does she need to know? Uncle Toma and Juraj live downtown in a big room on the ground floor, that's the whole place, and it's all like poor and old, but the two are having a great time. Sale and I were just discussing how they're not missing out on anything... I'd like to show all this to Dad once, he'd like it. He's really a people person.

...

LUCE I don't feel hungry at all.

...

MOTHER We haven't heard from him in a few days. There's not much signal around these villages. It's a long road from the north to the south - that's where they're based, in Kandahar. In his last text he wrote "Today I spent six hours with a herd of goats and farmers. They were talking to me about the meaning of life - it's enough for them to give the goat something to

graze and later to feed off it. There. Life philosophy at its finest. We ask for too much..." We ask for too much? "... Don't worry if you're not able to reach me in the next ten days. Lose the paranoia - as far as attacks are concerned, they mostly take place in the cities. He-he, they know where not to strike. It's much more peaceful around the countryside, and these new local people watching our back are great. People live all kinds of lives, I've witnessed some things and I can tell you I am more grateful with each passing day..." More grateful with each passing day? "... I love you. Give the kids a kiss."

KITCHEN

Mother and Luce are setting the table for lunch. Toni is sitting. All three are more aloof, tired. Grandma comes back from the bathroom, wiping her hands in her short. She keeps casting glances at Mother, Toni and Luce.

GRANDMA My doctor is always surprised at my perfect blood results. No wonder, look at this lunch... I never cooked as great as your Mother. (pause) Shall we say our graces? Toni?

LUCE Grandma wants you to say graces.

TON Huh? What?

GRANDMA I'm not saying anything, but you sum it up so nicely... for this and for that; and for us and for them, and for Dad and for Mother, and for me...

Everybody is waiting for Toni, he is trying to focus.

TONI God, ah... Ah... Please.... Ah... Thank you...

Toni finds it hard to open his mouth. Luce rolls her eyes.

MOTHER The food will get cold, God, bless this food and... us! Amen.

GRANDMA And thank you that it all went well in... Bash-ashan?

LUCE Badakhshan.

GRANDMA Bak-dash-kan. Bashak-dan?

LUCE Ba-da-KHS-AN, Grandma, Badakhshan.

GRANDMA Ba...

MOTHER Bon appetite, guys!

Silence.

MOTHER (to herself) I had a dream last night, just a few hours apart, that I was watching two kids fell off a building. Each building was ten storeys high and I was really far away from them. The first thing I saw was a kid falling down from the roof while playing there with other kids. I couldn't do a thing. A few seconds later, I was at a different place, in a completely different neighbourhood. I look at a similar building. A similar scene, only different kids on the roof. I look away, but then look back at them another free-falling kid.

GRANDMA It's not easy for him.

MOTHER Huh?

GRANDMA It's stressful. That's what I wanted to say. He can't do a thing if his contract is still binding...

Toni is slowly stirring the soup in his plate, closes his eyes and opens them, this is hard for him.

GRANDMA What's the matter? Don't tell me you think you're fat too.

Toni forces himself to put a little soup in his mouth. Grandma takes the spoon to her mouth, but has trouble with it because of the tremor. Mother reaches to help her.

GRANDMA No, no, no. This is my workout.

Silence. Mother and Luce are watching Toni 'looking' at his plate with his eyes closed.

MOTHER I'll drive you to therapies the next month, you won't go alone.

GRANDMA I love walking.

MOTHER I can't walk with you because I'm working.

LUCE Grandma didn't ask you to walk with her.

Mother grunts. Toni suddenly gets up and slowly staggers away.

GRANDMA Where are you going?

MOTHER Toni!

LUCE Let him be.

They wait a bit, Luce gets up and follows Toni.

GRANDMA What's the matter with him?

Sounds are heard. Mother also runs.

BATHROOM

Toni is over the toilet, he just vomited. Luce is standing next to him. Mother comes, closes the door.

MOTHER You can hear everything!

LUCE (quietly) I can't imagine how you thought he'd eat today.

TONI I did...

MOTHER (to Toni) Please go lie down.

LUCE (to Mother) What are you gonna tell Grandma? I don't understand why you even forced him...

Grandma is shouting from the kitchen. A cell phone rings. Toni vomits a bit more.

GRANDMA Someone's phone is ringing! (shouting) It says "SA-LE DAD" Who's that? Should I answer it???

MOTHER Don't answer! Don't answer!

Mother runs to the kitchen.

GRANDMA Hello? Huh? Huh?

Toni and Luce are listening from the bathroom

MOTHER Why did you answer it!

GRANDMA Take it, take it, there's a man on the line!

MOTHER Hello. Good day! Well, he's fine, he's on his feet. Thank you!

The kitchen door closes in the distance, indistinct sounds come from the kitchen

TONI Why is Sale's Dad calling?

LUCE The man drove you last night. (pause) Wash your mouth, you're full of it.

TONI I really didn't want to.

LUCE Who gave you alcohol?

TONI No one... It was only when the other guys came... That Rico...

LUCE Rico was there?

TONI The girl from the organization who was celebrating is his cousin and he came...

LUCE He came on his own or with a girl? Rico?

TONI I don't know... And then... She went to the tobacco shop for drinks...

LUCE The volunteer girl? Fantastic. Volunteers with kids and buys booze.

TONI She one of the good ones... she wasn't drinking at all last night....

LUCE So, what did you drink?

TONI A beer...

LUCE Since when do you drink beer?

TONI I tried one last night.

LUCE So you passed out on one beer?

TONI ... and some cherry brandy, and honey brandy. And then someone brought some wine...

LUCE You're such an idiot! You don't mix the drinks! Even I know that.

TONI But I was completely normal and then it hit me... I couldn't get on my feet, so I lied down...

LUCE (to herself) Primož wrote me this morning that this is completely normal to him and that he too once got drunk like this in eighth grade. But this is too pathetic. Can't you control yourself? With Dad gone, Mom has to do everything on her own. I can't understand how you can be so selfish?

Silence.

LUCE I don't know if you're aware of this, but they came buzzing our door in the middle of the night. Mom jumped up and started screaming. She didn't know what was going on, who knows what she thought. Her phone didn't even ring for some reason. I had to calm her down. She couldn't fall back to sleep until morning, and she wouldn't let me sleep too.

TONI What is Sale's Dad like?

LUCE A man like any other. He carried you to your bed. That is, you puked once more in the hallway. Mom cleaned it up when you were asleep.

TONI I'm sorry.

LUCE Well, fuck it. How come Sale didn't get wasted?

Toni just shrugs.

TONI ... Are they alike at all? Sale and his Dad.

Luce shrugs.

TONI Did they talk to you?

LUCE No. The man just said the ambulance came first and they gave you glucose, then you felt a little better.

TONI (to himself) First I was lying on the grass, that I remember, and then on sand. There's grass right by the beach, so I must have rolled on my own, or someone moved me... I heard some folks behind me. And as I was lying there, at some point I only heard Sale's voice, right by my ear, but I don't know what he was saying, I couldn't understand him. He was holding my hand as he was talking and wouldn't let it go. His hand was really soft, like a cushion; I could picture myself resting my entire body on his hand... And then nothing for like ten minutes, total silence; until it felt like someone pressed 'play' and people were laughing again, talking and I was really glad, because I couldn't move, but it's all fine, life goes on, people around me are alive... At some point, between light and dark, Sale and I, I don't know how, got up in the air and started flying. A few feet above the ground. Like two helium balloons, tied one to the other... Dad would always carry me in his arms at night from the car to the house, and I pretended to be asleep... I could hear the sea behind me...

LUCE Mother is so disappointed in you.

Mother and Grandma talk in the kitchen with their voices down, Mother is putting the tea kettle on

MOTHER ... And then this kid called his dad and they brought him here. At 3am. I had a dream and then all of a sudden the doorbell, it all came together. I looked at my phone later, just a black screen... Nothing...

GRANDMA Did you take anything?

MOTHER Two Ambiens.

GRANDMA Good for you! He should eat toast, drink tea... You could have told me! Why didn't you tell me?

MOTHER You know what was finally the death of Vlado?

GRANDMA Liver. Cancer.

MOTHER Liquor. It was the booze that got him.

GRANDMA Poor Vlado, God knows the things he saw...

MOTHER But booze is not the answer! He finally died from drinking, and everyone's trying to hide this, my husband, his late mother, all of them. God forbid you're in pain or having a hard time... That's what I'm afraid of.

GRANDMA War?

MOTHER No, the booze, this addiction, genetics...

GRANDMA Does your husband drink? No! And he's his son.

MOTHER That's precisely why... Where did Toni get the idea of getting smashed, shitfaced...? If he had a glass or two, but to look the way he looked - staggering, yelling "Sorry, Mother, it won't happen again, I'm a piece of shit, I'm nothing...", for that you really have to have a few.

GRANDMA What "piece of shit"? What the hell's wrong with him?!

MOTHER His T-shirt covered in puke, his hair, pants, trainers - it all reeked, Luce were cleaning the place until recently. I told the man I'd pay for the car wash, he wouldn't hear of it, he said it was human to help...

GRANDMA Grandpa Vlado and Toni seem like heaven and earth to me... Have you heard from your husband?

Mother takes a deep sigh. She has had enough of everything. Grandma would like to comfort her, but she doesn't know how. After a while Mother takes her phone, turns it to Grandma and plays her a voice message.

HUSBAND'S VOICE MESSAGE My love, can you hear this rattle? We're speeding along some paved road. I'll call you as soon as I get normal signal, everything is fine, it's very quiet here. Give the kids a kiss, I hope you're all fine! Love you so much.

GRANDMA You just take your time, I'll make us some coffee.

...

Luce to herself

What would be my fuck-up of choice?

10 times 200 metres. 600 metres. 800 metres. 10 times 300 metres. 400 metres. A kilometre.

How would I disappoint Mom?

10 times 40 kilos squat. 300 metres.

Plank. 150 metres.

How should I flip out?!

10 times 60 kilos semi-squat. 400 metres.

Push-ups. 200 metres.

I won't eat a thing until morning.

10 times 40 kilos. 6 times 400 metres. 10 times 30 kilos. 4 times 200 metres.

The blisters on my right foot have started pulsating.

...

BALCONY

Grandma and Mother are having coffee on the balcony.

GRANDMA It's different for a child when the father is present, although, there are some fathers who are much better absent... At least you got it all sorted out, nothing is hanging above your heads anymore.

MOTHER We've given him everything? Haven't we?

GRANDMA He's alright. He puked... Whatever's troubling him... It can happen to anyone... Nurse told me "Madam... This is all stress-related. This whole tumour is accumulated stress, everything you've been holding inside over the years, instead of throwing out."

MOTHER And I can't even call him... Not even if something worse happens.

GRANDMA Your dad and I were never apart, and that's also not good! Plus, he wouldn't let me talk, at least you can speak up in front of your husband.

MOTHER Hahahaha, imagine me not speaking up.

GRANDMA He'd used to tell me "Shut up, be quiet, it's no one's business what goes on in your house..." And I used to like having friends. But I wouldn't shut up before him, I had my say! Your dad was not a bad man, he was just sometimes overshadowed by his bad manners.

Mother is listening to Grandma and takes a deep sigh.

MOTHER More coffee?

GRANDMA He'd also be embarrassed afterwards, and would ask me later "Was I really that harsh? Was I?" He'd feel sorry, but I didn't care much.

MOTHER Want more coffee?

GRANDMA Never mind the coffee! I mean, I wouldn't let him mess around with me.

Pause.

GRANDMA I'd tell him alright! I didn't keep my mouth shut.

Pause.

MOTHER Remember that time when he beat me?

GRANDMA Huh?

MOTHER When he beat me.

GRANDMA Yeah.

MOTHER You didn't say a thing. A thing.

GRANDMA When he beat you...

MOTHER You didn't say a thing. You just kept your mouth shut.

Grandma is embarrassed.

MOTHER And then the guests came and you told them I was in my room, studying, while I really didn't want to get out. Or couldn't. Or both.

Grandma is very embarrassed, she takes a deep breath, doesn't know what to say.

GRANDMA You know what I regret? I regret that we haven't kept a single poem of yours. You used to write poetry and then rip it off. Tore the paper. Remember? Throw them into the sea. And then dad used to run after you and take it out of the sea. Nothing is kept. What was it that you were writing?

...

Luce to herself

I'm so desperate for sleep.

Apple

Three toasts

Yoghurt

It is so easy to get fat.

LUCE Last night in my dream I was naked in a pool in the middle of a desert. It was night and the pool was full of women and girls, all naked, cramped. I stood right by the edge, water barely covering my tits. The nipples on this girl standing next to me, she was about twenty, peeked out from

the water and just those nipples were bigger than my boobs gigantic, pointed, huge, purple. And the girl was a tad fatter too, she looked like someone smeared a layer of fat over her; like she should lose ten pounds and be just fine. A bunch of armed men were parading around, all with beards. That girls beside me all of a sudden started whispering that now they're going to start taking out all the virgins. And as soon as she said that, they started taking out some girls. I started hunching to be as ugly as possible; I saw Sanja far away, but she didn't see me. As soon as they started dragging her and the girls around her out, I shoved my nail down there - my index finger - I pushed and I pushed, I really pressed on and suddenly it just came in! And nothing hurt, just a little spilt blood... I haven't seen blood in ages.

Pause.

LUCE After the practice, my coach told me that the blisters would pass, but we had to talk about the psycho-test we had to solve at the Athletic Institute. It turned out I have poor training motivation. It turned out like I was being forced, which he finds odd because I train every day... Maybe I'm in some kind of a crisis... To be honest, I don't know what I'm gonna do, or where I wanna go. I'm so fed up with practice, and it's not like I have friends or something... Sanja is living in a world of her own, she'd be the happiest to find a boyfriend, and Primož is in another country and we only saw each other once, I can't count on him. I'll try to hang in here and keep my feet on the ground, there, the days just fly and that's good for me. Sooner or later things will have to go back to normal.

TONI'S ROOM

Toni is lying on his bed in a semi-darkened room. Later he gets up.

TONI God... I know I fucked it up... And now I'm paying for it. If I ever do this again... Then, I mean, I... Didn't deserve any better... (silence) Please make Sale call... Did I do something to him? Did I tell him something...? (pause) Kids at the organization are so sweet, they're never angry and they'd give you anything. Megi once brought Sale a gift, out of the blue, we were waiting to see what it was and she opened her backpack and took out a kitten (!) Man... So cute, yellow. Her kitten! From home. I didn't touch it because... I don't know... But Sale took it in his hands and cuddled it...

Luce comes in the room, holding her phone, with a bit of a limp. Before she starts reading the text from her phone, she disgustedly opens the window to air the place, pulls up the blinds.

LUCE You'll fuckin' suffocate in here... "... how are you... blablabla... And how is Tonči², he's not calling, say hi to my Tonči for me!"... What am I supposed to write him?... Come on, man, I haven't got all day!

TONI Why didn't he text me? And why is Sale not answering my texts?

LUCE What?

TONI Nothing.

LUCE Why would he send the same message to both of us? (pause) You won't tell him what happened? Getting drunk and stuff.

TONI Did Mom tell him?

LUCE "blablabla and Toni is fine. Call us when you get to a town so we can catch up!" Sent.

TONI (to himself) I'm such a pathetic shit... To get so wasted, to stink like that, to vomit... And I'm not even 15. Horror...

Luce sits on the floor, pokes around her toes, stretches.

LUCE You should start doing some sport, you probably got drunk because you have nothing better to do.

TONI If you came here to give me shit, buzz off...

LUCE I'm not saying anything, just saying.

Luce stretches. Toni is silent for a moment.

TONI Luce? Remember Petra's kittens from the countryside?

LUCE What about them?

TONI When we threw them away...

LUCE So? Her Grandma put that on us.

TONI The three of us kept laughing all the way... Laughing our hearts out. All the way to the forest.

LUCE Laughing? I only remember you crying afterwards.

TONI Yes, afterwards. But first we were grinning like idiots, screaming, they were meowing... Why were we laughing? What was so funny about that?

Luce shrugs.

LUCE You cried.

TONI Yes, but only later when we were left alone! You were comforting me.

LUCE I was comforting you?

TONI I could see you were sorry and you said it was such a dumbass thing to do.

LUCE How was I comforting you?

TONI Well... you were by my side all the time, listening to me... and then we tried to save them.

LUCE I was comforting you...

TONI And they were totally tangled up, their eyes bleary, they kept whining; they wouldn't put a thing in their mouths.

LUCE In the morning Mom came to pick us up, right?

TONI And we told her nothing...

LUCE We never told her anything. I remember her hands on the steering wheel and those wounds, longish, red.

TONI From ironing. Does she still have them?

LUCE When she came back, her hair was shorter and she smelled different... I was a bit embarrassed, she seemed like some other woman. It seemed like our Mom died and a new one came. It seemed like we weren't her kids...

TONI (to himself) ... Sale had a twin sister, Anja, she died when they were a month old. She had that totally disfigured, huge head with water inside. I Googled it then and never again... Those kids if they live, their head never comes back to normal. He often has dreams about Anja she wears a yellow dress and is about three. Her hair is long and brown, and her head completely normal. In his dream it always seems like she wants to tell him something and just when he realises it, everything turns to slow motion and Sale wakes up. He admitted that he lives for the day when he'll finally hear what will come out of her mouth. Ever since I heard about his dream, I've been looking forward to that day too. You should always look forward to something, no one needs to know what it is or how big it is...

LUCE (to herself) I lost four toenails - two on my left, two on my right foot.

TONI (to himself) Mother had an abortion after me, but I'm not sure it counts like I lost someone real. She was vomiting, Luce and I were looking forward to getting a brother or a sister, and then one day she came and said the baby was gone, there

2. Tonči is diminutive of Toni.

was something wrong with the baby and she had to go somewhere. Where can you even go? We didn't ask, she didn't say... I decided to define who this baby of 'ours' was. Why wouldn't I have someone of my own too? I'm still debating about a name, but I knew the sex right away. The baby was male. In my head he just turned two, he has curly hair and is dressed in a chequered short sleeve shirt. I'm imagining a normal Anja and him hanging out and whispering something, they can understand each other. Every time I imagine Sale and I getting closer to them, they disappear...

LUCE (to herself) Nothing to be done... I had to go to the doctor. First she said my blisters were a mess, I should put cream on them and rest. Realistically speaking, I can't because of the pain, plus I'm really having some kind of energy drop. Just thinking about making a physical move gives me the creeps... And then out of the blue she asked me to take off my clothes, all except my panties and bra, she wanted to weigh me. I turned out to be quite skinny, so what, Mom (!) was too. The next question - my period. I started beating about the bush and the woman figured me out, called Mom... This would be so much easier to take if I didn't feel like my thighs were rubbing off each other, I gained weight again. Disgusting.

...

LIVING ROOM

MOTHER It doesn't come at all? Not even for a day or two... Not a single drop? ... For seven months?! Why didn't you tell me.

LUCE I'm not using pads. You could have figured it out.

MOTHER Would you put the phone down and talk to me!

Luce looks at her and still clings onto her phone.

MOTHER You should have told me.

LUCE Why, I'm fine with it!

MOTHER How can you be fine with it?!

LUCE No pain, no drain, no smell, no bloating. And besides, do I really need to have kids?

MOTHER It's not because of the kids, it's because of you... The hormones... It's all deregulated now... Seven months... Were you hiding it from me on purpose? I mean really... Where's my phone... Toni! Toni!

TONI What?

MOTHER I don't know where my phone is. (to Luce) Why didn't you tell me... Come on, put that phone down!

LUCE Don't touch my phone!

Toni is carrying Mother's phone from the hall, he found it.

TONI You have a missed call from Dad! It says "HUSBAND AFGHAN"

LUCE Who are you calling?

MOTHER That one... Of mine, that one of mine...

TONI (to Luce) Did you hear from Dad?

LUCE Why her?

TONI Where is Dad now? Mom, will you call Dad later?

MOTHER (to Toni) Wait! (to Luce) She has to see you.

TONI It's over now, now you'll have to gain weight!

LUCE Disgusting.

MOTHER Toni!

TONI Ha?

MOTHER Stop fucking with us!

LUCE Wow, the drama! Now what, I'm gonna walk around all day taking my clothes off in front of doctors.

MOTHER Hello? Hello? Good afternoon!

LUCE (to herself) Oh, and the best for last... Primož! He wrote to me that he (?) would too love to see me in my panties and bra, and even more without them (!) I only replied I couldn't believe what kind of idiot I was dealing with and that he should go fuck himself.

KITCHEN

GRANDMA He's some coach?! The mother-fucker! I told you straight away, she's not eating at all. There's something wrong here!

MOTHER Allegedly he too vomits if he eats too much.

GRANDMA A madman!

MOTHER Luce says he's been through all kinds of things, he didn't have an easy life.

GRANDMA He's been through all kinds of things? And what have we been through?! Now I need one of your Ambiens!

MOTHER Want one?

GRANDMA No! Give me some brandy.

Mother goes to get the brandy. Her phone rings, her husband is calling (on silent). Mother sees the call and doesn't pick up.

MOTHER Luce texted him that she can't train for a while.

GRANDMA She should fucking get rid of it altogether. What did that doctor of yours say?

MOTHER That she should start eating...

MOTHER (reads a text to herself) "My love, call me, is everything all right? Kiss."

MOTHER ... The eggs are a bit lazy so they're not ready to be fertilised, but that's all OK, anatomy... It could have been a lot worse. She says she has ballet dancers, gymnasts, models, all with the same story...

GRANDMA This idiot should lose his licence! How many more girls is he going to wreck.

MOTHER Uh, well, he didn't wreck Luce... touch wood...

GRANDMA What do you mean he didn't? The girl's not menstruating, she looks like a boy. She can't go there anymore. Do you hear me? She should take dance lessons if she wants something recreational! She should have coffee in the sun, go out, sleep until noon, and not run around all day like a horse... Why does she even run? What's the matter with you now?

MOTHER I think it's my fault.

GRANDMA Huh?

MOTHER I didn't see a thing... She was doing all that right under my nose... She wasn't eating, she wasn't having her period... And I didn't see it. How come? I didn't see anything.

Pause.

MOTHER I remember, it was summer. I left them in the countryside at his Mother's, to take a few days of rest, to clean the place, to clear my head. I come to get them, they're standing in front of the old house, scratching their heads like crazy. Lice. Both of them. With all their fingers in their hair. After two days of fucking around the apartment, shampoos, combing, tears, baths and crying, I took the hair trimmer and shaved their heads. She's still holding it against me, how could I shave her – a girl – and how did it make her feel... How she looked like a boy for the next half a year.

LIVING ROOM

TONI (to himself) Sale decided that he'll probably stop coming to the organization, he said he couldn't make it anymore. And he didn't tell me, he told the director. She called me this morning to tell me and asked if she could take those stickers

to her grandson, he also collected them since the last Euro Cup. I donated them to the organization, and she can do what she pleases with them. I sent him another text and asked him was it because I got drunk. He said he didn't know what I was talking about.

MOTHER (sending a voice message to her husband) Please call me, I didn't see the missed call until very later. Call me when you get this! Everything is... OK. I mean, I want to talk to you.

TONI He texted me that he was fine and in some town of Bagram. That's somewhere near Kabul. I texted him back, asked him why he called you.

MOTHER Why did he call me?

TONI To hear from you. They're on their way to Kabul and they'll proceed to Kandahar later... What do you think, when will he get there?

MOTHER Never, they stop in any god-forsaken place.

TONI (to himself) I asked Dad when will he be back for good. He said I shouldn't worry about that and that time will fly, he'll come soon, he'll be back soon. He always says that... Mom didn't tell him yet.

MOTHER Did you notice anything about her? About Luce.

TONI She's always mad when you tell her something.

MOTHER Oh for fuck sake! He's never here... If you see she's not fine, please tell me! If she confides in you, tell me. OK?

Toni nods.

MOTHER Are you alright?

TONI Me?... Yes.

MOTHER Do you have any problems? Is there something that bothers you?

TONI Nothing bothers me, I'm fine.

MOTHER When you got drunk...

TONI I'm sorry, that was really awful...

MOTHER You told me "I'm a piece of shit, I'm nothing."

TONI I said that? To you?

MOTHER Yes. You called yourself a piece of shit.

TONI Oh, really?

MOTHER Why would you say that? Don't think about yourself that way... It's better that you don't remember, maybe you didn't really mean that.

Uncomfortable silence. They don't know how or what to talk about. Mother just smiles at him.

MOTHER You're a good kid.

TONI When are you going to tell Dad? That I was...

MOTHER You're worried that I didn't tell him?

Uncomfortable silence. Toni nods. Mother smiles kindly, as if she wants to say – let it go.

TONI And how are you doing?

MOTHER Me? I'm...

...

TONI (to himself) Her voice is somehow interrupted, quiet; how she sighed... Did I really say those things about myself out loud?

BEDROOM

The laptop is on the bed. Mother is in her nightgown, looking at the laptop. She is making a video call. Dad appears on the camera. They are finally alone with one another.

Finally! You in your room?
 Oooh, can't believe to see and hear you!
 Look at the room, it's huge!
 How is safety?
 Turn the lights on, I can't see you well!
 Top safety! A five-star hotel. The best in town!
 I saw you called the other day, but everything was so chaotic, I couldn't call back.
 You look nice...
 Oh I just washed my hair...
 I miss you.
 I mean, I just wanted to talk a little, nothing terrible happened, but...

There's knocking on the door of Dad's room. They both freeze.

Just a second.

A male voice is heard.

I have some Skype going on. No, you go. Or you can wait for me downstairs. Drink something. See you! Sorry, Sebastian, a colleague. I need to go to a business dinner with him.
 A dinner?
 The driver's already waiting, but let him wait. What were you saying?
 Couldn't you cancel it?
 How am I supposed to cancel it? The embassy organised it, everyone's here...
 Ad fucking hoc.
 You said you can talk for half an hour.
 I can! We can.

Mother is looking in disbelief.

Talk.
 We didn't talk properly in two weeks...
 Where are the kids?
 They're here. It's like... I can't talk like this.
 Why are you so angry?

We can either talk now or we can leave it for tomorrow.
 I don't know what you want me to say...
 You couldn't spare half an hour.
 You don't know the chaos I'm in!
 Half an hour!

Dad takes his phone and calls someone in a theatrical manner.

What are you doing?
 Sebastian! Hey! Aaaaa... Listen! My wife needs me...
 What's wrong with you now?
 You go! I will find some other driver...
 Why are you doing this?
 Ha-ha-ha, don't worry, I'll fin...
 Hey...
 Ha-ha. Yeah, tnx! Bye! See you! There.
 Half an hour. Talk.

Mother is silent. They're looking at each other.

I'm so fucking stressed out every day.
 There's shooting everywhere! I can't believe you're making a drama out of this... I'm not in and out of dinners all the time, this is once in three months... I can't even relax once in three months! There, I'm not going to this dinner at all, I'm not.

Mother is silent. Dad calms down a bit, thinks.

I miss hearing from you more often, too...
 I'm not happy with the fact that I don't hear from you in two weeks, I don't even know what's going on with you. This is hard for me.

Dad's picture freezes. The sound is still there. Mother answers.

Let's talk tomorrow, please.
 I'm right here, talk. What's up?

Silence.

What do you eat at those dinners?
 What's the food like?
 Nothing special, yours is better, I miss homemade goulash, they can't make it right here... It feels so stupid to fight over petty stuff, but we're just under such pressure, these maniacs over here blow themselves up in town squares, they barge into crowds, there's blood everywhere...
 I know...

Mother is looking at Dad's frozen image while he's talking.

My chef's son was recently killed. Sixteen years old. The kid was an intern in town and... Off with his head!
 Is it even wise to go to this dinner?
 There are foreigners there, double security.
 We can talk tomorrow... Whenever you can...
 Don't be angry with me. Are you angry with me?
 Oh well, I'm not...
 This isn't fucking going to last forever!

Silence.

Are you free tomorrow to talk? In the morning?
 I work in the morning, call me some time in the afternoon...
 Call me. Don't you dare not call me. I love you. A lot. Give the kids a kiss!
 I love you too...

Dad can't be heard anymore. The connection is broken. Mother is left alone

with the frozen image of her husband. Silence. She is looking at this picture. She is left with this picture. Looking at her husband.

MOTHER One, two, three, four... New wrinkles. You're getting old.

Silence. She is looking at the picture.

MOTHER How many new people told you you were genius, charming, skilful, empathetic? How many? How many new people will tell you that now at this dinner? Ha? You're empty, to me you now seem completely empty. You're here. And here's where you'll stay. As long as I want.

Silence.

MOTHER I'm scared. I don't know what I'm scared of, but I'm scared... Luce lost her period from hunger and pushing herself too hard, I don't know whom she's trying to impress; her coach is a maniac. Toni... Got drunk. I don't know why, he doesn't know why either and if it weren't for those friends, this friend, he could have been left alone, vomiting, I wouldn't find him, he'd suffocate, I was asleep... My Mother is not well, she pretends she is, but she's not. It's a matter of days when her cancer will just reach the point of no return... She doesn't want to talk about this. Me neither. I am alone... in everything. When was the last time you were alone? What do you even do when you're alone? When there are no emails you 'must' reply to, when there are no planned trips to a new town, a new middle-of-nowhere, when there are no arranged meetings, when there are no fucking guns firing around you and when you're not in mortal danger? What do you do? Why is it so appealing? The fact that you can get

killed on any given day? That turns you on? Right? Yeah, it turns you on. And you don't see a problem there. It's really hard for you to be 'ordinary', 'unimportant', 'small', 'weak'. It's hard for you to be like the three of us. We're small, you're big. You run, you rush, you travel, you plan, you help, you make money, you're a big humanitarian. Being home is not humanitarian for you. You find it boring, frustrating, tedious, full of boring stories - you, with your big stories about saving the world... I sometimes save an afternoon and that's enough for me. You decided to move on? You're standing right there. "Never again"... (to herself) "Never again", and then you look for it... You look for it around the world, and you always find it, it's not hard to find it. (back to her husband) And don't, don't tell me about money. We don't even need that money of yours anymore. The three of us could just as well live off my salary.

Silence.

MOTHER You know what else is new? I have a wish to be alone with myself. I want to be alone with myself.

Sounds from the living room are heard, it is Luce and Toni

TONI Mom! Are you using your laptop?

LUCE Do you have internet? Ours is non-stop disconnecting!

Luce enters Mother and Dad's bedroom

LUCE Did you talk to Dad?

MOTHER I did, but the connection is awful!

Toni comes too, he and Luce are looking at the frozen image of Dad

TONI What, connection issues again?

LUCE Holy cow! Did he lose some weight?

TONI Is he here?!

MOTHER No.

Mother reaches for the laptop to turn it off.

LUCE No, no, no, don't touch it! Can I take a picture of you?

MOTHER What?

LUCE One with Dad!

MOTHER With him?

LUCE Yeah! Stand closer! Come on, closer to the screen! Pull your head near, please! It'll be so cool!

MOTHER Toni? What is she up to?

TONI A...

LUCE Yes, yes, there, just a little closer.

Mother is confused, she tries to pose next to her husband's frozen image. Luce is taking photos with her cell phone.

click.

LUCE Wait, let me do another.

MOTHER Luce, come on...

LUCE You're grimacing. Relax your face.

TONI Give it a smile.... Try it.

LUCE Come on, you seem like you've never smiled before, show some teeth!

click.

LUCE Now more naturally...

MOTHER What do you mean more naturally?

LUCE I can tell you're forcing it!

click.

TONI Think of something funny.

click.

LUCE Now your eyes are closed. One more!

Mother's eyes are full of tears. Luce is focused on her phone screen.

click.

LUCE Wait! You can do better. Now! Hold it.

click.

Luce shows Toni the picture. Now she is happy.

...

MOTHER From Switzerland I only remember the smell of steam, hot water, iron and tons of bed linen. A 15-storey hotel in the Alps, every room crowded. For three months. We mostly spent time in the basement. We laughed a lot, communicated by gestures, we came from all four corners of the world. I remember the spasmodic laughter, to tears. Some women worked like that all their lives, and I sacrificed only two winters. The work conditions were really good.

...

LIVING ROOM

Luce and Toni are lying on the couch.

Luce is commenting on her parents' photo, Toni is typing on his phone.

LUCE She looks like she was forced to laugh.

TONI Well she was...

LUCE It's better to have any photo than none. *(she shows him a photo of Kabul)* See, so many women and children in the streets. It's a huge city, like entire Croatia.

It's really dangerous over there.

TONI The entire Afghanistan is dangerous...

Luce gets up, wraps her head in a scarf.

LUCE I'd love to go there once with Dad and walk around all day wrapped up like this. No one touches you, no one sees you. Head to toe, except for your eyes. You see everything around you, but no one can see you... Mighty stuff.

TONI Yeah, you'd love it...

LUCE What's the matter with you?

TONI What do you want? You want me to tell you that your stupid idea is great?

Silence.

LUCE You're typing all day. Who with? Is something going on?

TONI Sale cancelled the bike ride on me. We managed to arrange that and he told me he'd love to talk to me, and then... all of a sudden...

LUCE Is this why you're acting all depressed?

TONI And he dropped the organization.

LUCE Smart move. He is better off without it, anyway. You two can hang out on your own now... And maybe something got in his way, maybe his mother needed him.

TONI She didn't need anything, his mother lives on an island.

Pause.

TONI What am I going to tell little Megi, Juraj? Uncle Toma?

LUCE What? Who?

TONI Never mind. He said he'd like to meet some other people, not just 'hang out with kids'. All of a sudden that Rico guy and his whole crew are good...

LUCE Want me to call him?

TONI Who?

LUCE Sale!

TONI What the hell's wrong with you?!

LUCE Come on, Toni, don't be so dramatic! It's not how you thought it would be and you're immediately depressed. Give it a break, will you.

TONI Why are you even concerned with this?! I didn't ask for your help...

LUCE I just wanted you to keep that one friend you have.

TONI Look who's talking, you have that Sanja girl and who else? If Sanja is your friend at all.

LUCE You don't know a single thing about me!

Luce is preparing to do a push-up.

TONI I thought you took a break with the practice.

LUCE My coach keeps texting me, he begs me to come back.

TONI (to himself) I once tried to hang out with the kids from my class, but I simply couldn't... They kept talking about jerking off and who stole how many cigarettes from dad.

LUCE You know what's my personal best in plank? *(pause)* A plank. Like this, when you hold still in a push-up.

Luce holds still in a push-up. Toni is just watching her. She is planking.

LUCE 4 minutes. It's too hard. Give it a try.

Toni's facial expression seems to tell "Why are you doing this?"

TONI (to himself) When I'll need to go to college, if I will, and I really hope I will, I'd love to go abroad (God, please) to some country where I don't even know the language and learn everything afresh.

LUCE (to herself) *"Don't talk to me like that ever again, I really hate it. Okay?"* I texted Primož, he saw it and said nothing.

Frozen Luce doesn't have a clue why she is doing this.

LUCE (to herself) He keeps posting some stupid swimming pool pics. I liked one. Two more days – if he doesn't reply, I'll delete his number and block him on Facebook.

Luce can barely hold the plank.

LUCE (to herself) When we were in fifth grade, Rico told Sanja's sister that he'd like to fuck me... He was looking at some photo from Sanja's birthday. "I'd fuck this kid," that's what he said.

Luce can barely stand, she is shaking.

LUCE (to herself) You run and you think about nothing. You just run. And run. And you don't give a shit about anything. You couldn't care less. You just keep running.

Luce struggles to keep her position but eventually falls down, exhausted. She is out of shape.

She remains lying down on the floor. Toni watches her.

TONI Grandma said to Mom, I heard them, that, if Luce goes back to training, she would go there and set the place on fire.

...

A silence interrupted by a

POWERFUL EXPLOSION

...

KITCHEN

Dust. Mother is sitting at the table, Grandma is on her feet. Toni is sitting next to Mother. All three among the settling dust. Luce comes in, there is no dust on her. She sees the others, it's clear to her that something happened.

TONI Three cars full of explosive drove into Dad's hotel.

Luce opens her eyes wide.

GRANDMA It's all fine, Dad is out. He managed to escape to the bunker and they got them out.

TONI He called Mom from the bunker!

GRANDMA She heard the guys firing at the door.

TONI A colleague of his died.

GRANDMA They were in there for two hours and then the army came and got them out.

TONI Regular army, not terrorists.

Toni takes the TV remote.

MOTHER Turn it off, please!

TONI (to Luce) I'll play it for you later... It was on the News...

GRANDMA First one guy drove a car into the fence, it all exploded, the security guards were killed and the road was opened for two other cars. Those two other cars then drove directly into the hotel, downstairs into the restaurant. It killed all the people who were having breakfast, there were reporters' kids. He was lucky to escape to

the bunker... There's fresh bread for you. If you're hungry.

Luce is looking at Mother. The phone rings. Grandma grabs it, give it to Mother. They fuss a bit. Mother answers.

MOTHER Hello?! (to others) I hear a noise... Hello?! (to others) I can't hear a thing! Heeeelloooo!... I can't hear a thing!

GRANDMA Calm down, the connection must be broken!

Toni takes the phone and calls back.

TONI Unavailable.

MOTHER I'll kill myself.

GRANDMA It's just bad reception! You won't kill yourself over that...

All of a sudden, the sound of a text message. Toni opens it.

TONI "@US emabsyy, all fine! Lovr u"

GRANDMA Great! (to Mother) He's going to be fine, it's Americans after all.

LUCE How many dead?

TONI Fifty-six and counting.

GRANDMA How's your head?

MOTHER I can't feel a thing.

GRANDMA (to Luce) Your Mom got a hell of an headache. (to Mother) How about lying down for a sec? (to Luce) We'll make a quick lunch.

TONI I think it would be for the best if he came home now.

LUCE That hotel was really well protected. He said it had double protection.

MOTHER He says all kinds of things.

LUCE Did anything happen to any of the other Croats there?

TONI We'd already know if it did.

LUCE Where's this colleague of his from?

TONI Some woman from Macedonia. They said so on the News.

LUCE And how did she die?

each of them engrossed in their thoughts

LUCE (to herself) How old is he? Does she have any kids? Who are they with? Does she have a husband? A mom? A dad? Did she die from a bullet? Or was it the explosion?

TONI (to himself) I'll give away everything I have. Everything! A bunker! Does it look like a cave or an ordinary room? How many people fit inside? What would happen if those guys broke in?! Who managed to run inside? Who didn't?! Imagine someone didn't! Did some kid run? Did some kid stay out? They shot their door. What if the bullet had gone through? When did we last see him? In person. At the airport? No. In the yard? No. Where? When did we last see him? At home? Where?

GRANDMA (to herself) A kilo of potatoes. Chopped. Chicken legs from the fridge. Now he needs to come back home. A bit of lard. Spice it up. He'll come back. Heat the oven. 180. 45 minutes. A big pan. They're all going to get sick. Lettuce. Cucumbers? My poor kids.

MOTHER (to herself) "I'm so sorry for your loss. - He was so young! - So young! - The kids! - Two of them. - A tragedy... - Look at her. - God forbid anyone should go through this..." You selfish motherfucker! (out loud) You motherfucking idiot!

GRANDMA Ha?

MOTHER Never mind!... Do you need help?

GRANDMA No, maybe just with the potatoes and onions.

MOTHER Where are the onions?

LUCE I'll take the potatoes.

TONI Should I do something?

MOTHER Answer the phone if he calls.

TONI I want to peel something too...

...

a few days later

TONI Sale was so surprised when I first told him where my father was. He asked me that two days before I got drunk. Then he told me he recently read an article about the safest countries in the world; they took several criteria crime, murders, terrorist attacks, military stability... And he told me that, according to that list, Croatia was in the 28th place, Iceland in the first place, and Afghanistan in the last, the worst, the 163rd. Even Syria did better at the 162nd... I gave my box with soldiers to the manager, she put it to the playroom. Now I'd be the happiest to call Sale and tell him all this.

LUCE The Macedonian woman was burnt. She was having a shower in her room when it exploded and she ran out naked from the shower. In the hallway she just ran into the fire and got through it. She died after an hour and a half. In the bunker. All burnt, she was shaking on the floor, freezing...

MOTHER I once wished evil to that woman...

LUCE It was on all the news. Surely in Slovenia as well.

Grandma is standing alone on the balcony, smoking.

MOTHER Are you coming back at all? In what state? The next time we see you, if we see you, how many times will you fall off the bed in your sleep, running, persecuted... Who are you fighting all the time?

TONI I gave little Juraj my Liverpool scarf and told no one. He started jumping, clapping, hugging me, and he has no idea what Liverpool is. And now I have nothing left to give for the summer. Or winter. I gave it all.

Toni's voice is strewn with resignation. Soon, Luce starts bleeding. She is on the verge of tears, she is happy. Mother approaches her and tries clumsily to give her a hug. They are both embarrassed, but they make it.

a few weeks later

Toni comes to the kitchen and starts reading the messages he and Luce got from Dad to Mother.

TONI "I'm certainly not here for some kind of adventure and entertainment. This was all agreed on with my wife and your mother."

MOTHER Keep reading...

TONI "I pray God to give me strength to carry this cross to the end and return home soon. Don't worry, we're now at the American embassy until the things calm down a bit, and then we'll move on, to the south, where we're headed."

MOTHER Fine...

TONI "In a few months I'll definitely take a more peaceful mission, it only takes patience. All in all, if everything is fine, I'm in Kandahar in less than a month, it's safer in the south, and then I'll fly home for two weeks so I hope we'll have more time to hang around and chat."

MOTHER And?

TONI That's it in that first text.

LUCE He doesn't have much choice...

MOTHER What do you mean he doesn't?

TONI And your debts?

MOTHER We settled our debts.

LUCE Fine, but what's he going to do here? It's not like he is showered with job offers.

MOTHER True. No such challenges here. The adrenaline, always new people, the 'danger', 'humanitarianism'.

TONI Perhaps he's scared you'll go into debt again.

MOTHER What debts are you talking about! We had those loans because his business went bust and he, the idiot, co-signed some loans. But now all this is taken care of! This is his decision, there's nothing more to do. He's a grown man.

LUCE All the same, you're letting him do it.

MOTHER Me? He has a mind and a will of his own. What am I supposed to do? Pull him by the hand to make him stay? He knows it's dangerous. We talked about this on more than one occasion.

LUCE Mom, there's shooting down there!

MOTHER Of course there's shooting, but how do you make an idiot understand that? "We're safe, they won't shoot at humanitarians." What do you mean they won't? They shoot women and children, and they will somehow spare 'humanitarians, from West, no less. Sometimes he really seems stupid, I don't know how else to explain this.

LUCE Why don't you tell him that he's stupid? That he can't see things clearly.

MOTHER Why don't you tell him?

TONI "There were easier roads to take, but I was supposed to give up on my principles. Say, I could have accepted the mayor's offer and become deputy. You know the things it would bring? A place, a car, a job, decent money... And of course, I was supposed to do whatever the ones in power told me. I'm much more at peace here where I earn for a living, for my family and myself."

MOTHER Bullshit. Fantasies! Someone probably mentioned something along the line and he immediately caught onto it. Politics my ass, he doesn't know a single thing about politics...

LUCE Last week he wrote us how he really feels like 'professionally accomplished', he communicates with the entire world, helps people, children, they did some really big things.

MOTHER Yes... Here at home it's just a bunch of little things.

TONI I wish I could shove him on a plane...

LUCE It would be good to send him the same message every month, "You better come back."

MOTHER You know what, I'm not gonna spend every day of my life worrying. We need to fucking live!

Luce and Toni don't know what to say.

MOTHER Get ready. Grandma is taking us to lunch.

TONI I can't, I got to go to the organization...

MOTHER First you eat with us, then you go where you please. She booked a table by the sea. Her therapy is almost over.

TONI I promised, little Juraj has a test tomorrow, someone needs to show him how to do math...

MOTHER If no one among that staff doesn't know how to put three numbers together and show the poor kid how to add and subtract, then they should close down the organization! I'll call and tell them if I need to.

Toni seems to be a bit relieved, almost glad that Mother is speaking up for him. Mother goes to get ready. Luce and Toni wait for her, sitting at the table. Toni laughs.

TONI Our Mom can really go wild. Remember that time when she almost punched that idiot who called you a tomboy?! She stood in front of his face, I was there, outside the school!

LUCE I gave that moron a good hiding... I was not the only one he mocked...

TONI "Motherfucker!" that's what she shouted. Pure luck there weren't kids around. It was a bit cringe.

LUCE The idiot dropped out of school later anyway... I hope his life sucks. Remember how you and I 'smoked' Mo's cigarettes and Dad came in? We were sitting here.

TONI Mhm. He went crazy.

LUCE Started yelling.

TONI Didn't talk to us in 3-4 days?

LUCE Five days. "We disappointed him." Five and then he went away.

TONI We weren't even smoking, we just lit it and it started smoking. And then he came back...

LUCE Man, he really pushed my button! ... Toni, what do you think it will be like when he returns?

TONI When he returns... You'll probably be in college, and I'll be graduating from high school...

LUCE So, we won't be around...

TONI Are you into bicycles? That's also good training for you... People go around the island to explore.

LUCE I don't know why you always think I'm not into stuff.

MOTHER Luuuuce! Would you like some make-up?

LUCE Whaaat?

MOTHER I have this new lipstick, I think it'll look great on you... Take it off if you don't like it. Just a tad.

Luce gives in. Mother is putting make-up on Luce's lips, Luce is a bit pleased.

LUCE Less, less...

MOTHER It's barely visible! Just a bit, so you're not that pale. Looks great... (to Toni) Ha?

Toni nods.

Luce is looking at herself in the cell phone screen, happy, but removes the excess with her finger.

MOTHER (to Toni) I wish I could put make-up on you as well.

TONI So people could make fun of me in the street.

MOTHER You make fun of them too. It's none of their business anyway!

Luce and Toni and Mother soon leave the place.

*the place is empty
a phone ringing is heard in the empty place
someone's phone is left on the table
in the empty place the phone keeps ringing
nobody is answering
in the empty place the phone keeps ringing
the ringing is interrupted by a woman's voice*

WOMAN'S VOICE "Leave the message after the signal."

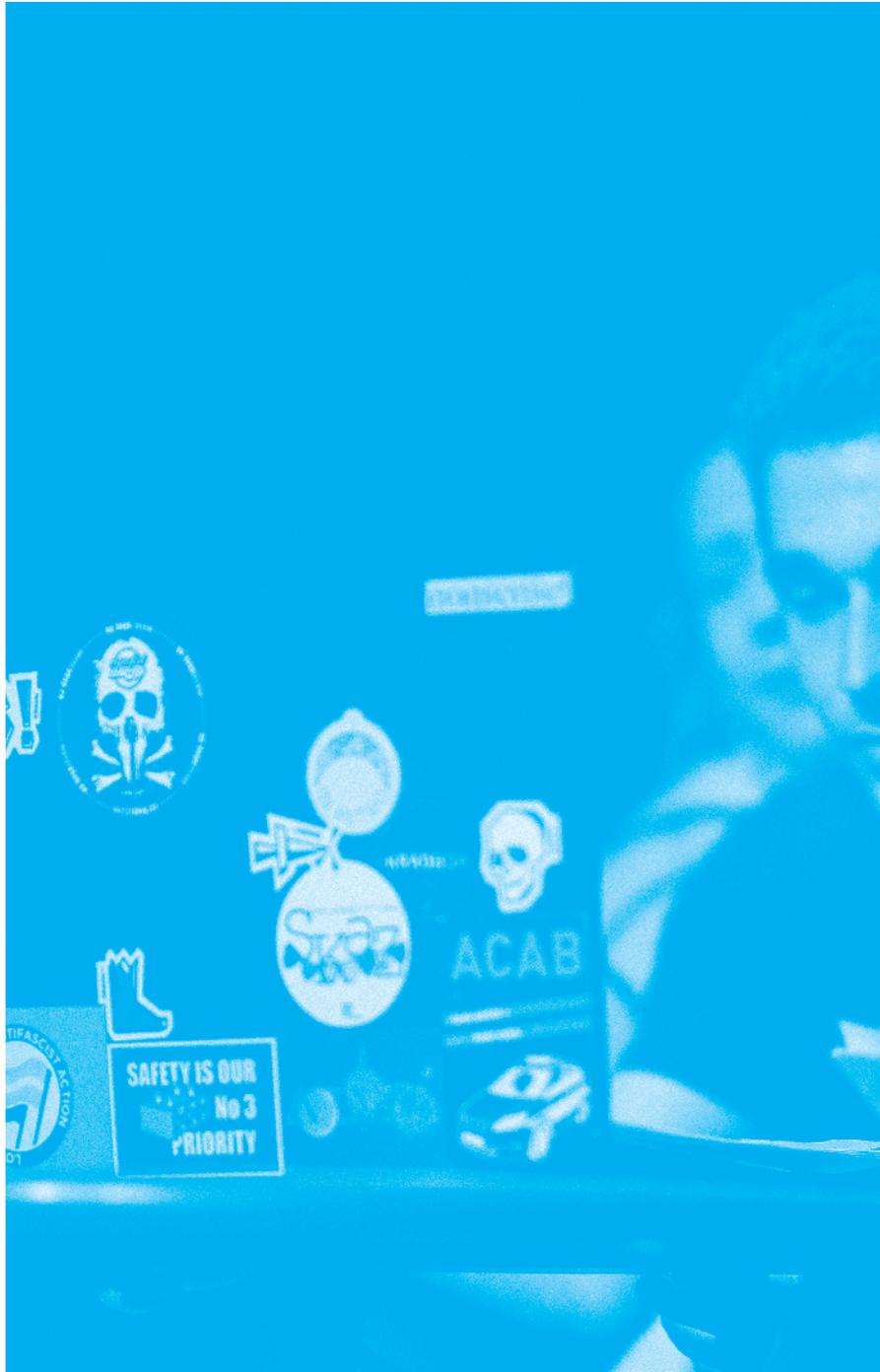
silence

the signal

DAD "Heeey... Where are you guys? I... I just wanted to hear from you... I miss you... I'm thinking about buying a plane ticket at the end of this month and returning home for a while... But I'm not sure if my organization will let me, things are busy again around here. I'll try to think of something and it's definitely going to be soon... I dream about you a lot lately... Hey, I have new photos, it's better not to show all of them, they're a bit brutal... Where are you? Call me back... I love you."

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP

...





CROATIAN CENTRE ITI

Croatian Centre ITI is an international and cultural association focusing on the promotion of Croatian theatre, drama and dance art globally.

In that respect, the Centre organises specialised programmes promoting playwrights, such as the International Drama Colony in Grožnjan, or in terms of theatre, a programme under the name Croatian Theatre Showcase bringing theatre people to Zagreb and Croatia and presenting important works of performing arts (theatre, dance, performance), which serve as perfect examples/showcases of Croatian stage productions intended for foreign producers, festival programmers, translators and curators.

The Centre also has a publishing department, consisting of the Mansioni Edition, specialised in drama and theatre studies, and two magazines, one for theatrical art, *Kazalište / Theatre*, and the other for dance art, *Kretanja / Movements*. We also publish books that verbalise and cover dance art and non-verbal theatre through theory and criticism in *Plesni studiji / Dance Studies* and *Mala dvorana / Small Hall* editions.

In addition, we design specialised events and symposiums which examine theatre and dance with a focus on neuralgic points of art, marginalised social groups, with a special accent on collaboration with related cultural institutions such as, in this case, the Goethe Institute in Zagreb.

Within the scope of the international project New Stages Southeast we collaborate with the Goethe Institute with our programme International Drama Colony *From Text to Performance*, including a public reading of the play *Story not Story* by Irena Parezanović, the Serbian representative in the New Stages project. Another artist-in-residence was the Romanian playwright Ionut Sociu, who was developing his original text under the mentorship of the Croatian playwright Ivor Martinić.

In the publication *Croatian Theatre* we are presenting five Croatian authors selected among 25 others to represent young Croatian playwriting talent in the project New Stages Southeast, or the up-and-comers. In addition to public reading of their texts which took place early in September in Zagreb, organised by the Goethe Institute, KunstTeatar and SPID, in this promotional issue the publisher Croatian Centre ITI is publishing their plays in English to make them visible in an international context.

We are one of the most active centres in the international ITI organisation which includes 90 national centres, recognisable precisely thanks to our programmes bringing collaboration and visibility on the international level.

We are a non-profit association financed by the Ministry of Culture and the Media of the Republic of Croatia and the City of Zagreb.

GOETHE INSTITUTE

Goethe Institute is a cultural institution of the Federal Republic of Germany active throughout the world, fostering international cultural collaboration and studying German language.

New Stages Southeast is Goethe Institute's ongoing international project supporting drama and playwriting and connecting young authors and theatre people from Southeast Europe and Germany to exchange experiences and develop new texts focusing on relevant issues. The project participants include playwrights from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Cyprus.

In 2021 Goethe Institute in Croatia selected five young playwrights who, mentored by Ivor Martinić, wrote new plays, presented in this issue. During the project, the authors got a chance to take part in workshops in Southeast European countries, meet fellow playwrights and improve their texts with the assistance of prominent playwrights as mentors. Stage readings of these plays are planned in association with the Croatian Screenwriters and Playwrights Guild (SPID) and KunstTeatar in September 2022 in Zagreb. In association with the playwriting colony *From Text to Performance*, organised by the Croatian ITI Centre, plays by foreign authors for the project were selected for stage reading in Grožnjan and Zagreb in 2022. The project presentation is planned for 2023 in Germany.





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