

TWISTED BRAIDS

A STORY FROM EXILE

BY

ALEKSANDAR LUKIĆ

TRANSLATED FROM SERBIAN

BY

RADICA B. L., WAT., CA



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Bibliography Note

Aleksandar Lukić was born in Mišljenovac, Serbia, in 1957.

He has published the following books: IN ROSANOV'S CARRIAGE (KOS, Belgrade, 1986, for which he received the Branko's award), THE FOUNDER OF THE UNDERGROUND CAPITAL (*Zavetine*, Belgrade, 1991), THE JUDGMENT DAY (Unirex - KZ "Vladimir Mijušković", Nikšić, 1991, for which he received the *Zaloga award*), THE EUROPE (Vreme knjige, Belgrade, 1995), VAMPIROVICI ["Almanah za živu tradiciju, književnost i alhemiju - The Almanac for Live Tradition, Literature, and Alchemy (ALTLA)", No.1, Belgrade, 1998), THE BOAT OF FOOLS (Narodna Knjiga, Belgrade, 2001, for which he received Srba Mitić award in 2002), and THE LEGENDS ABOUT RAMONDAMAS AND ROSY SAND OF MOON'S ELIMINATIONS (Prosveta, Belgrade, 1991).

His dramas include HAPPY MUMMY (*Ovdje*, Podgorica, 1998) and WHISPERER ("*Mobarov Institut* – Mobar's Institute (MI)", *Zavetine*, Belgrade, 2002).

Together with B. Mladenović, he translated into the Serbian language VLASKE BASNE, the collection of poems from the Southeast Serbia (ALTLA, No.1, 1998, pp. 58 - 70).

He also published the novel MAESTRO PER PJETRO [*MI, Zavetine*, Belgrade, 2001, for which he received the award *Drvo Života* (The Tree of Life)].

He is the founder and editor of the *ALTLA*.

Twisted Braids

Summary

During the 18th and 19th century in the North-Eastern Serbia, the custom of "branding" women was established. Women that killed their children, burned houses, or committed any other crime were stigmatized. The society (a village in this case) punished the female criminals, not taking into consideration their age or even their social standings, by preventing them in ever wearing the head scarf, which was the custom at the time. These women had to comb lard into their hair, braid it, pull the braids up and twist them on the top of their head into a knot, creating the Twisted Braids. Women subjected to this kind of social punishment had to appear in public wearing this hair style, i.e. made up into the Twisted Braids.

If you ever met a woman whose head looked like a pot with the handles, you immediately knew what type of woman she was.

But, did the punishment correspond to the crime committed?

They say that women in that kind of tribal and patriarchal society eagerly threw themselves into mischief, so they could earn Twisted Braids status. They happily did things wrong so they could get rid of the head scarf and walk around with Twisted Braids, showing off the beauty that God and nature had gifted them with. When this kind of behavior got out of control and spread, society revoked the custom.

It looked like as if only the name "Twisted Braids" remained from the whole custom.

But, is it really the case?

In the former Yugoslavia, both the nineties in the 20th century and, according to everything, the first decade of the first century of the third millennium brings back the story of Twisted Braids, signifying the fact that evil still tracks

down the beauty.

If, after the tragic Balkan slaughter, criminals evade the justice, if they walk freely among us, do we dare to conceal that they were our friends, neighbors, relatives, our fathers and brothers? Or, are we to say that everything that happened to us can be blamed on Twisted Braids?

The apartheid (stateless people) from this theatre play are trying to answer this question.

Wherever the heroes of this, not so perfect world are, the Twisted Braids are recognized all over the world meridians. Although they believe Dostoevsky who said "Beauty will save the world", it should be acknowledged that this attitude seems rather similar to the one of "Twisted braids". Even a more familiar attitude, such as "Art will save the world", does not satisfy them, although it seems more reasonable, exactly because it is utopia.

The heroes of this play would rather (if they have to be defined by the life and reality of the epoch that they belong to) recommend that The Book of Apocalypse be read in future like the Book of Love, and not like the book of the end of the world, something that clergy, in their self admiration and delirium, preach.

And so, this is the point from which it would be good to start. Love, before and after everything, love in spite of everything. It is a fortune that heroes like these still exist somewhere.

What about Twisted Braids? Turn around. Without betraying your heart, tell the story of what you have seen.

Characters:

William Coca, Director of one of New York City's theaters

Alexander Arsenov, Professor of English language,
Translator

Paul Arsenov, Student, Alexander's nephew

Natalie Arsenov, Medical doctor, Paul's mother

Galyna Filipovna, Actress

Blynia Pansa, Ballet dancer

ACT 1

[In the apartment of Alexander's nephew, Paul, William Coca and Alexander Arsenov (who just arrived to New York City) are sitting and talking. The conversation is pleasant, they are happy about their meeting. It may be that Alexander is talking about the success of the book *Tractate*, dealing with the theatre of the 20th century, translated and published in the Serbian language, the last of the volumes of William's opus, or, perhaps, about the horrible war that swept the Balkans, where you wouldn't know whose moans were louder and whose tears harder to take. In any case, without getting surprised, they are trying to find the truth from each other about many things, first handedly].

WILLIAM: I'm telling you, do not bow!

ALEXANDER: Nowadays, that's easy to say!

WILLIAM: You did not arrive to a local prison.

ALEXANDER: As recently as yesterday, drafted from the trenches and all dirty, I watched the death of the people closest to me. My family home in Belgrade was bombed and leveled. Instead of my wife and son, an open abyss in the ground waited for me, my family history finished like another literary work. I had no one to burry. Their lives passed by, like water under the bridge, leaving me on the ship of fools, like a scare crow, sprinkled with the gun powder.

WILLIAM: Reminiscence's prisoners stink like flowers in the vase with old water. Remember, this is New York. Different rules are applied around us. From the periphery of the world, immigrants or refuges come here to support one another. After only two hundred years of development, they reached the Moon!

ALEXANDER: So why should I envy them? That kind of life sounds unconvincing to me. Misfortune brings one closer to the truth, that doesn't need to be proven.

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WILLIAM: Ha! Ha! Ha! Dictators follow their convictions to the grave! We had enough of them. Isn't it the truth? After disaster, no matter how big it was, Monday comes, when the life should be pushed from the beginning. You can think whatever you want! In the future, if you still want to talk about horrors, write a book! We'll find a publisher who'll make you rich! For now, though, you can get a prompter's job in my theatre. I'm telling you, do not bow!

ALEXANDER: Today's world is ruin of a fairy tale.

WILLIAM: In theatre, it's easier to tolerate bandits turning into kings, refugees into admirals, and prostitutes into educators. No, you have to live off of something.

ALEXANDER: In theatre, I can not renounce my past, like some kind of worn-out suit? That's a laconic direction for the dictatorship of simple souls. This statement would fit cashiers, painters, street car drivers, and the whole pyramid up to the chief of the state.

WILLIAM: Fit the whole U.S....

ALEXANDER: Without it, the whole world would be in ruins. Right?

WILLIAM: Well, there are other occupations too.

ALEXANDER: It sounds like I have to choose one?

WILLIAM: I am not obliging you to show your smile to smile, if you don't care for it! Everyone follows his own agenda! If you decide to quit the theatre, than go for God's sake! I did not become director only yesterday! Saints do not exist, even in Christianity.

ALEXANDER: Do not make a quick decision!

WILLIAM: Of course! It's time for me to go. If I only knew what kind of eel awaits for me in the nest!? Small eel! It arrived from the Spanish National Ballet to the States. New York is spinning around its own axis after her. My pocket knife has two blades - I named it Blynia Pansa, it shaves without any shaving cream. I'll introduce her to you, maybe even tomorrow. OK? In Manhattan, it's worth starting the life all over again on Mondays.

ALEXANDER: I'll walk you out! In Belgrade, I used to walk, in the dusk, to Kalemegdan, to get a fresh breath of air.

WILLIAM: Americans climb the Statue of Liberty, to see the heaven.

[Paul, a handsome young man, enters the apartment. Natalie, his mother, more beautiful than most of the young girls, comes in the room after him. Mother and son are returning from work. They are tired. You could say they are rather hungry! They are noisy like crows that dropped bacon from their beaks].

PAUL: What a party you have in here! Even the United Nations would go into the bankruptcy financing this kind of a drinking party! Congratulations!

NATALIE: A decent man drinks whisky at home - life it's not easy for my brother!

PAUL: If that is the case, let's all have a drink?

NATALIE: He is left with no wife and son; he's even without the house. That great man! Since he came to New York, he even combs his hair backwards, his head looks like the roof with two streams.

PAUL: After 10 hours of work and four hundred sweaters at Steinbach & Sons, I could use my head to patent a husking machine!

NATALIE: It is not the same! You have the time. The whole world is in front of you!

PAUL: Why did you come after me? Hey? To show me the truth: work for six days, and take a rest on the seventh! To have means to buy whisky?

NATALIE: Shame on you, you bud into everything... Leave him alone, let him drink!

PAUL: Sure! I'll listen to his confession: That in the Balkans, you didn't know whose moans were becoming louder and whose tears harder to take. That's what you want?

NATALIE: Here we go again?

PAUL: The communist kaka-stocracy started the war, like if it was a question of starting the fire in a fireplace, but now they are sniffing. They wanted great countries, but they've got rants. Because of them I had to emigrate - spare the rod and spoil the child paradise. And you say the world is in front of me!? Sure! To a World Welcoming Committee I could bring the estafette! Twisted Braids!

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NATALIE: Enough! We need to eat and rest. Tomorrow, we are going to take our uncle to the museum!

PAUL: Even tonight you should get a good spot in front of it. Prehistoric man, skeletons, and heritage are crying out for you. Like on some wake given for the living, sing the International hymn for the Negroes, you'll knock them off their feet.

NATALIE: (Offers food to Paul): Milk! Pate! Sardines! Should I scrabble some eggs?

PAUL: Bring me a well roasted pig, with the apple stuck in its snout. After it, I could sing your favorite song!

NATALIE: Even after that, you wouldn't be able to get molded, to either side.

PAUL: I was destined for the knitting and textile factory! First class - second class, dump! Balkan's poverty follows me everywhere!

NATALIE: Others are guilty for starting the war, get it through your head. If you asked your uncle and me, there wouldn't be a war. But, that's another story! You would have been a professor by now, done with your studies long ago! Do not complain any more. Democratic forces won over the waste in Belgrade, the city that you had run away from. What are you waiting for? The abolition came into effect!

PAUL: All in all, I was given the life so I could spend it. I stopped studying, I evaded mobilization, became an industrial worker. My biography is good enough for me to become either a writer or a bum.

NATALIE (Bringing the food to the table): Our uncle is like a small cat - didn't venture too far from the house.

PAUL: He's puttering around! One can tell you two are twins - you keep buzzing united like partisans around a bonfire!

NATALIE: Listen, enough is enough. Your uncle is not a stranger!

PAUL: Above Sava and Danube rivers, placed like a crooked hat, Kalemegdan was there for him, where he could do some thinking. If his wife and son were killed, and if his house was just a crater in Vracar, why didn't he stay there to mourn them?

(Alexander, his lungs full of air, enters the apartment).

ALEXANDER: Good evening cousins! Good evening! Lit with commercials, the streets of Manhattan look so bright, like the sun never comes down!

PAUL: Uncle, you are shaken by the cultural shock! You started speaking English! "Good evening! Good evening cousins!" What happened to the slogan you used to repeat all the time: "Speak our language (Serbian), so the whole world can understand you!" Being out of your country killed your national esteem!?

NATALIE: Empty stomach feels the same, wherever you are.

PAUL: We are patiently waiting for you! I hope you found similar passion here as well?

ALEXANDER: America lives under the dictatorship featuring, paradoxically, an attractive appearance that stimulates self destructive instincts in human beings. The USA is the mirror image of madness that we live in, it is the proof that the worst type of communism, worthy of Stalin, won, shaped as in triumph, money and illusion. If you really want to know, here you can see that, even without having a hill like Kalemegdan for thinking. America has failed...

PAUL: So it means we need to run away again!

NATALIE: Put an end to the quarrel, we don't have anyone as close as we are among ourselves!

PAUL: You are failing like bishop Nikolai Velimirovic - first your family, than your neighbor, village, homeland, and then the rest! We pushed through it all at once! No one is guilty, we are where we are! Twisted braids!

ALEXANDER: You want us to sit down and be quiet like the English, with our mouths full of food!?

PAUL: Such a lesson would be a better thing for us, than turning the apartment into the restaurant. Not all of the Serbs have to gather for a drink at our place.

NATALIE: I don't want to hear a word any more!

ALEXANDER: The young man prattles like a mill. If it was up to me, I could drink up another bottle! To the last

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drop!

PAUL: Back in Belgrade, drinking didn't agree with you.

ALEXANDER: Over there, I was drinking like a sponge. Serbian pubs remind you on cemeteries, there is no one to hear you there. I wish I had at least one friend there, to wish me luck.

NATALIE: Stop it!

PAUL: You found him here gobbling down whisky instead of slivovic!?

ALEXANDER: What's wrong with that?

PAUL: Then celebrate! Serbs didn't get strewn around in vain.

ALEXANDER: The fellow I was drinking with today wasn't my countryman. But his fate was the closest to ours.

PAUL: I suspect he's a refugee too?

ALEXANDER: An experienced one! William Coca himself. The writer and the director whose work I translated!

NATALIE: (All puzzled) How come?

ALEXANDER: He is the director of one of the theatres in New York!

PAUL: A dissident, well known for that his books are better diplomats than he is?

NATALIE: Him?

ALEXANDER: As soon as I phoned him, he came over running. He was sitting at this table.

NATALIE: William Coca?

ALEXANDER: His gulp is like a rainbow after the rain!

PAUL: Who would say so?

ALEXANDER: He is giving me an offer for a prompter's position in the theatre.

PAUL: Thanks God you are not going to whisper in front of me any more!

ALEXANDER: "In Manhattan, life should be pushed from the beginning each and every Monday" says Coca.

PAUL: Smart man. He is all over the newspapers, day after day.

NATALIE: You know everything!

PAUL: Since I ran away from the basement of the official Belgrade's fools, I have been taking notes about the facts of life in New York.

ALEXANDER: You are too young to write about your life!

PAUL: And you are exactly old enough to confess to me?

ALEXANDER: It's not my fault that others don't want to listen to me!

PAUL: Put it any way you want, my diary and your confession will make for a good drama.

NATALIE: Don't you two know how to become different?

ALEXANDER: We'll never become Americans!

PAUL: (Getting up from the table and going to the bedroom) You could recommend our drama to Coca.

ALEXANDER: You do that! After all, one doesn't throw all the puppies from first litter into the water.

(Alexander and Natalie are alone at the table).

NATALIE (once Paul left the room): William Coca?

ALEXANDER: Yes!

NATALIE: Sat at this table?

ALEXANDER:Yes!

NATALIE: Here?

ALEXANDER: Here.

NATALIE: When you introduced us at the BITEF (Belgrade International Theatre Festival), he had the voice of a grouse.

ALEXANDER: He will remember that moment in

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Belgrade. It would all have been different had I not introduced you as my best friend.

NATALIE: That we cannot change.

ALEXANDER: Like a broken record, he was repeating what had happened at the festival. He was having so much fun, he even remembered a police chief who was swearing when we were brought to the local police station, a person to whom he was repeating: "What kind of communists are you? You cannot even prevent Tito's leg from being cut off!"

NATALIE: During the night I was with him, the night I got pregnant, he was saying: "Drink from my desire".

ALEXANDER: He didn't change a bit!

NATALIE: Is he married now?

ALEXANDER: No!

NATALIE: In Belgrade, after he kissed me, he joked: "After this kiss, women die in me like wind!" My maiden pride prevented me from believing in him, and six days later when he asked for my hand, it was to no avail. He gave me this broach as his gift, during that night, not meant to be a wedding night.

ALEXANDER: It's never too late. Life should be pushed from the beginning on Mondays, he says. That lesson should be learned!

NATALIE: What should I tell him if I see him again?

ALEXANDER: Tell him your life story, starting from the Belgrade's kiss!

NATALIE: From that?

ALEXANDER: Why not?

NATALIE: What about the secret? What would Paul say?

ALEXANDER: He should be happy to see his father! It's a good occasion for him to learn about it!

NATALIE: What about William?

ALEXANDER: He will realize who Paul is the first time he sees him!

NATALIE: I am worried!

ALEXANDER: Sister, only fire doesn't change! Let them hear you!

NATALIE: I feel as if my heart is full of buckshot!

ALEXANDER: Don't worry; you'll have something to talk about. You will cackle like a hen from the early morning.

NATALIE: After everything!?

ALEXANDER: I am talking like a man with dulled instincts, broken by the war. Do not take after me.

ACT 2

(A few weeks later, uncle and his nephew are getting ready to go to see the play's opening night at the theatre.)

PAUL (Entering the room where Alexander is sitting, all dressed up for going out): We are happier now. Your suit is fitted, your hair style is brand new, we are not complaining like we used to before. The way it started, girls are going to be all over us after the opening night. Uncle, have fun. If a funeral official had just met you, he would also see your optimism!

ALEXANDER: It's written on my forehead?

PAUL: With huge letters.

ALEXANDER: Are you ready?

PAUL: They would notice me even in the Kosovo battle!

ALEXANDER: When a dead man let the gas go?

PAUL: Fine!

ALEXANDER: You are such a trouble!

PAUL: You see what happens when they hire a trouble, you are the best example.

ALEXANDER: What do you know about a troubled man?

PAUL: All that you don't know.

ALEXANDER: A philosophical answer?

PAUL: The infallible feelings. I want to tell you that I do respect life. Every moment I sense its fulfillment. Every fool can be killed and die whenever they choose to!

ALEXANDER (Putting a stop to this kind of conversation): It's time to go, but she is still not here?

PAUL (Takes a bottle of whisky and pours it in glasses for both of them): I take it to get rid of stage fright. A glass of

whisky will soften wrinkles on our faces. With one glass, we'll get into the theatre like two bullets. With two, you'll whisper replicas like a Kalemegdan's jay.

ALEXANDER: I never refuse a drink!

PAUL: In that name, I'll pour one more.

ALEXANDER: It is three glasses that are not quarrelling!

PAUL: Let's cheer for the opening night!

ALEXANDER: "Tin drums" in New York!

(Natalie is coming back from shopping; she hurriedly enters the apartment).

NATALIE (Carries a bouquet of flowers in her hands):
Who are you waiting for?

PAUL: We are leaving!

ALEXANDER: Almost!

NATALIE (thinking): Go without me!

PAUL: If we were going to visit the museum, she wouldn't miss it!

ALEXANDER: But Natalie, I promised William I would bring you both to the opening night! How would it look now if you don't come with us?

NATALIE: Another time!

PAUL: Uncle, let's go. Theatre is not for her!

ALEXANDER: Natalie!?

NATALIE: I am staying! I'll read "The Book of Sacred Wars" and listen to the music!

PAUL: And then she'll go out to the balcony to admire the moon, am I guessing right?

ALEXANDER: A whetstone cannot escape anywhere. Tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, the heavenly pot will still be waiting for you at the same place? Do you hear me, Natalie?

NATALIE: Just go!

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ALEXANDER: What is that supposed to mean?

NATALIE: Hurry up!

PAUL (Before leaving the room with his uncle, he says to his mother): Time is money, in Manhattan! Bye, bye! The literature is on my table!

NATALIE (Pushes the bouquet of flowers into Paul's hands): You better learn good manners. Only hoodlums go without flowers to the theatre!

ALEXANDER: I cannot believe it! See! I really cannot believe it?

(Natalie is alone. She appears as if looking for something, more unnerved than a magpie, pacing through all the rooms. From one of them she brings a book, approaches the stereo, rummaging through the CD collection, chooses a CD and plays the music. Then she turns off the main light and goes to the balcony. Habits are comfortable prison. Let her have it!).

ACT 3

(Paul and Alexander are making noise in front of the apartment door. The noise is bigger than that made by the Serbian recruits leaving for the military service. Those who think of themselves as being more free thinkers, can presume that the forces of organic chemistry gush from the souls of the two, in fact - an entire vine cellar.)

ALEXANDER (Enters the apartment, turns the switch on, and the light bathes them all): What kind of people? All of them magicians! Should I let Negroes to mug me in the subway? Can you imagine that? That is - them, for whom I have to guess whether they are laughing or crying. In the subway, while I was looking at their lips, more swollen than tractor tires, and trying to realize what was going on, they took wallet from my pocket. Who would say they are that kind of people?

PAUL: Don't scream! They stole only twenty dollars from you! You're complaining as if you want the whole continent to hear you. One more thing you need to do is to go out on the balcony and spit in their face! You think the Americans don't know where thieves gather? They only waited for you to teach them. When boors and gypsies were ripping you off in Belgrade, you were quiet. You said OK, that's our people, poor people! You were admiring them at the market of Zeleni Venac, not to mention séances on the Branko Bridge. You should be ashamed of yourself! You are criticizing America's poor! Honest people!

ALEXANDER (Slowly approaches the door for the balcony. The wind has swayed the drapes, before he left): Dear God! What a wonder! Paul, come here. A Slavic soul sleeps on the balcony like an angel. Come and see! Should we wake her up?

PAUL (Does not go on the balcony): It's not recommended! As soon as the weather gets nicer, she is asleep under the moon, like she is sleeping under the plum tree in a companion's cottage on Avala! That's for sure!

NATALIE (Surprised, as is a person awakening from the nap, enters the room): Oh! You arrived? You look so shaken, like a "Buffoon From Another World".

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ALEXANDER (Enters the room after Natalie): You would look the same if the Negroes ripped you off as well. What do you say? We caught you like a swallow in a nap!

PAUL (To his uncle): Don't be afraid, she is not like you! She is not confessing. Even if you torture her like a folk hero, she would still not tell you about her dreams!

NATALIE (Gets the bottle of Coca cola, and pours into the glasses for all of them): Well! You are looking at me, as if I had, God forbid, run naked through the streets of Brooklyn!?

PAUL: What did I say?

ALEXANDER (Conciliatory): Let's stop joking.

NATALIE: And... How was the theatre?

ALEXANDER: First class!

PAUL: Ovations! Even the last rows had heard the prompter. Audience applauded from the balcony, thinking that it was some kind of trick in question. He was making all kind of noise hidden behind the scene, like he was confessing in front of me - a man talking and standing on the platform in the White House.

ALEXANDER: It seems like you only imagined it!

PAUL: I didn't get the applause. No, no! But you did! You do not feel that you are ready to see a doctor. You became stubborn and spiteful; you don't want to admit that Belgrade's bombing threw you off the tracks. You are hard of hearing. You were yelling replicas, as if you were swearing at fisherman on the river Sava all the way from Kalemegdan.

NATALIE: It looks like you two never watched the show, instead it seems like you went there to judge each other!

ALEXANDER: Paul has the soul of a beginner writer. He sees everything, knows everything, and wants to criticize everything!

PAUL: Well, well. I am talking only about what had bothered me at the opening night. I am not blind not to see that in the middle of America the audience came all made up with their national emblems. Wasn't that so? The Russian actresses had babushkas hanging around their necks, like cowbells. I am wondering how come you didn't put the Serbian hat on the top of your head!

NATALIE: Your uncle brought the hat for you to keep!

PAUL: But I am giving it to you as a gift anyway, so you can have a place for a hen to lay eggs once you return to Belgrade.

ALEXANDER: Paul, you are so nasty and no one knows that! You are forgetting that you have been at the most prestigious theatre. William has the world reputation and he deserves it. Critics favor him since he started acting. They divide time on before and after Coca, like they are cutting an apple. You think it's accidental that important people rushed and crowded from everywhere so they could be present at the opening night. You act like a fool, and the fact is that he couldn't get rid of the journalists at the cocktail party.

PAUL: That's another story! Right? You are the only one who didn't notice how rude he was, trying to get away from them. He was interested in me? Of course, since I am young. He plastered himself on me like some kind of stamp. His eyes bulged out like cabbage rolls when you introduced us.

NATALIE: It's so hot in here!

ALEXANDER: Such a considerate man!

PAUL: A God's man. He chooses to hug me, in front of all the guests tonight. I was biting my tongue through the night so I wouldn't slap him. I was holding myself back, only because of you. Your famous friend is a homo! He was staring at me. His eyes were shining like the eyes of a cat surprised in the dark.

NATALIE: What about uncle?

PAUL: He was another star of the night. The actress Galyna Filipovna stuck to him. A Russian soul. She was talking to him as if she is a poet. Can you believe, she was repeating all the time, little in Russian, then in English: "Well, Alexander, what a beautiful eyes you got; I haven't seen such eyes since I left Moscow!" Instead of paying attention to her like any normal man would, he was toasting to Coca: "Cheers! This is your lucky day, William. This is the important time for all of us"; he was so touched he was almost singing.

ALEXANDER: Green walnut, Natalie! Greeeen!

NATALIE: I have chills! Freshen up for once!

PAUL (Continues to talk): They prevented me from talk-

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ing to Blynia Pansa – a ballet dancer. What a beauty. If you could only see how she was swallowing me with her black, velvety Spanish eyes, I was getting all numb. Of course, I liked her. I kissed her on purpose in front of everyone, before we went home, rudely asking her for a date. Coca was so

surprised, most probably disappointed that he didn't charm me, bastard.

ALEXANDER: William did not deserve such a vulgarity.

NATALIA: I am all shaking! Freshen up! I cannot listen to that modern American fairy tale!

PAUL: So, should we close it up?

ALEXANDER: Better that, than to repeat the same!

PAUL: Why don't you continue complaining! America has to hear your voice too. You have a lot to tell. Go on the balcony and scream about being ripped off, talk loudly to them, let them know how your Slavic souls sometimes sleep above their heads, more alert than angels. I am going to finish up the drama!

ALEXANDER: Push on, novice!

NATALIE: I am so cold!

PAUL: I don't care about your loss. A man that runs, lives, says one adage, that wisdom I learned without you! Listen! I respect and value love, love and love again. Love above everything! Love in spite of everything! For those black Spanish eyes I would go to the end of the world!

ALEXANDER: One dreams what one likes.

PAUL: Let's not screw up our lives like that. Life is always something else! Think about it. Tomorrow, we are going on a vacation, you will see that there is a point in traveling north.

NATALIE: To the north?

PAUL: Towards Canada.

ALEXANDER: What are we going to do there?

PAUL: In the state of New Hampshire, there is a mountain top called "Old Man in the Mountains", something that deserves our visit. A place called Concord is on the way too, where one of Serbian poets lives. We'll drop in on

him unannounced, and he'll be happy to see us.

NATALIE: That's a long way!

PAUL: Like a travel from Belgrade to Skoplje!

ALEXANDER: Well, it is an honor to visit the poet! That's enough!

PAUL: That's comforting. Nothing can prevent us to visit the mountain top I recommended.

NATALIE: It would be more appropriate to skip that!

PAUL: What kind of people are you? From there, we'll watch the whole of Europe, like it deserves, from the height. If we have any luck, we'll see stiff minarets in Sarajevo. There is no better thinking hill for meditation in America than that. A clear night is not going to pass us by. In our earthly life, for the first time we are going to be the closest to the Moon!

(Paul leaves for his room. Natalie and Alexander go to the balcony, like some kind of pre-historic conspirators. Nobody can imagine what kind of ideas are in their heads).

ACT 4

(Paul and Alexander are leafing through some newspapers. They are reading one moment and talking the next. While talking, they are not holding back at all. Like Natalie says - "incorrigible Arsenovs").

ALEXANDER: And?

PAUL: The end of the world has been postponed!

ALEXANDER: Every fool can give that answer!

PAUL: Why did you then say "And?"

ALEXANDER: You got stuck with that Blynia Pansa. You're blushing, since you are with her I can see your cheeks are red like they are submerged into the sea of her Madrid's blood.

PAUL: Uncle, mind your own business! Keep on turning pages, like you are doing for days, look for the news from Serbia! My life is my business; it means no one should be getting into it.

ALEXANDER: The easiest thing to say is two plus two is four. The fact that you took away Coca's lover from him, is not a joke. You may or may not admit it, but that adventure is not the reflection of a good taste.

PAUL: You're preaching again, as if we are in the church of St. Sava!

(The phone ringing interrupts their dialog. Alexander gets up to pick up the phone. Natalie enters the room with the same idea. But he's quicker. The hostess stops short, like the call is for her. And that's what it is).

ALEXANDER: Hello...! Yes...! He is!... You can!... Of course, why not!... (He covers the receiver and talks to his nephew). Spanish eel!

PAUL (Takes the receiver from his uncle's hand and, not hesitating at all, begins conversation): My dear!... No, not at all... For sure... I am not hiding... I am waiting for you at my home! To a Spanish wedding?... Why not! My moth-

er and uncle are leaving right now; they are going to visit some Romanian lady, so she could tell them what their future is going to be, just by looking into the beans! You have to learn that people from Balkan countries, no matter what they say about themselves, look like each other more than two eggs do! It's incredible, but it's true. I'll see you! Kiss! Kiss!

NATALIE (As soon as Paul is done with the phone call):
It's not decent to make a date in front of us!

ALEXANDER: What does it look like?

PAUL: Spare me the lecture about the moral. OK! If you want a traditional behavior, go to the monastery. Priests are God's men; they do not have spare time to listen to the sheep from the drove, so their mouths would not be pulled in a yawn.

ALEXANDER: Then we should close our eyes; let the man stay with someone else's lover!

PAUL: I beg you; relieve me of the monstrous heritage. You should recommend the prompter to someone else. Respect the fact that I did not lecture you so far. I could have done that. As recently as yesterday you were gnashing like the sand under shoe soles. I had to know who had been broken by the war and in which way. You, uncle, were pointing towards the universe, where the souls of your unburied wife and son are wondering. Yes! Yes! If the uncle is so moral, why didn't he erect a grave stone for them, like the custom says it should be done? He wouldn't be so sad about the Spanish eel. If he was so smart, he would be running after the skirt of Galyna Filipovna in the theatre! That's the real life. Almost the following day, he would announce that he is getting married! And? What would I be supposed to say? Dogs' wedding? Right?

NATALIE: Yes or not, it would be better for you if you had chosen one of the girls that came as refugees from Belgrade to New York, shortly after we did. How beautiful they are! You can see them everywhere. You are pretending to be a fool. Only, you don't know that birds of the feather flock together.

PAUL: Get away, you matchmakers!

ALEXANDER: You should be ashamed of yourself!

NATALIE: Is that the way to talk to your mother!?

PAUL: I would talk differently to a normal people. Get

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with it; I am warmed up by love! Love before and after everything, love in spite of everything. It's all well while that is the case. What about you? You are slowly beginning. Traveling! Why don't you get all dressed up and start going. Diaspora awaits your visit!

(Natalie and Alexander leave the house in a hurry. Paul does not care about it. He plays the music and relaxes in the chair. He is daydreaming, which should be praised. What else could the man in love do, one who believes that love is seldom late? That fact is proven by Blynia Pansa, who comes to his door's threshold, like a wind blowing over the firebrand).

BLYNIA (Knocks at the door, peeking in with a humor):
Who's waiting for me in the house?

PAUL (Starts going towards her): The longing!

BLYNIA: Stronger than a bull!

PAUL: More cautious than a hunting dog at the edge of the forest!

(Their dialogue continues by itself, like shoe laces stretching in the water).

BLYNIA: We are strange people, Paul!

PAUL: Balloons!

BLYNIA: We are flying?

PAUL: Like main characters!

BLYNIA: Where a man's nose excites!

PAUL: Excited saintesses!

BLYNIA: From which order?

PAUL: A blessed one!

BLYNIA: A traveler through the universe!

PAUL: For instance!

BLYNIA: In love!

PAUL: Forever!

(The saga reminds us of a love's foreplay. In spite of the fact that only rarely women are gifted with an initiative, that the initiative is not a strong side of their character, the ballet dancer climbed up on Paul, kissing him and wrapping her legs around his waist. The two are seething like the Atlantic Ocean and they don't abhor to splashing the water over the people who are walking by. Coupled with no prejudice, they make love, raw and obvious, able to shake even the wooden doll).

Blynia

(Screaming in the love spasm like a scared bird in the middle of the night, in pain but sharply yelling few times: "This is America"! Without a doubt, she is approaching the climax in which she becomes disarmed and more beautiful. Poetically quiet and lethargic ballet dancer etherizes the following sentence: "This is America! This is America! My love! In love there is no measure". Like a bird's catch that tumbles down the sky into the birch wood, the lovers fell down to the floor. Even if she had been hurt, Pansa was not held back; she says): "The fire had burned you my love, you are not burning, neither are you hurting, you hairy dog, I am afraid to reach for you". This rhymes I have learned long time ago, when I was young, on the streets of Madrid. Why am I saying them now? You were not here yesterday, or the day before, or seven days ago...

PAUL: I was searching for myself!

BLYNIA: That's the way the stories with no end begin! But you could have contacted me before that!

PAUL: I could have?

BLYNIA: No matter what kind of enigma was in question, you should have called.

PAUL: From the emptiness, it was not possible to say anything since I was stuck in there like in a pendulum. You could say neither here no there.

BLYNIA: Even if you had been running after the tail of the bull like a scared toreador, you should have done it!

PAUL: I was on the top of the "Old man in the mountains", pulling behind me my mother and uncle as if they were some avalanche victims.

BLYNIA: A typical immigrant's story.

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PAUL: We were ready to have a dialogue with Europe!

BLYNIA: And? Did anyone answered?

PAUL: We heard each other among ourselves!

BLYNIA: Some time ago, on a clearing, while in Madrid I started the similar dialogue with America, just before leaving for New York. My collocutor did not hear me, like he didn't hear you. On a Spanish soil, I was happy hearing the echo of my own words. They were echoing "not here, not there", "not here, not there". That would mean, do not mind the story! Don't be sad! Take my heart for the homeland.

PAUL: If I could only learn what should be done with the past, so it would not drudge on me like an unbearable reality!

BLYNIA: That's easy. Forgive the worst deeds!

PAUL: You think it can be done just like that? Like I am cleaning the dirty glass?

BLYNIA: Do it with love!

PAUL: Even if I wanted to...

BLYNIA: Keep it in mind! World is waiting for us from the beginning like a big secret! Discover it! The sooner the better! Forget Serbia, Spain and Europe. Memories are for the old people, life is in front of us.

PAUL: "This is America!" like you say.

BLYNIA: In a way, but my words are not a sticky jam, even less a scale!

PAUL: If they are not, what really are they? Words, words and only words, stains! On the top of the "Old man on the mountains" I was listening to them shaped on our confession, observing uncle's stare which was stuck like a thunder in the distance. My mother would occasionally put out the fire of our quarrel. My God, I thought how happy the American tourists were, fat like green cucumbers on the shoot in the garden. Why are they so curiously looking at us, I asked myself? A few of them thought that we were saying enigmas, the rest of them could swear that they came upon the crazy people, since they were jokingly addressing Europe in many aspects. We must have reminded them on a traveling theatre or prehistoric monster that was getting tired, while they were getting their cameras ready to immortalize the moment they were in.

Dictatorship of the average souls is endless tapeworm, my dear. World is its own worst enemy, that needs not to be proven! No one is trying to understand another or to give in. Most of the people are standing aghast from the difference! I am frightened to death from the people, something that's not recommendable, more and more I am frightened!

BLYNIA: My dear, why be sad? The man is the most efficient God's discovery. He learned from the beginning of time to prepare his past like a scalped skin, spreading it apart in front of the shed to dry out. Often I was looking for this answer: Why is life worth living? How far did I come? Love brought me to you. At this moment, the fire will not burn our love like some Spanish rhymes are stating, what you're waiting for, kiss me, don't be sad any more!

PAUL: I am expressing myself like a man who failed everything!

BLYNIA: What would your uncle have to do then? I was listening carefully to his story that he was telling us when we were in the theatre. After all that happened to him at the Balkan's slaughter house, he looks pretty sane to me!

PAUL: The prompter?

BLYNIA: Excellent! Galyna Filipovna does not miss any of his stories. From the first word she clings to him like a domesticated dog. A sensitive soul, she does not hide her sympathy for him. The actress is crying as if all her close relatives were killed in Moscow. Simply, that's the way she is.

PAUL: I too, wanting or not, have learned his story by heart.

BLYNIA: Tragic witnessing! Isn't it?

PAUL: All people are tragic. His stories and my diary have been written in exile. All of this makes a short review of the deterioration. What I really want to say is that it was a good reason for the drama I wrote. All that is left is for me to get christened. But it got stuck even at the title.

BLYNIA: Drama?

PAUL: Drama!

BLYNIA: Repeat it one more time.

PAUL: I wrote a drama.

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BLYNIA: May I read it?

PAUL (Gets up and bring a file from his room): Why not!

BLYNIA: Maybe I could christen it?

PAUL: That is the history of our backyard, told as is.

BLYNIA (Takes the file): Kiss me, but as arrogantly as you did during the cocktail after the opening of the G. Grass's play. I am getting goose bumps thinking of it. I believe that a man has to go through life without prejudice; kiss me again and again! I can tell you now that even if I didn't look like Madonna that night, I was anticipating a writer hiding in you. Well? Why did you stiffen? Only the angels do not talk about the time, and for us, we are always late?

PAUL: You are my angel!

BLYNIA: Spanish wedding looks like a hot frying pan. Bride and groom are waiting for us. Let's go so they wouldn't be waiting in vain. A bride had announced to all her guests that an authentic Serb will be present at the celebration. There is no joke about it!

(Paul takes Blynia Pansa's hand. The girl walks after him like she is hurrying to the beaches of her homeland. The couple in love leaves the house, seemingly walking on air. It's hard to believe that this kind of love does exist).

ACT 5

(In the darkened room Galyna Filipovna lies stretched and naked like on some kind of Persian flying carpet. As beautiful as if she had just stepped down from the canvas of a Flemish artist, for a moment the actress puts on a dress through which one can see more than through the wings of an angel, looking for the cigarette holder, then she lights the cigarette. Nothing unusual in the life of the actress, people who know would say that, and the people who don't know would say the same. But...)

GALYNA: Well, Alexander! You Serbs are dangerous!

ALEXANDER (Comes out of the bathroom in his underwear): After such a long abstinence even my teeth are made out of steel!

GALYNA: Give me some! Give me some! I like to listen to the jokes!

ALEXANDER: Who would say that we are going to end up, how should I say it...?

GALYNA: In a bed?

ALEXANDER: You could say it like that!

GALYNA: If it's easier for you, we can say it had happened!

ALEXANDER: And I was thinking my life was over!

GALYNA: With such steel teeth?

ALEXANDER: I am afraid, if you really want to know...

GALYNA: Because of the age difference?

ALEXANDER: After the war, I am afraid even of my own shadow. Afraid of everything that had happened!

GALYNA: Forget that story. Forget Belgrade. Even without the war, death comes on its own. It's never late. Even Lord sometimes does not know about its plans.

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ALEXANDER: Doesn't know?

GALYNA: God's plans are not easily understood. Forever, He's been bringing some souls back to him to enable unification of the others. You can call it a fate. Thanks to it, we are now together.

ALEXANDER (Gets close to Galyna, then hugs her): If there was not for the Belgrade's misfortune, we wouldn't have met in New York, that's the way it seems now. The Almighty pedantically...

GALYNA: Connected our souls, letting us take care of ourselves in the future garden.

ALEXANDER: What about our conscience?

GALYNA: Do not think about the dead. Let's not bother them. Let them sing the hymns in the cosmos.

ALEXANDER: What can really be more important in the life of a man than...?

GALYNA: The renewal of it. That's why we are not giving up, but patching the holes at the braking points!

ALEXANDER: In New York, in Coca' theatre?

GALYNA: In our souls, my dear. In the right place where it should be done! In love, before and after everything, in spite of everything!

ALEXANDER: Listening to you is like listening to my nephew Paul!

GALYNA: Love will conquer all the tragedies. I feel it!

ALEXANDER: It's an unreachable lesson!

GALYNA: For the people that do not want to learn it, it is!

ALEXANDER: Well! Well! The way it looks now, I am going to start learning about it from the beginning. Let it be!

GALYNA: You have already started!

ALEXANDER: Then, for the good luck we should drink in that name, as they do it in the place where I come from, when they start building a new house.

GALYNA (Gets up and brings the bottle): Love is the best holiday in one's life, and because it's the fact, we'll cele-

brate as it should be done, with vodka!

ALEXANDER: The last time I had it was when I was in Poland; the same night when Coca decided to leave the homeland.

GALYNA: What about it now?

ALEXANDER: I am drinking the first glass in the name of love, in the name of love, before and after everything, and in spite of everything! And the second glass...

GALYNA: For us!

ALEXANDER: If my nephew heard us, he would have to cross himself all three times!

GALYNA: Every wonder lasts only three days!

ALEXANDER: It's not the same with him. He is as unpredictable as a rebel. For instance, I cannot forget how he was terrified of the war while we, with our hot heads cheered him. Nether the fact that he ran away from the ship of fools, the way which would make all the eastern dissidents ashamed of themselves, even Coca himself. There is no doubt; fool continues the same story here. You should have heard that he grabbed the Spanish eel for himself! He fell in love completely. What is not right is not right!

GALYNA: Well, kiss my little hand! In this world every man has to fulfill his own fate. It was almost yesterday that Blynia was talking to me with so much love about Paul while we were in a theatre. Coca was listening to what she was saying too! It seems to me that he was really happy when he heard what happened to them. "Young men are able to find gold in every woman" he said to Pansa in a serious voice, while she was pausing between two sentences; "You found each other! You two fit for each other like a wedding ring on a finger".

ALEXANDER (Caught by the story he heard, says almost to himself): What a joke?

GALYNA: What else could he have done? Well, let's have another drink!

ALEXANDER: For all the living souls, for us, cheers!

GALYNA: In the name of love!

ALEXANDER: I'll pour it on my steel teeth so they don't get numb!

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GALYNA (Pulls her dress up and appears half naked): It would be nice to make a toast even to my babushka! See, in front of her the whole Moscow would take a Communion. If I was lying down on the sidewalk of the Kremlin's square, they would wait in line to pay respect to her like waiting in front of the Lenin's Mausoleum. All Russians would love to ride babushka like this. How does a Serb look at that opening?

ALEXANDER: Galyna, that's a little too much!

GALYNA: I am very personal! Too personal, I think!

ALEXANDER: We are serious people!

GALYNA: Serious people are at the cemetery or in the theatre! In sophisticated roles on the stage!

ALEXANDER: I am not used to...

GALYNA: Vulgarly?

ALEXANDER: To them either!

GALYNA: Our life is a vulgarity!

ALEXANDER: Should I pour us another drink?

GALYNA: While there is a holiday...

ALEXANDER: Let's drink!

GALYNA: Let's show our true nature. Every drunken man has a privilege not to remember any words that were said while getting drunk. Try it!

ALEXANDER: I tried it already!

GALYNA: Vodka "Russia"!

ALEXANDER: I would recommend it to everyone, with no exception!

GALYNA (All dazed from drinking, she starts to sing in a melancholic manner; she's missing her life in Moscow and no one knows what's bursting in her soul at that moment; she is saying the following as if she is trying to catch a bug between her thighs, not caring whether the lights on the stage are being dimmed): "My love is like river Don, far away and wild, with a bum swimming in it, swimming with the moonlight on his back! The one I loved, the devil, and to whom I cannot forgive anything". Well, Alexander, get into the saddle. In love, you cannot be late...

ACT 6

(In Paul's apartment, Natalie comes out to the scene from one of the rooms, looking like she has just been awakened from a dream).

NATALIE: Paul, Paul! Get up at once! Get up I am telling you! You don't care about the state of emergency in this place! Where is your uncle?

PAUL (Joining his mother): Ah, mother! Honest people cannot even have a rest! What the hell is happening? Even if I got married, you would still howl beside my bed like an air raid of the NATO alliance! What's wrong with you? No bombing please! What about him? Isn't it clear that bombs had missed him in Belgrade? You need years for your sanity to come from your heels to your head and to know that your brother can take care of himself. He is somewhere around. He'll be here. Let me continue with my dreaming!

NATALIE: You want to dream about your Spanish eel! Of course! But this time is not going to be the same! Last time the Negroes ripped him off, and this time maybe they finished him up! What do you say? There is no sleeping now; we'll turn every stone upside down until we find him. You'll be diving to the bottom of the ocean if there is a need for that.

PAUL: I am already there!

NATALIE: Forget sleeping!

PAUL: So it means mobilization?

NATALIE: Hard core!

PAUL: Did you make the plans already?

NATALIE: No!

PAUL: Do you have any weapons?

NATALIE: No!

PAUL: Then it has failed!

NATALIE: You should be ashamed of yourself!

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PAUL: My ears are hanging down from my worries. Listen mom: don't waste your time. Go and visit the lady from Romania, so she can look in the beans and guess where he is. If she knows the location, it will be much easier for us. In that case I agree to get him home.

NATALIE: Stop joking. Start working. Go and alarm all the police stations in New York, hurry up. There is no time to waste!

PAUL: I'll alarm the American public. Do you want me to do that? To give a lecture to the American president! What is he thinking about this? A Serb is missing, my brother, we are not fucking around. They'll pay for that!

NATALIE: What do we look like to you?

PAUL: Like a single fetus stuck in the womb!

NATALIE: Who would ever think I gave a birth to someone like this? Oh, well a good beginning makes the good ending, I see it now; go back to bed you egoist, go and dream about your Spanish eel. I have to look for my brother.

PAUL: You wouldn't have lost him if you have stayed in Belgrade. You didn't need to cross the ocean. If you stayed, you would be still drinking water from the ancient Turkish faucet in Belgrade, and every day would be as quiet as a "quiet Bachka". Socialism! One is lost there? So what? Where did he get lost? I don't understand that paranoia, communism scared you to death. That's horrible! Instead of phoning Mr. Coca at the theatre and in a civilized manner asking him about your brother, you are getting into the worst kind of foreboding, drowning to the bottom of the ocean. Are you ashamed to show some concern for your brother when he is absent from the house for seven days? Take the phone and call the Director, tell him about your worries without holding back, that's the way it's done in a normal world.

NATALIE: I can't do that. What is he going to say?

PAUL: Once you tell him who's calling, there wouldn't be any problems.

NATALIE: I can't.

PAUL: I can't understand why not?

NATALIE: Why don't you try it?

PAUL (Gets to the phone almost angry, looking in a note-

book for Coca's number and finds it): Here it is: eight sixes, like a cluster!

NATALIE: Do it for me, please?

PAUL (Calling William's number): Hello! Mr. Coca? Paul Arsenov here. I am calling about the prompter in your theatre, my uncle; he hasn't come home for a week. My mother is very worried about her brother, how should I say it, blood is not water. For people that come from Balkans, even more so. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! So that's what it is, Casanova! In her apartment? Chirping like a skylark! Skylark? I'll check it! Yes? Blynia Pansa ... no...no! A drama? My drama? How come it's at your place? Blynia Pansa gave it to you... No, I am not angry... Not at all! You read it all at once?... In your theatre?... We'll see! To visit me?... Sure!... Of course! Goodbye!

NATALIE: Tell me?

PAUL: We won the battle!

NATALIE: Where is he?

PAUL: How should I say it...?

NATALIE: Say it!

PAUL: Uncle got settled!

NATALIE: Where, with whom?

PAUL: Let's say: A Slavic soul helped him.

NATALIE: That... what's her name?

PAUL: Galyna Filipovna. Galina the actress.

NATALIE: What a tramp!

PAUL: She's not to your liking?

NATALIE: He didn't morn like he was supposed to...

PAUL: He found someone else so soon. Like we say: "He had pushed the life from the beginning, starting Monday".

NATALIE: Why did I even worry?

PAUL: I am asking myself the same question?

NATALIE: He is going to get it, you'll see!

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PAUL: It would be better if you go out and buy a bottle of whisky, so we can celebrate. It's not a big spending for a medical doctor from a textile factory in New York.

NATALIE: Say... Which drama were you mentioning?

PAUL: My drama.

NATALIE: Yours?

PAUL: Who else's?

NATALIE: You wrote it?

PAUL: Like I have promised. Didn't I say I have biography worthy of a writer!

NATALIE: And you gave it to them without us knowing it?

PAUL: I gave it to her?

NATALIE: To her? That's nice. We deserve that. I am not going to argue with you. Since you have written it, good for you.

PAUL: That sounds much better... I am going to get the uncle!

NATALIE: Bring the vagabond home so I can teach him a lesson!

PAUL: To teach a lesson to a man in love?

NATALIE: Why not?

PAUL: What about the "love before and after everything, in spite of everything"?

NATALIE: Any kind of love?

PAUL: Love in Manhattan! In Galyna's nest, hidden on the Thirty Seventh Street, close to the UN. Uncle is advancing! He's becoming a lead violin.

NATALIE: Like some Kalemegdan turtle!

PAUL: This time, for your love, I'll find him without looking into the spider web to tell the fortune.

ACT 7

(The apartment of Galyna Filipovna. The light is increasingly but slowly bathing the scene. Alexander Arsenov is waking up, like a man caught in the act of stealing. On the floor, where he usually lies with Galyna Filipovna, he stares at the ceiling for a while. Then he takes off the sheet that was covering them and, like an Adam, the mythic hero, goes to the bathroom. Galyna continues lying down and dreaming, like an Eve in a Paradise Garden, suddenly discovered.)

ALEXANDER (He's making a noise in the bathroom like a bear whose snout is being bitten by bees. Like a man being caught in the trap of getting ready for work. At the moment at which Galyna Filipovna got startled in her dream and covered her nakedness, neat and all dressed up, he enters the room): I have the feeling I just resurrected.

GALYNA (Looking for the cigarette holder and cigarettes): That is the way it is when on the ruins of the previous life one starts building everything from the beginning.

ALEXANDER: Who would say so?

GALYNA: It is indescribable what this life is about!

ALEXANDER: And a man?

GALYNA: Born to create a world.

ALEXANDER: I was thinking...

GALYNA: If it is a sad story, don't tell me!

ALEXANDER: Last night's holiday...

GALYNA: Forget it if you don't like it.

ALEXANDER: My darling! You got me back to normal! Love before and after everything, in spite of everything! (Trying to sing) Looove...

GALYNA (She gets up and covers her nakedness with the

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robe, then goes to the bathroom door where she stops):
That's another story! I am willing to hear it!

ALEXANDER: I'll finish it when I come back!

GALYNA: Look, you are leaving?

ALEXANDER: I am going to the theatre and than to see
Natalie and Paul, so they wouldn't worry. I'll be back
soon. By the time you shampoo I'll be back to finish the
story.

GALYNA: How to create a world for the next seven days?

ALEXANDER (Gets close to her and kisses her forehead):
By supporting it for seventy seven more days with all our
might.

GALYNA: Well, you are my little steel tooth. It means it
was worth it?

ALEXANDER: A man is given a life to fulfill it.

GALYNA: In the right way.

ALEXANDER (One more time he kisses her, more pas-
sionately than a teenager): In love! Au revoir!

(After this scene, Alexander gets to the door and leaves.
What about Galyna? She goes to the bathroom where she
sings like a titmouse. She would stay in the bathroom
much longer if the door bell did not ring. The actress
comes out of the bathroom completely naked and gets to
the apartment door and, believing that the prompter had
come back, opens it. But, instead of him, excited like a lark
in the air, Blynia Pansa runs into the room).

BLYNIA: It happened! Ole!

GALYNA (Surprised, she kisses her friend on the cheek):
Hello!

BLYNIA: I just met Prompter. I could not resist enjoying
myself while I was watching him running down the
street, breaking the spider web like a child. I suspect...

GALYNA: You can not hide that! Just a moment!

BLYNIA (As if she is in her own apartment, she nests her-
self on one of the chairs, waiting for the naked actress to
come back from the bathroom): In your case the fate has

started waving its wings!

GALYNA (From the bathroom): For the whole week already. Seven unforgettable days, like at making the world!

BLYNIA: Love is like a nose standing out between two of you for a while already. It was threatening with an emission!

GALYNA (Gets out of the bathroom and joins ballet dancer): What can I offer you?

BLYNIA: When I toast I am not choosy!

GALYNA (Serves the drinks): In the name of love!

BLYNIA: Let's drink for the famous Russia's actress Galyna and almost unknown Serbian prompter Alexander.

GALYNA: I never felt better since the time I ran away from Moscow!

BLYNIA: It sounds so nice and truthful!

GALYNA: Have you ever seen me happier?

BLYNIA: This is the way that running away from homeland ends! In the big world life and everything else somehow always turns out the best. The way it is going now we are going to become in-laws one day!

GALYNA: Let's wait!

BLYNIA: It's going to be as it is written somewhere. But before that... Before everything, I think I came to make you happy!

GALYNA: I cannot even anticipate how you are going to do that?

BLYNIA: Giving you the main roll!

GALYNA: What main role? Don't joke!

BLYNIA: Paul Arsenov's theatre play is done!

GALYNA: So it means he toughened up!

BLYNIA: I have read and given it to Coca already. Old fox is looking for that kind of story. I am sure he is going to like it; he'll put it on repertoire as soon as he can!

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GALYNA: That is recommendable! How do you know that he is going to give main role to me?

BLYNIA: It looks like it is written for you. It is perfect for you.

GALYNA: Your optimism is contagious!

BLYNIA: I hope it happens. Can you believe that I was reading it so tense like a twig in the wind? I even gave it a name: "Prompter".

GALYNA: What did you say?

BLYNIA: "The Prompter".

GALYNA: What is the prompter talking about?

BLYNIA: About the history of one yard. About the horrible pains that a Slavic soul has to explain. The role of prompter's wife only you can conjure. With your emotions the spectators are going to understand the whirls of the tragedy.

GALYNA: It sounds so familiar. It reminds me of Alexander's life in Belgrade. Isn't it a truth?

BLYNIA: So far you heard a lot from him. And the part that you didn't would be a...

GALYNA: A secret?

BLYNIA: The chronicle of Paul's life, or, indirectly, the chronicle of our life. You should only see the paragraphs about the voluntary exile. You have to admit, it's a problem that bothers half of the world today.

GALYNA: Then Paul became a real writer for sure! Like Russians would say, he caught the rabbit by the ears!

BLYNIA: The writer that takes the mask off of the devastating ideology, of its core, of the monstrous role of a leader in one nation, of winners and losers, because, in the end, there are always a lot of them, too many on both sides. Well, Paul branded the communist kaka-crazy that got the whole world against their own people and ruined them.

GALYNA: If, that is so, there is no reason for me not to undertake that job.

BLYNIA: I was hoping...

GALYNA (She covers Pansa's mouth with her hand): Let it be!

BLYNIA: Good for you.

GALYNA (Again, she covers Galyna's mouth with her hand): Life has a meaning even when one doesn't feel it.

BLYNIA: Life always makes sense!

(The girlfriends continue their dialogue. What about? That can only be anticipated. Dark is covering them like two birds nestled up to each other on a tree branch in some remote thicket).

ACT 8

(Natalie is walking around the room, quite nervously. Her brother resembles a pupil in the classroom, sitting in his chair).

NATALIE: Shame on you, you didn't call us for the last seven days. What do you think? I was shaking like a twig because of you. And why? Tell me why! The man pushed his life from the beginning in New York? Right here. Nowhere else, but here! Couldn't you do it in Belgrade?

ALEXANDER: As if somebody's preventing you from doing the same?

NATALIE: To follow your example?

ALEXANDER: Why not?

NATALIE: Some edifying example!?

ALEXANDER: It could be, think about it.

NATALIE: Love before and after everything, love in spite of everything! But with whom?

ALEXANDER: With Galyna Filipovna. The little Galy. Honey cake!

NATALIE: You, bum! You didn't erect the monument in memory of your family killed in the bombing of Belgrade, and yet you found a nest at little Galy! That sounds normal to you!?

ALEXANDER: Completely!

NATALIE: You reckon there is always someone who's going to take care of the dead?

ALEXANDER: Someone always cares about them.

NATALIE: It's only you who doesn't do that!

ALEXANDER: I'm not God!

NATALIE: You were telling different story until yesterday!

ALEXANDER: My past moved faster than water under bridge.

NATALIE: Rather, under little Galy's bed?

ALEXANDER: Life is indescribable, my dear sister. Let's live the dead alone. The memories take care of their best. And what about the monument? Even if I return home, I don't have an idea where to erect it! My dead are God's treasure!

NATALIE: So this is it?

ALEXANDER: Don't get furious!

NATALIE: If somebody was telling me all this, I wouldn't believe him!

ALEXANDER: Me neither!

(The twin's conversation is interrupted by a door bell. Natalie goes to open the door. It would have been better if Alexander Arsenov did it. But devil chooses one to whom he wants to show himself. She opens the door without hesitation, even without looking through the peephole. And? Like a sculpture ripped off of the Moon surface, He presented himself in the door. The silver-haired and confused William Coca).

NATALIE (Resembling a wax statue and frozen, she hardly moved two steps back): Please, do come in!

WILLIAM (Entering like a man whose heart got stuck in his throat; doubtlessly, there are such people in this world too. He stepped in, having dropped a folder from his hands in front of Natalie's feet. The past groom is speechless. He kneeled down to pick up the folder, Natalie made the same move. Just when they found themselves curled up in front of each other, like people in a tight spot on the toilet, Coca said): Natalie!

NATALIE (Picking up the folder): William!

WILLIAM (Stretches his hands and touches Natalie's shoulders; pulls her towards him and kisses her in the forehead, seemingly loosing his breath): I have been dreaming about this moment for the last twenty years! Twenty years of my life have gone by...So what! They were eaten by...

NATALIE (Putting her hand on his mouth): The maiden pride.

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WILLIAM (He stands up and picks up Natalie in his hands. He hugs her tightly): I brought Paul's manuscript. I rushed to get here! Reading it I anticipated...

ALEXANDER: That a chip off the old block doesn't fall far away!

WILLIAM: And now tell me only that in the BITEF night he was...

NATALIE (Wiggling out of William's hug): Yes, Paul was conceived!

ALEXANDER: My golden nephew!

WILLIAM: My dear God! Well, you are...I cannot believe it! What Serbs...!

NATALIE: Crazy people! A customary description.

ALEXANDER: This doesn't apply in exile!

WILLIAM (Talking to Alexander): For God's sake, why did you keep quiet all these years, hiding the truth from me?

NATALIE: He fulfilled my wish!

ALEXANDER: Truth is never late. God prolongs, but doesn't forget -say Serbs. Tell us; is there a nicer rendezvous than today's? Don't nag. There is a hope for you two. Start pushing your lives from the beginning!

WILLIAM (Takes Paul's manuscript from the place where Natalie left it): My son? Paul? He wrote an outstanding play!

ALEXANDER: Himself!

NATALIE: He was concealing this work of his!

WILLIAM (Talking to Alexander): According to everything, you're the "Prompter"!

ALEXANDER: As you wish!

NATALIE: What can I offer you?

WILLIAM: Whiskey!

ALEXANDER: Right on the spot!

WILLIAM: And so, you were hiding from him for twenty years who his father was?

ALEXANDER: More or less!

WILLIAM: "Maiden pride?"

NATALIE: Yes. It must be named like that.

WILLIAM: Pride! Pride! Pride! It's about time...

ALEXANDER: To finally let him know the truth.

WILLIAM (Hands over Paul's manuscript to Alexander): He saw you like this. Read. And I? I decided to start rehearsals next week!

ALEXANDER: Rehearsals?

WILLIAM: There is no delay.

ALEXANDER: Who will help you if not your own!?

NATALIE (Pours whiskey into glasses): Please, have a drink.

WILLIAM (To Natalie): Well, now, it looks like I got...

NATALIE: That which I missed in Belgrade!

ALEXANDER (Addressing them in the simplest possible way): Cheers!

ACT 9

(A scene in which innocently gentle Blynia Pansa and Paul Arsenov appear is inevitable. The couple in love, as if running out from an Old Persian fairy tale, for a moment is daydreaming, for the next is talking. They could also find themselves in such a situation elsewhere. As a matter of fact – it could be anywhere).

BLYNIA: The "Prompter" rehearsals are progressing. Galyna Filipovna is going to realize her life time achievement.

PAUL: My future aunt has the role of a dead aunt. What a parody! I couldn't foresee that!

BLYNIA: In a theatre, they expect you to drop by before the premiere. It's an honor for a young writer!

PAUL: It's out of the question that I should go and see them.

BLYNIA: Ha, ha, ha! Here, where the order reigns you act as a rebel. Don't be so personal.

PAUL: I cannot be different. After all, I'm excessively personal.

BLYNIA: Contain your negative energy. Only a few lucky ones got a chance to succeed in America. Your play is performed in the most elite theatre. Every European playwright would wish such luck. Do not play with your own fortune.

PAUL: This is America!

BLYNIA: Oh, yes!

PAUL: Original story!

BLYNIA: Perfect!

PAUL: And I feel emptier than an empty beer bottle. Writing the "Prompter", I thought I put a period to the narrowness in which I lived. A period to the shitty spots dried on the face.

BLYNIA: Pardon me?

PAUL: Don't try to understand.

BLYNIA: A taste of an old jam.

PAUL: I spent my whole life in the lies of communism. Desiring to find my father! Looking for him! And then I ran away in front of the terrible sound of war. From a red hot abyss of the Balkan slaughterhouse to New York City. What do I remember? The blinks of light before the sunset above Danube. Almost nothing else. Out of everything which was making me happy, it may have been that I was the happiest while writing this play. Now, when it's done, when it's being put alive on the stage, I feel miserably. As if I got stuck in a mud.

BLYNIA: You're going to sing a different song after the premiere.

ALEXANDER: It doesn't interest me!

BLYNIA: It's going to be a holiday, you'll see!

ALEXANDER: A holiday of someone's tragedy you consider as a holiday!?

BLYNIA: You're grinding your teeth for no reason: tragedy, tragedy, and again tragedy. Oh my saints, you better get real for once! Submit yourself to its joys, as fitting.

PAUL: The others are going to enjoy it. What's mine in all that...? You know, I'm thinking about returning to Belgrade.

BLYNIA: What are you talking about?

PAUL: About the return.

BLYNIA: What about the premiere?

PAUL: It doesn't mean anything to me.

BLYNIA: What a change!

PAUL: Belgrade I remember has a soul. It has beautiful theatres, state ballet theatre. It's got the best meditation hill in the whole of Europe. My city has a chance. Sometimes I think that some of us emigrants have to return there to let them know that Serbia is world too. That it has a right to that feeling. If others don't want to do that, I have to do it. I don't give a fuck for their geographic misconception.

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For their tribal psychology reduced to a "leadership cult", naked and painfully simplified for the use of the lips and the butt of the father of the nation. They should be expressly punished for what they had done to us!

BLYNIA: And where do I fit in all that?

PAUL: Come with me.

BLYNIA: With you?

ALEXANDER: I'll be honored to ask for your hand where two rivers meet.

BLYNIA: Oh, my Virgin Mary! Oh, my dear God!

ALEXANDER: Why are you surprised?

BLYNIA: Nobody asked for my hand until now.

PAUL: We're going to have a Serbian-Spanish wedding worthy of remembrance in the whole of Belgrade.

BLYNIA: To be a bride amongst Serbs?

PAUL: Amongst the most bloodthirsty rulers. Their hearts are going to explode because of their envy.

BLYNIA: What a people!

PAUL: Like people like manners! That's not a nonsense thing. While the alliance was saturating them with bombs they were defying the "dogs of war", as they called them in their desperation, by dancing a folk dance.

BLYNIA: Promise something me...

ALEXANDER: I'm doing it in advance!

BLYNIA: We're going to get married before a minister?

PAUL: No doubt about it. The former communists are competing all over Serbia who's going to build more churches. They're going to kill each other in the heartless competition only to have their name written on the bells ordered and paid for in the Grays Mayer's foundry.

BLYNIA: Do sea gulls fly over the church towers in Serbia?

PAUL: In flocks!

BLYNIA: There is so many of them?

ALEXANDER: They look as white as snow. (He spreads his arms in order to illustrate to her what he means)...They are so big.

BLYNIA: Then, let's go!

PAUL: Towards the charcoal peddlers!

BLYNIA: We deserve such a premiere!

PAUL: Only to book the tickets!

BLYNIA: In one direction, please!

ALEXANDER: In one direction, for the time being.

BLYNIA: Let it be!

PAUL: Belgrade is awaiting us.

BLYNIA: Fortune awaits the courageous in Belgrade.

ACT 10

(Looking by what's going on in the apartment of Galyna Filipovna, rehearsals of the "Prompter" are progressing. The actress does not waste her time. She's telling the monologue of a "passed away aunt" that takes place amongst the stars in the universe. Her new darling is lying down stretched on his stomach and staring at the written pages in front of him, then at her. He's more ready for action than a red-backed shrike, a skilled hunter, while trembling on a telephone wire during an August heat wave).

GALYNA (Acting as if on the scene): "...My sweetie! Where did we go wrong? I know the transfiguration which you perhaps anticipate: It is the wind which carries a soul, and it is the earth which takes bones! If we only were more courageous, oh, if we only were louder for a moment, we would have won over fear, and our lives would have been different. But, we were looking for our Lord, while He was choosing us to try temptations. Only The Best among the rulers knows why we were whispering for so long during the communism. Whatever, but it is the death which rakes individuals and peoples like wind does the leaves on the ground, not representing a final state, though. One is taken by night, another by morning, yet another by noon. The death considers that a right thing to do. Everyone wears his face according to his merit. Now, when I'm afloat, a white light bathes me in angel's love. Oh, how beautiful it is! It awakens noble instincts to win in me..." (She pauses).

ALEXANDER (He hands over the text to the actress, to remind what to say next): "Is it a love...?"

GALYNA (Continues): "Is it a love, or is it a longing for you? Oh, you to whose dream I came on the front line to say goodbye, where are you now? How far does your cowardice reach inside the hot circle of life...?" (She pauses again).

ALEXANDER (Reminding the actresses, reading a paragraph on his own): "For the whole of history and culture is a magnificent failure. The memories cannot be subjugated like peoples, while announcing themselves by their

sediments from loneliness and silence. In our hearts they find a nice dwelling where they can think..."

GALYNA (Continues): "While afloat, I'm being born by the eternity capable of reaching every soul, saving each golden grain. My angel encourages me. He speaks to me with the book in his hand: "Let your son join our choir! For us to sing in front of the river of life, the tree of life!" We're becoming a generation for ourselves. I'm a shadow in the homeland of Truth, far from culture and big religious failure. Far from art and literature - the failure in creating the beauty; far from family and physical love - the failure in creating the love; far from morality and righteousness - the failure in creating the human relationships; far from industry and commerce - the failure in creating the supremacy of man over nature...Here I am, where realization of knowledge is being made, Where the beauty is, and not the symbol of beauty, where love is, and the symbol of love, where everything is transfiguring..."

(A long silence).

ALEXANDER: If the Al Qaeda suicide pilots didn't demolish the World Trade Center, all the newspapers would write about the "Prompter". About your success. This way, America is still in fear. They shot them right in the heart. The entire nation is in an unprecedented panic. Well, let them feel how we felt while they were bombing us as if they're crazed. Let them not think their mother is not made of tissue and blood. Galyna...my birch. How should I say? You're talking better than angel.

(Silence again).

ALEXANDER: That's true.

GALYNA (Replies, as if suddenly awoken from a dream): I have stage fright! My legs are shaking, I feel it!

ALEXANDER: You'll excel at the opening night. In seven days, you're going to blind the Northern Star in the sky!

GALYNA: Well, Alexander? How does it look to you? It seems to me that I cannot tell some paragraphs without shedding my tears!

ALEXANDER: Is that so? I also ask myself why the dead have to speak using such elevated words. In that way? Fortunately, I know who made them; that frees me from believing in them! A grumbler made them to keep lecturing us! Well, devils always stays devil.

GALYNA (Lies on the floor opposite from Alexander): Art

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is unreachable. It's always like that. A gifted writer hangs out in that person! There is not many of them in this world.

ALEXANDER: Given what kind of family he comes from, I wouldn't be surprised...

GALYNA: He wrote an outstanding drama!?

ALEXANDER: As if I myself was telling it right into his pen.

GALYNA: Whoever is to watch it, he won't be indifferent. It's going to bug him like a speck of sand in his shoe.

ALEXANDER: OK, he wrote it...The evil man! That is to say - an ungrateful person. Imagine what he told us during a dinner, a few evenings ago, without any shame, regarding the maniacs who crashed into the Trade Center towers in New York: "The way you are - he told us - you'll make even these Americans falling into disaster. They're going to rub the porcupine on his back. The misfortune is, you see, in your character. You attract it as a magnet. Since you were born, your heads are like hats turned upside down, almost inviting bombs. At any rate, I'll run away from you - all flashed, he told us - I'll return to Serbia, bombs stopped making noise there!"

ALEXANDER: The conscience atrophied around us.

GALYNA: That is why the dead are warning us!

ALEXANDER: Like my nephew, using exalted words!?

GALYNA: Well, tell me, what did you dream about that night on the front line? Did you really dream it? (Pausing, Galyna's fixing her hair).

GALYNA: I mean, what kind of dream was that?

(Alexander's looking through several pages of the play manuscript in front of him. He looks as if he doesn't know what to do. In a sort of a hesitation, he kisses the actress).

ALEXANDER (At last): I dreamt about a pacifier.

GALYNA: A pacifier!?

ALEXANDER: To me, it looked longer than cudgel. I was suckling it for an eternity hidden behind some iron curtain.

GALYNA: For God's sake!

ALEXANDER: After that, being so helpless, I masturbated.

GALYNA: Wait a moment!

ALEXANDER: To hell with all that, the fear hides in my dreams even today!

GALYNA: Here we are!?

ALEXANDER: The fear of communism is still stretched in me. Hey! It doesn't reflect in any direction.

(The actress is silent).

ALEXANDER: I'm not able to further unpack the load.

(She still keeps quiet).

ALEXANDER: I was going to say...

(Pause).

GALYNA: I would like to be tickled.

(Pause).

ALEXANDER: Me too.

(Pause).

GALYNA: We would both like to be...

ALEXANDER: Did we tangle up all this!?

GALYNA: Like in a delirium.

ALEXANDER: Like some beginners in the opening night.

GALYNA: Which is getting closer.

ALEXANDER: When I think of that in a more sober way...

GALYNA: Onanism is for a dream.

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ALEXANDER: For a small box of dreams.

GALYNA (Singing): "My darling's swimming down the Danube River, hammer and sickle on his back. Is he drowning, or calling me? Listen to his whistling!"

ALEXANDER (Concentrating on listening to it): Get into the boat and start rowing with all our might to help the poor guy!

GALYNA: Don't bother. He drowned long ago!

ALEXANDER: What are we going to do then?

GALYNA: Let's make a boat out of our bodies!

ALEXANDER: Out of our...?

GALYNA: The wind blows on its own will.

ALEXANDER: You mean, here?

GALYNA: Well, where else?

ALEXANDER: Now...?

GALYNA: Before and after everything. Again and again.

ALEXANDER: Let's draw the curtains so the malicious ones wouldn't see us.

(Curtains are down).

ACT 11

(Natalie Arsenov, at peace with herself as if the whole of the eternity promised itself to her, laid back in her chair, leafs through the pages of a New York paper. Everything's OK, one would think. If in anything, the devourers of newspaper articles are the same in this act of theirs, all over the world. For each one of them there is a pill in the papers that's worth their attention).

NATALIE (Flips several pages, then visibly surprised stops at one of them): Alexander's photograph? (She keeps her mouth shut and reads)...In Belgrade! A geyser in Vracar? (She again reads and nods her head)...My dear...Street...No! No!...It gushes from the hole now in the place of our family home once?... Belgraders got used to the miracle...The temperature of the water is such that grass and trees are cooked and evaporate like a steam from a pot. (She reads for a long time and without a word)...Patriarch...What, even him? (She reads faster and faster, swallowing a line by line in the paper like a gander does the rain worm, then pauses with a sigh after what she read)...A special reporter from Belgrade...Some reporter!? Son of a bitch!...(She lays down the newspaper on her lap, not letting it out of her hands though, keeps quiet for some time, then lifts them again to make sure what she read was still there)...It's not a sin to lie for a good news in these papers. No question about it, this nonsense is worth the worst form of Stalinism. What happened to us? (She moves her hand over her forehead as if wiping off the sweat from it)...My, my...

(Alexander Arsenov, looking not interested at all, enters the room. The way he is, he may pretend he didn't hear his sister saying to him "my dear brother". Still, he got involved).

ALEXANDER: What do you say?

NATALIE (Handles over to his brother already put away papers): Look!?

ALEXANDER: What to look?

NATALIE: Yourself.

ALEXANDAR: Who?

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NATALIE: Read.

ALEXANDER: I don't have time to read newspapers.

NATALIE (She stands up and pushes the paper into his hands): It's to do with you.

ALEXANDER: With me?

NATALIE: Take it!

ALEXANDER: Let's see!

NATALIE: Look at yourself!

ALEXANDER (Surprised): Me?

NATALIE: You!

ALEKSANDER: It's really me here?

NATALIE: Don't think it's St. Paul!

ALEXANDER: I look as in my ID.

NATALIE: From your younger days.

ALEXANDER (Moves the papers away, stretching his arms as much as he can): It looks like me...

NATALIE: Forget the photo, read!

ALEXANDER: Don't I look nice, say it.

NATALIE (Angrily): Read for God sake.

ALEXANDER (Looks for his glasses, finds them, fits them around his nose, sits down on his chair, lifts the newspapers, starts to read, keeps quiet. Then): What's this supposed to mean? "A GEYSER ERUPTED IN BELGRADE". (He keeps reading without saying anything)... In the street...(he addresses Natalie)...At the place where...

NATALIE: Yes.

ALEXANDER (Keeps reading): "The aerial attacks by NATO caused a great damage during the campaign on the Serbian soil. But, it's a one side of the medal. To remind you, the TV tower on nearby Avala mountain was demolished too. As well as the building housing the infamous political police, the Party's Central Committee building, the Headquarters of the once bureaucratized Yugoslav military, the assets of the opposition, the bridges, the hope. It is the poverty that reigns in Serbia, like a univer-

sally recognizable trade mark of all..." (He stops reading and addresses Natalie)...Who the hell writes all this?

NATALIE: Some Firbey Sein, a special correspondent in Belgrade!

ALEXANDER (Keeps reading without talking. Then): "During the night the Serbian capital firmly slept, a geyser suddenly roared and erupted in the very center of the city, Vracar. It looks like the so far unseen miracle in the world only strengthened the faith of the city dwellers. At the place..." (He reads silently, and after some time lifts his head and explains to Natalie)...Imagine, this fool wrote my first and last name as well as the names of all my family members who died in the attacks without a single error...How come he knows all that?

NATALIE: Must be a spy. All of the Americans always work in the interest of their government, wherever they are.

ALEXANDER: Hoodlums. We get killed, they get clean.

NATALIE: Justice. That's what kind of people they are!

ALEXANDER: Maybe it's the geyser which I dreamed about that night, on the front line.

NATALIE: When?

ALEXANDER: When, when!? When the bomb made the hole in the place where our house used to be. I got all numbed from the story that my wife and son flew to the sky at that moment.

NATALIE: Like some God's angels.

ALEXANDER (Keeps reading): "...The geyser water color resembles that of melted silver. While gushing and gurgling from the depths of the earth, its temperature reaches ninety degrees Celsius..." (Addresses Natalie)...Imagine!

NATALIE: Yes!

ALEXANDER (Stares at the paper and reads for himself): "...The Belgraders come from the early morning with eggs in pots to boil them on the geyser water. This is to be praised. I mean, it's very good in terms of saving. God was very giving to the Belgraders. Some of them take bath in paddles made by the geyser. The Patriarch alone came in front of the miracle, carrying the cross and eggs in a small pot, to bless water and at the same time boil the eggs..."

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(Alexander couldn't hold back from laughing)...Listen to this!

NATALIE: What's funny in that?

ALEXANDER (Now in a more serious tone): The style of the sentence.

NATALIE: Newspaper scribes.

ALEXANDER: A vagabond; he makes fun of our Patriarch on purpose.

NATALIE: An illiterate man!

ALEXANDER (Keeps reading): "...Belgraders proclaimed the appearance of the geyser as their sacred place..." (Keeps quiet)... (Addresses Natalie)...Listen to this...

NATALIE: I have already read it.

ALEXANDER (Without being concerned with Natalie's stand, keeps reading aloud): "On Good Friday, the whole of Serbia is going to gather around the geyser to boil Easter eggs. That will become their Mecca, the analysts of Serbian affairs claim, an already seen "people's self-realization"...Already seen feast..." (Natalie disrupts Alexander's reading)...

NATALIE: Enough.

ALEXANDER: Why? Let them know who we are. Look how big my picture is!

NATALIE: I'm sick of it.

ALEXANDER: Let us see what's next!

NATALIE (Angrily disrupts her brother): All nonsense!

ALEXANDER (Paying no regards to his sister, he keeps reading): "...Even the diplomatic core shyly gathers around the geyser over night, something that your correspondent witnessed himself, some to wash their faces, other to wash their feet, some to send reports to their respective governments on what Serbs got..." (He comments for himself)... "Fuck them, they have to know everything. Even if someone farts in Zemun, they run to their superiors to let them know about it. All of them are just spies... (He tries to continue reading aloud, but for no avail, Natalie disrupts him again and again)..."

NATALIE: It looks like you read the whole thing.

ALEXANDER: There is a final word.

NATALIE: Leave it alone.

ALEXANDER: That I cannot do.

NATALIE: Throw away the paper.

ALEXANDER: With such a nice picture of me?

NATALIE: Now everyone knows what happened with the family!

GALYNA: After the premiere many are going to understand what those bombs did to your people. In the same way in which they'll have to start thinking regarding this tragedy in New York. The world is not going to be the same after all this. Unless the crazy ones win and get it stuck even deeper. That can happen too. For, it is nowhere that the best are in power. The world enters a new epoch, inevitably different.

ALEXANDER: Happened, happened! While I was amongst them, Serbs didn't want to listen to a word from my mouth. They believe more to news that come across the fence, as a thief does. Let them hear this. The water gushes from my backyard. If I wanted that a geyser breaks from the depths of the earth at that spot, who knows if that would happen. Don't you understand, if this what Furbey Sein writes is true, because, as you know, people often take journalists jobs only to race against each other with their lies, so that if this what is written here is true, I couldn't have wished a better monument to those in my family who were killed. Not only that it is alive, but it boils in front of everyone's nose. Besides, the whole Serbian nation is going to gather there to boil Easter eggs on Good Friday. Go ahead, please, and tell me if anyone in this world has such a monument. No one, of course, no one has it. And will not have it. And should not have it. Only my poor family deserved it..

NATALIE: What monument?

ALEXANDER: Let me read this to the end.

NATALIE: It would have been better if I didn't get the papers.

ALEXANDER (Completes reading for himself, carefully looks at his photo in the paper): If I was there now. To wash my face as I should for once, at the threshold of my house, the house where I was born. To boil just a single

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chicken egg in the geyser, then to go down Knez Mihailova street to the very top of my "Hill For Meditation", and to eat it there on my empty stomach. If misfortune didn't have head and tail our troubles would have been easier on us. Much easier!

(The dialogue between Natalie and Alexander Arsenov is suddenly interrupted by Paul and Blyna who enter the place. The couple, deep in love, comes onto the scene holding their hands together, as if walking down a street. In his free hand, Paul carries a rather large suitcase, Blyna also carries one, but somewhat smaller).

PAUL (Addressing his mother and uncle, in a joking tone): Hello, cousins!

(Natalie and Alexander stare at them like at a blank page, keeping quiet).

PAUL (Repeats his greeting in a slightly different manner): Hi heroes!

ALEXANDER (In order to make the situation more pleasant): Here comes our daughter-in-law!

NATALIE (Also to break the silence): We hoped...

PAUL: Obviously...

ALEXANDER: Isn't that visible?

PAUL: Sure it is.

NATALIE (To Alexander): As I have said...

ALEXANDER (To Natalie): By all means, we looked forward to...

PAUL (Addresses Blyna): Look how unhappy they look! They stiffened like two coins in a pocket when they saw us.

NATALIE (To Paul): What are you talking about?

ALEXANDER: The girls are going to get a wrong impression of us.

PAUL: Wrong impression?

NATALIE (Almost in the same voice with Alexander): We meant...

PAUL (Places his suitcase on the floor): It is known to me...

NATALIE (To Paul): It's nice you moved your girlfriend to our place?

BLYNIA (Hardly speaking, and even then puzzled): I...

ALEXANDER: It's the high time...

PAUL (Approaching his uncle and noticing his photograph in the newspaper): Look, look, we've become famous in New York!? Let me see...Is the picture from your youth days?

ALEXANDER (Handing the paper to his nephew): You better read what it says.

NATALIE: Take it.

PAUL: It must be some bombing again?

ALEXANDER: It is to do with our family.

PAUL: Our family?

NATALIE: They don't leave us alone.

PAUL: Conspiracy?

NATALIE: Firbey Sein.

(Paul finally takes the papers, sits down on the chair, starts reading, while his uncle stands up and leans over his back, curious enough to read again from the beginning. Natalie uses the opportunity to converse with the ballet dancer).

NATALIE: It makes me happy you agreed to move in.

BLYNIA: What do you mean?

NATALIE: You're going to live with us!?

BLYNIA: Oh, no!

NATALIE (Pointing at the suitcases and signaling her to place the suitcase to the floor): What about the suitcases?

BLYNIA (Indeterminately): Just in case we need them.

NATALIE: Does every ballet dancer carry her suitcases

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around?

BLYNIA (Again indeterminately): Sometimes.

NATALIE: Well, you're carrying them now!

BLYNIA: That's because of the opening night at the theatre.

NATALIE: You think so...

PAUL (Stops reading for a moment and addresses his mother): Leave the girl alone.

NATALIE (To Paul, in a conciliatory tone): OK!

(Paul continues reading the newspaper. Alexander Arsenov goes to the washroom).

NATALIE (To Blynia): Please, have a seat.

BLYNIA: Thank you.

NATALIE (To Blynia): Do you have some business arrangement in New York?

BLYNIA: No.

NATALIE: What are you waiting for?

BLYNIA: The premiere.

NATALIE: What premiere?

BLYNIA: The simplest one in the life of any girl.

(Paul finished reading the newspaper and, all of a sudden, started laughing. He interrupted his mother's dialogue with the ballet dancer).

PAUL (His eyes searching for his uncle in the room): Uncle, hey uncle!

ALEXANDER (Coming out of the toilet): Yes!

PAUL: You got lucky!

NATALIE (To Paul): Watch your words!

PAUL: You're rich man now. A sheik. Sheik for boiling water.

ALEXANDER: Have you read...

PAUL: Easy now. Let's go slowly. When you return to Belgrade, fence your yard and charge Serbs for the entrance fee to get in and boil their eggs. Charge the diplomatic core twice as much, as they deserve it, their pockets are deeper. Get all the convertible currencies...Yesterday a bomb, today the geyser gushing like melted silver. It looks like it's a draw. In Serbian - zero: zero.

ALEKSANDER: In the center of the city, right in Vracar...

PAUL: The best place.

ALEXANDER: The monument.

NATALIE: Stop it!

PAUL (To Blynia): My dear, let's not forget to bye eggs. Tomorrow, we are going to boil them with pleasure at that place.

NATALIE: When?

ALEXANDER: He's joking!?

PAUL: I'll tell the cab driver to take us from the airport right there...

ALEXANDER: What airport.

PAUL: The one in Belgrade, uncle.

NATALIE: What do you mean?

PAUL: We're going home.

BLYNIA: We're leaving.

ALEXANDER: You two?

PAUL: Yes, the two of us.

NATALIE (Visibly shaken): Tomorrow is the premiere of the "Prompter", what are you talking about? Are you crazy?

PAUL (Pointing at Blynia): Our premiere is in Belgrade.

NATALIE (Addressing Blynia): That's not true!

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BLYNIA (Takes the airplane tickets from her purse and shows them around): The flight is leaving tonight at eight o'clock.

PAUL: If the plane doesn't develop any problems, we're taking off tonight at eight.

ALEXANDER: Well, people...What about the opening night...What are we going to say?

PAUL (To his uncle): I'm dedicating the opening night of the "Prompter" to you.

ALEXANDER: To me?

NATALIE: To him!?

PAUL: It would be nice. If he wasn't whispering his whole life in front of me, I wouldn't possibly write it. And because of that, he should better pay attention while whispering his long monologues to Galyna. Especially to her. Because you, uncle, deserve her...

NATALIE: One cannot catch you whichever way he tries. As if it was yesterday when you ran away from Belgrade, and now...And now, when you can celebrate, you...

ALEXANDER: Back home? Whom do you have there?

PAUL: No one who would be giving me lessons!

NATALIE: Why are you doing this to us?

PAUL: I, too, have to push my life from the beginning. As I know and am able to do so. I'm returning. One has to overcome his past in order to move further. I believe that not all in Belgrade shaved their heads over night like some time ago, resembling the Para-military vampires. This time I must not miss, I simply want to find people with a little bit more of necessary courage, the people with whom I would have what to talk about.

NATALIE: You?

PAUL: Yes, us!

NATALIE: Who "us"?

ALEXANDER (Pointing with his eyes at Paul and Blynia): In total.

NATALIE: What is Coca going to say?

PAUL: He's going to say it you.

ALEXANDER: The man supported you.

NATALIE (To Alexander): He supported her too.

PAUL (To his mother): I should have said to you "Go away!", but I won't. It's not nice. In this world, and at least for me, insults don't exist any more.

ALEXANDER: A career is waiting for you...

NATALIE: You're going to acquire a biography worthy of a...

PAUL: Nobel Prize winner.

ALEXANDER: If I was in your place, I would change my decision...

NATALIE: Don't you really feel of how much importance would be your presence at the premiere?

ALEXANDER: After the opening night, Coca is going to announce a real miracle...

PAUL: Already seen!

NATALIE (Her last effort): He... (Pause)...How should I say...? (Pause)...You have to understand...

PAUL (Placing his hand on his mother's mouth): A not extolled homo, I get it! All right!

BLYNIA: Paul!...

PAUL: I'm already packing myself.

ALEXANDER (In a questionable tone, in front of everybody): And what now?

PAUL: In a short while, you're going to see us to the airport?

(Paul and Blynia take their suitcases and go to one of the rooms. The twin brother and sister remain on the scene, their surprise quite visible. What happened to them?).

(The stage lights are getting dim).

ACT 12

(The opening night of the "Prompter" took place. The impressions of its success do not fade away. The box-office of Coca's theatre has no reasons to worry; tickets are sold in advance for a full year like a wild fire. The news of the event went around the globe, succeeding as a fever in a sick child. All who were responsible in reviving the show - triumphed. Galyna is a heroine about whom the stories go with the same intensity. Every day she receives congratulations, even in Moscow her accomplishment is being celebrated. And, in New York, love between her and the prompter is getting unusually stronger. The fame didn't mess up their senses, though. Do not worry. They are sufficient to one another while, from day to day, hidden in the nest of Galyna's apartment, acting on their own legend. The two of them became one).

ALEXANDER (Enters the room in which the actress, stretched out, is leafing through a magazine, taken from many similar scattered on the floor. He brings the mail): The mail box cannot handle all the mail you get. Look! They're writing from everywhere. The theatre professionals, their directors as well as fashion houses directors, journalists, immigrant and fan clubs....

GALYNA: The role of the prompter's wife changed our lives.

ALEXANDER: Perfect score!

GALYNA (Stops leafing through the magazine, takes a more cheerful position): Well Alexander? Let's see.

ALEXANDER (Sits besides her): This letter has a stamp representing Borodin battle. It's likely sent from Moscow?

GALYNA (Takes the letters from Alexander. Looks at them casually and puts them away): You separated it from the others?

ALEXANDER: Have a look.

GALYNA (With a religious dedication she opens the letter, lights the cigarette, inhales the smoke before starting to read. Easily and with sighs as if complaining about some-

thing, she was reading it as someone handling a slaked lime): Oh, oh, oh,...

ALEXANDER: They don't believe we once lived next to them?

GALYNA: My friend Sergey, the one with the mouth as in a fish!

ALEXANDER: It must be, again, some Prompter? A master in the trade?

GALYNA: The writer who wasted his life cutting up communists' sky.

ALEXANDER: Another one who was making a boat from fish bone. I knew people like him.

GALYNA: That's not him now - it's not the same person. The old, good, and not recognized Sergey used to write every morning using his own blood for ink. And now, look at this. He signs the letter as if a theatre director. Yesterday's outcast - now promoted?

ALEXANDER: The man got his turn.

GALYNA: Who, this Seryoza?!

ALEXANDER: It's good that he is not a director of a correctional facility.

GALYNA: Who would say that?

ALEXANDER: So, he remembered you and wrote you the letter?

GALYNA: Russians write letters to their friends only in desperation, once they get stuck in the mud.

ALEXANDER: Imagine that?

GALYNA: Just like that. When they get stuck in the mud!

ALEXANDER: Did that Sergey too....?

GALYNA: While asking for help, he doesn't differ from them. He asks for dollars for the Russian National Theatre. He would like to squeeze all of us, scattered around the world, into one bag. Listen to him: "We bow to your example, but not in any foreseeable future, things will develop naturally and by themselves back here. We heard about your success in New York. The news spread, just so you know. God will give, so you will act one day in

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Hudozestveni Theatre as well. But, even today, we lack necessary courage; they can still throw stones on anyone here, keep that in your mind. Socially useful bunch is always awake. One cannot live without obstacles in Moscow. Is it worth repeating, Russians don't forgive anyone's success".

ALEXANDER: Listen, listen!? What does that have to mean?

GALYNA: That we became nobody's!

ALEXANDER: What do you mean - nobody's?

GALYNA: They don't count on us.

ALEXANDER: Ha, ha, ha! As if we count on them!

GALYNA: Spirits, the pale, unstable spirits...

ALEXANDER: The question of choice, I'd say.

GALYNA: Rather of a fate?

ALEXANDER: In New York?

GALYNA: I became a swan over night. The white swan that revives from time to time. The farther away I am, the puzzle becomes bigger, for it is only a fairy tale that keeps Russians together. Let them have it. If I stayed with them, they wouldn't even notice me.

ALEXANDER: In our homelands, one never knows how truth may turn out. There, it's always something else. But I do believe that two evils make one good. Well? I forgave them everything, I think I did.

GALYNA: Life wins.

ALEXANDER: Naturally.

GALYNA: Our glory becomes their treasure, my dear; it is individuals who pull this world ahead. The creative effort of a single man determines the fate of the mankind.

ALEXANDER: The case of my nephew is worth repeating to them.

GALYNA: That's for sure!

ALEXANDER: So that they get this through their heads!

GALYNA: Once and for all.

ALEXANDER: They're bad off!

GALYNA: Our example is educational too!

ALEXANDER: It's close to Paul's!

GALYNA: It's almost like that.

ALEXANDER: For, "Giants are always busy!" as writers testify!

GALYNA: For people wandering around the world and resembling nomads.

ALEXANDER: Like my nephew!

GALYNA: Well, does he get in touch?

ALEXANDER: He rakes us over the coals, from time to time.

GALYNA: A young, smart writer...

ALEXANDER: His voice indicates he's as unhappy as in New York.

GALYNA: It means he learned how to live shoulder to shoulder with the misfortune?

ALEXANDER: You think Paul is like that?

GALYNA: The "Prompter" is his masterpiece.

ALEXANDER: He flew in the world of literature like a bullet. For a beginner it's sufficient, for the history of a backyard too much...

GALYNA: How's he doing in Belgrade?

ALEXANDER: Like it's for a barefoot man walking on a thorny path...

GALYNA: Is he celebrating his success?

ALEXANDER: He avoids talking about that.

GALYNA: About the success of the "Prompter", or...?

ALEXANDER: Recently, he praised all of us in one sentence.

GALYNA: He spares his words?

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ALEXANDER: He squeaks like a door hinge.

GALYNA: But I thought that he pushed his life in Belgrade forward?

ALEXANDER: In a certain way, he did. He married.

GALYNA: Pansa?

ALEXANDER: The little Spanish eel.

GALYNA: Thanks God!

ALEXANDER: They got married in church.

GALYNA: In the life of every one there are events more important than a theatre premiere.

ALEXANDER: That's because one doesn't know how to tie himself into a knot according his own desire. Wedding happens and goes. And then...

GALYNA: What "and then"?

ALEXANDER: A groom feels like a boat taken to the sea!

GALYNA: To groom the waves, isn't it so!?

ALEXANDER: What else is left for him?

GALYNA: I cannot believe it!

ALEXANDER: Look, since he got married he calls from time to time and yelps like an automatic riffle into the telephone.

GALYNA: Regarding what?

ALEXANDER: Regarding the fact newspapers published as a first-class sensation.

GALYNA: What fact?

ALEXANDER: That Coca is his father. The Serbian press proverbially added to the family secret..."Politika" published excerpts from the press conference, held after the "Prompter's" premiere, testifying how Coca shed crocodile tears during announcing his fathership...

GALYNA: Is that so?

ALEXANDER: He's angry at all of us!

GALYNA: What do you say?

ALEXANDER: The words worse than a mad Spanish bull.

GALYNA: He'll get over his anger!

ALEXANDER: There is no cure for his sickness.

GALYNA: Leave him alone. You know that, to a young man, all the time of this world promises itself.

ALEXANDER: Not always, and not to everyone.

GALYNA: A man is born to follow his own legend!

ALEXANDER: Serbs don't believe in fairy tales. They attributed Paul's success to William. Envy is their most sincere feeling. The adage "who's going to give to whom, if not one to his own" has been welcomed by them for the occasion. In order to preserve the established order of values from the communist era, Serbian writers canonized as artificial masters do not recognize anyone else... They are skilled to make up things, to be good stableboys. They live striving on intrigues. They'll do everything to set in concrete reality as they see it. By force of circumstances, bad people are burying Paul's success in Belgrade.

GALYNA (Picks up a bunch of magazines from the floor): But, how come these excellent reviews regarding the "Prompter" premiere don't mean anything to them?

ALEXANDER: Even if they were written in Serbian, it wouldn't mean anything to them. Among your own people - everything's small. Such persons don't appreciate somebody else's opinion.

GALYNA: They don't seem being sane!

ALEXANDER: Even if they were, it would be the same.

GALYNA: The same?

ALEXANDER: I repeat it, to the last detail.

GALYNA: It's a lucky thing that fortune will not go around the chosen ones. Only, it shouldn't be too late in Paul's case.

ALEXANDER: As long as their candle is up and lit, the false patriarchs support each other, growling like small dogs, neither chewing the bone nor giving it to others.

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GALYNA: As we would have said, they put on airs as meritorious citizens?

ALEXANDER: They are alike in both Belgrade and Moscow. We're lucky to happen to know them.

GALYNA: Well, but what are we going to do with Paul?

ALEXANDER: He's capable of finding his way among sharks on his own.

GALYNA: In Belgrade?

ALEXANDER: I think that he went there because of that. He prefers a clean bill.

ACT 13

(Like a lark in the air, Natalie trembles inside her apartment. The theatre director sits in his chair, reading a book one moment, looking at her the next, having moved to her place actually. At this hour, even if God alone was to come down in between them, He himself would not have been sure what kind of business they're occupied with. The two of them, in fact, resemble the actors stuck in a theatre scene in which they forgot their texts. At that, they are trying to figure out how to go from there).

WILLIAM: So, how it happened that the geyser gushed.

NATALIE: All of a sudden!

WILLIAM: It poured through like a thief, in the middle of the night!?

NATALIE: It squirts with the same intensity.

WILLIAM: What did it wait for, so long?

NATALIE: It was asleep.

WILLIAM: It's a miracle it didn't drown the neighbors!

NATALIE: Some of them it did burn.

WILLIAM: It must have been that it roared, announcing itself from the ground.

NATALIE: American journalists write that buildings were shaking worse than during the bombardment.

WILLIAM: It shook them from the bottom, didn't it?

NATALIE: If the bombing didn't happen...

WILLIAM: You mean it wouldn't trigger it!?

NATALIE: Our family would avoid the tragedy

WILLIAM: Tragedy?

NATALIE: Sure.

WILLIAM: In the renewing of the mankind, the tragedy

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is its first and last lesson.

NATALIE: That may be the case in art?

WILLIAM: In the life too.

NATALIE: God forbid.

WILLIAM: It is tragedy that pulls the world ahead.

NATALIE: Whose world?

WILLIAM: Take, for example, that of Belgrade!

NATALIE: Especially wouldn't let go of it.

WILLIAM: Imagine how ugly hole would be sitting at that spot! Weeds!? This way, at least boiling water's pouring, a phenomenon by itself! Whether it's been Nature or God, this was chosen to pay off the suffering citizens.

NATALIE: This - erecting the water monument in front of their noses?

WILLIAM: It's good it activated...

NATALIE: I'm getting goose bumps when I think of it.

WILLIAM: Why? Centuries were needed for it to activate again. If it didn't happen, we wouldn't meet each other again...

NATALIE: Pardon?

WILLIAM: I mean - the two of us!

NATALIE: We belong to some other story.

WILLIAM: To a pure prose. Given that tens of years were needed for us to wake up, it must be we're from another story...

NATALIE: The difference still exists.

WILLIAM: In our similarity with Chaplin's heroes?

NATALIE: Our fate, if I use that name to call all this what happened to us, required me to overcome my maiden pride. But, as we know, that took time, but that is...

WILLIAM: The worst part of the outcome. It was looking for a motive to happen after the misfortune. I mean, after the bomb!

NATALIE: Why not say after that!?

WILLIAM: When the curtains were drawn?

NATALIE: Something like that. After the tragedy.

WILLIAM: It means the bomb was the deciding factor!?

NATALIE: According to everything.

WILLIAM: Say, it was.

NATALIE: If such an ugly chronicle didn't happen to us, we wouldn't be in New York, for sure!

WILLIAM: And? You're implying that I, William Coca, would have been short of a deal for an indeterminate time? Even if I was so appreciated and recognized writer or theoretician or the theatre director, I would never learn that I have a son because your brother, Alexander, a proverbially loyal Serb, would keep his mouth shut. Why?

NATALIE: Because he promised to do so.

WILLIAM: Promised? In the style of a zealous Christian?

NATALIE: I've just said...

WILLIAM: Sense has reasons sharper than nails.

NATALIE: But William?

WILLIAM: But Natalie?

NATALIE: Why did you keep quiet?

WILLIAM: Because I didn't know how to set traps for birds when their time came.

NATALIE: Should I be angry because of that?

WILLIAM: I don't think so, anger is sickness of heart.

NATALIE: And that's all? What then did we suffer from all these years, even without bypass?

WILLIAM: From the excess of love? Because we didn't know how to be a part of the whole that offered itself to us. Because of the fatal readiness to play for all or nothing with our full strength. Oh, if I ever knew...

NATALIE: It would have been the same. One cannot win

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over the past. In it, our lives do not belong to us. One doesn't eat his rage.

WILLIAM: Like a pain in a child's jaws...You mean just like that. The past is only an echo of the wind?

NATALIE: Life is transfiguring itself all day and all night...At a time it grows like a plant, at another time it hangs from suspenders....

WILLIAM: The echo of the wind that makes draft both gives away and rakes leaves?

NATALIE: When it's to do with us, it also steals the moonlight

WILLIAM: It too?

NATALIE: It sweeps it like a broom does the yard.

WILLIAM: And leaves nothing behind?

NATALIE: It does leave the chips of the years.

WILLIAM: Which could be our starting point? Our construction material!?

NATALIE: Say, our solution!

WILLIAM: Worthy of a theatre play.

NATALIE: For our Paul, the writer of multifold truths.

WILLIAM: He's without equal. He proved himself. The "Prompter" opened eyes of everyone. It's already clear that in the history of Belgrade's backyard it was the insufficient brains that were leading the things. It's a fact that they squeezed the whole nation into the position of a Prompter. All of you.

NATALIE: If I only could, I would have slept through the horror. Let it not repeat itself!

WILLIAM: Don't think about that any more. Some are sad, others are happy, since the beginning of times. If it wasn't for that, I wouldn't have my son grown adult over night.

NATALIE: Like in theater.

WILLIAM: Huh! It happens.

NATALIE: As it does now, with us?

WILLIAM: In a theatre, or in life, what counts is that we're now together. As you can see, the dust cleared up.

NATALIE: What we missed, it will slide in front of us like a fish on the oil!

WILLIAM: Love - before and after everything. Love - in spite of everything.

NATALIE: According to your recipe: "Life is to be pushed from the beginning, each Monday"?

WILLIAM: The eternal groom in New York was saying so.

NATALIE: You don't think like that any longer?

WILLIAM: I don't think like that any more, starting from today.

NATALIE: Well, then...

WILLIAM: Marriage.

NATALIE (More jokingly): Are you asking for my hand?

WILLIAM: I'm doing that since our Belgrade kiss. Get rid of your maiden pride, look at us. We're in full power, see?

NATALIE: We resemble a nice couple of water snakes.

WILLIAM: Then...

NATALIE: There is no miracle. Life has to have a deserved place - like a tool.

WILLIAM (Opens his arms, as if pressuring Natalie to answer): It has to have, it has to have? Go ahead; say it once...I'll get a heart attack.

NATALIE: I accept, William. Is that OK?

WILLIAM (Not hiding his happiness because of Natalie's decision, he kisses her): Finally!

NATALIE: I'm promising myself to you.

WILLIAM: Both today and tomorrow...

NATALIE: And every future moment: I accept! But, before that...You have to see me before that!

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WILLIAM: As if I didn't happen to know you enough so far?

NATALIE: Don't be so quick!

WILLIAM: I'm waiting.

NATALIE (Wiggling out of his hold and going towards one of the rooms): I am going to reveal my secret to you. Be patient.

(William stays alone on the scene. Nervous like a sparrow hawk, he crosses the room in all directions. He pours whisky in his glass and simply throws it down his throat. At that moment, Natalie returns and, as she has promised, steps in front of him).

NATALIE (In a white wedding dress, she moves across the scene as an angel from a painting of Milena Pavlovic Barili): I designed it myself. Even though it was made long time ago, it looks like new.

WILLIAM (Not hiding his pleasure): Even today, you couldn't have ordered a better one.

NATALIE: You like it?

WILLIAM: You remind me of an angel.

NATALIE: I made it before Paul was born.

WILLIAM: Till then? Does he know about it?

NATALIE: Nobody anticipated its existence so far.

WILLIAM: It means they too are going to be surprised?

NATALIE: What do you mean - they too? Who are they?

WILLIAM: Paul and Blynia Pansa.

NATALIE: How come?

WILLIAM: I mean - when we go to Belgrade.

NATALIE: Belgrade?

WILLIAM: Where else?

NATALIE: We could celebrate in Manhattan!

WILLIAM: I'm not fond of Yankees.

NATALIE: There!?

WILLIAM: That's the right place!

NATALIE: With wedding guests!?

WILLIAM: And in front of our theater. I mean - the actors of the "Prompter". There are no better guests for the occasion. At least not at this time.

NATALIE: What are you talking about?

WILLIAM: The "Prompter" received an invitation from the BITEF.

NATALIE: And all of us...

WILLIAM: All of us are going. Our lives must not resemble a story without end. That is why...

NATALIE: You reason that, once the romance started among the Serbs, it has to end there?

WILLIAM: It's nice to start things all over. (PAUSE). At the right place. In Belgrade!

NATALIE: The servants of love will make it there too.

WILLIAM: They will. Belgrade is world too, for God's sake!

NATALIE: Before and after everything.

WILLIAM: Love knows us, in spite of everything - us.

NATALIE: Once losers...

(Natalie's words are disrupted by the door ring. Alexander and Galyna Filipovna enter the apartment, confused by Natalie's looks).

NATALIE (In order to end the pause, probably wanting to greet them, says): Even Belgrade is...

ALEKSANDER (Completing his sister's sentence): World. Even Belgrade is world for smart people.

WILLIAM: It always was.

GALYNA: What does 'world' mean?

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WILLIAM: A backyard in which one should feel like at home.

GALYNA: That's it then.

ALEXANDER: Would you explain to us what's going on here?

NATALIE: Nothing extraordinary.

WILLIAM: We are putting periods on certain tails of a story that once was without end.

ALEXANDER: What the hell are you putting an end to?

NATALIE: To that which was.

ALEXANDER: You decided you're not going to resemble a cutting board anymore? You understood that the past is useless! However, would you like us to keep standing here like horses at empty troughs, are we supposed to, perhaps, drink a toast to each other standing like this?

WILLIAM: Come here.

NATALIE (Talking to her brother): What can I offer you?

GALYNA (To Natalie): Huh, your looks are real nice!

ALEXANDER (Finds a seat at the table): You, my sister, look too serious for a bride.

GALYNA: That's how young Russian girls look like at mass weddings in front of the Lomonosov.

ALEXANDER (To Galyna): This in New York is another story.

NATALIE (Serves whisky): Obviously.

ALEXANDER: It can be seen even without glasses.

WILLIAM: You found us during we were going through the details of our wedding!

ALEXANDER: Let's drink to that!

NATALIE (Shows her dress to her brother): I recognize each stitch I made on this dress.

ALEXANDER: No kidding.

GALYNA: Oh, Alexander, can you see, the happy end is not Hollywood's privilege.

NATALIE (To Galyna): What Hollywood? It has been created by the movie people to mitigate America's fright.

WILLIAM (Confirming to everybody): At least in our love, we didn't miss.

ALEXANDER: Taking everything into consideration, congratulations!

NATALIE: Consider yourselves invited...

GALINA: To the wedding?

ALEKSANDER: If someone was telling me what our escape would bring, I wouldn't believe him.

WILLIAM: We cut it as we should have done it.

ALEXANDER: I'm only curious to know what Paul is going to say to all this.

WILLIAM: Don't worry about him. Our wedding in Belgrade is going to look to him like some history broadcast.

GALYNA: In Belgrade?

NATALIE: That's clear.

ALEXANDER: There?

WILLIAM: It's not a trick.

ALEXANDER: It means: Goodbye America!

WILLIAM: According to our plan, the things will start moving...

NATALIE: From where they stopped.

ALEKSANDER: So, among the great Serbs?

GALYNA: It is going to be a first class hit. If I was getting married, I would also arrange for a wedding party in Moscow.

ALEXANDER: Among your people? That makes for a perfect collection.

WILLIAM (To Galyna): Way to go.

ALEXANDER: After all, Paul is going to become a citizen of Belgrade?

GALYNA: It sounds so good.

ALEXANDER: Something for evening news - it sounds so noble. Who planned it?

WILLIAM (Simultaneously with Natalie): We did!

WILLIAM: It should be said that the "Prompter" received an invitation from BITEF too.

ALEXANDER: It too?

NATALIE: Let's not waste time anymore. We're going.

ALEXANDER: You're going to kill two birds with one stone...?

WILLIAM: If it suits you, we will.

GALYNA: Why not?

NATALIE: Each of us will have a role.

WILLIAM: In front of Serbs.

ALEXANDER: Well, well, they trust no one anyway.

NATALIE: It's never late for the truth. Paul did not write the "Prompter" in vain.

WILLIAM: Belgraders will be our forth wall outside America, the one we're looking for.

GALYNA: My small steel tooth, don't carp.

ALEXANDER: Artists are going to speak on our behalf, isn't that so?

NATALIE: What happened, happened, we have to forgive.

WILLIAM: So the life would make sense.

NATALIE: We need the fourth wall.

ALEXANDER: It looks like you found it in Belgrade?

NATALIE: Well, it's not that we are going to live in New York forever?

GALYNA: Like scared cats on a roof. The sons of a bitch have to listen to the "Prompter".

NATALIE: They didn't hold us in their laps, for us not to do that to them.

ALEXANDER: I already see it; their ears are going to get numbed! Listen, sister, it's smarter to get us another bottle...

WILLIAM: More today than at any time in the past, we have a good reason to be there, where the real life goes on.

GALYNA: Even if it was in the very puppeteer setting, we're going there.

NATALIE: Someone has to carry the key over to them, so they can open the door.

GALYNA: To teach them how to play.

NATALIE: Without a doubt. It's not going to be only the United States' privilege to see the "Prompter".

ALEXANDER: That would be bad for all of us, wouldn't it?

GALYNA (Talking to Coca and Natalie): The small steel tooth is really a big hero!

NATALIE: The "Hill for Meditation" is waiting for my brother, at the same place.

WILLIAM: The geyser too.

ALEXANDER: And the chained ape, why don't you say so? I'm going to boil an egg for every resident of Belgrade as soon as I arrive there!

NATALIE: Nobody is going to blame you for that.

GALYNA (To Alexander): Never again, you'll be a weight hanging from someone's neck.

ALEXANDER: You're trying to convince me as if we're going to topple down a president of the state. First Serbs, then the fourth wall, boiled eggs, twisted braids...As if you do not understand that we all are left in the lurch! Belgraders once liked to chase their own tails. Now, again, they're quiet. I wouldn't like being in their skin. After all, every day, every hour, someone prompts in the world. Prompters dust. Some disappear, other appear, for the folk dance to last. It's all of us who are in it. What sad entrepreneurs! I don't like being knocked out. After all, I feel naked. That's my life. Isn't that so, my dear friends?

TWISTED BRAIDS A Story From Exile

Natalie, you forgot the whiskey? You see!

NATALIE: Brother, they are not awaiting our arrival.

ALEXANDER: I don't care.

NATALIE: I know that we can do it.

ALEXANDER: That, again, we can be a part of the whole - the plucked chicken, the one we abandoned. You believe that they won't throw us underneath their feet, those unrealized and self-oriented people.

NATALIE: It won't pass, this time. Just let me be the PR of our expedition.

GALYNA: We're descent people. There are enough of us for a railway car load of BITEF heroes.

ALEXANDER: Don't shit around anymore. Maybe those poor people over there are not all to be blamed. As you, sister, used to say: "Belgrade is..."

NATALIE: The world. It's about time to teach them that lesson.

ALEXANDER: What do you say, William? The last line of defense: The fourth wall of places occupied by twisted braids. Twisted braids? Do you hear what I'm asking you?

(Music).

(Natalie goes to the corner of the room. She takes a white umbrella and opens it trying to cover all of them on the scene, who, for their part, try to stay squeezed to each other as if posing for a group portrayal).

THE END

Aleksandar Lukic
TWISTED BRAIDS

A Story From Exile

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