

**ALISA, ALICE**

Dragica Potochnyak

Translated by-dr Lesley Wade

*Although the immediate context is the exile of a Bosnian refugee in Slovenia, the play is about broader European attitudes towards refugees. Directors may choose to change the specific context.*

*The action takes place in Magda's living-dining room, from the evening until the following morning.*

*The furniture is of various styles, predominantly baroque reproductions. The room, though large, gives the impression of being crowded because of the large number of poorly arranged ornaments. Vases are choked with every possible variety of flower, particularly dried ones; gobelin tapestries, pictures and photographs in old, heavy frames cover the walls. There is an over-abundance of gilt, crystal and porcelain. The covers and cushions on the sofa are colour co-ordinated with the red velvet carpet and curtains. At least the red velvet is of a shade that, next to the gold, somehow saves the room from complete incongruity, providing a gentle breath of elegance that helps to create a feeling of harmony.*

*When Alisa is trying to annoy Magda, or to get revenge, she speaks with deliberately poor grammar and a strong accent, and adds some Bosnian words.*

**Characters**

**ALISA**                    **aged 17, a refugee from somewhere else**

**MAGDA**                    **aged 50, an office worker**

**IRENA**                    **aged 45, her friend**

**LEO**                        **aged 55, Irena's husband**

**VLADIMIR**                **aged 50, Magda's husband**

## ACT ONE

*A festively decorated table for two has been laid in the large living-dining room. ALISA is singing barely audibly what to our ears is a foreign sounding melody, full of feeling, tense, deep (we will hear the same melody again at the end). She makes the final adjustments to the table, then sits there and pulls a notebook out of one pocket and a packet of tablets from the other. She searches through her notebook for the words she needs.*

**ALISA** *(reading from her notebook):* 'I invite you to Alice's dinner party this afternoon'. Afternoon? No, evening. Evening dinner party. Yes! *(Reading again)* 'I didn't know I was to have a party at all', said Alice, 'but if there is to be one, I think I ought to invite the guests.' O. K. No problem about that! Last supper if you want.

*The phone rings once, twice, three times ... ALISA pays no attention to it.*

*(Reading again)* 'Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time.'

*The telephone continues to ring.*

*(Shouts)* Leave me alone, just leave me alone! I'll cut it off!

*The telephone stops ringing.*

*Prasats! Shithead!*

*She takes out a large number of pills of various colours, placing them one by one onto the plates and into the glasses, sharing them out slowly and carefully. She then proceeds to act out dining. Her behaviour is exaggeratedly 'fancy' and affected, her voice fairly coarse, producing sounds of munching, belching and laughter. She enjoys herself hugely when speaking in an artificial voice, overdoing it a lot, and obviously*

*imitating someone. Magda has told her this story several times. She speaks throughout with a strong foreign accent.*

It happened many times that he came home very late in the evening, you know. And me poor thing I was waiting for him, was waiting and was ... And I did not eat. *Uopshte*, I did not. I was not starving, not at all, *razumiyesh ti to?* Can you imagine? But when the hunger started, I knew he is on the way home. And I was not wrong, *yer on* was already coming up the stairs. The next moment he rang the bell and me full of joy runned into his arms. Kiss! Kiss! *Strashno!* Disgusting! He put down his bag, took off his coat and his shoes ... And the fresh towel was already there in the bathroom waiting for him. Every day the same, *kao neki ritual* ... like a ritual ... Yes? There is something majestic in that! And then a wonderful smell came from the kitchen. Mmmmmmmmm ... The most pleasant titillation followed by the most stupefacted (*Like a dialogue*) - stupefacted? - no, vaporising - vaporising? - no, *Shta me briga!* I don't care. Vapour! No! (*Very depressed*) I hate it! I'll never learn it. *Nechu, nechuda uchim. Mrzim vas, sve vas mrzim!* I hate you, I hate this ..., this ..., everything! No more learning, no more living. No more languages! No more Alisa! Nothing! *Nishta! Nishta!* (*Gestures as though she were going to knock things over on the table, then suddenly stops and slowly calms down.*) Alisa - Alice, you naughty Alice! - Alice? - Yes. - No, no. - Here we go again!

(*Continues speaking as she was before her outburst.*) All the time in the rythm of pleasant and un – obtrusive music. *Muzika!* La, la, la, la, la ... la! The king's smile spread over his slightly swollen and with saliva sprinkled, lips. Oh, yes! His grateful eyes melted over my fingers, which were serving him this ready-made artificial food with completely unartificial elegance.

*The telephone rings again.*

And Vladimir the king, with a small 'k', he was - ooh and aah, and oh – he was sighing and clicking and smacking and licking his lips and he was exerting himself with satisfaction and delight. (*Speaks into the telephone*) He was delightfully satisfied, oh, no, satisfactionally delightful! His stomach swelled up like risen bread,

so all the button of his snow- white shirt bursted and jumped merrily around the kitchen – pok, pok, pok! There. (*Gestures with her hand. Now speaking to the person on the telephone, she changes her voice.*)

Don't you understand? How come you ... It's me, I do not understand you. Who? You. *Molim te ...*, *ne volim*, I don't want ... *molim*. Please ... No, not pleased. Please! Just leave me please, not love me, leave me, I've said leave me! *Ostavi me, nech vishe!* No, no, *ne, rekla sam ne!* I said no! Sad? You are sad? Sad? Who is supposed to be sad here?! Sad?! (*Hangs up.*) Foey, foey, foey ... Disgusting!

And then my little hands lifted him up, pleasant dozy, like this and most carefully leaded him over to couch, where the poor devil fall to sleep. But I happily (and whistlingly) skip off to wash the dishes. I press his leftovers into my mouth. Baaah, baaah ...

*During this Alisa has put the pills back into their packet. The telephone rings again.*

(*Very loudly*) *Prasats! Svinja!*

(*Into the receiver*) You old pig! Old disgusting pig! I hate you, leave me alone. I can not do it any more. *Nechu!* No more! Foey! (*Places the receiver on the table.*)

Now all we've got is flowers, only flowers, flowers, stinking wreaths of flowers (*deliberately knocking over one of the vases*) !

*MAGDA enters, carrying a fresh bunch of flowers. ALISA immediately attempts to tidy the vase.*

**MAGDA** (*shouting*): Don't touch them!

*ALISA flinches, stops, does not dare to turn around. She slowly adjusts her clothes and hair.*

How many times have I told you already, they're not to be touched?!

**ALISA** (*still turned away*): I did not touch them.

**MAGDA**: What are you looking for there then?

*ALISA does not reply.*

What are you nosing around for?!

**ALISA** (*loudly*): I, nothing?

**MAGDA**: No, not nothing. Nosing! You nose around!

**ALISA**: Nose ... my nose ... how?

**MAGDA**: No, not nose, nosing, you're nosing around!

**ALISA** (*turning around and acting amazement.*): I am not understanding.

**MAGDA**: What are you saying?!

**ALISA**: Oh, I am sorry, I do not understand. Nose around - I do not understand this expression. I truly not ...

**MAGDA**: Nose around means you're looking for something where you shouldn't be, amongst foreign, amongst my things.

**ALISA**: Oh, really?

**MAGDA** (*forcefully*): Yes! Write it down, so you won't be asking me again.

**ALISA:** I will write it down. (*She clutches at her pocket.*) I do not know where is my notebook. I will remember it - Nose- a- round. Have you pencil? I will write it on the tablecloth.

**MAGDA:** My God, what next!?! Take these flowers then!

**ALISA:** Yoy, I am sorry, I was afraid to forget the words. 'I can read words of one letter' - only.

**MAGDA:** Where did you get that from?

**ALISA:** Oh, I read it somewhere. Before ...

(*She takes the flowers out of MAGDA's hands, smells them, pulls a face. She turns to MAGDA.*)

Ooh, what a scent, so beautiful. Are you tired?

**MAGDA:** They stink. Spray them with perfume! Your pencil's on the writing desk, dumbo.

**ALISA:** Dumbo. (*She laughs.*) I love that - dumbo.

**MAGDA:** You don't say you love it, you say you like it. There's a difference.

**ALISA:** How is that? If I am loving it then I am liking it. Yoy! (*She covers her lips when she realises she has made a linguistic mistake.*)

**MAGDA:** You're going to have trouble grasping it. It's too much for your brain. Well, go on, correct it now. You must correct your mistakes every time.



**ALISA** (*putting the flowers into a vase on the table*): No matter what I do I am never going to grasp it ... It is too much for my ... (*changes what she was going to say, and indicates her heart*).

**MAGDA**: Before that. You don't remember, do you?

**ALISA** (*with a smile*): I do! I said: If I love it then I like it, instead of: If something seems lovely to me, then I also like it.

*MAGDA does not comment. She throws herself onto the sofa.*

**MAGDA** (*after a while*): Have you got everything ready?

*ALISA nods assent. She sits on a chair at the table. She now calmly takes out her notebook from her pocket. She tries to remember words so that she can write them down.*

The same as yesterday?

*ALISA nods assent, and goes over to the writing desk for a pencil and dictionary.*

It was really good yesterday. Especially the meat.

**ALISA**: But why must I cook the same thing every day?

**MAGDA**: Because that's his favourite.

**ALISA**: But when I have to eat it for lunch the next day, it is not good any more. I cannot go on eating the same thing every day. (*She rummages in the dictionary.*)  
'Nose, noun ... A knack for discovery or understanding (a keen nose for absurdity).'

**MAGDA**: The next meaning. Read on.

**ALISA:** 'His wife is always nosing around after him - she tries to find out where he is, what he is doing ...'

**MAGDA:** You obviously understand, that's enough! Tea!

*ALISA goes off to the kitchen. MAGDA opens her handbag and swigs vigorously from a small bottle.*

*(Loudly to ALISA.)* It looks like you've forgotten already how hungry you were ...

**ALISA** *(returning with a tray, which is laid):* And naked and barefoot and ... I have not, I will be grateful to you to the end of my days. Your tea, madam. *(She serves it skilfully.)*

**MAGDA:** I hope you really will.

**ALISA:** I repeat it to myself morning and night, as you told me to. And then I really believe that I have arrived in paradise. Directly - from hell to sky.

**MAGDA:** We say heaven.

**ALISA:** We say hea-ven.

**MAGDA:** If you're lying, that's a sin.

**ALISA:** *Izmolish* - you say one Lord's prayer, and he forgives you, that God of yours is so good.

**MAGDA:** Stop winding me up, or this is not going to end very nicely.

**ALISA:** Oh, did you think that it would?

*A long pause. MAGDA drinks some tea, ALISA rummages through the dictionary.*

**MAGDA:** Don't I look good, then?

**ALISA:** Yes. As always.

**MAGDA:** You said I looked tired!

**ALISA:** How could I?

**MAGDA:** You did! You said it earlier on ...

**ALISA:** *Nisam*. I would never say something like that.

**MAGDA:** You did! (*She spills tea over herself.*) This is your fault! It's all your fault!

**ALISA:** Yes, sorry.

**MAGDA:** How come you're so nervy?

**ALISA:** I not, I just repeat words ...

**MAGDA:** You're doing quite well for only seven months here, after all ...

**ALISA:** *Sedam* months I am here?!

**MAGDA** (*ignores this*): What's the time?

**ALISA:** *Sedam* and ... Pardon, fifteen minutes past seven.

**MAGDA:** All right, still time for a shower. Don't worry, everything will be all right. Pull yourself together.

**ALISA:** Who says that tea really helps you slim, then?!

**MAGDA:** Have you ironed my dress?

**ALISA** (*ignoring the question*): What time will we wait to today? I am so sleepy.

**MAGDA:** My God, you've still got to do my nails!

**ALISA:** And perfume flowers and write word down and iron dress and serve up dinner and ... And when I allowed to go out? I already learned everything, I do everything you ask. You promise me I would go out ... when I know everything ... when your husband comes ... if not before. But your husband does not come!

**MAGDA:** Stop it!

**ALISA:** I don't even know what day is today; I look out, more people have left their coats off, they will be walk around in short sleeves soon, but you ...

**MAGDA** (*apparently calm*): They're still weeping for you at the station ...

**ALISA** (*as though leafing through the dictionary*): What is that word again ... nervous ... nose ... nose a-...?

**MAGDA:** Yes, nose around! A lot you remember! Nose around is the phrase. Nose around foreign arses. Or in other words - go whoring. That's what you miss. That's why you're nervy.

**ALISA:** I did never go whoring! *Deset dana sem trazhila Emira*, I look ten days for Emir. *Bez hrane*, without food, without money, without papers ... goodbye to everything, *posle svega*.

**MAGDA:** Speak my language, please!

**ALISA:** Yes, madam. Speak my language. Be like me.

**MAGDA:** Did anyone call? I asked if anyone called?!

*Alisa mumbles something.*

I can't hear! Did they? (*Expectantly.*) Did they?

**ALISA:** No.

**MAGDA:** They didn't? How do you know they didn't?

**ALISA:** Well I am here all the time. Night and day I am here.

**MAGDA:** Here?! (*After a moment, too pleasantly.*) What is this here?

**ALISA:** This is ...

**MAGDA:** Your home!

**ALISA:** I could throw myself through the window.

**MAGDA:** Please do, but what will you achieve by that?

**ALISA:** And you? What for God's sake do you want from me? 'I'm not a visitor, and I'm not a servant'. Who am I anyway? 'I can't stand this any longer.'

**MAGDA:** Have you been ransacking the house again? Have you been nosing around after the photograph?

*Here ALISA actually gets confused for the first time.*

**ALISA** (*panicking*): *Ne*, I was not, *ne*, how could you think I would, when ...

**MAGDA:** Admit it, you were nosing around for the photograph! When you promised you'd give me some peace until ...

*MAGDA approaches her threateningly; at the last moment ALISA recalls.*

**ALISA** (*practically screaming out*): I was nosing around, I nosed around ... for - after - a spider!

**MAGDA:** What?

**ALISA:** I nosed around after a spider. When you come in, I was nosing around after a spider! *Da!* That is how it was. A spider ...

**MAGDA:** And where is that spider now?

**ALISA** (*lightly*): I don't know, it escaped.

**MAGDA:** What, where was it, among the flowers?

**ALISA:** Yes. Here among the flowers. That big! Hairy and fat and black!

**MAGDA:** Stop that! Find it!

**ALISA** (*acting as though she is looking for it*): You devil, where are you hiding, then? I'm going to find you for sure! Yes, isn't that right? Oh, but it is!

**MAGDA** (*quietly*): Have you got it then?

**ALISA:** Yes. No! Oops, escaped again! Aaaah. Now I will! Hop! Here it is.

**MAGDA:** Kill it, what are you waiting for? Spray it!

**ALISA** (*to the spider in her palm*): Stop biting me, or I will!

**MAGDA**: Yes, do it now! Kill it!

**ALISA** (*imitating Magda*): ‘Suppress him! Pinch him!’

**MAGDA**: Christ, don’t you know I’m allergic to spiders?

**ALISA** (*acts surprised*): Oh! Really?

**MAGDA**: Yes, really. (*She climbs onto a chair.*)

**ALISA** (*walking around with the spider in her hand*): I didn’t know.

**MAGDA**: Well I told you!

**ALISA**: No! Oh dear!

**MAGDA**: What is it?!

**ALISA** (*opens her fist*): I can’t, I can’t kill it, because there isn’t a spider. I made a mistake. Error! Look ...

**MAGDA**: Don’t come near me!

**ALISA**: It is little leaf from the flowers.

**MAGDA**: Get away, get away!

**ALISA**: I squeeze it, crumble it, pinch it into dust. Bloodless. Dead. Dust.  
Don’t worry, we haven’t got a spider, that’s why we have ants, small ones, quite tiny.  
(*Picks one up.*) There, see? Shall I rip its leg off? Shall I squash it?

**MAGDA:** Yes! How do all these pests get into the house?

**ALISA:** This one isn't from here. She looks different, climbs different, behaves different, smells different, actually she stinks, and she is very frightened. As if someone hunts her. As if she is running away, running away. (*Gets angry.*) 'Give your evidence, or I'll have you executed, whether you are nervous or not. She denies it. That proves her guilt.' There is nothing for you here. Who asked you to come anyway? 'Off with your head!' Out, quick march! (*Throws it out of the window.*)

**MAGDA:** Stop playacting! I've still got to have a shower. From now on every day you're going to take a damp cloth and wipe the floors and the walls and the ceiling as well. Do you understand?

**ALISA:** I'm going to Hoover everywhere, tidy up, wipe up, wipe off, with instructions, this muck, this disgusting filth, this vermin ... (*To MAGDA.*) Is that how you say it? And what devil gave you accommodation rights?! 'You are a very poor speaker. Do you know that!' *Ovdye ne bu stopla* ...no alien foot is going to tread on this polished floor, dammit! Cut their heads off! 'Off with his whiskers! Off with her head!' (*Dancing around with a bowl in her hand, swiping at imaginary vermin.*) Ants, spiders, beetles and all other enemies, off with their heads, dammit! Chop, chop, chop!

**MAGDA:** Watch out, you'll break it!

**ALISA:** I obediently announce that the floor has been ethnically cleansed. Now we must still only ethnically ... Hooray! (*Drops the porcelain bowl onto the floor.*)

**MAGDA:** My dinner service! You've broken more of it!

**ALISA:** I didn't mean to, I really didn't ...

**MAGDA:** That's all I get from you, a pile of broken dishes and ... Get away! Go away!



**ALISA:** I will buy other one, I will replace it! I will find job and earn money, everything, I will replace everything ... Everything! Forgive me, forgive me, madam ...

**MAGDA:** Buy one? You're going to buy one? This can't be bought. It's a wedding present from my mother! It's the only souvenir I have from her. It can't be bought.

**ALISA:** I did not know... excuse me, I did not, I did not know ... Forgive me.

**MAGDA:** Forgive? I'm supposed to forgive you?

**ALISA:** Yes.

**MAGDA:** I'm supposed to excuse you, I'm supposed to help you, I'm supposed to comfort you, I'm supposed to feed you, I'm supposed to give you a roof over your head, I'm supposed to wear myself to the bone with kindness ... Me, me, me?! What about you? What are you going to do for me, then? What are you going to offer me in return for forgiveness? What? Go on, tell me - what? What can you give me in return for all that I've done, that I'm doing for you, well, what?!

*ALISA trembles and is silent.*

*(Continuing after a pause. Walking around her.)* You don't know? You don't know because you've got nothing, you've got nothing, darling. You've got nothing to give, you can only take! That's all you know, take, grab, steal! How can I forgive you? Some things can't be forgiven! Remember that! Clear it up! And don't ever let me hear you say, or even think, anything like that again.

*ALISA goes to fetch the broom, MAGDA for some drink from her handbag. The bottle is empty, so she sits on the sofa and watches ALISA, who sweeps up and gathers together the broken pieces.*

Did you forgive them? Did you or not? And where's the child? Where have you put it? Did you have it or did you abort it? Where is it? You drowned it. Did you throw it in the trash? You wrapped it in cling film and ...

**ALISA:** What do you want?

**MAGDA:** Me? Nothing.

**ALISA:** What do you want from me?

**MAGDA:** You're the one who wants, I'm the one who gives! We've already been through that, darling.

**ALISA:** Tell me out loud, what do you want from me? Do you dare to?

**MAGDA:** Stop that shit, that's what I want from you! I want you to be silent and obey me! That's what I want!

**ALISA:** I know very well why you took me in. But as long as I am alive you will never get it, not as long as I am alive, only when I am dead!

**MAGDA:** Get out of my sight, I don't want to set eyes on you again! Get lost! How could you? You slut, how can you think such a thing?!

*ALISA has thrown the shards onto the floor, and is going off towards the door.*

*(Leaping after her.)* You're not going anywhere, you hear! Did you think you'd go just like that, just when things are getting hard for me? You won't, no you won't. Listen to what I'm telling you ... Listen to me! Where could you go anyway? Who's going to take you without documents? There is no you, you understand, you don't exist! Nobody leaves me, ever! If he hasn't left me yet, you're not going to either!

*The women stare each other out.*

Naked and barefoot you were when I picked you up off the street, I gave you everything, welcomed you as if you were my own daughter, you're mine ... mine, mine ...

**ALISA:** *Ovako gola i bosa ...* I have never been as naked and barefoot as this! They degraded me with hatred, but you did it with goodness! Thank you, Lady Magda!

**MAGDA:** The photograph! Don't forget the photograph! If you go, you'll never see it again! I'll burn it! Some day you'll see it ... Just wait a little longer, be patient, we're friends ... Do you still remember it? Daddy, Mummy, Emir, Zuhra, little Aysa, you ... in front of the house ... Was Emir the oldest?

**ALISA:** *Nemoyte vishe*, please do not any more, please do not torture me any more, *molim vas*, I beg you.

**MAGDA:** I won't. I'm your friend, I'm fond of you, I'm very fond of you, Vladimir will be fond of you too, you'll see. Now you clear up. We'll wait for him together.

*ALISA sweeps up the shards of the bowl again.*

Is there a little sip of anything left anywhere? Go on, give me some! I'll never shout at you again. Look in the cupboard ... you know where you've put it. Go on, give me it! No, no, there's got to be some somewhere. (*Starts searching in the cupboards, on the shelves, among the flowers, everywhere.*) He hasn't called? He'll still call, the shit-head. You'll see.

**ALISA:** Why?

**MAGDA:** What do you mean, why?

**ALISA:** Why are you still waiting for him? Why do I have to cook these fancy suppers every day? Why do you sip that, that ... tea into you?! (*Carries the shards away.*)

**MAGDA** (*taking some tablets from her handbag*): Now she wants to brain-wash me! Monkey. She's dark as a monkey!

**ALISA** (*popping her head in*): Pardon?

**MAGDA:** Water! (*To herself.*) You can't teach culture to a barbarian, she's just an ape!

**ALISA** (*bringing a glass of water*): Won't that be too many tablets?

**MAGDA:** No. He can go to hell.

**ALISA:** Sir also?

**MAGDA:** Yes, Sir, and you with him! (*Swallows the tablets.*) Tomorrow I'm going to buy you some hair-dye, so you can colour your hair. Lighter.

**ALISA:** Lighter?

**MAGDA:** Yes, lighter! You look like a savage.

**ALISA:** Well, you're dark too.

**MAGDA:** I've got a light complexion. But you look like a black.

**ALISA:** I am not going to colour my hair.

**MAGDA:** Then you won't get any more to eat! And if you haven't done the ironing, there's still time. (*Collects her things and goes towards the door.*)

**ALISA** (*taking away the glass, she starts to exit, then turns in the kitchen doorway*):  
Now I remember, there was a call ...

**MAGDA**: What was their voice like?

**ALISA**: Beautiful. I mean ... warm. It was an O.K. voice.

**MAGDA**: I don't believe he called at all.

**ALISA**: He didn't then. (*Turns away.*)

**MAGDA**: And what did he say?

**ALISA**: Nothing.

**MAGDA**: What do you mean, nothing?

**ALISA**: I do not know. Maybe he had nothing to say. This happens, no, keeps on happening, people say something they do not know about because ...

**MAGDA**: Stop philosophising!

**ALISA**: But those are your own words! I've got them written down in here, there is more ... (*Pulls her notebook out of her pocket.*)

**MAGDA**: Wasn't he at all surprised when he heard your voice?

**ALISA**: Yes, he was a little.

**MAGDA**: And?

**ALISA**: And?

**MAGDA:** That's what I'm asking you.

**ALISA:** And me you!

**MAGDA:** Oof! Did you tell him I wasn't in?

*ALISA shakes her head from side to side.*

What do you mean you didn't? Why didn't you?

**ALISA:** Because ... because it wasn't him.

**MAGDA:** Stop messing me about! Who did you speak with on the phone? Was it a woman's voice?

**ALISA:** I don't know, maybe ...

**MAGDA:** If it wasn't a he, it must have been her. He's stuck it out a long time, eight months. I really don't know what he saw in her. You'd think the idiot would get sick of just looking at an arse and tits. And at his age it can be dangerous. Those young things want it three times a day every day. He could say no once maybe, but twice ...!

**ALISA:** It wasn't her.

**MAGDA:** How do you know, you don't even know her. Or do you?

**ALISA:** It was the wrong number.

**MAGDA:** The wrong number? Another wrong number?

**ALISA:** Wrongly, it was the wrong number.

**MAGDA:** Every day a wrong number! That's so strange! And just when I'm not at home!

**ALISA:** Really strange; you should report these wrong numbers to the police some time.

**MAGDA:** If the police come to this house, they'll only find one thing wrong, and that's you! You'd like the police to come to the house and find you, would you, eh?

*The doorbell. ALISA and MAGDA stop dead.*

You hear that?

**ALISA:** I hear it.

*The doorbell again.*

**MAGDA:** He's here. No. Maybe somebody rang the wrong bell.

*The bell rings again.*

He's at the door. He's the only one who rings like that. Hard, for a long time. (*Calls out.*) I hear you! You can wait - I've had to! I haven't even had a shower!

*The bell rings more urgently still.*

What if it isn't him? But who could it be? My perfume, it's in my handbag ...

*ALISA pulls out a bottle of whiskey first, then a box of tablets that she puts briskly into her pocket, then everything spills out of the bag.*

(*Pulling her away.*) Get away! See if everything's ready. Matches, where are the matches ...? (*Puts on some perfume; then inspects the table.*) Everything's been

moved! What have you done? Tablets. My tablets? And where did this ...? You'd better explain this to me. A hair? Another one! Oh, you filth!

**ALISA:** *Idite!* Go on, or he will go away!

**MAGDA:** Check in the kitchen and see that everything's ready. I can change later, he'll wait for me ...

*The doorbell.*

Coming! (*Walks away, turns again and swallows a tablet.*) Pick things up, hide the bottle! Don't leave your room till I call you! And then speak only when you're spoken to! Understand?! (*Goes to open the door.*)

*ALISA picks things up. She takes the box of tablets out of her pocket and empties them back into the pocket; however, she puts the empty little bottle back into the box and leaves it lying on the table. Next to it she places the empty bottle of whiskey. She also sprays the flowers copiously with MAGDA's perfume, and then runs to her room on the other side. A short silence. Voices are heard. First IRENA enters the room, after her LEO and then MAGDA, evidently troubled. IRENA has a bunch of flowers in her hand, LEO is carrying a bottle of cognac. The newcomers are laughing and in a good mood. IRENA sneezes several times.*

**MAGDA:** I was in the bathroom ...

**IRENA** (*to MAGDA.*): Are you wearing a new perfume?

**MAGDA:** No, why?

**LEO:** Is Vlad home?

*IRENA gives her the flowers and kisses her. She sneezes again.*



**MAGDA:** You shouldn't have. How come you two are ...? I mean - how are you both?

**LEO:** Terrific!

**IRENA** (*sneezing*): Sorry, I don't know what's come over me. Maybe a draught. The others aren't here yet then?

**MAGDA:** Others?

**LEO:** So we're the first. There's nothing wrong, is there Magda?

**MAGDA:** No, of course not. I'm going to get a vase. You two sit down.

**IRENA:** You did want chrysanthemums, didn't you?

**MARY:** Chrysanthemums? Oh, yes ... They're lovely.

**IRENA:** Some people like them, but they remind me too much of, of ... You know?  
(*Laughs.*)

**LEO** (*quite good-humouredly*): You're a bit daft then, aren't you?

**IRENA:** (*sharply and quite abruptly*): I hope you won't complain later when I say something as nice as that to you!

**LEO:** All right, I get it: cut it out.

**IRENA:** You did ask for them, didn't you Magda?

**MAGDA:** Ask for them?

**IRENA:** I didn't mean it that way, I'm sorry, I talk too much.

**LEO** (to **IRENA**): Congratulations! Congratulations on finally admitting it.

*Forced laughter from them all.*

(To **MAGDA**.) You were going to get a vase.

**MAGDA**: I see you're both just fine.

**LEO**: Vladimir's not here yet then?

*MAGDA exits without replying. IRENA and LEO almost whisper.*

**IRENA**: Stop asking her about Vladimir, I've told you they're probably getting divorced! Somebody said they already are.

**LEO**: Sure! That's his jacket hanging in the hallway.

**IRENA**: What if it isn't his? Oh, what do I care! Those two have been getting a divorce ever since they've been together. He keeps moving out then coming back to her again, poor Magda.

**LEO**: Is it because she can't have children, or because he likes young cunts?

**IRENA**: Eeeergh, you're disgusting!

**LEO**: That doesn't change the fact that the table's set for two.

**IRENA**: Strange. (*Picks up the empty bottle and sniffs it.*) Interesting.

**LEO**: What did you have to drag me here for?

**IRENA:** If I'm not mistaken, you wanted to see Vladimir! Actually, I don't know how long I'm going to last out, I feel like I'm going to suffocate.

**LEO:** Funny smell.

**IRENA:** Magda's perfume. It smells disgusting. (*Looks at the flowers.*) Still collecting that rubbish. They stink. Phoo! (*Sneezes again.*) Come here, take a sniff of this.

**LEO:** No thanks.

**IRENA:** Open a window. Isn't she acting strangely!

**LEO:** If she's consumed the whole bottle, she's holding up pretty well.

**IRENA:** I'm going to hide the one we've brought.

**LEO:** I meant the tablets, not the cognac.

**IRENA:** You're right, take one of those and you're out like a light!

*LEO opens a window. MAGDA returns just when IRENA is holding the bottle of cognac in one hand and the box of tablets in the other.*

**LEO (to MAGDA):** You could sell tickets with a view like this.

**MAGDA:** No charge to friends. So what brings you two here?

**IRENA:** Yes, what?! Well, Leo was tired and went to sleep this afternoon as usual ...

**LEO:** And we ate some lunch, tell her. You could swop the recipe, too.

**IRENA:** I'm really glad you invited us ... after such a long time.

**LEO:** Well, I believe you. What about you, Magda?

**MAGDA:** (*sourly, distantly*): And how are you otherwise?

**IRENA** (*looking at her husband and repeating what he has just said*): Fine, thanks, what about you, Magda?

**MAGDA:** I'm O.K.!

*LEO sits at the table. MAGDA doesn't like it.*

**IRENA:** You still like roses then? They're lovely.

**MAGDA:** Shall we open the cognac?

**LEO:** I'd rather have beer, if that's all right.

**IRENA:** Nothing for me.

**MAGDA:** Unfortunately I don't have anything else to drink in the house.

**IRENA:** Oh really?

**MAGDA:** Yes.

*IRENA picks up the small bottle and fiddles with it. MAGDA quickly puts the box of tablets away into her pocket.*

**LEO:** I'll have a cognac then. And one for her too ...

**IRENA:** I said I didn't want any!

**LEO:** I know, you'd rather be annoying. There's nothing wrong with having a drink, is there Magda?

**IRENA:** As long as she learns how to stop!

**LEO** (*To MAGDA*): You're still a great gal.

**IRENA:** Why didn't you call me yourself?

**MAGDA:** I've got a lot on at work.

**IRENA:** Yes, she told me when I asked her ...

**MAGDA:** Who?

**LEO** (*to IRENA*): Have a little drink, go on.

**MAGDA:** And how are you getting on?

**IRENA:** Matthew's got a girlfriend, Leo stares at the television non-stop, and I ... well, you know ...

**LEO:** She just slaves away.

**IRENA:** Have you started again?! (*To MAGDA.*) What about you two?

**MAGDA:** Us? Oh, Vladimir and me? Nothing, as usual ... You know ...

**IRENA:** Yes, work, home, kids ... . Sorry. I forgot you haven't got any.

**LEO:** Where's your television?

**IRENA:** You're not going to watch television when you're visiting, surely!

**LEO:** Does Vladimir always work so late? It's almost eight.

**MAGDA:** Eight?!

**IRENA:** That girl who cooks and cleans for you, that student, she's foreign, isn't she?

**MAGDA:** I don't have anybody cooking and cleaning for me.

**LEO:** Don't you really have a television?

**IRENA:** I mean the one who phoned instead of you ...

**MAGDA:** I've no idea what you're talking about.

**LEO:** Then we have a similar difficulty.

**IRENA** (*to LEO*): I'll talk to you later! (*To MAGDA.*) Does she live here in the flat?

**LEO:** Cheers!

**IRENA:** What's it like, taking a stranger into your flat?

**LEO** (*to IRENA*): I hope you're not getting any sick ideas into your head!

**MAGDA:** No-one's living with me. You must have been dreaming.

**LEO:** She gets confused sometimes.

**IRENA:** I know perfectly well what I'm saying, I'm not mad. Have you or haven't you?

**MAGDA:** Beer?

**IRENA:** You don't have a young woman who cleans for you?

**LEO:** I thought you were happy with our little Maria.

*IRENA sneezes again.*

**MAGDA:** Have you got a cold?

**IRENA:** No, you know I wouldn't be up and about if I had.

**MAGDA:** Well, we're all unwell.

**LEO:** Yes, each in their own way.

**IRENA:** I'm not unwell at all and I also wasn't dreaming this morning when, when was it, around nine, yes, around nine this morning, some girl called ... She didn't introduce herself. She sounded foreign, so I assumed you have her in to clean. Anyway, this girl, she sounded young, she said you were having a party and we were invited. She said there'd be a lot of people, all your and Vladimir's old friends, you were at work, you asked her, you gave her the telephone numbers, because you didn't have time, you asked her to call everyone! She suggested I bring you flowers, she reminded me you like chrysanthemums, in case I might have forgotten, I must say I really had, though I know you like roses and ...

**MAGDA** (*trying very hard to remain calm*): No-one cleans for me, no-one lives here and I didn't invite anybody. And I hate chrysanthemums, they're the only flowers I can't stand, you know that very well!

**IRENA:** Then throw them in the dust-bin.

**MADGA:** I already have.

**IRENA** (*stands up*): Thank you for everything. Especially the hospitality!

**MAGDA:** So now you're going to be offended?

**IRENA** (*to LEO*): I'm leaving.

**LEO:** Women!

**IRENA** (*to MAGDA*): You know what, I was really pleased we were going to see each other. Never mind why we haven't for such a long time!

**MAGDA:** Perhaps someone had a grudge against you. It does happen.

**LEO** (*to IRENA*): You drink too much, and then ...

**MAGDA:** And how's your son, what's his name again ...?

**IRENA:** I've already told you!

**LEO** (*to IRENA*): Look at our Magda, after all these years, she's still waiting for her love by candlelight.

**IRENA:** Are you ever going to stop criticising me?

**LEO:** Don't you know a joke when you hear one!

**IRENA** (*to MAGDA*): We're going, so we don't spoil your romantic evening.

**MAGDA:** Well, it's nice to have had a chat again, isn't it?

**IRENA** (*to LEO*): Just tell me how this girl on the phone knew we know each other?



**LEO:** That's a question for Sherlock Holmes.

**MAGDA:** Some people do nothing but interfere in other people's business. And there's a lot of them around, as you probably know.

**IRENA** (*to LEO*): Let's go. I feel like I'm banging my head against a wall.

*A door is heard slamming somewhere in the flat. They all stop dead and listen for a moment.*

**MAGDA** (*improvising*): There's a draught somewhere.

**IRENA:** I'm sure the telephone company's got a record of who calls, or at least where they called from.

**LEO:** Irena!

**IRENA:** What? What if they've carried off half your possessions while you've been here? Will you piss about with me then too! If you had anything in your trousers, you'd already have called the police! This can't be a coincidence. I'm sure there's something behind it.

**MAGDA:** What if somebody else was inviting you? Some good friend ...?

**LEO:** Who's having a good time now instead of us, when we're the ones who should be.

**IRENA:** It was a woman's voice, young, couldn't have been more than twenty.

**MAGDA:** A friend of yours then ...

**IRENA:** I haven't got a friend that young. And I know Matthew's girlfriend's voice ... Leo!

**LEO:** Look, I haven't got a girlfriend!

**MAGDA** (*pleased*): You never know what's around the corner.

*The door again.*

I'll close the window.

**IRENA:** This is just too much for one evening! It all seems impossible!

**LEO:** Stop acting like a lunatic! You know everything about me. You've got such control over me I'd have to be a flea to hide from you.

**IRENA:** You could always find an opportunity.

**LEO:** Is this self-criticism? (*He takes a cigarette from a box set out on the table.*)

**IRENA:** If you light up now, we're definitely finished! I'm not traipsing about with you to all the doctors!

**MAGDA** (*to LEO*): Go ahead and smoke.

**IRENA:** With cancer of the lungs?

**MAGDA:** Oh my God!

**LEO** (*to MAGDA*): I haven't got ...

**IRENA:** You're going to get it though! (*To MAGDA.*) You should hear how he coughs in bed at night, I can't sleep a wink!

**LEO:** Move to the living room! Stop bugging me for once! (*Smokes.*)

*MAGDA secretly enjoys their quarrelling.*

**IRENA:** You move. But not to my living-room, to hers, if she's got one, of course. Or do you only do it outdoors, then?

**LEO:** No, in your car, darling!

*IRENA throws herself into MAGDA's arms, sobbing.*

You're really sick! Sorry, Magda, say Hi to Vladimir. (*Puts some keys onto the table.*)

**MAGDA:** How's she going to drive in this state? Drive her home.

**IRENA:** I'm not going home! I'm not going. I'm not going anywhere!

**MAGDA** (*beginning to panic*): Come on now! It really isn't anything serious. Everyone sows their wild oats sometimes, you have to take it in your stride. Leo!

**LEO:** I'm going to a hotel, she's going home!

**IRENA:** Can I stay with you? I'll sleep on the sofa, please, Magda.

**MAGDA** (*pushing her away roughly*): Leo, take her away. I've had enough of the two of you, sort it out at home, not in someone else's house!

**IRENA:** I understand. I'll remember this, don't you worry!

**LEO:** Sorry, Magda.

**IRENA:** Now you're apologising to her as well?! (*To MAGDA.*) And you can wipe your arse with the flowers.

*(ALISA appears in the doorway. She is carrying a large cooking-pot, in which she has arranged the chrysanthemums.)*

**MAGDA:** As pleasant as ever.

**LEO:** Are you coming?!

**MAGDA** *(as though nothing had happened):* Good night, and keep on being fine.

**ALISA** *(smelling the flowers):* Someone throws these beautiful flowers in rubbish.

*They all turn round in surprise.*

*(Moves towards the table with the pot of flowers. Loudly and happily.)* Dobro veche, good evening everyone, how are you?

**MAGDA:** Alisa!

**ALISA** *(moves past LEO and IRENA. Her behaviour is now clearly on the border between acting and reality. She performs with ease and with her own kind of elegance):* 'Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time.' Alisa ...

**IRENA:** Wasn't it Alice ...?

**ALISA:** She was from *zemlye chuda*, from Wonderland, but I am from Monsterland.

*Forced laughter from everyone.*

**LEO:** Well I'm Leo, if you...

*ALISA doesn't even look at him.*

**IRENA** (*after a while*): And we know each other ... from the telephone ...?

**ALISA**: We all know each other in one way or another.

**LEO**: Witty!

**MAGDA**: Go to bed now, Alisa. Bed. Do you hear? I said - bed!

**ALISA**: Yes, that's why I came, to ask you if I may go ...

**MAGDA** (*firmly*): You may go!

**ALISA**: Why are you being unpleasant? I wait for you to tell me when Sir comes.  
(*Looks around almost theatrically.*) But it seems he has not. It seems these are your friends. Or are they not friends at all?

**IRENA** (*more quietly*): Who is 'Sir'? Vlad?

**ALISA** (*to LEO*): *Ali mogli biste biti i vi.* It could be you. (*To MAGDA.*) Couldn't it, madam? They are all the same.

**MAGDA**: Don't pester people! Bed, I said.

**IRENA** (*to LEO*): I think now's a good time to go, darling?

**ALISA**: Pester? Pester?

**MAGDA**: It's in the dictionary. Now go!

**ALISA**: To the devil?! (*Laughs.*)

**LEO** (*to MAGDA*): Did you say in the dictionary?!

**ALISA**: Yes. Some things you keep on learning to the end of your life, though you hate them. You live also with some people to the end of your life, though you hate them. (*To LEO.*) Is that right? (*To IRENA.*) Is that not right?

**IRENA**: No.

**LEO** (*with a smile*): I'd have to think about that.

**MAGDA**: If you don't go this instant I'll drag you away ... I'll carry you away!

**ALISA** (*happily, almost singing*): Yes, carry me away. Carry me away ... Carry me. Carry ....

**LEO**: If you don't do what you're told, I'll just have to carry you off ... myself.

**ALISA**: Go on, make my day ... try ...

(*When LEO stands up, ALISA suddenly screams.*)

No! No! Leave me alone! Madam Magda!

**IRENA**: Leo!

**LEO**: I was only joking ...

**ALISA**: *Ali svi bi oni*, anyone would think you really wanted to, you want me to ...

**IRENA** (*to MAGDA*): Well, this girl just comes right out with it, she has a sharp tongue.

**ALISA** (*puts out her tongue elegantly and acts as though she were removing a hair from her tongue*): No, it is not sharp, it is full of hair actually!

**IRENA**: I didn't mean it literally! (*Laughs.*)

**ALISA** (*brazenly*): Aren't you interested in whose hair it is? It's from ... I've got a throat full of them. Aren't you curious? Pity, pity. Oh well, who's interested in anything?

**MAGDA**: I am, I'm interested in when you're going to shut up!

**ALISA** (*after a pause. Speaking and moving in all kinds of ways and tones*): Today there'll be a dance too. But maybe the police will come first. Before, yes before, but not in time.

*MAGDA is already pushing her out of the room. ALISA doesn't resist when MAGDA pushes her towards the door, but once at the door she is so determined to say everything that she persists and simply does not budge.*

(*Talks as fast as possible.*) Pity, isn't it? Such a pity, but the man went too far, you understand? So there's no point, even though it seems like there is, I mean, all there is, is not simple either, but I would still prefer the tiniest, little, little, usual nonsense ... In fact I think it is truly better than any sense. But you know, we are always asking ourselves - where is there actually any sense here? And what if there is not any, if it has simply disappeared, if it is hidden, what if there has never been any stupid sense at all? Owwww, it hurts, my head hurts ... Everything will become clear in the end, you will find out everything. But first we must wait for that ending. And then it started all over again. If anyone thinks I'm mad, *neka pita moje*, let them ask my ... my ... *Oni che porechi*. They will deny it, they will say nothing, they will not move a muscle, because they already know everything - everything. *Nehce se ni okrenuti, yer oni vech znayu sve - sve ...*

*Ostanite tu, nemoyte ... molim vas, ostanite tu ... Stay with us, do not go away, I beg you not go, stay with us tonight ...*

**LEO:** I would, but my wife won't let me. (*Laughs.*)

**ALISA:** 'What do you suppose is the use of a child without any meaning? Even a joke should have some meaning – and a child's more important than a joke, I hope. You couldn't deny that, even if you tried with both hands. I don't deny things with my hands, Alice objected.'

*ALISA exits by herself. Silence. They look at each other for a while, they all start to say something at the same time, then they look at each other again.*

**MAGDA** (*pours a drink*): Was it her voice?

**IRENA:** On the phone? Yes.

*Another pause.*

That girl's got awful problems with herself.

**MAGDA:** I've got problems with her!

**LEO:** Everything she said ...

**MAGDA:** Is mad!

**LEO:** It seems nonsensical, but behind it there's some hidden ...

**MAGDA:** Sickness!

**LEO:** No, I'd say fear, fear and sadness.

**IRENA:** Yes, as though she wanted to tell us something.



**MAGDA:** Yes, especially that she fancies Leo.

**IRENA** (to **MAGDA**): Don't make stupid suggestions.

**LEO** (to **IRENA**): Thank you.

**IRENA:** The fact that she phoned us, I mean me, that could mean that ...

**MAGDA:** That she rummages around in the flat when I'm not at home.

**IRENA:** Obviously it was a big deal to her that we came. It's a real shame you drove her off to bed.

**LEO:** You've got considerable power over her, haven't you? What's her name again?

**MAGDA:** Alisa. And she's actually Vladimir's relative - his niece. The daughter of ... Vladimir's uncle travelled a lot, a long time ago ... after the second world war. He was an engineer, they built roads down in Bosnia and that's how ... he got a daughter. And Vladimir gained a sister, actually a half sister, Alisa is her daughter and ...

**IRENA:** Don't bother, Magda.

**LEO:** Leave her, let her tell. I find it interesting.

**MAGDA:** His brother died.

**LEO:** Brother?

**MAGDA** (*confused*): Did I say brother? No, sister, his sister died and ... in fact they all died and ... The child was left alone and ... she was left completely alone and she came to us. Perfectly logical, isn't it?

**LEO:** Sounds fairly likely. They might even believe you down at the police station.

**IRENA:** I didn't know he had a sister.

**LEO:** Half sister.

**MAGDA:** Half sister, yes. He didn't know either, nobody knew until now. Until everything changed so much down there and the poor child came here. If there hadn't been that - that bloody war, maybe we'd never have found out.

**IRENA:** But how did she find the two of you?

**LEO:** With difficulty! (*Laughs.*)

**MAGDA:** I've asked myself that too.

**IRENA:** What if she worked everything out, so that ... well yes, so that she'd be certain of getting a roof over her head. This would be a good way. You know what things are like these days.

**LEO:** Even so, she's still an orphan.

**IRENA:** Anyone would think he's always been such a good Samaritan!

**MAGDA:** It's a great blow to everyone though, especially me.

**IRENA:** I can imagine, but you're a real heroine!

**LEO:** Good joke that business with the uncle, no question, a good joke! Don't you think she even looks a bit like him?

**MAGDA:** Like who?

**LEO:** Her uncle Vladimir, of course.

**IRENA:** Only you could come up with something so intelligent.

**MAGDA:** You haven't seen him for a long time then ...

**LEO:** It's not important. What's important is my wife has stopped having doubts about me.

**IRENA:** What makes you think I've stopped?

**LEO:** Maybe Vladimir won't be hungry ...

**IRENA:** We'll eat at home. You know what she said at the end about there being some kind of meaning ...

**MAGDA:** Complete rambling, of course.

**IRENA:** I'd take her to a psychiatrist if I were you.

**LEO:** So she can show him all those hairs on her tongue. (*He laughs.*) That was ace!

**MAGDA:** Who knows what she's had to live through ...

**IRENA** (*enthusiastically*): She's definitely been raped. Look at all the things they did?! Cut off ears, pulled out tongues, killed children in front of their parents' eyes, burned them alive, for nothing, you must have read about it, (*to Magda*) you must have seen it on TV ... They raped her, they definitely raped her!

**LEO:** Yes! There was probably a whole squad of them, a hundred, two hundred, a few thousand. And where's the baby? Where are the children, I ask myself! Look, my hair's standing on end just thinking about all that ravishing those drunken soldiers did

to her. Imagine the mucus, the pus, the blood, the punches in the face, the hands grabbing her naked arse and tits, sticking it in her mouth, from behind, she doesn't want it, cow! bang her against the wall, push a knife into her crotch ... !

**IRENA:** Stop it! Stop it, are you crazy?!

**LEO:** Yes. Lucky I wasn't one of them, eh?

**IRENA:** You? What are you talking about?

**LEO:** I'm joking. How can you even think something like that! I'm not barbaric, believe it or not, I'm a settled, conventional gentleman, who doesn't even dare to fart in the street. We middle-class people do all that secretly, don't we Magda?

**IRENA** (to *MAGDA*): Do you understand what he's going on about?

**LEO:** Magda understands, she understands everything, don't you Magda?

**MAGDA:** No.

**IRENA:** But what you said ... that's a really different culture, different ... even a different religion. And how old is she?

*MAGDA shrugs her shoulders.*

You don't know?

**LEO:** She has no documents.

**MAGDA:** Right.

**IRENA:** So what will you do with her?

**LEO:** You'll find something! The most important thing is she's fallen into the right hands. Isn't that right, Magda? Magda will know how to look after her, won't you, Magda?

*MAGDA remains silent.*

And so we're going to go now.

**IRENA** (*unconvincingly*): Yes, Magda will know. (*To Magda.*) Bring her over to our place. Well, this has really been ... like in a film.

**LEO:** Yes - where's the dead body?

**IRENA:** Will you stop!

**LEO:** I thought we were talking about a film.

*IRENA is already pulling him by the sleeve.*

(*To MAGDA.*) You'll keep the flowers then? (*To IRENA.*) She's arranged them quite nicely.

**IRENA:** Are you trying to screw things up again?

**LEO:** Darling girl, I won't be risking that again today. I didn't know the girl was so clever.

**IRENA:** You didn't know? Well, how could you know?

*(Now LEO gets confused and worked up.)*

**LEO:** That's what I'm saying, I didn't know! How could I know?

**IRENA:** What are you shouting for?

**LEO:** I'm not shouting! I meant when she came in with the pot it wasn't obvious - so I didn't know - the girl was so clever. Is it clear now?! Or do I have to go in front of the Grand Inquisition again?

**MAGDA:** My God, what an outburst!

*A long silence.*

**LEO** (*completely calmly, as if nothing had happened*): Maybe she's even too clever. What do you think, Magda?

**IRENA:** Yes, she's learned to speak so nicely. How long has she been here then?  
(*To MAGDA.*) Say Hello to Vladimir if he comes?

**LEO:** If he comes?!

**IRENA:** Did I say if? Now I don't know what I'm saying either! (*Grins stupidly.*)  
When he comes, say Hello to him. (*To LEO.*) Have you got the car keys?

**LEO:** But I was planning to forget them, so I could come back!

*MAGDA passes him the keys, which had been left on the table.*

**IRENA:** To check if the girl's asleep yet?

**LEO:** Dead right.

**IRENA:** We just can't get away from here, we're stuck! We've been leaving for the last hour, from the time we came it seems like.

**LEO:** Maybe we shouldn't be going at all.

**IRENA:** We shouldn't have come.

**MAGDA:** I'm quite pleased.

**LEO:** (*Laughs.*) That we're going ...?

**IRENA:** I hope you don't take him too seriously.

**MAGDA:** No.

**LEO:** Pity! Pity!

**IRENA:** Bring her over to us sometime ...

**MAGDA:** She doesn't want to go out.

**IRENA:** Really?

**LEO:** Call me, I'll take her for a walk! (*To IRENA.*) Aren't you going to ask Magda for one of her tablets?

*When they finally exit through the door, IRENA is laughing too. Immediately afterwards ALISA enters, listens, takes the bottle of cognac from the table. She takes a fist full of tablets from her pocket, which she swallows with the cognac whilst looking nervously behind her towards the hallway. Just as she has managed to swallow the last tablet, MAGDA appears in the doorway. ALISA goes to put the bottle on the shelf. She is using her poor Slovene as a weapon against Magda.*

**ALISA:** Nice people.

**MAGDA:** Shits!

**ALISA:** It is really wonderful when someone come *i donosi vam cviyece* and bring you flowers. Then you not must buy them yourself ...

*(Magda picks up the pot of chrysanthemums and approaches ALISA.)*

**MAGDA:** I'm going to kill you ...

**ALISA:** Yes, but first thinking, what to do - *sta chete sa* - with dead body? So afterwards they not ... what do I know ... And your plans with me and your husband? *Ako ovako, kako vi kazete*, if it be the way you said me, looking at things in rational way, anyway it is better not to rush it. Murder in heat of passion! Could be opportunity missed! Is important to have plan! Plan! You like everything accord to plan! It is shame to break these beautiful pots you got from you mother and these rugs you were gift ... when blood soaks in ... it would ... And so is better, please, not to want to ...

**MAGDA:** I'm going to strangle you!

*(Magda puts the vase back onto the table.)*

**ALISA:** That is very better ... But not best! Best would be little bit of torture before everything else ... so we still have little time for prepare, for decide how to do it. And you, you are not your usual murderer! You have consider everything in your life, you have done decisions about all detail, you have take much time, you have plan everything. Then go and kill in blink of eye? No!

**MAGDA:** You're dead meat!

*ALISA retreats from MAGDA, hurls cushions at her, raises a chair, they play at cat and mouse around the table. They shout.*

**ALISA:** I know! I feel honoured because of that I could experience my death in lovely surroundings of middle class flat like this, killed by woman's gentle hand, and



not there at home by some barbaric dog ... Of course I interest in what you do with me after. But you do not know?

**MAGDA** (*grabs a knife from the table*): I'll send you to hell!

**ALISA**: But yes, since you already pick up knife, then it is best you use it, I mean, unless you do not want kill me, and then to cut me up into beautiful pieces, *kao svinyu*, like pig, you know or chicken or ... yes, *polako*, slowly cut me into pieces, and put me into freezer bags, and bags into freezer, so it looks like tender young lamb, then you write date on bags ... And every evening you throw one bag into dustbin! Perfect! (*She has managed to take the knife out of MAGDA's hand.*)

**MAGDA** (*pounces on her*): You won't stop me! You won't trick me out of it!

*ALISA is completely calm. MAGDA hangs on to her, and only realises later that ALISA is no longer defending herself.*

**ALISA**: I am going to trick you, also because there is always some dog or cat can always find the garbage ... who sniffs it out ... Well, you know what. The best thing would be to burn everything, send me to sleep with these beautiful memories ... ah, but what can you do, some little bone always gets left over ...

**MAGDA**: Shut up!

**ALISA**: Silence your voice, the bone speaks, through the ages. Go ahead, iron lady!

*MAGDA doesn't know what to do, and hits her. ALISA starts to laugh. Her laughter dies away in the darkness.*

**Act two**

*The time elapsed on stage has been the same as the interval in the theatre. Music as for the opening of the first act. ALISA and MAGDA are both sitting by the table, or where they were at the end of the first act, on the floor, physically together. ALISA is fairly 'absent', speaking more slowly, though this shouldn't be immediately obvious.*

**MAGDA:** Your suffering wasn't worth it, and neither was mine. Suffering has too low a value for it ever to have an end.

**ALISA:** *Molim?* I only pray for ...

**MAGDA:** You go right on praying; I stopped a long time ago. (*After a while, bursting out.*) Why did you tell her to bring me chrysanthemums when you know I don't like them? (*Gets up and goes over to the bunch of flowers that Irena brought her, and looks at them in disgust.*) They smell like death. I asked you a question!

**ALISA:** Because of the autumn, I can't ... Because of the winter I won't see ...

**MAGDA:** You won't see the spring either, if you don't start cooperating! We all pay for our ingratitude in the end! Kindness is an orphan ...

**ALISA:** Until you put a knife in its hand.

**MAGDA:** What? (*Sharply.*) Why did you say that? What were you thinking about?!

**ALISA:** You.

**MAGDA:** Me? Really?

**ALISA:** Not about you, about my other you.

**MAGDA:** I don't understand ... What you?

**ALISA:** You ... my ... home.

**MAGDA** (*visibly pacified. With relief.*): You can't go back again, forget it.

**ALISA:** Forget? Forgive? You?

**MAGDA:** Them! Not me! You haven't anything to forgive me for!

**ALISA:** Only words ...

The same words ...

The same fear. Blood ...

**MAGDA:** Stop laying the blame at my door. We've got nothing to do with that tribal warfare of yours. I'm not to blame for anything. Nobody's died because of me!

**ALISA:** But they will.

**MAGDA:** What? Do you have any idea what you're drivelling on about? I'm here, here, look at me. How could I have anything to do with that damned shit of yours back there? Nobody's died yet because of me, do you hear? Perhaps somebody has because of you, somebody on the other side. How can you know what's happened on the other side?

**ALISA:** Only one side is right ...

**MAGDA:** And you're the one who's going to decide which one it is??! Eat your own shit, darling, before you point at someone else's! You just don't realise that you and people like you are bringing your own muck here when we've already got too much of our own.

*ALISA wants to say something.*

*(Loses control, and thrashes ALISA with the bunch of flowers so that the blossoms fly everywhere.)* My conscience is clear, do you hear me? Clear! What do you know about my suffering? How do you know yours is worse than mine? We're all the same in the sight of God! And I'm innocent!

*ALISA has hidden her head in her hands.*

*(After a while, when she has calmed down a little.)* Clean up that stinking mess! And don't let me see it ever again! You lazy slut, you either stare at me like an idiot, or you babble insolence. That's all you know how to do. And when I'm not here, you snoop, snoop. You rummage through everything of mine. You eat my liver, you grind my spleen under your feet!

*ALISA has picked up the remains of the flowers; she wanders into the kitchen.*

**MAGDA** *(to herself)*: How could she dare?! Worthless ungrateful thing! *(Louder.)* You think you've fallen through a rabbit hole to us? Just so you can act like a smart arse? You can go straight back where you came from!

*ALISA returns.*

Do you understand me?

*ALISA nods assent.*

And will you remember that?

*ALISA nods assent.*

Have you done the ironing?

*(ALISA nods assent.)*

We'll see how well!

**ALISA:** Can I go to bed? (*After a while.*) Let me go to bed. Please.

**MAGDA:** No! I want a drink.

*ALISA hands her the bottle.*

A glass. That's not mine! This one! Pour it. You have some too.

**ALISA:** No, I won't.

**MAGDA:** You will!

*They look at each other for a while; MAGDA drinks. ALISA takes a glass from the table and pours one for herself.*

You drink out of a dirty glass, you don't know basic manners, you've no culture, you don't even know how to wash your hands ... and still you dare to accuse me! Who gave you that right? What god-given right is that?

Today's been really crazy. When I saw those two I thought I'd have a heart attack! But how do you like what I cooked up for them ... They're probably still talking about it!

(*Laughs.*) My husband Vladimir, right, is your uncle ... his father had a child with your grandmother, your mother's mother, who is therefore Vladimir's half-sister ...

(*Laughs.*) I like that! Let's drink to that! Your health, niece! Drink it down!

(*MAGDA drinks, but ALISA doesn't.*) Pour! What are you trembling for? Don't you like my story? Pity. I thought we might have a good time together for once.

The cognac's excellent though, isn't it? Genuine French. Sometimes they're really stingy, even though they've always been loaded. That's how they've got a cottage and two holiday homes, two or three cars, and ...

**ALISA:** A son?

**MAGDA:** I was hoping you'd given up by now ...! (*After a while, and in a different voice.*) Do you know, darling, that this cognac is worth more than your father used to earn in a month? (*Cynically.*) Poor daddy! Was he handsome? Do you ever still think of him?

*They look at each other. A long silence.*

**ALISA:** What if he really did call?

**MAGDA** (*starts*): Who?

**ALISA** (*sincerely*): Vladimir.

**MAGDA:** He called? Tell me!

**ALISA:** Yes, he called ...

**MAGDA:** And what did he say? Tell me, did he say he's coming?

**ALISA:** Yes.

**MAGDA:** When, for God's sake, when?

**ALISA:** Tomorrow.

**MAGDA:** I knew it! Tomorrow, then?!

**ALISA:** Tomorrow and every day. Today he said he's coming tomorrow. Yesterday that he's coming today. Tomorrow he'll say he's coming the day after. In fact he's here every day. But unfortunately, when you're not.

**MAGDA:** What's this now? You're not drunk, are you? Stop drinking! (*Takes her glass out of her hand.*) Are you trying to tell me Vladimir comes here when I'm not home?

**ALISA:** Yes.

**MAGDA:** That's impossible ...

**ALISA:** He's got a key.

**MAGDA:** I know he's got a key, but ... no! Tell me what he looks like, then?

**ALISA:** He's old.

**MAGDA** (*relaxes and laughs*): Yes, that's true! Even though he thinks he isn't. But Leo's even older, and you still liked him.

**ALISA:** He comes too, but after him.

**MAGDA** (*already enjoying herself*): Watch what you're saying, girl!

**ALISA:** *Dolaze i rade one stvari.* They come and do these things. But without blood.

**MAGDA** (*almost gently*): Well, you're really bored when I'm at work, aren't you?

**ALISA:** Someone is always here, *yedva da sredim stvari* ... I can hardly get things done ...

**MAGDA:** Speak Slovene!

**ALISA:** Why do they all want the same? And when they are old they want them young.

**MAGDA:** Now you're completely mixed up. Come here so I can give you a hug.

**ALISA:** No!

**MAGDA:** No, then! (*Pours herself some more, and drinks.*) All right, Vladimir's got a key, but what about Leo, how does he get in here?

**ALISA:** By telephone.

**MAGDA:** What? (*Laughs.*) On the phone?

**ALISA** (*seriously*): Sometimes he is stopped half way.

**MAGDA:** Where did you hear about that?

**ALISA:** *Kao da ne znate sta sve lyudi rade...?* Why you don't know what people do through the telephone?

**MAGDA:** Where did you get that from? You've got no newspapers or TV ... (*She laughs.*) Does Leo do it to you right over the phone then?

**ALISA:** Yes.

**MAGDA:** What's that like, I'd like to know ...

**ALISA:** He doesn't want to do it over the phone any more.

**MAGDA:** I imagine he doesn't!

**ALISA:** So now he wants ...

**MAGDA** (*in a good mood*): To do it for real?! Oh, the dirty thing! And that's why they came today?

**ALISA** (*only nods assent. As though she were performing a duty that from that moment no longer interests her*): Can I go to bed now?



**MAGDA:** No, of course not! Drink a little more, you can tell me some more ...

*ALISA resists.*

How sweet you are, you should drink more often. Drink! (*Pours for her and puts the glass into her hand.*)

*ALISA knocks over the glass forcefully.*

Cognac is drunk slowly, in sips ... I'll have to teach you. You hold the glass, it has to be the right one for cognac, this is a lovely one, isn't it? Yes, to make it warm ... can you feel it? He gave me them for our fifth anniversary ... What are you trembling for? You have to know how to take pleasure in everything, otherwise things are pointless, everything! Anyway, I can't have these precious drinks in cheap glasses, if I know it's not right ...! Look, there's no more in this bottle now either! (*The bottle really is empty. Pulls a box of tablets out of her pocket. Opens the little pill bottle, which is also empty.*)

No, no! It should be full ... See if there are any more in the drawer.

*ALISA walks with some difficulty.*

I was sure I had some left ... Perhaps not, then ... I'm getting a bit dizzy. What was it I wanted ...? Oh yes! To have such an excessive appreciation of quality ... That can be a serious problem, you know. I want, I insist that everything's as it should be! And if it isn't? What am I explaining this to you for? You haven't any feeling for detail anyway. But that's exactly what matters, tiny things, little awarenesses, important details ... Are you dizzy?

**ALISA:** Yes.

**MAGDA:** Hold on to the cupboard. What if I threw the whole box away at work?! You idiot! Are you ill?

**ALISA:** Yes.

**MAGDA:** You shouldn't get ill from such a good quality cognac! Perhaps you should go and take a bath? Warm water is calming ... Are they there?

**ALISA:** No.

**MAGDA:** Not even one?

**ALISA:** One wouldn't help you anyway.

**MAGDA:** Who said I needed help?! You've thrown them away! I know it's you. I'm certain.

**ALISA** (*after a while, turned away, barely audible*): Flowers, flowers ...

**MAGDA:** Are you starting again?

**ALISA:** All dry, all dried up, dead ...

**MAGDA** (*toys with the empty bottle of tablets. After a while. With feigned naivety*): What if one of your family is still alive?

**ALISA** (*still standing by the flowers*): They are only collecting dust. Why do not you throw them away?

**MAGDA:** You won't get at me like that! You're still hoping one fine day someone will turn up at my door, aren't you? Wouldn't that be nice! And he'll say he's your brother. What's his name again? Emir? Is it Emir? Yes, Emir.

**ALISA:** Did he really bring you them all? I do not believe it, you bought them yourself.

**MAGDA:** Of course it's Emir. Horrible name! Yes, if you weren't lying, all the rest of them burned in the house. But what if they didn't? Oh, of course they did! Terrible, that must have been really terrible! I can just imagine how they must have suffered ... How they screamed ... How they all died together in the fire. How those innocent little creatures clung onto your father and mother, who were weeping, because they couldn't help them, because nobody could help them, do you ever think about that?!

**ALISA:** They stink! Some of the blossoms have already fallen to pieces completely, you just touch them and they crumble into dust.

**MAGDA:** Don't touch them! Think how lucky you were ...

**ALISA:** Brown, grey, black ... these are not flowers, they are rubbish.

**MAGDA:** Not this one! This is my wedding bouquet! I've told you a hundred times.

**ALISA:** They will not crumble. It is like the leaves are glued on ...

**MAGDA:** But you know they have been!

**ALISA:** What? I cannot believe it ...

**MAGDA:** No! Alisa! Leave my wedding bouquet, please, leave it. Put it back ... Alisa! It was so full my fingers hurt when I held it in my hands ... Please, be careful ... look what's left of it ...

**ALISA:** And what do you call these flowers?

**MAGDA:** Lily of the valley, lilies and roses, little white roses, these are the only ones left ...

**ALISA:** Grey, brown, all full of cobwebs! Lily of the valley ...?

**MAGDA:** They've disintegrated into dust, they've gone, but they were ... I had them in my hair, I pinned them to the wedding guests' suits, their scent was everywhere, their fragrance wafted ...

**ALISA:** Faded ...

**MAGDA:** Put the bouquet back where it was ... I won't mention your family any more, I promise, I won't ever again, but you've got to stop hurting me as well.

*They look at each other for a long time, then ALISA puts the bouquet back on the shelf.*

Thank you. Thank you ... You see, we know how to cooperate with each other?

*(ALISA doesn't react. They look at each other quite calmly.)*

I gave him everything, desires, dreams, laughter, and little by little he took the laughter away ... I was left here with only fear, tears and fear, empty rooms, cold sheets, dead longings ... When the tears have gone as well, then you throw yourself into work, you work from morning till night, for years and years the same ... You think you're doing it for yourself, but really you're doing it for others, you feel you have to do everything ... And so you buy yourself a bunch of flowers that wait with you, looking at you ... so that once more ... you can still hope ... They're waiting with you, so you aren't alone, they get drier and drier, they dry out in your memory ... with you.

But tomorrow I'm really going to throw him out. How surprised he'll be, the poor thing! Don't you believe me? Try to believe it. Please, what can I do to make you believe me? What can I do for you to get you to trust me?

*ALISA remains silent.*

You don't know? I do. My keys are in my bag. Go and find them and take them.

**ALISA** (*staggers*): I feel ill ...

**MAGDA**: Of course, if you don't eat anything. I'll do it myself. (*Searches in her handbag.*) We'll make our dinner, we'll eat everything. He can go to hell!

**ALISA**: I'm not hungry.

**MAGDA**: You must put on a bit of weight ... Where are those keys then ...?

**ALISA**: In the cupboard ...

**MAGDA** (*looks there and finds them*): So they are. Have you already found the photo?

**ALISA**: No.

**MAGDA**: You're lying!

**ALISA**: I'm not lying.

**MAGDA**: I know exactly where I put it, it was under here ... (*Tosses things out of the cupboard.*) Of course it was. No, I moved it. Yes, yes. I know, I know where it is now. I remember ... You get the dinner ready and the dresses and I'll bring it to you ...

**ALISA**: Dresses?

**MAGDA**: Yes, my gold one and yours, we'll light the candles and celebrate our truce!

**ALISA**: I just want to go to bed, I really feel ill ...

**MAGDA:** Have you forgotten already how you begged me for it? I'll give it to you, really. The dress, quickly, quick!

**ALISA:** Oh God! (*Sits down on a chair.*)

**MAGDA:** Your God or mine? (*Laughs.*) And what are you sighing for now?

*ALISA is still just sitting.*

All right! I'll get the dinner! Go and get changed! I know where it is, I know where it is ... (*Already disappearing from the room.*)

*Alisa is still just sitting.*

(*Returns with the photograph in her hand, very pleased.*) Here it is! I've got it! I've found it! Get up, then! I'll give it to you when you've changed! Ha, ha, ha, now I've got you! Now you've got no choice, you'll have to cooperate now, he, he, he! Our little dinner will be on the little table in no time at all now, ho, ho, ho! Alisa, did you hear me? Wake up.

*ALISA slowly stands up and floats off into the bedroom.*

(*Brings food to the table. Talks loudly to ALISA at the same time.*) I'm going to tell you what it was like at our wedding ... Can you hear me?

*ALISA responds.*

The main thing is that my darling future husband had said his big – I do! - through his tears and he was kind of sneezing. Of course I thought he was so uncontrollably happy, overcome with emotion ... Can you hear me? Hurry up, will you! (*Lights the candles on the table.*) There we are, beautiful! But actually he was allergic and didn't want to admit it, he didn't want to offend me, you know? Can you imagine how much

he loved me? Can you imagine that? Allergic to lilies of the valley, whoever heard of that?

Alisa, I'm getting fed up with you! What are you doing?

In fact I've heard they are actually poisonous, but he ... if he'd only asked me what kind of flowers I was going to have in my bouquet?! Alisa! Some woman apparently committed suicide with them ... Can you imagine? Sometimes, when I look round this room, I can even see how ... *(Goes towards the door.)*

*ALISA enters with MAGDA's burned dress.*

Well, thank God! But why haven't you changed? *(Takes the dress from her.)* The whole room was filled with them, can you imagine, in every little corner ... What's the matter with you? Are you really drunk? Her body was as fragrant as a flower garden, the things people remember! *(She has laid the dress on the chair and already begun to undress, when ...)*

**ALISA:** Madam Magda ...

**MAGDA:** What is it now? Oh no, how? How could you? Ohhh!

**ALISA:** I didn't mean to, I really didn't ... I'm sorry, madam, I don't know how ...

**MAGDA:** My dress! My favourite dress?! How could you, Alisa? How could you?

**ALISA:** *Likala sam i onda* ... I was ironing and then I suddenly remembered the dinner and I ran to the kitchen and forgot that ... When I got back, it was already ...

**MAGDA:** You're lying, lying, you did it just now, that's why you were gone for so long, you did it on purpose to get your revenge! My ... my dress! *(Walks around the room, presses the dress to her, looks at it, strokes it, sobs.)* Now you've destroyed this too! The most beautiful thing in my wardrobe! Now what can I do ...? No other dress has ever suited me as well. I only wore it on special occasions ... Now what can I do? You've brought nothing but bad luck into this house. Nothing but bad luck!

(Sits down, her head in her hands.) And right now, when I'd decided ...! Why did you do this, Alisa?! Why did you do this now, now when ... It's not good, you shouldn't have, I'd decided, as I'd told you ...! No, oh God!

*A long silence. ALISA doesn't move, MAGDA hides her head in the dress. They remain like this for a long time, each in their own pain.*

(Looks up, feels in her pocket and pulls out the photograph, takes some matches, but suddenly reconsiders.) Handsome, that father of yours, very handsome ... You don't look like him at all. Your mother? Well, yes, was she older than him? I'd say she looks a bit tired! Jesus, how many children are there? And they all burned, poor things ... One, two, three ... six. Ah, is this you then? Look what a pretty girl you were ... Lovely little cheeks!

**ALISA:** *Nemoyte to raditi, molim vas.* Please do not do that, I beg you.

**MAGDA:** You're a slut, you know that!? How come you didn't die?

**ALISA:** I will.

**MAGDA:** Strange, really strange. And there's no-one left, only you survived.

**ALISA:** Emir ... *on niye bio tu*, he was not there, when it happen ... A man ... say that ... *da su ga zaklali* ... they butcher him. A neighbour.

**MAGDA:** A neighbour butchered him?

**ALISA:** No, I do not know.

**MAGDA:** Oh well, what's past is past. I'm really sorry to have to do this!

**ALISA:** May I please look at it just once? *Molim vas?* I beg you.



**MAGDA:** No. Unfortunately not. You could have had it, before ... Why did you do this?

**ALISA:** I do not know.

**MAGDA** (*lights a match and burns the photograph*): For everything you've destroyed of mine! Now we're even! Owwww! (*Throws the burning photograph to the floor, as she has burned her finger, then runs into the kitchen.*)

*Meanwhile ALISA picks up the matches and goes over to the flowers; she holds the wedding bouquet in her hands and sets it alight. MAGDA returns with a wet cloth around her fingers, screams and runs towards ALISA, hits the flowers with the cloth, the bouquet scatters over the floor. They both fall to their knees and gather together the ashes and remnants of their memories.*

Oh, you liar, you rotten liar, you pile of shit. There's not a drop of human dignity in you ... look what you've done to me! You whore, if we all spit on you, it's exactly what you deserve! What are you snivelling for? Eat your photograph! What's the point in crying now? You should have thought of it sooner!

**ALISA:** I could not run so fast ... *Nisam mogla ... vukao me ...* he pulled me behind him, but I just could not, my feet froze in those summer shoes. And had to more quickly, run more quickly across the clearings ... I turned round and stopped ... I could not go any more, could not go more ... I wanted go back, see just once more, just once more ... But there was only smoke there ... *samo dim ...* I could not find his hand, or his ... *kao da sam padala u mrak ...* so I fell into darkness, crawling slowly through warm, later I understood, bloody pits ... There were ... smashed up, torn to pieces ... He was not he was not ... any more ...

**MAGDA:** The neighbour or your brother?

**ALISA:** *Moy brat ... Moy... Emiiiiir!*

**MAGDA** (*Picks up the flowers, carries the remainder to the rubbish bin and then we hear her from the kitchen*): Well, now we both have our memories! Pull yourself together and stop whining! What terrible memories these are, you've got to forget them, we should remember lovely things, not those. Memories like those should be burned!

*ALISA slowly scrambles to her feet and slowly totters towards the hallway. MAGDA enters when ALISA has just disappeared through the doorway.*)

Have you finally come to your senses?! (*Pulls her back into the room.*) You're not going anywhere.

**ALISA:** Let me go ... I have to ...

**MAGDA:** We only have to die.

**ALISA:** I am going to throw up ...

**MAGDA:** No you're not, you're going to lie down, have a rest, you're going to forget about everything, me too ...

**ALISA:** I have to ... tell ...

**MAGDA:** There's no need to tell me anything else, because I know about everything ... Leo and Irena ... You were bored, you nosed around in my things, you found their number and ...

**ALISA:** No, no, no.

**MAGDA:** I know it's not easy for you, I know you don't like it here, but you can't go back, there's no-one there any more, there are other people there now. When Vladimir comes ...

*ALISA is very frightened, MAGDA can hardly calm her.*

**MAGDA:** No, no, no, you mustn't think that, I'm not giving you to anybody. I'm your friend, I'm fond of you, you've no idea how very fond of you I am. I need you as much as you do me, you're my sunshine, my only light ... I'll do everything to make you forget those atrocities ... I'm going to teach you, I'm going to bring you up well, give you everything I have ... You'll see how nice it will be together.

**ALISA:** No ...

**MAGDA:** Yes. My loneliness has become your loneliness, your soul has spread its roots through my heart ... You've got nobody and neither have I. It's as if Vladimir had never existed. Year after year, for the last twenty years, who could stand it? Overnight, just like that, and he never touched me again. Do you know what twenty years is like? For twenty years he's been going to someone else!

**ALISA:** I didn't want ... I'm going ...

**MAGDA:** I'm not letting you go anywhere! Only you can help me! It's lovely here with me, it's warm in here. I won't do anything horrible to you again, never again, you have to forgive me, forgive me for everything, I didn't want to, I don't know why you think that, even if I did once, perhaps I really did think, but only for a moment, that you could be ... that you would be Vladimir's ... that! But as God's my witness, God's my witness, I don't think it any more, no, look in front of you, I'm begging His forgiveness, on my knees I'm begging Him!

**ALISA:** Get up ...

*It is really impossible to tell who is holding up whom.*

**MAGDA:** You're not going, are you? (*Kisses her.*)

**ALISA:** Dress ... my ... dress?

**MAGDA** (*still dazed by her own speech*): What dress?

**ALISA:** My ...

**MAGDA:** You can't be thinking of that rag I found you in in the street?

**ALISA:** Dress ...

**MAGDA:** I threw it in the dust-bin.

*Alisa would cry out in pain, but suddenly she can't; increasingly, more and more inarticulate sounds come from her.*

And now you're going to cry again for that stinking rag? I thought I was doing you a favour. Why didn't you remember it before? I know why!

**ALISA:** Your ... (*Starts to undress, slowly and with difficulty. Sits on the floor.*)

**MAGDA:** What are you doing? What's the matter with you? Have you gone mad? Get dressed!

**ALISA:** I was naked and barefoot, *gola in bosa, ali ovako nikad*, but never like this, they put me down with hatred, but you do it with love and kindness. God knew, that is why he gave you no children. Carry on, iron lady. And I know, now I know. I am in the sky, on the way to the sky, *nebo do neba* ...

I am going home, I am going to lie down in the silence ...

**MAGDA:** Of course you are, but you're going to pay me for everything first!

**ALISA** (*Undressed, with her last words she lies on the floor like a corpse.*): I am going to forget everything, everything. I am going to bury myself in the earth with my fingers. I will cover myself with earth and forget ...

**MAGDA:** Of course you're going to forget, very soon, because you've obviously gone mad. Well, that's all I needed. Now ... (*Laughs.*) Now we've got her, Vladimir! I'll give you a dress! Stop pretending! Do you think I don't know you're pretending, I'll wake you up, don't you worry, you remembered that well enough but you won't, and you'll never ... neither will he! (*Shakes her and slaps her cheeks. Pulls her and tries to lift her.*) No-one has ever put one over on me yet, and they've been cleverer than you. Not even him, tomorrow first thing he'll be standing there at my door. He's going to lick every one of my fingers a hundred times before I touch him again. We already know this game off by heart! But now he won't go elsewhere any more, now he won't have to go crawling after foreign skirts any more, now he'll have a princess in a golden dress right here at home ... (*Starts pulling her golden dress onto Alisa.*) You're beautiful, you've no idea how beautiful you are, you're as beautiful as death ... No! More beautiful than I ever was. Oh, Vladimir knows how to be so kind and gentle, you'll see, you'll see how he'll love you ...

I always wanted a child like you. A little golden girl exactly like you. Alice. I'm going to call you Alice, because you came here to me, to us, to our wonderful country, to save me. Alice, I think Vladimir's going to like this. We'll never be alone again, there'll be the three of us now, you'll be with us for ever. We'll be a proper family. You're beautiful like Alice, Alice from Wonderland ... My golden Alice from Wonderland ... (*As she dresses her, she drags her to the table and leans her back on a chair. Talking to her the whole time.*)

First we're going to pray. I'll do it instead of you, you just listen, no, you repeat quietly after me ...

Lord God, our Father, who art in heaven, who art the only light of this world, take pity on me, take pity on my wounded soul and on my injured heart, which turns to you in the most dreadful torment with only one supplication. You did not grant me the child I asked you for in vain for so many years. You gathered him to you even before I could give birth to him. Only you know how much I suffered, how many tears I shed over him. And the moment time had healed the last wound of bitter memory, when I was

dried up with weeping, you put this girl in my way, this golden girl, to ease my loneliness.

Take pity on me, you who in your infinite benevolence presented her to me, don't grant her, don't allow her to go away from me. Don't take away today what you gave me yesterday!

There! You're so beautiful!

And now go ahead and eat, so you'll get strong! You must be strong, or you won't survive. You'll get used to it, don't be afraid of anything, people can get used to anything. How do you think I did? Some men somehow think we women came into the world with a broom. Vladimir does, God help him!

Just taste a little, go on. You cooked it really well, it's very good. You could make an excellent housewife ... *(Eats, bringing it to her lips very slowly and talking very fast, more or less without pause.)*

He'll come tomorrow, I know he will, I feel it, I've not been wrong yet. And how surprised he'll be, poor thing, when he sees what I've prepared for him. I can just see his face all contrite, standing at the door and looking at the floor, because he's too ashamed to look me in the face. He's ashamed, the coward, because he's dirty. First I'll send him to the bathroom, to wash off the filth. Then I'll prepare breakfast, or rather you will, and then his big confession will start. Always the same old story! I know it word for word already, inside out and back to front. I'm not worth enough for him to even bother to think up something new! Why should he? If I've always forgiven him ... But now?

How surprised he'll be, poor thing, he never expected anything like this even in his wildest dreams. Be a good girl and eat up. Yes, that's right. If you're good, you'll get a reward ... *(Laughs.)* And Vladimir will get a lovely reward too, if he's good.

You'll have to obey everything he says, because he's going to be your father now.

Understand? Do you understand? Are you listening? Listen to me, if you don't I'll ...! *(Bangs on the table.)* I can't stand spoiled children, do you hear?

There, we've eaten, now we can go to bed! I'll do the clearing up ... *(Begins to pile up the dishes. Then she holds ALISA and kisses her, presses her to her, weeps. When she releases her, ALISA's body collapses lifeless.)*

Are you full up? What's the matter with you, Alice? Why don't you answer? Look at me, look at me! Go on, get up. Vladimir won't do anything to you, he won't, do you hear, you must know he wouldn't ... now you're my, our daughter ... Look at me, look at me, if I tell you! Alisa? Stop doing this to me! (*Hits Alisa.*) Don't mess me about, Alisa ... Alisa, Alisa! (*Kisses her again and holds her.*) Alisa, my Alisa ... (*Suddenly gets up and runs to look in Alisa's dress lying on the floor. A notebook and the empty bottle of her tranquilisers fall out. She cries out and throws the pill bottle against the wall, so that the glass breaks. Then she staggers around the room, and pours out the last drops of liquid from the bottle of cognac.*)

*The room fills with quiet music. The motif is reminiscent of the country Alisa ran away from to us.*

*Darkness slowly descends. The music blares. After a while it becomes light again and it is morning. The sun is shining through the window, someone has opened the heavy curtains decorated with a golden border. MAGDA is lying on the floor next to ALISA's 'corpse', which is wrapped in a white cloth according to the muslim custom. The doorbell rings! Again. MAGDA embraces ALISA. Into the room steps an older, long awaited man – VLADIMIR.)*

**VLADIMIR:** Magda, Magdaaa ... Is anyone...? (*His eyes rest on the figures on the floor.*)

Magda ... Magda ... For God's sake ... Magda? (*Bends over and tries to touch her.*)

**MAGDA** (*begins to speak in a strangely broken voice, slowly*): It's ... me.

**VLADIMIR:** Thank God, I thought ...

**MAGDA:** And this is Alice ... Alisa, Alice.

*(She holds her against her even more closely.)*

Go away ... Go.

**VLADIMIR:** What's the matter with you? Magda, what are you doing on the floor?

*(Tries to lift her up.)*

**MAGDA** *(doesn't let him):* On earth. Magda, what are you still doing on earth?

**VLADIMIR:** I said what are you doing on the floor? *(Removes the cloth, so that Alisa's face is momentarily lit. He is pretty shocked.)*

**MAGDA:** We're not on the floor. We're high above. Go away, Vladimir. There's nothing for you here any more. Go away.

**VLADIMIR** *(lights a cigarette from the table):* And who is that unfortunate person? *(Sits.)*

**MAGDA:** She's ... mine, because she didn't want to be ... yours. Get away from here.

**VLADIMIR:** What the hell are you talking about? I don't understand anything and I'm not going anywhere. I came back because ... because I've decided I'm not ever going off anywhere again. Never again. I've decided to stay here, I'm going to stay here with you.

**MAGDA:** There's nothing left for you here.

**VLADIMIR:** This is my house! If you think we've settled everything, you're mistaken. I'm not getting divorced, I don't like divorce, I want to live with you because ...

**MAGDA** *(gets up):* Darling husband, not another word! Not one sugared, stale, pissing word more!

**VLADIMIR:** What kind of language is that?



**MAGDA:** My language! (*Laughs.*)

**VLADIMIR:** Magda, for God's sake, don't you understand? I've come to tell you that I ...

**MAGDA:** That you want to spend the remnants of your filthy, lying, loose-living existence with me! Thanks a lot, I already know that tune off by heart! I could sing it to you back to front. But I'm not going to, and neither are you, because it makes me sick just thinking about it. Because I'd be spewing out shit, front and back, your filthy stinking shit, you lousy pile of crap! You're going to keep quiet because I'll strangle you if you say another word!

**VLADIMIR** (*jumps up*): Don't you talk to me like that!

**MAGDA** (*shouting*): Oh but I am talking to you like it! I'm going to speak to you any way I like! Sit down!

**VLADIMIR** (*almost collapses backwards into the chair*): Magda ... Magda baby ...

**MAGDA:** Quiet! I'm speaking now! You've had your say!

**VLADIMIR:** But ...

**MAGDA:** I said be quiet! We've nothing more to say to each other. Every word about what has happened is one too many. I'm not going to talk about your guilt or my guilt, or rather my loneliness. I only want you to forgive me.

**VLADIMIR:** Forgive?

**MAGDA:** Yes, forgive me for the things you know about and the things you don't.

**VLADIMIR:** What have you been doing while I've been away, then? You haven't found anyone else, have you?

**MAGDA:** I found that girl.

**VLADIMIR:** Who is she then? What's she doing here in my house? And she's ...

**MAGDA:** Dead?

**VLADIMIR:** Yes! I hope you're going to be able to explain that!

**MAGDA:** I'm not going to explain anything to you. Call the police.

**VLADIMIR:** The police?! Are you crazy? Call them yourself! What did she die of?

**MAGDA:** I killed her.

**VLADIMIR:** What? You, you ...?

**MAGDA:** Please call them.

**VLADIMIR:** Call them yourself! You really are mad, I'm supposed to call the police and tell them my wife's ...?!

**MAGDA:** Yes.

**VLADIMIR:** No!

**MAGDA:** Vladimir, why are you so pitiless?

**VLADIMIR:** Me? You're the one who's pitiless!

**MAGDA:** Yes, but I'm a ...

**VLADIMIR:** Murderer! Since when are we supposed to pity murderers?

*The doorbell rings.*

Looks like they've already come for you. (*Gets up and goes to open the door.*)

*MAGDA stands erect and self-possessed. VLADIMIR doesn't return for quite a while.*

You're lucky, it wasn't them.

**MAGDA** (*after a while, quietly*): Who was it then?

**VLADIMIR**: Some tramp.

**MAGDA**: Who?

**VLADIMIR**: How do I know who ...

**MAGDA** (*runs out; we hear her calling outside*): Emir?

*VLADIMIR, surprised, remains onstage. He sits on a chair. He draws back the sheet. ALISA slowly begins to rise from it, as though in a mist, accompanied by the music from the beginning of Act One. VLADIMIR remains speechless. ALISA slowly approaches us – the public. When she gets right up close, it is ...*

**THE END**





