

AT THE BOTTOM

a play

in three acts

PREVOD: BORUT PRAPER

This play combines poetic language with an intense, realistic atmosphere. The combination of poetry and theatre *naturalism* is supposed to set up a comedic distance; however, this does not mean that the play is supposed to lose any of its sharpness and roughness. Perhaps it even becomes a bit rougher because of it.

Despite the language they speak, the persons in the play are psychologically motivated and serious in their functions.

All of the quotes (familiar names of people, events and places) are not intended literally; instead, their meaning is an absurd travesty. They should be understood as such.

The play should be smooth, clear, and as far as characters are concerned serious and unyielding.

Characters at the bottom

YOUNGER BROTHER, hungry

MISTRESS, very heavily pregnant

GRANDMOTHER, almost dead

BROTHER, missing an eye

FATHER, missing an arm

MOTHER, as good as it gets

Characters on the top

PRINCE ARTHUR, handsome

GUINEVERE, beautiful

One

A basement.

A door in the middle. There's a steep stairway behind the door. High up under concrete posts there are elongated windows. Perhaps a sort of chute for coal. Pale light from the street floods the space, reflecting on the wall.

Concrete. Grey concrete. Maybe a basement of a huge deserted building. A heap of rags - a kind of a makeshift bed - is stuffed in a concrete niche underneath the coal chute. The same on the other side. Crates litter the floor. Candles and broken oil lamps are scattered all over the crates. However, everything else is clean. Somebody cleans the place up, after all.

Grandmother is lying semi erect in the concrete niche under the coal chute. She is wearing a scarf. She is very old. Her face is thoroughly wrinkled. Her eyes are closed. On the other side of the room, Younger Brother and Mistress are lying on the heap of rags. Mistress is very heavily pregnant

They fuck.

MISTRESS: (after a while) You think he can see us?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Nobody can see us!

They fuck.

MISTRESS: And if he comes in?

YOUNGER BROTHER: He won't.

They fuck.

MISTRESS: And sees us.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Shake your booty!

They fuck.

MISTRESS: Maybe he can hear us?

YOUNGER BROTHER: We'll hear him.

I put a bunch of cans on the steps.

They fuck.

MISTRESS: He's watching us.

YOUNGER BROTHER: He's not watching us and he can't hear us!

Now, shake it, I beg of you!

MISTRESS: *She* is watching us.

Younger Brother stops fucking. He stands up and walks to Grandmother in the corner; her eyes are still closed.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Her eyes are closed.

MISTRESS: She's pretending.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She has cataract.

MISTRESS: She smiled before.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's deaf.

MISTRESS: And yet she smiled.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She was dreaming.

MISTRESS: There are no dreams here.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She was dreaming of youth.

Younger Brother leans over Grandmother, watching her.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's not moving.

MISTRESS: Is she dead?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Maybe.

Younger Brother shakes Grandmother.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Mother! Grandmother!! Are you dead?

Grandmother doesn't move.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's dead. So, no worries...

Younger Brother goes back to Mistress and mounts her...

YOUNGER BROTHER: Shake your booty... Pretty please!

They fuck.

MISTRESS: I can't.

Mistress manages to free herself from beneath Younger Brother and stands up.

YOUNGER BROTHER: What now?! She can't hear us,
she can't see us. She's dead.

MISTRESS: Perhaps we should put her hands together.

YOUNGER BROTHER: You're complicating things.

MISTRESS: She's your mother.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Grandmother.

MISTRESS: Same thing.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Almost.

Grandmother opens her eyes.

MISTRESS: She opened her eyes.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Mother! Grandmother!!! Are you alive?

Grandmother moans and turns towards the wall.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's alive. Are you happy now? Come on!

Mistress goes back to Younger Brother.

They fuck.

Mistress suddenly raises her body.

MISTRESS: But now she really can hear us,

now she really can see us!

Now that she's not dead.

YOUNGER BROTHER: What do you want, damn it!

It's not OK if she's dead,

and you keep nagging if she's alive.

MISTRESS: It's not right.

YOUNGER BROTHER: (nervously) What's not right, what's not right?!

MISTRESS: It's not right that she can see us.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Nobody can see us. Remember that.

Nobody ever sees us! Ever!!

Younger Brother pulls at the Mistress, roughly.

They fuck.

Upstairs, behind the door, we hear metallic clatter and cursing. Younger Brother and Mistress flinch, then dash apart and hastily start tidying themselves up.

The door opens.

Brother enters the room.

BROTHER: You put cans on the steps again.

Some day I'll really fall and break my jaws.

Brother looks at Mistress and Younger Brother.

BROTHER: Were you two fucking?

YOUNGER BROTHER: What?! Are you nuts?

BROTHER: (calmly) You were fucking.

Brother steps towards Mistress calmly and slaps her a couple of times.

BROTHER: I told you a thousand times you shouldn't.

Mistress sobs.

MISTRESS: You told me... You told me...

BROTHER: Yeah, I told you to be nice to my brother,
not to put out to him.

YOUNGER BROTHER: But we didn't! I swear!

Here, I give you my hand! Here!

BROTHER: (hisses angrily) Don't give me your hand,
for I shall tear it off and throw it away.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Fine.

Brother walks to Grandmother and leans over her.

BROTHER: Mother! Grandmother!!! Are you dead?

Grandmother doesn't respond.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's not dead.

MISTRESS: She opened her eyes before.

BROTHER: While you were fucking?

Mistress weeps.

MISTRESS: I promise I won't do it again, never again!

BROTHER: In Grandmother's presence! There's no, no, no...

YOUNGER BROTHER: (helps him *find* the word)... respect?

BROTHER: ... anymore.

Brother sits down in the corner. He pulls a bag from his pocket. Inside is a heap of cigarette butts. He opens the bag on his knees and starts making a new cigarette out of the cigarette butts... He shakes the tobacco from the cigarette butts into the remains of a newspaper...

BROTHER: People throw them away without even finishing them. Which is good, I

suppose, I mean, good for me, I try to squeeze a bit more from all of this... It's good for me... But, otherwise, I'd say that... all of this... is... (tries to think of a word) It's, it's, it's...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ...shallow?

BROTHER: Such a state of mind.

Younger Brother nods faithfully. Mistress starts crawling towards Brother on her knees. Brother keeps peeling the cigarette butts...

BROTHER: I collect them with such love... Like pearls. Yeah, like pearls... Tiny cigarette butts, and I peel away their stinging heads, so that I reach the succulent crumbs, I'd say, twinkling fireflies...

Mistress lies down next to Brother and puts her head on his knee, while he proceeds to roll a cigarette into a piece of newspaper.

BROTHER: Nobody is that good... Just me... And you know why... Because I love it.

Yes, I enjoy my precision. Nothing escapes my attention. As soon as they drop it, I'm there. Sometimes I grab it before it hits the floor. Last time one of them stepped on my fingers. He dropped it on the floor and wanted to step on it in order to put it out, but my hand was already there... I mean, beneath his shoe. So he stepped on my fingers and my fingers crushed the cigarette tip. Around three hundred degrees Celsius. Yep, on my fingers. I still have a bubble here. Here, look!

Brother shows his finger to Mistress. Mistress snatches his hand hungrily and puts the finger in her mouth. Brother pulls his hand away.

BROTHER: What are you doing?!

MISTRESS: I'll lick it. The wound. The burn.

BROTHER: That's not a wound, you cow! It's not a burn, you simpleton! (tries to find

a word) It's... It's, it's...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ...a trophy?

BROTHER: It's *proof!* (proudly) Yes, proof of how good I am. How quick I am.

Brother pulls a box of matches from his pocket and lights the cigarette with delight. Younger Brother watches him...

BROTHER: In order to work well, you have to enjoy your work.

You can only work well if you truly enjoy it. And I truly enjoy it.

Drags at the cigarette, passionately.

BROTHER: Not only do I enjoy it. I also laugh. Yes, laugh.

A kind of inner laughter. I laugh because they're too stupid to smoke
it to the end. That's my victory!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Can I have a drag?

BROTHER: No.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Just one drag!

BROTHER: I will not give you fish,
I'll teach you how to fish.

Brother throws the bag of cigarette butts into Younger Brother's lap.

BROTHER: Here, peel them yourself.

Roll your own smokes!

Younger Brother peels the cigarette butts.

Brother smokes.

BROTHER: We're family, right?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Yeah.

Brother smokes.

BROTHER: We must take care of each other. It's important.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Yeah.

Brother smokes.

BROTHER: That's why I always think of my Younger Brother. Always.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Yeah.

Brother smokes.

Now Younger Brother also lights up and smokes.

BROTHER: And, while I think of him, he fucks my Mistress.

YOUNGER BROTHER: What?! Are you crazy? You know I wouldn't. Never ever!!

Brother stops smoking. He's quiet, watching Younger Brother, as if to weigh his words...

BROTHER: I don't believe you.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Why would I lie to you?

BROTHER: Because you're my brother.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Brother lie to brother?

BROTHER: To keep me from suffering, I'd say.

We always lie to keep people from suffering.

YOUNGER BROTHER: You see, I'm also a good brother.

BROTHER: Yeah. And that's why I love you.

MISTRESS: I love you, too. I love both of you!

BROTHER: You shut up, you bitch!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Nobody asked you anything! Fucking whore!

We hear noises from behind the door. Two voices, cursing. The door opens. Father enters the room, immediately followed by Mother. Father is missing his left arm; instead, he has an old plastic prosthesis, riddled with holes, as if he used a mannequin hand.

FATHER: Home sweet home.

MOTHER: And ill-fated are those who have none!

Father is carrying a bunch of newspapers, tied together with a piece of rope. Mother is carrying bags full of various vegetables. Mother is wearing an old, worn but clean dress, and a little hat on her head; Father is wearing similarly worn but clean clothes, so that they both look like retired teachers. Father drops the newspapers on the floor, and Mother puts down the bags of vegetables.

FATHER: News!

MOTHER: Vegetable soup!

YOUNGER BROTHER: I'm hungry.

MOTHER: Our youngest son is always hungry.

FATHER: He's still growing.

BROTHER: I got lucky today.

FATHER: Have you collected some for me, too?

BROTHER: Of course, father. I left the biggest ones for you.

MOTHER: You smoke too much. It's not good for your health.

Cigarettes killed our grandfather! We shouldn't forget that.

Genetics looms over us like the hand of destiny.

BROTHER: Not everything's about genetics. Somewhere I've read that they proved society also has something to do with it.

MOTHER: The smoke also dried up great grandfathers lungs.

BROTHER: Didn't he die in the war?

MOTHER: Fortunately, yes! Destiny spared him from coughing out his spirit slowly and painfully.

FATHER: Come on, stop it, Mother! If I smoke a cigarette with our eldest son after supper, it doesn't necessarily mean we're going to die.

MOTHER: He who smokes gets cancer.

FATHER: And he who doesn't, can't sleep.

MOTHER: Oh, daddy, you must always have the last word. You know, what I'll tell you: it's why I'd marry you again today.

FATHER: And I'd marry you, because you could always cook so well.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I'm so hungry I'll die.

MOTHER: I'll cook supper in a minute... While we're at it, how's our mother?

BROTHER: She opened her eyes before.

MISTRESS: And listened.

MOTHER: Mother, are you still alive?

Grandmother in the corner whines.

MOTHER: Alright. If you're still alive, I'll cook soup for you, too. It'll be a fine vegetable soup.

MISTRESS: I'll help you!

MOTHER: Oh, that's the spirit! Daddy, I'm so happy we have such a handy *young one*. Here, we'll get it ready...

Mother takes off the top of her outfit and hangs it on a nail, then pulls out a big tin kettle, which is actually only a big worn-out can for pickled gherkins, from the corner. Mistress starts piling bricks in the middle of the room... Father sits on the floor and drags old newspapers from the stack, browsing through them.

FATHER: They killed Kennedy.

BROTHER: There's going to be a war.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Some say there already is a war.

FATHER: Ah, they're overreacting. History is a good teacher! Remember that, my sons. The generation that tasted Auschwitz will never want to go to war again.

We're in a period of peace. A period of permanent peace.

YOUNGER BROTHER: They say that the United States are under attack.

FATHER: A newspaper hoax! What things journalists wouldn't make up only to give us a more interesting read!

Mother pulls a board from the corner and shakes the vegetables from the bags on it. Various vegetables, picked up everywhere.

MOTHER: I'll sort through the vegetables... You pour the water and get the fire going.

Mistress nods obediently and goes to the window, which is actually a coal chute; there are some cans placed under the pipe, jutting from the ceiling. The water from the pipe and the walls has accumulated in the cans. Mistress pours water from the smaller cans into the bigger one.

Father pulls a magazine from the stack.

FATHER: Look at this! DeGaul died!

BROTHER: Really?

FATHER: What a waste. He was a great man, a great politician.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Didn't he die years ago?

BROTHER: I also think I heard something about that.

FATHER: Even if he died years ago, that only proves the fact that death spares no one. And, nevertheless, he was a great man.

Mother starts sifting through the vegetables. She cleans rotten tomatoes...

MOTHER: The vegetables get more and more worthless every year.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Mother, please, watch for sand when you clean the stuff,
I broke my tooth the last time.

MOTHER: Oh, sonny, you're so sensitive; just like my brother, your uncle.

When he was a child, a train cut off his legs, and for years he kept whining
about how terribly the soles of his feet itch.

***Mistress brings the water and pours it into the can; then she starts
crumpling a newspaper, putting the paper under the can...***

MISTRESS: Can I start the fire now, Mother?

MOTHER: Just a minute, Mistress, wait until I cut the cucumbers...

MISTRESS: Isn't that a pumpkin?

MOTHER: No, it's a cucumber. Feel it, how soft it is. It'll be great for our soup.

MISTRESS: But it seems like a pumpkin to me. Because of the colour.

MOTHER: Oh, my child, you know nothing... It's so yellow because it's pretty ripe,
much like this salad... Nice black leaves, containing all the vitamins and
minerals...

***Mother cuts the vegetables, throwing the pieces into the can. Father
leafs through the newspapers.***

FATHER: They've opened a new shopping mall.

BROTHER: They keep opening them.

FATHER: It says this is the biggest one.

MISTRESS: I've never been to a mall.

BROTHER: There's nothing to see there. A heap of people, everybody pushing
shopping carts.

MISTRESS: When I was a child, I wanted to go in to see if oranges
are really stacked in pyramids, and if there are really

so many varieties of milk and bread;
they say they also sell toys and clothes,
everything in one spot. You just put things into the cart,
meat, jellies, jams and flour in the bottom, then cans,
cheese, bottles of drinks, and vegetables on top,
exotic fruits, strawberries, tangerines, puddings of all sorts
and colours, red, pink, blue for boys...

Father keeps reading.

FATHER: Ah! Fire in a mega shopping mall. Four hundred and thirty-two people
burned to death. They still haven't identified many of them. When they
informed the owner of this chain of shopping malls that a fire broke out in the
cellar, he ordered that all doors be locked because he was afraid that people
would panic and forget to pay for the stuff in their shopping carts.

MOTHER: He did the right thing. People tend to forget about paying, especially if
there's a fire at their heels.

MISTRESS: Did they all burn?

BROTHER: Not all of them. They only counted four hundred and thirty-two of them.
And several thousand people shop in such malls every day.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Four hundred thirty-two... That's not so much if you consider
that there's a hundred thousand billion of us on this Earth.

FATHER: You see, Mistress, fortunately you haven't gone there,
you'd be charcoal today.

MOTHER: Wouldn't that be a shame. Because of the child.

Mother touches Mistress's belly.

MOTHER: This child is our greatest treasure. He's important. My grandson! That's

why I'll cook an excellent vegetable soup today. Full of vitamins and minerals.

Mother goes back to the kettle.

BROTHER: I can hardly wait for him to be born.

When I sleep, he kicks me in the
back. If I put my ears to her belly,
I hear him cursing. Sometimes he sings
to himself. On New Year's Eve...

MISTRESS: I remember, three years ago you brought me
a fistful of confetti and scattered them all over my belly...

BROTHER: I wanted to get on his good side,
ask him to finally come out...
Well, so: on New Year's Eve, three years ago,
I put my face to her belly,
I wanted to whisper him a gentle fatherly word,
and he punched me in the eye with his fist.

MISTRESS: It hurt me.

BROTHER: It was our first... first... (tries to find a word) ...first...

YOUNGER BROTHER: Conflict?

BROTHER: *Quarre!!* Between father and son.

MISTRESS: You can't blame him.

He's only a child.

An unborn child.

FATHER: Fathers and sons! An old story. Look... It says here they sent a manned
ship to the red planet. Mars!

BROTHER: He's starting to get on my nerves. This son of mine. He should finally get

the hell out of there!

YOUNGER BROTHER: He doesn't bother me at all.

BROTHER: You shut up, or I'll tear your arm off
and throw it into the corner.

Mother finishes chopping the vegetables.

MOTHER: How about celebrating today!

BROTHER: It's not the Day of the Republic.

MOTHER: Even if it's not the Day of the Republic, we can be very happy, we
managed to survive another day!

Father keeps leafing through the newspapers.

FATHER: Thirty-eight shopping malls and they intend to open ten more! What is our
world coming to, where is our poor beautiful world heading in such a rush!

MOTHER: (calls out) Meat!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Yeah, meat!!

MOTHER: We'll have meat today!

BROTHER: I'm not sure if it's ripe yet.

MOTHER: Doesn't matter, it'll be OK for the soup, just enough for it to contain some
fat. Our child also needs fat, not only vitamins and minerals.

Mistress holds her belly.

MISTRESS: I can hardly wait to breastfeed him.

Father keeps reading the newspaper.

FATHER: Look at this! Fathers and sons! Kings and Princes! Prince Arthur, the son
of the owner of all owners, is going to open Gravel Pit, a new shopping and
recreational centre.

YOUNGER BROTHER: That's nearby, just around the corner.

FATHER: Only yesterday that was a park, but now it's a shopping mall.

Father rips the newspaper. He tries to rip out the photo from the newspaper.

MISTRESS: I thought I'd take the child there when he's born;

I thought he'd play in the sandbox when he begins to toddle;

he'd grab the sand with his tiny little fingers and stuff it into his mouth.

Father holds up the photo, showing it to everyone.

FATHER: Prince Arthur! The richest young man.

YOUNGER BROTHER: He has white teeth.

Father sticks the photo on a nail sticking out of the wall.

YOUNGER BROTHER: You think they're real?

MISTRESS: My little boy will also have teeth like that.

I'll save some money and buy them for him.

MOTHER: Meat! Who's getting the meat?

BROTHER: I'll get it.

Brother stands up and heads to the iron door in the corner. Just before he opens it, he grabs the iron pipe standing next to the doorway. The door squeaks and closes behind Brother.

Mistress, Younger Brother and Father observe the photo of Prince Arthur. Mother keeps stirring the soup. It is boiling. Grandmother snores, facing the wall.

MISTRESS: He's handsome.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Artificial.

MISTRESS: Doesn't matter if he's artificial.

FATHER: Tomorrow he's going to solemnly open his father's mega shopping mall.

YOUNGER BROTHER: On the other side of the road. They built a wall around it.

MISTRESS: They fenced it in.

YOUNGER BROTHER: There are lawns inside the wall.

MISTRESS: And neon signs, and playgrounds for kids,
also fenced in, where mommies can leave their children;
as they stroll among display windows, shops, cafés,
hairdressers, their kids - all light-haired,
all looking like each other - wait;
and they put things into their shopping carts,
try on clothes, braziers, silk panties, blouses,
and if they have the time, they drop by the pedicurist's,
the hairdresser's, perhaps go to a sauna
or gobble up those tiny little sandwiches with caviar,
salmon and a glass of bubbly, while their kids,
all light-haired, all looking like each other,
wait at the playgrounds, fenced in, bricked in,
there, on the other side, in the place you cannot see.

MOTHER: *(calls out)* Meat! Is it ready yet?

We hear Brother's voice from behind the iron door.

BROTHER: Which one shall I take? Jody or Marie?

MOTHER *(calls out)* The fat one!

BROTHER: Marie, then. Shouldn't we save her for the Day of the Republic?

MOTHER: No! Go ahead, butcher her!

We hear metal clatter, as if somebody in the back room behind the metal door overturned metal cages. We hear Brother.

BROTHER: *(from behind the door)* Prick prickly prick! Here, here! Look what I've got for you... Marie, Marie, girl!

Mistress, Younger Brother and Father keep staring at the photo of Prince Arthur.

MISTRESS: They say he has girlfriends.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Faggot!

MOTHER: Watch your language!

FATHER: Of course he's got girls. Many girls. Any girl he wants. Always fresh. A generous amount. He never runs out of them. However...

Father lifts his finger high in the air...

FATHER: ... he's not happy. Happiness can't be ordered by mail, no shopping malls, no fitness workouts, no state lottery can guarantee your happiness! You can only attain happiness yourself!

MOTHER: *(with admiration)* How smart you are, Father!

FATHER: *(he waves indifferently)* Bah! It's just that I have a classical education.

From the room behind the iron door we hear horrible squealing and clattering...

BROTHER: *(from behind the door)* Prickly prickly prick! Marie, Marie, girl! Here, here... Here, a sausage for you!

Something grey and fat shoots from the back room. A rat. Squealing, the rat scurries down the length of the wall and hides behind stacks of newspapers. Brother, brandishing an iron rod, comes running from the room behind the iron door.

BROTHER: Marie, Marie, girl! Here, here...

Brother swings the rod, trying to hit the rat, which keeps getting away from him, ducking behind heaps of newspapers.

MOTHER: You're so clumsy! They always get away from you.

YOUNGER BROTHER: (cheering) Hit it! Hit it hard!

Father barely looks away from Prince Arthur's photo on the wall.

FATHER: I've read that rats learn fast...

BROTHER: Marie, Marie, girl... Here, here... A sausage for you!

FATHER: They're intelligent. Extremely intelligent.

MOTHER (yelling) Her head, smash her head in!

FATHER: They even get used to cyanide, let alone iron rods.

MOTHER: If you whack her over her back, we'll make stew.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Let me, give it to me...

The rat darts to the alcove where Grandmother rests... Brother and Younger Brother rush behind her. They yell and keep trying, but they fail to hit her. When the rat, with obnoxious ear-splitting squeals, dashes behind the crates, Grandmother lifts herself swiftly, holding a big rusty pan, and smites the rat with it. Everything calms down. Grandmother turns towards the wall and sleeps on.

MOTHER: Some men you are, always forcing Grandmother to kill them instead of you!

BROTHER: I only missed her by a whisker. I swear!

YOUNGER BROTHER: I hit her! I flattened her tail. Here, look, Mother!

Mother leans down behind the crates, picks up the dead rat by the tail and throws it onto a piece of newspaper.

MOTHER: Some hunters! Amateurs, that's what you are! (to Father) Daddy, you

taught them nothing!

Father keeps staring at Prince Arthur's photo.

FATHER: I know. My fault. I spoiled them. *I should have taught you how to fish instead of giving you fish*, like Li Tai Po put it years ago.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Who?

FATHER: My schoolmate. Also with a classical education.

MOTHER: Who will help me skin her?

BROTHER: I'll do it. I'm so... (tries to find a word) so... so...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ... skilled?

BROTHER: ... in these things.

Mother and Brother start skinning the rat.

The water is boiling.

Grandmother is sleeping...

Father keeps staring at the photo of Prince Arthur.

Mistress sits in the middle of the room, gently stroking her belly.

MISTRESS: I'll give birth to a child, Mother, not a stone;

he'll be *my baby*, a living being,

different from anything else I know.

He'll radiate light, glow like the sun,

and we'll turn on new lights with him.

I'll give birth to a child, Mother, not a plant;

he'll be *my baby*, he'll give meaning to our lives;

we'll know who we cook for,

who we open our eyes for in the morning,

we'll know the answers to all the questions,

also the questions still unspoken.

I'll give birth to a child, Mother, not empty space;

I won't give birth to a hollow cave,

we'll be able to recognize our faces in him again,

when we lean over his crib, it'll be like looking in the mirror.

I'll give birth to a child, Mother, not an animal...

MOTHER: (interrupts her) Before you do, set the table, honey. It was very nice, but the tables only set themselves in fairy tales...

MISTRESS: Right away...

Mistress stands up and starts dragging old crates from the corners, arranging them in a long table in the middle of the room.

MOTHER: The soup is boiling and the meat is just about ready.

FATHER: I like it al dente... Al dente un poco... Not too hard, not too soft. Just about right.

MOTHER: Marie is exactly like that. Just about right. If I still remember chicken correctly, our Marie is just as soft and white.

BROTHER: Only featherless.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I like the skin best, anyway.

FATHER: Like the Chinese. It says so in the papers! They eat everything, with skin and bones, and they like crispy skin the best.

YOUNGER BROTHER: The Chinese are always right.

FATHER: That's why there's so many of them.

MOTHER: Come on, my dear boys, lunchtime!

Mother brings the pot and puts it in the middle of the table. Everybody sits around it. Father in the middle, Mother to the left, Brother and Mistress to the right, Younger Brother at the end.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Won't Grandmother eat with us?

MOTHER: Grandmother, won't you eat with us? It's soft. White. Dietary.

Grandmother does not respond.

BROTHER: Grandmother, are you still alive?

MISTRESS: She was alive before.

MOTHER: Mother...!

Mother steps up to Grandmother...

FATHER: Is she dead?

MOTHER: Her eyes are open.

BROTHER: That means nothing.

YOUNGER BROTHER: It'll get cold. Shouldn't we just eat? It's not good cold.

Suddenly Father slams his fist on the table. Everybody falls silent, respectfully.

FATHER: Until we make sure that Grandmother is all right, we will not reach into the pot. Understand?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Fine.

MOTHER: Mother, move a bit, if you're still alive!

Everybody is silent, waiting.

Silence.

In a bit, Mother returns and sits down at the table.

MOTHER: She moved. Wiggled her little finger. She's alive. (calls out over her

shoulder) Mother! I'll feed you later. Don't you worry. We'll leave a little bit for you in the bottom. Like usually.

FATHER: Do you know that the Chinese never say *bon appétit*? They just dig in. Not a peep. Come on! Let's eat!

MOTHER: Let's eat till it's fresh!

Using an old can - she uses the top, the half-open part of the can as a handle, and the whole can as a ladle - she pours soup in everyone's cans.

MOTHER: There! Here we go! We all have our soup. And who will say the prayers today?

BROTHER: I exhausted my ideas last week.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I will... I remember a good one...

FATHER: Your prayers are always so vulgar. It's better I do it.

They fold their hands in prayer.

Father clears his throat.

FATHER: Thank thee for the food we eat.

Tomorrow we'll eat some more.

Thank thee for the air we breathe.

Tomorrow we'll breathe some more.

Thank thee for the sun shining down on us.

Tomorrow it'll rise again.

Thank thee for the love we feel.

Tomorrow we'll feel it even more.

Thank thee for being with us.

Without thee we'd be so miserable and alone.

Amen.

MOTHER: Amen.

BROTHER: Amen.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Amen.

MISTRESS: Amen.

GRANDMOTHER (facing the wall) Amen.

Everybody starts eating eagerly.

Quiet scraping sounds.

Lights out.

Two

The same setting.

Grandmother lies in her spot. Her face turned towards the wall.

Mother stands next to the wall, watching the newspaper photo of the young Arthur Prince. Watching him, she combs her long white hair, which she had bound in a knot in the first scene, as if watching herself in a mirror.

MOTHER: Mother, you think they'll make it? It would be very nice if they pulled it off, at least once. It would be good for their confidence. Men are so sensitive. They always believe there's something totally wrong with them if some little thing proves a bit tricky. Otherwise they're sweet. My three boys! I'd like to see them succeed, but I'll keep my fingers crossed they wouldn't. The parting will be hard but full of happiness! I'm aware of that. I'm a mother and I know how hard it is when they leave.

We hear a noise upstairs. Mother gets nervous. She runs to Grandmother.

MOTHER: Cross your fingers in the hope they pull it off, mother! At least you. I'll cross my fingers in the hope they fail.

Mother crosses her fingers and hides them behind her back.

Father and Brother *stumble* into the room. They're dragging a well-dressed man, a plastic bag with ads for the *mega* shopping mall over his head.

FATHER: We made it!

BROTHER: It was quite easy!

Father and Brother push the man with the plastic bag on his head to the middle of the room.

MOTHER: Is he the right one?

FATHER: Of course he is.

MOTHER: He wasn't the right one the last time.

BROTHER: What can I do, they all look so much alike.

FATHER: I don't see very well, so the last time I relied on our son.

BROTHER: I told you they all look alike. Like eggs. Or the Chinese.

MOTHER: Make sure of it before it's too late.

FATHER: Let me catch my breath. I kneeled in the grass all afternoon. In the parking lot. I kneeled in a piece of shit with one leg. And I didn't dare move, afraid of ruining everything. Our sons were so enthusiastic, mother. I'm proud of them!

BROTHER: If it weren't for you, dad, I could never have handled him. They're as strong as animals.

MOTHER: They're well-fed.

BROTHER: I could barely pull him out of the car. He bit my leg. If daddy hadn't walloped him from behind, he'd even get away.

FATHER: (modestly) Bah... I did what had to be done. For our future and yours!

MOTHER: Let's check how he is and make sure he's the right one!

Mother walks to the wall with the photo of Prince Arthur on it.

MOTHER: Who will take off the bag?

FATHER: I put it on.

BROTHER: I'll do it.

Brother walks up to the man sitting on the floor, his hands tied on his back, and removes the bag. We see a confused face of a young man with Scotch tape over his mouth. The young man is Arthur Prince. He looks around, miserable and confused.

Mother expertly compares the photo to the young man in the middle of the room.

FATHER: Well, what do you say, mother?

MOTHER: The face in the photo is a bit plumper.

FATHER: You think? You really think?

Father also looks at the photo.

BROTHER: (anxiously) You think it's not him. You think I screwed up again?

FATHER: I believe it *is* him.

MOTHER: It's him. Photos don't lie.

FATHER: Let's check!

Father steps up to Arthur Prince and tears the Scotch tape from his mouth with one swift move.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Ouch!

FATHER: What's your surname?

BROTHER: What's your name?

MOTHER: Is that you?

ARTHUR PRINCE: Ouch! It hurts!

FATHER: What did he say? *Hurt?*

BROTHER: And your name?

ARTHUR PRINCE: *Very much.*

FATHER: Hurt. *Verymuch.* Strange name. Strange surname.

MOTHER: He said *it hurts very much*, because you pulled the Scotch tape from his mouth.

FATHER: Oh! That! I thought...

Brother grabs Arthur Prince by the collar and shakes him.

BROTHER: Why don't you answer our questions? Get used to answering our questions!

MOTHER: Leave him be! I wouldn't want him to think we're some ordinary primitives.

Mother shows the photo to Arthur Prince.

MOTHER: (gently) Is that you? Your face? Is this your face?

ARTHUR PRINCE: Yes.

MOTHER: Yes? That means you are Arthur Prince?

ARTHUR PRINCE: Yes.

MOTHER: He's the right one.

BROTHER: Finally!

FATHER: Now we can proceed.

MOTHER: (to Arthur King) May I offer you anything?

BROTHER: Mother, that's not why he's here.

FATHER: He's not here for a social visit, mom!

MOTHER: Doesn't matter. I wouldn't want him to think we're inhospitable.

ARTHUR PRINCE: What do you want from me?

MOTHER: I'd like to introduce myself. We are a family. I am the mother. Everybody calls me Mother. You can call me that, too. It would be an honour. And that's our grandmother. We also call her Grandmother. (calls her) Grandmother!!

Grandmother remains silent, facing the wall.

FATHER: Mother! Grandmother!! Are you dead?

Grandmother is silent. Mother walks up to her... For a moment nobody moves, everybody is quiet, waiting.

BROTHER: Is she dead?

Mother comes back.

MOTHER: No. Her eyes are twitching.

BROTHER: She's dreaming.

FATHER: I hope it's a nice dream.

BROTHER: Dreams are always nice.

Mother turns back to Arthur Prince.

MOTHER: Anyway, that's our Grandmother. She keeps sleeping for days. Hardly eats anything. And she dreams!

BROTHER: Who doesn't eat, at least let him dream!

FATHER: Well, and I'm the father. They also call me Father. This is Brother. Elder one. We also have our Younger Brother. He, together with Mistress...

BROTHER: My mistress!

FATHER: Yes, he and Brother's mistress, whom we call Mistress, are taking care of your car. They're going to dump it in the river.

BROTHER: Because of the tracks.

FATHER: To *cover up* the tracks.

ARTHUR PRINCE: (panicking) What do you want? I'll give you anything. Plastic money, keys to my house, apartment, all I have, I'll give you everything, just let me...

MOTHER: (serious) We want your kidneys.

ARTHUR PRINCE (terrified) Whaaat?!

FATHER: And liver.

BROTHER: And I want your eye.

ARTHUR PRINCE (starts crying) Nooooo! I beg of you. Don't cut me up! I'm still young.

Moments of seriousness... Then Mother, Father and Brother start laughing. Heartily.

MOTHER: Hahaha! Did you really think were so bloodthirsty? So brutal? Hahaha!

FATHER: It was a joke! We were just joking.

BROTHER: This joke always works.

FATHER: I read it in a newspaper. In the ads. They're offering to buy internal organs.

They pay well. Especially for the heart. The only problem is you can't live without your heart.

BROTHER: That's why I sold my eye instead.

FATHER: And I sold my arm.

MOTHER: We don't need any livers or kidneys. We have enough of everything. We just said it... To crack a joke. To meet you in laughter...

ARTHUR PRINCE: A strange joke, that.

FATHER: Black humour.

BROTHER: But always effective.

ARTHUR PRINCE: But... Then... What do you want from me?

FATHER: A ransom.

BROTHER: We'll sell you.

MOTHER: To your father.

FATHER: Market relations. Trade. Just like in your shopping malls...

BROTHER: Mega centres...

MOTHER: Just like in your new recreational shopping complex...

FATHER: The opening was truly gala...

BROTHER: Lots of superstars, a red carpet, spectacle, dance on the water, loudspeakers, important guests, president, ministers, police, army, strippers...

MOTHER: Them, too?

FATHER: Your father held a brilliant speech.

I could hear him from miles away.

I kneeled on one knee, in the grass next to your car.

I heard everything. Excellent public address system.

Precise. Like a Swiss watch.

BROTHER: And I was crowding at the entrance.

They wouldn't let us in. I could see your father from far away.

He stood on the stage, his bald spot shining in the floodlights.

He spoke, waving his hands so elegantly.

He descended onto the tribune dressed like Mercury.

FATHER: Prince looking like Mercury! An all-time classic!

MOTHER: Oh, I'm so sorry I wasn't there. Women are always deprived of things
because of housekeeping...

BROTHER: (passionately) There was light. Everything shined and flashed

as Mr Prince, manager of managers,

appeared in the air, suspended in the main hall

of the recreational shopping centre.

He floated in blinding light, bathing in organ music.

I felt like crying. Everybody was moved.

Including us, elbowing each other at the entrance,

while the special police forces, wearing dark helmets,

kept us away with metal shields.

MOTHER: Magnificent!

BROTHER: Then we clapped as he slowly descended onto the tribune;

a thousand beauties, wearing fluttering white dresses,
danced around the stage as he spoke with
a thundering booming voice: *All of this I built for you,
my beloved people!* We clapped spontaneously,
my hands just kept moving by themselves. Then he went on:
*People are only truly human, when they buy.
And I make it possible for you to be human!*
Look, mom, my eyes are brimming with tears again.
And I haven't cried ever since we thought Grandmother died.

MOTHER: I am also touched, my son.

FATHER: And tears also came to my eye while squatting there
in the grass, one knee in a pile of shit.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Let me go! Please! My father will appreciate it. You'll get a
permanent discount at the food and the cleaning products departments.

FATHER: We want more!

ARTHUR PRINCE: Fine. I'll throw in the discount at the vegetables department. I
manage the fitness centre, I'll let you have annual membership. All of you!
Including Grandmother. Just let me go! I won't tell anybody...

FATHER: Well, this, exactly, is the problem...

ARTHUR PRINCE: You don't believe me?

MOTHER: (serious) You're a trader. Why wouldn't we believe you... However...

ARTHUR PRINCE: I guarantee it! I can offer you a certificate of my honesty...

BROTHER: You salesmen always certify things.

ARTHUR PRINCE: This time I won't charge you anything. This time everything is
gratis. I appeal to your conscience!

FATHER: No. No, no... We want more. We have to carry this out.

MOTHER: I'm already quite old. My time is running out.

FATHER: If you don't do it now, when do you do it?

If you do it sometime, you don't do it now.

If you do it now, you don't do it some other time.

To be prepared, that's all.

BROTHER: (serious) I agree.

ARTHUR PRINCE: So, what will you do, then?

FATHER: Trade with the trader.

ARTHUR PRINCE: For what price?

BROTHER: (dead serious) The price of life.

We hear noises at the door upstairs. Shoving. Shouting.

The door opens. Younger Brother, Mistress and Guinevere stumble into the room. Guinevere is very beautiful and very scared.

GUINEVERE: Let me go! I don't want to...

Guinevere spots Arthur Prince.

GUINEVERE: Arthur!

Rushes towards him.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Guinevere!

YOUNGER BROTHER: She was in a hurry when she left her home.

BROTHER: How do you know?

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's not wearing any panties.

FATHER: Who's this?

YOUNGER BROTHER: We found her in the car.

MISTRESS: In the back seat.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She was sleeping.

MISTRESS: She wasn't sleeping. I know bitches like her! She pretended to sleep. I

know these sluts! When you took Arthur Prince away she kept out of sight, but we found her.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Her eyes looked so sleepy.

MISTRESS: Not sleepy - vicious, cunning, treacherous.

Mistress kicks Guinevere.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Leave her alone! She doesn't have anything to do with this.

FATHER: Do with what, if I may ask?

ARTHUR PRINCE: My kidnapping.

FATHER: Well, she does now. Tie her up!

Brother pulls a wide Scotch tape out of his pocket...

ARTHUR PRINCE: Guinevere, we've been kidnapped. We shared the good things, now we'll share the bad ones, too.

GUINEVERE: What do you mean *share*? Why *share*?

ARTHUR PRINCE: You're my Guinevere.

Brother starts tying Ginevere's arms on her back with the Scotch tape.

GUINEVERE: What in the Lord's name are you doing?

BROTHER: Tying your wee little hands behind your back.

GUINEVERE: But... I really don't have anything to do with him. I dumped him. I was fed up with him. And I left him today.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Guinny!

GUINEVERE: Why are you gaping at me as if I killed your pet or something.

ARTHUR PRINCE: We met in the car just after the opening, there was no indication of your leaving me...

GUINEVERE: I wanted to tell you it was over, that I was sick of you and your shopping malls.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You congratulated me. You hugged me.

GUINEVERE: I was gathering the courage.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You stuffed your tongue in my mouth...

GUINEVERE: Just to get you to quit rambling about the fitness centre, hostesses, air conditioning in your Ferrari, income and outflows, percentages and margins, new building plots, golf courses and the automatic bowling alley...

ARTHUR PRINCE: I fucked you.

GUINEVERE: Like performing an appendectomy.

ARTHUR PRINCE: I was so good you fell asleep on the back seat.

GUINEVERE: That was the only way to stop you from forcing your way into me.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You always fall asleep.

GUINEVERE: Because you never quit on time.

MOTHER: Now stop it!

BROTHER: Father, I tied her up.

FATHER: Way to go.

GUINEVERE: I don't have anything to do with him. Let me go! I don't even like him. I hate him!

MISTRESS: She's pretending! I know tramps like her! She just wants to save her life! The harlot!

GUINEVERE: I'm on your side. If you didn't kidnap him, I would. Kidnap him and dump him in a trash can.

MISTRESS: I told you.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Guinny, you're in shock, babbling nonsense. I'm your Arthur

Prince! The richest son far and wide. You'll be sorry one day.

GUINEVERE: Let me go! I'm one of you, too. When they tore down our house and started building the *Shopping City* where it stood, I was hiding among the machines at the construction site.

ARTHUR PRINCE: I saved you.

GUINEVERE: You saved me from the construction workers, so that you could take their place in abusing me.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You said I was the only one, the best one, that you loved me...

MISTRESS: The bitch only wanted to survive, same as now. Mother, let me be the first to kill her.

GUINEVERE: Whaaat?!

MOTHER: (resolutely) We aren't going to kill anyone!

BROTHER: At least not just yet.

FATHER: Let's wrap this up. Now we've got both of them. We may have intended to get just one...

YOUNGER BROTHER: Ha, ha! Just like those super discounts. You buy one and get one free. Ha, ha.

FATHER: Let's pull ourselves together! Get down to business. Mistress, grab a pen and write a note.

Mistress pulls a crumpled paper bag from her pocket and spits on the end of a tiny pencil.

MISTRESS: Ready, Father.

Father clears his throat. Everyone stares at him.

FATHER: ... We have Arthur Prince, your son, and his Guinevere. We're ready for anything...

MOTHER: Well said!

FATHER: We demand...

BROTHER: That's right!

FATHER: ... We demand...

Father glances at everyone...

FATHER: What do we demand?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Money.

MISTRESS: Heaps of money.

BROTHER: A billion.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Million.

MISTRESS: (writes it down) A billion million!

MOTHER: Let's be modest. Money's not everything. There are other values.

MISTRESS: Then make them burn all shopping malls

to the ground! Each and every one of them!

FATHER: A good idea.

MOTHER: I like it.

MISTRESS: (fanatically) Make them burn them to the bare black ground

and then grow meadows and build children's playgrounds there,

and sandboxes and slides and little tables for changing

the babies' nappies, and make meandering footpaths sprinkled

with white sand in between, and populate the park with birds,

all kinds of birds, flocks of swallows, cockatoos from tropical countries,

nightingales and finches, and make them set up a summerhouse

in the middle and let musicians play A Little Night Music all day long.

BROTHER: You're pathetic.

YOUNGER BROTHER: And totally impractical. What do we get out of this, I ask you?

BROTHER: Even if they rebuilt the parks they'd surely charge entrance fees. And immediately set up stalls for popcorn, hot dogs and sodas of all kinds.

YOUNGER BROTHER: And, as always, they'd refuse to let you and your baby in.
No, I vote for a billion!

BROTHER: A billion million!

FATHER: Right. Let's write a billion million. Whatever will be, will be. As long as it's over.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You're crazy. Crazy!

GUINEVERE: What if the manager father Prince refuses to give you a billion million?

MOTHER: He'll do it for his son. I would.

ARTHUR PRINCE: No son is worth that much.

BROTHER: You mustn't have such a bad opinion of yourself. We should think highly of ourselves. Otherwise we're nothing. Less than animals. Less than stones.

GUINEVERE: (carefully) What are you going to do with us if you don't get the ransom?

MISTRESS: (fanatically, characteristically of a pregnant woman)

We'll dismember Arthur Prince and burn Guinevere alive
and scatter her ashes all over the highway.

MOTHER: Calm down! Mistress! Don't be so hectic. Think of the baby! I've read somewhere that violence is bad for the mammary glands.

FATHER: So, Mistress, write this down: *We want a billion million in cash for their lives.*

BROTHER: In small and medium bills.

FATHER: Now why's that?

BROTHER: I've read somewhere it's supposed to be like that.

FATHER: Right. *A billion million in cash in small and medium bills, or else we'll...*

Father looks at everybody...

MISTRESS: Dismember and incinerate...

MOTHER: Simmer down!

BROTHER: We can leave it unsaid. And let them imagine.

MOTHER: That's right. Let the imagination do the job. Son, I'm very proud of you.

FATHER: Right. Let's write... or else Arthur Prince and his Guinevere will be in a lot of trouble.

Father looks at everybody...

FATHER: Well, what do you think?

MOTHER: It's great, dad! One can really tell you have a classical education.

BROTHER: I think they'll pay right away.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Maybe we're not asking enough.

MISTRESS: We can still dismember and vaporize them.

FATHER: And what have our two victims to say?

Father leans towards Arthur Prince and Guinevere.

FATHER: Well, is it well written? Do you think a man with classical education should use more elaborated expressions?

ARTHUR PRINCE: No one will buy it.

FATHER: What?

ARTHUR PRINCE: A billion million! That's insane!

GUINEVERE: You don't know the old Prince. He won't even spit out a million.

ARTHUR PRINCE: They'll think that you're joking. No one has that much money. It's not serious!

FATHER: (seriously) As far as we're concerned, it's serious.

ARTHUR PRINCE: They'll never believe you.

MOTHER: Maybe he's right.

MISTRESS: What if we still made them burn everything down to the ground, to the
black soil...

ARTHUR PRINCE: Ask for a normal amount.

MOTHER: But it's not just about the money...

ARTHUR PRINCE: What is it about, then?

Brother grabs Arthur Prince by the collar and shakes him like a bag of sand.

BROTHER: Shut up! We are the kidnapers and you are... (tries to think of a word)
you are...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ... the kidnappee.

BROTHER: And you are the kidnappee.

MISTRESS: And this is your bitch... Also a kidnappee!

GUINEVERE: I have nothing to do with him. I've already told you.

BROTHER: It's not usual for kidnappees to lecture their kidnappers.

FATHER: True. I've never read anything about that.

BROTHER: We'll do as we please. WE set the terms. Finally the world is in our
hands. We have nothing to loose and everything to gain. Thus: everything!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Everything!

MISTRESS: Everything!

FATHER: Though, it's true what he says. They won't believe us.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Then let's make sure they believe us. Let's be violent!

MOTHER: We don't have any violence in the family.

YOUNGER BROTHER: It's not about how we really are, it's about whether they'll buy it or not. It's a game! It's business. Negotiating. That's why I suggest we rape Guinevere. Rape always works. Rape is the correct strategy. They'll know we mean it.

Everybody is quiet.

MOTHER: I won't watch.

MISTRESS: And I'll be glad to.

Guinevere, even though her hands are tied, kicks Arthur Prince.

GUINEVERE: See, you bastard, what you got me into. It's you they kidnapped, but I'm the one that gets raped.

Mother stuffs pieces of newspaper in her ears and covers her eyes with her hands.

MOTHER: See no evil. Hear no evil.

FATHER: Well, let's do it! As long as it's convincing. Who's going to sacrifice himself and do it?

BROTHER: I would, but I don't feel well.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Right. I'll do it.

BROTHER: I know it won't be difficult for you.

MISTRESS: Just don't be too gentle. She's not pregnant!

Younger Brother drops his pants to his knees and kneels down in front of Guinevere. Guinevere lies on her back and spreads her legs.

Silence. Everyone waits. Everyone watches.

YOUNGER BROTHER: (in a while) Something's not right.

BROTHER: What's not right?

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's supposed to resist.

MISTRESS: Goddamn bitch, resist!

GUINEVERE: I'm not crazy, am I? He'd tear my dress.

Mother is still covering her eyes with her hands.

MOTHER: Are you done yet?

YOUNGER BROTHER: I can't do it this way. I don't feel motivated.

BROTHER: (spitefully) Can't get it up?

FATHER: (indignantly) Son, there are women present!

BROTHER: Maybe there's too many of us around, perhaps he just needs some intimacy. Wouldn't you agree, Mistress, that he doesn't have these problems when you two are alone?

MISTRESS: (cries) I said I'm sorry.

YOUNGER BROTHER: It's true, bro, your Mistress motivates me...

BROTHER: (angrily) Don't make me tear your arm off and throw it into the corner.

FATHER: What are you going on about? I don't understand anything.

MOTHER (covering her eyes) You done yet?

Guinevere is still on her back.

GUINEVERE: Well?!

Younger Brother stands up. His trousers are still around his ankles.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I can't do it. My buddy went limp on me. It's pointless if she doesn't resist. Resistance is what it's all about. A brutal rape would convince them that we mean business. That would be the psychological effect. This way it's senseless.

MOTHER: Can I look yet?

ARTHUR PRINCE: Even if she resisted, they wouldn't be convinced.

FATHER: Why not?

ARTHUR PRINCE: How would they know you really did it?

FATHER: We'd write in the letter: *because we're dead serious, we raped Prince Arthur's Guinevere.*

ARTHUR PRINCE: Same as a legend. Just written down without any material, any physical evidence. Nobody believes anything that's written anymore. Fairy tales!

Everybody ponders.

FATHER: He's right.

BROTHER: We need something to convince them, something tangible.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Can I put my trousers back on, then?

MOTHER: I'll look.

Younger Brother pulls his trousers on and Mother opens her eyes.

MOTHER: Is it done yet? That was kind of quick.

ARTHUR PRINCE: (to Guinevere) You can put your legs together again.

Guinevere sits.

GUINEVERE (to Arthur) See, you pig, what I was prepared to do for you?

FATHER: Well, what shall we do?

BROTHER: They must know we're dangerous and that we mean... (tries to find a word) and that we mean...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ...business.

BROTHER: And that we mean business.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Let's just try writing a letter. I'll take it to the corporate skyscraper and leave it in front of the entrance. After all, Arthur is the old Prince's son! (to Mistress) Hand over the letter!

Mistress offers him the crumpled paper bag that she wrote the note on...

Then pulls it back, remembering something...

MISTRESS: I know!

BROTHER: What?

MISTRESS: A bag! A bag for fruits or vegetables...

FATHER: It would be better to have a real letter, I know. But where am I supposed to get a letter in these times?!

MOTHER: Yeah, our great great grandpa, a soldier in the Punic Wars, had his family crest on all his letters, in three colours. Black, gold and red!

MISTRESS: Bags are for putting something in.

BROTHER: No shit!

MISTRESS: We have to send them something in the bag, so that they know we're serious.

A moment of silence.

FATHER: What?

MISTRESS: A part of Arthur Prince.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Beg your pardon?

GUINEVERE: Well, now you're fucked, Art!

BROTHER: A bloody part...

YOUNGER BROTHER: A brilliant idea!

ARTHUR PRINCE: Wait!

Mistress's eyes gleam.

MISTRESS: Let's cut something off.

ARTHUR PRINCE: (defends himself in panic) There's no point, I tell you, you won't even be able to get a good grip on it. It's so small. And insignificant.

GUINEVERE: I can attest to that. First hand experience.

FATHER: What should we cut off?

BROTHER: Something symbolic.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Something he counts the cash with. People like him miss that most.

BROTHER: His fingers! Awesome! I'd never think of that.

FATHER: I suggest a finger. A single finger. For now.

GUINEVERE: Art, you're in luck again!

BROTHER: That's right. Let's cut off one of his fingers and send it to them.

YOUNGER BROTHER: The ring finger. I noticed he has a precious signet ring.

BROTHER: Wouldn't the thumb or index finger be better? He counts his profits with those. If you cut off a merchant's thumb and index finger, you cut him to the quick.

YOUNGER BROTHER: For starters it would be better if we cut off the finger with the ring.

ARTHUR PRINCE: My father's present.

YOUNGER BROTHER: His father will recognize it immediately.

BROTHER: Fine. The ring finger it is, then. For starters.

MOTHER: I won't watch.

Stuffs the newspaper in her ears again and covers her eyes with her hands.

MISTRESS: But I will! I've never seen an amputation before!

GUINEVERE: Art, I can watch, too, if that'll make you feel better.

ARTHUR PRINCE: (screams) Help! Help!!

FATHER: Who will do it?

BROTHER: Oh, that would be me.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I'll help you.

The brothers grab hold of Arthur Prince, untie his hands, throw him on his belly and stretch out his left hand, Younger Brother kneels on his back and grabs him... Father pulls a little knife from his pocket...

FATHER: It's grandfather's. A bit jagged.

BROTHER: Don't worry, I'll cut well, I'll press hard.

ARTHUR PRINCE: (screams) Help!

GUINEVERE: Hold on, Art! One, two, three, and it'll be over! Or actually: it'll be gone.

Brother opens the little pocketknife and kneels next to the Prince's stretched-out hand. Mistress opens the bag and holds it out...

BROTHER: Don't fret, you don't use your left-hand ring finger at all.

And cuts off his ring finger with one energetic move.

Arthur Prince shrieks... Then all is quiet.

Brother throws Arthur's ring finger into the bag and Mistress immediately closes it... Then Brother stands up, wipes the blade into his trousers, closes the pocketknife and gives it back to his father.

BROTHER: It's still sharp enough.

FATHER: I hope it's not even more jagged now.

MOTHER: Can I look yet?

Younger Brother also stands up. Arthur keeps lying on his belly, whining quietly. Younger Brother ties his hands on his back again and wraps the bloody stump with the newspaper at hand.

MISTRESS: I think now they'll believe we really exist.

BROTHER: I *would* believe, if I were them.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I'll take the bag to the corporate skyscraper immediately.

MISTRESS: I'll walk with you.

BROTHER: I'll go with you, too.

FATHER: Wait up. I've got to get some air. Mother is always angry if I let out fumes
all over the apartment. And when I'm angry, I always pass gas.

MOTHER: I'll open my eyes.

Mother opens her eyes.

MOTHER: See, it wasn't so bad! Like at the dentist's... You bear with it a bit, and it's
done. Half an hour later you no longer remember it hurt.

FATHER: Mother, are you coming with us?

MOTHER: Sure. I'm looking forward to a little walk by the highway. While cars are
rushing past, you can calmly contemplate the transience of life.

Everybody heads for the exit.

FATHER: Grandmother, you watch them, will you?

Grandmother doesn't move.

BROTHER: Grandmother! Just like we talked about... Don't let them escape. These
two are our future!

Silence.

Grandmother doesn't move. She doesn't respond.

FATHER: Do you think she's dead?

MOTHER: But of course not! Grandmother will never die.

Mistress *wiggles* the bag.

MISTRESS: Shall we?

They leave.

Slowly, whining, Arthur Prince pulls himself up and remains sitting. Guinevere sits with her hands tied, her head bowed.

For a while everything is silent. We only hear Prince's laboured breathing.

Then Grandmother stirs in the corner. She stands up from her makeshift bed. She reaches under a pile of rags she was lying on and pulls out a huge shiny butcher's knife. She lifts it over her head and slowly approaches Arthur Prince and Guinevere from behind. Guinevere sees her: the old lady, holding a knife over them. Guinevere screams... Arthur also looks around...

Grandmother leans down and uses her knife to free Arthur Prince's hands with one indifferent move. Then she walks to Guinevere and frees her, too. Arthur and Guinevere stand up quickly. They look at her. Then Grandmother gestures at the exit.

GRANDMOTHER: Shoo! Shoo!

Grandmother chases them away as if she was driving chickens from the yard.

Arthur Prince and Guinevere slowly retreat...

They look at each other. They can't believe it.

Then they open the door and run away.

Grandmother returns to her bed.

She puts the knife between the old rags and lies down.

She turns towards the wall and rests still.

Lights out.

Three

The same setting.

Grandmother lies in her makeshift bed. Her face turned at the wall.

Mother sits on a worn old suitcase in the middle of the room. Brother is arranging various small things in a shoebox. Younger Brother nervously paces up and down the length of the wall. Mistress is wearing a coat, holding a beat-up bag. She's lost in thought. She's looking at her bulging belly, stroking it.

Obviously they're all getting ready to go somewhere. Or waiting to go somewhere...

MOTHER: I hope I haven't forgotten anything.

BROTHER: I can't decide... Should I take my cigarette box collection with me?

YOUNGER BROTHER: I suppose you could. Even though I hear they take everything away from you.

MOTHER: I heard you can't have any sharp objects - knives, forks, scissors, nail files... They confiscate such items at the entrance.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Depends on what section you're in. Some are very liberal, while elsewhere they strip you naked and look up your butt hole.

MOTHER: Come on! Watch your language! There are women present.

YOUNGER BROTHER: That's why I'll only pack the things I won't miss if they take them away. The headless teddy bear, you know, mom, which you gave me when I came of age. And three marbles and the heart-shaped stone. My first love bashed me over the head with it. That's my romantic memory. But I won't be sorry at all if they confiscate it.

Brother stops putting things in his shoebox. He ponders...

BROTHER: All that's important to me is to be someplace warm,
where I won't have to take a walk if it rains,
where I can smoke a cigarette from tip to butt,
lie down into a clean bed at the same time every day,
eat with a big spoon, listen to fresh news,
someplace where I'll be able to close my eyes
and only think of dreams, pleasant dreams of bright rooms,
dry halls, where I can look at my wounds
and they won't be festering with worms of doubt and despair,
where I'll have a mirror on the wall and see my face in it,
every morning, every evening, be calm,
resemble others, resemble myself, resemble a human being.

A moment of silence.

Brother proceeds with putting his things into the shoebox.

MOTHER: All will be well. You'll see. Not long before they arrive. They'll be here. And everything will be over. And that'll be a new start. I'm so excited. Like when I gave birth to you. I felt as if a door was opening inside me. Opening wide, for a great arrival into a great life. It hurt. I felt like being torn apart when you came out. But I was still pleasantly excited. Pain intertwined with mystery. The unknown. Just like now.

We hear a noise upstairs.

YOUNGER BROTHER: They're here.

BROTHER: Let's bid farewell.

MOTHER: I won't say *until next time*.

BROTHER: Goodbye, mom.

The door opens. Father enters the room.

FATHER: (excited) They're Everywhere. Nearby.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Thank God.

FATHER: They'll be here any minute.

BROTHER: Did they see you?

FATHER: Sure did. I made sure of it. They drove past me the first time, but I ran over the parking lot and caught up with them at the crossroads.

YOUNGER BROTHER: And?

FATHER: I jumped in front of the car. They could have run over me. But I didn't care.

A broken thighbone is a trifling matter. They stopped. At the last moment. The bumper touched my knee slightly.

YOUNGER BROTHER: But did they see you?

FATHER: I stood in front of the car, motionless. I looked straight at them. There were four of them. I stared at them. Then I turned around and walked back over the parking lot.

MOTHER: Did they follow you?

FATHER: I didn't look back.

BROTHER: You should have. You should have run. Then they'd surely follow you.

FATHER: I heard them turn the siren on behind my back. The flashing blue lights reflected from the wet asphalt beneath my feet.

MOTHER: Did they follow you or not?

FATHER: They drove on.

BROTHER: Maybe they went for backup.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Why?

BROTHER: Because of the finger.

MOTHER: Perhaps they were afraid?

FATHER: (insulted) Of whom? Me? An intellectual? A classically educated humanist?

Come on!

BROTHER: I see! They didn't take you seriously.

FATHER: I wasn't ready to throw in the towel... I waited for them again. At the new recreational shopping centre this time. They were there.

BROTHER: The same ones?

FATHER: Different ones. Two cars. I went up to the entrance to the shopping mall, waited a bit, just enough for them to notice me, then turned around and ran in our direction. I wanted it to appear as if I stole something. I was convinced they'd follow me. *Hey, wait up, sir!* And they came. They followed me! I heard them running!

MOTHER: (exuberantly) Then they'll soon be here!

FATHER: Certainly. I heard sirens outside. On all sides. They're slowly tightening their grip. They'll surround us and storm in here...

YOUNGER BROTHER: They finally took us seriously!

BROTHER: If I knew that I'd cut off a finger years ago.

MOTHER: How much time do we have left?

FATHER: Enough to say goodbye.

Father walks up to Mother and hugs her.

FATHER: Mother, thank you, we made a wonderful family.

MOTHER: You were the best father.

FATHER: Probably we'll never see each other again.

MOTHER: No. Women have their own section.

FATHER: Well, but it was nice, right?

MOTHER: We had a really good time here. (remembers) Blazes, did you let Jody out?

BROTHER: I'll do it right away.

Brother heads to the small iron door and disappears in the back room.

MOTHER: We won't need Jody anymore. Let her live, the poor thing! She's lucky.

There's a holiday in a week's time. She surely wouldn't live through that.

FATHER: I'm sure we'll get real macaroni stew for the holidays.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I hear they even serve sweets for the holidays.

MOTHER: Cookies in the shape of the state crest, sprinkled with the finest Vanilla dust. They make them at the women's section.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Vanilla dust still exists?

We hear the characteristic squealing from the next room. We hear Brother's voice: *Jody, Jody girl, here's some sausage, don't be afraid, I won't hurt you.*

FATHER: And after the festive supper they'll organise a cultural event.

MOTHER: Maybe we'll see each other then! I'll apply for the drama club. I used to recite poems when I was young. *Freedom, happiness, reconciliation; shall shine upon us once again...* We'll most surely perform in the men's section, too. We'll see each other.

FATHER: But we won't be permitted to touch.

MOTHER: Perhaps we'll be able to. In some corner. Secretly. Just like when we were young.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I'll try get some training. I always wanted to be a cleaner in a shopping mall. When everybody leaves, you come in and clean between the shelves.

MOTHER: You're young. Talented. They'll let you. Maybe not right away, but surely in about five years or so.

FATHER: I can't wait for them to arrive!

YOUNGER BROTHER: (impatiently) What's keeping them!

Brother comes back from the back room.

He slams the door shut behind him.

BROTHER: She won't come out.

MOTHER: Who?

BROTHER: Jody. I said: *My little Jody, we won't eat you, I offer you freedom!* And she crawled even further into the corner.

MOTHER: Stupid animal.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She'd rather die in the cage!

BROTHER: She won't. I killed her.

FATHER: You did the right thing: he who doesn't want freedom, doesn't deserve prison.

Everybody falls silent.

They hear something.

BROTHER: I think I... (tries to think of a word) That I...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ... heard.

BROTHER: That I heard something.

FATHER: They're here. Get ready. No resistance. Is that clear?

BROTHER: I'll try to restrain myself.

FATHER: They're highly trained. They'd break your arm in a jiffy. Poke your eye out. Peel the skin from your most sensitive parts.

MOTHER: (has an idea) Hands up.

FATHER: Everybody, hands up. That's the only signal they know.

Everybody puts their hands in the air.

MOTHER: You too, Mistress.

**Mistress looks at Mother, Father, Brother and Younger Brother
absentmindedly, their hands in the air.**

MOTHER: Being pregnant is no excuse.

BROTHER: What do they know of pregnancy.

Mistress also raises her arms.

MOTHER: Grandmother, you hear, hands up.

Grandmother doesn't respond.

FATHER: Is she dead?

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's not moving.

MOTHER: Mother! Grandmother!! Are you dead?

Grandmother doesn't move.

BROTHER: She's dead.

MOTHER: She's not dead. She's just pretending.

FATHER: What'll happen to her?

MOTHER: She'll have a wonderful time. Tea at five, fresh diapers every evening,

maybe they'll even give her glasses and hearing aid...

FATHER: What happens if they leave her here!

MOTHER: They won't. I'll testify against her. I'll say she was more fanatical than any
of us.

They stand there, arms raised, waiting.

In a while...

YOUNGER BROTHER: What are they doing! Why won't they come?

BROTHER: They're afraid of us.

FATHER: They're right to be. After all, we're bloodthirsty.

MOTHER: We cut his finger off.

FATHER: Young owner's finger.

BROTHER: That's a serious crime.

MOTHER: A most serious crime.

They wait, arms raised.

FATHER: When they break in, we have to keep our cool. No unnecessary movement.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Probably they'll throw in a smoke grenade first.

BROTHER: You think?

YOUNGER BROTHER: They always do that.

FATHER: We mustn't resist. But we also can't just confess to everything. First we deny it, then break down and confess.

MOTHER: I wouldn't want them to pardon us.

FATHER: That would be catastrophic. All values would be broken.

MOTHER: Although that has happened often.

BROTHER: Values are broken three times in a century.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Have they been broken in this one already?

FATHER: Sure. Several times. But that doesn't mean anything. Values are unpredictable. A living and ever changing formation.

They wait, arms raised.

BROTHER: Let's spread our legs.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Why should we do that?

BROTHER: If you spread your legs, they can perform a cavity search more easily.

FATHER: We could stand against the wall. My arms hurt. I'd like to lean against something.

MOTHER: We shouldn't be too obliging.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Because of pride, at least.

MOTHER: They could get suspicious of our trying so hard and decide to leave us outside, despite everything.

Mistress drops her arms and collapses to the floor.

The rest of them keep holding their arms up.

MISTRESS: I can't do it anymore.

BROTHER: Hold on, Mistress, hold on!

MOTHER: For baby's sake!

BROTHER: Think of how nice it'll be for him; you'll bathe him in warm water, powder his bottom, they'll give you tiny little clothes, pink for girls, blue for boys, he'll have a neat little cap, several caps in different colours, and if you don't have any milk you'll get powdered milk, enriched with minerals...

Mistress covers her face and cries.

MISTRESS: He'll never come out. He doesn't want to.

MOTHER: He will, he will! It's only that up until now the conditions weren't right.

Younger Brother drops his arms. He goes berserk.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Enough of this! Where are they, goddamn rotten assholes!

Fucking unreliable sons of bitches!

MOTHER: Well, well! Sonny boy! There are women present.

YOUNGER BROTHER: To fuck with people like this! Fucking cocksuckers! You can't

trust anyone these days! And I'd like to trust! Fucking hell, I really would. I want some order. Real order! Motherfuckers! I want cause and effect! Crime and punishment! I want supper!! I want supper!!! I deserve it!!!!

Younger Brother leaps through the door.

MOTHER: (yells after him) Son, be careful!

FATHER: (yells after him) If they shoot you, don't let them hit any vital organs!

They all lower their hands.

They sit down, tired, on their bundles and suitcases.

After a while...

BROTHER: What if Grandmother failed to do it right?

MOTHER: Grandmother always sticks to the agreement.

FATHER: She's never failed us.

They are quiet. Waiting.

BROTHER: Winter will be tough.

MOTHER: And spring even tougher.

FATHER: Summer will be intolerable.

BROTHER: And autumn will be sad.

They're quiet. Waiting.

BROTHER: If somebody cut off my finger I'd be very very angry.

FATHER: Even if it's just your left-hand ring finger...

MOTHER: I'd never forgive that. I'd have my revenge. I'd demand punishment. And
you all know I'm not violent.

They're quiet. Waiting.

BROTHER: I can't believe they're not here yet.

FATHER: Maybe they just didn't remember.

BROTHER: If someone cut off my finger and raped Guinevere...

FATHER: There was no rape, just attempted rape...

BROTHER: Psychological pain, humiliation, fear... Even though he didn't in fact rape her, the pain remains the same. Such crime deserves severe punishment.

MOTHER: (thoughtfully) Maybe it's just simple human forgetfulness.

FATHER: Sorry, mom, I can't agree with this. Each time he looks at his missing finger, he remembers.

MOTHER: I don't mean that kind of forgetfulness,
I'm talking about distraction. People forget faces,
smells, they confuse streets, forget umbrellas,
fathers forget their sons, wives their husbands,
one lover forgets the other, sometimes we put too much
salt in the soup, forget to pay our taxes...
People forget, they're bad at spatial orientation,
can't read maps, predict the future... Especially if they're in shock...

FATHER: So, you think they forgot where we are.

MOTHER: It's possible.

BROTHER: (upset) Impossible! We were hiding behind the containers when
Grandmother let them go and they came out running. Arthur Prince was
looking around in all directions and so was Guinevere. It's impossible, they
wouldn't forget where they were kidnapped and bullied...

MOTHER: They were looking back because they were afraid. Afraid that outside we
would grab them and drag them down to the bottom again. Prince Arthur was
looking around simply because he had nine fingers left. He was afraid to lose

more fingers. He wasn't looking back to remember where he came from. They were running to forget as soon as possible, not to remember.

BROTHER: (upset) Impossible! Impossible!

FATHER: Mother is right. They forgot about us.

BROTHER: What about them? They must have been looking for us. With helicopters, cars, airplanes, armoured cars, trained dogs. We shouldn't forget they are well aware that whoever cuts off a finger would not stop when it comes to a head.

FATHER: There are thousands like us. Millions.

MOTHER: Billions of millions!

FATHER: They lost us in the billions of millions of people like us.

MOTHER: We are not the only ones, so it's easy to forget about us.

The door opens. Younger Brother returns. He slams the metal door behind him in anger. They all look at him in hope.

FATHER: So?

Younger Brother goes silently to his bundle and empties the contents into the corner.

BROTHER: Where are they?

Younger Brother takes off his coat and hangs it on the nail.

YOUNGER BROTHER: They aren't there.

MOTHER: Are you sure you looked thoroughly?

YOUNGER BROTHER: I walked to the highway three times and then to the shopping mall...

BROTHER: And?

YOUNGER BROTHER: I yelled at the top of my voice...

MOTHER: What did you yell?

YOUNGER BROTHER: *I did it! I did it!*

FATHER: You should have been more precise.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Then I walked to the entrance to the recreational shopping centre and on the front of it there was a large picture of Prince Arthur, smiling his white smile, so I lifted my hands and showed my fingers...

Younger Brother lifts his hands and spreads the fingers on both hands.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I said to everyone who passed by: *I have all ten fingers. But some people don't.* I went to the security, even to the doorman in the corporate skyscraper, then I went further, to the city centre itself, to the main square, I stood under the flag, I stopped cars at the parking lot, knocked on doors, stopped in front of offices, in front of ministries and screamed out as loud as I could: *I have all ten fingers! But some people don't!*

BROTHER: And?

YOUNGER BROTHER: No one was interested in why some people don't.

FATHER: As I said, not precise enough, too symbolic, lacking substance, too poetic...

YOUNGER BROTHER: Then I turned myself in.

MOTHER: A smart move! I'm proud of you!

YOUNGER BROTHER: I confessed to everything. I poured my heart out. Described everything in detail. Exaggerated a bit. I wanted to be a beast, I wanted them to believe that we were beasts, real animals. I described the place, the time, everything. I ratted on you!

MOTHER: Brilliant!!

YOUNGER BROTHER: I betrayed and I lied.

BROTHER: And?

YOUNGER BROTHER: They said *thank you*.

FATHER: Did they go with you?

BROTHER: Did they write it down?

YOUNGER BROTHER: They said *thank you* and walked me out.

Silence.

In a while Brother clenches his fists, almost screams...

BROTHER: I'm so... I'm so... (tries to think of a word) I'm so...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ... angry?

BROTHER: I'm so *disappointed*.

Silence.

Mother is the first one to move.

MOTHER: (calm and focused) What if it's supposed to be this way...

FATHER: What do you mean, mom?

MOTHER: Someone is at the bottom so that someone can be on top?

FATHER: Hell, no! You're exaggerating, mom! In reality life is not that complicated at all. Life is a rainbow. Pure light! Already the ancient Greeks believed that. You can trust me. I have a classical education!

Relieved, they all start unpacking their suitcases and bundles.

Then Mistress speaks. Calm, focused.

MISTRESS: If I give birth, I'll give birth to a stone.

If I give birth, I'll give birth to a dead animal.

I won't give birth to a star or a universe

or a river or a bird. Something inside me

hardened and broke thousands of years ago, mom.

That's why I won't give birth to a living creature,

I won't give birth to hope or to despair.

Nothing will come crawling out of me.

Nothing like a stone that keeps growing from day to day

in order to finally turn into a sky made of stone,

stars made of steel. If I give birth, mother,

I'll give birth to myself dead.

They all look at her suspiciously.

MOTHER: (interrupts her) Before you do, set the table, honey. It was very nice, but tables only set themselves in fairy tales.

Mistress starts setting empty cases.

BROTHER: I'll get Jody.

Brother goes to the next room. Father picks up a newspaper.

FATHER: (reading) The family is falling apart... says Pious the Fourth...

MOTHER: Oh, never mind him! He is a notorious pessimist!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Isn't he dead already?

Father skims over the article.

FATHER: It doesn't say.

Brother returns with Jody. He proudly holds her by the long tail.

BROTHER: (passionately) And what shall we do now?

Mother claps her hands enthusiastically.

MOTHER: Eat! What else!

Lights out.

THE END