

**Vinko Möderndorfer**

# **EUROPA**

*a play with a message, a  
blasphemous farce, a poetic  
burlesque show, a European  
nightmare, and much, much more*

*Winner of the Grum Award 2014, Slovenia*

Translated by Erica Debeljak

**PETER:** Who are you and what do you want?

**VAGABOND:** A passing vagabond who's lost his way.

**JACINTA:** Greetings, passing vagabond!

**PETER:** Where have you been wandering?

**VAGABOND:** (*jumps up, frightened*) Close the window! Lock the door! The whole place is full of black shadows and ghosts!

Ivan Cankar's *Scandal in St. Florian Valley*, Act Two, Scene Ten

**APPEARING IN LIFE:**

MAX

LANDLORD

STANKO

IRENA

PHILOSOPHER

VAGABOND

TRUCK DRIVER

**APPEARING IN THE NIGHTMARE:**

MOTHER MAJDA

ANGEL

MAYOR

PRIEST

PRIEST'S COOK

INNKEEPER

ROAD WORKER

TRUCK DRIVER

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE

**The *same characters* appear in both the nightmare and in life (which means that they can be played by the same actors).**

The **Landlord** in life is the **Mayor** in the nightmare.

**Stanko** in life is the **Road Worker** in the nightmare.

The **Philosopher** in life is the **Mayor** in the nightmare.

**Irena** in life is **Irena** in the nightmare.

## 1. A rented room

*Max in bed. Covered up to the neck.*

MAX: Winter. Cold winter. Floods. Everywhere. Europe is underwater. Europe is under snow. It's snowing and raining. Both at the same time. I'm cold. That's why I stay in bed all day. My landlord turned the heat off. I can't even read and warm myself at the hearth of literature. Sometimes I go out to warm up in a restaurant or bar. I go inside as if I'm looking for someone, and then I sit down and pretend to wait. When the waiter asks me what I'll have, I say: *I'm waiting for a friend. I'll order when he comes.* But there is no friend obviously. For a long time, there is no friend. And when the waiter comes a third time, I stand up and go, to another place, and repeat the same procedure there. But the problem is that now everyone recognizes me. As a customer who never orders anything, who waits for a friend who never comes. They know me as a customer with no money. I even used to work at places like that. I was a part-time waiter. Some restaurant owners paid, some didn't. You work, work, work, but you only get an advance on wages. Ten percent. And then they call security and chase you out. For no reason. Or for an imagined one. *You broke too many glasses. You were too slow. You were unpleasant...* But that is what I learned. That these are good places to go in the winter. I used to throw people out into the street when I was waiter. Now I'm the one being thrown out.

*Silence.*

*Max in bed. Covered up to the neck.*

MAX: I worked at a gas station too, and also at a school. I replaced a woman on maternity leave. I worked at restaurants. I delivered newspapers, but now there aren't any newspapers anymore, only the internet. You click and you get your news. The people who delivered newspapers are going extinct, so are the printers and the typesetters. Even the teachers are dying out. The dinosaurs went extinct because of such a cold winter. Half the world under water, the other half under snow. A total crisis. It's the same now. We're also going extinct. Everyone over twenty, everyone under twenty, bakers, cooks, clerks, shoes salesmen, presidents, secretaries, national secretaries, newspaper salesmen, even television hosts. The way of the dinosaurs. Everything has stopped. Time is stalled and white. My life stands still. Everything stands still. And now someone will knock on the door.

*Knocking at the door. Then banging at the door.*

MAX: The landlord.

LANDLORD: The landlord here! Open up!

MAX: He won't stop.

LANDLORD: I won't stop! I know you're at home! The key's in the lock.

MAX: I didn't pay him.

LANDLORD: What do you think, you cunt, that you're going to camp out on my property for free? Open up or I'll break the door down!

MAX: He won't do it. Repairing the door will cost more than I owe him.

*The landlord breaks the door down.*

MAX: I was mistaken.

*The Landlord and his son Stanko enter the room.*

LANDLORD: I'm charging you for the door.

*Max in bed. Covered up to the neck.*

MAX: I didn't break it down.

LANDLORD: You didn't open it either.

MAX: I didn't hear you.

LANDLORD: You did not allow me access to my own property. You blocked the estate. That is why I had to repossess it. I had to fight for my property! And now you will pay! Stanko, begin!

STANKO: Yes, dad.

*Stanko begins to throw Max's belongings into a suitcase.*

MAX: I'm sick. You can't throw a sick man out onto the street. I will file a complaint with the ombudsman for human rights.

LANDLORD: That position has been terminated.

MAX: It's inhuman.

LANDLORD: It's inhuman not to pay your rent. You're six months behind.

MAX: I'll pay.

LANDLORD: You'll pay in my dreams!

STANKO: Only books, dad. Should I pack them up or destroy them?

LANDLORD: Pack them! And his clothes too. I don't want any of his things here.

STANKO: You're so cool, dad!

MAX: Careful with the books. Please! That's intellectual property.

LANDLORD: I'll give you... whatever it was you said. But otherwise you're right. The room is property and I'm the owner, and you're going to pay even if I have to die to make you do it.

MAX: I don't have any money.

LANDLORD: Then you'll pay me when you get money. I'll sit on your bank account.

MAX: I don't have a bank account. Only bills.

STANKO: Dad ... for these books... we could get a couple euros for each one.

*The Landlord thinks.*

LANDLORD: You're right. We won't leave him anything. And the pants, his pants...

STANKO: Here, dad.

LANDLORD: Wallet... empty of course... personal identity card, driver's license. I'll take both of those. Confiscated!

STANKO: You really are cool, dad.

MAX: You can't do that! You have no right!

*The Landlord pulls the blanket from Max. Max is dressed beneath the blanket. He even has a scarf around his neck. His hands are shoved deep in his pockets.*

LANDLORD: Okay! Let's go!

MAX: It's cold outside.

LANDLORD: Your being cold doesn't bother me at all.

STANKO: Me neither.

MAX: Everything is underwater. And it's snowing.

LANDLORD: Stanko, pack up. Just pack, Stanko!

*Max gets up.*

MAX: You're heartless.

LANDLORD: It's true. For six months, I extended my heart to you, and now I haven't got one anymore.

MAX: I'll pay...

LANDLORD: You will, of course, you will. Stanko...

STANKO: Yes, dad.

LANDLORD: Take something for yourself. He'll never be able to pay anything.

STANKO: With pleasure, dad.

*Stanko steps toward Max and hits him in the face.*

STANKO: Can I do it again, dad?

LANDLORD: No.

*Stanko is very excited.*

STANKO: Just one more time! Please! Please!

LANDLORD: No. We're not savages like him, who lives and doesn't pay. If you live, you have to pay. Understand?

*Stanko hits Max in the face a second time.*

STANKO: I couldn't hold back, dad.

MAX: That hurts.

LANDLORD: What about me! Six months with no income from my own property. Do you know how much that hurts? You can't imagine it, can you?

STANKO: It hurts our dad. He cries everyday about it.

LANDLORD: I go to sleep crying and I wake up crying. It hurts to be wronged!

*Max goes to the door and puts on his coat.*

LANDLORD: Stanko.

*Stanko grabs the coat out of Max's hand.*

MAX: Then at least give me Kafka for the road.

STANKO: What did he say?

LANDLORD: I have no idea. Fucking intellectual!

*Max grabs a book from the table, tucks it under his jacket, and goes out.*



**2. In front of the entry door to an apartment building.**

*Max rings the bell.*

*Irena opens.*

IRENA: What do you want?

MAX: Will you take me back?

IRENA: Are you crazy?

MAX: I got thrown out.

IRENA: You always do.

MAX: I got beat up.

IRENA: Losers always get beat up.

MAX: I have nowhere to sleep.

IRENA: I left you a year ago.

MAX: Irena, I've been thinking about you the whole year.

IRENA: You have not.

MAX: I have.

IRENA: You're worthless. That's what I think.

MAX: I have a college degree.

IRENA: So do I.

MAX: I'm going to make it. I'll get a job.

IRENA: I already have one. I clean offices.

MAX: I'm going to work for a publishing house. I'm going to write books. I'm going to lecture. I'll have my own apartment, a child with you, a loan from the bank, and a car, a van, used maybe. Our kid will go to nursery school. We'll grow old together. We'll

save a bit, not much, but a little bit. I'll buy you a gift for your birthday every year. We'll go to the seaside every summer, to restaurants, nothing too expensive, moderately priced. We'll be decent middle-class people, happy. Don't throw away happiness, Irena!

IRENA: You're a crazy dreamer! Middle class! Don't make me laugh. Did you fall on your head? There hasn't been a middle class for a long time now!

MAX: You're my only hope.

IRENA: Your last hope?

MAX: Just hope.

IRENA: I left you because you didn't take care of me. The male is supposed to take care of the female. That's what animals do. I saw it on *Animal Planet*. And I also studied about it. *The Evolution and Emergences of Species*. That was the title of my master's thesis.

MAX: I remember. I typed it for you.

IRENA: Then you know that I know exactly what the biological and historical role of the male is.

MAX: With animals, yes, but people are different. People should be patient.

IRENA: I was. I sold books: *The Secret of Self-Employment, Be Your Own Shareholder, Thai Cooking, What Women Should Know about Men...* I sold such useless books door to door. And you walked around the city with your hands in your pockets.

MAX: I'm going to freeze. Let me in, please, my one and only.

IRENA: I don't fall for those tricks

MAX: Just one night?

IRENA: After a year has passed?

MAX: Yes, after a year, just one night. Because of all the orgasms we had together. That we unselfishly shared.

IRENA: Don't be pathetic.

MAX: I'm under pressure. Being pathetic is at home with being under pressure.

IRENA: I'm not alone.

MAX: Do you have a friend with you? I don't mind. I'll sleep on the couch.

IRENA: You're such an idiot! Did you think I spent the whole year alone? That I would just wait around? Waiting around until you show up and ring my doorbell. I have a boyfriend now. With a PhD. In philosophy. We live together. We're going to Australia.

MAX: Right now? Tonight?

IRENA: In a month. We're waiting for a work visa. You could go too.

MAX: I love you.

IRENA: Not now. Please. You never said that when we were together.

MAX: Pressure can move mountains.

IRENA: You're just a user. A parasite! I knew that. An emotional manipulator!

*The Philosopher, naked to the waist, appears at the door. He has a very hairy chest. Black hair everywhere.*

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: Irena, is this person bothering you?

IRENA: You were eavesdropping.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: You didn't come to bed for a long time.

MAX: I'm her ex. I'm happy to meet you.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: I'm not. I don't see any reason to be on friendly terms.

MAX: Intellectuals with college degrees are always on friendly terms.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: I'm not going to be an intellectual anymore. I'm going to be a tram driver in Sidney.

MAX: I'm going to keep trying a little longer.

*The Hairy Philosopher turns to Irena.*

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: What is he doing here? Why is he hanging around our front door?

IRENA: I don't know. It's not my fault. He just came.

MAX: For old time's sake.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: And orgasms. I heard.

IRENA: So you were eavesdropping.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: Philosophers always eavesdrop. We eavesdrop on life and discover the truth. And the truth is that this guy you used to fuck gets on my nerves. Understand? Now scram! Get out of here!

MAX: I have nowhere to go.

IRENA: Go abroad! I told you!

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: So we'll run into him there too?

IRENA: To Argentina. We won't run into him there. It's a huge country. Lots of tropical forests. Or Brazil. I hear they need people who know about art.

MAX: Just the couch. Please. I'll put cotton in my ears. Newspaper if you don't have cotton. I won't hear you making love all night. I'll only hear the stories in the newspaper that will seep into my ear, whispering, whispering.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: What is this guy babbling about?

IRENA: Something about seeping.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: He's about to get a fist in his face. Get lost, I told you.

MAX: I'll freeze. I haven't eaten for three days.

IRENA: I can't listen to this anymore. I'm going inside.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: Warm up the bed and get ready. Once I'm done with him, I'll be very ready for you, if you know what I mean, Irena.

*Irena giggles and disappears into the apartment.*

MAX: Irena!! Irenaaaa!

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: Don't yell. You'll wake up the whole apartment building.

MAX: What about a basement? Do you have a warm basement? Or a woodshed? I could lie in some old and wormy cupboard covered with old newspapers.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: We don't have worms. Because we don't have wooden cupboards. And we don't have any old newspapers. Only reviews. Philosophy reviews. Subscriptions all cancelled.

MAX: I don't need to be covered then. I'll curl up in the fetal position. In the basement. Where it's warm. On a pile of coal.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: Get lost! I don't want to beat you up.

MAX: Please.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: Listen. I'm going to have to hit you. Because of my manhood. What will my woman think, what will the neighbors think if they're listening at their doors, if I don't defend my home from harassment?

MAX: Please.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: Or I could push you down the stairs. Which do you prefer? The choice is yours.

MAX: In that case, I'll take the stairs.

HAIRY PHILOSOPHER: All right.

*The Philosopher pushes him down the stairs.*

*Max tumbles down noisily.*

*The Philosopher calmly returns to the apartment, closing the door behind him.*

### **3. In a ditch by the side of the road.**

MAX: I gave it my all. I'm in the city for ten years now. In this jungle of lost and alienated human beings. And now I'm going home. To my mother. I struggled for a long time. I carried the weight of the city for so long. Going to exams. Getting my degree. To the library. To government offices. Waving all my documents around. My certificates. I stood in line. I received mail, mostly rejection letters. I got used to rejection. I loved a woman and she threw me out in the end. But this winter, hand on my heart, it's completely my fault. Not for the jobs, for the endless lines, but for losing love. I lost my Irena. Only she doesn't know what I know, that it was my fault. She'll never know, and it's fine that way. Again, hand on my heart, even though it's so cold and freezing that I can't pull it out of my pocket, but metaphorically speaking. You see, I had another lover. A better one. Both were named Irena, but the first was better. Bigger tits, softer skin, narrower hips, oh and ah... Different hair too. Blonder. She was younger. A high school student in my hometown. That's where I'm heading to now. And they had the same name. That's how everything can be simplified in the real world. Two women, completely different, but with the same name. So you never make a mistake when you call out their name in the heat of passion. Every weekend I went back to my hometown. To my sick mother. That's what I told Irena from the city. When I got back, I told my hometown Irena with the big tits and soft skin that I had a job in the city. That's how it went. But one day, I had to make a decision. *Make up your mind, boy*, I said to myself, *you can't sit on two chairs at the same time. Pick the one you like better, the one who suits you better, who sighs more nicely beneath you. Be a man! Make up your mind like a man!* And I did. Too late unfortunately. *It's over between us. It's not working. I can't take it anymore. Love has died.* That's exactly how she said it to me, only not that she was going to home her mother, but to her new boyfriend with his hairy philosopher's chest. I let out a sigh of relief. I went back to my hometown, to the embrace of my high school sweetheart. But before I could open my mouth, she said: *Sorry. It's over between us. It's not working out. Goodbye.* And she left. I was left alone. Guilty and alone. I paid for my two-timing and now I'm in a ditch at the side of the road, waiting for the bus, to go home to my mother. In the end, we all go home to our mothers.

VAGABOND: Do you have something warm to drink?

MAX: What?

VAGABOND: Schnapps? Or tea? Or tea with schnapps?

MAX: No.

VAGABOND: Fucking loser!

MAX: What about you? You're lying in a ditch and asking me for something warm to drink?

VAGABOND: I'm not too worried about it. I've been here for twenty years.

MAX: Twenty years?

VAGABOND: I'm used to it. The skin on the soles of my feet has grown thicker and thicker.

MAX: I'm waiting for the bus.

VAGABOND: You're going home to your mother. I know.

MAX: I don't have anyplace else to go.

VAGABOND: I also took the same trip. Twenty years ago. Back to my mother's arms. And look where I ended up. In a ditch.

MAX: I'm just going there to recharge my batteries. For a break so to speak. A holiday of tender loving care. To heal my wounded soul and gather the strength for a new battle.

VAGABOND: And then back again?

MAX: Back to the city. That's where my place is. The place for an educated man with a college degree. A job, a salary, a mortgage, an apartment, a wife, two kids...

VAGABOND: Literature.

MAX: What?

VAGABOND: What you're taking about is literature. Fiction. Not real.

MAX: I haven't given up.

VAGABOND: I also didn't give up twenty years ago when they threw me down the stairs. I said to myself I didn't write my thesis on Kafka for nothing. *The Central European Lie of or The Rise of Global Alienation in the Free Individuum.*

MAX: I got the highest possible grade.

VAGABOND: Me too.

MAX: Then why did you give up?

VAGABOND: I didn't. I'm happy.

MAX: In a ditch?

VAGABOND: You can see all this foreign idiocy better from a ditch. That's why I'm happy.

MAX: When does the bus come?

VAGABOND: In two minutes.

MAX: Are you sure?

VAGABOND: But you don't have any money.

MAX: That's true. Do you?

VAGABOND: Are you crazy?

MAX: A loan?

VAGABOND: But you're not coming back.

MAX: I will.

VAGABOND: And I'll be the president of the United States of Europe one day.

MAX: I'll hitchhike.

VAGABOND: You're not a girl.

MAX: So what?

VAGABOND: They only stop for girls.



MAX: What about empathy? Compassion? It's the middle of the night, it's cold, a freezing man standing beside the road sticking his thumb out. I would stop.

VAGABOND: The girls can pay.

MAX: What?

VAGABOND: Truckers are on the road for a long time. They have desire and the money to pay for the bodies of young girls. That's why they stop for young girls. Loser! You're not even a girl! You have nothing to offer. How tragic!

MAX: I believe in goodness, in compassion...

VAGABOND: Are you a faggot?

MAX: No.

VAGABOND: When truckers have been a long time on the road, they're not very picky. You poor thing. You're not even a faggot. You really have nothing to pay with. Things don't look so good for you. I'll be on my way.

MAX: Where?

VAGABOND: I'm going to turn around and go to sleep.

*He turns on his other side.*

MAX: You'll freeze.

VAGABOND: I can't anymore.

MAX: Everyone can freeze.

VAGABOND: Except for those who are already frozen.

*A truck driver passes by and stops.*

VAGABOND: Say hello to your mother.

MAX: Do you know her?

VAGABOND: Of course, I know my mother.

*Max climbs into the cabin of the truck.*

#### **4. In the cabin of the truck.**

*The truck driver enthusiastically sings a popular country song.*

TRUCK DRIVER: Home again among the hayracks,

the wife waiting with a pot of stew,

the bulls bellow and the cows moo

twisting and turning in their stalls,

waiting for me to milk them all.

Home again among the hayracks,

the wife waits and the cows moo,

life is nice and fair to me,

I'm a good man and a driver too!

MAX: You sing nicely.

TRUCK DRIVER: *Country Boys*. It was a hit. A classic. Like Mozart.

MAX: Very nice.

TRUCK DRIVER: They don't write those kinds of songs anymore. That one could have been our national anthem. It has everything in it. Hayracks, which is to say tradition, stew, which is to say healthy home-made food, cows, bulls, which is to say home, self-sufficiency, potency, family, wife, fairness, and drivers. That's our country, our town and the larger region. I'm proud to be a driver.

MAX: Nice.

TRUCK DRIVER: You don't know how to say anything else?

MAX: What?

TRUCK DRIVER: *Nice, nice, nice.* Are you retarded or something?

MAX: What?

TRUCK DRIVER: *What, what, what?* If you escaped from the mental institution, tell me right away. I'll turn around and drive you right back. Not long ago, I picked up someone who had escaped from there. He had a big head. Too big. At first, it didn't seem that unusual to me. You see lots of different people on the road. Black, yellow, dark, blue, skinny, big heads, smalls ones too. Only no women, which is a pity. They don't hitchhike anymore. I look around the roads but no women. They're used to be. They used to hitchhike, but I guess they stay at home now. Cooking, giving birth, cleaning up, going to mass. That's the right way, though on the other hand, it's not as nice for truck drivers. The absence of women on the roads deprives our profession of many pleasant hours.

MAX: Yes.

TRUCK DRIVER: Yes.

MAX: Yes.

TRUCK DRIVER: You're not very talkative?

MAX: Yes.

TRUCK DRIVER: Are you a Jew maybe?

MAX: No.

TRUCK DRIVER: I've never seen one, but they say that they don't talk a lot.

MAX: I don't know.

TRUCK DRIVER: It's probably because of their tongues. They have strange tongues. When they stick them out, they're all blue. They are a completely different race.

MAX: I wouldn't know.

TRUCK DRIVER: What about Gypsies?

MAX: What?

TRUCK DRIVER: Are you a Gypsy?

MAX: No.

TRUCK DRIVER: Thank God! I prefer Jews. Are you going home to your mother?

MAX: How do you know?

TRUCK DRIVER: Everyone is going home to their mothers these days. You're thirty, thirty-five, maybe even forty, and then: *hello, then back to mommy.*

MAX: And you?

TRUCK DRIVER: Me? I have work. A job.

MAX: You're lucky.

TRUCK DRIVER: I was quite lucky, yes, but only after I went back to my mother. I was around thirty-five years old. She had a stroke the moment she saw me. I sold her house and bought a truck. It saved me. My mother's death gave me a future. Otherwise I'm a musician. Conservatory-trained. Academy of Music. Ten years of piano. A bachelor's degree in composition. Masters in conducting. I was a music teacher. At primary school. Before they cancelled music. Not all music. Only classical. Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky. I didn't miss it that much. I discovered ethnic and national folk music. I actually adjusted really quickly.

MAX: You have luck on your side. I don't. I have a degree in literature and language. I just can't get used to another language.

TRUCK DRIVER: It's true. If I have anything, it's luck!

MAX: Are you married?

TRUCK DRIVER: And I also have a sextet.

MAX: A paid gig?

TRUCK DRIVER: Six kids. A capable wife. Not a local, not one of ours, but I had no other choice. You take what there is. And she's extremely fertile.

MAX: Then you're doing well?

TRUCK DRIVER: The kids are hungry most of the time. But we cultivate moral values. And we can always sing instead of eating dinner.

MAX: At least you have work.

TRUCK DRIVER: If I don't have it, I make it.

MAX: If only I knew how to do that!

TRUCK DRIVER: There's money lying all over the roads.

MAX: You definitely have to show me where those roads are.

TRUCK DRIVER: You're my work.

MAX: Pardon?

TRUCK DRIVER: I drive you and you pay me.

MAX: How's that? I was hitchhiking. You're not a bus.

TRUCK DRIVER: I offered you a favor and favors have to be paid for.

MAX: I was hitchhiking.

TRUCK DRIVER: You were, yes. I didn't stop because I wanted to. You wanted me to stop. That's why you have to pay.

MAX: I don't have anything to give you.

TRUCK DRIVER: You must have something.

MAX: I don't.

TRUCK DRIVER: Everyone has something.

MAX: I have a college degree. In my backpack. It's a little wrinkled. But I could give it to you.

TRUCK DRIVER: Everyone has a college degree. I want something else. Something useful, something I can bring home to my kids. I have...

MAX: A sextet, yes, I know.

TRUCK DRIVER: Six hungry mouths to feed!

MAX: I don't have anything. I don't. I really don't.

TRUCK DRIVER: All right.

MAX: Thanks.

TRUCK DRIVER: Are you a faggot?

MAX: No.

TRUCK DRIVER: That's no problem. Neither am I. But I like faggots better than I do Gypsies or Jews. You're going to have to pay for this ride somehow. Nothing is for free nowadays. I'll take what you have even though you don't have anything, and even though you are nothing and I am nothing. That's the new world order, so I'll take what you have. I'll clench my teeth and take what you have to give. I'll drive you to a meadow. I'm used to it. Lately, I am driving there all the time because most people don't have anything else to give. So we're agreed.

MAX: What?

TRUCK DRIVER: I'm going to take what you have even though you have nothing. Do you understand?

MAX: No.

TRUCK DRIVER: You're going to suck my dick and then you're going to have to walk a little ways. I won't drive you all the way to Majda's house.

MAX: My mother's name is Majda. How do you know that?

TRUCK DRIVER: It's a small world. And your mother's name is known around here, if you know what I mean.

MAX: I don't know what you mean.

TRUCK DRIVER: *I smile and think and give a little wink.* Now do you know what I mean?

MAX: No.

TRUCK DRIVER: Then you're even more lost than I thought. So, we're agreed?  
You'll do it?

MAX: I won't! I'm not that kind of person. I won't! I don't want to.

TRUCK DRIVER: Then I'll drive you back.

MAX: Where?

TRUCK DRIVER: Back where I found you. Back to that ditch. It will be a loss for me,  
of course, but at least I'll have some moral satisfaction.

MAX: You're out of your mind!

TRUCK DRIVER: I'm a businessman. I'll turn around.

MAX: I'll freeze there. Water will pour over me. Snow will cover me.

TRUCK DRIVER: You won't be the first. I'm going back.

MAX: Wait! Wait!

TRUCK DRIVER: Why should I wait? I'm in a hurry. There are lots of people waiting  
by the side of the road, wanting to go back to their mothers. There are millions of  
them.

MAX: All right.

TRUCK DRIVER: All right, what?

MAX: The meadow.

*The Truck Driver hoots happily and starts to sing.*

TRUCK DRIVER: Home again among the haystacks,

the wife is waiting with a pot of stew,

the bulls bellow and the cows moo

twisting and turning in their stalls,

waiting for me to milk them all.

*The truck turns onto the meadow.*

**5. In front of his mother's house.**

*Max knocks.*

*Mother Majda opens.*

MOTHER MAJDA: Oh, for the love of god, my son!

MAX: Mother!

MOTHER MAJDA: You didn't die?

MAX: I didn't.

MOTHER MAJDA: Frozen on the road? Covered by water?

MAX: That wasn't me.

MOTHER MAJDA: Then they told me about the wrong person.

MAX: You've aged, mother.

MOTHER MAJDA: Thank you, son.

MAX: You're uglier than you used to be.

MOTHER MAJDA: When you're unhappy, it shows on your face. That's what your grandmother always said.

MAX: Mother, I brought you my college diploma. Are you happy?

MOTHER MAJDA: No bottle?

MAX: Just my diploma.

MOTHER MAJDA: But you know I'm an alcoholic.

MAX: Still?



MOTHER MAJDA: It's hard to keep it up these days, but somehow I manage. I'm more and more dependent on charities and other organizations. You really didn't bring me a bottle?

MAX: No, I really didn't.

MOTHER MAJDA: You're mean. You always were mean. You were mean when you were born. When I caressed you, you bit my hand. You were aggressive.

MAX: I'm cold, mother.

MOTHER MAJDA: You're not dressed warmly enough.

MAX: I'm hungry.

MOTHER MAJDA: Haven't you eaten?

MAX: No, mother.

MOTHER MAJDA: And what will you do now?

MAX: I came back to you, mother.

MOTHER MAJDA: But I have no more milk, son. All the cows croaked twenty years ago. Even the fat ones.

MAX: A crust of bread would be enough.

MOTHER MAJDA: I soaked the last bread in schnapps this morning for my breakfast.

MAX: Mother, they beat me.

MOTHER MAJDA: You poor little thing!

MAX: Mother, they chased me out the door.

MOTHER MAJDA: That's terrible!

MAX: Mother, they threw me down the stairs.

MOTHER MAJDA: Ay, ay, ay!

MAX: They abused me horribly, mother. At the meadow. Among the parked trucks.

MOTHER MAJDA: Yes, I heard something about that. But what should I do? How can I help you, my poor boy?

MAX: Take me back into your home, mother.

MOTHER MAJDA: I'm not alone, my little son. An Angel is with me.

MAX: You and your Angel can take me under your wings. I'm tired. I have nowhere to go. Have mercy on me.

*Max falls on the doorstep in a faint.*

MOTHER MAJDA: My little son, you'll freeze on my doorstep. Who will bury you? I don't have enough for a bottle, let alone for candles, and it is still too cold to gather daisies in the field. Get up, my son, and go the hell back where you came from!

*Mother Majda slams the door.*

*For some time, Max lies motionless on the doorstep. Then he gets up and goes to the other side of the house.*

## **6. In his mother's sitting room.**

*An empty room. A green ceramic stove in the corner. A faint glow in its fuel chamber.*

*The window opens. Max climbs into the room.*

*He immediately goes to the stove and warms himself. Hands, feet, backside.*

MAX: When I was a child, I climbed through this window. When she and my father locked me out, because I was naughty, because I chased the neighbor's chickens, I climbed back in through this window. Out the door and in the window. Oh, oooooh, the blessed hearth, musicians playing on a harp! The first half of hunger is filled by warmth, the second by a warm home. Which means that if you're at home, you're never hungry again.

*Mother Majda and Angel enter.*

MOTHER MAJDA: Weren't you just lying dead on my doorstep?

MAX: I wouldn't want to cause you such sadness, mother.

MOTHER MAJDA: What will I do with you, son? Another mouth to feed.

MAX: Be charitable, mother. I'm an only child.

MOTHER MAJDA: The only one I didn't wash down the drain. Even now I regret it.

MAX: What did I ever do to you, mother?

MOTHER MAJDA: You're not a rich man who could support me. You did that to me! You're not a businessman who could build me a house with a pool in the garden. You're not an ambassador who could take your mother with you to a foreign country and bring her to receptions where they serve tiny sandwiches spread out on silver trays to foreign emissaries and their wives. You're not a tycoon, a rich thieving bandit who brought down a great factory in order to buy his mother a yacht. You're nothing. Isn't that bad enough? What should I do with you? You stand there and block my heat. And then you're going to want dinner.

ANGEL: Be charitable, little Majda!

MAX: You must be Angel.

ANGEL: That's me. My identity.

MAX: I don't have one. They took my identity card at the restaurant Under the Archway. They kept it so I would come back and pay for my goulash and beer. But I just left it there. I traded my identity for goulash and beer. I'm nobody.

ANGEL: I am Angel in the flesh. I bow to you.

MAX: Oh yes, that! Of course. And I bow to you.

*They bow to each other, as if they were from some other century.*

MOTHER MAJDA: Stop that shit! There's hunger, plague, war, the failure of the health and pension systems, and you two are going all Baroque on me!

MAX: You don't have any wings?

ANGEL: I do, but I keep them in the closet. So they won't get wrinkled.

MAX: Smart in these times.

ANGEL: They wanted to parade me around with them, so I put them under lock and key.

MAX: Nothing is sacred anymore.

ANGEL: That's because there is no god.

MOTHER MAJDA: I thought I could at least get a bottle in exchange for them, but I was told that you can't even get a used lighter for angel's wings. So I gave them back to Angel.

ANGEL: And I put them in the closet.

MOTHER MAJDA: I found him...

ANGEL: I fell ...

MOTHER MAJDA: ... and I took him home.

ANGEL: I got hit with an anti-storm rocket. They like to shoot them into the clouds around here.

MOTHER MAJDA: He doesn't use anything, he doesn't eat, and he gives off warmth.

ANGEL: I fell in the mud, I got my wings wet, and then a cheerful driver picked me up.

MAX: You too?

ANGEL: He took me to a meadow.

MAX: Then you know everything.

ANGEL: I actually liked it. It was very physical.

MOTHER MAJDA: And that's where I found him. Still in one piece. He keeps me warm. He's a source of heat. And he's lively.

ANGEL: Shall we go, little Majda, too bed? It's late.

MOTHER MAJDA: Did you hear that, son? I'm still desirable. Let's go, my guardian Angel, straight to bed!

*They go toward the exit locked in an embrace.*

ANGEL: I still have so much to learn.

MOTHER MAJDA: We'll be loud, my son. Don't let it bother you.

MAX: No, mother.

MOTHER MAJDA: I was never loud before, but now in my old age I have discovered a whole new approach. Let's go, Angel! Just like that wonderful country song goes:

If two are hungry, poor, and sad,  
they might as well spend the night in bed!

*Mother Majda and Angel move toward exit.*

MAX: Mother!

MOTHER MAJDA: Son?

MAX: I would like some dinner.

*Mother Majda slaps him loudly across the face.*

*Mother Majda and Angel exit.*

## **7. Still in his mother's sitting room.**

*Later or even later.*

MAX: All night I covered my ears. I was aching from hunger. My ears ached. The fire went out and I started to pull up some wood panels from the floor. If it goes out again, I'm going to tackle the paneling on the walls and then the window frames and beams and the wooden stairs...

*Mother Majda's cries are heard from the neighboring room.*

MOTHER MAJDA: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

ANGEL: How interesting this is, how interesting ...

MOTHER MAJDA: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaa!

MAX: I thought they'd finished for the night.

MOTHER MAJDA: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaa!

ANGEL: Now the other side, the other side...

MOTHER MAJDA: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaa!

MAX: Quiet! I beg you of you, quiet! You're corrupting your child. Mama!

MOTHER MAJDA: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaa!

*Silence.*

MAX: Maybe they've finished for the night. They've already done it six times. It's like living next to train tracks, with trains driving past your window all night.

*Silence.*

*The fire in the stove crackles.*

MAX: I'm overcome by despair. Not just hunger. There's a black darkness in my heart. I'm thirty years old. A little more than that. And I'm nothing, nothing from nothing dunked in nothing. With no hope. No possibilities to get in line. There is no line. There are no doors to wait in front of, no doors that invite you in. No invitations. Degrees don't mean anything, doctorates, fakes, magistrates and masters, receipts and contracts, birth certificates, death certificates, estimates, settlements, tax receipts. Only good for burning now, all that useless paper, or to prop up a wiggly table. I'm tempted to commit suicide. I could swing like the pendulum of a clock. But clocks don't even have pendulums anymore, only digital numbers that shine in the dark. Until they turn off the electricity, that is. No rope for the neck, no rat poison, no high staircase or skyscrapers where you can have an ice coffee, and then throw yourself down. Because there is no down, and there is no up. Only homesickness and memories of the times when you cried in your mother's skirt because you felt bad. That's why I'm here now. I'm a burden to my mother instead of a help to her. Despair, despair, dunked in golden honey, sweet despair, sugary and pale.

*The door to the neighboring room opens. The naked Angel crosses the room. He stops in the middle.*

ANGEL: Your mother knows what she's doing. Like god.

*And he continues on his way toward the outer door. He opens it. A cold icy downpour outside. For an instant, the storm spins in the center of the room. The Angel, as naked as he was on the day god gave birth to him, stands at the doorstep, and then he disappears into the gray downpour, as if he is flying.*

## **8. In the village inn.**

*Everyone is gathered together. The inn is full. People are sitting all over the place. Some we recognize, others not. It is a meeting of residents from the village and wider region. The Mayor is playing an accordion. Everyone is singing some strange sort of patriotic polka. The Inn Keeper pours a clear liquid for all the singing villagers.*

EVERYONE: All of us gather here and now,

we love each other, oh yes, and how!

MAYOR: (playing the accordion and singing)

All for one and one for all,

together we stand, together we fall,

tightening our belts, we look forward to our next meal,

like a mother expecting a baby will!

EVERYONE: All of us gather here and now,

we love each other, oh yes, and how!

MAYOR: We gather in this watering hole,

to banish winter from our frozen souls!

We tighten our belts and look to our next meal,  
just as a mother expecting a baby will!

EVERYONE: All of us gather here and now,  
we love each other, oh yes, and how!

*The Mayor puts down the accordion.*

INN KEEPER: Bravo, Mayor, you sing better all the time!

TRUCK DRIVER: Without me and my wife, it would all be in one voice.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: We provide the harmony.

MOTHER MAJDA: May I have another one?

INN KEEPER: I don't serve winos.

MOTHER MAJDA: I'm not a wino. I'm an alcoholic.

PRIEST: I'd like another one. The last one.

MOTHER MAJDA: Why do you serve the Priest? He's also an alcoholic.

PRIEST: I'm cured. The cured can drink. That's the letter of the law. Moreover, I'm here today in the role of market inspector.

MAYOR: Yes, I also trust the Priest as market inspector.

PRIEST: I confirm the percent.

*The Inn Keeper pours the Priest a generous measure.*

INN KEEPER: Father, will you confirm?

*The Priest leans forward. He knowledgably sloshes the liquid around his mouth and then swallows it.*

PRIEST: It burns just right. It warms me just right too. About sixty percent, I'd say. Maybe sixty-two percent. Am I right?



INN KEEPER: It was a hundred percent when I got it at the pharmacy. Then I watered it down. Forty deciliters to one liter. Just eyeballing it. So, yeah, that's about right. Bravo, Father, you are a real expert in market inspection. Congratulations!

TRUCK DRIVER: What if we sing another one?

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: With harmony again. Now I'll be coloratura. I can shape my lips to make any sound I like.

PRIEST: Oh, that bit about the lips is interesting.

MAYOR: No, we've sung enough. We have other business to attend to. Does anyone have any comments before we start?

ROAD WORKER: I'm only interested if it has to do with the roads ...

MAYOR: Roads have not been an issue since the end of the war. We don't need them anymore.

ROAD WORKER: I'm a road worker, so naturally I have a vested interest.

MAYOR: Well, now you'll be a postal worker. You'll be the official postmaster from now on. Let's go on to the next point of business!

PRIEST'S COOK: I prepared a list.

PRIEST: Yes, last night just before going to bed, my cook and I jotted down on a piece of paper everything that is wrong in our town and the larger region.

*The Priest's Cook pulls a sheet of paper from her bag...*

PRIEST'S COOK: *Ad primus*: there is no god.

MAYOR: That doesn't matter.

PRIEST'S COOK: *Ad secundum*: there are no people. The church is empty.

MOTHER MAJDA: How could it not be since there are no pews? We can't sit on the cold floor. We could get an infection.

ROAD WORKER: I got one during the war. I was waiting for a tank with a surface-to-air launcher in my hands. I fell asleep. My butt on the cold soil. It burns like the devil when you get it. Your intestines swell and nearly fall out.

PRIEST'S COOK: You chopped up the pews and used them for firewood. That's why the church is empty.

MOTHER MAJDA: I only took a prayer stool.

PRIEST'S COOK: And wooden angels from the seventeenth century. Carved. There were six of them. I saw you dragging them to your house through the mud. Where are they? I ask you. Where are those carved angels?

INN KEEPER: I took the pews. You all know that. You were all in agreement. We had no other way to heat the kettle and boil the soup, to grill the meat. How else would we have kept our backsides warm in the inn, I ask you directly, if your Inn Keeper didn't have any wood to burn?

MAYOR: We voted on the pews. That's true. We decided. Unanimously and democratically. The inn got the pews. Even the Priest agreed.

PRIEST: But not in the role of Priest. I want to especially emphasize that. I agreed as the President of the Council for Social Activities.

PRIEST'S COOK: I was also for the pews. But not for the angels from the seventeenth century or for the altar. Late peasant Baroque. Master Eisensperger of the Holy Cross. A well-known painter and carver. In Brussels, they have him by the kilo. And we didn't all vote for the cross, three meters by a meter and a half. Who took the crucified Christ? Who took our god?

PRIEST: Yes, that's a bit problematic. To take god out of the church. What's left then? What values?

MOTHER MAJDA: Warmth in the middle of the winter is also a value.

TRUCK DRIVER: Drop it! Let's drop it!

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: What would I do with a crucifix?

TRUCK DRIVER: Yes indeed. It wouldn't be enough for even one good fire.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: We have eight children. Isn't that burden enough?

TRUCK DRIVER: Six. The twins died.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Yes, I'm sorry, six. Seven actually if I count the one we made last week.

TRUCK DRIVER: Really?

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I didn't tell you. You left so early.

TRUCK DRIVER: I had something to do at the meadow. But I'm very happy to hear. Sincerely I am. Yoo-hoo! Yodel-ay-ee-oooo! My darling!

*The Truck Driver yodels, grabs his wife, and proudly spins her round the middle of the inn.*

TRUCK DRIVER: We'll be rocking the cradle again! Never mind the hard times! Come on friends, let's sing! Let's yodel one of our best songs! Yodel-ay-ee-oooo!

MAYOR: Later, later. You can celebrate at home. Now we've gathered for other reasons.

PRIEST'S COOK: Allow me to continue: *Ad terco* ...

MAYOR: Later, I said! We are gathered here to welcome a new member of our community. Actually an old member. Our little Max, now our big Max, has come back from the capital to his hometown.

TRUCK DRIVER: I drove him.

PRIEST'S COOK: To the meadow, I presume.

MAYOR: We have gathered here, to welcome him, to wish him...

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Good appetite...

MAYOR: Good day and welcome!

MOTHER MAJDA: I hope he'll leave soon.

PRIEST: How you speak, mother!

MOTHER MAJDA: I'm an alcoholic. I just babble.

MAYOR: Step forward, Max! Don't be shy.

*Max timidly steps from the background into the center of the inn.*

*Everyone joins him. They touch him. They are almost fondling him as they reach out their hands in greeting and welcome.*

INN KEEPER: We almost forgot about you. Such a little boy you were.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I don't remember him.

TRUCK DRIVER: Because you came to live in my house.

MOTHER MAJDA: Dirty foreigner!

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Did you hear what she called me?

TRUCK DRIVER: But you are an immigrant. Nobody will ever let you forget it.

MAYOR: Quiet! Max has the floor!

PRIEST'S COOK: You wore short pants. You were such a tiny thing. All sickly. Not very much to look at. Just skin and bone.

INN KEEPER: How old are you now?

MAX: Thirty.

INN KEEPER: I would give you a few years more.

MAX: Do I look that bad? It must be because of the crisis. Enormous unemployment. Hunger. Austerity. All at once, and a person, especially if he's engaged in culture, grows old from all of it.

MAYOR: How much do you weigh, may I ask?

MAX: I have no idea. I haven't weighed myself recently. I did it last about three years ago. In a pharmacy. Then they got rid of the scale. People were losing so much weight that they viewed the scale as a provocation. They ended up throwing it in the trash because of potential unrest.

*The Mayor steps up to Max, holds him around the waist and lifts him. Then he puts him down again.*

MAYOR: A little bit more than eighty kilograms. Maybe ninety. A decent weight.

INN KEEPER: Fine, fine ...

MAX: And I have a college degree.

*The townspeople react with agitation.*

MAMA MAGDA: Be quiet, son! Don't embarrass me.

MAYOR: I imagine it's in the humanities.

MAX: Literature.

*Everyone is horrified.*

TRUCK DRIVER: Horrible! Horrible!

PRIEST'S COOK: Oh, oh! I'm going to throw up.

PRIEST: There is no god because of such people!

ROAD WORKER: And no new roads!

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: And a falling birthrate. At least for some.

PRIEST'S COOK: There are no more pews in the churches because of such people.

PRIEST: As if we needed that! As if this nation hasn't suffered enough!

MAYOR: A storm has swept the land. Rain and floods. Everything is underwater. Everything under an icy snow. A natural catastrophe and now this...

MAMA MAGDA: Do you hear, son! What you've done to me, what you've done! As if it isn't enough that I'm an alcoholic, that I have a fatty liver and diabetes, and they're going to amputate my leg any time now! And now this! Why don't you know when to be quiet, you brat? And you're boasting. You're actually boasting about it.

MAX: I apologize. I won't mention it again. I didn't know.

*The locals grow a bit calmer.*

PRIEST: That's right. Whoever repents has a chance to survive.

ROAD WORKER: Repentance does not build new roads.

PRIEST: That's also true.

MAX: I'm sorry, really, please, I'm sorry...

MAYOR: Well, you're not the only one. Everyone who's come back in recent years has also been a loser. Useless at thirty. My son was even worse. Graduated in philosophy.

MAX: Franci! My schoolmate. Is he here? Can I see him?

ROAD WORKER: The road took him.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: More of a kettle. I mean a hole. A ditch by the side of the road.

ROAD WORKER: Yes, but that was later.

MAYOR: He disappeared. He left his wife and disappeared.

MAX: I didn't know ...

INN KEEPER: He was over a hundred kilograms.

PRIEST'S WIFE: He was fat even as a child.

MAYOR: Let's not talk about the past. Whoever talks about the past doesn't see the future.

ROAD WORKER: And my daughter wasn't much better. She was a lawyer.

TRUCK DRIVER: Horrible! Horrible!

INN KEEPER: My Frederic is a painter. I never thought it would come to that. My entrepreneurial seed, and my son such damaged goods.

MAX: Did they all come back?

PRIEST'S COOK: Our son as well...

PRIEST: John Paul, yes.

MAX: Little Paul?

PRIEST'S COOK: A sociologist. And a Marxist.

MAX: They all came back?

PRIEST'S COOK: One every month. That's about it. They come, they get married, and then they leave. Always in that order.

MAYOR: You're only the most recent one.

MOTHER MAJDA: Oh, if only he weren't!

MAX: And where have they gone? My classmates, my friends, my generation...

ROAD WORKER: To the same place you're going.

MAYOR: Out. Away. Away from Europe. Away from Eurasia. Maybe to Atlantis. The Easter Islands. That's where those kinds of people can find jobs. A hundred and ten thousand jobs for college graduates. Our town and the larger region was the last stop before they went out into the great white beyond.

PRIEST: White, yes. Very white.

ROAD WORKER: Like a white road.

PRIEST'S COOK: That's the way it is. Such ingratitude! You come and eat, cry in your mother's skirt, then it's goodbye. Thanks for the support, the scholarship, the stipend, the education. Now I'll go wait in some other line, knock on some other door, worship some other god...

PRIEST: This business with god! Now that's tragic!

PRIEST'S COOK: No gratitude for our suffering...

MAYOR: A man believes that he'll benefit from his seed.

ROAD WORKER: It only causes pain to bring children onto this earth...

MOTHER MAJDA: I started to drink because of you ...

MAX: You drank before, mother.

MOTHER MAJDA: You damned ungrateful brat! You pig of a son! I pushed you out of my body in pain. It hurt so much I couldn't take it and had to have a drink. And then another one. The pain didn't leave me and that's why I drank, only because I suffered at your birth. You're guilty, you rotten child, that they'll amputate my leg, that's I'll spit out my liver!

MAX: You can't spit out your liver.

MAYOR: Stop, Majda!

MAX: You spit out your lungs! Like the poets Kette and Murn!

MOTHER MAJDA: Don't throw Murn at me! I only went with the old Murn once because I thought that he had a bag of corn flour hidden somewhere. And he had nothing! He used me, poor innocent servant girl!

MAX: Mother, you're not an innocent servant girl. You were the head accountant at the Postal Hotel.

MAYOR: Enough! We're not going to argue now. No more reproaches. A lost child from our town and the larger region has returned and we must be grateful to him.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I'm already grateful. I'm so grateful my stomach is growling.

MOTHER MAJDA: Shut up, you primitive immigrant! You're just using up our air and our space!

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Did you hear what she said to me?

TRUCK DRIVER: But it's true.

MAYOR: We must take care that Max, who is the only and last solution for our town and the larger region, stays here with us.

PRIEST: Forever and ever.



EVERYONE: Amen.

MAX: What do you mean? I thought ...

ROAD WORKER: You thought that you might take to the road and get away? Admit that was what you were thinking!

MAX: Not that. I thought that later, when the situation gets better, when the long winter ends, when the high water retreats, when Europe once again emerges from the snow and begins to prosper, when jobs begin to open up, when things are worth something again, if you have...

MOTHER MAJDA: Quiet, son!

MAX: If you have a college degree.

PRIEST: *Apage satanas!*

MAX: Well, it was worth having some kind of education. I thought that I might return to the city then. I've outgrown our little town and the larger region. A person wants to be independent. This is only temporary. My mother's skirt, my father's house...

MOTHER MAJDA: Thank god he died.

ROAD WORKER: He fell into a ditch by the road.

MAX: I admit it to you openly. I intend to leave again after some time. Leave the town for the city.

MAYOR: Unless you get married.

PRIEST'S COOK: And move in with your new wife.

PRIEST: And stay with us forever and ever.

EVERYONE: Amen.

MAYOR: If you procreate, you begin to care that your town and wider biological region stays on the map of Europe and the world.

PRIEST: And that the cross and our god are returned to our church.

PRIEST'S COOK: And the pews.

MAX: I didn't take them! Not god or the pew!

PRIEST: I was speaking metaphorically.

PRIEST: That's why we brought you a potential bride. You already know each other. She was your high school sweetheart. You were together once, very passionately, it is said.

*The Mayor opens the door and Irena, who had been standing outside the door in the rain the whole time, shyly steps in.*

IRENA: Hello!

MAX: Irena

ROAD WORKER: A widow.

PRIEST: And now a bride.

ROAD WORKER: For the twelfth time.

MAYOR: The thirteenth.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Whore.

TRUCK DRIVER: You're just jealous because of her potential.

MOTHER MAJDA: Old soup still stinks when it's heated up.

MAYOR: Given that you've already been a couple, you can skip over the phase of getting to know each other, holding hands, fondling, harmonizing bodily juices and chemistry.

PRIEST'S COOK: What about dinner?

MAYOR: The wedding can be in a day or two. Our town and the larger region will take care of all the preparations and organization. I'll be the sponsor. All three flags will hang on the Maypole, which will be raised to the greatest possible height as a symbol of potency and promise. Three flags will flutter in the breeze: our regional flag with the image of Saint John roasting a dragon over the flames, the national flag with

the familiar tricolore, and of course the European flag with its fading stars. We'll have all three. Agreed? We'll give them two days and two nights to get their juices flowing.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Wouldn't one day be enough? We have children, you know.

MAX: Wait! Wait!

MOTHER MAJDA: Don't make problems, my son. Our pantries are empty.

MAX: What?

INN KEEPER: Majda let me pour you a shot of schnapps to get your brains working again.

MAX: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's not going to happen!

IRENA: You don't want me anymore?

MAX: Irena, of course, I want ...

PRIEST: Then it's settled.

MAYOR: Our town and the larger region will not die out.

MAX: Wait! I have fond memories of Irena. I even loved her, though she gave me the boot.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: What boot?

TRUCK DRIVER: You're a foreigner. You wouldn't know the expression.

MAX: And all these years when I was studying in the city, waiting in line for a job, serving tables in local eateries, feeling sorry for myself, because I was not capable of surviving on such slavish work, I thought about her then. About you, Irena. About your kind and lively soul, full of empathy...

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: You see. They already have great sympathy for each other.

TRUCK DRIVER: That's good. Sympathy is good. It's worse if there's fear. You can taste fear. When I killed my last dog, he was afraid, and that fear got its way into the meat, like beef in a slaughterhouse, then it doesn't have a good taste...

MAYOR: Shut up, you idiot! These two thirty-year-olds are telling the tale of their lost and rediscovered love.

MAX: Irena, I am happy to see you again, to be near you in these cold times.

IRENA: To be warmed by each other.

PRIEST'S COOK: On a low flame.

MAX: But a wedding and all of that. Dear townsfolk, you must allow us to make that decision on our own.

PRIEST: You've already said yes.

PRIEST'S COOK: But don't wait too long. Love can grow cold like soup.

PRIEST: And soup is tastier when it's hot.

MAYOR: Let's go, residents of the town and larger region! Let these two young people enjoy each other in solitude!

*They move toward the exit. Everyone shakes Max's hand.*

MAYOR: Max, I'm happy that you came home. You're our only hope.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: What do you mean Hope? Do I know her?

TRUCK DRIVER: It's another expression. You stupid foreigner!

*The Mayor approaches Max. He whispers to him.*

MAYOR: Watch out for the Inn Keeper. He's corrupt. Don't sign anything. He'll take everything you've got.

*He exits.*

*The Truck Driver approaches.*

TRUCK DRIVER: I'm happy that I took you to the meadow. Don't hold it against me if I was rough. I have eight children.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Six. Seventh on the way.

*The Inn Keeper approaches Max. He whispers to him.*

INN KEEPER: Did the Mayor say something to you about me? If he did, it's not true. The opposite is true. I was never in his party. He was in mine. He even paid to get membership. The nicest part of his winter stores. He would have given me five kilograms with no bones for it.

*He exits.*

*The Truck Driver's Wife approaches.*

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I'm from somewhere else, from beyond of the Urals, the true cradle of the Slavs. That's why they hate me. I rowed here the moment the waters came. There were one hundred and twenty of us on the boat. They all drowned. I barely survived. If my future husband hadn't found me and taken me to the meadow, I would have died in that ditch. They leave everyone who is not from the town and the larger region in that ditch. I still don't have documents. I don't even have a name. My children are bastards. You have no idea how hard it is.

*She exits.*

*The Road Worker approaches.*

ROAD WORKER: The priest burned the crucified Christ. He's been living with his cook in sin even when it was strictly prohibited. And he ordered me to destroy the roads so nobody could get away from his god. I obeyed. I'm pragmatic. And an alcoholic. Road workers are traditional that way. Oh, and one more thing. The Truck Driver and his foreign bitch claim that they have six children. Nobody's ever seen the kids and yet the parents seem to be doing well. They never seem to lose weight.

*He exits.*

*The Priest's Cook approaches.*

PRIEST'S COOK: You have nice thighs. I'd like to eat you right up, if you understand what I mean. A propos: your mother's a whore. But that's probably entirely clear to you as her son. Now she has some Angel, but everyone says he escaped from a high security prison for terrorists. They're frantically looking for him outside of Europe.

*She exits.*

*Mother Majda approaches.*

MOTHER MAJDA: The cook is a slut, if you get my meaning, son.

MAX: No, mother, I don't.

MOTHER MAJDA: She gets at least seven abortions a year, sometimes nine, sometimes eleven. And it's not only the Priest. She wanted to snag my Angel too. It's lucky that he's faithful. I'm happy that you came back, son. We'll put aside food for winter. We'll pour cracklings into jars. That's my job as a mother.

*She exits.*

*The Priest approaches.*

PRIEST: They're all atheists. Can you imagine me with all of them? Always copulating with each other. They've ruined everything. Schools, healthcare, roads, good companies. They've even corrupted the Vatican, infiltrated the security services, destroyed solidarity. Now they want to devalue god. But they won't do it. I have him safely stored in a locked chest, in the cellar. I carry the key around my neck at all times. So if you come to me in secret, tonight perhaps, my cook and I will show you god. You'll enjoy it.

*Everyone moves toward the exit.*

*Before exiting, they stand in front of the door and sing. An octet in harmony. A song that is a little bit patriotic, a little bit popular.*

EVERYONE: Let the young lovers be,

if it is a son, it will be meat,

if it is a daughter, vegetables to eat..

Let them be here at home,  
because youth is like an old chewed bone,  
and old age is a bridge so wide,  
that carries you to the other side  
where you wake up butchered.

Surprise, surprise!

Long live our fellow man,  
long live the light-bathed land,  
for we are Europa after all!

*Everyone disappears into the storm.*

## **9. Still there. In the village inn.**

*Only Irena, Max, and the Inn Keeper remain.*

INN KEEPER: Listen, son, do you remember how your broke my window once?

MAX: Yes, I remember. I was with your son....

INN KEEPER: Don't mention him. He was no good. I get sick to my stomach just thinking about him.

MAX: All of us kids were playing in front of the inn. Everyone from the village. Franci and Silvo, Jože, Janez, Dobrivoj, Črtomir and Tugomer, and the girls too. You were there, Irena. Football. World Cup 1989.

IRENA: I was a cheerleader. You said I had to do splits and handstands, which I didn't like very much, because my pleated skirt kept falling over my face, and I couldn't see what you were doing.

INN KEEPER: Oh, those were good times. Prosperity. A framed picture behind the bar, money in the register, no receipts, cash in hand. Well back then, son, I didn't care at all about that broken window. For years, I just covered the window with newspapers.

MAX: You really didn't make a fuss.

INN KEEPER: That's why you owe me now. Now we live in times when everything comes back to haunt to you, and everything needs to be paid back. Also past debts. So sign here, please.

MAX: What?

INN KEEPER: Don't ask any questions. Just sign. It's only fair. Don't worry.

MAX: I won't sign.

INN KEEPER: The Mayor turned you against me, right?

MAX: I don't know anything about that. I don't even know if I want to get married.

IRENA: You don't need to Max, if I seem ugly to you.

MAX: Don't act insulted, Irena. You've aged incredibly well, as if these past ten years never happened. I still have fond memories of you. But I need to be the one to decide.

INN KEEPER: I wouldn't bother you if it weren't for that window. I had to put up my own money. Europe issued a directive. *From now on: all windows have to be in pristine condition!* So I obeyed. What was I supposed to do? I used my own money and bought new glass, even though they didn't force me to do it. And now I want my money back! Sign here. That's all I want. I'm an Inn Keeper and I must have my way.

MAX: I won't sign anything. And anyway it was your son who broke the window. He was afraid you would beat him up, break his leg again, knock out whatever teeth he had left, and he begged me to take the blame. *He won't beat you up because he's sleeping with your mother.* That's what he said.

INN KEEPER: I thought it was him, that bastard painter. All right, Max, I'll wait for you to decide, but my offer is an honest one. You won't get a better one.



MAX: I don't even know what your offer is.

INN KEEPER: Routine, complete routine. I'm going to bed. You two stay here. The stove is warm. You can undress if you like. I won't look. You can do anything you want, freely. No one will be watching you. I swear. Just don't burn the chairs. These are the last chairs in the town and the larger region.

*He exits singing a favorite folk melody.*

## **10. Still there. In the village inn.**

**Only it's darker now. The stove has gone out.**

MAX: You gave me the boot back then.

IRENA: You smelled of another woman.

MAX: Strange. She was also named Irena.

IRENA: Not all Irenas smell the same.

MAX: I never forgot you.

IRENA: I forgot you. Very quickly. You were bad. I mean in bed. And sometimes you had bad breath.

MAX: You got married.

IRENA: Thirteen times a widow.

MAX: What a pity.

IRENA: The crisis.

MAX: Midlife crisis.

IRENA: Hunger.

MAX: For love.

IRENA: Also.

MAX: They left?

IRENA: Some inside, others out.

MAX: Older?

IRENA: But you know them all! Franci, Silvo, Jože, Janez Pavel, Dobrivoj, Črtomir, and Tugomer. Our generation!

MAX: Our classmates? Our neighbors and friends?

IRENA: Sometimes also friends of friends. It depends on whether they came recommended or not. Why are you looking at me like that? Where is a girl from the town and the larger region supposed to find a husband if not in the town and the larger region? I didn't wander around big cities or go to the heart of Europe. I stayed here, on the working margins, in the cellar so to speak, the furnaces, the guts of Europe. And when they came, if they came at all, I was available. Beautiful, educated, with close connections to the community. I gave myself to them. A little bit out of love, a little bit out of regional loyalty. Like a tourist attraction.

MAX: I thought you were going to study. You were smarter than me. You were really good in math. And languages. And physical education.

IRENA: I would have gone but I was afraid. I knew everyone at home. I didn't know anyone out there. At home, they always leave a light on in the hallway so you don't fall if you come from the firehouse a little bit tipsy. In a foreign country, no one cares.

MAX: That's why you didn't go study?

IRENA: Plus there were enough boys here. I hadn't met them all yet. Once I had, maybe I would have left to study languages. Or economics. Or sociology. I was always very social. So I thought after I met all the boys here, and broke up with all of them, then I would go. That's what I thought. But then the crisis came unfortunately. So much rain. Europe underwater. The town stores all closed. The newsstand too. The gypsies carried off the railroad tracks and sold them for scrap metal. I tried to hitchhike a couple of times to get out of the town, but I always wound up in the meadow.

MAX: You should have written to me. You should have looked for me. I missed you. I thought about you.

IRENA: I forgot about you. Only now, after all these years, when I'm widowed thirteen times over, and we put together a list, only then did I think of you.

MAX: A list?

IRENA: Yes, a list. In specific order. Who is where and who hadn't come back yet. You were the last one. Everyone else has already come back: philosophers, painters, economists, social workers, lawyers, actors, linguists, doctors, surgeons, psychologists, sociologists, art historians. Writers last the longest apparently.

MAX: I had no intention of coming back. If they hadn't thrown me out of my room, if they didn't close down the library, change all the theatres into waiting rooms, I wouldn't have remembered this place at all.

IRENA: You see. We were all waiting for you. When I was left alone the last time, I knew you would come back. This is your home, Max. The town and the larger region is your deepest home. Written in your blood and in your flesh.

MAX: Home is where you can work, where you don't stumble around cold rooms, and don't knock on closed doors. Home is where you are valued, where people need your hands and feet, where you are paid, where you can buy food, newspapers, electricity, books, tickets to the philharmonic, parking places, a dentist. Home is where there is no war, where you can look at faces, hear voices, and you aren't always angry. Where you don't hear lies as truth. Home is where you are honest among honest men, and not honest among bad men, so you don't feel ashamed that you're not a bad man. Home are black and white birds, and colorful ones too. Equal among equals. Home is summer. Home is not eternal winter. Home is not a competition for affection, or playing dumb, or greedy or big market games. And that's why there is no home anymore. No home at all. Only flooded regions. So much water. So many directives. Clogged ditches. No difference between the sky and the earth. No difference between words. There is no home, not any more.

IRENA: Home is where they're waiting for you.

*Silence.*

IRENA: You forgot about us, but we waited for you. When we realized that only you hadn't come back, we waited for you. I waited for you. Starving, I waited. Home is where someone is waiting for you. Only that.

### **11. Still in the village inn.**

The window opens. A naked Angel stands by the windowsill. It is raining outside. Very hard.

ANGEL: I'm happy that there is still someone who speaks nicely and forms complex thoughts. Otherwise it's all phony. Nobody cares about original human thought anymore. It's a catastrophe!

MAX: Come inside. It's cold.

IRENA: You're not cold at all?

ANGEL: Angels don't get cold. We aren't hungry. We have no asses. No digestive system. We're just angels.

IRENA: I heard that outside of Europe, they're hunting you down for terrorism.

ANGEL: Enemy propaganda.

MAX: Come inside. It really is cold.

*Angel climbs into the inn. He closes the window behind him.*

MAX: You really never get cold?

ANGEL: Are we in a mill?

MAX: Why?

ANGEL: Majda says that you need to say a thing twice in a mill.

IRENA: What would you like? The inn is closed. And Max and I are having an intimate conversation

ANGEL: I'd like to warm myself up.

MAX: Didn't you just say that you don't get cold?

ANGEL: I lied. But anyway it's just an expression. *To warm oneself up.* An expression. *Angels never get cold.* An expression. *An angel is an emissary of good.* An expression. *Angels protect children from pedophiles.* An expression. *There's no more war.* An expression. *There is no rich or poor anymore.* Well, that's not just an expression. That's a blatant lie. Actually I came for no reason at all. Angels also do things like that. Angels can also pop into the inn on the way home. This is an inn, isn't it?

IRENA: Yes.

ANGEL: Do they get internet? I mean wifi?

IRENA: What are you talking about?

ANGEL: I'd like to check my e-mail and look at the news.

IRENA: We have no electricity, no heating, no newspapers, no internet, no television, no radio, no music.

ANGEL: Then what do you have in the town and larger region?

IRENA: Only a bank.

MAX: And I saw a post office.

IRENA: The post office is robbed occasionally. The leave the bank alone. It's empty.

ANGEL: If you have a bank and post office, then you also have hope. I paid a visit to a neighboring region.

IRENA: How far away?

ANGEL: Nothing is far for an angel. It's close. Two stops on the bus, then you hop across a wall, and you're already there. It's wonderful. Pure tourism. Everything brand spanking new. Clean water. Clean soil. Clean tax policies. Warm, hot even. People walk around like me. Naked. Or at least with very few clothes on. And they're sipping cocktails, long drinks, tall glasses with straws and bright paper umbrellas. Fancy. Very fancy.

MAX: Where were you?

ANGEL: Next to here. The next town in the region. Did you think this was the only one? The only one in the universe? What arrogance! I went into the Imperial Hotel de Lux and checked my e-mail for free. For free, I tell you. They asked me if I was a tourist. I said I was a transient, passing through. And they said *transients get a discount here*.

IRENA: Such places still exist?

ANGEL: Europe has two faces. Even your town and the larger region has two faces. Yours and others. The one on the other side of the wall, two stops from here. I like the other face better. It has internet. And I surfed the news. The rain is growing lighter. The icy snow is melting. There's only fog in your town. You should do something about that. Change the system. Everything. And you won't have problems anymore. It is what it is. People are resilient, angels even more so. Because we have no asses, no digestive organs. You know, ever since I got hit by a rocket in a storm, I've completely changed. I'm addicted. Confused like a human being. The internet. A physical body. It all mixed me up. Now I see that Majda invited the Road Worker into her bed and that's good for me. She'll already be warmed up when I get to her.

MAX: You're talking about my mother, you shameless winged creature!

ANGEL: That's right! My wings! I have to take them with me. In the neighboring town, the sun is always shining and everyone walks around with their wings on. They make shade with their wings. And there's no danger that they'll get wet. Wings are super high fashion now. Here and there. In hell and heaven.

MAX: Are we in hell?

ANGEL: Don't talk nonsense! That was just a metaphor. A saying. Such stupidities don't actually exist. Fairytales. There's no devil. And there's no god either. Well, there's been no god for some time actually. Instead we have fashion. High fashion. That's the only truth! Accessories, pants, colors, skirts, feathers up, feathers down. The devil and god are dead, but fashion is alive. Very much alive. It's essential. I'm going now if there's no internet here. You two carry on. *Home is where someone is waiting for you*. Nice thought, but completely obsolete. Home is where you have your

bank account. That's what the Angel tells you. But lovers live in confusion, because to be in love is to wander through a hard winter. How beautifully I said that! I really must go now. My intuition tells me that the Road Worker has finished the job. I am going into a soft and wet furrow, if you follow my thinking.

*Angel opens the door and disappears into the rain, which has changed into icy snow.*

*Max closes the door after him.*

IRENA: To be in love is to wander through a hard winter. He did say it beautifully.

MAX: Blathering winged idiot. An Angel, and so much insinuation.

IRENA: I'm cold.

MAX: He let the cold in. That's all that angels these days are able to do. They let the cold into the soul.

IRENA: Poet.

MAX: Graduate.

IRENA: Hug me.

MAX: What?

IRENA: Love me. Please.

*Irena pulls him to her and embraces him.*

IRENA: I'm so alone. And so hungry for love.

MAX: I'm also alone. Alone in this terrible winter.

*He holds her tightly.*

IRENA: And I can't remember the last time I had dinner.

MAX: I could dine on your kiss. That's enough for me.

*Irena carresses his arms and his chest.*

IRENA: You have strong arms. Only muscles. No fat at all on your shoulders.

MAX: I'm happy that I'm here. That you're here. That we're here. Home is where you are waiting for me.

*He embraces her.*

IRENA: Will you marry me?

MAX: I will.

*Someone claps somewhere.*

*Then another person and another. Timid applause from somewhere.*

*Then they all timidly go silent.*

MAX: What was that?

IRENA: What?

MAX: Mice? Rats? The cracking of furniture in the cold winter?

IRENA: Don't be stupid! Mice and rats don't clap. We burnt the furniture for heat in 1991. And we haven't had any mice or rates for twenty years. No cats or dogs either.

MAX: What then? The Inn Keeper and his people?

IRENA: Ghosts. Don't be afraid. My husbands. All thirteen of them. Come into the bedroom with me so I can explain everything to you and confess my love.

*They exit.*

**12. In the mother's sitting room. Rain can stil be seen falling outside the window.**

*Mother Majda, the Priest's Cook, the Truck Driver's Wife, and Max, the only man among all the women.*

MOTHER MAJDA: Pants down!



MAX: Mother! We're not alone.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: All men are the same. White skin, a bloated belly, a little thing hanging down.

PRIEST'S COOK: You have no right to judge our men, you dirty immigrant!

MOTHER MAJDA: I'll undress you, my son!

*Mother Majda pulls her son's pants down with skilled hands, and then takes off his shirt and his sweater.*

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: What *immigrant*? I've been with you from the very beginning.

PRIEST'S COOK: From what beginning?

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: The new beginning.

PRIEST'S COOK: Even if you'd been here since the crucifixion! Look at you! Freak! Black hair! Dark brown eyes!

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Brown is cool.

PRIEST'S COOK: Here we're all blond with blue eyes. We have short legs and long hands. Working hands. Big palms like shovels because we're used to working with the soil. Look at you! Narrow-assed long-legged degenerate!

MOTHER MAJDA: There we go, we're done, my son! Let's begin!

*Max stands in the middle of his mother's sitting room wearing only his underwear. They are not too clean.*

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I have children. My chemistry has already blended with yours. Genetics has made a cocktail. Isn't that enough for you?

PRIEST'S COOK: No one has ever seen your brats. Are you feeding them with our winter stores?

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I also took on your god. And rejected mine.

PRIEST'S COOK: Whoever rejects their own god does not deserve a foreign god.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: What can I do so that I'll finally belong here?

PRIEST'S COOK: Go back to your own country.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Who will you hate then?

PRIEST'S COOK: Don't worry. We always find someone.

MOTHER MAJDA: My son is ready.

MAX: What are you going to do with me, ladies? Some ritual that I've never heard of?

PRIEST'S COOK: We're going to measure you. Parcel you out. That's a woman's duty. Traditionally. We always do it before weddings. New standards. I'm the first. Render under god what is god's!

MOTHER MAJDA: I'll go second. That's my position by default.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: And I'm third.

MOTHER MAJDA: Don't even think about it, you greedy guest worker!

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: What should I do then?

MOTHER MAJDA: Just stand there.

*The Priest's Cook pulls a black felt tip pen out of her pocket and draws lines all the way around Max's ribs, across his stomach, and down over his left thigh. And then makes a big circle, like a small continent on human skin.*

PRIEST'S COOK: That will do just fine.

MAX: What is that supposed to be?

MOTHER MAJDA: A vest. Half of it red velvet. The other half ...

*Mother Majda takes the felt tip pen and draws the other half, a little larger, down over the other thigh.*

MOTHER MAJDA: Green damask. Red and green. And an accordion. The colors of our town and the larger region.

PRIEST'S COOK: You drew it too low. It's not symmetrical. It won't be right.

*Mother Majda corrects it.*

MOTHER MAJDA: I don't have my glasses.

MAX: What now?

MOTHER MAJDA: Pants.

*She makes a line from the thighs down to the ankles.*

PRIEST'S COOK: This goes to the Mayor's house.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: What do I get?

PRIEST'S COOK: Immigrants get the trimmings.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: The leftovers.

MOTHER MAJDA: Some consider them delicacies.

MAX: What are you doing?

PRIEST'S COOK: Each house gets something ...

MOTHER MAJDA: To sew.

PRIEST'S COOK: That's the fairest way to do it. Now the shirt and the jacket. The upper part.

*She draws from his neck down, across the center of the ribs and back around to the shoulder blade, outlining a nice wide section.*

PRIEST'S COOK: The rib cage.

MAX: I feel like I'm at ...

PRIEST'S COOK: The buttons will be here. In the middle.

MAX: ... the butcher's.

*The door opens a crack. The Inn Keeper peeks in.*

INN KEEPER: I get the back.

PRIEST'S COOK: Quiet!

INN KEEPER: He signed.

MAX: I didn't sign anything.

INN KEEPER: You did. Look!

*He reaches his hand through the crack in the door. He's holding a piece of paper.*

MAX: I did not.

INN KEEPER: Are you claiming that I'm lying?

MAX: Yes.

INN KEEPER: Then I'll see you in court.

*Mother Majda goes to the door, pushes the Inn Keeper's head out, and shuts it.*

MOTHER MAJDA: We're working here.

MAX: I didn't sign anything, mother.

PRIEST'S COOK: I wouldn't worry. The court will decide...

MAX: I'm sure they will.

PRIEST'S COOK: In his favor.

MAX: But my signature is not on the paper.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Our Inn Keeper is also a high court judge.

MOTHER MAJDA: And a constitutional judge.

PRIEST'S COOK: The Mayor gave him a mandate.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: As long as these exceptional circumstances last.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Until the water is gone. Until the snow melts.

PRIEST'S COOK: Which means a permanent mandate.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Because the water will never be gone. And the snow will freeze over.

MOTHER MAJDA: Now turn around, so I can draw the kidneys, the sweetest part. For the Mayor.

MAX: For the Mayor?

PRIEST'S COOK: He also has to live.

MOTHER MAJDA: An empty sack cannot stand upright.

PRIEST'S COOK: Speaking of *an empty sack*, I heard that the Road Worker came to see you.

MOTHER MAJDA: Skin and bones. If Angel didn't come afterwards, I would have fallen asleep in a bad mood.

*The Cook draws on Max's arms. Max's face is increasingly pale and worried. The three women are becoming more and more enthusiastic. They are practically drooling and their chins tremble as they work.*

PRIEST'S COOK: This cut will go to the Priest. The fingers can be used for aspic.

MAX: What cut?

MOTHER MAJDA: The sleeves. The Priest adores soup made from the arms. I mean to say that he likes sewing that part.

PRIEST'S COOK: All five fingers are delicious to lick. I mean to sew. Like gloves. Oh, I'm so mixed up. I will stir them. I will make aspic that quivers for the whole town.

MAX: This is a nightmare! A nightmarish nightmare! What are you doing to me?

PRIEST'S COOK: Calm down, boy. Humanity must survive!

*The women look at him, fondle him, drooling, their chins shaking even more than before...*

MOTHER MAJDA: My son, you have such juicy kidneys, your sirloin is so nice.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I also love sirloin.

MOTHER MAJDA: Quiet! Foreign born scum!

PRIEST'S COOK: The tenderloin is also nice and meaty, but his shanks are stringy.

MOTHER MAJDA: Such a fine boy, but no hips.

PRIEST'S COOK: That's why his lower back is so inviting.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I would also like ...

MOTHER MAJDA: Get away, immigrant filth! My son is too good for you!

PRIEST'S COOK: His back is nicely developed. You fattened him up nicely, Mother Majda. Good job!

MOTHER MAJDA: Oh, it was nothing! He also helped. He always liked to exercise. He was first in the hundred-meter race. I still have the medal, my son, somewhere up in the attic.

PRIEST'S COOK: And here. One or two rumsteaks. No more than that. The rest is too gristly.

MOTHER MAJDA: His father was also gristly. Bad neck, ribs with no fat on them...

*Max goes crazy. He grabs his clothes and gets dressed.*

MAX: What's the matter with you! Have you all gone mad! You want to butcher me alive!

PRIEST'S COOK: So we won't starve to death.

MOTHER MAJDA: So there won't be war.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Foriegners only ever get the leftovers anyway.

PRIEST'S COOK: A civil war is the worst. That's the last thing we need.

MAX: But this is crazy! I thought I understood all of you. That I knew you. That Kafka had already described everything that was indescribalbe. Mother, instead of bringing me a cup of coffee, you intend to cut me up like a pig!

MOTHER MAJDA: It's not my fault. The government is guilty! The king is guilty! The crown and empire. Presidents are guilt. Parliament! The water up to our neck is guilty. What can a poor mother do, who on top of everything else is an alcoholic?

MAX: A mother should stand by her son's side, not stick a knife into his ribs!

MOTHER MAJDA: A mother is thirsty, a mother is hungry, her child so big and well built he could move mountains. How can a mother help herself, I ask you, a mother who has toiled her whole life, with a drunken father, and the poor sad thing had to start drinking herself? What can she do, poor thing, when the electricity is turned off, the plumbing clogs, the cat and dog already killed. And after the poor woman worked for forty years in a factory, she was told to get lost. Serves here right. Why didn't she do something else, something more entrepreneurial, or at least steal goods from the warehouse and sell them on the black market?

MAX: You didn't work in a factory. You were an accountant at the Post Office Hotel.

MOTHER MAJDA: How can a poor mother know what is right and what is wrong, if everything is wrong and everything is right? Hunger and cold, high prices and loans. Floods too. And directives from above. Why wouldn't a mother have something good from her son, maybe a piece of his thigh, a bowl of grease, some fatty cracklings, since the whole world is underwater?

MAX: A nightmare! This is a nightmare!

PRIEST'S COOK: It has been a nightmare for some time.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: The worst nightmare is to be a foreigner in this country.

MAX: I'm leaving.

PRIEST'S COOK: And we'll have to go without supper?

MAX: I'm leaving right now. Get away! I'll take my young love, Irena, with me. I will take my own youth and I will go.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Irena is waiting in the church.

MOTHER MAJDA: Son, don't do this. You're embarrassing me.

PRIEST'S COOK: There really won't be any supper?

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Not even lunch?

MAX: What kind of mother are you? You would sell your own son? Slaughter him like a young calf?

MOTHER MAJDA: What kind of son are you? That you would leave your mother with no supper?

*Max walks out into the gray rain and slams the door behind him.*

*The women look at each other and shake their heads.*

PRIEST'S COOK: Our approach was wrong.

MOTHER MAJDA: It was his upbringing.

PRIEST'S COOK: We shouldn't have let him know that we were after his best parts.

MOTHER MAJDA: We should have let him believe that we were measuring him for his wedding clothes until the very end.

PRIEST'S COOK: We should have surprised him right before he got to the altar.

MOTHER MAJDA: I couldn't help myself. My mouth started to water. I could already see those delicious kidney steaks.

PRIEST'S COOK: This crisis just goes on and on.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: And now we'll get hit with taxes too.

MOTHER MAJDA: But isn't he my own flesh?

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Supposedly.

PRIEST'S COOK: We screwed up in the storytelling department. We revealed everything too soon.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Where I come from, we would have just hit him over the head. Let him bleed out. Then butcher him.

PRIEST'S COOK: What a savage!



*The door to the little chamber opens.*

*Angel enters. He's wearing his wings. He's dressed in a white robe that looks like a nightshirt.*

ANGEL: When is the wedding? I'm the best man.

### **13. In an empty church with no pews and no god.**

*Irena stands in the middle of the church dressed in a wedding gown. She is waiting.*

*From somewhere, in all likelihood from a choir, beautiful sacred singing can be heard. Four voices at least. With a faint trace of a simple folk melody.*

EVERYONE:

Bride and groom before the altar meet,

and there they have a bite to eat.

She gives him her hand,

and feels young again.

She grills him a steak,

he doesn't say thanks.

Blood drips down to his toes,

when she snips off his nose.

Bride and groom before the altar meet,

and there they have a bite to eat.

*Max runs into the church.*

MAX: Let's go! Let's run!

IRENA: Where?

MAX: Away! On a bus! On a train!

IRENA: The last bus drove away in the year 2004. May 1.

MAX: Then the train.

IRENA: The gypsies took the tracks...

MAX: I know, yes. The road! The road beneath our feet!

IRENA: The Road Worker diligently dug them up. Now you can't tell anymore what's the road and what's the field.

MAX: They went mad. They're all mad. If you only knew...

*He quickly unbuttons his shirt and shows the black lines on his skin.*

MAX: They were drawing which parts of me belong to which house. This part to the Mayor...

IRENA: I hope they didn't give the guts to me. I am so sick of eating tripe. I'll throw up if you even say the word liver to me.

MAX: Irena! You too! You knew?

IRENA: Don't play the fool! Pull yourself together and make the necessary sacrifice! Let's get married and everything will go by the rules.

MAX: By the rules? What rules, fucking Christ?

IRENA: This bread is my body and this wine my blood.

MAX: But that's just a saying ...

IRENA: That's what he said before he allowed himself to be eaten.

MAX: It's a metaphor ...

IRENA: It's a commandment. Everything is literal now. Nothing is metaphorical.

MAX: Well, I won't have anything to do with it!

IRENA: You don't have to. You're just the object.

MAX: And that's why we have to marry?

IRENA: One soul, one body. Only then can it be done. If there weren't a wedding, it would be unethical and immoral. This way I will be certain that you're the flesh of my flesh. I will be loyal to you and your blood will flow in my veins. The wedding gives permission for...

MAX ... for the last supper.

IRENA: For love. I love you so much I could gobble you up.

MAX: What a cursed devilish world!

*The winged Angel flies across the church.*

ANGEL: I'm here. Am I late?

*He lands softly between the bride and groom.*

ANGEL: I will be the best man.

MAX: You again!

ANGEL: Who is the maid of honor?

MAX: There won't be one.

ANGEL: Then I will be best man and the maid of honor. Angels can play many roles at once.

MAX: There won't be a wedding. Because I won't be here. I'm leaving this crazy place.

*Max turns and makes to leave. Irena grabs his hand and won't let him go. She looks at him with feverish, mad, flashing eyes.*

IRENA: What do you think you would be if you went away from us, if you took your brains out on to the sour meadows of the so-called humanities? You'll still carry the smell of shit from our town. Mister Shit. And you'll be hungry wherever you go, to Vienna, to the North Pole, or to some sunken Atlantis, our claws will still hold you. You'll always carry our stink on your shirt, our mark on your skin. Who are you, Max? Maximilian, little Marjan, looking askance at our accordion, laughing at our flag, with no patriotism or love of home, rolling your eyes when we sing our songs, disgusted at how we comfort each other in the evenings at the campfire of our little town and the larger region. You're just a useless intellectual who forgot that you also shoveled manure at the Inn Keeper's in exchange for a glass of raspberry schnapps, and who now thinks that the heavens opened up, that raspberry shnapps was some kind of fabulous miracle. You were all over me because I let you be. But it was the townspeople who encouraged me. *Give it to him, they said, let him fondle you, the stupid little cunt, always carrying a book around with with him. That puny kid will never be a hero like Martin Krpan, he'll never be a fireman, never a mayor, not even a chicken-hearted tax collector, so let him have a little pussy this once.* That's what they said. I gave it to you out of pity, and when you left, we were all happy. You squirted your ruined seed around and then pissed on it, and not even thistles could grow from it. But then the times changed. The water came. Flooded everything. God fled. Taxes wiped out the chickens and pigs and rats. And now we need you. Now we need your nasty seed. We never thought we would need you. Everything under water and now it's time to give back to us what we gave you, you pimply idiot, give at least something back! Marry me so that the laws will be satisfied, so that Europe will be satisfied, so that everything will be by the rules when we eat you. A pound of flesh that you make at home, that your rear at home, is an untaxed commodity! Give me your hand, you cursed Franc.

MAX: I'm not Franc.

IRENA: Milan, Jožef, Lojze, Črtomir, or Janez Pavel. You're all the same. Some are better for steak, some better for goulash.

*Max pulls his hand from her vicelike grip.*

MAX: Let me go, you witch!

ANGEL: The first lover's quarrel, a good sign.

MAX: Shut up, you winged creature!

ANGEL: I'm just observing. And I'm happy. A good argument can always be settled between the sheets.

MAX: Irena, I'll ask you one more time. Will you go with me?

IRENA: Give me your thigh! So I'll have enough until the thaw.

MAX: Farewell, slut!! Farewell, Angel! Farewell, town and the larger region. I'm going, even if I die from it!

#### **14. Still in the empty church with no pews or god.**

*The villages crawl out from all the dark corners of the church.*

MAYOR: Bravo, Irena!

INN KEEPER: You didn't betray us.

PRIEST: Well-raised girl.

ROAD WORKER: Well put together. The thing she said about the roads, that came from me.

MAYOR: We all helped to raise her well.

MAX: Stay where you are! Don't come near me! I'm leaving.

MAYOR: Inn Keeper, do you have a knife?

INN KEEPER: I always carry one with me.

MAYOR: Good boy. Remind me to give you a job as Village Veterinarian.

INN KEEPER: You already did when we butchered my Franc.

PRIEST'S COOK: Quiet! Don't use such words in this holy house!

INN KEEPER: What should I say?

PRIEST'S COOK: *When we took him back among us again. When he became our man again. Our flesh, our blood.*

MAYOR: We had him in the freezer until not too long ago.

TRUCK DRIVER: Shall I get the canvas from the truck so we won't soil god's house with blood?

PRIEST: Don't trouble yourself. My cook will scrub the floors and I'll bless them. Then it will be holy again.

*The townspeople close in on Max. The Inn Keeper is brandishing a large knife in his hands.*

MAX: You're not going to say anything, mother? You won't defend me? Even the mothers of animals defend their young.

PRIEST'S COOK: Animals take care of themselves.

MOTHER MAJDA: Where hunger begins, maternal feeling ends.

MAX: And why me?

MAYOR: If it were someone else, would you even worry about it?

INN KEEPER: We already went through everyone else. That's why.

ROAD WORKER: Smartypants! Graduates! Everyone!

MAYOR: The ones who worked with their brains were first in line.

PRIEST'S COOK: Because they're soft. Without muscles.

MAYOR: You never get muscles from flipping through the pages of a book.

PRIEST'S COOK: The educated are like suckling pigs.

MOTHER MAJDA: Manual laborers are stringier, better for goulash.

INN KEEPER: Let's stop shooting the breeze here!

MAX: Wait! Wait! Let's keep talking.

INN KEEPER: This knife is heavy.

MAX: What about you, immigrant woman! You see the world differently. Won't you take my side? Today it's me. Tomorrow it could be you!

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

MAYOR: You already are. You think we don't know. You give birth to children and then grow fat on them. And you don't share them with anyone.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: We never will, even if the water runs down our throat.

INN KEEPER: That's why you'll get a smaller piece of Max now.

ROAD WORKER: Leftover. Trimmings. Skin.

TRUCK DRIVER: I'm not an immigrant. I'm one of you. Punish her, not me.

INN KEEPER: We're talking too much. Let's just grab him!

*The townspeople menacingly approach Max.*

MAX: Don't come close to me! I studied martial arts in the city. I'm warning you.

INN KEEPER: Don't wave your hands like that. I don't want to damage you too much.

MAYOR: Father, let us begin!

*The Priest, as befits his positions, begins the liturgy. Almost singing it.*

PRIEST: Irena, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, do you take this young man as also flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, to be your one...

IRENA: I take him! I take him!

PRIEST: And unite with him flesh and blood...

IRENA: Yes, yes ...

PRIEST: And he will be your only care, your only freedom...

IRENA: Freedom!

MAX: What kind of freedom are you talking about? Murderers!

PRIEST: And you will share him with us fairly, we flesh of your flesh, blood of your blood...

MAX: What about my freedom? My life and my freedom?

PRIEST: We will liberate you from your mortal coil and then you will be truly free.

ANGEL: Although, if you'll permit me to say so, physical existence can also be very pleasant.

*The townspeople approach Max and surround him. The bride Irena puts her arms around him and holds him, as she might her husband in a wedding photograph.*

MAX: You'll be sorry. This crime will not be ignored. The world will punish you. They'll put you in jail. Bastille, Guantanamo, Alcatraz, London Tower, Spandau in Berlin. The world and Europe are full of jails.

PRIEST: Europe values freedom more than anything else.

MOTHER MAJDA: And you are our freedom!

MAYOR: If you can't pay for your electricity, you're not free.

ROAD WORKER: And if you can't pay the tolls.

TRUCK DRIVER: ... or rent...

PRIEST'S COOK: ... or water...

MAYOR: ... or income taxes.

PRIEST: No fees ...

PRIEST'S COOK: If you don't have a job, you're not free.

IRENA: If you don't have a husband, you're not free.

ROAD WORKER: If you don't have a car or roads or a garage to park in, you're not free.

MAYOR: If you don't have a bank account, an accountant, a bribe, or a tax number, you're not free.



PRIEST: If you don't have god, you're not free.

*Mother Majda grabs her son from the other side.*

MOTHER MAJDA: And if you're hungry, you're not free at all!

EVERYONE: A hungry man is the most unfree!

PRIEST: Forever and ever amen...

EVERYONE: Amen.

*Max tears himself away from the clutches of his mother and his bride (as any intelligent man would do). He reaches into the pocket of his jacket and pulls out a brown colored object. It looks like a book.*

MAX: Get away! If you don't, you'll be sorry!

MAYOR: Watch out! He has a bomb!

INN KEEPER: Terrorist! I knew it.

*The Priest covers his face and starts to cry.*

PRIEST: Spare me!

PRIEST'S COOK: Janez, get a hold of yourself! People are looking at you.

PRIEST: I'm still so young.

PRIEST'S COOK: Janez, think about heaven! Just think about heaven!

PRIEST: Don't give me that shit about heaven! I don't want to die! That's it. I don't want ...

MOTHER MAJDA: Son, give me the bomb!

MAX: Whoever comes near me will get it in the head!

TRUCK DRIVER: Doesn't it look like a book?

ROAD WORKER: I have no idea. I'm illiterate.

*The Inn Keeper gathers his courage and goes toward Max with his knife.*

INN KEEPER: I'm going to stab him. Whatever happens happens.

*Max throws the book with all his strength toward the Inn Keeper's head and runs.*

*Everyone screams and throws themselves onto the ground.*

*The Inn Keeper holds his head.*

INN KEEPER: Ow! My head exploded.

*They slowly collect themselves.*

*The Mayor picks up the book.*

MAYOR: It isn't a bomb. It's just a book.

PRIEST: That's even worse, even worse!

TRUCK DRIVER: The book is camouflaging a bomb.

MOTHER MAJDA: What is that boy doing to me! And how I suffered pushing him into the world!

PRIEST'S COOK: He ran away, poor thing!

STREET WORKER: He has nowhere to go. There are no roads. He'll be back.

TRUCK DRIVER: I'll pick him up again and take him to the meadow.

*The bride in her beautiful white dress (it doesn't show that it was used thirteen times before) stands in the middle of the church and screams ...*

IRENA: HUUUNGRY! I'm huuuuuuuungry!

MAYOR: Until then we'll just have to make do.

INN KEEPER: We'll have to butcher someone else. The water in the kettle has been boiling for more than an hour...

*Everyone turns toward the Truck Driver's wife.*

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Why are you all looking at me?

PRIEST'S COOK: You're on the list.

MOTHER MAJDA: Foreigners are always on the list.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: I'm assimilated. Adapted. I'm yours. Ennobled by your seed.

PRIEST: *Whoever is foreign can never be ours.* That's what the old song says.

MAYOR: And also the European directive.

IRENA: Forget Europe! Europe is underwater. Huuungry! Huuungry! I'm huuuuuuungry now!

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Get someone else, please!

*They menacingly approach her.*

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Protect me! You're my husband!

TRUCK DRIVER: First I'm a loyal citizen of the town, then I'm your husband.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Why are we foreigners always screwed, I ask you!

MAYOR: Father, can we start?

PRIEST: We don't have any special protocol for foreigners. We can do them at any time and at any place.

TRUCK DRIVER'S WIFE: Wait, wait! What about the Angel, I ask you. The Angel is even more foreign. Nothing hurts him. Do him! Do him first!

*Everyone stares at Angel.*

*They reflect a little bit. But not too much.*

MOTHER MAJDA: We can burn his wings.

TRUCK DRIVER'S: We can roast them on the fire.

PRIEST'S COOK: What do you say, Janez?

PRIEST: It's not explicitly forbidden in the Holy Book.

*The Angel smiles angelically as he observes the townspeople approaching him, and recites in a mild voice...*

ANGEL: Wine is more intoxicating than blood,  
and blood, you know, is redder than love.  
The sky is darker than night and the eyes  
that search more blue than the sea.  
How beautiful and pure is the burning bush  
its crimson flower, its crimson flame.  
How perfect the grapes, the bloody berries,  
like a fragment of marble crystal  
from which the mountains are made.  
Wine is more intoxicating than blood,  
and blood is more beautiful than love.  
Even the sky cannot find its end;  
and the eyes that search for you,  
rest in the distance of your gaze.  
Everything is over, that is true,  
and I am sorry I will not be there to see it too.

*The townspeople lunge at Angel, throw him to the floor, and fall upon him.  
Feathers flutter up from the closed circle, as if they are plucking a chicken.*

## **15. In the ditch at the side of the road.**

*Max awakens with a scream and jumps up.*

MAX: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

*Out of breath, he looks around him.*

VAGABOND: Good morning.

MAX: What?

VAGABOND: Don't tell me that you've already forgotten me.

MAX: It's you?

VAGABOND: You.

MAX: I was dreaming.

VAGABOND: Impossible.

MAX: I did.

VAGABOND: In these lands, no one dreams anymore.

MAX: Then it was a nightmare.

VAGABOND: Oh, that is possible. A nightmare, of course!

MAX: I saved myself with a bomb.

VAGABOND: So you found him?

MAX: Who?

VAGABOND: Kafka.

MAX: I saved myself with a book.

VAGABOND: Kafka was a real bomb!

MAX: I barely escaped.

VAGABOND: A really bad nightmare.

MAX: It was like reality.

VAGABOND: Reality is the worst nightmare of all.

MAX: I won't go home. A grown-up man cannot return, even during a crisis. Even if everything is underwater and buried in ice.

VAGABOND: You can say that now that you're almost there.

MAX: I'd rather die in my prime ...

VAGABOND: You won't need to.

MAX: I'd rather freeze and pass out in a watery ditch right in front of the house where I was born then go back.

*The Vagabond shows a newspaper.*

VAGABOND: It says that a thaw is coming. That the water will flow away. Atlantis will rise again. The Statue of Liberty will peek out of the water, and the Eiffel Tower, and the cathedral of Cologne, the gardens of Vienna, and Versaille, the Berlin Wall, and even the castle of the angels will be visible again. I hope that the Sistine Chapel will still be useful after all this time...

MAX: Are you sure that's today's newspaper?

VAGABOND: Or tomorrow's. Or yesterday's. It doesn't matter. What matter's is that the a thaw will come. It always does. The world is like a great big amusment park. Europe especially. The oldest in the universe. She'll be back on her feet again. You can return to the city without worries. There will be lines again, electricity again, traffic regimes, rentals, sales, angels in low flight...

MAX: God only knows what happened with Angel.

VAGABOND: In fact, there is no Angel, but Angéla. A woman after a successful operation.

MAX: He had wings.

VAGABOND: The devil also has wings.

MAX: Was it the Devil?

VAGABOND: Don't be stupid! It was a pigeon. A completely ordinary pigeon. An urban rat. That's the taste it has.

MAX: But how do you know? You said it was all a nightmare.

VAGABOND: Our nightmare. Now go back to the city. Find Irena. She's the one for you. Don't leave her to that hairy philosopher. I hear the bus coming. I have to go.

MAX: Where?

VAGABOND: I'm going to turn onto my other side and go back to sleep.

*He turns on his other side.*

MAX: You'll freeze.

VAGABOND: I can't anymore.

MAX: Anyone can freeze.

VAGABOND: Except for those who are already frozen.

*Max stands up and wipes off his clothes.*

*Then he climbs out of the ditch.*

*A bus really does arrive.*

MAX: But I don't have any money.

VAGABOND: You don't need it. The bus is free now. And healthcare also. And schools are free. And universities. And the highways. And electricity. Everyone has a pension and no one steals.

MAX: You're kidding me?

VAGABOND: I'm just babbling before my afternoon nap.

*The bus honks.*

MAX: All right. Farewell then.

VAGABOND: Leave me Kafka. For under my head.

*Max tosses him the book.*

*The Vagabond tucks it under his head.*

MAX: Goodbye.

*The Vagabond is already asleep.*

*Max climbs on the bus.*

*The bus drives off.*

**THE END**