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## Brief Connections

**Characters: HER, HIM, LIL', Dara, Boro, Milija, Mum, Gary, Azra, Estate Agent, Srđan, Stranger**

The play is set in the present. The past is marked in green. The past and the present intertwine. Not only in our memories.

*There will be a lot of stage directions throughout the script. Don't let it shock you, if such a thing is still possible...*

*SHE is sitting and crying. But that's just fine, lots of women cry these days. And no one knows about it. I for one, try not to cry, or at least not in front of others. (There has already been a play that starts like this ... but then, so many things in life begin or end with tears. So let's not worry about it too much.) SHE is sitting on the floor with piles of clothes strewn around her. A bottle of wine sits in one hand and a glass in the other. Untouched. And somewhere there is also an old phone, that SHE probably got from a flea market. It's beautiful, big and shiny. Like a black exclamation mark. SHE has just finished talking on her mobile.*

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HER. Does mum know that you're calling me?

LIL'. No.

HER. You know it costs to call abroad?

LIL'. I'm calling from MY mobile. It's new.

HER. And who's paying for it?

LIL'. Dad.

HER. Oh, so... it doesn't matter.

LIL'. The landline would be cheaper than a mobile.

HER. What's that noise?

LIL'. I was flushing. In the loo.

HER. What are you doing there?

LIL'. Have a guess.

HER. Honey, are you alone?

LIL'. No, I'm not, but I am alone in here. They can't hear me.

HER. Honey, hold on, I'll call you back!

II.

*SHE thinks for a moment and then dials. From the landline. SHE always calls home from the landline. SHE doesn't know why. No reason in particular. No one picks up. SHE tries again. Nothing. SHE dials again.*

HER. Listen, muppet, why didn't you pick up?

LIL'. I didn't know who it was. Why did you call from a landline? Are you at work? Saving money?

HER. *(Ignoring her questions.)* I told you I'd call you back.

LIL'. I don't have this number. Just your mobile. Mum said not to accept calls from unknown numbers.

HER. Not to what?

LIL'. Not to pick it up, Jesus!

HER. Okay. Why did you call?

LIL'. Just to see how you are.

*SHE hesitates for a moment. Doesn't know what to say. Kids can ask difficult questions. SHE sips her wine. Just in case. SHE might need some strength.*

LIL'. Are you there?

HER. Yes.

LIL'. So, how are you?

HER. What you mean?

LIL'. Are you happy?

*SHE fights back the tears. Lil' is calling her in not exactly a good moment for answering those kinds of questions. SHE finishes her wine. SHE likes good wine. Who doesn't? I too, like to spoil myself with a bottle of good wine now and then. Never mind that it costs me.*

LIL'. Your love life. How are the men there? The same as here?

HER. The same as everywhere.

LIL'. Mum says the same.

HER. How about your dad, is he in touch?

LIL'. He got me a computer.

HER. What was wrong with yours?

LIL'. Nothing.

HER. What will you do with two of them?

LIL'. Nothing. I'll keep one in my room and we'll put the other in mum's bedroom.

HER. But she's already got one.

LIL'. So we'll have three of them. We can connect one to the internet. You know, viruses.

And I can get on Skype. And we can talk for free.

HER. Do you miss him?

LIL'. Not really. He was a dick.

HER. You shouldn't say that.

LIL'. Mum said. And how about you, have you met a nice dick?

HER. Did she say that?

LIL'. She says all men are dicks.

HER. Why did you call?

LIL'. I've told you, to see how you are.

*SHE hesitates for a while. But hesitation doesn't really work with kids. They can tell.*

HER. Just for that? And how is school?

LIL'. Stupid question, innit? You know I am a clever clogs .

HER. Yeah...

LIL'. You're not getting any younger ...

*This is too much. Every question adds insult to injury. SHE's flustered. And the wine isn't helping.*

LIL'. How about kids? Don't you want any? Haven't you heard about the biological clock? Yours must be ticking faster than the speed of light.

HER. Thanks, Miss. Having you is more than enough.

LIL'. It's not the same. You see me three times a year. That's not enough. You could come more often.

*SHE knows that LIL' is just asking big questions that she must have picked up from the adults, but still SHE's getting more and more confused by the conversation, forgetting that SHE's talking to a fifteen year old girl.*

HER. Drop it. You know I don't have much time.

LIL'. And I do? Nobody does these days. I do piano, gymnastics, French ... and then school as well.

HER. I go to the gym twice a week, have English and – surprise, surprise – I work, too.

*SHE feels a bit better, but only for a moment.*

LIL'. You can't speak English? Every moron can speak English!

HER. Well I am not a moron.

LIL'. Have you bought a flat yet?

*SHE feels awkward again.*

LIL'. You need to take these things seriously. If you want to stay there, you need to think about your future.

HER. What shall I bring you when I come?

LIL'. *(Right away, without thinking, though apparently that's not why she called.)* Is the latest Harry Potter out yet?

HER. I don't know... maybe.

LIL'. God, you're useless! Check it on the web and let me know. Promise?

HER. Promise.

LIL'. So, I'll be waiting for you.

HER. Can I talk to your mum?

LIL'. She went out with a new mate of hers. A BOYFRIEND! A LOVER!

*(After a brief silence. Pleading, like a child.)* Can I come? To visit you? Please, please!

III.

*SHE's sitting and thinking. The conversation beforehand has left her properly shaken. I guess SHE didn't expect that. At least not coming from Lil'. An hour, or two, pass by. The time is not important. In the meantime SHE tidies up her rented flat.. It's quite large and light with loads of books and plants. SHE's giving it a proper clean, washing all the dishes from last week. SHE's not singing or listening to music. It's quiet. Suddenly the intercom buzzes. And again. SHE doesn't react. SHE carries on cleaning. SHE turns the radio on, then the washing machine, and the TV too... Altogether they make a proper racket. But still, it won't silence the beep of an incoming text on her mobile. SHE texts back without hesitation and keeps cleaning. The phone rings - it's her mobile.*

HIM. Why didn't you open?

HER. I am not at home!

HIM. You know you can't lie.

HER. And?

HIM. What was that abrupt text all about?

HER. I don't have time. I'm working.

HIM. You know you can't lie.

HER. And?

HIM. Don't you think we should talk?

HER. No, I don't!

HIM. So what are you thinking about?

HER. That I want to be on my own.

HIM. For how long?

HER. For long enough.

HIM. And what exactly will that do?

HER. Nothing. It's been at least six months since ANYTHING has been done.

HIM. Don't forget that tomorrow is the do. You promised you'll join me. I can't go on my own. They would talk. I can't stand them asking. You're still my girlfriend. At least in public.

HER. Find a new one. I'm busy tomorrow.

HIM. You know you can't lie.

HER. And?

*Suddenly the phone rings. The pretty, black, shiny one. Like an exclamation mark. Not her mobile, since SHE's still talking to him on her mobile.*

HIM. Someone's calling you. Who is it?

HER. How should I know?

HIM. You know that no one uses the landline anymore. Why don't you cancel it?

HER. Better I cancel you.

*SHE cuts him off, even though it's a bit awkward. Especially for the other side. But not every phone call is a pleasure. As we all know ...*

IV.

*The black shiny phone keeps ringing. SHE's wondering whether to pick it up. It's one too many phone calls in a day ... SHE picks it up the moment it seems it's about to stop ...*

HER. Hi Milija.

MILIJA. How do you know it's me?

HER. Because I do. Only three people have got this number. The little one called already. The only one left is Mum, and she never calls first. She texts me. To say how she is. And where she feels pain and to report all the local gossip. Then she waits for me to call her. Maybe she's saving money. God knows ...

MILIJA. Is this a good moment?

HER. For you, always.

MILIJA. Don't tell me that you're in a bad mood. Not you!

HER. Imagine, even I can be in a bad mood.

MILIJA. Honey, I'm fucked. Gary dumped me.

HER. He was a cunt, fucking cook.

MILIJA. Not all men are cunts.

HER. Yes they are. *(SHE smiles, perhaps remembering what the little one said just a moment ago... )*

MILIJA. But he was the cunt of my life.

HER. I've told you that practically all cooks are gay. The only ones who beat them statistically are dancers. I'm talking serious, long-term, empirical research!

*Her comment is met with a positive and noisy response.*

MILIJA. You're fab, you know?! You always drag me out of my misery.

HER. I know, but that's not gonna help me.

MILIJA. Honey, what am I going to do? Who's gonna cook for me? *(Laughter that has nothing to do with a sense of humour....)*

HER. You can eat out, in pubs. It's cheaper, I've done my maths. And it's much more comfortable. No messy dishes and dirty nails and no fucking boring grocery shopping, no stress that you'll burn the plastic chicken.

MILIJA. Gary was the best.

HER. And so was John before him, Michael and Milorad. The last one is always the best one.

HER. Remember what we said when we were leaving...

MILIJA. This place is tough. No one gives a shit about immigrants.

HER. And this one isn't?

MILIJA. At least you could speak the language when you got there.

HER. You're wrong, my dear. They looked at me like I was a zoo animal. Only I was better at Ypsilons.

MILIJA. At what?

HER. Y griega. Nothing.

MILIJA. Greek what?

*They are obviously enjoying the conversation. They are old mates, and they miss each other. They are a thousand miles apart ...*

HER. Dunja got married, she emailed me.

MILIJA. Stupid cow. To that moron?

HER. No, to a different guy. Also a moron.

MILIJA. Have you split up with another guy yet again?

HER. If you don't succeed as a scientist you can consider a career in fortunetelling. Milija - The Fortune Teller. Sounds great. Post some adverts and you'll have the British on their knees.

MILIJA. Are you still blonde?

HER. What do you think? How long is it since we last saw each other?

MILIJA. Five years. Long time.

HER. Why don't you come?

*Silence.*

HER. Do you think we 'll ever go back home?

HIM. Which home do you mean? There has been quite a few.

HER. Srbsko. Serbia. Republika Srbija...

*MILIJA is quiet. Perhaps he's thinking. It's not a sin. People do think sometimes. It happens to me too.*

MILIJA. Do you remember the sociologist? He failed us both twice.

HER. The sports sociologist. Sure. I won't forget him till the day I die. Or even longer ...

MILIJA. He died. I read it on the web.

*The news makes her a bit upset. SHE has never been into sport, apart from going to her local gym, but still. Death is always moving. Regardless of the circumstances.*

HER. I didn't like him.

MILIJA. But he wanted you to join his department. You were the only one happy to plough through the third edition of his masterpiece "General Sociology with a Focus on Sports Sociology at Secondary Schools in Serbia". You actually read the whole thing. If you didn't lie, that is.

HER. I felt sorry for him. Can we change the topic?

MILIJA. I went to Poland.

HER. And you couldn't drive a few miles down the road to boring fucking Bratislava?! Now you've pissed me off!

MILIJA. Do you think I'm made of money?! It was a scholarship.

HER. Fuck you. Would have been the first time we wouldn't have had to share the same bed!!! I'm renting a bigger flat now.

MILIJA. Bigger flat, bigger problems.

HER. No flat, no problems. But I do miss you, do you know that?! You're the only man I can say this to.

MILIJA. Cause I am gay, so you're safe. You know I won't give you any heartbreak or any other shit.

HER. I really miss you...

MILIJA. You're strange. What's wrong with you? Is everything OK at work?

HER. Don't you have anything more interesting to say?

MILIJA. Dad was killed!

*Pause.*

MILIJA. Five years ago. Nobody told me!

*God knows why the line cut off right then. Maybe it's the distance. SHE hesitates for a moment, not sure whether to dial his number but SHE gives up. SHE waits a bit, to see if he calls back, and when the phone doesn't ring SHE realises that Milija won't call either. SHE sits on the sofa, opens a book and tries to read. SHE's enjoying the silence. Then SHE goes and sits at her computer.*

HER

. I knew it Milija, I did. Forgive me. *(She is crying.)*

V.

*BORO comes in, with a huge box in his hands. He's a policeman but he's off duty now. He's still carrying his gun. He has it all the time. He doesn't feel safe without it. It gives him security. We all need some sort of security. But I would never go that far.*

BORO. Lil', look what Daddy got you.

LIL'. Yah.

BORO. Guess what it is!

LIL'. A computer.

BORO. How did you know?

LIL'. The box.

BORO. Aren't you happy?

LIL'. You got us one just like that two months ago. Is this a storage room?

BORO. This one is more powerful. You'll see.

*BORO is still holding the big box and it's getting uncomfortable. He looks awkward and funny. Like every parent he wants to impress his child, especially after leaving her for his new life. He keeps checking for his gun as he struggles not to drop the box. It's a tick - one that will never go away.*

LIL'. Okay, I am off to French.

BORO. Aren't you happy to see me?

LIL'. You've asked that already.

BORO. I asked about the computer.

LIL'. Mum will be happy to see you. *(Little girls can be pretty cynical, particularly when they're in a bad mood).*

*LIL' sits on the floor and, ties her laces while she looks up at her dad.*

LIL'. Since when do they sell computers in old boxes?

*BORO feels embarrassed by her question. Should he come clean and tell his child that he's 'bought' her his old computer because he gets to keep the new laptop he's just bought himself?*

BORO. The box may not be brand new, but the computer is like new!

LIL'. *(in French)*. Up yours, moron! Fuck you and your new laptop!

BORO. What? I don't understand! Your English is impressive.

*BORO is trying to be funny. Or maybe he's not. Maybe he's never heard French before.*

LIL'. I'm off.

*DARA appears at the door. She's a beautiful woman. Well, or at least she would have been, if it wasn't for certain unpleasant experiences that have taken their toll on her looks.*

DARA. *(to Lil')* Are you still here?

BORO. *(Thinks She's talking to him. Immediately goes onto the offensive.)* Don't forget

that this flat still belongs to me too. So I can stay here as long as I want.

DARA. As far as I'm concerned you can DIE here. Lil', after the class, straight home, okay?

LIL'. *(in French)* But you'll get rid of this one by then, right?

DARA. *(in French)* No worries, I'll sort it out.

BORO. So now you made sure she speaks the language too, so that I can understand fuck all. That's just great. And what's it good for anyway? Who exactly uses foreign languages round these parts?

DARA. Certainly not you. Foreign weapons, more like.

BORO. Sure, mock me all you like, Miss Professor! If it wasn't for me handing you money you'd hardly survive on your crappy teacher's salary.

DARA. Every day I pray to God at least three times to thank him for all the wars in the world – so that you've got something to do and get well paid for.

BORO. You didn't mind before.

DARA. Before, everything was different. Now go. I am expecting someone.

*BORO sees this as a challenge to argue.*

BORO. Don't tell me you still have some interest?

DARA. Oh, sorry, I forgot to tell you. I've put on at least 15 kilos for starters as I've completely given up on things. Especially on life. Is that what you wanted to hear?

*LIL' is singing a French song and pretending that her parents' argument doesn't bother her, but it does. Every child suffers when their parents fight. Never mind that they are exes. She makes as if to leave. Just as she is by the door, she abruptly turns and lets out a loud, sudden "Wham!", scaring BORO. His tick kicks in. He drops the box, it falls down with a noise, he pulls out his gun and aims at her.*

DARA. BORO!

LIL'. BORO!

*LIL' hides in the loo. She locks herself in and does what she always does in these situations. She calls HER.*

VI.

*SHE is sitting at her computer and starts crying. It's the second time today. SHE can't write. Then SHE gets a text. SHE looks at her watch.*

SHE. Mum!

*It's her mother. She gets in touch every day at seven pm. Sometimes SHE ignores her texts but that means risking a second text, and then a third...*

The text: How are you? I rearranged the living room & am on a new diet! Must shed 5 kilos by summer. 😊

*SHE knows, this is 'really important' and 'needs to be discussed' so SHE moves to the phone. The beautiful, black shiny one. SHE's ready for the monologue. But before that SHE saves the text SHE was working on. SHE might get back to it one day ...*

HER. Hi, it's me.

MOTHER. Who ME? How about saying your name politely Missus, or is it still 'Miss'?

HER. Mum, drop it. It's obvious it's me.

MOTHER. You don't care about me, right?

HER. I do, but I was so busy at work.

MOTHER. Always the same. The same old excuse. Always working. And do you do anything else apart from working? Could you maybe let me know any interesting details from your rich social life?

HER. Come on Mum, that's a bit much, don't you think?! You're exaggerating just a bit...

*SHE doesn't manage to answer... SHE listens passively till the end of the conversation. Not that SHE wouldn't have anything to say but ...*

MOTHER. Imagine, the neighbours' dog was run over. You know, the Alsatian. (*SHE didn't have a clue about the neighbours having a new dog. After fifteen years SHE hardly remembers the old one.*) I felt sorry, though I was scared of it too. When I come home late at night I always need to steer clear of their gate. They would always say it's not dangerous but you know, Alsations can go nuts. And we have little kids playing in the street. What if he jumps over the fence and mauls one of them? Then what? Nobody seems to be bothered about it. And this friend of mine, she had her book launch

yesterday. She wrote another book. About the past. I think she's making things up. I'm sure she's not spending time in the archives studying. I never see her there. She's going from one visit to another. I mean, gossiping. She never gets bored of that. This one will be full of vague information, just like the ones before. Anyway, I am sure no one's reading it. Good that there was a programme on her on TV. She's big now, an acknowledged writer. She'd better ... The old Slovak teacher died. You know, the one who taught me and then you. He must have been really old. I don't think he was ill. Do you remember? No one ever listened to him. Poor man. The funeral is tomorrow. Shame you can't go. You should. *(SHE wouldn't go even if she were in the country. She hates funerals, dogs and poetry. And politics.)* Listen! You won't believe this! A friend of mine, not the one with the book, another one, a close friend... she has gone completely bonkers! She got involved in politics. I don't get it. POLITICS! They actually talked her into joining the party so now, wherever she goes, she's promoting them. She has changed. I think the pensioners here just get bored. I guess because they have no money. What is she gonna do, what is it good for? Now she has no time, apart from politics. We don't hang out any more. What if anyone sees me with her. They will think I've joined the party too. And I haven't told you yet which party she's campaigning for. I don't want to say it over the phone. What if we are bugged? I'll tell you when you come home. So, when are you coming? *(SHE tries to answer but doesn't get a chance.)* And the electricity has gone up again. How will I pay the bills? Just now it was the water and gas and now, for a change, electricity. This state is a thief. *(SHE wanted to say that it's more or less the same shit everywhere, but SHE knows SHE won't get a chance to get a word in.)* We'll go on strike. I mean, not me personally. It won't sort anything. And never did. We didn't work for a week and then the next two we had to work from dusk till dawn. There's a new TV series. National production. It's quite decent. The one that you like is in it too. You know, the one you always fancied. I can't remember his name now. Dark, tall, handsome. I've read he left his wife and kids and moved in with his lover. Men in their fifties, that's what you get. They can leave the wife and kids and just start over again ... And you? Are with someone? Finally?

*(Silence. Pause. Her mum waits for the answer. SHE knew that sooner or later this will come up, but it always catches her unprepared. And SHE knows too well, that her mum won't leave it till she gets an answer.)*

HER. I don't know.

MOTHER. What you mean you don't know. You don't know if you're seeing someone?

HER. I don't.

MOTHER. You're pretty, smart, intelligent, you should finally find someone. Something serious.

HER. I don't know.

MOTHER. Don't know what? If you're pretty or if you're on your own? And what was wrong with that poor guy you brought home last time?

HER. I don't know.

MOTHER. I thought you were getting serious, since you introduced him to us. And he stayed for three days: breakfast, lunch, dinner ..., breakfast, lunch, dinner ..., breakfast, lunch, dinner ... my dear!

HER. It wasn't serious. I told you we were friends. And I did give you money for the food.

MOTHER. Why don't you try with that one ... what was his name? He's still single. Last time he was asking about you. I think he still has a thing for you. And he was decent... what was his name? He started to teach at the school. The kids love him!

HER. Mum, I am not there! I live in a different country. 600 kilometres away.

MAMA. But you make it sound as if it was at least 6000. That's silly. All of you ran away to different places. There is no one here. The other day I read in the papers that we suffer from the highest brain-drain in the region. Ah, I didn't tell you, our neighbour is in hospital. The one who lives across from the neighbours with the dog. The dead dog, I mean. *(Thanks God, the relationship discussion is over! Her mother keeps reporting on what's new and what isn't. SHE moves to her computer with the phone in her hand and starts typing. Her mother keeps talking and talking...)*

VII.

*A small flat on the outskirts of Birmingham. It looks like student accommodation, though the 'student' living in it has long graduated. He just hasn't thought of moving out yet. Where to? And what for? And who can afford it anyway? And this is not a bad place, with lots of light, full of books, plants and dirty dis. Milija is sitting on the sofa and facing him is AZRA, his older sister. They don't look very happy.*

AZRA. How are you gonna tell mum?

MILIJA. I'll stand up and announce it: "Dear mother, I've got something to tell you. I am gay. I mean, homosexual."

AZRA. Forget it. That would kill her.

MILIJA. If she survived you having a bastard child who she now dotes on like the happiest grandma of all time, she'll survive this too.

AZRA. You're being cynical.

MILIJA. I'm being cynical? You opened your legs for the first UNPROFOR guy you stumbled across and I'm being cynical?

AZRA. That child was born out of love!

MILIJA. Yep, international love equals better genes. Is that what you really meant to say? Well, yeah, at least we're not all sleeping with each other. Is she pretty?

AZRA. It's a boy, Milija. I have a son! That's the least you could remember. A boy to carry on the family name.

MILIJA. You see, I knew I could rely on you for that. I'm not sure I'll ever have a son. Or a daughter. *(He's teasing her and he's enjoying it.)*

AZRA. You've changed. You weren't like this before.

MILIJA. Dear sister, I've been away from home for 15 years. It's not my fault that I can't go back.

AZRA. But people are coming back.

MILIJA. And running away again.

AZRA. We've got a big house. And a garden. You always liked it there. Look at where you're living now.

MILIJA. I like it like this. WE like it like this. Gary and I like it like this.

AZRA. That's why you didn't want us to come.

MILIJA. You couldn't.

AZRA. But then, after they opened the borders, you still never invited us.

MILIJA. Because I knew how you would react.

AZRA. Does anyone know?

MILIJA. Know what?

AZRA. That you have a ..., that you are ...

MILIJA. That I am what?

AZRA. You know.

MILIJA. Yes, people know. WE don't have to hide in a shelter, it's not like back home.

AZRA. How about taking time out to think about it, and in the end you might even meet a nice girl. One of us!? I've read that you've got plenty of local community clubs here. Why don't we go and have a look?

MILIJA. Azra, I don't want to change. I love him.

AZRA. Does he love you back? Isn't he just using you? Does he have a job?

MILIJA. Yes, he does.

AZRA. I suppose you can't tell me what it is that he does.

MILIJA. He works at Uni, in the canteen.

AZRA. At the canteen? You're with a cook?

MILIJA. Would you prefer a thief or a murderer? I know. A soldier. UNPROFOR, ideally. That's more up your street.

AZRA. Screw you. Come home with me. I bought you a ticket. Here.

MILIJA. Azra, you came here, without asking and now you're hassling me. In my own place. In my home.

AZRA. This is not your home! Your home is there!

MILIJA. Whatever. I live here and I like it here.

AZRA. This is worse than a bad dream! I never dreamt I'd find you like this and with somebody like that. I came to tell you that mum needs you, because...

MILIJA. And dad? Don't tell me he's transformed into a liberal, gay rights activist fighting for the legalization of gay marriages?!

AZRA. ... dad was killed. *(Pause)*. Five years ago! *(After a brief silence.)* It's over. Don't imagine it's not.

\* \* \*

*Just as SHE finishes writing, her mother finishes talking.*

MOTHER. You're not listening to me! Why do I bother talking to you?!

*And she puts the phone down. Finally!*

VIII.

*Now SHE really doesn't know what to do. It's late evening and it's dark outside. SHE's thinking and after a while SHE takes some stuff out of the fridge for dinner. Something light. SHE shouldn't eat so late, it's not right. Definitely not for women over thirty. SHE wouldn't want to end up like DARA. SHE brings the fitness ball and stares at it. When the food is ready, (some microwavable ready meal), SHE sets the table for two, sits on the ball and stares at the plates. Though SHE's been on her own for a while SHE keeps setting the table for two. SHE doesn't want to eat on her own. SHE doesn't enjoy it that*

*way. And, to be honest, it's also a matter of habit. You know what I mean. Anyway. The food doesn't look that great. It looks awful actually. The intercom sounds. It must be him. SHE holds back the tears. SHE opens the door. HE looks gorgeous. As usual.*

HIM. Who called you?

HER. When?

HIM. When I was talking to you.

HER. Don't know. I didn't pick up.

HIM. You can't lie.

HER. And?

HIM. You're not looking bad.

HER. You meant to say I look good?

HIM. I meant to say what I said.

HER. In case it was a compliment, thank you.

HIM. Do you have something to eat?

*SHE shows him the table. HE notices the two plates.*

HIM. Are you expecting someone? The one who called you while you talked to me?

HER. It's the low-carb diet. One plate with proteins, the other with veggies.

*Now it comes in handy that SHE cooks for two. For herself and another person who is not there: it's a good habit. After all, it wasn't such a bad idea. HE'll never believe her that SHE wasn't expecting anyone.*

HER. Did you come to eat?

HIM. I came to tell you I'm leaving you!

HER. It was me who left you this afternoon. If my memory serves me right. And the same thing yesterday afternoon, and, now I come to think of it, six months ago!

HIM. If it's over the phone, it doesn't count.

HER. So leave me. Alone.

HIM. I have a child.

HER. Yeah. On a remote control?

HIM. I am serious. I wanted you to hear it from me.

HER. Congratulations!

HIM. It's a girl. *(Pause)* She's one.

HER. They say love rats always have daughters. So it's true. And it means you were cheating on me. Is that what you're actually trying to tell me?

HIM. No. I didn't.

HER. Ooh, so in that case she's not your daughter. Your lover number two has presented you with somebody else's love child, what a bitch! That's pathetic. Does your wife know?

HIM. You're pathetic.

HER. Since I'm with you, you mean.

*SHE sits at the table and starts eating. SHE looks calm.*

HIM. So what will happen with us now?

*This is getting too much but SHE still looks calm.*

HER. We can get married and live together till death do us part!

*HE leaves, SHE sits at the other plate. Starts eating the meal. It's weird but SHE's not crying. I think I would.*

IX.

*The phone rings? What's the time? Oh, not again, it's...*

ESTATE AGENT. Good afternoon.

HER. Good evening.

ESTATE AGENT. Apologies for calling so late but I didn't get a chance before. I was snowed under, fortunately. *(He's trying to be funny, but he's the only one laughing at his joke. He hangs on and then continues.)*

I found your email. You're looking for a flat. Congratulations!

HER. On what?

ESTATE AGENT. On your new place. That's the best investment. Property. *(Another joke, again without the desired response.)*

HER. I haven't bought anything.

ESTATE AGENT. But you're planning to.

HER. I'm not.

*The ESTATE AGENT starts feeling a bit awkward, uncomfortable. But he puts it down to his tiredness.*

ESTATE AGENT. But you did call me.

HER. I sent you an email.

ESTATE AGENT. You left your contact details and a phone number.

HER. I didn't think you'd call back. You know what men are like.

ESTATE AGENT. But I am not like them. *(He laughs. It's getting really awkward. The ESTATE AGENT feels really awkward now.)* So, young lady, what are we looking for?

HER. Well, I am not young anymore ...

ESTATE AGENT. Well, miss, what can I do for you?

HER. Marry me.

ESTATE AGENT. Any time.

HER. Are you free tomorrow? And the next day I move in. And my housing issue is sorted.

ESTATE AGENT. Can I call you tomorrow? You don't seem to be in a good mood today. And I've called quite late actually, apologies.

HER. I won't be in the mood for getting married tomorrow.

ESTATE AGENT. Well, we can try some other day then. Maybe you'll feel like getting divorced and we can sort your housing situation again.

*SHE is quiet for a while. And SHE bursts out laughing. This was fun. Well, SHE might buy a property, with her earnings SHE could afford a bigger dog kennel and that's not really appropriate, you see.*

X.

*She checks her emails. She has a new one from her MOTHER.*

MOTHER . *(Mail)*

Imagine, the neighbours' dog was run over. You know, the Alsatian. *(SHE didn't have a*

*clue about the neighbours having a new dog. After fifteen years SHE hardly remembers the old one.)* I felt sorry, though I was scared of it too. When I come home late at night I always need to steer clear of their gate. They would always say it's not dangerous but you know, Alsatians can go nuts. And we have little kids playing in the street. What if he jumps over the fence and mauls one of them? Then what? Nobody seems to be bothered about it. And this friend of mine, she had her book launch yesterday. She wrote another book. About the past. I think she's making things up. I'm sure she's not spending time in the archives studying. I never see her there. She's going from one visit to another. I mean, gossiping. She never gets bored of that. This one will be full of vague information, just like the ones before. Anyway, I am sure no one's reading it. Good that there was a programme on her on TV. She's big now, an acknowledged writer. She'd better ... The old Slovak teacher died. You know, the one who taught me and then you. He must have been really old. I don't think he was ill. Do you remember? No one ever listened to him. Poor man. The funeral is tomorrow. Shame you can't go. You should. (She wouldn't go even if she were in the country. She hates funerals, dogs and poetry. And politics.) Listen! You won't believe this! A friend of mine, not the one with the book, another one, a close friend... she has gone completely bonkers! She got involved in politics. I don't get it. POLITICS! They actually talked her into joining the party so now, wherever she goes, she's promoting them. She has changed. I think the pensioners here just get bored. I guess because they have no money. What is she gonna do, what is it good for? Now she has no time, apart from politics. We don't hang out any more. What if anyone sees me with her. They will think I've joined the party too. And I haven't told you yet which party she's campaigning for. I don't want to say it over the phone. What if we are bugged? I'll tell you when you come home. So, when are you coming? (*SHE tries to answer but doesn't get a chance.*) And the electricity has gone up again. How will I pay the bills? Just now it was the water and gas and now, for a change, electricity. This state is a thief. (*SHE wanted to say that it's more or less the same shit everywhere, but SHE knows SHE won't get a chance to get a word in.*) We'll go on strike. I mean, not me personally. It won't sort anything. And never did. We didn't work for a week and then the next two we had to work from dusk till dawn. I've got more news, but I'll tell you all about it when you call. A kiss and a hug, Mum.

XI.

MILIJJA is on his own in his flat in Birmingham. He springs into action. He wants to

surprise his boyfriend the cook by making him dinner. A lovely idea! He opens the fridge and closes it. He weighs up his options. No, he won't order a take away pizza. A decadent thought briefly crosses his mind. He takes a frozen ready meal out and shoves it into the microwave. He starts setting the table for two. He pays attention to details. The candles, the wine, the flowerpot. No time to buy flowers. He puts on some Yugo pop music and waits. And waits. Then he picks up a book and pulls an old photograph out of it. It must be a photo of his dad. He's doesn't look at it, he just holds it in his hand. Finally Gary turns up. With flowers in his hand.

GARY. These are for you.

MILIJA. *(Looking very pleased. He puts away the flowerpot and arranges the flowers in a vase.)* What are we celebrating?

GARY. The split?!

MILIJA. I wasn't good to her. Azra doesn't deserve it. She's a good sister. Pathetic, as sisters are, but we used to be close.

GARY. *(Wants to talk about something else, but there will be time.)* Has she gone?

MILIJA. Yeah, two minutes ago. We didn't exactly part on good terms.

GARY. What did she want?

MILIJA. Me to come back home.

GARY. So why don't you go back?

MILIJA. Back?

GARY. Home.

MILIJA. My home doesn't exist anymore. It disappeared from the map.

GARY. But not from your mind.

MILIJA. I made dinner. It's no culinary masterpiece but the box says it's organic. You know, organic farming, ecology and all that. *(He was trying to be funny. Everyone is trying to be funny these days.)*

GARY. I ate at work.

MILIJA. Was it organic? *(The last time he tries to make him laugh. He knows there won't be another chance..)*

GARY. I think you'll never stop thinking about your home. And you'll never feel good here.

MILIJA. But I do, this feels like home.

GARY. You've just said it. LIKE home.

MILIJA. Gary, I know that Azra offended you, but that's the way she is, you know, a bit

tactless. She doesn't know anything else apart from her village. She never travelled anywhere. This was the first time. And the last one too.

GARY. Azra is right. We ARE different. And we come from different time zones.

MILIJA. It's not funny, you know.

GARY. I'm not trying to be funny.

MILIJA. Trouble at work? Come on, we can get through this like we always do. I don't earn much, but it's enough to take care of the two of us.

GARY. Can you change the music?

MILIJA. Why, I want to listen to it ...

GARY. All we ever play is this sentimental crap of yours.

*MILIJA goes to the stereo and turns it off. Obviously it's not him who has the upper hand. He looks at the CDs, but doesn't know what to play. He doesn't have any other music apart from his 'sentimental crap'.*

GARY. Your sister has a point.

MILIJA. Azra was just exaggerating. She can't imagine being uprooted from one country and then settling in another. It's something she can't understand.

GARY. You've lived here for 15 years and you don't have anyone.

MILIJA. I've got you.

GARY. That's not enough, don't you see?

MILIJA. It's enough for me. And I thought for you too.

GARY. The best thing for you would be to go back home. It's okay now. I read about it in the paper.

*GARY doesn't understand that he's being a merciless bastard. Milija starts to see it.*

GARY. I'll give you back the money I owe you. You'll have enough for the flight and you'll find somebody. I am bored of it being just the two of us. And your music, I can't stand it. And the news from YOUR homeland. In the last few years I have learnt more about Bosnia than I have ever known about Britain. Without ever setting foot there.

MILIJA. You should have told me you wanted to go.

GARY. There? Thanks, but no thanks.

MILIJA. Is it a problem for you that I'm from Bosnia?

GARY. Not for me, it's a problem for you.

MILIJA. What should I do?

GARY. I think it's too late for that. Go back home. I think you need it. How long is it since you last saw your dad?

*MILIJA knows that GARY doesn't know anything but he still won't forgive him.*

MILIJA. Dad was killed.

*GARY leaves, without saying a word. Without packing his things. Well, not that he has lot of stuff to take. Actually he has nothing worth taking. It seems that he has no memories worth keeping either. MILIJA sits at the table set for two. He takes the flowers out of the vase and puts them in the bin. He sits at the table and immediately stands up again. He lights a candle and puts the photograph of his dad on the plate. He sits opposite, puts on some folk music and starts eating. After a while ...*

\* \* \*

*MILIJA dials the long, familiar number. He knows it by heart. Whenever he needs to be cheered up he knows who to call. But SHE doesn't pick up. The phone keeps ringing, twice, three times ... Just as he is about to hang up ...*

HER. Ciao Milija.

MILIJA. How do you know it's me?

HER. Cause I do. Only three people have this number ...

XII.

*BORO didn't pull the trigger. But it was close. DARA is still in shock. She can't open her mouth, which is something of a miracle in her case ... As it is in most women, for that matter. LIL' runs to the loo.*

LIL'. I'll go to my godmother's. I'll go there. I'll never come back. Fuck you! *(in French, only the last bit though).*

BORO. *(After a while.)* What did she say?

DARA. That she's staying at home. *(Pause)* She's not going to her French class.

BORO. Good idea!

*DARA says nothing. The situation is precarious.*

BORO. Say something!

DARA. Get the fuck out of here! I don't want to see you ever again! *(In French)*

*BORO doesn't need translation. He got the message.*

BORO. Okay, I'm off. Where shall I put the box?

DARA. Up your arse.

BORO. You won't believe me, but I've got no idea what came over me. I'm sorry.

DARA. Your own child ...

BORO. It's not me, I can't ... really, really ...

DARA. *(After a while)* I know ...

*Suddenly they have a moment. Just like it used to be in the past. DARA knows that BORO the monster is just a product of their times - times that they have no control over. Her old BORO is gone, for ever. BORO only realises now that he's still holding the gun in his hand.*

BORO. Throw it away!

*DARA takes the gun. She holds it in her hand. She doesn't know what to do. They embrace each other. Beware, this is not a melodramatic scene, though it might seem like it at first. Melodrama with guns is called a war. The bell rings. Cutting short the happy ending.*

BORO. The bell.

DARA. I know.

BORO. Won't you open?

DARA. I will!

*SRĐAN appears at the door. He's DARA's new partner. Her lover.*

*SRĐAN . (He might feel a bit awkward. There is a big box on the floor and next to it is a dodgy looking guy, and his new lover DARA has a gun in her hand.) Did Lil' go to her*

French class?

DARA . She's in the loo. Let me introduce you. This is my husband.

BORO . Ex husband.

DARA . Thanks. The original one was not grey haired, skinny and didn't carry a gun around.

SRĐAN . Nice to meet you! *(He means it)*

BORO . *(After a long pause.)* Look after them!

*DARA still has the gun in her hand. She hands it to SRĐAN . For SRĐAN it's the first time in his life that he has held a gun. I swear. On my life.*

BORO . I'm going...

DARA . Goodbye . *(In French)*

BORO . Tell LIL' , I'll bring her the laptop.

*BORO leaves. Now what? SRĐAN holds the gun in his hand and with the other hand takes some cinema tickets out of his jacket.*

SRĐAN . Do you want to go to the cinema?

*DARA is quiet. It's a weird situation. A while ago her ex husband almost shot her daughter. LIL' is locked up in the loo, God knows how long for, and her new lover wants to go to the cinema.*

DARA . Is it a comedy?

*She takes the gun from SRĐAN and drops it in the bin. She knocks on the loo. No response. LIL' is still on the phone.*

DARA . Lil', SRĐAN and I are going to the cinema. Call me when you finish. *(In French)*

SRĐAN . What did you say?

DARA . I told her to flush! I need to remind her all the time.

\* \* \*

*In the loo.*

HER. Can I talk to your mum?

LIL'. She's gone out with her new friend. Boyfriend. LOVER. Can I come? To visit you?

Please, please!

*LIL' starts crying, heartbreakingly as only kids can. She comes out of the loo. Next to the door is the box with the computer. The gun is in the bin. Luckily, LIL' doesn't know.*

XIII.

HER. *(Everything that SHE says, SHE also does it at the same time. It's very descriptive. So what.)* I'll find an empty notebook. I haven't written anything for ages. Fucking computers. I'll pull a page out, best are the middle ones so that it won't all fall apart, and I'll start writing. But first I'll find a pen. This one isn't working. Let me find another one. I'll put it all down on paper. PROS and CONS. And then I'll make up my mind. I'll smoke as I am thinking, it helps. It's not gonna be too much. The writing. Let me start. To write. I'm not gonna drink, I want to have a clear mind. And to be sure that what I have written down is me and not somebody else. My name, what shall I put? The way my mum calls me or what other people call me? Everyone calls me a different name. And they see me differently too. And I feel different too. Sometimes I think the colour of my voice changes according to who I'm talking to. And my vocabulary too. And all my different appearances merge into one, into ME. I fall asleep with them and I wake up with them ... Purified. And then, during the day I take them all up again. At times I am happy with all of them, and sometimes I hate one of them, but mostly I try to combine them. So that each of ME finds its proper audience.

. Okay, so let's start. PROS, and against them all the Cons.

PROS

-I am single

about)

-he sends lovely texts

-when he's drunk he wants to marry me

CONS

-he's married (this I do know about)

he's got another lover (her I "don't know"

-I'm afraid to ask questions about us

-when I'm drunk I want to go back home

- we've been together for 3 years

- we split up 6 months ago...

... Since then I keep seeing nuns and pregnant women in the street. As if there was one lurking round every corner .... And I started to be superstitious.

*After a while SHE realizes that the columns make no sense. There is too much in them and it doesn't make sense. It can all be positive or negative: it just depends on the point of view.*

XIV.

*HER and MILIJA are sitting in the student club at a certain Serbian university in a certain Serbian city and are drinking. To be more precise, they're getting plastered. They keep at it, heading straight for a blinding hangover the next morning. They are having a great time together, both happy and not worried about a little headache... This is just one of those moments that are worth living. There won't be any more. For a long time. She leaves the country the next day and so does he. To different countries. Incompatible ones. But they're not dwelling on any of that, or on the impending farewell. Although this get together is about just that. A way of saying goodbye.*

MILIJA. Do you know that the toreador seeks death to become immortal?

HER. So you want to be famous? I thought you wanted to be a scientist....

MILIJA. Yes, a super famous scientist!

HER. Well, that *ain't gonna happen* here. Here, you can become at best a super anonymous policeman.

MILIJA. Everything went to shit. How come we didn't see it coming?

HER. We didn't want to see it as it was happening. That's the difference.

MILIJA. Fuck, you really understand me. Why aren't you a man?

HER. I'm that bull from your toreador story.

MILIJA. You won't have it easy in life, girl.

HER. You know I don't care, boy?

MILIJA. Olé???

HER. Olé!!!!

*They're playing like children. Like best friends. Despite being completely pissed.*

MILIJA. Are you worried about something?

HER. He who kills a bull, is like ...

MILIJA. ...he who kills a man, Isaiah 66.3.

XV.

*SHE is packing her stuff. It might seem a bit erratic. SHE's packing it all as if she doesn't care in the slightest. SHE's piling up all her clothes. SHE has a lot. A woman of her standing should have loads of dresses. Each one of them unique. A different one for every occasion. Now all the brands are piled up on top of one another. Once SHE's finished, SHE knocks the pile over. Then SHE sits in the middle and pulls out a bottle of wine and a glass. SHE pours herself a glass. And she feels good. As if perched high up on her throne. SHE snaps her fingers ... and nothing. Nothing at all. SHE tries again. Nothing again. Third time lucky. The phone rings. SHE knew it!*

XVI.

*HER and DARA sit next to each other. Somewhere in the street. DARA has been bleeding but is not crying. SHE is clean and crying. It's not raining, or snowing, it's just getting dark. Luckily. (At least no one witnesses this scene.) An ordinary evening. Most people are living their ordinary lives and can't be bothered about somebody else's story. Pretty insensitive, dare I say.*

DARA. I don't envy you.

HER. I don't envy you either. (Or myself - thinks DARA to herself.)

*SHE uses the handkerchief to wipe the blood off DARA's face. But you can't wipe bruises off with a handkerchief. They're not painted on. They're the work of a professional. Concealed under her clothes, but still very painful. But it's not the pain that hurts the most.*

DARA. Leave it. It's fine.

HER. It's not a trophy. We need to take it off. Lil' mustn't see anything.

DARA. It's my fault.

HER. Don't you ever say that again.

DARA. I kept nagging him that we don't have this or that and that Lil' needs to have it

all... stuff that we couldn't do as kids. Piano, gymnastics, French...

HER. But that's not anything unusual.

DARA. In this country it is. That's why I am paying for it now. My fault. Serves me right. I wanted it all, so I got it all. All inclusive, plus a bonus on top.

HER. You didn't ask for a husband who's a murderer.

DARA. Oh, I did. He murdered left right and centre, he murdered everyone he could. Our family too.

HER. He wasn't a bad guy. Maybe he didn't have a choice. Maybe the damned war was an opportunity he couldn't refuse. He didn't know that in war it's not just the people who lose their lives that are the victims, but the survivors too.

DARA. He was great. Do you remember how he used to play the guitar?

HER. Till late at night. We would all tell him songs to play. He knew them all.

DARA. We were all happy then. You, Milija, Dunja, Boro, and me ... Who would have thought that this was waiting for us around the corner? That we would all end up in different places? I miss you. All of you.

HER. Milija is happy in Britain. Finally he can work on his career as a scientist. That was his dream. And he has finally found a boyfriend, who understands him, apparently. I haven't seen him for a while. But we talk from time to time ...

DARA. He doesn't write to me. He can't forgive me that Boro was in Bosnia.

HER. But it wasn't HIM.

DARA. Maybe!

HER. In war you don't know your own friend.

DARA. It couldn't have been him. I thought about it a thousand times. When Milija's dad was killed, Boro wasn't there. He wasn't even there! Do you believe me?

HER. It wasn't HIM!

DARA. He didn't even know him. They never met each other. (*Pause.*) But what if ...

HER. He would feel it. When you're looking death in the face, you must feel something. Boro would know if it was Milija's dad standing in front of him.

DARA. It's good that you left.

HER. If you say so.

DARA. I would be glad if Lil' could stay with you for a while.

HER. I'll take care of her. Whenever.

DARA. She dreams of studying languages. French.

*Silence.*

DARA. It wasn't him, right?

HER. *(Is quiet.)* It couldn't have been him. When Milija's dad got killed, Boro wasn't there.

DARA. If we only knew that it would come to this ...

HER. ... we would never been born. We would have refused to be born! We would have said "screw you" to a life like this!

XVII.

*HE calls again. The third attempt, this time the mobile. Only three people have the land line number. He's not one of them (any more.) Number three, the lucky number.*

HIM. I was thinking about the idea you had.

HER. Which one? I used to have too many.

HIM. We'll get married and live together happily ever after till death do us part.

HER. I didn't mean it. It was a joke. And a bad one, at that.

HIM. What if we moved, away somewhere?

HER. I've already moved away once. I'm settled here. Besides I don't have enough suitcases.

HIM. We don't need suitcases. And we'll leave the memories behind. Wherever we're going to, it's gonna be just you and me.

HER. I don't have enough money to fly to the moon. I need to save. I'm buying a flat. Sorry. *(after a while)* You know I love you.

*This is the first time SHE's said the word. There's nothing else to say. If you can come up with something better, well then hats off to you!*

XIII.

*BORO is sitting in a pub. There are loads of pubs where he is, and people drink a lot. Maybe they're trying to forget. But not everything can be forgotten. Not even the strongest whisky is strong enough for that. BORO' has got a lot on his conscience. And he drinks proportionately. To be precise, he's drinking himself to death. He's already pissed and sees, or at least he thinks he sees, a familiar face.*

BORO. Will you have a glass with me? So that we can finally sort it out, face to face.  
Man to man.

STRANGER. I think you've mistaken me for someone else, mate. *(In this country, they are all very matey and casual, it's kind of cool. Only, it can be pretty inappropriate at times. Like now.)*

BORO. Don't pretend to be too cool, for fuck's sake. Come here, I 'm telling you. *(BORO's tick kicks in, he touches his belt, but the gun is not there. He left it at DARA's place. That's where it's place is. In a bin. But now, he kind of needs it. Perhaps he regrets that moment of weakness ... )*

STRANGER. You must have mistaken me for someone else.

BORO. *(He staggers towards the STRANGER.)* It is you. Don't pretend that you don't know me. You and me, we have been through a lot together. You, me, the chicks... We wouldn't have it half bad if it hadn't all got screwed up.

STRANGER. That's true ...

BORO. You see. So I need to draw you a picture to refresh your memory.

STRANGER. ... true that it all got screwed up, I mean!

BORO. So, still nothing? Do you want me to punch you in the face? Would that help?

STRANGER. Or the other way round. I can punch YOU in the face!

BORO. *(His tongue is getting tied in knots, but he keeps talking. Nothing can stop him. He needs to get it out.)* That's not a good idea. I have a good memory. You fucking ignoramus. I just need to explain what really happened. Whatever you heard, it's not true. They're just making it up, so that that can pretend to be clean. But I am! My conscience is clean. I wasn't even there, in the village. I got pissed the night before and felt sick and threw up the whole night.

STRANGER. *(He feels sorry for BORO. He doesn't understand what it is that is worrying him, but the look of him makes him feel sorry for the guy.)* Can we agree on one thing?

BORO. You and me? Any time. I knew you'd understand!

STRANGER. Let's agree that I do believe you, every word you say. Whatever you think of saying, I believe you. You don't even need to say it. Okay? And now leave me alone.

BORO. *(Considers the meaning of the STRANGER's words but it seems he's not convinced.)* Shouldn't I belt you one? I really want this to be clear. Once and for all!

STRANGER. You don't get it, do you? I'm not who you think I am!

BORO. You're taking the piss, mate. I don't like it. If I had my gun with me, you'd believe

that you're God if I told you so.

STRANGER. And what if I AM your God? (*The STRANGER has changed strategy. God knows, maybe he'll get somewhere.*)

BORO. (*BORO crosses himself.*) Well, in that case, listen to me and forgive me, Milija!

*And BORO starts talking and he talks and talks and talks ...*

BORO. It was dark everywhere, we couldn't see anything. That was our strategy, not to see the victims. But the cries, I can still hear the cries. I can hear it very clearly. They echoed up in the mountain, which swallowed up all the suffering. No one knew who we were killing and why. And I was throwing up, since the morning, when I heard the cry. I heard the women scream and the children too and I knew I had to leave right away. But it was pitch dark and I couldn't stand up and I was just throwing up. And lying around in my own vomit and blood and I was screaming with them... stop it, for God's sake, stop the killing, stop it .... But no one heard me. If they did, maybe that evening would have ended up differently, maybe your dad would be still alive, to bother you for being gay. My conscience is clear. Do you understand? My only fault is that I exist. That I wanted that shit to finish as soon as possible and carry on living like before. Like normal people.

*No one pays attention to him. BORO is screaming and his whole body is twisted in pain ... his mouth is foaming.*

BORO. Amen.

XIV.

*SHE is still sitting among the piles of her clothes. SHE slowly starts putting them on. All of them, one layer after another. SHE's turning into a huge blob. It doesn't look bad. Or good. SHE pulls her suitcase out from under the bed. SHE always keeps her suitcase under the bed. SHE sits in it, but she can't close it....*

\* \* \*

**THE END**