

DARK TOURISTS

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© The Theatre Institute, Bratislava 2021/Divadelný ústav, Bratislava 2021
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A list of characters

HE

SHE

THAT ONE (female character)

GUIDE

MOTHER

WOMAN

CHILD

TEACHER (female character)

LAD 1

LAD 2

**A GROUP OF “INDEPENDENT” TOURISTS (male characters): FIRST, SECOND,
THIRD**

Introduction

He and She stand in front of an arid lake. It could be Lake Aral. A lake where one can see its bottom, the bottom of which can be seen, which used to look like a sea, and now it is virtually a mere beach with the remnants of the sea. A shipwreck is wedged in the lake. Drought everywhere. An idyll on the shore of the arid lake. There is a barrel rolling with oil spilling out; wind is playing with soil; stumps that once belonged to trees are sticking out from weary soil. The wind picks up and debris appears in the air. The debris circles like seagulls. Screeching noise of rust, sheet metal.

She is wearing a summer dress with shoulder straps, a veil on her head that still shows the remainders of wedding. He has a bow tie on his neck.

HE Just a little longer. And we're there. Careful! Careful!

She tips over a forgotten beer can.

SHE Aaach! Did you have to blindfold me?

HE Otherwise it wouldn't be a surprise.

SHE You could have removed the blindfold at least in the car on the way here.

HE You asked for a surprise.

SHE It resembled an abduction. Indeed, it does look like an abduction.

HE Abduction of the bride by her groom. After four years.

SHE Well-schemed abduction. You packed my stuff a long ago; you packed yourself quickly and straight into the car. I was stunned, I didn't fight back. You abducted me, what can I say.

HE Why are you going on about the abduction?

SHE I could have screamed. Because it really looked like an abduction. I also scratched you.

HE But you had food to eat.

SHE You fed me like a child. Thanks ever so much, I look accordingly.

HE You even got a little dirty, it's part of honeymoon.

SHE I didn't hear anything at all; you put plugs in my ears.

HE You could have protested.

SHE I'm letting myself be surprised.

HE You slept.

SHE How long did I sleep?

HE Long enough. Even on the flight.

SHE On the plane? We took a plane?! I don't remember.

HE Yes, it's possible that we also took a plane.

He puts on a mysterious expression.

SHE So we're abroad. Someplace in Imitation? That would really get me.

HE It will get you, you'll see!

SHE On the Imitation Coast, there is a bay view and moonlight ... though you'd have to wait all year, year after year, even two on the waiting list. You would have to register, spend all night at the computer. I can't believe it, I just can't.

A beach perhaps? He picked some tucked-away bay with idyllic sea views. Bahama Bay, or Reunion with a shark. There will also be a Caribbean bar with thatched roof and cocktails. All-inclusive. You make my dream of the all-inclusive, the Caribbean, come true. In the afternoon, we'll go snorkelling in the bay, check out the local oceanarium.

She throws herself around his neck.

HE See, we did take the plane after all. You didn't want to believe me.

SHE Take off the blindfold at last!

HE Can't you feel it? We're standing on the sand!

HE And, in the evening, we'll let our hair down in local bars and enjoy the nightlife. Of two singles who just got married.

SHE Hold on, hold on ... We must be far away ... I feel like we went through some check points. I don't believe you. In my state, they would send me from the border straight to a shelter for abused women. And, as for you, they'll put you in jail as a terrorist.

HE It depends.

SHE What depends?

HE Don't worry, you won't see a thing anyway.

SHE Stop making fun of me!

HE We're here ... I can feel the nostalgia.

SHE It's so weird.

HE Don't you want to guess where we are?

SHE I can't wait. Time to tell me!

HE Careful, there's a rock.

He seems to be indulging in delaying the moment when he can show her the scenery that is impatiently stretching in front of them. He is adamant. She removes the scarf from her eyes.

SHE Would you take it off now?

HE What to take off?

SHE The scarf. You don't expect me to wear white scarf on my eyes throughout our honeymoon.

*They fight a little. She removes the scarf from her eyes and looks in astonishment at the arid lake in front. Heel on her pumps might break in surprise. The scenery in front of them suddenly shakes. A blast in the distance. In the distance, behind the lake, houses turn into ruins. He doesn't seem to have expected that, as he is looking at the massive pressure wave in astonishment.
Lights off.*

Scene 1.

About what a blast that was

THIRD Wow, what a blast!

SECOND Incredible!

FIRST When it exploded, it was something else. I browsed the web. There are testimonies saying the earth was torn from the ground up, domestic animals were flying in the air and so on. This is just ... nothing compared to that.

GUIDE It was a detonation that struck the area with a force of 6 degrees on the Richter scale. It scattered electricity poles, the streets cracked, the walls of houses began to break. Of course, pills against this disaster.

FIRST Excuse me, what were the ingredients, it must've been placebo, right?

GUIDE At the time, local authorities were distributing them to the city residents. They were totally insufficient against the effects of the contamination. It was a modern city with a population of about 40,000, the average age was 28. The city had everything – from shops, through grand flats to sports facilities.

SECOND So why did you give us the pills?

GUIDE For the sake of the sensation.

THIRD It's like a simulator: we keep getting everything as if it really happened. By the way, the pill tasted pretty good.

GUIDE It was originally without flavour. Now the manufacturer makes the pill with Skittles flavour.

SECOND Skittles, what's that?

GUIDE Sweets popular at the time.

FIRST The guidebook talks about it. In Chernobyl, they were handing out something similar, though ours taste differently. So (*looks anxiously at Guide, who is waiting for what he has to say*), so fresh.

GUIDE We have differently flavoured pills, according to visitor preferences. Plus those specially adapted for diabetics and those with celiac disease.

FIRST The guidebook says to watch out for ...

GUIDE Forget it. I am the guide. Whatever is in the guidebook, no longer applies. You will find things on the Territory that you don't get to read about in such novels.

FIRST It's not a novel, it's a guidebook ... plain facts.

GUIDE As I say, I am the guide.

SECOND He is the guide. Stop insulting him. He can knock us off.

FIRST Alright, alright, no need to get jumpy. We have to get our whereabouts. The Territory stretches over seventy square kilometres of land. 25 years ago, it was considered one of the most sought-after territories in the world.

GUIDE Excuse me, may I continue ...

FIRST Go ahead, you're the guide.

GUIDE Fifty-two thousand people lived here. They enjoyed the finest luxury shops of the time. This was one of the first places worldwide to have widespread robotics. People watched the robots do their work. They were free to engage in other activities. Though the robots were set for ecological activity, modelled on human performance. Hence, the robots had been unable to separate waste perfectly. From time to time they confused an earthquake with explosion in the Factory. Emergency alarms were the order of the day. Otherwise, robots can cook perfectly from organic food, that is, unless you throw them something unhealthy. *(laughter)*

SECOND That must be a joke. Robots cooking?!

GUIDE In winter they were the first to have central heating, one of the most economical in the country. In summer, they basked in the sun on sandy beach by the lake – you got to see its state at the time. All in all, paradise on Earth.

Just a single element outweighed all the pros. More than that. It turned out that it was making this place by far the worst imaginable. You will see it tomorrow.

FIRST Tomorrow ... So, tomorrow we'll check out the Source?

WIZARD You will see the Source, though only from distance.

SECOND He says from distance. Why not today?

GUIDE Because the Source is always scheduled for the third day. This has been the case since the clean-up.

THIRD *(retrieves a pill from his pocket)* Should I take it at all?

FIRST It's been twenty-five years since the disaster. Get grip!

SECOND I'm getting peckish.

FIRST When's the carousel scheduled for?

GUIDE The afternoon. Always for the afternoon.

SECOND So I better don't have anything now.

GUIDE When the D-day came ... Well, we'll cover that in the next part of the programme.

Third is stuffing himself with pills. Sharp unspeakable cry. From somewhere. Not far away.

Scene 2

A scene about the tour guide

He and She stand by the fence with a large sign: "At your own risk only." He and She are still by the lake.

HE Like ... what was that?

SHE A bomb, I guess.

HE What, here?

SHE Sure. Nuke. The mushroom. Didn't you see?

HE What could it be? After all, once ...

SHE What once ...

He gets alarmed.

HE Never mind.

SHE What did you mean by "once"?

HE The explosion.

SHE Are you saying you took me on a honeymoon where something blew up?

HE Looks pretty much OK now.

SHE What?! You take me I don't know how many miles away, board me on planes, ships, at least it seemed so. I get worn, dirty. You blindfold me. Then you come up with such weird poetic talk, so sophisticated that it makes my head spin. Only for me to have to look at a devastated landscape?

HE You're hallucinating. You can convince yourself of it ... It used to be nice here. You won't believe it, somewhere here (*points to an ugly green puddle*) was water. As kids, we used to dive there. The girls were lying on inflatable mattresses. We would sneak beneath and flip them. Classic! Summer. I was about ten. My last summer here.

SHE You really aren't with it! I bet you'll show me next where, on that shipwreck you had your first intercourse.

HE Honestly, I won't know. I can't remember. Though, when I was fourteen, I might have read a forbidden magazine over there. Possibly.

SHE That's enough. Either tell me why we're here or I'm off.

HE Hm, it had to be somehow like that. The explosion happened while Mum was swimming. She had her head submerged, so she didn't hear the blast. When she saw what was going on, she swam to the ship in the middle. Don't you want to see it?

SHE Is that a local tourist attraction? Tell me they have a hotel here and I'll be all over you.

HE I booked a few days in a hotel in the city.

SHE You mean in the ruins back there? Forget it.

Guide approaches them.

GUIDE Where would you go? Sorry I'm late. Got held up with the Americans. A colleague of mine had one of them overdose himself on the pills.

HE Did they make it?

GUIDE They could be pleased.

SHE Who are you?

GUIDE I'll be taking you around the Territory. Sorry, got held up with the Americans. A colleague of mine had one of them overdose himself on pills.

SHE You will ... You told me you were home here.

HE Didn't I say that we can only enter the Territory with a guide?

GUIDE A lot has changed here. This is no home anymore. It's Territory. You must always have a guide when visiting the Territory. Sorry.

HE No, no, that's fine. After all, even the tour catalogue says that we will have a guide.

SHE Quite a honeymoon – with a guide. We could've vacationed with my folks just as well.

Guide has nothing to say to that. To bridge the awkward silence, he starts a soliloquy in Her direction.

GUIDE First, some business and warnings. Welcome to the Territory. I am at your disposal from now until the end of your stay. I shall be taking you through no man's land. All items, events,

scenes you are about to experience, are utmost authentic reconstruction of the events that shook this region, as well as the whole world. You may have read about these events. Welcome to the Territory. As you no doubt know, at the time it was densely populated, this area was one of the most beautiful spots in Europe. It was even ranked one of the hundred prettiest places ever. All that because the Factory – one of the safest plants of the then régime – was concentrated here ... A plant for ecological waste disposal. Simply, amidst the splendour of the then paradise, all the world's waste was being destroyed in the Factory. It was the world's waste bin.

SHE I have no idea what you're going on about, but keep going. My husband seems to have lost his tongue.

He does pretend not to wish to be there and is gazing ahead.

GUIDE Let me take you to your hotel.

Sharp sound of a school bell, interrupted by a siren.

Scene 3.

A scene about an experience you want to forget and, at the same time, to talk about

Exposition in local school. In one of the classrooms, school bags are left behind – one per desk, placed each on a chair. Individual items are left behind: the place hasn't been tidied up.

Inscription on the blackboard: "Welcome, holidays!" A speaker is placed in front of the blackboard, playing a voice of a girl aged about fourteen. A group of pupils is gathered around. Annual grade reports are scattered around.

LAD 1 Ah, this guy failed chemistry. The explosion came in handy.

LAD 2 What a retro speaker! It's ordinarily worth about five thousand. Dad has about three of those in the attic. Is this one actually going to work?

TEACHER Kids, be careful not to touch the exhibits, they are severely contaminated.

GIRL So why did we come here given that it is all contaminated?

TEACHER So that you can appreciate things that aren't anymore. Besides, it's compulsory.

LAD 1 The whole world has long been contaminated anyway, so what.

LAD 2 The main thing is that there's always room to add extra mess.

TEACHER Shush! The guide wants to tell you something.

GUIDE We are in a classroom, perhaps similar to yours. Just at that moment ... (*points to the wall where the dial shows 8:32*) As if time stopped. The explosion could be heard all the way here. As you can see, at that very point the students were receiving their grade reports. They are left forgotten on the desks.

(The group is looking through the grade reports.)

LAD 1 It was just as well for some that it happened.

GIRL You mean you'd rather have an environmental disaster than come home with a C in chemistry?

LAD 2 The one because of whom it blew up, must have failed. Amateur.

GUIDE I shall now play an authentic survivor testimony.

Scene 4

Voice of a girl aged about fourteen

GIRL'S VOICE The teacher stood at the rostrum, handing us grade reports ... That year I was very much looking forward to the holidays, more than ever. With my parents, we are going to the sea, for the first time ever. Though, I am a little sad, because I won't get to see him. We met by the lake in the morning and were supposed to go swimming. Skipping school on the last day. He and I.

LAD 1 That's pretty cool, they were skipping school even then.

GUIDE Sorry, that's a mistake, this is an authentic testimony.

Students laugh.

ANOTHER GIRL'S VOICE The teacher stood at the rostrum, handing us grade reports ... That year I was very much looking forward to the holidays. I'm thinking of my B in chemistry, the only B in my grade report. I approach the teacher to receive the report, hand her a flower, we shake hands, I turn around and ... there comes this massive sound. I get knocked to the ground.

Sound of a siren. We only see open windows and dust is creeping inside.

LAD 1 Where is she now, given she survived?

Guide is silent.

LAD 2 So where is she?

GUIDE The presentation is over. There is an exit, make your way.

Scene 5

A scene from the window

He and She are looking out of the hotel window that doesn't open. They keep trying, to no avail.

HE I thought it would be less formal.

SHE What did you expect? That they'd show us the belly of the Source? I'd feel slightly safer, if they gave us spacesuits against the grime.

HE I was actually hoping they put us in some ... Plastics are still quite okay. It gets worse when they get covered with the sludge from septic tanks. Plus the overall air contamination that no doubt occurred here.

SHE You're expecting me to inhale some fumes and be happy about it? Thanks ever so much, really!

HE You know, this place has its history. It's not an ordinary dump like those our parents go to for holidays, and where we'll be taking our kids. I wouldn't want to end up like that.

HE Had the guide not been here, we could peek behind the scenes. Might be interesting.

SHE I find him quite interesting ...

HE The guide? I find him familiar. I feel like I've known him since childhood ... Though I have no idea what the occasion was ... Aren't you going to change?

SHE I don't want to strip here ... I'm afraid ...

HE What can I do so that you aren't afraid?

SHE Explain to me why we're here ... for starters.

She turns on the TV. A documentary about the Territory. They probably don't show anything else here.

VOICE FROM THE TV (*in the background*) The entire flora and fauna of the Territory has been modified to such an extent as to eliminate the unappealing impression of the Factory. At the time, the city residents and visitors had access to a remarkably wide range of sports and cultural activities. Modern swimming pool with a water slide, horse riding, water sports were practiced on the lake, an artificial skiing slope was available in winter. The city had its own theatre with three ensembles: drama, opera and ballet. And its own philharmonic.

The residents lived in maintained flats. Everyone was happy and jolly. They separated waste with utter ease, used electricity sparingly. Every balcony had solar panels. Urban architects wanted to make up for the view of the Source – the constant presence of the colossus. A bit of a nuclear power plant, a bit of a wastewater treatment plant, a bit of a global waste incinerator. It was processing global waste that was vanishing somewhere in the massive, dozens-of-kilometres-deep pit, someplace underground. Day after day, the planet, like a hungry whale, devoured the food. And it wasn't just uneaten lunches in microtene bags. There were (*the speaker lists, in a suggestive voice, different types of waste*) exhaust gases, fuel oils, sewage, slime ... Until the D-Day.

The rain came down. After a month of drought. Finally. Everyone wished for it. The light rain turned into a storm and then into gale. And then came an explosion, followed by another, and an earthquake. Within a few hours, a number of natural disasters swept over the present-day Territory. An apocalypse. It ripped off the Factory roof, disabled the drive elements of the huge turbines that ran the disposal of waste in insane quantities.

At the time, the planet was changing its identity, its state. Let's face it: how many times have you thrown medicine packaging among paper, or a can among glass, or plastics among cans, or an

electrical appliance among plastics? All in all, what are all those things for? In this short instructional video, we will teach you how to live from nothing.

He is asleep. She is watching the documentary in suspense. There is music reminiscent of a wedding party. He jolts awake, stumbles around the room, turns off the TV, oblivious of her watching.

SHE What are you doing, it was just getting interesting.

He, half-asleep, is looking out the window.

HE What is he doing there?

He hears the voice of the Second.

SECOND Get up, come here, some crazy chick is up on the carousel, topless ... Really. At least she looks it.

HE You see, there's someone up on that American nonsense I wanted to ride as a kid, but never managed to. There is someone without ...

SHE Without what ...

HE Without ...

SHE Who?

HE A woman ...

THIRD Perhaps we should help her down.

FIRST I bet she's there intentionally ... Activists ... It's a whole environmental movement.

SECOND Should I climb up to her?

HE (*reads an inscription*) DO-YO-U-WA-NT-TO-KN-OW-THE-TRU-TH?

SHE What are you staring at?

HE Nothing, someone's hot.

He draws the curtain.

Scene 6.

A scene you don't want to see but are still watching

A group of tourists in the culture centre. They are taking photos of a sitting elderly lady who is leaning against a wall and talking. There are remnants of decoration, probably from a festivity or variety show.

WOMAN It was strange to sit in a room where I used to go to parties for years. We would to drop cigarette stubs on the floor, men were spitting, so were women – sometimes. I never sat on the floor here. I never even looked at it. Never. Except when I was bringing around my husband after my sister's wedding, the day before it all happened. I was literally scraping him from the floor: you wouldn't believe how much he could drink. As he used to say, plain natural fuel. Earlier, I used to bring about my father like this. As a little girl, I would pull his arm, but he laid motionless. Strange, as I sat here, with my son in my lap I watched my friends, my neighbours gradually arrive in the culture centre, greet each other without a word, sit on the floor in silence, as if they had a predetermined place on Earth, as if they had paid for their seat in the theatre and now they were looking at each other. Ominous silence all around. Silence after the blast. We might have been there perhaps even for two days. They kept bringing us water – volunteers from the charity. They were put in white spacesuits, looking like snowmen. My son told to me: "Mum, snowmen came in the summer." They weren't allowed to touch us in order not to get contaminated ... Though they never stayed long. It was summer and awfully hot. They hosing us with water to give us some respite. They really looked after us; except we weren't allowed to leave. I don't understand why they kept us here like this.

Silence. Woman seems to be about to say something else, but she says nothing, she is just silent and sobs, just silent and sobs, sobs and cries.

GUIDE And now it's time for Q&A.

LAD Did it really happen?

GUIDE What was to happen?

LAD Well, that disaster.

The pupil is chewing a gum, showing it through his teeth to a little girl sitting by her mother.

TEACHER Do behave, you are at a site of reverence. Can't you see what's left here? Would you stop chewing and acting like at a fun fair. Don't touch the exhibits.

LAD 1 These are just ordinary plastics.

LAD 2 In addition, real fuck-ups, roasting oil in a plastic bottle, quite some excavations.

LAD 1 It's been dealt with on the zero-waste principle for years, though still to no avail.

GUIDE Can't you talk more to a point?

LAD 1 The product manager at this eco-park really pisses me off.

LAD 2 Cool, man, we deal with stuff kinda alternatively.

The girl sticks her tongue out at him.

GUIDE Didn't you hear? She survived.

LAD 1 No one can survive that.

GUIDE Let's move on to the next exhibit.

LAD 2 It's just exhibits, you know, an exhibition, nothing else.

TEACHER I'd love to know what you'd have done had you lived here at the time.

LAD 1 No way I'd ever live here.

MOTHER (*to Guide*) What's he saying?

GUIDE Airing his opinion. If I hear it again, I'll draw consequences.

LAD 1 and **LAD 2** Gestapo! Gestapo!

TEACHER Your conduct will be reviewed at the board meeting when we are back to school.

LAD 2 I like these eco-games.

GUIDE (*to Mother*) Save yourself for the others.

Scene 7

A scene about ecological education and tardigrades

He and She at the hotel. The hotel is built in Communist style with a view of the square, probably with a large ferris wheel. It is represented by a shadow projected on the wall. All furniture is in its original condition, from sometime the 1980's, the walls are covered with posters of period bands and stars. She is sitting on the toilet reading a period magazine. He is trying to tune a radio.

HE Imagine, it remained as it was before it all happened. Exactly the same.

SHE So, you came home.

HE Somehow.

She slowly sits on the bed.

SHE I feel like I don't even want to sit here.

HE So I'll help you.

SHE I pictured it differently. It's so ... Why, of all places, did you bring me here?

HE Do you know how people lived here? Back then ... We had hot water all day and were the first to have a swimming pool with a water slide. I remember it from the photos. I never tried it. Look, there's a piece of it.

They are looking at a picture hanging on the wall.

SHE Not much left.

HE The blast spared nothing.

SHE Don't you want to tell me about it?

HE A documentary about the disaster is on the schedule tomorrow.

SHE There are more films in the world about disasters than there is the number of disasters themselves.

HE It depends on what you consider a disaster. What do you consider a disaster?

SHE To travel here instead of to Imitation.

HE Imitation is nothing compared to this.

SHE Compared to what? Compared to the hotel that lost the last of stars? A bunch of teenagers having their first party free of parents, and the bizarre trio of Americans upstairs, with one of them staring at me like at meat in the showcase.

HE That's life. The meat. And the Americans.

SHE Better than hanging on to the waiting list for our turn.

HE Well, the waiting list ...

SHE Didn't you feel like waiting?

HE I ended up just below the line. I haven't been separating waste for a month. Further points went down because of plastic boxes for chocolates.

SHE You didn't care, you wanted to come here. Otherwise, the boxes would have the top eco-certificate.

HE I haven't been here since I was fourteen ... not much change. Things have changed even less so back home ... It's always the same there. Do you know that nothing will ever be as it used to?

SHE You mean in the world or between us?

HE Perhaps we're turning into tardigrades.

SHE Turning into what?

HE Tardigrades, microscopic organisms. They survive temperatures up to 150 degrees centigrade, but also freezing temperatures. They would even survive a crash of meteorite.

SHE So?

HE The secret of their ability lies in that they retreat into a lump and fall into a state in which they limit all vital functions to an absolute minimum. Their body gets rid of almost all water, and starts releasing the sugar trehalose, that glazes the cells. In this state, they can actually survive anything.

SHE Am I to incapsulate myself into a pupa in order to survive?

He embraces her. A voice is heard from the speaker calling them for dinner. She breaks away from him.

SHE I guess I'm starved. I can hardly turn into a tardigrade.

Scene 8

A scene about dark food

A group of diners in the hotel dining lounge. He and She, and the three Americans. He and She take a table for two, decorated with a miniature factory chimney that serves as a candlestick. The sluggish Guide lights the candle.

HE Thanks, man.

GUIDE Hey, how's the honeymoon?

HE Well, let's say we have a pretty good phase right now.

She pretends not to understand. She keeps turning the plates decorated with the motif of the power plant. She looks at him inquisitively.

GUIDE Well then, what are you having today?

SHE Starter, please, trout, meat. Apple, cider. Frog, fennel and bacon. Main course lamb, carrots, *bryndza*.¹ And then cherry, kefir, sheep cheese, tarragon.

GUIDE Are you thinking of a tasting menu? Then here we have a classic broth, fried cheese with fries or dumplings, for dessert pancakes or steamed buns or juniper gin.²

SHE I'd like something that people used to eat at the time.

GUIDE That's exactly what I mentioned.

SHE Though they still eat it today, if I'm not mistaken.

GUIDE Yes, that's true, but they don't eat it here and without eco-packaging.

SHE Are you saying you don't separate waste here?

GUIDE: We're exempt.

SHE And isn't it ...

¹ Transl. note: *bryndza* is a curled sheep cheese. With distinctive flavour and crumbling consistency, it is often used as the main ingredient in many traditional Slovak dishes. Those include popular tiny gnocchi-like dumplings – mentioned further in this scene as dumplings – topped with *bryndza*.

² Transl. note: the original Slovak text mentions a traditional Slovak spirit *Borovička*. It is comparable to gin, but is somewhat stronger, with robust flavour of juniper berries. It is often offered as part of a traditional menu.

GUIDE No, all food is carefully selected and prepared outside the Territory.

SHE Well then, I'd like to have the third item on the menu ...

GUIDE What would it be?

SHE The third item. Dumplings.

GUIDE And to drink?

SHE I'd rather nothing.

He looks at her in apprehension.

HE May I have the dumplings, generously spiced, and Coke?

SHE I have no idea what we're going to do here for the next few days.

HE Tomorrow we'll see the Factory and Incinerator.

She observes with interest a quarrel between the Guide and the three Americans.

FIRST These are all the traditional dishes that were eaten in this area at the time. I'd taste'em all gradually. Even though they're heavy on stomach.

SECOND Are they contaminated? Otherwise, I'd like a steak and French fries.

GUIDE They all are, as I said ...

SECOND I want something contaminated, I wanna get contaminated.

GUIDE In that case we would have to bury you here, and that is not included in the price of the trip.

THIRD I'd rather not have anything.

FIRST Three broths and three vodkas.

Guide leaves to fetch the food.

SECOND Why did you come with us? Are you afraid? I don't believe in radiation.

FIRST How can you say you don't believe? I don't believe I could be radioactive.

THIRD Well, you probably are, given you keep beeping. You've been beeping all day.

SECOND So what that I was beeping ... I just don't believe that anything could eat me up whilst I can't see it at all.

She and He are eating their dinner. In silence.

SHE Where do you think they are from?

HE From the other side of the ocean. They kinda piss me off.

SHE They're quite fun.

HE They litter themselves with garbage, burry it in the soil, at best, dump it into the ocean. There's more garbage than fish in the oceans. They sit by their plasma screen with an online game, and then they say they want to finish the catastrophic game in reality. Hence, they come here.

SHE Aren't we the same? I bet I am. Do you like what you eat?

HE I haven't eaten it for ages.

SHE I never ate it.

The Americans are looking at photos. They are likely to have consumed three rounds of vodka.

SECOND Fuckin' good. Couldn't be better.

THIRD Look, they had a bank here. Who knows how much money of theirs there still is.

FIRST It's been stolen long since. In the first days, despite the radiation, they raided it.

SECOND They fucked it up, the people who lived here, they fucked it up, and then things went down the hill one after another. It first exploded in the middle, then in the East, and then everything went West to us. Those fuckers from the East.

HE Who's the fucker to you?!

He stands up. Second (American) stands up.

GUIDE Gentlemen, please. Here, in the Territory, we solve problems by not solving them.

HE The point is indeed they are not being solved here. Everything we see, doesn't solve anything.

FIRST Everything is a historical fact.

SHE Please, we came here on honeymoon.

HE A while ago, you weren't so sure we were on honeymoon.

SECOND See, didn't I say... newlyweds. They look so stunned.

HE You think I can't understand you?

THIRD Should I film it?

FIRST Not sure about copyright.

HE Yeah, real funny.

SHE Let them be, sit down. Let's love each other.

HE You said we fucked up something.

SECOND Well, the ones in the east for sure. We saw the same document, I guess, it was there.

HE I bet you're the ones to emit more carbon dioxide into the air. The economy on your East Coast is based on these gases.

SECOND The gentleman is an ecologist.

HE No.

SECOND Environmental activist, then.

FIRST All your life your folk used to say words, words, words about climate change, there were rallies, worldwide horror and now ... now we are here and keep going on holidays ... we have come to terms with it. So should you.

HE Except we didn't fuck it up ...

SECOND Where we are now ... I mean East or West ... I'm not so pissed yet not to know ...

FIRST There's plenty of it on our Territory too... we went on holiday to our power plants, I mean whatever is left of'em ... an interesting destination, I recommend it ... or in our refineries.

SECOND They, too, are honeymoon destinations.

He looks at Her. Everyone shifts focus elsewhere. Enters That One. She is dressed. She looks in front of her, dejected. Sun-bleached hair. She sits at the table.

SECOND It's so cool, to sunbathe like that, huh?

GUIDE You better get out. Sorry, she isn't part of our team.

THAT ONE I came to get something to eat.

GUIDE I can throw you out. (*to That One*) And, be so kind and don't change the recording of that testimony for me. It's copyrighted.

THAT ONE But I'm telling the truth there. That's the authentic truth.

SECOND I would order for her, if you will.

FIRST We better not get involved.

SECOND Why shouldn't she stay, huh?

HE Do help yourself – my wife hasn't even touched it, have you?

She pushes the plate away, insulted.

GUIDE (*to That One*) When you finish your meal, you'll leave. Is that clear?

SECOND The groom wants to hook another chick. How does he do it?

FIRST She keeps walking with us with that board pinned to her chest.

SECOND I must say that I have seen similar peculiarities in our country. Though we usually ignore them.

HE Why are you doing this?

That One points at the board.

THAT ONE Do you want to know the truth?

SECOND When dressed, she isn't that impressive.

That One gazes into His eyes.

THAT ONE Do you want to know the truth?

SHE What truth?

THAT ONE About it all.

GUIDE Enough. It's our attraction, sorry.

Guide hurriedly passes vodka around.

GUIDE A drop of vodka at the end of the evening, and we're looking forward to the documentary tomorrow. We deserve our own applause for being able to solve international environmental issues peacefully.

Scene 9

Sentimental scene about toys

He and She watch a demolished kindergarten site. He keeps photographing everything. She, using a dosimeter, watches different items, mainly toys; most of them make the dosimeter beep ...

GUIDE We are in a local kindergarten. Ordinary kindergarten, toys, beds; there was a small dining hall. When in full operation, the kindergarten accommodated up to 150 children from the Territory. It was also attended by children from catchment areas and villages.

She is baffled when noticing a tidy row of teddy bears with the inscription "Nice Holidays".

GUIDE I know what you want to ask. The day of the disaster was the last day at school before summer recess.

She briefly touches the teddy bear.

GUIDE Don't touch! It is all contaminated!

Scene 10

A scene about the ends

SHE I am to shower immediately. They gave me pills against contamination. You, too, are to take some. (*He doesn't really want to.*) Come on.

HE Don't touch me.

SHE What's wrong with you? Why shouldn't I touch you? What does it say on the web?

HE Don't touch me!

SHE Love till death do us part, you promised.

He pulls away. He doesn't want her to touch him.

SHE You're acting childish.

HE Childish? It is you to act childish. What on earth got into you to touch that toy? You act like a tourist. But people actually lived here, I actually grew up here, too. Perhaps that toy car belonged to me. I was only fourteen at the time.

SHE Now, how do you want us to have sex? We're on our honeymoon, in case you haven't noticed. So far, we haven't done anything remotely reminiscent of sex.

HE Ok. All right. It may be crazy that we're here instead of somewhere on that Imitation, or another perfection embodied ...

SHE I know what you told me. That you're from here. So what? Everyone comes from nowhere.

He looks out the window. He sees That One. She is falling asleep. He points to himself.

THIRD I guess she's pointing at me.

SECOND I arranged a first-class date with her. For the three of us.

FIRST The guide already gave us all the facts, plus I chipped in with some.

He sneaks out of the room.

Scene 11

Scene about a carousel

THAT ONE You recognised me ... how did you recognise me?

HE Not by your handwriting. You always wanted to ride it.

THAT ONE I didn't get the time ... I pulled you out of the house, didn't I? Did you have your moment?

HE Can't you get dressed?

THAT ONE Did you come to tell me just that? We swam stark-naked back then ...

HE Times have changed.

THAT ONE You got married, right?

HE We decided to ...

THAT ONE Children?

HE Nope.

THAT ONE How much waste do you produce ...

HE We try to live zero waste.

THAT ONE Don't you eat? Or do you process it yourselves like our Factory? Quite a place you took her to!

HE I wanted to show her where I lived ... who I am.

THAT ONE You didn't say a word at the dinner. Were you nervous?

HE What do you actually do?

THAT ONE I protest ...

HE Environmental activist?

THAT ONE What, today? The least polluted places are those hit by disasters ... Just tell me, how's life out there, in places before a disaster?

HE We try to make sure there's no disaster.

THAT ONE So where do you take it all?

HE There're still places ...

THAT ONE Like this one?

HE We had no idea that we actually have it here, that we have first-class accommodation here because the Factory's here.

THAT ONE Does she separate?

HE What?

THAT ONE Well, whether she separates waste, has she ever been to a clima-rally ... does she ride a bike instead of a car ...

HE She does separate, though not out of principle ...

THAT ONE She wants to get to Imitation to score some the points, right? You didn't arrange it for her ... as your father arranged everything for you.

HE Stop it. You knew back then why you were after me...

THAT ONE You call dating being after you ...

HE Get dressed ...

THAT ONE Do you mind him watching? Look, perhaps he's standing in the window and watching us have fun ...

HE Where is he?

THAT ONE You came on vacation?

HE I want to see it.

THAT ONE Ask the guide ...

HE It's not in the itinerary ...

THIRD So here we are ...

THAT ONE You want to see the Factory from inside.

HE What's that supposed to mean?

SECOND (*to That One*) So you're such a dark guide. Well, we'd like to see what others can't.

FIRST We should not stray from the sidewalks that are identified in the guidebook. Otherwise, it's dangerous for visitors to the Territory. You can also get dozens of Roentgen units.

SECOND As for me, I am replete with Roentgen units. My folks wanted to be sure that I was healthy, so they kept having me X-rayed .

FIRST We aren't in Chernobyl, this place was ruled by bacteria.

THIRD Really? I haven't been to an X-ray yet.

SECOND You will show us a disco. Well, a disco – the city used to be vibrant, so they must have had a disco. And perhaps we take a ride on that carousel too. Look, the chimney, the chimney looks just like a prick.

HE We want to, perhaps I won't have them after this.

The Second knocks.

SECOND So, are you coming with us? We can go Dutch.

THAT ONE (*to Him*) Do you want to know the truth? They wanted to see a bit more.

The Americans pay her. He looks in surprise.

Scene 12
Scene about the Source

They are standing in front of a deep pit, looking inside.

THIRD What a stench!

FIRST It is said to fit billions of waste that need decades to disintegrate. It's amazing to see it up close.

SECOND See, you played decent.

THAT ONE It contains everything dumped twenty years ago across the world.

THIRD I guess it wouldn't be much fun to swim in it.

HE Why are you showing it to them?

THAT ONE To shock them ...

HE How do you enlighten them given that, when they return home, they get so unhappy that they toss an oil bottle not among glass but among mixed waste ...

SECOND I am really sick ...

FIRST There must be billions of cubic metres of waste...

SECOND If I imagine that there are my disposable diapers, my uneaten sandwiches, my purchased-yet-never-played CDs, my unopened mp3s, and how much more I shall send there ...

FIRST There was plenty of space here at the time, hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of underground space ... but today there are other sites for that ...

THIRD I don't imagine anything ... who knows how deep it is.

Second pushes Third, he almost falls inside.

THIRD Are you nuts or what? Do you want me to end up there?

THAT ONE That's enough. We're going back to the hotel, and that's it.

Second is staring at her exposed bust with the inscription: "Do you want to know the truth?"

SECOND No kiddin'?

She doesn't even look at Second and is looking at Him sincerely.

SECOND Ok, I see, I'm going to recycle myself in the hotel.

SHE And where is he?

SECOND He stayed there.

SHE I'll call the guide. Where's the guide? I don't have a phone number on him.

Guide appears in the hallway.

GUIDE What's going on?

SHE My husband disappeared.

GUIDE Where?

SHE If I knew, I wouldn't be asking you, would I.

GUIDE So he must be located in the exterior ... It's strictly forbidden to move around the

Territory without a guide.

SHE I'm going with you.

FIRST They are by the Source.

SHE With whom?

SECOND Like, you don't have to be specific, man. Don't spoil it for them.

SHE With whom?

GUIDE I probably know of someone like that. (Speaks to the pager). Come to pick up the intruders, they have to be isolated.

SHE I'm going with you.

GUIDE It's not for you.

SHE I will go with you. You're the guide.

The Guide, noticeably flattered, agrees.

Scene 13

Scene about appearing at the Source

HE I have never been to my father's work. He never took me there, it was allegedly very dangerous. To work for the Factory and the Source. I don't think he ever talked about it even to my mother. Except she once teasingly remarked that he worked for the scrapyard of the Earth.

THAT ONE My Mum and your Dad ...

HE Everything's changed here.

THAT ONE Nothing is here as used to be.

HE It's got are fewer people.

THAT ONE It's supposed to be better here than out there. So they come here as there's no more space left to ship the crap in. Tourists come here, many like those three.

HE Or me?

THEN ONE Why did you want to come here?

HE I wanted to check it out.

THAT ONE Like a ZOO?

HE You never left?

That One is silent.

THAT ONE How about a swim?

HE You mean here?

THAT ONE At our spot ... when it blew up, we were at our spot.

HE I guess I should go back.

THAT ONE Back then you ran to our spot ... and today ... How about you just say hi to someone.

HE Who?

That One straightens her chest with the inscription: "Do you want to know the truth?" He follows her hesitantly.

Scene 14

Scene about returning to the Source

She and Guide are dressed in protective clothing, only their eyes are visible.

SHE At least I know what it's like to walk around in a burqa.

GUIDE Be careful. There's a chance of getting infected. Your husband, if we find him, he'll go

...

SHE Where?

GUIDE No matter now. Don't come here, it's not a pretty sight.

SHE You mean, something happened?

GUIDE Not now ...

SHE Such stench ...

GUIDE I got used to it in all these years...

SHE Noah! Noah!

GUIDE What are you calling?

SHE My husband's name.

GUIDE That's how only one man is called, someone I used to know...

SHE I Possibly. My husband comes from here.

GUIDE Well, someone I nearly knew ...

Scene 15

A scene about being trapped in the Arkship

He and That One are by the shipwreck which we saw at the beginning from a distance. There is a small water area, about up to one's waist. She dives into the water. He hesitates.

HE There isn't much left, and people say everything has changed.

THAT ONE Come on.

He follows her.

HE I actually swam that day. The last day of school, we didn't even get time to pick up our grade reports.

THAT ONE Not that we wouldn't have made it. It was your idea not to go to school. You were afraid you failed.

HE I didn't want to see your straight A's, that was all. Inhale, exhale, remember, and then it came.

They dip in and emerge a few times, and nothing. They find it funny. They are close and grow closer. They don't find it that funny. They hear Her voice. He and That One look at each other and quickly get out of the water. That One takes his hand, opens the door on the ship wreck, pushes them both in and shuts the door.

Scene 16

Scene about how good it is at home

Small house, full of miscellaneous items, especially clothes that obscure the misery of it all.

Mother is sitting in an armchair. That One enters.

MOTHER Who is it?

THAT ONE It's me.

MOTHER Go get dressed.

That One goes to the bathroom. He looks at Mother in surprise. He would like to leave but is unable to open the door.

MOTHER Who are you?

Mother is using her hands to feel the space in front. She is blind.

MOTHER Rafka, Rafa!

That One is returning.

THAT ONE I suppose you already made the acquaintance.

HE What's going on? What kind of game is this?

MOTHER You? You? So you found him? Your showing off in public "just like that" bore fruit.

THAT ONE That's activism.

MOTHER (*feeling in the space*) Well, do sit down ...

HE I better be off ...

MOTHER I'm not angry that you weren't at school ... no need to worry. I have the grade report ... I took it when it was all over. You didn't fail.

Mother gestures to That One to bring something. She brings the grade report and hands it to Him. He is examining the sheet.

MOTHER Welcome home!

He smiles more contently about the grade report more than about the last sentence.

MOTHER I saw it from here every day. Four chimneys and then the waste separation building. New processing technology. I learned to count using the chimneys. One, two, three, four. And why...

HE They don't spring up like mushrooms after the rain, you used to say.

MOTHER We benefited from it, what else ... we were well off. We had a lake, we were like on vacation, medicines here were like nowhere else. Nobody noticed and even wanted to notice. Lorries drove there, lots of lorries, though concealed beneath a green alley, of which only the name remained. They arrived loaded and left empty, now I know, though it is still the best place in the world. (*to Him*) You want to hear something more, more than you heard there ... on stage. It's their stage. The old Greta beset by fate. She can't deny the teacher in her. She still probably

talks about the wedding. But I stayed home, I had to deny my teaching vocation. It was better that way. After all that happened, only emotions remained, not reason. Better not say anything, because if I spoke, they would bar me. Do you really want to hear the truth, why and what happened? Why it didn't explode elsewhere, and only here? The one who caused it should ask. Don't you want to hear it? Genes are being inherited, brought into us, dumped and burned, and we see only smoke from them, a shadow, something distant that we cannot even recognise. Mother doesn't seem to notice them, she is saying something to herself.

HE I was only fourteen, Mum.

MOTHER You knew everything. You stood out at school. Were inquisitive, curious, you wanted to know the facts, just like me. Yet when you had to evaluate them, to get to the heart of the matter, you stepped back. Even when they beat up your brother. You knew who triggered the fight. Still, you didn't intervene, you just watched.

HE He was older than me.

MOTHER And they were stronger. Had he known what you did, he would have done something. He would have told me. The dead know and I'm dead, right. That's a fact. I came to believe this transcendental fact. She was an assistant. He trained her. She asked a lot, he answered her. In time, she was asking a lot and he was answering. Eventually, they both kept asking. They got their answer that dreadful summer evening. There. (*points towards the Factory*) Their safe meeting spot. Daily meetings. He liked to go to work, he was fanatically happy because he was working hard, he knew the facts. Though, I repeat, he didn't know what to do with them, suddenly he didn't know what to do with them. (*She serves soup to her son; puts bowl on the table next to him.*)

HE No, thank you. We have breakfast at the hotel.

MOTHER So, you come home and sleep in a hotel. Then, on that last night, each of us in the city ate the foul last supper. Separately – us and her. We thought of his son and your brother. (*gazes blankly at the table*) He thought of her all the time. He ate and kept thinking of her, watching black-and-white programme on our black-and-white TV. And he went to sleep. He had to go to work. I knew he was primarily going to her. There was to be an incineration test that day, a check on the interaction between incineration with central cleaning. Over the holidays, tons of crap were to be brought for burning. The system had to be tested. He was to check the system. An ordinary, routine task. Except he didn't do it right away. He didn't, because she was there. They

met in the locker room. She didn't tell him she was expecting a baby – she didn't know then. He sent her away saying that he would come to her and stay. He would have his stuff delivered. He was nervous, the time was passing. The shift manager was looking for him. After she left, he went to do the job. But he didn't do it properly. The equipment failed. His mind was elsewhere. We all did it gradually, because our minds were elsewhere.

THAT ONE She saw something. She walked down the alley to the city, turned around and saw a fascinating sight. Something like fireworks, if it weren't so strangely dump ... I told myself that I was somewhere in an exotic destination and celebrating somewhere in the capital.³ She ran insane and jumped into the lake. She wanted to end like that.

HE (*to That One*) I'm sorry.

She shrugs.

MOTHER That's alright. People here don't tend to realise that they are responsible for what they see around, even if they were just born at that time. Perhaps even prematurely. Everyone who was in the Factory, died of the consequences, and everything ended up in the air, all that had been disposed of until then, all plastic cutlery, bottles, plates, saucers, cups, toys, packaging, bags ...

HE Why are you telling me now?

MOTHER You were thinking of your father, you thought of him a hero, he was an icon to you. And I portrayed him like that, although I wanted to tell you the truth. I came back and you stayed. You've become a tourist. Nothing was as before ... Everything was dead. She gave birth to a living child, perfectly healthy. And it is still alive.

GUIDE (*the device in his hand beeps*) That's crazy! (*opens the door; the torch shines into the shipwreck*) It brought us here. Fine device.

A contour appears in the beam of the torch: He and That One in embrace. Earlier gloom changes from darkness to an abandoned space of the shipwreck.

³ Transl, note: At this point, the line changes deliberately from 1st person singular to 3rd person singular, though the character still talks about herself.

SHE Noah?

GUIDE You violated the rules of the Territory. I must get you out of here right away.

THAT ONE Just calm down, bro.

GUIDE You get out and I'll quote him a clause that you have nothing to do here. As a tourist, he will have to go to isolation.

Guide says something to the radio.

Scene 17

A scene about what it is like to be in isolation

He is sitting in a small room. Sound of her voice and later that of the Guide.

SHE We'll make everything clear, okay? Let's do it at home.

HE I was home already. Something 's changed.

SHE They actually gave me the waste we produced here. I'm supposed to take it back home. Imagine, travelling from the honeymoon with this garbage. Alone. Pretty bad, isn't it? But if you want, I'll start recycling and we can stay home for vacations. How long will you be staying here?

HE Not sure Until I'm clean.

GUIDE Your taxi is waiting on the border to the Territory.

SHE Won't you escort me?

GUIDE Would you like me to?

SHE You're the guide, so it's in your job spec.

GUIDE Gladly, though as a matter of exception. It's not in the regulations.

Lights off. He is left in the dark.

Scene 18

A scene in which they both find themselves in an ecological void where they will be fine for a while ...

She and Guide on a first-class beach under bright sun. Poster-like scene.

HE Can you finally remove the blindfold from my eyes? What a silly idea. I have no clue where I am.

SHE Stop working for a while, you're my guide. A bit more suspense.

HE I can feel sand. It is sand, isn't it?

SHE Yes.

HE What colour?

HE White.

SHE I don't believe you. I want to see.

Roaring waves. He gets startled.

SHE It's just the sea roaring.

Another crashing wave pulls off the scarf from his face.

SHE You're happy, aren't you?

HE Imitation!

SHE Look, there's actually fish, live fish swimming. And look there, must be a dolphin. How come it survived? Imitation! Look, this is totally different from what we are used to.

HE Genuine tree. Actually, a living tree with branches, looks, even leaves. With real birds.

SHE It also has leaves. If we visit this destination in Spring, it will have flowers. And here, they write that it has real fruit in the Summer. Grand!

HE I've been waiting for a holiday voucher my whole life. So this is a world I've never lived in before.

SHE All that to score some points.

Guide and She bask in the sun. Guide is photographing every detail. They are enjoying the moment looking out over the bay. Nude couple appears in front of them, possibly He and That One with the inscription: "Do you want to know the truth?" Guide and She ignore them. They undress, dive into the water and stretch on an inflatable mattress in the shape of tardigrade. Voices of three independent tourists echo from a distance.

SECOND It's really boring, we shouldn't go on vacation together anymore. No disaster.

THIRD Look!

Explosion in the distance.

FIRST This is somewhere by our place.

SECOND Right, next time we're vacationing at home

The End