

<b><i>DON´T CRY, ANNA</i></b> Julius Meinholm
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A PLAY FOR ACTRESSES PERFORMING IN A STORY OF A WOMAN WRITTEN BY A MAN

First performance: September 21, 2001  
 Banská Bystrica, *The Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads*

SCENES

1. DON´T CRY, ANNA
2. ANNA´S GARDEN
3. OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD
4. FAMILY TREASURE
5. ON THE WAY TO... A.
6. SINGIN´ IN THE RAIN

CHARACTERS

ACTRESS – ANNA

MAN – DIRECTOR or GOD

HILDA – Grandmother

RELIKA – Hilda´ s older sister

EMA – Anna´ s dead sister

Translation: PhDr. Katarína Feřková, PhD.

SCENE ONE

DON´T CRY, ANNA

DIRECTOR – MAN (*music*): Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome to the theatre. To the theatre! Which means – nothing you are going to see tonight is true. Nothing is true. Everything is fiction and nothing corresponds to reality. Enjoy yourselves. See you in the club after the performance. Bye.

ACTRESS (*music increases in volume*): At least turn it down, will you?

(*music stops, ACTRESS to the audience*): Excuse me... I... It doesn´t mean I don´t know why I am here. I do know it. Yeah, I am the actress... I come to perform. I enjoy performing. There are so many of you here... quite a lot. Excuse me, I´m not used to the lights glaring at me this way. (*looks up at the balcony*) Guys, could you dim them a little?... Guys?

DIRECTOR – MAN (*voice from above, off stage*): Stop directing, my little beauty.

ACTRESS: Oh... (*to the audience*) They haven´t heard me. Well, I´ll play in this glare. We´ve agreed on performing... *Don´t Cry, Anna* by Julius Meinholm. He is a renowned author. And I am the actress who should... could... play a renowned author. Excuse me, not him, but his wife... no, not his wife, but a woman LIKE THIS... like this. Fine. (*starts acting*) Julius Meinholm: *Don´t Cry, Anna*. (*to the audience*) Why should I care about her... let her have a good cry...

DIRECTOR – MAN (*voice from above, off stage*): Shit on that, baby. Perform.

ACTRESS (*looking up at the DIRECTOR*): Sure, sure, I´ll manage. I´ll try... to manage it... (*to the audience*) I´ve already played all kinds of bullshit. Excuse me... well, excuse me, I didn´t mean it, you always know what you are

doing. And there are even worse things in the world. What if I were run over by a train, ehm? I know we should talk about this very inspiring topic – a woman. It is a very inspiring topic. And we have come together because of it. By means of this play I should say... no, I should play... something in my name... I should play also in your name... nicely and cleverly so that it would be truly worthy of all his suggestions and inspiration about a woman like this. Julius Meinholm... (*bursts into laughter*)... it reminds me of: “Julius Meinl – The taste of good coffee!” A cup of good coffee – that’s what I need badly at this moment.

DIRECTOR – MAN (*voice from above, off stage*): Go to hell.

ACTRESS: Me?... I know how good you are, what you give me, sometimes it seems to me you can’t be real. You’re too good to be real... I know what troubles you have had with me, I don’t want to disappoint you... but the best thing would be if you took the role. You are able to stand up in front of people... you are able to defend your opinion... it’s better to look at a man, and he doesn’t have to be a fashion model... excuse me... I’m not good enough for this.

DIRECTOR – MAN (*voice from above, off stage*): Fuck you, bitch!

ACTRESS: I see, I see, it’s a great opportunity for me, right? A chance. To play about Meinl’s wife... I feel like crying... no, no, no, no, it’s Anna crying... Can’t you give me a hand here?... Gee, one single gesture would do, one shrug of the shoulder, one lift of the eye lid, a tremble of the lip... All these are signs, rescue signals from the director... These are directions. There’s a whole arsenal of directions, it is a map with strictly marked side-walks and pathways... with prudent little flags: “Shit on that”. “Go to hell, you little cutie”. “Fuck you”. Excuse me, but I must tell them something. (*to the audience*) Have you ever said anything like that?

ACTRESS: Too bad. (*if the answer is negative; if the answer is positive, she continues*)

Because it is very exact: Go there and do this. I need it, too, I need very badly somebody to tell me that. Then, I start like an antelope, I snap up the reference, I grasp what’s the matter as quick as lighting, and that’s the way I avoid problems before they appear. You’re proud of me that I get so quickly here and there, do this, do that... and I am proud of myself, that I’m capable of it. And now, I am sitting here and I don’t know... Well, sh... Excuse me, I’m so nervous from all this, from the... Meinl... I have already used three dirty words... and I didn’t even mean it. I don’t do that. It’s not polite. We have had three four letter words here: “Shit on that”. “Go to hell, my little bitch”. “Fuck you”. And I feel like using the fourth one. You know which one. But what can I do? I can only say the chickenshit stuff I am allowed to say... poopoo... ka ka... doodoo... tushie... These are even nice words, aren’t they? (*looks up at the bride*) Folger’s, Jacobs. What?! Who will explain this to me? Is it possible to believe in words? And you want me to play the truth. Whose truth? Anna’s? Julius Meinl’s? Yours or mine? Shit on life. Hell, I should never have trusted you.

DIRECTOR – MAN (*voice from above, off stage*): I’m coming down.

ACTRESS: Stay there.

DIRECTOR – MAN (*voice from above, off stage*): Music.

ACTRESS turns into ANNA.

ANNA: I am a woman. A married woman. We got married in a hurry. Actually, one year after Franja was born. I don’t even know why we did it... the wedding I mean... uhuh... my husband wanted to have her christened. But I was so happy, too – it is good when your baby has her papers in order. Well... it’s a daughter... well, most

important is that she's healthy... My husband was a bit disappointed, he wanted a boy. A soccer player. "When a boy's born into the family, it is always a great joy, a credit" – that's what my granny Hilda used to say.

ANNA (*moved emotionally*): Hilda. A wonderful woman. The most beautiful woman in our family. She took care of me and my sister Ema when we were kids. Our parents went out to work, they had no time. And so our wise Hilda ruled over us... If I know something, I know it thanks to her. I always remember her when I don't know what to do. Hilda used to say... "There are always problems with girls, they soon have one in the oven..."

ACTRESS: Ai, ai.

ANNA: Well... me too... I longed for a son a lot, nine months I talked to him – to her – like I was talking with a boy... well, and eventually Frantishka came – a girl. We named her after my husband's grandfather... You see... so that it stays in the family (*starts sobbing*)... And Franja is now such a bean pole, she kicks the ball and runs with the boys on the playground... and I am so sorry about it...

ACTRESS: Oh. Now the actress pretends to cry – the author justifies the title of his work.  
(*music forte, ACTRESS looking at the DIRECTOR upstairs*) OK. I continue. (*volume diminishes*)

ANNA (*apologizing*): I seem to be talking too much. I don't even know if I am boring you 'cause my life is so common – work, home, Franja... over and over. I haven't even been away from home. Well... as a girl I dreamed... But, what would they say at work? And my parents? And my husband would certainly divorce me – if I packed suitcases and left for just anywhere. (*gets excited*) The worst thing that can happen to a woman is being so sure of her own opinion. Instead of love she spits out *responsibility*, instead of her child it is *whataboutyoursenseoflife*. She doesn't even speak about her own illusions but about "the myths" of the world or she babbles tasteless ideas about those sexual organs – male, of course. You know, when the woman misses her man in bed...! But I think, we have our own common sense. Nobody can take that from us. Everybody has to follow their own conscience and know what is good for them. We've had revolutions here. And how did things turn out? Like a fart! (*stops*) Oh. My husband is right. When I get so excited... I need to take deep breaths. I've always been so tongue-tied from fear, because I am used to listening rather than talking. But my tongue is slowly loosening up. I think my life's story is coming out of me on its own...

ACTRESS: Word after word come rolling along and I can't feel my tongue. Where are you? Uha... Here it is... and now it tells you something... on behalf of Anna... bla-blabla! *Kraklakvakve? Koranere! Ksonsirýři – guelira: Brifsi, brafsi, gutužere: gasti, dasti kra... Lahu-lahu-lahu-la! Chandraradar – sísjádra – tesku tes py pi? Vahapádra pryvešádra, klukpukpici li? Lahu lahu lahu lahu la!* Humans can adapt so perfectly that they don't know why they exist or what they're here for.

DIRECTOR – MAN (*voice from above, off stage*): Don't worry about it, honey. Nobody's interested in your opinion. Are you an actress? Yes, you are. So perform. After the performance, see you in the club. Bye-bye.  
(*leaves, the door bangs*)

## SCENE TWO

### ANNA'S GARDEN (GET ME TO THE CHURCH ON TIME)

<sup>1</sup> MORGENSTERN, Christian. *Dass Grosse Lalula..* In: Beránek měsíc. Praha: Odeon, 1989. p. 337. Czech translation: J. Hiršal.

ACTRESS: Scene Two. Anna's Garden or *Get me to the Church on Time*. (*calls up above*) Is Anna saying this or who? And does she understand it? Because I don't... He left. (*to the audience*) Never mind. We'll help ourselves. At the theatre, there is help, which is called the playbill... There we can find all the answers to unanswered questions, if by chance we don't understand the play. Please, does anybody have a programme here? Could you lend it to me? (*she takes a playbill from the audience, turns the pages; improvisation according to the need*) Oh, here it is. *Get Me to the Church on Time*. Here is an old poem (*reads*): *What to my savior shall I give, / Who freely hath done this for me? / I'll serve Him here whilst I shall live / And love Him to eternity.*<sup>2</sup> Anne Bradstreet, 17<sup>th</sup> century. But it's very topical. It is closely connected with this play. (*returns the Playbill to the audience*) Now, we'll have something modern, what about Folger's? We'll play that bit out to the end.

ANNA: All women talk about men. Those who got married, those who never got married, and also those who got divorced. Everything centers on men. But in most cases men are terribly cursed. This one hasn't done this, that one hasn't done that, this one drank up all his money, or simply didn't come home for two nights... and his wife suffered so much. She cried so much, or she was waiting, why has he done this to her? I don't know what those women actually want, they keep complaining, and nothing satisfies them. They've got what they were dreaming about. Their family, children, home... (*ACTRESS makes angry noise, ANNA keeps talking.*) When my husband snaps at me angrily... I think it over... and I find the mistake. Mostly it's in me. Either I haven't understood him properly, or I haven't managed to do what he wanted me to do or I was just talking nonsense, and, of course, it got on his nerves. Simply, I didn't meet his expectations when he counted on me, and he has reason to feel offended. Well, what if he shouts a little, calls me names, here and there, and raises his fist or breaks something? That's a part of the deal. He's got his reasons, it was me who provoked him.

ACTRESS: For God's sake, what bullshit is she talking about?

ANNA: For example, the other day I didn't dress the way he wanted, and Franja really screwed up something. He's got real troubles with us. No, I'll never complain about my husband, because I know what I know. My granny used to say...

ACTRESS: For Christ's sake. Hilda, Hilda!! We've met her already here. Where would I have been if I had known Hilda. This Meinhalm, is he a German? Or an Austrian? God, it doesn't matter. Well, well, well, I proceed.

ANNA: ...“You are his shoulder, you are his right hand, you are his support, and the man who has a wise wife doesn't need to be afraid of anything”. I don't want my husband to be afraid. If he is afraid, all of us are afraid, too. Franja and I are shaking in the bathroom when he starts to get mad because we have spent all the budget money. Fortunately, the bathroom door is solid and it holds. Last time it was the stupid plastic door handle that (*laughs*)... broke into hundred pieces, because my old man is so strong. If he hit me... or Franja... I don't want to think about it. If any man is so strong and has such violent passion in him, he needs some way to let it burn off, even if it's just a stupid door handle.

ACTRESS: What a stupid woman you are. You let him batter the kid and yourself. Jesus Christ, is this possible? Is the author still alive? Where? Tell me where.

ACTRESS as ANNA: It was my fault because I spend a lot on clothes. But for whom, who else do I want to like me, but him; he didn't believe me, the little jealous coward, that I want only him and nobody else. He goes crazy... out

<sup>2</sup> BRADSTREET, Anne. “*Here Follow Several Occasional Meditations.*” Infoplease. ©2000/2006 Pearson Education, publishing as Infoplease. 28 Jun. 2006 <<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0765967.html>>.

of fear, because he cares, he loves me so much he can't cope with it. And me... I understand it. I have learned to be quiet and smart. My sister Ema was like that. *(cries)* No, I am not going to speak about Ema. It still hurts a lot. *(cries)*

ACTRESS: Amazing! The author mentions a character and then refuses to tell more about her. He is simply a genius!! You can always learn a lot. Ai, ai, ai.

ANNA: You can always learn a lot. Once he called Franja "my princess"... really, he asks me about everything, he finds time, but he says – we spend too much on telephone bills... you must stop it, is it clear? Or – where did you buy this ham you gave me for lunch? It was a bit off. Don't you think you should watch what the stupid idiot throws on the scales? See... he is worried about them cheating me because he thinks I am more capable. His friends come, drink and talk about... sports... and women, the size of their tits... you know what I mean, and who they... again – you know what... .

ACTRESS: What? Do you know? Eh? You suspect, don't you? Well, let's just say they got laid? Not counting their own wives, of course – but that's obvious.

ANNA: You know, they can't live without it. Nor without booze. If my old man has a few, he wants me to express myself: "Well, will you speak up or not?" And then I say what I mean, or I don't. In most cases I don't. Then, he's angry with me that I sat like a log and didn't say anything. His friends could have been offended. Don't I care about his friends?

...Well, no, I don't want him to think I'm restricting him. I just don't know what to say. I don't like the sex talk, but will anything change if I tell them they are pigs? They don't mean it, at least my husband doesn't. You know,... I like only words for... cuddling... soothing, laughing and for just stupid things. For example: sweetie pie, darling, babe, love-bug, cuddly-wug, doodly-bug. Franja laughs at them, she's crazy about them.

When we're at home alone, we're often at home alone, it happens. Then my little tiny string bean Franja and I play. We talk tenderly and we imagine... All of sudden we find ourselves in a beautiful garden, where everything grows topsy-turvy; with pink ears and noses both inside and outside. Under the roots of beautiful plants we bury words like "sadness"... "whydidyouhitme", "I'mnotacunt", "yousonofbitch", "inwomen'sheadsthereisjustlickedoutemmentalcheese", "wherethehellareyourbeautifullegs youhadbeforethewedding"... *(weeps)* I did have beautiful legs, I would wear a pair of white shorts in summer, a long time before I got married... I used to go with my girlfriends to the beach, and if we didn't feel like walking, they sent me to hitchhike.

"Go on, they'll eat you up when they see your beautiful long legs." And there I went, I wouldn't spoil the fun, would I? *(cries and demonstrates)* So I stood up, I stood up with my arms akimbo, rocking like a giraffe, it was a wonderful feeling... but in our garden my former beautiful legs have turned into pounds of magical oranges. Franja and I take out seeds from them and bury them in holes of happiness in order to grow trees with long legs just in case. If he comes back, we will have grown centipedes, a hundred luminous white legs with soft skin, tender to the touch... Oh, God, what nonsense I'm talking about my life. Jesus Christ, isn't anybody going to stop me? I have to be exact, no feelings or impressions. Again, I'm not able to control it. What was it I was supposed to be talking about? About the important things. I have forgotten about everything important.

ACTRESS: Anna. You are harvesting his words and sounds, then you sow them into your garden. The kid is growing under your hands and you feel like God. Pardon me. Well, we need to understand every tongue that's stuck out at us. We can't do anything else.

*Then while we live, in love let's so persevere / That when we live no more, we may live ever.*<sup>3</sup>

Anne Bradstreet, 1678. Used of course without author's permission in Julius Meinholm's play *Don't Cry, Anna*.

SCENE THREE  
OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD

ACTRESS: (*sings*)

*I taste a liquor never brewed, / From tankards scooped in pearl, / Not all the vats upon the Rhine / Yield such an alcohol! / Inebriate of air am I, / And debauchee of dew, / Reeling, through endless summer days, / From inns of molten blue.*<sup>4</sup> That's just beautiful, just beautiful, but what do you have in common with it, Anna – Reeling, through endless summer days? (*parodies ANNA*). Me? But that's about me, that's my whole life. Yes? So we'll proceed. We're going to play your life. (*puts clown's nose on*)

ANNA: Sometimes, when I am sad, it comes... Please, God, I'm not complaining... If I were complaining, I would be here all day... The other day Franja was hanging around in the flat. She broke the old man's pipe. He collects pipes. He's got plenty of them. A hundred – two hundred, porcelain ones among them, and she broke one of them, the crazy kid, and what a terrible ruckus followed! He whacked her. If I had stood up for her, I would've got it, too. Sure, they cost a world, those pipes – it's such a sophisticated hobby... everybody should have one, and those who don't, like me, shouldn't criticize those who do. I help. I polish the copper ends. I enjoy doing it because... (*she takes out a 1.5 liter plastic bottle of red wine*)... when I am alone with the smell of tobacco, I take out a bottle of wine from the pantry... (*turns the cap*). I pour just a jigger (*pours into the cap*)... and I sip... (*drinks from the bottle*). My husband is a very orderly man, he draws small lines on the bottles to check whether the wine hasn't evaporated or got sour. My jigger of wine is just excellent (*loosens her hair and puts the hair band on the bottle to mark the level of wine; drinks*). It makes a thicker line and his line is not seen on the bottle. Maybe my Guardian Angel stands by me and watches while I sip... I sit in the tobacco smell, sip my wine, it tastes good to me... clouds of pleasant aroma stream around me and I am so happy. I don't do it very often, I know it isn't normal to be sipping alone at home, but I don't drink, I just play. I have it under control. I know how harmful and dangerous it is to drink on your own. (*takes a big slurp from the bottle and throws it behind the stage*)

ACTRESS (*takes off the clown nose, speaks to the audience*): Please, don't think that what I just drank was really wine. It wasn't! In a drama it is just as if. Everything is as if... instead of cognac, tea, instead of wine, soda, – or they put artificial color in your glass of water and you have to drink shit like this. But not just drink. You have to act. Pretend feelings. Talk nonsense. "Jigger of wine" is unbelievable! (*she looks up*) Listen, darling Meinholm. If you want to write something about women, I'll tell you something. We women like real wine glasses (*she picks up a wine glass and shows it in the direction of the balcony*) that are easy to hold, and solid. and firm to hold in the hand. Words turn into drops and these drops into a stream of warm, living wine. (*returns to the place she had her glass and takes out a glass bottle of red wine*) Ah, a little Cabernet. (*throws away the cork, pours the wine into the glass and drinks up fast, then she pours a second time, enjoying it slowly and continuing the lecture – this time to the audience*) I don't know what the author thinks, but I claim that drinking wine doesn't mean drinking. You only have to choose the right kind, corresponding to your feelings and dreams. You can't imagine what a French, or Spanish or Italian wine might do for you. Be careful! If you don't want to reveal yourself, don't drink

<sup>3</sup> BRADSTREET, Anne. *To My Dear and Loving Husband*. In: McMichael, G., et al. *Anthology of American Literature*, Eighth Edition. Vol. I. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson, Prentice Hall. 2004. p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> DICKINSON, Emily. *I taste the liquor never brewed*. In: *The Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*. New York: The Modern Library. 2004. p. 14.

*Merlot or Bull's Blood. And Alsatian is especially dangerous. After a few drinks you babble like a baby: I'll show you. (sudden shift – she acts like a drunken woman). Yeh... Hello, you're here, too? How're ya doin? I'm not doing well, either. They drove me crazy at the post office yesterday... or was it at the theatre? Do you remember the one... well, the one... what's... Ah, that doesn't matter... she married a rich one, she's got a baby already. Well, well, she managed to arrange it, didn't she? Last time she was here she was wondering how I could stand it, the cow... Well, then we cried together. Jesus, why is it such a pain to meet our girlfriends after many years... Really, after Alsatian you spill everything except what you don't know. You won't tell only what you don't know. (the door in the hall opens, the ACTRESS hides the bottle under her skirt and sits down)*

DIRECTOR – MAN (*comes in, angrily takes away the bottle from her and leaves*)

ACTRESS: Close the door! From outside. (DIRECTOR *closes the door*) That was the...

DIRECTOR: (*checks if he really left and from the left side of the wooden platform picks up another bottle of red wine and has a sip*) Really, after Alsatian you won't tell only what you don't know. (*the technician enters and reproachfully stands next to her*)

ACTRESS: The technician. The head technician (*passes the bottle to him, he takes it and leaves*). Such a demi-God! He sits over there, next to the Genius. The DIRECTOR is the Genius – and he is his right hand. But otherwise, he is a good guy. Maybe he's going to tell on me. (*shouts*) Are you going to snitch on me? (*quickly runs behind the stage and picks up two bottles of red wine*) *Denis d'Or* and *Sunny Port* will cause a wonderful feeling like the jouissance you experience looking at a shop window full of gold or at the harbor where the old ships are creaking and sighing (*pours and drinks*), and so much more comes out than you're usually ever able to say. I'll show you. Listen, listen, I've got to tell you something... but really don't tell anybody! My boss is a terrible harridan, she thinks that now she's got a husband, (I don't know how she got him), and a car and goes regularly to her hairdresser, she can dispense those sirupy pieces of advice of hers – “Why such a young pretty girl like you isn't smiling” – and I should smile at her? Or: – “If you don't think positively, my dear, you call to yourself negative influences and then you will go from one depression to another” – but I already have a depression from the fact that such a bitch like her could exist in this world. *Denis d'Or* and *Sunny Port*. (*a stage technician in working clothes enters*) This is the Little One... A very nice boy, I love him dearly, but he never says what he wants. His look tells me that he wants my wine. Have a sip, you Little One... (*passes a bottle to him, he leaves*)

ACTRESS: (*finishes the glass of wine and walks with an empty glass*) Consider very carefully which brand you choose if you want to have a good time and forget about all those (*points at the door where men disappeared*) enemies spying on you. (*to the audience*) Don't you have any wine? You don't bring wine with you to the theatre? Does anybody have any wine? Hallo! Really excellent and great for forgetting without leaving a bad conscience is... (*picks up another bottle, she is a bit tipsy*) *Vin de Pape*. Pap parap pap. Pope wine won't loosen your tongue, it will just press you deeper into the armchair, and the only thing you're expected to do is to find a proper place to sit. (*drinks*) You'll cry, you'll feel sorry for yourself, and let's admit, nobody feels sorrier for us than ourselves. (*another man enters the stage*)

ACTRESS: Why are you so sad? ...Wine, isn't it? (*gives him the bottle, he leaves*)

Inspi... Inspi... (*picks up another bottle*)... ration! And when you really don't know what to do with your body, with your soul, and with your melancholy, with your loneliness, because your husband got some secretive little scraps with messages – “I am your untamable little mare”, “You'll do it to me better tomorrow”, “At three o'clock

all the bells of the world rang”, “The earth moved tonight”, “The angels cried”,... get *Bardolino Chiaretto*, it won't disappoint you. *Bardolino* has a magician in it. He jumps out of the bottle as soon as you reach its bottom.

(DIRECTOR – MAN *in mask enters; the ACTRESS is frightened*)

ACTRESS: Of course. (*hands him a bottle and a glass; the man takes everything from the stage – a chair, a rag, a microphone, and leaves*). Don't take that! Hallo! He was the last apostle of the Lord. We don't have any more of them! Isn't there a single Judas among you? (*door bangs*). The Saint! (*finds a crate full of red wine bottles*) You just mustn't be too tired. You have to be very careful about the fatigue, really. If you are like that at home, it's okay. But in public it can be fatal, because on a scale of ten for the scandalous behavior of tipsy women – all of us sitting here could get the full number. But Meinholm doesn't write about it, our drama keeps silent about it. (*to the audience*) At least you have me here. (*falls down at the small round stage she is performing on; the stage becomes a trampoline*)

ACTRESS: They've screwed up the buffet. That's fine. The scale of ten for the scandalous behavior of tipsy women. I'll start with the mild ones. The first grade! You tittle-tattle, the number of pleasant men surrounding you grows, meanwhile you are spitting saliva and crumbs in the face of the person sitting opposite you, from whom you've just learned that you know each other, even if you haven't any idea about it; it's still possible to stop.

Then, we have the second grade, you tittle-tattle, then you're giggling like a fool, you're banging your fist on a desk wondering how hard it is; suddenly, you realize that you have been yearning to have a desk like that in your office and you are pleased to see how many fine men agree with you. It's still possible to stop. Here is number three. You are giggling, you don't bang on the desk, you have achieved the lightness of a fly, you don't babble, but you are using words in a meaningless way, for example “Eros was my childhood friend”;

“I paid for a taxi ride to Hopelessness with my velvet shawl”... “If I'm in dire straits I know what self-realization is”... Now it is high time to stop! Then it goes quickly. Number four. You are not giggling. You're braying non-stop, and you understand foreigners speaking in all the world's languages. Maybe it's possible to handle it, if you are strong enough and you have somebody next to you who cares to save you... Madam, aren't you here with your husband?

And number five is this. You don't bray but you're dancing and don't understand anything at this brothel. You're starting to curse any important person around you, and only a very strong individual could take you away. But here comes number six! You're not dancing any more, you're cursing everybody who is more successful than you. You don't have any chance to stop now. Then we have number seven! Hatefully, you're accusing everybody of what they have done to you. You're proclaiming that they look like horses' asses, and nobody can stop you any more. Number eight. You're stripping off your dress (*ACTRESS takes off her dress and throws it away, she is more drunken*) and you want to prove how strong and beautiful you are at the same time – a real jewel for those who would like to have you; you can't stop... And number nine! You are throwing everything that you have at hand at everybody within your reach, and it's all the same if it's your husband, lover, girlfriend, family or company's sponsor; nobody can stop you.

The Last Phase! Only death is next. You are crying, you cannot control your body and you're making a mess around you; nobody cares to stop you, any more. (*she falls down, all lights go off*)

ACTRESS: Direct hit, right? Well, you can't see it. That's the end. The end of everything. Finish. Really. It's time to go home. The play is finished. It's not possible to play without lights. I know all of you will forgive me. We can go home. I'm so stupid. So are all of us actresses. We take it too emotionally. What's that? You don't feel like leaving? Okay. Does anybody have a cigarette? Do you have one? We're alone here. We can do whatever we want,



even the fireman has left. Do you have a lighter? (*asks for a cigarette and lighter – improvisation – then returns to the platform and lights the cigarette*)

Then there is one last miracle wine. I recommend it after enduring various grandiose official events, banquets, patron parties and family reunions, when you have your best dress on, when you have shown your low neckline, and after you have sighed enough over the excellent sauce... then there will be the chance to open a bottle of *Lambrusco Emilia* in your own room! (ACTRESS *is all of sudden totally sober.*) The chance to take a pen and write the first word in your life. Today I haven't wished anything bad to anybody and nothing bad has happened to me. Only twice towards evening did I want to put my pale, clever head into an oven. However, instead I made a cup of cocoa and some bread and butter and honey for my kid. *When landlords turn the drunken bee / Out of the foxglove's door, / When butterflies renounce their drams, / I shall but drink the more! / Till seraphs swing their snowy hats, / And saints to windows run, / To see the little tippler / Leaning against the sun!*<sup>5</sup>

Thank you. See you. You've been an excellent audience. Have a nice evening. I do not deserve you. And... the author, excuse me, but I am not up to it.

(Darkness. ACTRESS leaves, she has finished her part.)

#### SCENE FOUR

#### FAMILY TREASURE

(ACTRESS *is leaving bowing to the audience. A voice stops her.*)

HILDA: Anna!

(ACTRESS *is coming back, unbelieving, is looking at a strange old woman.*)

HILDA: Where are you Anna? Switch on the light, immediately.

ACTRESS: Madam, everything has finished here.

HILDA: You must be drunk again, or what?

ACTRESS: Let's go, you can tell me what you need outside.

HILDA: I am fed up with all your bullshit. If your Granny comes to see you once in a long time, don't be performing.

ACTRESS: What?... But, Madam... I'm not going to quarrel with you. Everything has finished here, come with me. You're not supposed to stay here.

HILDA: You're throwing me out? Anna, Anna! I don't deserve this from you. One word more and you'll see what you haven't seen yet!

ACTRESS: (*doesn't understand what the old lady wants to do on the stage – she goes over to her*) Anna? I'm telling you that there's something mixed up in your head. Come, we can talk about things behind this door.

HILDA: Are you crazy? Don't pull this with me. If I lose patience, I'll give you such a shock that you will remember all important things in your life.

ACTRESS: Madam, why are you shouting? Hey, were you sent by the young man, the director? The one sitting downstairs in the club? He wouldn't try to fool me.

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<sup>5</sup> DICKINSON, Emily. *I taste the liquor never brewed*. In: *The Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*. New York: The Modern Library. 2004. p. 14.

HILDA: So you are drunk again. I should have known it. What can you expect from such... a stupid cow. Where are the candles? Relika will come in a moment, so put your head in the basin and sober up. We have brought you something important.

ACTRESS: Madam, I m telling you there must be some mistake.

HILDA: Sit down, and shut up, will you? You´re just talking nonsense.

ACTRESS: Okay, okay, as you wish. Excuse me, madam – but how do you dare?

HILDA: I´ll tidy it here before Relika arrives.

ACTRESS: Who?

HILDA: God, what a dump it is. At ninety-eight I still have to tidy up for my own granddaughter. Shame on you, a thirty-year old woman and a real wreck. A corpse! What have I lived to see, Hilda, what? But I never expect anything good... dump, dump it is!

ACTRESS: Hilda?

HILDA: Don´t say anything. Shame on you!

ACTRESS: They´ve paid you... you´re performing... shit, you´re performing well. I like a good laugh, but this is too much. I am going.

HILDA: Shall I tie you up? Sit down... Relika likes cleanliness. She can´t stand germs and moths flying around... And Franja?... Well, where is the kid?

You´ve locked her in the bathroom again. That´s why you are drunk. So what has she done?

Broken a pipe or eaten more than she should have?

ACTRESS: I can´t believe what I see. I haven´t drunk too much. Guys, please, stop... (to HILDA) You are not real. You are just a character. Shoo, shoo... Disappear!

HILDA: Don´t wave your mitts at me! You were always after boys, weren´t you?... so look at yourself, what you look like – as green as a worm. Can you see any people around except me? And as to how I look, let it be... when you are ninety-eight years old, then we´ll talk about it. But you won´t live that long. If the kid wasn´t in the bathroom, I´d lock you in there so that you´d get sober.

ACTRESS: I am sober...

HILDA (*bangs at the table*): Shut your mouth!... Relika, come on. I have cleaned up. You can relax.

(RELIKA *enters*)

RELIKA: Well. (*steps forward, but the ACTRESS – ANNA steps back*) Kiss your Aunt.

ACTRESS: Not another drop. I will start tomorrow. They are really two... characters in this play.

HILDA: She´s nuts. She´s talking nonsense about characters. She must be drunk again. Shall we start?

RELIKA: Well, hopefully, some coffee will be served. It´s dusty here.

HILDA: She hasn't cleaned the house for years.

RELIKA: Does she wash?

HILDA: Maybe her water was turned off. She doesn't pay her water bills...

RELIKA: What does she spend her money on?

HILDA: ...on wine. She doesn't enjoy her life.

RELIKA: A moth! A moth is flying around.

HILDA: (*makes a vicious sound; both HILDA and RELIKA give the ACTRESS-ANNA a meaningful look*).

RELIKA: Let's kill her.

ACTRESS: Are you crazy? Let me go. Let me out of here!

HILDA: We want to help you.

RELIKA: We have come to take care of you, to feed you. (*to HILDA*) Have you got everything?

HILDA: We've brought everything. (*to the ACTRESS – ANNA*) We have brought everything. You don't even have to move a finger. I am very unhappy with you. You stopped washing clothes three times a week. You have lost control. Ema would never have behaved like that. Even when she was dying, she was so balanced...

ACTRESS: Ema?

HILDA: And you? You have been behaving like a wild, stupid...

RELIKA: ...goat.

HILDA: Other women, when they get married are happy, and you...? As a child you were already a kind of goat... stupid, stubborn...

HILDA and RELIKA: ...goat.

HILDA: I have tried in vain. Nothing is so bad that you should give up and hate the world just because you have not borne a son.

RELIKA: Everything can be settled.

HILDA: We have come to help you. We are not as bad as you think. We love you... And sit down properly!

ACTRESS: Ema...? The dead one? But it's not possible.

HILDA: (*to RELIKA*) Do you see, she is crazy. (*to the ACTRESS – ANNA*) Not long ago you claimed you were meeting her whenever she came to you... in your dreams...

RELIKA: I'm becoming very worried about you, my kiddo. Pipes covered with dust, a black spider web hanging in the bedroom. A nasty spider is waiting in the corner.

HILDA: Shall we start?

RELIKA: Yeah.

RELIKA: Well, Annie. Open your little mouth and we'll have a bite.

ACTRESS: No damn way.

HILDA: What we've made for you will get rid of all your troubles. So, come, come, open your little beak.

ACTRESS: I don't have any troubles, you witches.

RELIKA: But you should eat it up voluntarily. It's always better that way (*ACTRESS tries to get away*)

RELIKA: Oh, oh, Anna. You can't fool us. You were never able to lie. You always turned red when you were hiding something.

HILDA: We know it, he is cheating on you.

RELIKA: You must be able to please men, Anna.

HILDA: This is really fine din-dins. It'll really help you.

RELIKA: Yummy-yummy. Anna, you can't escape.

HILDA: She's performing. She always was a good actress.

RELIKA: She is misbehaving, Hilda. Where does it come from?

HILDA: She is such a stubborn goat. She has forgotten the recipe for a long marriage.

RELIKA: (*holds the ACTRESS*) Fidelity. Respect. Perfect sauces. And a son in the cradle. So it is, little sweetheart.

HILDA: And what is the best for potency?

RELIKA: Chestnut pureé.

ACTRESS: Shit.

HILDA: She doesn't believe what we have prepared for her...

HILDA and RELIKA: ...excellent chestnut purée.

RELIKA: (*to HILDA*) Please, don't expect anything from her. She has no idea what poached eggs are. And how do you keep steak warm, Anna?

ACTRESS: I am not Anna!

HILDA: Relika!

RELIKA: Hilda!

RELIKA and HILDA: Anna. (*HILDA pulls ANNA's ear*)

ACTRESS: I'll get them!

RELIKA: Annie, you seem to be somehow strange... (*both are cajoling her*) Do you want to kill your marriage?

HILDA: Look here.

RELIKA: Do you want to kill your marriage?

HILDA: Franja is a weak brew of desire.

RELIKA: Do you want to kill your marriage?

HILDA: You need a son, kiddo – he will unite your family.

RELIKA: Do you want to kill your marriage?

HILDA: A man is a man. He wears high boots, he goes hunting...

RELIKA: Do you want to kill your marriage?

HILDA: ...And your son will be a soccer player.

RELIKA: We´ve made din-dins for you, Anna. It will set you on your feet.

HILDA: You´ll eat it up, yummy-yummy, and... you´ll have a son.

ACTRESS: Go to hell!

HILDA: We´ll go, but first you must finish this.

RELIKA: You were always a good eater... for mummy...

ACTRESS: I don´t want anything from you.

HILDA: But you do. We are helping you, you want a son.

ACTRESS: I don´t want. (*holds her lips tight*).

RELIKA: Yummy-yummy, how delicious it is. Yummy, spoonful for Daddy... for a brother... (*ACTRESS tries to escape, but doesn´t succeed*)

RELIKA: This is the way, this is how all geniuses are treated.

(*they are shoving food into her mouth*)

HILDA: (*to the ACTRESS*) Open your mouth...

RELIKA: Hold her chin. Push.

ACTRESS: I won´t!

HILDA: This is so you´ll conceive a son... Ouch, she´s biting.

RELIKA: Throw it on her head, if she doesn´t appreciate this!

(*EMA, ANNA´s dead sister appears*)

EMA: Granny! Aunt Relika!

HILDA: (*to RELIKA*) Ema is there. Do you see?

RELIKA: There is Ema. I see.

HILDA: Aaa... Hallo Emmy. It´s me, your little old granny...!

EMA: Let her alone!

RELIKA: We always loved you so much. You were... our favorite granddaughter.

EMA: I know. Anna wasn´t.

RELIKA: Hildie...?

HILDA: Yes, Relika?

RELIKA: Put the chestnut purée in the fridge and let´s disappear.

HILDA: Right, Relika.

(*both leave*)

ACTRESS: So, you´ve come.

EMA: Frantishka is beautiful. I have put her to bed so that she won´t cry so much in the darkness. Annie? Be good to her.

ACTRESS: Uhm.

EMA: Don't worry, I have been guarding your little one. I have been looking after her since she was born. I was with her when the sun breathed on her. She's a sweet girl. And she doesn't even cry very much. You need each other, sister.

*(ACTRESS stays on the stage. She doesn't understand anything)*

SCENE FIVE

ON THE WAY TO... A.

*(Knocking on the door, the MAN enters lighting a pipe.)*

ACTRESS *(ironically)*: And who are you?

MAN: Are you still angry with me? People are telling me: "You are talking too much nonsense, you should bite your tongue." Or was I supposed to bite it off? What? Was I supposed to put out my eye when I look sideways at you? What? What? Was I supposed to cut off my hands, break my legs? Maybe you would finally smile seeing such a cripple. Would I please you at least once? Finally, one reason for you to have a laugh.

ACTRESS: You want to mutilate yourself for me to notice you? Just go ahead.

MAN: I know that one day you'll forgive me. You will understand everything. There won't be any pain between us, no reproaches, no bad memories. I'll take care you won't suffer. Depressions... Spoonfuls, as usual, right, darling? Brandy! Brandy is best with coffee. Would you like to have some? You'll calm down and everything will be fine.

ACTRESS: But I have nothing to celebrate.

MAN: Our getting together... my requests for understanding. Anna, I swear, I can't live without you. I need you. Anna, Anna, am I not worth a bit of your attention? I don't reproach you for anything. I am glad you are so calm. Although I like you better when you are restless. But I like to look at you lying on your back and breathing regularly. From your mouth the breath of life passes directly over to me, and I can't understand how it could ever stop. To beautiful dreams as long as you breathe. To long nights dreaming and nothing hurting...

ACTRESS: ...wake up! Wake up!

MAN: My darling. No, that's not possible. Let's have a drink first. To the fact that we exist. To our expectations. To what ever comes.

ACTRESS: Stop it. I don't need you. I don't need you.

MAN: *Open your hand . /Empty? / Empty. / Here is a hand / To fill it and willing / To bring teacups and roll away headaches / And do whatever you tell it.*<sup>6</sup> We'll write your real story. Just say so. Only together can we dream.

ACTRESS: I sleep very well. It seems to me as if I have slept a thousand years. I want to wake up from this strange dream.

MAN (*starts crying*): Anna, Anna, what's wrong with you? I know, I know how much you have suffered for all this nonsense of mine, for all this blah, blah, blah. But every woman suffers for a violent man. Anna, anyone would have done what you did when you were desperate. It's what you will. The only thing you can decide for yourself, that you can enforce, and it's what you have known for a long time.

ACTRESS (*calmly*): How and when to die. Now? (*rejecting*) Franja is still young.

MAN: I know that's exactly what you want. So, are you mine, my darling? Are you? Anna?

ANNA – ACTRESS: Yes, I am Anna. It took me a long time before I recognized you in my dream. But now I know, my heart is still the loaf of bread my daughter is eating from. I'll get old, you can look forward to it, I'll bring you a piece of dry bread. Then we can smile our toothless smiles together. Death loves us so much... .

(*after a while ANNA gets up and proceeds to the audience*)

## SCENE SIX

### SINGIN' IN THE RAIN

ANNA: Listen, kid, to my last story because nobody else will listen to it. It's not a fairy tale even if you think it is. The first thing that you saw was the sun. And you were stinking. Not all babies stink. Some of them are luckier than others if their mothers got an enema before giving birth. That's why when you open your eyes, think of this double whammy: sunlight and shit. I see you turning up your nose when you imagine all that crap, but you'll understand in a while how accurate it is: sunny days and shitty days. Laugh, that's fine. One moment I am singin' in the rain of your laughter, and the next I am growling at you: "I'll eat you up and you'll be back where you were." You get scared because it is mysterious and strange too – get from the belly between the legs – and wait until the same thing happens to you. When, in the same way, a baby like an unfolding leaf drops out of you. We don't know yet how that's possible. If God is involved, or it's a miracle, or some extraterrestrial power, we haven't figured out. But as soon as you are born you are either a little woman or a little man. You are now a little

<sup>6</sup> PLATH, Sylvia. *The Applicant*. In: McMichael, G., et al. *Anthology of American Literature*, Eighth Edition. Vol. II. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson, Prentice Hall. 2004. p. 1721.

woman that dropped out from a big one; for nine months we had the same face, smile and tastes. That's why every time you open your eyes, remember that we have spoken together long before you uttered your first word. People will tell you that you are a beautiful little girl, a doll, a princess, an obedient, cute, loved, charming girl. All around you: friends, acquaintances, actors, shop assistants and news vendors will say that. There's nothing wrong in praising a child's blue eyes and blond hair. It's a part of our fairy tales and all that; everybody likes it and it doesn't hurt anybody. But not all girls are so lucky. There are also those who suffer without a mother or father. But I swear – and if I am mistaken, you don't have to clean your bedroom the whole week – that both little girls and grown women dream almost the same dream: WE ARE THE CHOSEN LITTLE GIRLS. WE WILL LIVE IN A BEAUTIFUL CASTLE. WE WILL HAVE A CROWN AND MAGICAL TALKING SWANS, AND IN OUR HEARTS A BRAVE KNIGHT FOR OUR DADDY OR HUSBAND, AND WE WILL HAVE SMILES AND LOVE ALL AROUND US, AND EVERYONE WILL LOVE US. But we don't even have a house or a garden where you can scrape your knees; that's why you think there must be a mistake, a strange affliction that shouldn't happen to you. You don't have a beautiful castle or swans. You'll ask me: "Mummy, how is it possible that I am a princess but you are not a queen, nor is granny the good fairy." For a long time I have been at a loss how to tell you, little bug, that in a couple of years everything will change. And you won't be a princess any more but just another girl, a frump that doesn't grasp anything properly, who bleeds every month, someone that simply isn't fit for some things. Who isn't fit for math, physics, chemistry, driving, flying, because you don't have in you what the boys have. Maybe neither your daddy nor your brother will tell you this because they love you and they think you are more special than the others. No, you aren't different, you are simply theirs. Somebody else will tell you. Maybe other daddy, other brother, a granny, a mummy, a teacher, or an acquaintance, who know that it's perfectly okay to tell girls how stupid they are and how difficult life is supposed to be for them. And when you have succeeded and you prove that you are able to read and write without any help, that you enjoy learning foreign languages, they will think that you're just one who crams for exams, who is trying too hard and doesn't really understand, and if she didn't memorize, she wouldn't know anything. And, all of sudden, even your grannies will start complaining about your sitting at home over the books and your wanting to tell them about distant worlds... about Prague, America, Mars... They will be angry with you and make you throw out the trash. And if you don't finally succeed, maybe because you're lazy or less gifted, they will say it's okay, because you're just a female, who can't really achieve anything. The only thing you can do for yourself – is to get married. Making coffee and pouring cognac, it's enough for you. Instead of daddy, you'll see him – that beautiful knight with dark eyes, who will kill the evil dragon and will marry you. If that's all there is, then that's all there is. I'll smile, I won't deceive my friends, I will fall in love, and I will be happy. Terrified, you'll find out that your knight won't stay with you forever. Another woman... more beautiful, more stupid but cleverer, replaces you. The thing is that it's not him, but you, who will have to be on guard. And you will have no idea where things started to go wrong in this beautiful fairy-tale.



Maybe, you won't give up. I believe you won't, after your shower in the sun and bath in your happiness flecked with shit. Then, little frog, await the next change for the beautiful princess. You'll change into a cunning witch, an egotist, a biddy hen who asserts herself unnecessarily. Your tender self will become an ambitious cow. And you'll have to get along without your knight, and he will be the first one to tell you. You will want to be loved and you'll hardly get a light caress. You'll want to know more and not feel humiliated, but you'll learn that you are a poor silly little creature who missed her train and cannot get onto the right one without her knight. You will want to have the right to make mistakes, and you'll find out that you are not supposed to have that right. You will want to talk to your friends, and there won't be any left. Then, you'll ask me, "Mummy, why shouldn't we feel the same pain?" Sure, my beloved. But there is something you don't know. Women still do what men don't do. Women envy each other. Maybe, it's because from the very beginning there was that story about a beautiful princess, and all of us wake up from the same dream in a different way, and we all want to fulfill our dream in a different way. And so we envy each others' castles, crowns and knights.

You, my happy little one, should not envy anybody. Leave everybody their own wishes. Indulge yourself – to be free and brave. Don't sacrifice yourself. And to those who would harm you or make you afraid, don't give even a single day of your life. If you don't know what to do and I am far away and the phone lines are frozen and all the pens dried up, talk to the trees. We are special beings. We know special things because we are a part of nature. We feel life in our temples and death under our heart. We belong with the trees that are able to heal and give joy in return... Don't forget that, my beloved. You are my face, my sister in another time, a drop from a big drop. I was divided into you, and I am staying in you. Both of us belong with the leaves, the grass, the sea, the birds, the wild berries, the rocks and even the funny-looking bats. But we also belong with people. We are alive, and lifeless, when the moon touches us. We belong with all the souls and shadows looking down at the world and loving it. We, my dear, don't have to have a reason to love. We can hear people and nature laugh and cry. We feel them growing. That's why you shouldn't be afraid of the invisible roaring. You've been walking in the darkness safely. You can see with every touch. In the same way you understand the waves that, before you, were our common language.

Translated by Radka Kain-Milá