

PREŽITIE – OPSTANAK – SURVIVAL

Characters: GRANDMA, GRANDPA, SANDRA, TOMÁŠ (a.k.a. CHAUFFEUR), SAŠA, JELENA, SHE, IVAN, JASMINA, MILAN

Travellers in the trolley-bus: GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET, YOUNG COUPLE, VERY ELEGANT LADY, RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN, IGNORANT TEENAGER

Shoppers at the market: mostly anonymous, but some might know one another

It is not easy to live in today's world. We all have had our share of experience. It has been a bitter struggle for survival. For some spare change. We keep fighting and lose track of how the times have become "disjointed", how 'crisis' justifies all, and how the Earth keeps stumbling across the universe without anything to hold on to. The rules we used to know are no longer valid, perhaps except for the relativity rule – that one grows more topical and valid every day and now we are finally starting to understand it. This is the diagnosis of our times and it is in this environment where our characters find themselves. They do not want to give up the fight too soon. After all, they already lost most of their previous battles.

Scene One. CAR MAKES

SHE is sitting in a car, in the passenger seat. This might or might not be a business trip. Maybe she is just going home. Despite the fact that a company car should not be used for private trips. Fully concentrated, SHE is looking through the windshield, talking.

SHE. Renault?

CHAUFFEUR. No.

SHE. Toyota?

CHAUFFEUR. No, no.

SHE. Volkswagen?

CHAUFFEUR. (*Shakes head.*) Ts!

SHE. It's Renault *now*?!

CHAUFFEUR. Right on.

SHE. (*Whoops with joy.*) Let me guess some more... (*It seems she likes the game.*)

CHAUFFEUR. Ms. Director, I've already told you that the easiest way to guess the make is to look at the back... of the... car... to see the logo... You'll never guess the make from just

seeing the type of the vehicle or looking at its grille, you'd have to be a real ace to do that!

SHE. I just guessed it right, didn't I? Tomáš, can't you see how fast the cars are? I barely start to focus and they're gone. Volkswagen Fox?

CHAUFFEUR. Polo.

SHE. That's almost the same thing.

CHAUFFEUR. I disagree. As opposed to the Fox, Polo has different parameters and technically it's slightly more advanced. It's a higher class.

SHE. I wouldn't insist on that kind of thing. That's just details. Ferrari?

CHAUFFEUR. Oh my God (*laughs*). Totally wrong. Didn't I tell you that in this town only ten chosen people have a Ferrari?

SHE. We saw one the other day. (*What SHE keeps from him is that she happens to know one particular Ferrari owner quite well. And SHE is even more familiar with its backseat. Or was it a Porsche?*)

CHAUFFEUR. It had a foreign license plate. That doesn't count.

SHE. Do you think, Tomáš, that a car make can reflect your social status? That you behave according to what car you can afford? That the car can actually determine one's character? (*pensively*) What make would suit me, do you think?

CHAUFFEUR. (*He is very careful, as if he sensed that this conversation should not be continued*). Well, I guess something very elegant, not too extravagant, with emphasis on performance, soft lines, graceful, powerful but not dangerous, commanding respect in every way... very safe, with heated seats, of course – leather seats... in short, great to drive... The sound of the engine changes depending on the driving style, from a very rich sound when driving normally to aggressive when you floor the accelerator. A passionate vehicle... that never loses its fascinating charm... (*TOMÁŠ keeps enumerating, but SHE evidently finds it funny, SHE laughs and continues to laugh more and more. Maybe she suspects that TOMÁŠ is either disgustingly trying to ingratiate himself with her, or has totally lost touch with reality. Eventually, SHE asks:*)

SHE. And what make might this be that has all these features? (*TOMÁŠ cannot answer this question, but it seems he has successfully kept his job as her chauffeur*).

Scene Two. A RIDE INTO THE UNKNOWN

JELENA in a trolley-bus. She is guessing the stories of other people based on their appearance. Sometimes, she thinks about the protagonists of our story. We hear her inner voice as well as the actual dialogue among the travellers. This is a real mixture of characters which seems to reflect our time, its deformed ego and bittersweet destinies. We see GRANDMA, GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET, YOUNG COUPLE, VERY ELEGANT LADY, RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN, IGNORANT TEENAGER and many other unknown people who are in a hurry, push their way through the crowd, nervously.

They hate everyone around, but most of all, it seems, they hate themselves. But so it goes. However, just like your family, you cannot choose your co-travellers on a trolley-bus.

JELENA OFF. *My dream is to have... my own car. A Japanese or German car. Or just a common Czech Skoda. Could even be a used car. Five, six years maximum, in a good condition so that I'm not ashamed when people will see me get out of my car. Should be red. A pretty red, not too bright though. It will be my little Skoda – my protector against the smell in a trolley-bus. I'm almost thirty and have been taking the trolley-bus every day. To work and back. Sometimes even twice. But almost always it's just unbearable. My Skoda – my protector – will always wait for me in front of the building, parked under the window so I can check on her occasionally. She won't grumble that the autumn leaves will fall on her hood, or that late snow will cover her windshield, her eyes to the world. She will be happy if I reward her for her services from time to time by taking her on a long ride into the unknown... Just to get somewhere, without a destination, driving through the crooked streets of the city... She will admire her reflection in shop windows, winking at herself with the right indicator, then with the left. Such a pretty girl. Heads will turn to look at her...*

GRANDMA. JELENA? Is that you? Girl?

JELENA OFF. *(Continues her daydream looking out of the window.) And then my Skoda, my protector and I will stop at Saša's place and he'll jump in to join us just like in a movie, he'll get in like into a convertible and we'll drive on, blown by the wind, racing against time.*

GRANDMA. Hello, my girl!

GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET. You have to jolt her! You see, she's doing as if she can't see you, it's deliberate so that she doesn't have to get up.

GRANDMA. Dear lady, please don't get involved. It's none of your business.

GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET. And whose business is it? Now she'll get away with it, next time she won't get up to let *me* take a seat. I was lucky enough to have pushed through when we were getting on, otherwise I'd be standing now as well. You know what that feels like to me, with my sore legs, to have to stand for half an hour in the trolley-bus?! I can't afford taxis or other such princely stuff. How could I? With my measly teacher's pension? *(She sizes GRANDMA up.)* You know what I'm talking about.

GRANDMA. JELENA! *(Grabs her arm carefully.)*

JELENA. Grandma, is that you?! *(She jumps up at once. GRANDMA looks at the GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET victoriously – it is a look that needs no commentary.)* Where are you travelling?

GRANDMA. I'm going to the Green market. To meet Sandra.

JELENA. *(Blushes.)*

GRANDMA. That's all over. Nothing to be done. You look good. Beautiful as ever, my little Jelena. How are you, my girl? Good I bet? You've always been very clever. You got a job at your school as a teacher, is that right? I knew it. Don't say anything, I don't want to feel even more regretful.

JELENA. Grandma, you're exaggerating.

GRANDMA. Oh don't say anything, I just look and know what's going on.

JELENA. Grandma, I'm still trying to find a job. I've got something now, but that's only temporary.

GRANDMA. You should be a boss somewhere, you're as bright as ten people. If only my little Saša had seen that. It wouldn't have ended the way it did.

JELENA. Never mind. Tell me, how are you and grandpa? And aunt Sandra?

GRANDMA. How we're doing? Like pensioners in a country that wants to see us all drop dead. And Sandra... (*Waves her hand*). She sells stuff at the Green market. She hasn't got anything either. She's still with the.... that guy... the driver! You know what, come with me to the market and she'll tell you herself. Maybe she'll have some new information about Saša. Maybe he's finally contacted her. You know, I go to see her every day to ask if there's any news. Since he left he's only called us once, then one more time and then he simply vanished.

JELENA. I'm sure he'll call.

GRANDMA. He hasn't called *you* by any chance?

JELENA. (*Silence.*)

GRANDMA. Don't worry, he'll get in touch. He needs to find his way in a new city. Life in the West is not like here. It's much harder.

GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET. How do you mean that? Sorry for busting in your discussion, I wasn't eavesdropping or anything, God forbid, I just happened to hear what you were saying... I don't think life can be harder anywhere else than here, can it?

GRANDMA. That's just a turn of phrase. It's harder because you've got no one there. No one close. No one to help you, no one to watch TV with in the evening. No one to sit next to and say nothing.

JELENA OFF. (*She is observing a young couple who are being very intimate. In truth, they are being too intimate given the fact that they are in a trolley-bus which is jam-packed because it is lunch time. They do not seem to mind too much, though.*) *We'd drive the car until sunset and then we'd park it somewhere and look at the sun disappear, then watch the moon come on, holding hands all the while..*

GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET. Look at those two, I can't believe it. How old do you think they are?

GRANDMA. Leave them alone. There is nothing more beautiful than love while it works. Wouldn't you want to go back to such times?

GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET. *Meee?* No way! Honour was the most important thing for me. I touched my husband, may he rest in peace, for the first time only after the wedding.

JELENA OFF. *And in a few years we'd get married, then have a baby, we'd go on vacation to the sea, just like any normal families. And our son would grow to be a handsome teenager... (She glances over at IGNORANT TEENAGER who is wearing a baseball cap, tapping his foot, fully concentrated on his Samsung Galaxy, paying attention to nothing else.)*

Simultaneously, right next to them, the typical everyday row between RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN and VERY ELEGANT LADY is going on.

VERY ELEGANT LADY. Excuse-me, I realize this is not the time or the place, but could I dare to alert you to something, young man?

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. Shoot.

VERY ELEGANT LADY. *(Taken aback by the expression he used, but she does not let him interrupt her.)* You know, many of us would certainly much rather use an entirely different means of transport, but as you are aware, we are in a crisis, an economic crisis, I know that you know what I have in mind. And so we are doomed to get in contact with one another that would very certainly never take place were it not for the crisis. Do you comprehend what I am trying to tell you?

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. Honestly? No idea!!!

VERY ELEGANT LADY. How could I put this politely? Well, because many of us can't afford to travel by any means of transportation other than the trolley-bus...

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. Then take the bus, eh! *(Laughs stupidly at his own joke. Laughs too loud. People like him enjoy drawing attention in this manner.)*

VERY ELEGANT LADY. Yes, I would very much like to use the means of transport you have mentioned, unfortunately, there is no bus line that would suit me. Therefore, we all have to squeeze in here which, I'm certain you'd agree, is not the most pleasant experience.

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. I would squeeze myself onto that blonde that she'd squeak! *(No need to add that this comment is also accompanied by boisterous laughter.)*

VERY ELEGANT LADY. I see that I will have to tell you very openly what I think about your attitude to everyday hygiene.

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. *(He is starting to get what is going on and gradually stops laughing. One mood is replaced by another and he now fully displays his aggressive nature.)* Who're you to tell me that!? My old woman?

VERY ELEGANT LADY. God forbid, young man, I would not dare do that, but considering the situation in which we have found ourselves – and in which we find ourselves every

day – I take it you would not mind if you spent more time taking care of your daily hygiene.

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. Careful, oldster, you ain't gonna teach me what to do and what not. I know what I want. So you just sit there, gape through the window, eh, and don't stick your nose where it don't belong. 'Cos you know what could fuckin' happen? Lucky could get really pissed off and that won't be fun no more, innit. That'd be like bad. That pretty hat of yours will fly off your noggin' and them all will just stare! So be careful. You'll all shit bricks when Lucky gets pissed off!!! (*Starts gesticulating and the conversations around go quiet. It is clear that this can turn nasty. But situations like this are very frequent in trolley-buses. In this town, there is direct proportion between aggression and relatively normal behaviour. But it has not always been like this. RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN pulls a face and kicks the YOUNG COUPLE of lovers, then frightens both grannies. Everybody is pushing their way forward, only JELENA remains where she is.*)

JELENA OFF. *If Saša were here, he'd show you where you belong. He was allergic to types like you, who flooded our city, our country, traffickers, dealers, wearing gold necklaces around their thick necks, sporting their shaved heads. You pushed us out, stained our souls and entered our dreams. (RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN comes up to JELENA).*

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. You don't think I smell, my pretty? What're you dreaming of, pretty one? The guy who's fucking you? He won't help you now! Now you're here with me, in good company.

JELENA. Get off me, please, sir. Leave me alone.

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. Yeah, sure, we can sir and madam each other. But I like first name terms better! Chill. Be cool and stop telling me what to do, all of you. Lucky knows very well what to do. If he wants to, Lucky will kick this whole thing to pieces. Kick this trolley into a scrapheap.

JELENA. Smash it all into pieces. And kill us all! (*After these words, she bursts out crying. JELENA never cries – even much more complicated situations never brought her down to her knees. But now she bursts into tears and will not stop weeping. She keeps crying... Tears are rolling down her cheeks until she, gradually, makes RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN cry too. They are crying together and are joined by the grannies, the young kissing couple who stopped kissing and are crying now along with everyone else. Only IGNORANT TEENAGER, wearing a baseball hat, keeps playing games on his Samsung Galaxy.*)

Scene Three. WHEN I MAKE SOME MONEY, I'LL GO BACK TO WORK

A market place – rather a flea market. Our protagonists shop there too. Or they are just selling various things. SANDRA, for example. She is selling tiny devices, mobile phones, MP3 players, as well as vegetables and homemade compotes and other bric-a-brac. It seems she is slightly ashamed of doing this.

The scene is made by the CHAUFFEUR – he comes to ask for money. (SANDRA is not aware that TOMÁŠ's boss is the new lover of her ex-husband. In essence, however, this is insignificant information. They are not getting back together with IVAN again anyway. It is way too late for that because they both are too old and have too many problems. The only difference between them is that IVAN has money and SANDRA does not, and that IVAN does not care at all about what will happen to their only son while SANDRA is rather frustrated because of it.)

In the flea market, we see GRANNY from the trolley-bus, as well as SANDRA's neighbour – JASMINA who is selling things at the market and who always keeps an eye on SANDRA's goods when SANDRA goes to have a secret smoke. This is SANDRA's little deviation which she cannot, and essentially does not want to, get rid of. A secret cigarette tastes best. JASMINA is a good shoulder to cry on – she likes to listen to the fates of unknown people and likes even more when she can spread the news around.

JASMINA. Sandra, love. Barely anyone here today, damn it.

SANDRA. My son is abroad, fighting against globalization and corporate networks that have driven out small businessmen and farmers. *(She is duly proud of her son – though she withholds the fact that she has not heard from him in almost six months. Maybe he still has not found a job, or maybe he is doing really well which is why he does not call because he is busy. Or maybe he was arrested at an anti-globalization demonstration, maybe he is still looking for something, or again maybe...)*

JASMINA. The boy has guts. If I were in a foreign country, I'd just shut up and go with the flow.

SANDRA. He was always, you know, so vigorous and full of defiance. I knew he was going to achieve something in life. Was never afraid, always pushing through to be in the front row.

JASMINA. Why didn't he stay here? And fight? We're still fighting against something... *(JASMINA knows that SANDRA does not know. But she does not show it. SANDRA is, after all, a good friend from time to time.)*

SANDRA. He couldn't. *(She struggles not to burst out crying)*. He was made for a higher purpose. He was suffocating here. Felt pain in his chest. But he'll go far one day, you'll see.

JASMINA. The news are full of such stories. I always read that this guy or that is here or there and received I don't know what... the Nobel prize! One of us. And here, at home, nobody gave a hoot about him! Do you get that?

SANDRA. You know what, forget it. At least today. Let's focus on, say... this carrot! We should work hard to sell it. We've been standing here all week and sold nothing.

JASMINA. Isn't it weird that the two of us, almost top-of-the-class students, are selling stuff at a market while all kinds of personages are showing off on TV warping our minds?

SANDRA. We've already agreed not to talk about this. There's no point. You won't sell carrots by getting pissed off.

JASMINA. Even the farmer who sold us the damned vegetables is better off than we are.

SANDRA. The last shall be first...

JASMINA. I seriously doubt that. When? When we're so old that we won't be able to stand on our own legs? I used to have ambitions, my good woman. Ambitions. I dreamed that I would be educating future scientists, doctors, engineers, that I'd instil in them love for life, for people, for animals. That I'd make people out of them!

SANDRA. *Bad choice.* You should've chosen something else. These days, studying education is only the last choice.

JASMINA. It wasn't back then. Absolutely not. Back then. Ma'am? (*Stops the still scared GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET.*) Ma'am, do you believe that things will get better one day? That we'll all be happy again? Each in our own place? Ma'am (*GRANNY grumbles a comment and leaves with quick steps.*) And you (*she stops another random shopper*), what do you think? Do we stand a chance here? Do you think this carrot has a future? (*SANDRA tries to calm her down, pulling at her sleeve to stop her making fuss, but keeps laughing at the same time because she is enjoying the situation.*) People, come buy the best vegetables from the two most intelligent sellers around. Folks, this carrot is miraculous. If you eat it regularly, every day, your emotional intelligence will soar. This parsley, too, it's not just any parsley, this is Sir Parsley... also has therapeutic effects: one root a day will make a difference – your immunity will improve and you'll jump out of bed the next morning like an athlete. Spinach, now that's a special category, isn't it, spinach not only gives you power, but eating it will make you younger, your complexion will visibly brighten and you'll look ten years younger. Nothing will be able to piss you off anymore. Not even a live coverage from the parliament. (*Her monologue is suspiciously similar to TV Shopping. Perhaps she is doing it on purpose.*) What else do we have here? Garlic? Oh, well, my pretty little garlic is the best of all. A clove of garlic a day and your blood pressure will settle, your heart will start beating like a clock, tick-tock, ticky-tock, no gym can compare with a clove of garlic. Ma'am, excuse-me, you want to go to the gym? Lose the extra kilo or two? Forget it, we've got magic garlic for you. *And it's organic.* That's the added value, included in the price, of course. (*The people around are looking at her like at a weirdo. Some stop by and immediately understand that this is a game played by a desperate woman who is fed up with everything. This is a woman whose ideals got drowned in the beautiful, colourful market place. JASMINA keeps talking. SANDRA is listening – perhaps we see tears rolling down her face. Perhaps.*) And what is it *you* are selling, Sandra, dear? Oh, homemade compote and an mp3 player? What an exquisite combination! Compote and mp3 are such a great match. It's a combination that provides certainty, stability and a good feeling from life. Don't hesitate, dear people, buy the latest model of this mp3 player and a fantastic pear compote to boot! Homemade... (*At his point, CHAUFFEUR TOMÁŠ hastily arrives at the market place. For a moment, he hovers away from everybody, then moves over to the women at the stand.*)

TOMÁŠ. Ladies, come to your senses! What's all this fuss? Sandra, stop laughing right now! What're you crazy?! You're making fools of yourselves. Come on everyone, the

show's over! You're dismissed. (*The two women are roaring with laughter. They needed it today.*)

SANDRA. Tomáš, what are you doing here? Do you need anything?

JASMINA. Well what do you think? (*Laughing side-splittingly.*) What could our little Tomáš need? Cash, isn't it? (*Laughs.*)

TOMÁŠ. You shut up and don't butt in!

SANDRA. Tomáš, stay cool, no need to get offended.

TOMÁŠ. She should shut the fuck up... bitch!

SANDRA. Tomáš! Stop it, I hate this kind of talk! (*Good mood is subsiding. Is it because of TOMÁŠ? Who knows. But it is very likely.*) What is it?

TOMÁŠ. What is what?

SANDRA. What is it you need? Why are you here? Aren't you driving the fatty around?

TOMÁŠ. She's my boss. I told you not to talk about her like that. She's an unhappy woman.

SANDRA. Oh yes, I'm sure she is. Monthly income 4,000, essentially for no work because no one knows *who* it is she manages, plus bonuses for extra service, plus... am I right? And you drive her around and do everything she tells you to.

TOMÁŠ. Do you want me to sell stuff at the market? (*SANDRA studies his company uniform and realizes that TOMÁŠ does not look bad in it at all, but still...*)

SANDRA. She's a slut and takes advantage of you for all sorts of private events. If I were you, I'd strictly define the boundaries of my work and tell her that this crosses them.

TOMÁŠ. I should leave the job? This *clean* job?

SANDRA. It's the dirtiest job you've ever had! What do you want? Say it. Can't you see there are people waiting? (*In fact, nobody is buying anything today and nobody is waiting at the stand.*)

TOMÁŠ. I need some spare change. To buy cigs.

SANDRA. (*Cannot believe her ears.*) Are you out of your mind?! I should give you money for cigarettes? You've got both arms and both legs and you want cash for smokes?

JASMINA. (*Quietly and only to herself before she leaves quickly.*) Only Mr. Brain has long departed. Hello, Mr. Brain!

TOMÁŠ. I'll be back when I get paid. My salary's been delayed a bit...

SANDRA. Forget it! I will never give you money for cigarettes! Ask your boss for it, you can whine to her and complain about delayed salaries. Does *she* even know that you work for a salary? I bet hers isn't delayed!!!

TOMÁŠ. That depends on the top management.

SANDRA. If you can't afford it, don't smoke. (*TOMÁŠ turns around. He is pissed off. He exits while SANDRA pulls out a pack of cigarettes from under her apron, her hands shaking.*)

Scene Four. BRAIN DRAIN

A former three-generational apartment. Now it is only a two-generational apartment. We still do not know how the situation will turn out.

GRANDPA is typing a letter on a typewriter. He is wearing two types of spectacles on his nose – reading glasses and far distance glasses in order to be able to see properly. GRANDMA is sitting next to him, slowly dictating the draft of a letter they wrote together on a sheet of paper earlier.

GRANDMA. Write this: Dear Saša, the previous letter we wrote you was returned to us. Recipient not found. But the address was correct. I checked it myself, at least five times. 12 Soul Street.

GRANDPA. How do you spell that?

GRANDMA. S – O – U – L – S – T – R – E – E – T. With a space after L.

GRANDPA. What a strange name. Can't these people abroad think up something normal? They complicate everything. We may be all messed up here, but at least our streets have normal names. Marshall Tito Street, Revolution Boulevard, Liberation Lane... So you know what it's all about. Never mind whether you like it or not. Our street is Nikola Tesla Street. That's nice, isn't it? Every primary school pupil knows that the guy invented electricity and then left for the States which turned out to be his fatal mistake. The Yanks destroyed him. Blasted arsonists. Ugh. Everyone they hired ended up badly. Remember that neighbour of ours? The one who died. How did his son end up in the white world? Boozed away all he had. Even the little he earned. I'm telling you, honest work has never hurt anyone. I've toiled away like a horse all my life and feel good about it still.

GRANDMA. All right, go on. Or we'll never write this.

GRANDPA. I'm just saying. I have a right to express my opinion. How long has our grandson been abroad? And what has he achieved? Here, he could have been a doctor by now. And over there? God knows what he's doing. If he was doing fine he'd call us, that's for sure, or he'd write a nice letter: Dear grandma, dear grandpa, I'm here in this place doing this and that, I'm doing fine, have been in all these places and so on. But we haven't even heard from him for over six months. I wonder why our children are not trying to find him.

GRANDMA. They promised to call an embassy.

GRANDPA. They won't know where he is. They're just a bunch of good-for-nothings. They're only there for the foreign cash. They quietly wait out four years, fill their pockets and go to another place. You think these people would try to find our Saša? No goddamn way.

GRANDMA. Language! Of course they would. Why wouldn't they?

GRANDPA. 'Cause that's the way it is. They all only care for themselves. These are the times we live in. Nobody gives a damn about the misery of others. If I were younger and not afraid of flying, I'd get on a plane at once and put this in order.

GRANDMA. If, if... come on, write. Grandpa and I are very worried about you. Let us know where you are and what you are up to. If you need money, we'll send you some. Come back home. Don't be ashamed. Our neighbours' son, Marko, also returned home and nobody is making fun of him. He told me how hard it is to make it there. They have enough of their own people there. And now there is big unemployment everywhere, not only here. So just come back. Jelena sends her regards too. Grandma bumped into her today, in the trolley-bus. She's still beautiful and we are under the impression that she's still in love with you. When she saw grandma she blushed – and that is a clear sign. She's not with anyone, I asked her right away. She finished school and has a great job now. She seems to be coming along very well at work. (*GRANDMA is lying without a blink. What does it matter, a letter can take anything.*) She is a pretty and smart girl. Come back for her, if not for us. We know what happened between you and your mother... and that idiot of hers.

GRANDPA. Let's not write that. Why reopen old wounds? It's all behind us, thank God.

GRANDMA. If our little Sandra had any sense, she'd never forgive that prick for having driven our grandson away. We should have done something back then, but we just stood by and watched. This is what happens when one finds an unequal partner. A driver? I mean, what kind of job is that? In a state-owned company? If it were a ministry at least, there's always something to bag, but in a state firm? That's where the most incompetent end up.

GRANDPA. That's their problem. They wouldn't have listened to us anyway.

GRANDMA. But Saša would not have left. He'd be doing fine here. He had a well-paid job and it looked like he was going to make some progress.

GRANDPA. I said this wasn't going to end well when they all moved in with us here.

GRANDMA. What were we supposed to do? They lost their apartment. Should we have left them out there on the street?

GRANDPA. It would never have happened if Sandra had known her priorities. She could never do that. She duly graduated, which only very few did, but even so she didn't find a job.

GRANDMA. That's not her fault. She tried her best, you know how many applications and cover letter she sent out. The jobs were always given to some sluts instead. In this country, you don't need to be smart, but... oh, forget it...

GRANDPA. I still don't understand how Ivan could have dumped her like that, with a kid and a mortgage. Who would've thought that about him... it seemed such a nice marriage at first...

GRANDMA. I told you, at the very beginning, that it was going to be good for nothing. It's easy to love somebody when you're doing well. You know true love when trouble

comes... Sandra couldn't find a job and that's when it all started. In the meantime, Ivan was thriving...

GRANDPA. Yeah, so much that he forgot about his own family. Well, thank you so much. May he die with his profitable company! Businessman of the year!

GRANDMA. Write. Grandma and grandpa love you and we miss you very much. Then our signatures. Hope he'll get it this time. (*When GRANDPA is not looking, she secretly slips 100 Euros into the envelope, 100 Euros she saved from her 150-Euro pension. She licks the envelope thoroughly, seals it and kisses it, wishing it a safe journey.*)

Scene Five. EU.eu

SAŠA is in the capital city of a European country. It could be Bratislava, London, Prague, Budapest, Zurich, Copenhagen, Vienna... any city, really. He is scraping along. He speaks the language now, but he will always sound like a foreigner. He will probably also always feel like one. What is more important, however, is how he makes his living and whether he is planning on coming home. He lives in a rented studio with his friend MILAN. The music is cranked up at full volume – it is Bajaga i instruktori (Moji su drugovi).

SAŠA. (*Sings, but it sounds rather like uncontrolled roaring.*) *Moji su drugovi biseri rasuti po celom svetu i ja sam selica, pa ih ponekad sretnem u letu. Da l'je to sudbina ili ko zna šta li je, kad god se sretnemo uvek se zalije, uvek se završi s'nekom od naših pesama.... Moji su drugovi žestoki momci velikog srca...*

MILAN. (*Yells to be heard.*) I'm here, hello....

SAŠA. (*Keeps singing.*) *I kad se pije, i kad se ljubi i kad se puca...*

MILAN. (*Shouting.*) You hear me? Turn it off for a second, will you? (*Turns off the music.*)

SAŠA. Hi. Let me see!

MILAN. (*Opens his palm, but there is nothing.*) Look!

SAŠA. There's nothing!

MILAN. Because it's Friday today.

SAŠA. So what?

MILAN. Well and it's Christmas – the festival of plenty.

SAŠA. (*Kidding.*) It's not so plentiful when you have nothing!

MILAN. Are you kidding me?

SAŠA. (*Of course he is kidding him and finds it hard not to laugh.*) Oh yeah, I forgot, plenty comes here sooner than it comes to us. We're about two weeks behind. Sorry. (*Laughs.*)

MILAN. We're more than two weeks behind. And you're one whole life behind.

SAŠA. Different Christian traditions, buddy. If it was up to me, I couldn't care less if it's Julian or Gregorian or whatever. Who cares about these things?

MILAN. You're a such a twat, you let me go out well knowing no one's going to be there.

SAŠA. I said, sorry, who's supposed to remember all this stuff?

MILAN. Now that's really difficult... remembering one day in the whole year!

SAŠA. All right, they have it before us, but you must admit that it's not my fault.

MILAN. I ran from one place to another, the city's deserted, totally de-ser-ted, I had no clue what was going in. The first store – CLOSED, the second store – CLOSED, the third – also CLOSED... the twentieth – CLOSED. I felt like I was dreaming, like I was in another dimension, as if this was all deliberate, just to make things even *more* complicated! Finally I ran into this granny who was walking her dog and asked her: *Ma'am, do you speak English?* Her dog started to snarl at me and the granny ran away. And again there was no one else for a long time. Then I bumped into this weirdo who gave me a Christmas blessing and I gave him money.

SAŠA. And it didn't strike you before when you saw all the decorations around?

MILAN. What decorations?

SAŠA. Christmas decorations, for two months all over, you didn't notice that?

MILAN. You don't get it? What situation I'm in right now? I don't have time to pay attention to the world around! It's been no fun for two months! You could show at least some compassion!

SAŠA. All right, I'm beginning to feel sympathy. (*He is still in a good mood.*)

MILAN. And what am supposed to do now?

SAŠA. Wait till Monday.

MILAN. Everything will still be closed on Monday.

SAŠA. It won't. The holidays end on the weekend. Christmas Day, Boxing Day...

MILAN. Well exactly, they won't open until Wednesday.

SAŠA. No, it works differently than back at home. You can't transfer holidays that fall on the weekend to the middle of the week. They're in bad luck, basically.

MILAN. But I can't wait till Monday. I need it tomorrow.

SAŠA. Are you sure that Christmas Day is ideal for this kind of activity?

MILAN. But I had no idea that Christmas is not *their* Christmas.

SAŠA. If someone heard you now they wouldn't believe what you've just said.

MILAN. Do you realize that we've lived her for almost a year? We live in a city whose language we don't speak, work for an American company where we speak English, celebrate *our* holidays, but are unaware of their holidays... And the other day we went to work on a bank holiday.

SAŠA. That's globalization for you, what's wrong with that?

MILAN. Is that why you keep protesting against it? You know what's wrong? That we don't actually live in this reality. Our present is just a memory of the past, you listen to the Serbian radio all day, you installed a satellite to watch our stations, and when someone comes to visit you cook our specialities...

SAŠA. I can't cook Nordic food that well, so what?

MILAN. I'm talking about the food *here!* Why don't we start living here? And now? What do you say?

SAŠA. We do live here. But even you don't buy their shoes and I can't remember when was the last time you had a glass of their wine. I'm telling you, this is globalization and it suits me fine. You can try to acclimatize on my behalf too if you want to. You're well on the way. And I don't understand why you, their future son-in-law should have a problem with Christmas.

MILAN. I can't show up at their place tomorrow. I had no idea it was so serious. I mean, Christmas and family?!

SAŠA. Don't show up then.

MILAN. Don't be silly, man.

SAŠA. Just call them, apologize, and tell them you're in pain. I don't get it, why are you making so much fuss about it?

MILAN. 'Cause it's Christmas. (*Pause.*) And because my grandfather is an orthodox pope and if I tell him that I proposed to my girlfriend on Catholic Christmas Day, he will keel over. But it's all your fault! You knew it was Christmas and deliberately didn't tell me so that I'd get in this damn pickle.

SAŠA. It's *my* fault? What? *You* found this woman who now, to the great delight of us all, wants to introduce you to her family. On Christmas Day! And she wants to announce this extraordinary event to them. That's no trifle, my friend. Just imagine the beautifully set Christmas table, her parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents... Just imagine yourself with your wonderfully broken lingo, how you're announcing your engagement to everyone present, then you want to confirm your proposal with an engagement ring, and you start looking for the box and the box is nowhere to be found... because all shops were CLOSED.

MILAN. Maybe she hasn't told them yet. Maybe I could ask her to put the engagement off a little bit. Fuck this shit! This is impossible. I can't even tell my parents at home now!

SAŠA. Tell them when it's Christmas back home, they'll be happy.

MILAN. Watch what you're saying! It's not funny. Can't you see what shit I'm in?

SAŠA. Remember how our secretary would always buy Christmas presents in the summer? To avoid the mass hysteria? And how we looked at her back then?

MILAN. But in the summer I had not the slightest idea I was going to get married one day.

SAŠA. But you knew that you were hitting on the daughter of our big boss, didn't you? Of course you did. And if you don't go there tomorrow, we'll fly back home like wild geese and we'll be back in the same shit, both of us. Her father will make sure that we'll never get any job here.

MILAN. You're really enjoying this, aren't you?

SAŠA. I'm enjoying this you think? It's *you* who fucked everything up! I'll have my ass in a sling because of *you*. I'll be back at where I started just because of *you*, man. And you say *I* am enjoying this!?

MILAN. I'd better call off the whole thing.

SAŠA. You'd do much better if you called off Christmas!

MILAN. Pour me one. (*They drink.*)

SAŠA. (*First symptoms of drunkenness.*) Would you marry her even if she weren't the boss's daughter?

MILAN. Don't know.

SAŠA. You've been together a few months and she's used to the kind of luxury you never had, not even in mummy's womb, my boy. Don't you think you're jumping into a trap?

MILAN. You didn't complain when we were promoted the other day? It was her doing.

SAŠA. (*Pathetically.*) I'd much rather lose my job than a friend. (*Pours.*) Cheers!

MILAN. Cut it out. Who says that marriage is forever?

SAŠA. Come to think of it, where do you want to get married?

MILAN. What do you mean? In a church.

SAŠA. And your granddad would wed you with great splendour?

MILAN. Fuck, I didn't think this could be a problem. I guess she won't convert to our faith, will she?

SAŠA. Maybe only to get married and then she'll convert back the next day.

MILAN. You're an idiot!

SAŠA. Buddy, faith should unite, not divide!

MILAN. Then I won't tell anyone. We'll marry in secret and one day, when no one expects it, I'll tell the truth, may God help me.

SAŠA. Are you sure she'll agree to that? I mean, the very first wedding a secret one? I don't think you'll get away with it.

MILAN. Pour me a drink! And crank up the music!

SAŠA. (*Just like at the beginning of the scene, the music is "Bajaga a instruktori".*) Do you realize how much truth there is in this music?

MILAN. What does he know about truth? He never set foot anywhere outside his country!

SAŠA. He's an artist, he can feel!

MILAN. Another drink! (*They sing together. The music stays on until the end like a soundtrack. A phone rings several times, but the two men do not react to it.*) I don't want to move again! I want to live here! I want a home!

SAŠA. My own peaceful Christmas!

MILAN. My wife and kids! And my friends!

SAŠA. So far you've only got me.

MILAN. Yes, but in time someone else will show, someone as real as you!

SAŠA. Stop it or I'll start crying.

MILAN. You're a cynic, but you understand that soon we'll have to decide what we're going to do. Whether we'll stay or go back home. (*The phone rings again, but it is hard to hear it.*)

SAŠA. At the beginning, you never know what's going to be forever! You said the same about your marriage!

MILAN. We'll go there. Even without the ring.

SAŠA. We? You mean the two of *us*?

MILAN. You have to come with me, after I'd like you to be our godfather. And we'll say that *you* forgot the ring.

SAŠA. No way. You want me to face the wrath of your future in-laws?

MILAN. They'll all understand that this is an exceptional situation, stressful and so. It happens...

SAŠA. I'm not coming!

MILAN. You're aware that this is a test of our friendship?!

SAŠA. (*Pause.*) This is no longer funny!

MILAN. I don't want to live captured by false reality.

SAŠA. Are we going to fall out at Christmas? If it weren't for Christmas, you wouldn't realize that you live in a parallel reality, would you?

MILAN. Pour me another one! (*They drink.*)

SAŠA. Cheers.

MILAN. And to you! (*Music is heard and a phone is ringing.*)

SAŠA. I'm not sure you know what you're letting yourself in for. Marriage won't solve your problem and now this won't either.

MILAN. Sometimes you have to act on impulse.

SAŠA. Funny *you* should say that. By impulse you get a promotion, you plan a divorce even before you're married and fight your best friend. But it's all just an excuse because you don't want to admit how things really are. And answer the phone, for fuck's sake.

MILAN. What phone?

SAŠA. The one that's been ringing since you got back! You know very well who it is.

MILAN. (*Uncertainly.*) I didn't hear it.

SAŠA. Call her back, take a risk, go and see her and explain to her what's going on. If she loves you, she'll understand.

MILAN. And if she doesn't love me?

SAŠA. She'll understand anyway. Don't deal with problems by making them bigger than they really are.

MILAN. And what if I invited her here tonight? You could make dinner, we'll open a bottle of wine and when the right moment comes, you can explain everything to her and tell her to wait a little while.

SAŠA. I should ask your girlfriend to postpone your engagement?

MILAN. She'll take it from you. She'd get pissed off if I told her.

SAŠA. (*Reciting mockingly.*) Dear Tea, Milan and I have decided that it would be best for you if you could wait a little while. After all, it's not good to have too many festivities at once. It would be a shame if you celebrated your engagement every year on Christmas Day from now on until your last days. It's like celebrating your birthday on New Year's Eve – the occasion has to be celebrated anyway. You would never truly enjoy the rarity of the moment! (*Pause.*) You want me to tell her *this*, are you insane?!

MILAN. (*Telephone.*) It's ringing again.

SAŠA. Answer it!

MILAN. (*After a moment.*) That's not Tea. It's JELENA.

Scene Six. THE BACKSEAT OF YOUR CAR. O-o-o-o-o-o-o.

SHE and IVAN together after an intimate act. They are lying on the backseat of a Porsche (the make is not important this time, but it is a Panamera Turbo), both smoking – SHE has elegant women’s cigarettes, a foreign brand with coloured filters and golden edges, the type you can buy only in a Duty Free shop. Who else would buy them for her if not IVAN? But he is slightly more nervous. Perhaps this relationship does not really suit him, but there has not been anything better at the moment, or maybe he is just too busy.

SHE. My chauffeur told me that there are only a few Ferraris in town.

IVAN. Were you bored again and played that silly game?

SHE. Apparently only three or four cars in the whole town.

IVAN. He’s very perceptive. Obviously a careful driver.

SHE. I didn’t mention that I happened to know one of the cars intimately.

IVAN. I had no idea. You do? You know it?

SHE. It has really soft leather backseats...

IVAN. How soft?

SHE. The softest in the world. Black leather, heated.

IVAN. What else does the ride have?

SHE. A very sexy owner, tall, strong, and when you look at him you know immediately he’s very successful.

IVAN. And what does he do, this guy who owns the Ferrari?

SHE. Well, he does business, has a company with astronomical turnover. So big that it makes your head turn when you imagine the money.

IVAN. What kind of business? (*Starts to put on clothes.*)

SHE. This and that... (*We do not know whether she is really so stupid or only pretends to be.*) And his love helps him a lot.

IVAN. What does his love do?

SHE. Oh she manages.

IVAN. Manages to do what?

SHE. Manages as a manager. She’s the sexiest manager in a Dior dress, a million employers report to her, a hundred meetings every day poor little thing, but in the evening, in the Ferrari she always forgets all about her *hard* business.

IVAN. (*Thinking.*) This is a Porsche, Ms Manager, a Porsche. If you're fucking someone in a Ferrari, that's not part of our business. (*His phone rings. He glances at the display and curses to comment his situation. It is his ex-wife which foreshadows an unpleasant talk.*)

SANDRA. Do you have a minute, or are you working hard?

IVAN. I'm always available for you. (*Is this a false impression or can we detect cynicism in his words?*)

SANDRA. You know very well that I have never wanted anything from you.

IVAN. Do we always have start from ground zero? Or will we fast-forward to the essence of the matter tonight?

SANDRA. Saša...

IVAN. Did he get in touch?

SANDRA. No, he didn't...

IVAN. He's a spoilt young man who only took advantage of the situation.

SANDRA. Saša has never been spoilt... he graduated from college top of the class! You're being unfair!

IVAN. It's not enough to graduate. Only later it shows who's really capable.

SANDRA. If you're talking about me, I tried to find a job, but the times were tough and nothing has changed since then.

IVAN. All right, I'm at an important meeting, tell me what should I do?

SANDRA. Call your influential partners, make them get in touch with their contacts and find out where *your son* is. Ivan, he's your only child.

IVAN. I've told you a thousand times that I won't look for him. When he runs out of money, he'll call.

SANDRA. He won't. You don't even know your own son.

IVAN. And how are *you*? Business going OK?

SANDRA. You swine. (*Hangs up.*)

SHE. Who's the spoilt young man?

IVAN. This guy causing trouble to his parents!

SHE. A family friend?

IVAN. Something like that.

SHE. Do *we* want to have a spoilt young man soon?!

IVAN. (*Jumps up.*) WHAT???

SHE. Just kidding. (*But who knows if she was really joking. IVAN jumps on her. Maybe he does care about his son a little bit, but does not want to admit it. Maybe he is ashamed to have let him go, regretting that it is now only the beep of a text message – the bank notification about the monthly alimony payment – which reminds him of being a father.*)

**Scene Seven. Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
PART 1.**

GRANDMA and GRANDPA in their apartment. GRANDMA put several passports on the table and cannot seem to be able to choose. They both look like they want to take the bull by the horns and make a journey to see their grandson. But which passport is the right one?

GRANDMA. (*Analyzing the passport the way only older people can. Very thoroughly.*) SFRY. Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Yu-go-sla-via!!! (*With much emotion, she presses the passport to her heart.*) It's a shame, grandpa, isn't it? Good old times, do you remember? A holiday every year, a new car every third, the cottage, New Year's Eve in the mountains... The children were pleased, we were pleased, our dog was pleased, the neighbours were not like mad dogs, no one stole, wages like in the West, everyone had what they needed, or even slightly more... and then this balloon burst and started to deflate slowly and no one could find the little hole that caused it, it grew bigger and bigger until... My good passport, my beloved little passport.

GRANDPA. This passport has already expired.

GRANDMA. Oh I know that! It did, in 1992. The year our son made us so proud. How happy we were. How smart he was! He could do two years in one in college, nobody could do that! Only he could, our Saša.

GRANDPA. He wasn't so lucky to choose which country he would be born in. If he had hurried, he could have experienced some of the good times in Tito's Yugoslavia. Because after that they robbed us of everything. The state stole everything that was ours.

GRANDMA. Don't yell, or someone will hear you!

GRANDPA. I will yell. I don't care anymore. I should have screamed back then. I shouldn't have listened to you. Now it's too late... all I can do now is run to the main square, stand on the top of whoever's statue and shout into a megaphone. But the good times are not coming back.

GRANDMA. You think you should have screamed and yelled? But what if they had decided to fire you? What would we have done then? It's easy to be a hero once the war is over.

GRANDPA. Don't you watch the news? The war is all around us... it did not end. Just moved east. Wars are never over, remember that, woman. There's always someone who needs a war to get rich, to prove how powerful he is. Do you know how much all our former republics borrowed after Yugoslavia was dissolved? 80 billion dollars! And do you know what was the total debt of the SFRY?

GRANDMA. (*Sighs and presses the passport to her chest again.*) Nothing?!

GRANDPA. Now come on, don't overdo it with your ex-Yugoslav nostalgia. 17 billion! And who did we borrow all that money from, huh? From the foreign friends we idealized. The interest they gave us? We'll never recover from it. Never.

GRANDMA. They tore us apart to make us weaker.

GRANDPA. We tore ourselves apart. If we had any sense we'd never allow it to happen. Even if the whole West, with all its dirty money, tried to bend over backwards.

GRANDMA. You always see money behind everything.

GRANDPA. Well that's the way it is! And the Euro? What good is all that for? You have to keep converting it to our money.

GRANDMA. (*Pulls out old Yugoslav money from somewhere. The two of them share a moment of utter nostalgia.*) Look at that. Isn't it beautiful? The colours, the smell.

GRANDPA. (*Smelling the old money.*) Smell it? For one of these we could buy a fridgeful of food!

GRANDMA. And for this one my favourite candy. (*They start naming the pictures on the old banknotes*). Look, my hard-working miner!

GRANDPA. Nikola Tesla. The green one was Tesla, remember?

GRANDMA. What was on the back?

GRANDPA. (*Thinks for a moment.*) I can't remember exactly, but on the back side, next to Meštrović's relief, was this bubble and the text was in Macedonian and God knows what other languages.

GRANDMA. The red horse, Jesus Christ, remember how much you could buy with just one of those? The miner, how many cigarette packs for one hard-working miner?

GRANDPA. Oh, our beloved... (*They start stroking the banknotes. Then, GRANDPA seems to pull himself together.*) Our little horse, our little *red* horse. Do you know where the statue of that horse was? In New York! In front of the United Nations building!

GRANDMA. What's that have to do with the nominal value of the note? I don't get it!

GRANDPA. The Yanks were already cooking something up! Why would they put a statue of *our* horse in front of *their* building?! Besides, the sculptor was a Croat! Do you know what the statue is called?

GRANDMA. (*Shakes her head.*)

GRANDPA. *Monument of Peace!* Do you understand now?

GRANDMA. You and your conspiracy theories! You always see something abnormal behind normal things.

GRANDPA. Because I see the reality and can read between the lines. If I had been a politician, we'd never have ended up like this. Never!

GRANDMA. Question is if the statue is still there. Even after the terrorist attacks? (*GRANDPA cannot answer this question.*) You should have become a politician. It seems easy enough! Just look at all those fools who are in politics!

GRANDPA. Won't get anywhere with this passport. Find another one.

Scene Eight. HELLO? EXCUSE-ME? SAŠA, I LOVE YOU!

JELENA plucked up all the courage in the world to give MILAN a call. She knew that SAŠA would be somewhere around.

MILAN. (*Cheerfully, but we feel that his behaviour is stilted.*) Jelena, I haven't heard you for some time. (*Immediately, he understands that he just dropped a brick. With each further question, the abyss in the conversation gets deeper. MILAN is not talking only to JELENA, but also to SAŠA who is gazing at him.*) How are you? Everything OK at home? How's work, all right? And how about at home? I guess I've already asked that. Is it snowing? Here it's quite nice, pretty warm, considering that it's late December. Can you imagine they have Christmas here today! Now! Do you get that? And I'm supposed to get married, I mean not today, well actually yes, today we were supposed to get engaged, but we're not getting engaged because I don't have the ring. You can't get a ring on Christmas. It's no good. Why aren't you saying anything? You there? Jelena?

JELENA. Congratulations.

MILAN. On what?

JELENA. That it's not snowing! That's a good sign.

MILAN. You think?

JELENA. Of course not. Milan, stop talking nonsense. I dialled your number by mistake. I have your name saved right next to another Milan – a colleague from work. And I happened to dial his number. (*This is very unlikely, isn't it?*) How are *you* though? Now you're on the line...

MILAN. Me?!?

JELENA. Who else?

MILAN. Well... I'm doing OK, as long as I survive tonight... it's quite nice here...

JELENA. Is it really not snowing?

MILAN. (*Is confused, not knowing whether JELENA is serious or is just pulling his leg.*) No, it's not, not snowing at all. But it should snow some. You know, then the pressure will be reduced. Winter needs snow.

JELENA. Just like summer needs the sun.

MILAN. Hm...

JELENA. What's her name?

MILAN. Whose?

JELENA. Your fiancée.

MILAN. Teodora. Tea.

JELENA. Have you known her long?

MILAN. Yep, four months. It's my record! (*Now it is the good old MILAN. A bon vivant and joker.*) Jelena?

JELENA. ?

MILAN. We miss you.

JELENA. I miss you too.

MILAN. Aren't you going to dial a Sam by mistake now?

JELENA. Why?

MILAN. Well maybe his name is stored next to Saša and you'll call who you're supposed to call, it's that simple, right?

JELENA. (*Starts laughing, MILAN has not changed. Maybe SAŠA is still the same too.*) But Saša is no longer stored in my phone.

MILAN. Can you imagine what a coincidence this is, there is one Saša standing right next to me. Isn't that the lost one, the Saša from your phone? (*SAŠA is frightened, knowing well that in a moment he will have to face reality.*)

JELENA. The Saša from my phone was a bold, square guy, full of plans.

MILAN. The Saša next to me is a strong man too. (*SAŠA is slowly becoming dispirited.*) He looks like an idiot, and sometimes even behaves like one, but he's still my best friend.

JELENA. My Saša was more than just a friend. My Saša would never leave grandma, grandpa and mum behind... My Saša was the best Saša in the whole world.

MILAN. Perhaps we're talking about the same Saša after all. Here he is.

SAŠA. Jelena?

Scene Nine. YOGA LIFE, OR TAKE A TEST

SHE is bored at work again. Seated behind a massive ebony desk, she is reading Yoga Life and taking the test "How Healthy is Your Life?" SHE has no idea why she is working here. It just happened, let us not fool ourselves here, it was a reward from him. For something SHE really wants to forget, but it is not that easy. And because almost everybody knows about it, SHE can never get ahead in this work. Even though, to be honest, she is far from being a stupid and incapable woman. It was just this one fling,

when emotions got the better of reason and she has lumbered with it ever since. She has continued in the same manner too. Perhaps she does not know any better.

SHE. How many times a week do you take yoga classes? None, fewer than three, more than three! Fewer than three times... Do you maintain a drinking regime? Yes, no, partly. How can you maintain your drinking regime partly? Either you drink, or you don't! Hm... What breakfast do you prefer? Sweet, salty, I don't eat breakfast! I'd look like a fool... not of course it's salty breakfast, with one tomato every morning. One tasty tomato works magic. A fresh tomato makes a sexy girl, a sweet tomato a sweet sexy girl from the market... Only seasonal vegetables and fruit. It's the ten commandments of a healthy diet... (*The intercom rings and frightens her because she is immersed in the test.*) Love, I have no time for him now, I'm dealing with a very intricate matter, tell him to come next week, will you? Next week, I don't know when exactly. Friday? (*This worked out well and now she can go on with the important work.*) Where was I... a-ha! What type of sport activities do you prefer? Aerobic, anaerobic, none! My dear, if you only knew how hard it is to toil away in the gym three times a week, then yoga classes, manicure, pedicure, stylist. And every single day this extra super boring job. Love, the gym keeps me afloat. Otherwise I'd have long croaked it here. (*The intercom again.*) Well, ehm, I can't right now, tell her next Friday. Pardon? Oh I see, all right, in two weeks then. When? Friday I said! My diary's full every day, like a dentist's! I feel like I work on a promenade. (*Hangs up, or rather slams it.*) How many calories do you burn every day? Thank God I don't have to calculate this. God, mum, thank you both for the genes. Yes, mum, I haven't forgotten about you, I'll come over, it's just that now I really need a vacation. I'm totally exhausted from work. I have to go see Ivan. Work can wait.

Scene Ten. Serbia and Montenegro – Republika Srpska. PART 2, VISA

GRANDMA is turning over a banknote with the picture of Nikola Tesla in her hands. She has several notes: a 500 dinar note, a 1,000 dinar note, then a 5,000,000 and a 10 billion note. It is easier to distinguish the banknotes with colours: orange, red, claret and green, pink and purple.

GRANDMA. I think even Tesla was actually born in Croatia, wasn't he?

GRANDPA. No, Tesla wasn't! Don't touch my Tesla! The borders were different back then.

GRANDMA. The borders are always different here. Who's supposed to remember. (*Flipping the Tesla note over in her hands.*) For this Tesla of yours you couldn't even buy an egg.

GRANDPA. But that's not his problem. It's not his fault. They used him. Like all of us.

GRANDMA. Listen, what if I took this passport?

GRANDPA. Hm, don't know, that one might be expired as well. How can we find out if we need visas?

GRANDMA. And where will we go if we don't know where Saša is?

GRANDPA. He'll call before we get our visas.

GRANDMA. But what visas are we talking about? For which sinful country?

GRANDPA. I'm certain my grandson chose wisely.

GRANDMA. Maybe he's in America?!

GRANDPA. (*Her words set him off like a bomb. GRANDPA is clearly no supporter of the American way of life.*) Are you mad? My grandson would never go to that dump! Never. He's my blood! I raised him! He knows well that America is full of perverts!

GRANDMA. All right, so we should call the police and ask to what countries he could have gone without a visa. He had no money for a visa. No way of getting it.

GRANDPA. I guess I was unfair. It's actually a good idea. Where is the telephone book? (*They start looking for it, but it is not going to be that easy to find because they have not phoned anywhere for a long time. What for? And who would they call? The telephone is more of an accessory in their apartment. Eventually, they find the book under a flower pot.*) Call!

GRANDMA. I'm afraid to call the police. You call. You're a man!

GRANDPA. I'm a man now, aren't I?! But until now you've been so sure of yourself! (*Starts to dial a number, but his hands are shaking.*)

GRANDMA. And don't say why we need to know.

GRANDPA. (*He was just waiting for this kind of remark. He immediately hangs up the phone. In fact, it came in handy, because now he can take another deep breath and try again. It is not easy to call the cops.*) Don't tell me what to say.

GRANDMA. But they mustn't find out that Saša is gone. And who knows where he is and if he has the papers there...

GRANDPA. You try it if you're so clever!

GRANDMA. God forbid. I'd be scared to death.

GRANDPA. (*Shaking all over, he dials the well-known three digits.*) Hmm. Hmm. Good day to you, my boy, I just, I mean, I only need to know something... Something common, nothing secret... And you, boy, would happen to... (*GRANDMA is trying to gesticulate to him that he should say SIR and not BOY, but GRANDPA has an evident problem with authority.*) You, sir, are said to... know this because your people allegedly know these things... (*GRANDMA is trying to assist, gesticulates, prompts... They look like a real comic couple. A truly frightened couple, that is.*) Say what? An extension? Don't know, my boy, extension for the visa department I assume. It's for me, of course, for me only. Who else? (*Gestures that he is being put through to the visa department, indicates that there is music...*) Hello, I just want to ask if I can go to the States without a visa? No? I can't? Thank God! Sorry! I mean goddamnit! So I can't. There's no way, is there? Not even for a few days? Just to have peek at the horse? What horse? Well, the red one from the banknote. You don't know what I'm talking about? Never mind, my boy... When were you

born? (*GRANDMA is tapping her head indicating that GRANDPA is probably not quite normal.*) In 1980? The year Tito died!? TITO! Comrade Tito! You, my little boyito, can't really know that. How much does a visa cost, then? How much? Oh my God! I would have to rob a bank to afford that! That's a half of my and grandma's pension! Goodbye, boy. (*Hangs up. Victoriously, he announces the information he has just collected.*) He's not in the States!

GRANDMA. Is that what they told you?

GRANDPA. Indirectly! Where would he get the money for a visa? He's in Europe! My blood!

GRANDMA. (*Notices another passport.*) What if he used this one?

GRANDPA. Which country is that now?

GRANDMA. No idea. It seems to be the most recent one, like the one they use now. But I'll ask Sandra when she gets home.

GRANDPA. Don't say a word! She'll know at once that we're planning something. Give it here, I'll find out.

GRANDPA thumbs through the passport, comparing it with the previous one. Then he puts all four passports next to each other and tries to arrange them, but cannot quite do it... Helplessly, he looks at GRANDMA. They like two sad sacks, really.

Scene Eleven. WILL EXCHANGE A KILOGRAM OF OFFENCES AND TWO KILOGRAMS OF ABUSE FOR A RETURN TO THE PAST

A huge shiny car comes to a halt at the edge of the market. It is a Porsche. It has been mentioned a few times already. IVAN gets out of the car. If it were not immediately obvious that his suit has been tailor-made from a high-quality fabric, he might make the impression that he is a newly-rich with no taste. Now let us admit the possibility that not all modern-day nouveau riche have no taste. The older market sellers take no notice of him and why should they? Their world is miles away from his world. On the other hand, the young shopping mothers with children have to struggle not to let their eyes fall out of their sockets. IVAN is a really, but really, handsome and charismatic man. It is a shame that morally, he is an imbecile. But the mothers with children do not know this. After IVAN, other people turn up at the market: TOMÁŠ, SHE, GRANDMA, JELENA... Is this a coincidence, or is it destiny?

JASMINA. I don't believe this! Look who's here? IVAN!!! What happened? The crisis knocked at your door too and now you have to go to the flea market? Look, I've got something for you. A fine jacket. It's a bit older than the one you're wearing, but it would suit you I think. Ten Euros! And a discount only for you.

IVAN. (*Is not laughing because this is not funny. He does not feel easy in this place. Not anymore.*) Jasmina? Don't be ridiculous. I'm looking for Sandra. Where is she?

JASMINA. I shouldn't be telling you this, but she's having a smoke behind the corner.

IVAN. She still tries to keep it secret?

JASMINA. Some people never change.

IVAN. I haven't changed either if that's what you mean. Fine feathers don't make fine birds. (*Looks nervously at his watch. Time is money!*)

JASMINA. Why do you always dress up then? You realize that what you're wearing now cost more than what about half of all these people make in a year? Not to mention the watch. You really got guts to show up here like this. You should go now. I won't tell Sandra you were here. She'd be worried.

IVAN. I need to talk to her. It's urgent and she hung up on me.

JASMINA. And that surprised you?

IVAN. What are you, her lawyer?

JASMINA. We all need someone to be close in times of crisis. You ran away to seek a better life. She needed a shoulder to cry on.

IVAN. Don't exaggerate, Jasmina. Every second marriage in this country comes apart. It's noting abnormal or immoral.

JASMINA. Exactly, every *second* marriage. That means that only every other guy behaved like you. There were those who endured, who didn't run away like cowards.

IVAN. Give me a break, that's long behind us.

JASMINA. It's not behind us. Maybe you flung it all behind. Your son hasn't called for six months. You think it's all because of nothing? No reason? That your total lack of interest has nothing to do with it?!

IVAN. If you want to make me feel guilty, you've got the wrong guy. Really, I don't feel responsible for all that happened.

At that moment, TOMÁŠ shows up at the market.

JASMINA. Uh-oh, fun ends here.

TOMÁŠ. Where is she?

JASMINA. Who?

TOMÁŠ. Come on, woman, you know very well who I mean.

JASMINA. If you're asking about Sandra, she went to get some change. Can I help you? Want a cigarette?

TOMÁŠ. Fuck off. (*IVAN is alarmed by what he sees and, especially by what he has just heard. In truth, he is absolutely unaware that the man who has just appeared is the current husband of his ex-wife. If he had known this, he probably would not have joined the conversation.*)

IVAN. Could you do without the vulgar language, mister?

TOMÁŠ. (*Sizes him up with contempt.*) Don't you mister me! And a piece of advice: mind your own business!

IVAN. I am minding my own business. I've just pointed out that this is no way to talk to a lady.

JASMINA. Oh but he's used to all kinds of ladies and madams. Isn't that right, Tomáš? Is your lady with pink nails in the gym right now? (*Of course, JASMINA does not know that TOMÁŠ's boss is IVAN's current lover. The situation is getting very complicated.*)

TOMÁŠ. Leave her out of it! She did things her own way. If you had more sense, you'd organize your life differently too.

JASMINA. Never! I'd never ride in a car like a whore. I'd rather starve to death and die of shame.

TOMÁŠ. I'm not quite sure which one of you is a bigger whore!

IVAN. I'm seriously warning you to cut down on that diction.

TOMÁŠ. You ain't gonna tell me what I should say. Bugger off while I'm calm. Where's Sandra? (*Instinctively, he pats the pocket where he usually keeps his cigarettes... or rather, where he never has any cigarettes.*) Fuck, I'd kill for a smoke! You totally pissed me off.

IVAN. I can offer you a cigarette if it's going to calm you down. (*He pulls out a cigarette case and offers a luxury brand.*)

TOMÁŠ. You can stick them up your butt!

IVAN. You are really transgressing here, mister!

TOMÁŠ. I told you not to mister me, didn't I?!

JASMINA. No, you're certainly not a mister!

TOMÁŠ. Damn it, tell me where I can find Sandra 'cause I've got my boss in the car. I can't get stuck here forever! She's supposed to meet some guy she's fucking. And he's nervous when she's late.

JASMINA. Can I invite our beauty for a coffee? I've got some in my thermos, it's still warm. (*In the meantime, she sells a kilogram of carrots or parsley – it is not important now – to GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET.*) Maybe she's never been at a market. She'll like it here. (*At that moment, SANDRA enters. She does not show any surprise or fear.*)

SANDRA. Hello, what can I do for you, gentlemen? What would you like? Carrots, parsley, parsnip, mp3, compote? Or something else? We've got all kinds of things, look, a real sight for sore eyes.

IVAN. Sandra, I need to talk to you. Why did you hang up on me?

SANDRA. I'm sorry, I don't know what you're talking about. I wasn't on the phone with anyone. I was... at lunch.

IVAN. I understand you don't want to deal with it here, but please come with me, I'll buy you a coffee, we have to go through the whole thing.

TOMÁŠ. What whole thing do you two have to go through? Sandra, who's this hot stuff?

IVAN. I have already asked you, mister, to tone down.

TOMÁŠ. You think I'm stupid?! What things do you go through with my wife?

A long, but really long pause. It is full of baffled looks. Nobody knows how this will end and so they all choose to be silent. The moment SANDRA tries to say something, GRANDMA comes from one side and SHE from another. Two more worlds.

GRANDMA. Oh my goodness! My children! (*Stops in her tracks in disbelief.*)

SHE. Tomáš, what are you up to, for God's sake?! I've been waiting for you in the car! (*SHE then notices IVAN.*) Ivan, and what are you doing here? I was coming to meet with you, but was waiting for my driver!

The long pause continues. What follows is a scene like from a mute film. SANDRA grabs a fruit or vegetable from the stand and throws it at HER. SHE is hit, or rather her magnificent Chanel skirt suit gets it – unidentifiable juice from overripe fruit trickles down her suit. SHE does not hesitate and returns the shot aiming at SANDRA. JASMINA, SANDRA's protector, as if waiting for her chance, starts throwing everything she can get her hands on at IVAN and TOMÁŠ. The two men start fighting. Everyone is yelling, shouting, screaming. The market is in disarray. All kinds of people join the fight. Some only seem to be waiting for an excuse because they like to fight even without a reason. Vegetables, fruit and offences fly around in all directions. People in this country love brawls, even those without a cause. This is how we picture the end of the world. In the end, JELENA joins the chaos. She jumps on the counter in the stand.

JELENA. People! All of you, stop for a moment, I have good news. Saša called.

Scene Twelve. THE LAST RIDE IN THE TROLLEY-BUS

All our protagonists are in a trolley-bus. Their clothes give away the fact that they were involved in the unexpected incident at the market. However, their faces are bright, content and smiling. Even though this is like a movie scene, none of the people in the trolley-bus is surprised. As if things like this happened every day, as if this were the most common thing in the world. YOUNG COUPLE is kissing even more passionately, IGNORANT TEENAGER is browsing on his Samsung Galaxy, GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET is crossing herself at regular intervals, demonstrating her outrage at the peculiar group of people in the trolley-bus, VERY ELEGANT LADY takes paper tissues out of her handbag and hands them over to GRANDMA, RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN remains speechless after some time.

Then, all of a sudden, it starts snowing.

JELENA. It's snowing.

JASMINA. Beautiful.

SHE. Romantic.

VERY ELEGANT LADY and GRANDMA let out a sigh.

SANDRA. (*Gives IVAN a side glance.*) Just like New Year's Eve in 1986.

IVAN. Hasn't snowed on New Year's Eve ever since.

GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET. That's a sign, a clear sign.

TOMAS. Let's hope we're not going to get snowbound.

RATHER SMELLY AGGRESSIVE MAN. We're all gonna die one day. (*His own philosophical words take him by surprise. IGNORANT TEENAGER looks up from his Samsung Galaxy, YOUNG COUPLE stop kissing for a moment. They all are now looking out of the window. It snows more and more. After a while, the trolley-bus comes to a halt.*)

JELENA. Just let it snow.

GRANDMA. Let the snow cover all the grime...

VERY ELEGANT LADY... that has piled up here over the years.

JASMINA. The snow carpet is getting thicker and thicker....

GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET. This is a sign. Please Lord, save us all.

SANDRA. We are saved.

IVAN. It will be all right.

TOMÁŠ. Let's hope.

SHE crosses herself, imitating the movements of GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET, but she looks comical. Everybody starts praying as best as they can. Suddenly, JELENA's phone rings.

GRANNY FROM THE FLEA MARKET. It's here! Heeeeelp!

GRANDMA. Calm down, it's him.

VERY ELEGANT LADY. Finally!

SANDRA. Tell him... tell my son that it will be all right. That it's been snowing so he should bring something warm to wear. He must bring a scarf and a hat. And a pair of gloves, warm leather gloves, he should take the brown ones I bought him for Christmas two years ago.

IVAN. Tell him I'll pick him up at the airport.

SHE. Maybe he can't afford to fly, dear!

JASMINA. Don't you butt in if you have no clue.

TOMÁŠ. I can help too. I could drive him from wherever! *(SHE stabs him with her look.)*

JELENA. *(Answers the call. Quietly.)* Are you coming?

The last scene – Scene Thirteen. THIS IS NO HAPPY ENDING

You did not expect a happy ending in this story, did you? Are there any optimists left in this world? But sometimes there is a happy ending, not often, but it does occur, surprisingly. And it hits everybody. I experienced a happy ending myself a few times, even though it should be experienced only once in a lifetime, but PROPERLY. SAŠA is holding a phone in his hand and is waiting for JELENA to pick up. He is standing in the middle of a room, next to a small open suitcase.

The End