



Uncle from America

Johnny returns from America to win back Alenka, who, fifteen years earlier, left him for an older, more experienced man. This time Johnny has an advantage: he had managed to save half a million dollars and wants to buy an old mansion that he and Alenka had dreamed of when they were young. Alenka is happy to resume their relationship: she has dreams of becoming an artist, owning a gallery, gaining social status.

There are others who look to Uncle Johnny for salvation: members of his family, whose selfish squabbles had brought them to a state of suppressed mutual hatred. Mother, to escape the diatribes of her cranky incontinent husband, had moved to an old people's home. Father, bitter because of his lifelong failures, has only one pleasure: to be rude to everybody, especially Neighbor, his one-time mistress, now paid to nurse him. Johnny's sister, resigned to life with a philandering husband, hopes that Johnny's return will put an end to his liaison with Alenka, but this does not happen.

Other things, too, are not what they seem. It transpires that Johnny had lost all his savings during a stock market crash. This is enough for Alenka to drop him again. But she doesn't – for it turns out that it is the Father who is loaded, having won half a million on the lottery. Further, Father may be persuaded to buy the mansion in return for living with Johnny and Alenka as one of the family. He is persuaded, and the stage is set for the modern Lady MacBeth to plot Father's demise, while Johnny, caught between filial duty and erotic obsession, contributes Hamlet-like indecision, which leads to a tragic denouement and to his remaining alone among the ruins of shattered illusions.



What the critics said

“A tight and unclouded plot, full of dramatic suspense, a skilful blend of comedy and tragedy, witty and in parts aphoristic dialogue – these are the elements on which firmly rests Flisar’s contemporary comical-sad grotesque about self-destructive dreamers and losers of all kinds. A firmly structured text and a self-assured direction have given the actors a range of creative opportunities...”

Slavko Pezdir, *Delo*, 1994

“Dramatic works of Evald Flisar stand out for the same reason as the plays of the great Irishman G. B. Shaw – they are just as delightful to read as they are to watch on stage... The unpleasant collection of selfish, dissatisfied individuals who call themselves family, but are connected by nothing more than a relentless pursuit of personal gains and a complete disregard for the feelings of others, has presented the director with a challenge – how to bring to life the rich fabric of the play without sacrificing the plasticity of the characters, the sparkle of the dialogue and the immediacy of the author’s message...”

Rapa Suklje, *Dnevnik*, 1994

“In his latest play Evald Flisar confronts us with the eternally tragi-comic essence of family life... He does that with the help of clearly delineated characters, revolving around the remarkable central figure of Father, and especially with his well-honed, playful and witty dialogue... The plot moves along in an accomplished manner...”

Lojze Smasek, *Vecer*, 1994



“Flisar’s play *Uncle from America* follows the rules of the Anglo-Saxon type of family drama (especially as exemplified in the plays of Sam Shepard)... Nevertheless, Flisar’s approach remains wholly original... laughter, which in the first act amuses, in the second act conspicuously fades, until – in line with the central message of the futility of egotistic way of life, a message unobtrusively buried in the firm dramatic structure – it turns into anguish, despair, even tragedy...”

Ignacija Fridl, *Slovenec*, 1994

Uncle from America is above all a gallery of meticulously carved characters, caught up in complex family relationships, and thus an ideal vehicle for actors eager to test the limits of their talent... On the realistic set we could see a whole range of convincing portrayals...

Matej Bogataj, *Republika*, 1994

“All these ‘archetypal’ characteristics of the play find their expression in exceptionally witty, skilful and smoothly proceeding dialogue. There is no doubt that Evald Flisar is one of our most intelligently writing dramatists ... In *Uncle from America* he employs the method of building suspense whereby the action is set in motion by dialogue, and also resolved by it along the way, rather than piling it up for the final denouement. The play could be either longer or shorter – it would remain equally powerful... A real tragi-comedy!”

Veno Taufer, *Delo*, 1994



Uncle from America, Ljubljana City Theater, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1994
Sreco Spik as Tonko and Violeta Tomic as Alenka
Directed by Dusan Mlakar





UNCLE FROM AMERICA

Nomination for Best Play of the Year Award 1994

Characters

Johnny
Alenka
Father
Mother
Sister
Sister's Husband
Tommy
Mark
Neighbor
Tonko
Inspector



Uncle from America was first produced at the Ljubljana City Theater, Slovenia, on September 23, 1994. It was directed by Dusan Mlakar with the following cast:

Johnny
Alenka
Father
Mother
Sister
Sister's Husband
Tommy
Mark
Neighbor
Tonko
Inspector

Slavko Cerjak
Violeta Tomic
Matjaz Turk
Vera Per
Majda Grbac
Franc Markovcic
Gasper Bratina
Evgen Car
Maja Sugman
Sreco Spik
Joze Mraz



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Act One

(Sitting room in Sister's house, with a dining corner. Middle class, comfortably furnished, but without imagination. Sofa, armchair, rocking chair, dining room with eight chairs. At the back, a fairly tasteless natural pine drinks bar, well stocked, with two bar stools. Nearby, placed on a small table, a synthesizer. Next to it, a small wooden stool.)

1.

(As the curtain rises, Tommy is sitting at the synthesizer, learning to play, producing various jarring sounds. Mother is sitting in the rocking chair with a blanket across her knees, hands folded. Neighbor, a corpulent lady of sixty plus, is perching on one of the bar stools, sipping brandy.)

MOTHER: For God's sake, do you have to spend the whole day behind that accordion?

NEIGHBOR: Go out in the garden, kick a ball or something, like other kids.

TOMMY: Why don't you go, and kick the drinking habit?

NEIGHBOR: Jesus, these children show no respect at all. I used to regret not having any, but now I think: thank God I was spared at least one trouble in life.

TOMMY: Not only trouble, that which causes the trouble as well. You might've liked that.

MOTHER: I can't listen to this. *(She plugs her ears with cotton wool.)*

NEIGHBOR: Have you no shame, speaking like that in front of your Grandma?

TOMMY: She is ashamed, that's why she keeps plugging her ears.



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NEIGHBOR: What's your uncle going to say? He must be sorry now that he brought you all those things.

TOMMY: What things would they be?

MOTHER (*removes ear plugs*): He brought you that accordion, didn't he?

TOMMY: It's called synthesizer.

NEIGHBOR: Is it true, then? That he has nothing to show for those fifteen years in America?

MOTHER: Evil tongues. Money is being sent over.

TOMMY: First he'll marry Alenka. Then we'll go to San Francisco. Uncle will work on the Stock Exchange and Alenka will have exhibitions in famous galleries.

NEIGHBOR: What, those eyesores of hers?

TOMMY: I'll work in Hollywood, composing music for movies.

MOTHER: He's come back to buy that house. That Austro-Hungarian mansion in Black Forest.

NEIGHBOR: That ruin? It's been empty for twenty years!

MOTHER: He'll renovate it.

NEIGHBOR: Good. Then he can take care of Father. That's what you've been saying all these years. "When Johnny returns from America, everything will be fine, he'll know how to take care of his mother and father."

(Mother plugs her ears. Sister enters through the main door, carrying shopping bags.)

SISTER: Tommy, go to your room, do your homework.

TOMMY: I did it last night.

SISTER: Go and do it again.

TOMMY: I've done it again as well, this morning.

SISTER: Stop this noise, I can't stand it.

NEIGHBOR: I told him to go out in the garden –

SISTER: Oh yes? Why didn't you lock him in his room?

MOTHER (*removes ear plugs*): What's the matter again?

SISTER: Why should you care, you left everything to me so you could live in peace. You don't care if Father is locked in his flat and keeps hammering on the door like a madman.

NEIGHBOR: Last time he messed himself on the staircase –

SISTER: Are we not paying you to clean up after him?

NEIGHBOR: Not over the entire neighborhood!



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SISTER: How many times have I told you not to lock him in? Suppose there's a fire?

NEIGHBOR: Why don't you let him live here? You have a large house.
(She pours herself another glass of brandy.)

TOMMY: He doesn't want to live here. He doesn't like us.

SISTER: Tommy, go and do your homework. Now.

TOMMY: I'm waiting for Uncle Johnny.

SISTER *(yells)*: How many times do I have to tell you?

NEIGHBOR: Obey your mother, Tommy, otherwise she'll have a fit and will have to stay in bed for two days.

(Tommy leaves through the main door.)

SISTER: I'm going to wait another ten seconds. Then I'll call the fire brigade and ask them to break down the door.

NEIGHBOR *(finishing her drink)*: Don't blame me if he falls on the stairs and cracks his skull. Or wanders into the street and is run over. That would be quite convenient for you, wouldn't it? One worry less.

SISTER: And very inconvenient for you. No more free booze.

(Neighbor defiantly refills her glass with brandy. She downs it, picks up her bag, leaves through the main door.)

MOTHER *(removes her ear plugs)*: I've told her a hundred times not to lock him in.

SISTER: As if you hadn't done the same – before you moved to the old people's home as an easy way out.

(Sister takes bags to the kitchen. Mother re-plugs her ears.)

2.

(Alenka and Johnny enter through the main door, both a little tipsy. Johnny stops Alenka with his hand, steps aside and bows.)

JOHNNY: Gracious lady – oh sorry! – Miss! – what's wrong with my eyes today *(Rubs his eyes.)* – gnädige Frau – *(Slaps his forehead.)* Fräulein! – your lord, count, knight, etcetera, is expecting you.



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ALENKA (*giggles as she places imaginary coat, gloves and hat into his hands*): Everything comes to those who wait, someone once said, certainly a man of experience...

JOHNNY: Pleasure delayed is pleasure doubled, said someone else.

ALENKA: Well, what are you waiting for, butler? Take me to your master, to my –

JOHNNY: – obedient servant, gracious lady. To the man who is finally in a position to furnish your life with the softest of carpets –

ALENKA: Is that all?

JOHNNY: – and with – crystal chandeliers whose gentle light will –

ALENKA: What?

JOHNNY: – make your brushwork look like that of a real artist!

ALENKA (*bitterly*): Oh, thanks!

JOHNNY: Will the gracious lady forgive her stupid servant for lacking the imagination to find the right words?

ALENKA: Like his master? Let him take care of money, then – *I* will take care of imagination.

JOHNNY: One moment, gracious lady. (*He takes two steps towards an imaginary person and bows.*) My lord, your charming lady is here, will you receive her? (*Turns, becomes the imaginary person, opens his arms.*) My dearest! Where would you like me to take you?

ALENKA: Take me – let me think – take me –

JOHNNY: To a dance?

ALENKA: All right then, to a dance.

(She holds out her arms, they start to dance.)

JOHNNY: From now on, my dearest, your days will be filled with heavenly light...

(They dance around Mother, who keeps rocking with her eyes closed. Tommy enters.)

TOMMY: Wait, Uncle... (*He hurries to the synthesizer.*)

JOHNNY: Tommy, play your uncle and his bride a melody that'll take them up to the clouds, beyond the clouds...

(Tommy plays, Johnny and Alenka dance. After a few seconds they realise that Tommy is playing a funeral march. They come to a halt and disengage, embarrassed.)



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TOMMY: Sorry, Uncle, I'm still learning, that's all I can play so far.

ALENKA: Excellent choice.

MOTHER (*stops rocking and removes her ear plugs*): He played that for me.

JOHNNY: Mother, I had no idea your hearing was so good – and with ear plugs, too!

SISTER (*entering from the kitchen*): With ear plugs even better, isn't that right, Mother? Why did you stop, Tommy, you played so beautifully.

JOHNNY (*gently pats Tommy on the head*): How could I be angry with you, Tommy? Certainly not on a day like this, when I feel like rising into the air and floating away. Alenka, will you break the good news?

ALENKA: They're your relatives.

JOHNNY: And your friends.

ALENKA: Really?

JOHNNY: All right. Mother, sister, Tommy – Mother, can you hear me?

SISTER: Depends on what you have to say.

MOTHER: You've decided to buy that derelict mansion.

JOHNNY: Mother! – and I wanted to surprise you, make you happy.

SISTER: Even God can't manage that.

ALENKA (*to Johnny*): Shall we go?

TOMMY: Uncle Johnny, tell me – tell me the good news – (*Grabs hold of Johnny's hand.*) – please, Uncle, I'll be happy for you – all of us will be, won't we – you too, Grandma – (*Pulls cotton wool from her ears.*) – won't you, Grandma? Please.

MOTHER: I just hope you'll be happy there, that's all.

JOHNNY: Of course I'll be happy, Mother.

MOTHER: I just hope you won't regret it.

ALENKA: Regret being happy with me – don't you get what she's trying to tell you?

JOHNNY: Alenka, please! – all I wanted was to share my joy with –

ALENKA (*cynically*): – your dearest?

SISTER: Perhaps I'd better go and make lunch. (*She marches to the kitchen door, slams it behind her.*)

ALENKA: Let's go.

TOMMY: Uncle, I've just thought of something. In that big house you'll need an extra good lighting system.

JOHNNY: A few candles, Tommy, that's all.

TOMMY: Imagine you have to crawl around those corridors looking for switches. You'd soon fall down the stairs and break your legs. But if you have sensor lights you'll be able to move around even if you're blind.



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JOHNNY: Very clever, Tommy.

TOMMY: When you move I'll come and fix it for you.

JOHNNY: Thank you, Tommy. And then Alenka and I will be able to dance in each room regardless of the time of day, and in each a different dance. *(He opens his arms.)*

TOMMY *(runs to the synthesizer)*: Just a moment, Uncle. O. K., the orchestra is ready.

(He plays, not very well, a Viennese waltz. Alenka reluctantly joins Johnny in a dance. They dance around Mother, who keeps rocking with her eyes closed. Father hobbles in through the main door, armed with a walking stick and hearing aid. He looks at the dancers. Leaning on his stick, he starts to wiggle his hips. Johnny and Alenka stop dancing, Father continues to make awkward dance steps.)

JOHNNY *(claps)*: Bravo, Father, bravo!

(Tommy stops playing. Father takes a few breaths and readjusts his hearing aid.)

FATHER: What?

JOHNNY: I said, bravo, Father, bravo.

FATHER: Who are you? You remind me of my son who went to America many years ago.

JOHNNY: That's me, Father. I've been back for a week, have you forgotten?

FATHER: I forget nothing. *(He rocks the rocking chair so hard that Mother nearly falls out.)* My life is nothing but memory. Once, as an officer of the imperial army, I danced with the Empress Maria Theresa. When we stopped, I bowed, took her hand and said, "Küss Hand, Majestät". And she replied... *(He loses the thread.)*

TOMMY: Grandpa, Maria Theresa died two hundred years ago.

MOTHER: She replied: get lost, we don't dance with stable boys.

(Father looks at Mother, wants to say something, changes his mind, turns to Tommy behind the synthesizer.)

FATHER: Ah, a new piano.



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TOMMY: No, Grandpa, a synthesizer. A present from Uncle Johnny.

FATHER: In my days pianos used to be different, larger, standing on three or four legs. This must be an American thing. Americans think of the most incredible gadgets – an electric toothbrush – drrrr, drrrr, drrrr – can you think of anything sillier? Well, I don't need one, I have no teeth, the only gadget I could use would be an automatic ass-wiping device.

MOTHER: You had one, before I moved away.

FATHER: Son, how do Americans say "You silly old cow?"

JOHNNY: You silly old cow.

FATHER: I can't hear you.

JOHNNY (*louder*): You silly old cow.

FATHER (*readjusting his hearing aid*): A little louder, son – batteries must be weak.

JOHNNY (*almost yelling*): You silly old cow!

(Johnny's eyes come to rest on Mother, who is sitting right in front of him.)

FATHER (*pleased*): Thank you, son.

ALENKA: Shall we go?

(Sister enters from the kitchen.)

SISTER: Will you eat with us? Or would you like to have it brought there?

FATHER: There?

SISTER: Home, Father, don't be difficult.

FATHER: I didn't know I had a home.

JOHNNY: You'll have one soon, Father. Soon you'll have a real home.

(Silence. All eyes are on Johnny. Mother unplugs her ears and waits.)

FATHER: What did you say, son? This stupid thing needs new batteries.

JOHNNY: Home, Father.

FATHER: Old people's home? That's where you want to send me? You're back two days, and already you've put your heads together and decided to get rid of me? (*To Sister.*) Your work, no doubt!

SISTER: Father, please.



Uncle from America, Ljubljana City Theater, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1994
Matjaz Turk as Father, Vera Per as Mother, Slavko Cerjak as Johnny
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



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FATHER: Where's my eldest? He's the only one who's worth anything.

SISTER: Ha!

JOHNNY: Father, do you remember the old Austrian mansion, about ten miles out of town, in the woods –

FATHER (*suspicious*): Why?

JOHNNY: Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live there?

FATHER: In a ruined building, with rats everywhere, and wind howling in the corridors? That's where you want to shift me – to make me catch pneumonia?

JOHNNY: Father, listen to me –

FATHER: You listen to me –

JOHNNY: No, Father, first you listen to me. Alenka and I are going to buy that mansion in Black Forest, renovate it, furnish it, central heating and all, and you're going to live there with us.

(*Pause. Father turns away.*)

FATHER: You have no money to renovate that ruin.

JOHNNY: It's not a ruin, all it needs is repointing.

FATHER: Too big. I'll need half an hour to get from my room to the kitchen.

JOHNNY: You'll have a room next to the kitchen.

FATHER: I'll need an hour to get from the kitchen to the bathroom.

MOTHER: Especially the bathroom.

JOHNNY: That, too, will be next to the kitchen.

FATHER: But I already have that. Room, kitchen, bathroom – in the block across the street. Why buy such a large building if you're planning to have everything in two rooms?

JOHNNY: There will be other things, Father. Alenka is going to open a gallery, we're going to organize social events, dances, concerts. We'll have a billiard room, a hunting room –

FATHER: Hunting room?

JOHNNY: Yes, you'll be able to exhibit your trophies.

FATHER: Trophies? I have only one, a stuffed partridge. Even that's gone rotten – it's been rocking in front of my eyes for longer than remember. (*Gives Mother's chair a push.*) You don't have much hunting experience either. (*Looks at Alenka.*) When it comes to setting traps, others are way ahead.

JOHNNY: I just wanted to make you happy.



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FATHER: Well, if you insist I'll give the matter some thought.

JOHNNY: Do that, Father.

FATHER: And now that I've thought about it I want to say that I will accept your offer. When can I move?

(Astonishment.)

JOHNNY: Not for some time, I'm afraid.

SISTER: Not for some years, I'm afraid. *(Goes to the kitchen.)*

ALENKA: Johnny, can I talk to you in private?

FATHER: I know you'd rather sleep in a viper's nest than live with me under the same roof. But that's your problem, not mine. Son, will I be allowed to have a wall-to-wall carpet in my room, so I won't slip?

JOHNNY: Of course, Father.

FATHER: And a room facing west, so I'll be able to watch the sunset?

JOHNNY: Anything you want, Father.

MOTHER *(unplugs her ears)*: You silly old fool! Instead of looking forward to a new life you should be asking yourself who's going to come to your funeral!

FATHER: You certainly won't, you silly old cow, because you'll be dead at least ten years before me! Attendance at my funeral will be by invitation only. In any case...

MOTHER: In any case you've no intention of dying.

FATHER: For the first time in twenty years you've said something I wholly agree with. No, I'm not going to die. The best years of my life are still before me. Right, son?

JOHNNY: I hope so, Father.

FATHER: Tommy, what did we say?

TOMMY: "You're not looking at an old ruin – you're looking at four young men."

FATHER: Eighty-eight is four times twenty-two. I'm made up of four young men. And every day I'm younger. Right, Tommy?

TOMMY: Shangri-la.

MOTHER: Blah-blah-blah.

FATHER: Blah-blah-blah silly old cow. Tommy, help me.

TOMMY: Time for exercises Shangri-la.

(Father extends his arms. Tommy takes the walking stick from his hand and leans it against the synthesizer. Father, making awkward



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little steps, begins to turn clockwise round his axis. Tommy takes him by the hand and runs around him in a circle, half pulling and half supporting him. Father loses his balance and staggers. Johnny catches him just in time. Father looks at him.)

FATHER: Rejuvenation exercises. I'll teach you how to do them. You look rather spent for your age.

JOHNNY: Thank you, Father. *(He pulls him upright.)*

FATHER: Shall we continue, Tommy?

(Father starts to turn round his axis once more. Tommy takes him by the hand to help. Sister enters.)

SISTER: Father, you have a weak heart!

FATHER: Rubbish, I'm taking pills, aren't I?

SISTER: Take Grandpa home, Tommy.

MOTHER: I want to be taken back, too.

SISTER: Mother, I'm in the middle of cooking.

MOTHER: Switch it off. *(She plugs her ears.)*

SISTER *(unties her apron and chucks it through the door into the kitchen)*: As you wish, Mother. As you wish.

(Sister goes out through the main door and returns with a wheelchair. Johnny helps her lift Mother into it. Sister pushes the wheelchair towards the main door and out.)

JOHNNY: Good bye, Mother. Good bye, Father.

FATHER *(at the door)*: It's true that four young men have only two legs among them, but they're still standing.

TOMMY: Let's go, Grandpa.

(They leave.)

4.

(Alenka slowly lights a cigarette.)

ALENKA: What about me? *(Johnny looks at her.)* Will I be allowed to have a wall-to-wall carpet, so I won't slip?



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JOHNNY: You'll have Persian carpets. On the floor, on the walls, *and* on the ceiling.

ALENKA: Will I be allowed to have an electric ring, so I can boil myself an egg every now and then?

JOHNNY: Alenka! – we'll have a kitchen.

ALENKA: Not for me – four young men will be dining there.

JOHNNY: A large kitchen.

ALENKA: Of course I can always leave after serving your meals, can't I? Not that it'll be much safer in the corridors, with an old loony tottering up and down, waiting for an opportunity to delight me with a piece of his wisdom.

JOHNNY: You're talking about my father.

ALENKA: I'm talking about our life together. It was meant to be a dream, not a nightmare.

JOHNNY: Alenka! – the mansion has twenty rooms!

ALENKA: Father will be followed by mother, she by your sister and brother. Just like a summer camp.

JOHNNY: I haven't seen Father for fifteen years –

ALENKA: For seven years we talked about that mansion. We would sit under a chestnut tree, gaze at it and phantasize how we'd furnish it.

JOHNNY: And you said –

ALENKA: I said, "The man who'll carry me across the doorstep of that mansion will be mine forever."

JOHNNY: And I said –

ALENKA: And you said –

JOHNNY: "The girl who'll take me across the threshold of love I'll carry across the doorstep of that house."

ALENKA: Well, I did it, didn't I? Right there, in the bushes behind the mansion. When will you fulfill your part of the bargain?

JOHNNY: It was you who changed your mind.

ALENKA: I was young... didn't know what I was doing.

JOHNNY: Oh yes you did. (*He takes a piece of paper from his wallet, unfolds it.*) "Dear Johnny, I know you'll be terribly upset, but I need a man a little older than you, more experienced. Someone to protect me from the world and support me in my artistic endeavors." (*He folds the paper and puts it back in his wallet.*)

ALENKA: Well, why didn't *you* protect me?

JOHNNY: I, too, was young, Alenka.

ALENKA: But now everything can be just as we imagined, Johnny...



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JOHNNY: Yes. But there is no harm in letting my old man live in hope.
I owe him that. Besides, all we have so far is the news that the mansion's for sale.

ALENKA: Well, where is the money?

JOHNNY (*after pause*): It was sent yesterday. It shouldn't take longer than twenty-four hours. I'll walk to the bank and ask.

ALENKA: I'll go with you.

(Sister's Husband enters, returning from work.)

5.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Where're you off to, isn't it time for lunch?

JOHNNY: To the bank and straight back.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Whiskey? Brandy?

JOHNNY: We won't be long.

ALENKA: Actually, there's no point in both of us going.

JOHNNY: . Yes. I mean, no, there is no point. Well, see you later.

ALENKA: Bye bye.

SISTER'S HUSBAND (*hands Alenka a glass of whiskey*): Don't be too long, we won't start without you. Is she cooking anything? (*He looks towards the kitchen.*)

ALENKA: Chicken.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: God Almighty, this woman never runs out of ideas.

JOHNNY: I'll be off, then. (*Leaves.*)

(Alenka and Sister's Husband look at each other. He raises his glass. She sips, turns away.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Well?

ALENKA: Well what?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I imagine you haven't stayed behind because you're too lazy to walk the short distance to the bank.

ALENKA: No?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: You want to apologize for last Friday, when you kept me waiting in the studio flat of one of my employees, who in the meantime had to pace the streets in driving rain, while you couldn't even be bothered to let me know you weren't coming.



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ALENKA: You shouldn't have waited.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I sent you the name of the street, the number of the apartment, name on the doorbell –

ALENKA: Yes – by fax.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: *You* said the phone wasn't safe. And there's another thing we agreed –

ALENKA: Yes – that we'd meet in apartments and houses of your employees, acquaintances, friends, even a former lover – not when I felt like it but when you were in need of releasing your testicular pressure.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I can't think of a single occasion when your needs did not coincide with mine. What's wrong all of a sudden?

ALENKA: Can't you see?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I must be blind.

ALENKA: Stupid, not blind. Can't you see it's over?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Over?

ALENKA: That it must be over?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Because of the prodigal son who by hook or more likely by crook amassed a pile of greenbacks and can now offer you comfort to which you'd like to become accustomed?

ALENKA: Johnny is offering me a new life.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Well, he owes you one, doesn't he, after all you've done to him.

ALENKA: I don't want to be an accounts clerk for the rest of my life. I have talent, I must develop it.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I don't see why that should make any difference.

ALENKA: I told you – I'm starting a new chapter.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Every new chapter has elements of the previous one, especially if they were agreeable.

ALENKA: How do you know they were?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: You're hardly the kind of woman who'd be doing unpleasant things once a week for two years.

ALENKA: You really are full of yourself.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: No, Alenka. I'm full of you. More whiskey?

(Alenka hesitates, then holds out her empty glass. Sister's Husband refills it.)

ALENKA: On top of which I probably wasn't the only one.



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SISTER'S HUSBAND: Maybe so – but you were unique.

(Tommy enters.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Honestly, any normal man would go round the world for a woman like you – on his knees.

ALENKA: And you got me for free, aren't you exceptional?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: And because I am – *(He sees Tommy.)* – Tommy, where have you come from, where's your mother, when shall we eat?

TOMMY: Daddy, I'm afraid I'll never be a normal man.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Why not?

TOMMY: I can't imagine a woman I'd like to go round the world for – certainly not on my knees.

(Sister's Husband crosses to Tommy and slaps him – just as Sister enters from the kitchen.)

SISTER: Tommy, what have you done?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: He was rude to Alenka. He said that – something in connection with – anyway, he was rude. Tommy, go to your room and do your homework.

SISTER *(goes back towards kitchen door)*: Lunch is ready. *(Turns.)* Or have you satisfied your hunger behind my back?

ALENKA *(puts down her glass)*: I'll be off.

SISTER: Where is Johnny?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: He went to the bank.

SISTER: Of course. His second home from now on. *(Goes back to the kitchen.)*

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Sorry, Tommy.

6.

(Johnny enters. He walks to the bar, pours himself a glass of whiskey, downs it, pours himself another.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Anything wrong?

JOHNNY *(mutter)*: Black Monday.

TOMMY: What does that mean, Uncle Johnny?



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JOHNNY (*collapses into a chair, begins to shiver*): I'm cold.

ALENKA: What's the matter?

JOHNNY: I've heard horrible things.

(Alenka and Sister's Husband exchange anxious glances.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Look, whatever you heard you probably misunderstood –

JOHNNY: No. It's over.

ALENKA: Johnny, I can explain –

JOHNNY (*rises*): I must explain. (*He begins to pace restlessly up and down. Sister enters.*) When I was a little boy I wanted to join the school football team. I practised at home, in the backyard, shattering neighbors' windows. I practised on the school playing field – late at night, alone, as if doing something forbidden. Then I demonstrated my skills. And they said: sorry, boy, you kick the ball too carelessly – and they turned me down. Not to worry, I said to myself. I'll try again. I did, and again I was turned down. In the end I gave up. I took a knife and cut the ball to shreds. I just wasn't born to be a footballer. It took me a long time to accept that, but the important thing is that I did. In the end I bowed my head, humbly, and said: all right, I'm one of those who are not good enough. But there must be at least one thing in this world I can be good at. Most people are good at something. I was lucky, I met you, and for a long time it seemed that I was good at love. But the match ended 1 : 0, the goal was scored by another man, again I had kicked the ball too carelessly. Then something happened. Something broke inside me. And I left for America. At least one goal, I said to myself, I must score at least one goal in my life, so I won't be the only one who doesn't belong to a football team. It wasn't long before I discovered the secret. Money. The world is for sale, goals are scored with the bank balance, top league players are recognized by their credit cards. "American Express? That'll do nicely, thank you, Sir."

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Well, no need to complain, then. You've scored your goal, a whopping big one, and we, your fans, applaud you from the bottom of our hearts – bravo! (*He claps, and stops when he realizes that no one has joined him.*)

JOHNNY: There is no money. Gone with the wind. Like everything else in my life.



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

ALENKA: What are you talking about?

JOHNNY (*with tears in his eyes*): I'm sorry, Alenka. I made careful plans, considered every move, did only what my gut feeling told me was right –

ALENKA: Johnny, stop this babble and tell me what happened!

JOHNNY: Yesterday there was a crash on the world stock markets. On Wall Street shares collapsed like a house of cards. Millions vanished into thin air.

ALENKA: You had your money in shares?

JOHNNY: You always have money in shares, at least most of it, profit is always greater –

ALENKA: Exceptional.

JOHNNY: My broker did what he could. He sold the shares as soon as the downtrend became obvious.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Then you haven't lost all of it, it's not a catastrophe –

ALENKA: How much did you lose?

JOHNNY (*after pause*): Ninety percent of what I managed to save.

ALENKA (*after a long pause*): And how much have you got left?

JOHNNY: Enough for a small car. (*Silence. Johnny sinks to his knees and buries his face in his hands.*) Oh God.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: So you'll buy a small car, what's so bad about that?

SISTER: You'll find a job and go to work every day, like the rest of us.

TOMMY: Uncle Johnny, I didn't even know you had money. What's important to me is that you're back. But if you need a loan – I have some pocket money.

JOHNNY (*moved*): Tommy...

SISTER'S HUSBAND: In a year or two you'll buy a two-bedroom condo or a small house and live like the rest of humanity. Dreams are for children.

JOHNNY (*to Alenka*): Forgive me.

ALENKA: How could you save for fifteen years and then put all your money into a balloon so slight that it was blown away by the first wind?

JOHNNY: I was greedy.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Well, if the drama's now over I suggest we sit down and have some of that chicken.

ALENKA: I have to go.

JOHNNY: Alenka –

ALENKA: I have an appointment with the director of the Art Gallery. I'm running late, sorry.



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JOHNNY (*gets to his feet*): I'll drive you.

ALENKA: You're drunk.

SISTER'S HUSBAND (*puts down his glass*): Not only that – your rented car's become too expensive. Each extra mile would mean a further drop in your savings. (*To Alenka.*) I'll take you. (*Follows Alenka to the door.*)

SISTER: That was the last time I cooked. Why do I bother?

SISTER'S HUSBAND (*turns*): Because you like being a housewife. And because there's nothing that suits you better. (*Follows Alenka out.*)

SISTER (*after him*): One of these days I'll cook something that'll get stuck in your throat!

7.

TOMMY: Don't be sad, uncle Johnny. Shall I play you something to cheer you up?

JOHNNY: I don't want to be cheerful.

TOMMY: Want to go to your room and lie down a little?

JOHNNY: I'll be all right. (*Staggers to the bar.*)

SISTER: Go ahead, I can always buy more when you finish that.

JOHNNY (*with a bottle of whiskey in his hand*): I'll do it.

SISTER: You have no money.

JOHNNY: Oh Christ! Where can I go?

SISTER: Move in with Alenka.

JOHNNY: She lives with her mother. Besides...

SISTER: ... you don't know if she'll have time for you, now that you're poor.

JOHNNY: I'll go back to America.

SISTER: Once more to get rich?

JOHNNY: Maybe I'll shoot myself.

SISTER: There is Father's apartment...

JOHNNY: Too small for one, let alone two.

SISTER: I meant for you.

JOHNNY: Where would Father go?

SISTER: Old people's home.

JOHNNY: Father should go to an old people's home because his youngest came back from America without a dime and has nowhere to live?

SISTER: I can't cope any more.



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

JOHNNY: Isn't the neighbor taking care of Father?

SISTER: Some care. And I'm paying her.

JOHNNY: Old people's home would cost even more.

SISTER: He's got money.

JOHNNY: Father? (*He laughs.*) Father has no money.

TOMMY: He has. He won the lottery.

SISTER: Father has more money than you've lost with your shares. All in the bank. Maximum interest.

TOMMY: The richest four young men in town.

SISTER: He could buy two mansions and still have enough to live on.

JOHNNY (*feeling his head*): Suddenly I feel very strange.

SISTER: He could pay for the best care in the best home in the world. The rest he could give to his children. You talk to him, maybe he'll listen to you.

JOHNNY: Surely we can take care of him while he's alive? There are three of us, after all.

SISTER: You mean your elder brother?

TOMMY: Mister attorney Mark, defender of the humiliated and unjustly accused.

SISTER: Mister attorney who humiliates and unjustly accuses. Turns up once in a blue moon. Always with a new idea for persuading Father to part with his money.

TOMMY: Uncle Mark never brings me anything. He says there're too many spoiled children in the world as it is.

JOHNNY: We have to think about this. Very carefully.

(Father enters, followed by Neighbor.)

8.

NEIGHBOR: I had to bring him. He threatened me with his stick.

FATHER: Son, how do Americans say "Get lost, you witch!"

TOMMY: "Get lost, you witch!"

JOHNNY: Not bad, Tommy.

FATHER (*to Neighbor*): Haven't you heard? Why do you stick your nose in other people's business? I want to speak to my son in private.

NEIGHBOR (*to Sister*): I'm not putting up with this for much longer. (*She leaves.*)



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SISTER: Don't let me disturb you either. (*Goes to the kitchen and slams the door.*)

FATHER: Tommy, bring me a chair.

(*Tommy brings a chair, Father sits.*)

FATHER: Tell me, son. When I move to your mansion, and I hope it'll be soon – who will take care of me?

JOHNNY (*hesitates*): Do you have special wishes?

FATHER: You tell me, you must've thought everything out to the last detail. Who's going to clean for me, wash and iron my clothes, talk to me, so I won't be bored all the time?

JOHNNY: Do you mind if I ask you something?

FATHER: Go ahead.

JOHNNY: Why don't you buy yourself a nice little house with an orchard, out in the country, in fresh air? You talked about that when I was a child. Why don't you make it come true – now that you can? Now that you have money?

FATHER: I have money?

JOHNNY: Why do you live in a small apartment, with traffic under your window, on the second floor, without a lift?

(*Father says nothing.*)

JOHNNY: Father?

FATHER: House with an orchard? Fresh air? Trees in bloom?

JOHNNY: Sun setting behind the hills...

FATHER: And loneliness? Boredom? And a toothless old hag coming up from the village to cook and wash for me? And accuse me of not paying her enough? I imagine my future a little differently.

TOMMY (*rises*): "Have you had enough, Father? Or would you like another piece of cake?"

FATHER: I want to smoke. Havana cigar.

TOMMY: "Sorry, Father, we've run out. All we have is cigarillos by the name of Hamlet." (*He offers Father an imaginary cigar.*)

FATHER: I don't want any Hamlets. Only Havana.

TOMMY (*picks up imaginary phone and dials a number*): "Hullo? Is that the shop selling Havana cigars? Please deliver five boxes to the Obersturmbahnführer of the Austro-Hungarian Army in the Meadow



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

Mansion on the meadow in Black Forest. Thank you. (*He replaces imaginary receiver.*) Cigars are on their way, Father.”

FATHER: Switch on the TV.

TOMMY (*pressing buttons on an imaginary remote control*): “Newsnight? Documentary series about turtles? Horror movie?”

FATHER: Porno film. Oh, damn – sorry, Tommy. What I’d really like to watch is – nothing. Switch it off. I want to sit by the fire and talk about old times.

TOMMY: “You’re tired, Father. Your bed is ready.”

FATHER: Bed can wait. Read me the newspaper.

TOMMY (*spreads an imaginary paper*): “Yesterday saw a collapse of the world’s stock markets. Shares plummeted like dead pigeons. Some people lost ninety percent of what they managed to save in fifteen years. Their dreams went up in smoke together with their money –”

FATHER: Enough, Tommy, that’s boring. Do you understand now, son? (*He looks at Johnny who stands as if paralyzed, staring ahead.*) Son?

TOMMY: Oh, sorry, Uncle.

JOHNNY (*coming alive*): Yes, I understand, Father.

FATHER: I’ll give my money to whichever of my children will take me in as a member of the family.

JOHNNY: But how did you – how did you – manage to get all that money?

FATHER: Tommy...

TOMMY: The numbers of lottery tickets which in the last twenty years won the main prize –

FATHER: – all had four to six digits – right, Tommy?

TOMMY: In the four-digit numbers the first digit was never lower than four, and in five-digit numbers never lower than three. Right, Grandpa?

JOHNNY: That still means more than half the tickets.

FATHER: Of course. But –

TOMMY: – the second digit was never zero, four or nine, which leaves us numbers from 4100 to 4399, and from 4500 to 4899. In five-digit numbers it leaves us numbers from 31.000 to – I forgot, Grandpa.

FATHER: Never mind, Tommy.

JOHNNY: Even that still means an incredible number of tickets!

FATHER: Fifteen thousand six hundred, to be precise. One of those had a hundred-percent chance of winning half a million dollars.

JOHNNY: You must’ve paid a lot of money for all those tickets.



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FATHER: Twelve thousand dollars. Half I'd managed to save, the other half I borrowed.

JOHNNY: And you won – half a million?

TOMMY: No.

FATHER: The system was full-proof, but like all systems it had an exception that proved the rule. I was the one on whom God decided to demonstrate the exception.

JOHNNY: You lost twelve thousand dollars?

FATHER: Right. Didn't have enough for a cigar. Just enough for another lottery ticket. So I said to myself: I'll buy one more, the last one, maybe I'll win enough for a box of cigars. I asked the ticket seller to give me just any ticket, the first he laid his hand on. He did, and with that one I won half a million dollars.

JOHNNY (*after pause*): Father, do you know what that means?

FATHER: Yes I do. When I finally got enough money to buy myself the love and care of my children, one of them decided to offer me all that for free. I can't tell you, son, how glad I am that I have no further use for that money. I'll give it to your sister and brother, so they'll leave me in peace.

(*Sister enters from kitchen.*)

SISTER: Am I allowed to go through?

FATHER (*rising*): Of course you are, I'm going back to the comforting stink of my crummy apartment.

SISTER: You can stay if you want.

JOHNNY: I'll go with you, Father. Sweep the floor, tidy up a little –

SISTER: Why not cook his dinner as well – for both of you, since you've become such good friends?

TOMMY: May I go, too, Grandpa?

FATHER: Why not? Enough of us for a youth brigade.

(*Father, Johnny and Tommy leave. Sister picks up the phone and dials a number.*)

SISTER: Hullo? Is Mark there, please?

(*Sister's Husband enters.*)



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

9.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I see that the poverty-stricken uncle has decided to accompany four rich young men.

SISTER (*into the phone*): I'll call back later... (*Replaces phone.*) You don't have to be a genius to guess why.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: He doesn't know. Or does he?

SISTER: Well, it sort of... slipped out.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Oh for heaven's sake...

SISTER: Well it's hardly a secret, Father himself could've told him!

SISTER'S HUSBAND: It doesn't matter, anyway.

SISTER: Of course it does. If we're not careful we can say good-bye to that money.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: We don't need it.

SISTER: Oh?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: We have everything.

SISTER: What about that house in the hills you talked about? And a place for Tommy, when he goes to college?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: He's still a child.

SISTER: Not for much longer. Can't you see? Do you really have eyes only for that tramp of yours?

(*Tommy enters.*)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Not in front of the child. Tommy, have you done your homework?

TOMMY: I'm not a child, Daddy, I'm almost three quarters of a young man.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: All right, when you're a complete young man you may object, but for now you must obey your father and go to your room – have you done anything at all today?

TOMMY: I'm waiting for lunch. (*Sits down behind the synthesizer and plays with the keys.*)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Yes, what happened to that chicken?

SISTER: It's been waiting so long that it turned into a hen. And that hen is me. (*She unties her apron and throws it on the floor. She begins to cry.*)

SISTER'S HUSBAND (*picks up the apron and hands it back to her*): Sometimes it's simply too much –

SISTER: It's always too much. Either lunch is too early, or it is too late.



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SISTER'S HUSBAND: All right, all right.

SISTER: For ten years I've served him and washed his clothes, cooked his meals and run his errands, and now I should quietly let the money go to this – this –

SISTER'S HUSBAND: He doesn't know what he wants. He'll make plans for a while, throw the whole family into confusion, and then he'll go back. To America.

SISTER: I must phone Mark.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: With his help you *will* ensure that Johnny won't get the money. Mark will get it instead.

SISTER: You know perfectly well what has to be done. We must prevent Father's money from ending up in the paws of your – Johnny's –

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Not in front of the child!

SISTER: – you know who.

TOMMY: Miss Alenka? I know her, too.

(Tommy starts playing. Blackout.)

10.

(Lights up. Tommy is still playing, but during the blackout he has changed to another song. Sister is laying the table. Sister's Husband is taking care of glasses, wine, etc. He opens a bottle of red, pours himself a glass, drinks.)

SISTER: Tommy!

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Tommy, for God's sake!

TOMMY *(stops playing)*: Yes Sir, no Sir, yes Madam, as you wish, Madam. *(He gets up and exits through the side door.)*

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Tommy!

TOMMY *(looks back in)*: Yes, Daddy, I've done my homework.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Uncle Mark should be here any moment –

(Mark enters at the main door.)

MARK: And this is the moment. *(He takes off his hat and removes a large chequered scarf.)* Tommy?



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

TOMMY (*takes hat and scarf*): Thank you, Uncle. Nice present, but the hat is too large for me – (*Puts it on his head.*) – and the scarf reaches down to my toes. (*Wraps the scarf round his neck.*)

MARK: I was going to put the present in the car, but then I still had to get petrol, and then, unfortunately, I forgot. I'll bring it next time.

SISTER: Don't overburden yourself.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Glass of red?

MARK (*produces a wallet*): Here, Tommy, so you won't say Uncle Mark doesn't think of his only nephew. (*Offers him a ten-dollar bill.*) Take it.

TOMMY: Why, Uncle? I'm not selling anything. (*He takes hat and scarf out through the main door.*)

MARK: (*still holding the bill*) Tommy, don't make a fool of your uncle –

(*Johnny enters and stops, staring at the bill.*)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Give it to him, he needs it more than anyone else.

(*Mark puts the bill back in his wallet and replaces the wallet.*)

JOHNNY: Well, hello – brother!

MARK: Good evening, brother. Long time no see.

(*They shake hands, embrace, kiss each other on the cheeks, step apart, look at each other.*)

JOHNNY: Do you know I wouldn't recognize you if we met on the street?

MARK: Do you know that I was going to say the same?

JOHNNY: There's quite a lot more of you than there used to be.

MARK: And you have very strange, shining, crazy eyes. What has America done to you?

SISTER'S HUSBAND (*offers each a glass of wine*): Well, to this moving, not to say poignant reunion let us raise our glasses.

(*They drink.*)

TOMMY (*raises an imaginary glass*): Cheers.

JOHNNY: Cheers, Tommy. (*Father enters at the main door.*) Father! – have you come by yourself?



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FATHER: No, I came with my favorite witch. (*Neighbor enters.*) Where did you park your broom, Madam? I wouldn't hang around – in this neighborhood there're so many witches that brooms have to be kept under lock and key.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Will you have a drink before you go? A few glasses of brandy? Or half a bottle, to make it simpler?

NEIGHBOR: After this sort of welcome? (*Leaves.*)

(*Father sticks out his tongue after her.*)

MARK: Hello, Father.

FATHER: What's this now? Where have I left my glasses? (*Tommy pulls glasses from Father's breast pocket and puts them on his nose.*) Thank you, Tommy. (*Examines Mark.*) I've seen you before. (*Slaps his forehead.*) Of course! How stupid of me. You're my eldest son, last seen in these parts about a year ago.

MARK (*embarrassed*): Work, Father, work won't let go of me. People never tire of litigation.

FATHER: Where do you live?

SISTER: Round the corner.

FATHER: Yes, corners are treacherous, you never know what's behind them. But today you've plucked up your courage and come anyway. With a good reason, no doubt.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Come and sit down, Father.

FATHER (*to Johnny*): Son, I want to ask you something. Come to the window.

(*He hobbles to the window, Johnny follows him. Others watch.*)

FATHER: What do you see out there?

JOHNNY: Nothing special, Father. Darkness. Stars.

FATHER: Don't you see a dark cloud? A shadow?

JOHNNY: Trees, Father. Edge of the park.

FATHER: When I came to the door, I heard a strange sound. Listen.

(*In silence, a screech-owl can be heard outside.*)

TOMMY: That's an owl, Grandpa. It's been there for days.

FATHER: Why do you keep saying that I'm deaf?



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

SISTER'S HUSBAND: There's an old wives' tale that someone will die if a screech-owl is heard so close to a house.

FATHER: That's why I'm worried. *(Looks at all of them in turn.)* Are any of you ill?

SISTER: Tommy, bring the soup.

(Tommy goes to the kitchen. Others sit down at the table, Father at the head.)

FATHER: Shhhhhh. Silence.

(In silence, Tommy enters with a tureen of soup, pauses. The sound of a screech-owl is repeated.)

FATHER: Why do you keep saying that I'm deaf?

(Sister takes the tureen from Tommy's hands and puts it on the table.)

SISTER: You're not, Father, I've just put new batteries in your hearing aid.

FATHER: What did you say?

MARK: Mother won't be coming?

SISTER: A nurse will bring her a little later –

FATHER: What? The stuffed partridge? Give me that soup, so I can eat it and leave.

(Sister serves Father, others serve themselves. Father starts eating, smacking his lips.)

SISTER: Father, please.

FATHER: I must hear what I eat – how else will I know if it's good?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Is it good, Father?

FATHER: The best meal I ever had was during the Great War in Romania. As an officer of the Austrian Army I brought a detachment of hussars to a small village where we spotted a pregnant sow. We cut her open, pulled the piglets out one by one and roasted them over a fire.

SISTER: Disgusting. Tommy, go and bring some bread.

(Tommy rises.)



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FATHER: Tommy, sit.

(Tommy obeys.)

FATHER: When the piglets were eaten and we started to lick our fingers, four of my soldiers collapsed and died like dogs. The sow must've had a horrible strange disease. *(He pushes his plate away.)* And now you can go and fetch bread, Tommy.

(Tommy rises and goes towards the side door.)

FATHER: And a sharp knife for your Grandpa.

(Father pulls a small paper-wrapped parcel from his pocket. He unwraps it and produces a large piece of home-made salami. Tommy returns with bread and knife.)

SISTER: Father, I spent more than two hours cooking dinner, and you're going to eat sausage at my table?

FATHER *(cuts a slice of bread)*: I spent more than two years wiping your behind before you learned to use the pot – and you are telling me what I should eat at your table?

SISTER *(fighting tears, rises)*: Eat what you like, Father. Eat what you like. *(Goes out through the main door.)*

SISTER'S HUSBAND: For Christ's sake...

(Father offers Johnny a slice of salami.)

JOHNNY: Thank you, Father. *(He puts the slice in his mouth.)*

FATHER: Do they have sausages like this in America?

JOHNNY: No.

FATHER: There you are.

MARK: Speaking of America, is it true what they say about American women?

JOHNNY: What do they say?

MARK: Well, that they – *(Looks at Father.)* – I don't want to embarrass Father –

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Tommy, go and fetch your mother.



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

FATHER: Go ahead, son, you can't embarrass me more than you did when you were born.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Tommy!

(Tommy rises and goes to the main door. As he reaches it, Sister enters, pushing in Mother in a wheel-chair.)

SISTER: Look, Mother, everybody is waiting for you. Will you eat?

MOTHER: I see nobody, I won't eat, I have a tummy ache.

SISTER: Do you want to sit in your chair? Tommy, help me.

(Tommy and Johnny help Sister transfer Mother from the wheel-chair to the rocking chair.)

MOTHER: Tommy, give me my handbag.

(Tommy puts the handbag in Mother's lap. She opens it, rummages inside it, pulls out two pieces of cotton wool and screws them into her ears. She closes her eyes and starts to rock.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Well, here we are. A happy family.

FATHER: Son, you're an attorney, I want you to represent me.

MARK: Glad to be of help, Father, if I can.

FATHER: I want to sue my wife, affectionately known as stuffed partridge. I want to sue her because after long years of our life together she deserted me just as I most needed her care and consideration. She said I was an objectionable, selfish old man who pissed and messed himself every five minutes. That's an insult. I want the charges brought as soon as possible.

MARK *(after pause)*: Father, you're talking about my mother –

FATHER *(loudly, glancing at Mother)*: I demand a public apology and financial compensation. I won't rest until she's forced to return and take care of me in a manner befitting the wife of an Austro-Hungarian officer.

MARK: I think that won't be necessary, Father, because I have a much better suggestion, which will delight you, I'm sure.

FATHER: Then you won't represent me?

MARK: Father, after considering the matter carefully I've come to a decision: you will get all the care and consideration you need from me.



Uncle from America, Ljubljana City Theater, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1994
Majda Grbac as Sister, Franc Markovcic as Sister's Husband, Slavko Cerjak as Johnny,
Evgen Car as Mark, Matjaz Turk as Father, Gasper Bratina as Tommy,
in the foreground Vera Per as Mother
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

(Silence. Sister and her husband exchange glances. Mother unplugs her ears and laughs, then replaces the plugs.)

FATHER: From you?

SISTER *(abruptly rises)*: I should've known.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I did warn you.

FATHER: How do you mean? Are you coming to live with me in my small apartment?

(Sister sits down.)

MARK: No, Father. You're coming to live with me. As one of the family. You'll eat with us, sit with us, watch television – all your conditions will be met.

FATHER: All of them?

MARK: All of them.

FATHER: Including the additional one?

MARK: Including that one. – What additional one?

FATHER: That you get rid of your wife. I can't share an apartment with someone who thinks I'm a peasant. What's the matter, son, has the soup gone to your face?

MARK: That's not true, Father, Maria thinks very highly of you.

FATHER: Twice so far I've asked you to let me live with you. Before I won the lottery.

MARK: Well, on those two occasions –

FATHER: – there was no incentive, I agree. You said that you *would* take me, even though your five-bedroom apartment was too small, but the problem, you said, was your wife. She was like a poisonous snake, you said, wagging her tongue the way a fly-infested cow wags its tail. You were afraid I'd go hungry.

MARK: She's changed – she used to be terribly nervous – but for a year now she's been taking some pills –

FATHER: Sorry, son. Either she goes or I don't come.

SISTER *(rising)*: Tommy, come and help me with the chicken.

(Tommy rises.)

FATHER: Chicken? *(To Sister's Husband.)* Do you have a chicken farm?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Her imagination appears to have acquired wings, but it hasn't quite taken off.



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SISTER: All right, if you think you are too good for chicken, I'll feed it to the cat.

MARK *(rises)*: For me, in any case, soup was more than enough. *(Turns to go.)*

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Don't be childish, sit down. Christ, what a family.

SISTER: You can say that again. *(Goes to the kitchen and slams the door.)*

MARK: Tommy, where did you put your uncle's hat and scarf?

(Tommy goes out through the main door, Mark approaches Mother.)

MARK: I'm sorry, Mother, that there is no time for a little chat.

(Mother unplugs her ears.)

MARK: I said, I'm sorry, Mother –

MOTHER: Do you see now why I left? *(She replaces her ear plugs.)*

TOMMY *(from the door)*: Uncle?

(Mark wraps his scarf round his neck and puts on his hat.)

FATHER: Good bye, son. Come again with another suggestion.

(Mark wants to say something, changes his mind, leaves.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I have lost my appetite for a week at least. *(Goes out through the main door.)*

FATHER *(rises)*: Tommy, where's my stick?

(Tommy gives Father his walking stick.)

JOHNNY: Won't you stay, Father?

FATHER: Lately I have only two kinds of amusement: spending happy hours in the warm circle of my family, and staring at a blank wall. The latter appeals to me more and more. Come, Tommy, on the way we shall rest a little and listen to the screech-owl.

JOHNNY: Shall I go as well?

MOTHER *(removes her ear plugs)*: You stay, I want to tell you something.

FATHER: There you are, there's no end to delights.

(Tommy leads Father towards the main door.)



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

SISTER (*looks in from the kitchen*): Tommy, don't forget to give your grandfather his pills.

(*She withdraws and slams the door. Father and Tommy leave.*)

11.

MOTHER: Has he gone?

JOHNNY (*pulls up a chair, sits*): We're alone, Mother.

MOTHER: Your brother and sister are pulling strings to have your father declared insane. They want to get hold of his money. They've employed a psychiatrist who'll get ten percent.

JOHNNY (*after pause*): We must prevent that. For Father's sake.

MOTHER: He should give his money to you. Buy that mansion, take him with you, look after him. I don't want to see him in a mad-house, however much he belongs there.

JOHNNY: I *have* been thinking along those lines, but –

MOTHER: You're the only one he has any respect for.

JOHNNY: All the more reason –

(*Sister enters from the kitchen.*)

SISTER: What're you two whispering about?

MOTHER: Take me back.

SISTER: Mother, I've just finished washing up and throwing the whole dinner away, allow me at least one cigarette.

MOTHER: Call a cab.

SISTER: Why doesn't Johnny drive you back, since you're such good friends all of a sudden?

MOTHER: Take me back now, or I will never enter this house again.

SISTER: As you wish, Mother. As you wish.

(*Sister and Johnny transfer Mother from rocking chair to wheel-chair.*)

JOHNNY: See you again soon, Mother.

(*Mother plugs her ears.*)



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SISTER: Why don't you take her, at least you'll see where she lives.

JOHNNY: I must make an urgent call.

(Sister pushes the chair towards the exit, and out.)

12.

(Johnny dials a number.)

JOHNNY: May I speak to Alenka, please... It's urgent...

(Alenka enters at the main door; Johnny doesn't see her.)

JOHNNY: What do you mean, she refuses to speak to me?... I have what?... Disappointed her?... Listen... tell her –

ALENKA *(pulls the receiver out of his hand and speaks into it)*: What crap are you inventing now again, Mother?... You watch too much television, why don't you go to bed?

(She slams the phone down. Johnny looks at her, delighted. Alenka lights a cigarette, sits down on the sofa, remains silent. Johnny sits down next to her.)

JOHNNY: Alenka... I've thought about it and – things aren't entirely hopeless.

ALENKA: Do you know that I had no idea? I heard them talking about it, but I thought that was just – you know... It was your brother-in-law who – in passing – told me that your old man – your father – is sitting on a pile of euros.

JOHNNY: I didn't know myself.

ALENKA: Well, things are pretty clear to you now, I hope.

JOHNNY *(rising)*: The only problem is that he thinks –

ALENKA: – you're sitting on a pile of dollars.

JOHNNY: How can I tell him that he can't live with me until he *buys* the house in which he would like to live with me?

ALENKA: Johnny, you're one of the stupidest men I know. You'd like to be good, but you lack the will. Next to being good you'd also like to be a little bit bad. But you lack the courage to be really bad. So you're neither good nor bad, but a moral drunkard, lurching about.



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

JOHNNY: Alenka –

ALENKA: “I’d like” and “I wouldn’t like” – is that what passes for man in America?

JOHNNY: I’m not in America now. I’m surrounded by shadows from the past –

ALENKA: What about me?

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: Alenka, I’ll do everything to make you happy –

ALENKA: Except what I want.

JOHNNY: I can’t imagine you’d wish my Father anything other than well!

ALENKA: That’s the difference between us: that I wish him well, while all you wish is to be good in his eyes. Even if that’s bad for him. Do you know what’s good for him? To move as soon as possible to an old people’s home, where he’ll have professional care.

JOHNNY: He won’t give me the money if –

ALENKA: You don’t have to tell him.

JOHNNY: I can’t lie to him.

ALENKA: I’m prepared to live with you, but I won’t be your father’s maid.

(She goes to the door. Johnny blocks her way.)

JOHNNY: Alenka... We’ll sort things out, one way or another...

(Alenka pushes him aside and goes out.)

JOHNNY: Alenka...

(Alenka slowly comes back, halts, looks at him. She goes back to the sofa, sits, produces a packet of cigarettes, sticks one in her mouth, looks at Johnny, waiting for light. Johnny approaches, examines all his pockets, can’t find a lighter, shrugs. Alenka rummages in her handbag, takes out a lighter, gives it to Johnny. He lights her cigarette. She thanks him by puffing smoke into his eyes.)

(Enter Sister, Tommy and Sister’s Husband.)

SISTER: I’m afraid it’s a bit late for dinner.

ALENKA: Doesn’t matter, my doctor’s forbidden me to eat chicken.

SISTER’S HUSBAND: God, how quickly women stick their claws into each other. Why aren’t you drinking? *(Goes to the bar.)*



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SISTER (*goes back to the main door*): Yes, have a drink. I'll carry the shopping into the house, as usual. (*Goes out.*)

JOHNNY: Let me help. (*Follows her out.*)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Tommy, go and help your mother.

(Tommy follows Johnny out. Sister's Husband looks at Alenka.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Well?

ALENKA: Well?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Shall I drive you home?

ALENKA (*rises*): My future husband will drive me.

SISTER'S HUSBAND (*short laugh*): Into the first ditch or into the nearest tree?

ALENKA: I will tell him where.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: No doubt. The only thing I don't understand is why you keep changing your mind.

ALENKA: Because I don't know what I want. Satisfied? (*She goes.*)

(Blackout.)

13.

(Lights. Tommy, Father, Neighbor. Father is wearing a black suit, with sleeves and trousers a little too short.)

FATHER (*tugging at his tie*): What's this piece of cloth hanging round my neck?

TOMMY: Tie, Grandpa.

FATHER: In my days ties used to be different. They didn't hang so stupidly –

TOMMY: They stood up?

FATHER: It's too tight, I don't like it.

NEIGHBOR: Stand still for a moment, so I can loosen it for you –

FATHER: Why did you tighten it as if you meant to strangle me in the first place?

NEIGHBOR: My God, look at your shoes – Tommy, bring me some polish.

(Tommy moves towards the door.)



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

FATHER: Tommy, stay here.

NEIGHBOR: You can't – not with shoes like that –

FATHER: Why didn't you clean them before?

NEIGHBOR: I didn't look.

FATHER: It's not enough that my back's being used as a chopping-block,
now you'd like to polish shoes on me!

NEIGHBOR: All right, if you aren't ashamed of them –

FATHER: Ashamed because you're not doing the work for which you're
paid?

(He raises his stick to hit Neighbor. Tommy restrains him.)

TOMMY: Grandpa, no...

FATHER: You're right, Tommy. Not worth the wood. *(Rummages in his
pockets.)* Where's my handkerchief? I have a cold.

NEIGHBOR: You don't have a cold.

FATHER: Now you're a doctor as well as a witch?

NEIGHBOR: Tommy, go and find your Grandpa a hankie.

(Tommy moves towards the door.)

FATHER: Tommy! – stay. I'm not going to wipe my nose with a borrowed
handkerchief. I'm going to wipe it with this piece of cloth that you
call a tie – so everybody will see what sort of care I enjoy.

NEIGHBOR: Wait, I'll get you one... *(Leaves.)*

FATHER *(grinning)*: See now how to get rid of women? Remember this
trick, you'll find it useful more often than you imagine. *(Confiden-
tially.)* Tommy, now that we're alone... You wouldn't lie to your
Grandpa, would you?

TOMMY: No.

FATHER *(hobbles to the dining table)*: What's this?

TOMMY: A table laid for lunch, Grandpa. Plates, spoons, glasses.

FATHER: I can't remember ever seeing flowers on this table. And this –
I'm not stupid, you know – these are champagne glasses. This
table's been laid for an important guest.

TOMMY: I don't know.

FATHER: They're coming to take me away, aren't they? *(Tommy shrugs.)*
This table's been laid for their friends the doctors, who'll declare
me senile and lock me up. Right?



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TOMMY: I don't know, Grandpa.

FATHER: They've got you on their side as well. What did they promise you? A new bike? I'm off.

TOMMY: No, Grandpa – where?

FATHER: South America.

TOMMY: You must wait, Grandpa –

(When Father almost reaches the door, Sister pushes in the wheel-chair with Mother. She's followed by Johnny, Sister's Husband and Alenka, each with a parcel. Mother, too, has a small parcel in her lap. Sister carries the largest parcel under her arm. Father stands in front of the wheel-chair and stares at Mother.)

FATHER: Why're you dressed in black?

MOTHER: You tell me. When we met I was in white, all white, no darkness, all light.

FATHER: You've gone crazy, woman.

SISTER: Mother's always in black, Father – haven't you noticed?

FATHER: Let me go.

SISTER: Tommy, help your Grandpa to the table.

FATHER: Tommy, push this stuffed partridge out of my way.

JOHNNY: Don't upset yourself, Father. Come and sit down. *(Takes Father by the elbow and gently propels him towards the table.)* Look what we've prepared for you –

FATHER: I know very well what you've prepared for me.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Then why not have a drink?

SISTER *(pushing the wheel-chair to the rocking chair)*: Help me, Tommy.

(Tommy relieves her of the parcel and puts it on the floor next to the rocking chair.)

JOHNNY: Come, Father, sit down.

(Father stops in front of the rocking chair and looks at Mother, whom Sister and Tommy are about to lift from the wheel-chair.)

FATHER: I'm not going to share a table with Judases. *(He lowers himself into the rocking chair.)*

SISTER: Father, that's Mother's chair.



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

FATHER (*plugs his ears with his forefingers*): I can't hear anything.

SISTER (*pushes the wheel-chair to the table*): Stay here, Mother, we're going to start soon anyway.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Drink, anybody, while we're waiting?

FATHER: Must go.

JOHNNY: Where?

FATHER: Business in town.

SISTER: What business?

FATHER: Most men have business in town. At least once a year. Tommy, call me a cab.

JOHNNY: All right, Father, if you have business in town I'll take you.

FATHER: Urgent business.

JOHNNY: Let's go, then.

FATHER: Help me, son.

(Johnny helps Father to the door and out.)

SISTER: Wonderful. *(Goes to the kitchen and slams the door.)*

14.

(Neighbor enters with a large handkerchief.)

NEIGHBOR: I saw them leaving – where're they going? *(Approaches Mother and shows her the handkerchief.)* What am I supposed to do now, wipe my own nose?

(Mother reaches towards the table and picks up the nearest spoon.)

MOTHER: Wipe the cutlery.

SISTER'S HUSBAND *(to Alenka)*: Come to the garden, I want to show you something.

(Alenka puts down her glass and goes to the door. Sister's Husband follows her out.)

NEIGHBOR *(wipes the spoon with the handkerchief, puts it down, sits, wipes her nose)*: I've had enough. Tell your daughter we have to negotiate new terms.



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(Goes to the bar and pours herself a glass of brandy.)

MOTHER: It's all been done. The old man will move in with Johnny, and you can resume staring into space, your favorite occupation.

NEIGHBOR: What?

SISTER *(enters from the kitchen)*: Tommy, where's Daddy?

TOMMY *(looking out of the window)*: In the garden.

SISTER: Go and tell him I need him. Now.

TOMMY: I think he needs a coat.

SISTER: Don't be silly, why?

TOMMY: He's just huddled up to Miss Alenka as if he were cold.

NEIGHBOR: These children... Don't miss a thing, do they?

SISTER: Come here, so I can smack you!

TOMMY *(retreating towards the main door)*: Must fetch Daddy.

(He turns and collides with Uncle Mark, who enters carrying two very small parcels.)

MARK: What's the hurry?

TOMMY: Uncle Mark! Hat and scarf...

(Mark bends forward, Tommy unwinds his scarf and takes off his hat.)

SISTER: Tommy, when you've taken uncle's hat and scarf to the hall, where he could've left them on his way in, you must help him bring all the other parcels from his car.

MARK *(offers the smaller parcel to Tommy)*: This one's for you.

TOMMY: I can't, Uncle Mark, my hands are full. *(He takes hat and scarf to the hall.)*

SISTER: Won't you relieve yourself of that weight? Your arms must be aching.

MARK *(acutely embarrassed, puts both parcels on the table)*: How are you, Mother?

MOTHER *(looks at the two parcels)*: Thank you for the present.

MARK: Well, actually... Why aren't you in the rocking chair?

MOTHER: Is that a new suit? You must be doing well.

MARK: No, Mother, it's an old one, I just haven't been wearing it, it was hanging in the wardrobe –

MOTHER: Give me my handbag.



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

(Mark picks up Mother's handbag and puts it in her lap. She opens it, takes out two pieces of cotton wool and plugs her ears.)

MARK: Father's not here yet?

SISTER: He's packing. He's decided to accept your offer.

MARK (*astonished*): Well, as a matter of fact...

(Enter Sister's Husband, Alenka and Tommy.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Uncle Mark! Have you decided to sacrifice half an hour of your precious time? Father's gone to town to look at an old people's home.

NEIGHBOR (*rising*): I know why they're late. They're buying tickets for America.

MARK: Actually, it's quite convenient that Father's not here, because –

SISTER'S HUSBAND: – you've come with another plan for solving the family crisis. (*Goes to the bar.*)

MARK: This time I've looked at the matter from every angle, consulted specialists, worked out a plan which is optimal for everybody concerned –

SISTER'S HUSBAND (*offers him a glass of whiskey*): Here, on the rocks. Like your plan.

MARK (*takes the glass*): – thank you – plan, which –

MOTHER (*unplugs her ears*): Take me back.

SISTER: Mother! – have you forgotten why we're here?

MARK: It's important that you hear my plan, Mother.

(Mother re-plugs her ears.)

MARK: Without you, no plan would have a chance of working in the long run. The fact is, we've made an elementary error.

(Father enters, followed by Johnny. They pause at the door. Mark doesn't see them.)

MARK: We've been thinking about Mother and Father as two separate problems. But we can't solve one without the other. That's why I want to suggest – (*He turns and sees Father.*) – want to – suggest – hello, Father –



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FATHER: Go ahead, son. Suggest.

MARK: Actually, I wasn't thinking of anything in particular.

FATHER: I'd be surprised if you were.

MARK: All I wanted –

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Come, Father, sit down.

(Father lowers himself into the rocking chair and starts to rock.)

SISTER: Tommy...

(Tommy sits down at the synthesizer and starts to play "Happy Birthday." Sister, Sister's Husband, Alenka, Johnny and Mark sing along. They pile up all the parcels near the rocking chair. Father keeps rocking without reacting.)

NEIGHBOR: I did bring your hankie, but you weren't here, so I wiped my own nose with it. All best from me, too. And now I must go.
(Leaves.)

SISTER: Father, wouldn't you like to come to the table?

(Tommy resumes playing "Happy Birthday.")

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Tommy, for Christ's sake –

(Tommy stops. Father gets up, goes to the table and sits down.)

SISTER: Come, Tommy, help me.

(She goes to the kitchen, Tommy follows. Others sit down at the table. Sister's Husband pours wine.)

JOHNNY: Won't you open your presents?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: After lunch, no one's going to steal them.

MOTHER *(removes her ear plugs)*: And if anyone does, they'll bring them back to complain.

SISTER'S HUSBAND *(raises his glass)*: Let's drink a toast to the four young men who're celebrating their birthday on the same day.

(Alenka and Johnny get up and raise their glasses. Father doesn't react. Sister brings roast potatoes. Tommy brings a huge chicken.)



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

SISTER: Couldn't you wait? (*Picks up her glass.*) To your health, Father...
(*She notices that everybody is staring at the chicken.*) Anything wrong?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: No. It's just that there seems to be no end to surprises. Let's sit down.

(*They all do.*)

MOTHER (*removes ear plugs*): I'm not going to eat.

SISTER: Please don't be your usual self, Mother, not today.

JOHNNY (*rises*): Before we begin I'd like to say a few words.

(*Father doesn't react. Mother plugs her ears. The others wait. In silence, Neighbor appears at the door and – still with the same handkerchief – loudly blows her nose. They all look at her. She makes a gesture of apology. They all look at Johnny again.*)

JOHNNY: This is an exceptional day. Four young men have reached four times 22 years. But it's an important day for another reason as well. I might as well give you the news now, when we're in the spirit of goodwill and able to look at things as members of a family whose concern for the well-being of their father is not the last thing in the world –

SISTER'S HUSBAND: This looks like going on for some time – (*Sits down.*)

SISTER: Food will get cold.

JOHNNY: I'll be brief. Father will contribute the money for the purchase and renovation of the mansion in Black Forest. Half will be mine, the other half his. He is going to live with me as a family member, with complete care, in his own wing. (*He sits down. Awkward silence. He rises.*) I said Father was going to live with me. I should've said, with me and Alenka. (*Sits. Silence continues.*)

SISTER: I hope you won't be sorry, Father.

MARK: I've nothing against it, of course, although – from the legal point of view – things are not so simple, especially not as far as Father's half after his death is concerned –

SISTER'S HUSBAND: For Christ's sake, he's not dead yet. (*Raises his glass.*) To your health, Father, and to a very long life.

(*With the exception of Father and Mother they raise their glasses and say "To your health" and "Long life," etc.*)



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SISTER (*with a pointed look at Alenka*): Although some would no doubt be happier if it wasn't too long.

TOMMY (*who's poured himself a glass of whiskey at the bar*): To your health, Grandpa, and looking forward to the the birthday of five young men.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Tommy, for Christ's sake –

(Tommy downs the whiskey like an old sailor.)

JOHNNY: It won't do him any harm.

(Near the door, Neighbor, forgotten by everybody, blows her nose.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: We really do behave like – come, Madam – (*He starts to pour wine in an empty glass.*) – or shall we give you a bottle of brandy, so you won't feel lonely at night?

(Neighbor bursts into tears and leaves.)

SISTER: Don't expect her to be happy. She's going to lose her job.

TOMMY: I think she's in love with Grandpa.

JOHNNY: It won't happen tomorrow, it'll take at least a year to get everything ready.

SISTER: Does anybody want to eat, or shall I chuck it into the trash?

MARK (*rising*): As a matter of fact I'm not really hungry – I think I'll just – you know, a lawyer's work is never done – once again, all the best, Father – the present is there, among the others –

FATHER (*suddenly coming alive*): Present? For me?

MARK: Of course.

FATHER: Look at that, I had no idea these were all presents for me. (*Rises.*) I must see at once what's inside them.

SISTER: Later, Father – the food's getting cold.

FATHER: Gratitude is harder to warm up than soup. Look at this, I've been given things for another 88 years of life. And what expensive wrapping paper! How do I know who's given me what?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: It doesn't matter –

FATHER: It does. I want everyone to pick up their present and hand it to me personally.



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

(Reluctantly they all obey his command. When they're all holding their parcels, Father steps before them.)

FATHER: Line up, so I can see you.

(They line up. One of the parcels has remained on the floor.)

SISTER: That's from Mother.

FATHER: Leave it there. Well, now that I've seen what you've brought me you can put the parcels back on the pile. Except you, Johnny, and you, Tommy.

(He waits for the parcels to be placed back on top of one another.)

FATHER: And now I want you to line up again.

(He waits for them to do so.)

FATHER: Today is the first day of the last fifth of my life. It is also the day when I can tell you that I'm no longer dependent on you. So it's only right and proper that I give you each a little present myself...

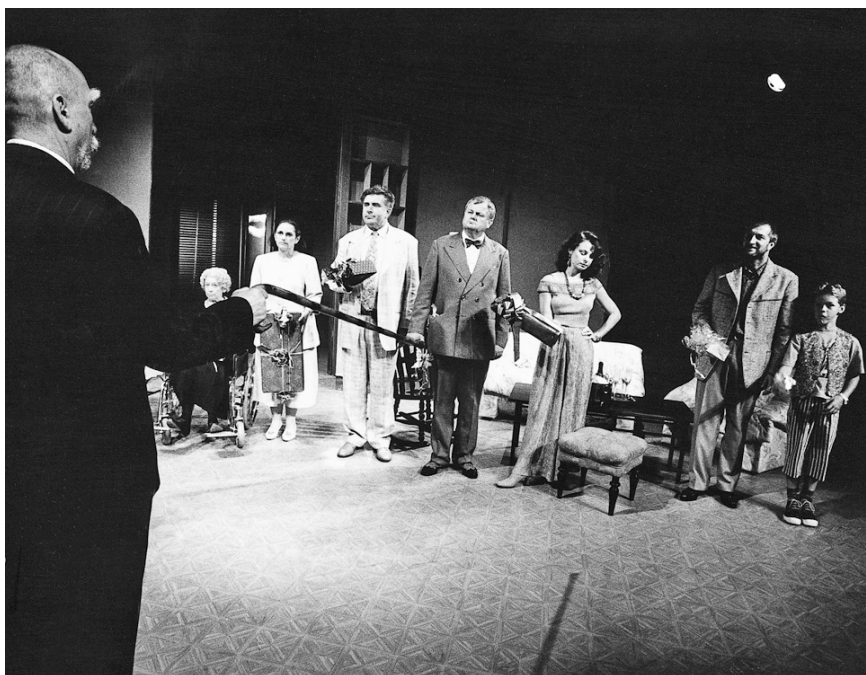
(He approaches Sister and blows a raspberry into her face. He moves on to Sister's Husband and sticks out his tongue at him. He pauses in front of Mark and kicks him in the shin. He pauses in front of Alenka and looks at her.)

FATHER: You're hardly a daughter-in-law of my dreams. But because I'll have to live with you I'll give you a present some other time.

(He stops in front of Mother and looks at her.)

FATHER: For you, my dear, I have the most fitting present of all. *(He turns around, bends down and loudly farts into Mother's face.)* Happy birthday to all of you. Tommy...

(Tommy sits at the synthesizer and plays "Happy Birthday." Father produces a box of matches, strikes one and holds the flame to the nearest parcel. As the parcels catch fire, curtain.)



Uncle from America, Ljubljana City Theater, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1994
Vera Per as Mother, Majda Grbac as Sister, Franc Markovcic as Sister's Husband,
Evgen Car as Mark, Violeta Tomic as Alenka, Slavko Cerjak as Johnny,
Gasper Bratina as Tommy, in the foreground Matjaz Turk as Father
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

Act Two

(Reception room of the mansion in Black Forest. Wood-panelled walls, covered with a multitude of Alenka's paintings. Main door is at the back, at the end of a short wide corridor, from which doors lead to the kitchen and the east wing of the mansion, and – on the right – to the west wing. Through a large window can be seen lawn, rose bushes, edge of the forest. Heavy furniture: luxury sofa, a smaller sofa, couple of easy chairs, discreet table lamps. Bookshelves, built into walls, stacked full with what appear to be neatly arranged books. In a special wooden case, an expensive stereo.)

1.

(As the curtain rises, the stereo is playing Mozart. Alenka and Tonko, the dumb butler, are standing in the middle of the room. Alenka, who is barefoot and dressed in a paint-spattered white coat, is holding a brush and a palette. Tonko, who is dressed like an English butler, is holding a framed picture of a wooded landscape, Alenka's dominant theme.)

ALENKA: Do you think it'll make the room look cluttered if I hang it here?

(Tonko shrugs.)

ALENKA: Tonko, you know nothing about art – to you all paintings look the same...



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(Tonko runs his eyes over the paintings which look very much alike, then looks at the one in his hands which seems to be no different; he shrugs.)

ALENKA: Good thing you have no tongue – at least you can't say anything stupid.

(Tonko obligingly nods.)

ALENKA: Suppose I remove the one above the arch and replace it with this one, which is a lot more – striking – wouldn't you say?

(Tonko leans the picture against the side of the sofa, steps back and briefly studies it. Then he studies the one above the arch. He pretends not to see that there is almost no difference between the two paintings. He nods and walks towards the door on the left.)

ALENKA: Where're you going?

(Tonko gestures to explain he is going to fetch a ladder.)

ALENKA: Good boy... And don't forget to make some coffee.

(Tonko exits to the left. Alenka puts down the brush and palette and picks up a cordless phone. She dials a number.)

ALENKA: Director of the gallery, please... Thank you... *(Changes tone.)* Peter, how are you, it's me, Alenka... Working harder than ever... I'm going through a period of mad creativity, each painting is like – an orgasm!... As soon as one is finished, I'm dying to start another!... *(Silly giggle.)* Have you arranged anything?... The list! – oh my God, haven't I sent it?... I paint so much that the world's no longer real for me... No, I've got it, it's in my *atelier*... hang on a minute...

(She puts the phone down and rushes out to the left, nearly colliding with Tonko, who is returning with a step-ladder.)

ALENKA: Go ahead, Tonko, I'll be straight back...



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

(Tonko sets up the ladder under the arch and climbs up it. He takes the old painting off the hook and gets ready to climb down. Johnny comes in through the main door and walks down the corridor. He is dressed as a hunter and is carrying a pair of stag's antlers. He walks past the ladder and looks at Tonko.)

JOHNNY: Tonko, I can't believe it... How did you know?

(Tonko shrugs and produces an obsequious grin. Johnny takes the painting from his hands and leans it against the side of the sofa, next to the new one. He hands Tonko the antlers.)

JOHNNY: Aren't they beautiful? My first trophy, it deserves the pride of place... There's a ring at the back, it's hung in the same way as pictures... Will you or shall I?

(Tonko shoots a worried glance at the side door, tries to explain something, then obligingly nods and carefully hangs the antlers on the hook above the arch.)

JOHNNY: A little higher on the left, I think... Too much, a little lower... That's it!...

(Tonko climbs down.)

JOHNNY: Take the ladder away and make some tea.

(Tonko walks towards the door on the left, nearly colliding with Alenka, who comes rushing back. She picks up the phone.)

ALENKA: I'm sorry, Peter, I can't find that list, I'll make another tomorrow... *(Brief pause.)* Hullo?... *(Puts the phone down.)* Bastard! *(She turns to Johnny and studies his enigmatic grin.)*

JOHNNY: Don't you see?

ALENKA: I see that you've shot another few bottles with your hunting buddies.

(Johnny proudly points at the antlers.)



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ALENKA: What?!... Tonko!

JOHNNY: It's a tradition for the first trophy to hang above the main entrance.

ALENKA: Hang those horns above the bed, so they'll remind you of what stags do at night. This is where I'm going to hang my painting.

JOHNNY: Another one?

ALENKA: Don't you find it vulgar, hanging horns among art?

(Tonko comes in through the door on the left.)

ALENKA: Tonko, I was out of sight for less than two seconds, and already you've betrayed me.

(Tonko twists and uses gestures to put the blame on Johnny.)

ALENKA: Take that horrible thing away and hang my picture. And where's that coffee you promised?

JOHNNY: Tea, Tonko.

(Tonko goes out to the left. Alenka lights a cigarette.)

ALENKA: I'm sorry, I've nothing against your antlers, hang them in the corridor or wherever, but not here, this is a reception room, the impression people get is very important.

JOHNNY: What people?

(Tonko returns with the ladder and sets it up under the arch. He climbs up it to remove the antlers.)

ALENKA: People who'd be eager to come if they didn't have to leave their cars at the foot of the hill and walk the rest of the way through mud and brambles.

JOHNNY *(takes antlers from Tonko's hands and puts them on the floor)*: Why don't you get to know someone at the Roads Department? You may persuade him – for a favor – to extend the village road to our door.

(He picks up one of the two paintings and hands it to Tonko, who climbs back up the ladder and hangs the painting above the arch.)



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ALENKA: It seems I'll have to do that, since the only thing *you* are interested in is killing animals.

(Tonko carries the ladder out again. Alenka looks at the painting above the arch.)

ALENKA: Well? You have to admit that there is no better place for it. That it reaches out into space and – somehow – gives it that final distinctive touch.

JOHNNY: Wasn't it doing that before?

ALENKA: Not this one.

JOHNNY: Dark-brown frame with a slight gap in the lower right corner?

(Alenka realizes that her new painting is still leaning against the side of the sofa, and that Tonko has hung back the old one.)

ALENKA: Oh shit! *(Yells.)* Tonko!

(Tonko enters from the left and brings a tray with coffee and tea. Simultaneously the door at the end of the corridor opens to admit Neighbor and Mother in a wheel-chair pushed by Sister's Husband. They proceed down the corridor.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: What's the matter? You keep complaining that no one comes to visit you, yet you're gaping at us as if you all had your tongues cut off, not only one.

JOHNNY: Hello, Mother. Father is resting.

SISTER'S HUSBAND *(pushes the wheelchair to the front)*: I'm ripe for a good rest myself, if not for retirement.

ALENKA: We're quite inaccessible, as you see – worth remembering. Tonko, serve the guests.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Whiskey and coffee, if it isn't too much.

NEIGHBOR: I'll have whiskey without coffee, so it'll be simpler.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Mother, what will you have?

MOTHER: Glass of water.

(Tonko transfers coffee and tea from the tray to the small table, picks up the tray and walks towards the side door, nearly colliding with Father, who enters leaning on a walking stick.)



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FATHER: I saw you coming, so I came straight down. *(Suddenly embarrassed by his lack of reserve.)* I can go back up again, if I'm bothering you.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Mother is here, she's come to see you.

ALENKA *(picks up her brush and palette)*: Well, you won't be missing me, then. I'll go and mess about with my eyesores. *(Walks towards the main door.)*

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Where *is* this studio of yours? Wouldn't mind having a look. *(Follows her, turns back.)* Whiskey can wait. As for coffee, tell the eloquent butler not to bother.

(Alenka and Sister's Husband exit.)

JOHNNY: Coffee is here –

NEIGHBOR: I'll have it, if none one else wants it. Actually, I'd prefer tea. *(Picks up the tea cup.)* Oh, I'm sorry now I said whiskey, I'd be much happier with a touch of rum.

MOTHER: Glass of water.

JOHNNY: I'll get it, Mother. *(Goes out through the side door.)*

(Father goes to the mini-bar, returns with a bottle of rum, pours some into Neighbor's tea.)

FATHER: Drink up, so I can pour you some more.

NEIGHBOR: It'll do for now. *(Sips.)* Uuuuhhh ...

FATHER *(to Mother)*: Have a drop yourself, so you won't look so miserable.

MOTHER: Glass of water.

FATHER: I'll drink for both of us, then. *(Takes a swig from the bottle.)*

NEIGHBOR *(holds out her cup)*: There's room for some now.

(Father pours her some more rum, takes another swig, puts the bottle back on the mini-bar. Johnny returns with a glass of water.)

JOHNNY: Won't you have a drink, Father?

FATHER: I wouldn't mind a touch of rum, actually.

JOHNNY *(hands Mother a glass of water)*: Help yourself.

FATHER: Good of you, son. *(Reaches for the bottle of rum.)* Can I pour a few drops into the lady's tea?

JOHNNY: Of course.



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NEIGHBOR (*downs the contents of the cup in one go*): Here, so there'll be room for it.

(*Father fills her cup with rum, takes a swig from the bottle.*)

JOHNNY: All right, I'll have coffee, if no ne wants it. (*Picks up the cup of coffee.*)

MOTHER: This water's no good, it tastes very strange. (*Hands the glass back to Johnny.*)

FATHER: Probably stale, go and pull a bucket of fresh one from the well. Shall I go?

JOHNNY: No, Father, you have visitors. (*Puts coffee down, goes out through the side door.*)

NEIGHBOR (*after pause*): Very peaceful here.

FATHER (*as if waiting for this*): Thank you very much for such peace. Sometimes the only thing I hear is a dog barking a mile away on the opposite hill. Or, if I'm lucky, a quarrel between the two lovers.

MOTHER: At least you have enough space.

FATHER: Thank you for all that space. The entire western wing is mine: seven rooms and six miles of corridors. In one room I sleep, the others I visit to see when the last piece of plaster will fall off. There're birds' nests in some of the rooms.

(*He takes a swig from the bottle, pours Neighbor some more in the cup.*)

NEIGHBOR: Oh...

FATHER: They won't let me into the kitchen. This former sailor, whose tongue was cut off by savages in Africa, brings food to my room. When they have visitors, which thank God isn't too often, they lock me in. As for my pills, I never get them on time. (*He leans forward, lowers his voice.*) I think they're trying to murder me.

(*Johnny enters with a glass of fresh water, overhears Father's words.*)

FATHER: "I think they're trying to murder me," says this fellow in this film on TV. But then I stopped watching because it was obvious how it would end.



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JOHNNY (*hands glass to Mother*): Father, did you tell Mother that we've installed an intercom, so you can ring when you want something and speak to us from your room?

FATHER: No, I didn't tell her.

JOHNNY: Because of the pills, so you always get them on time. Is this better, Mother? Fresh water from the well.

MOTHER (*takes a sip*): Do you sleep well?

FATHER: I keep dreaming I'm in a cage. I try to escape, but I can't, so I yell: "Help, help!" No one hears me. (*Raises the bottle.*) May I, son?

JOHNNY: No need to ask, Father, this is your home.

(*Father drinks.*)

MOTHER (*to Johnny*): What about you, are you happy, now that you have what you wanted?

JOHNNY (*goes to the mini-bar and pours himself a glass of whiskey*): What is happiness, Mother?

MOTHER: I'm asking you.

JOHNNY: I certainly didn't want this place because I thought it would make me happy.

MOTHER: No, you wanted it to make *her* happy. Is she?

JOHNNY: There are no simple answers.

FATHER: It's a pity that being lucky isn't the same as being happy.

JOHNNY: You must've been happy at least once in your life.

FATHER: Oh yes. When I got my first pair of leather shoes. The following Sunday I went to church to show them off. It was raining cats and dogs, and I arrived covered in mud to my knees. But I didn't care. I knew that under all that mud my shoes were polished, clean and new. And knowing that gave me such a warm feeling that if someone had asked me if I was happy, I'd have said without hesitation: yes. At that particular moment. At any other time – no.

JOHNNY: What would make you happy, Father?

FATHER: Something quite simple, son. If the witch who comes up from the village to wash and clean for me were paid off, and these duties were again given to this old witch here, then, I think, I'd count myself at least lucky. And there's one more thing I'd like you to do for me. I'd like you to persuade your mother to move from the old people's home into one of the rooms in my wing, so we could sit



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quietly on the terrace each evening and – without saying a word – watch the sun setting behind the hills.

JOHNNY (*after pause*): What do you say, Mother?

MOTHER: Give me some more water.

(Johnny hands her the glass, she takes a sip and hands the glass back to Johnny.)

FATHER: Son, forget that I said anything. (*Walks towards the side door.*)
It's time for me to check how the birds are doing in the room next to mine.

MOTHER: If your father came to my room in the old people's home, knocked before entering, fell on his knees before me and with tears in his eyes asked my forgiveness for all the evil I've had to endure at his hands, then, perhaps, I'd feel it was my duty to lessen his burden of guilt before he departs for hell.

(Father, who was standing near the door, turns and comes back. Mother plugs her ears. Alenka and Sister's Husband return through the main door.)

FATHER: Because you'll be in hell long before me I want to ask you a favor. Would you – in case you aren't burned to a cinder by the time I get there – ask Lucifer to stick me on the spit next to you, so I'll be able to amuse myself by listening to your screaming?

SISTER'S HUSBAND: A real arts centre. Exhibitions, dramatic performances – good thing I'm interested only in money, otherwise I'd move here and start writing poetry.

MOTHER: Take me back.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Home sweet home, eh, Mother? Eh, Father? (*He pushes the wheel-chair towards the exit.*)

FATHER: Tell my daughter they're feeding me only grass and bran here, like an animal.

NEIGHBOR: Oh – I forgot.

(She pulls a roasted chicken from her shopping bag and hands it to Father. With the chicken under his arm, Father walks out through the side door.)



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SISTER'S HUSBAND: Well, that's it. Mission accomplished.

ALENKA: Don't forget the party.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I can hardly wait.

(Pushes the wheel-chair out. Neighbor follows.)

JOHNNY: What party?

ALENKA: I'm giving a garden party for thirty guests.

JOHNNY: I don't know anything about it.

ALENKA: I've just told you. Do you think you could shoot us a deer and some hares?

(Blackout.)

2.

(Lights. Tonko enters at the main door, carrying a large tray of empty and half-empty glasses, cups, mugs, etc. He takes it to the kitchen. At the back, Alenka and Johnny are saying good-bye to the last departing guests. Alenka enters, comes forward, lights a cigarette, sits on the sofa, remains silent. Johnny comes forward with a glass of wine in one hand and a cigar in the other.)

JOHNNY: Another drink? *(Alenka remains silent.)* I think it was a good party. *(No response.)* There were quite a few people.

ALENKA: Twelve, if you include four young men. Of the other eight two were your sister and brother-in-law, of the remaining six one was your hunting crony who invited himself, and only five could be described as guests.

JOHNNY: Well?

ALENKA: Of the thirty who were invited!

(Tonko returns and starts dusting, cleaning ashtrays, etc.)

JOHNNY: Yes, but they were important people.

ALENKA: Two village school teachers, two minor clerks and one architect. Of those who were invited because they are important, not a



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single one came. Not the mayor, not that supercilious bitch from the local TV.

JOHNNY (*takes his hunting gun off the hook*): You can't force the game to step before the barrel of your gun.

ALENKA (*rises*): Keep your hunting philosophy for your rampagings through the woods. All I want is what is my natural right. Which is all the more difficult if you're obstructed by someone who should be your ally.

JOHNNY: Alenka! – do you want me to bring people round here at gunpoint?

ALENKA: How can you be so consistently stupid? People don't come because they expect to get some fresh air. Instead they find themselves in a half-ruined building that smells like a public toilet. They expect to be able to have an intelligent chat in the company of like-minded people, but encounter instead four young men who insist on being the center of attention and barge into every conversation with four different opinions – as if they were the sole authority on everything in the world!

JOHNNY: You know perfectly well –

ALENKA: I do. I know perfectly well that one decrepit old man insists on hanging onto half of the building – the half that's most suitable for a gallery, painting school, meetings –

JOHNNY: Alenka –

ALENKA: You've let me down.

JOHNNY: Alenka –

ALENKA: I'm sorry, Johnny. I can't any more. (*Walks to the side door and turns.*) Actually that might be the best solution. You and him staying here alone. He with his stick, you with your gun.

(Alenka goes out through the side door. Johnny, gun in hand, walks out through the main door. Tonko stops dusting and pours himself a glass of brandy. Father enters through the side door.)

FATHER: I've pissed myself.

(Tonko ignores him.)

FATHER: Who's going to change me?



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(Tonko goes past Father into the kitchen.)

FATHER: I am deaf, you're dumb, not the other way round.

(Tonko returns and resumes dusting.)

FATHER: It's two o'clock and there's no sign of my witch, what's going on?

(He raises his stick and knocks Tonko on the back. Tonko slowly turns and glares at Father.)

FATHER: Bring me a cigar. I want to smoke.

(Tonko goes past Father into the kitchen.)

FATHER: Don't forget that you're my servant, too. Everything here was bought with my money.

(Tonko returns with a glass of water on a tray. He offers it to Father. Father looks at him. Tonko smiles. Father takes the glass and pours the water on Tonko's head. Tonko grabs Father by the lapels of his dressing gown and pulls him up. Johnny enters through the main door. He is wearing his hunting clothes.)

JOHNNY: Tonko! *(He points his gun at him.)*

(Tonko lets go of Father and puts up his hands. Alenka enters through the side door.)

ALENKA: For God's sake!

(Johnny lowers his gun. Father clutches at his heart, staggers to the sofa, collapses.)

FATHER: He attacked me!

ALENKA *(to Johnny)*: How dare you point a loaded gun at my butler?

JOHNNY: It's not loaded.

(Tonko uses gestures to explain that Father poured water over his head.)



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JOHNNY: He attacked him, I saw it.

ALENKA: Don't be stupid. He serves him, cleans after him –

FATHER: Either he goes, or I go.

ALENKA: In that case the choice is very simple. I'll go. *(She walks towards the side door.)*

JOHNNY: Alenka –

FATHER: Where is my witch from the village? It's two o'clock, I've crapped on myself, I'm hungry, I need a bath.

ALENKA: She won't come any more. She said she'd rather clean stables than be a slave to an evil old man.

FATHER: I'll sue her.

ALENKA: Tonko, come and help me.

(She leaves through the side door. Tonko follows.)

FATHER: Son? Are you the boss in your house? Or are you, too, a spineless wimp, like the rest of my bastards? I should've had myself castrated when I was fifteen.

(Johnny lowers his head, puts the gun down, pours himself whiskey.)

FATHER: Is that all you have to say?

JOHNNY: No, Father. I'm afraid that some things – that the moment has come –

FATHER *(after pause)*: You've started well. Continue.

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: Father...

FATHER: Son?

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: Father...

FATHER: Son?

JOHNNY: Father, this place isn't for you. Here you'll always be unhappy.

FATHER: Like you?

JOHNNY: I have no choice.

FATHER: Neither have I.

JOHNNY: Yes you do. And you shouldn't dismiss an opportunity that might bring you at least some relief.

FATHER: An old people's home.

JOHNNY: You could still come and visit –

FATHER: Whenever?



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JOHNNY: You'd always be welcome.

FATHER: For lunch?

JOHNNY: Of course.

FATHER: Dinner?

JOHNNY: As well.

FATHER: Could I sit on the terrace sometimes and watch the sun going down?

JOHNNY: As often as you wish.

FATHER: Then it'll be simpler for me to stay here. Why sleep somewhere else and travel here every day to do what I'm doing already?

JOHNNY (*after pause*): I don't want to be rough. Please understand me.

FATHER: What's this uniform you're wearing – have you become an officer?

JOHNNY: A hunter, you know that.

FATHER: I've mislaid my glasses. And that rifle, is that a machine gun?

JOHNNY: No, Father, a hunting gun.

FATHER (*gets to his feet*): Pick it up, I want to see if you can hold it properly.

JOHNNY: Of course I can.

FATHER: Do me a favor, son – pick up the gun and point it towards the door.

(Johnny sighs, picks up the gun and points it towards the main door. Father steps in front of the barrel.)

FATHER: You said you couldn't be rough. With the gun in your hands it'll be easier. Come on, march your father to an old people's home. Left right, left right...

(Leaning on his stick, he marches towards the exit.)

(Blackout.)



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4.

(Lights. Tonko enters at the side door and starts to dust, tidy up, etc. Neighbor enters at the main door, carrying a large basket filled with roast chicken, salami, bananas, etc.)

NEIGHBOR *(wheezing)*: Jesus... What a struggle... When I was young, people were moving from village to town... Now they're moving from town to the back of beyond... *(Sits down on the sofa.)* Where is everybody?

(Tonko ignores her.)

NEIGHBOR: Guests are usually offered a drink...

(Tonko ignores her.)

NEIGHBOR: Are you deaf as well as dumb? *(Rises.)* Even better, at least I won't have to talk to you. It's nice when nobody hears you, then you can say whatever you like.

(She pauses by the mini-bar, reaches for the bottle of brandy. Tonko raps her fingers with the end of the duster.)

NEIGHBOR: Where did you learn your manners? Go and tell them I've brought food for the old man, so he won't die. At least not of hunger. I'll be taking care of him from now on, the way I used to. I miss him, although he's an awful bastard at times.

(She reaches for the bottle again, and again Tonko gives her a rap across the fingers.)

NEIGHBOR: You're impertinent, they're going to hear about this. *(She goes to the side door and yells.)* Do you hear me? You have visitors, aren't you glad? *(Silence.)* A house of ghosts. *(She walks towards the main door and yells.)* Where have you disappeared to?

(Alenka enters at the side door, walks up to Neighbor and stops behind her back.)



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NEIGHBOR: Have you finally eaten each other? *(She turns and sees Alenka.)* Oh Jesus... Now I really need something to prop me up.

(She walks to the mini-bar and reaches for the bottle of brandy. Tonko gives her a rap with the duster.)

NEIGHBOR: Tell him not to do that, because I'll complain to Johnny and then he'll have to pack his bags. In any case I can do what he does a hundred times better. The old man wants me back.

ALENKA: The old man has moved to an old people's home. I suggest you follow him. Tonko, see the lady to the door.

(Tonko picks up Neighbor's basket and carries it towards the main door.)

NEIGHBOR: Don't be saucy, Dumbo, give me that basket, I've brought salami, chicken and Havana cigars.

ALENKA: Smoke one yourself. As for salami, you can have a picnic on the way to the bus stop.

(Tonko grins and opens the door.)

NEIGHBOR: I've always known what you're like. But I never thought you could be even worse.

(Goes to the door, pulls the basket from Tonko's hands and leaves. Tonko returns to the mini-bar, picks up a bottle of whiskey and, using mimicry, asks Alenka if she wants a drink.)

ALENKA: Not now, Tonko. But you go ahead.

(Tonko pours himself whiskey.)

ALENKA: Sometimes I wonder what you'd have to say if you still had your tongue. Sad, really, when you think of all the things you can't do without it.

(Tonko picks up the duster and resumes cleaning.)



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ALENKA: This afternoon you'll start disinfecting the western wing.

(Tonko bows and continues cleaning.)

ALENKA: Then we'll hire builders, decorators, glaziers! Empty corridors and rooms will be turned into a gallery. Tonko! – we'll open a permanent exhibition of the best works of the best alternative artists! We'll have gala openings, one a week, we'll have crowds of VIPs, especially from abroad. We're going to make it big, Tonko! My paintings will hang in all the places you've visited as a sailor, from China to... Monte Carlo.

(Tonko bows and continues cleaning.)

ALENKA: And now I feel so good that you may pour me that whiskey.

(Tonko pours whiskey, Alenka switches on stereo: Mozart.)

ALENKA: To our success. And to a long, fruitful cooperation. Pour yourself another.

(Tonko pours whiskey for himself, they touch glasses and drink.)

ALENKA: Do you like Mozart?

(Tonko shrugs.)

ALENKA: To tell you the truth, he gets on my nerves. But he's part of the image – people who count swear by him. Cheers.

(They touch glasses and drink. Neighbor, Father and Johnny enter at the main door. Father carries Neighbor's basket containing chicken, salami, etc. Alenka stares at them in complete disbelief.)

NEIGHBOR: Good thing I met them. Show me the way, Father.

(Father carries the basket out through the side door. Neighbor follows.)

NEIGHBOR: Just a minute. *(She walks back to the mini-bar, pours herself a large brandy.)* This is going to go down really well. *(She*



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drinks up, puts the glass down, picks up the duster and raps Tonko across the fingers of the hand in which he is holding his drink.)
Since when are servants allowed to drink whiskey?

(She sticks the duster into Tonko's side pocket and follows Father out through the side door.)

ALENKA: Why did you bring him back?

JOHNNY: He looked at the home and asked many questions. He liked most of what he saw. Then he suddenly said that he wanted to stay here. And die here.

(Alenka puts her glass down, walks up to Johnny and attacks him with her fists.)

ALENKA: Why didn't you stay in America? Why did you come back and ruin my life?

(Johnny tries to restrain her.)

ALENKA: Tonko, help me...

(Tonko picks up the tray, quickly loads it with some cups and glasses, and takes it out to the kitchen.)

ALENKA: Oh God... I'm so alone... *(She starts to cry.)*

(Blackout.)

5.

(Lights. Late evening. Father, wearing slippers and dressing gown, shuffles in through the side door. He pauses at the window, looks out. He goes to the mini-bar and takes a swig from one, then from another bottle. He sees the cordless phone. He picks it up, dials a number, holds it to his ear.)

FATHER: Speak up, I'm hard of hearing... You are who?... My daughter?... Of course you're my daughter, what else could you be, since



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I'm your father... Give me Tommy... He can't be doing his homework at ten in the evening, why doesn't he come to visit me?... Very bad line?... Perfectly normal at my end...

(Puts the phone down, returns to the mini-bar, takes a swig from one, then another, then from a third bottle. Goes to the window and stares out. The sound of a screech-owl can be heard. Father re-adjusts his hearing aid and presses his face to the window pane. The sound of a screech-owl is repeated three times. Father picks up the phone again and dials a number.)

FATHER: Who am I? Obersturmbahnführer of the Austro-Hungarian Army, decorated for exceptional valor on the Russian front... What do I want?... I'm lonely, I'd like to talk to someone... Are you a boy or a girl?... Boy... How old are you?... A little younger than my grandson Tommy... They won't let him visit me any more... Me? – I'm a little older than you, but not much... If we ran a mile I'd still reach the goal only an hour or so after you... I live in an enchanted castle in the middle of Black Forest... Have you ever heard the death bird?... You haven't... *(Goes to the window.)* Listen...

(He presses the phone to the window pane. The sound of a screech-owl is heard twice, as if ordered. Father puts the phone to his ear.)

FATHER: You haven't heard it?... Maybe you need a hearing aid. I've got one, would you like to borrow it?... I first heard this bird a year ago in the city park... It must've followed me...

(Johnny enters through the main door, in pyjamas, dishevelled, in a dark mood. He goes to the mini-bar and pours himself whiskey. Drinks.)

FATHER: Do you like going to school?... Not much... That's how it should be... And now I have to go, because – I won't start explaining my problems, otherwise you'll have a nightmare... What must you confess?... You're not a little boy... you're a little girl... Never mind, that's a little lie, compared to those I have to live with... Maybe you'll meet my grandson Tommy one day.... He plays the American piano really well... Good-bye.



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(He puts the phone down and lowers himself on the sofa. Johnny pours himself another whiskey.)

JOHNNY: Won't you have one, Father?

FATHER: I don't drink, son, as you know. Except now and then a touch of brandy, if it's good. Yours is all right.

(Johnny pours a glass of brandy and hands it to Father. He sits next to him on the sofa. They sip.)

JOHNNY: Father...

FATHER: Son?

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: My brother and sister used to respect you.

FATHER: They did.

JOHNNY: They no longer do. Why?

FATHER *(after pause)*: Because they found out that I'd never been an officer of the Austro-Hungarian Army. I looked after horses of the second battalion of the Hussars near Budapest. A uniformed stable boy.

JOHNNY: I've always found it comforting to believe that you were an officer.

FATHER: So have I. *(Pause.)* You see, I was afraid there wouldn't be enough of me. So I stuffed myself with old newspapers, imaginary events. With achievements that God granted others, although I'd asked him often enough not to leave me out altogether.

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: Father... *(Father looks at him.)* That money I was supposed to have lost during the crash on the Stock Exchange – there never was any.

FATHER: There never was any crash?

JOHNNY: No, Father. There never was any money.

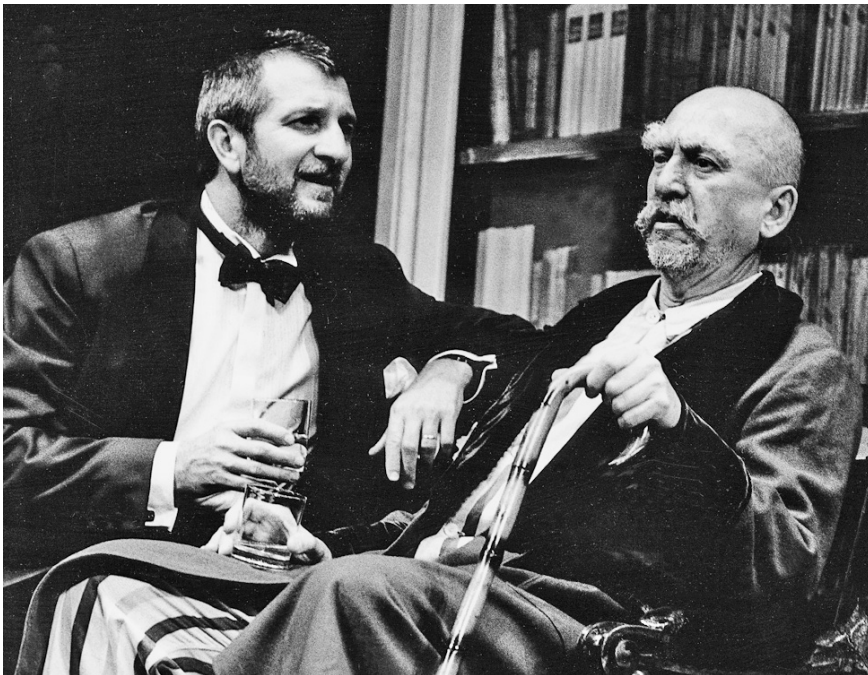
FATHER: But you spent fifteen years in America!

JOHNNY: I worked as a waiter. Supporting a family. I was married, I have a son. *(Pause.)* I still don't know what happened, but one day I got tired and – came back.

FATHER: And told a lie about a million dollars.

JOHNNY: At first it was meant as a joke. But when I saw that everybody believed me, even Alenka – especially Alenka – I gradually fell under the spell of my own invention. I wanted to – lift off again – repeat the flight that many years ago ended with a crash.

FATHER: And your wife? Child?



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Slavko Cerjak as Johnny, Matjaz Turk as Father
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



UNCLE FROM AMERICA

JOHNNY: I'm flying, Father. I don't know how it's going to end, but I must wait until I land, one way or another. The only thing that gives me the feeling I can control events is the gun. So simple. You aim, you pull the trigger, you kill. You haul it back home, you skin it. You've achieved. The victim doesn't object.

FATHER (*rises and shuffles towards the side door*): Good night.

JOHNNY: Father...

FATHER: We don't have to respect each other any more, son. Isn't that a relief? (*He leaves.*)

JOHNNY: Father, have you taken your pills?

(Johnny sits still for a moment, then rises, pours himself a glass of whiskey, drinks it, goes to the window, stares out. Picks up the hunting gun, comes forward, looks at it. Goes down on his knees. Alenka, wearing a nightie, enters through the main door. She comes to a halt, watches Johnny, waits. Johnny pushes the gun away from himself, buries his face in his hands and begins to cry. Alenka approaches, sinks to her knees, puts her arm round Johnny's shoulders.)

JOHNNY (*assumes a foetal position in her arms and allows her to comfort him like a baby*): Alenka... help me...

ALENKA: Poor little Johnny... You worry too much... Why don't you leave things to me?

JOHNNY: I don't want to lose you.

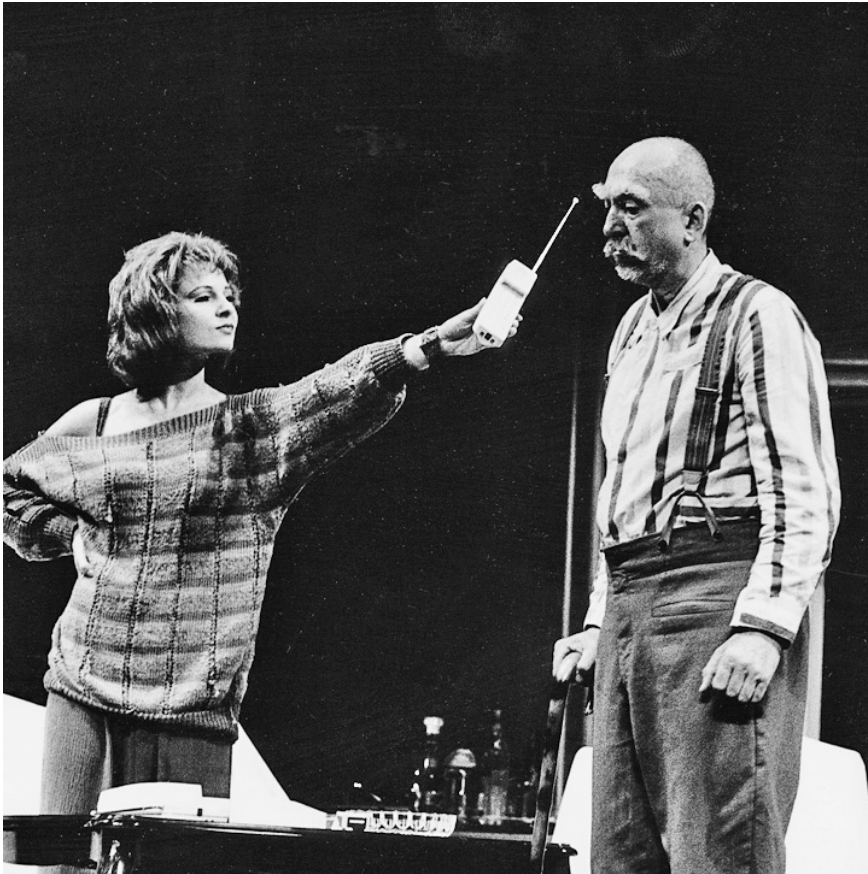
ALENKA: I'm not a button on your shirt, to fly off just like that. Trust me...

(Blackout.)

6.

(In darkness, at the back, sounds of builders at work, scraping, knocking, replastering, etc. Tonko enters carrying two framed oil paintings; he takes them out through the side door. Alenka enters through the main door, speaking into the cordless phone.)

ALENKA: No, Bill, I have enough oils, I need some prints... I want to present an overview of the artistic achievements of this area... Your prints have always... how shall I put it?... all right, they've always



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made me green with envy... That's why I want them here... How did I succeed? *(She laughs.)* By struggling hard, struggling like mad... You know how it is, everything's possible now, everybody's claiming his lot – you can't hang around – niches are few, they're filling fast... Money?... Money isn't a problem...

(Father enters through the side door, not leaning on his walking stick but holding it in his hand.)

FATHER: What's going on?

ALENKA: Sorry, Bill, can I call you back?... *(Puts the phone down.)*

FATHER: Who's brought the builders, why're they replastering walls?

ALENKA: Because they need replastering, and because we're opening a gallery.

FATHER: Not in my wing.

ALENKA: In the wing in which you have a room.

FATHER: There're birds in the room next to mine, I feed them, I won't let anything happen to them.

ALENKA: Birds belong in the forest.

FATHER: And I, where do I belong?

ALENKA: We've built you a garden hut. We've put in everything, bathroom, central heating, intercom, TV, what else do you want?

FATHER: Give it to the Gypsies – I'm not going to live in a wooden shed.

ALENKA: Then you'll just have to stay in your room, so you won't frighten the visitors. Under lock and key.

FATHER: Where's my son?

ALENKA: He's gone shooting – it seems he hasn't got enough horns.

FATHER: Where is the phone?

ALENKA *(picks up the phone)*: Who do you want to call?

FATHER: My daughter, to tell her to come and take me away.

ALENKA: Let me help you. *(She dials a number.)*

(Blackout.)



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7.

(Lights. Tonko is standing at the mini-bar, preparing a cocktail. Alenka enters through the side door, sits on the sofa, lights a cigarette, opens a fashion magazine. Tonko brings her the cocktail.)

ALENKA: Thank you, Tonko. Tell me – have you remembered everything?

(Tonko nods.)

ALENKA: Have a drink.

(Tonko pours himself a glass of brandy. Johnny walks in through the main door. He hangs the gun on the hook, goes to the mini-bar, pours himself whiskey. Tonko watches him, sipping brandy. Johnny comes forward and looks at Alenka. She is turning the pages of the magazine.)

JOHNNY: How is Father?

ALENKA: Tired.

JOHNNY: Why?

ALENKA: He's been to town.

JOHNNY: Did you drive him?

ALENKA: Your sister. There and back.

JOHNNY: Why?

ALENKA: He went to change his will. Wants to give half of the mansion to your sister.

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: I don't believe that.

ALENKA: Ask Tonko, he overheard it. He was helping him down to the car.

(Johnny looks at Tonko, who vigorously nods.)

JOHNNY: And my sister, what did she say?

ALENKA: She said that the old man has finally come to his senses.

JOHNNY: But he can't – I mean, the ownership of his half is part of the contract we signed when we bought the house –

ALENKA: He hasn't done it yet. He just went to ask if he can. They told him he can let his half to ten Gipsy families, if he wants to.



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(Johnny goes to the mini-bar; this time Tonko immediately serves him whiskey.)

JOHNNY: What shall we do?

ALENKA *(puts the magazine on the sofa and rises)*: You're going to live here with your sister. She'll put out a sign, "Rooms for rent," and you'll go hunting every day so that occasional tourists will be able to eat pheasant and partridge – instead of chicken, which they would have to eat otherwise.

JOHNNY: I meant – what shall we do about the gallery?

ALENKA: I've dismissed the builders. I need a long holiday. On my own. Tonko, how far have you got with packing?

(Tonko bows and leaves through the side door.)

JOHNNY: Alenka – wait... Father can't do that without me, we bought the house together.

ALENKA: No, Johnny dear, he paid for everything, have you forgotten?

(She walks towards the side door.)

JOHNNY: Alenka – please.

ALENKA: I need three to four months. We'll talk when I return.

JOHNNY: Alenka – *(He blocks her way.)* Please –

ALENKA: Johnny, it's late, I'm tired, and I'd like to leave early in the morning.

(She tries to push him away. Johnny resists, grabs hold of her hands.)

JOHNNY: We can't just – let everything go to ruin –

ALENKA: There wasn't anything that could go to ruin. Where have you lived all this time, on the Moon?

JOHNNY: Perhaps I wasn't consistent enough in fighting for my – our rights – but –

ALENKA: But now it's too late.

(She wants to leave, he blocks her way.)

JOHNNY: One more chance, Alenka. *(He goes down on his knees and wraps his arms around her.)*



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ALENKA: Johnny, this is highly embarrassing.

JOHNNY: One more, Alenka, please. I'll speak to Father. We'll find a solution.

ALENKA: Good old Johnny. You never let yourself down, do you? Now you'd like to persuade me it would be to our advantage to have your sister here.

JOHNNY: I swear I'll sort things out.

ALENKA: I've heard that too often.

(Father rings the bell, indicating he needs his pills. Johnny rises to go. Alenka blocks his way.)

JOHNNY: Father needs medication.

ALENKA: You've just sworn you'll sort things out.

JOHNNY: First I have to give Father his pills.

(He wants to go, Alenka blocks his way. The bells rings insistently. Johnny stares at Alenka, horrified.)

ALENKA: Do you know who is prepared to exhibit his paintings here? One of the best-known contemporary artists. He's had exhibitions in London, Paris, New York!

FATHER *(via intercom)*: I need my pills.

JOHNNY: I must go.

FATHER: Son? What's going on? *(The bell rings insistently.)*

ALENKA: You begged me to give you one more chance.

FATHER *(via intercom)*: Tonko!... Alenka!... Johnny!... I can't find my pills...

(Tonko hurries in through the main door; he stops, looks at Alenka.)

JOHNNY: Alenka, I must go up – *(He tries to push her aside.)*

FATHER *(via intercom)*: Help!...

ALENKA: Look!... I know this isn't the most appropriate moment, but look – touch – here – *(She takes his hand and places it on her tummy.)*

FATHER *(via intercom)*: I don't want to die!

JOHNNY: Alenka!

ALENKA: Can you feel his little heart? Your son!



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(Johnny sinks to his knees, wraps his arms around her, presses his head against her tummy.)

FATHER *(via intercom)*: Son, where are you?

ALENKA: Don't you feel it?

(Blackout.)

8.

(Lights. Through the main door enter Tonko, Sister who is pushing Mother in wheel-chair, Neighbor, Mark, Sister's Husband, Alenka, Johnny, Tommy. Sister's Husband brings the synthesizer.)

JOHNNY: And now wine for everybody, Tonko.

MOTHER: Glass of water.

SISTER: Juice for Tommy.

TOMMY *(sits down at the synthesizer)*: I'll have wine as well.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: You're drunk already, I wonder why.

NEIGHBOR: I'd prefer a glass of brandy, if it's all the same.

ALENKA: Whiskey for me.

SISTER: I need strong coffee, to recover.

JOHNNY: Have you remembered, Tonko?

(Tonko starts preparing drinks. The others sit or stand. Tension among them.)

MARK: My wife couldn't stay – she hates funerals – I won't stay either –
I'll just have a glass of wine, if the offer still stands.

JOHNNY: Tonko?

ALENKA: Leave him alone, he's only got two hands.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Can I help?

SISTER: You want to help a servant serve drinks?

NEIGHBOR: Oh, I mustn't forget – where did I put them? *(She looks behind the sofa and picks up a basket in which we can see three roasted chickens.)* Someone will have to carve them, we can't eat them like this, shall I take them to the kitchen?

JOHNNY: Come, I'll show you.



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(Neighbor follows Johnny out through the side door.)

MOTHER: I won't eat.

ALENKA: Come on, Mother, chickens are such a rare treat in this family that you can't say no to a little drumstick.

SISTER: Or maybe you'd prefer a fox, or a badger – here they don't go shopping, they shoot their lunch through the kitchen window, whatever happens to scurry past.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: For Christ's sake, not today!

(Tommy starts to play a funeral march.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Tommy! – stop that, or I'll smack you as I haven't done for a long time – I swear I will!

(Tommy, with tears in his eyes, runs out through the main door.)

SISTER: Wonderful.

MARK: It's not nice that we can't – on a day like this –

SISTER *(to her husband)*: Go after him and apologize.

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I'm not going to bother him now – let him cry in peace.

(Tonko has prepared all the drinks. He lifts the tray to serve them.)

ALENKA: Tonko, put the tray down, everybody can take their own drink, go and bring the sandwiches.

(Tonko puts the tray down and goes towards the side door.)

SISTER: And a glass of water for Mother, if it isn't too much.

MOTHER: I don't want anything.

ALENKA: Glass of water, Tonko.

(Tonko leaves. Mother opens her handbag, takes out two pieces of cotton wool and plugs her ears. Sister's Husband, Mark and Alenka take their drinks.)

MARK: The funeral was beautiful. Pity, though, that the priest couldn't remember Father's name.



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SISTER'S HUSBAND: He was so drunk he nearly fell in the grave.

SISTER: Horrible. He started to bury Tony, continued with John, and finally buried Peter.

JOHNNY (*looks in through the side door*): How many for chicken?

(They exchange glances, but no one responds.)

ALENKA: Stop playing the housewife and behave as befits the moment – we have guests.

(Johnny obediently enters, picks up a glass of wine.)

SISTER: I don't know why I bother–

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Oh for Christ's sake, you'll just take them back and we'll be eating them for the rest of the week – what's so unusual about that?

MARK: The funeral was beautiful. Pity, though–

SISTER'S HUSBAND: – that Father couldn't be one of the mourners. I'm sure he'd say a thing or two about your speech.

SISTER: I still can't believe that he died the moment he made up his mind about moving to an old people's home.

(Johnny looks at Alenka.)

JOHNNY: He didn't decide to move to an old people's home.

SISTER: I drove him there. He asked me to. He signed a contract. Didn't he tell you?

(Sister, Sister's Husband and Mark exchange glances.)

JOHNNY: This is not possible.

ALENKA: We'll never know what he decided to do. In any case, he is dead. And now I'm getting a little hungry myself – (*Walks towards the side door.*) – Tonko?

JOHNNY: But you told me –

ALENKA: I was wrong – that changes nothing.

JOHNNY: Everything! – that changes everything!

ALENKA (*walks up to him*): Keep a grip on yourself, O. K.?

JOHNNY: It's my fault. I didn't give him the pills.



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ALENKA: He's obviously distressed because of his father's death, he's a little confused, I think we should get him to lie down.

JOHNNY: I wanted to, but – I was on the phone and I couldn't – didn't want to be rude – and then – it was already too late because – (*He looks at Alenka.*) No, this hasn't happened.

ALENKA: Of course it hasn't – you're becoming deranged.

JOHNNY: He didn't get his pills –

ALENKA: Of course he did – are you crazy? Tonko went up in the evening to prepare his pills as usual, and the next morning we found him dead! (*Tonko enters from the kitchen with a handful of paper plates.*) Tonko, did you give Father his pills, that evening when he died, did you?

(Tonko looks at everybody in turn, looks at Alenka, then nods.)

JOHNNY: No – no –

ALENKA (*to Sister's Husband*): We must get him to bed, he needs sedation, help me, he's very confused – if he doesn't come to his senses we'll have to call a doctor.

JOHNNY (*snatches the gun off the hook and points it at Alenka*): The first to come near me will have to look for his brains on the ceiling.

(Astonishment. They all stare at Johnny. Tommy enters through the main door, halts, stares at Johnny. Neighbor comes in from the kitchen with a platter of chicken pieces.)

NEIGHBOR: Oh Jesus Mary!

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Well, this was one of the more interesting funerals I've attended, but too much of a good thing is a bad thing. (*Walks towards the exit.*) Tommy. (*Looks at his wife.*) You're staying?

SISTER (*pushes the wheel-chair with Mother towards exit*): Well, Mother, you never got your glass of water.

MOTHER (*pulls the plugs from her ears*): Tell them not to hang their black suits in the wardrobe – it's my turn now.

JOHNNY (*lowers his hunting gun*): Mother –

MOTHER: The whole family's mad.

(She plugs her ears again. Sister's Husband holds the door open, Sister pushes the wheel-chair out, Sister's Husband follows. Tommy pauses at the door, stares at Johnny.)



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JOHNNY: Tommy...

(Tommy runs out through the door. Mark puts down his glass, wraps scarf round his neck, puts on his hat, walks towards the exit, turns.)

MARK: The funeral was beautiful, though. *(He leaves.)*

NEIGHBOR: And I was so looking forward to the chicken. *(She puts the platter on the nearest table and walks towards the exit, turns.)* Well, you're alone now. That's what you wanted. *(She leaves.)*

(Silence. Johnny hangs the gun on the hook. Tonko takes paper plates back through the side door. Alenka lights a cigarette.)

ALENKA: I didn't know. Sorry.

(Blackout.)

9.

(In darkness, stereo begins to play Mozart. Lights. Johnny, with the gun in his hands, enters through the main door. He hangs the gun on the hook, goes to the mini-bar, pours himself whiskey, stands, sips, lost in thought. Alenka enters through the side door. She is wearing a paint-spattered white coat. She switches stereo off, replaces Mozart with another CD, switches it on again. Thunderous rock music: Motorhead. Johnny winces. Alenka lights a cigarette and begins to gyrate to the rhythm of the music.)

JOHNNY: Not so loud! *(He springs to the stereo and lowers the volume.)*

What on earth is this?

ALENKA: Mozart that doesn't get on your nerves. Tonko likes it, you don't?

(Alenka turns the volume so high that the noise becomes unbearable. She takes off her coat, throws it on the sofa and begins to gyrate in a suggestive manner. Johnny walks out through the main door. Tonko appears through the side door, halts, watches Alenka. He is dressed as a French chef, with apron, peaked cap, etc., holding a ladle. Alenka beckons him to join her. He does, they dance together, without touching.)



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Violeta Tomic as Alenka, Slavko Cerjak as Johnny
Directed by Dusan Mlakar



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Alenka grips one end of the ladle and holds on to it as they dance. Tonko presses the other end of the ladle against his navel. She loosens her grip and makes a couple of masturbatory moves. She laughs. Tonko grabs her hand, emitting strange, animal-like noises. Alenka pushes him away, crosses to stereo and switches the music off.)

ALENKA: Don't try to rush things, Tonko. *(She pours herself whiskey.)*

(Johnny comes in through the main door with some letters and a newspaper, which he is reading. He puts the letters on the table and continues to read.)

ALENKA: Something interesting?

JOHNNY: A piece about the opening of your gallery.

ALENKA: What?! Let me see! No – read it to me! *(She runs to the sofa, sits, assumes an air of importance.)* Slowly, so I can savor every word.

JOHNNY: It's very short.

ALENKA: Never mind. Are you listening, Tonko?

(Tonko nods.)

JOHNNY: Are you sure?

ALENKA *(impatiently)*: Why're you torturing me?

JOHNNY *(reads)*: "There is no need to waste words about the gallery that opened two days ago in the renovated old mansion in Black Forest. The idea of housing a permanent exhibition of local artists would have merit if it was supported by the majority of these artists – and if the selection were made by someone who knew what he was doing. Instead, we were forced to witness an almost obsessive desire of the woman who organized the event to sneak her brushwork among the paintings of those two masters who agreed to take part without making prior enquiries. Even worse – she tried to overshadow their work with the sheer quantity of her paintings, which indeed hang everywhere one cares to look. Her landscapes affect the observer like a blunt surgical knife – one feels that one's eyes are under attack, but it's not easy to say what's worse – the picture or the frame –"

(Johnny folds the newspaper. Tonko tiptoes out of the room. Alenka rises, looks for cigarettes, pulls one from the pack. Her hands are



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visibly shaking, her face is twisted. She lights the cigarette and aggressively puffs the smoke into the air.)

JOHNNY: Some journalist is having a field day, you just weren't particularly nice to him.

(He goes to comfort her. She blows cigarette smoke into his face and attacks him with her fists. Then she breaks, slackens into his arms, bursts into tears, sinks to her knees, and Johnny with her; enfolded by his arms, she cries bitterly, her whole body shaking. Tonko appears at the side door and watches.)

JOHNNY: I'm sure others will be more positive –

ALENKA: I don't want anyone to write about me! I won't allow it!

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: We still have each other.

ALENKA *(moves away, looks at him)*: What?

JOHNNY: Alenka, I – I – really do love you.

ALENKA: What good is love I cannot feel? *(She walks towards the main door.)*

JOHNNY: Alenka! – our child!

ALENKA *(turns)*: What? – Oh, that... I was wrong. Sorry.

(She turns to go. Johnny remains on the floor. Tonko disappears into the kitchen. Alenka comes back.)

ALENKA: You did hang the antlers above the bed, but then you forgot why they are there.

(She switches on stereo: Motorhead. Holding her head high, she marches towards the exit. Lights slowly dim to blackout.)

10.

(In darkness, music fades and is replaced by the ringing of the phone. Lights slowly rise. The phone keeps ringing. A woman's laughter can be heard in the depths of the building, followed by a man's voice. The ringing stops, only to start again. Alenka rushes in through the side door, dishevelled, wearing a dressing gown under which she is naked. She picks up the phone.)



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ALENKA: Yes... He's not here... He went to the old people's home to fetch Mother... In an hour or so, I should think... Who?... Police inspector?... I'll tell him...

(She puts the phone down, wraps the gown round her body, tightens the belt. Looks worried. Sees a packet of cigarettes, lights one. Through the main door enter Tonko, Johnny who is pushing Mother in her wheel-chair, Sister and Tommy. Alenka doesn't see them until they reach the reception room.)

ALENKA *(shocked)*: You can't be here already!

JOHNNY: We met by the bus stop – they were already on their way.

SISTER: I went to fetch Mother myself – Tommy wanted to get the synthesizer.

ALENKA: There was a call from – well, nothing important – you take care of the guests, I must finish something –

(She rushes towards the side door, nearly colliding with Sister's Husband, who comes running in wearing nothing but underpants. He is pressing stag's antlers to his forehead – Johnny's first trophy.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Have you ever been screwed by a Viking? They had horns on their heads as well, for extra support – *(He jumps up and down.)* – Hoo hoo, hoo hoo –

(He becomes aware of Johnny, Mother, Tonko, Sister and Tommy. He freezes in a very unflattering pose. Mother opens her handbag, takes out two pieces of cotton wool, plugs her ears. Tonko grabs an empty bottle and breaks it by hitting the side of the mini-bar. Holding the jagged end in front of him, he slowly approaches Sister's Husband.)

ALENKA: Tonko, no!

JOHNNY: Tonko!

(Sister's Husband, using antlers as a shield, strikes a defensive pose; they face each other, Tonko poised for attack.)

MOTHER: Bring me a glass of water.



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SISTER'S HUSBAND: For Christ's sake, can't we behave like adults?

(Tonko makes a move to strike; Johnny grabs hold of his arm.)

JOHNNY: Tonko! – no!

(Sister's Husband carefully backsteps towards the side door.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: I'm leaving... Okay? *(Still holding the antlers as a shield, he withdraws.)*

ALENKA: So am I.

(She walks towards the side door. Tonko attacks her with the broken bottle. Johnny again restrains him. Alenka goes out. Johnny pulls the bottle from Tonko's hand. Tonko staggers to the sofa, collapses, begins to cry. Johnny looks at him, astonished.)

SISTER: Tommy, take your synthesizer – we're leaving.

TOMMY: No.

SISTER: Tommy –

TOMMY: No.

JOHNNY: Take it, Tommy, it's yours, I bought it for you.

(Tommy runs out through the main door.)

SISTER: Tommy... *(She follows him.)*

(Johnny looks at Mother.)

MOTHER *(removes her ear plugs)*: Don't look to me for comfort. I knew what was going on.

JOHNNY: Mother!

MOTHER: From the very beginning.

JOHNNY: Why didn't you tell me?

MOTHER: None of my business. Your father had the same sort of thing with Neighbor when he was younger. I knew, but I never said anything. God punished them both. She ended up having to wipe his behind!



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(She plugs her ears and closes her eyes. Sister's Husband, now fully dressed but still holding the antlers, looks in at the side door and quickly crosses to the main door. He hands the antlers to Johnny.)

SISTER'S HUSBAND: Your trophy.

(As he reaches the door, he turns to say something, but can't find the words. He shrugs and leaves. Alenka comes in through the side door, dressed, carrying a suitcase. She walks towards the main door.)

MOTHER: Give me a lift.

ALENKA: Gladly, Mother. You, too, would rather be somewhere else. I understand you. *(She grabs the wheel-chair and pushes it towards the main door. Looks at Johnny.)* Well? Won't you open the door for your Mother?

(Johnny walks to the door and opens it. Alenka pushes the wheelchair out. Looks at the antlers in Johnny's hands.)

ALENKA: Satisfied?

(Tonko emits a loud sob. Alenka looks at him, then back at Johnny.)

ALENKA: Time to leave – this place has turned into a home for the disabled. *(She goes, the door closes.)*

JOHNNY: Alenka –

ALENKA *(looks back in)*: Innocent I came, and innocent I'm leaving. I may've been thinking aloud, but you were the one who acted.

(Alenka leaves. Johnny slowly comes forward, goes to the mini-bar, pours two large whiskeys, crosses to Tonko and offers him one. Tonko slowly looks up. They stare at each other. Tonko rises and quickly walks through the side door. Johnny stands, glass of whiskey in each hand. He drinks one, then the other. He slowly returns to the mini-bar and puts down both glasses. Tonko walks in through the side door. He's carrying a suitcase and – in the fold of his left arm – a raincoat. He pauses and looks at Johnny. They stare at each other. Tonko proudly marches out through the main door.)



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11.

(Johnny goes to the window, stares out. Crosses to stereo, switches it on: Motorhead. Johnny recoils, fumbles with the buttons, switches it off, breathes a sigh of relief. Pours himself another whiskey. Crosses to the synthesizer. Starts playing with the buttons. He triggers off a pre-programmed funeral march. He panics and pushes blindly at the buttons, trying to switch it off. He plugs his ears with his forefingers. Inspector enters through the main door – rain coat, hat, briefcase. Johnny attacks the buttons again. Inspector watches him for a few seconds, then puts down his briefcase, quietly walks to the wall, bends down and pulls out the plug. Music stops.)

JOHNNY: I couldn't switch it off – I thought I was going crazy –

INSPECTOR: Well, Sir, the way I look at it, there are things we cannot switch off. Let alone erase from memory. *(Offers his hand.)* Inspector of the local police. *(They shake hands.)* We must have a chat.

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: Of course... Take a seat. *(Inspector sits on the sofa.)* Would you like a drink? *(He goes to the mini-bar.)*

INSPECTOR: I'd rather not. *(Johnny pours himself a large whiskey.)* I read somewhere that each drop of alcohol kills off five million brain cells! Do you live alone?

JOHNNY: No... My wife has gone... for a long... short holiday. To her relatives.

INSPECTOR: I imagine it gets quite boring here in the middle of nowhere.

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: Fortunately there's always enough to do.

INSPECTOR: Yes. *(Looks at the shelves.)* All those books! What's your favorite read?

JOHNNY: It depends –

INSPECTOR: And those paintings! Life's been good to you. My own – compared to yours – is very prosaic. Flatfooting up and down country lanes, through the bushes, mud – *(He looks at his feet.)* – I suppose I should take off my shoes –

JOHNNY: No no, please.

INSPECTOR: I hear you've been to America. And you're a hunter, a member of the local hunting club. I suppose you know why I'm here.

JOHNNY *(after pause, head low)*: I do.

INSPECTOR: I'll take a statement, we'll check it, you'll sign it, and that'll be that, what do you say? *(He opens his briefcase and takes*



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out a notebook and pen.) And now I will have that drink – to make the whole thing a little less formal.

(Johnny goes to the mini-bar.)

INSPECTOR: Wine, if I may. In vino veritas, they say.

(Johnny opens a bottle of red.)

INSPECTOR: They say the weather's going to worsen. It's getting windy, a big black cloud followed me on the way here. *(Takes the glass from Johnny's hand.) Cheers. (Takes a sip, puts the glass down.)* I'm listening. *(Opens his notebook, waits.)*

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: Guilty.

INSPECTOR: That's half the work done. Now the details.

JOHNNY: May I ask you something? *(Inspector looks at him.)* Do you ever get the feeling that everything around you is – empty? *(He feels the air with his hand.)* That everything you see – objects, people, trees – that all this is no more than pictures painted by your imagination on the canvass of emptiness?

INSPECTOR *(looks at the walls)*: Your pictures? Are you a painter?

JOHNNY: No – they're not mine – I'm talking about –

INSPECTOR: I know what you're talking about, Sir. But I haven't come here to discuss points of philosophy. I'm asking you to describe what happened and tell me why you did it.

JOHNNY *(after pause)*: I killed him.

INSPECTOR: You've already said that, now tell me why.

JOHNNY: I let him die. Alone. In horrible pain. I could've saved him. He could've lived another twenty years. But –

INSPECTOR: But?

JOHNNY: There was a woman. A barrier I couldn't break through. Between me and what I'd have to do to become the sort of man I wanted to be – there's always, all my life, been a woman.

INSPECTOR: Sir...

JOHNNY: Not a flesh-and-blood woman, which I could understand, but my image of one, my creation, my wish. And my excuse for not ever having done anything.

INSPECTOR: Except what you did do. Was it deliberate, or an accident?

JOHNNY: Both.

INSPECTOR: The gun went off by itself, but you pulled the trigger.



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JOHNNY: It's not what I did do, it's what I didn't – (*Looks at Inspector sharply.*) – Gun? What gun?

INSPECTOR (*abruptly rising*): You shot a dog! Without warning, for your own amusement, you fired at a Great Dane and killed it!

JOHNNY (*after a long pause*): That's why you came?

INSPECTOR: My dear fellow, one doesn't do that sort of thing. You filled the dog with lead and left it on the river bank, suffering for two hours.

JOHNNY (*defiantly*): I acted according to rules.

INSPECTOR: What?

JOHNNY: Dogs must be chained. They're not allowed to stray more than a hundred yards from their home. There's a danger of rabies.

INSPECTOR: You shot a dog belonging to the local vet. Would he let a rabid dog run around? Have you – in the name of the hunting club – warned him not to let his dog loose?

JOHNNY: You don't understand – I've done something far worse!

INSPECTOR: So have we all – but I'm interested in breaches of the law. You hunters have gone mad – shooting cats, dogs, chickens, deer through the windows of parked cars. I'm getting complaints from all sides. This must stop. I'll make an example of you – you'll go to court. (*He looks at him.*) I'm sorry. (*Picks up his glass.*) Cheers. (*Drinks up, puts the glass down.*) Good wine. (*Puts notebook and pen in his briefcase, walks towards the exit. Turns.*) I don't understand you. Look at the palace you live in. You have everything a normal person could want. Why aren't you happy? Do you know what Nietzsche said about happiness? I forget, but no doubt you have Nietzsche among these books as well – (*Approaches the bookshelves, examines titles.*) – and here it is –

(He reaches for the book, pulls, and pulls off the entire length of cardboard on which the book spines have been painted so convincingly that they look real. Inspector stares at the piece of cardboard in his hands, looks up at other "books.")

INSPECTOR: A house of art indeed.

JOHNNY: My wife. Her best work so far.

INSPECTOR (*again looks at the cardboard in his hands*): I'm sorry... (*He leans the cardboard against the wall.*) Shouldn't be difficult to stick it back on. (*Picks up his briefcase, walks towards the exit, turns.*) What about walls? (*He knocks on the wall, nods, and goes.*)

JOHNNY (*after pause*): The walls are real.