

# **FINAL INNOCENCE**

## **Characters**

**Mary**

**John**

**Gypsy**

*Final Innocence* was first produced by the Slovenian Chamber Theatre in Ljubljana, Slovenia, opening on 13. 2. 1997. It was directed by Sladjana Vujović with the following cast:

**Mary**  
**John**  
**Gypsy**

Violeta Tomič  
Boris Kerč  
Polde Bibič



Polde Bibič, Boris Kerč  
*Final Innocence*, Slovenian Chamber Theatre, 1997



Polde Bibič, Boris Kerč, Violeta Tomič  
*Final Innocence*, Slovenian Chamber Theatre, 1997



Violeta Tomič, Polde Bibič, Boris Kerč  
*Final Innocence*, Slovenian Chamber Theatre, 1997

*A dilapidated hunting-hut in the Bosnian mountains. Door on the right, window at the back. On the left, a crude wooden bed without a mattress, covered with a sleeping bag. Behind it, lying on the floor and leaning against the bed, a battered wooden cross. On the floor in front of the bed, a half-unzipped backpack. On the right, a rustic table, in front of it a rickety chair. On the table, a tightly packed canvas bag.*

### Act One

*(In the darkness, at some distance, the gentle voice of a young girl is singing a soulful Bosnian ballad. As the lights come up, John is sitting on the chair, trying to repair a small camping gas burner. Mary is standing at the window, peering out through a frosted-up pane, listening to the song. As the song ends, she slowly turns and looks at John.)*

MARY: It's following us. *(John looks at her.)* That song. I heard it last night. From my room in the hotel. You didn't?

JOHN: No.

MARY: Outside, in the darkness. As if hovering in the air.

JOHN: Tape.

MARY: What?

JOHN: Someone was listening to a tape.

MARY: In a snow-covered forest, in the middle of Bosnia, a mile from the nearest village, someone's listening to a tape?

JOHN: Far less unlikely than someone standing in the snow singing.

MARY: I know what it is. *(Pause. John looks at her.)* The voice of the Virgin Mary.

JOHN: Really?

MARY: Wandering among the trees. Bemoaning the lost souls.

JOHN: And why is it following *us*?

MARY: Because we're here with a special mission.

JOHN: Like fifty thousand U.N. soldiers?

MARY: Ours is connected with the *essence* of what happened here! Not so?

*(John doesn't respond. Mary climbs under the sleeping bag and rests her head on the arm of the cross.)*

I'm cold. *(John doesn't respond.)* I have a fever. *(John doesn't respond.)* My migraine is coming back. *(John doesn't respond.)* Will you be much longer?

*(John shrugs.)*

You're just like my father.

JOHN: Really?

MARY: He, too, managed to produce more coughs than words in his life.

JOHN: Oh.

MARY: Once I asked him what he *got* out of being the strong, silent type.

Do you know what he said? *(John doesn't respond.)* "Still waters run deep." That was the high point of his originality. *(John doesn't respond.)* So deep ran this water that it vanished without leaving a trace.

JOHN *(hurting his hand as it slips on the burner)*: Shit!

MARY: Except for this bundle of flesh and bones which keeps asking itself why all men are the same.

JOHN: All of them?

MARY: I knew you were going to say that! You want to be an exception.

That, too, makes you like all the rest.

JOHN: And what *are* we like?

MARY: Have you ever tried to peel a stone with a blunt knife? That's what you're like.

JOHN: Impenetrable.

MARY: Opaque.

JOHN: Perhaps you should sharpen the knife.

MARY: It used to be sharp! It got blunt from all the attempts to scrape a sliver of life off you!

*(John shrugs.)*



Knife against stone, eternal grinding, that's what a woman gets out of men. (*John doesn't respond.*) Object! (*John doesn't respond.*) Oh God. Why are you so... expressionless?

JOHN: Am I?

MARY: You wouldn't flinch if they nailed you to a cross. Is this your personal thing, or some kind of muscle seizure. Part of being British?

JOHN: Why all this? (*Pause.*) Why now? (*Pause.*) And why me?

MARY: Because you're here. And because I'm frightened... of silence.

JOHN (*rises, goes to the window, looks out*): Two feet of snow in less than three hours!

MARY: It's Easter tomorrow. This can't be normal.

JOHN: By tomorrow we won't be able to open the door.

MARY: There must be a shovel.

JOHN (*moves away from the window*): I've looked everywhere.

MARY: Well then, you'll clear the snow with your hands. I'm sure a hero like you won't surrender to a pile of snowflakes.

JOHN: Or you're going to lie in it, and melt it with your fever! If you really have one. (*Mary turns her back on him.*)

(*Mary doesn't respond. John reaches out to feel her forehead. She pushes his hand away.*)

MARY: Don't touch me.

JOHN: I was trying to feel your –

MARY: Yes, I know your leaps from forehead to knee, and under the skirt, as if you'd lost your way in the dark.

(*John abruptly turns and goes back to the burner.*)

Sorry. (*John doesn't respond.*) I've no idea why I'm behaving like this. Slap me. (*Shouts.*) Do something, make me stop! (*Calmly*) I'm so afraid. (*Pause*) John?

JOHN: It'll be all right.

MARY: Don't comfort me, I'm not a child.

JOHN: The gypsy will get us out of here.

MARY: Why do you think he got us here in the first place? He knew damn well that the snow was going to cut us off.

JOHN: I suppose he even knew it would start snowing.

MARY: Sure. They know such things, these people. They have a sixth sense.

JOHN: Ah, well. In that case...

MARY: Did you see his eyes? I shivered every time he looked at me.

*(John is busy with the burner.)*

MARY: Speak to me! Sing, anything!

JOHN: We must remain calm and sober.

MARY: Yeah, sure.

JOHN: That alone will save us. No fantasies.

MARY: Wasn't it you who fantasized a minute ago about how great it'd be to have a cigarette? Just one puff?

*(John is busy with the burner.)*

My kingdom for a smoke! Which isn't there. Pockets bulging with credit cards, travellers checks, a thousand dollars in cash, well-endowed, as they say, but all that virility can't get you as much as a puff of smoke!

JOHN: I hardly know you anymore, since we came to this hut.

MARY: I bet you never thought it was possible to end up in a soft white embrace from which neither money nor gun can save you.

*(John doesn't respond.)*

The impotence of male fantasies! And the world built on them!  
*(Pause.)* I could smell a trap. But I walked into it as if driven by something. So stupid –

*(A burst of gunfire from an automatic weapon. Mary abruptly sits up. John whips out his gun and takes cover at the window. Another burst of gunfire, from a different direction. Silence.)*

So close.

JOHN: About a mile.

MARY *(relaxes)*: Your gun can hit a target as far as that?

JOHN *(slight embarrassment, puts the gun away)*: Reflex.

MARY: You're nervous.



JOHN: I'm not.

MARY: I hardly know you either, since we came to this hut. You're afraid.

JOHN: I can quite imagine what sort of articles you write.

MARY: Tell me.

JOHN: Querulous. Obstinate biased.

MARY: Anything else?

JOHN: Opinionated.

MARY: If you can produce so many epithets in a single breath you can't be as dull as I thought.

JOHN: No more than the knife you'd like to skin me alive with.

MARY: Could even be witty, given a chance. If we survive this adventure I'm going to write a big piece about you.

JOHN: Thank you.

MARY: Do you realize what power I have? Greater than your gun. Greater than a thousand guns.

JOHN: Really? (*Resumes work on the burner.*)

MARY: With a single paragraph I can blast you out of the sky. With three I can build you up into a hero. (*John doesn't respond.*) I can make the world beat a path to your door. And TV companies bid for an exclusive interview. Tempted?

JOHN: No.

MARY: "John, the mysterious Englishman who single-handedly caught the most notorious war criminal and brought him handcuffed to the ICC in the Hague. Who and what is John? An adventurer, secret agent, a gallant knight believing in justice? Or is there something else behind his grand gesture? An attempt to wash away the sins of the past, perhaps?" How does it sound?

JOHN: Inane.

MARY: Are you sure?

JOHN: I hope this isn't your usual style.

MARY: I adapt it to suit the person I write about. When I see a defiant posture like yours, and eyes which silently cry: "I hate the world because it doesn't need me," then it's melodrama – with a touch of irony, to make it convincing.

JOHN: I knew you were no different from the rest.

MARY: All the same, are we?

JOHN: If men are, why not journalists?

MARY: Describe us. (*John doesn't respond.*) Are you afraid to, or can't you find the words?

JOHN: Shallow. That's the word. You assess a situation at a glance, add what isn't there, leave out or simplify what you don't understand. These concoctions are then sold to people as pictures of the real world.

MARY: Poor people!

JOHN: Don't you have nightmares? Don't you ever sit up all night, asking yourself how many innocent people are suffering because of your half-baked opinions?

MARY: Journalists must have given you a raw deal.

JOHN: Go ahead, write about me. It's unlikely you'll manage to tell the truth. Lies can't hurt me.

MARY: But the truth could?

*(John wants to say something but changes his mind.)*

You can't really hide it, can you, this festering wound? I feel it, oh, how I feel it! I felt it the moment we met. You were so... lost. That's why I joined you.

JOHN: Shall I tell you why you joined me?

MARY: Tell me. Straight to my face.

JOHN: You know very well why.

MARY: No, I'm one of those premenopausal American women who're full of poisonous wind but haven't the slightest insight into their motives. You tell me.

JOHN *(turns away)*: It doesn't matter.

MARY: Because I smelled a good story? Or because I was hoping that in this forest of corpses and murderers you'd manage what you failed to accomplish last night, and I would at last experience a moment of bliss? *(John looks away.)* Do you think I'm one of those women who come only when they're in mortal danger –

*(A burst of automatic gunfire, this time very close, somewhere behind the hut. John, gun in hand, leaps to the window and carefully looks out. Mary scrambles out of her sleeping bag and follows him on all fours. She tightens her hands round his right arm. Another burst of gunfire.)*

John!

JOHN *(tries to push her away)*: Mary, for God's sake!

MARY: May I say something?

JOHN: Not now, are you crazy? Down, on the floor!

MARY *(puts her hand on the barrel of the gun)*: May I? I've never touched one. *(She strokes the barrel. John looks on in astonishment.)* It's

## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

so warm. I thought guns were cold. Like winter. But this one's... almost hot.

JOHN: You're mad.

MARY: Is that all you can say? At this moment, which is so full... so... Is there nothing beautiful you can say? Nothing warm?

JOHN: You are mad.

*(John pushes her away, walks to the door, opens it, looks out.)*

MARY: Don't get excited. There's no one there. Only snow. And corpses. And silence. Will you make tea?

JOHN: What?

MARY: I'd like some tea. I've got some in my backpack. Real tea. Earl Grey. *(She looks at him.)* Please.

JOHN: The burner's kaput.

MARY: Haven't you fixed it?

JOHN: The frame is bent... The canister won't go in... In any case we haven't got... *(Sits down.)* I'll try again.

MARY: Haven't got what? Matches?

JOHN: They must've fallen out of my pocket.

*(Mary returns to the bed and climbs under the sleeping bag.)*

MARY: They didn't.

*(John looks at her.)*

They didn't fall. The gypsy made them disappear.

*(John doesn't respond.)*

Don't you see this chain of omens which has brought us precisely here, to become precisely the people we are, precisely where we have to be for destiny to unfold?

*(John is busy with the burner.)*

MARY: Haven't you heard of Medjugorje? *(John doesn't respond.)* Don't you know what was happening there?

JOHN: No.

MARY: The Virgin Mary used to appear to three children, year after year.

JOHN: No doubt the place was crawling with pilgrims. Manna for local shopkeepers.

MARY: Can't you see that was an omen? Foreshadowing ruined cities, raped women, skulls, bones?

JOHN: And what else?

MARY: Why would the Virgin Mary appear to people who could already smell what was coming?

JOHN: Smell, did they?

MARY: Even animals. Only they were clever. I have information that in the years before the first shot was fired fifty bears deserted these woods.

JOHN: Were they counted by the Italians while crossing their border?

MARY: And wolves. In the two years before it all started there wasn't a single case of wolf killing sheep.

JOHN: What about foxes? If they are as wily as they're supposed to be, they should've been the first to make a dash for the nearest border.

MARY: There is another omen which proves I'm right. If you weren't so preoccupied with yourself you'd have seen it a long time ago. (*John shrugs.*) It's staring you in the face.

(*John looks around the hut in spite of himself.*)

Don't you find it unusual that we're called John and Mary?

JOHN: At least a million people are called that.

MARY: Don't you find it *significant*?

JOHN: Why?

MARY: Haven't you read the Bible? John was Mary's husband.

JOHN: You certainly haven't read the Bible. Otherwise you'd know that Mary's husband was Joseph.

MARY: And what is Joseph, if not a longer version of John?

JOHN: Something completely different.

MARY: No.

JOHN: Jokanon in old Hebrew.

MARY: John is biblical Joseph. It must be. I'm talking about the chain of omens –

JOHN: I must be the missing link.

## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

MARY: Then you must've been christened Joseph and later changed your name. (*John abruptly turns away to resume work on the burner.*)

John? (*John doesn't respond.*) What's the matter?

JOHN: Why are you calling me John if I'm Joseph?

MARY: Don't be childish.

JOHN: *I am childish?*

MARY: You.

JOHN: All right, I'm childish, but you're crazy! Omens! For God's sake! Runaway bears, superstitions, visions! Strange coincidences! Even if we were Joseph and Mary, what would that prove?

MARY: Probably nothing, without the next link in the chain.

JOHN (*pause*): And what is that?

MARY: Don't you see?

JOHN (*in spite of himself takes another look around the hut*): Empty walls? Your backpack? My shoulder bag?

MARY: And what else?

JOHN: Snow outside? The approaching night?

MARY: And what's this? (*Points at the cross.*)

JOHN: A piece of wood? Two pieces of wood. Nailed together. Probably... part of the hut, or...

MARY: Or?

(*John looks at the cross, shrugs.*)

MARY: Don't you see it's a cross?

(*John takes another look at the wooden structure.*)

JOHN: If you take two poles and nail them together at right angles you'll get something *resembling* a cross. That doesn't mean it's a real cross.

MARY: No?

JOHN: What would a cross be doing in a forest hut?

MARY: Suppose it was brought here for safety? Suppose whoever brought it wanted to protect God?

(*John goes to the window, looks out.*)

MARY: John, we're not alone. Jesus is hiding here with us. Jesus, our son.

JOHN: Mary...

MARY: Suppose this isn't Bosnia? Suppose we're on a strange planet, alone in space, yes, the space of hearts and minds, destined to act out the final drama of humanity?

JOHN: You must've read an awful lot of bad books.

MARY: Suppose we're here to test the idea that man has no future?

JOHN: Careful, Mary. Such ramblings can sometimes make a sudden leap into reality.

MARY: You sound like you've read some bad books yourself. In any case this isn't the only cross.

*(She reaches inside her pullover and pulls out a little silver cross on a chain. John looks at it from a distance.)*

Afraid to come closer?

*(John approaches and looks at the pendant.)*

A parting gift from my father to my mother. She gave him one exactly the same. They bought them together and exchanged them. Nine months before I was born.

JOHN *(moves away)*: And?

MARY: My mother gave it to me on her deathbed. "If you find him," she said, "give it back to him and tell him that he's the greatest scoundrel on earth."

JOHN: Well, have you found him?

MARY: She met him thirty years ago, on a holiday in Dalmatia. He promised to write, follow her to the States. She never got as much as a Christmas card.

JOHN: Wasn't she a little naive?

MARY: She would've have forgotten him a long time ago if not for me. For thirty years I reminded her of the few days they spent together.

JOHN: And what will you gain by finding a father who doesn't know you exist?

MARY: He may need help.

JOHN: Money? Or moral support?

MARY: When the Virgin Mary began to appear not far from here, my mother was one of the first to go on a pilgrimage. Twice she went. Each time *convinced* she was going to run into him. By the will of fate.

JOHN: Belief in fate obviously runs in your family.

MARY: She would sit on the beach where they met. She made enquiries in one office after another. But all she had was this pendant and my father's first name.

JOHN: Which he had made up, while the pendant was one of a million sold at roadside stalls.

MARY: Why are you making such an effort to... to devalue the greatest pain in my life?

JOHN: Devalue? An unusual expression for a *New York Times* reporter.

MARY: What do you know about that? What do *you* know how... oh God!... Why am I telling you such personal things? You're not my confessor. And the last person on earth to be that!

JOHN: Thank you.

MARY: How can you not understand my fear? That these omens add up to the most... to... And it'll turn out that my father... that he is...

JOHN: Dead?

MARY: That I could accept.

JOHN: What could you not accept?

MARY (*pause*): Is there *anyone* here who has no blood on his hands?

JOHN (*makes a helpless gesture*): Mary...

MARY: My father is called Joseph. You are Joseph. I'm Mary. My mother was Mary. The Holy Virgin was Mary.

JOHN: Mary...

MARY: Enough omens?

JOHN: Mary, allow me to tell you – and don't, please, hold it against me, because I wish you no harm – but do allow me to tell you that you're a frightfully stupid woman. You see the world as made up of threads which connect things and events in a way that's also a reason for – and the meaning of – these things and events. The world isn't like that. Events are one thing, our thoughts about them quite another. Events occur randomly and they go their own way, left, right, straight, sideways. It's pointless to imagine that Fate has picked us as a target. The Earth circles around the Sun, not the Sun around us –

MARY: Stop it.

JOHN: First you told me that your father was a man of few words, now you expect me to believe that you've never seen him.

MARY: Have you ever lived with a woman?

JOHN: What's that got to –

MARY: Do you know any women?



JOHN: Quite a few.

MARY: I just happen to be different. I don't travel the world like a post-card on which it says simply "Greetings" and nothing more. I happen to be a little more complicated. If you find this a burden, I'll try to reduce myself to a level you won't find so threatening.

JOHN: You've *already* reduced everything to the simplest level.

MARY: What about you? Joseph? Do you feel you function on a high level?

JOHN: How do you know my name is Joseph?

MARY (*pause*): Because otherwise there'd be a missing link in the chain of omens. With all the others being obvious –

JOHN: Stop this, Mary, because I've had enough. Honestly. These feverish ramblings of yours get on my nerves. (*He towers over her.*) Have you been through my things? (*Mary doesn't respond.*) You have, haven't you?

MARY: Your friend told me.

JOHN: My friend?

MARY: Your friend the gypsy.

JOHN: He's hardly my friend.

MARY: Then you're his. Why else would he call you "my friend" all the time?

JOHN: And what did he tell you? That my name was Joseph?

MARY: Yes, among other things.

JOHN: You were never alone together.

MARY: When you went to the loo. Before we set off.

JOHN: He took advantage of my brief absence to confide to you that my name was Joseph?

MARY: He asked me how long I had known you. His "friend" Joseph. I said: "You mean John?" And he said: "His name is Joseph."

JOHN (*pause*): And you believed him.

MARY: Why not?

JOHN: He could've been joking.

MARY: What would he gain from that?

JOHN: I don't know.

MARY: It made me wonder what *you're* gaining by claiming to be John Willmott while in fact you're Joseph Williams.

JOHN: And what conclusion have you reached?

MARY: That you want to conceal your real name because you have a reason for doing so.

JOHN: What reason?

## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

MARY: To cover your traces. After all you aren't here for a picnic. You're dangerous, to quite a few people. It's normal for you to pretend. And lie.

JOHN: Lying, am I?

MARY: That's not a reproach, John. Joseph. I understand you.

JOHN: You don't.

MARY: I do –

JOHN: How could the gypsy have known my name was Joseph? It says so only in my passport. And my passport is with me all the time.

MARY: Perhaps he felt it was inevitable for you to be Joseph, considering I'm Mary.

JOHN: Oh for Christ's sake –

MARY: Exactly, Joseph. For Christ's sake. Do you think the gypsy didn't know there was a cross in the hut?

JOHN: I don't know what to say anymore.

MARY: There are people who act as servants of Fate. I'm sure he's one of them.

JOHN: Did he say so?

MARY: Yes. He said I must take care of you. That it's my duty.

JOHN: My duty is something else, Mary. My duty is to tell you that this gypsy has his own fate to worry about –

MARY: Why else would he make matches disappear from your pocket?

JOHN: I lost them!

MARY: Don't you see? Step by step he's reducing our space. Under false pretenses he brings us to a broken-down hut in the middle of nowhere. In a few hours we're snowed in. I fall ill. The gas burner doesn't work. Matches disappear, just in case you managed to fix it. And finally, he scrambles your brains.

JOHN: Mine?

MARY: You know we have no matches, yet you've been fiddling with that burner for almost three hours.

JOHN: I can't just sit here doing nothing.

MARY: Surely you could've found yourself a pleasanter task! Maybe this time you *would* get it up, and we'd at least be warm, if not hot.

JOHN (*pause*): Don't provoke me, or I may be forced to say something that'll hurt.

MARY (*aggressively*): For example?

JOHN: For example, that sometimes the man can't because he doesn't want to.

MARY (*pause*): Doesn't want to.

JOHN: Doesn't want what's too obviously on offer. In any case I'm trying to tell you something else –

MARY: Tell me, for God's sake! Stop trying! Do something! Action man!

JOHN: Someone's been through my things. Someone has looked at my passport. The gypsy didn't have an opportunity. You did.

MARY: When?

JOHN: We stayed at the same hotel.

MARY: You in one room, I in another. And twenty walls between us.

JOHN: One flight of stairs.

MARY: And the key, which you kept in your pocket at all times!

JOHN: How do you know?

MARY: You told me! You said I shouldn't leave mine at the reception either, because they steal. What worries you most in this country of half a million corpses is that people steal. Maybe they're hungry.

JOHN (*pause*): Someone's been through my things. Only in my passport...

*(He checks the left inside pocket of his jacket and pulls out a wallet. He checks the right inside pocket. His face visibly lengthens. He examines all his pockets and finally his canvas bag. He unzips Mary's backpack and empties it on the floor. He looks at Mary.)*

Where is it?

MARY: I've burned it. I tore out every page separately and threw it into the toilet and flushed it away. (*John stands above her, watching her.*) And now you don't exist. You can't prove you're John, you can't prove you're Joseph. Now I can call you whatever I like. I'm going to call you a hero. All my life I've been waiting to meet one. And here he is, right before me, and I'm alone with him, cut off from the world. And what is he going to do, this knight in shining armor, this prince? Will he kiss me and change me from a frog into a princess? No. Is he going to hit me? One way or another he has to prove that he is a hero. The safest thing is to slap a sick woman. Who is going to know? Is he going to rape me? No. That would require too much effort. Worse, it may turn out he isn't up to it. Why waste time and precious strength on the least important obstacle on the way to his goal –

JOHN: Stop it.

MARY: I have. It's your turn.

JOHN: I'm not going to shout. I'm going to ask you once more, very quietly – look, not even my fingers are shaking – what have you done with my passport? (*Mary is looking at him defiantly.*) Since we came to this hut you behave as if...

MARY: As if?

JOHN: As if you were trying to find my weak spot.

MARY: May I tell you something?

JOHN: Well, you found it. You found it all right. You got me to take you with me. From then on nothing's been right anymore.

MARY: Sure, it's my fault that the snow's cut us off. That you trusted a gypsy who hasn't come back... and never will.

JOHN: You work for someone.

MARY: Yes, I'm the one who's responsible for the war in these mountains, for ruined churches, for the dead and the wounded. For hatred, for all other wars. I'm responsible for this world. Because I'm a woman.

JOHN: Stop it.

MARY: Why don't you admit that somewhere deep down you'd like to agree with me?

JOHN (*seizes the pendant and tears the chain off Mary's neck*): You'll get it back when you return my passport.

(*He puts the pendant in his pocket.*)

MARY (*quietly*): Your passport's at the hotel.

JOHN: How do you know?

MARY: I saw the gypsy handing it to the reception clerk before we set off. He asked him to lock it in the safe. (*Pause.*) He probably wants to blackmail you for more money than you agreed on. (*Pause.*) Pity there's so much snow. Otherwise you could go straight to the hotel, get the passport and return in less than two hours.

JOHN: Why didn't you tell me before?

(*He advances towards her. Somewhere in the forest or beyond it, the gentle voice of a young girl starts to sing the mournful Bosnian ballad again. John stops, looks toward the window. So does Mary. Then, slowly, they look at each other. Mary rises and gently puts her arms round John's neck. She kisses him on the mouth. The singing stops. John abruptly disengages himself. He picks up his canvas bag and goes to the door.*)

MARY: John!

*(John opens the door, looks at Mary, steps out into the snow and shuts the door.)*

*(Mary reaches inside her sleeping bag, pulls out a packet of cigarettes and a box of matches. She lights a cigarette, draws, exhales, smiles.)*

*(Blackout for five seconds.)*

*(As the lights come up, Mary, wrapped in her sleeping bag, is asleep. The Gypsy enters and looks around. Carefully, he closes the door. He puts his badly worn bag on the table, beats the snow off his coat, sits down on the chair. He takes off his hat and puts it on the floor. He removes his boots and puts them next to the hat. He starts to remove his socks. He smells the left one and reacts with a grimace.)*

GYPSY: Merde! If he could smell his socks now, that French officer I stole them from, he wouldn't say merde, he would say merde, merde, merde! *(He takes off the right sock and smells it.)* Mon Dieu! If he smelled this one, he'd put a bullet through his head.

*(Mary wakes. She stares at Gypsy's bare feet.)*

MARY: What are you doing?

GYPSY: Testing my patience. God is my witness. I want to see how much more I can bear. It used to be easier, only latrines and rotten teeth used to smell, but now a horrible stench is coming from the entire world. No fresh air. Worst of all, I have started to smell to myself. That's the beginning of the end.

MARY: I'm ill.

GYPSY: What about me? My head's like a bucket of sand, my heart's full of blisters, my stomach's got a bad cold, and everything else is in the terminal stage of sclerosis! Actually I've been dead for some years, but I had no time to notice it. Where is my friend John?

MARY: His name is Joseph.

GYPSY: He can be Winston Churchill, for all I care. I remember faces, names I forget. Although some people have more than one face, no? And John Joseph's got at least two, with a third for emergencies. That's my feeling. Am I wrong?

MARY: I don't know him that well.

GYPSY: No? Listen, I don't really care what you did, the two of you, to keep warm in this cold, that's your business. All I want to know is where you've hidden him. Because it's my business to fuck with him, not with you.

MARY: You're so... vulgar! (*She turns her back to him.*)

GYPSY: Oh shit, I've insulted a lady again. I just don't know why this keeps happening. I *could* have my tongue shortened by an inch or two, but then I couldn't lick my fingers after a good meal anymore. Better a little gaffe here and there than to lose the last enjoyment in life. Although –

MARY: You talk too much.

GYPSY (*astonished*): What?

MARY: You talk too much.

GYPSY: No one has ever accused me of that. In fact –

MARY: Please. I'm ill.

GYPSY: All right, I'll whistle then. (*Begins to whistle to himself.*) Women! Wagging their tongues like there's no tomorrow, but the moment you open your mouth they tell you to shut it.

MARY: Please. A minute of silence.

*(The Gypsy continues whistling to himself. He goes to the window, looks out and wonders where to put his socks to dry. Finally he puts them across the top of his hat. He looks at the contents of Mary's backpack on the floor.)*

GYPSY: God bless America. If this doesn't look like a U.N. warehouse...

*(He spots three pairs of long winter socks. He selects the red pair and puts them on. They are too small for his feet, but he doesn't mind. He rummages among the things on the floor.)*

Imagine. A woman comes to Bosnia in the middle of war, equipped as if her true destination were the French Riviera!

*(He picks out a sexy pair of knickers, whistles, looks at Mary, who still has her back turned to him.)*

Can't say I haven't seen any nice ones, beside all the ugly ones, or the ones I couldn't see because it was dark or I was too drunk, but

such a... must be careful not to be vulgar again... such a tasty pair I haven't seen in a thousand years.

*(He sits on the chair and, using the knickers as a handkerchief, blows his nose. Mary abruptly turns. The Gypsy wipes his nose once more, folds the knickers and puts them in his pocket.)*

I need a handkerchief. You've got plenty left. As for your socks, you'll get them back as soon as mine dry.

MARY: Keep them, thank you. *(She turns her back to him.)*

GYPSY: Not at all. You're welcome. I won't wear them, I'll give them away, to some woman who hasn't got any. For some favor or other. Times are such that a man's got to be grateful for everything.

*(He returns to the contents of Mary's backpack and picks out a bra.)*

MARY: Leave that!

*(The Gypsy reacts, makes an apologetic gesture, drops the bra. He starts to gather Mary's things into a pile.)*

Leave my things alone!

GYPSY *(straightens up, moves away)*: All right, all right... There's no room to walk anywhere. But if we *must* have an exhibition, I, too, can show you a thing or two.

*(He opens his bag and starts to take out various objects, putting them on the table. He takes out: a corn-cob, a small blanket, a red telephone, a large kitchen knife, half a loaf of bread, a piece of salami wrapped in newspaper, a pair of sandals, a packet of ground coffee, a small aluminum pot, a cassette player, two apples, a bottle of local plum brandy, a hammer, and finally a rubber doll. Mary observes all this with growing astonishment. Finally she laughs.)*

I bet you've set your heart on the sausage.

MARY: Apple.

*(Gypsy throws her an apple. Mary catches it and sinks her teeth into it.)*

GYPSY: Have this one as well. *(Throws her the second apple.)* I did want to come earlier, and bring better things, but that's how it is, man makes a plan, God makes another, and then Lucifer adds his own.



MARY: I'm sorry I shouted at you.

GYPSY (*dismissively*): Bah...

MARY: I don't know this part of the world. There's much I don't understand.

GYPSY (*takes a swig from the bottle, wipes his mouth*): It all depends on whose side you're on. It's been my habit, from quite early on, to be on the side of those who have power. (*He cuts himself a slice of the salami and eats.*) But now it's all gone haywire. Now you haven't the slightest idea who belongs where and what he's up to. All you can do now is to be on your own side, at least you know where you stand. Trouble is you can't *get* anything from yourself, not even a kick up your ass. (*Takes another swig.*) Then my friend John comes out of the blue with his offer.

MARY: But...

GYPSY: Yes?

MARY: You've returned without the general.

GYPSY: I've brought a telephone. (*Lifts the phone to show her.*) So that John Joseph can call his bosses and tell them the price has gone up.

MARY: He won't like that.

GYPSY: I don't like it that he's not here. Where's he gone?

MARY: Didn't say. (*Pause.*) Is there much snow?

GYPSY: Just enough so you can't leave. So no one can get here. We're alone. (*He moves toward her.*) But you don't have to be afraid.

MARY: No?

GYPSY: No. Life is just another TV show. When it gets nasty, you switch the channels. Besides, this hut's a U.N. exclusion zone. If you're attacked, I'll call in the airplanes. (*He produces a chilling laugh.*) I'm sure they'll protect you. The only problem is... (*Moves away from her.*)

MARY: What?

GYPSY: This strange... thing that's following me... (*Opens the door, looks out, closes the door.*) This... shadow...

MARY: Shadow?

GYPSY: Reaching across the trees and covering half the forest. And these paws, with claws at least two meters long. (*He goes to the window, looks out.*)

MARY: How did *you* get here, if there's so much snow?

GYPSY: Snow can't stop me. I change into a monkey and swing from tree to tree. Or into a badger and burrow under the snow. (*Offers her a piece of salami.*) Here, so you won't be so pale.

MARY: I'm not pale.

GYPSY: Pale and malnourished, a pitiful sight.

MARY: I don't need pity! That's the last thing I need.

GYPSY (*moves away*): I'm beginning to understand why John Joseph went for a walk. Merde! So much effort, and all for nothing! To whom can I sell the general now?

MARY: Me.

GYPSY (*pause*): You?

MARY: Yes, me.

GYPSY (*brief laugh*): And what will you do with him?

MARY: My business.

GYPSY: Aren't you together in this? You and John?

MARY: How much did he promise you?

*(The Gypsy goes to the window, looks out, goes to the door, opens it, looks left and right, closes the door and looks at Mary.)*

GYPSY: Are you serious?

MARY: All right, forget it.

GYPSY: Not so fast. Do you know why God created gypsies? To confuse ordinary people. So they wouldn't get too conceited. But woman he created to confuse us, the gypsies! And now you expect me to strike a deal with a woman at the expense of the man we both know, and who trusts you more than he'll ever trust me? (*Pause.*) All right. These aren't the times to let principle get in the way of advantage. But it depends. It depends on what you can offer me.

*(Mary produces a British passport. The Gypsy takes it, opens it.)*

MARY: With this you can get out of the country. To England. Wherever you wish. All it needs is your picture.

GYPSY: And my friend Joseph? Where will he go? Among the gypsies? Without a passport there isn't much else he can do.

MARY: But you can. All over the world.

GYPSY: It's no use. The shadow that's after me reaches as far as England, America. (*He clenches his fingers round her wrist.*) You'll have to offer me something more... edible.

MARY: Give me the passport.

## FINAL INNOCENCE

GYPSY (*putting passport in his pocket*): Might be useful to me when we start negotiating.

MARY: I don't negotiate with thieves.

GYPSY: Who else is there to negotiate with?

MARY (*wrenching her arm from his grip*): And what is John going to think when he finds his passport in your pocket?

GYPSY: Look at her! Not as simple as she'd like to appear. More the kind of woman it would pay to have on one's side.

*(With a slow, deliberate movement of his hand he switches on the cassette player to Faure's "Requiem": Sanctus. The Gypsy slowly cuts a piece of salami, breaks off a piece of bread, eats, and watches Mary. He cuts another piece of salami, offers it to Mary. She takes it and slowly puts it in her mouth. She reaches out, breaks off a piece of bread. They eat, looking at each other.)*

GYPSY: This music's no good. I found it on the body of a soldier who stepped on a mine.

MARY: Why isn't it good?

GYPSY: Too dangerous for a man. It makes him soft, seeps into him like water into a sponge. And then he does stupid things.

MARY: Like what?

GYPSY: Falls in love. Takes out a big loan. Steps on a mine. Worst of all, starts to believe in God. (*Switches off music.*) Good sausage?

MARY (*moves away*): I know so little about you.

GYPSY: What could interest you?

MARY: Who and what you are.

GYPSY: What you see. In fact, there's even less of me than meets the eye. Each day a piece of me disappears in the jaws of the beast on my trail. What about you?

MARY: Me?

GYPSY: I don't know who and what *you* are.

MARY: Is that important?

GYPSY: Very important. If you want to negotiate.

MARY: You have no general.

GYPSY: Where do you expect me to have him? On a chain, like a dancing bear?

MARY: Perhaps you don't even know him.

GYPSY: I thought I did. Now I have to admit that I didn't, ever. Or he wasn't then what he later became.

MARY: Then?

GYPSY: When we went to school together.

MARY (*eagerly*): With him?! Together with him?!

GYPSY: Why not?

MARY: What was he like?

GYPSY: Like me. Not like I'm now, like we both were then.

MARY: Tell me.

GYPSY: We believed in something. Something that now seems sinful even to think about, or stupid. Something...

MARY: Bright?

GYPSY: We had a dream, like all little boys, that one day we would...

MARY: Change the world?

GYPSY: There was a poem we recited. At night, on the beach, under the stars. In English, we found it in a book of poetry left behind by an English tourist.

MARY (*pause*): Do you still remember it?

GYPSY (*laughs*): After all these years?

MARY: "What I expected, was  
Thunder, fighting,  
Long struggles with men  
And climbing."

GYPSY (*astonished*):  
"What I had not foreseen  
Was the gradual day  
Weakening the will,  
Leaking the brightness away..."

MARY: "For I had expected always  
Some brightness to hold in trust,  
Some final innocence  
To save from dust..."

*(Mary is looking at the Gypsy. He lowers his head. Then he looks at her.)*

GYPSY: Who are you?

*(Blackout)*

**Act Two**

*(As the lights come up, Mary is standing in the middle of the room. The Gypsy is standing at the window, looking out.)*

MARY: Why don't you say anything?

GYPSY: Didn't you say I talked too much?

MARY: Or too little.

GYPSY (*pause*): You're ahead of me. Far ahead.

MARY: Because I know a poem by Stephen Spender?

GYPSY: I don't care *how* many poems you know. I've always known only one. And you knew which one.

MARY (*pause*): Trust me.

GYPSY: I *have* trusted people, and look where it got me.

MARY: All right then – trust John.

GYPSY: What makes you think that I do?

MARY: His motives are far from what they appear to be.

GYPSY: That's his problem.

MARY: He'd like to atone for something he did in the past.

GYPSY: Who wouldn't?

MARY: He'd like to clear his name.

GYPSY: He's not alone in that either.

MARY: He is an ex-officer of the British Army. During the Gulf War he was charged with cowardice. Abandoned his soldiers under fire. He was dishonorably discharged. It was in all the papers, a big story. That's the reason behind this romantic gesture. He doesn't care if he dies as long as he dies honorably. He's not interested in justice, he's seeking salvation.

GYPSY: Aren't you?

MARY: Not for myself. Tell me what he was like when you were kids.

GYPSY (*pause*): Who?

MARY: The general.

GYPSY: Why are you so interested in this man?

MARY: Because I'm a journalist. And because he's supposed to have  
rained grenades on innocent children for sport. He fascinates me.

GYPSY: You are beginning to fascinate me.

MARY: Did you have goals when you were kids?

GYPSY: I suppose so.

MARY: Did you know what you wanted from life?

GYPSY: He did. I still don't, not even now.

MARY: Did you talk about it?

GYPSY: What is this, an interview for the *New York Times*?

MARY: Did you?

GYPSY: We made up a silly little play. Played it on the beach, in late  
September, when the tourists had gone. I always played that Greek,  
the Spartan. Leonidas, I think.

MARY: Leonidas! The battle of Thermopylae. And he, who did he play?

GYPSY: The entire Persian army.

MARY: He wanted to win.

GYPSY: Until the teacher explained to him that the true hero was really  
the loser, who fought to the last and died. From then on...

MARY: He wanted to play Leonidas himself.

GYPSY: And from then on he knew what he wanted to become.

MARY: Did you remain friends?

GYPSY: For as long as we had a common hobby. (*Looks at her.*) Chasing  
women on the beach.

MARY: French? English? American?

GYPSY: Most were German. They were the worst, haughty and miserly.  
Still, we shared as many as we could, it was the deal between us.  
Until one day we came to blows over one. Right there, on the beach,  
under the stars.

MARY: Why?

GYPSY (*dismissive gesture*): Bah...

MARY: Was that the end of your friendship?

GYPSY: He went to the military academy. I wanted to see the world. And  
did, most of it. He succeeded and became what he had dreamed of.  
I became a gypsy. Not quite my choice, but there you are. (*Takes a  
swig from the bottle.*) Then the war came and the general got the  
chance to take a stab at making history. And history got a chance  
to take a stab at me.

MARY: Do you hate him?

GYPSY (*pause*): I don't know.

MARY (*pause*): Can I trust you?

GYPSY (*laughing*): Try.

MARY: Something tells me that you'd never abuse a person's trust.  
Especially not if it's born of pain.

GYPSY (*advancing towards her*): That's what you're offering me for the general? The emotional outburst of a pampered ass which, after a lifetime of resting on soft cushions, accidentally sat on a drawing pin and now wants the whole world to know about this terrible injustice?

MARY: The general's my father –

GYPSY (*pushing her away*): Bah...

MARY: He recited that poem to my mother. On the beach. Under the stars.

GYPSY (*pause*): We both did, and not only to one.

MARY: But the one who recited it to my mother was a student at the military academy and dreamed of becoming a general!

*(The Gypsy takes a swig from the bottle, goes to the window, looks out. He turns, looks at Mary.)*

GYPSY: That's why you came?

MARY: To save him.

GYPSY: After all he did?

MARY: He made mistakes. Misjudged things. Then he was drawn in and it was too late.

GYPSY: Once a mistake has been made it's always too late.

MARY: I want to help him *understand* what he did. Make amends. And return to the fold of good, honest people.

GYPSY: Make amends? To whom? To good, honest people who're rotting under the snow because he misjudged things?

MARY: In every human heart, even that of a criminal, there is a grain of innocence which can give birth to a new, better man. But not without help. Who shall help him, if not I, his daughter?

GYPSY: He doesn't even know you exist.

MARY: Makes no difference. Can't you understand?

GYPSY: I could, but I mustn't. It's too late for me.

MARY: What does that mean? That you'll hand him over to John?



GYPSY: Don't push me against the wall. I don't like that, I'll hit back, without wanting to.

MARY: What shall I do, then? Let Joseph hand him over to people whose sole aim is punishment? Who don't even know that every soul is worth saving? Let alone the soul of a great sinner?

GYPSY (*pause*): I can hand him to you. Why not? I just hope you realize that if I do that, someone will have to die.

MARY (*pause*): Who?

GYPSY: Your friend John.

MARY (*pause*): Why?

GYPSY: Because if he doesn't, you will.

MARY (*pause*): Surely there must be another way.

GYPSY: Yes. That we all die. Would you prefer that?

*(Mary slowly sinks to her knees.)*

MARY: Help me.

GYPSY: I'm trying to, but you won't listen.

MARY: What's true of Joseph is true of me. All I've achieved in my life so far is so puny that I might as well throw the lot, myself included, in the trash can.

GYPSY: It can't be that bad.

MARY: I don't work for the *New York Times*. I write articles for a religious magazine in a small town that only those who live there have ever heard of. All my life I've been trying to create the impression that I'm more than I am, that I'm better than I can be. Such an effort! And all for nothing, because no one has ever believed me. Look, my hands are shaking.

GYPSY: It's the cold. Haven't you got any gloves?

MARY: I missed my father. All my life I've lived with this pain. It infected everything. I looked for a father in every man I met, and every one disappointed me. I spent two years in a convent, trying to forget. Whenever a small glimmer of hope appeared that I might find him... it was like... I can't even describe the joy that gripped me! But now...

GYPSY: Now?

MARY: Now I see that...

GYPSY: You can't.

MARY: That I'm not...

GYPSY: You are not.

MARY: Up to it.

GYPSY: No.

MARY: Help me.

GYPSY (*pause*): You don't want me to help you. What you're asking me is to hand a war criminal to a former nun for Christian re-education.

MARY: A father to his daughter! Who alone has the power to save his soul from eternal fire!

GYPSY: You flatter yourself.

MARY: Aren't you a Christian?

GYPSY (*laughs*): I'd rather die than admit to being one.

MARY: What are you, a Muslim?

GYPSY (*laughs*): Is that any different?

MARY: Aren't these things important here?

GYPSY: So important that God would burst into tears if he saw what's happening in his name. But God has no time, along with everyone else he watches American TV shows up in heaven. And when he switches over to CNN all he sees are their advertisements for themselves. Otherwise he would've heard by now that he has become a Balkan soldier.

MARY: Then you're an atheist.

GYPSY: No, by religion I'm a gypsy. And even that only by force of circumstance.

MARY: I feel there is a lot of good in you –

GYPSY: Don't flatter me, it won't help. My heart has been eaten away, there isn't much of it left –

MARY: It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter how small the piece of heart is that we've managed to save! It's *always* big enough for that last refuge... that... tiny space where we can wait for an opportunity to flower into a new spring of life –

GYPSY: You've started to preach. You've been doing that all the time, only I didn't notice. A nun! And I thought you were...

MARY: What?

GYPSY: One of those American women who resent men for wearing trousers and so try to pull them off every one they meet.

MARY: Don't be obscene.

GYPSY (*laughs*): I don't believe this. You've come to the heart of hell as if going out for a cup of coffee. Now, just as lightly, you expect me to protect you from the beast even I can't escape.

MARY: Fate has brought us here.

GYPSY: Maybe you, I came by myself.

MARY: All of us. Why else would there be a cross here?

GYPSY (*looks at the cross*): Because I brought it.

MARY: Yes, but why?

GYPSY: Because it's good dry wood that'll burn nicely, since everything else is under snow or rotting wet.

MARY: Sometimes we do things with an intention that only seems such on the outside, but deep down, in our subconscious, it isn't ours, but God's intention.

GYPSY (*looking at her*): Maybe you're right. Maybe we *should* put the cross to its proper use. Help me.

*(He stands the cross upright. Mary tries to help, but the cross sways and almost topples over.)*

Careful it doesn't fall on your head. (*He steadies the cross.*) Whatever Fate intended, it can't be that a nun should die under a cross. Dying is done *on* a cross.

*(He leans the cross against the back wall.)*

MARY: Why are you doing this?

GYPSY: To help you. You're better than most of us. Isn't that what you're trying to prove? We just talk, the rest of us, but you can still do something, you can actually *be* good. I feel that. All you need is a helping hand to nudge you in the right direction.

MARY (*pause*): Thank you, but I have a direction. What I don't have is the general. Let's negotiate.

GYPSY: How do I know you didn't *invent* your story? To rouse my pity? So you and John could get the general without paying?

MARY: And the poem? Doesn't it *prove* that the general is my father?

GYPSY: He may be your father, but that doesn't make him an angel.

MARY: I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is that we can't hope to make this world better if we don't try to *understand* people who made such horrendous mistakes.

GYPSY: I understand them, is the world any better for that?

MARY: If we only lock them away, so they die full of hate for the world –

GYPSY: Illusions.

## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

MARY: To believe in good is not an illusion! Belief in good is the blood of life, without it we cease to be, the world comes to a standstill.

GYPSY: The world *has* come to a standstill. Look out the window. There's nothing left. For God's sake! Why does this have to happen to me?

MARY: Happen? To you?

GYPSY: All my life I've been trying to figure out what I want. Now, when I do, I should give it all up to bring a little joy into the life of an American nun?

MARY: We all can save our souls. Even you. God is giving you an opportunity.

GYPSY: You talk of God, but I can hear Lucifer whispering through your words.

MARY: If you won't help me, I'll go. I'll find someone else. (*Starts to gather her things.*)

GYPSY: You can't. No one can leave.

MARY: And no one can get here? Where are we, at the end of the world?

GYPSY: That's right. Here's the end of the world.

MARY: Maybe for you. Not for me. (*She starts packing.*)

GYPSY: I can't let you go out there.

MARY: What are you going to do? Nail me to the cross?

GYPSY: If you don't stop, I'll have to hit you.

MARY: Really?

GYPSY: You leave me no choice.

MARY: And what choice are you leaving me?

GYPSY: Who gives you the right to demand anything from me?

MARY: A daughter's love for her father! Next to it your aims and needs are a mere whisper!

GYPSY: Thank God you're not my daughter. Love like that would make me run to the end of the world.

MARY: That's here, you said.

GYPSY (*picks up the knife and threatens her*): Who do you think you are, nun? Get over there, in the corner, and shut your mouth, otherwise I'll shut it for you! (*Mary, trembling with fear, retreats against the wall. The Gypsy stands in front of her, knife in hand.*) Damn it! See what you've done to me?

(*Door opens, John enters, gun in hand. The Gypsy slowly turns. They look at each other.*)

Monsieur Major! Where have you been? I was worried about you.

JOHN: What're you doing with a knife in your hand?

GYPSY: I was just getting ready to cut your friend here... a slice of the sausage. But she doesn't want any, says her stomach is aching. Probably from the slice she ate before. Will you, Major? (*He reaches inside his pocket.*)

JOHN: Stop! (*Points the gun at the Gypsy.*)

GYPSY (*laughs and pulls out a piece of salami*): Good sausage. Have some.

JOHN (*looks at Mary*): Did he threaten you?

(*A moment of suspense. The Gypsy and Mary exchange glances.*)

MARY: What makes you think that?

GYPSY: You're accusing an innocent man. (*Sits down at the table.*)

JOHN: I'm not accusing anybody. I just react. There is a war going on.

GYPSY: Oh thank you for telling me. And why is there a war? Because the world isn't divided as it should be. I'd cut it up and stick it back together completely differently.

JOHN: Really? (*Replaces the gun.*)

GYPSY: There wouldn't be more than three countries. One for the unhappy, one for the happy, and one, the highest of all, for the gypsies.

JOHN: Oh, indeed?

GYPSY: In the first would live all the normal people, in the second idiots and similar fools, and I would live in the third.

JOHN: All by yourself?

GYPSY: All by myself. My own company and amusement, bothering no one.

JOHN: Might be a bit boring.

GYPSY: Not for me. While the normal people in the first country burn down each other's houses and steal each other's land, and the idiots and similar fools in the second country dream of a better future, I'd be enjoying a good sleep. For me there is no greater happiness.

JOHN (*looks at the disorder on the table, looks at Mary*): And what was happening here while I was away?

GYPSY: And out there, Major, where you've just been, what was happening there?

JOHN: Nothing special. And here?

GYPSY: And where you've just been, Major, and where you say nothing special was happening, has anything happened that might be of interest to me?

JOHN: Depends on what you have to tell me.

GYPSY: That depends on what you're going to tell *me*, Major. For example, what did you see where you've just been, and what did you see on the way back?

JOHN: Snow.

GYPSY (*laughs*): Very, very witty. (*Picks up the bottle.*) I'm not going to offer you this evil brew, where you've just been you were surely offered far better things.

*(Takes a swig, offers bottle to Mary. Mary shakes her head.)*

JOHN: You seem to have become friends while I was away.

GYPSY: I wouldn't say friends, we just realized we have a common enemy. Very close on our heels, although she doesn't know that. Have you seen it, the beast, on your way to wherever you went? If you haven't seen it you must've smelled it, you must've heard its paws in the snow. Haven't you?

JOHN (*looks at the cross*): What's this doing here?

GYPSY: Major! You're a Christian! Don't you know who died on the cross? Your spiritual general, Jesus Christ.

JOHN: So?

GYPSY: On this day a little less than two thousand years ago Jesus Christ took upon himself the sins of mankind from the beginning of light and for two thousand years in advance. For two thousand years we could murder, pillage and rape without the slightest fear that we would end up in hell, because the son of God had already been punished for our sins. A good man, can't deny it. Although some people have taken advantage of his goodness a little, wouldn't you say? Including you, Major. And I, there's no point in pretending that I'm any better. But now the party is over. Yes. Once a thousand years and never more. Why else would the Virgin Mary appear to innocent children not far from here? She was trying to warn us that Lucifer's shadow is creeping over the world and that from now on we'll have to pay for every sin with our own suffering, no longer by kneeling in front of the nearest cross. Unless, of course... (*Pause.*)

JOHN: Unless?

GYPSY: We find a new one.

JOHN: A new one?

GYPSY: We don't actually find one, he walks into a trap. Nor do we know he is the Savior until he's been crucified! (*Laughter, half-silly, half-sinister.*)

JOHN: You seem to be in a good mood.

GYPSY: In winters like this, laughter takes the place of a good coat. Let me sing you an old gypsy song –

JOHN: Business first.

GYPSY: It starts like this –

JOHN (*sharply*): I said, business first!

GYPSY: As you wish, Major. You're used to giving orders, and I'm used to taking them. But before we get down to business I want to sing you this gypsy song –

JOHN: Have you found the general?

GYPSY (*a swig from the bottle, pause*): A thing or two could be said about that.

JOHN: If you found him, you'll tell me where he is, and if you haven't, you'll tell me why not.

GYPSY: Oh no, Major. Not like that. I know your military reasoning. Black is black and white is white, and not a fart between them. You can afford the luxury of looking at the world through the barrel of the gun. For me, things are not as simple. For me they're slightly blurred. I have to come quite close to them before I can decide which way to turn.

JOHN: We made a deal. Your part of it was to find the general and bring him here.

GYPSY: And your part of the deal, Major?

JOHN: Didn't we say there'd be no advance?

GYPSY: Did we?

JOHN: That I need proof? Didn't we say that in this kind of business there is no place for trust?

GYPSY: You said that, Major. You said the nature of the business was such that I *had* to trust you, but you, on the other hand, couldn't trust me.

JOHN: Let's stick to the point –

GYPSY: I am sticking to the point, Major! But there is a problem. I don't know who you are. Even less what you're turning into. Look



## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

at yourself. Your nails are changing into claws, your body hair is getting longer, your teeth will soon look like fangs.

*(He goes to the door, opens it, looks out in all directions, closes the door.)*

JOHN: Expecting someone?

GYPSY: It won't be long now.

JOHN: You want to raise the price? Is that it?

GYPSY: What can I do? I'm only a link in a long chain of hungry people.

You're right, the price isn't what it was. It's growing, minute by minute. Soon you won't be able to afford it. So, let's stop wasting time –

JOHN *(pulls out the gun and points it at the Gypsy)*: You're wasting mine.

Turn around. Hands on the table.

GYPSY *(complying)*: Like in American movies?

JOHN *(looks at Mary)*: Clear out his pockets.

MARY: I won't.

GYPSY: You've made a bad mistake, Major.

JOHN: Yours was far worse.

*(Looks at Mary, decides to check the Gypsy's pockets himself.)*

MARY *(remembering John's passport)*: Wait!... I'll do it...

*(She checks the pockets in the Gypsy's coat and trousers. She pulls out a piece of salami, a box of matches, some change, a few nails. Puts everything on the table.)*

JOHN: The inside pockets.

*(He changes his mind, pushes Mary aside, presses the barrel of the gun against the Gypsy's neck and checks his coat pockets. He pulls out the passport. He checks it and puts it in his pocket. Looks at Mary.)*

MARY: I... must've missed it.

JOHN *(suddenly very unsure)*: What's happening here? On whose side are you?

MARY: On the side of God.

JOHN (*to the Gypsy*): Turn around. (*The Gypsy turns.*) How did my passport get into your pocket?

(*The Gypsy looks at Mary, who looks away.*)

GYPSY: You left it behind. As I went past the hotel this morning the receptionist shouted: "Hey, your English friend forgot his passport, give it to him when you see him!"

(*John produces a pair of handcuffs. The Gypsy half-jokingly offers his hands. John handcuffs him and leads him to the chair. He pushes him down on it. He takes a long piece of rope from his shoulder bag and throws it on the floor and looks at Mary.*)

JOHN: Tie him to the chair.

(*Mary hesitates. John points the gun at her. Mary picks up the rope and ties the Gypsy to the back of the chair.*)

How do you feel?

GYPSY: Like an innocent man facing a firing squad. But that's the story of my life, you just carry on.

JOHN: I'll ask you once more, for the last time: have you found the general?

GYPSY: As soon as I started to look for him, strange things began to happen –

JOHN: Have you found him?

GYPSY: As I said, from the moment –

JOHN (*presses the gun to the Gypsy's face*): Listen, old man. Stop it, okay?

GYPSY (*with a smile*): Isn't it wonderful how close two strangers can get to each other across a huge gap dividing them?

JOHN: There is a limit to what I can take, and you've pushed me right to the edge. Don't push me over it. Because if you do... I won't be responsible for my actions.

GYPSY: I will accept responsibility for them. Don't worry.

JOHN (*moving away*): Let's stick to the point. Have you found the general?

GYPSY: Yes.

JOHN (*surprised*): Where?

## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

GYPSY: Not far from here.

JOHN: What does that mean?

GYPSY: That he isn't at the other end of the world, but closer than may be good for us.

JOHN: And that is?

GYPSY: A farm, two hours from here.

JOHN: And what is he doing there?

GYPSY: Difficult to say.

JOHN: Why?

GYPSY: Because I didn't see him.

JOHN: You didn't see him?

GYPSY: Not the general, no.

JOHN: Then how do you know he's there?

GYPSY: The farmer told me. An old acquaintance, why should he lie?

JOHN: All right. (*Looks at Mary.*) Give him his boots.

GYPSY: Where are we going?

JOHN: To get the general.

GYPSY: We can't.

JOHN: Why not?

GYPSY: Because we won't find him.

JOHN: Has he evaporated?

GYPSY: He'll be back after dark. The farmer said so.

JOHN (*scrutinizing the Gypsy from a distance*): Did you tell him *why* you're looking for the general?

GYPSY: One moment you think I'm dangerous, the next you think I'm an idiot.

JOHN: What did you tell him?

GYPSY: As he was milking his cow just then, I told him not to let her kick him in the head. Then I went.

JOHN: Where?

GYPSY: To an old woman up on the hill, who used to give me little jobs before the war.

JOHN: And?

GYPSY: I found a burned-down house and a rotting body. A Bosnian postcard. Greetings from hell, wish you were here.

JOHN: And then?

GYPSY: Then I went back here. I would've come earlier if I hadn't noticed those tracks in the snow.

JOHN: Tracks?

GYPSY: As soon as I saw them I was a different man. I returned to the farm where I'd seen a stack of firewood behind the house. Long, heavy poles. I took one and followed the tracks. I knew he was waiting for me.

JOHN: The general?

GYPSY: The wolf. I could smell his skin, he was so close I could feel his stench in my nostrils.

JOHN: Should I laugh or should I cry?

GYPSY: Laugh, Major! Laugh! You don't know the beast on our heels. This is no ordinary wolf. All of a sudden his fur starts to turn into short blond hair, his snout changes into the pleasant smile of an educated man, claws become manicured nails, and then no one knows they're facing a beast. So they trust him. By the time he shows his fangs it's too late.

JOHN (*puts the gun in his pocket*): You picked up a pole and followed the tracks.

GYPSY: That's what I said.

JOHN: What happened?

GYPSY: I hit him on the head. I hit him hard, although he begged me to spare him.

JOHN: The wolf begged you?

GYPSY: The wolf wasn't there anymore. Instead of him I found a young man in uniform. On all fours, in the snow.

JOHN: What uniform?

GYPSY: I think he was one of yours, one of those heroes of the United Nations who're paid more in a month than a hundred Bosnians make in ten years.

JOHN: Was he wounded?

GYPSY: Butchered. But still conscious. He wanted to say something but couldn't because blood spurted out of his throat.

JOHN: And?

GYPSY: It was obvious, wasn't it? The wolf had got him.

JOHN: Did you help him?

GYPSY: I did. I hit him five times over the head. He was dead by the third blow.

JOHN (*pause*): And then?

GYPSY: I came here.

JOHN (*pause*): And now?

GYPSY: Now the wolf is so close I can feel his teeth in my neck. I'm struggling for breath. All my life I've been hoping this wouldn't happen. It has. How can I defend myself?

JOHN: I'll protect you. As long as you're with me.

GYPSY: As long as you expect to profit from me?

JOHN: There is nothing I expect from you that I wouldn't want to pay for! According to our agreement, sealed with a word of honor, which *you* are breaking, not I –

GYPSY: Something's happened, Major. Since we made our agreement something happened. Something's cut into my heart, sharp and cold. So bad is the pain that I can't think anymore, my brain's in a spasm –

JOHN: Listen, I've had enough of your –

GYPSY: It's all different now, Major! Quite different than it was! On my way back, as I walked through the woods, the wind swept past me like Lucifer on his way to hell. I said to myself: it's getting brighter in the east, the snow will soon melt, the spring's on the way. Then I said to myself: don't fool yourself, old man, this brightness is a reflection of flames, they're burning down houses again. At that moment, Major, a voice appeared above me, whispering, floating above the trees, and repeated: they're burning down houses again. I could see no one. And I yelled: who is that, who's there? Only the pine trees creaked in reply as if they wanted to break in half. I went on, and suddenly I felt a strange warmth. And I said to myself: no, the spring can't be far away. Again the voice above me repeated the very same words. And suddenly I recognized it. It was the voice of my daughter. I yelled: is that you, is that you, my dear soul, the heart of my heart? And then –

JOHN (*moves toward the Gypsy*): What's that got to do –

(*Mary stops him with a gesture of her hand.*)

GYPSY: And then she asked me: are they near? And I replied: no, my sweet one, you'll hear the rumble of their guns before they come. But the sky, Father, she said, the sky is ablaze with so many colors, and the air is filled with the smell of corpses. Don't be silly, I said, the sky is ablaze with the sun, which shines on killers and their victims alike, they're still far away. And she said: are we going to wait, Father, are we going to wait till they come? No, I yelled, no, stupid girl, we'll leave

as soon as the snow melts, we can't go before. And she said: you're only promising. All the time you're only promising. That's what she said. It was like steel had cut into my heart. I'm responsible for everything that happened. I refused to listen to her. I thought she was just a silly girl. And then the wind came storming past again, blowing snow in my eyes, and the gentle, sweet voice never returned. I shouted so hard I nearly went deaf: are you there, my sweet little one, my bright-eyed doe, your father's pride? There was no reply. Even the wind fell silent. (*Silence. John has lowered his head. Mary is looking at Gypsy.*) And then, Major, then it struck my mind, my heart, my soul, and I said to myself: I'm mad. My daughter is dead. They killed her. Before the eyes of her father who kept looking at the sky, waiting for your planes. "Where are you?" I yelled. "You promised! You told us we were safe here!" You never came. As I watched what they were doing to her, I raised my hand and put a curse on you. You scavengers! You monsters from hell! All you well-bred vampires with scented blood, and all the killers with Lucifer's urine in their veins are going to be judged by this hand of mine! This hand of mine –

(*John removes the handcuffs from the Gypsy's hands and looks at Mary.*)

JOHN: Untie him.

MARY: What are you, my commanding officer?

JOHN: Untie him.

MARY: What's the matter with you, waving your gun and threatening people like a madman?

JOHN: Untie him, please.

(*Points the gun at her.*)

MARY: Do you realize what you're doing?

JOHN: Do you?

MARY: You're pointing a gun straight at my heart.

JOHN: He who is not with me is against me.

MARY: All right, then. Fire. Come on.

JOHN (*lowering the gun*): Untie him. Please.

(*Mary unties the Gypsy and throws the rope at John's feet. Outside, much closer than before, a burst of automatic gunfire. John leaps to*

## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

*the window and carefully looks out. The Gypsy comes up behind him and hits him with both hands on the back of the head. John falls to the ground. The Gypsy pulls the gun from his hand. Another burst of gunfire.)*

MARY: Oh God! You've killed him.

GYPSY: I hope not.

*(Takes a swig from the bottle. Another burst of gunfire.)*

MARY: Who's that shooting?

GYPSY: They all shoot in this part of the world. Either to kill or just for fun. Trouble is you never know until it's too late.

MARY: It's so close.

GYPSY: Death is always close, even when you don't hear it.

MARY: Somebody's coming, right? Somebody's coming here.

GYPSY: Another minute and he'll thrust his snout right through the door.

*But... (Looks at the gun.) It'll be easier now. They refused to give us weapons. They just watched us being slaughtered. Now we're equal at the game of death: checkmate! (He fires in the air.)*

MARY: You're drunk.

GYPSY *(laughing)*: Maybe. *(He weighs the gun in his hand.)* I had no idea one felt so... powerful. God must feel like that.

*(He points the gun at Mary, lowers it.)*

MARY: What're you going to do?

GYPSY *(pause)*: The fact that now I can kill doesn't mean I know what I want.

MARY: Then we can carry out our plan.

GYPSY: *Our* plan?

MARY: We can leave. In two hours we can be at the farm where my father's hiding.

GYPSY: My dear girl, how naive you are. *(He walks toward her and lifts her chin with the barrel of the gun.)* And how terribly stupid.

MARY *(frightened yet defiant)*: Because I was hoping that your heart wasn't dead?

GYPSY: How strange. Your words used to strike me as if you were sticking pins into my heart. Now they sound pompous. Empty. Now that

my hand has lengthened into steel and steel into bullet, and bullet into death, words have turned hollow. Unnecessary.

MARY: Please take me to my father.

GYPSY: He's not your father.

MARY: He is! Please, please, take me to him!

*(She sinks to her knees, buries her face in her hands and starts to cry. The Gypsy watches her.)*

GYPSY: All right. But before we leave here you must do something for me.

MARY: Anything.

GYPSY: You must help me finish our business.

MARY: Our business?

GYPSY: Fate has chosen us to complete a task. Remember? *(Gives her the handcuffs.)* Put these on him.

*(Mary handcuffs John. The Gypsy prods him with his foot. John doesn't react. The Gypsy pours some brandy on his face. Then he kicks him. John moans and opens his eyes.)*

GYPSY: On your feet, like a soldier!

*(John sits up. He looks at the gun in the Gypsy's hand. He looks at Mary. Mary lowers her head.)*

Get up, boy. *(John struggles to his feet.)* Over there, in front of the cross. *(Points the gun at him.)*

*(John staggers toward the cross and leans against it with his back.)*

*(The Gypsy looks at Mary)* Tie him to it.

*(Mary picks up the rope and ties John to the cross. The Gypsy sits down on the chair.)*

The accused, what say you in your defense?

JOHN: Nothing, until I know what I'm accused of.

GYPSY: The murder and humiliation of my daughter!



## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

JOHN (*long pause*): I don't even know your daughter –

GYPSY: Must we know someone before we can kill them?

JOHN: This is absurd.

GYPSY (*looks at Mary*): Defend him.

MARY: I can't.

GYPSY: Why not? Because you feel you're just as guilty?

MARY: Are you accusing me as well?

GYPSY: The entire world! (*To John.*) You're here as a representative of the United Nations –

JOHN: I don't represent anybody –

GYPSY: You do. The world which has always lectured us about justice. Religion that teaches pity and the love for one's neighbors. God, who for his amusement decided to make fools of us. You, too, are responsible.

JOHN: For what?

GYPSY: You said you would protect us!

JOHN: I did?

GYPSY: You said to the killers in the hills: if you enter the town you'll have us to deal with. And you told us: you're safe, in the name of everything that's sacred to us we won't allow them to burn down your homes, steal your land, kill your children. We believed you. The world is with us, we said. The Christian God can be merciful even to those who believe in Allah.

JOHN: I understand you, I agree with you! But that has nothing to do with me!

GYPSY: If the victims are as guilty as their murderers, you're all equally responsible for what happened to them! Didn't you sit in front of TV sets thrilled by the horror, yet not lift a finger? That's right, boy. Not a finger did you lift as they started to come down from the hills and set fire to our homes and herd us like cattle into trucks and buses – which even you contributed – thank you, Major, sir, thank you for being able to think at such a moment of such an important thing as our comfort! Let them go to their deaths on soft seats, so no one will be able to say we did nothing! Thank you, Major, thank you so much. Unfortunately some didn't live to see the comfort of your buses, among them my daughter, to whom the heroes from the hills wanted to show how well-endowed they are, how they can bugger us at will because we deserve no better. Ten of them lined up in front of her and dropped their trousers. My daughter was pushed down on

her knees. She was forced to suck them off one by one and swallow their seed, while four of them held me so I couldn't avert my eyes. "Enjoy yourself," they said, laughing, "you've trained her well for the only job she's suitable for." When she came to the end of the line, we both thought they'd give her a few more kicks and let us go. No. Another appeared before her, the eleventh, the ugliest and filthiest of them all. And my daughter, the heart of my soul, the soul of my heart, the gentle singer of gentle songs, took hold of his prick and put it in her mouth. And bit it off. They battered her head in with the butts of their rifles. They trod on her with their boots.

*(Pause. The Gypsy lowers his head, his body is shaking.)*

The wolf is here. He is breathing with my lungs, my heart beats inside him, he looks through my eyes. I was afraid of this. Perhaps I shouldn't have run from him all my life. He is much bigger now than he was in my youth, when I could've struck a deal with him, promised to pay him occasional tribute. Throw him a bone now and then. Now he wants all. *(He looks at Mary.)* Remove the handcuffs.

*(Mary complies.)*

Raise your arms, John Joseph.

*(The Gypsy points the gun at him. John raises his arms. The Gypsy looks at Mary.)*

Tie his hands to the cross.

*(Mary, using the ends of the rope, ties John's wrists to the arms of the cross. The Gypsy drinks and laughs.)*

How quickly the world turns upside down. Eh, boy? But now it's too late to turn back. Now we have to finish the job.

*(He switches on the cassette player. The Bosnian ballad, sung by the girl we now know to be the Gypsy's dead daughter. The Gypsy looks at Mary.)*

On your knees, girl. Down, before him.

## FINAL INNOCENCE

---

MARY: No... Please...

GYPSY (*points the gun at her*): On your knees before him who has taken upon himself the sins of humanity –

MARY: No!

GYPSY: You can still love and forgive. That's what you said. So, suck out his seed and swallow it. Change it into the germ of man without evil in his heart. Do it!

MARY: I'd rather die.

GYPSY: You mustn't die if you want to save your father's soul. Don't give up now if you want to be good. (*He presses the gun into her hand and steps back.*) Shoot him. Him or me. (*Pause.*)

JOHN: Kill him, Mary! Have you gone mad? (*Mary raises the gun and points it at the Gypsy.*) Mary, for God's sake!

*(Mary points the gun at John and fires. John quivers, his head drops to his chest. The Gypsy pulls the gun from Mary's hand.)*

GYPSY: Start packing.

MARY (*mechanically*): Now I can save him... Now I can... (*Begins to cry.*)  
Now I can save him...

GYPSY: Him, maybe. But not this one. This one has saved us for another two thousand years.

*(He checks John's pockets and pulls out Mary's little cross on a chain. Then he pulls out spare cartridges for the gun. As he loads the gun he comes forward, with the chain hanging from his fingers.)*

MARY (*reaching out and taking the chain*): That's mine. A memento my father gave to my mother before they parted. She gave him one exactly the same.

*(She holds the cross up for the Gypsy to see. He looks at it. Then he reaches inside his pullover and pulls out a similar chain with a similar cross. He compares them. They look exactly the same. He looks at Mary. Mary looks at him. Slowly, she moves toward him and stops. They stare at each other. Almost simultaneously they sink to their knees. As the song in the cassette player runs out, lights fade to BLACKOUT.)*

## A Drama of the Flaw in Christian Morality

At a time when the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is close and the world is looking to the future with uncertainty, the need for a collective moral and historical “stocktaking” is not only timely, but also inevitable, particularly in Europe, the most “civilized” of continents. After it had exported Christianity to “less civilized” parts of the world, created an amazing intellectual and cultural heritage, and developed sophisticated social structures and democracy, along with the tradition of charity and liberalism, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became the setting for the destructive Great War, the shame and the horror of the Holocaust, and the extreme savagery of the recent wars in the Balkans.

If we put to one side the socio-economic and political causes of such conflicts, we are left with the enormous burden of unresolved moral dilemmas, which in a time of collective crisis glitter with the treacherous luster of ambiguity. *Final Innocence* looks into this dark side of our morality. In this play, set in the final days of the Bosnian war (in which “God became a Balkan warrior”), Evald Flisar bravely takes on the foundations of our moral code, exploring the nature of personal identity, moral purity and freedom of choice. Like all good dramatists, Flisar deals with his material at a deeply human level, but reaches past the contradictions of his characters to the very heart of Christian morality, revealing its central, tragic flaw.

Each of the three characters in the play tries to repair a terrible wrong (“sin”) and to solve through positive action (“faith,” “charity,” “justice”) his own crisis and achieve salvation (“absolution”). Believers or not, they have in common the principles of charity, benevolence, compassion, as well as justice and retribution (principles that we have taken from the Old and New Testaments, and which are an integral part of our collective awareness). In short, all three speak the same moral language.

The story of three strangers who seek absolution in the heart of a living hell presents to us the drama of Christianity: one of sin, sacrifice and forgiveness. When the characters seek a way through the ruins of their wounded souls, they realize that it is possible for the roles of destroyer and victim to quickly change, and that forgiveness and sacrifice are just words in a world gone mad. Each of them gets to the point where his own suffering releases him from responsibility for the pain of others and where their shared moral language becomes dysfunctional. Because they have different syntaxes available to them, they are compelled to recreate the ruined logic of their moral code, but in doing so manage to create only a grotesque imitation. By dealing with their ordeals they also reach a point without hope where absolution in the Christian sense is impossible.

And yet the gloomy finale is not entirely without hope, as it points the possibility of a different, more courageous principle: the principle of personal, *individual* responsibility.

*Sladjana Vujović*