



Ukrainian Drama TRANSLATIONS

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Play original name / translated	ua	Егоїстка
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The project is implemented with the support of the International Relief Fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany and the Goethe Institute within the project "Theatrical windows. Work in progress" implemented by the NGO "Teatr na Zhukah" (Kharkiv).



Auswärtiges Amt



Olena Astasieva

THE EGOTIST

A play

Translated by John Freedman

Characters:

MOTHER – an elderly woman 70 years of age. She talks with her **DAUGHTER** in a quiet, plaintive voice. She looks rather wretched, is perhaps a bit hunched over. However, when emotions get the better of her, she begins to speak loudly, even to shout hysterically. In those moments she is transformed, as if she has been inhabited by someone else, and in her voice one hears power and past animosities.

DAUGHTER – a woman 50 years of age, has a very cultured way about her. She is still attractive, although she looks her age. She converses calmly with her **MOTHER**, but it's as if she is suppressing irritation. This suppression of emotions deprives her of all her energy, and so, in all other moments, she is quite listless. Occasionally her repressed irritation breaks out into the open.

FRIEND – a man 45 years of age, an alcoholic and drug addict. He has spent time in prison. This is evident in the way he looks. Behind his feigned swagger lies low self-esteem, and lack of self-confidence. He is not lacking in charm.

Notes for the actors:

When talking to **FRIEND**, **DAUGHTER** is transformed, her suppressed irritation dissipates, and she becomes rather buoyant. In such cases, her voice becomes flirtatious.

During interaction between **MOTHER** and **DAUGHTER**, every time **MOTHER** tries to touch her **DAUGHTER**, the latter draws back as if avoiding something unpleasant.

The action takes place in an unknown country.

SCENE 1

A small studio apartment with a kitchen. A full-sized bed stands in the middle of the room. Next to it stand a desk and a closet. A television is affixed to the wall.

***MOTHER** and **DAUGHTER** in the room.*

***DAUGHTER** unpacks her suitcase. Removes things from it and places them on the bed. **MOTHER** takes the things from the bed and puts them in the closet. At present, **MOTHER** is putting away **DAUGHTER**'s panties. She picks up each item separately, looks it over, adds it to a neat pile in the closet.*

DAUGHTER. Why didn't you tell me I wouldn't have my own room?

MOTHER. You can sleep on the bed, and I'll sleep on the floor. I don't mind. It's no problem.

DAUGHTER. On the phone you said I would have my own room.

MOTHER. At least no bombs are falling on you here.

DAUGHTER. If you had told me I wouldn't even have my own room, I would have gone to another country. Ireland offers stipends of 900 euros a month. Germany provides apartments for refugees.

MOTHER. Oh, stop it. Where would someone give you an apartment for nothing?

DAUGHTER. Everywhere, Mom! All my friends have received apartments! Where am I going to live here?

MOTHER. Live in this room. Sleep on my bed. I'll sleep on the floor. I'll sleep in the corridor on the welcome mat in front of the door. Is that what you want? Maybe you'd just prefer to kick me out of my apartment?! You just got here and you're already pushing me out! At my old age!!!

DAUGHTER. You just shouldn't have lied to me.

MOTHER. If I'd told you the truth, you wouldn't have come. I didn't want you to go to Ireland. It's so far away. What would you have done there alone? (*Very pathetic tone.*) How could I fail to help my own daughter when there is a war going on? True, nobody gives anyone stipends here. And my apartment is tiny. But at least we'll be together. I made you some blintzes. Remember how I did that when you were a girl? When you were little you always asked me: Mom, make me blintzes...

DAUGHTER. I can't eat blintzes. They're too heavy. I'll be sick to my stomach.

MOTHER. Really good blintzes. With honey. Or jam. You want me to open a jar of plum jam?

DAUGHTER. There's no jam I hate more. Since I was a child.

Offended, MOTHER falls silent.

DAUGHTER. All right. Let's go to the kitchen. Maybe I'll have a couple of blintzes.

SCENE 2

Kitchen.

DAUGHTER sits at table and eats. MOTHER sits across from her, stares.

MOTHER. What a joy it is to watch you eat.

DAUGHTER. Why aren't you eating?

MOTHER. I don't want to. I don't need anything more in life than to be able to sit and watch you eat. I also made some soup, with meatballs. Your favorite. You want some?

DAUGHTER. I'm full now.

MOTHER. Have some more. You're so skinny. Here's some cheese, and butter, and sausages, and blintzes with honey, and olives, and tomatoes, and cucumbers, and rolls... The bread rings here are especially good. Here's some fresh bread.

DAUGHTER. In Kherson people stood in line for bread. The first thing that happened when the war came was that bread disappeared. I went without bread for a week. I had no desire to stand in those lines. Then one day I walk out of our building and there's a woman coming toward me with loaves of bread. And that fresh bread smelled so good! I was overcome with a craving for fresh bread!

MOTHER (*Pushes the bread towards her*). Yeah, I read all about that in your Facebook posts. How the bombs rained down. Horrors. You poor girl. I haven't been in Ukraine for 25 years, but when the war started I saw it all in my dreams. The explosions, the shells. It's good that you left.

DAUGHTER. What do you mean you read my posts? I locked my profile. It was only open to friends.

MOTHER. You mean I'm not your friend? I don't understand. So now a mother can't read about her own daughter? I want to keep up with what is happening with you. You never say anything about yourself. Other people's kids call them every day. But I'll go deaf waiting for you to call me. You never visited me, you were always too busy. If it wasn't for the war we probably would never have seen each other again. You might not even have come for my funeral!

DAUGHTER. You could have come to visit me yourself.

MOTHER. Peter wouldn't give me the money to go anywhere. He was so stingy. "Why do you need to go to Ukraine?" he would ask. "You forget something?" Now I'm old and weak, and I can't travel by air anymore. To say nothing of the fact that there's a war on. I'm so happy you came!

Stands, goes to DAUGHTER, wants to embrace her. DAUGHTER withdraws.

When you were a child you would never let me hug you either. You're like a feral animal. I couldn't hug you, couldn't kiss you. You'd push me away.

DAUGHTER. You told me a different story. Remember? You told me you didn't kiss me or hug me because you read in a magazine that children should not be embraced.

MOTHER. Well, back then there were ideas like that floating around. I read Family and School magazine, and they printed an article saying you should not hug children, should not kiss them, or tell them that you love them. Otherwise you'd spoil them. I believed what they wrote. I'd wait for you to fall asleep, then I'd go and kiss you tenderly. Later when we started seeing movies made in the West I was absolutely shocked! All the mothers are saying, "I love you!" They had instructed us not to do that.

DAUGHTER. Well, now I can't stand it when you touch me.

MOTHER. So, I'm to blame, am I? I'm telling you, you were always like that.

DAUGHTER. All right. I want to get some sleep. I'm tired. I've been on the road two days running. Where do I sleep?

MOTHER. It's a big bed. There's room for both of us.

DAUGHTER. I'd rather lay out a spot on the floor. But I can't live like this for long. I won't be staying here. I'm going somewhere as soon as I get my biometric passport.

MOTHER. When you were little, and I was going out, you would say: "Mom! I miss you already!" That's what it's like for me now. You haven't even left, but I miss you already.

SCENE 3

MOTHER and DAUGHTER out for a walk. They walk in circles in a park.

MOTHER. I so dreamed of you coming so we could go for walks in the park. I'm so alone here. Whenever I walk here alone I have to swallow tears. Everyone else is with their family and children. That's how you do it here, you go for walks with your family. They have picnics on the lawn – mothers and children, grandmothers and grandchildren.

DAUGHTER. What about husbands?

MOTHER. Men here have their own recreational customs. When Peter was alive he hardly ever went for walks with me. He'd spend all day long with his friends, then come home in the evening. I'd be all alone and I'd say, "Let's go for a walk." He'd say, "I'm too tired." Still, every now and then I'd get him out to take walks with me. Now I'm alone all the time.

DAUGHTER. You're not alone now. We're taking a walk together. Your dream has come true.

MOTHER. But you'll still leave me. Or, maybe you'll stay. What do you think?

DAUGHTER. What is there for me here? There's no stipends. I can't work here. I don't know the language. There are almost no Ukrainian refugees here. There's no one to talk to.

MOTHER. It's true that there's no one to talk to. In my 25 years here I never made a single friend among the locals. I had only Peter to talk to. After he died, I've had no one to talk to. Just on the telephone. Even then, if I don't make the call, no one is going to call me.

DAUGHTER. That's true for everybody. I make all my own calls.

MOTHER. There's one solution for that: Find a husband. Like I did.

DAUGHTER. Who's going to want me at the age of 50?

MOTHER. I got married at 50. You can too. Only don't go looking for a young man. Find an old man, 20 years older than you.

DAUGHTER. You mean find a husband who will die soon?

MOTHER. He dies and you get his pension. I live quite well on Peter's pension.

DAUGHTER. You just got lucky with Peter.

MOTHER (*Suddenly begins speaking loudly and angrily*). Lucky? I got lucky?! What are you talking about? Do you know what I had to put up with with him?! You have no idea what a difficult man he was! He hid his money from me. He wouldn't even give me money for groceries. He did the shopping himself! And if he did give me something, he insisted that I answer for every penny! He would add up the receipts. He was afraid I would run away if I had my own money!

DAUGHTER. Mom, quiet. There are people around us! Don't shout.

MOTHER (*pays no attention*). He would begin shouting the instant he didn't like something! I was always afraid he would hit me. He didn't hit me only because he was afraid of going to prison. The laws about that are very strict here. Or he could get angry about something and not speak to me for entire weeks. I would crawl on my knees before him, begging him to forgive me. And he would say,

“You don't like it here? Then go back to your Ukraine! Live there on your pension of \$50!” Lucky!
I went through a-a-a-ll kinds of shit with him!!!

DAUGHTER. So now you want me to fall face-first in the same pile of shit, do you?

MOTHER clutches at her heart, sits on a bench.

DAUGHTER. Are you all right?

MOTHER. Give me my heart medicine. It's in my purse. *(Takes pills)*. It's all right. It'll pass.

MOTHER and DAUGHTER sit on bench. They are silent.

DAUGHTER'S DREAM №1

I am returning to Kherson in a packed bus. I get a phone call with the news that my mother has died. I arrive in Kherson and walk the totally empty streets. I realize that everyone has died but for me. I am alone in the city, alone on the planet, alone in the universe. I weep and I cannot stop. I wake up in tears.

SCENE 4

Kitchen. MOTHER and DAUGHTER prepare a holiday dinner.

MOTHER stands at the stove frying meat patties. DAUGHTER sits at the table cutting vegetables for a salad.

DAUGHTER. Why make so much food? There's just two of us. We have no guests. We should go to a cafe and have pie with tea.

MOTHER. I want to prepare something tasty for you myself. I miss cooking. I used to cook for Peter. He loved to eat. I'd be preparing something for him, but I'd be thinking: Where is my daughter, what is she eating? Now I'm cooking for you and it is such a joy! I never got any joy cooking for him.

DAUGHTER. I don't understand the joy of slaving over a stove for hours.

MOTHER. I'm the one standing here. Don't do it if you don't want to.

DAUGHTER. I can do it.

MOTHER. Only, peel the skins off the tomatoes, please. Don't slice them with the skins still on.

DAUGHTER. All right.

MOTHER. And not such big chunks. Cut them in smaller chunks.

DAUGHTER. All right.

MOTHER. And slice some bread, too.

DAUGHTER takes bread, slices it.

Why do you hold it up in the air to slice it? Put it on a cutting board. Here, I have one right here. And cut thinner slices. And use this other knife. That's not a bread knife.

DAUGHTER takes other knife, slices bread. Goes to sink, begins to wash the built-up pile of dishes.

Oh, look at all the dish detergent she uses! Economize! Squeeze it on the sponge, not on the dishes.

DAUGHTER (*irritated*). Mother!!!

MOTHER. What did I say? Can't a person say anything anymore?

SCENE 5

MOTHER and DAUGHTER sit together at table that is set for a festive holiday.

MOTHER. Happy 50th birthday, sweetheart! May all your dreams come true! Whatever you may dream about!

DAUGHTER. I dream of Ukraine's victory.

MOTHER. What good will this victory do you? Nothing good will ever happen in Kherson again. What could you do there after the war, live among the ruins? Dream of something better for yourself. Make plans... how you're going to live here.

DAUGHTER. I have no plans. What plans, Mom? My whole life is ruined. Everything I built in Kherson for 50 years. I have nothing left, no friends, no work. The library I worked in was bombed into rubble. As far as I know my apartment building is still standing, but there's no guarantee they won't bomb it by the end of the war.

MOTHER. Almost the same thing happened to me at your age. But that's okay, I got through it. Perestroika, the 1990s, no jobs, no money, inflation. Lida would say, "Let's go sell stuff at the bazaar! Everybody's doing it, we can too." I'd never tried to sell a thing. I'd worked my whole life in a factory. I got my pay every week like clockwork. And now – the bazaar. Lug those sacks, push that overloaded cart out to market every morning. And what if you don't sell anything? I had debts. And a baby to feed. My nerves were shot. How I used to yell at you every day when I'd come home from the bazaar!

DAUGHTER. I remember. I was afraid of you. You'd come home and right on the doorstep you'd start yelling: "Why didn't you wash the dishes?! Why didn't you make supper?!"

MOTHER. Oh, you were so afraid...

DAUGHTER. I'm still afraid now. I shudder every time I hear your footsteps, just like I did in my childhood. I think you'll come in and start yelling: "Why aren't you doing anything? Reading your books again? Go wash the dishes!"

MOTHER. I used to shout at you like that? You're making that up. She can't remember anything good. Am I really such a bad mother?

DAUGHTER. I'm not saying you're a bad mother. You raised me as best you could. They say

everyone raises their children as they were raised by their parents.

MOTHER. That's not always true. My mother, your grandmother, never hit me.

DAUGHTER. You mean you used to hit me?

MOTHER. You mean you don't remember?

DAUGHTER. No. Somehow I don't remember that at all. My memory must have erased that. Now I understand why I'm afraid of you. Of course you'd fear someone who used to hit you.

MOTHER. Well, what do I mean by "hit." You say it as if I used to give you beatings! I'd just give you a little wallop now and then. One time, I remember, you hid my belt from me. You thought if you hid my belt, I wouldn't whop you. That made me laugh!

DAUGHTER. What did you hit me for, Mom?

MOTHER. All kinds of things. I don't remember now. Probably because you didn't do what I asked. Didn't wash the dishes, maybe. Didn't vacuum the floor. Didn't do the wash. Lots of reasons.

DAUGHTER. That's funny. People usually get hit for doing something wrong. But it looks like you hit me for what I didn't do.

MOTHER. Why do you keep going on about this? Hit you! I might have given you a slap on the butt a time or two. I remember you were almost 12 already when I went to give you a smack. But you lay down on the bed and stuck out your arms and legs so I couldn't even reach you. For some reason that cracked me up. I laughed, dropped my belt and left. I never hit you again after that.

DAUGHTER. What about Dad? Did Dad hit me?

MOTHER. Oh, come now. Dad wouldn't lift a finger against you. He only smacked you on the head once when you refused to finish your soup. But I had a talk with him. I said, "Don't you ever dare do that again!"

DAUGHTER. I vaguely remember that. Somebody's voice: "Only don't hit her on the head! She'll come out an idiot!" Mom, I came out an idiot.

MOTHER. What are you talking about? You're my smart, beautiful girl.

DAUGHTER. Why didn't you ever tell me that when I was a kid? You always said I was too skinny. That I should wear baggy clothes and long dresses to hide my bony arms and legs. I thought I was ugly. In fact, I had a beautiful figure, Mom!

MOTHER. And you have a beautiful figure now, too. Who looks so good at your age?! We were on the street yesterday and one man couldn't take his eyes off you. He craned his neck so far, he almost broke it. Why didn't I say it back then? I don't know myself. For some reason it was always easy for me to compliment others, but it was always hard to compliment you. I couldn't bring myself to do it. In the Soviet Union we were taught: "You shouldn't praise children or they'll grow up to be egotists."

DAUGHTER. I grew up an egotist anyway.

MOTHER. You're no egotist! You're my beloved daughter. Who has a birthday today! I have a gift for you, by the way. (*Hands her a gift.*) Happy birthday!

DAUGHTER. What is this?

MOTHER. It's a blood pressure monitor. Very useful at your age. Your health has grown so weak.

DAUGHTER. Thank you. (*Ironic.*) Yes, a fine gift for my 50th birthday.

Attaches device to her arm and measures her blood pressure. Outside – the sound of a passing jet. DAUGHTER jumps up, covers her head with her hands and hides under table.

MOTHER. What's the matter, sweetheart? Did that scare you? There's nothing to fear, there's a show in town. They have an air show every year. I forgot to tell you.

DAUGHTER. I thought we were going to be bombed

MOTHER'S DREAM №1

I dream I'm cooking up a meal in the kitchen, but I don't have time to finish it. People are ringing the bell and knocking at the door, and I know they've come to see me – my hungry children are standing at the door. I have to feed the whole crowd of them, otherwise they will starve to death – but I can't do it. I never finish what I was cooking. I was too late. I race around the room. I want to open the door for them, but I fear doing it too.

SCENE 6

DAUGHTER lies on the bed, her nose in her notebook, and tells about all the information she finds. MOTHER irons clothes on an ironing board.

DAUGHTER. In Ireland people get stipends of 200 euros a week. And they're put up in hotels. Families of four are given modular homes. For free!

MOTHER. When I came here, nobody gave me anything for free. I lived in a rented apartment with five other immigrants.

DAUGHTER. Husbands and wives are placed in private rooms in a hotel.

MOTHER. I thought I would go mad! I was used to living in my own apartment in Kherson. I didn't have to answer to anyone. And now when I go to the shower, Lida yells at me through the door to cut my shower short and save water! Lida – she was the one who convinced me to follow her here. I was afraid to go anywhere alone. But I owed her money. My little sales business had gone bankrupt, and I had nothing to pay her back with. I had no choice but to follow her here.

DAUGHTER. Single women, if they have no children, are placed in a single room with five or ten others. In a hostel.

MOTHER. I had this one roommate, Rita, who was always trying to economize on the heating. She kept the room brutally cold – and me with my cystitis. I'd turn on the heat, she'd turn it off. Oh, we used to go at one another!

DAUGHTER. There is such a shortage of housing in the Netherlands that they house refugees in

prisons.

MOTHER. All day long on my feet, morning to night, 12 hours a day every day. The factory. I'd come home and want to get some rest and Rita would have turned off the heat so the room was like a freezer. It didn't bother her in the least! She was from Moldova. Really sneaky. And, God, was she ugly.

DAUGHTER. Germany offers stipends, but you have to live in a camp. I recently read a post by one young woman who lived in one of those refugee camps. Guards follow them everywhere at all times of day, even when they go to the bathroom. There are cameras everywhere, even in the showers. They feed them with terrible German food, nothing but pudding. She went on a hunger strike in protest. And then these German psychologists came and asked her, "Do you have thoughts of suicide?" She said, "Not until you came here." You can rent an apartment, of course, but how do you find one if you don't know the language?

MOTHER (*continues to reminisce*). I don't know the language, and I have no idea of what is going on around me. There were these young guys who worked at the factory with me – they would say something and laugh, but I had no idea what they were saying!

DAUGHTER. In Norway they put you in communal lodgings and give you a stipend, but it's too cold there for me with my cystitis. There's no way of getting anything private, just communal quarters with a shared kitchen.

MOTHER. Oh, I hate to iron. I'm sick of it! My back hurts. I'm a wreck.

DAUGHTER (*half-hearted*). You want help?

MOTHER. No, no. I'll do it. You rest.

DAUGHTER (*refocuses on notebook*). It's warm in Spain, but they only offer stipends for a few months, and they don't provide lodging. You have to work. The only thing I could do there would be to scrub toilets.

MOTHER. I remember Lida once said: "Why don't you do anything? You don't wash your dishes, you don't sweep the kitchen floor. Who's going to scrub the toilet for you? There aren't any servants around here!" In Kherson I was used to you doing all the chores. I'd come home from work and lie down. I got very lazy.

DAUGHTER. Strange. I remember you always telling me that I was lazy, and that laziness was born the same night I was.

MOTHER (*laughs*). I said that? I don't remember that.

DAUGHTER (*refocuses on notebook*). Basically, my problem is that I'm alone. Families get private rooms, or even homes, but single people are placed in rooms with strangers. The countries with cold climates give you stipends; the warm countries give you nothing.

MOTHER. So, stay here. Why should you go anywhere? It's warm here. We can share this apartment together. It's better than being with strangers.

DAUGHTER. What about money? I'll bet no one is hiring librarians here. And I don't have the health to scrub toilets.

MOTHER. Peter's pension will be enough for the both of us.

DAUGHTER. I can't do that. I don't want to stay here. I'm leaving. Only not yet. I'm too tired to go anywhere yet.

DAUGHTER'S DREAM №2

I go back to Kherson. I approach our building, sit on a bench and begin to look for my keys. I rummage around in my purse, dig into my pockets – but I have no apartment keys. I'm terribly upset. I enter the building and ring my apartment doorbell. A woman holding a child opens the door – they live there now. I don't know them. I have no home.

SCENE 7

DAUGHTER sits alone in the room, her notebook open before her. She talks to FRIEND.

FRIEND. So, tell me, how are you doing, kid?

DAUGHTER. I can't talk for long. She is always at home. She has no friends, nobody. She just stays home in her apartment. Just now she went to the market, I barely got out of going with her.

FRIEND. Come here to me, why not? I'm here with open arms.

DAUGHTER. So, has the war ended?

FRIEND. Oh, there's almost nothing at all. You know, some rocket flies past once every two weeks. Nothing more than that. Although last night a drone hung buzzing outside my window. My stomach sunk into my feet. But, hey, nothing happened.

DAUGHTER. What about the air raid sirens?

FRIEND. Oh, yeah, the sirens. All the time. Nothing to be done about that. You get used to it. Listen, I've got a plan. You come here and we'll go get married on the spot. I'll take your last name. I'll get a new passport. And there you have it: I'm clean as a whistle! 'Cause I've got a couple of charges hanging over me. They're trying to ruin my reputation, ha-ha.

DAUGHTER. I'm not interested in getting married. That's the last thing I need. And I doubt seriously that I'll be coming back.

FRIEND. Yeah, kid. I wasn't expecting that from you. What about our love affair? I want you back. I rented an apartment in Kyiv. I bought a sofa. Almost anyway. Somebody threw it out and I salvaged it. A really good sofa. Almost new. I haven't had a drink in a year. Ever since I got out of prison and had the injections – not a drop.

DAUGHTER. Grass?

FRIEND. Weed, my love... They don't call it holy weed for nothing. That's not a question. Anyway, how much do I smoke? I might have a couple of joints over a weekend, nothing more. Don't get stuff in your head. Come back home. You promised.

DAUGHTER. I promised to come back when the war ends. But it hasn't ended yet. Anyway, how

can I say it? I come home and we're going to move in together just like that?

FRIEND. Of course, kid, we'll live our lives. We'll have a beautiful life. I've got a job. I'm moving up. We'll buy a car.

DAUGHTER. A car? When you're always toasted?

FRIEND. That hurts, kid. I'll have you know I haven't smoked for a week. The last time I was lit I was wiped out, worthless the whole day long. I'm getting old. I mean, I've been smoking dope since I was 15, and I'm no spring chicken anymore. You're the one who improves every year, just like old wine.

DAUGHTER. I'm getting old, too. I'm older than you are.

FRIEND. No, you're eternally young. Time broke its teeth on you. You, my love, are the most beautiful, the most bestest and the most smartest woman I know. I adore you. And, I'm not afraid to say it, I love you. Come home.

DAUGHTER. I'll come and the army will take you. Then what do I do?

FRIEND. Who needs me? Some guys even came up to me a few days ago... on a Saturday – can you imagine? I'm minding my own business going home and, just as I am about to enter the building, there they are. “Your papers, please? Come with us, you need to renew your registration information. They take me there, and put me right in front of a medical commission. The doctor asks:

- Why are you so jumpy?

- I say, “I'm not jumpy, I just have to take my pills.”

- What pills are those?

So I show her my doctor's certificate. Fortunately I had it with me.

The doctor looks at the commissioners: “Who in the hell are you bringing me?” The commissioners say: “Get outta here!”

DAUGHTER. So, what's this doctor's certificate?

FRIEND. I made it myself.

DAUGHTER. What for?

FRIEND. That I'm doing methadone therapy.

DAUGHTER. You didn't tell me that.

FRIEND. I didn't tell you, but I did it. It's good to be an addict in this world, kid. Not even the army wants you.

DAUGHTER. So you have an exemption now? Maybe you can leave Ukraine? Let's go to Europe together. It's hard for me alone, they'll put me in a dormitory. Together we'll get our own private

apartment.

FRIEND. Sorry, love. I didn't get an exemption. No papers, no permits. They just said, get your butt outta here, that's all. You'll have to come home to me here.

DAUGHTER. Mom just got back. Talk to you later.

FRIEND. Hugs and kisses all over...

DAUGHTER quickly shuts her notebook.

MOTHER enters the apartment with a large shopping caddy.

MOTHER. I am exhausted.

DAUGHTER. Why did you buy so many groceries? There's only two of us.

MOTHER. Help me put it all away.

MOTHER and DAUGHTER put groceries away.

MOTHER. You have to switch everything in colored bags into white bags.

DAUGHTER. Why? Why can't we leave them in colored bags?

MOTHER. Because I suspect they give off a chemical residue. White bags don't.

DAUGHTER. They don't give off any residue. You just love to make work for yourself.

MOTHER. Don't do it if you don't want to. I will.

DAUGHTER continues to put things away. The following conversation between DAUGHTER and MOTHER takes place as MOTHER transfers butter, vegetables, bread, and fruit from colored into white bags.

MOTHER. Were you talking to someone when I came in? I heard someone's voice.

DAUGHTER. Nobody. (*Lies*) Dad called.

MOTHER. How are things with him?

DAUGHTER. Okay. Still in Kherson as they bomb. He says he's fine. He has no plans to leave.

MOTHER. I find it very strange that you stay in touch with him.

DAUGHTER. Why?

MOTHER. He was so mean to you when you were a kid.

DAUGHTER. You said he never hit me.

MOTHER. Didn't hit you, of course. No, he didn't hit you. But he would always come home drunk with his friends. Making noise, drunken conversations, fights. You were afraid of him. You locked

yourself in your room. Then you'd complain to me.

DAUGHTER. I don't remember that at all.

MOTHER. Maybe it's good that you don't.

DAUGHTER. I only remember getting angry at him once. He bought a book: *King Matt the First* it was called. I read it and I loved it! Then I came home from school one day and it was gone. Dad had sold it for booze money.

MOTHER. Yeah, he'd do that. He sold a lot of things for booze. Our television, and our tape recorder... He'd buy the stuff himself, then he'd sell it for drink. Oh, the arguments we had over that!

DAUGHTER. That was my whole childhood: arguments and shouting.

MOTHER. One time when you were young, you came up to me and said, "Mom, why do you always yell at Dad? He's so nice..."

DAUGHTER. I pitied him. I was a good kid.

MOTHER. You didn't have a clue. You saw me yelling at him, but you had no idea why. You thought I was being mean to him.

DAUGHTER. It's weird. Dad was an alcoholic. He'd sell off all our stuff for booze, wasted all our money and possessions, but I never got mad at him. I almost don't remember him doing anything at all. But I remember how you shouted all the time, either at me or at him.

MOTHER. There you go again: I'm a bad mother. What is this? It's true what they say: It doesn't matter what you do, or how you did it, your child is still going to hold it against you later.

DAUGHTER. Mom, I'm not holding anything against you. And I'm not a child. I am a grown, 50-year old woman knocked down by life. I'm almost elderly.

MOTHER. You'll always be a child for me.

DAUGHTER. Don't say that! I'll always be your daughter, but I'm not a child.

MOTHER. Don't put the herbs in bags. They have to dry out and breathe first.

DAUGHTER. I will leave here soon, no matter what.

MOTHER. I'll miss you when you leave.

DAUGHTER'S DREAM № 3

The same room and bed. DAUGHTER sits on the bed, reclining on pillows. FRIEND lies next to her on bed, his head on her lap. DAUGHTER strokes FRIEND's head, tenderly running fingers through his hair. Occasionally leans over and kisses him on the lips.

When DAUGHTER and FRIEND speak, it's as if they're thinking aloud, calmly, lacking emotion, speaking into emptiness, not as a friend would normally speak to a friend.

DAUGHTER. I don't know what attracts me to you so. I know you are no good for me at all. You're

a drug addict, and alcoholic, and an ex-con. I've never done drugs. I don't drink. I don't even smoke cigarettes. Basically, you and I have nothing in common. But my head swims when I hear your voice. Your words give me goosebumps. My knees go weak, it's like I'm falling into an abyss. And I don't know why. You're not even handsome. I fell in love with a drug addict who has no teeth. (*Leans over, kisses him on the lips.*) You are so wretched... You're a lost cause. I feel so badly for you. (*Showers him with kisses*).

They change places, now DAUGHTER'S head lies on FRIEND'S lap.

FRIEND. I know myself that I'm not handsome, even unsightly. I'm a hopeless drug addict. I've used everything they've got. Ephedrine, heroine, methamphetamines, opium, mephedrone. Hemp is the best of them all.

I was born in a village full of narcotics, everyone was shooting up and drinking. My dad did two turns in prison. Only my mother had pretensions of normalcy. She was a little like you. She read books.

Women paid me no attention. Who would have been interested in me?

Then somehow you saw me. I was in seventh heaven. I was on wings, my feet never touched the ground...

Such a beautiful, smart lady. But what had that to do with me? What did I do to deserve such happiness? I can't ever get you out of my mind. Kid... What do you see in me? (*Leans over and kisses her on the lips.*) I want to indulge you, and pamper you. To spoil you. I have no money to do that right now, but I will. Just come home. I want you here.

DAUGHTER and FRIEND start kissing and embracing, but MOTHER enters the room. DAUGHTER hides FRIEND under the blanket. MOTHER holds out a sheet.

MOTHER. Where are you, sweetheart? Come here. I wish you were little again, so I could diaper you and carry you everywhere in my arms. I want to be able to do everything for you. I love you so! (*Approaches the bed.*)

DAUGHTER leaps up and MOTHER runs around the bed after her, trying to grab her. Dream breaks off, all plunges into darkness.

SCENE 8

MOTHER and DAUGHTER clean the apartment.

MOTHER dusts.

DAUGHTER wipes down the room's big mirror.

MOTHER (*looks at mirror, points*). There are still some streaks over there, up top.

DAUGHTER. I've wiped that spot several times.

MOTHER. Use a soft cloth, why are you using a newspaper? And add some vinegar to the water.

DAUGHTER. Mother! I can clean the mirror myself. I've done fine my entire life, and now it's as if I suddenly can't do anything without your sterling advice. Is that what you're saying?!

MOTHER. What are you so bothered about? I can't even say a word. It must be menopause coming on. How long since you had your last period? I haven't seen any tampons in the trash.

DAUGHTER. None of your business.

MOTHER. How's that? You're my child. I have to know what's going on with you. Maybe I can give you some advice. You need to take vitamin B12 when menopause comes on. Folic acid helps too. Vitamin D in drops is another one. I should still have a bottle around. Your bones grow weak at menopause. I even broke my arm. (*Rummages in the medicine cabinet, pulls out a bottle of drops, hands it to DAUGHTER*).

DAUGHTER. I don't need any drops!

MOTHER. And I remember those hot flashes... Nerves too, I'd be shaking all over. Do you have hot flashes? Do you get a hot head?

DAUGHTER. I hate it when people ask me how I feel. I hate it. When you do that I feel like you're trying to weasel your way into my body, to squeeze in under my skin. My skin crawls from disgust. Brrrr.

MOTHER. I'll put some vitamin D out. You can take it later. (*Takes out a bucket and mop, prepares to mop the floor.*)

DAUGHTER (*watches. Half-heartedly*). Let me help. That's hard work for you.

MOTHER. No problem! I've got it.

DAUGHTER tries to take the mop from MOTHER, who will not let go. Their lazy battle goes on for some time. MOTHER finally wins and begins to mop the floors, huffing and puffing heavily.

DAUGHTER. I can't watch you do this. It's just too painful for me to see.

MOTHER. Don't give it another thought. You did your mopping when you were a child. It's my turn now.

DAUGHTER. You know, when I was a girl I used to think our house was very dirty. Because you always said it was. You said we were pigs, that our house was a mess, and that you were ashamed to invite guests in. I couldn't ask my girlfriends to visit. I had to lie and tell them that we were remodeling our apartment so we couldn't have guests.

MOTHER. Oh, I remember your friends visiting you. That one, what's her name... Ira. Or was it Katya?

DAUGHTER. When I got older I realized that all my friends' apartments were not nearly as clean. Although nobody thought it was a problem. We had ideal order and cleanliness at home.

MOTHER. What are you talking about? What order and cleanliness? Now, my neighbor Aunt Nina, she had ideal order and cleanliness, I'll tell you. I remember going to her place when I was a child and everything just sparkled! She'd open a closet and everything inside was neatly stacked in piles! And I thought that when I grew up I would have order like that in my apartment. And I taught you about cleanliness.

DAUGHTER. I hate cleaning. I don't mind dirt at all. But when I see you mopping the floors, I suddenly feel sick. I feel guilty that you're working and I'm watching.

MOTHER. For now you can take out the trash.

DAUGHTER. I feel discomfort when I hear the sound of a vacuum, as if something bad is about to happen. It's probably because you used to yell at me while I cleaned the apartment. Maybe you even hit me. The body remembers everything.

MOTHER. I might have slapped you a time or two. You call that hitting? And I yelled. Yes, it happened. When I arrived here I was shocked to see that women here never yell at their children. A child sits splashing in a mud puddle in the middle of the street, and the parents stand by looking on. And smiling.

DAUGHTER. Yeah, but those kids grow up to be normal. And happy.

MOTHER. Is that supposed to mean you're unhappy?

DAUGHTER. Do you think I look like a happy person? I'm 50 years old. I've never been married. No family, no kids.

MOTHER. Am I supposedly to blame for that, too? You yourself always used to say you didn't want children or a husband! Now it turns out I'm to blame! I never stopped hounding you: You've got to get married!

DAUGHTER. You said: "Get married. Only don't pick an alcoholic!"

MOTHER. I didn't want you to repeat my life! I remember you were about five and I said to you, "Sweetheart, never marry a drunk!" And you said, "Mom, you mean there are men who don't drink?" I almost burst into tears. "Mom, you mean there are men who don't drink?"

DAUGHTER. It so happened that there aren't.

MOTHER. Your father was already a heavy drinker when I met him. But I fell in love! I didn't want to hear or see anyone else. And I got pregnant almost immediately. When you were born he went on a bender. He drank so heavily every day that his friends had to carry him home. I was afraid you would grow up a drinker, too. They say that's passed on genetically. But God had mercy.

DAUGHTER. That's not how it works. Sons of drunken fathers become drunks, yes. Daughters don't drink. They marry drunks, imitating their mothers.

MOTHER. You never got married.

DAUGHTER. Just in case I decided not to get married at all.

MOTHER. You could at least have a child! So I could have a grandchild.

DAUGHTER. Why?

MOTHER. What do you mean, why? For the joy of it, the happiness.

DAUGHTER. Are you happy yourself? I somehow don't recall you smiling or taking joy in life.

You were always annoyed with something when I was a girl. You were always gloomy and irritated. You never laughed or joked.

MOTHER. Who had time for jokes? I was preoccupied keeping you fed. Lugging groceries around, spending half the day in the kitchen cooking. Then there was all that canning. Jams, and stewed fruits. Making pickles, conserving eggplant, marinating tomatoes. Stuffing zucchini. Jams of apricot, raspberries, cherries, plums, peaches, black currants. Stewing cherries. Making quince jelly. Apricot jam. All of it for you, so you wouldn't go hungry.

DAUGHTER. Did I really eat so much?

MOTHER. Are you kidding? You almost never had an appetite. You were small and skinny. I had to stand over you to make you finish your soup. You can't throw that stuff away! Otherwise who was I slaving away at the stove for?

DAUGHTER. I read a book recently. Some scientists did an experiment with monkeys. They made two puppets. As if there were two monkey mothers. One puppet mother was soft, furry and warm. The other was made of coarse wire. Cold and prickly. But they fixed a milk bottle in her hand. And then they sent a bunch of baby monkeys in to these puppets. Which of the mothers do you think the baby monkeys preferred?

MOTHER. The one with the bottle?

DAUGHTER. No, the furry one.

MOTHER. What a weird experiment. Everybody needs to eat. Fuzziness is nice, of course, but hunger is no friend. Sooner or later those monkeys would have gone for the milk. They probably all had full stomachs. How long did that experiment last?

DAUGHTER. I don't know. I don't remember. But why do you always have that pained look on your face? It's irritating. I want to see you joyful and happy. Tell me some happy memory from your past.

MOTHER (*sits on bed, thinks*). I remember when your father and I had just married. You weren't born yet. He came home one day from work and brought me a thistle flower! Imagine him picking a thistle flower and bringing it to me! He had come to Kherson from Siberia – they don't have thistles there. As he was coming home, he saw this pretty flower growing there. And he brought it to me. I said:

“Why did you bring me a thistle? It's a prickly weed!”

And he said: “A rose is prickly, too. How was I supposed to know?”

Oh, did that make me laugh! Imagine that? A thistle!

DAUGHTER. And that's your happiest memory for your whole life?

MOTHER. Your happiness is what your life is. I don't have happy memories. We were poor in my childhood. I lived in a village with no electricity. We had an earthen floor. Mother was always tired, she slaved her days away on a farm. I had no grandmother. She and my grandfather died of hunger in the famine after the war, before I was born. I had a good stepfather. Actually, I thought he was my father at first, but good people told me later that he wasn't my real father. He brought me up

from the time of my birth, so I considered him my father.

DAUGHTER. Did he hit you?

MOTHER. Of course not! He loved me as if I were his daughter. Then he died. Got drunk and a tractor ran him over. Then I was in an orphanage, and later I went to Kherson where I met your father. We lived together for 13 years. I put up with his drinking sprees. I'd take him to get injections every year. I kept hoping we would cure him of that. Then divorce, Perestroika, the collapse of the Soviet Union. I sold things at the bazaar in order to survive. Then I came here and worked at the factory. I met Peter and he proposed. I didn't love him, but I agreed to marry him so I could stay here. I thought: "Who cares about me in Ukraine?" I lived with him for 20 years. Then he died and I was left all alone in a foreign country. I would howl in anguish. Where do you see any happiness?

DAUGHTER. Why did you have me if you were so unhappy?

MOTHER. I was stupid. I was only 20. I didn't understand a thing.

DAUGHTER. Well, I decided to be smart and not give birth to anyone. I am an egotist.

MOTHER and DAUGHTER sit silently on the bed.

MOTHER. You know, there are still streaks on the mirror.

MOTHER'S DREAM №2

Young DAUGHTER stands before MOTHER who feeds her porridge with a spoon. DAUGHTER turns away, won't eat. MOTHER bangs her on the head with the spoon, and recites:

- one spoon for Grannie! (WHACK!)
- one spoon for Grandpa! (WHACK!)
- one spoon for Mommy! (WHACK!)
- another spoon for Daddy! (WHACK!)

DAUGHTER suddenly begins to grow; is now larger than MOTHER. DAUGHTER grows all furry and turns into a monkey. Monkey-DAUGHTER ties MOTHER up, binding her arms behind her back with the long sleeves of a straitjacket as they do in insane asylums. Monkey-DAUGHTER holds a milk bottle in her hands. DAUGHTER feeds MOTHER the milk in the bottle.

MOTHER coughs and chokes as the milk pours over her mouth.

MOTHER tries to break free. A jet is heard outside, followed by an explosion (it may be thunder). Lights out.

SCENE 9

DAUGHTER and FRIEND again converse online.

DAUGHTER. She went to the hospital, so it will be a while.

FRIEND. What's the problem?

DAUGHTER. Arrhythmia or something like that. I didn't get it exactly.

FRIEND. Man, you are a degenerate. Top to bottom. I love it.

DAUGHTER. Look who's talking.

FRIEND. That's obvious. So, when are you coming home?

DAUGHTER. I told you. When the war is over.

FRIEND. But what about carnal stimulation, my love? Do you really not want to feel that adrenaline surge? Hang on a precipice a bit? A few rockets... drones... The romanticism of war.

DAUGHTER. I want no carnal stimulation. I had my fill of wartime romanticism in Kherson. My nerves are shot.

FRIEND. We'll heal them. I've got a thing or two here... Recipes, let's call them. To calm the nerves, and cure everything else.

DAUGHTER. What, LSD?

FRIEND. You want LSD? It's yours! We'll get whatever you want. Just come home. I want to hold you and kiss you. I want to be near you. Remember New Year's Eve in Kherson?

DAUGHTER. The only night we ever spent together.

FRIEND. If I had known a war was going to start, I would never have left you there. But I had a job to do in Kyiv. I didn't know you were going to go border hopping.

DAUGHTER. I already wish I hadn't. I'd forgotten what it was like to live with Mom.

FRIEND. I get you. I couldn't handle two days with mine. Come home!

DAUGHTER. Okay, let's say I come home. Let's say we live together. Describe a day of that.

FRIEND. A day like any other. I go to work in the morning. And you do whatever you want. If you want to, sleep in. If you want to, knock around with your friends. The main thing for me is that there be borscht on the table when I get home in the evening.

DAUGHTER. I hate cooking.

FRIEND. What do you mean you hate cooking? That's not what we agreed on. Hell, no, kid. That's a deal breaker then.

DAUGHTER. If it's a deal breaker, it's a deal breaker. See? I don't even need to come home.

FRIEND. Oh, come on, love. Can't I even joke? I'll do the cooking then. I can cook anything – borscht, patties and mashed potatoes. No problem. I want to know something else: Let's say I come home and I need to unwind. Smoke a bit of dope. What are you going to say about that?

DAUGHTER. That's your business, of course. But then you're going to lie around like some smelly blob. What am I going to do?

FRIEND. You could smoke with me. I won't forbid it.

DAUGHTER. You know that's not my style.

FRIEND. Well, what are we going to do, then? Let's say I get you something else, mushrooms, for instance. The mushrooms out there these days make your body go wiggly.

DAUGHTER. I don't want my body to go wiggly. I need something that will make me feel good. Better than now. If you only knew how sick I am of everything! My whole life is shattered in pieces. Something always hurts. First it's one thing, then another. Darkness has come over me. I have no energy for anything.

FRIEND. That's what I'm saying! Come home! We'll get you some smack. You'll feel good!

DAUGHTER. Thank you, kindly. But I have no desire to become an addict in my old age.

FRIEND. You got that right! I'm the lost one. You're the good one. A goddess. Smart, beautiful, oh my! Kid, you drive me wild. I'm here waiting for you. Come home.

DAUGHTER. Better for you to leave Ukraine. We'll find some place in Europe. Portugal, for instance. Spain. We'll live there in a little white house by the sea.

FRIEND (*Sings the Natilius Pompilus song, "We'll live together in a little hut..."*.) I'd be happy to come to you, my love. I'd go to the ends of the earth, but nobody's going to let me out. True, there is one possibility – my beasties.

DAUGHTER. Your beasties?

FRIEND. That's what I call them. I met them in prison. They're not people. They're beasts. These guys are offering to dispatch me to a free country. Right over the border. But I'm broke right now.

DAUGHTER. How much do you need?

FRIEND. Lots, my love. Lots. I don't have that much. To tell you the truth, my finances have not been in order lately. I'm out of work.

DAUGHTER. You're out of work? You said you were working construction?

FRIEND. Well, I was, but that blew up. They hired me at first, off the books. Then they decided to run a check. Can you imagine, there's this app-thing – you type in a name and it shows everything about you. And I've got those two charges hanging over my head. I'm still under investigation. So they asked me to skedaddle.

DAUGHTER. Why didn't you tell me about that?

FRIEND. I didn't want to upset you, kid. You've got it bad enough as it is. I'll figure something out. But, to tell you the truth, this all has me royally fucked. Pardon my language. If I don't find some way to pay my rent this month – I'm on the street. Sometimes I think, maybe, just screw it all?

Overdose and you're done. No more worries.

DAUGHTER. What about me? What about our little white house by the sea?

FRIEND. I don't get it, kid. What the hell good am I to you? Really. You're so smart and beautiful! I adore you. Fell in love with you like a schoolboy. What the fuck good am I for you, huh?

DAUGHTER. I don't know myself. But for some reason I need you. Maybe it's so I'll hear you say words like that.

FRIEND. You are wicked, kid. The best. But I'm a lost cause, I am. You don't want to be with me.

DAUGHTER. Wait a minute. Everything's going to be fine. Maybe I can scare up some money.

FRIEND. You're the best, kid. I love you.

FRIEND'S DREAM

I usually don't have dreams. But if I do, it's about shooting up. Then I dream about coming down.

SCENE 10

MOTHER and DAUGHTER in the room.

MOTHER sits on the bed. TV shows the news, but the sound is off.

DAUGHTER packs her suitcase alongside the closet.

MOTHER. You were such a good girl when you were young! Quiet, down-to-earth, obedient. You were never rude. You always sat in the corner with your books. I dreamed of you growing up and being my support system.

DAUGHTER. But I grew up and became an egotist. Stuff happens.

MOTHER. When you were a child you used to say: "Mom, I love you th-i-i-is big!" And you'd show me with your arms. (*Demonstrates.*) "I love you th-i-i-is big!" Now you want to abandon your mother.

DAUGHTER silently continues to pack her bag.

Where are you going to go? Where are you headed?

DAUGHTER. I haven't decided yet. Germany maybe. Maybe Finland. Or Norway. But I want to have my bag packed just in case.

MOTHER. It's cold in Norway, and you have bad kidneys.

DAUGHTER. It's all right. They'll fix me up.

MOTHER. Nine months of polar nights. All Norwegians suffer from depression because of it. I saw that on TV. They drink vodka non-stop to beat their depression. Then they jump out their windows.

DAUGHTER. Then I'll jump out a window too.

MOTHER. Stop that silly talk! But where will you go? What will you do? Things are calm here, it's warm.

DAUGHTER. Maybe I'll go to some warm place. America. Miami. I have a girlfriend there. An online friend. She said she'll help me with my visa.

MOTHER. America! That's the other end of the world! You'd really go and leave your mother alone like that? You really are an egotist! I'm old. I have a bad heart. High blood pressure. I could have a stroke any minute. I'll fall down and lie here all alone. And die. The neighbors here don't care about me.

DAUGHTER. You'll call an ambulance.

MOTHER. I gave birth to you. I raised you! I came here for your sake, to earn money so you could have your own apartment in Kherson. I lived in a foreign country, suffered, and sent all my money to you. How would you have survived otherwise on your librarian's salary? I put up with that Peter. All for you! Now look at your gratitude! I'll have no one to bring me a glass of water in my old age!

DAUGHTER. What can I do about it? I have no children, no one's going to bring me any water. You know what I decided? When I get really old – I'll hang myself.

MOTHER is stunned into silence.

So as not to suffer. I'll have no pension. There will be no one to look after me. There's only one way out. What do you think – is it a good idea? Cat got your tongue?

MOTHER. Well, I... I mean, you... How can you say something like that to your mother?!

DAUGHTER. Don't worry about it. You'll be long dead by then. I'll bury you first.

MOTHER. Oh... I don't feel so good... (*Grabs her heart.*)

DAUGHTER (*indifferent*). You want some water? Pills?

MOTHER. Some water...

DAUGHTER brings MOTHER a glass of water.

DAUGHTER. See? You have someone to bring you a glass of water. I won't.

MOTHER. You should have thought about that earlier! Am I to blame that you have no husband or children?

DAUGHTER. Who's to blame? I always think about that. Why did things happen as they did? Who's to blame for that?

MOTHER. It's the rage now to blame your mother for everything. That's what psychologists preach. You have to take responsibility for your own life!

DAUGHTER. Psychologists preach that everything starts in childhood. It's hard to grow up happy in the home of an alcoholic.

MOTHER. But I lived with him for your sake! So you'd have a father! I lived my whole life without a father. I thought, at least you could have a father.

DAUGHTER. I dreamed of you divorcing him. I begged you to do it.

MOTHER. It's true, I should have divorced him earlier. Shouldn't have dragged it out 13 years.

DAUGHTER. I dreamed that after the divorce we would live together. Things would be good and calm. I was so happy when you filed for divorce! And then you dragged in that... that...

MOTHER. That creep.

DAUGHTER. And you made me call him father.

MOTHER. I wanted the best for you. I didn't know he was... one of those. You should have told me immediately.

DAUGHTER. I was 13 years old! And I saw that you worshipped him. You were in love with him. I would have broken your heart if I told you what was going on. I felt like your rival. A rival to my own mother!

MOTHER. Nonsense! You were still a child. If I'd gone to the police, they could have sent him to prison.

DAUGHTER. You said he was our breadwinner. That we'd be lost without him. We would die of hunger.

MOTHER. I said that? He must have convinced me to say that. I was beside myself. He had me all mixed up. He always took me wherever he went, he'd never leave me alone with you for a minute. He was probably afraid you'd tell me everything. And he said all kinds of nasty things about you. That you were lazy, that we should make you do more house chores. That we should teach you to love to work.

DAUGHTER. He taught me other things. At night when you were working the night shift at the factory.

MOTHER. But I didn't know anything!

DAUGHTER. There were times when I thought you knew it all. That you were letting him do that to me on purpose. Anything so that he wouldn't leave you.

MOTHER. No. I didn't know. There was just that one time when I came in the room and saw him embracing you. He told me later that you'd been crying, and he was comforting you. And I believed him!

DAUGHTER. I wanted to kill myself. I had the pills ready. I'd stand on the roof for hours, wanting to jump. When I crossed the street, I'd pick the car I would throw myself under. But I never did it.

MOTHER. I had no idea such things happened. We lived in the USSR, nobody talked about that. And that creep seemed so good at first. He didn't drink, didn't smoke. He exercised. And who else would want me after my divorce, with a child on my hands?

DAUGHTER. I was the only reason he married you. He found out you had an adolescent daughter. It all started the day after he moved in.

MOTHER. Why didn't you tell me?

DAUGHTER. I tried to tell you once. We were cleaning the house. What else?! We were always cleaning the house! I was mopping the floor. And you started in telling me again how lazy I was because I was using a mop rather than getting down on my hands and knees. He's the one who said I should do that. And I said that I hated him! You didn't ask why. You just slapped me in the face, remember? You gave me a bloody nose. And I just kept on washing that floor, crawling on all fours, wiping up the drops of blood. You remember that?

MOTHER. Forgive me! Forgive me!

MOTHER approaches DAUGHTER and tries to embrace her, but she pulls her hands away and backs up.

DAUGHTER. I forgave you long ago. But those two years... when I lived that hell... Those two years left their mark on me. I thought I'd forgotten it all, that it was all over when he died. That I could shake it off like a cat and go on living my happy life. But that didn't happen. I always felt dirty and unworthy. I felt different from everyone. I thought a normal man would never take a second look at me. I was frightened and demoralized. I dreamed about peace and quiet, so I got a job at a library. I put together a life somehow. But a family... I could never have a family.

MOTHER. Others have families who have experienced something similar. Some people have it even worse.

DAUGHTER. You know, I read about another experiment in that book. They divided the baby monkeys into two groups. The first group lived among the troop of monkeys, and the other group was separated, put in zoos or cages. The monkeys from the first group easily found partners when they grew up, and they went on to live normal lives. Members of the second group had no idea how to find a partner. They tried having sex with towels, stuffed animals, dogs... All because they had never seen a proper example. They had no one to teach them. That's what it's like with me. I didn't have a good example. First my dad was an alcoholic. Then I had a pedophile stepfather. So I've spent my whole life trying to have relations with the wrong people. I understand everything in my head, but I do everything wrong. And I have no idea how things need to be done. I can't do anything but what I do.

MOTHER. So, in the end I am to blame. I crippled your life.

DAUGHTER. No, Mom. You're not to blame. He's to blame. They are. Maybe no one is. It's just life.

Silence. MOTHER approaches DAUGHTER again and tries to embrace her. This time DAUGHTER does not pull back, but makes no effort to hug her mother in return. She simply freezes and stands motionlessly in MOTHER's embrace.

MOTHER. You know, Peter once left me some money. Plus I've always saved up a little from his pension. Let's sell this apartment and buy a little white house by the sea! Why should you go somewhere? Let's live together.

DAUGHTER. Peter left you money? Where do you keep it? You have a bank account?

MOTHER. I don't trust banks. In Soviet times anybody who kept their money in the savings bank always lost it. No, I keep my money in a safe place. Right here under the mattress.

DAUGHTER. Good for you. I don't trust banks either. Let's have some tea and watch a TV show.

MOTHER. And I'll make some blintzes to go with the tea!

SCENE 11

DAUGHTER is alone in the apartment listening to voice messages on her phone.

FRIEND. I got your money, kid. All's good. Thank you. You saved me. You're a goddess! I'll pay it all back as soon as I come. But I can't come right now. We'll have to wait again. I had to give your money to my cohorts. I was pretty deep in debt, kid. So I'm high and dry again. But I'll give it all back, don't worry. Have no fear. I've been told there's a job for me. If everything works out we'll be living high on the hog. You'll have your little white house by the sea, plus everything your little house needs. Everything will be copasetic, kid. I hug and kiss you everywhere. In fact – I don't fear saying this – I love you.

DAUGHTER approaches the mirror. Looks at herself. Hauls off and slaps herself. Clenches hands into fists and hits herself on her torso, legs, stomach, and head.

SOMEONE'S DREAM.

FINALE.

A small white house by the sea. A bright sun shines, we hear the splash of waves.

A rattan table and chaises longues stand beside the house.

MOTHER, DAUGHTER and FRIEND in white summer clothes and hats that shade them from the sun. Thistle flowers grow all around. FRIEND takes turns dancing with MOTHER and DAUGHTER to Leonard Cohen's "Dance Me to the End of Love."

DAUGHTER. I tried to think of a happy childhood memory. I really did want to remember one. But I don't remember any. I only remember waking up one morning, and Mom was not there. She hadn't come home from work yet, she worked the nightshift at the factory. I waited and waited for her, but she didn't come home. Then I started thinking she must have been run over by a car. Or a bus. Something terrible must have happened to my mother, otherwise she would have come home. My mother was dead. And I couldn't stop weeping... Then I heard a key turn in the door lock. I wiped away my tears so she wouldn't notice anything. So she wouldn't know I'd been crying. Then I went and greeted her as if nothing had happened: "Hey, Mom!"

FRIEND. One winter evening I was walking through Kherson looking for a place to shoot up. I see this library with the lights on inside. I go in, and there she is. Such a cultured lady. Such a delicate soul. "You want a library card?" – she asked. I said, "Yeah, and in the meantime I'll go find a book." I went into the stacks and shot up. There was nobody in that library but us! Then we got to talking and one thing led to another. We had a proper conversation. After that I'd go there in the evenings to see her. I fell in love like a schoolboy. She is the only bright spot in my life. The straw that keeps me from sinking to the bottom.

MOTHER. The strangest thing about old age is that, down there inside my head, I don't feel it at all. Inside myself I feel like an 18 year-old girl. Then I look in the mirror and see an old woman. Lately I've been thinking a lot about my childhood. I grew up alone, no brothers or sisters. I was very

lonely. My mother was very strict, not at all affectionate. So I dreamed of growing up and having a daughter who would love me. Your child will always love you unconditionally, just for the sake of love. Everybody knows that. I have no idea what I would do if I did not have my daughter.

DAUGHTER approaches MOTHER.

DAUGHTER: Mom, Mommy, I love you very much. (*Embraces MOTHER.*)

MOTHER. I love you, too, sweetheart.

FRIEND (*approaches DAUGHTER, gives her a thistle flower and hugs her*). I love you, kid. This is for you.

DAUGHTER (*hugs him in return*). I love you, too. Thank you, it's beautiful!

ALL three declare their love for each other and embrace. We hear Leonard Cohen, the lights go down and all we hear is "I love you" spoken in various voices. Then they fade out.

We understand that someone's dream has ended, and that this someone has awakened.

THE END

September 2024.