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An object life for five actors

Scene 1. Unbidden guests

There is a large room which is encumbered with different junk. We see an entrance hall with a big wardrobe at the left part of a stage, and an entrance door at the back. There is a curtained window and a door to the next room at the right. Bookcases, shelves placed on each other, a desk – there are so many things that only narrow passages between them are left. The occupants use them to move around the house. There is also neatly made double bed in the centre and at the back of the stage.

It's quite dark. Elena is sitting with her back turned to the audience. She's trying to fix a portable TV. Her manipulations are no use. Finally she gets on a chair, lifts up the TV on a straight hand, trying to fix the antenna with the other hand. Through interference and fizzing and we hear a news edition

Newscaster, male voice. (appearing and vanishing because of the interference)... up to a hundred thousand people, no one can tell the exact number of demonstrators... (fizzing)... the tension is rising (fizzing)... cordon and search (fizzing)... the prime minister doesn't give any comments (fizzing)... what to expect tomorrow (fizzing)...

Elena stands on tiptoe to place the receiver higher, loses her balance and jumps down to the floor. She's trying to get a bit more of the information, through interference she's hearing an absolute different program.

News caster, female voice: (appearing and vanishing because of the interference)... are waiting for the planets parade... (fizzing) astrologists tell... (fizzing) ...attributing this to the Maya calendar (fizzing)...

Elena switches off the TV and pushes it under the table.

She stands for a while thinking. Then following a narrow passage she comes to the window, moves aside a curtain, and looks out of the window. She slightly opens a window frame. We hear distinct and wild crowd noises and a shrill cry. She carefully closes the window and moves back a curtain.

She stands silently for a minute she rushes to the table, finds a phone and dials a number, but no use. Hastily she flings the phone.

Suddenly she sees her reflection in a mirror. She gets closer to it and observes herself.

Elena. So what? How are you? Summon your strength. (She passes her finger over her face. Then sharply moves back and observes herself as a whole, like she's doing it for the first time in her life). Oh, God, what am I thinking???!!!

The phone is ringing. Elena's looking for the receiver. She finds it on a couch and hastily answers a call.

Elena. Hello! Oh... it's you... Yes, yes, I'm at home... No, he went to the consulate again and hasn't called since... I've tried. There is no connection.... Of course, I am worried... Oh, dear my! I've told you already. Three times he was turned down asking a visa... How would I know?! They pounce on every detail, so I don't know what will be... He's got a contract on 15 concerts... Yes, they signed it... He didn't tell me... well, I don't know... But why would he conceal it?... This is our only hope now. If he doesn't get a visa in a week... I don't want even talk about it... No, I haven't watched the news. We don't have a TV. I guess Andrei must have told it a thousand times... Yes, I know, my window is like a TV screen... I close it... Anna Sergeevna, please, don't talk to me like to a child. I close the curtains and I've been sitting in halfdark for a week now . We'll live in holes soon... Never mind... Please, if he calls you, tell him to call me at once. Excuse me, someone's ringing at the door. It's a Neighbour, probably... No, he's the one who's got the key. Ok, we'll talk later...

She ends the call, tries to dial a number, but no use. She flings the phone again. She comes to the mirror.

Elena (looking at her reflection) I know... I know everything... I can't talk to them. Tell me... what we've got to expect? Shall we leave?... How's Andrei? He is all right, isn't he?

She rushes to the phone, looks for the right number, makes a call.

Elena Hello, Sergey... Can you talk? What is that noise? What? I can't hear you... (shouting) Didn't Andrei call you? Damn it! I can't hear almost anything. Where are you?... Yes, now it's better... He didn't call. I see.... How are you doing? It's very noisy... You are on the square... Yes, it's next to our place... (hastily) No-no, I'm not at home. I won't be soon. We're occupied with the papers... This rush... Yes, with the consulate... What are the news?... Sorry. What do you mean you take it apart? What for? Oh, God... Are you serious? Hold a second, please (comes to the window, looks out carefully). What would this mean? So would I... Don't say anything. Call me if you need any help. Please. And take care, ok?... The

neighbour said she saw a column of militaries... (listens to him, smiling). It's good that you are joking... Ok. Don't forget to return everything to its places. And easier with the boys from a cordon, as they are still kids. Kiss you, buy.

She ends the call, but changes her mind and calls again.

Elena Seriozha, sorry for bothering you with such stupid things. Just in case, don't tell Andrei that I had called, ok? Come on, don't laugh at me. I'm serious... Not to you only, but to everyone... Yes, he doesn't change if to talk about this. If you need anything, call at once... I'm sorry that I can't help you now... Ok, bye...

She comes to the mirror again...

Elena. Please, don't look at me as I don't exist. I'm lost, completely lost.

Suddenly the door bell rings. Elena looks towards the entrance hall with surprise... The ringing repeats... She's a bit confused, but rushes to the door. She opens it wide and leans back at once. A swarthy black haired young man bursts into a flat, locks the door... He's very frightened, speaks in broken Russian with a strong accent.

Stranger. Please, do not scream. I'm being chased. Please, don't tell them that I'm here.

Elena. You say someone's chasing you?

Stranger. Yes. They are trying to catch me.

Elena. (presses her ear to the door and leans back) Oh, my God. What should we do?

Stranger. Help me, please. Save me.

Elena. (makes a gesture, inviting him to the room) Who is chasing you?

Stranger. I'm an immigrant. Illegal.

Elena. Illegal immigrant?

Stranger. Yes, I'm working for this country. The market stands still. I earn money.

Elena. So, who's out there? Who's chasing you?

Stranger. Police.

Elena. (in a lower voice) Don't they have anything better to do?

Stranger. The prime minister said that migrants cause huge problems. So today there are many policemen on the streets. I'm worried.

Elena. Of course. What are you going to do?

Stranger. Maybe Europe...

Elena. Please, sit here for a while. I'll go and listen...

She sneaks up to the door and listens carefully.

Elena. (on the way back) You shouldn't stay here for long. I'm waiting for my husband. He's just about to come.

Stranger. I understand. I shall wait for a while and then go away quickly.

They sit for a while listening carefully for the outer noises.

Stranger. (after a pause, carefully arranging the phrase) Thank you. You are very kind.

Elena looks at him silently. The tears appear in her eyes.

Stranger. Sorry! Did I say something wrong? Did I offend you?

Elena. I'm not that kind. It doesn't matter.

Stranger. (surprisingly) You think you are not kind? Why?

Elena. What's this? (points at the tail of the suit)

Stranger. Oh, sorry. (takes off the gun) It's my weapon.

Elena. (jumps up) What do you think? A weapon? In my house? Get out! Now!

Stranger. I can't leave. Police...

Elena. I said: go away immediately! Get out or I'll scream.

Stranger. Please, please, do not scream. (throws the gun to the floor and raises the hands) Please, do not scream... You are kind...

Elena. (pushes the gun away with her leg) Sit!

The stranger carefully sits down on the edge of a chair.

Stranger. Please, do not scream...

Elena. Oh, God. I'm sorry... I got so frightened. I'm afraid of weapon since childhood. Even when I'd go to the shooting gallery I was afraid that a bullet rebounded and wounded someone. I'm sorry.

Stranger. I understand. I won't shoot. It's only for defense.

Elena. Anyway, it's better to leave it on the floor. (pushes the gun with her leg further, under the wardrobe) Now you see. I'm not that kind.

There is a door bell ringing again. Two times in a row.

Stranger. No. No. Don't open. (rushes to the gun)

Elena. (stops him on his way) Are you crazy? Are you going to shoot here?

The stranger starts to dash around the room. He catches in the bookshelf, books fell on him.

Stranger. (stands still) What shall we do?

Elena shakes her head confusingly.

Stranger. Please, don't open.

Elena. Andrei usually rings the bell this way. He might have forgotten the keys.

The bell rings persistently. The stranger falls on the floor and crawls under the bed.

Elena. No! This is the worst choice. (looks around helplessly). Okay. Sit quietly. Not a sound.

Comes to the entrance door.

Elena. Who's there?

A female voice answers from behind the door.

Neighbour. Lenchka, thanks God, you are home.

Elena. Oh, it's you... Excuse me, I lay down and the room is untidy, just like always.

Neighbour. I've come just for a minute. Lenchka, open the door, please. Are you O.K.? Is everything fine?

Elena. (after being confused for a couple of seconds opens the door) Yes. But what has happened?

Neighbour. Haven't you heard anything?

Elena. What are you talking about?

Neighbour. Well, militaries are prowling around the whole building. They are looking for someone.

Elena. You mean police?

Neighbour. They are uniformed. They ask haven't I seen anything suspicious? They say some man ran into our front door. He might have a weapon.

Elena. (comes out to the stair landing) Why would you stand on the doorstep? Please, come on in...

The Neighbour comes in, Elena closes the door quickly after her.

Neighbour. So, Andrei is not at home, right?

Elena. No, he's not. So what?

Neighbour. I wouldn't come in. You know he doesn't like me. He hates me. Literally.

Elena. He doesn't hate you.

Neighbour. No, he does. He hates me utterly. I don't know what I've done to him...

Elena. I guess you wanted something to tell...

Neighbour. Yes... I was on my way from the shop. I went there to buy some fresh bread. The thought stroke me: everything at the street is a mess, but the bread is newly baked, like nothing happens. But you watch a TV, don't you? Oh, you don't have one... So you don't know any news.

Elena. Please, let's be specific or we'll get lost.

Neighbour. Let's be specific. Give me some water, please... It's such a long way upstairs... The lift has been switched off... Can you believe it? The bread is delivered in time, but the lift doesn't work...

Elena makes a sluggish inviting gesture, goes to the room, pours a cup of water, gives it to the Neighbour. The Neighbour follows her to the room, sits down on a chair, and takes a few sips.

Neighbour. Right you are... I am dead tired. So, I'm coming up to a house and these guys meet me right next to a front door. The one who talked to me even had some stars on a shoulder strap. "Old lady, are you going far?" "I just go home", I answered, "But what has happened?" He tells me: "The market is rounded up" we are looking for illegal workers. "Excuse me, who are you looking for?" "The Swarthy, The Asians... One of them ran to hide here". "You mean he entered our front door?" "Yes, he entered your front door. So you've got to be careful, mother. He might be armed with a gun." Then he laughed at me maliciously. Can you imagine it? Ah, you are a villain, I thought. You think if you put on the stars it gives you a right to laugh at the old lady? So I went further, but my heart was popping out. I closed the door, sat down for a while, then I thought about you... Hardly got up here. I'll stay for a minute to recover my breath.

Elena. But why did you think about me?

Neighbour. (suddenly she looks fixedly in her eyes) Something unkind stung me. You didn't know anything, did you?

Elena. (confusingly) N-no... I lay down. You woke me up. Being half asleep I ran into a bookcase, you see?

She collects the books that fell on the floor, returns them to its place. She bents lower than it's necessary to make signs to a stranger he must be silent.

Neighbour. So, you know, I suddenly remembered. Yesterday that guy... I can't remember his name... Our minister... This devil...

Elena. I don't know his name.

Neighbour. Fine, it doesn't matter. He appeared on television and said that illegal immigrants are a huge problem. They don't pay taxes, and are the cause of crime level rising... So the militaries are chasing them since the very morning. So, you tell me, how such fools become ministers? We have such a mess, but they are looking for immigrants.

Elena. They are freaks. Oh, God, I'm so bored with all this. They think they've found the enemy, indeed! It happened at all times. If people rise against something, they start a war. Who would we declare a war? Here you are there. So, they will find someone who will go kill and plunder.

Neighbour. Oh, God forbid. (making the sign of the cross) They are dead to shame.

Elena. Andrei must have come long time ago... I'm worried... (she makes a pause, attentively looking at the Neighbour) But something inside me says he's fine.

Neighbour. (she also makes a pause) For some reason I also think he's fine.

Elena. (breathes the sigh of relief) Probably, you might have heard about what's happening on the square.

Neighbour. I haven't been there yet. Yesterday I baked some pies for treating people there. There were cabbage, potatoe pies ... A whole lug-box. You know they took them like hot cakes. They thanked me a lot...

Elena. Margarita Tihonovna, they are building barricades... I've seen it through the window. They also demolish the roads. That's horrible. It's XXI century outside...

Neighbour. But yesterday I saw the whole column of militaries.

Elena. You've already told about that.

Neighbour. So it was shown on television: the militaries come from the entire country. It's horrifying. They have guns and tanks... But you shouldn't worry too much. It's said they have summit talks at the highest level, even with presidents from foreign countries. Everything will be fine, please God. You seem anxious. You should pray, it'll help.

Elena. I don't know how. Though I pray in my own way sometimes.

A neighbour. It's also fine. You should take a candle and pray in your own way.

Elena. It's always difficult to find the right words, to mark out the main things.

A neighbour. Come on, Lenchka. Now everybody has the same main thing. To drive off these demons. To prevent shooting. But if they start, to minimize losses. Don't you think so?

Elena. Yes, Margarita Tihonovna. Amen. Please, pray for me too.

Suddenly the door bell rings confidently. Two times in a row.

Neighbour. Oh, my God. It must be your Andrei. Lenchka, I'm afraid of him. Please, don't be offended by this (she's hiding behind the wardrobe's door at the entrance hall). I'll stand here quietly, he'll come in, and I will go away quietly. He won't notice anything, I'll be very quiet (hides).

Elena. (opens the wardrobe door, in an undertone) Margarita Tihonovna, what on earth did you think up?

Neighbour. I'm afraid to be here if he gets mad... My fingers grow numb after this. It's better for you too, by the way... You should only take him to the room at once. (closes the wardrobe door).

The door bell is ringing insistently. A stranger tries to get out from under the bed and to reach the gun, but doesn't have enough time, so he plunges back.

Elena. Who's there?

A male voice. Police! Open the door!

Elena. What has happened? What do you want?

A male voice. We'll explain when you let us in.

Elena. Do you have the... the warrant?

A male voice. Of course.

Elena opens the entrance door. The police officer comes in.

Officer. So, why are you so distrustful?

Elena. Please, show me the warrant.

Officer. Are you kidding me? What warrant? We're questioning the residents of this building. We don't need to have any warrant. Even if we needed... (making the gesture of indifference) Nobody thinks about warrants now.

Elena. What are your questions about?

Officer. Shall we talk right here?

Elena. Sorry, I'm in a hurry and my house is a mess.

Officer. (examines the room over her shoulder) Yes, I can see that. Ok. (takes out a pen and a piece of paper) What's your name and surname?

Elena. Do I have to answer?

The officer shrugs his shoulders.

Elena. Can I call my lawyer?

Officer. You have a lawyer?

Elena. Yes. I do. I have some friends who graduated department of law.

Officer. (puts back a paper and a pen) Ok, if you are afraid so much, let's just talk. Tell me, please, have you seen or heard anything suspicious today?

Elena. You mean where?

Officer. I mean here. There might have been some noise at the stairs. Or someone might ring your doorbell...

Elena. I don't know. To be honest, I was asleep. You woke me up....

Officer. (looking at her suspiciously) That's very interesting.

Elena. What do you mean?

Officer. You say you're in a hurry, but supposedly you were asleep. That's a mismatch. This is suspicious, isn't it?

Elena. (confusingly) I overslept. I should have gone long time ago, but I fall asleep...

Officer. But why would you sleep in the daytime?

Elena. I'm very tired. Lots of work, you know...

Officer. Where do you work?

Elena. Why are you questioning me? Does it make any difference to know my place of employment?

Officer. I'm just curious. You say that you are in a hurry, but supposedly sleep in the daytime. The bed is made. You don't tell us neither your name, nor your place of employment. It's quite suspicious I would say...

Elena. I haven't heard any noise. I couldn't hear it because I lay down to have rest and fell asleep. If that's all you wanted to know, please, leave. I'm really in a big hurry.

Officer. Why are you so nervous?

Elena. You're right... You know... all this events. I'm on the edge...

Officer. So, you're in sympathy?

Elena. In sympathy? With who?

Officer. With those ones... who are on the square.

Elena. Even if I am, it's my own business.

Officer. Of course, it is. Let me... (Slightly pushes her away and comes into the room)

Elena. By what authority do you act like this?

Officer. Authority is a wrong word to use. Today every man is his own authority.

The phone is ringing. Elena rushes to the receiver. While she's talking the officer listens to her, examines the room with interest, then comes to the window, moves the curtain aside and looks down. Margarita Tihonovna opens the wardrobe door, tries to open the entrance door without any noise, but doesn't manage to deal with a lock, and hides back.

Elena. Hello, Mashen'ka! So glad to hear you... My voice is fine. I'm just worried a bit. Andrei has left in the morning and hasn't even called yet. Yes, he went to the consulate... No, he hasn't it got still, that's why he went there... Of course, I remember your request. Oh, my God, is it urgent?... Of course, hang on. (rummages through papers on a table). He's a very good dentist, but I can't find the note right now. Right, it was quite long ago... He was going to change the clinic; I have no idea where he's working now. Can't find this note. I'll tell you later, ok? What? To the cinema? Are you kidding me? Some theatres still working? Well, it's not a good time... By the way, there is a policeman at my place now... They are looking for someone, ask questions... No, no need to do it yet. Don't worry, I'll be fine. Ok, hug you, have a great time... (ends the talk)

Elena. I've told you everything I could and...

Officer. (interrupts her) That's very interesting...

Elena. What are you talking about?

Officer. (points out to the view from the window) I'm talking about this. (turns back, looks at her with attention) Andrei is your husband's name, right?

Elena. Yes, it is.

Officer. Are you going abroad?

Elena. Is it suspicious too?

Officer. I have to clarify some things. Have a seat. (sits down on the edge of a bed, takes off a writing tablet), makes a gesture inviting her to sit down, which Elena does) You know what else is suspicious?... You haven't even ask who we are looking for and what has happened? Everyone's asking...

Elena. I don't care who you are looking for. If you haven't got any more questions, please, leave. I'm in a big hurry and Andrei is about to come.

Officer. By the way, your Andrei is very lucky...

Elena. I don't think that your duties include paying compliments. What did you want to show me?

Officer. Yes, have a look. (unfolds the map as it covers both his and her knees) So, this is our square. And this is your home – right on centre.

Elena. (slightly seats herself apart) So what?

Officer. (continue running his finger over the map) There is not any building from this side. There are some buildings here but they are not right on centre. This is the only building which situated in a strategically important place. Do you know that among all the windows in this building only yours are facing the square?

Elena. Yes, I know. So what? (stands up)

The officer rolls up the map, looks at her silently.

Officer. (after a pause) You also say that you're in sympathy with this people. You shouldn't be afraid. Many people are. You think it's a pleasure for me to obey orders... (in an undertone) Maybe the only thing I've been waiting for is... By the way, I'll get promoted then. The heads will roll... Oh, they will... (puts out cigarettes) Do you smoke?

Elena. No.

Officer. Me neither. It's good we have something in common (hides a pack) But you can't disobey the order, you know...

The door bell rings persistently a few times. Elena rushes to the entrance hall.

Officer. Wait a minute! (passes ahead of her, stands behind the door, unfastens a bolster)

Elena. O, God!

Elena opens the door, Andrei comes in breathless.

Elena and Andrei fall into each other's arms.

Andrei. Lena, I'm sorry, Lenchka. The battery has discharged, I couldn't call you, should have thrown out this phone. The public transport doesn't work. I was halfway running... How are you?

Elena. (slightly pushes him away) Not now, Andriusha. We have a visitor.

Andrei. (notices the officer who comes from behind the door) Hello. What has happened? Lena, what does it mean?

Elena. I guess they are looking for someone, making the round ...

Officer. We're looking for the illegal immigrants. One of them ran into your front door. So, Elena... Excuse me, what's your patronymic?...

Andrei. So, you call her "Elena"... Well-well-well... What do you want here?

Officer. We're performing a task work – questioning the people.

Andrei. About the immigrants?

Officer. Yes.

Andrei. (looks around the room) So, you're looking for the immigrants, huh? How long?

Officer. What do you mean by "How long?"

Andrei. How long have you been here?

Officer. For 15 minutes.

Andrei. Have you been here before?

Elena. Oh, my!

Andrei. Why do you say "oh, my!?" Couldn't you be more inventive? Why would you be looking for immigrants? You can hardly walk the street because of the barricades, the militaries are everywhere, and half of the stores are closed. But you tell me that police is looking for the immigrants?!

Officer. Haven't you listened to the prime minister yesterday?

Andrei. Neither yesterday, nor the day before. I got rid of TV two years ago. I don't want to listen your prime ministers, presidents, their speakers, freakers...

Elena. Andrei, don't be hysterical.

Andrei. Lena, tell me please...

Elena. Andrei, he came in 15 minutes ago.

Andrei. (seeming tired) I see. I'm sorry. Are we done?

Officer. No, we aren't. Who are you?

Andrei. What do you mean?

Officer. Your passport, please.

Andrei. What does it mean?

Officer. Passport check. To make sure, you know...

Andrei. Here you are (rummages in his bag, handles the passport to the officer)

Officer. Let's see... (opens it up, verifies the photo and the place of residence). So... (gives it back, speaking to Elena) And your's also.

Andrei. I've also got it. (rummages again)

Officer. It's forbidden to give your passport to any other person. A-ny other person. What if I came in and asked you to show your passport at once and you didn't have it? Isn't it suspicious?

Andrei. I was at the consulate. They ask for so many documents. So I took all we have just in case. Here you are... (handles Elena's passport)

Officer. (glancing the document, gives it back) We'll post a sentry at your front door. If you notice anything suspicious, let us know... Good bye. We'll see each other again probably. (goes away)

Andrei. (locking the door on him) I hope we won't. (turns to Elena) Lena, I'm sorry.

Elena. Did they accept?

Andrei shakes his head.

Elena. What's about this time?

Andrei. The bank certificate has gone out of date... I took it about a month ago.

Elena. Oh, damn it. Do you have any money left there?

Andrei shows "zero" with his fingers.

Elena. What shall we do now?

Andrei. I'll buy a gun and shoot them all down.

Elena. I'm seriously.

Andrei. Do you have any better ideas?

Elena. (looks on the wardrobe's door) Oh, I completely forgot ... (takes him to the room). I just wanted to show you something. Have you seen this? (looks out of the window)

Andrei. I've seen it all over the town.

Elena. What do you think is going to happen?

Andrei. I don't know, Lena. But if a gun is hanging over the stage... you know...

Elena. Andrei, I can't stay here anymore waiting for you. I'm going crazy with all this. I'm scared, can't you see? I want to leave this place as quick as possible. We don't have a TV, but I am...

Andrei. ... You are highly imaginative. I know... Please, don't start all over again. We don't have time for this. I've dropped at a bank, they work by some miracle. I talked to a manager, explained him the events, so he promised to make a fake account statement. I can take it away in an hour. Then I'll have time to go to the consulate again. They said I can try to surrender the documents one more time today.

Elena. What do you mean – “to try”? You’re the most talented musician, you...

Andrei. What did you say? Talented? I’m a genius! You were going to say “genius”.

Elena. Andrei, it’s already enough. Listen, you have a contract on fifteen concerts throughout Europe. You’re a normal person. But you’re supposed to bow low to all these clerks whose only work is to put papers from one place to another! Who gives them a right to decide anything? Who gives them a right to ask you for an account and employment statements?

Andrei. Yes, you feel a bit naked at the consulate.

Elena. Why should we tremble worrying if they give us a visa? Just because we were born in a dump place like this?

Andrei. Of course, this is a cause. We’re a lowest caste for them. Half-people. Some villains which is better to keep further from the master’s table, somewhere closer to a stockyard. But they have a right not to trust us. If we behave like slaves, they’d consider us as slaves.

Elena. Well, I don’t want them to consider us as slaves. Give me the consulate’s number!

Andrei. It’s no use, Lena. You’ll only make it worse.

Elena. That’s it! That’s your slavery and “you never know what might happen”.

Andrei. Lena, don’t... I was rushing here, I thought how useless we spend our time sometimes! We’re very happy. We can just be together. Even if we argue. You know, these militaries awoke our voice of reason.

(Margarita Tihonovna finally gets out of the hide-out and tries to open the door very quietly)

Elena. (gives him a tight hug) And what does it suggest?

Andrei. (takes her in his arms, carries to the bed and puts her down) That I should be at bank in an hour, but I miss you so much... I’ll burst myself out to pieces if you don’t kiss me now...

Elena. Ok, I’ll do. (kisses and gets up) But the rest we’ll do afterwards.

Andrei. Why afterwards? It never comes.

Margarita Tihonovna slips out of the apartment, closing the door, which makes a slight sound.

Andrei. (gives a start) Did you hear that?

Elena. (snogging him) What?

Andrei. The entrance door slammed.

Elena. You are hearing things.

Andrei. I’m sure it is slammed...

Elena. It might be a neighbour’s door

Andrei stands up, goes to the entrance hall, opens the door, looks out to the landing.

Andrei. (screams to Elena who stayed sitting on the bed) This is strange! The door is opened. Lena, I locked, I remember it well. This freak has gone and I locked it at once. That's very strange.

Andrei locks the door again, looks around the room, looks into the wardrobe, then gets inside, gets out and comes back to Elena. He stands up facing her and looking fixedly. Then comes to the nearest wardrobe and kicks it heavily, so some stuff from it the falls down.

Andrei. Well, it perfectly explains your "afterwards".

Elena looks at him calmly.

Andrei. Who is he? (after a pause, controlling himself) Elena, I'm asking who he is.

Elena. (exhaling) Andrei, what's the matter again?

Andrei. Who was hiding at the wardrobe? The chair bottom is still warm and shoe boxes are crushed.

Elena. (laughing) It's not what you think it is.

Andrei. You're trying to tell me there was no one there?

Elena. Andrei, I didn't want to upset you.

Andrei. Upset me?!

Elena. Calm down, please. It's our neighbour Margarita Tihonovna who was sitting there. She had hidden even before the officer came. She thought it's you who's ringing and got into the wardrobe. "Andrei hates me, it's better for me to hide", she said.

Andrei. Gee... That's why I smell the old perfumes... Trying to guess where is it from?... (laughing and snogging Elena) Lenka, I'm sorry, I can't help myself. I really get crazy sometimes. Have you got anybody else here?

Elena. Well, there is a couple of lovers...

Andrei. (kisses her) How do you manage to hide everyone? Wait a minute... Why did you let this neighbour... Margarita... to come in? I asked you so many times... You might not like it, but I consider her as a witch. I told it a thousand times. Did you see her eyes? And her ears? In the Middle Ages people with such ears were burnt on a flame immediately. How right was a crowd...

Elena. Andrei, it's a shame to listen to you sometimes... It's almost always a shame.

Andrei. So why did you marry me?

Elena. I listened to how you play, not to what you say

Andrei rushes to the next room.

Andrei. (shouting) Lena. Lenka, come here immediately.

Elena. (shouts back) Andrei, don't behave yourself like you're a boy. You got to go.

Andrei starts to play violin: the third Paganini concert with an orchestra. In a moment he appears on the threshold without a violin, but sound of music continues.

Andrei. (smiling) You didn't recognize, huh? It's Menuhin.

Elena. I've recognized him immediately.

Andrei. (comes to her) No, you haven't. You're musically ignorant.

Switches off the light, so it becomes almost completely dark.

Elena. What are you doing?

Andrei. What does it look I'm doing?

Elena. I've told you already, let's do it later. You got to run to the bank.

Andrei. I'll be in time. I always am. Except for when I'm running to you.

Elena. Andriusha, please, don't... Be a good boy.

The kissing noises are heard.

Suddenly a shot rings out. There's short flash of the light and a constrained groaning.

Elena's voice. Oh, my God!

Andrei. What was it?

There is a sound of footsteps. The light is switching on. The stranger is lying on the floor, leaning to a wardrobe and clasp to the chest his blooded hand and groaning. The gun is lying next to him.

Elena faints, Andrei catches her up.

Andrei. (shouting) Who... Who are you? Tell me now. Lenchka, sweetheart. What's happened to you? (carefully slaps her on cheeks) Lena, Lena, come to yourself. Who are you (takes out the gun and points it at the stranger, but he doesn't react, and continues groaning) Answer me, bitch! Lenchka, Len, Lena... (intensely slaps her with one hand, pointing the gun at the stranger with another) Lena, come to yourself for God's sake. Oh, God, what's happening here...

Elena. (coming to herself) Andriusha... Water...

Andrei. Water... Yes-yes.. Now... (puts a gun into her hands) Handle it. (points to the Stranger, runs to the next room, which is connected with a kitchen)

Elena. When he leaves, Elena drops the gun and pushes it away. Andrei returns quickly with a cup of water, handles it to Elena who's sitting on the floor. The stranger doesn't groan anymore, only whining.

Andrei. Lena, Lena, are you fine?

Elena nods.

Andrei. Lena, Lena, Lenchka, who is this? How has he got here?

Elena. (hardly articulates) From under the bed.

Andrei. What do you mean "from under the bed"? (leerily looks under the bed, then at Elena) Damn it! He was lying under out bed?

Elena nods.

Andrei. (jumps up, starts dashing around the room) Dear my, why does it happen to me? (rushes back to Elena) So, you weren't kidding. Where's the second one? (rushes to the stranger, grabs hold of his shirt front) Where's the second man? (starts dashing around the room again, looking under the bed and under the table)

Elena. (have gathered her strength, cries) Andrei!!!

Andrei rushes to her, falls on his knees. Elena clasps him to her breast.

Elena. Andrei, Andrei, it's another story... He's the one they are looking for. An illegal immigrant. He'd been chased, I opened the door, he hid. That's all. Water!

Andrei carefully helps her to drink.

Andrei. Lena, Lenchik, it's all clear... it's all clear now. It's going to be easier. Damn it, why he's got a gun?...

Elena. Gradually comes to herself. I took off a gun, hid it under a wardrobe. He might have tried to find it in the dark and randomly shot. If you didn't switch the light with your crazy fantasies... If people made love right on the top of my head I would also tried to escape.

Andrei. Lena, Lena, Lena, I'm sorry. (after a pause) I did not know about that. Why didn't you tell me?

Elena. Come on, you'd kill him at once and I'd be passing you parcels.

Andrei. You're right... But what we're going to do with him?

Elena. Help me to get up.

Gets up, leaning on Andrei. They come to the stranger. Elena lowers on her knees, carefully touching the stranger's hand and examines the wound.

Elena. Everything's going to be fine. He's got a pain shock. We should rinse the wound. Bring me a basin with some water and a medicine chest.

Andrei runs away.

Elena. (calls after him) Look for the bandages, cotton and peroxide. Or take the whole chest. (talking to the stranger, examines the wound) Don't worry, it'll be fine. Everything's gonna be fine. (reaches to a pillow, puts it under his head)

Andrei brings a basin with some water and a first-aid kit. They rinse the wound. The stranger cries out sometimes.

Elena. The bullet went right through. That's good. We should rinse it better....

Andrei. (looks into the wardrobe) That's it. It went right through. It's stuck in the wall. (comes back to Elena) Listen, are you sure we're doing everything right? He's been wanted, he's got a gun...

Elena. (puts the dressing) He's not dangerous. Imagine yourself coming to another country, where the law doesn't work at all. Buying a gun would be the first thing you'd do to be safe-reliant. Help me, let's take him to another room and put him to bed.

Andrei. (helps her with grumbling) This is a place for my violin... Fine, I'll put her away. What's his name?

Elena. I have no idea.

Andrei. (talking to the stranger) Do you hear me?

The stranger nods

Andrei. What's your name?

Stranger. (whispering) Vali.

Andrei. Vali, can you walk?

Vali nods.

Andrei. Then let's stand up.

Help the wounded to get up and lead him, supporting, talking on the way.

Elena. I forgot to tell you. Your mom's called. Your parents take much offence as they hear neither hide nor hair of you.

Andrei. I'll call them later. I will leave here the mobile – no use to take it. If someone has heard a shot tell them I was hanging up the shelf and fell of the stepladder. Let's go, Vali, let's go a bit more. I should get to the bank and to the consulate in time at any price. I can't believe I will leave you with this guy... he came like a bolt from the blue (they lead Vali to the next room)

In a minute Andrei comes back, looks around, sees a gun, picks it up and hides in a bag.

The lights go out.

Scene 2. In the dining

The action takes place in the apartment of Andrei's parents. The scene looks like a big table covered with a table cloth. There are separately located items used for the setting of the table: the Cup, the Saucer, the Teapot, the Wine Jug, the Wine Glass. Over a period of action the guitar compositions by Francis Goya play one by one.

The Cup. I love her lips so much... The hot red tea burns my sides, she carefully embraces me with her dry fingers, gently touching me with her lips... I dream about her lips at nights...

The Saucer. Anna Sergeevna has gone...

The Cup. She couldn't just go away, to leave me and to go away. When the tea is finished, when everything is behind, she brings me to the other room, where the walls shine as bright as my sides. She bathes me in delightful foam water. She couldn't left for a long time. She will come back to me. Today Anna Sergeevna splashed my inside all over with tea only once, she'll come and want to do it again. And the once more... Yes, yes, I know.

The Glass. I have a gut feeling we are going to have big troubles today...

The Teapot. Say it frankly: we are all in danger. Last time when she cried like this, she cracked my brother's head.

The Cup. Your brother had never loved her! The tea he'd make was either too rough or excessively bitter. What should I feel when he filled me in? I had to pour this drink, if one may call it so, in her beautiful lips. I kept calm, and didn't say anything. Anna Sergeevna has a boundless patience. Though she couldn't put up with it forever...

The Teapot. And that's why she took him by his ear and threw against the wall? If you don't remember, he was cracked into dozens of crocks. The wet tealeaves flew about the room. This picture haunts me in nightmares.

The Saucer. (To the Cup) Listen to me, sister. Anna Sergeevna left for the kitchen. And she is crying... Just as that time...

The Cup. (anxiously) Crying again? What's happened? Why is she crying?

The Saucer. Haven't you heard? She just had a talk with Lev Borisovich...

The Wine Jug. Today he has finished the red wine he prepared two years ago and kept inside me

The Wine Glass. He always acts this way when having a quarrel with Anna Sergeevna.

The Wine Jug. He shouted again that he would drink vodka today though he knew for sure that Anna Sergeevna emptied the bottles when he got to know to his diagnose. But then he took me out again, but this time there was very little wine left.

The Cup. What's happened? Why did they quarrel again? Did Lev Borisovich offend Anna Seergevna again? I was luxuriating in her touches all morning and can't remember anything else.

The Saucer. She asked him not to go away. She said she was afraid for him. And he replied that he had an important ...

The Wine Glass. (interrupts) He has an important interview with the director of some plant. He had been striving for it for several months and an appointment was scheduled right for today.

The Saucer. Anna Sergeevna said that considering his age and reputation he should set the time for appointments himself, and that his work has always been more important than her. She told about great sacrifices she made for him, but he hadn't made any sacrifice for her ever, and that he'd ruined all her life.

The Cup. Of course, he ruined her life. In her youth there was Georgi who made court to her. I'll always remember his lips, so hot and wet... Of course, you can't know this, it's our secret.

The Teapot. He ruined her life, and it serves her right... She broke my brother's life too... And before that she threw out of the window my coffee cousin, and before that...

The Cup. Shut up! You have no right to say so, you don't know anything about her life.

The Teapot. That's fine, if everybody is indifferent to this topic, and wants me to keep silence, I will. It's better to meditate on tea fragrance than to listen to you.

The Wine Glass. And Lev Borisovich replied to her that she had never valued the things she'd had...

The Cup. This all seemed strange, because today's morning started so peacefully... They were sitting, having breakfast... There was some music playing...

Pause.

The Saucer. Hasn't Andrei call?...

The Wine Glass. He hasn't...

The Saucer. He didn't call yesterday as well, did he?

The Wine Glass. He hasn't called them for two weeks...

The Cup. (making a sigh) I see...

The Wine Jug. But who called yesterday afternoon?

The Saucer. It was a notice to come and draw a pension.

The Cup. In the past the phone used to ring so often that vibrations of this sound seemed to stay in a complete silence. But now even when the telephone rings it seems like it's a dream, and I don't care much.

The Wine Jug. Because our days became the same as our dreams.

The Wine Glass. You mean monotonous and colourless?

The Cup. My dreams are not like this. They're bright, they're hot, they are...

The Saucer. Andrei hasn't come for half a year already...

The Wine Glass. He is very busy. He has rehearsals from morning till night...

The Saucer. Of course, he has.

Pause.

The Wine Glass. By the way, a new store is said to have been opened in the next door yard. The prices are very low there...

The Wine Jug. It's strange. I've heard quite the opposite. The stores are being closed now, everybody is afraid of all these events.

The Cup. You might not have heard it in your cupboard but I watch news every evening, and they said the caring government would open a hundred of social stores around the city.

The Saucer. At least they do something... Everything is rising in price...

The Wine Glass. Especially medicine.

The Saucer. Maybe they'll manage to save some money for a nice present to children.

The Wine Glass. To children... If you are talking about Andrew with his Lena they have so many things that they are hard to please...

The Saucer. They don't have a TV... But there is so much going on around... Where else they'd get the news from?

The Cup. And how would you watch series?

The Wine Jug. It's unlikely that they like series.

The Cup. How one can be indifferent to series?

The Wine Glass. Andrew said he had thrown away a TV set by himself.

The Saucer. It was old so he threw it away... He won't do get rid of a new one. Has they got any news from Oksana?

The Wine Glass. There was a letter the other day... She writes that children go to school. Kate started learning violin...

The Cup. Just like Andrei...

The Wine Glass. Yes, like Andrei... And the kid went to a kindergarden.

Pause.

The Saucer. What kind of music is playing?

The Wine Jug. It's Francis Goya

The Saucer. It's nice... but very sad.

The Wine Jug. It's sickly sweet.

The Wine Glass. The phone also rang yesterday. Though I don't remember who called.

The Saucer. There were even two phone calls yesterday. At first they were reminded of Valera's death anniversary on Saturday...

The Wine Jug. Valera was a good friend.

The Wine Glass. Yes, that's for sure.

The Cup. What? I can't believe it... Valera is dead? What sweet lips and hot palms he always had!...

The Saucer. Cool down, it happened two years ago. And the second call was from Canada.

The Wine Glass. And how are they doing?

The Saucer. They are fine... Quiet and calmly. The children live their own lives, brother with his wife live their own. They seldom see each other. They think about going to Europe, Paris and Vienna.

The Cup. Paris... I have always dreamed of travelling there...

The Wine Jug. Are there any news from the doctor?

The Wine Glass. No, the doctor keeps silence.

The Saucer. Andrew is going abroad, he has a contract.

The Wine Glass. He'll probably stay there.

The Saucer. Let him stay there... But how can it be here without him?

The Wine Jug. He almost didn't appear anyway.

The Saucer. Why isn't he calling?...

The Wine Jug. Last time he called they had a quarrel... Lev Borisovich told that he got disappointed with all the politics, and for the first time in his life he won't go voting. Andrei answered that not voting means supporting the authorities. Lev Borisovich got offended and said there's not a pin to choose between them. They were arguing for quite a long time until Andrei hung up the phone.

Pause.

The Teapot. (couldn't stand any longer) What is this starry-eyed conversation for? Can't you understand we may not live until the evening?

The Cup. What does it mean? My and Anna Sergeevna's favorite series is on tonight.

The Teapot. You want to watch series again?

The Cup. Yes.

The Teapot. Like yesterday?

The Cup. Yes.

The Teapot. And the day before yesterday?

The Cup. Yes.

The Wine Jug. She wants to watch series every evening.

The Teapot. What for?

The Cup. What do you mean "what for"? What a nonsense!

The Teapot. You saw my brother's death, after all. Can't you see that you're placed on the verge. You can lose your life at any time! And if you realize all this, don't you ask yourself "what for"?

The Cup. What for we watch TV series?

The Teapot. No, what for do you live? For instance, I need some time to sort it out. I need my life to understand what it is for...

The Cup. What a load? I feel sorry for you. Because you've never ever been touched by Anna Sergeevna's gentle lips. No lips touch you at all. You won't find the answer to your "what for" question. No meditation will help you.

Pause. Somebody's damped sobbing sounds can be heard.

The Wine Glass. She's crying even more.

A telephone rings. It continues ringing persistently but nobody picks it up.

The Saucer. Why isn't she coming up?

The Cup. Does everybody hear that sound?

The Saucer. It might be Andrei? Or Lena? ...

The Wine Glass. Or Lev Borisovich is calling to make his peace...

The Wine Jug. Or Oksana?

The Wine Glass. Oksana`s call would be long - distance and long one. I suppose it`s Lev Borisovich.

The Wine Jug. Maybe on some matters ... On pension, or municipal...

The Wine Glass. It would be an international call from Oksana`s with a long beep. I suppose it`s Lev Borisovich.

The Wine Jug. It might be on business ... About the pension, or public utilities charge...

The Saucer. Or from the hospital about the operation.

The Cup. (worrying) What`s wrong? Why doesn`t she pick up the phone?

Telephone continues ringing.

The Teapot. (in panic) She is crying more loudly. She is ever more loudly crying.

Telephone continues ringing.

The Teapot. Last time it rang too and she didn`t pick up!!!

Telephone continues ringing.

Everybody start speaking very fast almost interrupting each other.

The Cup. What is happening, indeed?! I`m trembling with all my inside.

The Teapot. My poor brother! Poor we are!

The Wine Jug. I don`t feel quite well. Lev Borisovich shouldn`t have left.

The Wine Glass. He had to go, but it would be better for him to stay.

The Teapot. Pray if you can, she is coming!

Telephone stops ringing. Sobbing becomes louder, and the footsteps are more distinct.

Everybody starts speaking almost at the same time, and it`s impossible to make out who gives the each cue.

- Let her not cry!

- I don`t want to die!

- I`m not guilty of anything!

- Let her forgive everyone!

- Help us!
- Help!
- I wish everything ends up peacefully!
- Please, take pity on us!
- Let her just drink some tea!

Suddenly it becomes silent, light goes out and one can hear clatter of dishes getting smashed.

Everyone's screaming.

The Wine Jug. (shouts) Aaaaah! What's she doing?

The Teapot. (shouts) Look out! She rolled up the tablecloth with us on it.

The Cup. (shouts) Why? Whyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!!

The last shout follows the general breath out, because at this moment all the dishes wrapped into the tablecloth rise up and then rushes to the floor.

In total silence there is a sound of the stroke - all the pottery crashes at once, then there is one more stroke. A sack full of broken crocks is heard to fall on the floor. Steps and too short sobs not so inconsolable as before are heard to move away.

Scene 3. The abandoned interview

The action takes place in Olga Ivanovna's office, a director of soft drink production company.

Olga Ivanovna and Lev Borisovich are sitting in silence at the table heaped up with papers. They face each other. In front of him there is a notebook with a pen, a dictaphone, a cup with fuming tea and a saucer with biscuits.

Lev Borisovich is continuously staring at Olga Ivanovna, and she as if being away is looking through the papers.

Lev Borisovich. There is no way I can understand it. We've been arranged this interview for many months and now you are telling me you have nothing to say?

Olga Ivanovna is looking over some papers.

Lev Borisovich. Are you joking? Don't forget that I sent you the first list of questions more than half a year ago. All the time you postponed a talk from week to another and so when we are finally meet...

Olga Ivanovna continues looking over some papers.

Lev Borisovich. Fine, but what shall I say to the editor? What should I write about? Would the article be about an interview that didn't happen? That you pulled the wool over my eyes all the time?

Olga Ivanovna. Have your tea, Liova, or it'll get cold.

Lev Borisovich. You mean drink your tea and get out? What for did I travelled here for more than two hours passing all these passport controls? Couldn't you call me and postpone the meeting? Don't you know what is going on in the city?

Olga Ivanovna. Liova, you insisted on the meeting yourself...

Lev Borisovich. Of course, I did. I still have the article to write...

Olga Ivanovna. I thought It was not proper to cancel again.

Lev Borisovich. (after pause) Olga Ivanovna, tell me what is wrong? Maybe you can use some of my help?

Olga Ivanovna. How long have we known each other, Liova?

Lev Borisovich. Since you've become the head of the business. I attended the shareholders meeting, and then interviewed you for the first time...

Olga Ivanovna. Oh, my God, it's been 17 years already... You know, I've always considered you as a talented journalist. You are able to give an exact meaning of words said, don't distort anything and write easy and interesting texts...I could always talk to you in a confidence. I knew if I ask you not to write about something than you wouldn't.

Lev Borisovich. Well, why would I ruin our prospective relationships. (after a pause) Olga Ivanovna, I'm very glad to see you, I can't understand at all what is happening here and why you couldn't meet me for so long... All right, I put away the dictaphone, I close the notebook, let's just drink some tea.

Olga Ivanovna. That's good.

Lev Borisovich. Why don't you want to talk?

Olga Ivanovna. I respect you too much to get away with some rubbish.

Lev Borisovich is looking with surprise.

Olga Ivanovna. (lowering the voice). Liova, I've never felt so badly as I do now. For all years, not even at any authority, never. Liova, they are just destroying us.

Suddenly starts crying. Lev Borisovich jumps up confusingly, gives her a napkin, takes her by hands.

Lev Borisovich. Calm down, Olga Ivanovna. Calm down, please.

Olga Ivanovna. I don't know how to call them, they are real bandits. They got used to steal so they decided to steal the whole country, to put it into their pocket. They are pulling everything! (sobbing)

Lev Borisovich. What's happened? Was it a raider seizer?

Olga Ivanovna. No, that's what we'd prepared for. At first there were warning lights flashing. They were sounding me out saying "we should meet", "we should talk". I didn't meet anybody finding some temporary protection. I hired expensive lawyers. After all, you know, we've always worked openly and fairly . We've had a good reputation... We've got so many letters of commendation from tax administration. The walls of our accountant department are covered with diplomas . I have my own hall

of fame: there are references from city majors, premiers and presidents... To sum up we beated off somehow, more over it wasn't for the first time.

Lev Borisovich. So what's next?

Olga Ivanovna. They are oppressing us so much that I can't bear it. They do everything to leave our turnover without any free money at all. The government must compensate us the value-added taxes for export. I'm supposed to get it by law, by law!!!, you know. They don't compensate. (sobbing)

Lev Borisovich. What if to sue to the court?

Olga Ivanovna. (sobbing) I won three court proceedings! I went through all instances, up to a Supreme one! Supreme Court decreed: to compensate eight millions. It's written in black and white – to pay out. They don't. To save my life! There've never been such lawlessness...

Lev Borisovich. It's a criminal case against those who don't pay.

Olga Ivanovna. We've even made an action. None the court accepts. Just don't accept for examination, that's it.

Lev Borisovich. Oh, my...

Olga Ivanovna. They have clout everywhere. Although there are huge holes in the national budget. They promised here and there it would be better. Somewhere printed in addition, somewhere gathered and threw it under the elections as a bone for a dog. And now those holes must be covered. And they rip off us taxes in advance. We have advance payments on income tax a quarter forward. There is no profit yet but they are asking us to pay already!

Lev Borisovich. Don't pay!

Olga Ivanovna. How?! Once we tried to refuse. The chief of tax administration got to know about it at once. And the next day we had an unplanned checkup. I have these checkups 100 days a year at my enterprise and so they'll be there all three hundred and sixty five days. When to work and most importantly how?

Lev Borisovich. Maybe you should act right oppositely, to tell about everything. You know, to write a letter to the president...

Olga Ivanovna. What are you talking about? Our most intelligent director Semyon Naumovich recently spoke at the meeting and talking to a president told about tax problems, which has got everyone. Well, it just wearied the man to death.

Lev Borisovich. So what?

Olga Ivanovna. Nothing happened. A tax wasn't compensated, but there was a command to fleece. To ruin him utterly, you understand me? He has at his enterprise now tax inspectorate, public prosecutor's office, department on economical crime struggle, firemen and goodness knows who. That's all. They hold all system in one fist; everybody is connected through the chain. And here is economical crises, people don't have money and we drop on sales mercilessly. And I have almost a thousand of people and I must pay salary to all of them, to settle accounts with suppliers, to pay for communal flat. And what is the way out: to take credits, to be in debts? And what to return from after that? And no raiders are

needed. It would possible to come and take everybody with bare hands. It`s needless to say... We`ll crawl ourselves...

Lev Borisovich. Do you think there is nothing to do at all?

Olga Ivanovna. The other days there was a telephone call... From the tax authority by the way. Some man wanted to meet me. Ok, I would receive him. He comes. Some creature... God knows what he was wearing, with dirty nails. Proposed a help with compensation. Asking him the price of the matter. He takes a piece of paper and draws «30%».

Lev Borisovich. Thirty?!

Olga Ivanovna. It`s enough to drive one crazy! I have no words! They undress in the whole!

And I asked if he compensated to many ones. He agreed but bigger sums of money, hundreds of millions. Leva, you know, I`ve never done such machinations, yeah? And asked him if it could be a little cheaper. He said it would be cheaper if you make an agreement only with somebody of vice-premiers or just premiere himself, or with president. Then maybe for five-ten percents you`d come to agreement (sobbing).

Lev Borisovich. Maybe it`s better to sell the enterprise while it`s not late yet? To some Europeans for normal price.

Olga Ivanovna. Oh, God, who would invest in this god-forsaken hole? It`s like a war time we`re living at. The battle front line goes through any reasonably significant business. And it has been for twenty years so far! And while each of us was is fighting for his own business our country is fooled away. We lose money and people as well (sobbing).

Lev Borisovich. Olga Ivanovna, please don`t cry. People went out to the square and I think this time it`ll be another ending.

Olga Ivanovna. We all hope for it. They make an appearance for Europe telling about negotiations. But they are gathering troops instead. It`s so disgusting, Liova, so disgusting! They started to open cheap stores urgently, you`ve probably heard about it. They are buying a nation for 3 cents again, like they always did. They call it the initiative of government! They tell about social prices! They made us all to give products 30-40% lower of their cost value for these stores, forcing us into submission! We can`t last long. I hate myself... (crying) I am sorry, Liova, I`m sorry..

Light goes out.

Scene 4. Shengen visa.

The Embassy of a European country. There is a queue to the window. The Important Seal accepts documents behind. The First Folder stands the first in the queue. It is followed by the Second Folder with the Gun next to it. It is hidden in the bag so other characters don`t notice his presence. From time to time the Foremost Seal appears behind the window placed at some distance.

The Important Seal appears behind the window and sits down in the armchair.

The First Folder. (bashfully) May I?

The Important Seal. Sure.

The First Folder. Hello! I called in advance, made an agreement...

The Important Seal. Have you collected all the documents?

The First Folder. Yes, of course.

The Important Seal. So show them.

The First Folder tries to push a huge heap of papers through the narrow chink under the window

The Important Seal. Wait a minute. What's this?

The First Folder. The documents.

The Important Seal. Why so many of them?

The First Folder. It's for the whole group.

The Important Seal. What group?

The First Folder. "Nightingale".

The Important Seal. What nightingale?

The First Folder. It's a choir of boys called "Nightingale". We were invited on a music festival.

The Important Seal. Ah, choir of boys "Nightingale"! Why didn't you tell it at once...

The First Folder. I'm telling you now that I called, and made an appointment.

The Important Seal. You know all the people call us and make arrangements. I know, we have an appointment for the "Nightingale" choir for today, but you don't come. You've been called twice already.

The First Folder. I don't think we have been called... I came 20 minutes after the opening, I was getting here from the train station. There was a huge crowd next to the Embassy, I asked and people said they hadn't heard.

The Important Seal. You were the first we've called up, I didn't expect to meet you anymore. If you had come earlier you wouldn't have stood under the Embassy for the whole day. Have you ever applied for visa before at our office?

The First Folder. Yes, half a year ago.

The Important Seal. We remember you, there were some problems with documents then...

The First Folder. Oh, no. It was one of our guys who registered in the other city and he should apply to another Embassy representative, you didn't want to take his documents then.

The Important Seal. What do you mean "didn't want"? We don't have a right to do this.

The First Folder. Yes, of course. And the boy wasn't able come with us.

The Important Seal. (To the Second Folder) Please, move beyond the line, yes, yes, I am talking to you, don't come so close to me, or it's impossible to work.

The Gun. Just try me!

The Second Folder. Take it easy! (Moves one step back)

The Important Seal. (talking to The First Folder) Where is the original of the invitation?

The First Folder. Here you are.

The Important Seal. Well. Where are you going to live?

The First Folder. It's written here. Organizing committee provides with food and accommodation.

The Important Seal. An exact address of living must be indicated.

The First Folder. We didn't indicate it last time we applied. We don't have enough time to get another invitation letter. We are to leave in ten days.

The Important Seal. I don't know why nobody noticed it last time. Ok, we will shut our eyes on it, but keep it in mind for the next time.

The First Folder. Yes, of course.

The Important Seal. Sooo. "Nightingale" choir of boys. There are fifteen persons. But what about this girl?

The First Folder. This girl is me. I am the head of a group.

The Important Seal. Oh, excuse me. But why the boys are so mature? Everyone is more than twenty.

The First Folder. Well, we'll celebrate our tenth anniversary soon. Naturally, they've all grown up since, but the official name remained.

The Important Seal. You consider what to do with it. It's going to be a choir of men soon, but you still mention "boys" in the name of the group. Sooo, do you have your boys' letters of attorney?

The First Folder. Of course, here you are.

The Gun. I would really like to shoot.

The Second Folder. Be quiet!

The Important Seal. Ok, handle me the documents. It should be the blocks with documents for five persons.

The First Folder. (fussing, looks through the papers, counts five files with packs of papers, pushes through the chink under the window) Here you are, please.

The Important Seal. (looks through) And where is income reference here?.. Aha, I see. You'd organize each of them in the same order not to get lost. So, the next packet.

The First Folder handles the documents.

The Important Seal. (glancing documents) I'm confused... Did you buy the return tickets?

The First Folder. I keep them separately here (takes out one more file with documents, puts it though the chink). I don't have tickets themselves, but rather the confirmation of reservation. We didn't have time to buy for the return tickets.

The Important Seal looks through the documents.

The First Folder. By the way, there is no mention about tickets in the list of documents required for visa. It's just my friends who advised me to buy them just in case.

The Important Seal. They gave you the good idea. We don't have the right to require them, but if you have the tickets, we don't worry much: there is a certainty you won't stay there. (Shows through the window one of the inquiry forms) And what is this?

The First Folder. What are you talking about?

The Important Seal. Where is a sign in the inquiry form?

The First Folder. There it is!

The Important Seal. There must be two signs. The one - here, another – there. Where is the second one?

The First Folder. Oh my God!.. How didn't I watch to the end! I checked up hundreds of times. But fifteen persons... And everyone has a heap of papers! Let me sign it for him!

The Important Seal. By no means! What do you offer me? This is a falsehood. It's a forgery of documents. I put away this pack of files, I'll show to the chief, let him decide. Give me other papers.

The First Folder puts in the chink packet of documents.

The Gun. Please, I need just one shot!

The Second Folder. Keep silence!

The Important Seal. Sooo! This boy doesn't work, does he? He doesn't study anywhere as well...

The First Folder. He's been looking for a job for half a year but can't find anything so far.

The Important Seal. He doesn't have a bank account as well...

The First Folder. No, he doesn't. But he's got his own apartment, there is a copy of the document attached. We also have a copy of his marriage certificate, his wife stays here. He will come back with everyone. As you may see, we signed the petition with all group that he'll return.

The Important Seal. This is great, of course. But the order is above all, you know...

The First Folder. Oh, I'm begging you. If you, please, can let him join us. He is our soloist.

The Important Seal. I see, though I can't take so much responsibility on myself. I put away his pack of files for our chief's consideration. You shouldn't worry.

The First Folder. (Starts crying) It's easy to say – not to worry. We've already bought the tickets, we are expected to come, we can let the people down, but you say we shouldn't worry.

The Important Seal. Well then, these files are accepted and I'll go to confirm these two ones with the chief. (She gets up and disappears behind the door, in the depth of her room)

The First Folder, sobbing, collects the documents left and drops them. The Second Folder rushes to help her.

The Second Folder. You shouldn't worry. At least they've accepted your documents at your first visit. I come here for the fifth time already. I can't sort these damned documents out any way.

The First Folder. They always fray our nerves completely. Believe it or not. After these visits I need at least two days to come to myself. We've already been abroad for several times and it's always been accompanied by a great stress.

The Second Folder. Have you been refused to getting a visa?

The First Folder. No, but it's always such a headache.

The Second Folder. I've travelled a lot too, but usually there was someone else dealing with the documents. And this time I tried myself for the first time – it's a real nightmare.

The First Folder. They should provide **visa-free regime like they've been promising for so many years.**

The Second Folder. By no means... With our government they won't do it ...

The Gun. (comes, talking to the Second Folder) Listen, let those come back, then we'll shoot them down both and run away.

The Second Folder. Don't you have anything better in mind?

The Gun. Well, let's put a bullet at the partition at least. That'll do so much noise! We will make them sit up, huh? There must be a reason I was taken with you here?

The Second Folder. Sit quietly, you'll see the time you've been waiting for.

The Gun. (with a disappointment) You'll see the time, you'll see the time... (returns back on his place).

The Important Seal comes back accompanied by the Foremost Seal who is courteousness itself talking to others.

The Foremost Seal. (Says with a slight accent) Hello, I examined your case. I don't see any trouble in allowing your soloist to go with the group, I think everything will be fine, moreover that you have a good visa history.

The First Folder. Thank you so much.

The Foremost Seal. As for the second person's case, we will accept the documents but he will have to come here and sign on the inquire form himself. I understand he's from the other city what means some costs, but I can't do anything about it, it's his mistake.

The First Folder. Ok, ok, of course.

The Foremost Seal. We are glad you are coming to our country, I heard about your group and we'd like to welcome you.

The First Folder. Did I understand correct via the telephone that we`d get visas for free?

The Foremost Seal. Beyond all doubt. You have right on that as for this project is directed for cultural approaching of our nations.

The First Folder. I thank you.

The Foremost Seal. In a week you`ll be able to take your documents back, a group Shengen visa will be issued to all of you.

Behind the scene there is a huge noise, a little bit in undertone but quite clearly a talk in the heightened voices. Everybody on the scene listens to it.

The first voice. I said let me in.

The second voice. I`ve told you already you can`t come in. You aren`t in a list today.

The first voice. (shouts) But I have an urgent question.

The second voice. What question?

The first voice. Why was I refused to getting a visa!!!

The second voice. It won`t be explained to you!

The first voice. Why?

The second voice. An embassy doesn`t explain the reasons of refuse but has a right to do so.

The first voice. But I have a right to know what had happened! I am a scientist, I constantly go on conferences abroad, there are lots of visas in my current and old international passport. There haven`t ever been any problems.

The second voice. I am sorry, there`s no way I can help you.

The first voice. Why can`t I talk to you bosses?

The second voice. We have to keep order. If you want to make an appointment you must register in advance.

The first voice. (moving away) What a scandal! I can`t believe it! You ought to be ashamed... My foreign colleagues will be shocked...

The Gun. (jumping out onto the proscenium, growling) Shoot! Shoot! Let me shoot!!!

The Second Folder falls down on him from the back, ties him up and gets him at his place.

The Foremost Seal. So if you don`t any questions I wish you good luck. (disappears in the distant door).

The Important Seal. You see, everything is settled. Sign here, please. And take these labels. Take them with you when you come for visas in a week.(shouts to the Second Folder) Next one!

The First Folder. May I call and find out when our boy can come and leave his signature.

The Important Seal. You`re welcome.

The First Folder moves away from the window, the Second Folder takes her place. The Important Seal gets up, collects some of the papers and goes to the next room.

The First Folder. (calling over the telephone) Hello! I'm calling from the Embassy, so I'll be brief...Yes, documents were accepted, but there is a problem on your inquiry form: you forgot to sign in the second place... No, it was accepted anyway but on a condition that you'll come and sign one of these days... Yes, I see, but we have no more options ... On Thursday? Are you sure you'll be able to? Good... In overall everything is fine, everything was excepted ... Yes, for free, promised to make a group visa... Group? I don't know. Is there any difference? Well no, haven't heard earlier... Are you on Internet?.. Yes, have a look for some reason... Waiting...(diverting from the telephone to the Second Folder) Do you happen to know what the difference is between group visa and usual one?

The Second Folder. I have no idea. I hear it for the first time. And what may the difference be?

The First Folder. I also think there is no difference... (getting back to the phone conversation) What? What, what? Ouch, oh my! And where is it written? And is there officially anywhere?.. On forums... People's opinions, well I see. I don't know what to say... Ok, I'll try to find out while I'm here. Ok, thank you.

The Second Folder. Is anything wrong?

The First Folder. (tired) It seems to me we'll have to go with a group all the time...

The Second Folder. What? How is that?

The Important Seal comes back on her place behind the glass. After her follows The Foremost Seal and takes some papers on the table.

The First Folder. (coming to the window) Our boy will come the day after tomorrow approximately at the same time.

The Foremost Seal. Good (to the Important Seal) Make an appointment for him.

The First Folder. Tell me please, what is a group visa?

The Foremost Seal. How is it what? That means you are going by one group.

The First Folder. And coming back by one group too?

The Foremost Seal. Well, it's desirable, yes.

The First Folder. But how is it possible? We have three persons leaving a day later. Somebody is planning to come back earlier, somebody stays vice versa a little bit longer...

The Foremost Seal. I think there won't be a problem.

The First Folder. But why a group one? Can't we get usual visas?

The Foremost Seal. But are you going by a group?

The First Folder. Yes, but not a touristic group when everybody sits into a bus and comes back by the same one. My guys just saw in the Internet some people write there may be some problems while moving around with such a visa.

The Foremost Seal. What problems?

The First Folder. Somebody came back earlier and he had to wait for the rest of the group.

The Foremost Seal. What exactly the question do you have for me?

The First Folder. To tell the truth we weren't planning to come back in one day. I know, that somebody of our guys was going to come by their relatives or friends for a short while after the festival... This travel for them is a rare opportunity to see Europe.

The Foremost Seal. We were talking a moment ago that you are going on the festival, we give you a visa for free and what can I hear now? You want to travel around Europe as tourists?

The First Folder. We are going on the festival, but what is the crime if we stay a little longer for a week and see something? Architecture, painting art, opera... Is it a crime?

The Foremost Seal. No, but we must be sure you are the festival is your destination.

The First Folder. We are going on the festival!!! And if you need I personally will bring you thousands of proves that we have been there. But why are you making us go marching like we are soldiers?

The Foremost Seal. Nobody asks you go marching. There are transparent borders in Shengen zone you may move around as you wish but we must be sure you spend the most of the time at festival.

There is a telephone call. The Important Seal picks up the phone, listening.

The Important Seal. (gives a telephone to the Foremost Seal). This is for you.

The Foremost Seal. Speaking... Yes, it's me. Who am I talking to?.. Speaking... Yes, absolutely right.. Yes, I understand... I must agree with you but you should realize that we follow instructions. Unfortunately we are bureaucratic instance, you right on this point. But we must take into consideration many circumstances... Yes, it's fair, unfortunately, but you must understand us...What?... The fifth?... Don't worry about it, we will give you visa. The documents must be drawn perfectly we are watching over. Thank you, sometimes it is pleasant to hear such words too. All the best. I wish you a good trip beforehand (after a sort pause to the First folder). Great, so not to make you worry we'll issue usual visas not group ones.

The First Folder. Thank you. (leaves)

The Foremost Seal. (to The Second Folder) How can I help you?

The Second Folder. (puts a batch of documents into a chink) I'm trying to cope with this batch of papers. I come here for the fifth time already. So, here is a bank certificate that was missing. There are money on the account, as you see. I even can take off my clothes. Would you like me to do it?

The Foremost Seal. There is no need in that. I appreciate your sense of humor (looking through the papers). I see, you are the violinist ... Your documents are accepted, I regret it have taken so much time. Put your signature here and take a label please, you'll get visas in a week.

The Second Folder. And is that all?

The Foremost Seal. Of course, good luck (leaves, the Important Seal follows him)

The Gun. Hate it.

The Second Folder. (moving off to the opposite side of the stage) And where is my feeling of happiness?

The Gun. Maybe, we'll fire a shot at last?

The Second Folder. Let's do it!

The Gun fire happily, sounds of the shots are heard.

Light goes out.

Scene 5. The absurd death.

The evening of the same day. Elena and Andrei's apartment again. The table lamp is switched on. Andrei and Elena are lying on the bed.

Elena. Are you sure nobody saw you?

Andrei. I think I am. I mean nobody seemed to follow me.

Elena. Oh, God!!! I can't believe it! Your mom's calling. There was a TV report about shooting near the consulate. It nearly killed me... I was awfully frightened about you. But even in a worst nightmare I wouldn't imagine that it was you who started shooting. I can't believe you did this and can't understand why.

Andrei. It was a holiday firework on the occasion of applying for the Shengen visa!

Elena. Andrei, I'm gonna kill you with my bare hands if you don't stop playing the fool. Can't you talk to me seriously?

Andrei. Of course, I can. Please, tell me if there was anything between you and Vali?

Elena seizes the pillow and starts to hit Andrei with it. They both laugh and then fall flat on their backs again.

Andrei. Lenka, forgive me a fool. I don't understand myself quite clearly how it happened. You know what's exactly humiliating? It's not the way it happens, but the fact it actually happens: that somebody gives himself a right to take away a part of your freedom... When this corporal punishment has finished and I went out of the building, I felt like someone placed this ill-fated gun right into my hand.

Elena. But if you felt the same way in the consulate, you'd start shooting too?

Andrei. I wouldn't feel this way at the consulate. I'm a responsible man after all. I controlled myself with all my strength there.

Elena. That's a dear. Why did you take a gun with you anyway?

Andrei. To kill you in case I come and you are in bed with Vali... Ok, ok, don't beat me! The gun is a very useful thing. You can't walk on the streets without any weapon today. There are policemen, militaries, even tanks. I'm not worse than anyone else. In America you can keep and bear arms, and that's right. With such a thing in your pocket you feel yourself like a Man. With a capital "M".

Elena. Of course, you do. Especially when you run into passport inspection.

Andrei. I provided for every eventuality. I had a plan.

Elena. What kind of plan?

Andrei. To shoot down everyone and to run away.

A pause.

Andrei. Lenka, come on!

A pause.

Andrei. Lena, don't be offended... I am silly. I didn't even think about passport control. I've never been stopped and checked ever... It might be