

MIRO GAVRAN

ALL ABOUT WOMEN

First night: October 31, 2000

at the Epilog Theatre, Zagreb

Directed by: Nina Kleflin

The players: Ksenija Pajiæ

Doris Šariæ-Kukuljica

Mladena Gavran

Sets: Miljenko Sekuliæ

Costumes: Marija Šariæ - Ban

Music: Robert Torre

Note I:

The play is for only three actresses. Each of them plays five different roles.

FIRST ACTRESS plays Lada, Greta, Nena, Mimi and Caroline

SECOND ACTRESS plays Anita, Dubravka, Maria, Biba and Agnes

THIRD ACTRESS plays Stella, Olga, Jasna, Dada and Louisa

Note II:

The transition from one scene to the next i.e. from one story to the next, has to be carried out quickly, so the actresses change their appearance with only minor details - a scarf, hat, wig, jacket...

Note III:

Because of the complex structure of the play it will be "difficult" to read, "difficult" to direct, and "difficult" to interpret. Therefore, I recommend that it be read off with care, directed with mathematical precision, and interpreted dynamically.

1. A - JUST FRIENDS (ANITA'S sitting room)

(ANITA, LADA)

(ANITA is a young woman with long hair dressed in an understated frock. She comes out of the bathroom carrying a bowl and a rag for collecting water. At that moment the door-bell rings. ANITA places the bowl on the floor.)

ANITA: I'm coming!

(She goes to the front door and opens it. LADA comes into the room.)

LADA: Hi! Sorry I'm late.

ANITA: Hi! I thought you wouldn't be coming at all.

LADA: Did you think I would leave without saying goodbye? What's that?

(LADA points to the bowl on the floor.)

ANITA: A disaster! Don't even ask! The bathroom flooded!

LADA: How? When?

ANITA: When I came home from school the bathroom was under water.

I was almost in tears.

LADA: What happened?

ANITA: The valve on the bidet gave way. - I called the janitor right away, he's supposed to know about such things. He was here until fifteen minutes ago.

LADA: Is everything alright now?

ANITA: Yes and no. The water has stopped flowing, and I have cleaned up, but the neighbour downstairs... I introduced you once, that lady called Maria... her bathroom ceiling has gone to the devil. The water seeped through.

LADA: What will you do now?

ANITA: I don't know. I will have to pay for the re-plastering and all that. She was so upset she was crying. I'm feeling pretty desperate myself. I really am sorry, sorry for her. She's celebrating her birthday tomorrow, and both her daughters are coming. I have ruined it all for her. I feel so embarrassed.

LADA: Oh, come on. You didn't do it on purpose. You don't always have to feel guilty, kid.

ANITA: I know, but just the same - my flood will ruin her party.

LADA: It just happened - it's not as if you are happy about it yourself.

ANITA: What a crazy day - I had trouble with the principal this morning - he got angry with me because I excused the absence of a boy they wanted to throw out of the school - and now they can't. He said I was too soft, that I was not a good educator, he went on and on how teachers sometimes have to be resolute and strict - and when I got home the flood was waiting for me.

LADA: Poor kid - and I'm leaving tomorrow. How will you manage without me for two long months?

ANITA: This is a bad day, a really bad day.

LADA: I know you will find it harder now than me. I shall be with people from my profession, doing advanced training in something I love. And I'll finally get to see America. It will all pass much more quickly for me than for you. I'll love to pack you into my suitcase and smuggle you onto the plane for Washington.

ANITA: You'd need a pretty big suitcase.

LADA: You must promise me something, something that's important for you.

ANITA: What?

LADA: I don't want you to be unhappy again, so please, don't go back to her while I'm away.

ANITA: Don't worry, that's over.

LADA: Just the same, be careful. Don't let her talk you round with two or three sloppy sentences and then put you in an inferior position again.

ANITA: Don't worry. That's all in the past - it's over. If she suggests we live together again, I'll say no. I can do it.

LADA: If you even allow yourself to talk to her, you'll be lost. You are

not as strong as she is. So please promise me you won't even talk to her.
ANITA: But what if she phones?
LADA: ... Tell her you are in a hurry, just on your way out, and put down the phone.
ANITA: That I'm in a hurry and just on my way out?
LADA. Yes.
ANITA: What if she rings late at night?
LADA: Then say you have just gone to bed because you have to get up early. And hang up.
ANITA: Do you think I shall be able to?
LADA: You have to. Think back, until five years ago you couldn't make a move without her - it's only now that you've become a person in your own right. Only since I helped you to move out, to get this flat, only since you've started to live your own life. Isn't that so?
ANITA: Yes, it is.
LADA: When I get back from America, it will be May, and it won't be long to the summer holidays - we'll make up for not seeing each other for two months. We'll go to one of the islands again. Our fifth holiday together. When you feel down because I'm not here with you, think about that and it will be easier for you. When we are at the seaside I shall tell you about everything, about my residency, about how American hospitals operate, about everything that I experience there. But please, don't let her into your life again. You mustn't on your own account. Don't forget that you only started to breathe freely when you got out from under her thumb.
ANITA: I know all that, but...
LADA: But what?
ANITA: She is still my mother.
LADA: That's just why I hold it against her for ruining your life, for chaining you to her. You must admit that it was really stupid for you to be living with your Mummy until you were thirty-two. That was pure selfishness on her part. Do you agree?
ANITA: Yes, I do.
LADA. OK, Kid, look after yourself while I'm away.
ANITA: I will. Who will your daughter be with while you are away?
LADA: Who would she be with? She'll be by herself. She's fourteen now. She knows how to look after herself. I have reared her for life. And not for me, the way your mother did you.

1. B - CAREER (GRETA's living room)

(GRETA, DUBRAVKA, OLGA)
(All three women are holding glasses. They have been drinking fairly heavily.)
OLGA: Dubravka? Greta? - another drink? OK?
GRETA: OK, but you'll have to pour for me, I'm not too steady on my feet.
DUBRAVKA: Pour mine, too, Olga.
(OLGA pours the drinks.)
OLGA: Here's to your very good health, my dear drunk pals.
DUBRAVKA: Here's to you, you fantastic broads.
GRETA: Here's to us, you luses.
(Each of the women empties their glass.)
DUBRAVKA: It's wonderful getting together with you every Saturday, it's wonderful that we give our husbands and kids a day off on Saturday. It's wonderful that we work in the same company, and that we are here together now.
GRETA: It's wonderful, fuck me if it isn't.
OLGA: That's right.
GRETA: If it's so wonderful, why aren't we singing?
OLGA: Perhaps we are tone deaf.
DUBRAVKA: Perhaps you are. But I sang in the choir in elementary school
GRETA: Aha. Then let's sing that old one, La donna e mobile.

DUBRAVKA: Let's sing!

GRETA-DUBRAVKA-OLGA:

La donna e mobile

DUBRAVKA: That was marvellous.

GRETA: And have you ever been mobile where your Doug is concerned, Olga?

OLGA: Ha, ha. Cock an ear and listen. Never! And if I had been, you would be the last person I'd tell, because you don't know how to keep a secret. So the answer is: No.

GRETA: What about you, Dubravka? Are you faithful to your husband?

DUBRAVKA: Yes, I am. A few days every month.

(The women burst into laughter.)

GRETA: Ah, that's a good answer. Faithful to him for a few days every month. Dubravka, you're a genius.

OLGA: Girls, it's just great that we can enjoy ourselves every Saturday without our husbands, without those dear boring children. And where's your stud now?

DUBRAVKA: More "muddy" than "studdy".

GRETA: The stud has taken his son to the movies. To see "Star Wars - the First Generation".

OLGA: No more than he deserves. It's a terrible film. And what about your husband - where's he?

DUBRAVKA: He stayed home with the boy. They are probably watching television.

OLGA: Men - that's when they're the best, when they're watching TV.

GRETA: I thought they were best when they were on the job.

OLGA: What job?

GRETA: You know, that job.

OLGA: Ah, that job. You mean riding.

GRETA: Aha.

OLGA: I don't like doing it with mine any more.

GRETA: Why?

OLGA: Do you know how he does it?

GRETA: Tell me.

DUBRAVKA: Come on, tell us!

OLGA: Are you really interested?

GRETA + DUBRAVKA: Come on, come on! Tell us!

OLGA: He does it as if he's riding a bicycle, with a lit cigarette in the corner of his mouth - while the ash falls on me, he grinds and grinds.

GRETA: But that's super!

OLGA: What's so super about it?

GRETA: Everything - the ash, the smoke, the grinding! Passion!

OLGA: But he grinds too fast.

GRETA: Ah, fuck it all then! Then not even that "cigarette" is any help.

OLGA: Nothing can help him when all he thinks of is himself. What about yours? How does your husband do it. After all, he is eighteen years older than you are.

DUBRAVKA: He's a real technician.

GRETA: In other words, another one who's poorly hung.

(The women burst out laughing.)

DUBRAVKA: You now how it is with older men - they are always grateful when they get it.

GRETA: Everything in slow motion, they are never in a hurry.

OLGA: Did I tell you what that cow cooked up for me yesterday?

GRETA + DUBRAVKA: Sophia?

OLGA: Yes, Sophia.

DUBRAVKA: What?

OLGA: The day before I asked the department head to let me leave at two, the little one had a production at kindergarten - he said OK. And then - just before two, those French clients arrived to sign the contract. The chief says: Bring the contract from the general manager's office and then you can leave. I go to the office and his right hand - our dear, stupid

little Sophia has forgotten to prepare the contract. And then the two of us had to type it up, helter-skelter from the beginning. A disaster. The French clients had to wait about forty minutes. My chief was in a rage, I was hysterical, but Sophia was dead cool. She even said: "What are you getting so upset about, there'll be at least ten more kindergarten shows before your little girl starts school." To cut it short, I was late, of course. When I finally got to the kindergarten, her number was over. So, that was it. Mimi started crying in the middle of it when she saw I wasn't there. Terrible. She wouldn't talk to me - not yesterday, nor today.

GRETA: All because of that silly cow.

DUBRAVKA: It's all so unfair - as incapable and careless as she is, I don't know how she can be the top man's secretary, while the three of us who are so bright and normal are secretaries to the department heads. What makes that goose better than the three of us?

GREATA: Perhaps she's better because she knew which one to give a blow job to.

DUBRAVKA: Surely not the general manager?

OLGA: I wouldn't be at all surprised. She has those tiny teeth and a tiny mouth, and a friendly face - she fulfils all the pre-conditions for giving a top-class blow job.

DUBRAVKA: Let's have a look at your little teeth?

OLGA: You'll get both the teeth and this glass.

(The women burst out laughing again.)

1. C - LOVE (Maria's living room)

(MARIA, NEDA)

(MARIA, a woman around sixty, is dusting in the flat. The sound of the front door-bell ringing.)

(NENA comes in carrying a small suitcase.)

MARIA: Nena!

NENA: Mama!

(They embrace and kiss each other.)

NENA. Happy birthday, Mama.

MARIA: Thank you, child, thank you.

NENA: There's a present for you in the case, but it's at the bottom. I'll give it to you when I unpack.

MARIA: There's no hurry. What's important is that you are here. I was afraid you might change your mind. I'm really happy to see you.

NENA: Who would think it - my mother is sixty years old! And you look sixteen.

MARIA: Go on with you. I have eyes, too, you know.

NENA: No, really. You have managed to retain something youthful. How are you?

MARIA: I would be better if our neighbour, the one upstairs, hadn't put on a real show yesterday.

NENA: What happened?

MARIA: The ceiling in the bathroom is seeping with water. The plaster is falling down. There was a flood in that little goose Anita's bathroom. She says the valve on the bidet gave way.

NENA: Did it really?

MARIA: I don't know. Perhaps she's lying, but perhaps it did... That's what happens with women today who live alone - without a man. While she was teaching at school, the water started seeping out. If she had had a man at home - that would not have happened. That's why I say a woman needs a man in the house. And you could think about that yourself - living alone, and thirty-five...

NENA: Give over, Mum. Don't start that again! Why don't you get married?

MARIA: Who needs a woman of sixty?

NENA: You were only fifty-two when Dad died.

MARIA: That's was the last thing on my mind then. For the first year or two, I had to get used to the fact that he was gone. And then, suddenly - I realised that I was too old to start again.

NENA: I like living alone better, too.

MARIA: You're wrong. You should get married and have some kids. What would I do without my grandchildren?

(She picks up a photograph.)

MARIA: Look how lovely they are.

NENA: Mum, I don't want to look at their photograph.

MARIA: But they are your born sister's sons.

NENA: That's just why I don't want to look at their photo.

MARIA: Robert is six now, and Tony is four. They really are sweet.

NENA: I'm not interested.

MARIA: The children are not to blame that you two are not talking.

NENA: Mum, please, don't start again - otherwise I'll be off without even saying good-bye! I told you seven years ago that I never want to talk to you about Jasna, never! I had to move to Osijek. That's why I haven't come home for your last six birthdays. Just because I knew my sister would be here - probably with them. You know I couldn't bear it, you know I don't want to see her, or him, ever again as long as I live.

MARIA: I have to tell you something.

NENA: What is it?

MARIA: I lied when I said Jasna would not be coming for my birthday.

NENA: That really is a blow below the belt!

(NENA walks over to her suitcase, picks it up and walks towards the door.)

MARIA: She'll be coming alone, without him.

NENA: Just the same.

MARIA: Wait, just let me tell you something!

(NENA pauses with her hand on the door.)

MARIA: It's my sixtieth birthday today. I could die tomorrow. I have two daughters. I love you both equally. Is it asking too much to want you both beside me today. Is that asking too much?

(NENA turns back towards MARIA.)

MARIA: Only one day and one night. You will be leaving tomorrow anyway.

NENA: Mum, you know how painful it all is to me.

MARIA: Even now.

NENA: ... Even now. As if it all happened yesterday. You know how much I loved him. And then, after a silly little tiff, after only one week, the love of my life starts going out with my sister who is two years older than me.

MARIA: You have to forget it.

NENA: How can I forget? Since that day I have never been myself. It broke me into pieces, it destroyed me. How can I help hating her and despising him. And now you poke their children's photo under my nose - they should have been my children. Can't you understand that my life has been ruined because of her?

(NENA starts crying. MARIA hugs her.)

MARIA: Calm down, calm down. Life goes on. Time heals all wounds. Come on, promise me you won't run away. That you'll stay with me. Promise.

(NENA nods her head in agreement.)

MARIA: I have made some French salad. I put apple in it.

NENA: Thank you, Mum. Is Grandma coming?

MARIA: No. I phoned her and begged her to, but - they are having a show at the retirement home, and she has a part.

NENA: At ninety-two?

MARIA: She was always crazy. I am sorry I don't take after her. I'm sorry you don't take after her. Life would be easier for both of us. She never allowed herself to be impressed by anything, good or bad. When her first husband died - she married again. When the second one died - she married a third one. When the third one died - she told me "I have to move to a home, because I could meet a man my age there". - And she was already eighty-five

then.

(The phone rings.)

MARIA: Excuse me.

(MARIA goes over to the telephone and lifts the receiver.)

MARIA: Maria here.. yes... yes... she's here, she arrived ten minutes ago... of course you can. Nena, it's for you.

NENA: For me?!

MARIA: Yes, here you are.

(She passes the phone to her surprised daughter.)

NENA: Hello.. oh, hi Davor, how did you get my mother's number... no, no, I'm not angry... what?... I can't... I don't like hiking, but... no, I like the people, it's not that... but why do I have to tell you now - ah, because of the reservations... I don't think I'll be able to... look, Mum needs me, I'm sorry I can't talk now... bye, bye!

(She replaces the receiver.)

MARIA: What do I need from you?

NENA: Just a white to help me out.

MARIA: Who is he?

NENA: A friend from work... We have been out a few times lately, but nothing more. He's nice, honest, bright...

MARIA: He sounded very nice on the phone.

NENA: He's even too nice. I am not fond of very nice men. They get on my nerves. I always think they are weaklings, that they pretend to be well brought up mother's boys. Although he really is a good friend. I enjoy his company.

MARIA: What did he want?

NENA: They are organising some hill-climbing in Slovenia. Some friends of ours. He has to confirm the room reservation at the mountain lodge... I am not ready yet for the next step. He is not interested in our friends, or in hill-climbing... I am afraid that if I go there with him, on this hill-climbing trip, I am afraid that we will sleep together.

MARIA: My goodness, even if that does happen - where's the harm in that?

NENA: Ah, Mummy, Mummy. I don't want to complicate my life. I don't want any obligations.

MARIA: If that's the way you are going to look at things, you will always be alone.

NENA: I don't know, Mum - I am just not sure what I want at the moment, and what I don't want. I am alright as I am.

1. D - THE KINDERGARTEN (the play-room)

(MIMA, BIBA, DADA)

(Each little girl has a Barbie doll in her arms. They are sitting together, playing, talking baby talk.)

MIMA: My Barbie has a big car, and then she sits in it and drives and drives...

BIBA: My Barbie has a big, big aeroplane and then she sits in it and flies and flies and flies...

DADA: And my little Barbie never pees... all Barbies pee, but my Barbie never does, and she doesn't make poo-poo either - she's the best Barbie in the whole world.

MIMA: My Barbie doesn't pee either.

DADA: She does pee, she does so - all Barbies pee except mine. My Barbie is special.

MIMA: And when my Barbie sleeps - she doesn't sleep. When she closes her eyes, she doesn't sleep, she listens, and she can hear what Mummy and Daddy are doing. And she hears everything when Daddy lies on top of Mummy, and Mummy groans, because everything hurts her, and then everything hurts Daddy, and he moans, and then they choke until they get too tired.

DAD: When I'm big... I'll marry Ken. And then Ken will be my husband.

BIBA: He won't want you, he won't want you 'cause he only likes big girls.
DAD: And I'll be big when I grow up.
MIMA: And my husband will have blond hair.
DAD: Mine will be bald like my Daddy.
BIBA: And mine will have a moustache.
DADA: And I saw our Miss kissing the principle in the kindergarten toilet.
BIBA: And I saw them kissing in that place where they keep the rags and the brooms.
BIBA: And my Barbie can sing and dance - but she won't when anyone is watching - she only sings when she's at home with me, she...
DADA: And my skirt is prettier than yours.
BIBA: It is not. Mine is prettier than yours.
DADA: Mine is prettier than yours, and it changes colour when the lights go out.
BIBA: You're silly, a skirt can't change colour.
DADA: It can, too, it turns black when the lights go out, when it's dark. I know everything.
BIBA: You can't know everything. Only my Daddy knows everything. He is so clever that everyone is afraid of him.
MIMA: And my Mummy will come to see me in the concert.
BIBA: No she wont.
MIMA: She will, she will too.
DADA: Your Mummy is always working when we have a show. And I can see that I never see her at our kindergarten.
MIMA: She will so too be coming. She'll come out of spite, and she promised she would come, and that's why I know she'll come to the concert.
DADA: She will not either!
MIMA: She will so too!
DADA: She will not either!
MIMA: She will so too!
BIBA: Ah, you are both so silly, 'cause you are always fighting and saying all sorts of things.
DADA: You're silly too!
MIMA: You're really silly!

2. A. JUST FRIENDS (ANITA's living room)

(ANITA, LADA - and then STELLA)
(ANITA has short hair now. She is putting plates and glasses on the table. The front door bell rings.)
ANITA: It's open!
(LADA comes into the room carrying two large paper carry-bags for clothes.)
ANITA: Lada!
LADA: Hi, Kiddo!
(They run towards each other, embrace and kiss each other on the cheek.)
ANITA: You said you wouldn't be arriving until tomorrow.
LADA: I managed to change my flight for a day earlier. I didn't want to let you know - I wanted to surprise you.
ANITA: How are you?
LADA: Great, marvellous, tired, short of sleep... Everything was more than wonderful. I'll tell you about, I'll tell you about everything. They were so welcoming. Did you get my postcard?
ANITA: Yes - it arrived last week.
LADA: We went on an excursion. You can see it all on the postcard. I met the editor of one of the leading medical journals - just imagine, he read my paper on blood vessels. - He's going to publish it. Do you know what that means? I might even make a career for myself on the other side of the Atlantic. I am so happy to see you again... that we are back together. I brought you two presents. You have to see them right away, you must tell me if you like them.
(LADA takes a very feminine dress out of the first carry-bag and holds it

up for ANITA to see.)

LADA: Well, what do you say?

ANITA: It's nice.

LADA: Nice - it beautiful! And now let me show you the other present.

(LADA takes a shoe-box out of the other bag, and takes out a pair of elegant high- heeled shoes.)

LADA: And what about these, hey? Come on, try them on. Let's see if they fit.

(ANITA puts on the right shoe.)

ANITA: They are very nice, but I think...

LADA: What?

ANITA: They are a little bit tight, over the toes.

LADA: Don't worry, you'll break them in. They're your size.

(LADA suddenly pauses and looks closely at ANITA.)

LADA: Hey, what's with you?

ANITA: What do you mean?

LADA: Your hair! What have you done with your hair?

ANITA: I had it cut, shortened.

LADA: Why the devil did you do that? It was nicer before, more feminine...

Who talked you into cutting it?

ANITA: Nobody talked me into it. I just made up my mind myself.

LADA: Yourself? Don't make me laugh. You have never done anything yourself in your life. You really have surprised me, Kid.

ANITA: I just wanted a change and then...

LADA: And then you cut off that lovely hair. I shouldn't have left you alone so long. I knew you would do something stupid.

ANITA: I was just sick of long hair, so I...

LADA: Hey, you're expecting someone! - Two plates, two glasses! I just burst in. Have you met some dude?

ANITA: No - I'm expecting a friend from work. She came to work at our school a week after you left for America. She teaches maths. She's great, cheerful. You'll like her. We have become friends so I invited her to dinner.

LADA: You invited her to dinner?

ANITA: Yes.

LADA: Since when do you invite colleagues from work to dinner?

ANITA: I was only...

LADA: I'm just joking. I am glad you had company when I was away I can leave if I'm in the way.

ANITA: No, not at all. Stay here with us. There's plenty of food for three. She will be glad to meet you. I have talked so much to her about you.

LADA: I'm tired. I only landed at the airport three hours ago, I don't have the strength for meeting new people, seeing new faces...

(The front door-bell rings.)

ANITA: It's too late now, she here. It's open! Come in!

(STELLA comes into the room.)

STELLA: Good evening.

(STELLA is holding a bunch of flowers in one hand, and a bottle of wine in the other.)

ANITA: Hi there!

STELLA: Here, this is for you.

ANITA: You shouldn't have bothered. Thank you and welcome.

(STELLA and ANITA kiss each other on the cheek.)

ANITA: Let me introduce you - this is Stella, and this is Lada I spoke so much about.

(The women shake hands.)

STELLA: It's a pleasure.

LADA: Same here.

STELLA: Weren't you expected back tomorrow?

LADA: Unfortunately, I came back today.

ANITA: She changed her flight. Won't you sit down.

STELLA: Thanks.

ANITA: The flowers are lovely. I'm going to find a vase.

(ANITA goes into the kitchen.)

STELLA: I have heard so many wonderful things about you. I feel as if I know you.

LADA: Really? I still haven't managed to hear anything about you because I only arrived five minutes ago.

STELLA: Never mind, there's time... Well, how was it in America?

LADA: Marvellous.

STELLA: Yes, they give every opportunity to people who want to make a career for themselves.

(ANITA comes back into the room carrying a vase with the flowers.)

STELLA: I wouldn't want to live there.

LADA: You're probably saying that because you have never been to America.

(STELLA laughs.)

STELLA: Unfortunately, I have been there. Ten times or so for a months or two. I have an aunt in New York.

LADA: What is it, what's wrong with the country?

STELLA: The country is alright, the people are alright - but the food, what they eat - it's not food. That's the only reason I couldn't live there.

LADA: Don't you think there are more important things in life than food?

STELLA: No, I don't.

(STELLA bursts out laughing, and ANITA laughs too.)

ANITA: Isn't it odd that my two best friends are on such formal terms.

LADA: Yes, it is.

STELLA: We have just met. Give us time. After a drink or two it will be easier.

ANITA: Forgive me, I forgot. Would you like something strong or would you prefer beer, or wine?

LADA: I'll have wine.

STELLA: I will, too - I always do.

(ANITA pours wine for them.)

ANITA: Someone should make a speech. I am somehow happy tonight because my two friends are with me. Well, who'll make the toast? LADA: You just did.

(ANITA holds out her glass.)

ANITA: Well then, here's to your good health, my dear friends! Cheers!

LADA + STELLA: Cheers!

STELLA: That short hair suits you so well.

(LADA chokes on her wine and coughs.)

3. C - LOVE (MARIA's sitting room)

(NENA, JASNA)

(The front door-bell rings.)

NENA: Come in!

(JASNA comes in carrying a travel bag.)

JASNA: Hi!

NENA: Hi!

JASNA: I'm pleased to see you.

(Silence.)

JASNA: Where's Mum?

NENA: She went to the butcher's. She'll be back in five minutes.

(JASNA puts down her bag.)

JASNA: How are you?

NENA: I'm fine.

JASNA: I am really pleased to see you. After such a long time.

NENA: You have already said that. I'm sorry that I don't share your delight at our meeting again. When I heard you were coming, I wanted to leave. Mum asked me to stay. I stayed because of her. Only because of her. When she asked me to come, she didn't tell me you would be here.

JASNA: I'm still pleased to see you.

NENA: I'm telling you, I stayed because of Mum.
(Silence.)
JASNA: What's new with you?
NENA: Nothing. Or almost nothing.
JASNA: Mum told me two months ago that you had been promoted.
NENA: A bit. My salary has stayed just about the same.
(Silence.)
JASNA: May I give you a hug?
NENA: No, you may not.
JASNA: We are still sisters. Sisters who have not seen each other for seven years.
NENA: We are not ordinary normal sisters. And I don't want to talk with you, except when Mum is here. Do you understand?
JASNA: Why are you being like that?
NENA: When Mum is around, I am prepared to exchange phrases like: "yes, please, here you are, lovely weather, a beautiful day, it's going to rain, please hand me that spoon"... and nothing more than that. I don't want any more than that.
(Silence.)
JASNA: All I care about is that Mum feels happy on her birthday. I would like her to be able to celebrate her birthday without stress.
NENA: I would like that, too. Do you doubt that I want Mum to have a wonderful birthday? Do you think that I would spoil it for her with my behaviour?
JASNA: I didn't say that.
NENA: We will be happy, cheerful, sweet and smiling. We will be the daughters that every sixty-year-old woman could only hope for on her birthday. We will act out the happy family.

2. B. - THE CAREER

(GRETA, DUBRAVKA, OLGA)
(The sounds of the funeral march can be heard. GRETA, DUBRAVKA, and OLGA appear upstage and walk towards the front of the stage, the three of them side by side, carrying wreaths. They are dressed in black and are talking)
OLGA: She was a wonderful woman, really wonderful.
GRETA: Poor Sophie. When I heard she had been in a traffic accident, I thought of our unforgettable moments we experienced together in the office.
DUBRAVKA: She always had a warm word for everyone. I feel sorry for her husband. I am sorry for the general manager, too, losing such a hard-working secretary.
OLGA: We all loved her. She was so unselfish.
GRETA: She had a really generous heart.
DUBRAVKA: We must not forget her. Ever.
OLGA: She was just at the best time of life, she should have started enjoying life now. She bought a flat last autumn... she worked hard to make her way...
GRETA: I will miss her sense of humour. She was always ready to help out with advice...
DUBRAVKA: I can hardly comprehend that she's gone. I shall never meet her again in the corridor, or in the canteen. I will never see her smile again.
OLGA: Those are nice shoes. Where did you buy them?
DUBRAVKA: In Slovenia. They are Italian.
OLGA: Are they comfortable?
DUBRAVKA: Yes, they are. Although I like them to be a bit wider, I have a broad foot across the toes.
GRETA: Did you see how her sister is dressed, so tastelessly - that's their level.
OLGA: I had an Avon presentation set up for today at home - I had to cancel everything because of the funeral.
DUBRAVKA: Do you have any money at it?

OLGA: Well, look - I make a few hundred marks a month. I can't live off my salary. My husband is only being paid the legal minimum - we still haven't paid off the flat. What's even worse, the late Sophia still owed me for some face cream.

GRETA: How much?

OLGA: Three hundred Kunas.

GRETA: What will you do now?

OLGA: When her husband gets over all this - I'll ask him for the money. A debt is a debt.

GRETA: You are quite right.

DUBRAVKA: Poor Sophia.

OLGA: I miss her so much.

DUBRAVKA: So do I.

3. C. - LOVE (MARIA's living room)

(MARIA, NENA JASNA)

(NENA and JASNA are sitting opposite each other. They are avoiding each others' eyes and sitting there in silence. They sit like that for a long, long time. MARIA comes in from the kitchen carrying a cake.)

MARIA: And now, my daughters - let's have some cake!

JASNA: It looks wonderful. Did you make it yourself, Mummy?

NENA: Who else would have made it?

MARIA: I made it myself.

NENA: I have eaten so much.

MARIA: Then we can wait until we cut the cake. Do you agree, Jasna?

JASNA: I agree. I'm quite full, too. The French salad was excellent.

NENA: Only the French salad?

JASNA: Everything was excellent. Mum really cooks wonderfully.

MAIRA: Doing anything for the two of you is no problem for me. Nothing is too much for your happiness.

JASNA: After a bit of a break, we'll try that cake.

(A short, heavy silence.)

MARIA: How life flies. All these years have just trickled through my fingers. You turn around, and you are already at the end of the road.

NENA: Come on, Mum, no need to be so pathetic. What end - what would Grandma say if she could hear you.

MARIA: I remember the first time we went to the seaside. You were just little girls, four and six year old.

NENA: I am sure we were seven and nine.

MARIA: Alright, seven and nine. I remember it as if it was yesterday... your father took us to a beach which was three kilometres away from the house we were staying at, we swam and sunbathed all afternoon - and then, when we decided it was time to go back, Daddy went to the car and remembered that he had left the key in his trousers, and his trousers were in the car.

JASNA: He was so angry, he almost cried.

JARIA: We were in our swim-suits, he was in his bathing trunks. He circled around the car like a cat around a hedgehog. People gathered, you started crying - night was falling. I was angry at him, he was angry at me. He said it was my fault that he had forgotten the key in his trousers and shut the door. When our landlord saw us, he thought we had been robbed. The next day, a young man from the village went with your father to the car and opened it with a piece of wire. We laughed about it later - but as far as the villagers were concerned, we were those strange tourists who did not know how to get into their own car.

JASNA: I thought it was even crazier when we went to Hvar for that holiday. That was a year or two after the year of the car. Dad took us by inflatable dingy to a small desert island. We took food with us, tomatoes, figs, liver paste and tinned sardines. We had a lovely time swimming for about two hours and then you served lunch, Mummy, under a large old olive-tree, but

we couldn't eat it.

MARIA: Yes, the tin opener! I remember!

JASNA: Dad had forgotten to bring a tin-opener. We couldn't open the liver paste or the sardines.

MARIA: He was always clumsy.

JASNA: It was only after about half an hour, when it looked as if we were going to go hungry, that he found a sharp stone and opened the tins with it.

MARIA: I was sprinkled with fish oil.

JASNA: That was the best liver paste I ever ate and the tastiest sardines. For a while, I felt like a child living in a cave.

MARIA: We really used to laugh while your father was alive... something was always happening when he was around, he was always getting into some sort of mess, then getting out of it. It was never boring when he was alive. He loved us, he really did - even though he never said so... but, what can you do... The years fly past so quickly. I have to show you the sketches for the family plot, I think you will like them.

NENA: Mum, please, let's not speak about tombs on your birthday. We can talk about liver paste, and even tin openers, and car keys - but please let's not talk about tombs.

MARIA: Alright, I won't. We will speak about it later.

(Silence.)

JASNA: That bathroom ceiling has to be fixed as soon as possible - it really looks terrible without the plaster.

MARIA: First I have to find a tradesman. Anita promised to pay for it - perhaps she'll find someone. We still have to talk about it.

(Silence.)

MARIA: Remind me tomorrow - before you leave - I've bought the boys shirts with squirrels on them, and two little cars.

JASNA: You shouldn't have, Mum.

MARIA: I think they'll like them. They have to know they have a grandmother.

JASNA: Robert loves you very much. He tells everyone at kindergarten about how his Grandma makes the best cakes in the world.

MARIA: And I love them, too, God bless them.

JASNA: They get into my bed every morning, they crawl under the covers like little rabbits. They cuddle up for hours, they never get enough hugs, and they would always...

(The phone rings. MARIA gets up from the table, goes to the telephone, and lifts the receiver.)

MARIA: Hello... yes... thank you for your good wishes, thank you... she's here, she's here - Nena, it's for you - Davor... Good-bye.

(NENA take the receiver from her mother...)

NENA: Hello... hi, what is it... listen, we are in the middle of dinner, I can't talk now... I probably won't be able to go on that hill-climbing trip... you don't have to apologise, we are almost finished, we are going to eat the cake now, and that's it... alright, bye, we'll talk later, bye!

MARIA: You turned him down again?

NENA: No, I didn't, I just didn't know what to say - to accept or not to accept.

MARIA: He wished me a happy birthday.

NENA: I gathered that from what you said. I told him I was coming here to celebrate your birthday with you - that's how he knew.

MARIA: It was nice of him - he has good manners.

JASNA: Is that your boyfriend?

NENA: A friend, Sister, just a friend.

JASNA: Sorry, from what Mum said I thought you must be going together.

NENA: You misunderstood - as usual. And even if he is my boyfriend - I don't see why I have to talk about him to you.

JASNA: You don't have to get upset straight away.

NENA: Unless you want to meet him. And then - who knows - maybe he will

appeal to you, maybe you'll want to get to know him better, maybe you are both the same sign, maybe you'll climb into the same bed. Just by chance, unintentionally.

MARIA: Nena, stop that!

NENA: Maybe you'll even slip up and get pregnant. There is no greater joy than making a baby with your sister's boyfriend.

JASNA: I don't think I have to put up with this.

NENA: I could never hurt you as much as you hurt me, as much as you deserve, as much as I would really like to hurt you.

JASNA: I'm sorry, Mummy, I should never have come. I am sorry because of you, but I'll pack now and go home to Rijeka. Forgive me, but I can't allow her to carry on insulting me.

(JASNA stands up and walks towards the bedroom.)

JASNA: Aha, now she's sorry, she is so refined and sensitive.

(JASNA goes into the bedroom and slams the door.)

NENA: She didn't used to be so refined.

MARIA: You have gone too far. You promised me. You could have controlled yourself at least for today. You really are an egoist.

NENA: I couldn't stand it anymore hearing about her "little rabbits" under the covers. Every move, every word - oozes with her self-love and arrogance. She has everything, I have nothing. Forgive me, Mum, but I could no longer pretend that I am part of a fine family. The two of us should never be seated at the same table. My nerves can't stand it. Forgive me, but her happiness, and her kids, and her husband, all disgust me.

MARIA: He's not her husband any more.

NENA: What?

MARIA: He got involved with some student six months ago, and she got pregnant. She is going to have the baby. A month ago, he left Jasna and the boys and moved to Split with this new one.

NENA: Why the devil didn't you say something before?!

MARIA: I only found out two hours ago - when you went to the bakery to buy the bread. Suddenly she started crying - and then she told me. She wanted to keep quiet about it until after my birthday - but she couldn't stand it any more. I noticed that something was wrong with her - I thought it was because of you. I asked what was bothering her - and she burst into tears. She is completely shattered, lost. He doesn't contact her at all. He is concerned about the boys - She will have to handle the children alone, and she doesn't know how she'll manage. And with all that - you haven't stopped with your sarcasm all evening, with your cynicism. You really have overdone it.

NENA: I didn't know that...

MARIA: Well you know now!

1. E - THE RETIREMENT HOME (The garden.)

(LOUISA, then CAROLINE, then AGNES)

(LOUISA is walking around the garden beside the Retirement Home with the heavy measured steps of the elderly, helped along by her walking stick.)

LOUISA: Spring, spring... ah... spring everywhere in the air... and I am bothered by my rheumatism... the roosters are crowing and jumping on the hens.. The young foals are whinnying... the tomcats are circling around the cats... spring everywhere, and I am a full eighty-seven years old, and all sorts of things are still rattling around in my head, if only I didn't have this rheumatism... devil take it.

(Leaning on her walking stick, CAROLINE appears at the end of the park and walks slowly towards LOUISA.)

CAROLINE: Ah, there's the old bitch, this is where she is hiding... I have been looking for you all over the home, and here you are in the park... running away, hey, running away?

LOUISA: What's wrong with you, Caroline, what's got hold of you?

CAROLINE: What's got hold of you when you think you can make up to, to... there, I've lost it, what was it I wanted to say.

LOUISA: You are angry at me about something.

CAROLINE: Ah, yes - I remember - what are you making up to Luka for?

LOUISA: Who's fussing around Luka?

CAROLINE: You, you are, you bitch! I saw how you were looking at him while he was playing chess.

LOUISA: Why shouldn't I look at him, is it prohibited to look at people while they are playing chess.

CAROLINE: Yes, if he is one of the people - because I have had my eye on him since here came to our home.

LOUISA: Had your eye on him?

CAROLINE: Yes, yes.

LOUISA: You are twelve years older than he is. He is only eighty, and you are already ninety-two.

CAROLINE: And you are eighty-seven.

LOUISA: At least I am younger than you are.

CAROLINE: But you look worse. I will bury you.

LOUISA: Ah, no you won't.

CAROLINE: Ah, yes I will!

LOUISA: Ah, no you won't!

CAROLINE: Ah, yes I will!

LOUISA: Ah, no you won't, you old tart!

CAROLINE: Who did you call old?

(CAROLINE swings her stick at LOUISA, but LOUISA blocks her blow with her own stick, using it like a sword. The old ladies "fence" and squabble at the same time.)

LOUISA: Take that!

CAROLINE: And here's one for you!

LOUISA: Damn you!

CAROLINE: Die, you old hag!

LOUISA: I'll kill you!

(AGNES appears with her walking stick.)

AGNES: Hey, that's enough, you two... damn those men... you two are always fighting because of them! (The old ladies stop "fencing.")

CAROLINE: She started it.

LOUISA: But she provoked me.

AGNES: That's enough of your justification, like two old hags.

LOUISA: Well, when that's what we are.

(All three old ladies burst out laughing.)

AGNES: The director of the home personally sent me to talk with you.

LOUISA: The director personally?

CAROLINE: We haven't done anything, we haven't broken anything or stolen anything.

AGNES: No, don't be scared, it's not that, but... but.. fuck it all, I have forgotten why I came...

CAROLINE: You said "the director sent me".

LOUISA: "The director personally."

AGNES: Ah, yes - the director has ordered the three of us... to perform at the celebration for Statehood Day.

CAROLINE: Where?

AGNES: What do you mean, where - here at the home, in the concert hall.

LOUISA: What do we have to do?

AGNES: Sing, recite. What do I know?

LOUISA: What if we refuse?

AGNES: Then there won't be any more cakes after lunch for the three of us.

CAROLINE: If it's for cakes, I'd even dance, and not just sing.

LOUISA: Me too, me too.

CAROLINE: The only thing is, it's my daughter birthday on Statehood Day, but still - if I go to her birthday, you will steal my sweetie.

LOUISA: I will, too.

CAROLINE: No, you won't!

AGNES: That's enough, you old hens! We have to rehearse, we have to put together a trio.

2. A - JUST FRIENDS (ANITA's living room)

(ANITA, LADA)

(LADA is sitting on the couch. ANITA comes in from the kitchen carrying coffee and cups on a tray. ANITA is wearing jeans.)

ANITA: Sugar?

LADA: You know I don't take sugar.

ANITA: Here you are.

LADA: Thanks.

(LADA takes the cup of coffee and drinks some.)

LADA: You don't contact me lately.

ANITA: I have had a lot of things to do at school, I am coaching some students for the state geography contest.

LADA: We used to talk every day, or at least every second day.

ANITA: I'm really sorry. I have been a bit confused lately, with hundreds of things to do. You could ring me.

LADA: Me ring you?! You used to be the one who rang first. As a rule. You always had some problem and the need to talk about it.

ANITA: It's all the same who rings first.

LADA: I agree.

(Silence.)

ANITA: I didn't ask you what you thought of Stella?

LADA: Well, look...

ANITA: She's wonderful, isn't she? So natural, and witty... She really knows how to make you laugh.

LADA: Look, it's hard to say what is humour, and what isn't. What makes Peter laugh is stupid to Paul, and vice versa.

ANITA: It's always cheerful in her company. When she comes into the staff room, it's as though the Sun comes in with her. She has won over all the teachers at my school.

LADA: That's not so hard to do.

ANITA: I am glad you like her.

LADA: I didn't say I liked her.

ANITA: So - you don't like her?

LADA: I didn't say that either. It's simply too early to have an opinion about a woman I have only met once.

ANITA: Exactly. It takes time. When you get to know her better you will come to love her the way I do.

LADA: So you have come to love her?

(A moment of silence.)

ANITA: That's just an expressions. She is a sweet person, a very sweet person.

(The phone rings.)

(ANITA goes to the phone and lifts the receiver.)

ANITA: Anita here... ah, Mum, it's you. How are you... look I have guests so I can't talk right now, and, anyway, we will be seeing each other on Saturday... alright, Mummy, take care - bye!

(ANITA puts down the receiver.)

LADA: So you're talking to your mother!

ANITA: Listen. We made our peace. But - we talk only once or twice a week.

LADA: Who was the first to ring, before you made up - did you ring her, or did she ring you?

ANITA: I don't remember - as if that is important.

LADA: It is important - the one who rings first after a quarrel is admitting that she is to blame. So - who rang first?

ANITA: I still don't think it matters.

LADA: So you rang first?

ANITA: Yes, I did. After all, she is my mother. I am the younger one.

LADA: It doesn't make any difference who is younger. You have already forgotten the way she behaved towards you. Just don't let it happen that I have to extract you from her claws again, to drag you out of depression.

ANITA: Don't worry. I am not the same person I was five years ago.

(Silence.)

ANITA: What did you want to talk to me about?

LADA: What about?

ANITA: Last night you said to remind you when you came.

LADA: Ah, yes... I went to the travel agency. It will soon be summer. I took some brochures. We have to choose the island we are going to.

ANITA: You had an island in mind?

LADA: Of course. The sea is best around the islands. We have gone on island holidays for four years now, and it was wonderful every year. Don't you agree?

ANITA: Yes, I agree. But...

LADA: But what?

ANITA: Stella thought we could go for a cruise through the Adriatic. She found a very good offer. It really is not expensive.

LADA: So you would go with her on that stupid boat?

ANITA: All three of us can go.

LADA: There is no better holiday than a holiday on an island. You always agreed with me on that.

ANITA: I know, but - a change would do us good.

LADA: Which us?

ANITA: You and me. We don't have to go to an island every year. But, if you insist - I can talk again with Stella.

LADA: Was it your suggestion or hers?

ANITA: What?

LADA: This business about a cruise?

ANITA: Hers. Why?

3. B - THE CAREER (A neutral space)

(GRETA, DUBRAVKA, OLGA)

(GRETA, DUBRAVKA, and OLGA standing front-stage, each of them lit by a beam of light. They are all holding cordless phones. Each of them is in her own area.)

OLGA: Hello, this is Olga... what do you mean, where am I - I'm here, at my flat... no, I haven't forgotten... stupid question - if he was home, I wouldn't be calling you now... why would you be jealous of my husband, you know who I love best... no, I haven't forgotten you, as far as I am concerned you are unforgettable, ha, ha - listen, I need your help, I found out that Greta and Dubravka are trying to claw their way into the position of secretary to the general manager... I knew that you would help me, you can always rely on a real man... where could we meet... which hotel... ah, our hotel, we always had a good time there.. you know I always have time for you... alright, sweetie...

DUBRAVKA: Listen, Goran, you are a member of the board after all, and I know you can help me if you want to... of course I would keep you informed about everything, who else?... I wouldn't like it to go to Greta or Olga, or anyone from outside... I know that no-one could do the job as well as I could... and listen, a thirty percent pay rise is quite important, too...

GREAT: Hello, Mato, it's Greta... yes, hello... listen, I wanted to ask you something, you heard that my general manager's secretary was killed... listen, since you helped him as a member of parliament to push through that customs act - he could hardly say "no" if you asked him for something... of course I know how influential you are, that's why I'm asking - you see: the

post of his secretary hasn't been filled yet - and if you could intervene on my behalf, he would take me. And that would be great for you, too - because you would be the first to hear everything new that's going on - after all, it is your former company, and I know you hold shares in it... the only problem is that I have heard that two other department head secretaries are trying to claw their way in - Dubravka and Olga...

2. D - KINDERGARTEN (the hall in the kindergarten)

(MIMA, BIBA, DADA)

(MIMA, BIBA, and DADA are standing front-stage, each of them holding a doll.)

VOICE ON THE PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM: Dear mothers, dear aunties, dear grandmothers - welcome to our kindergarten's last concert this year before the summer holidays. We will show you what we have learnt - and you'll support us with your applause, because we are still small, and we love your applause and your praise... The first song will be sung for you as a duet by Biba and Dada. The song is called "Chocolate".

(BIBA and DADA hold hands, bow, and start singing.)

BIBA + DADA:

If you ask me
What I like
The answer is always:
Chocolate.

If you ask me
What all kids like
The answer will always be:
Chocolate.

If you want
To give me a present
And don't know what -
My advice to you -
Pick some chocolate.

VOICE ON THE PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM: And now our little Mimi will sing you a song dedicated to all the mothers in the world, called "My Mama".

(MIMA bows and starts singing.)

MIMA: My Mama is the prettiest,
My Mama's the best on Earth,
My Mama really loves me
And I love her, too,
And our eyes are blue.

Do I have to tell you
I don't fear the dark
When I'm with my Mama
My dearest Mama.

(Suddenly MIMA stops singing and starts crying.)

MIMA: Why didn't my Mama come to the concert... boo hoo... where is my Mama... boo... she's a naughty Mama, she promised to come, but she's not here... boo hoo... she's a bad, naughty Mama.

3. B - THE CAREER (DUBRAVKA's living room)

(DUBRAVKA and OLGA)

DUBRAVKA: What will you have?

OLGA: Coffee.

DUBRAVKA: They spilt coffee over my stockings in the canteen yesterday. Black coffee on white stockings. And an hour later I had to keep the minutes at the staff meeting.

OLGA: So, what did you do?

DUBRAVKA: I washed them in the wash-basin and dried them on the radiator. I was bare-legged for an hour in the office. But no-one noticed.

OLGA: Will we wait for Olga?

DUBRAVKA: She won't be coming.

OLGA: Did you invite her?

DUBRAVKA: Of course I did. But the princess doesn't have the time. The general manager is travelling on Monday to France, to Paris - she is smothered in work.

OLGA: What difference does it make if he's going to Paris. He's travelling, not her.

DUBRAVKA: But she is travelling.

OLGA: Really?

DUBRAVKA: Really and truly.

OLGA: To give him a blow job in Paris?

DUBRAVKA: I think she's already taken care of that in Zagreb.

OLGA: Do you know something, or are you just guessing?

DUBRAVKA: It only logical. She has less experience than you and me. But, there she is - she was named his secretary. Overnight, she became the secretary to the general manager, literally "overnight".

OLGA: Yes. It's strange. I must be frank - it would have been logical to me if you or I had got the job. We both have the experience. I really know my job.

DUBRAVKA: And we are both reliable, unlike Greta.

OLGA: Ah well, fuck it all - that's life - tarts always do better than honest women.

DUBRAVKA: I feel sorry for the late Sophie - she deserved a better successor.

OLGA: It's all the same now to Sophie. I feel sorry for the two of us - we will have to work with her, and you know how sloppy she is.

DUBRAVKA: And she's lazy and she can never make up her mind.

OLGA: An awful person.

(Silence.)

OLGA: I have to go to Hungary next week to pick up my stock. We are going to get some new cosmetics from Paris, I have read the brochures, something fantastic. You must come to my next presentation.

4. A - JUST FRIENDS (A cafe.)

(LADA, STELLA)

(LADA is sitting on a bar stool, when STELLA comes in.)

STELLA: Sorry I'm late. It's a madhouse in town.

LADA: It's alright. Shall I order you a drink.

STELLA: No, thanks. I had some juice half an hour ago.

LADA: Would you like some coffee?

STELLA: No, nothing thanks.

(Silence.)

STELLA: It's a nice cafe.

LADA: Yes. I always come in here after work.

STELLA: It reminds me of an English pub.

LADA: Yes. That's why I like it.

(Silence.)

STELLA: You weren't angry, were you, that I was late?

LADA: No. I didn't expect you to be on time.

STELLA: You didn't? Why? I didn't plan to be late. It really happened just by chance.

LADA: Perhaps, but - I probably have an instinct for it... pure intuition. I almost always have a feeling when someone will be late. And when I get that intuition - it happens.

STELLA: Interesting. I don't have any gifts like that. Otherwise, I don't like being late.

LADA: Neither do I.

STELLA: Well, go ahead. Here I am. Tell me why you wanted us to meet alone, without telling Anita?

LADA: You seemed surprised when I rang you?

STELLA: Yes, I was a bit. I don't know what the conspiracy is all about.

LADA: I wanted us to talk about Anita.

STELLA: Without her being present?

LADA: Absolutely without her being present. For her own good.

STELLA: I don't understand you.

LADA: Be patient. You probably know that Anita and I have known each other for five years now.

STELLA: Yes, I know.

LADA: You haven't known her long. Only for a very short time. You don't know what she was like before, before I met her. She has become a different person over the last five years. Do you understand?

STELLA: Yes... and?

LADA: She has become what she is now thanks to me. Before that - that awful mother of her had her tied to her apron-strings. Pathologically possessive. Anita never went out anywhere, she had no friends - all because of her mother. Do you realise that I was the first friend she had ever had and that when we met she was already thirty-one. Her first real friendship - at that age. Unbelievable. She was frightened, unsure of herself. She lived with her mother who planned every hour of every day for her. Thanks to me, she turned over a new leaf. Literally - she broke off all contact with her mother - she left her a letter, which we wrote together, and rented a flat. And started life from the beginning. If you had met her when she was living with her mother, you probably would not have wanted to know her.

STELLA: Why?

LADA: Because she was enclosed in her own world, with locked bars on all the windows. And I was the one who found the key to those bars, that impenetrable fortress. I spent every day with her. I protected that tiny flame of her independence, her new life, with all my being. Believe me, it wasn't easy - but I felt that she was a worthwhile and positive person. I wanted that fine young woman to find herself again. And little by little, we became what we became - best friends. She really means a lot to me. I don't know if you realise that.

STELLA: I do. Anita always speaks very well of you. And I can see that you care about her. I don't see where the problem is.

LADA: The problem is that I am worried that all my effort and hard work could prove useless.

STELLA: Could you explain.

LADA: She is in contact with her mother again.

STELLA: I know. And what's bad about that?

LADA: What bad about is that.. don't you understand... her mother is a terrible witch and she could place her under her spell again.

STELLA: I doubt that.

LADA: You don't know her. That's why you say that. You speak as if you know Anita better than I do. As if you could know her better than I do. Don't forget that the two of us have been friends for five years.

STELLA: That could also be a reason for your not being objective about it.

LADA: What do you mean?

STELLA: When you have spent five years with someone - you are no longer

able to see that person's life objectively. You see?

LADA: Not exactly.

STELLA: Perhaps as a new, disinterested observer, I can better judge what Anita's life has transformed into.

LADA: As a "disinterested observer"?

STELLA: Well, let's put it like that.

LADA: I wouldn't exactly say that you were disinterested in her and her life.

STELLA: What are you trying to say?

LADA: You know what I am saying.

STELLA: No, I really don't.

LADA: Are you acting naive?

STELLA: What are you talking about?

LADA: Do you care about her?

STELLA: In what way?

LADA: I have the feeling you care about her.

STELLA: We are friends. It's natural. I care about her just in the way you do. She is charming and interesting.

LADA: Charming and interesting?

STELLA: Yes - charming and interesting.

LADA: I could never say that about someone I really cared about, that they were charming and interesting.

STELLA: Why not?

LADA: They are such superficial... adjectives.

STELLA: But she really is charming and interesting. Unless you think she is lacks charm and is uninteresting.

Perhaps you think she is boring.

LADA: You are making me laugh.

STELLA: It wasn't intentional.

LADA: You talk about her as if...

STELLA: Yes?

LADA: It's not important.

(Silence.)

STELLA: It's a really lovely day today. Real summer.

LADA: Yes, it's warm.

STELLA: I don't know how to dress when I am getting ready for work in the morning. It's so unbearably hot around noon - while the mornings are still...

LADA: Yes, they are.

(Silence.)

STELLA: Would you like me to leave?

LADA: No. We have just started talking.

STELLA: I don't have much time. I still have to go back to work.

LADA: Then we had better meet at some other time and talk about everything in peace without hurrying.

STELLA: You misunderstood me - I am not in so much of a hurry that I can't listen to what you have to say. I just said I don't have very much time, not that I have no time at all. I simply - don't have much time. Or to be more precise: I don't have much time for unimportant things.

LADA: No conversation about Anita could be unimportant as far as I am concerned. Never. After all, she is...

STELLA: One moment you are idealising her, and the next you're belittling her. You aren't capable of assessing her with a level head, without emotion.

LADA: What about you?! Can you talk about her without emotion?

STELLA: What do you mean, can I?

LADA: I don't know the answer, that's why I'm asking.

STELLA: D'you know what I don't like about you, Lada?

LADA: No. What?

STELLA: You are so pretentious. I feel as if you are continually in some sort of spasm, you're so tense.

LADA: I don't know how to play around with people I care about. I have never been irresponsible nor superficial - neither in my private life, nor in my work. What irritates me about you is that I feel you have a flippant attitude to life. You don't seem to try to differentiate what's important from what isn't. Not even where Anita's mother is concerned - you haven't even considered that in the right way. You are playing with Anita's life with your superficiality and frivolity. You are allowing that awful woman to take charge of her destiny again.

STELLA: Her mother is an ordinary woman in ill health, who wants from time to time to see the daughter she gave birth to.

LADA: She's only pretending to be ill, just the way she pretended to five years ago. It's bad for Anita to have any contacts at all with her mother.

STELLA: What was bad for Anita was the way she broke off her relationship with her mother, Anita felt terrible not speaking to her mother all that time. That she ran away from her - that she offended her with that letter full of cheap shots. She had a guilty conscience because of all that.

LADA: What nonsense! Who told you all that?

STELLA: Anita.

LADA: Anita?

STELLA: Yes, Anita. She has been wanting to make up with her mother for three years now, but you wouldn't let her.

LADA: Of course not, when I know how bad it will all be for her. Unless you think that it would be natural for a woman of thirty-seven to start living with her mother again, by her mother's rules.

STELLA: That would be stupid. I admit that. Just as it was stupid to ignore her mother for five whole years.

LADA: But that was the only way she could preserve her freedom, herself.

STELLA: That's not true. I was there when they made up, they were crying. They have been seeing each other these last weeks, and sometimes they talk on the phone. But still - each of them is living her own life. And they are both happy. In other words, love can exist without possessiveness. Believe me, it can and does exist

(Silence.)

LADA: You will ruin her life again. Just as her mother did before.

STELLA: Those are harsh words.

LADA: No, they are just the truth. You are shaping her according to your wishes. When I saw her in those stupid jeans, which don't suit her at all, when I saw her with short hair, I knew that she had come under your influence. When she told me she wanted to go on that cruise with you - it was clear to me that she was slipping from my grasp. This is all happening because of you. You are doing everything to throw me out of her life.

STELLA: I really have no idea what you are talking about.

LADA: You won't take her away from me.

STELLA: Take her from you?! She is not a thing to be taken, my dear.

LADA: Don't you "my dear" me, whether you are aware of it or not, because of everything you are doing to Anita I shall never be "your dear" - nor will you be "my dear". I won't allow you to highjack her away from me.

STELLA: For goodness sake, woman, what's wrong with you? Anita and I are just friends, you are talking as if you were fighting with me about some bloke. I have a boyfriend I go out with. Anita really is just a friend.

LADA: Just a friend?

STELLA: Yes, just a friend.

LADA: Why don't you go to the devil!

(She stands up.)

STELLA: What is it?

LADA: Damn the day when you came into our lives. You and your disgusting humour. You have a boyfriend, and you are just playing with her. Just for fun, you are stealing the only person I have ever cared about. Why don't you go on the cruise with that boyfriend of yours?

STELLA: I'm going to. With him, too. He is going with us.

LADA: He'll be going?

STELLA: Yes. He'll be there, too. Didn't Anita tell you?

LADA: ... No, she didn't.

(A heavy silence.)

STELLA: You are possessive and jealous. You treat Anita just the way her mother used to in the past. You are unbearable, disgustingly possessive. The best thing you could do would be to get some therapy right away. Otherwise, you will be disappointed and unhappy your whole life.

LADA: Go to hell, you cheeky bitch!

STELLA: How can you be so horribly unpleasant?

LADA: Because some people get everything from life, some get little, and some get nothing at all. Good-bye!

STELLA: Good-bye!

(LADA pauses.)

LADA: I know you have won this battle - but you won't win the war! When her enthusiasm wanes for your new, witty face, Anita will realise who you are, and come back to me. She can't survive without me.

(LADA leaves, slamming the door behind her. STELLA takes her cell phone out of her bag and picks out a number.)

STELLA: Hello, kid... Stella here... I have just finished talking to your former guardian - she won't bother you any more, you will be free from now on - you can even go on that cruise - or you can go to an island if you want to - it's up to you... Why would it be unpleasant? It wasn't hard and it wasn't unpleasant - I even enjoyed it, see you, bye!

2. E - THE RETIREMENT HOME (The concert hall.)

(AGNES, CAROLINE, LOUISA)

THE VOICE ON THE PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM: Dear members of the "Future" Retirement Home community, dear visitors, welcome to our modest little commemoration of Statehood Day. We are honoured that the chairman of our local community is present with us here today. I wish him and all of you a very pleasant time. To open our show, we have a surprise for you - the oldest female trio in Croatia will sing I Love You. For today only, and for you only, Agnes, Louisa and Caroline - the Rheumy trio.

(The music starts playing, tapping the stage with their walking sticks, Agnes, Louisa and Caroline appear up-stage and move towards the lights. They stop, and then start singing in their squeaky old-lady voices.)

AGNES + LOUISA + CAROLINE:

Love is a wonderful thing
Love is a fine day in Spring
Love in your eyes so divine
Love in the heart that is mine.

.....

3. C - LOVE (MARIA's bedroom)

(JASNA is packing her travel bag. NENA comes into the room, JASNA pretends not to see her.) NENA: Mum told me...

(JASNA pauses in her packing and sits on the edge of the bed.)

NENA: I had no idea until now.

(Silence.)

JASNA: Feel free to gloat. I know that you are happy that my marriage broke up.

NENA: No, I'm not happy.

JASNA: Why pretend?

NENA: I loved him. He knew what he wanted, he was very well-liked. Wherever he appeared, everything pivoted around him. I envied you being with him, I envied your happiness, bringing up your kids with him. But now...

JASNA: You envied me being married to him?!

NENA: Yes, I admit it, I envied your happiness.

JASNA: Happiness?! He was a terrible husband. He never cared about the children, I had to do almost everything myself. He was always rough with me and rude. Everything had to be the way he wanted. We never talked things over like people, like partners.

NENA: You're exaggerating. I remember him differently.

JASNA: It's one thing to go out with someone, and another to live with them everyday. You only see the real person when you live with him. I really don't understand why you still hate me.

NENA: I hated you because you came between us, only a week after we had a small tiff which I thought we would soon get over.

JASNA: I'm sorry, but I wasn't the one who did the chasing. He rang me every day. And another thing - it's easy today to remember it as a small tiff, because I remember you saying it was over forever. When he invited me to the movies, I asked you if you had any objections to me going out with your former boyfriend, and you told me you didn't care about him any more and that it was the same to you if I went to the movies with him or to bed with him. That's what you said.

NENA: I couldn't imagine that on that same evening you would go to the movies and to bed, dammit! Your speed completely shocked me.

JASNA: He took me for a drink after the film. You know I can't take alcohol, even today. He literally got me drunk and led me off to his flat. When I sobered up, it was all over...

NENA: That explains the first time - but what's the justification for what followed? Can you justify that?

JASNA: Later I wanted to prove to myself that I hadn't been an easy woman that first evening, a woman who steals her sister's boyfriend. I have had a bad conscience for years because I went to bed with your boyfriend, even if you did give me your blessing. Later I fell in love with his charm, with that disgusting arrogance and resoluteness which hooked you. Today I know that I was not the one who betrayed you with him, he was the one who was deliberately unfaithful to you. He knew what he was doing. He wanted to hurt you and get his own back because you had insulted him a week earlier in front of his friends.

NENA: He offended me, too.

JASNA: I was just the means for him to take his revenge on you - because your pride collided with his. He told me later that he was expecting you to ring then and suggest that you make up. But you were just as stubborn as he was, and you waited for him to apologise. He started things with me just to get back at you.

NENA: But later, you had a real marriage with him, you had two kids You had a real family with him, and despite the way it all ended, you reached out and touched happiness.

JASNA: Happiness?! Our marriage was the ninth circle of hell. You were always hovering there between us. Like my guilty conscience. Like his unfinished love story. I knew he only went with me because of you, I knew that he only loved you. He never really became mine. And this business - his student - unfortunately, it's all part of the same story.

(Silence.)

NENA: And I thought... you see, it was as if my life stood still. After him, I never managed with anyone else... I simply didn't have the strength to have faith, and if that's missing no relationship makes sense. I simply stopped caring. I became a typical loner. Everybody gets on my nerves. I have got used to not needing anyone. I retired into my own little world... and you know how much I used to love it when something was happening, when we all got together. This is not natural to me - everything has changed without my wanting it to.

JASNA: He used to seduce young girls in front of me - he would give excessive compliments to my girlfriends from work in front of me. I was ashamed to go out with him - I knew he would always say the wrong thing in the wrong place at the wrong time. Can you imagine what it is like to have a child with a man you have no respect for. Can you imagine that?

NENA: Mum never told me anything about all this.

JASNA: She couldn't have. She knew nothing about it. I kept the truth from her, too, I kept it from everyone. But I didn't manage to keep it from myself. If I had only had the courage myself to break up our marriage. Much earlier. And not to wait - until he threw me out of his life like a pair of worn-out slippers.

NENA: But still, you have the boys. Despite everything, you have two sons - you have achieved something.

JASNA: He even managed to embitter my motherhood. When I had Robert, he went to a brothel to celebrate. The whole town was buzzing with it. He never came to any of the children's kindergarten shows - he never stopped his mindless running around for a moment to show interest and tenderness to his sons, he never ever played with them. When he went on a trip, he never brought them presents. He never brought me anything. As far as he was concerned, I was just another thing which would be in the same place when he returned from a trip. It's awfully difficult for me to talk about all this. My own life disgusts me, I disgust me because I was willing to accept all this - this degrading life.

NENA: And I envied you all these years.

JASNA: Envied what? The contempt which surrounded me? Mum was angry with me for a long time after I told her that I was pregnant with him. You rejected me outright and haven't spoken to me all these years. And you know how much I always loved you. And all this time he behaved towards me as if I was an old rag. What did you have to envy? What?

(JASNA starts crying. NENA slowly moves towards her and puts her head in JASNA's lap.)

NENA: Calm down now, everything will be OK. Believe me, everything will be alright.

(JASNA stops crying for a moment.)

JASNA: Please forgive me.

NENA: No, you forgive me.

(JASNA starts sobbing again, even more bitterly.)

NENA: There, there, little sister, it's OK.

JASNA: I am so sorry, I am sorry on your account. I don't know what I shall do with my life... Everything hurts so much, it hurts so much...

(A new wave of sobbing.)

NENA: Remember when we were little girls, we still weren't going to school, when we would be frightened of the dark or thunder, when we cried because of bad dreams, we would sing something to drive away the fear. That how we gave each other courage. Do you remember?

JASNA: Yes, I remember.

(The two of them sit in silence for a time, until there is a knocking at the door.)

NENA: Come in.

(MARIA comes in carrying a cordless phone. She stops in surprise for a moment, but then hands NENA the phone.)

MARIA: It's for you again, Nena... It's Davor.

(NENA takes the phone.)

NENA: Oh, hi... what?... you have to confirm how many rooms we'll need... well, listen - alright, I'll go too, why not, we'll have a good time... I'm pleased too, I'll call you when I get back to Osijek... Bye.

NENA: Mum, could we cut the cake now.

JASNA: That's a good idea.

MARIA: So we'll be having supper together?

JASNA: Yes, we're staying. Only if I don't have to wash up.

NENA: Alright, but you'll have to wipe.

(MARIA goes over to her daughters and hugs them tenderly.)

THE END