

Miro Gavran
LAUGHTER PROHIBITED
(A Comedy)

- The author was awarded the Croatian Ministry of Culture's 2004

***Marin Držić* Prize for this play. -**

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Characters:

Mia 48 years old

Boris 48 years old

Nina 32 years old

1. (A Museum)

(Boris, Nina)

(Boris is standing in the Museum of Modern Art in front of an abstract painting, with a small bench for visitors in front of it. He has a newspaper under his arm. He opens the paper and starts looking through it, and then places it back under his arm. Then he takes it out and leafs through it again, only to replace it under his arm. He starts examining the painting tilting his head to one side and then to the other, because he has the feeling that it is hanging upside down.

(At that moment, Nina enters the hall.)

BORIS: Where've you been?

NINA: I couldn't find a place to park, so I had to go round the block twice.

BORIS: You ask to meet me and then you are late. And you know how I don't like us meeting in public places, someone could see me here in the museum.

NINA: Come on, Boris, you know that no-one ever visits our museums. And if anybody did see you here with me they would think that it was just a chance meeting of two people who enjoy art.

BORIS: Alright, I agree that a museum is the safest public place but, all the same, pensioners drift in sometimes to get warm. You never know, a friend of mine could chance by, or, even worse, a friend of my wife, and then... it doesn't bear thinking of... but, I had a inkling why you

didn't suggest your little flat, our love nest, I had a feeling why you wanted me to come here and not to your place.

NINA: Did you really?

BORIS: Yes, I did, first off. You know that I am an intuitive man.

NINA: Thank God, then this talk of ours will be much easier and simpler. I thought it would be best for us to meet right here so that we could speak openly and... and...

BORIS: And evoke everything that has happened in the past five years of our relationship. Those tender moments... those passionate moments.

NINA: Yes... that too... but I wanted to say... we must finally...

BORIS: My dear Nina, I know you can't find the words to express everything that you feel for me after these five years... I mean, these five years of our love... When you told me that you wanted us to meet here, and rejected my suggestion that I come to your place, I was confused at first, and then I remembered – I looked in my secret calendar with the coded dates and found that we went out right here for the first time, five years ago. And it dawned on me that you wanted to celebrate our anniversary... that was so moving and so romantic of you.

NINA: Well in fact I...

BORIS: I almost wept at the thought that you remembered our anniversary, our first date.

(Boris takes an envelope out of an inside pocket and hands it to Nina.)

BORIS: Here, this is for you. A small gift for our fifth anniversary.

NINA: Oh Boris, my dear, how wonderful, you thought of me, you are so attentive. You spent money on me even though I know you are always short of it, and...

BORIS: No, I didn't spend anything – it's not a material present, it's a spiritual gift. I wrote you a poem, a poem about you and about us, for the occasion of our anniversary.

NINA: Oh, I see... I was already thinking that you had started to change.

BORIS: Go on, read it.

NINA: Please Boris, perhaps we could talk first, and then...

BORIS: I'm impatient to see if you like it. You know: when I was young I didn't read much poetry, literature always got on my nerves, all that affectation. And that subject was not in the forefront at commercial school, but still: I think I wrote the poem well, because I wrote it from the heart since I wanted to tell you everything I feel, right from the heart... I didn't want to buy you some trite little present – like perfume or a bracelet, I know that modern emancipated women don't want to feel that men spend hard cash on them, as if they are buying their love...

NINA: Well now...

BORIS: I know that emancipated women put more store on gifts of the spirit rather than banal material, consumer gifts. Come on now, read it.

NINA: If I really must.

BORIS: But read it slowly so that I can enjoy the tone of your voice, and so you don't miss anything.

NINA: I would feel silly reading your poem. It would sound better if you, as the poet, recited it to me. That's what real writers do.

BORIS: Is that a fact?

NINA: Of course. Here's your poem; you read it to me.

(Boris starts reading.)

BORIS: «A Poem about Five Years of Love»

My dearest love

For five years now, we have been living
In a sublime state of emotion
Secretly hidden under a cover
Of rose petals
Our love must remain a secret
It must not hurt anyone
And even though you are dearer to me
Than my very own wife
You, my eternal lover
Must remain
How many times in your embrace
Have I found solace from matrimonial monotony
So many times I've felt your passion
And your tenderness
So many times I must say
Thank you, thank you, thank you,
For, to my life
You have given meaning
My sweet little one.

(A moment of silence.)

BORIS: What do you say? Is it good?

NINA: Well... it is.

BORIS: I'm so happy you like my present and that we have met here again, after so much time, even though we said we would be careful and not meet outside here in our town – where my wife and children live... but a fifth anniversary deserves a little risk, a little adrenalin...

NINA: Listen, Boris, I did not want to meet you here because of the anniversary.

BORIS: What do you mean?

NINA: I had forgotten that anniversary.

BORIS: Impossible!

NINA: Oh no, quite possible. I didn't want you to come to my flat, because... I have wanted for some time now to speak seriously and openly with you about everything, about us, our relationship...

BORIS: Go ahead!

NINA: I hope you care about my feelings.

BORIS: Absolutely.

NINA: I hope what I think and feel is important to you.

BORIS: That's the most important thing in my life. Your feelings are as important to me... as my own.

NINA: I wouldn't want you to misunderstand me. It's hard to find the words, it's hard to express it after all these years, everything that we have gone through... the right words always elude you, but, finally... I have to find them, and say what we must say, because that is the only way to say what we have to say...

BORIS: What are you trying to say?

NINA: I can't and I won't go on like this.

BORIS: I don't understand.

NINA: I don't want to live as the 'other woman' any more.

BORIS: What do you mean «I don't want to live as the other woman any more», you have to live. Every person must live, whatever happens in life. Because life is... the meaning of life. Only immature teenagers think of suicide as the way out of problems, only the mentally ill could think that a violent end to life could solve their problems. Your duty to me as a human being is a duty towards life as such, because the negation of life as such can never be the objective in the life of a healthy human being.

NINA: I wasn't thinking of suicide.

BORIS: But you said...

NINA: You misunderstood me.

BORIS: I thought that...

NINA: Nothing like that.

BORIS: So that means you weren't thinking of a final solution, you haven't become depressed, you weren't thinking that you can't go on living.

NINA: I said I don't want to live as the 'other woman' any more, with the emphasis on «other woman», and not on «living». To put it simply: I don't think we can go on like this, the problem is in the form and the content.

BORIS: Listen, I can't marry you. I have a lawful wife, all we own is that three-roomed flat, even if I wanted to I couldn't get divorced and marry you... and beside that: I have two children with her.

NINA: Boris, I don't want you to get divorced from your wife either, and marry me. I am not asking you to.

BORIS: Then there's no problem at all. I was worried you were going to set me some unrealistic conditions.

(For a moment, Boris «steps out» of this scene and addresses the audience directly, while Nina remains «frozen» in the interrupted scene.)

BORIS: I must admit that once, before, while I lived without a girlfriend, my life was sad and grey. Empty... It was worst of all with my colleagues from work. When we used to go bowling, they all boasted about their sexual trophies, their successes, their experiences with squeezes who just flew into their arms... and I was the only one who had nothing to boast about. I thought about lying to them, thinking up a story about some affair I had had, but I felt sure they would know that I was lying, that I was concocting it all. Everyone had a mistress except me. Some even had two or three, as least that's what they said and I had no

reason to doubt them. I was no miserable and powerless. I was overtaken by a feeling of inferiority, I felt like a former member of the Vienna Boys Choir of young castrates who had been invited to act in a film about Rasputin. My ego suffered, my self-confidence waned. I couldn't even look my own wife in the eye without shame, because I felt that she knew, in some intuitive way, that I was a second-rate man, a man who did not impress women. And then, like Haley's Comet, Nina burst into my life. It was proved to me over-night - not only that I was a desirable man capable of having the status of a lover, but that I was exceptionally successful at it. Poor thing, she was totally inhibited in the emotional and sexual sense, without experience, or almost without experience. I'm sure you know those well-brought-up mother's daughters who finish school and university in good time, who have good manners and know ninety percent of the answers to all the questions in any crossword puzzle, but who give so much time to their studies that they never manage to come in contact with real life. Two dilettantes had raced through her intimate life before she met me, clumsy oafs, and only the second one managed to deflower her on the seventh attempt, leaving her with one of those unpleasant ongoing memories that women want to forget as soon as possible. It was only with me that she learnt what an authentic male-female relationship really is. I broadened her horizons, and lead her into the world of intimacy and sensual indulgence. With me, she felt what it means to be a woman to the very essence of her being, a woman who knows how to enjoy her own body and who knows how to provide equal enjoyment to her partner. I felt as happy and successful as a good teacher, a didactician who joyfully transfers his knowledge to a timid, but talented, student. And just as a great Chinese philosopher says, I can't remember his name: «It is blessed to receive, and blessed to give, but it's best of all to give while receiving.» Just now, when she started to

talk about not knowing how to go on with her life, I was frightened for a moment that she was experiencing some sort of crisis, or had been speaking to some jealous girlfriend, who wanted her all to herself. But, luckily, there is no danger. The problem probably lies in «those dark and gloomy female days», but we have to be patient because we know they definitely pass quickly, and then we have the bright horizon of more than twenty normal days, without any unnecessary complications and obstacles standing in the way of our intimate permeation.

(Boris «returns» to the scene with Nina.)

BORIS: So does that mean you don't have any extra demands on me? Everything can stay as it has been until now.

NINA: No, it can't.

BORIS: What do you mean, it can't.

NINA: I don't want to be anyone's fancy woman any more. I have had it up to here with that life, all that sneaking around. Next week I start working as a psychologist at the Marriage Guidance Centre. I can't advise people on how to save their marriages, while I am the other woman who is destroying another woman's marriage. It's something like a conflict of interest. I would lose my job if anyone found out. I am not prepared to go on living as a secret mistress, and even less as a public one.

BORIS: But you have had the best possible status of all the 'other women' in Europe. Even better than a Japanese geisha. I have taken you with me to a new town every weekend, you have lacked for nothing.

NINA: Thank you, Boris, for everything you have done for me, for all the towns in Croatia and abroad that we visited. If it weren't for you I would never have seen Krško, Krapina, Zidani Most, Prelog, Čakovec, Bovec... [all provincial towns in Slovenia and Croatia]

BORIS: I am going to Brežice next weekend and I thought we could celebrate our anniversary there... you wait for me at the motel while I hold some business meetings and then...

NINA: No, Boris, no! We are breaking up! I don't want to be your lover and wait around for you in hotels!

BORIS: But why?

NINA: Have you any idea how old I am? Do you know?

BORIS: Yes, I do.

NINA: And how old would that be?

BORIS: Well... twenty-eight, twenty-nine. Around that.

NINA: No, sweetheart. Some time has passed since I was that age.

BORIS: When we started you were twenty-seven.

NINA: I am 32 and you are 48. You have a wife and children: a son and a daughter who are students. And what do I have?

BORIS: You have me. Our relationship is wonderful, what else do you need, where's the problem?

NINA: How much longer do you think I should live like this with you – another year, two, or ten?

BORIS: Well... forever.

NINA: That's exactly what I don't intend to do. I worked as a school psychologist for seven years – that's where I met you when you came to ask me to help your son and your daughter, who were definitely the worst and most troublesome pupils at our school... I did everything I could to help them, I went down on my knees to beg so many of the teachers not to fail them, to have understanding for their antisocial behaviour – and they both completed secondary school thanks to me.

BORIS: They're university students now.

NINA: Yes, now they're students... and that's what brought us together, my commitment to them. I found it touching that you came to

ask about them, while their mother never did. I felt that you were a really good man, I felt you deserved love, even recognition, for that very reason... I felt like the mother of your children... and that's why I went to bed with you the first time... I felt sorry for you... I never set out to be the other woman, to steal some woman's husband, but what is more logical than that the mother of the children sleeps with their father... and that's how it started... but I can't be the other woman all my life, I just won't, I have to have my own life, and my own family one day.

BORIS: But I was pleased with the way things were.

NINA: But you see, I wasn't...

BORIS: You are a selfish, rude, spoilt woman who only thinks of herself!

NINA: And you really are a pig! That's it! I have had my fill of a mean lover who thinks only of himself! Ciao!

2. (A Kitchen)

(Boris and Mia)

(Mia is in the kitchen, holding a cup of tea. Boris comes in.)

MIA: Hey!

BORIS: Hey!

MIA: What are you doing home so early? I was expecting you at five.

BORIS: I finished up things in the office, and I had to take some papers in to the Council... that was finished quickly, and I didn't want to go back to the office, but to my little home and my little wife... I have worked enough in this lifetime, it's time for me to enjoy a little of the beauty of family life, of marriage, beside the fireplace.

MIA: We have central heating and ordinary radiators.

BORIS: I know, but that's the way it's said, «beside the fireplace», it's a symbol for the warmth of the family home... Otherwise, I ran into Marko, my mate from elementary school – we haven't seen each other for eight years, and we used to be the best of friends... he used to copy history from me, and I used to copy mathematics from him... he was just no good with dates, he could remember everything, a very bright boy, but historical dates, he was just no good at them, and he started talking about his wife and his two sons, they are much younger than our children, but I told him about you and our children, and then he said it would be great if we could get together for our wives and children to meet, and I said to him: we could go collecting mushrooms this Saturday, all together – your family and my family, and there's nothing lovelier than socialising in the fresh air, and he agreed, and so: we have something arranged for this Saturday, too.

MIA: Wait a minute, Boris, you know that I am going riding at the Hippodrome this Saturday. I haven't been now for four Saturdays running. Pegasus will forget what I look like. I have made arrangements with Milena and the girls, and I really can't...

BORIS: But I promised the man, you can't do that to me. I want us to really stick together as a real family.

MIA: You were never home for even one weekend for a full five years, and now, all of sudden, for three months you have been taking us somewhere every Saturday, if it's not fishing on the river it's excursions up into the mountains, or... It's all too intensive for me and for the children! All of a sudden, just like that!

BORIS: It's because I love you. I know I have neglected you for years, but now I am finally in a position, as the head of the most successful group of commercial salesmen, to stay home whenever I feel

like it, and to send others out into the field... now I can finally dedicate myself fully to my little wife and to my children. I have finally discovered the beauty of family life, the beauty of the nuptial nest, it's as though I have lived under stress for years and have neglected you so much for years, but now I want to make it up to you and to our little children, and to myself.

MIA: Listen: our children are not little any more. Boyan is twenty and Alida is twenty-two.

BORIS: Children are always children, and they always need their parents' love and attention. You have seen how they have enjoyed me always taking them somewhere lately, and that we have introduced the Sunday family lunch as something sacred.

MIA: That's because they thought you were ill.

BORIS: That I was ill?

MIA: Yes. Boyan and Alida talked with me last week and confessed that they were convinced that you were suffering from some incurable disease. You suddenly seemed so depressed about three months ago, you were so down-hearted, and they were sure... and then you started dictating a new lifestyle to all of us and all these excursions together, and family lunches and...

BORIS: I was sure they enjoyed it all. Our renewed togetherness.

MIA: They pretended to you in front of you, anything to prevent you becoming so blue again. When I told them that you were not suffering from any illness, they said that they did not have the energy any more to act like little children for you, that you had become so demanding... Boyan was neglecting his girlfriend, and Alida her boyfriend.

BOJAN: What's that, a girlfriend, a boyfriend, I don't believe you... I am sure they will go mushroom gathering with us this Saturday.

MIA: Ah no, they won't. A thousand to one they won't.

BORIS: Why?

MIA: Because they are moving into their flat. They have rented a two-room flat and they are moving in this Saturday. They want to live their own lives without their mother and their father.

BORIS: They can forget about that because it is out of the question that I pay for them to rent a flat. At their age, I was already working, earning my own money, and they... failed students who only want to bleed me dry. There is no way that I will be paying for that flat.

MIA: You won't have to. Grandpa and Grandma have promised to pay the rent.

BORIS: Grandpa and Grandma?

MIA: Yes.

BORIS: Your parents?

MIA: That's right.

BORIS: They are always interfering in my life when they shouldn't and when I least expect it.

MIA: Why do they bother you?! Instead of being happy that they care for our children, that they are prepared to help them financially, you hold it against them.

BORIS: They could have discussed it with me first.

(Boris turns towards the audience.)

BORIS: That father of hers, and her mother, they are the sort of people that would have made St Francis of Assisi lose his temper. Her father spoilt his daughter beyond belief, as if he was preparing her for life at the British court. When I appeared in the life of his little angel, he let me know straight away that she deserved much better than me, that I was just a temporary, necessary evil. And her mother, that noisy old harridan from a wealthy family, when I went to their place to meet them for the

first time she said: «You know, Boris, there are certain rules in our family.» Those rules of hers made my life a misery at the beginning of my married life. They were always on the side of their spoilt, conceited daughter, and never lost an opportunity to stress that I came into that marriage with just the clothes on my back, without money, without a flat, without anything. And now in my mature years, when I have made something of myself through hard work, now they meddle in the lives of my children.

(Boris returns to the scene with Mia.)

BORIS: They really should have talked over this business of the flat with me first, and not behave like this.

MIA: And what would you have done... forbidden them to pay the rent for them. It's time for you to realise: the children are grown-up and want their own lives.

BORIS: But I want to give them of myself, my time, my attention. Finally, I have time for them and for you. I want us to be a real happy family.

MIA: You should have thought of that twenty years ago. All this time, I have been taking care of the children alone. And all that alongside a job that is much more demanding than yours. Do you have any idea what the dynamic is like at our insurance company? All I managed to get you to do was to go to the parent/teacher meetings and information sessions, because I was too embarrassed to go there and hear how terribly they were behaving. And they behaved terribly because their father was never home.

BORIS: But I was a travelling salesman, so how could I have been at home?

MIA: You could have been if you wanted to.

BORIS: So only you are coming mushroom picking on Saturday.

MIA: What about the riding club? What about Pegasus?

BORIS: Please. Don't you let me down, too... Besides, I have put together a plan for the coming month, a plan on spending the next four weekends with you and our children... alright then, they could take turns, our son with us one weekend and our daughter the next, but I expect at least that, that's what I want and demand. I have to make up for all those years when I neglected you all, and that's the way it's going to be, like it or not. I am still the head of this family. And now I'm going to take a shower and then we can sit down and eat and talk in peace.

(Boris exits.)

(Mia turns towards the audience.)

MIA: It's really hopeless with these husbands. In the first phase, at the beginning of married life, they are with you every second, and then in the second phase, which lasts twenty or thirty years, you hardly ever see them, and then, all of a sudden, comes the third phase in which they never even leave the house. Just so that there is no misunderstanding: despite the external similarity, the first and third phase have nothing essentially in common. Because the first phase remains unique, since no-one ever stepped in the same water twice, as that Greek said... And what can I do with him now, when he's in the house the whole day long. What are we supposed to talk about? Unlike me, he never reads books, he is not interested in films, concerts get on his nerves, and he knows nothing about fashion. I can't talk all day about mushrooms, sport and the price of the articles sold by his travelling salesmen. When I was a young wife with small, naughty, hyperactive children, I thought I would go mad, because my husband was not home. But now I know that I shall definitely go mad with him here all the time.

3. (The Marriage Counselling Centre)

(Nina, Mia)

(Nina is seated, arranging papers at her desk. A knock at the door. Mia comes in.)

MIA: Excuse me, is this the Marriage Counselling Centre?

NINA: Yes.

MIA: There's no sign on the door.

NINA: They painted the woodwork last month, and haven't yet returned the signs. I think we are even getting new ones.

MIA: Ah, I see. I am looking for Nina, the psychologist.

NINA: That's me.

MIA: Ah. So you are Nina. I imagined you differently.

NINA: Really?

MIA: Yes, really.

NINA: Do we know each other some somewhere... or...

MIA: I heard that you were an excellent marriage... counsellor, that's what they call it, I suppose. You understand marriages... you know how to help so that a marriage does not rot completely away, how to give it new vigour, you know how it's done. Everyone praises you for being so very... skilful.

NINA: Skilful?

MIA: Yes, skilful.

NINA: Look, I am glad if you have heard such comments, if that's what people say about me. I have only been working here for four months, I was a school psychologist before that... I am really happy if people feel that I can help them, that I know how to help them.

MIA: That you are skilful... and effective. A real enchantress.
NINA: Well, I wouldn't say that...

MIA: So I thought that you could help me, too, and my emotionally unstable husband, that is, you could be the right remedy for our relationship.

NINA: I hope so. What do you mean by remedy?

MIA: You know, Prozac, a sedative, an antibiotic...

NINA: I would rather use psychological terms... sometimes, the right word at the right moment, a warm word, is enough to save a relationship.

MIA: Or the right touch.

NINA: Or the right touch... what do you mean, the right touch?

MIA: Sometime a squeeze of the hand can mean a lot... or if someone strokes your head... When I was a little girl, I remember if someone patted my head, or my face, that was enough for me to be happy all day long. Do you agree?

NINA: Of course – the tactile aspect of communication is more than important.

MIA: You undoubtedly like your job.

NINA: Very much so.

MIA: And it would be terribly tough for you if someone took it away from you?

NINA: Of course. Why do you ask?

MIA: That means that you are the right person in the right place, that means that you have God's gift for this job, that you don't do it for the money, but because of inner satisfaction.

NINA: Exactly.

MIA: I knew it... that's the real thing, only such people can be really fulfilled and really happy.

(Silence.)

NINA: But excuse me, you probably have some particular problem.

MIA: Ah, listen here my dear young miss... You are still a Miss?

NINA: Yes, I am.

MIA: I assumed so – a successful woman remains a Miss for quite some time... What was it I wanted to say? – look, young lady, who is without problems today, who, I ask you? Is there anyone in this whole world who is spared problems?

NINA: I meant marriage problems.

MIA: Ah yes.

NINA: You probably want me to help you in that area.

MIA: I would be endlessly happy if you could. And grateful to the grave... and beyond.

NINA: I assume you are married.

MIA: I would hardly be coming to a marriage counsellor if I wasn't.

NINA: I have experienced all sorts of things in these four months.

MIA: I can't believe that anyone who wasn't married would come to you, apart from young couples planning to marry.

NINA: Even that... there were those who were unmarried and those who were divorced and widows... People want to talk, they need comfort and a warm word, and some want to talk about the future even if there is no partner on the horizon.

MIA: I am married... officially and legally. I would even say that I have lived in a happy marriage for the last 23 years.

NINA: Well then, where's the problem?

MIA: Lately there has been a shadow over that happiness, the intensity has changed...

NINA: Why didn't you bring your husband with you? Problems can be eliminated only when both partners are prepared to co-operate. To the limit, with no holding back.

MIA: If I had told my husband that I was coming to talk to you – he would have freaked out. I doubt he would have agreed to come here with me.

NINA: You still haven't told where the problem lies. Or, that is, what you think the problem is.

MIA: You doubt my judgement?

NINA: Excuse me?

MIA: You believe that the objective problem and what «I think» are not the same thing.

NINA: I didn't mean it in that sense.

MIA: My husband has another woman.

NINA: Are you sure?

MIA: As sure as I am standing here in front of you.

NINA: Do you have any proof?

MIA: Firm proof. I know when the affair began, I know what she looks like, and I have even decided to speak to her about it all...

NINA: I am not sure that that would be wise.

MIA: Still, she knows my husband best... after me, that is. There would be no problem without her, and that's why I have decided it would be best to confront her. Otherwise, she is younger than he is, much younger.

NINA: The usual thing.

MIA: Yes, the usual thing. You can imagine how I felt when I found out that my husband had a girlfriend.

NINA: I am sorry, I really am sorry.

MIA: You couldn't even imagine what this is like. I wanted to tear out her throat with my teeth. To put her in a Spanish Boot. Push her under a tram... just by the way, in passing... so as to leave no clues. Do you understand?

NINA: Yes, I understand... that's only human.

MIA: I don't have any cannibalistic inclinations, but I have already seen me biting her throat many time. Excuse the expression.

NINA: Not at all, not at all – it's a human reaction. And I would feel like that, in your place...

MIA: I don't doubt it. Do you think you can help me?

NINA: I hope so, but I have to know as many details as possible about you and your husband, and only then can the three of us working together, co-operating in a joint effort, manage to restore that shaken equilibrium.

MIA: That's sweet of you, but if the three of us would have to solve this problem together, that would feel something like group sex as far as I am concerned.

NINA: What do you mean?

MIA: I would feel uncomfortable talking to both of you at the same time about such intimate matters. That's why I came here alone. Do you understand?

NINA: Yes, I do, but group therapy is much more effective.

MIA: I am against that group stuff. I prefer for just the two of us to come to an agreement.

NINA: I don't even know your name, or his name. I have to start somewhere, to have something to get to grips with.

MIA: Perhaps you should get to grips with him... his name is Boris, he is 48 years old, and he works as a commercial traveller... He studied advanced economics as a night student but, unlike me, he never got his

degree... that mistress of his is 16 years younger than he is, it's been going on for five years now, and he used to take her with him through the provinces every weekend, in Slovenia, in Croatia, while I was home with the kids, waiting like Penelope.

(Nina rises to her feet behind the table.)

NINA: I, I...

MIA: Sit down!

NINA: I should drink some water... I am feeling dizzy.

MIA: You're going to feel even dizzier! Sit down when I tell you!

You bitch! You fancy woman!

NINA: I didn't mean to, it just happened!

MIA: You can forget the refined excuses. I know everything.

NINA: Forgive me.

MIA: I forgive nothing.

NINA: I did not mean to hurt you.

MIA: You don't say. Aren't we the lady now! Hypocrite – working as a marriage counsellor, and stealing a woman's husband. Shame on you!

NINA: I'm sorry, please forgive me.

MIA: I did not come here for that «forgive me», I don't need it. That's not why I'm here.

NINA: Why then?

MIA: I came for you to help me save my marriage.

NINA: Me - help you!?!

MIA: Of course – you are the marriage psychologist, you understand such things. I hope you will act professionally, that you won't turn me down just because we are intimately connected to the same man, the same idiot.

NINA: I... well, I'll do anything I can... I shall try to make it up to you in any way I can, in any way possible.

MIA: Ah, that's just what I expected from you. Professionalism and a willingness to help. Well done.

(Silence... They eye each other.)

NINA: How long have you known?

MIA: From the very beginning... for more than five years. Men are like children... it's all there in their faces... as soon as he started going off on those suspicious weekends, as soon as I saw that he rushed to shower the minute he came home, and spoke to me like a clerk behind a counter, his thoughts somewhere else... it was all clear... And he was obviously less interested in... you know... less demanding... I saw through him very quickly...

NINA: I never wanted it to happen.

MIA: Really. And I'm supposed to believe you.

NINA: Why didn't you react immediately?

MIA: I found out who you were... in the beginning I didn't want to stop you helping our children, while you were still working at the school, and later... well, I just got used to it and realised that it was even for the better as far as I was concerned.

NINA: Even for the better?

MIA: In a certain way. Boris behaved correctly with me and the children, and the fact that he was rarely at home... it suited me more and more. I had time for myself, to go to the riding club and aerobics classes, time for reading, the cinema, for socialising with my friends. My life was not reduced to merely my husband and children as it is with ninety percent of women. But there was just one thing I could never understand.

NINA: What was that?

MIA: What on earth did you ever see in him? As he has grown older, he has become so boring, miserly and exclusive. I asked myself what a liberated young woman was doing with a middle-aged pain in the neck.

NINA: If you know everything, then you probably also know that we broke it off four months ago and that I am no longer his girlfriend.

MIA: Of course I know. That's just why I have come to have this talk with you.

NINA: I don't understand – we have broken it off and there are no more problems.

MIA: Quite the contrary, in fact – the problems started when you stopped seeing him. And that's the reason for my being here.

NINA: Now I'm really confused.

MIA: You don't understand?

NINA: Not a thing.

MIA: Take it easy now – I shall explain it all.

NINA: Please forgive me for everything.

MIA: Would you please stop saying that and playing the sweet miss role, because it doesn't suit you. But, if you really want to help me you will have your chance. Just listen carefully.

NINA: I am listening.

MIA: Since you left my husband after this five-year romance, my life has become pure hell. In a word: I have lost my smoothly running life, I am forced to give up all my preoccupations, I have lost my peace of mind, I have lost everything. How could you just break off with him like that, after everything he had done for you? How could you?

NINA: I don't know what to say.

MIA: The poor thing became so depressed that the children thought that he was seriously ill... and then, soon after that, he discovered the

«joys of married life» and started tormenting us with Saturday trips, Sunday family lunches, he stopped travelling - he could do that as the leader of the salesmen group, he could stay in the office – he stopped going out to 'urgent' meetings in the evenings, and every evening, absolutely every evening, there he was right next to me. He put an end to my cosy everyday life, made it impossible for me to continue my socialising, possessively took hold of me and our children... suddenly I realised how great life had been when he had had an outside interest... Naturally enough, the children made their escape to a flat of their own a month ago and saved themselves, but I am stuck there in his possessive company. And besides: over the last five years – we have practised sex once a month – which is around my limit. I don't like it too often, but for the last four months he has been pestering me as many times as twice a month. And that's an increase of 100 percent. All this business with him is driving me crazy and I have realised that only you can help me, and only you can understand me, and that it is a wonderful thing that the my husband's girlfriend works as a psychologist in a marriage guidance centre. I felt intuitively that you wouldn't say 'no' and that you would really help me.

NINA: I don't know what to say.

MIA: You don't have to say anything – just help. Will you help me?

NINA: Of course I will.

MIA: Wonderful. Brilliant. So that means you will help me?

NINA: I will try. If I can.

MIA: Of course you can. It's great that my husband chose such a dear, positive woman. It's great that you and I understand each other. I am really pleased that we have finally met, in the flesh so to say. My

intuition did not fail me. You are good-looking... pretty... and it seems that you are intelligent and a decent person... I am so pleased.

NINA: Well, I'm pleased, too. Although it's not clear to me how I can help you.

MIA: If you only want to – easily.

NINA: Please explain.

MIA: You see, Nina, while my husband had a girlfriend, while his affair with you was going on, my life was... it was just as I wanted it to be for me to be satisfied with it. I had my own world and even lived with my husband and children in a desirable equilibrium... if you understand what I am trying to say. But – everything went downhill after you left him. Everything became complicated. I am not happy any more, and neither is he – and the children have run away from us because he is so possessive. And now – after thinking about it deeply, I have come to the conclusion that you are the only one who can help us.

NINA: But how?

MIA: Be his lover again. We were all happy and satisfied with you.

NINA: You must be joking!

MIA: Not in the least. All our problems can be solved if only you will start up your affair with him again. Of course, he must know nothing of our conversation – because, in that case, his adultery would lose its attraction as forbidden fruit, all that hiding and disguise. And you know what men are like – they only enjoy forbidden fruit.

NINA: Madame, you are abnormal!

MIA: You don't say – I'm abnormal? Your rude little bitch. You have been bonking with my husband for five years, making a fool of me all over the place, and now you dare to tell me – his legal wife – that I am abnormal. You really are a whore!

NINA: I'm sorry, I did not mean to offend you – I am simply confused.

MIA: I am not interested in your confusion. What I am interested in is whether you are prepared to help, or not prepared to help.

NINA: It's not so simple – I was fed up with him after those five years, and I would like it if someone else came into my life. He simply bored me to death.

MIA: Surely you don't think he hasn't bored me to death in these last 23 years. Well – are you going to help me or not?

(Silence.)

NINA: And what if I refuse?

MIA: If you refuse – I shall make sure that your superiors know that you have be living as the other woman, and I shall make sure that a news item appears in the newspapers about a woman working at the marriage counsel centre who is woefully lacking in the moral qualities demanded by such a job.

(Nina turns towards the audience.)

NINA: This is blackmail, a classical case of blackmail. I first thought about breaking up with Boris three years ago, and if I had done it then, I wouldn't be in this stupid situation today. But it's not easy to break off an affair, it's not easy to tell someone who showers you with expressions of love: I don't want to be with you anymore. Before he came into my life, I never imagined I would one day become the other woman in some woman's marriage. It was unconceivable to me. I knew that it wasn't for me, even though there was a sort of thrill about it all in the beginning, some excitement lacking in ordinary relationships. And now, when I have finally managed to break off with him, when I thought that all that hiding and disguise was behind me forever, that the affair in which I had lost my identity was finished and that I was turning over a

new leaf – my past has unexpectedly returned to me like a boomerang. What can I say except that this woman is so insolent towards me that I don't know what to do. Once, my conscience was very uneasy about me sleeping with her husband, but now it seems to me that I can understand Boris for looking for tenderness with somebody else. You probably are aware that my job means a great deal to me. I love the work I do. I feel that I know how to help people, how to save marriages that go off in the wrong direction. The fact that I have myself participated in the emergence and existence of a love triangle is only a great advantage to me in the professional sense. In that way I have found out more about the dysfunction of the marriage mechanism than I could have learnt at twenty seminars and ten psychotherapy sessions. That practical experience helps me in my job, but this unpleasant shrew really could attack me in public and lead to my losing my job that I care about so much. And I would also be publicly humiliated.

(Nina «returns» to the scene with Mia.)

NINA: Wouldn't it be much better and more effective for you yourself to seek out the solution to this problem and talk to him openly about everything that is bothering you. He could then equally openly express his objections about the way your married life is going, and in a constructive dialogue you could...

MIA: Listen, young lady, I haven't come to this centre to ask for your advice, but to tell you what you must do unless you want to lose your job.

NINA: You really are the worst of the worst...

MIA: You can see you have no choice, dear colleague.

4. The Levee by the River / A Motor Car

(Nina, Boris)

(The back seat of a car is in the background of the scene. There are two reflectors, that is, two headlights in front of the seat. The car's headlights come on, the sound of the engine is heard. Boris and Nina are sitting in the car but the audience cannot see them because of the glare of the headlights that are shining from the stage into their eyes.)

NINA: Where are we Boris, where are you driving to?

BORIS: Far away from the city... Here we are. I'll park here.

(The sound of the car stopping.)

NINA: I am asking you where we are.

BORIS: Near the Sava River levee. Far from civilisation, far from home, and far from people. You can see it's a wilderness here.

NINA: But someone could come along the levee. Some of those joggers.

BORIS: Don't be afraid, no-one jogs here at night.

NINA: But people do walk their dogs at night. If anyone were to catch us here while we were... I would die of shame.

BORIS: There's nothing to be afraid of. We are far enough away from the levee. And if someone were to chance along, they wouldn't hear us or see us. We will be so discreet and quiet.

NINA: I'm frightened all the same.

BORIS: It's a good thing that you are scared. It introduces adrenaline into this evening and our relationship. That's a positive element.

NINA: Perhaps we should have gone to my place.

BORIS: Excuse me... you were the one who admitted that it was already monotonous at your place... that it had become a routine, a cliché. I promised I would think of something that would add zest to our relationship and I thought about it all week, until I finally came up with sex in the car. Since you have never gotten into sex in a car, this will be an unforgettable experience for you. It's routine to me and I can guarantee that there is no better sex than sex in a car, especially on the back seat.

NINA: Well I know, but how will we now...

BORIS: Now we have to play and everything will happen during the game. So, this is how we start: «This little pig went to market... » and he reaches your sweater and it really bothers him. And the little piggy wants you to take off your sweater.

NINA: I'll do it myself, Boris, leave it, I'll do it myself. Just give me a minute or two to get used to this situation, give me a moment to smoke a cigarette before we start. You know that a cigarette calms me down. You surely don't mind if I smoke just one cigarette.

BORIS: Alright, have a cigarette. Although you know that the smoke bothers me. While you are smoking I shall stretch my legs a bit, to see where we are.

(Boris comes out in front of the audience, in front of the headlights.)

BORIS: All that about sex in the car – it has always attracted me. It was the customary way of entry into the world of eroticism for my generation. I always envied blokes who talked about their experiences with sex on the back seats of cars. I could imagine it all as if I had been there and held a lamp for the horny couple being described. Unfortunately, I never experienced it. As far as I was concerned when I was young, sex in a car remained a permanent secret for just one banal reason – I didn't have my own car. It was only in the seventh year of my

marriage that my wife and I bought an automobile, if a *Renault 4* can be called an automobile. It would have made me uncomfortable to suggest to my very own wife that we have sex in the car. She would have thought me a pervert. And so, it is only now in my forty-eighth year that I shall savour what I started dreaming about exactly thirty years ago. Nina thinks that I am expert at it, but I have no idea how to perform in half a square metre of space, instead of the usual roomy bed. So you can probably understand why I am not excited and why it gets on my nerves that she has decided to smoke a cigarette at this historical moment.

(Boris returns to the seat of the «car».)

BORIS: Here comes your Tom-cat, miaaou! Here comes your teddy-bear Bruno, mmmrr, mmmrr! Come on, Sweetheart, «This little piggy went all the way... ».

NINA: There, love, there... Just give me a bit of room, that's it... move over a bit. And now kiss your little turtle dove, and your little dove will spread her wings around you...

BORIS: Watch out, Nina, the gear shift! Careful!

NINA: Alright, alright, I'm being careful.

BORIS: «... all the way home».

NINA: Come on, little piggy... Miaou, miaou, my tomcat... Wait, Boris, how can I take off my clothes now?

BORIS: You can do it, slowly, if only... You didn't have to wear trousers, it would all have been easier if you had come in a skirt.

NINA: Help me.

BORIS: Careful, just a moment, careful!

NINA: What are you doing now? I can't do anything that way – you are heavy, I can't take off my clothes, or even breathe... Man, it's just not working. If you only had a larger car.

BORIS: Some of my friends used to do it in that little *Fiat*. «It's not the polished weapons that win the battle». Relax, I'll help you, if only... Ahhh!

NINA: What is it?

BORIS: My back! I've pinched a nerve in my back.

NINA: Man, you are lying on top of me!

BORIS: Wait! It hurts, careful! Wait a minute, ohhh! Let's just get slowly out of the car. Can we stop for a moment?

NINA: Yes, but I need air.

BORIS: Ouch, slowly now, I have to go first.

(They get out of the «car» and come out in front of the headlights. Boris clothes are unbuttoned, Nina is wearing a white T-shirt and carrying a cardigan.)

NINA: It's cold outside.

(Nina puts on her cardigan, Boris does up his buttons.)

NINA: Why did you insist that we had to do this today?

BORIS: I'm sorry, I had to see you today, even though we agreed that I would come to your place tomorrow – after work, in the evening. Today is an important day and I had to have you for at least five minutes. Today is an important day – a round date – a day that deserves to be celebrated as special. Go on, do you remember – what day is it today?

NINA: Today is... I have no idea. What day is it? The anniversary of the October Revolution?

BORIS: Something more important for the two of us – come on, think!

NINA: ...come on, Boris, stop torturing me, what day is it?

BORIS: On today's day, exactly a month ago, you rang me and invited me to your place after work, and on today's day we made up and

my life was given new meaning – I am once again the happiest man in the capital city of our homeland.

NINA: And that is why we had to come here to the levee?

BORIS: Not just because of that, but so that I could give you a lovely present.

(Boris goes to the «car» and takes out his briefcase. He quickly returns. He starts to open the briefcase.)

NINA: I hope it's not a poem.

BORIS: No it isn't, don't worry – something much lovelier.

(He takes a single, wilted rose out of the briefcase.)

BORIS: A rose for a rose.

NINA: Oh, Boris, you didn't have to spend money on me.

BORIS: Well, I have to show you sometimes how much I love you.

NINA: Thank you, Sweetheart!

(She takes the rose, and he kisses her on the forehead.)

NINA: I wouldn't have been offended if you had brought me a whole bouquet. We women love flowers.

BORIS: Ah no, never a bouquet – that is so expensive and boorish, in this town a bouquet costs an entire fortune, and I would not want you to think that I want to buy your love with money and extravagance. After all, I am not a Greek ship-owner.

NINA: Unfortunately.

BORIS: What did you say?

NINA: Nothing, nothing at all.

(A brief silence.)

BORIS: I also wanted to see you about something else – today in the office I compiled a schedule for the next six Saturdays and for the six towns in Slovenia and in Croatia that I shall be visiting... with you of course. They are all great places.

(He takes a sheet of paper out of his briefcase.)

BORIS: This is how it will go – in the order of events, our adventures, our wonderful trips will be in this order: the first Saturday – Ptuj, the second Saturday – Lepoglava, and then Ajdovščina, Zabok, Postojna and Ludbreg.

NINA : Couldn't you have squeezed Paris or London in somewhere.

BORIS: Unfortunately, our products are not attractive to the western market... My love, we will once again enjoy our stolen love the way we used to, in sweet little towns, and modestly small hotels, our romance will continue as in those most beautiful days five and a half years ago, when we started, when we discovered the joy of our bodies coming together, the joys of games of conspiracy...

NINA: Boris, I have enrolled in post-graduate courses and I need my Saturdays free for study.

BORIS: Come on, you can study during the week.

NINA: But you come to my place during the week, too. Please, my sweet, switch down to a lower gear, I have to think of my job and my friends. I haven't visited my parents for two months, so you know...

BORIS: Wait a minute, my darling – I have always told you that there is nothing more important and sublime in life than love. And you have always agreed with me. Isn't that so?

NINA: You can't...

BORIS: Please tell me, isn't that so?

(Silence.)

NINA: And what if your wife gets suspicious?

BORIS: Out of the question, she would never think of anything like that.

NINA: Are you sure?

BORIS: I guarantee it.

NINA: All the same – be careful.

BORIS: I am the smartest husband in Europe – I always have two alibis in reserve.

NINA: Even the smartest can make a mistake.

BORIS: Others maybe, but me, never.

NINA: Should we get into the car, and do what we came here to do?

BORIS: Look... I would rather we went to your place. It's so awkward here, and my back aches.

NINA: I agree. Cars were meant to be drive in, while beds are something else...

5. (The Kitchen)

(Boris, Mia)

(Mia is pouring coffee into a cup from a Turkish coffee pot. Boris comes in.)

MIA: Good morning, my dear.

BORIS: Good morning, dear.

MIA: Would you like some coffee?

BORIS: I don't have time, I'm in a hurry, just a bite and I have to be off.

MIA: As far as I'm concerned, there is nothing nicer than Saturday morning, at peace, in the silence, with the aroma of coffee. I don't have to hurry anywhere, God's own bliss. And in the afternoon I'm off to the riding club and I will ride until I am worn out. Ah, if only every day was like Saturday morning. No work, no obligations.

BORIS: While some are enjoying themselves, others have to work, and work hard at that.

(Boris takes some bread and slices the cheese.)

BORIS: You could have at least made me some sandwiches.

MIA: You know I don't like to do any work on Saturday mornings.

BORIS: That's not very nice of you... while I am working my guts out, it's a problem for you to make an ordinary sandwich.

MIA: As if you give me any help when I'm working. And in any case, it won't be so difficult for you on the trip.

BORIS: That's what you think – because you have no idea how hard it is to negotiate in those small towns with suspicious clients. And I'm all alone out there, far from the warmth of home.

MIA: Come on now, don't exaggerate, I know you won't have to raise a sweat... you won't have to make any physical effort, you are not a sportsman or a labourer on the land.

BORIS: You can't even imagine what I have to do for the benefit of my family, the sacrifices I make so that you and all of us can have a better quality of life.

MIA: Where are you travelling to today?

BORIS: Lepoglava.

MIA: Lepoglava?

BORIS: Yes.

MIA: Is that where the prison is?

BORIS: Yes.

MIA: I have never been there.

BORIS: Where, to prison?

MIA: No, in Lepoglava.

BORIS: So what.

MIA: You could take me with you.

BORIS: Where?

MIA: To Lepoglava.

BORIS: When?

MIA: Today – you said you were going to Lepoglava today, didn't you?

BORIS: That's right.

MIA: Why don't you take me with you, you said it's hard for you to be on the road, far from your warm home. And it's the wife who gives warmth to a home, a wife is home to her husband, not the walls and the furniture and all that. Don't you agree?

BORIS: I can do it alone. Why should you suffer and bump around on those bad roads. It's Saturday, the only chance you have to rest after a hard working week, there's no need for you to suffer too.

MIA: Nothing's hard for me if it's for you.

BORIS: You are riding at the club this afternoon, and you have probably promised to have coffee with your girlfriends after...

MIA: I can put all that off, if my husband is in question - I can see that all this travelling bothers you and that they are making you work over the weekends, while others are taking it easy. That's the least I can do for my husband – keep him company while he's travelling. I am prepared to do at least that for you.

BORIS: But no, that would not be a good idea.

MIA: Why not?

BORIS: It would look unprofessional if I took my wife to business meetings. It's frowned on in my branch – my rating would fall. D'you understand? It's something like that old rule that ships officers never took their wives with them, because women were supposed to bring bad luck.

MIA: Surely you don't believe that I would bring you bad luck.

BORIS: I didn't say that, I just said...

MIA: I don't want you to be bored and I am sorry that you have to freeze alone in those hotels. We never stay at hotels... I would love to

experience that with you. It's nicer and warmer when there are two. Don't you agree?

BORIS: I agree, my sweet, but you know that it is never a good idea to mix your business life with your private life. It's just unprofessional.

MIA: You think so?

BORIS: Yes, I do. Off you go to your riding club and enjoy yourself when you can, and I will sacrifice myself for the two of us and do what I have to do.

MIA: You really are generous... and so unselfish.

BORIS: One becomes that as the years go by and nothing is hard for me if it's for the happiness of our family.

MIA: By the way, my mother is celebrating her birthday next week. On Saturday, in fact. I have suggested that she and Dad come here, and I shall prepare the party. I will make the birthday cake and you can handle the barbecue. The kids will come, too.

BORIS: Wonderful, wonderful... Did you say next Saturday? But I'm on the road. In Ajdovščina.

MIA: For goodness sake, Boris, surely you won't be travelling on my mother's birthday?

BORIS: It's business. It's been planned for ages. I have to go and you can have the party on some other day.

MIA: What's wrong with you, man? You can't move birthdays around. That's like saying: «Let's celebrate New Year on some other day». If the entire family is going to be here on my mother's birthday, then you can be, too. I will start to think that you are travelling with some secretary, some woman, some other woman.

BORIS: My dearest, how can you throw mud at our love and our marriage like that. Such terrible words. I could never have expected anything like that from you.

MIA: Well how do I know why you won't cancel next Saturday's trip?

BORIS: I would rather that my hands wither before I would go with any woman to a hotel... How could you? You are really cruel, you have really offended me, and I have never been so angry. While I am working my guts out, you are defaming me with your unfounded doubts.

MIA: I'm sorry, but you yourself make me suspicious with your stubbornness. Send someone else to Ajdovščina. What would my Mama say if you were not with her hereon her birthday. And by the way, you are becoming too career-oriented again, you are neglecting us again.

BORIS: Excuse me, but someone has to make a sacrifice for the family. You can't do anything today without money.

MIA: Come on, we want for nothing. Keep the weekends for yourself and your family.

BORIS: It's not that simple. The boss told me directly that he expects me to be a model for the other salesmen and I really must...

MIA: Nothing else is important on Mama's birthday. When you tell him that your mother-in-law is celebrating her seventieth birthday, I am sure that he will understand.

BORIS: Alright then. I'll make that sacrifice. I won't miss it. I have to be here on her birthday and I will postpone everything else.

(Boris turns towards the audience.)

BORIS: That old cow is still celebrating her birthdays. I had everything planned for Ajdovščina, and I hardly managed to talk Nina into it, and now it's all going down the drain because she wants to celebrate a historical date – the date of her birth. What luck if she had never been born, perhaps my life would have been happier and more meaningful.

6. (The Street)

(Boris, Nina)

(Night. Boris and Nina are strolling along with their arms about each other.)

BORIS: It's wonderful to be able to stroll with you like this at night. It's nine o'clock and the streets are empty. My wife is at home, and my son and daughter have gone to Austria for three days. But still, there's that shot of adrenaline, because I am walking embraced with my lover, exposed to the danger of some acquaintance seeing us.

NINA: I don't like that word 'lover'.

BORIS: I don't like the term travelling salesman, but that is what I am, a travelling salesman.

NINA: All the same, don't call me that, because I don't like it.

BORIS: Alright then, «girlfriend».

(Silence.)

BORIS: Look, I have a small problem. And I think you could help me.

NINA: What is it?

BORIS: It's somewhat delicate.

NINA: It must be extremely delicate, if you're hesitating. Tell me!

BORIS: On Friday it's the twenty-fifth anniversary of when my wife and I first met.

NINA: First met?

BORIS: Exactly. Actually, it was on that day that we first started going out together. And she buys me a nice gift on that day every year. I usually pretend to have forgotten because it all gets on my nerves, but this is the twenty-fifth anniversary and I think it would be in order that I buy her something for that day.

NINA: So... what's that got to do with me?

BORIS: I am in a dilemma. I don't know what to buy her. What do women like nowadays, what would be suitable for such an anniversary? I wanted to ask you for your advice.

NINA: You wanted to ask me?

BORIS: Who else? You are of the female gender – you know what women like. And besides: you are the only person with whom I am close enough to be able to ask openly for advice. You know me well, and you also know that every gift reveals the giver. What I mean is that a gift tells much more about the person giving it than about the recipient.

NINA: I think it is a bit tasteless that I help you in this matter.

BORIS: Why?

NINA: Well, for moral reasons.

BORIS: Please, don't talk to me about morals, surely you are aware of where we are living.

NINA: Where are we living?

BORIS: We live in our homeland, in which moralists are more ridiculous than thieves.

NINA: I have a slightly different opinion of myself.

(Nina's cell phone starts ringing. She answers it.)

NINA: Hello... yes, it's me... I'm fine, thank you, fine... Why? Florence?... When?... On Saturday?... Hang on a moment, please.

(Nina covers the receiver with her hand, and asks Boris):

NINA: Is that Ludbreg still on for next Saturday?

BORIS: Of course.

NINA: Can you cancel it?

BORIS: No way. Ajdovščina fell through for us. I have already reserved a double room. Surely I won't have to pay for a double for just me.

(Nina sighs deeply, and raises the cell phone to her ear again.)

NINA: Look, I'm sorry, but I just can't make it this Saturday. I have something arranged and there's no way that I can cancel it... Yes, I'm sorry, too, some other time perhaps... Bye, good night!

(Silence.)

BORIS: Who was that?

NINA: There's an architectural bureau in the building where I work and they are going on an excursion to Florence this weekend, and they invited me to join them.

BORIS: Why you exactly?

NINA: We drink coffee together during the break, and we have become friends.

BORIS: Do women or men work at that bureau.

NINA: Both women and men.

BORIS: And now on the phone, the person who called you, was that a woman or a man?

NINA: For goodness sake, Boris – it was a hermaphrodite. Are you satisfied now?

BORIS: It's a terrible thing how those cell phones destroy human lives and people's privacy. We were having such a lovely walk in the fresh air before that phone intruded into our privacy, and our lives. They should be banned by law, people have become mere addicts, they have lost their personalities, their peace and their intimate lives.

(The cell phone in Boris's jacket pocket starts ringing. Boris hurriedly takes it out and puts it to his ear.)

BORIS: Yes, my sweet, it's me. Here I am... What do you mean, where am I... at dinner, of course... can't you hear the clinking of the cutlery... yes, we have all quietened down now, before the dessert is served, the blokes are using this interval to light up... «Careful, Robert, it's fallen on your suit!!»... «Sorry, fellas, talking with my wife, here I am...» sorry dear, the boss has just arrived, and I have to sign off, bye... of course I'll be home before midnight, you watch TV and enjoy yourself, wish we were together. Bye, bye!

(Silence.)

NINA: You lie like a small child.

BORIS: If a lie is useful, then it is socially justified. Even a humane gesture.

NINA: We all lie so much in our lives, that it has really become disgusting.

BORIS: A sweet lie is better than the bitter truth.

NINA: I have decided to go to confession next Sunday.

BORIS: Really – why do you need that? You never used to go to church.

NINA: I did during my childhood. And I have been to mass twice during the last month, and it suited me... that's where I got the idea to go to confession.

BORIS: Come on, you don't need that. It's not for you.

(Silence. Suddenly Boris pauses and asks in an agitated voice.)

BORIS: Surely you are not going to tell the priest about us?

NINA: I have to. It will make it easier for me. There's no point in going to confession if you are not completely frank. You can't skip over anything.

BORIS: So that means you will tell him about us.

NINA: I think so.

BORIS: You won't be telling him my name, will you? You won't be telling him who I am?

NINA: I will tell him that I am in a relationship with a married man, but I won't mention your name.

BORIS: Don't mention my profession either. One day the priest could work out who is in question.

NINA: Boris, stop worrying. You know that priests are bound by an oath on the secrecy of the confession.

BORIS: You can forget that – priests drink too much at Xmas, just like everybody else, and anyway... I was at a wedding once when the priest got drunk and starting telling such juicy jokes that we were all left speechless... I don't even like the thought of you talking with other people about our intimate life. It's our intimate life, our secret, something sacred to us. And I am particularly displeased that you are treating our sublimely pure relationship as a sin.

NINA: But it is a sin.

BORIS: Just a minute, please, you can see that you have never been married. If you knew my wife, you would understand me. In any case, it's more honest to have another woman than to go to brothels and pay big money for love and pleasure, the way our grandfathers and great-grandfathers used to do in the past.

NINA: Ah, thank you very much for that disgusting comparison.

BORIS: Sorry, I didn't mean it that way. Sorry.

7. (Nina's Office)

(Nina, Mia)

(Nina is sitting at her desk. Mia comes in.)

MIA: Hello.

NINA: You are an hour late.

MIA: I know. I hardly managed to get rid of Boris. He wanted to spend this afternoon with me, and just wouldn't leave me alone – then I remembered that I could use his birthday as an excuse, so I told him that I had to be alone because I wanted to buy him a birthday present.

NINA: When is his birthday?

MIA: Don't you know?

NINA: I knew, but have forgotten.

MIA: On Thursday, the twenty-sixth.

NINA: Ah yes.

MIA: You must buy him something, something small... don't forget or he will come home to me all upset.

NINA: OK – I'll keep it in mind.

MIA: What did you want us to meet?

NINA: I wanted to tell you... I can't go on like this any more.

MIA: What do you mean?

NINA: I can't keep on seeing him.

MIA: You promised... do you want to lose your job?

NINA: Instead of blackmailing me, help me to solve the problem.

MIA: And what is the problem?

NINA: He is the problem. He is possessive and unbearable... he keeps on insisting on those trips through the provinces, he comes to my home two to three times a week... since we made up he is sexually insatiable, and besides: I know all his jokes, all his little jests, he meddles in my life, everything has to be his way. I'm a nervous wreck. In a word: he bores me stiff.

MIA: All the men I know are like that. I don't see where the problem is. I expect you to keep to your side of the bargain and carry on as before. You are a woman. Women know how to put up with things as they are!

NINA: And there's something else.

MIA: What's that?

NINA: There is an architectural bureau in my building, next door to my office.

MIA: Yes, and?

NINA: A young man works there, he's my age... he's an architect and keeps on asking me out for a drink, to the cinema. He's attractive and nice...

MIA: Oh, I see... Have you already been out with him?

NINA: No... I don't think it would be fair while I'm still seeing Boris...

MIA: Do you like this architect?

NINA: Very much.

MIA: How much?

NINA: Very, very much.

MIA: Are you sure of your feelings?

NINA: One hundred percent.

MIA: Careful now, women are sometimes inclined to imagine that they like someone, only because the gentleman in question is well-mannered, with a pleasant smile, and wears a good suit.

NINA: No, it's not that. He's a worthwhile person. And every time I meet him... I start fluttering. As if I were back in elementary school.

MIA: Well, listen... if it is so evident that you can no longer play this game and be Boris's squeeze, well... then again, if you break up with Boris, you will shove me back into the shit, he will have me by the throat

again... But then again – if true love is on the horizon I can't expect you to sacrifice yourself for us and turn away from it. Otherwise, I have always thought that love conquers all, true love. And now this is all so complicated... because of Boris and because of me.

NINA: That's why I wanted to talk with you... I am not shrewd enough... how can we unwind all this so that it will be good for you and good for me... and good for Boris.

(A long silence.)

MIA: Shit. Deep shit.

NINA: I know, I know.

(Mia turns to the audience.)

MIA: That's life for you – first I solved my own problems, and then my husband's problems, and now I have to solve the problems of my husband's girlfriend. And what makes it really funny is the fact that I really care about her and her happiness.

(Nina speaks to the audience.)

NINA: I feel even sillier than she does. I work at a marriage guidance centre as a highly respected expert. I am successful in helping people with the most serious emotional problems in their lives. And now I am reduced to asking for help from the wife of my lover.

(Nina and Mia «return» to the scene.)

(A long silence.)

NINA: Does anything occur to you?

MIA: Leave it to me! Be quiet! Can't you see I'm thinking.

(Another long silence.)

MIA: I know! I've got it!

NINA: Really?

MIA: I have the solution!

NINA: Tell me.

MIA: Slowly – wait for it – this is how it is: You have to go your own way, and build your life without this married man as your lover. Isn't that right?

NINA: Yes! That would be best for me.

MIA: I have to take responsibility for my husband, but in such a way that he gives me breathing space and becomes submissive and completely insignificant. Is that right?

NINA: Yes. That would perhaps be the best solution for you.

MIA: So, for him to leave you in peace and come back to me so that I can dominate him – it would be necessary for me to «catch» him while he is with you and «discover» that he has another woman and become deathly angry because he has been cheating on me, and tell him never to dare to appear before me again, that I don't want to spend even one night more under the same roof with him. Then he goes to his mother's place... and stays there for a month, waiting for me to soften up and take pity on him, and allow him to return home. He will come home but will no longer be of any consequence whatsoever... I shall be the master of the situation and, from that day forward, everything will be as I say because he will have been caught red-handed and be feeling as guilty as hell.

NINA: That's a great idea! But it won't be simple to act it all out – not simple at all.

MIA: If there are some things that women are good at they are shopping and acting. All we need is a good script. Do you agree?

NINA: I agree.

8. (The Museum)

(Nina, Boris)

(Boris is at the museum and Nina arrives.)

BORIS: You are late.

NINA: Sorry.

BORIS: Why did you want us to meet here? And so urgently.

NINA: I wanted us to see each other and have a talk.

BORIS: I have always hated this place... since that day when we broke up... I don't even like to think of it.

NINA: But this is where we started – our first date. This is the place where we started.

BORIS: All the same... I have deeper memories of that unhappy break-up than of the beginning. In other words, I would like it if we could go somewhere else.

NINA: We had to pay to come in, it's not a free day like Mondays.

BORIS: Yes, that's a pity.

NINA: Why are you so jumpy. Relax.

BORIS: I had a bad dream. I had a terribly bad dream.

NINA: Please don't start recounting dreams and films to me.

BORIS: It's not a dream you can talk about!

NINA: Tell me all the same.

(Silent.)

BORIS: Well... I dreamt that I was ten years old and was at my grandmother's in the country... and our neighbour there had a wonderful cherry-tree, but he would not allow us children to pick any... and so I went secretly at night to the cherry-tree, climbed up to the crown and grabbed two cherries and just as I was putting them in my mouth... I heard the thundering voice of the neighbour: «The thieves are here!»... and as he shouted I got such a fright that I fell to the ground. And as I fell the branches caught my shorts and underpants and they stayed up in the tree. And there I was suddenly, completely naked facing our neighbour, and he shouted: «Take a look at this naked thief», and all at once the

whole village was there, even one little girl whom I liked, and the neighbour once again said just look at this naked thief, and everyone burst out laughing, so that I wished that the ground would swallow me up, I was so embarrassed. I started screaming out in shame. And I kept on shouting until I woke up in a sweat, screaming... My wife woke me up.

(Nina takes a nervous look at her watch.)

NINA: And you call that a bad dream.

BORIS: A nightmare.

NINA: Just a minute – did it really happen, or was it just a dream?

BORIS: What do you mean?

NINA: Did that really happen to you during your childhood, or is it all made up?

BORIS: Look – my neighbour was real, and I really did go to my grandmother's every summer, but I never dared to climb that man's cherry-tree... he was a vicious man.

NINA: Then that is not a real dream. It's just an illusion.

BORIS: What do you mean it's not real – it was really awful.

NINA: But it never actually happened to you in reality.

BORIS: Dreams are always a mixture of the real and the unreal – they have a firm basis, something fluid... but possible.

NINA: Well alright, but you don't have to get excited about it. It's nothing.

BORIS: Like hell, it's nothing. If you only knew how embarrassed I was – all naked and humiliated like that.

NINA: But it only happened in a dream.

BORIS: While I was asleep, I didn't know it was a dream.

(Silence.)

BORIS: Well then, what did you want to talk about.

NINA: I wanted to ask you something.

BORIS: Ask me then.

(Nina takes another nervous glance at her watch.)

NINA: I shall... but let's take it easy, you know that no conversations in the world start off with the main theme.

BORIS: They taught us that at commercial college.

NINA: One should never try to force anything. Real things are said at the moment when...

(At that moment Mia comes into the museum. Boris tries to hide, appalled at her arrival, turning away to the other side.)

MIA: Ah, so this is where you are?

BORIS: What... what are you doing here?

MIA: What about you... what are you doing here?

BORIS: I have come to see this exhibition with my business partner, she is a connoisseur of the visual arts, and I am negotiating sales to their office, and...

MIA: Shame on you, you bastard! I have always been faithful to you and I find you here with this slag.

NINA: Excuse me, Madame, I neither know who you are nor why you are interrupting my conversation with this gentleman.

MIA: Shut up, you little whore - I am the legal wife of this wretched creature and I found out from reliable sources that he has been cheating on me with you for five and a half years already and I would love to slit his throat with a blunt knife.

BORIS: Mia, please, my sweet, please, I can explain everything, I didn't want to, it happened without my wanting it to, she seduced me, she crawled around after me, she has cancer... she told me she had cancer, then, the first time, the first time she dragged me off into her bed, she said she was dying and that her last wish was to sleep with me, and I couldn't

refuse her, you can't say no to someone's last wish, it would not be humane, and that's the only reason I gave in... but before that I let her know that I love you and our children and that I was doing her that service only because she was near death, and that it is the way it was, she talked me into it, against my will.

MIA: She was a death's door, you say?

BORIS: Yes. A hundred percent.

MIA: That first bonk of yours, that was five and a half years ago. If she had been at death's door, she would be dead by now.

BORIS: They found a cure and I took her to the best herbalists, they combined chemotherapy and radiation therapy, and then...

MIA: Boris!

BORIS: What.

MIA: Stop it!

BORIS: Alright, I'll stop, I've stopped, but please don't be angry.

MIA: Listen to me and don't interrupt.

BORIS: You see, I'm listening, I'm listening.

MIA: I know all about you and this little tart here, just everything. It's finished between us. I don't want to see you ever again, never! And I don't want to spend even one night under the same roof as you. Is that clear?

BORIS: Quite clear!

MIA: And now, goodbye.

(Mia moves towards the exit.)

BORIS: Wait!

(Mia pauses.)

MIA: What is it?

BORIS: But where will I go?

MIA: Wherever you want.

BORIS: I'll have to go to Mama's.

MIA: It's up to you. Goodbye!

BORIS: Wait!

MIA: What is it now!

BORIS: The general manager is coming tomorrow to visit our department... I'll need an ironed shirt, that new jacket and a tie.

MIA: Man... I don't want to see you again, ever... send your mother or one of your friends, your clothes will be in front of the door in large boxes this evening. And you can iron your own shirt.

BORIS (He turns to Nina): This is terrible, it's the end of the world. And it's all your fault. You have separated me from my wife, from my children, from my family... I am humiliated... and only because you insisted that we meet here in this stupid museum, you have seduced me and destroyed me.

NINA: Boris!

BORIS: What!

NINA: Get out of here, you unspeakable piece of rotten garbage!

(Silence.)

BORIS: But...

NINA: Get out of my sight, I never want to see you again. You make my stomach turn.

MIA: Mine too. Get lost!

BORIS: And that is thanks to me after everything I have... but, never mind, I'm going to Mama's... ah, if I had only listened to her...

(Boris goes towards the exit. He pauses. He turns towards the audience and utters his farewell monologue.)

BORIS: That's what happens to a man who wants to please everyone, a man who wants everyone around him to be happy. In the end, he takes the fall, through almost no fault of his own. I, who made

everyone happy, shall now be the victim of a permanent calamity. How can I face my mother? What can I say? How can I explain to her that life with my wife has become so impossible that I have decided to sail out of the marital harbour. It's really awful! I suppose you have all heard of the «Women's House» - that secret shelter where women can take refuge from their violent husbands. If only there were a «Men's House» as a refuge for us outcast and discarded husbands. I'll write to the Government. I'll write to that woman who is the Minister for Social Services and Inter-generational Solidarity... And now, I bid you farewell, dear witnesses to my misfortune.

(Boris exits from the scene. The women are left alone.)

MIA: Finally, we have solved that problem, too.

NINA: He was so confused and frightened. «She has cancer – she was at death's door». He was really scared. I have never seen anyone so scared.

MIA: I am so pleased that it is all over, and that you and Boris and I can start living without lies and without deception. Our lives are starting over, based on the truth and sincerity. Thank you, Nina, for everything. You were a great actress. And now I'll be off – I have to pack his things, and finally I will be able to live for a whole month without harassment.

(Mia goes towards the exit.)

NINA: Wait! It's not all over.

(Mia pauses.)

MIA: What do you mean?

NINA: The two of us still need to talk things over.

MIA: The two of us – after everything?

NINA: Yes, the two of us. I would like to talk to you as a psychologist who works in a marriage guidance centre, I would like to

help you, too. I know you need help. A friendly word at the right moment.

MIA: You want to help me? What? Help me in what?

NINA: How is Pegasus?

MIA: Which Pegasus? My horse, you mean?

NINA: Yes, I mean your horse.

MIA: Fine, he's fine.

NINA: What about the riding teacher? How is your riding teacher? Pegasus's trainer.

MIA: What are you trying to say? There's nothing... I mean... we haven't ever... only when we have been bored, but talking is no sin, just an ordinary conversation between two people who want to say something to each other, because they are desirous of a sincere, warm word...

NINA: Mia, my cousin works as a waitress at the Hippodrome Cafe. I know everything. I know about your relationship with the riding teacher, and I know why you rush off to the riding club every Saturday. Pegasus is just a front. Just like your girlfriends. But I know you really enjoy riding. More often than once a month.

MIA: There's really nothing between us, just a friendly... it's an intellectual closeness, platonic love... How do you have any right to meddle in my private life, you are the former girlfriend of my husband so why should I have to be explaining anything to you, I am...

NINA: Mia, you don't have to explain anything to me, and I have no intention of blackmailing you the way you did me. I just want to give you a small piece of advice as a psychologist from the marriage guidance centre... If you permit me, I would like to tell you.

(Silence.)

MIA: Go ahead.

NINA: You were right when you said that the best life is based on truth without lies and deception, and that is why I would advise you to put an end to that story with Pegasus's trainer as soon as possible. That is a precondition for the restoration of your peace of mind, your sense of balance, and your happiness... Believe me, I have experience.

MIA: I know, but... it's not easy. For the first time I have someone with whom I feel so close, someone who understand me, someone who showers me with attention and tenderness. It's not easy to break off with such a man. If he only had some faults.

NINA: I know it's not easy, but don't let it go on too much longer.

MIA: I won't.

NINA: So now it's goodbye.

MIA: Goodbye!

(Mia goes towards the exit.)

NINA: Mia!

(Mia stops.)

MIA: Yes.

NINA: I'm glad to have met you.

MIA: And I am glad to have met you... and thank you for the advice... I will take it, but only after a month has passed, that is when I shall allow my husband to come back to me. But only on his knees. Goodbye!

NINA: Goodbye!

- THE END -