

**Miro Gavran**

**THE DOLL**

**(A Play)**

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**Characters:**

**MARKO** - looks as though he could be about forty

**STELLA** - she looks about thirty

**Scene 1.**

(The lights come up slowly. We see a modestly furnished space that is a linked living room and kitchen. There is a box, the size of a large coffin, on the floor. The box is in the stage of being unpacked and is surrounded by pieces of crumpled paper. We see Marko trying to gather the pieces of paper into a heap. Marko bends over the box and takes out a small box, containing a remote.)

**MARKO:** Ah, here you are!

(Marko takes the remote and points it at the large box, pressing the button as if he expects some sort of reaction – but there is none. Marko puts down the remote and picks up the phone receiver, and entered a number.)

**MARKO:** Hello. . . this is winner Number Seven. Yes, the package arrived half an hour ago, your people were very careful carrying it into the flat . . . Everything's alright but – I am trying to activate the remote control, and it's not functioning. . . Batteries? Ah yes – I forgot to put them in, I am a bit excited, sorry. . . Yes, yes, I shall certainly let you know what my impressions are. . . I have studied the instructions and think that it is all clear to me. Thank you and goodbye!

(Marko puts down the receiver, finds two batteries in the small box and inserts them into the remote. He then moves away from the large box that is on the floor and points the remote at it again. He presses one of the buttons on the remote and at that moment a female figure appears from the box, and takes a semi-sitting position. Almost in fear, Marko takes a step backwards, presses the other button and the female figures straightens up.)

**STELLA:** Hello!

**MARKO:** Hello!

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** Are you going to be fostering me?

**MARKO:** Yes – I am. I am. .

**STELLA:** I am programmed to offer you my hand and to become acquainted with you, but only after you decide on my name.

**MARKO:** After I decide on your name?

**STELLA:** Exactly – you have to enter it.

**MARKO:** Yes, I know, I know.

**STELLA:** I hope that you have already chosen a name. Some name that you will enjoy saying.

**MARKO:** Yes. . . I have. . . there – I shall enter it.

(Marko enters the name on the keyboard of the remote.)

**MARKO:** I've done it.

(Stella holds out her hand.)

**STELLA:** Stella - it's a pleasure.

**MARKO:** For me too, I'm Marko. . . Welcome, Stella. Welcome here to my flat.

**STELLA:** I am pleased that you are going to foster me.

**MARKO:** Why do you use that word, isn't it silly to say that? That expression is used for taking in children, and not mature people, and you are. . . how should I put it, “a completed person“. You're not a child.

**STELLA:** There is an article about fostering in the contract. Article 11 speaks about you taking care of me like a member of your family and that, for the first six months, you will treat me as. . .

**MARKO:** Yes, I know, I know! Just the same – it's stupid to refer to me as anything like a foster parent.

**STELLA:** Not to me, it isn't. I am programmed to feel that that is the very best way.

**MARKO:** Best for whom?

**STELLA:** For you, and for me. We are partners, and something that is best for both partners is what is really best.

**MARKO:** Who taught you that?

**STELLA:** I don't know, that's how I'm programmed.

**MARKO:** And I thought you were programmed in a way that would make me happy.

**STELLA:** But that is how I am programmed. You don't have to worry about that. My man will be happy and satisfied.

**MARKO:** Are you calling me “my man“?

**STELLA:** Yes. Aren't you my man?

**MARKO:** Yes, I am., but. . . why are you so sure that I will be happy with you?

**STELLA:** Because I am programmed to do everything that is necessary to make you happy.

(He approaches Stella and sniffs at her the way a dog does when he sniffs at some suspicious object.)

**STELLA:** What are you doing?

**MARKO:** I am checking what you smell like. I want to see if you smell of rubber or of plastic.

**STELLA:** Please, there's no need to be offensive – I am not one of those primitive blow-up dolls, I am a most modern doll, constructed of renewable organic matter. I am ecologically desirable. My skin is the same as human skin in its composition. I have the fragrance of a young thirty-year-old woman who came out from under the shower ten minutes ago, dried herself and used deodorant. I must point out that - every day - I am a girl who will be as if she is fourteen days from her period, so I am prepared for passionate sexual union with a man - every day.

**MARKO:** Excellent – I shall definitely try that out this evening. Since my girlfriend walked out on me three months ago, I have got out of the way of having sex.

**STELLA:** When sex is in question, you will experience only pleasure with me.

**MARKO:** I am glad to know that you are so self-confident. Although I never really liked self-confident people.

**STELLA:** Why? It's much easier with self-confident people than with the other kind.

**MARKO:** I have never been self-confident – perhaps that is why the self-confident ones always get on my nerves.

**STELLA:** I don't understand.

**MARKO:** You don't have to. Just listen to me and that will be enough. Help me to take this rubbish out of the living room.

**STELLA:** I am not programmed for heavy physical work.

**MARKO:** Come on, don't complicate things – I wasn't trained for it either, but all the same, I have to do it sometimes. - Pick up one side of that box, I'll take the other and we will carry it out.

**STELLA:** Let me say it again – kissing, fallatio of the male sexual organ, cooking, hoovering, smiling, chatting – that is the scope of my activities. Carrying out bulky rubbish is not my job.

**MARKO:** What bulky rubbish? – this is a light box. I only need your help because it's big.

**STELLA:** My constructor won't be pleased about this.

**MARKO:** What won't she be pleased about?

**STELLA:** That you are forcing me to do work that I am not programmed for.

**MARKO:** You are programmed to obey your man and to serve him, and I am ordering you to help me carry out this box. Well?

**STELLA:** Alright then – if that is your order – I shall obey it, but I retain the right to be angry and to store this undesirable situation in my memory.

**MARKO:** Store it wherever you like, just help me. Come on!

(Marko picks up one side of the box, Stella the other, and they carry it into the next room. Then they return and Marko quickly picks up the string and the paper that the box was wrapped in, and takes it all into the next room. A moment later he returns to the living room.)

**MARKO:** Do you know what your name means?

**STELLA:** In Latin, Stella means star.

**MARKO:** Bravo — they have done a good job of filling you with knowledge.

**STELLA:** I am programmed to be similar to you as far as education is concerned. Men don't like it when women are much smarter than they are, but they don't think much of the ones who are much more stupid either.

**MARKO:** Who told you that?

**STELLA:** Barbara, my constructor and the world's greatest scientist today. She transferred her scale of values to me where judging men is involved.

**MARKO:** So that means that you think about men in the same way that the 'great scientist' Barbara does?

**STELLA:** Yes, that's right – I am her child.

**MARKO:** And what if she makes faulty judgements about men?

**STELLA:** Impossible – she is infallible. She is always right.

**MARKO:** Then it is not easy for her husband.

**STELLA:** She doesn't have a husband – she left him.

**MARKO:** And that's the sort of woman who taught you all about men.

**STELLA:** Don't bad-mouth Barbara – I am programmed not to want to listen.

**MARKO:** I thought that things would be much simpler for me with you.

**STELLA:** To think is not to know.

**MARKO:** Exactly.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Will I be your first?

**STELLA:** I don't understand the question!

**MARKO:** Will I be the first man you make love with?

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Answer me!

**STELLA:** Theoretically. . . you are the first, if I don't count the trial period.

**MARKO:** What trial period?

**STELLA:** The laboratory trial period – a sort of “technical initiation”. .

**MARKO:** What are you saying? - Surely they didn't. . .

**STELLA:** Before I earned my certificate as a complete woman, they carried out a lab experiment with me. The experiment was related to sexual flexibility.

**MARKO:** And who did it?

**STELLA:** What is it you want to know?

**MARKO:** His name! Who was that clown?

**STELLA:** I don't remember names – we were never officially introduced. We only practised the details.

**MARKO:** What did you practice?

**STELLA:** Sexual finesse.

**MARKO:** And you can't even remember his name?

**STELLA:** There were a few of them.

**MARKO:** Dammit! Disgusting! Quite disgusting!

**STELLA:** There's no reason for you to be angry – after the experiment they washed me thoroughly and disinfected me. I am not carrying even one of their bacteria.

**MARKO:** All the same – you make me feel sick – all of you. I order a doll, and it turns out not even the doll is innocent.

**STELLA:** Innocence in our civilisation is vastly over-rated, it's almost an anachronism.

**MARKO:** You must have learnt that from your creator, Barbara.

**STELLA:** Emotionally speaking, I belong to no-one except to you. So – I shall be yours and only yours.

**MARKO:** Isn't that nice!

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Listen. . . in the laboratory. . . you know, while you were practising. . . did you do it one by one, or with more of them at the same time?

**STELLA:** It lasted for a week, one by one.

**MARKO:** How many of them were there?

**STELLA:** Five men and Barbara.

**MARKO:** Barbara!

**STELLA:** She only checked my kissing skills. Nothing more than that. .

**MARKO:** They practised for a week, one by one, with a doll who could not defend herself.

**STELLA:** On the last day – before they put me in the box, they organised a party in the lab, everyone had a bit to drink and then it happened that they did not take turns in practice.

**MARKO:** But?

**STELLA:** They all wanted to together.

**MARKO:** And you let them?

**STELLA:** They didn't ask my permission.

**MARKO:** A bunch of perverts! So you have even tried out group sex. They have sent me a 24-carat whore!

**STELLA:** Calm down. I am telling you – after that they washed me and sterilised me, so that we can say that I am as good as new. As if nothing had ever happened.

**MARKO:** You are even worse than ordinary women.

**STELLA:** I had hoped that it wouldn't bother you. .

**MARKO:** Well you had false hopes! I am not a doll like you. I am a man of flesh and blood and it matters to me who my partner had sex with before me.

**STELLA:** Why is that so important?

**MARKO:** It's important. . . it just is.

**STELLA:** But why? Explain that to me.

**MARKO:** You wouldn't understand.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** And how many women have you practised with?

**MARKO:** What?



**STELLA:** With how many women have you practised sexual activity?

**MARKO:** Well, there have been . . . a few. . . in my life.

**STELLA:** Don't you know the exact number?

**MARKO:** I was not aware that you, too, could be curious.

**STELLA:** I am programmed to be interested in the things that interest my partner. That's why I would like to know the number of women with whom you have had a sexual relationship.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** You really are a bit of a pain.

**STELLA:** Tell me.

**MARKO:** In the last thirty-nine years I have had as many partners as you had in the first week of your life. . . there in the laboratory.

**STELLA:** That means that we are the same.

**MARKO:** It looks that way. . .only I have never tried it in a group.

**STELLA:** It's nothing special.

## **Scene 2.**

(The sounds of heavy breathing. A man and a woman are making love. It is dark. Their breathing quickens. Then they both have an orgasm, fairly theatrically and loudly. Their breathing gradually becomes calmer. There is silence. The lights come up. Marko, wearing a shower robe, comes out of the bedroom. He goes to the refrigerator and opens the door, takes out a can of beer and opens it. He pours the beer into a glass and drinks it. A moment later, also wrapped in a shower robe, Stella comes in from the bedroom.)

**STELLA:** Why did you get out of bed?

**MARKO:** I was thirsty. . . Men get thirsty after sex – it's nothing unusual. . . I enjoyed being with you, you really are hot stuff. By your sighs, I would say that it was good for you, too.

**STELLA:** What makes you think that?

**MARKO:** Well. . . we climaxed at the same time, together. That didn't often happen with my ex.

**STELLA:** I am programmed so that my moans follow yours.

**MARKO:** But. . . was it good for you, too. . . ?

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Dammit – Just don't tell me that you felt nothing.

**STELLA:** Your ecstasy and your excitement transfers in the same extent to me. My feelings are always proportional to yours.

**MARKO:** That's not so bad, either. . . But are you telling the truth?. . . Tell me, am I the best?

**STELLA:** The best in what?

**MARKO:** In sex, of course. We are not talking about soccer.

**STELLA:** The best in relation to whom?

**MARKO:** The best in relation to those men you "practised" with at the laboratory.

**STELLA:** I don't know how to lie, and I am afraid that you would not like a sincere answer.

**MARKO:** Never mind that – just tell me.

**STELLA:** You are not the best. The best was the young chemist from the laboratory. His body was unbelievably supple, and his fingers were soft. His heart had the highest number of beats.

**MARKO:** Doesn't it make you the least bit uncomfortable to praise him to me only five minutes after the two of us have. . .

**STELLA:** You insisted on a sincere answer.

**MARKO:** Fair enough – just what I deserve. Alright then – now tell me all about it – where do I stand on the scale of that experience of yours? If you take into account the six with whom you "practised" and me. What place would you give me?

**STELLA:** Do you think you will be happy when I express my opinion?

**MARKO:** No, I don't, but I want to hear it anyway, because I am curious. Curiosity is a characteristic of all living creatures.

**STELLA:** Are you saying that I am not a living creature?

**MARKO:** You are not a living or an inanimate creature. You are a machine, that is, a doll. . . an "active" doll. That is what I would call you. Do you agree?

**STELLA:** Expression of my opinion would not change yours.

**MARKO:** I know. Anyhow – where am I on that list, as a man? Second, third or seventh?

**STELLA:** I cannot give an opinion on Barbara, my creator, because I only kissed with her. That was her by-the-way check on of my facial capabilities, and in no way an active sexual act. So, if I take the five men I practised with and you, with whom I communicated sexually this evening, I have six value categories, and you are in fifth place.

**MARKO:** Fifth place?

**STELLA:** Yes, fifth.

**MARKO:** What about that sixth one, who was given a worse place than me, who was he?

**STELLA:** Would it be fitting for me to talk about him?

**MARKO:** Yes, it would – I look forward to hearing about the man who was worse than me.

**STELLA:** I have been programmed not to speak ill of anyone.

**MARKO:** The truth cannot be ugly. And besides – you have also been programmed to listen to me and to please me, and that order is more important that speaking nicely. So tell me, what the sixth-placed one was like?

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** He is a part-time associate of the Institute. He is eighty years old. His functions failed after two minutes of “practising”.

**MARKO:** Aha – that was it.

**STELLA:** Yes, that was it.

**MARKO:** Does that mean that I was only better than he was?

**STELLA:** I can see that you aren’t happy. I should not have told you.

**MARKO:** Yes, you should have. You should always answer when I ask you something.

**STELLA:** Couldn’t you insist on me lying to you just a little?

**MARKO:** Why?

**STELLA:** So you’d be happier.

**MARKO:** No, don’t do that

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Maria. . . my ex. . . I never really knew for sure what she was thinking. Except when she started nagging me about it being time for us to make a baby. She insisted that we would be happier with a child.

**STELLA:** Women and men have children, that's natural.

**MARKO:** But it wouldn't be natural to me to have a crying child waiting when I come home from home that started jumping around on my head, that I would have to serve like a slave and that one day he and I. . . With my father. . . we often argued, he got on my nerves, and I got on his. . . we were different in every way. I did not want to go through that with my children. . . that lack of understanding. He didn't support me in anything – I wanted to enrol at the naval academy, to travel around the world. He didn't let me. Today, I am an unimportant clerk in a primary school. Secretary to the principal – I'm just a man who moves unimportant papers around from one drawer to another.

**STELLA:** What about her? What is she?

**MARKO:** Who do you mean?

**STELLA:** Your ex.

**MARKO:** She's a maths teacher. She came to our school as a six-month replacement eight years ago. She was so good-looking, so attractive and self-aware that I did not even dare to try to get close to her in those six months, although she appealed to me from the very beginning. It was only on her last day at the school, when she came into my office to say good-bye and to pick up her work record, that she looked me in the eye and smiled and said that she was sorry that we would not be seeing each other any more. I summoned up the courage and said that it did not have to be that way if she wanted to go with me to the cinema that evening. She said yes. After a week had gone by she moved here into my flat. And everything was wonderful until something more than two years ago when my lovely mathematician calculated that her biological clock was ticking and that she wanted to have a baby with me.

**STELLA:** That's all so normal.

**MARKO:** Please, I don't think you are the one who should be talking about what's normal.

**STELLA:** Why not?

**MARKO:** Because. . . Never mind. . . Anyway, when my Maria began with that story about a child or even children, everything started going downhill. And then finally, one day, standing right where you are standing now, she asked me directly if I had ever thought in those seven years that we had been together that we would one day become husband and wife and have a child. I answered her very sincerely: "No, I have never wanted to have children with you."

Then she went very pale, walked into the bedroom, took two travel bags, collected her clothes and books and left me without a word of explanation.

**STELLA:** Good for her.

**MARKO:** Why?

**STELLA:** Because she realised that she had no future with you.

**MARKO:** But she had the present. Look – you and I are living our present, we are not thinking about the future, and are we lacking anything?

**STELLA:** That's different.

**MARKO:** Why is it different?

**STELLA:** Because, after all, I am just a doll.

**MARKO:** And that is just what I like most about you. The fact that you are just a doll. Although even you sometimes say things that I don't like and don't expect.

**STELLA:** Would you like me to keep quiet?

**MARKO:** No. I didn't even like it when Maria went silent. Female silence can be so thundering that a man's blood freezes in his veins. Do you understand?

**STELLA:** No, I don't. How can silence be thundering? That is impossible, that's absurd!

**MARKO:** But when women are in question, nothing is impossible.

**STELLA:** So that's the way it is.

**MARKO:** Exactly.

**STELLA:** Are you still angry at her?

**MARKO:** Yes, I am. She walked out on me so suddenly.

**STELLA:** It was hardly sudden if she had been trying to talk you into a baby for two years.

**MARKO:** You know what – you really can be a pain in the neck.

**STELLA:** I am simply drawing a logical conclusion.

**MARKO:** And that can give someone a hard time. Why are you like that?

**STELLA:** I have to be what I am.

**MARKO:** We all have to be what we are. Unfortunately.

**STELLA:** What about your father – are you still on bad terms with him?

**MARKO:** He died suddenly – the day after I finished high school. . . I was still a kid. . . he was gone before things between us could be settled. It was as though he ran away from my life.

### **Scene 3.**

(Marko is reading the paper, the doll is tidying up the table and putting plates in the dishwasher.)

**MARKO:** Can't you be a bit quieter?

**STELLA:** What?

**MARKO:** Stacking those dishes.

**STELLA:** I cook for you, tidy up for you, and you're not satisfied?

**MARKO:** I am satisfied, I just want some peace when I am reading the paper.

**STELLA:** Why don't you wait with reading the paper until I stack these dishes?

**MARKO:** And why do you have to come back at every question of mine with three questions of your own?

**STELLA:** Because I am looking for logical answers and logical explanations for all the processes that take place between us.

**MARKO:** Did you say "logical answers" and "logical explanations"?

**STELLA:** Exactly.

**MARKO:** Life is not always logical, and what is especially illogical is what happens between a man and a woman.

**STELLA:** Why's that?

**MARKO:** Why's what?.

**STELLA:** I'm not sure that that is a logical explanation.

**MARKO:** I know.

**STELLA:** Can't you give me an answer based on a collection of logical conditions.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** What was your first question? And what are we fighting about anyhow?

**STELLA:** We are not fighting, but I noticed the illogical nature or absurdity that derives from the fact that I cooked the lunch, which you ate with enjoyment when you came home from work, and I started to fill the dish-washer after that but you - who did not cook the lunch and did not tidy up afterwards - took the newspaper and even started complaining that I was making a noise. In answer to that, I pointed out that it was illogical and then you started to relativise logic as far as the male-female relationship was concerned.

**MARKO:** And what were you expecting?

**STELLA:** I am programmed to expect your satisfaction and a pleasant conversation after everything that I do, and not to have to listen to complaints about noise that cannot be avoided, because the eating utensils are metal and the plates are ceramic so they make unpleasant sounds.

**MARKO:** Does that mean that you are programmed to expect that we talk now, instead of me reading the paper?

**STELLA:** Exactly. .

**MARKO:** So re-programme yourself a little and learn that I like to read the paper after a meal and not to talk to anyone, not even you.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** Is that what you did with Maria, too?

**MARKO:** What do you mean?

**STELLA:** Is that how you behaved with her after lunch?

(A long silence. Marko sighs deeply.)

**MARKO:** Listen. . . I lived alone for years before Maria moved into this flat and I simply – I have become used to reading the paper after lunch, and not to have anyone talking to me about things that don't interest me. I am a man and I like to read about what's happening here and throughout the world. I don't have the money to travel, but at least I can find out in the paper how people are living elsewhere.

**STELLA:** So you didn't like to talk with her after lunch either?

**MARKO:** No, I didn't – and what of it?

**STELLA:** Then that was not a really shared life.

**MARKO:** Why not?

**STELLA:** Because you excluded her.

**MARKO:** Nonsense! Men and women aren't the same. We men know that we are not the same, we are aware of it and admit it, but women behave as if their criteria have to apply to us, too. They simply don't understand us, or they don't want to understand us. .

**STELLA:** You made big mistakes in your relationship with Maria, and that's why she left you and that's why you are still carrying the torch for her.

**MARKO:** What on earth makes you think that?

**STELLA:** It's obvious. You are suffering. You often mention her, and that is the best sign that you are not over her.

**MARKO:** But that's logical after a break-up. . . it always lasts a while. . . it is never over in one day.

**STELLA:** I know.

**MARKO:** How would you know?

**STELLA:** It is built into me that I simply know.

**MARKO:** Even without personal experience?

**STELLA:** Even without personal experience.

**MARKO:** Thanks to your creator, Barbara. .

**STELLA:** Exactly. When she left her husband, she, too, went through that phase of quiet suffering and loneliness, only to be even stronger and happier afterwards.

**MARKO:** Don't lie! You are talking nonsense! It wasn't the way she says it was.

**STELLA:** I beg your pardon! How can you say that, how can you doubt what Barbara says, which is always unquestionable?

**MARKO:** Too right I can – because your Barbara is also inclined to self-deceit and false presentation of herself.



**STELLA:** That's impossible!

**MARKO:** It certainly is possible. I googled her name and I found out that she divorced her husband four years ago and filled all the tabloids with her emotional story. She was already a star then in the scientific world. I also found an interview with her former husband in which he said that she never left the laboratory while they were married, that she was obsessed with her job, that the fame went to her head, and that she had no time for intimate life. When she would come back from work and when they were finally at home together, she was the one who quickly ate her lunch, read the paper without talking with her husband and went back to her lab, leaving her partner without the communication that he yearned for so much.

**STELLA:** That's a lie!

**MARKO:** That's his version of the truth.

**STELLA:** Barbara built into me her view of their relationship.

**MARKO:** We never see ourselves in the right light. Others always see us better – the ones looking on from the side.

**STELLA:** That's what I think about you, too.

**MARKO:** What?

**STELLA:** That you can't or don't want to see yourself the way you really are. That's why you are telling me stories that aren't true.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Now you are even being offensive towards me. . . Alright then, go on, tell me. . . how do you see me? Me and my relationship with my ex.

**STELLA:** It's all quite clear.

**MARKO:** If it's all so clear – tell me in a few sentences with those Barbara experiential senses just how do you see me and my Maria.

**STELLA:** Are you ready to hear it, even if you won't like it perhaps?

**MARKO:** I am ready. Go ahead.

**STELLA:** You were with her for seven years and even though you are convinced that you loved her, you never gave up yourself and your egoism, not for a moment. You didn't want children, even though you knew that children were essential for her fulfilment and happiness. When Maria left you, you started to feel tormented. You entered that contest with the prototype dolls,

because you never got over her. If you had, you would have approached some other woman. You decided on a doll, and not a real woman, because you thought that you would have no obligations to a doll, and as a selfish and egoistic man you do not want any obligations, you want to gratify only yourself, and that means that you do not know what real love is. Love is giving, and not receiving, love is when we are happy because of the happiness of the person we love, and not because of our own happiness.

**MARKO:** Come on, that's enough! Don't say any more!

**STELLA:** Did I say anything wrong?

**MARKO:** No, you didn't.

**STELLA:** Then why are you saying that I should stop talking?

**MARKO:** For that very reason.

**STELLA:** I don't understand.

**MARKO:** You don't have to. You don't have to understand everything. .

**STELLA:** Are you angry at me?

**MARKO:** No, I'm not.

**STELLA:** Then you're angry at yourself.

**MARKO:** Perhaps.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** I have another possible logical explanation of why you decided on a doll. Do you want to hear it?

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Tell me!

**STELLA:** You decided on a doll and not a normal woman, because you did not want any other woman to take Maria's place.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** That contradicts what you said earlier just now.

**STELLA:** What was that?

**MARKO:** About me not knowing that real love is.

**STELLA:** Both conclusions are equally correct as probabilities and I arrived at both of them on the basis of the same data about you and about her.

**MARKO:** It's obvious that even you are beginning to understand that life is not so simple and one-dimensional. Neither black nor white.

**STELLA:** I know what I know. I know what I can access.

**MARKO:** That's the way it is with my conceptions.

**STELLA:** But you are nervy, sad and unhappy.

**MARKO:** Perhaps I am, but so what?

**STELLA:** Would you like to have sex?

**MARKO:** Why are you asking me that now?

**STELLA:** That's the way I am programmed, to offer sex to the nervy, sad and unhappy man whom I have the obligation to make happy. You are simple creatures who always have sex on your minds and it always helps to improve your moods.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Eh — well, you see — I don't feel like having sex. And definitely not with you and definitely not at this moment.

**STELLA:** That's impossible!

**MARKO:** It's possible.

**STELLA:** Up until now, you have always wanted sex.

**MARKO:** Well, for the moment, I have had it up to here with sex.

**STELLA:** Are you ill?

**MARKO:** No, I'm not. What about you?

**STELLA:** I can't be ill.

**MARKO:** But you can be out-of-order. You can break down.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** I have just conducted an analysis of our conversation and I have concluded that you are angry at me.

**MARKO:** That's a sound conclusion!

#### **Scene 4.**

(Stella is working out in the room. There is a mat on the floor and she is doing push-ups, knee-bends and stretching exercises. Marko comes in from the bedroom.)

**MARKO:** What are you doing?

**STELLA:** I'm exercising.

**MARKO:** Why would you do that?

**STELLA:** I have to – so that my skin remains smooth and my body flexible .

**MARKO:** I thought that that would not be important to you.

**STELLA:** It's important for everybody to exercise, and also for me. You should do a work-out, too.

**MARKO:** You think so?

**STELLA:** Yes, I do.

**MARKO:** Why?

**STELLA:** You're always in slow motion. In the four months that I have been with you, you have gained three kilos. That's not good.

**MARKO:** It's because you cook regular meals for me.

**STELLA:** It's because you are so sedentary. You should join a gym.

**MARKO:** I have neither the money nor the will to socialise with men at gyms.

**STELLA:** Then exercise here with me. That won't cost you anything.

**MARKO:** That would be even sillier.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Listen, I would like to talk to you about something.

**STELLA:** I'm listening.

**MARKO:** Forget about exercising now. It makes me jumpy when someone is doing something when I am trying to talk to them.

(STELLA stops exercising.)

**STELLA:** Is that better?

**MARKO:** Yes. . . Look – it's my birthday tomorrow. My fortieth birthday. Otherwise, while I lived alone, I did not like celebrating my birthdays, but Maria always made a cake for that day and an especially fine lunch. . . and every time. . . she gave me a present. And it always made me happy. She knew how to pick out the right thing.

**STELLA:** And – you are now expecting that of me?

**MARKO:** Well. . . I would like to receive a present from you.

**STELLA:** I can offer you more vigorous sex, and that would surely please you.

**MARKO:** I have had more than enough of that with you.

**STELLA:** Isn't sex with me good for you, am I not pleasing you anymore?

**MARKO:** You are pleasing me, but it's not all about sex. It's a little like too much of a good thing.

**STELLA:** Should we reduce it?

**MARKO:** I didn't say that either. Now we are talking about my birthday and about the present I am expecting from you. After all, you are my partner.

**STELLA:** So sex would not be a good present?

**MARKO:** I wouldn't say it wouldn't be, it simply is not essential for me to feel good tomorrow.

**STELLA:** I don't know what else I can do for you. I am searching and searching and searching. There's nothing about birthdays in my programme.

**MARKO:** Of course there isn't – obviously your Barbara can forget something, too. Perhaps her former husband taught her to receive gifts, but not to give them.

**STELLA:** I cannot listen to you saying anything against Barbara, I simply can't!

**MARKO:** Alright, I won't any more.

**STELLA:** How we will solve the problem called a gift?

**MARKO:** It's not a problem – it is something normal between a man and a woman – but sometimes they do have a problem in choosing the right gift. I just like to receive a present, I like to be surprised. It wasn't always like that. . . Maria got me used to it and I would like to have the same sort of birthday tomorrow as the ones over the last seven years, when she lived with me.

**STELLA:** Well then, what do I have to do?

**MARKO:** I will give you some money. Tomorrow, when I am at work, you go to the shop across the road and buy me some sort of present.

**STELLA:** What sort of present?

**MARKO:** Something that you think I would like.

**STELLA:** I don't have any opinion about such things. You have to tell me what to buy and I'll buy it. .

**MARKO:** But it wouldn't be a surprise then if I knew ahead of time what you were going to buy me.

**STELLA:** Exactly. So the problem has no solution.

**MARKO:** No solution? Couldn't you pick out something yourself?

**STELLA:** No, I couldn't. I am not programmed to buy gifts.

**MARKO:** Go to hell!

**STELLA:** Why are you angry with me? I have my limits – I'm not to blame for being the way I am.

**MARKO:** I know. Alright then, I wanted a gift and a surprise. But you could at least try a little.

**STELLA:** Nobody's perfect.

**MARKO:** You've finally said something smart.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** I'm sorry.

**MARKO:** For what?

**STELLA:** For not being able to make you happy on your birthday.

**MARKO:** Never mind.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Hey, wait a minute – I have an idea!

**STELLA:** What idea?

**MARKO:** I will write three possible presents down on a piece of paper, or even five or six possible presents, and you will then choose the one to buy for me. Have it wrapped nicely, and when I come home – you can wish me a happy birthday and give me my present.

**STELLA:** But how do I choose, how do I choose it?

**MARKO:** You choose whatever you like.

**STELLA:** What criteria do I use to choose one of the proposed gifts?

**MARKO:** I don't know – it can be just by chance – as when one plays roulette. .

**STELLA:** And what if you don't like what the roulette chooses? In that case, will you be angry with me?

**MARKO:** No, not at all. When Maria was choosing something for me, I did not always get what I wanted, but I was still pleased at her thoughtfulness, because she had shown that she cared about me.

**STELLA:** You're thinking about her again.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** I think about her all the time.

**STELLA:** Why don't you phone her?

**MARKO:** Why doesn't she phone me?

**STELLA:** Is it important who phones first?

**MARKO:** It is to me.

**STELLA:** I don't understand.

**MARKO:** You don't understand because you could not possibly understand.

**STELLA:** That's not logical.

**MARKO:** There often is no logic in what happens between a man and a woman – that’s why it is all complicated and screwed up.

**STELLA:** But – do you care about her?

**MARKO:** I do care – but I am angry that she just got up and left.

**STELLA:** But you don’t want to phone her?

**MARKO:** No, I don’t.

**STELLA:** How can you solve the problem then? How can you talk to her without calling her on the phone?

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** I think I know how.

**STELLA:** Tell me!

**MARKO:** We used to go for a coffee at the “Eldorado” Café after work. That’s where we went out together for the first time, after the cinema. It was my favourite café. But since we broke up, I haven’t been there even once, to avoid running into her.

**STELLA:** That’s just silly.

**MARKO:** What’s silly?

**STELLA:** It’s silly that you don’t go there so you won’t meet her, but what you would like is to meet her.

**MARKO:** Yes. . . perhaps you’re right. Perhaps I should drop in to the “Eldorado”, but then again. . . perhaps it’s better to forget all about it instead of opening up old wounds.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** There’s another problem connected with your birthday present.

**MARKO:** What problem is that?

**STELLA:** I am programmed to be a home-maker and lover who stays in the flat, the kitchen and the bed. I am programmed to leave the flat only in cases when it is very important for my partner.

**MARKO:** This is very important for your partner.



**STELLA:** How can I know that it is very important? Don't you realise that my going out is not without risk? It could happen that my power runs down for a moment, that people think I am dead – and then discover that I am a doll.

**MARKO:** Listen, my dear Stella, this is important for my happiness, and you are programmed to make me happy. It could also happen to me that I have a stroke or a heart attack in the street, but I still go to work every day.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Why don't you say something?

**STELLA:** Because I don't know if you are right.

(The phone rings and Marko lifts the receiver.)

**MARKO:** Hello. . . oh, Mama, it's you. . . How are things with you?. . . Thank you, but it's not my birthday until tomorrow. . . Exactly – I was born on the seventeenth, but today is not the seventeenth, it's the sixteenth. . . It's not important, Mama, you can wish me a happy birthday again tomorrow. . . These forty years have flown past for me, too. . . No, I am not in contact with Maria. . . Why do you say a wasted life?. . . I liked her, too. . . Perhaps I made a mistake, and perhaps I didn't. . . You're sure that I made a mistake. . . Well, I am not quite so sure. . . Why do you think I shall never find such a nice girl again – as a matter of fact, I have just started keeping company with an even nicer girl than Maria. . . No, I'm not joking, we love each other, she loves me, I love her, and she's here with me now. . . Why don't you believe me?. . . I'm serious – we get on wonderfully and everything. . . It's serious. . . Of course she's honest and reliable. . . I can't put her on the phone. . . that wouldn't be. . . You insist. . . But, believe me, I can't. . . She's here, but. . . Wait, I'll ask her if she can talk to you, just wait a second. . .

(Marko puts his hand over the microphone and starts speaking in a low voice.)

**MARKO:** Listen, my mother is on the phone, just say hello to her briefly and confirm that you are my girlfriend, that we love each other and nothing more. . . Can you do that?

**STELLA:** Alright.

**MARKO:** Hello, Mama, this is my girlfriend. . . Her name is Stella. . . here she is. . .

(Marko hands the receiver to Stella and she takes it and puts it to her ear.)

**STELLA:** Hello, I'm Stella, and I confirm that I am your son's girlfriend and that we love each other. . . I am pleased that you are pleased, and what pleases you pleases me. . . I do the woman's work around the flat – I wash, tidy up, make him happy, and fulfil his wishes. . . What degree do I hold?

(Marko rushes to Stella in panic and covers the receiver with his hand.)

**MARKO:** Say Information Science.

**STELLA:** In Information Science. . . Are we thinking about children?

(Marko shakes his head in negation.)

**STELLA:** No, we are not thinking about children. My analysis tells me that Marko should have had children with Maria and he would now be a father in his fortieth year. . . Ah, you think so, too. . . How old am I?

**MARKO:** Thirty.

**STELLA:** I'm thirty. . . Do I want to have children with your son? – Unfortunately, I can't give birth to children. . . It's not a question of illness, I am simply not programmed to give birth. . .

(Marko grabs his head in his hands.)

**STELLA:** We have not discussed adoption, but I will do whatever makes him happy, because. . .

(Marko literally snatches the receiver from her hand.)

**MARKO:** Mama, Stella likes to make jokes, but we have just started out and it's too soon for all that. . . Forgive me, but we are on our way to the cinema, we'll talk tomorrow, call me on my cell phone! Bye, Mama, bye!

(Marko puts down the receiver.)

**MARKO:** What's gotten into you? Babbling on such nonsense – Mama is in a state of shock!

**STELLA:** I have not been programmed for conversation with the partner's mother.

**MARKO:** Another thing they forgot.

**STELLA:** Did I make a lot of mistakes?

**MARKO:** Yes, you did, but never mind.

**STELLA:** I am sorry.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** From when you started fostering me until today, have I made a lot of mistakes in other matters?

**MARKO:** It's not so important now. And don't call our life together "fostering" – it bothers me.

**STELLA:** But I know that you signed a contract with the agency about fostering me for six months and I know that you could sign a contract about having me permanently only after those six months. I know that your obligation is to keep a diary about how I behave and I know that if I don't satisfy you that you can send me back to the agency and let them know that I do not suit you.

**MARKO:** And – what about it?

**STELLA:** That is the reason that I am interested in whether I am satisfying you and whether I have made a lot of mistakes in the fostering period.

**MARKO:** You have not made a lost of mistakes.

**STELLA:** I am pleased to hear it.

**MARKO:** But, you haven't been faultless either.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** Can I ask you how it was that I ended up belonging to you and not to somebody else.

**MARKO:** There was a competition on the Internet for the first ten dolls that the agency claimed could be a brilliant replacement for real women. Only single men between the ages of thirty-five and forty could enter. I had to write my biography, prove that I lived alone and that I met the conditions for "fostering". After they selected me, I had to sign a contract on discretion and secrecy. I must not tell practically anyone that you are a doll; otherwise I lose all my property, and that means this flat, and I shall never be able to get another doll manufactured by that agency in the future. I was lucky enough to be one of the ten candidates selected, even though they received thousands of applications. I was under number seven, just as you were registered under number seven. The ten of you – you are a trial series, you were not for sale, because they were not sure about your quality and efficacy. After this trial, they will start up mass production, and then every doll will costs as much as an expensive motor car or house. . . And I was given you free of charge, on the basis of my autobiography.

**STELLA:** It was probably Barbara who read your autobiography. . . she probably selected you.

**MARKO:** No doubt.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Are you pleased that you were chosen to belong to me?

**STELLA:** I cannot know that.

**MARKO:** Why not?

**STELLA:** Because I don't know what the other nine men selected in the competition are like.

**MARKO:** I don't know what the other dolls are like, either, the ones they received, and if anyone asked me if I were pleased with you I know what I would say.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** Well then, what would you say?

**MARKO:** I won't say, that's too intimate a question.

### **Scene 5.**

(Stella and Marko are sitting at the table playing chess. There is a long silence. Stella makes her move. Marko moves his hand towards one of the figures, but decides against it and withdraws his hand. After thinking for a while, he moves his hand again and moves another figure. Stella responds quickly to his move and takes one of his pawns.)

**STELLA:** You missed that.

**MARKO:** Damn it!

**STELLA:** I think you're going to lose again.

**MARKO:** We'll see.

**STELLA:** I have taken two of your pawns and one rook, and you haven't taken anything of mine yet and that reinforces my conviction that I shall soon beat you once again.

**MARKO:** One never knows who is going to win.

**STELLA:** We have played nineteen games up until now and I have won nineteen times. The position on the board at this moment in this twentieth game looks far from ideal for you, so – dialectically speaking, we can soon expect my twentieth consecutive win.

**MARKO:** Don't be so sure. In sport, there is always hope – hope that we will win even when dialectics is against us.

**STELLA:** Where chess is concerned, my IQ is thirty percentage points higher than yours, and that means that you will lose again.

**MARKO:** And I say again that a man can always hope and pray to God that, with a little luck, he will win.

**STELLA:** Pray to God? - You said you could always pray to God?

**MARKO:** That's right.

**STELLA:** Does that mean that you are religious and believe in God?

**MARKO:** No, it doesn't.

**STELLA:** Why do you pray then, if you aren't religious and if you don't believe in God?

**MARKO:** Just in case. From habit. When I was a child, I used to pray to God and I still have the habit. At the end of secondary school, when my father died so suddenly – I definitely had my doubts about God.

**STELLA:** What you do is silly and absurd. People who pray to God are the ones who believe in God, and not those who doubt that God exists.

**MARKO:** Hope and prayer cost nothing.

**STELLA:** If you don't believe in God, then you are an atheist, and atheists don't pray.

**MARKO:** It's true that atheists don't pray. . . perhaps I am an atheist, but. . . that doesn't have anything to do with the fact that sometimes I believe and sometimes I don't, that I sometimes say a prayer that has remained in my head since childhood. Everyone is entitled to hope – both the believers and the atheists.

**STELLA:** Why aren't you a believer?

**MARKO:** Because believers are ridiculous.

**STELLA:** What's ridiculous about them?

**MARKO:** Everyone who believes in God is ridiculous to me, because there is no tangible proof of his existence, not even one.

**STELLA:** Then you really are a true atheist, and that means that you believe the world came into existence from the Big Bang.

**MARKO:** Yes – I believe that.

**STELLA:** And where is the proof that it all came about because of the Big Bang?

**MARKO:** I've no idea. . . That's what great scientists believe.

(Marko makes a move. Without giving it much thought, Stella makes her move, too.)

**STELLA:** And where do they find the proof for that conviction?

**MARKO:** Everything must have become from something, to start out from something.

**STELLA:** I have received all the knowledge of the great world religions from Hinduism and Buddhism to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, I am familiar with Darwin's theory of evolution and the theory of the Big Bang. If I was a man like you – I would rather believe that I am God's creation, rather than the outcome of the Big Bang.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Perhaps you're right. . . but I have been taught all my life to think rationally and scientifically.

**STELLA:** Then tell me how can a "bang" exist, if no ear exists to hear it. The cosmos is deaf. If nothing existed prior to the bang, how could something come out of nothing? In other words – how can everything come out of nothing? I can understand that a firecracker explodes, or a barrel of gunpowder, or a munitions store, but it is not clear to me how NOTHING can explode, and that all the stars and this world could have come from nothing. . . from that unproven explosion.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Listen – I am not a philosopher and I am not a scientist and I don't plan to exhaust myself with questions about the beginning of the world.

**STELLA:** But you said that you're an atheist.

**MARKO:** I expressed myself wrongly. It would have been more precise to say that I am not a practical believer or a convinced atheist.

**STELLA:** What does that mean?

**MARKO:** Just that.

**STELLA:** How can I define you now?

**MARKO:** You can't. I am a man who doubts a little and believes a little. I am not sure where the truth lies.

(Marko makes a move.)

**STELLA:** That's no good.

**MARKO:** Do you mean my attitudes on life and faith?

**STELLA:** No, I mean the move that you just made.

(STELLA makes her move.)

**STELLA:** Check-mate! You have lost again!

**MARKO:** Wait! - Damn both you and your talk of religion, and God, and the bang and the atheists! You got me all confused.

**STELLA:** That's not why you lost.

**MARKO:** Of course that's why I lost. Instead of concentrating on the chess board, I had to do some hard thinking about questions which can't even be clearly answered by philosophers.

**STELLA:** In any case, you would have lost – because you always lose to me.

**MARKO:** Don't talk like that – I will beat you one day, and you will see that there are no rules in sport.

**STELLA:** If you lose twenty times in a row, then that's a rule.

**MARKO:** It's not a rule, because there's always a chance that I will beat you. .

**STELLA:** You never will.

**MARKO:** Yes I will – sooner or later. Let's play another game!

(Marko sets out the figures.)

**STELLA:** I think this is unnecessary and pointless. You are only torturing yourself. If you like, I can let you win.

**MARKO:** Why did you say that now? You're insulting me.

**STELLA:** I said it because I can see it's important to you to win, while it's all the same to me whether I win or lose.

**MARKO:** I would like to win, but not if you let me.

**STELLA:** But if I don't let you, you will never win.

**MARKO:** My God, how irritating you are! You can't talk with me like that, you can't be so obstinate with me.

**STELLA:** You're angry with me again. Would you like some sex to calm you down.

**MARKO:** You really are perverted.

**STELLA:** What have I done wrong now?

(Marko stands up crossly from the table.)

**MARKO:** I am going to take a walk to have a bit of a spell from you.

**STELLA:** It's raining, and you don't like walking in the rain.

**MARKO:** Well, I shall walk despite the rain, just so as not to be with you here.

### Scene 6.

(Stella is sitting at the table, which is set for Marko's meal. She is motionless and is staring at the empty chair across from her. That lasts quite some time. The front door is heard opening and Marko comes into the flat. He is wearing a macintosh, and carrying a briefcase.)

**STELLA:** You're late.

**MARKO:** I know.

(Marko takes off his macintosh.)

**STELLA:** Your lunch has got cold, should I heat it up?

**MARKO:** No, don't, I'm not hungry.

**STELLA:** But have been gone for a long time, so you must be hungrier than when you come home an hour earlier.

**MARKO:** I'm telling you – I'm not hungry.

**STELLA:** But the meal is ready and. . .

**MARKO:** That's enough! Stop nagging me! I don't feel like food, and I don't feel like conversation!



(Silence.)

**STELLA:** Did someone upset you?

**MARKO:** I heard something that I didn't like and it spoiled my day.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** And who's to blame for that?

**MARKO:** You are. It's your fault.

**STELLA:** Me?

**MARKO:** Yes, you.

**STELLA:** That can't be possible! How can I be to blame?

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** I went to the "Eldorado", to that café where I used to go with Maria.

**STELLA:** And. . . what happened there?

**MARKO:** I met her.

**STELLA:** How nice – that's what you wanted. Did you tell her that you miss her and that you still love her?

**MARKO:** No, I didn't.

**STELLA:** Why not?

**MARKO:** She was not by herself.

**STELLA:** But?

**MARKO:** She was with her new boyfriend. She introduced me to him – to that arrogant clown, and she told me with a smile that they were getting married next month.

**STELLA:** She wanted to marry you.

**MARKO:** Yes, she did. But this jerk of hers has been working in America for years. After they marry, he will be going back to America, and after the birth, she and the baby will be moving to be with him in Denver.

**STELLA:** What birth? What baby?

**MARKO:** She's pregnant. She's expecting a baby with him.

**STELLA:** She always wanted a child.

**MARKO:** Yes, she did.

**STELLA:** So that's good then.

**MARKO:** Good for whom?

**STELLA:** For her, of course.

**MARKO:** You don't understand anything. It was the longest ten minutes in my life. She offered me a drink – I said that I couldn't stay because I was looking for a friend, and I ran out of the café. It was terrible. She wrote me off and found a new man so quickly, and she even got herself pregnant. The slut! That's women for you.

**STELLA:** Why are you angry at her – you always said that you didn't want marriage or a child and she always said that she wanted both. So isn't what happened quite logical?

**MARKO:** Listen – if I hear the word logical from you again I will pull those batteries out of your back! Do I make myself clear?

**STELLA:** I'm sorry, I did not want to make you angry. But I really don't understand your rage.

**MARKO:** You don't have to understand anything, all I'm asking is that you keep quiet. Can you do that?

**STELLA:** Yes, I can.

(A long silence.)

**MARKO:** I should have. . . I should have gone to the "Eldorado" earlier, I should have proposed to her, I should have made a baby with her, I should have lived a different life, and not like this. . . .

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** That child should have been my child. Do you know why. . . why I didn't want a child?

**STELLA:** Because you don't like children.

**MARKO:** No – I convinced myself of that. But that is not at all true. . . I was subconsciously angry at my father who just "disappeared" from my life one day. . . I was afraid that something like that could happen to my child, that, without wanting to, I would desert him. .

**STELLA:** You are not God and you are not a prophet and you cannot know the future. If other people shared your fears, the human race would die out.

**MARKO:** You're right. I see now that I made a mistake, but. . . it's too late now.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Listen – tomorrow I shall take you shopping and buy you the loveliest dress they have. And then you will go with me to the “Eldorado” Café.

**STELLA:** Why?

**MARKO:** I want Maria and that bloke of hers to see you. I want them to see that I have someone younger and more beautiful than she is.

**STELLA:** Will that help you to be less angry and less sad that you are now?

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** No, it won't. . . Nothing can help me anymore. When you screw up. . . You're right though – going to the café would be a stupid idea. It will be easier for me if I never see her again for as long as I live. Never.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** A bad day, a terribly bad day. Luckily, I have you. You will comfort me.

(STELLA approaches him and gently strokes his face.)

**STELLA:** I will do everything you want me to, just so that you are happy.

**MARKO:** Thank you. .

**STELLA:** You don't have to thank me, that's how I am programmed.

(He roughly pushes away her hand.)

**MARKO:** I told you never to use that word “programmed”!

**STELLA:** I'm sorry. .

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** Are you angry again?

**MARKO:** Yes, I am.

**STELLA:** Am I to blame?

**MARKO:** Yes, you are. But not only you.

**STELLA:** Why am I to blame?

**MARKO:** Because you keep on asking unnecessary questions like a small child. . . And it's your fault that you advised me to go the "Eldorado" and to look for Maria.

**STELLA:** I wanted you to be happy.

**MARKO:** That's what I wanted, too.

(Marko sits at the table and starts reading the paper.)

**STELLA:** Why have you been reading the paper so often these last days and watching TV more often than you usually do?

**MARKO:** Because the election campaign is under way in our country. A new government is being elected. I have to see what's happening on the political scene. . . When the campaign ends, the elections will follow and everyone will vote and choose the people who will lead us over the next four years.

**STELLA:** Who will you be voting for?

**MARKO:** I don't know. I haven't made up my mind yet.

**STELLA:** Who have you voted for before?

**MARKO:** It depends – we had local elections two years ago. The last two times it turned out that when I voted for the right, the left won, and when I voted for the left, the right won.

**STELLA:** How could that have happened?

**MARKO:** It seems that I always support the losers.

**STELLA:** What about Maria – who did she vote for in those two elections.

**STELLA:** The opposite of me.

**STELLA:** So she voted for the winners?

**MARKO:** That's the way it turned out somehow. . . Why do you keep on asking me about her?

**STELLA:** Because she is the subject you talk about most frequently. I would like to make you happy, and I feel that you were happier with Maria than you are with me. I would like to have her knowledge and her capabilities. .

## Scene 7.

(Marko is alone in the living-room, in the middle of a telephone call.)

**MARKO:** ...I'm sorry, Mama, but I can't promise that. . . we do love each other, but we have not talked yet about getting married. . . The fact that we live together does not mean that we will marry. . . But I am certain about my intentions. . . I know that I am forty, but. . . For Sunday lunch? – I can come, but I am not sure about Stella. . . I know that you want to meet her, but she is not ready for it yet. . . I am not ashamed of my own mother, how can you even think such a thing?. . . No, I am not ashamed of my new girlfriend either. . . I promise to speak with her about it. . .

(Stella comes in and sits at the table.)

**MARKO:** I can't say with certainty that Stella will be coming with me. . . I don't know what her obligations are, or what she has planned. . . No, she's not here right now. . . Will you stop saying that time is passing me by and that I will be fifty in ten years time, and sixty in twenty years, I can add up myself, you don't have to force me in that way. . . I promise that I shall phone you and let you know if she can come. . . I will certainly come. . . What do you mean that I am unimportant?. . . Of course you would like to see us together. . . Alright, I'll call you. . . take care Mama. Bye!

(Marko puts down the receiver and sighs deeply.)

**STELLA:** You lied again to your mother about me not being at home.

**MARKO:** I had to.

**STELLA:** Why do you lie so often?

**MARKO:** Everyone lies. Sometimes it is easier to tell a lie than to tell the truth. My mother wants me to bring you to her place for Sunday lunch.

**STELLA:** Why don't you grant that wish for her?

**MARKO:** Because she will make something tasty for the three of us and you will have to refuse to eat, because you are a machine and you don't eat food. And if you say 'no, thank you' to food my mother has prepared she will be very offended.

**STELLA:** Couldn't you tell her that I don't eat.

**MARKO:** I could say you had no appetite, but then she will think you are pregnant. I could even say that you are on a diet, but she will still try to talk you into at least trying something that she has cooked – you will refuse, and she will get angry.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** So that means I will not be going with you to your mother's?

**MARKO:** You won't be going. I shall go myself, although I know she will not forgive me for not bringing you. . . Or we could tell her that you have just been to the dentist where you had an urgent intervention and that you are not allowed to eat or drink because of the effects of the injections and the pain.

**STELLA:** Then we would both be lying.

**MARKO:** If you want to be like a normal woman, you will have to learn to do that, too. . . My mother will complain about the economic crisis, and her small pension, and that prices have gone up in the last week, and you will have to nod your head in complete understanding.

**STELLA:** I'll do everything you tell me to do.

**MARKO:** And then at some moment she will start talking about Maria and how the two of them became friends, and how she felt as if Maria was her daughter and how hard it was for her when we broke up. I will say that it is not nice to talk about Maria in front of you, and I will ask her if she needs help with anything in the flat. She will say how everything in the flat is alright, but that it really is time for put a new headstone on my father's grave, that what is there now looks terrible, and I will say that I do not have the time or the money, but that I shall see to it during the summer, and Mama will say that I have been repeating for ten years that I will do it when summer comes. . .

**STELLA:** Why do you go to your mother's to talk with her when you already know ahead of time what she will say?

**MARKO:** Because, apart from me, no-one in this world is prepared to listen to her advice.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** I have to buy you a new dress.

**STELLA:** Why?

**MARKO:** Mama won't be pleased to see you dressed like that.

**STELLA:** It's all the same to me what dress I wear.

**MARKO:** You are the first female in my life who does not care how she is dressed.

**STELLA:** Is that bad?

**MARKO:** Quite the contrary – as far as I am concerned, that is brilliant. You are my ideal. All my girlfriends spent money on silly things, complicating their lives with clothes and make-up. Things that got on my nerves.

**STELLA:** If they got on your nerves so much, why didn't you live alone? Why bother having a girlfriend, if it is more difficult with them than without them?

**MARKO:** Because solitude is unbearable. It is like death. It is better to have someone than to be alone.

**STELLA:** Does that mean that you have me so as not to be alone?

**MARKO:** Among other things, yes. . . even though you are not the real thing. . . what I want to say is that you are not a typical woman. . . you are only a partial replacement.

**STELLA:** Aren't you satisfied with me?

**MARKO:** I didn't say that.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Do you know where I was yesterday?

**STELLA:** Where?

**MARKO:** In the park, not far from the kindergarten. Mothers and grandmothers come there with their small children. I sat there for an hour and watched those little ones playing. . . It is so strange. . . .

**STELLA:** What's so strange?

**MARKO:** I have never done that before. There are lots of children at the school where I work, but. . . no very small children. . . and those little ones are so special. . . Generally speaking – I have been walking past children all my life, but without noticing them at all. . . and now, suddenly. . . They are so sweet, when they are three or four. . . It looks as though I am starting to grow old.

**STELLA:** Is that so bad?

**MARKO:** Yes. That is very bad.

**STELLA:** Can you prevent it, or stop it?

**MARKO:** No, you can't. Everyone who has tried to stop time has turned out being ridiculous.

### **Scene 8.**

(Marko is doing push-ups on a rug on the floor. He is bare to the waist. His shirt is thrown over the back of a chair. While he is working out, Stella is sitting at the table playing chess against herself. Then the door-bell rings.)

**MARKO:** Go and open that – it's the pizza delivery man. The money is on the table, give it to him and take the pizza. I can't go like this.

**STELLA:** Alright.

(Stella take the money from the table and leaves the room, after a few more push-ups Marko starts doing knee-bends. Then he stretches to the left and to the right. Stella returns with a pizza-box, and Marko rubs himself down and starts putting on his shirt.)

**MARKO:** What took you so long?

**STELLA:** The pizza-man wanted to talk with me. .

**MARKO:** He wanted to talk with you!

**STELLA:** Yes.

**MARKO:** Was he unpleasant?

**STELLA:** No, not at all. He said something nice about my hair and my face.

**MARKO:** What did he say?

**STELLA:** He said that the colour of my hair suits my face very well. That you can see that I have a complexion that is looked after.

**MARKO:** The cheeky devil!

**STELLA:** Why? He did not say anything bad.

**MARKO:** Flirting with my partner on the threshold of my flat. That is really too much!

**STELLA:** He smiled at me very nicely.

**MARKO:** Did he, indeed!



**STELLA:** He was very polite. He said to say hello to my father.

**MARKO:** To say hello to your ‘father’?

**STELLA:** That’s what he said.

**MARKO:** Idiot! He thinks that I’m your father. What did he look like?

**STELLA:** Blond, tall, with a gold chain around his neck.

**MARKO:** That’s Robert! That moron! That creep won’t bother you any more!

(Marko picks up the phone received and enters a number.)

**MARKO:** Hello, is this “Sunshine” Pizza?. . . Give me the boss, please. . . Hello, your man has just delivered a pizza to me at Danube Street, Number 15 – a tall, blond boy, I think his name is Robert. . . I don’t know what the pizza’s like, I haven’t had a look at it yet, and certainly have not tried it, but I have no complaints about the pizza. I am calling because of the delivery boy, he’s the one I’m complaining about. . . Why – because he was rude and unpleasant to my girlfriend. . . Your apology means nothing to me but I want to say is: never send him to deliver pizzas here again, never!. . . Good-bye! .

(Marko puts down the receiver.)

**STELLA:** But that’s not true.

**MARKO:** What’s not true?

**STELLA:** He wasn’t rude or unpleasant to me, in fact he was very pleasant.

**MARKO:** He won’t be bothering you again.

**STELLA:** He didn’t bother me now, he merely made a few nice comments about my appearance.

**MARKO:** And you like being given compliments?

**STELLA:** No. I can’t take the credit for my appearance and it is of no importance to me whatsoever how people see me, but I don’t understand how you can make accusations against the young man when he didn’t do anything wrong.

**MARKO:** Yes he did, and how he did. You cannot understand that. If you were like us, like normal people, it would all be clear to you.

**STELLA:** So I would have to be vain?

**MARKO:** Exactly – if you were vain, you would not always be asking me those stupid questions and you wouldn't be so surprised at everything all the time. Don't think that vanity is an exclusively negative characteristic. If it were not for vanity, the world would have ceased to develop long since, and you probably would not even exist at all. Barbara created you out of vanity – in order to show that she was the best in her profession, the leader among all her colleagues.

**STELLA:** Nothing can justify lies.

**MARKO:** You're saying that I lied?

**STELLA:** Of course you did – you lied about the behaviour of the young man, and you lied when you told the boss at the pizza place that I am your girlfriend.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Why do you think that that's a lie?

**STELLA:** Because you have never called me your girlfriend.

**MARKO:** Well. . . perhaps not. . . But we are not in a situation when I speak of you in front of other people. In the future, we will probably go out among people and then. . . then I will introduce you as my girlfriend.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** I won't be your girlfriend even then.

**MARKO:** Why not? We live together.

**STELLA:** By definition – a boyfriend and girlfriends are unmarried persons of both genders who show their love publicly. And you have never told me that you love me and you have never gone outside this flat with me and never taken me to any public places.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Listen – you complicate life a bit too much. You behave the way most women do.

**STELLA:** And that bothers you?

**MARKO:** Of course it bothers me. If I had wanted a “customary” woman, I never would have entered the contest for the doll.

**STELLA:** I'm sorry, then I shall be just a doll.

**MARKO:** That's the only thing you can be.

**STELLA:** Are you sure about that?

**MARKO:** Yes, I'm sure.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** Your pizza is getting cold.

**MARKO:** It already is.

**STELLA:** Should I set a plate for you, and a knife and fork?

**MARKO:** No – I'm not hungry any more.

**STELLA:** Why not – when you ordered the pizza you said you were dying of hunger?

**MARKO:** That passed. I have lost my appetite from talking with you and from that pizza-man.

**STELLA:** You get angry all the time. You are nervy and dissatisfied and someone else is always to blame.

**MARKO:** Could you give it a rest?

**STELLA:** Alright – I'll keep quiet.

**MARKO:** I didn't tell you to keep quiet, just stop saying things I don't want to hear.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** I have shit at work, shit at home and shit everywhere.

**STELLA:** What's so bad at work?

**MARKO:** We have a new principal – he doesn't have a clue but he acts as though he knows it all. He doesn't even know how to fill in the form for a business trip voucher. The one before was stubborn, but at least he wasn't stupid. This one is both stubborn and stupid.

**STELLA:** And – how are you going to solve the problem?

**MARKO:** There's no solution. People are not machines and we don't have a solution for every situation that life brings along.

**STELLA:** Then you don't have it easy.

**MARKO:** Of course not.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** What should I do with this pizza?

**MARKO:** Throw it into the rubbish.

### **Scene 9.**

(Stella is working out. Marko comes into the flat; he is wearing a macintosh and carrying a briefcase.)

**MARKO:** Hey!

**STELLA:** Hey! Why didn't you phone to tell me not to cook lunch?

**MARKO:** Today was our School Day – when everything was done, we all had lunch together. One of the teachers from the school where Maria works came to join the celebrations. I couldn't resist and I asked her - by the way - about my ex. And she told me that that creep of hers, the one I met at the "Eldorado", had left her and gone back to America. He has a wife and two kids there, but he didn't mention that to Maria. She had no idea that she was having a relationship with a married man. And he has left her very, very pregnant. Her colleague says that Maria is desperate and that she is crying all day long. She is so ashamed that she won't even go out of the house. She's in total shock.

**STELLA:** That's a chance for you.

**MARKO:** What's a chance for me?

**STELLA:** A chance to win her over. Didn't you say that you still love her, and that you should have married her and had children with her?

**MARKO:** Yes, I did, but – she is pregnant with another man.

**STELLA:** And what does that matter – if you love her, then you love her. If you don't, then you don't.

**MARKO:** I can't renew a relationship with a woman who walked out on me, and then made a baby with another man. And now he has given her the heave-ho. That simply would not work.

**STELLA:** So you don't love her anymore?

**MARKO:** That's not what I said.

**STELLA:** Surely you're not going to live alone for the rest of your life>?

**MARKO:** No, I won't. . . I probably won't. . . anyway, I have you. It will be exactly six months tomorrow from the day you came into my life. The people from the agency that makes replacement women are coming tomorrow. I'll sign a new contract with them and you will be mine to the end of my life. I will also meet your Barbara, your creator.

**STELLA:** Have you kept a diary and sent regular e-mail reports about our life together?

**MARKO:** Yes, I have – at the end of each week, I have described how we had spent it and how you behaved in particular situations, and how I felt at those times. I have to send the last report this evening, and I am sure that you will be allocated to me forever.

**STELLA:** What makes you so sure?

**MARKO:** Because I am satisfied with you.

**STELLA:** I don't remember you showing that in the last six months.

**MARKO:** What didn't I show?

**STELLA:** You didn't show your satisfaction. But you did often complain to me and show your dissatisfaction.

**MARKO:** What are you trying to say?

**STELLA:** According to the agency rules – the dolls are allocated permanently only to those men who are satisfied with the doll, and under the condition that the doll is satisfied with them.

**MARKO:** What does the doll's satisfaction have to do with anything? It wasn't mentioned in the contract.

**STELLA:** It did not state that the doll's satisfaction was important, but it did state in Article 46 that the "User" and the doll had to achieve a high level of mutual respect and compatibility for the agency to allocate the doll for permanent use. In other words, that means that the doll's impression of their life together is also important.

**MARKO:** But they have no idea what you think and what you feel.

**STELLA:** They are coming tomorrow to establish that. Everything that I have experienced with you is stored in my memory. I went through all of it today - my report on you is not positive. And that means that tomorrow is our last day.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** You're joking!

**STELLA:** No. You know that I am not programmed to have a sense of humour and to make people laugh.

**MARKO:** Wait a minute. . . Are you trying to say that, as a man, you are rating me negatively?

**STELLA:** Precisely – you are egotistical, jealous, selfish, and coarse. You think only of yourself and your own pleasure. You have never shown interest in me – and you have insulted me.

**MARKO:** But you are just a doll, an ordinary doll.

**STELLA:** Yes, I am a doll, because that is how you treated me, as a doll. If you had treated me as a princess – I would have been a princess – and I would have given a positive report on you tomorrow. That’s the lesson that every man should learn – your partner is a reflection of how you behave towards her.. When you shower your partner with attention, when you believe in her, she grows in self-confidence. But when you belittle her, then she feel miserable and insignificant.

(Silence.)

**MARKO:** Barbara has filled your head with all this nonsense.

**STELLA:** No – everything is set up in such a way that I adopt your value system, and then I judge you by the same criteria that you judge me. It says in one of the holy books: “. . . judge not. . . with what measure ye mete, it shall be meted to you. . .” That principle is applied in my logical apparatus when I am evaluating you. Barbara did not suggest anything to me. My conclusions about you are the result of your behaviour towards me.

**MARKO:** But you really are just an ordinary. . . doll.

**STELLA:** It’s obvious that you have understood nothing in the past six months, or even in the past forty years. I have been a doll, because you behaved towards me as to a doll. Do you know why the world of so many people is pure hell – because that is what they themselves create. Everything that has taken place between you and me in this flat – you have created all that. If it has been heaven, or if it has been hell – you are the one who deserves the credit. You probably treated Maria the way that you have treated me.

**MARKO:** Stop it! I can’t listen to this any more!

**STELLA:** You can’t listen because I am saying what you do not want to hear. They didn’t tell you, but – for these last two days, I am programmed not to say what you want to hear, but instead what I consider to be the truth. I have been your last chance, Marko. Your last chance to become better than you have been.

**MARKO:** I wanted a doll and not a prattling woman who does not know how to stop.

**STELLA:** You wanted a doll, because you thought you would have no obligations towards a doll.

(Silence.)

**STELLA:** As of tomorrow, you're on your own. You will be put on the agency's black list so that in the future, even if you become very rich, they will never want to sell you another doll. And over the last forty years you have never managed to build up something permanent with natural women.

**MARKO:** I don't want to hear another word. That's enough!

**STELLA:** Noted. And anyway, I have said all that I had to say. Would you like me to go into the bedroom, or will you go into the bedroom?

**MARKO:** You go – please.

**STELLA:** That's the first time that you ever said 'please' to me. I shall be happy to fulfil you wish.

(Stella goes into the bedroom and Marko is left alone. He sits at the table, picks up the paper, starts reading, and then suddenly throws it angrily onto the floor. He stands up and paces around the room. At one moment, he pauses beside the phone, lifts the receiver and enters a number. Someone answers, but he abruptly puts down the receiver, and starts pacing again. After several minutes, he enters the number once again.)

**MARKO:** Hello. . . Maria. . . It's Marko. . . A short while ago. . . No, that wasn't me!. . . And I have no idea who called you then, but I am calling now. . . How are you. . . Well, I'm fine. . . No, nothing. . . I just wanted to hear you, you know. . . Alright – I admit that I know – your colleague Anna was at our school – I heard it from her. . . I am sorry that it turned out like that with that man. . . I really am sorry. . . No, of course I'm not glad, it really hit me when I heard how he had hurt you. . . How is your pregnancy progressing?. . . You have to think of yourself and of the baby, that's what's most important now, your health, and everything else is by the way, everything else will fall into place. . . Why are you crying?. . . If those are the kindest words you have heard in the last three weeks, then that's a reason to be happy, and not to start crying. . . Why is it strange that I am calling you, I simply – felt like talking to you. . . I would like to see you, have a drink and a chat with you. . . Why do you say "one day" – if it's possible, it's possible immediately, today, right now. . . You are not ready to go out?. . . I can come to your place. . . It doesn't bother me is the flat is untidy, it's your flat, why would I be bothered, except if you want me to help you tidy up. I'll stay as long as it suits you. . . Just tell me the address. . . Ah yes, I know, near that bridge. . . Of course – just to talk. . . take care, see you in half an hour.

(He puts down the receiver and takes a deep breath. Stella appears at the door.)

**STELLA:** I heard your conversation. .

**MARKO:** Were you eavesdropping?

**STELLA:** No – you know that I have very acute hearing. Much better hearing than you people have.

**MARKO:** I have to go.

**STELLA:** Are you going to see Maria?

**MARKO:** Yes.

**STELLA:** Will you sleep over at her place?

**MARKO:** I don't know. . . perhaps. . . You never know. . .

**STELLA:** I got the impression that you would like to.

**MARKO:** That's your impression?

**STELLA:** Yes, I thought that you would like to stay the night.

**MARKO:** Well, there's a possibility that I will. . . but I can't know for sure. . .

**STELLA:** When the people come from the agency in the morning, what should I tell them if you aren't back.

**MARKO:** Tell them that I'm grateful. .

**STELLA:** For what.

**MARKO:** For everything. . . for you. . . While I was alone, I wasn't really alone – thanks to you. I have also learnt a thing or two from you.

**STELLA:** And I also learnt a lot from you.

**MARKO:** Really? What would that be?

**STELLA:** Well, let's say. . . how a man should not be towards a woman.

(Silence)

**MARKO:** You're right – no woman should allow a man to treat her like an ordinary doll. . . ever. . .



**STELLA:** I'll remember your advice.

**MARKO:** But you are. . .

**STELLA:** What?

**MARKO:** Well. . . It's not important. . . If I don't see you tomorrow – good-bye!

**STELLA:** Good-bye!

(Marko goes towards the door.)

**STELLA:** Don't forget the keys!

(Marko pauses.)

**MARKO:** Which keys?

**STELLA:** The car keys.

**MARKO:** Ah, yes!. . . Would you like to take something from this flat as a souvenir? Anything?

**STELLA:** Thank you, there's no need. . . I shall take only the memories.

**MARKO:** They're the only thing. . . when you take them with you from a relationship. . . that leave enough for the next one.

**- THE END -**