

Miro Gavran
THE HENPECKED

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Roles:

ANA..... age 48
IVO, Ana's ex-husband..... age 48
MARKO, Ana's husband..... age 55
MARIJA age 48

NOTE: The comedy has been written in such a way that both female roles can be played by one actress.

ACT ONE

Scene one

(Ana, Marko)

In front of us there is a spacious living room with a couch. In the background there is an average kitchen with a stove and a refrigerator. On the left side there are two doors - one leading to the bedroom, the other to the bathroom. On the right side there is just one door leading to the hallway. Enter Ana from the bedroom in a bathrobe. It is morning, she stretches and yawns.

ANA: Would you like some tea?

Marko enters after her, also wearing a bathrobe. He stretches.

MARKO: Sure.

Ana goes to the stove and pours water in the teapot.

ANA: What a beautiful Sunday morning!

MARKO: I just love sunny Sunday mornings. Especially after a great Saturday night. We had such a good time last night in that restaurant.

ANA: Our first wedding anniversary deserved a celebration.

MARKO: It deserved a dinner in a fine restaurant.

ANA: Thank you, Marko, that dinner made me so happy. We haven't been out in a long time.

MARKO: We went to a basketball game a week ago.

ANA: A basketball game is not the same as dinner.

MARKO: Last night was special. I'm glad you liked my gift.

Marko points at small dumbbells.

ANA: I really did.

Takes the dumbbells from Marko.

ANA: And I'm glad you liked mine.

Marko takes a pair of polka dot pajamas, just like a child's, out of the wrapping paper on the table

MARKO: It was a pleasant surprise.

ANA: A surprise?!

MARKO: I mean, it made me happy.

ANA: I thought you'd like it. One should buy proper presents or none at all.

MARKO: That's right, I agree. That's why I like it so much, and I'm glad you like mine too.

ANA: What kind of tea would you like, fruit flavored or green tea?

MARKO: Fruit's OK.

Ana makes the tea and puts it on the table.

MARKO: Yesterday was nice, but way too expensive.

ANA: What was?

MARKO: The dinner.

ANA: Oh, that...

MARKO: I thought it would be a hundred kunas less. But then again, it's a famous restaurant, everybody speaks highly of it... I'm sure we'll never go there again, but I'm glad we've seen what it looks like.

ANA: It's not worth the money.

MARKO: I agree, but then again... I'm going downstairs to get today's newspapers from the mailbox.

ANA: You do that, I wonder what's new.

As Marko exits, Ana goes to the phone and checks the answering machine.

OFF 1st FRIEND: Hey, it's Suzana, we've just seen it on TV! Oh, Ana, it must have been a shock for you too! Call me when you get home! I can't believe it!

OFF 2nd FRIEND: Ana, pick up the phone, it's Milena! We just saw the news about Ivo and the bank. It's great! You must be so happy! Call me!

OFF 3rd FRIEND: Pick up, it's Dubravka! You must be watching the TV. This is horrible, nothing is like we thought it was! It was such an injustice, the way he...

The answering machine stops. We hear a beep, then the voice of the answering machine speaker.

ANSWERING MACHINE SPEAKER: You have no more messages!

As Marko enters the room holding Večernji list, he opens the sports section, and starts reading out loud:

MARKO: Can you believe it, Chicago won by 15 points, even though three of their best players missed the game because of the injuries that...

Ana goes over to him and yanks the newspapers from his hands.

ANA: Give it to me!

MARKO: Hey, what's wrong with you?!

ANA: Where are the Crime pages?

MARKO: Why? You never read the Crime pages!

ANA: Where is it?

Flips through the newspapers hysterically.

MARKO: Back pages. Fifth or sixth page from the back. What happened?

ANA: Here's what happened: "Shift in the *Romabanka affair*"... "Owner of the Romabanka office in Zagreb, with head office in Sicily, whose eighteen-year-old daughter passed away tragically a month ago due to overdose, committed suicide the day before yesterday. He left a remorseful suicide note, in which he admitted that he had been fully responsible for the infamous *Romabanka affair*. According to what has been known so far, he personally directed the fraud with the assistance of two helpers from Romabanka, involving money transfer to Cyprus. In the note he deeply regrets putting the blame on Ivo Preradović, who was unjustly sentenced to five years in prison.

MARKO: Wait, this is about your ex...

ANA: Yes, it's about him. "The Italian police in Palermo have informed the police in Zagreb of the entire case, while the investigative judge of the County court of Zagreb announced that he would start a procedure, no later than Monday morning, for the renewal of the investigation and for releasing the wrongly accused bank clerk who is..."

MARKO: So he's not guilty?!

ANA: That's what he kept saying. Even the judge held it against him that he didn't plead guilty or showed any sign of remorse.

MARKO: But all the evidence was against him...

ANA: You see, it says here that he was framed. Those people did the money laundering, and blamed it all on him. Terrible!

MARKO: But how is that possible!?

ANA: Everything is possible in banking business.

MARKO: And now what?! Does it mean he is going to be released?

ANA: Horrible! Dear God! I figured he'd be behind bars for at least three more years.

MARKO: There's something about you, too.

ANA: What?

Marko reads from the newspapers.

MARKO: “While he was still in the investigative prison, the poor man was even abandoned by his wife Ana, an elementary school geography teacher, who then married the school principal, a former gym teacher.” They know everything!

ANA: Oh, crap! I’ll feel embarrassed just walking down the street again. Wait ‘till he starts giving interviews to the press, ‘till he slurs me in public...

MARKO: He could also attack me because I stole his wife while he was in prison, and the Minister of Education might read it and remove me from the principal’s position.

ANA: He wouldn’t!?

MARKO: Anything is possible in education. Our fate is in the hands of your ex-husband, and I doubt that he would show any mercy to the people who betrayed and deceived him in any way.

ANA: But why me?! He loved me.

MARKO: Think of the interview that you gave to *Gloria*, the headline read “NOTORIOUS ECONOMIC CRIMINAL ACCUSED BY HIS SOON TO BE EX-WIFE” The caption read: “I have been nourishing a viper in my bosom. The “innocent” lamb betrayed me..

ANA: I didn’t say that. The editors added it.

MARKO: That’s when they published that beautiful photo of you, the one that captivated me... Everyone in the teacher’s lounge had a copy of that magazine, you were so popular those days. I admit that was the first time I had started thinking what a beautiful woman you were, so attractive in your rage and sorrow, and now... imagine what he is going to say to the press about you.

ANA: But, when the affair began, I supported him, I believed in him.

MARKO: For how long?

ANA: Well... for the first fifteen days... OK, ten.

Scene two

(Ana, Marko, later Ivo)

Ana is sitting on the sofa. In front of her there is a bunch of newspapers and magazines that she is flipping through as if she is looking for a specific article. For a moment she pauses on one of the pages and then keeps going. Marko enters the room, wearing a coat and carrying a briefcase.

MARKO: Hi!

ANA: Hi!

Ana looks up at him.

ANA: You haven't taken your shoes off.

MARKO: I was just about to.

Marko goes back to the hallway. He is gone for a few moments, and then he appears wearing slippers and no coat. He comes up to the phone and puts down his briefcase.

ANA: You know I hate it when you put it down like that.

MARKO: I know, but it's not in the way.

ANA: It doesn't matter. A briefcase on the floor is not a pretty sight.

MARKO: No one will see it, it's not like we're expecting company.

ANA: Yes, but we are here.

MARKO: So what?!

ANA: It's in our way. We can see it lying there.

MARKO: It doesn't bother me.

ANA: Besides, it doesn't belong there.

MARKO: OK, give it a rest, I'll take it to the bedroom after dinner.

ANA: I didn't have time to cook dinner.

MARKO: Why am I not surprised? You think you have to read all the newspapers and magazines.

ANA: Well, I do.

MARKO: Anything there?

ANA: He is all over the newspapers. "Scandal in the Justice System!" "Ivo Preradović - Victim of a Corrupt System!" "Man Rejected by Society and Family" "Forsaken by His Wife, Forsaken by His Country!" "The Return of the Count Monte Cristo"

MARKO: Has he given any interviews or statements?

ANA: No, nothing yet. It was on the radio that he would be released today. His verdict was officially revoked this morning.

MARKO: So, he's officially innocent.

ANA: Yes, officially... I tried to find you in the office after the fifth period, but you weren't there. The secretary told me you went to the Ministry of Education. I didn't know you were going there today.

MARKO: That's what I've told her... I went to see a friend from my college days.

ANA: Why?

MARKO: I wanted to get some advice from him.

ANA: About what?

MARKO: About all this mess.

ANA: But why him? You could have talked to me.

MARKO: You and I, we're on the inside. We're biased. I wanted an opinion from someone who is neutral.

ANA: I don't think you should talk to anyone about this, anyone at all. Except for me.

MARKO: Sorry, I had to talk to someone. It's such a nightmare. I haven't been myself lately. Anyway, we went to Cmrok for a walk.

ANA: Why Cmrok, why the walk?

MARKO: You know why!

ANA: No I don't, tell me!

Marko looks around, as if someone was spying on him. He goes to the phone and lifts it up to check if there is a bug planted on the bottom of it.

MARKO: We're definitely under surveillance.

ANA: What surveillance? Why are you whispering?

MARKO: Imagine what any reporter would do to find out more about the background of the *Romabanka affair*. They must be interested in the two of us. Investigative journalism uses all means of investigation - bugging and stalking are a part of it.

ANA: You think so?

MARKO: No doubt about it. You know how terrified I am that they might dig up something from my past.

ANA: Tell me about it! I was mentioned in the newspaper in a negative context three times. They described me as my husband's traitor, a woman who turned her back on him during the hardest time of his life. As if I understand all those bank frauds and papers. I could never understand any of it. Two years ago I believed in everything that

was in the papers – that is my only sin. I thought that he turned his back on me. And millions of others in this country also believed it, only they were not slandered in those same newspapers that misled me too. You were the only one that helped me and protected me from the public humiliation.

Ivo enters the room carrying a big bag.

IVO: Good afternoon!

Ana and Marko look at him as if they see a ghost.

ANA: You?! What are you doing here?!

IVO: I was released. They released me an hour ago. I took a cab and came straight here.

ANA: Why here?!

IVO: And where else would I go?

ANA: But I... you know that I... you know that I have... Remember Marko?

IVO: How could I not, he taught Religion in your school and then he became the principal.

MARKO: It wasn't Religion, it was Physical Education.

IVO: Ah, right. I apologize! My bad.

MARKO: That's OK.

ANA: You've heard... you probably know that Marko and I... we've been married for a year.

IVO: I know, it was in the newspapers, my cellmates told me about it. Congratulations!

MARKO: Thanks!

ANA: Did you want anything?

IVO: What do you mean?

ANA: You probably came because you wanted something.

IVO: No, I didn't.

ANA: What do you mean?

IVO: I don't want anything.

ANA: But, surely you wanted something from me, from us.

IVO: Nothing whatsoever.

ANA: But... there must be a reason for you coming here?

IVO: No reason at all. Why would you think that?

ANA: Why are you here then?

IVO: And where am I supposed to be? I've been released, the verdict has been revoked, I'm free at last. They've let me out and I'm back home. What's so weird about it?

ANA: "You're back home"?!... You mean, for a visit?

IVO: Does one come home for a visit?

ANA: Sorry, there's something I don't understand. I've just told you I've been married to Marko for a year.

IVO: I understood that. I congratulated you, honestly, with all my heart.

ANA: We've been living together for a year now.

IVO: That's only natural and logical. Marriage is a positive thing. One can't face life alone, without support, without love. It's easier when you have someone, someone you can lean on. Isn't that right?

Silence.

MARKO: Yes, it is.

ANA: We've been living in this apartment for a year now. Marko sold his one-bedroom apartment this spring and bought a small apartment in a village on Dugi otok.

MARKO: Three kilometers from the sea.

IVO: How nice. You've always dreamed of having a place by the sea and finally it came true. How nice. I'm sure you're happy with it.

MARKO: Yes, we are. Only, we have to ride a bike to the beach. It's three kilometers away.

IVO: I've been feeling guilty all my life for not making enough money, so we could only afford to go to the sea every other year and only for ten days or so. I really am glad you're finally... finally happy. I mean: the two of you are happy.

ANA: Yes, we are.

Ivo sits on the sofa. He looks around.

IVO: Everything looks the same as two years ago.

ANA: I'm sorry, Ivo, but can I ask you something?

IVO: Ask away.

ANA: When are you leaving?

IVO: Where?

ANA: Anywhere.

IVO: I have no intention of going anywhere.

ANA: Does this mean you want to stay here, live here?

IVO: Where else?

ANA: But I live here with Marko.

IVO: That makes sense. You already told me that, I got that.

ANA: You're not seriously thinking of living in an apartment with your ex-wife and her new husband, are you?

IVO: What am I supposed to do? I have no money for a hotel or rent. And, if I remember correctly, we bought this apartment together. Half is mine, and half is yours. You didn't think I'd let you have my half, did you?

ANA: No, but I thought you'd be in jail for three more years.

IVO: I thought so, too, but everything changed so suddenly. I'm out of the prison and what would make more sense than coming back home? You would have done the same if you were me.

ANA: Ivo, this is a two-bedroom apartment, and there are three of us.

IVO: There were three of us here too, when Lovro was with us.

ANA: A child is different. I don't know how you would expect...

IVO: As the old saying goes: "Where tenants get along, nothing can go wrong", or something like that. You can sleep in the bedroom. I'll sleep here, in the living room, on the sofa. It may seem to you that this might be uncomfortable for me, but after two years in prison, in a room three times smaller than this one, with two other convicts, this apartment looks like a royal palace to me.

MARKO: Excuse me, but how do you imagine me and my wife functioning under these awkward circumstances, while...

IVO: No, excuse me!

MARKO: What?

IVO: If I'm not mistaken, you are wearing my slippers.

MARKO: I don't know, Ana gave them to me. Maybe I am.

IVO: Those uncomfortable prison shoes gave me bunions, so if you would... I hope you won't mind giving me those back. Ana, could you confirm to the gentleman...

ANA: Yes, the slippers are Ivo's.

Marko takes the slippers off.

MARKO: I'm sorry.

IVO: It's OK.

Marko hands Ivo the slippers.

MARKO: Here you go.

IVO: Thanks. My good old slippers.

Silence.

ANA: We could never agree to something like that. What would the neighbors say?

MARKO: Yes, it's impossible, us living together.

IVO: Then, you find me a better solution. I have nowhere else to go.

MARKO: We have nowhere to go, either. I simply can't have you living here.

IVO: Look, mister, let's be realistic, we're adults: half of this apartment belongs to me, the other half to my ex-wife. Legally, it all makes sense. You, mister, on the other hand, legally don't own a thing. But, lucky for you, I'm a philanthropist and I want you to be happy. I want my ex-wife to be happy, too. Now, theoretically speaking, there are four possible solutions to our problem. First, that me and my ex-wife live in this apartment. Second, that the two of you live in the apartment, and that I go to a park bench. Third, that I live in the apartment alone, and that the two of you go to a park bench. And fourth, a compromise, which seems most reasonable, is that the three of us live in this apartment until one of us hits the jackpot. The last solution makes it clear that I'm the one making the biggest compromise.

Long silence.

ANA: That's out of the question!

MARKO: Absolutely not!

Scene three
(Ivo, Marko, Ana)

Ivo is in a bathrobe. He is making tea. Marko comes out of the bathroom, also wearing a bathrobe.

MARKO: It smells nice.

IVO: Do you want it with or without sugar?

MARKO: Without... I mean, I'll put some myself, but just a little.

Marko yells towards the bedroom.

MARKO: You can use the bathroom now!

Marko takes a seat at the table. Ana comes out of the bedroom also wearing a bathrobe.

ANA: Good morning!

IVO: Good morning! Coffee or tea?

ANA: Tea is fine.

Ana goes to the bathroom.

MARKO: Did you bring the paper from the mailbox?

IVO: It's here, on the sofa.

MARKO: Thanks.

Marko goes to the sofa, takes the newspaper, gets back to the table, and Ivo brings the teapot and teacups. Ivo puts three cups on the table, and then pours to Marko first.

IVO: There you go!

MARKO: Thanks!

Ivo pours himself a cup, while Marko flips through the newspapers.

MARKO: Anything interesting?

IVO: No. I wasn't looking for anything. I've only glanced at the front page and the TV program. I haven't got the stomach for the press anymore. Ever since they attacked me two years ago like the worst criminal in the country, I have simply despised all the newspapers. I have a strong aversion to them.

MARKO: Don't be like that, one has to be informed...

IVO: Why not? For example, I see in an article that someone said something and I already doubt whether he really said that, or whether his words were misinterpreted. Or, for instance, if it says that Petar forged the documents to get his hands on the business premises that Ivan thinks he rightfully owns, I'm not sure anymore whether

Ivan himself leaked that news to the press to discredit Petar or not. Everything they ever say is either untrue, partially true, superficial, or malevolent. That's why I rather watch some funny show on TV or go to the movies ... even though I became picky about that, too.

MARKO: In what way?

IVO: I can no longer watch prison movies.

MARKO: That's only natural.

IVO: But, I can't watch crime movies, war movies, horror movies, or any other movie that includes violence, destruction, or negative emotions.

MARKO: What can you watch, then?

IVO: Romances and light comedies. Just that. Children's movies are OK, too, as long as they're not too educational.

The phone rings. Both men twitch. But, Ivo is faster.

IVO: I'll get it!

Ivo picks up the receiver.

IVO: Hello... Oh, hi Lucija, how are you? ... What do you mean 'who is it'? Why, it's me...

Ana exits the bathroom.

IVO: What do you mean 'me who'? Ivo... No, we didn't make up, I mean, we weren't even in a fight, we just divorced... Why would you ask that? No, she didn't break up with Marko... Why is it strange that I'm answering Ana's phone at 7 a. m.?! This is my phone, too!

Marko lights a cigarette. Ana wants to take the receiver, but does not know how, so she is jumping up and down.

IVO: No need to worry about it, you don't have to apologize... Ana is here, right beside me, here she is... Ok, bye... I'm glad as well.

Ana takes the receiver.

ANA: Hello, good morning, Lucija... No, no, everything's fine... No need to apologize or feel awkward, I'm aware it's 7 a. m., I'll take it for you, I won't forget... Nothing much, Marko is also here... Why can't you believe it?... The three of us are having tea... I'm not kidding, here, you can talk to him. Come, Marko!

MARKO: Why?

ANA: Lucija wants to hear your voice.

MARKO: But what for?

Ana puts her hand over the receiver and says in a softer voice:

ANA: She thinks I'm alone with Ivo... Please, come answer the phone.

Marko reluctantly stands up and picks up the receiver.

MARKO: Hello, Marko speaking... Hey, how are you? ... Why didn't you expect to hear from me? ...Well, I just wanted to say 'good morning' so that you would know I'm here... Of course, see you at school in half an hour... Ana will get you the manual, don't worry... OK, bye!

Marko puts the receiver down.

ANA: Shit! Now everyone at school will find out about our situation. Ivo, please, don't answer the phone anymore. Lucija was shocked when she heard you. What will she think of me now, of Marko, of us?

IVO: And which phone would you like me to answer? You know I don't have a cell phone and that I'm looking for a job anywhere I can. I have to give them a contact number.

ANA: Yes, but you're putting me into an awkward situation by doing that. You could refrain from answering the phone.

IVO: Refrain from answering the phone I bought with my Christmas bonus four years ago in Cibona's tower?! You're asking too much of me.

Ana sees Marko smoking, approaches him and shouts furiously.

ANA: You're smoking again! In the apartment!

MARKO: Just one. In the morning.

ANA: One in the morning, one in the evening – that's two a day, in front of me. And how many do you smoke when I'm not around?

MARKO: Not one! Not a single one! Except on special occasions.

ANA: Wow, you're something alright – you were a non-smoker for ten months, and now this again! You're despicable!

MARKO: But, only one or two... on special occasions. I'm not a regular smoker.

ANA: You're no longer a non-smoker, but a pathetic addict.

MARKO: But I don't smoke as much as I used to.

ANA: Can't you understand – whether you smoke two or twenty-two cigarettes a day, you are a smoker! You're a non-smoker only if you don't smoke at all – it's the same as being pregnant.

MARKO: What do you mean 'the same as being pregnant'?

ANA: No woman can say: 'I'm a little pregnant.' Either you are pregnant, or you're not. It's the same thing with smoking. Understand this – I hate the smoke, the cigarettes, smoking, the smokers, the ashtrays, the reek, smoky rooms, the yellow fingers, the trembling fingers, addicts of all sorts. You've promised you wouldn't smoke anymore and now again... You do not keep your word. When someone lights a cigarette, I'm thinking he's a retarded suicidal maniac.

IVO: But, Ana, you used to smoke. You have to be tolerant, you must be more understanding toward your partner and his habits, you can't...

ANA: You're not the one to teach me how to treat my husband. Aren't you ashamed of butting into my new marriage, into our relationship?

IVO: I'm not butting in, I see you verbally molesting your husband, and I feel sorry for him. I feel sorry for anyone who has to endure violence, this pressure.

ANA: What do you care how we talk to each other; what gives you the right to judge me?

IVO: I care, because you're nagging at him in front of me. I'm also a victim of your verbal abuse towards your new husband.

ANA: But you don't mind being a 'victim' of passive smoking. Moreover, what's your business answering the phone and putting me into an awkward situation in front of my school colleague?

IVO: We've cleared that out already.

ANA: You're getting on my nerves.

IVO: You really should have better control of yourself when you're around us.

MARKO: I agree.

ANA: To hell with both of you!

Scene four
(Ivo, Marko)

Ivo and Marko are sitting at the table, playing cards. Long silence.

IVO: Do you want a beer?

MARKO: Sure.

IVO: Bottle or can?

MARKO: Bottle will do. I know you have no money.

IVO: My sister from Osijek sent me a thousand kunas. Just tell me which one.

MARKO: Then give me a can.

Ivo puts down the cards and goes to the refrigerator. Marko takes a peek at the cards. Ivo notices that.

IVO: Hey, what are you doing?!

MARKO: I'm just making sure they don't fall off the table.

IVO: You're not supposed to look at my cards.

MARKO: I wasn't looking, but...

IVO: But what?

MARKO: I was just making sure they don't fall off the table.

IVO: I always play fair.

MARKO: Me too.

IVO: I've been honest my whole life. Then again, you can do harm even if you're honest.

Ivo brings two cans of beer, hands one to Marko, puts the other one on the table in front of himself.

MARKO: What do you mean?

IVO: You can be honest, but cold, unkind, insensible to others, without emotions, without love, true love.

MARKO: What's your point?

IVO: My point is that honesty isn't everything.

MARKO: I'm not sure I understand.

IVO: Let's say a husband and a wife have a child, they treat him right, yet again, the child is unhappy with them.

MARKO: But I have no children. I don't understand what you're talking about.

IVO: Then a husband and a wife without a child. He treats her with kindness and respect, but still she is unhappy with him, and he pretends not to notice. Get it?

MARKO: No. How can she be unhappy with him if he's kind, decent, and all that?

IVO: Yes, she can. There's more to it than just being kind and nice, although that's the foundation of a good relationship.

MARKO: I have no idea what you're trying to tell me.

IVO: Oh, forget it. I often think about life, so different things spring to my mind.

Silence.

IVO: Don't you ever do that?

MARKO: No.

IVO: How come?

MARKO: I never think about such things... Unless there is a reason.

IVO: Never?

MARKO: Never ever.

IVO: How do you do it?

MARKO: Why would I think about things I can't change or influence?

IVO: So, you believe there's nothing we can do about it?

MARKO: I have no idea.

IVO: But you've just said...

MARKO: You take words too seriously.

IVO: Whose words?

MARKO: Everyone's – yours, mine, ours. People don't weigh every word they say. I like talking to people, but I don't like being taken too seriously and having my words reviewed and examined.

IVO: Sorry.

MARKO: Nothing personal.

IVO: Still, I'm sorry if I'm sometimes difficult to talk to.

MARKO: Not to me. I enjoy talking about anything with anyone, really. To me, words don't carry any weight and I think it's for the best. We can be more relaxed that way.

IVO: Maybe you're right.

MARKO: As long as the beer is cold.

IVO: It's cold, it's cold.

Silence.

IVO: Listen...

MARKO: What?

IVO: I think you're a happy man.

MARKO: I probably am. That's what my late mom used to say.

Silence.

MARKO: Why do you think I'm happy?

IVO: 'Cos you don't complicate your life.

MARKO: Well, that I never did.

Silence.

MARKO: Listen...

IVO: What?

MARKO: I have to ask you something.

IVO: Shoot.

MARKO: It wasn't my idea.

IVO: What wasn't?

MARKO: To ask you this.

IVO: Whose was it, then?

MARKO: Ana's.

IVO: So, you have another awkward suggestion.

MARKO: It's not awkward. It's a great suggestion. All the problems could be solved, only if you agreed.

Silence.

IVO: Go on, tell me.

MARKO: You know how lovely it is at the seaside. Fresh air, healthy food, olive oil, the whole nine yards. You'd be happy and relaxed there.

IVO: What do you mean?

MARKO: I could give you the keys to my apartment on Dugi Otok. You could go there, stay as long as you like and enjoy yourself.

IVO: Is there a store there?

MARKO: Not right now, but there's one during the summer. But you can take the bike to the next village. It takes only 15 minutes and they have a store.

IVO: Is there heating in your apartment?

MARKO: No.

IVO: I've had my share of freezing in jail. I think I'll pass, thanks. I could go there during the summer, though.

MARKO: I don't think so... Ana planned for us to spend two months in the summer there, and you could live there for the rest of the year.

IVO: Thanks a lot, but I'm not interested.

Silence.

IVO: I have a better suggestion.

MARKO: Shoot!

IVO: What if you sold that apartment and bought a one-bedroom place in Zagreb, and then I could move there. It could even be a small studio apartment.

MARKO: Cannot be done.

IVO: Why?

MARKO: 'Cos there are no necessary permits for my apartment. We don't have the necessary permits for the construction of the building, so no one would buy it. The newspaper said that the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction would send bulldozers to the whole apartment complex so everybody's frightened.

IVO: I see. Didn't you know the paperwork wasn't in order when you bought the place?

MARKO: I was told the procedure was in progress and that everything would be taken care of in a few months. I bought it. Then they replaced the municipal mayor, some ministry inspector from a different party got involved, anyway – the whole thing got messed up.

IVO: Too bad.

MARKO: Too bad.

Silence.

IVO: I forgot to thank you for Lovro. Ana told me you helped him with the scholarship and the accommodation for the first few months.

MARKO: Don't mention it. Your son is a great kid. My cousin has been in Munich for a long time now, he's a big shot at the factory – so I asked him to help him out, recommended him and so on...

IVO: I appreciate it.

MARKO: No thanks is needed for helping the sick and the children. It's only natural.

IVO: Still – thank you.

Scene 5
(Ana, Marko)

Marko is sitting on a couch and cleaning his glasses with a cloth. Ana enters the room. She puts her coat and bag aside.

MARKO: Where have you been?

ANA: I'll tell you where I've been.

Ana pulls out three pieces of paper from her bag and puts them in front of Marko.

ANA: Look!

MARKO: What is it?

ANA: Anonymous students' work. They deliberately left it on my desk.

MARKO: It's handwritten, I can't read it.

ANA: What do you mean you can't?

Ana takes the papers from him and starts reading.

ANA: "Professor Ana in the Middle" is the title of the poem.

MARKO: Poem?!

ANA: Yes, a poem. And it goes like this:

The banker touches from behind
It's a foul, the boss will find
The professor takes it kind
All can see, she doesn't mind
She's not some ancient mountain range
Sexy Kilimanjaro's all the rage
With her no talking is allowed
She's happy screaming it aloud:
Tibet, the Alps, the river Po,
That's it my boys, c'mon let's go

There's more:

"Professor Ana in the Middle
Front and back they play her like a fiddle"

MARKO: Horrible! Appalling! It's a provocation.

ANA: And the graffiti appeared on the school: "Professor Ana in the Middle."

MARKO: Where? I haven't seen it.

ANA: From the courtyard side, on the wall. Painted in red.

MARKO: That's vandalism. We're being framed. I bet it's Luka. He probably has his eye on my job.

ANA: Oh, c'mon, it's not Luka – kids read the papers. I could barely hold the class today. The students were giggling the whole time. Everybody knows everything. The fact that Ivo is living with us leaked out. That's what happens when he has to answer the phone!

MARKO: Now everybody in the teacher's lounge is laughing at us.

ANA: This can't go on anymore.

Silence.

ANA: It's high time we did something.

Silence.

ANA: We have to kick him out before both of us go mad.

Silence.

ANA: Are you with me?

MARKO: I am, but how?

ANA: Not by sitting with our arms crossed, that's for sure. We have to do something. We can't talk, we can't relax, we can't rest after a long day while he's here. We can't even make love, I'm uncomfortable with the fact that he might be listening. He's in the apartment all the time, he rarely goes out, he pretends to be nice and he's getting on my nerves. You have to do something.

MARKO: Me?! It's your ex-husband!

ANA: So, you don't want to help me?

MARKO: I do, but I don't know how.

ANA: This crazy situation doesn't seem to bother you at all. Now you have company for guy talk and watching football. For beer, coffee and smoking.

MARKO: Ana, darling, what are you saying?! He's annoying me even more. The very thought of my friends finding out that your ex-husband is living with us makes me feel embarrassed. It's already all over the school. It's very bad for me and my reputation. If this gets to the Ministry of Education I could lose my job as a principal. And having him around the apartment, bathing and shaving in the same bathroom makes me feel very uncomfortable. But what can I do? What?! I should be grateful that he even puts up with me in this apartment.

ANA: You? Grateful to him?

MARKO: Yes, to him.

ANA: You are out of your mind.

Silence.

MARKO: Anyway, yesterday I got a call from the Ministry. There's a four-day conference for elementary school principals starting Saturday in Split that I should go to.

ANA: Then go. What's the problem?

MARKO: What do you mean what's the problem? I can't go to the conference and leave you here with an ex-con.

ANA: Why not? He's harmless.

MARKO: C'mon, Ana! Just imagine some of our friends coming over and seeing you two here while I'm away! What would they think? No, I can't leave the two of you alone.

ANA: Why can't you? You know he gets on my nerves.

MARKO: I'm sorry, this is really awkward, after all, he's your ex and...

ANA: You're not jealous, are you?

MARKO: No, but you used to be...

ANA: Now, this is really insulting! You can't possibly think that I'd do something with him? ... You don't trust me; you don't appreciate me either as a wife or a partner.

MARKO: I'm sorry, dear; I didn't mean to, I was just...

ANA: That's your redneck, primitive way of thinking...

MARKO: I'm still your husband and he used to be your husband. How would you feel if some woman was staying here for four days and four nights while you're away? Put yourself in my shoes. Just imagine! Imagine yourself coming home from some seminar to find me here with a woman. What would you do?

ANA: I'd break your legs and scratch her eyes out!

MARKO: There you go. Now you get me.

ANA: That's completely different.

MARKO: What do you mean, different?

ANA: If you found me here with some random guy it would make sense if you broke my legs. But my ex, with whom I spent twenty long and boring years – you can't possibly be jealous of him.

MARKO: I never said I was jealous. I'm just trying to explain how twisted it is of you to ask me to go to that conference while he's here with you in this small apartment.

Silence.

ANA: Look, he's as emotionally and sexually appealing to me as opera. And you know I never liked opera... Besides, if you don't go to that conference everyone's going to know why. Also, I would know that you don't trust me and that would leave a mark on our marriage. I would doubt your love and your trust.

MARKO: Now you've really outdone yourself!

ANA: Not in the least.

Scene six
(Ivo, Marko)

Night. Ivo is lying on the couch in his pajamas watching the game on Eurosport . A muffled voice of the sports commentator can be heard. The room is lit only by the television. The bedroom door opens. Marko enters, wearing pajamas. Carefully shuts the door and tiptoes to Ivo.

IVO: Is she asleep?

MARKO: Yes. Barely. I hope you don't mind me.

IVO: Not at all. I prefer watching the game in company. Here, have a seat!

Marko pulls up a chair and sits down.

MARKO: Thank you. Who's in the lead?

IVO: The French, by two.

MARKO: I'm glad. They always give their best. They have always been the fittest and the most prepared team.

IVO: Tonight's the same.

Silence.

MARKO: Look...

IVO: Go ahead!

MARKO: Can I light one? I know you sleep here, and Ana doesn't like me smoking, but I can't fall asleep without one.

IVO: Sure, have one!

MARKO: After all, this is where you sleep ... just tell me if it's a problem , or if I'm asking too much.

IVO: C'mon, it's ok – I'll open the window when you go to sleep and problem solved.

MARKO: Thank you.

Marko lights a cigarette.

IVO: How's it going these days?

MARKO: Where?

IVO: At work, at school.

MARKO: Oh, that? Nothing special.

IVO: You probably have more obligations as a principal than as a gym teacher?

MARKO: It's not a problem. Everything is well defined and very dull. The Ministry signs your paychecks, gives us money for building maintenance, toilet paper...you just make sure that the school cafeteria and the heating work and that's it.

IVO: After all you're the boss.

MARKO: But I'm not on the market. There are no problems in state schools. I feel like that railway guy, what do you call him?

IVO: Signalman?

MARKO: Yeah, the signalman. He signals the train, but someone else is driving it. That's the case with me.

IVO: Really?

MARKO: Really. It's easier since I've become the principal. It's different in other professions. Some of my friends, who became production or market managers, got an ulcer or a heart attack after the promotion, and I put on ten pounds.

IVO: You don't say.

Silence.

MARKO: I got tired of working with students – running circles, long jumps, high jumps, vaulting, splits, rope climbing... That amateurism drove me crazy. When I was young I dreamed about becoming a famous coach, only to end up in a school. Sad and pathetic.

IVO: C'mon, it's better than ending up in a bank like me. That is, in jail.

MARKO: Sorry, but banks at least have a certain reputation. And it wasn't your fault you ended up in jail.

IVO: Banks are disgusting and dangerous, and jail – once you end up there, it doesn't matter whether you're guilty or not. The fact that you're in it makes you guilty. It's like a disease.

MARKO: What do you mean "like a disease"?

IVO: It's like this: picture your best friend. Have you?

MARKO: I have. Đuro.

IVO: Now, imagine Đuro contracts some contagious disease; let's say AIDS or cholera... Would you call him and suggest you take a walk around Maksimir?

MARKO: Well...not while he's contagious....

IVO: There you go. We ex-cons are permanently contagious. Carriers until death.

MARKO: But, everybody knows you're not guilty!

IVO: It doesn't matter; none of my ex-friends want to hang out with me anymore. Nobody asks me out for a drink. I understand them and I'm not mad. To be honest, it's fine by me.

MARKO: What do you mean?

IVO: Because none of them came to see me while I was inside. Nobody. Not even my ex-wife. Not even my own son. He's in no hurry to come from Germany and visit me, not even now. Get it?

MARKO: Everyone thought you were guilty.

IVO: So what? Can't a friend have some flaws? Even if I were guilty, is that a reason enough to reject me forever?

MARKO: You can't look at things that way.

IVO: Sure I can! In jail, there were some real criminals, killers, people who have stolen big money, but they still had friends who came to see them. I considered them the luckiest people in the world. And I still do.

MARKO: They belong to a completely different world. We can't compare ourselves to them.

IVO: There's only one world.

Silence.

MARKO: You had a hard time in jail, didn't you?

IVO: Yes, I did. But I got used to it quickly. You get used to anything.

MARKO: I know.

IVO: No, you don't.

Silence.

MARKO: Even now things aren't what they're supposed to be.

IVO: Now it's great.

MARKO: Being without a job and completely broke?

IVO: I'm as disgusted by money as any other bank official. I don't even miss my job because the very thought of my colleagues and the whole institution makes me sick.

MARKO: You could apply for some other bank.

IVO: Not in a million years! I never want to work in a bank again. I don't want to deal with money, trade, bank notes, or businessmen ever again!

MARKO: Then what are you going to do? You have to do something.

IVO: I'll try working as a doorman.

MARKO: A doorman?! You have a degree in economics.

IVO: My late parents made me study economy. I wanted to be a vet, but they didn't like it so they made me take a different path.

MARKO: You're mad at them?

IVO: No, I haven't been for a long time. I'm mad at myself for listening to them.

MARKO: Even if you had become a vet, sooner or later you'd have grown tired of animals, like I've grown tired of students and their parents.

Silence.

IVO: Can I ask you something... something personal?

MARKO: Personal? Me?

IVO: Yes, you.

MARKO: Go ahead.

IVO: Do you love... Do you love Ana?

MARKO: What do you mean, *do I love her?*

IVO: I mean literally – do you love her?

MARKO: Why do you ask?

IVO: Ana suffered a lot when I went to jail. She had a hard time.

MARKO It's not your fault.

IVO: It doesn't matter. I told you, it's like being contagious: sick people can't be blamed for being sick, yet everyone avoids them. She was the wife of a "contagious" man. It wasn't easy for her at the time. Trust me, there were times when I felt worse for her than I did for myself. It would be wrong if you left her and hurt her.

Silence.

MARKO: Relax, I have no intention of leaving her. Why would you think that?

IVO: I thought, since I'm here... it might be a reason for you to bail. I'm probably getting on your nerves, and so is she. I'm probably getting on her nerves too. But I don't have a choice. I have nowhere to go. You know?

MARIO: I know.

IVO: You're not mad at me, are you?

MARKO: No, I'm not.

IVO: You're a good man. That's why I let you smoke in my room although it bothers me.

Marko puts out the cigarette.

MARKO: You should've told me straight away.

IVO: Come on, we have to be kind and tolerant to each other. And tolerance means accepting things that make us feel uncomfortable.

Silence.

IVO: Listen...

MARKO: Yes?

IVO: Imagine you were single... divorced, for example.

MARKO: I have no intention of getting divorced.

IVO: I know, but imagine you were divorced and it wasn't your fault.

MARKO: Not my fault?

IVO: Exactly.

MARKO: You mean, if Ana left me?

IVO: Right.

MARKO: You think she wants to leave me?

IVO: No, just in theory... hypothetically speaking... what if?

MARKO: You know something or is it just a hunch?

IVO: Don't worry, it's nothing like that. I was just wondering what you would do if you were in the situation that a friend of mine is in.

MARKO: I see...

IVO: Yes. Imagine you were that friend of mine; divorced, not your fault, and a single woman gave you her phone number...

MARKO: Yes, and...

IVO: What would you do?

MARKO: It depends.

IVO: On what?

MARKO: Whether she's good-looking.

IVO: She's very good-looking... At least that's what my friend says. It's just that she has an illegitimate daughter... Some guy got her pregnant and left.

MARKO: That's not a problem for me. It's even a good thing.

IVO: But she also has a mother, a seventy-year-old mother.

MARKO: Now, that's a bit inconvenient.

IVO: Why?

MARKO: Mothers are always unpredictable. Some of them are good, but mostly they're possessive when it comes to their daughters. It's like "I want to protect you

from repeating your mistakes”, but the thing is they never want to share them again. But I didn’t get your question.

IVO: Well... that... If she gave him her phone number, does she expect him to call?

MARKO: That’s not the point.

IVO: What do you mean?

MARKO: The real question is whether *I* want to... I mean, whether *he* wants to see her or not, do *I* want to... does *he* want to hang out with her, and not whether she expects him to.

IVO: You think so?

MARKO: Absolutely. Tell your friend to try and figure out what he thinks of her, what he wants from her... and then decide whether to call her or not.

Silence.

IVO: Maybe you’re right.

MARKO: I know I’m right.

IVO: And what would you do if you were him?

MARKO: I wouldn’t think twice. I’d call her the very next day.

IVO: What about her daughter, and the mother?

MARKO: Oh, well – that can be arranged. There are no perfect situations at our age.

IVO: I’ll say.

MARKO: Listen, buddy, it’s better to regret something you did than something you didn’t do. That’s personal experience talking.

IVO: Why... You had a run-in with destiny?

MARKO: Well... I’ll admit it, but only under the condition that you *never* tell Ana.

IVO: You can trust me.

MARKO: After college... which took me longer than usual to finish... I was twenty-seven and drafted into the army...the navy, in Pula. I had just finished boot camp, and was spending the summer, in the garrison. The city was packed with tourists, and I was working at the headquarters, so I could take a walk around the town every day. The film festival was about to start, there were posters all over the town... So, I’m walking the streets and I run into a beautiful girl at the bus station. She was heading to the beach with her ten-year-old nephew. We started to talk. The bus was late, so we started talking about movies. I found out she was visiting her relatives for the summer, that she finished her first year of college, anyway... Before her bus had

arrived, we set up a date for the next day by the old Roman arch. I heard her little nephew calling her Micika so that's what I called her.

IVO: So, she agreed to meet you right away?

MARKO: It was love at first sight. Three days later we started dating, ten days in I was already fantasizing about marrying her and so on... Two weeks later we decided to go to the Arena to see a movie. I remember some comedy was playing and... anyway, I was overjoyed, on cloud nine...I remember shaving that afternoon and getting ready like I was getting married, when captain Živković burst into the headquarters and ordered me to report to major Popović. I had a feeling something was up, but when I saw the MP's, white belts and all, with the major, I realized that all hell broke loose

IVO: What happened?

MARKO: A colleague of mine, a friend who worked at captain Živković's office with me, met some English guy. Since he spoke English, they became friends and he invited the guy for a drink at the barracks. The worst thing was that he snuck him in over the fence, then drank and hung out with him till dawn and someone reported him. As it was my watch that night it was also my fault. Anyway, we ended up in the brig for ten days and after that were reassigned to the island of Vis. Until the end of my military service they treated me like an outcast. The worst part was that I ended up in the brig on the very night I was supposed to take Micika out. You can imagine how I felt. She must have thought I've ditched her.

IVO: Have you tried explaining it to her?

MARKO: How, when? I didn't have her address or her phone number. I never saw her again. She remained the most treasured memory of my youth, but also the saddest one.

IVO: You knew her last name?

MARKO: The hell I did! I forgot to ask. I went to Pula for five summers in a row hoping I'd bump into her on the streets, but it was no use. I guess we were never meant to be.

IVO: That's sad.

MARKO: Very sad.

Scene seven

(Ana, Ivo, later on Marko)

Ana is alone in the apartment. She's wearing an apron and peeling the potatoes. Ivo appears at the front door.

IVO: Hi!

ANA: Hi!

Ivo puts the newspapers on the table.

ANA: What's the weather like?

IVO: Cold. Pretty cold.

Silence.

IVO: What are you doing?

ANA: Peeling potatoes.

IVO: What are you going to do with them when you're done peeling?

ANA: I'm gonna make a potato pie.

IVO: I used to love potato pie.

ANA: I know. I remember.

IVO: Does Marko like potato pie?

ANA: Nope.

IVO: Why are you making it, then?

ANA: I'm not making it for him. He left for the train station fifteen minutes ago. He'll be gone for four days. He has a conference in Split.

IVO: I see.

Silence.

IVO: You're not having guests over today, are you?

ANA: Nope.

IVO: So, the potato pie is for you and me?

ANA: No.

IVO: How come?

ANA: You know I don't like potato pie.

IVO: Who are you making it for, then?

ANA: Take a wild guess.

IVO: I don't suppose it's for me then?

ANA: Of course it's for you.

Silence.

IVO: Well...thanks!

ANA: You're welcome.

Silence.

ANA: You know, while you were in jail I made a potato pie a couple of times. I meant to bring it to you, but each time I gave up the thought.

IVO: Why?

ANA: Because I was mad at you.

IVO: Mad at me?! You?

ANA: Of course... Our lives were miserable, you were working at the bank for peanuts. What's worse, I wasn't making good money either. I taught geography and except for that one trip to Trieste and one to Nagykanizsa, I've never been abroad. It's awful to teach something you know nothing about. Each and every one of my students has seen more of the world than I have, which means they basically know geography better than I do.

IVO: Hold on a minute. You took your students on that class trip to Budapest, Vienna, and Barcelona.

ANA: Class trips don't count. When you're a teacher you have to act like a cop, constantly keeping kids from getting drunk and having kids of their own. The only memory I have of those trips are drunken students puking on the bus. I wasn't able to concentrate on the cities or the landscape... That's why I've been avoiding class trips for years.

IVO: At least you got a chance to see some of the world.

ANA: Fine, but don't change the subject, and the subject was that we lead a miserable life. And then, when I found out that you and that Greek guy transferred thirty million Euros to Cyprus, I figured you finally decided to get some money in a risky way. But at the same time I felt awful that you didn't say a word to me. I was convinced you were going to run away from me and our son, leave both of us in complete misery while you're off to Tahiti with all that money.

IVO: Tahiti?!

ANA: Or Hawaii.

IVO: Nonsense! You know I don't like islands... I didn't steal that money and I had no intention of leaving you. You should've brought me that potato pie.

ANA: Well, I didn't know back then what I know now.

IVO: Still, you should've brought me that pie to prison. Despite everything.

ANA: You think?

IVO: Yes, I do.

Silence.

ANA: I was angry at you for ending up in jail. For being careless, that's all I held against you.

IVO: That's why you were angry at me?

ANA: Of course. Look how many people stole from this country, politicians to businessmen, and they all got away with it, only my dumbass of a husband didn't... Sorry, but that's how I saw it back then. You were mine and you were a dumbass.

IVO: Sadly, that's how many people think.

ANA: It's only logical.

IVO: You know that I haven't stolen a single penny, anything in my entire life. That's my only treasure.

ANA: Neither have I and you don't see me bragging about it.

Silence.

IVO: Our Lovro called yesterday. We had a great chat.

ANA: You didn't tell me that.

IVO: He says he likes it in Hamburg. I had no idea his German scholarship was that good.

ANA: He's the top of his class. There is a job waiting for him as soon as he graduates.

IVO: We can be proud of him.

ANA: He's smarter and better than the two of us. I only wish he were here in Zagreb.

IVO: I think I know why he went to study abroad.

ANA: Why's that?

IVO: Because of me. Because of that scandal, to escape the stories about his father who went to jail.

ANA: It's not that, there are better prospects for engineers in Germany.

IVO: You're just saying that.

Silence.

ANA: Listen...

IVO: What?

ANA: This is very difficult for me...for all of us.

IVO: What do you mean?

ANA: You know very well what I mean.

IVO: When you say 'us', who exactly do you mean?

ANA: I mean you, Marko and me. You've messed up my life. Sorry.

IVO: I'm sorry, mine's messed up, too. It was against my will and it wasn't my fault.

ANA: I know, but I've only been married to Marko for a year, you know how fragile and delicate new relationships are. What you're doing is really mean and rude.

IVO: And what exactly am I doing?

ANA: You know damn well.

IVO: No, I don't, tell me.

ANA: You're keeping us from picking up where we left off. You're compromising our marriage, you're bothering us. You hardly ever leave the apartment; you're an intruder in our privacy. It's terrible!

IVO: Where am I supposed to go, what can I do? I can't afford to go out, all my friends have forgotten me. This apartment is mine as much as it is yours. As if I enjoy being in this ridiculous situation, as if I wouldn't like for all of us to have some peace and quiet.

ANA: If that were true, you would get a job and rent your own apartment.

IVO: You two already have jobs, why don't *you* rent one?

ANA: You know that's not possible with our income.

IVO: And you're talking *me* into it. Besides, I'm looking for a job every day.

ANA: Yeah, as a doorman or a night guard. Like that's gonna fix anything.

IVO: I've submitted a request for compensation of damages from the state for all the days I spent in jail. My lawyer explained that I couldn't sue the State, but only request damages for all 742 days I've been inside.

ANA: And when will that be settled?

IVO: Who knows, considering what our legal system is like.

ANA: How much will you get per day?

IVO: 160 Kuna, or 22 Euros.

ANA: That's it?!

IVO: I'm afraid so. And I'll have to pay my lawyers and cover my debts. I am living on a loan.

Silence.

ANA: I still think you should be a gentleman and leave the apartment.

IVO: I was a gentleman when I agreed to a consensual divorce, although I shouldn't have.

ANA: And why is that?

IVO: Because... Well, never mind.

ANA: It surprised me how easily you gave me the divorce.

IVO: What else could I do?

ANA: You could have fought for me. I was even hurt a little – you gave me the divorce so easily, as if I meant nothing to you. That's why I rushed into my new marriage.

IVO: I did you a favor, although my heart was breaking, and now you're bitching about it.

ANA: If you were as good as you say you are, you'd leave this apartment without a word.

IVO: Wait a minute, you're making this potato pie just to get me to leave my apartment so you could enjoy it with your new husband?! I'm always supposed to be the gentleman, so you can treat me like an idiot, with an exception of an occasional potato pie as a token of your infinite goodness.

ANA: Another one of these inappropriate remarks and I'm throwing the potatoes into the waste bin.

Doorbell.

ANA: Come in!

A failed attempt to open the door that is locked, then a doorbell again.

IVO: I've locked the front door.

Ivo goes to the hallway and a moment later he returns with Marko who is holding his luggage.

ANA: What are YOU doing here?

MARKO: Why is the door locked while the two of you are alone?

IVO: I locked it.

MARKO: Why?

IVO: I always lock the door.

ANA: You still haven't told me why you came back?

MARKO: You of all people shouldn't be asking me this question right now.

ANA: What do you mean?

MARKO: You're here with your ex-husband behind locked doors while your husband is away.

ANA: Are you accusing me of something?

MARKO: I'm just stating the obvious.

ANA: You know what – shame on you! You should be ashamed of yourself! You creep! You cancelled your trip because you don't trust me?

MARKO: Looks like I made the right choice.

ANA: Listen, you pathetic bastard: I've forgiven men for everything, absolutely everything, except jealousy and distrust! As a woman of character, I cannot and will not let that pass! It's over between us! I don't need a jealous man who doubts me. Get your things and get the hell out of this apartment!

MARKO: Wait, where am I supposed to go?

ANA: Well, that's your problem.

MARKO: I didn't mean anything by it, I just had some doubts and asked for an explanation.

ANA: I don't need a husband who doubts me. Ivo never did. Right, Ivo?

IVO: Well...uhm...

ANA: Come on, back me up on this!

IVO doesn't know what to say.

MARKO: You know, not everything is exactly how you see it. You can't just throw me out.

ANA: Sure I can! You've hurt me, you've broken my heart! I'm sick and tired of husbands and men and married life. From now on I'm a free woman. Goodbye!

MARKO: But...

ANA: But what?

MARKO: It's cold outside, I can't just sleep in the park.

ANA: I don't care, just get lost!

IVO: Ana, wait, you can't just throw the man out on the street. You can't be that cruel.

ANA: You're the last person who gets to lecture me on what I can and cannot do.

IVO: He's a living being, you have to consider his feelings too.

ANA: Just don't meddle in my life! I'm sure of one thing – he won't be staying in my room, and I don't see you letting him stay in yours!

ANA goes to the bedroom and slams the door.

IVO: She was always impulsive and cruel.

MARKO: Ivo, can't a man be a little jealous?

IVO: Not with this kind of woman.

MARKO: She wants to throw me out in the street. Ivo, please, help me, my friend, please, help me.

IVO: You know, Marko, she is my ex-wife after all, we have a son and... I've bonded with you, but we've known each other for a short period of time and everything is so delicate... you've gotta understand me... I would like to help you, and be in her good graces, which seems impossible in this situation.

MARKO: You're not going to ditch me, too?

IVO: You are forcing me to make a difficult decision.

ACT TWO

Scene eight

(IVO, MARKO, later ANA)

Night. Marko and Ivo are lying on the couch. They are sleeping. Ivo is snoring incessantly. Marko is turning over in his sleep. Ivo is still snoring. Marko wakes up and, leaning on his elbow, gently pushes Ivo, with a quiet "shhhh". Ivo rolls over and continues snoring. Marko gets up, turns the night lamp on, looks for cigarettes and matches. He lights a cigarette and stares in front of him. Ivo wakes up.

IVO: What are you doing?

MARKO: I'm smoking.

IVO: What time is it?

MARKO: It's three o'clock.

IVO: Oh, my God! Why aren't you sleeping?

MARKO: I can't. You keep snoring.

IVO: Sorry. That bothered Ana too when we were together.

IVO gets up and goes to the bathroom. He comes back soon and walks over to Marko.

IVO: Can I have a cigarette?

MARKO: But, you don't smoke?!

IVO: Well, I feel like smoking today.

MARKO: Sorry I woke you up.

MARKO gives the cigarettes to Ivo, he takes one and lights it.

IVO: It's not your fault. My snoring woke you up, I woke you first. I have an important meeting today, I barely fell asleep.

MARKO: A business meeting?

IVO: No, something personal.

MARKO: Oh, sorry...

IVO: Never mind.

Silence.

MARKO: Listen...

IVO: Shoot.

MARKO: This isn't working.

IVO: What isn't?

MARKO: Well, this whole mess.

IVO: What are you saying?

MARKO: I can't stand it.

IVO: What?

MARKO: This situation. Her anger. The three of us in one apartment, you and me sharing a bed. I can't take it anymore.

IVO: Oh, come on.

MARKO: Aren't you fed up with everything?

IVO: No.

MARKO: That's impossible!

IVO: We obviously have a different take on life.

MARKO: What do you mean *different*?

IVO: You're spoiled.

MARKO: What are you trying to say? Isn't this unbearable to you?

IVO: Come on, Marko, I've had a great time since I was let out of prison. The crowded bed and the apartment aren't all that bad. Here you go, it's 3 AM and the light is on, isn't that great?

MARKO: Why great?

IVO: I'd be punished for that in prison. We're even smoking. I'd be punished for that, too. Isn't it wonderful, us smoking as much as we want to?

MARKO: But you're a non-smoker?

IVO: Yes, but I take pleasure in smoking and not being punished for it. Although, I admit, I do not like cigarettes. I'm smoking with you so I can feel my unlimited freedom and to support you. After all, we are roommates, brought together by destiny through the same person, her love and anger.

ANA comes from the bedroom in her nightgown.

ANA: It stinks in here! It reeks of cigarettes. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?

IVO: If I remember correctly, you haven't been talking to either us for more than a week now.

MARKO: Now we are in trouble.

IVO: Do not be afraid. A barking dog never bites.

MARKO is speaking silently.

MARKO: What do you think, will she make up with me?

IVO: Sure she will.

MARKO: How do you know that?

IVO: Some time ago, in my time, she would always make up with me. You just have to let her blow off some steam.

MARKO: What do you mean "blow off some steam"?

IVO: Let her punish you with her anger. You know, she is a social being; she will want to talk to you, and that's how you'll make up.

MARKO: That's comforting, thank you.

A sound of water running comes from the bathroom. A moment later Ana goes out from the bathroom and into the bedroom.

MARKO: We are crammed up on the sofa while she can stretch out on the double bed.

IVO: It's all in the attitude.

MARKO: What do you mean *attitude*?

IVO: She has assumed this dominant position. She's made us inferior.

MARKO: Can that be changed? Can we become dominant? Make her inferior?

IVO: I doubt it.

MARKO: Why?

IVO: Because we're regular henpecked husbands, that's why.

MARKO: Oh, I didn't think that was so important.

IVO: It's crucial. Once you let a woman take control, which usually happens in the first week, she tightens the reins on you for good.

MARKO: So there's no cure?

IVO: No.

MARKO: So what should I do?

IVO: To come to terms with the situation and accept your position as a gift from God.

MARKO: What do you mean?

IVO: Have you even been to a sermon?

MARKO: Not really, I'm not much of a believer.

IVO: I started going to church regularly while I was in prison, we had a chapel there and the preacher was all right. It helped me sort certain things out. Thanks to those sermons, I realized that a true Christian needs to learn how to carry his cross, without feeling resentment or rage. In fact, our task is to learn how to love our own cross... as a gift from God. Do you get it?

MARKO: No. What do you mean "love your cross"?

IVO: Ana is our cross. Or better yet, she's yours. She's no longer mine, as we are divorced. I'm only helping you carry that cross, just as Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus. Do you get it now?

Silence.

MARKO: You know what?

IVO: What?

MARKO: All you former inmates are overthinking things. I watched a documentary once where the reporter spoke to former prisoners trying to lead a normal life, and now as I'm listening to you and your rubbish, I realized you're all the same. You all have those big theories and everything is so clear and easy for you, whereas we who haven't served time, are only suffering and don't have a single answer to any of the life's important questions.

IVO: That's only fair.

MARKO: Why fair?

IVO: Because we have paid our dues, all that overthinking. Isn't that so?

MARKO: I don't know. I guess. I'm not sure about anything anymore. While I was living alone, everything was simple and easy – my life was perfectly clear to me. I was confident in everything I did, but now...

IVO: Why did you get married then?

MARKO: I read in a newspaper that single people live 10 years shorter than married ones. I got afraid, I panicked and so I wanted to prolong my life. And I started dreading solitude. It's great to be alone for a day or two and then you start thinking about those who have a wife, a partner... you start to think their lives are more meaningful and that you are missing something important.

IVO: Well, you actually are.

MARKO: What?

IVO: Dynamic, life, emotions, love, hatred, quarrels, making up. The exchange of the cold and warm, the foundation on which every relationship between two people lies upon.

MARKO: Are you trying to console me or frighten me?

IVO: I'm consoling you.

MARKO: OK then.

Silence.

MARKO: Listen, you should speak to Ana, tell her a few good words on my behalf.

IVO: What do you mean?

MARKO: Persuade her to reconcile with me.

IVO: Me?

MARKO: Who else? You know her best. Better than me, in fact.

IVO: I'm afraid this might be counter-productive.

MARKO: It won't. It's not that usual for a man to say a few good words about another man in front of a woman. Especially the ex about the current one.

IVO: It seems to me that you are also soon to be an ex.

MARKO: Don't let it happen. Help me, buddy.

IVO: I'll see what I can do. I'm not making any promises, though.

Scene 9

(Ivo, Ana, later Marko)

Ivo is wearing an apron. He's setting the table for three. He's putting three plates and three wine glasses and then three smaller liquor glasses. Ana comes home from the town, she enters the room. She's surprised at the sight.

ANA: What is this?

IVO: Lunch.

ANA: You made lunch? For whom?

IVO: For the three of us. When is Marko coming?

ANA: I don't know.

Ana sniffs the air.

ANA: What's that smell?

IVO: Beef and eggplant pie.

ANA: I've always loved it.

IVO: I remember. We'll wait for Marko and then...

ANA: Why?

MARKO: We can't let the guy starve.

ANA: What do you think you're doing?

IVO: What do you mean?

ANA: I'm asking you, what do you think you're doing?

IVO: What?

ANA: This lunch and your friendship with Marko. Don't you think it's perverse, sneaky and unfair towards me?

IVO: What do you mean? I don't get it.

ANA: You're doing it just to spite me.

IVO: First of all, I'm not a spiteful person. If I ever was one, well I'm not anymore. Secondly, Marko is your choice and he became a part of mine only by accident, against my will. And it's all thanks to you.

ANA: You are too good to him. I don't like it.

IVO: I'm only being fair to him.

ANA: You've been getting on my nerves lately.

IVO: Why?

ANA: You are pretending that you care more for your wife's husband than your ex-wife. It's a bit far-fetched and unconvincing.

IVO: I'm not pretending.

ANA: Yeah, you are. And you're being very unfair towards me.

IVO: Why would you think so?

ANA: You're treating me as if I don't matter, as if I don't exist.

IVO: What are you saying?

ANA: You're ignoring me.

IVO: You're overreacting.

ANA: You're pretending like I'm some unimportant person you have nothing to do with.

IVO: Those are unfounded accusations, I treat you fairly.

ANA: Fairly and coldly, overly "disinterested". Like I'm not your ex, like I'm not a woman made of flesh and blood. You're always giving me the cold shoulder. You are trying to tell me that you care more for my new husband than you do for me. Admit it, you've gone too far. It's perverted, it's low, it's degrading to me.

IVO: What did you expect?

ANA: I expected you'd behave like every other man, that you'd show you care for me, at least a little bit.

IVO: But you're a married woman!

ANA: So what? I didn't die the day I got married. I didn't become ugly and uninteresting, at least I hope not.

IVO: So, that's why you've been angry with me all this time?

ANA: Finally you've figured it out! You keep ignoring me as a woman and still expect me to respect you. If you were a real man, you would have complimented me at least once in the last month, you would have remembered at least one of our good moments together.

Silence.

IVO: Well, you're just as beautiful as you were then, I often think of the day we met at the hiking centre on Sljeme.

ANA: You bastard, coming on to me so shamelessly! You're forgetting that I'm a married woman! Now you've really sunk in my eyes.

IVO is shocked. Short silence.

IVO: But you just said it was exactly what you wanted to hear?! You talked me into saying that!

ANA: Of course – so that I could turn you down.

IVO: Now I really don't get it!

ANA: What do you mean you don't get it? Your task was to notice I'm a woman, to at least try something and mine was to turn you down, because I'm an honorable married woman. Now everything's in its place.

IVO: Right. So you're not mad at me anymore?

ANA: No. Maybe a little.

IVO: So we can talk like we used to?

ANA: Yes.

MARKO enters the room.

MARKO: Hi everybody!

IVO: Hi, Marko!

MARKO: Wow, something smells good!

IVO: I've made eggplant and beef pie for the three of us. And I've just talked to Ana how it was high time you two made up and she agreed.

ANA: I did?!

IVO: Yes, you agreed. You've proven to be a real honorable woman who cares about her husband. Isn't that right?

ANA: Well...sort of.

IVO: I suggest we have a brandy before lunch, to bury the hatchet and to continue to live without anger, without hate, without jealousy and without the need to dominate. Ok?

MARKO: I'm in.

Silence.

ANA: Come on, pour that brandy!

IVO pours the brandy into three small glasses. He hands the first glass to Ana, the second to Marko, and then he takes one himself.

ANA + MARKO: Cheers!

They clink glasses and drink the brandy up. The phone rings.

IVO: I'll get it!

ANA: No, I will!

ANA is faster than Ivo. She picks up the phone.

ANA: Hello, yes... Who wants to speak to him? ... An acquaintance from prison?! ... Why are you calling him to this number? You're confirming "Love and Malice"?! ... What opera?! ... You're confirming the date in the opera tonight... No, I'm not his sister... Yes, he's here... Well you haven't asked for him... Alright, here you are... *Ivo*, it's for you!

IVO takes the phone from Ana.

IVO: Oh, hi... No one of importance – my ex-wife... Oh no, I don't have anything to do with her anymore... Her new husband is also here... I'm not visiting them... They're not visiting me... It's complicated; I'll explain everything when we meet... I am really looking forward to seeing you, I can't wait... So in front of the theater a quarter before the opera starts... I love operas... love. Bye!

ANA: So I am "no one of importance" to you?!

IVO: I'm sorry, I had to ... so she wouldn't suspect that we're together again.

ANA: Since when do you love opera?

IVO: She invited me, I can't tell her that I don't like opera because I want her company, now can I?

ANA: You're dating a former convict. That's really low, even for you. You make me sick. Typical man.

IVO: She is not an ex-convict.

ANA: How can she not be when she's saying that she is an acquaintance from jail?

IVO: Of course I know her from jail.

ANA: You see!

IVO: But she's not an ex convict. She worked there as a doctor. We first met when I had dysentery.

ANA: And now you're hitting on her!

IVO: I'm not "hitting" on her. She's a single woman, I really don't see what the problem is.

MARKO: How can you be jealous of him? Let him live his own life.

ANA: What makes you think I'm jealous?

MARKO: You're grilling him about that doctor like some kind of P.I.!

ANA: I just don't want him to rush into anything. And I'm completely sick of you, all you men are the same! I'm sick and tired of both of you! Sick and tired!

ANA goes into her room and slams the door!

MARKO: Do you see that...she's being crazy?! She still cares about you, she's jealous- she's never been jealous of me. I'm sorry, but I just can't take it anymore!

IVO: Come on, you got it all wrong.

MARKO: No, no! I finally understand. I'm getting my things and sleeping in the school tonight. I can't do this anymore. Either she's mine all the way or it's over for good.

IVO: How exactly are you gonna sleep in the school?

MARKO: In my office- I'll get a sleeping bag. Anything's better than this.

ANA appears at the bedroom door, holding a suitcase.

IVO: Where are you going?

ANA: To the school. I'm sleeping there, in the geography classroom. I've had enough of you and MARKO! He agreed to all this, instead of putting his foot down and ending it. If he had done that, I'd respect him as a husband and as a man.

IVO: While you've been packing your suitcase he just put his foot down and said that he's had it and that he's going to take a sleeping bag to sleep in his office.

ANA: Are you making this up?

IVO: I am not making this up. I swear.

MARKO: It's true. I don't want to stay in this apartment where I'm being insulted any longer.

ANA: I don't want to live here either, under these circumstances.

IVO: Excellent! I have to be honest – that suits me just fine.

ANA: What does?

IVO: Well that you two are spending the night at that school of yours so that I could invite my doctor over for a drink.

ANA: Invite her where?

IVO: Well here, to this apartment.

ANA: You want to invite women to our apartment and seduce them? I'm sorry but I cannot allow that.

IVO: We will stay in my half of the apartment.

ANA: Still, I would not allow it even if you begged.

IVO: Why?

ANA: I just wouldn't!

MARKO: Wait a sec, wait – what's wrong with that? We have to do the man a favor. He's been good to us all this time. He made us tea, breakfast and even cooked lunch

for us. And besides, we would even profit from him dating the chick so she'd eventually take him in.

IVO: Wait, wait, slow down, I didn't think everything over yet, I don't know her very well, I wouldn't want to rush in again.

ANA: What do you mean RUSH IN AGAIN?! Are you trying to say you've rushed in with me? Wasn't I a good and devoted wife to you? Was there something wrong with me? Come on, say it! I supported you, I've been kind to you, I bore you a son, you could rely on me in everything.

MARKO: This is really perverse and disgusting.

ANA: What is? What are you talking about?

MARKO: How can you not feel uncomfortable talking about your relationship in praises in front of me? Are you completely unaware of how you've been treating me this whole time?

ANA: And how can you push him in the arms of another woman just to spite me? Since he got out of prison you've been a closer friend to him than to me. You're faking friendship and kindness with him just to hurt. You don't even care about my thoughts and feelings.

MARKO: This is what I get from you, after everything I've done for...

IVO: Wait, people, wait!

Silence.

IVO: Can I say a few words?

Silence.

MARKO: Yes.

ANA: Speak!

IVO: I know this was a hard day for you, but, believe me, mine was harder. I cooked this lunch with love for the three of us, so you'd make up. I put a lot of work into it. Also, I'm excited because tonight's my first date with the doctor. I admit it. You two have each other and I have no one. It's not easy. You can't go through life like that. I am also aware that my coming home from prison messed up your life, as well as mine. But allow me to say that we've managed to build some kind of mutual trust in all of this. We all care about the other person's happiness. And that means we've become friends. Isn't that right?

Silence

MARKO: That's right.

ANA: True. This is turning out to be a very unusual friendship.

IVO: So let's have lunch together as friends, let's tell jokes, help each other with our problems. In fact, I'll take the liberty of asking you to spend the night in the school, so I can have the apartment to myself tonight. And my date... if she agrees to come.

Silence

ANA: Do you care about her?

IVO: I do.

ANA: Is she a good person?

IVO: She's great.

ANA: You can count on me. I'll sleep over in the school tonight. And I hope you get your well-deserved fresh start with the lady doctor.

MARKO: I'm sleeping in the school tonight, too. I also hope you get it on with the doctor...I mean, get a fresh start.

IVO: You two are truly great friends. Can I take the pie out of the oven?

ANA: Sure, I'm starving.

MARKO: Me too. It's chow time! We have a long night ahead of us.

ANA: Maybe we can get a sleeping bag for two.

IVO: Thanks a lot, my friends. Tonight would be smooth sailing if it weren't for the opera.

MARKO: Oh, please - you'll be watching her, not the show.

ANA: That's right. Now, let's try that pie.

IVO: Right away.

ANA: Wait.

IVO: What?

ANA: One of my student's mother brought me a bottle of No.5, you could give it to your date tonight.

IVO: I'm not sure if that's appropriate on a first date?

ANA: Of course it is! You know that women like presents; you have to make the evening special from the start.

IVO: Maybe you're right.

MARKO: As long as she doesn't get used to it...otherwise he'll have to come up with something special on every date. And when he's out of ideas, she'll find someone more imaginative than him.

ANA: Come on, don't scare him with your grim scenarios. He should do anything to make this work.

IVO: Okay, I'll take the perfume. If it can help, I'll take it.

MARKO: Can you afford buying her a drink in the theater café?

IVO: Yes, I can cover that.

MARKO: If you want, I can lend you two hundred and fifty kuna, just in case she suggests having dinner.

IVO: I don't think that will be necessary...although...maybe I should have it with me, just in case.

MARKO: You have to think of everything. I'll get the money.

IVO: And I'll go get the pie.

Scene ten

(Marko, Ana, later Ivo and Marija)

ANA: We can't live like this anymore.

MARKO: I agree.

ANA: We've slept four times in the school so he could be here with his horny lady-doctor. And now when I've expected this to be over, he managed to talk us into going to the school this Saturday too. I'm exhausted from sleeping on the hard floor and my back is killing me. While we are over there, covering ourselves with maps and freezing our asses off, they are doing it all over the place as if they were in a hotel. Why don't they go to her place?

MARKO: Because her mom and daughter are there.

ANA: And why doesn't she ask them to go to the cinema, theater, or school?

MARKO: Because she feels uneasy.

ANA: Uneasy? Women don't feel uneasy when they have a clear goal. It's easier for both of them this way... And the two of us back to the sleeping bag tonight – again.

MARKO: What goal do you have in mind?

ANA: What goal?

MARKO: I quote: "Women don't feel uneasy when they have a clear goal." In your opinion, what is her goal? Be explicit!

ANA: Her goal is to marry him. And he is like a foolish kid, head over heels in love.

MARKO: That's good for us.

ANA: Yeah, if she doesn't marry into this apartment.

MARKO: C'mon, she wouldn't, would she?!

ANA: Anything is possible. Listen, I'm going to take a shower, then we'll pack our things and be off to school to camp.

MARKO: Ok. Just hurry up, we wouldn't like to be here when they come.

ANA: Actually, I'd really like to meet her. I wonder how she doesn't feel embarrassed about throwing us out from our apartment so they could...

Ana goes to the bathroom. Marko takes Sport Magazine and flips through the pages. All of a sudden, unlocking of the door is heard, Ivo and Marija are appearing at the door leading to the hallway. If Marija is played by the same actress, she should have a wig of a peroxide blonde.

IVO: Good evening.

MARKO: Good evening.

Ivo and Marija enter the apartment.

IVO: Let me introduce you. This is Marija, and this is my friend Marko.

Marija and Marko shake hands.

MARIJA: Nice to meet you.

MARKO: Nice to meet you.

MARIJA: Ivo talked a lot about you.

MARKO: And about you, too. I'm so glad we've finally met, too. How come you've already..., I thought you're going to...

IVO: The concert has been called off, the violinist got sick. And where's Ana?

MARKO: She's taking a shower. As soon as she is over, we're heading off to school. Straight to school!

IVO: You don't have to hurry. Take it easy.

MARIJA: You said: "straight to school"? I had known a man who used to say "straight". Sometimes he would have said: "straight to town" or "straight to the cinema" or...

MARKO: I'm sorry, but it seems to me like we met before...

MARIJA: Me too ... Oh my God, is it for real?!

MARKO: Micika!!! Is that you?

MARIJA: Markan!!! What are you doing here?!

MARKO: And where would I be?

MARIJA: I can't believe this.

MARKO: Neither can I. After all these years!

IVO: The two of you know each other?!

MARKO: Marija is my ex-girlfriend, I mean, a friend that I got to know while I was doing military service in Pula. I was telling you about her.

MARIJA: A friend?! I was just a friend to you?! I was your girlfriend, you promised to marry me and then you took to your heels! Phew! God only knows where!

MARKO: I didn't abandon you. Captain Živković and major Popović put me in the brig, and after ten days I was transferred to Vis!

MARIJA: That's a lie!

MARKO: Micika, I am telling you the truth, I swear!

MARIJA: Don't call me Micika! My name is Marija! Only my family called me Micika. I don't believe a word you said.

IVO: He has been telling me the story about how he got into detention and how much he loved a girl while he was in the army, little did I imagine that girl could have been you.

MARIJA: Now you're just making excuses. Male solidarity. There is no excuse for a man who seduces an innocent girl, knocks her up and then vanishes into thin air forever!

MARKO: A child?!

IVO: Are you talking about your daughter?

MARIJA: Of course I'm talking about her! That bastard! Now it's all coming back to me, my whole youth. He ruined my life as well as my daughter's, who never got to know her father. Phew! All men are bastards, all of them! Goodbye!

Marija storms out of the house slamming the door.

MARKO: Wait a minute: the daughter, the wife, Micika - it's impossible! Sorry, I must go after her!

Marko runs after Micika. Ivo takes a deep breath and sits on the sofa. A moment later Ana appears at the bathroom door in a bathrobe with the towel on her head.

ANA: What are you doing here?

IVO: The concert was cancelled so I came a bit earlier to introduce Marija to you and Marko.

ANA: So, where is Marija?

IVO: She got angry and left.

ANA: Why did she get angry?

IVO: It's difficult to explain.

ANA: And where is Marko?

IVO: He went after her.

ANA: Why did he go after her?

IVO: He wants to apologize to her for having made her pregnant.

ANA: Pregnant?! Whom?

IVO: Her!

ANA: Are you out of your mind?! What are you talking about?! My Marko doesn't have children.

IVO: He hadn't had any, not until today at least.

Scene eleven

(Ivo and Marko)

Ivo and Marko are sitting at a table (and) playing cards. Silence lasts a long time.

IVO: Wanna beer?

MARKO: No, thanks.

Silence.

MARKO: The weather forecast said that it would snow tomorrow.

IVO: I don't mind. I like snow. As long as I sit in a warm apartment.

MARKO: Oh, yes.

Silence.

MARKO: Forgive me for everything. I didn't mean to.

Long pause.

IVO: No, you forgive me. If I had known she was your ex, I would never be with her.

MARKO: It's not your fault.

Long pause. They continue throwing cards.

IVO: What is your daughter like?

MARKO: Nice, polite, the best. She started crying when she saw me. She was crying for ten minutes, and then her grandmother started to cry, then Micika, I mean Marija began to cry, and then all three of them were crying for ten minutes. And I was standing there like a fool not knowing what to say. The soup was getting cold while they were crying. Terrible.

Pause.

IVO: Nice that you called on them. Nice of you to have accepted their invitation for Sunday lunch. Nice of Ana to let you meet your daughter.

MARKO: Yes, she agreed to it – and now she's angry with me - says I shouldn't have stayed for five hours at lunch. What could I do when they wanted to show me family photo album – and some five hundred photos.

IVO: Five hundred photos?

MARKO: Around, about. Approximately. Listen, the girl is now twenty seven years old, and they took photos of her at least twenty times a year. You do the math. Those five hours went by like five seconds. I went through her whole life, and Marija talked about herself and how it was... Hope you're not angry.

IVO: Not at all.

MARKO: I had to listen and be polite; moreover, I was interested.

Pause.

MARKO: I'm sorry.

IVO: Come on. It's not your fault.

MARKO: It doesn't matter. I came into your life when you were in jail and now this thing with Marija and neither of that was on purpose.

IVO: I know. It was destined to be so.

Silence.

MARKO: Listen!

IVO: Yes?

MARKO: Since the day you brought Marija to meet us, not once have you gone out with her.

Silence.

IVO: We talked on the phone... several times.

MARKO: It's not the same.

IVO: I think she's a bit confused about everything... it's hard for her to pick up where we left off... until everything settles down.

MARKO: Oh...

IVO: So. She needs some time.

MARKO: I'm sorry if I've spoiled something.

IVO: C'mon... I've spoiled your life with Ana. It is actually my fault that she is mad with you.

MARKO: Your fault?

IVO: If I hadn't started dating her, brought her here and introduced her to you, she wouldn't be angry with you now.

MARKO: Oh, that's true too.

Silence.

IVO: She never introduced me either to her mum or to her daughter.

MARKO: Well, listen... She will.

IVO: You think so?

MARKO: Yes, I do.

Silence.

IVO: They liked you?

MARKO: It seems so.

IVO: After you it'll be much harder for me, you know.

MARKO: And why do you think so?

IVO: It's hard to eat ice cream after cake.

MARKO: A cake is a cake. And the second one can never be like the first one.

Silence.

MARKO: C'mon, let's have some of that beer!

IVO: With pleasure. I enjoy drinking beer only in company.

Scene twelve

(Marko, Marija)

Marko is alone at home, doing some back-exercises. Doorbell rings.

MARKO: Who could that be?

Marko enters the hallway, the moment after he returns with Marija.

MARKO: Come in, it's a bit messy.

MARIJA: Oh, no problem. Sorry for popping in unannounced.

MARKO: It's alright - my wife will probably arrive any minute now, and so will Ivo.

MARIJA: Marko!

MARKO: Say it!

MARIJA: I know that your wife is in Dubrovnik at student geography competition and that she won't come back until tomorrow.

MARKO: Who told you that?

MARIJA: Ivo. And he won't be here for the next two hours either because I asked him not to come.

MARKO: How?! Why?!

MARIJA: So that I can talk to you about everything in private.

MARKO: And Ivo agreed?

MARIJA: As you can see, he did.

Silence.

MARKO: Do you want to drink something?

MARIJA: No, thanks.

MARKO: Coffee, juice or tea?

MARIJA: Nothing, absolutely nothing. I wouldn't be able to concentrate on drinking... For days... I've been thinking for days that we should talk to each other, in private, face to face, and now when we got the chance, I don't want to waste our time on soda, coffee, I wouldn't like to run out of time, you know?

MARKO: Yes, I do.

Phone rings.

MARIJA: Pick up.

MARKO: Excuse me!

Marko picks up the receiver.

MARKO: Yes... Hi, honey, are you having a good time in Dubrovnik? Great, strolling on the city walls, nice... Miss you too... No, I'm here ... I was just

exercising my back... No, I'm alone, Ivo isn't around... You have a message for him? Sure I'll say hello... Hear you soon, bye, enjoy yourself... You too honey, bye!

Marko hangs up.

MARKO: Sorry!

MARIJA: Maybe me being here isn't such a good idea. You're married, have a wife and... I'm sorry to have bothered you, but I'm leaving now.

MARKO: Wait! You may go – and it is only logical that you will go one day – but before you go, please tell me why you came.

MARIJA: I'm uneasy about this, this was a wrong decision. It's best for me to leave and not say anything. I'm sorry.

MARKO: Micika!

MARIJA: Don't call me Micika. It brings back everything. I think it's best for us that we never...

MARKO: Micika, why did you come here? If you leave without telling me, you will regret it.

Pause.

MARIJA: OK then... I'll say why. You see, when you spent that Sunday with us, at lunch, our daughter... you thrilled her. The house was full, and she really liked it. You're all she's talking about. That also upset her, and you being a good and a kind man disarmed her. Besides, before you came she had been ready to argue with you. Back in the days she believed what I did... that you intentionally abandoned us and took off. When you set foot into our apartment and stepped in front of her, she instantly realized you didn't do it on purpose, that captain Živković and that big misunderstanding were to blame. She believed it all... and so did I.

MARKO: I wouldn't assign so much guilt to captain Živković, it was major Popović who put me to custody.

MARIJA: OK, who did what doesn't matter anymore. I just want you to know that our apartment was so full and warm that Sunday... And I was glad our daughter was happy and made myself believe I was happy for her, only to admit to myself the day before yesterday that I also had a great time, us having lunch and flipping through the family photo album... Even my mother liked you... very much. And suddenly I realized my past came back to me like the most beautiful present... I cannot think of anything without thinking of you, of what happened, could have happened or could

happen in the future. Forgive me but I had to say this though I know you and I are destined for failure and would never...

Marija starts to cry.

MARKO: Micika... I think you'll understand why I cannot hug you now and wipe your tears, and I would like to do it so much... Micika, Ivo became my best friend, and I can't even think of hurting him or my wife... She went through so much, and I wouldn't want that...

Marija starts to cry harder and runs out of the apartment.

Scene thirteen

(Ana and Ivo)

Ana in a bathrobe, peels potatoes, Ivo comes in.

IVO: Hello!

ANA: Hi! How was it like?

IVO: Excellent! A wonderful mass, a wonderful sermon. That priest is really a brilliant preacher. And where is Marko?

ANA: He is having a Sunday lunch with his daughter... and her mother and grandmother.

IVO: And you, what are you doing?

ANA: Making lunch.

IVO: For whom?

ANA: For the two of us.

IVO: I see: you are peeling potatoes.

ANA: You see correctly.

IVO: Will you bake them or boil them?

ANA: Neither.

IVO: It means that...

ANA: Exactly – I am making a potato pie.

IVO: Oh, thank you very much! I'm so happy about that. I like nothing more than your potato pie.

ANA: I have noticed that you've in a bad mood lately, so I thought I might cheer you up.

IVO: Is it so noticeable?

ANA? What?

IVO: My mood?

ANA: Everything is written all over your face. It's the same with me. I have also been somehow sad and anxious lately.

IVO: But why?

ANA: Because of everything – because of Marko, because of you, because of that lady doctor, because of the daughter that showed up out of nowhere, because of this jealousy that's eating me up.

IVO: Are you jealous of Marko and the lady doctor?

ANA: No.

IVO: Then of whom?

ANA: You know it very well.

IVO: No, I don't.

Silence.

ANA: You really don't understand anything, or are you just playing me?

IVO: I'm sorry, tell me. I don't have a clue about whom you are jealous of, if not of them.

ANA: You just want to annoy me, don't you?

IVO: No, not at all. I just don't understand what are you trying to say.

ANA: You're just pretending.

IVO: No, I'm not. I simply can't get why you're jealous.

ANA: C'mon. You are just pretending you don't understand anything.

IVO: What am I unable to understand? You said you were sad. I have no idea who can make you feel like that if not Marko.

ANA: Have you thought at least once that you hurt me by bringing your lady doctor here, in our apartment?

IVO: You didn't tell me anything... I thought you didn't care.

ANA: You thought I didn't care?

IVO: Yes, I did.

ANA: Well, you should know that I did care. I wanted you to be happy, but seeing you with her made my heart bleed.

IVO: Ana, you are married to Marko. You have your husband.

ANA: Sorry, but I think of you constantly. Since you were released, I have lost my peace. At first I wasn't sure of whom I love. While I was taking a walk on the city walls in Dubrovnik, I thought of how wonderful would it be if you were with me. Then I got back to the hotel, phoned you because I wanted to hear your voice, but Marko answered... It made me sad and disappointed. Do you understand what I've just said? I was unhappy because my husband answered the phone, not you. At that moment it was all clear to me. After all, we used to be so...

Silence.

IVO: Marko is a good person.

ANA: I'm aware of that and I wouldn't like to hurt him... I just want to know if you ever think about me, do you still care about me or do you only have eyes for your lady

doctor... I know that the two of us will never get back together, but I just want to know if you ever think about me when you are taking a walk in the street, do you ever wish that we were walking together...?

Silence.

IVO: Listen, I'll be frank. When I was taking a walk in the street, on my way back from the church, I was thinking only about you and that I should never have started dating that lady doctor who constantly talks about her daughter, her mum and about that soldier from Pula, she loved so much. I also realized that we found ourselves in a very unpleasant situation because Marko became my best friend and I could never take his wife away from him, no matter how much I loved her.

Silence.

ANA: Why don't you talk to him about your feelings towards me?

IVO: Never! I don't want to hurt him. I would rather live without you and suffer till the end of my life.

Scene fourteen

(Marko, Ivo, later Ana then Marija)

Marko and Ivo play cards.

MARKO: You're lucky.

IVO: Lucky?! I thought I was playing better than you.

MARKO: Still, luck is crucial.

IVO: You think?

MARKO: I do.

IVO: It seems I'm better than you in figuring out how to play.

MARKO: If there wasn't for good cards, figuring it out wouldn't help either.

IVO: Maybe you're right. The most important thing is to get good cards.

MARKO: I agree.

Silence.

IVO: Where's Ana?

MARKO: I have no idea. She went out somewhere without telling me anything. Lately she hasn't been talking to me a lot. She's all in herself. I thought since it's Friday night, she'd like to go out to the movies or for a walk, but nothing.

IVO: Well, what can you do...

Silence.

MARKO: And your doctor? What's with her?

IVO: What about her?

MARKO: You don't go out anymore.

IVO: Well, I think she's busy. And you're often there for lunch... so it seems she doesn't have a lot of time for me.

MARKO: If that bothers you, I'll stop going there, I'm going there only because of the kid. She wants to make up for all those years she didn't have a father so I can't turn her down, but if that bothers you, I'll cut down on it.

IVO: C'mon, you won't avoid your own daughter and her mother because of me... and grandmother?

MARKO: You know I respect you.

IVO: I know. And I respect you, too.

MARKO: Thanks.

IVO: Thank you.

Silence.

IVO: Listen, dude.

MARKO: I'm listening.

Silence.

IVO: Oh nothing...

Silence.

MARKO: Did you want something?

IVO: Oh nothing...

MARKO: Just say it if you want us to talk about it. I'll be glad to hear.

IVO: Oh no, nothing... only if you want to hear, only then will I be ready to talk.

MARKO: About what?

IVO: Whatever you want to hear, I'm here.

MARKO: And what do you want to talk about? Just go on with it.

IVO: You think that I want something?

MARKO: You just said that!

IVO: And you said that you are ready...

MARKO: Only if you...

IVO: Only if I?...

MARKO: Yes, only if you...

IVO: And about what... or whom?

MARKO: Well, you already know.

IVO: Yes, I know. It's a little bit tricky.

MARKO: For me too. But we have to, we have to tell everything.

IVO: I agree, come on – you go first.

MARKO: I think it's better if you go first... Please, you go first.

IVO: I'd love to, but I want to know what you think, how you feel.

MARKO: You really want to know?

IVO: Of course.

MARKO: It's not easy to put it in words.

IVO: I agree, but we have to.

MARKO: Yes, we have to.

IVO: This won't work anymore.

MARKO: I agree...I also find it a bit...I wouldn't like neither of us to feel bad.

IVO: We share the same point of view.

MARKO: I'm glad that we agree on this.

IVO: Me too.

Silence.

IVO: What are your feelings?

MARKO: Towards whom?

IVO: Towards her.

MARKO: The same as they used to be.

IVO: That's what I thought. Thank you for being honest.

Silence.

MARKO: Tell me... whom did you think of?

IVO: Well, I thought of her.

MARKO: Of Ana or Marija?

IVO: Well I thought... And whom did you think of when you answered that you still have feelings for her?

MARKO: Well, I thought of... I'm sorry, I wouldn't like to hurt your feelings. I don't know what you think and feel, but I care about your happiness.

IVO: I would like you to be happy too.

Long silence.

IVO: What are we going to do now?

MARKO: Why don't you suggest something?

IVO: Should we leave everything as it is?

MARKO: That's exactly what I had in mind.

IVO: That means that we won't change anything?

MARKO: Alright. As far as I can see, that's best for both of us.

IVO: So for you too?

MARKO: Absolutely.

IVO: Fine then – you carry on with Ana, and I'll take lady doctor to the movies tomorrow... And everything will be as it was.

MARKO: Fine. If you like it, I'll be honest, I like it too.

IVO: I'm glad that everybody will be satisfied.

MARKO: That's the best for all of us. If necessary, I'll go straight to school with Ana tomorrow, so that you two can be here.

IVO: Oh, that would mean a lot to me. It's been a while.

MARKO: You have to spend more time together.

IVO: Yes, I know. Two things are crucial in a relationship... stability and persistence...

Doorbell.

MARKO: Did you lock the door?

IVO: Yes.

Marko enters the hallway and a moment after comes back with Ana.

IVO: What are you doing here? I haven't seen you for ages.

ANA: Ah, you know, I had things to attend to in the town.

MARKO: I've been trying to reach you on your cell phone.

ANA: I met Marija. We had a serious conversation so I turned off my cell phone.

MARKO: You had a serious conversation?

ANA: That's right. This situation got too complicated so I decided to talk with Marija.

MARKO: How did you get her phone number?

IVO: I gave it to her.

ANA: Marija was eager to talk to me. She openly told me that because of this unusual situation she's been out of her mind these days, and that she's been waiting for the two of you to sort this out and the four of us to solve this unpleasant situation.

MARKO: Really? Thank God.

IVO: I'm glad to hear that.

ANA: Since the two of you were so indecisive, the two of us had to take it into our own hands and reach the only possible solution, which is best for all of us.

MARKO: Oh, and the two of us have just...

ANA: Have just what?

IVO: We have honestly talked about everything.

MARKO: Like brothers.

ANA: Is that so? Thank God, then everything will be easier.

MARKO: That's right, we shared our thoughts and feelings.

ANA: Good for you guys, I was afraid that you were dumb henpecked husbands who don't have guts to express their feelings.

MARKO: No, we're not.

IVO: We're not like that.

ANA: Great.

IVO: And where is Marija?

ANA: She'll be here any minute now. She's trying to find a parking spot but everything is full.

MARKO: She's coming here?

ANA: Yes, she's coming. Her mother has gone to the spa for five days, and her daughter has gone for a trip to Bled with her boyfriend for the weekend. She has neglected her boyfriend lately so she decided to go out of town for a while. Anyway, Marija is alone in her empty apartment for the weekend, so it would be a shame not to use this opportunity, wouldn't it?

MARKO: Well, yeah... But, what do you mean?

ANA: Look, Marija and I have talked honestly about everything, we opened our hearts to each other and admitted that we like more our old flame.

Silence.

ANA: Marko, she loves you the same way I love Ivo. As I was coming up, I thought it would be difficult for me to tell this out loud, but since you and Ivo have already talked honestly, everything has fallen into its place. Isn't it right? We all came to the conclusion about what's best for all of us.

MARKO: Well, now...

IVO: Yeah, yeah, we came to the same conclusion like you and Marija did.

MARKO: Exactly, yeah, very nice.

ANA: Marko, let's go to the room to pack your things, everything you need for a weekend, Marija will take you to her apartment, and I'll finally spend two beautiful nights with Ivo.

MARKO: And later on?

ANA: What about it?

MARKO: How will we organize this later? Her mother, daughter, Marija, two apartments, the six of us, and your son in Germany?

ANA: We'll see about it later. Don't let the future get in the way of our present.

MARKO: That's right.

IVO: Nicely put.

ANA: Let's go to the bedroom to pack your things – so you don't embarrass yourself at Marija's. Let Marija see everything is ironed and neat. Let's go.

Marko and Ana go to the bedroom. Ivo is alone for a while. He pours himself a glass of soda and drinks it. After awhile the "blond" Marija enters front door.

MARIJA: Hey, hello.

IVO: Hello.

MARIJA: Where's Ana?

IVO: She's in the bedroom with Marko, they are packing his things. She's getting him ready for a weekend at your place.

MARIJA: Great. I hope you're happy with our arrangement, too.

IVO: I am, very much. It's like I got back from jail today, except for good this time.

MARIJA: I'm glad I found my old flame... It seems like my life has stopped. You know?

IVO: I know.

MARIJA: Aren't you mad at me?

IVO: No, not at all. Without you I would've never got my wife back. Aren't you mad at me?

MARIJA: Gratitude is all I feel for you. I'll go help them pack.

IVO: Go ahead.

Marija goes to the bedroom, after a while comes Marko. Marko and Ivo are alone.

Marko approaches Ivo and asks conspiratorially:

MARKO: Dude, what will we do if the two of them find out that the two of us have a different agreement?

IVO: Marko, shut up, this has to stay our secret forever, or the two of them will think for the rest of our lives that we are real henpecked husbands.

MARKO: Ok, I'll keep quiet about our agreement for the rest of my life. And what do you really think? Are we?

IVO: Are we what?

MARKO: Are we really henpecked husbands? Please, tell me what you really think.

IVO: You know what?

MARKO: Tell me.

IVO: Spare me from answering that question honestly.

MARKO: Why?

IVO: You'll be happier without the answer. Anyway, you haven't asked the right question.

MARKO: What do you mean?

IVO: It's not important if we are henpecked husband. The only thing that's important is that we are happy and are our wives are happy with us.

MARKO: And the answer is?

IVO: Listen, I'm sure this weekend we'll all be happy. And later on, we'll be living of the memory of this weekend.

MARKO: Well, this doesn't sound bad at all.

IVO: I agree, man.

THE END