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# IMMORTAL

drama

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TO MY FATHER

*"There was once a Life.  
It lived, it existed,  
It was happy or unhappy,  
It was joyful and sad too,  
Then it met Death.  
And it was over."*

## Actors

Dönci - grandfather  
Elvira - grandmother  
Gerda - their daughter  
Vatta (Olivia) - their granddaughter, Baba's daughter

[Baba (Olga) - their younger daughter]

Scene. A living room. Armchair, couch, shelves with books and photos. There is a sturdy and old wooden table with chairs in the middle.

Stage setting changes are Dönci's memories--lots of flashback. The scene is always the same, only time keeps jumping to the past. During those changes light and sound effects signal when the story takes place.

(Room. Dönci is sitting at the table. There is an urn on the table. Not far his wife is standing in a white dress. They are looking at each other silently. For a long time. Elvira is dead; only her ghost is present in the scenes. Nobody sees her on stage besides Dönci. She appears as a live person during flashbacks.)

VATTA (from outside) Hello! (huge fall and moaning) What the fuck!

(She is coming in with her wheeled luggage and a large plastic wreath in her hands.)

VATTA Greetings and kisses, am I late?

DÖNCI (doesn't answer, just stares)

VATTA (silence) Shall we leave? (silence) The others?

DÖNCI (doesn't answer, just stares)

VATTA (silence) Are you fine, Dönci?

DÖNCI (staring at the wreath) What is this?

VATTA (looking for a place) I've brought it for grandma.

DÖNCI (looks at Elvira)

VATTA (roaming) What time does it start?

DÖNCI (looks at the urn) She is here.

VATTA What?

(Dönci doesn't answer. Vatta slowly grasps that it is Elvira's ashes' urn on the table. She stands disturbed for minutes, then sits down, and starts laughing unstoppably. Dönci doesn't understand first, but then he can't hold back his laughter either which eventually turns into loud sobbing. Vatta becomes silent too.)

VATTA Don't be upset!

DÖNCI What'll happen to me?

VATTA (silence) I'll throw this out.

(Vatta takes the wreath out.)

ELVIRA (steps up to Dönci) Are you afraid?

DÖNCI (nods)

ELVIRA (referring to Vatta) She'll help. She is like you. She is like her... Just let her get closer to you. Don't push her away.

DÖNCI I want to hug you.

(Dönci doesn't move, just stares at Elvira longingly.)

ELVIRA (silence) Your cry is so disgusting.

(Elvira hugs Dönci. Gerta enters on the other side.)

VATTA (from outside) When is Gerda coming?

(Vatta is coming back.)

VATTA (silence) Why are you sitting so weirdly? (notices Gerda) Hello, Gerda!

GERDA I arrived two days ago; I came as soon as dad called me. Hello. (silence) It has been a while since I last saw you.

VATTA (sit down) Yeah.

DÖNCI Only the two of you remain for me.

ELVIRA Like an ancient Greek ancient theatre!

GERDA There won't be a funeral.

VATTA I got it.

DÖNCI Why now?

GERDA Dad, rest a little!

VATTA Did she suffer?

GERDA Vatta!

VATTA What did I say? I am just curios.

DÖNCI She was just being busy in the kitchen, sat down on a chair, leaned against the wall, and fell asleep.

VATTA Fell asleep?

DÖNCI In my arms.

VATTA Did she say anything?

ELVIRA I did not want to. It felt good there.

DÖNCI She stayed quiet. Only I spoke. I asked her not to. Not yet.

ELVIRA I didn't have the strength to stay.

GERDA It is really hard now. Let us rest, and we'll take care of everything tomorrow.

VATTA You don't want to vacuum now, do you?

GERDA I think this brutish style doesn't belong here.

VATTA Should I have nicer manners?

ELVIRA (to Dönci) They are nice, aren't they?

DÖNCI I don't know...

GERDA Respectful is what you need to be!

VATTA Okay, let's take care of things, and I'll be off tomorrow.

GERDA Dad, do you want a sedative?

ELVIRA A shot of palinka will do. Right, dear?

DÖNCI Palinka now?

VATTA I want one too!

GERDA We are not drinking alcohol. That is distasteful.

VATTA What would be proper to drink then?

GERDA I don't know. I just feel that this isn't right. Let's not argue now!

ELVIRA I don't mind!

VATTA Who's fighting with whom?

DÖNCI (to Elvira) What about your clothes? Your cremes, your jewelry?

ELVIRA We'll discuss it when we are alone.

GERDA Dad, are you okay?  
VATTA I think he is not well. (she stands up) I am going to turn in.  
Was that appropriately said for the occasion?  
GERDA (silence) Will you go out to your mother?  
VATTA (holding her anger back) I usually don't.  
GERDA (hugs Dönci)  
VATTA (steps up to Gerda) Can you believe it, yours died too.  
GERDA (quietly) Stop it!  
VATTA Good night! (leaves with her luggage)

(Silence. Dönci and Gerda are hugging each other, staring ahead. Elvira is looking at them smilingly, then becomes less patient, nervous, and the long pause bothers her. Dönci finally looks at her.)

DÖNCI (to Elvira) On Monday we brought the lawn mower in together.  
ELVIRA (sighs) On Sunday we were still eating meatloaf together. On Saturday we were still walking together by your church. On Friday...  
DÖNCI (sobbing) Why?  
GERDA Calm down, dad!  
ELVIRA (hurtfully) Can't I even mention Friday's bedroom secret?  
DÖNCI What will happen to me?  
ELVIRA (cynically) What will happen to you, my dear?  
GERDA We'll help. You are not alone.  
DÖNCI (to Elvira) I don't even know where the salt is. And where is the store? What should I buy so that I won't starve? How do I pay? I don't even know my pick code. You are the dead one, but I still see as if you existed. I am alive, but I feel dead. Is this justice?  
ELVIRA (laughing) Pick-love, be a man at last!  
GERDA (stands up, uptight) Dad, take a sedative!  
DÖNCI You women can't even imagine what it's like to be a man! You are clueless about us. Men weren't made to be lonely. We are not allowed to be alone. We cannot be alone. No, and that's it! I know that we are unbearable. Yes. But lovable too. (silence)  
Gerda, I did not prepare for this. I should have...  
GERDA (searching her purse, then takes out a pill) Take this!  
ELVIRA (laughs) Dear, I will leave you two alone. (leaves)  
GERDA Better? (Dönci's eyes follow Elvira) What are you looking at?  
DÖNCI She left.  
GERDA (she hugs him) I know.

(FLASHBACK. Thirty years earlier. The scene changes slowly. Dönci is hugging Gerda, and Elvira trots by them nervously. Dönci is listening to his wife tensely, then jumps up nervously. The little girl Gerda is looking at them affectionately.)

ELVIRA This little piggie went to the market, this little piggy stayed home, this little piggie shot one, this stupid one fried it all up, and this poor little piggie threw it all up.

DÖNCI You want me to be a man, is that it?

ELVIRA Yes, that's what I want. If it was up to me, you could be so drunk, if you wish, that you could see flying fish, but at least do it as a man, with a straight back, because it isn't a heavenly experience to shuffle between the toilet and you.

DÖNCI Do you want trouble?

ELVIRA With you? I'll raise my voice, and will strike your ambushment down in one breath.

DÖNCI I was put on the bus by Karesz; that's how I got home on time.

ELVIRA Don't change the subject!

DÖNCI I am not in (nem kell "a") good shape, but I will pull myself together by the afternoon and all will be spot on. (hugs Elvira) Shall we go to your mother?

ELVIRA Do not touch my bottom! (to Gerda) What are you doing, my daughter?

(The little girl Gerda is imitating an owl. She is sitting in a strange pose, motionless, occasionally blinking, saying tu-whit tu-who, turning her head, looking around with wide-open eyes. Her parents are looking at her with nervous interest.)

DÖNCI (jokingly, when silence is over) If I throw up on her, will she stop?

ELVIRA (hits Gerda on the head) Have you gone mad, Gerda? Hello! (to Dönci) And you, don't be a jerk (yobbo--angol angol, ha azt akarod)! As you can see, this is what happens to every kid who doesn't have a father. Be a man, at last!

DÖNCI Couldn't I be a heretic who regrets his sins under the garden's walnut tree while playing love songs on his lute his beloved?

ELVIRA Never mind that you are always gone, that you use your job as an excuse to get out of everything, and go ahead and deny it, I believe you, but these two children are only a nag for you.

DÖNCI Are you expecting me to do a gag or two to get rid of the tension with one well-timed joke? I will pass on the opportunity to answer. I didn't need this nighttime adventure either, believe me! I am going to work, you sweet, dear, cynical...

ELVIRA My dear litterateur and lawful husband, whose present state of being is critical, you stay here now, and we'll solve the child's problem together, am I understood? And I don't want any more ignoring...!

DÖNCI (staring) I am sorry, did you say something?

(Suddenly back to the present: just for a second, for as long as the two glances intertwine. Gerda remains a little girl.)

ELVIRA      You used to be a nice man.  
DÖNCI      And you a beautiful woman.  
ELVIRA      It was a long time ago.  
DÖNCI      Very long.  
ELVIRA      We were in love.  
DÖNCI      Wildly.  
ELVIRA      (sighs)  
DÖNCI      And young. How young we were!  
ELVIRA      Then we got old.  
DÖNCI      (hesitantly) Was it worth it?

(Back to the past again.)

ELVIRA      Call the doctor, and go get him!  
DÖNCI      Why do we need a doc? She is just fooling around. I have a buddy from Tarnok, and he acts like a frog when he is having a drunk session.  
ELVIRA      This isn't a contest, but a serious disease-type symptom, not a game.  
DÖNCI      Oops, here comes the home-pharmacy section!  
ELVIRA      She hasn't had a bite to eat today.  
DÖNCI      She never eats. Perhaps that's a sign?  
ELVIRA      What is this sudden climb of elevated fatherly feelings that surfaced and awakened responsibility inside you? You are foolish.  
DÖNCI      You should mingle with people sometimes, Elvira.  
ELVIRA      Away from here? So that the house should crumble?  
DÖNCI      This feverish depression brings out the worst in you and always makes you grumble.  
ELVIRA      Yes?  
DÖNCI      Literature doesn't discuss the fact that when a girl becomes a mother, some sort of a monster starts to form in her brain...  
ELVIRA      I am listening, just continue on, if you are that brave!  
DÖNCI      It must be the revenge of evolution or creation that you cannot find your place on these rotten weekdays. Tell me what harm did this girl or the other do? And I? Do I beat you or cheat on you? Because I could! Since all the days' black letters in the calendar show: I didn't screw with Elvira today, oh no!  
ELVIRA      (claps) Is that all you know? You critic! I wish for that mediocre, zero-art-admirer, udder-grazer (of the famished), average-culture empire to fall on you!  
DÖNCI      "Life and Literature", <sup>1</sup>if I may refine that for you!

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<sup>1</sup> The most popular Hungarian literary newspaper.

ELVIRA Page 22. Congratulations. You know what? I'd rather expose you and the child to my regurgitations.

DÖNCI A mother cannot hate a husband and a child like this!

ELVIRA I'd like to ask for a nicer life, please! A more well-rounded one. Like a merry-go-round in the nursery rhyme. Or the hill which Jack and Jill climbed. Do we appreciate everything that is blown in front of our eyes by the everyday breeze? Grown ups, have we all grown up?

DÖNCI (looking at Gerda) What if she stays like this? Do we feed her mice?

ELVIRA (waves)

DÖNCI We can take this fast as a serious warning that in this family something is not right.

ELVIRA You cannot solve everything with a good rhyme.

DÖNCI What then?

ELVIRA Come on Gerda, let's do some math!

(Gerda stands up and leaves with Elvira.)

DÖNCI But after math let's get a watermelon as big as the Moon, and we'll cut it in half, gut it, string its seeds on a thread, put the green rinds on our heads, and shout like indians and owls. (Gerda runs back to Dönci and sits on his lap.) Alright, my daughter, this is a bad episode in our lives, but do not worry, we will not have many more. Toss in your bed, dream away the bad of the night-time. Because dad will solve everything with a rhyme. Get it? I live only for you. And now I am saying whoo-whooh. (says whoo-whooh while laughing)

(Back to the present. Teary-eyed Gerda stand in front of Dönci.)

DÖNCI Why don't we mourn the one who stayed here alone?

GERDA There isn't anyone more selfish on this Earth than you!

DÖNCI Is it worth living for a hundred years? Isn't sixty four too long already? What's the purpose of doing nothing? Is it worth living? Alone.

GERDA Do you think that this is only your tragedy? Didn't my mother die? The only one who could verify that this was my family. That I have a family!

ELVIRA (arrives laughing) Familiar racket.

DÖNCI (to Elvira) Are you laughing at me?

GERDA I am laughing at you. You are pathetic...

EIVIRA Go, bring your grandchild back!

DÖNCI (jumps up) Where is she?

GERDA (doesn't understand) What are you looking for?

ELVIRA In the pub.

DÖNCI That little....(starts to leave)

GERDA Where are you going now?

DÖNCI I will bring your niece home.  
GERDA She is in the bedroom.  
DÖNCI She is in the pub.  
GERDA (doesn't understand) What?  
DÖNCI We'll be back. (leaves)

(Gerda runs in the room. Elvira is alone, pacing, walks around playfully, shuffles back and forth as if dancing.)

ELVIRA Once a child fully grows up, she'll be a serious grown up.  
Grown ups should be children, this would make it even!

(Gerda comes back.)

GERDA (sits down on a chair) This little rotten...

TOGETHER She climbed out the window.

ELVIRA (silence) It's obvious how rarely all of you are together! It's difficult with the others, isn't it? It is what it is. You assume it is the easiest with them. With the family. Then it turns out you are all strangers to each other. Familiar strangers.

GERDA (holds the urn) This was really poorly done, mom.

ELVIRA So I see...

GERDA I have been watching you and dad for forty years. It was easy. You lived your lives in front of my eyes. You signaled my existence only seldomly. I was who I was. I befitted your expectations in every way. You wanted me to be sufficient. It was easier that way. More comfortable and simpler. You looked, but you didn't see. Gerda is smart, Gerda is clever, Gerda is skillful, and Gerda is almost an adult! And now I am sitting here by myself; I am always alone, and I don't know what it's like to be *an adult*. I'd love to be a child again, but for real! I'd like to cry, to be afraid, to be scared, and to wait for my mother and father to protect me. I wish to be Baba! My sister. The one who could cry and laugh, and if she was scared or afraid, you both hugged her...You loved her. How I long for a slap so big that I'd fall behind the cabinet with a swollen red face. But I never got one. I got nothing. I just gave, gave, gave... But so much, so very much that I know nothing else nowadays. I became a precise human machine with Belgian accuracy. I could be proud of myself, of me. Because I am appreciated away from my family. Because at home I feel that I can't help, and I can't be anything else but that girl who grew up when she wasn't a grown up yet. And that's not good. It is not good at all this way.

ELVIRA What can I say? I am sorry...

GERDA I know it is not easy to be a parent. It is not being taught. The school of life isn't a university overcrowded with skillful teachers. Eenie, meenie, miney, mo...I have no strength to

do anything against it. I'd flee, but I can't go any further. I'd rather come back to the house, to you, so that we could start all over again. Why isn't life a fairy tale? A fairy tale where we are the little meatloaves. Baba, Vatta, dad, mom, and I!

ELVIRA Gerda, if humans could see the future, believe me, they'd never make mistakes. I know it hurts. And I don't push away: I am the reason.

(FLASHBACK. We jump back in time. Not long after having lost her sibling, Gerda is just leaving her parents' house.)

GERDA Do you expect me to groan instead of you, so that your pain will erupt from me? You've taken everything away, and you keep taking everything from me!

ELVIRA Don't go away!

GERDA Why should I stay? So that I would end this helpless family graphic novel with my own hands? Tell me what could keep me by your side! Should I turn the pain of my birth, which I survived with the help of my own life, into mourning? Illusion. I was a nineteen-year-old mature adult when I first had to face the fact that I had to live with that strange creature whom you saw when you looked at me. I grabbed all my valuables with youthful hurtfulness which was a dozen clothes or less that I packed from the armoire into the luggage alone...

ELVIRA You've always been a rolling stone!

GERDA It has been five years since I left with teenage zeal and the blunt hope that if I found the key back to you, you'd welcome me, and I was hoping that you'd await my return. But it turned out differently. In Szeged<sup>2</sup> sometimes I reminisced about the past: perhaps I was wrong, and my rock-solid confidence which I thought to be so true might just be the fruit of my awkward worthlessness. But with a diploma in my hands I understood that I didn't have a family.

ELVIRA Do you think that now I will acknowledge that we made bad decisions? Perhaps! The fact that we didn't take the train to Szeged was a big mistake. We have no excuse. But to miss a graduation is not a profanity, and even you can admit that, but if you are still upset about it, please remember that your grumpy father was in mourning while living out the end of his god-fearing period. Why are you beating yourself up? You have a home in this house!

GERDA Your answer is simple, as such. But I will not be your crutch. I will go far away, really far away from here. As of today, I will not have to carry your gear. You were a mother, because to be a mother is pure luck. But you weren't a good mother,

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<sup>2</sup> One of Hungary's furthest cities.

because to be a weekday mother sucks. The limit in this family is nineteen years. After nineteen years death awaits some, and some have a choice: a new home over the hill, up in the air passed the seven seas; to arrive, to discover, to forget being adequate in front of yourself and other friends. Ditches between lovers aren't dug by strangers' hands. When I didn't eat, you filled me up. I laid down, you picked me up. You left me, left me behind, skipped over me, gave up on me, you let me be the way I did not want to be. Mother, I have to leave this place, let me be!

(Back to the presence. Vatta and Dönci arrive. The man sits down at the table without saying a word. Gerda goes up to Vatta, holds her shoulders and looks into her eyes.)

GERDA      Vatta, where were you?

(Vatta doesn't answer. Dönci takes down a whiskey bottle from the shelf, puts it on the table, stares at it, then puts it back to the place from where he took it. Gerda turns her back to Vatta, and then Vatta pours her soul out without taking a breath.)

VATTA      Mr. Jenó, my ecology teacher, who actually is a dumbass forest ranger, but for some reason he is crazy about Ferenc Molnár, because he was an extra in his movie *The Boys from Pal Street*, he used to say all the time, "Just remember son, after each fright, drink a beer!", and first we laughed at him, but as it turns out he wasn't such a dumbass after all, because beer always worked, and before exams we'd start at the 'Lawnmower', and in the morning we'd drink a Soproni beer on an empty stomach, and it hits your brain so hard that everything surfaces, and that is the reason why I passed all my exams, and who'd think that a forest ranger who teaches ecology-toxicology can say anything new to a youngster, yeah, because what matters is that one is young, and you know, I am young too, although that can be argued, because it is all relative to whom or what one is compared, but I think at nineteen I am rather young instead of old, even though my life wasn't very childlike or youthful so far, because I get slapped so much that the whole Forest Engineer Branch from its professor to its cleaning lady hasn't experienced as much as I did, but if this is the kind of life I got, then I will live it, but the only thing I don't know how to deal with is death, because I am more freaked out by death than anything, and I am terrified to meet it, and I think you have no idea how I got home, because you are just sitting here cloistered, crying for grandma, but nobody really cares why I have been freaking out for four days, but of course, I admit, you are the adults,

and one of you lost his wife, the other her mother, but you have each other, father and daughter, and I feel really damn alone, because grandma was the only one who, besides life, has slapped me so badly that even my tongue got bent out of shape, but those slaps felt so good, because as my face was burning, I felt alive, I was worth something, and when I called grandma to complain that Mate was such an ass, because he screwed me twice, but didn't give a shit about me, then she told me the shit, and since then Mate doesn't want to screw anyone, not even once, because what he got from me made his testicles shrink for life, and how could I confide in you Dönci, when you were incapable of taking advantage of the big opportunity to fix that fucked up father role, which you fucked up not only once, but twice, and you had the opportunity to play it again, Sam, because the one thing I wish for the most is a father by my side, but not the sperm donor who screwed my mother twice, then didn't give a shit, and has no idea that he has a damn amazing daughter, but the one who is like Liam Nielson in *Taken*, who says to the person kidnapping his daughter, "I don't know who you are. I don't know what you want. If you are looking for a ransom, I can tell you, I don't have money. But what I do have is a very particular set of skills. Skills I've acquired over a very long career. Skills that make a nightmare for people like you. If you let my daughter go now, that'll be the end of it. I will not look for you. I will not pursue you. But if you don't, I will look for you. I will find you and...-music! tatatata-, I will kill you...", then the stupid Albanese said, "Good luck!", but he got screwed, because Liam really beats the crap out of him, because he is a hero, and I know that you are not the world-saving movie star type, Dönci, so I would have been satisfied if you had drunk four or five shot glasses of palinka with me, and you had pissed by the fence and had slept in the hammock, but oh no, because you are convinced that I am lazy and cheeky and a liar, which is true, because I know Vekerdy is a good buddy of yours, but you should take into consideration sometimes that I am not just learning material, but a real-life person, a girl, your granddaughter, because it is really cool that my grandfather sits in front of the tv day and night and watches one cool show after another, but you can't treat your own life like an american synchronized tv show with a guaranteed happy end, because life doesn't pay attention to what is good for you, and if you don't do anything to make it better, it'll throw all the dramatic shit in your face, and you can sit in your armchair for the rest of your life, but here comes the big fucking BUT, but you still have a family and responsibilities, but you don't fucking want to acknowledge that, and you either, my auntie, who fucking hates me,

because I was such a lame misfortunate loser that I was dropped out into this filthy earth from your hated sister's vagina, and we can't live like this, even you can admit that, and if there is no more grandma, then I am alone, and I will have a document that I am an adult, because I have to grow up to this situation, and that is why uncle Jenö is right that the only medicine for fright is beer, but there isn't a fucking thing in this house, except for a raspberry soft drink, so where should I go, to a disco or a church, Dönci?, straight out the window and into a pub, of course! (takes a breath) Do you understand why I am so pissed at this world?

(Deadly silence. Elvira's laughter breaks the silence, Dönci looks, he smiles too, stand up and goes to the kitchen.)

DÖNCI I'll make tea. (goes out)

(A little while later Elvira follows Dönci, but when she gets to Vatta, she strokes her head. Gerda and Vatta are sitting next to each other quietly. Vatta scratches her hair where Elvira touched her. They can hear Dönci's busywork from the kitchen. The girls turn toward the kitchen at the same time. Dark.)

SOMETIME LATER...

(Gerda and Vatta are sitting next to each other silently, looking at the kitchen. Silence. The two girls are staring ahead. Elvira stands by them.)

GERDA You talk really dirty.  
VATTA I don't know where the fuck I learned...  
DÖNCI (comes with a pitcher in hand) Do you want some?  
GERDA No.  
VATTA Me neither.  
DÖNCI Fine. (goes out)  
VATTA What about him?  
ELVIRA Don't bury him, you sillies!  
GERDA He is in bad shape.  
VATTA Yeah. (silence) How old is he?  
GERDA I can't believe you don't even know that!  
VATTA Why, do you?  
GERDA My father!  
VATTA Yeah. (silence) So how old?  
GERDA He turned sixty four in February.  
VATTA Of course. It was Friday the 13th, I remember now.  
GERDA You said that as if you had been there.  
VATTA I don't think I said it like that. (tests her) And I? When was I born?  
GERDA (looks at her with imperious self-confidence)

VATTA Fine, that is too easy.  
 GERDA You ruined a really promising New Year's Eve, my niece.  
 VATTA I am sorry...  
 ELVIRA Ask who she was with then!  
 VATTA So who did you miss out on?  
 GERDA Not important. You don't know him.  
 ELVIRA Come on! Let me find out!  
 GERDA A guy.  
 VATTA (mocking) You don't say!  
 GERDA Then suddenly I became and only child, then an adult with a diploma, hurray, then Brussel came, and I bid goodbye to the next year there. Then ta-ta, the years of love were over. I kept switching guys for so long that they all turned into men. Head of Department, chief doctor, diplomat, teacher, and who knows what else! I got too old to be married off. That is how I remained an old maid and a loner.

VATTA Really nice story. (suddenly) Do we inherit the house together? Or what is the protocol?  
 GERDA What are you talking about?  
 VATTA If Dönci kicks the bucket, the house will be ours, won't it?  
 GERDA Vatta, there is a limit to inconsideration!  
 ELVIRA She is only provoking!  
 VATTA And the car? How old is it? Ten? Fifteen?  
 ELVIRA Twelve.  
 GERDA Stop it!  
 VATTA I brought this up so that we can all be clear. Who knows when we'll all see each other again! You that way, I this way, Dönci over here...  
 GERDA If dad comes in and hears this...  
 VATTA Hears what?  
 GERDA Do you want to crush his heart even more?  
 VATTA It is unbreakable.

(Dönci stands in the background listening to the girls. Elvira is trying to comfort him with sad empathy in her eyes. Dönci is trying to stay unnoticeable with his broken posture; he doesn't want to bother the girls.)

GERDA Dad is too sensitive..., and weak.  
 VATTA And a damn coward.

(Gerda notices her father. They exchange glances for an instant. FLASHBACK. Dönci sits down across from the seventeen-year-old Gerda. He takes a deep breath and starts to talk.)

DÖNCI Gerda...I need to talk to you. I have done many stupid things, yes, I did, and I will not beat around the bush, and I will admit the truth to you. Have you heard that...  
 GERDA Where is Baba? Shouldn't she hear your confession?

DÖNCI She is still young. By the way, she is at her ballet lesson at school. You are a big girl, and it is easier for you to understand. You are seventeen. Soon you will take your final exam and finish school. You'll be an adult and in control of your life. That is how it should be. But now I will have to tell you something eye to eye!

GERDA What?

DÖNCI I'll start.

GERDA But what?

DÖNCI I have been meeting new people for a while. My old friends disappeared and those attachments have worn out. You know that I had trouble with my job too, my workplace closed, there were other needs...I wasn't popular anymore in this new and transforming transformation. I couldn't keep up with the innovations. Bowling youngsters with rubber spines came along, and I am forty years old. It is hard for me and I can't change any more. Doesn't matter. I met a few people who introduced me to an unfamiliar medium. I am talking about religious people. (sighs) Fabulous. I'll continue. I am spending more and more time among them, because I feel that they are powered by strength that is so strong that I can only talk about it in whisper. And I want to believe that I belong there! If you saw them and knew them, you'd understand for sure! I just talked to your mother too. It is hard to convince women with arguments. They are only interested in reality. Yes. Your mother is mad at me. But once she calms down, perhaps she'll be able to face the new situation. Then she will understand it too. (silence) I met the almighty God. (he is waiting for a reaction) That's what I suspected. The light of fright lit up in your gaze.

GERDA I am listening to you.

DÖNCI Good. If I am boring you, just let me know, and I will organize my thoughts. Yes, we met. But don't think that God came toward me and then stopped me. That's not what happened. The community where Providence has guided me hides unique people. People who had already experienced this earlier, and since then, they always do. I'll give you an example. They are all sitting in a circle. They reminisce about the moment that could have only been created by an almighty power, the meeting with that power, the experience which makes the mortal understand the soul of the immortal. Last time, imagine this, they even spoke! They were shouting incomprehensible sentences in a language which I have never heard before, which no one among us knew. And everyone was chatting away, and as I mentioned already, we were all sitting in a circle, and I...understood them! The musers who spoke a strange language. I understood their every word. Do you know why that is?

GERDA No.  
DÖNCI I'll tell you: because God loves me. The ancient language has been the secret of the origin-proving zygote, and its existence was guarded in the living and the dead. And I understood it. I didn't know what to think of my ability. But the guardian God's answer came one night: I sat up in bed while your mother was snuffing in her sleep next to me, and I saw an incredible and never-before-seen light! And then among the colors a face appeared. I saw God's face. And God talked to me in the language that was spoken during God's battle against evil. And I understood it. And God would say, of course, not in Hungarian, "How much longer will you be sad, Endre?" That's how it happened. I have arrived to that person, to God. And I see the Almighty regularly every night. (silence) I won't talk about it any longer, because I am about to announce a fateful prophecy. Starting now, I will be a completely different person, you know. I will abandon my past self. The self that you'll have to meet even if you will be angry. I wrote all my fallible sins down. (take a piece of paper out) Please read it, and state your opinion bravely, and sooner than later!

GERDA (takes is and read it for a while) What's a vibrator?  
DÖNCI Just read on, all the way to the end!  
GERDA (reads for a while, then looks up) What did mom say? Did she understand?  
DÖNCI I might have mentioned that she is mad at me now.  
GERDA Great. What do you expect from me, father?  
DÖNCI Understanding and acceptance.  
GERDA What will happen to Baba?  
DÖNCI She accepts changes easier. I don't want to weigh her down with serious matters. Only when she is an adult.  
GERDA Good.  
DÖNCI I will let you be alone now, you little adult! (gives her a kiss and leaves)

(Gerda remains by herself. Signs of insanity appear on her face; she's storming inside, but doesn't want to make noise. She is rubbing her wrist roughly back and forth on the edge of the table, while helpless anger is raging in her gaze. Finally she is hitting her arm so hard on the razor-sharp edge that it starts to bleed and the table nearly falls over. Darkness. Back to the present. Three people are sitting at the table, Elvira stands behind them.)

VATTA Are you not sleepy either?  
DÖNCI I can't sleep.

(Gerda is rummaging her purse. She is puzzled.)

GERDA In the last few days you've been closing your eyes for only a few hours, dad. You need to take care of yourself!

VATTA Right.

DÖNCI (hesitantly) Should we pray?

VATTA (chuckles, then contains herself) I can't. (silence) Will you read from your book? (searching the bookshelf) Where is *The-little-meatloaf-written-by-my-grandfather-the-world-famous-Dönci...*?

DÖNCI (to himself) Basic rule of drama: if an urn sits on the table, something has to happen to it.

ELVIRA (whispers) Are you waiting for a miracle?

VATTA (finds the book) Found it!

GERDA I don't think this is the right time!

VATTA Oh, the sensitive aunt Gerda didn't make it into her daddy's book. Oh, how sad!

GERDA Vatta, you're dumb.

VATTA (hurtfully) Who cares?

(Gerda throws her bag down and leaves, feeling hurt.)

DÖNCI Who can be the cause of this hatred?

ELVIRA That's still left: our last inventory.

DÖNCI I'll take the blame. Without a word.

ELVIRA Go ahead! Start with the little Vatta!

VATTA (to Gerda) Why do you always have to throw temper tantrums?

DÖNCI Stop it, Vatta! And talk reasonably, for God's sake! We can't understand a word of your gibberish, and you swear like an animal. What kind of a person will you become? Do you think that if you sit in the loud plaza movie theatres watching idiotic horror movies, chewing loudly, then you'll learn your lesson?

VATTA Oops! My retired-by-force grandfather is trying to criticize me. Perhaps a generational problem has surfaced, hasn't it? But what kind of a critic is the critic whose critique can be exhausted with one expression: shut up!

(In the meantime Gerda picked up her bag. It's obvious that she is getting ready for something, but she waits.)

DÖNCI (silence) Should I not talk? There is truth to that. When you criticize, you predict. You bet on what should happen based on common sense. It's a gamble. And luck has nothing to do with common sense. Not even rationality! Very few people win. Most people miss. And fury roots from that. Anger. Critique is nothing else but anger. It rarely helps; rather, it destroys. And is it good to destroy? Hell, no! The main virtue of a good critic is the skill to pay attention to details, combined with an excellent ability to interpret. I wasn't cut out to be a critic. I

did not like either theatre or films, and I did not understand them either. Somehow this bus was my ride and I took it. Was that worth it? Of course it was! I learned to be quiet. Because in my work that's essential. Don't talk, because once you say something, you can't take it back. And from your story the listener will only retain what s/he wants to remember. And usually it isn't the grey matter what counts, but the gibberish. Everyone will remember that, adjusted to their own truth, but linked to your name. But if you write it down, chew on it, digest it, adjust it, clarify it, compare it to the other, you can save it for the future. All of it will remain, building up the whole from the particles, which contains the truth, and it will stay undefeatable. Mainly, of course, because it can be controlled. This is the weak person's commandment. To remain silent is gold. And I am feeble enough to be an inspiration for a statue! I wish I had the strength to speak! Even the half-truth is better than nothing.

VATTA Aha. I didn't understand a word of that.  
DÖNCI Nothing?  
GERDA We must talk! That is the key. To talk to others. Let's speak!

(Gerda take three dolls out of her bag. She gives Dönci the man doll, Vatta the little girl, and a blonde Barbie doll for herself.)

GERDA There is a method that could ease repressed emotions. (struggles to speak) You turn yourself, your being into...a puppet. Something like that. I read it not long ago.  
VATTA You bought three Belgian clowns in order to play psycho-theater with us?  
GERDA We must talk!  
VATTA Yeah. (plays with her doll) I am Vatta, a sad girl, where is Mr. Hat and Mr. Hankey?  
GERDA If you don't like it, you don't have to sit here!  
VATTA Sorry. I'll be good, aunt Gerda, I promise.  
GERDA Dad, please!  
DÖNCI (picks up his doll) My name is Dönci, a widow, afflicted by adversity. Old and human.  
VATTA (laughs) I'll catch you, you old man! (chases his puppet with her puppet)  
GERDA Stop it, you two! (silence) If you have a better idea, be it, but we can't leave here without having talked to each other. Don't you get it?  
ELVIRA They don't get it.  
VATTA What don't we understand?  
GERDA The three of us are what remains. Vatta, I know you too are afraid that we'll drift away from each other. You talked about this not long ago. We must do something to prevent that.  
VATTA Who is responsible? You, of course.

GERDA I am...?  
 VATTA (picks up her doll) You are responsible, you big-boobed, long-legged, cocksucker-lipped blonde babe!  
 GERDA (picks up her doll) Why do you think that, Vatta?  
 VATTA (lowers the doll) I'm just kidding.  
 GERDA (starting to raise her voice) Why did you say that about me, Vatta?  
 VATTA Like I said, it was nothing. I was just joking.  
 GERDA Do you accuse me of being responsible for something?  
 VATTA Perhaps...  
 GERDA Tell me what your problem is with me!  
 VATTA Nothing. Let's let it go...  
 GERDA Please, tell me!

(Gerda is making the doll talk ceaselessly while she is noticeably on the verge of a collapse. Dönci is playing with his doll with childlike sensitivity. Elvira is standing behind him observing the girls with honest interest.)

ELVIRA (to Dönci) Do you think they will verbalize it?  
 DÖNCI (nods)  
 VATTA (silence) You are happy that mom isn't here.  
 GERDA No, Vatta, I am immeasurably sad and desperate, because your mom is my sister, and to process the void she leaves is impossible.  
 VATTA You left us here.  
 GERDA That's not true.  
 VATTA You went away. You let my hundred-year-old grandparents raise me!  
 ELVIRA Hey!  
 VATTA You didn't even give me the slightest chance to live with a person who at least had the talent to replace the role of a mother for an abandoned child! Because no matter how we beautify this, you are the one closest to mom. You were. I would have accepted you! Because I used to believe that you could be my mother instead of mom. But instead, you left me.  
 GERDA (with barely audible quietness) I didn't leave you.  
 VATTA What then?  
 GERDA I accepted that mom and dad were the best solution for you.  
 VATTA Oh, I see! You hired professionals for this project! (laughs)  
 That's a whole different story. Right, Dönci?  
 DÖNCI (lifts up the doll, and talks to Elvira) I have done many wrong things. I can't even list them all. When Baba was being born, I was with another woman. An actress. I spent the night with her...

(Gerda and Elvira are looking at him with dispassionate faces.)

ELVIRA And? Everyone knows that.

VATTA Famous?  
DÖNCI Not anymore.  
VATTA Did you cheat on grandma?  
DÖNCI (nods)  
VATTA She was pissed, wasn't she?  
DÖNCI (waves 'no')  
VATTA I would have been. Do you have other sins?  
DÖNCI I do. A thousand. Countless. Let's drop it!  
ELVIRA You have confessed, my darling, every sin, and have processed every tragedy. Except for one. Except for one...  
VATTA Should I tell one? I don't really have ones that relate to grandma. Once I lit her hair on fire.  
ELVIRA (laughs) That did hurt.  
GERDA (silence) I am sorry for bringing this up...  
ELVIRA Not yet! Continue!

(Gerda puts the doll down, stands up, wants to leave, but suddenly Dönci starts to speak.)

DÖNCI I must have been five years old when I was friends with KisDönci. They had a small store where all sorts of things were sold, and occasionally even we got a few delicacies. One morning he told me that the ÁVH<sup>3</sup> was taking away his father. We ran back to the store because we have never seen the ÁVH before. We thought we were going to be part of a great adventure. We crawled inside through the back window and hid in the storage room and waited. They came. They had black coats and black hats, those ÁVH policemen. And the first one, the loudest one, their leader was my father. I wanted to run to him I was so glad to see him, but just as I was going to stand up, my father, that calm man punched KisDönci's father in the face so hard that he collapsed without a word. There are unerasable moments in a person's life. This was one of them. That was where I understood that my father was a bad person. So I grew up like that, became a husband and a father. Without a father role model. When occasionally I read a terrible critique of a college about a play, I was always outraged. If the critic wondered how the protagonist could have aged twenty years by the beginning of the second act, I told myself the reason was, you idiot, because you were sitting in the middle of the row, facing a wooden platform surrounded by black draperies, watching an imaginary world, not a real one, because it would only turn into reality if you, you row-occupying idiot longed for that too. Actually, I never told this to anyone. I was weak, mediocre, and not good at my job. I

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<sup>3</sup> The State Protection Authority (SPA) was a partially secret organization of the Hungarian communist party dictatorship between 1948 and 1956.

was an average Hungarian, I am, and I will be. Only here, among you could I feel appreciated. I composed the tale that brought in a lot of money. I didn't care about money. The sole purpose of writing that book was for everyone to find out what a wonderful daughter my Baba was...

VATTA Grandma said you wrote that book so that you could tell me those tales you told mom, but you couldn't remember exactly, so you had to write them all down, since you couldn't just tell tales sitting on my bed like you used to do for mom, and when mom left, then grandma took out that folder, in which you collected them all, and you assembled them into a book.

DÖNCI I don't remember. It could have been like that.

VATTA (silence) Then you wrote that book for me.

DÖNCI (jumps up and walks around annoyed) I don't know how it happened. I don't remember. Those are Baba's stories and that's all. I can feel that this is all about finding the accountable person. We haven't finalized the exact reason of responsibility yet. Good. (to Elvira) Haven't you ever made a mistake? Have you not made wrong decisions? It is easy to dump everything on me! That is simple, isn't it? But to accept that I can't lift the lawn-mower alone, that I fall asleep watching the 9:30 p.m. movie, that I can't remember the name of a girl, Marika Nemeth, who sat next to me in elementary school when she says hello at the grocery store, to accept those things isn't easy. Nay! Depressing.

ELVIRA Talk!

DÖNCI Because you are right, Gerda, we will not leave this place until certain things are verbalized. Should we be honest? Fine. I'll start. I haven't been the perfect father, and I listed its reasons just now. I haven't been a good husband either, but as it turns out, everyone already knew about that. I haven't been outstanding at my work either, and I lagged behind. What did I achieve in this life? I raised three girls. It can be argued whether I did that well or badly. The fact remains; I nurtured each one of them for three times nineteen years. What a mystical number that is! Ours. Our prime number, our biblical number pair! And you? Based on what do you want to levitate like saints above our family altar? Because you're not saints. (to Gerda) Where were you when your fiftysomething parents started to raise a child? Your niece's feelings are right: you abandoned your family. It's easy to be smart from afar. It's easy to be judgemental from afar. (to Vatta) And you, stop nodding with that self-satisfied head of yours! How dare you not show even the smallest inkling of respect? Would you act towards your mother, talk to your mother, and disrespect your mother the way you do with Gerda? Older people deserve appreciation! Pay attention to us! Learn from us! If we make a

mistake, remember that! Your life is the very easiest ever.  
Your life is the most beautiful ever. Even if....Even if...

(Dönci waves at the girls with trembling hands and moves over. Elvira doesn't move.)

GERDA (silence) Is God a man or a woman?  
DÖNCI I don't remember.

(Gerda takes out a past-century 'Kodak' envelope and tosses it toward Dönci on the table.)

GERDA I pulled another card when I already had nineteen.

(The worrisome Dönci impassively opens the top of the envelope and looks at the photos. He turns pale. FLASHBACK. The morning before Baba's death. Dönci is trying out a new camera.)

DÖNCI (shouts) Come on in! Everyone, come into the room!

(Gerda enters with a bulky and typical 90's mobile phone in her hand.)

GERDA I am here. (she is on the phone) They put it into writing at the Department of Studies.  
ELVIRA (from outside) I am hurrying!  
DÖNCI Come, hurry! You too, Baba, hurry!  
ELVIRA (coming) Oh, how beautiful is this thingie!  
DÖNCI Nikon. (shouts) Baba, you won't make it into the photo!  
GERDA (on the phone) Then we'll move off the map, hello!  
DÖNCI Gerda, hang up the phone, and put it away!  
GERDA Just a moment.  
DÖNCI (shouts) My daughter, can we rely on you today?  
ELVIRA Should we stand, sit, or what do you wish?  
Dönci A little to the left, so Gerda isn't so squished!

(Baba runs in with her eyes cried out--who, in this flashback, is played by Vatta--, stands in for the photo with a somber face. From here on the past and the present, reality and fiction are mixed together.)

DÖNCI (to Vatta, frightfully) Where is Baba?  
VATTA (doesn't understand it) I am standing in front of you. I am *she*.  
DÖNCI No, you are not *there*...I don't understand you.  
VATTA Let's hurry, because I have to get to Kassa by two!  
ELVIRA Dönci, please, I still have to grind the meat by tomorrow!  
DÖNCI Don't you see? She is not my daughter though!  
GERDA Are we starting, or should I call the university back?  
DÖNCI You are not Baba, you...

(Dönci grabs Vatta's hand and strokes her face.)

VATTA (kindly) Don't squeeze my hand; that hurts a lot.  
DÖNCI You look so much like her! And like me.  
GERDA What's going on, how much longer do we have to wait? (leaves while on the phone) They are idiots.  
ELVIRA What are you doing, Dönci?  
DÖNCI Elvira, she is not our daughter!  
VATTA Tell me what you see!  
DÖNCI I see you. Your eyes, your mouth, your sad face are all like her, but you are not Baba. The dance! Her feet made a knocking sound. Do you hear that? Who's outside? Do you hear her voice? She is calling me. She wants me to go! She wants me to hear the rumbling of her madness! Why did you leave without me? I wanted to help, to admire you, to understand with my common sense that you are not a little girl anymore, that you are not Baba anymore. But it didn't work. So many trials were tied up in a loop due to my stubbornness! I buried my collapsed life with you and without you. My truth was all a lie. Then and now. If I hadn't let go of you, if I had gone with you, if I had written two lines more, instead I had cried over my bitter future more, I would have been able to imprint the last two lines: the burning hearts of little meatloaves are like a hearth's portal, but their souls and bodies are immortal.

(Back to the present. Gerda and Vatta are sitting at the table. Elvira is next to them.)

VATTA (whispering) I can feel that mom is among us and she is eavesdropping.  
ELVIRA (nods smilingly)  
GERDA I wish to go away from here...But something is keeping me here. I want to escape and stay. I'd rather stay. And I don't understand it.  
VATTA What was mom like?  
GERDA At night I used to hide under the bed and listen from there to the tales dad would tell Baba. Because he never did that with me! I never got a good night kiss, because I was the big girl, the smart and crafty Gerda! If you knew how much I hate that damn story, those rotten little meatloaves, because those are all Baba's stories. And yours. I am not in any of those sentences. As if I had been a live portrait in this house, locked behind a Plexiglas. In the meantime I have learned that in hindsight every truth surfaces and makes the past liveable again. That is where I lived. I raged and I whined rightfully so. But if I had learned to love and accept myself by now, it could

be only due to having received directions with such accuracy. Or hypocrisy? I had a terrible and a wonderful mother. As a child I hated her, and I think she hated me too. We both wished for the other to be gone! But as time went by, everything changed. She became a sweet, interested, and humble birth-mother who was brave and willing to pay attention to me. What was needed for that? We all know that in this family. But I believe it would have happened the same way without the tragedy too. And if mom could shed her evil past and reborn as an angel, then why can't I? I have changed. I have transformed. That is why life is nice. It gives us the opportunity for change without borders. (silence) I felt mom's death. I know the exact second when she took her last breath. I was sitting at my laptop, and time stopped, my hand didn't move, the monitor became blurry, and I saw the ceiling as I was present and inside mom at the same time.

ELVIRA You were inside of me.

GERDA (to Vatta) I can see that you are upset with me. You asked about your mom, yet I am reminiscing about myself. I admit, this isn't a very stylish equivocation. If I make a mistake, I'd rather deny it and protect myself in every possible way to avoid having to admit when someone else is right. It is difficult to admit that I am happier when I know that I don't have to be honest every minute, because I don't want to be honest! My life is built on lies. This is terrible. I am a monster in others' eyes, because the cultural agreement in this christian world is the basic thesis built on honesty. I deeply disagree with that. I don't believe in impeccable morality. Yet I feel great in my own skin. See, I said smart things. You could give me kudos for that. (laughs) I don't know the answer to your question. I don't know what your mother was like.

ELVIRA On guard!

VATTA What could I have expected from you, you selfish, hypocritical, characterless and dubious bitch! I could drown you in a basin full of water.

GERDA (slaps Vatta's face)

VATTA You're not normal!

(Vatta slaps Gerda too, who slaps the girl backhanded so hard that she falls off the chair. Vatta would cry, but she is so surprised that she forgets the pain.)

VATTA (silence) I deserved it, didn't I?

GERDA I don't know. (silence) Please forgive me!

VATTA Don't you think that I could lecture about my screwed up life with a 30-minute long monologue?

ELVIRA We already heard it today and there is no need for an addendum!

VATTA You'd be sobbing right here, you idiot! What do you know about me? What?

GERDA Nothing. I don't know.

VATTA (silence) You despise me.

GERDA Olivia...

VATTA Don't Olivia me! How do you even know that I have a real name? I am Vatta, the little grandchild and grandma's favorite. Did you forget?

GERDA I truly hate you. But...I can't truly explain why.

ELVIRA You know very well!

VATTA You hate me because I could experience the tragedies from closer than you. Because Baba was my mother, and for you she was only a sister. I was a defenseless baby orphan, and you, the already-graduated adult, from whom her loved ones expected a solution and help. Because you seemed strong and I seemed weak. Therefore they compellingly exempted me from accusations. That must have bothered you endlessly. You felt left alone. Perhaps you are right, but you are also wrong: others can feel alone too. Really morbid, isn't it? Plenty of lonesome people are condemned to solitary irritating each other instead of finding each other. Ah, what a rotten feeling this is! I always waited. Always waited for someone. Waited for the door to open, and my father would walk in. Waited to wake from my dream, and my mother would be sitting next to me. I visualized Dönci and grandma getting off the Sopron<sup>4</sup> express train. I waited for my phone to ring to hear your voice say an inquisitive hello. But all in vain. Nobody ever came.

(Gerda hugs Vatta, Elvira turns away from them.)

GERDA (silence) If you had a sibling, you could tell her that you are pretty and she is not.

VATTA Did you say that to mom?

GERDA No, I didn't say that.

VATTA Then?

GERDA The other way around.

VATTA Did you shout? (whispering) I tell you a secret. If you laugh at me, you are rotten. So the secret is that sometimes I dream, but not the usual way, but while I am awake. They are not dreams exactly, but memories. Memories of mom, you, and grandma. Situation which I technically couldn't even remember. I think I can do that because these things are important to you. And I see everything. And I hear everything as if it was a movie. And everyone is like they are now, but it all takes place in the past. When I see you as young, you are as old as you are now, but I still know it is not happening now

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<sup>4</sup> One of Hungary's furthest cities.

but back then. And we talk as if our speech was scripted. Our sentences come forward like the lines of a poem, in rhymes. Do you think this is an alarmingly gigantic stupidity or totally normal?

GERDA (smiles) Normal. Totally.

(Gerda takes out a pack of 30-piece 'Chesterfield' cigarette box, an artsy metal lighter, and starts smoking.)

VATTA How long have you been smoking?

GERDA (doesn't answer)

VATTA What a huge box!

GERDA (blows the smoke out)

VATTA (silence) Will you ever love me again in this lifetime?

(Elvira is watching the girls somewhat sadly. Gerda looks ahead with a smoking cigarette in her hand. Vatta is sleeping with her head on the table, then suddenly wakes herself up with her snorting.)

GERDA (silence) Only his balls are lukewarm...

(They are shouting and laughing. Elvira is chuckling with them. Sounds of throat clearing from outside; Dönci is coming.)

DÖNCI I can't sleep. (the girls are laughing) What is it?

VATTA Do you remember when aunt Gizi was sitting next to the dead uncle Fritz with the freshly baked acorn in her hands that the old man wanted for dinner?

DÖNCI (laughing) His body is icecold...,

TOGETHER Only his balls are lukewarm...

(They laugh together.)

VATTA (they quiet down) Grandma used to laugh at that too.

DÖNCI We used to laugh a lot back then.

GERDA Back then. Yes. (silence) It is late.

VATTA (stares at the urn) What about this?

DÖNCI I don't know.

VATTA Put it up on the shelf!

GERDA Why there?

VATTA I don't know.

GERDA (stands up) Will you sleep with me in my room?

VATTA (nods) Perhaps not.

(Gerda grabs Vatta's hand and they leave laughing.)

ELVIRA I am done. (silence) I am good, aren't I? (looks at the urn) I wish I knew what will happen to the miracle!

DÖNCI (suddenly) Have you seen Baba?  
 ELVIRA Dear, I am not in the otherworld, but here. (touches Dönci's forehead) Inside you.

DÖNCI But I can see you!  
 ELVIRA That is why.  
 DÖNCI Aren't you a ghost?  
 ELVIRA There are no ghosts. You watch too many T.V. shows.  
 DÖNCI I don't understand this.  
 ELVIRA You've always been too much of a materialistic. I liked that about you too.

DÖNCI I made a lot of money.  
 ELVIRA I wasn't thinking about that.  
 DÖNCI I know. If what you are saying is true, you can only be so educated-mannered and literature oriented, because my brain controls my displayed photo of you which then meshes the past with the present and fiction with reality!

ELVIRA (ponders) It can only be this way.  
 DÖNCI Elvira, I got really dumb.  
 ELVIRA No, you didn't!  
 DÖNCI Believe me, I did! At the end of a show, perhaps "NCIS" or "Criminal Minds", I am not sure, but the show always ends with the airplane flying above the clouds, and a protagonist quotes something smart from a famous person. These are my wisdoms. And of course I forget all of them immediately. I haven't had my own thoughts in years. Perhaps that is the reason why you found room in my mind. That is why you fit in there. Inside of me. The two of us make one mind. And I don't know if that is sad or jolly.

ELVIRA (stroking the urn) A handful of ashes.  
 DÖNCI What are you planning?  
 ELVIRA (tearful smile)  
 DÖNCI Will you leave?  
 ELVIRA I have already left.  
 DÖNCI I don't get it....what is happening?  
 ELVIRA The time is here. (laughs) Am I pathetic? (frighteningly) You have to let me go, Dönci! I can see the light...

DÖNCI Don't joke about that!  
 ELVIRA Why not? My dear, death is life's biggest joke. It strikes so fast that the smile freezes on your face. This is not how I planned it, of course, but this is what I got. It isn't really satisfactory to perish in the kitchen with an apron around my waist. Yes, I would have rather been in bed stretched out voluptuously with lipstick on my lips! You ask me why I am a jolly dead? Why am I joking? We haven't laughed in this family in twenty years. Life cannot be a drama. Only comedy. If we let destiny guide us, then perhaps a tragicomedy. (waves) I lived enough. It could have been more. I wasn't the one who decided. Perhaps it was Providence, in which you don't believe blindly

anymore. Actually, you don't believe in your god anymore at all. When in fact it is good to believe. To believe...(silence) I had been a horrible mother. Let's not beautify it; it is unchangeable even if I know now where and what mistakes I had made. I was selfish because I was afraid. And I felt so sorry for myself! My youth. Our love. Vatta helped with self-deception, because I believed that as a replacement mother I can correct Gerda and Baba. But as a mother I will not be better. You had been a good father, Dönci. That is, when you actually wanted to be a father. You know, a man enjoys what he does. A woman doesn't. You are all famous for your cooking knowledge, your arts and crafts, and your work mania. But not you. Because you liked something else. Yourself. And you did that with such devotion and charm that it could only be viewed lovingly. I never regretted choosing you. That is what was written in my book. You. I have never dreamt of anything else or wished for anything else. But I wish these last two decades would have shaped differently! I have tried to save the salvageable and become a good person. Yet, we had to learn a hard lesson. You did. A father cannot bury his own child, as you said. Yes. A mother *must* bury her own child! And she has to walk with a straight back all the way to the one she hates the most in the whole wide world. Those poppies bloomed so beautifully from my tears. Nice sentence, isn't it? Write a lot! Even about me. (sighs) Write only about me! (silence) This is where the story ends. If you could wish for one thing, only one more thing, what would it be?

DÖNCI (thinks for a long time) When you stood on the pier in the summer of '68, looking at the smooth surface of the water, your round knee peeked out, because the light of the moon lit only that part of you, as if for me see it. And I stepped toward you...

ELVIRA I was your wife, don't forget!

DÖNCI I looked into your eyes which were shining like the moon on the surface of the water...

ELVIRA You always used to say very nice things to me, my love.

DÖNCI I wanted to kiss you, but you pushed me away, because Pál Szécsi<sup>5</sup> was singing from the speakers.

ELVIRA The "Butterfly"<sup>6</sup>!

DÖNCI And you asked me to dance with you right there on the lake's bank.

ELVIRA But you didn't want to.

DÖNCI I am very sorry. I'd like that dance...

ELVIRA ...the "Butterfly"?

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<sup>5</sup> A popular Hungarian pop singer in the 70's and 80's, committed suicide at an early age.

<sup>6</sup> Pál Szécsi's hit.

DÖNCI Yes, the "Butterfly". Because that can never be recalled, and that one feeling can never be relived without you...Your touch.

ELVIRA I know. The scent lives on for a long time. The voice remains too. And the image has been burnt in you for a thousand years.

DÖNCI I cannot recall so many things! It has only been a few days, and I am already forgetting you! You are disappearing from my head, and I don't want that!

ELVIRA Darling, believe me, it is better that I went first, because if it had been the other way around, I would have died from the pain of losing you. (Dönci wishes to speak but Elvira doesn't let him) A man slowly forgets every detail, so you won't remember me forever either. (Dönci wishes to speak again) I know you don't want it that way, but that's how it'll be. Don't regret anything! You have two girls by your side. Watch them and then you can see me too. (she spins Dönci while dancing) I never cared for the "Butterfly". (sings) "To love till we go crazy, how wonderful that'd be! Only if the other could notice me and would agree with me!"

DÖNCI You liked this.

ELVIRA But it has never been my favorite...

DÖNCI I can't see you!

ELVIRA I know.

DÖNCI Don't leave yet!

ELVIRA (laughs) This is so dramatic!

DÖNCI You said the voice fades sooner than the face...

ELVIRA No way!

DÖNCI But!

ELVIRA (stops, sternly) Sometimes we cheat...

DÖNCI But only sometimes!

(Dönci is laughing loudly. Elvira goes up to him, hugs him, pets his back kindly, whispers something into his ear, then suddenly disappears. Dönci becomes quiet. Gerda is standing behind him.)

GERDA Dad...

DÖNCI Gerda, have I been a bad father?

GERDA (sits down) Let's leave it!

DÖNCI No, my daughter, let's not leave it. We haven't laughed in this family in twenty years. Life cannot be a tragedy. Only a tragicomedy.

GERDA (laughs) Are you better?

DÖNCI I am sorry, but I can't promise anything else but entertainment.

GERDA A lot of details have smoothed themselves out in me. If you wish, I can tell you.

DÖNCI I have always lost in tennis. It was shitty. (silence) I don't want you to tell me.

GERDA Are you afraid that I would hurt you?  
DÖNCI You could never hurt me. You don't have the ability to do so.  
GERDA You do accuse a lot. And I mean particularly unfounded accusations. Don't you think I could babble for half an hour about my fucked up life? You'd be sobbing right here, you idiot! What do you know about me?  
DÖNCI Here comes, "I wish if it had been you who died, dad!"  
GERDA You are wrong. The realization within me is getting stronger that mom's departure wasn't by chance. Her death had a reason and a goal, I feel.  
DÖNCI Death cannot have a goal.  
GERDA Why not? Look around, can't you see?  
DÖNCI (looks around)  
GERDA This house is alive because of us.  
DÖNCI (shocked) Is that why? That is why this happened now?  
GERDA If mom could be here, she'd hug you smilingly, and would pat your shoulder: "Nice, Dönci!"  
DÖNCI (laughs)  
GERDA Right?  
DÖNCI She was here a minute ago. She hugged me smilingly and patted my shoulder.  
GERDA (holds Dönci's hand) This much was with her. What comes now will be without her.  
DÖNCI A funeral feast till death?  
GERDA The Earth turns. And so do we. Once up and once down. Remember, you always used to say that! When you were everything. My everything. I used to be so small next to you! I crawled into your lap, but of course you pushed me out right away. But I always had time to inhale your scent inside of me. The dad scent. I listened secretly to you when you were Baba's storyteller. I was jealous and happy at the same time, because I could hear you. I was hearing you, the dad. A long time ago mom was the stupid one and you were the funny one. Then it all changed. Mom became the sweet mother and you the surly father. No problem.

(Vatta appears. She watches them quietly.)

GERDA (silence) I'll go pack and fly back to Brussels in the morning. And I will laugh all the way and wait for you to call me in a couple of days to ask me, "What is going on with you, my little girl?" And I'll tell you while you listen to me, and a week later I'll call you, then I will come home, and you will wait for me and will be happy to see me, and we'll live like this till the end of time. We'll have a happy end, dad! Just want it! You have to want it! I am so scared! Yet I trust you so much! (she kisses him)

DÖNCI Will you still be an owl?  
 GERDA (shrugs her shoulders)  
 VATTA (suddenly) I am going to leave school. The university.  
 GERDA (lifts her head up)  
 DÖNCI No problem. (silence) We'll paint your room. I'll call Karezs.  
 VATTA Could it be dark brown?  
 DÖNCI Even underwear red. (laughs weakly) Indeed...!  
 GERDA Will you move back home?  
 VATTA I will.  
 GERDA (silence) Good for you.

(Dönci walks up to the record player and starts the song with a loud crepitation: the "Butterfly" by Pál Szécsi. Dönci listens to the song with natural calmness. He looks up as if to look at the blue sky. He is young again, by the pier, a summer night breeze blows. He closes his eyes and enjoys the stroking air. He stands up slowly and starts to dance. Reality turns to fiction again: there are three people present. Dönci is trying to follow the dance steps more and more wildly, and he wants to tear his clothes off--he wants to get rid of his past figuratively. Gerda is leaning back and forth with small movements and can't loosen up. She crouches instead and becomes an owl. She laughs loudly. She flaps her wings and flies up and around the room. She tries to hug her father but he pushes her away rudely over and over again, then he pulls her close with a manly gesture, and finally they hug each other. On the contrary, Vatta gets wild, dances dynamically, jumps, flaps her arms, beats Dönci and Gerda. In the meantime she sobs, and finally her sobbing turns to yelling. Upon the last musical note Vatta's kick makes the urn fall to the ground and it breaks. Yet there are no ashes among the broken tile pieces. Everything that Elvira ever was is flying above Dönci's head in the shape of colorful and shining dots...And the last scene is coming up. Dönci tells the two girls his life's most sour and fateful story. We are in the past, Gerda and Vatta are the outsiders, Dönci is a persona and a narrator simultaneously. Everything he says comes to life. A schizophrenic state of being: as if his own life was playing on the movie screen.)

DÖNCI It was fall, since everything happens in the fall. And silence, dead silence. I didn't want to be there, because I didn't want to see Baba in the dance assembly, since mediocre wasn't enough for me. My daughter can only be a swan. White and black. The 32 fouette en tournant was in her feet. Elvira cooked. A Sunday lunch. She made meatloaf for Baba; that's how she waited for her. Because we didn't go to Kassa to see my daughter's dance. It wasn't enough for me to see her in that dance assembly. She was the best, and I wanted to see her in the role of the swan! Gerda was playing in the garden with little Vatta. I was standing in the middle of the room. I don't know why. We could say that I felt something. But I didn't. I didn't know that at that moment Baba was racing

through one of the most beautiful and steep roads of the hills of Matra in her 12-year-old dark green Opel. I did not know. And the phone rang. The clock signaled with a loud click that time did not stop. It was five past eleven. The hands were like this. (shows a "V" with his fingers) The phone was ringing ear-piercingly. In its sound some human pain could be detected. I sat down and picked up the receiver. Who is it? - asked Elvira from the kitchen. I didn't answer her, only the question of the police sergeant: yes, I am he, her father. It seemed like a long millenium while he was talking...my daughter consumed alcohol...yes, whiskey sometimes, she liked that..., and was driving too fast on the mountain road...she was in a hurry to get home, and...and went through the roadside barrier...Yes. By then Elvira was standing there too, with a plate of meatloaf in her hands. I looked at her and I couldn't speak. I said it with no voice: Olga plunged into "that" abyss. I didn't even notice that I called Baba by her name. The plate, greasy from lard, whirled out of Elvira's hand. The small pieces of meatloaves landed on the ground like the fluffs of a dandelion, then they rolled softly all over the floor. I didn't hear the collapsing Elvira's grievous sobbing, and I didn't hear her knees' clatter on the hard floor either. I only heard the shrieking beeps from the receiver which were simultaneous with my heartbeat. Baba died. A father cannot bury his daughter. His mother, father, sibling, spouse, dog, cat, calf, yes. But a father cannot lose his child! The truth of life can't let this illegality happen. I couldn't embrace my wife. I couldn't live through this mourning with her. I couldn't accept it...So far.

(Dönci returns to the fictitious present from the past. He is sitting by the table with his daughter and granddaughter next to him. The urn has already disappeared from the table, and only a lonely whiskey bottle exhibits itself. Dönci's is mumbling the the last few lines of his infamous fable when Gerda and Vatta join him. They are getting louder.)

DÖNCI        The little meatloaves were looking for grandma,  
Teakettle-eared Auntie, Abysmal Baba.  
But Teakettle-eared Auntie and Abysmal Baba,  
They never answered them, were never seen at all.

TOGETHER She headed for a big battle, jumped on a horse,  
Which the little meatloaves never knew, of course.  
Baba went with weapons, with fork and spoon  
She went to fight, but only played with Doom.  
The little meatloaves waited for meatloaf grandma,  
Teakettle-eared Swan Auntie, Abysmal Baba.  
They crawled into bed, into the fluffy and soft bed,

They slept cuddling, quietly sobbing under the spread.  
In the morning their good friend knocked, Sanyi.  
Sanyi was an owl, his wife was called Manyi.  
They comforted the little meatloaves together,  
They strummed the elderberry stem lutes together.  
Where can you be, where can you be, Abysmal Baba?  
Are you still alive, or are you dead? - a story told by Lala.  
Lala, who was a fish, had his own carp nationality.  
Lala never found a wife within the lake's capacity.  
Except above the clouds, that is where she lived: Irma,  
She became Lala's wife, what's she writing, that Stork Irma?  
She's writing a sonnet, just like Wasp Rick,  
When everyone knows that he's a big...

(Eventually Vatta loses it, starts to laugh, laughs even more, and then Gerda joins in. Dönci is laughing with them. He embraces the girls happily.)

(Curtain.)

Budapest-Gárdony, 2012.

The story takes place on October 21st, 2012.

Dönci (February 13, 1948, 64 years old)

One of the most popular critics of the Kadar dictatorship, his career soared, which remained unbroken despite the change of regime. He gained lots of enemies, but he always posted himself well, and was a favorite of every governing party. With the death of his daughter something broke in him and he stopped writing, was supported by his wife, published a children's book, which earned him immense popularity and money. He hasn't written since and doesn't need to. He watches T.V. series, sits in his armchair glumly and silently.

Elvira (August 20, 1946-October 9, 2012, she was 66 years old)

She married Dönci on July 26th, 1968. She retired from teaching. She lived by and for Dönci her whole life.

Gerda (February 29, 1971, 41 years old)

She has always had special abilities, won academic contests and sport competitions, was fully independent even as a child. She graduated from the university in Szeged, and moved to Brussels after her sister's death and still lives there by herself.

Baba/Olga (March 1, 1973-March 1, 1993, she was 19 years old)

She got pregnant at age 18, father unknown. She wanted to be a ballerina, but remained mediocre. She got a small role in college in "Swan Lake", and she died in a car accident on her way home from the opening performance.

Vatta/Olivia (December 31, 1992, 19 years old)

She has been living with her grandparents since birth, since she became an orphan when she was a few months old, Dönci and Elvira raised her. After her high school final exam she got accepted to the Sopron Forestry University where she remains in the dorms.