

# PRIME LOCATION

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A Comedy by György Spiró (2011)

Translated from the Hungarian by Szilvia Naray-Davey

## LIST OF CHARACTERS:

MR SNEAK

MISS JUDITH

HUSBAND

WIFE

WOMAN

MOTHER

DAUGHTER

OLD MAN

THREE MEN (Beaters and Turks)

THREE WOMEN (Turks, Old ladies)

## Scene 1

*(Trees, bushes, bulrushes are being blown by the wind. Three men enter from stage left dressed in hunting clothes. They stand.)*

*[Translator's note: Beater 2 speaks German; Beater 3 speaks Russian. The Russian words are phonetically spelled.]*

BEATER 1: *(Reads from a notebook.)* High aim?

BEATER 2: Die Kanzel.

BEATER 1: And what else?

BEATER 2: Der Hochstand.

BEATER 1: High aim?

BEATER 3: La Bazz. Vurshka.

BEATER 1: Hunting ground?

BEATER 2: Der Jdgbezirk.

BEATER 3: Ur gordyer. Paulyer ahortu.

BEATER 1: Woodland of Peace?

BEATER 2: Die remise.

BEATER 1: Woodland of Peace?

BEATER 3: I don't know. Not on my notes.

BEATER 1: Doesn't matter. Prey?

BEATER 2: Die Beute.

BEATER 3: Der bee-oocha.

BEATER 1: Hunting horn?

BEATER 2: Das Horn

BEATER 3: Valtorna.

BEATER 1: What?

BEATER 3: I've got Valtorna.

BEATER 1: Really? Strange. Sure it isn't Faltorna?

BEATER 3: It's Valtorna. What is Faltorna? It is Valtorna. The accent is on the long o.

BEATER 1: Don't mind me. Beaters' Drive?

BEATER 2: Die Laufjagd. Die Kreisjagd. Die Triebjagd. Die Streifjagd. Die Streifhetze.

BEATER 1: Beaters' Drive.

BEATER 3: Ahorta Zagorn.

BEATER 1: Beater?

BEATER 2: Der Treiber. Der Hetzer. Der Kaiser.

BEATER 1: Beater?

BEATER 3: I don't have anything like that written down.

BEATER 1: If you don't have it, you don't have it.

*(They exit stage right. The trees, bushes, bulrushes disappear.)*

## Scene 2

*(OFFICE. Desk with a computer screen on it, keyboard, and files. A leather swivelling chair behind it. Husband, Wife, and Mr Sneak enter.)*

SNEAK: Please wait here. Miss Judith will arrive shortly.

WIFE: Isn't she called Mary?

SNEAK: That was the one before, ma'am. Miss Judith has been the new boss for six months now.

HUSBAND: We would have come before but no one ever mentioned anything.

SNEAK: Well, then there were was nothing wrong. Don't you worry nothing about it. Please wait here.

Usually people wait in the dining hall, but they're getting ready for tonight's party, cleaning, setting up tables, and all that stuff. When Miss Judith gets here she'll give you the entry permits.

HUSBAND: To where?

SNEAK: To them, little oldies.

HUSBAND: You never needed a permit before.

SNEAK: Well, you need one now. With so many overnight guests staying, they could wander in. Or the little oldies could walk out, which would not look good.

HUSBAND: They're not locked up, are they?

SNEAK: We are sensitive to their resting needs. And that is why you can't just visit as you please. You've got to book yourself in first, and Miss Judith will sort you out with an appointment.

WIFE: We had no idea about any of this!

SNEAK: It's no problem, we're flexible. I'm just telling you for next time. You can still go in now. Miss Judith is very understanding like that. No worries about going in this time, as you didn't know. She'll allow me to open the ward as I've got them keys. But next time, book by email and Miss Judith will write back with a slot.

WIFE: They're not allowed in the garden.

SNEAK: Of course they are, when it's scheduled in they can. The ones that can't walk get pushed out . . . we roll them out. "Mr Sneak, will you roll me out, please?" And then I go and roll them out. I've got time, me, so I roll them out into the garden. Mr Sneak, that's me, that's what I go by. I used to be Snape but became Sneak . . . It was before I got this job here. I am the opposite actually. Always speak my mind, me, say it as it is. They just won't believe me.  
*(Laughs)*

HUSBAND: You used be able to park right by the gate. Can't believe that they had the nerve to put a security-gated, paying parking lot in the middle of nowhere!

SNEAK: It's the new development.

HUSBAND: And what are all these Russian and German four-by-fours doing here? Who are these people?

SNEAK: They're the hunting holiday adventure guests.

HUSBAND: What do you mean by hunting holiday?

SNEAK: The one over here. In the west wing of the castle.

HUSBAND: The bit that's been renovated?

SNEAK: Yes, building new business is the only way. The council had run out of money, they got them overdrafts fees, can't be too much, but still . . . it meant they couldn't have got them zero tax returns, which they would need for the grant application . . . Then the finance manager showed up and made it clear what you can spend the money on. It wasn't the mayor or the committee, you see . . . So that's when Mary left, the boss before, and we came on the scene, because they wanted to recruit Miss Judith.

HUSBAND: Excuse me? Can you clarify this for me? Are you saying that they took the main castle section away from the residential home and then piled the old people on top of each other in the ancient bit that was left in ruins?

SNEAK: Even like this, there's plenty of space for our little oldies. We get a lot of interest; we've a good reputation, you see. It's not in such a bad state inside. Next year, we'll be replacing the ventilation system . . .

WIFE: How many share a room?

SNEAK: It depends, ma'am. You'll see for yourself, when you visit your lovely old man. It is your old man, if I'm not mistaken. You did say it before, am I right?

WIFE: My father.

SNEAK: Lovely old man then.

*(Doorbell rings.)*

SNEAK: Excuse me, I've got to go. Please wait here . . . Don't sit in this chair. Miss Judith don't like it. I'll bring you some chairs.

*(He leaves.)*

### Scene 3

*(SILENCE.)*

WIFE: Jesus Christ, I told you we should have come before!

HUSBAND: Relax, there is nothing wrong with him. They didn't contact us. And he didn't call, either.

WIFE: He can't "do" mobiles.

HUSBAND: He could use it. We've taught him. But he never picked up when you called!

WIFE: No reception, or it got stolen.

HUSBAND: We'll buy him a new one.

WIFE: It'll get stolen too.

HUSBAND: We'll chain it to his wrist.

WIFE: We should have visited. We never come!

HUSBAND: We're here now, aren't we? He was perfectly well last time.

WIFE: They built an entire hotel since then.

HUSBAND: They renovated a wing. What's the big deal? It was done in three weeks. No shortage of manpower . . . the building sites are deserted.

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: They've moved him to another room, to a shared ward. We should arrange for him to be . . .

HUSBAND: We will.

*(SILENCE. Husband walks to the back of the stage.)*

HUSBAND: The garden is still beautiful. A bit on the wild side now, but still beautiful.

*(Wife also walks to the back.)*

WIFE: I can't see anyone around.

HUSBAND: Quiet time.

WIFE: In the morning? They won't let them out during the day?



HUSBAND: Of course they do. He said so earlier. They roll them out.

WIFE: We'll have to pay him off, this Mr Sneak guy.

HUSBAND: Okay, we will.

WIFE: And what if they moved him to the top floor? He can't walk down by himself. I'm not sure they've got a lift here . . .

HUSBAND: Then they'll bring him down. It's their job. No big deal—we'll just slip the nurses a backhand. Everybody will get slipped one, whether they want it or not.

*(SILENCE. Husband sits down on Miss Judith's chair.)*

WIFE: Don't sit there, we've been told not to.

HUSBAND: You must be joking?!

*(Stays sitting, turning, swivelling on the chair.)*

WIFE: They'll take revenge on Daddy!

HUSBAND: Of course not! *(Swivels.)* They'll have been paid off. It's not my fault that there are no chairs here. I'm not going to be standing around for hours.

## Scene 4

*(A woman and Mr Sneak enter. The latter is carrying three folding chairs used for hunting under his arm.)*

WOMAN: Good morning.

WIFE: Good morning.

SNEAK: I've brought three chairs. One has one leg . . . You get used to it.

*(SILENCE. Husband gets up in silence. Mr Sneak puts down two chairs and pulls open a three-legged camping chair.)*

SNEAK: They're willing to sit on this for hours. I couldn't do it.

*(Sneak opens another three-legged one, puts it down. He plants the one-legged one down, sits on it, loses his balance, laughs.)*

SNEAK: Out there they quickly disappear into the ground, 'cause it's too powdery. So you have to move it somewhere else from time to time . . . and where the ground is hard, it feels like you've swallowed a pole.

*(Gets up. To the women)*

SNEAK: Miss Judith is on her way. She must be at the tailor's because of them costumes. They love the folkloric stuff and Gypsy music. This is a Gypsy-free area, so you need to bring them in from elsewhere.

HUSBAND: Gypsy music?

SNEAK: For the feast. They love it.

HUSBAND: What feast?

SNEAK: For the hunters. You've got to include everything in the package, otherwise they won't come. The in-laws will snatch them off us otherwise. Are you with me? The Austrians.

HUSBAND: Aren't the Gypsies too loud?

SNEAK: They're loud, alright, sir.

HUSBAND: Can you hear them in the old people's home?

SNEAK: The ones who aren't deaf. They love it too.

WIFE: All his life my father hated Gypsy music.

SNEAK: We only book them good bands.

WIFE: It makes him want to slash his wrists. He hates it.

SNEAK: I'm sure he got to like it. They're lovely, our little oldies.

HUSBAND: Whose idea was it to take out half the castle?

SNEAK: I don't know nothing, me. I was in tourism before . . . Me and Miss Judith was asked to come here, because of the new hotel and the castle. Miss Judith worked in Germany for years. They did tourist office stuff and all that. And me, I was at the Spa Hotel . . . Miss Judith saw I was a jack-of-all-trades, so that was it . . .

HUSBAND: Hasn't she got a related professional qualification?

SNEAK: She sure got them qualifications. Not a softie, Miss Judith, oh no.

HUSBAND: What about the other boss lady? Did her contract end? Did they sack her?

SNEAK: I'm the doorman, me, the garden is my responsibility, and other things, but I don't know what goes on up there. I was brought here by Miss Judith, me, but I know Mary is the only one who left. The psychiatric nurse and the physio nurse stayed and all the others too . . . It's hard to find employment around here . . . the whole region is unemployed. Everybody is happy to have the old people's home. And they were pleased that the hotel came along. The hotel is completely separate, apart from Miss Judith, who manages both. Two separate divisions, only the boss is shared, as manager. And the kitchen is shared too! They get unique gourmet food here, our little oldies, and don't cost more, you know what I'm saying. Guess how much it costs? It's shameful to say, really . . . With that you have to cover their breakfast, lunch, dinner, vegetables, fruit too . . . the diabetics need two extra snacks, they end up licking their fingers, because of the hotel's catering. The committee gets their lunch from here too, I mean the council, which is now the government's office.

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: Are the diabetics also allowed some sweet stuff? Suppose a small amount won't do any harm!

HUSBAND: Wait a second. Someone bought half the castle?

SNEAK: *(Laughs)* Or the whole thing, maybe. Wasn't expensive. The deal being that they'll be keeping some of its functions, like the old people's home. It was left out of the capital when the assets here were stripped. The trust took it out.

HUSBAND: You mean the finance manager?

SNEAK: Yes.

HUSBAND: And he sold it? But who valued it?

SNEAK: I wasn't there. But must be a real estate guy . . .

HUSBAND: They made a deal . . . The finance manager gets a cut.

SNEAK: At least ten thousand forints after each deal.

HUSBAND: So, it was a good deal to sell it cheaply then.

SNEAK: They're asking for one to ten percent of its official value. And they don't have to sell it at an auction either. They often don't even bother advertising. The one percent isn't that much. You get ten thousand for the value of a million. But what can you do? It's legal.

*(Laughs.)*

HUSBAND: And you could have gotten a loan on that one percent, couldn't you? If we had known about it, we could have bought it without any cash.

SNEAK: But you didn't know nothing about it. *(Laughs.)*

WOMAN: I would have come before but couldn't manage it. I kept putting it off for the following week. You don't realise how time flies.

*(Pause.)*

I've been here and stayed the night, but today I've got to get back.

SNEAK: We haven't got them guest rooms no more, because of the merging . . . Can't stay overnight now. You can at the hotel of course, but you've got to book it and it's expensive . . . It's luxury stuff. Hungarians can't afford that. We've got new house rules, please look on the boards in the corridors. It's on both, on the women's too.

HUSBAND: New rules?

WOMAN: My train leaves late afternoon, actually, not in the evening, but I can just about make it . . .

*(SILENCE)*

HUSBAND: How much is the daily food bill?

SNEAK: The Germans ask me that too. I tell them a euro and a half. But they don't believe me. Not possible to cover the costs, they say. Ausgeschlosschen . . . But that is how much it is, and if we didn't have the hotel . . .

WIFE: Euro and a half for a day.

SNEAK: You can ask Miss Judith, she'll tell you exactly how much. She is coming soon. Please take a seat, these chairs are fine.

WIFE: A euro and a half isn't much really.

HUSBAND: Hang on. You can only sell something if it's on the inventory. In the nineties not everybody did one, when they passed on the state's capital, so in fact, we don't really know what the country's assets consist of. Is it possible that you lot didn't actually buy the castle, but MISS just occupied it?

SNEAK: Well, I bought nothing, me, you can find out from Miss Judith, you can. She'll tell me off for blabbering on too much, she says I shouldn't hang out dirty laundry. *(Laughs)* But nothing ever came of it. I like to chat and get to know people. But I do my job on time, me. I'm a social man, with a friendly character . . . Miss Judith will soon be here.

*(Leaves.)*

## Scene 5

WOMAN: Mum or Dad?

WIFE: Dad.

HUSBAND: It's dad for me too. He's seventy-one, and that's not that old nowadays.

WIFE: If he's not ill.

WOMAN: Well, yes. He left me and my mother when I was little. I couldn't even remember him. I grew up searching for him. I put ads out, but he didn't see them. Someone who knew him told him one day. I hadn't seen him for twenty years. He was so happy to see me. My mother was upset; she didn't want me to see him. Then she died. My father became ill. He would have needed a carer, but who can afford that? Apparently you can employ these Transylvanian women.

WIFE: We had two of those.

WOMAN: But if you need them for twenty-four-hour shifts, and pay someone who can attach the intravenous stuff, that's five months' salary for me!

*(Pause.)*

WOMAN: I checked out so many old people's homes, until this . . . just this one's name: "Sweet Home." It's a lovely name, isn't it? And I was sold on the garden!

WIFE: Yes, the garden . . .

WOMAN: The castle itself is not a big deal. But the garden is great.

WIFE: When the Russians were here it was a stable. Then a storage place, when they took it from the aristocrat who owned it; and after that it became the farmers' agricultural co-operative's office. They were growing cabbage in the park, and the pool became a lake for geese . . . The kids destroyed it, when it became a school. Mary told me the whole story because she was from around here. Amazing how much of it is still in one piece, actually—with some of the original plastering, even. You can see bullet holes in some places . . .

WOMAN: Dad had a small one-bedroom courtyard apartment; he lived alone, 'cause his partner died. I didn't know her. You know, third-floor courtyard, no lift. I thought that at least now, at the end of his life, he could enjoy a big garden! Someone recommended this place. The director was such a nice lady, too; she didn't ask for any backhanders.

HUSBAND: The state ones can't ask for it. Only the charities and the religious ones. Well, the religious ones can't ask for it officially, but of course, you can "donate" to the church. *(Laughs)* Or if it's a charitable trust. And if it's a church, then of course you can donate to the priest, or the reverend. They're people too, after all . . . and who knows—they might put you ahead on the waiting list and give you a single room. *(Laughs.)* The rate is between three and five million, but for this you'll need to sell your flat.

WOMAN: That's not why we sold Dad's place though; he simply wasn't using it anymore, and I already had my mum's apartment where I was registered, so why let it go to the dogs? And why would I want two flats? Double the utilities. It would've been hard to rent it out—a run-down, centrally located courtyard apartment in a Gypsy area . . . I put all the money in a bank account and haven't touched it ever since . . . It's his. But he's never asked about it. I put it in a bond, it's not much though . . . Mary said he'd be well looked after here. Dad doesn't even know he's got money, first time in his life . . . It reassured me that I brought him to a good place. I was finally able to relax. He was put into a shared room, with another old man, who never, ever said a word . . .

HUSBAND: They have dementia. More than half of them. Alzheimer's and stuff like that.

WOMAN: So your dad ended up in a good place.

WIFE: I've wheeled him out in the garden every time we've come. He used to be strong enough to push himself. Mentally speaking he is one hundred percent. The nurses take them out every day, in the winter too. They wrap them up really well. If you slip them a backhander, they'll take them out. It's just this mobile he can't cope with. He can't even answer it.

WOMAN: Can't he? That's it then! I bought him a mobile too, but can't reach him for the love of God . . . though you see some oldies, on the tram they are like kids, texting all over the place. I don't know why he can't . . . He might have dropped it . . . Got to get a new one.

HUSBAND: They can be exasperating.

WOMAN: And he doesn't write either.

WIFE: Dad doesn't. It's gone out of fashion.

WOMAN: Last time I visited, I shared a room with a twenty-year-old girl. It was in room number three downstairs on the right. There's a big walnut tree in front, dark during the day, but we were there just for the night . . . Her mum is only forty-five, and already here. Awful story . . . She only visited her twice a year, there was something wrong with her mum . . . she cried to me all night, for having been a shit, and not visiting her mother—she kept me up all night.

*(Pause.)*

HUSBAND: There are more women than men, sixty-five percent—in some places, sixty percent—but they are all demented. The state spends a fortune on them—well, you and I actually . . . the insurance company spends the most in their last years of life, when it's too late anyway. The whole thing just doesn't make sense. You should support the healthy ones, those who are still useful to society. Those who work. Why throw money out the window for nothing? It wasn't an issue in the past, people died at forty, fifty. There are still places in the world today when at sixty, they tell them, "Goodbye, old fellow, you've lived enough, let the young live now," and the old men take themselves into the rainforest, walk up the mountains into the clouds, and the situation is resolved.

WIFE: Where do we have mountains that big and rainforests around here?

HUSBAND: We used to have them, they got taken off us.

*(SILENCE)*

WOMAN: I didn't see him for twenty years. And then for ten years only saw him every couple of weeks for lunch. Always sharing the bill down the middle. But then I had to bring him here. And for the past eight years I've hardly seen him. I don't get much time off, no car, and on the train it takes all day. That's the problem with this place, it's too far out.

WIFE: It's only an hour and a half by car . . . So pretty and quiet. It's still unspoilt here, and it's safe. The air is good. I even suggested to my husband the idea of relocating here. In America they don't mind about having to drive two hours to work and two hours back. It's only for us here that it seems so difficult. We could buy a house on the hillside. This is still untouched territory, prime location; no heavy industry here—there never was, really. People are kind. It's the countryside, nature!

*(Pause.)*

WOMAN: You can't get home in the evening from here. Even from the bigger towns you don't have trains going to Budapest after six o'clock, so you can guess what it's like from here. The country stops functioning at six o'clock in the evening. I looked into the buses, but that's even worse. You've got to change, wait for three quarters of an hour in a vandalised waiting room, with the wind whistling in. I'm not sold on the country . . .

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: The village is full of houses for sale, nice big ones. There are some real new ones, can't cost too much . . . They say that now it's the right time to invest in property . . .

HUSBAND: They bought them on credit. And now they need to get rid of them. So—they'll give them away for nothing. But the prices will drop further.

*(Stabs down the one-legged chair, sits on it, balances on it, laughs.)*

I couldn't be a hunter, that's for sure, not for any money in the world.

*(Sits, tries to balance.)*



You really can't fall asleep on this.

*(Gets up and pulls out the chair from the carpet.)*

Can you imagine a seventeen-stone guy on this?

*(SILENCE)*

WOMAN: I really could do with going in now . . . I've got to catch a train this afternoon . . .

WIFE: Kids will be done with their A Levels soon, then off to university. You and I would be alright here—good air, peace and quiet.

## Scene 6

*(Mr Sneak comes in with Mother and daughter. Husband and Woman stand up.)*

SNEAK: Please come over here. They call me Mr Sneak here. I used to be Mr Snape, but Sneak stuck with me from me primary school days. I'm not sneaky in the least, though, but they don't believe me . . . These people here are also waiting for Miss Judith, as you can see. The canteen is being cleared. There'll be a party tonight. I'll go and find some chairs. Especially for the lady.

MOTHER: No need, I'm fine standing. I'll survive.

SNEAK: Please do take this.

*(And he pulls the chair from behind the table.)*

This is Miss Judith's chair. She doesn't like it if someone else uses it, but she will forgive us this time.

MOTHER: I won't sit though.

DAUGHTER: We're just here for a quick look and then we're off.

SNEAK: Just until she gets here then, please.

DAUGHTER: We'll take a quick look at the rooms and the garden and we'll be off.

SNEAK: If Miss Judith gets here, and if she'll allow it, I'll open the garden gate. You can't just go out there. Miss Judith runs a tight ship. I've got them keys, but she'll eat me alive if I decide to open it, just like that.

DAUGHTER: You can't go out in the garden.

SNEAK: You can, but not at any time you like.

DAUGHTER: Why can't you?

SNEAK: Because we have house rules. They are hanging on the corridor walls. When Miss Judith gets here you'll be able to look at them.

DAUGHTER: Are they locked in?

SNEAK: The door is locked, but it's for their own good. We don't want the hotel guests and relatives bothering them.

DAUGHTER: Relatives?

SNEAK: They're the worst, ma'am. But I don't want to offend nobody. But the little oldies get real upset after them family visits. And it's hard to deal with them afterwards . . . The peaceful ones too get angry . . . And we've got some phoney relatives, who are only collecting, thieving, or converting them to Jesus, or making them sign wills, wanting to get their hands on everything. You can visit, but you've got to email first. You've got to let us know how you are related. Plus give us your identity number.

DAUGHTER: *(To her mother)* Are you hearing this?

MOTHER: It's a beautiful castle. In a beautiful place. The garden is also beautiful.

DAUGHTER: You're not even allowed to go into the garden!

SNEAK: You are. But not always.

DAUGHTER: *(To mother)* Are you listening?

MOTHER: You can look at it from your room. You can look at the garden, can't you?

SNEAK: Sure you can. I'm responsible for it. I sometimes get some help because it's big. To mow the grass, trim the hedges, watering, I've got tons of other stuff too. But people like it that it's gone a bit wild. The little oldies, they like it, that it's not like an English garden.

MOTHER: It's really beautiful.

SNEAK: I prefer the weed myself, me. The colour is not as washed out as the grass is, don't you think? Ragweed has got a lovely colour. I feel bad getting rid of them. I've got to pull them out, otherwise Miss Judith will eat me alive. But I don't like to, me. It should be able to live anywhere, it should. It's so bright and green; it's got lots of chlorophyll in it. It's not its fault that it gives allergies, is it? It's happy just being.

MOTHER: Nowadays they can cure allergies, can't they? Homoeopaths with ragweed.

SNEAK: I had a feeling, me! The bushes too should be left alone to grow. They were not made to be round, but bushy and tall . . . I'll bring more chairs in.

*(Leaves.)*

## Scene 7

MOTHER: It's a beautiful castle.

WIFE: It is.

MOTHER: I'm going to move in right now.

DAUGHTER: Let's not get carried away. She's perfectly okay at home—she's just got this thing into her head.

MOTHER: You can't expect your kids to sacrifice themselves for you.

DAUGHTER: Right. Can't expect it.

MOTHER: Young people should enjoy living their own lives.

DAUGHTER: She's got it into her head that she is stopping me, that she's the obstacle . . . that it's because of her that I'm not dating. It's not my fault that there aren't any men in this country.

MOTHER: I'll be alright here.

DAUGHTER: We haven't seen it inside yet!

MOTHER: I don't need much, just a bed, a cupboard. I'm lucky not to be fussy. That's how I survived everything . . . And we've got the luxury garden here!

WIFE: It's a good place.

WOMAN: It is good—I wouldn't have brought him here otherwise.

WIFE: My dad was in another place in Budapest. He would have put up with it, he's like that—a trouper, doesn't complain, just puts up with it. But it was me—I couldn't bear to see it. We moved him back home with us after a few weeks . . . but, we both work full time, and you can't expect the kids to care for him. They're busy with school—private lessons, sports. Dad required full-time care. We couldn't have made it work at home.

HUSBAND: In that place, they were constantly arguing whether to leave the windows open or not. They managed to argue about that all day long. We were told that in another residential care home, that's how the nurses tried to get rid of them, by opening the windows and leaving, and then hoping they'd catch a deadly cold. *(Laughs.)*

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: As soon as you stepped inside, the worst smell of urine hit you. It was like a primary school—even worse.

HUSBAND: Encia, mencia, demencia, incontinence . . . cia.

WIFE: The incontinence pads were thrown around, left by the wall for days . . . the bedsheets never got changed. They had marble flooring everywhere, the rooms, the corridors . . . The heating was on, but it made no difference, because the cold was coming up from underneath.

HUSBAND: It didn't have a basement. Used to be a factory outlet. Then a hostel for workers. And now an old people's home . . .

WIFE: We wanted to bring him in an electric heater but they wouldn't let us, as the electricity bill was so high already. We offered to pay the difference; but apparently they couldn't work out what we would've owed. Others weren't so fussy, apparently, and we were told that dad should just put on thick socks. They suggested that he put on two pairs.

HUSBAND: They had eighty people on the waiting list. There's more than two thousand waiting in Budapest alone!

WIFE: We brought him home after a few weeks, though it wasn't easy to get him in there. You had to slip them a backhander to jump to the top of the list. We never saw that again, but didn't ask for it either. We were just so pleased that we'd freed him. Dad would have put up with it. Didn't complain. But I couldn't bear it!

WOMAN: We were lucky to come straight here.

HUSBAND: (*Laughs*) Every room had its own TV with the three free public access channels. My God, they could fight over it. All three of them wanted to watch different channels. If they had four channels, each of them would want to watch four different channels. They had lights out at ten p.m., but they kept watching it on mute. (*Laughs.*) The nurse couldn't care less, as long as they had the volume down. They were deaf anyway. They would stare at the moving mouths, well into the night. I suppose they got used to reading lips.

WIFE: The common room had a TV, but it served as a smoking room too, and dad doesn't smoke . . . So he didn't watch any TV. But this one here, I'm pleased with this one now. We've looked everywhere in the country. I don't exactly know now where they've moved him to, but I hope that . . .

(*Pause*)

MOTHER: I don't mind if we have to share a room—much more entertaining.

DAUGHTER: You've never had to live in a dormitory. I had to. They don't let you sleep, people turn on the lights, chat, bang the doors, snore, grunt, throw up.

MOTHER: People entertain me.

DAUGHTER: And what if they have bunk beds. How will you climb up?

WIFE: They don't have bunk beds . . . At least, not that I know of.

DAUGHTER: You've got the master bedroom at home, why would you leave it empty?

MOTHER: The box room would do for me too.

DAUGHTER: I don't want your room! We've got space, she can go on walks, go shopping. When she is off to the chemist, she stops to have a chat at every corner. Why does she need this, then? There is no reason for you to go into a hospice!

WOMAN: This is not a hospice! It's a residential home for the elderly.

DAUGHTER: Of course it's different. These guys only get a quarter of the care that a hospice would offer and with less medical staff. I've done my research!

MOTHER: I'm sure they have a doctor, too.

WIFE: He comes twice a week, right?

HUSBAND: Yes, the GP comes twice a week.

WIFE: That's when he writes the prescriptions. It's the nurses who give out the majority of the drugs though. They have registered nurses here.

MOTHER: You see, this place is okay.

DAUGHTER: Let's get out of here! We weren't even allowed to take a look!

MOTHER: I'll wait 'til we can. I've got plenty of time. You go if you want to.

DAUGHTER: And how will you get home?

MOTHER: I'm not. I'm staying here for good.

DAUGHTER: You can't just stay here! You've got to fill in the paperwork. Takes weeks. We haven't brought your stuff!

MOTHER: I'm staying, and if I need anything, I'll catch the train home.

DAUGHTER: Jesus Christ.

*(SILENCE)*

HUSBAND *(Laughs.)* At election time, they would make them vote by passing the ballot box around the room. They brought it to those with dementia and showed them where to put the X. Surprisingly, everyone had to put an X for the same representative and party. They got shit scared and X'd everything. Encia, mencia, demencia, incontinen . . . cia. I reckon they should not allow the over-seventies to vote. Take back their voting rights, I say; they don't even know what time it is. Only the young should vote, the ones who support them, right. The dried out tree should turn to dust. Actually, take it away from them at sixty, they're nuts enough by then. The Indian way is to charge them when they move in and then make them work. They have to work on carpets, do embroidery, stuff like that. In the evening, it's collection time so they go out to beg. They've got to work to get fed. They're not bored to death, at least. If the state is broke, why should we have to pay?

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER: I'm sure I'll be able to get a lift from these lovely people. They probably drove here.

WOMAN: I came by train too . . .

MOTHER: Then we can go together. This lovely couple will take me to the station.

WIFE: Of course.

HUSBAND: How can people who don't work but stare at the TV all the time understand what the world is about? The TV's on day and night. They don't even talk to each other. They just stare. Don't even know what at.

WIFE: Don't we all do the same? We sit and stare. Except we drink, too.

HUSBAND: It's not against the rules for them, either. They are allowed to bring drinks in. Well, you could six months ago. They'll sneak it in anyway, so it makes no sense to ban it. Mary was alright in that respect. She only took it away from the drunks.

WIFE: Dad doesn't drink. Hates it. When his health declined, we brought him a wheelchair, so he could get around.

HUSBAND: A good chair cost a hundred thousand forints plus VAT, not even a motorised but just manual one. You have to buy everything separately—headrest, the ramp. That in itself is six hundred thousand.

WIFE: But you've still got to help him get onto the toilet. He's got a really heavy body because he's disabled. He needs to go more often. When the lift was out of order, we couldn't take him down. You can't live like this. He kept asking to be booked in somewhere . . . kept saying that he didn't need his flat. It wouldn't have been big enough for both kids and their future families . . . they're constantly fighting anyway. We have decided to sell Dad's flat. We'll help the kids later on, so they can buy one each. His place is not small, eighty-six-metres square. But it was just a bit lived-in. We're updating it now. Some people say that you'll never get your money back. But others say that you can't sell it if it's in bad condition. There are so many on the market.

HUSBAND: That flat's not worth much now. It's not in a bad area, not exactly Buda's leafy suburbs, but it's not bad at all.

WIFE: We've got new plumbing in, and a new boiler instead of the coal-fired burner. When dad was living there, no one minded about the peeling wallpaper, or the damp walls, or the crackling of the floor with bumps in it . . . but now that dad isn't there, the place will be as good as new . . . So we've got the new kitchen, we got rid of the old table, and the pantry cupboard. We've got a marble-style counter, easy to clean, if you get water on it. Dad was really keen on having that done. Well, now it's going to happen. The bathtub has got new taps on now; we got rid of the heater. Dad had always wanted to keep it. But you can always change it back to multi-energy if you run out of gas. Which according to him we will soon do. We'll still be able to have heating.

HUSBAND: *(Laughs)* My father-in-law has catastrophic thinking. Didn't trust the Russians.  
*(Laughs)* Hated the Germans. *(Laughs)*.

WIFE: I've never plucked up the courage to tell him that his bunker from the cellar got stolen. When we were allowed to buy it off the state, a good twenty years ago now, they forgot to add it to the inventory. We were so happy to finally own something that we didn't notice that someone had walled it off and put a lock on it. When we brought it up, it turned out that you couldn't prove anything, couldn't prove it belonged to us.

HUSBAND: They got paid off on time. We overslept on this.

WIFE: If need be, there's nowhere to store the coal or the wood. Dad wanted us to take care of it. He was only interested in his work, and we messed up. They stole the bunker. *(Wipes her tears.)*

*(Pause.)*

The flat will be gorgeous. Like never before. We'll have another toilet added to the bathroom, a suction one, so you can advertise it with two toilets . . . Dad will never get to see it . . . We should take him to see it, shouldn't we?

HUSBAND: Of course not! He wouldn't realise that he used to live there.

WIFE: There's nothing wrong with him mentally! He remembers everything!

HUSBAND: You mustn't bother him with this. Or anything else. He's fine here.

WIFE: It's not right we're selling the flat when he's still . . . Maybe we should wait a little . . . there's no hurry for the kids. Real estate prices are at their lowest, so why rush it like this?

*(Silence)*

I do know that he wouldn't even have dared to dream of a garden like this. The garden was a priority! Dad always lived in downtown Pest, he used to say he wouldn't like it in leafy Buda, even if it was free; thought people were different there. Still, for a garden, it would be worth it. For him, this garden will make up for it.

WOMAN: The garden is really something! That's what I was thinking too at the time.

WIFE: Still, it's—when they lived in their flat, they never did anything to it . . . they couldn't afford it during those forty years with my mum, or when he was alone. And now when it gets redone, he's not . . .

HUSBAND: He wouldn't have put up with the mess anyway. And actually we planned this when he was still walking. It was after your mother died. But we thought he would be better off without all that business. He wouldn't have wanted it anyway. Don't worry about it. We're here now, and it isn't true that we don't visit him!

WIFE: He should have moved in with us when my mum died. He would have had a completely different life with us.



HUSBAND: Where, sweetheart, where? We had the kids by then!

WIFE: We talked about doing an exchange swap, swapping his and our flats for a bigger one, which would have been big enough to have him live in it as well.

HUSBAND: You can't be serious, my sweetheart! Sharing with your dad, the know-it-all?

WIFE: To this day he knows everything. He's smart—was born that way. He predicted stuff that ended up happening. He just let himself go because he was so into his work, nothing else interested him. He could have become a millionaire if he had left in fifty-six, before I was born . . . But oh no, he was dedicated to his work and the country. This is the only thing that he didn't . . . Why do you have to hate smart people? It's not their fault that they were born that way. They're harmless, and still everybody bugs them. It's pure jealousy!

*(Silence)*

It's a pity that the kids didn't inherit it . . . Neither of them . . . I didn't inherit it either, so no chance that they could have got it from me. This gene business is not fair.

*(Pause.)*

HUSBAND: They must have put a new heating system in the castle. I reckon they have had to do it from scratch, with all the wiring, unless they closed off the old part, which would not surprise me.

*(Silence)*

WOMAN: I don't know, my father was a drunk. All his mates drank. All of my mother's colleagues drank too. It's a miracle that I don't . . .

DAUGHTER: It's not like that with us. *(Pause.)* We had plenty of room, the kitchen is big too. And the box room is eight metres square. We've got plenty of space for all my stuff. Why would she need to leave? Why would she voluntarily choose to go to a prison?

WIFE: It's not a prison! That's an exaggeration!

WOMAN: Not a prison at all, it's a fantastic place!

DAUGHTER: Okay, not a prison, but a prisoner's camp, for a life sentence. Why do it if you don't have to? Mum's got some twisted pedagogical thinking. This is her way of blackmailing me to into standing on my own two feet. So that way, at least I'll make some friends, because apparently if I pour my heart out to her, then I'll stay immature. Fifty-one percent of women in America live on their own. I mean completely alone, with no pet dogs, cat, no friend, no husband, no boyfriend, and without a woman friend either. Over there the lesbians are lonely too. And they don't have mothers either . . . Over there they have a name for them. They push themselves so hard, from morning till night. By nighttime they can barely drag themselves to bed. No time for a relationship that's for sure.

HUSBAND: America's America. They're rich. You can put up with it, if you've got money.

MOTHER: I don't want to be anybody's burden. If I pay for it with eighty percent of my pension, that's fine, and fair. At least it's a clean deal.

DAUGHTER: A burden. Do I grind my teeth and poison your food? Do I?

MOTHER: It would be more honest.

DAUGHTER: She's obsessed with this! I can't talk to her!

*(Silence)*

HUSBAND: *(To Mother)* The elderly have tons of savings. They're actually rolling in it. But they don't want to spend it, because they're worried about not having enough for later on. Mind you, it's true they do get taken for a ride in their last years, with the cost of prescription drugs and all. They'll buy into some so-called new procedures, the newest drug, the miracle ones, the alternative-whatever cure—natural healers, charlatans, magicians, confessors, Reiki healing. They promise you a separate room, with ensuite bathroom, when in fact the whole floor has only got one toilet. And apparently you're not allowed to build extra bathrooms. It's the young who are skint. They really could do with that money now. Economists say we should earn more when we are young. We should start with a high salary and reduce it gradually! Where can an old guy go? They push him out to the garden, leave him out in the sun, let him burn to cinders, meanwhile the money is rotting, in the bank or the pillowcase. So, let me warn you, dear lady, that you will be squeezed and fleeced in this place.

DAUGHTER: You see? If you don't believe me—

MOTHER: If I always saw the glass half empty, I could have hung myself sixty years ago.

WIFE: Dad has not been fleeced!

HUSBAND: He hasn't! We have!

WIFE: His own pension covers his bills.

HUSBAND: It only pays for half of it, so in fact they're getting the other half from us.

WIFE: They might get exploited somewhere else, but not here! We wouldn't have brought him here otherwise!

HUSBAND: There's no escape from it.

WIFE: We looked around, didn't we? You always assume the worst of everybody, the very worst—everybody is a thief, a cheater, a robber. That is all you think about! Next you'll be accusing them of mass murder!

HUSBAND: But aren't they like this? In politics too . . .

WIFE: But not here!

HUSBAND: Okay, of course not here—this is an exception, I was talking generally.

## Scene 8

*(Mr Sneak comes in, bringing in two stools, and a folder.)*

SNEAK: Sorry about this, but had to get it from the kitchen . . . Why don't you sit down? Please sit, and if Miss Judith doesn't like it, I'll explain.

*(Puts down the stools.)*

This is the application form . . . Please go and sit down by the table, it's more comfortable to fill it out there . . . It's just a few pages. *(Laughs)* We are very thorough . . . *(Sneak puts the folder on the table, pushes the chair back under the table.)*

MOTHER: Alright. But just until . . . *(Sits down, takes her glasses out, puts them on, takes the documents out of the folder, takes her purse out of her bag and puts it in front of herself.)*

Does anybody have a pen?

SNEAK: There're some in them drawers.

MOTHER: I don't rummage in other people's drawers.

HUSBAND: *(Takes out a pen from his inner pocket.)* Here you are.

MOTHER: Thank you. *(Disappears in the paperwork.)*

SNEAK: We've got enough chairs around . . . No one else should arrive now. People don't arrive after late morning. It gets busier sometimes. You can book a visitor's dinner too . . . Not cheap though . . . We have higher-than-average prices . . . Miss Judith's brought in a chef she's worked with before . . . Miss Judith would make a good chef too—she's qualified.

HUSBAND: As a chef?

SNEAK: She's got a hospitality and catering background. They took cooking exams. So yes, she can cook.

MOTHER: You have to fill in your religion?

DAUGHTER: What? Religion?

SNEAK: Well, of course if someone needs last rites . . . Wouldn't want to give it to someone who isn't entitled . . . *(Laughs)*

MOTHER: Fine. I don't mind filling it in.

DAUGHTER: It's none of their business. Don't write it down. Don't fill in anything.

SNEAK: Miss Judith will help you fill it in . . .

MOTHER: "When did you last go to confession?" You've got to write that down?

SNEAK: If you don't remember when, she'll type in any date.

DAUGHTER: On the website it said that this is a state-run home, not a religious one.

SNEAK: Of course it's state run.

DAUGHTER (*To her mother, looking over her shoulder.*) Chronic illnesses, it's none of their business! That is sensitive personal information!

SNEAK: It's for the doctor! What is the matter with her?

HUSBAND: (*To daughter*) Excuse me, but this is an obvious one . . . How can they possibly treat her if they don't know what's wrong?

WOMAN: Obviously they'll need to know.

DAUGHTER: "When did you last confess"?

HUSBAND: If you don't remember, just put down anything. Why get hung up on that? And if you are a Protestant, they will have it on file, and you won't have to confess.

WIFE: This is a good place. We wouldn't have brought Dad here otherwise. Why would we have brought him to a bad place?

WOMAN: It's a good place and the care is good. My dad was all skin and bones, and they fattened him up. They are very humane here. The nurses too. It's clean too, and it's quiet. This was the most important for him. All his life he was shouted at.

WIFE: When he needed round-the-clock full-time care we started to look around. We wanted the best place. One day we had gone and looked at three places in different towns.

DAUGHTER: "Your savings"? None of their business. If you pay the monthly fee, it's no business of theirs to know what your financial situation is.

MOTHER: We don't have anything to put down anyway. Why are you making a fuss?

DAUGHTER: Because it's none of their business.

HUSBAND: Of course it's their business. They need money to live on too. They'll live off your dear mother's pension, for example, and off our money, and they'll get some state contribution, too.

SNEAK: Six hundred and thirty-two thousand. Been the same for years. Hasn't followed inflation. The faith-based ones cost much more. Some charge one million. That's state money, too, from our taxes . . .

HUSBAND: He could have gone to a faith one—I don't mind . . .

WIFE: Dad is not religious.

HUSBAND: He was fighting against it, had a tantrum. "I'd rather you killed me. Kill me!"

SNEAK: The ones with dementia pay an extra hundred thousand forints more. You've got to pay the hairdresser and pedicurist separate. I'm sure you'll want them services, as you seem to look after yourself. The cafe waitress comes over and brings you whatever you want—coffee, hot chocolate, chocolate bars. The diabetics can get diabetic biscuits. Some homes are run like pawn shops. For four weeks they sell you food on credit, then charge you a huge interest rate when the pension check arrives. In a few months, they got nothing left.

HUSBAND: Pawning?

SNEAK: Sure thing. Well, we don't have that here! Miss Judith wouldn't put up with it. Oh, before I forget, you'll have to pay for your medication if you don't get them on the national health. And that's a lot of money. Anyway, Miss Judith won't ask you stuff that isn't important.

DAUGHTER: Did Miss Judith write the form? Isn't it a standard form?

SNEAK: Of course she did. It's different in all homes. The house rules are different too. Please go and take a look at them when you go in. Ours are different.

*(Silence)*

DAUGHTER: "Permanent place of residence . . ." You mean the home isn't going to be the official registered address?

SNEAK: Of course it will.

MOTHER: Give it back now! It's my form!

SNEAK: Excuse me, ma'am, but what some people ask about is death and funerals. This is not awkward for us at all. We talk about it more openly, and don't tell no lies. Death is a simple matter here with us, ma'am. And quite frequent. There are days when we have three or four . . . then a few weeks off, and more again . . . The doctor shows up—he comes twice a week anyway . . . or the ambulance. If someone kicks the bucket in the ambulance, then it's those guys who do the paper work . . . But mostly it's the doctor. He was here this morning and signed all the necessary paperwork. The death certificates are in the folder here on the table. We deal with all that business right here. The relatives don't have to do nothing . . . They get given the filled-out death certificate, which of course requires a signature, so as to avoid further complaints. We take care of the funeral too. I do it. The relatives don't have to do a thing. They like to have the funeral here . . . often they don't come. You don't have to, the priest gives a speech, or an official from next door. Miss Judith will send an email, saying it was lovely and how much it cost. It's not expensive, believe me. We can account for every penny . . . And the ones without relatives, well, I take care of those . . . basically you couldn't wish for anything better.

*(Pause.)*

HUSBAND: I heard that in some places they don't tell you that someone died, so they can keep claiming their pension from their account.

SNEAK: It's not like this here with Miss Judith. We let them know straightaway. We wouldn't be caught cheating over something like this. If you require a gravestone, you can just give the inscription to our wood sculptor, he's real good with his hands. He can also do figurines, very popular, that. He'll sculpt you dates, tulips, stags, patriotic stuff, anything. But you can have gravestone, if you wish. It won't be done here locally, but you can order it from us, too. Anything from imitation stone to marble . . . Plenty of space in the cemetery, worth taking a look, if you can go home that way—it's just after the turn. We're in the country here, and everything is cheaper, and we really do take care of everything, we do. Makes it simple.

*(Pause.)*

DAUGHTER: Do you also do euthanasia?

MOTHER: It's completely fair that they talk openly about everything. Why shouldn't we talk about death? Especially in a place like this! I really like what you said. Finally, a straight-talking person!

SNEAK: I could see right away that we'd get along, ma'am. But if the lady weren't so intelligent, we'd get along too. Miss Judith doesn't tolerate just anybody around her—she's got high expectations. You get guaranteed quality with her, that's why I came to work for her.

WIFE: This home is perfectly in order. You'll be in good hands. Your mother will be in a good place. From a care-treatment point of view.

WOMAN: We were lucky about being having been recommended this one first . . . And "Sweet Home"—the name itself was catching . . .

SNEAK: Miss Judith will be here soon—Oh, and the wood sculpture is separate. We can contract them for you, and we don't charge a broker's fee. Miss Judith has learned her work ethic from Germany, you see; she's worked over there for years. She's got contacts over there. She's fluent in German and speaks English to the Russians . . . Not easy to manage a hotel . . . there's a lot of competition . . . Especially Austrian competition. You've got to offer lots of extra-special deals or they won't come here. Miss Judith even brought in big cats.

HUSBAND: Big cats in Hungary? You must be joking.

SNEAK: It's true though, I always speak the truth, me. No exaggeration or lie has ever been uttered by these lips. Miss Judith brought in big cats!

HUSBAND: Jaguars, cougars, leopards?

WOMAN: And panthers, snow tigers, tigers . . .

DAUGHTER: Hyenas, pumas, wild cats . . .

WIFE: And marble-printed cats. That's a separate species.

WOMAN: Cheetah?

DAUGHTER: Yes, cheetah.

HUSBAND: Which ones do they hunt then?

WOMAN: We left out the lion!

*(They laugh.)*

HUSBAND: Where did they get them from? This must have been crazy money! Unless they were domestic cats gone feral.

SNEAK: They cost a lot, so Miss Judith stopped it. It wasn't financially viable. But you have to offer something different to these guys. They want sensational stuff. They will hunt absolutely everything in the world. Birds, four-legged creatures, two-legged creatures, as long as it's exotic. *(Laughs.)*

WIFE: How come they hunt two-legged ones?

SNEAK: That's why she got the sack from Germany, because those know-it-all German lawyers didn't like it that a non-German made a successful business over there . . .

WIFE: What kind of two-legged ones, monkeys?

SNEAK: Human-sized ones. *(Laughs.)* Believe you me, ma'am, I am known for always speaking the truth and never exaggerating. Often they don't believe me, but when they find out I was right, yes! *(Laughs.)* I'm a straightforward man, friendly, open-minded, welcoming. And if I say that it's worth staying for dinner tonight, then you must believe me. I don't know what the menu is, but please stay. It will be worth it.



## Scene 9

*(Same place. Same people.)*

SNEAK: They start cooking it in the morning. The sweet little oldies get the same, if the dietician nurse allows it. So every other week they, too, really look forward to the hunters' visits. One nurse, her daughter, actually, takes care of the pickled salad. The meat is from the farmers' market, and the wine comes direct from the vineyard. It's got to be quality. The Russians have been well spoilt recently. We get wholesale beer for the Germans. Kolsch or Pils.

HUSBAND: The oldies are allowed alcohol?

SNEAK: Sure, if they pay for it.

WOMAN: How much is a beer?

SNEAK: It depends on the exchange rate of the euro.

WOMAN: I'll sign up Dad. How much are they allowed per person? I'll pay for a month, two months, six months—how much does it cost?

SNEAK: I can't tell you all the prices, you've got to ask Miss Judith.

HUSBAND: What about Schnapps?

SNEAK: We got it.

HUSBAND: Is it homemade?

SNEAK: Sure it's homemade. The Russians drink it at sixty degrees. Germans can't take that, so they get it at forty degrees.

HUSBAND: This is paradise.

SNEAK: Yep. When the school had a power cut, and had no heating, we had everything working fine here. The hotel takes care of the whole castle.

HUSBAND: What kind of heating does it have?

SNEAK: It's got a mixed combustible wood-fire. We can bring the wood in from the forest.

HUSBAND: Who does the forest belong to?

SNEAK: No idea, me.

HUSBAND: Thought you knew it all?

SNEAK: Yes, I do. *(Laughs.)* The point is, even in the winter it's warm here.

HUSBAND: Who gathers your wood?

SNEAK: It gets brought in. The locals like the castle; we maintain a good relationship with them. It's important to us.

HUSBAND: You must need a lot of wood for such a big castle. Yes, especially since you've got to keep heating it when you don't have gas, so the walls don't go cold.

WIFE: And because of the residents, too.

SNEAK: Of course, ma'am.

DAUGHTER: What happens if you run out of wood then?

SNEAK: It doesn't run out.

DAUGHTER: And hot water?

SNEAK: Boiler.

DAUGHTER: How many bathrooms on each floor?

SNEAK: One. At the end of the corridor. That's where we've got all the plumbing. I mean in the old wing. Because the hotel has got ensuite bathrooms.

MOTHER: I don't mind walking out to it.

DAUGHTER: And how many people in a room?

SNEAK: You'll see for yourself, love, when Miss Judith gets here.

MOTHER: The more the merrier.

DAUGHTER: Oh my God!

SNEAK: I can see that you're a smart lady. We'll get along just fine.

DAUGHTER: What size are the boilers?

SNEAK: I've got no idea.

DAUGHTER: You don't know? Aren't you supposed to know everything?

MOTHER: Leave him alone, I'm the one moving in, not you. He'll get upset with me.

SNEAK: We don't get upset with nobody, ma'am. We understand that old age is difficult. But to be honest with you, there are times when we run out of hot water and you've got to wait. They run the hot water and then forget about it. They forget to turn off the taps. In that case the boiler gets cold and you've got to wait. But it's not a big deal because some don't wash for a week.

DAUGHTER: You don't wash them?

SNEAK: Of course we do—just that sometimes they forget. Their nurses are on it though. You've got to shave them too. Many if not all women have hanging beards. *(Laughs.)* But there is a hairdresser, who needs to be booked and paid in advance. You walk into the TV room, and you see them with beards blowing about.

DAUGHTER: Can they go out into the garden?

SNEAK: I'm in charge of opening the door; you've got to be careful that no one wanders in. We don't have thefts here. Miss Judith makes sure. They leave everything out and about, these happy-go-lucky oldies. On chairs, tables, we don't have no safes here.

HUSBAND: A few years ago they fitted them in all hospitals. It cost a fortune, and then they banned them. They took them down and someone walked off with them. That's how things work in this country.

SNEAK: Yes, that's how. I used to be in charge of ordering stock. You won't believe the things I saw. I used to work in hotels too. That's where Miss Judith poached me from. She noticed I'm good with people. After high school, I worked in leisure, at the union's package holiday company. Oh, those were the days! Date nights, trips, singing, dancing games. A new group of people every week . . . They used to love my matchbox trick. They were supposed to put it on their noses without using their hands *(laughs)*. Then we would visit the wine-cellars . . . then ping-pong tournaments. I was able to involve the awkward ones as well, 'cause I'm a people person, me . . . That's when I realised that you don't have to get married, what with getting a new group every two weeks, and another get-to-know-each-other evening! *(Laughs)* Czechoslovakian knee-high padded trainers with airing holes in them, tights, nylon turtle necks, tight jogging outfits . . . I wasn't Mr Sneak in them days. I was Sandor, dear Sanyika, and so-forth. *(Laughs.)*

*(Pause.)*

HUSBAND: When is Miss Judith getting here? We're busy this afternoon . . .

SNEAK: Very soon now. She likes to do everything in person. She trusts me, of course, but has her doubts. She got used to precise work—but none of it over here. She was sought after in Germany too. She used to organise fantastic trips to Africa. They hunted absolutely everything there—four-legged, two-legged, a hundred-legged creatures . . .

WIFE: Hunted monkeys?

SNEAK: Not monkeys. The local blacks. *(Laughs.)* You had to book a year in advance. That's how popular it was. Of course the legal guys came in, made a fuss, they reported it. The business was too successful . . . Not easy over there in Germany either. They've got different types of people there too. I used to go there when I was a tourist guide. I learnt a bit of German from home—we could watch Austrian TV. Everybody watched it. I don't speak as well as Miss Judith, of course. She's phenomenal! She just picked it up from over there . . . I get to welcome them here. Bitter schon, Ya vol, I'm doing okay. *(Pause.)*

MOTHER: I'm signing it.

DAUGHTER: You haven't seen what it's like inside! For God's sake, don't do this! Let's look at it first at least.

MOTHER: Will I be done by signing it?

SNEAK: Almost, ma'am. It will be passed on to the directorate, and they'll make a decision.

MOTHER: Who are the directorate members?

SNEAK: Miss Judith.

MOTHER: It only depends on her?

SNEAK: Of course it does, but she'll be here soon.

HUSBAND: Couldn't you give her a call?

SNEAK: She won't pick up and I don't know her German mobile's number. She didn't give it to me, but she has got one. She has a Russian one too. A manager type if there ever was one.

HUSBAND: You can't call her? What kind of a caretaker are you?

SNEAK: A jack-of-all-trade kind. My contract says doorman, but if Miss Judith wants something, she'll call me. But we prefer talking face-to-face. *(Laughs.)* Phones could be tapped. Wouldn't surprise me.

*(Pause.)*

DAUGHTER: Don't sign it until we have seen it!

WIFE: It would be better, you know, if you did take a look! Would set your daughter's mind to rest . . . help her accept the separation. It's very difficult, even if it's a relief. But you really seem to be in a very good shape . . .

MOTHER: There is nothing wrong with me! That's why I've got to do it now, while I've got my wits about me.

WOMAN: Don't worry about signing it. This is a good place. My father is completely satisfied with it. Miss Judith is a very good director. She's strong, strict but humane. A lot depends on the director . . .

SNEAK: There are some places where they leave everything they've got to the care home. Big money, too—just like that, a new will appears . . . They must beat it out of them.

HUSBAND: I read somewhere that in some care homes, they kept the corpses in the fridge to avoid paying for the funeral.

WIFE: Stop talking utter nonsense!

HUSBAND: I promise, somewhere in Romania . . . They did business with secondhand clothes, the ones they left behind. To get a place, they had to forfeit their house. After they died the house became the care home's property. They made them sign official charitable donation forms.

SNEAK: I've told you. They beat it out of them . . . out of these poor little oldies . . .

WIFE: It's awful!

SNEAK: In some places they sedate them, stuff them with sedatives so they don't fight back . . . Well, we have nothing like that here.

DAUGHTER: Do you hear that? They'll give it to you, even if you don't want it!

WIFE: The point is, they don't do that here.

MOTHER: You don't even hear what they are saying, you.

WOMAN: It's alright here, you'll see. I wouldn't have brought him to a bad place. He's ignored me for twenty years, and I searched for him all the same. Didn't even have a new family, or a new kid. Found out that he didn't have one. Still he never . . . I never made him feel like . . . he was shit though. I get it with my mother. But with me, his kid, what had I ever done to him? Others had fathers, I didn't . . . I kept making deals with myself, that if I ever found him, that I would take revenge and burn down his flat. I learnt how to do it from the movies. You pour petrol down and throw a lit match on it . . . I used to practice in the park, how to throw away a burning match, but the wind always blew it out before it fell down. It would've worked in an enclosed space. I didn't think of it then. Shame mum let slip he was alive—I wouldn't have looked for him otherwise. It's easier to live with the idea that someone died, especially if you don't know them. I haven't seen a photo of him either, so I was shocked when I . . .

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER: I'm going to sign it now. *(Silence. She signs it. Puts the pen down.)* Until the director gets here, I'm going down to the garden.

SNEAK: You can't go there unless she allows it.

MOTHER: But you've got the keys to the garden, haven't you?

SNEAK: I do, I've got keys to everywhere, me. But it's not a good idea for them to socialise. I mean the patients and the hotel guests. There could be misunderstandings, you see, and the hotel guests have not come here to make friends . . . They might be turned off by the whole thing! *(Laughs.)* They couldn't speak to each other anyway; the patients don't speak Russian or German.

WIFE: My father does.

SNEAK: They speak with such strong dialects, that it's impossible to understand them. I don't understand them either. I just nod. But when there are no guests they can go outside. Accompanied, because they could wander off. Not everybody knows where they are.

DAUGHTER: What do you mean by no guests? So if the guests happen to stay for days, it's house arrest?

SNEAK: They are here every other week for two or three days. The other days the hotel is empty.

HUSBAND: Is that good business?

SNEAK: Sure it is. Please don't ask me the details, but I tell you, they pay a lot for all the extra activities, and we offer tons of extras here—four-legged, hundred-legged, two-legged. We've got a good reputation. Big companies organise their bonus trips with us. We created the "Woodland of Peace." We took trees and bushes from the garden here, pulled them out by their roots and replanted them . . . Gardening costs would've been massive.

WIFE: What is the Woodland of Peace?

SNEAK: It's a small wood with bushes and trees in the clearing where the beasts go to hide.

WIFE: You brought the trees from the home?

SNEAK: We bring the people, the trees . . .

WIFE: With their roots?

SNEAK: Used to work in gardening, after the event-organiser job. So I know what I'm doing. Carried the bushes in a wheelbarrow and the trees in a trailer, we stood them up, we pegged the tall ones down, we watered them, and they all survived.

HUSBAND: You've moved them from the home's garden?

SNEAK: But we've planted new ones. There's plenty left still. It's either trees or dinner, we get to choose, we've no other option. They had no heating or food at the school, so they had to shut it down. The kids had to go to another local school. They promised a bus route, but it never happened . . . Here with us at least, you've got heating as well as food. The little oldies have got it good. They've got plenty of padding on them. You'd want to eat them. Look at me for example; I eat what they eat. Am I skinny? You've got to become entrepreneurial, Miss Judith says—we shouldn't give in just like that.

HUSBAND: No, we shouldn't.

SNEAK: Whinging about difficult circumstances—that is all you hear. We need action, not moaning.

HUSBAND: You are absolutely right. Moaning is a Hungarian damnation. As well as passivity and showing off. We really need to break out of it.

SNEAK: Miss Judith has learnt to fight for everything. I've learnt that, too. But she really has. I've met hard girls before. But she's hard as nails.

MOTHER: If I give you my application form today, when can I move in?

SNEAK: We too got a waiting list here. But you don't have to wait as long as in other places. As Miss Judith says, we've got a quick turnaround, every two weeks. Every other week there are three or four new places, sometimes five or six. It depends on the weather, more frequent in season too.

HUSBAND: These guys are sensitive to heat waves. Apparently more people give birth then, and when there's a full moon.

SNEAK: They don't hunt at night, these sow hunters. They can't even manage to finish eating their dinner. They get totally trashed and pass out. Russians on vodka, Germans on beer. It's us who got to drag them back to the hotel. You can imagine how we struggle. They're overweight, and heavier when they're unconscious. They fall over in the woods too, not used to walking. I follow them with a hunting chair, but they can't even sit down on it. They rented it, so I'm bringing the damn thing. I am also dressed as a beater. Miss Judith bought us hunting outfits, and checked that they fit okay. She thinks of everything. She knows what she wants and how to get things done. She's got contacts abroad and at home too. A rare woman! Born to be a leader—from a small village. Isn't that amazing? I am from a small town, me. But I'm not as hard as she is.

MOTHER: I'm going out into the garden.

SNEAK: Just a little patience, ma'am. It's no good if the hotel guests and the little oldies meet before it's time . . . You see, you've now become a sweet little old lady. The rule is that they can only meet in the Woodland of Peace.

WIFE: What is the Woodland of Peace?

SNEAK: It's the part of the field where the beasts hide.

WIFE: You take them out? Into nature? *(To Husband.)* You see, they get fresh air. What about those who can't walk? My dad, for example . . . ?

SNEAK: They get wheeled out. We wheel them out, to be more precise. I do it too . . . On the boggy bits, we put some planks down so the wheels don't lock in the mud, and for the ones with crutches, so they don't slip. The ones who are still running around—and I mean it metaphorically, because they are wobbling—they walk around in the garden here, when it's possible. We don't really take them out to the hunting ground. It does happen, but not typical.

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER: I'm going down.

DAUGHTER: Don't go!—She's impossible . . .

*(Mother leaves stage left.)*



## Scene 10

DAUGHTER: Go after her!

SNEAK: She'll come back alright . . . They like to wander about until they're able . . . They don't usually get lost . . .

DAUGHTER: She's got a bee in her bonnet. Her auntie from New Zealand wrote to her. She left in 1956 when she was fifteen. My mother was ten at the time, worshipped her whilst she was away. She imitated her, put her on a pedestal . . . They didn't write to each other, but all the way through it was Buffy this and Buffy that. Buffy can barely speak Hungarian. Writes appallingly. She's called Lizzie now, not Buffy. Buffy's gone to a residential care home now. It's fabulous, dream-like, and so my mother got it into . . . I tried to explain that it's not the same in New Zealand . . . but she's never really listened to anything in her whole life.  
*(Pause.)* Bring her back, she'll break the door down.

SNEAK: You mustn't force it. Let them be. In the end, they'll do what they are told.

DAUGHTER: She's completely bonkers. We used to bring over bedsheets from Poland, across the Czech border on the train. We stored them in the cellar, but couldn't sell them because they all rotted . . . She forced me to study engineering at uni because women have the same rights now. I got a place. Tried the entry exam four times. Got ill from it. The constant drawings killed me off. They kept sending them back. Destroyed my guts. She wanted a small plot in the outskirts nearby. Wanted to grow vine spinach, because it's high in vitamin C. Not surprised my father left her . . . then we got stuck with unripe bitter melons, all kinds of tropical crap. She grew the stuff in the bathroom, until the Japanese mushroom pushed it out. It's good against cancer, diabetes, blood pressure, we grow it in the bathtub in Japanese soil. It's as expensive as gold and I can't take a bath! She always seems to want something.

WIFE: The Woodland of Peace must be beautiful.

SNEAK: It's beautiful, peaceful, and quiet. When they shoot, the ducks and pheasants escape together in a flock, the sky goes dark with them.

WOMAN: They shoot?

SNEAK: Yes, ma'am, they do where they hunt of course. In some places they provide bows and arrows. It's becoming popular because it's quiet, but they are so crap they can't hit anything. So we don't use the bows.

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: Could we go and see the Woodland of Peace?

SNEAK: Sure thing, but there is nothing there. No one is interested in it in the village. They don't go that way, they've got no business there. Others who wander in here don't know of it.

HUSBAND: But the hunters do.

SNEAK: We take them there—though we've got to be careful so they don't fall into the lime pit. Because there is a big lime pit out there. That's why us, the beaters, we're there to stop accidents happening. I'll soon need to get changed . . . I would've never thought I'd become a beater on a hunt. It's amazing how many jobs you can end up doing! You just have to live long enough, don't you? (Laughs) They could tell you a lot about what they went through, these sweet little oldies. Of course, they babble nonsense, make up stuff, have visions, get reality and dreams mixed up . . . many of them are like that . . .

WOMAN: My father does that too. It's from the booze. We were sitting in a pub, and he was telling me about his daughter, describing her—all the time I'm sitting there facing him. He didn't know he was talking to me, about me.

*(Pause.)*

SNEAK: What's bad is that you do get to like them. Then you have to mourn them. So many I've met aren't here anymore.

WIFE: It's awful!

HUSBAND: Sweetheart, this is the natural way of things.

WOMAN: That's why I don't have pets. A few years with them and then you have to start grieving them. I'd rather not have one.

SNEAK: During the seven months, we had five hunts. It took two months to get the first batch . . . Everything sorted itself out after that . . . That is about twenty-five oldies in six months. I haven't counted exactly . . . Oh, what can you do?

DAUGHTER: How many are on the waiting list now?

SNEAK: Miss Judith will tell you, but I reckon about thirty. It'll be six months till we can admit the last on the list.

## Scene 11

*(From stage left, three women and three men dressed in Turkish costumes enter. The men are not wearing shirts but sleeveless waistcoats, baggy puffy trousers, and each has a different coloured turban on their head. The women are wearing turquoise, red and blue bra-like tops, with tasselled bits hanging off them. On their waists they are wearing tasselled scarves. In front of their faces, white veils. Their eyes and foreheads are showing. Baggy shiny trousers and red leather boots with spurs on.)*

MAN 1: Where's Miss Judith?

SNEAK: Isn't she in the costume room?

MAN 1: She isn't.

SNEAK: Oh dear. We've got new outfits from the costume's rental. They had to be fitted on them. They're going to be Turks today. They got nuts for the folkloric outfits. That's how they wait on them. Usually they're dressed in traditional Hungarian clothes. The boys in shirts and breeches, but the girls, oh the girls . . . headdress, skirt, apron, sometimes it's Indians or pirates—depends—or Romans in togas or Egyptians in God knows what. We advertise it on the web like this: themed costumed waiters. Miss Judith has bought the hunting clothes, and it's not just for us—the guests can rent them so they don't need to bring them. We get to charge them a rental fee that way. We've bought capes for example. Officially they're hussar collars. They're waterproof, and in the sales they go for fifteen hundred thousand plus VAT. But we also bought trousers that you can warm up. They cost thirteen hundred thousand each. Not cheap. And we also got waistcoats that you can warm up, fifty thousand a pair, and ambush trousers for thirty-four thousand, and kidney protectors, for nine thousand. It pays off in the long run, you only need to invest once. But when it works out cheaper, we hire it too. We get a ten-member group discount, and you've only got to leave a deposit. Of course the rental shop makes a continuous profit. But it's still worth it for us . . . We've regular customers who like to see the girls dressed differently every time. As if that made it new to them! *(Laughs.)* Whoever was an Egyptian goddess last time will become a country maiden, and so on. It's the boots that are a problem, because we don't have enough. They've got these soft boots in sizes thirty-four to forty. They cost two thousand three hundred plus VAT for three days, which is all we need them for, but you have to reserve them three days before. And the deposit is twenty thousand. To buy them would cost thirty-five thousand. We don't buy them; then again, here are the boots that go with the pirate, sheriff, or military girl outfits. They simply don't make them anymore. There is no demand. So they have to wear red boots when they are Egyptian slaves, nuns with cleavage and bonnets; so as you can see, the boots are an issue. You've seen it for yourselves.

MAN 1: Shall we wait for her?

SNEAK: She'll be here soon. As you can see, we are entrepreneurial. That's how we make sure the little oldies get heating . . . And that they have more to eat than spuds and cabbage, which is what the daily food bill would cover. You've got to be resourceful, that's what Miss Judith keeps saying. These Turkish things are quite cheap. So we hire them. With everything, it's five thousand, plus VAT. On the day of the hunt, everybody has to have a bath, wash hair, shave, put on deodorant, and all. Shoe shining too. We've got lacquered, long-pointed shoes from the rental place. They've got high heels, can barely walk in them, but that's all they had in the lacquered style. We actually ended up buying them shoes, and coats too, as well as hunting hats with the badges. The Russians love those hats; they think it's part of the Hungarian folkloric costume. *(Laughs.)* The boys and girls also have to bathe before dinner, isn't that right, kids? At the beginning Miss Judith would go round and sniff everybody. But sometimes she will just appear and sniff you. *(Laughs.)* The bike repair kits also belong to us. The wheelchairs break down quite a lot, they get a flat, or the spokes get bent. There are tricycles made out of old bikes too, out of the old Csepel R26. That's why we've got to park so far, because that's where they are, the rickshaws . . . Weren't they around there today? The rickshaw drivers are out looking for our hunting guests' business. They'll become beaters, too, if they get in there first.

HUSBAND: This mouth cover makes it look like there's an epidemic going on. *(Laughs.)*

WIFE: Don't be crude.

HUSBAND: Alright. But it's weird that they're not wearing real veils.

SNEAK: Because it's more expensive. They do have them, black ones, though with matching hats, and mourning veils. If they ask for it, for a funeral. Everybody walks out in a line, in any costume you wish, it's simply matter of paying for it . . . And I go in, in my doorman's coat, me. When they come down for dinner I greet them in my knee-length doorman's coat. They got it especially for me. It's light blue baize with gold laces. The hat is eighteenth-century Hungarian style. And I salute them, like that—freshly shaven, Miss Judith insists on that. You wouldn't recognise me. I salute them throughout the evening and the night. One time they booked a funeral with twenty-five mourners—they, the family, never showed up. But they sent a spy—just to check that there were enough mourners. They wouldn't pay for them otherwise. *(Laughs.)* We're not going to be caught out with something like that. Would you like us to sing to you? Shall we sing? Something happy. I've taught it to them. I picked up this skill from my cultural organiser days. Okay, boys and girls! *(Mr Sneak lifts up his arms like a conductor.)*

SNEAK: Rasvetalie! *(Gestures silence.)* What's going on, have you got frogs in your throats? Rasvetalie, and one, and one and two . . .

*(Choir sings a Russian song.)*

SNEAK: You see! They know all five verses. The last one is the same as the first one though. Right, listen to this one now. *(Gestures.)*

*(Choir sings a German song.)*

SNEAK: And who sings all this? The Turks! (*Laughs.*) It's good, right?—It's good fun, right?!

## Scene 12

*(Mother enters stage left.)*

MOTHER: How lovely, how lovely!

SNEAK: You won't believe it but three of them have degrees. Hands up, ones with degrees!

*(Two women and one man tentatively put up their hands.)*

SNEAK: I don't have a degree, me, but they still have to do what I tell them, because I'm Miss Judith's right-hand man. Did you enjoy your walk, sweetheart? Did you not change your mind?

DAUGHTER: You are at the bottom of the list. It will take six months; you've got time to change your mind.

MOTHER: I haven't changed my mind. The dining room is huge with brand new fixtures!

SNEAK: They were made to order!

MOTHER: I just can't believe that you're not able to jump ahead on the list.

SNEAK: Of course you can. But you can't say you heard it from me, sweetheart. I haven't said a word. I just chat. But you can ask anybody, I have never lied to anybody. "Mr Sneak is not a lying rascal," they will say. No, in fact no one has ever accused me of exaggerating, either. You see, I never exaggerate—why would I? It would make no sense, would it? Let's look reality straight in the face.

HUSBAND: That's right. They try and make you believe all kinds. You mustn't believe a word of what they say. When they're not speaking, they're still lying. They twist it inside out; they're very good at it. Good at screwing you over, that's what this country is good at!

SNEAK: Well, I was never one of those, who wraps it up in lovely packaging, someone who speaks nonsense. I'll always tell you how it is, me. I'll tell it to you factually. *(Laughs.)* Usually they don't believe me, when I'm being completely straight to their faces. I enjoy it.

HUSBAND: Hungarian people are straight talking, they're known for it.

SNEAK: Absolutely right. My mother used to say that I've been doing this my whole life.

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER: We're grateful to you. What's your name again?

SNEAK: Mr Sneak.

MOTHER: We're grateful to you, Mr Sneak.

WIFE: And if you could take Dad out regularly . . .

WOMAN: And if he wants a few spritzers, here and there, it will be okay.

HUSBAND: Salaries are so very low, in places like these; even if one is a jack-of-all-trades, the more stuff you get to do, the less money you get for it, right?

SNEAK: I can't really complain. Miss Judith appreciates her staff. But of course if it looks half decent before them taxes, the net number is not so . . .

HUSBAND: Don't you worry, Mr Sneak.

SNEAK: You too mustn't worry. You guys—Look away.

*(After considering it, the Husband takes out an envelope, which he gives to Sneak, who whips it into his pocket. The woman takes out an envelope, gives it to Sneak, who whips it away into his pocket.)*

WOMAN: You'll take my father out for a walk too, won't you?

SNEAK: Of course I will.

WOMAN: Take him into those small woods.

SNEAK: Into the Woodland of Peace.

WOMAN: There, yes!

SNEAK: It's Miss Judith who decides whose turn it is to go to the Woodland of Peace, when there's a hunt. We take them out, but it's her decision, who goes out that day.

MOTHER: Can you please pass my bag?

*(Daughter takes the bag to her. Mother takes out her wallet.)*

MOTHER: What's the going rate?

SNEAK: Twenty thousand, let's say thirty.

*(Mother, searching in her wallet, gets the money, counting it out.)*

DAUGHTER: Eight thousand four hundred.

SNEAK: It will do.

*(Daughter takes the money over and gives it to him.)*

MOTHER: Here you are.

*(Sneak steps towards them, spits on the money, and whips it into his pocket.)*

HUSBAND: We won't say anything to Miss Judith.

SNEAK: Miss Judith hasn't got heart problems, so you can tell her, don't worry about it. She suspects it. There's always someone who likes to enlighten her. (*Laughs.*) It's not really our main subject of conversation. She'd rather tell you what to do than chat. She was born to give out orders. From a small village, she is.

MOTHER: Miss Judith is a wonderful creature. She's determined, strong, a good manager. You have to keep order in a home like this. How many of us are here?

SNEAK: Seventy-three without you, ma'am.

MOTHER: And you've got the staff on top, and the whole hotel! This is not an easy job. But Miss Judith can tackle it, she can.

DAUGHTER: You haven't met her, haven't even talked to her on the phone!

WIFE: Everybody knows Miss Judith.

WOMAN: Miss Judith is humane. She wrote to me, asking me to visit my father, 'cause he missed me. But some stuff came up and I couldn't come. When did she call, maybe eight months ago ...

HUSBAND: Eight months ago.

WOMAN: It could be nine.

HUSBAND: Mary was the boss then, right?

WOMAN: Could have been, but it doesn't matter. I knew that he was in a good place here with Miss Judith.

MOTHER: The name itself. "Sweet Home." Others don't have names, or if they do, it's something cheesy, like "Fairy Garden," "Pearl Wreath," or "Autumn Blue," "Oasis," "The House of Beautiful Age." Why can't they simply say home for old people? Why give it diminutives, or nicknames? "House of Joy." I am sure it's full of song and laughter. "Silver Bridge."

DAUGHTER: "Sweet Home" is as revolting as those other ones. "Autumn Rose." "Diamond Gate." "Sun Ray." "Beautiful Dawn." But you've got ones like

WOMAN: It isn't. It's got some warmth to it, something spiritual.

WIFE: Heart-warming. It spoke to us too. Miss Judith's done a good job with that.

DAUGHTER: Okay, fine, we've sorted it. You're top of the list now. Let's go before you give out our petrol money too.

SNEAK: I'll give you money if it's for the petrol. There's a station two kilometres from the cemetery. Their petrol comes from the Ukraine. Our guests use that one, much cheaper.



DAUGHTER: Thank you. Let's go now.

*(Sneak takes money out of his pocket.)*

SNEAK: How much do you need?

DAUGHTER: We'll be alright.

*(Sneak puts money back in his pocket.)*

MOTHER: I'm going to stay and wait for Miss Judith. You can go of course.

DAUGHTER: I'm not going.

MOTHER: You can climb in through the windows.

DAUGHTER: Don't start now.

MOTHER: She uses her window to go in and out. Her box room opens onto the courtyard. She does it to avoid me. She had it fixed so you can open the window with keys, from the outside. All this so she won't run into me in the hall. We're the laughingstock of the whole building. She's climbing in through the window when she could have added a door! She can't stand my smell, but she pretends to. And now that I want to leave so that she can finally have the flat to herself, she's stopping me. She's ashamed of her hatred of me. She shouldn't feel ashamed. Her face is scarlet right now.

*(Daughter crying, having a tantrum.)*

DAUGHTER: She's crazy! She's crazy!

MOTHER: Isn't she? Look at her, she's about to explode. Shame on you, doing this in front of strangers. They're laughing at us, everyone's laughing at us, and it's revolting.

*(Daughter cries loudly, has a tantrum, and slowly stops. Silence.)*

WIFE: Let your mum do whatever she wants. She can always go back home if she isn't happy.

MOTHER: I'm not leaving. Never!

WIFE: We brought Dad back home once.

MOTHER: Because the fortuneteller didn't tell you anything, but she told me.

DAUGHTER: Oh, of course not, it's not possible.

HUSBAND: Be glad to get rid of her.

WIFE: It's none of your business.

*(Pause.)*

SNEAK: She really should be here any minute now. I'm off now—I'm getting changed into my beater costume. If you aren't going to sit down, then I'll take the seats back. It's lucky that they're so light, they easily fit in the weapons bag . . .

## Scene 13

*(Miss Judith enters stage left.)*

MISS JUDITH: Good morning.

*(Goes behind the desk. Mother gets up and stands farther away. Miss Judith sits.)*

You haven't made appointments.

SNEAK: I've told them.

MISS JUDITH: Can you please register your visit next time? Our email address is on the Internet. We give out visiting-time slots. If you come at a different time, we won't be able to let you in. I'll make an exception now. Mr Sneak, please be careful, because the earth is flooded near the pit. The fresh lime arrived. I was out there and they poured it straight into the pit. Tell the others that it's slippery.

SNEAK: Of course.

MISS JUDITH: Let me see your heels.

*(The girls like horses hold their legs up. Miss Judith checks their heels.)*

MISS JUDITH: Okay, you can put them down.

*(The girls put down their legs.)*

MISS JUDITH: *(To the others)* They usually wear the boots all day long, that's how it's always been. But from now on, the spurs will have to be worn as well. Please use them carefully.

SNEAK: You think of absolutely everything, Miss Judith dear, don't you?

MISS JUDITH: You can leave now.

MAN 1: Goodbye, ma'am.

*(The Turkish-dressed people leave annoyed.)*

## Scene 14

MISS JUDITH: Mr Sneak, open the corridor, there's half an hour for the visit.

SNEAK: I'm on it. *(Takes out a bunch of keys.)* Should I open the garden door too?

MISS JUDITH: Not that one, because they've arrived. We don't let them mingle before it's time. Our guests can only use the garden when the hunters have left.

SNEAK: I've told them that too.

MISS JUDITH: Any questions, any wishes?

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER: Miss Judith, dear, I'm moving in here.

MISS JUDITH: Fill out the admission form, please.

MOTHER: I've filled it out, got it from this gentleman.

MISS JUDITH: Has he also told you about the entry fee?

MOTHER: There was no mention of that . . .

MISS JUDITH: One million. Due on the day of moving in. In case you don't have this amount, we have a payment plan to offer you. Our bank gives us a ten-year loan. The interest rate is below the norm and well under the legal limit. The monthly payment is thirteen thousand, eight hundred and sixty-seven forints. We don't ask for a processing fee, nor for a first payment. When you sign the contract we will also need proof of ownership of your flat. The documents must be less than two weeks old. In the eventuality of multiple owners, all owners need to be present.

HUSBAND: What is this, house swap?

MISS JUDITH: If you compare the lending rates on a comparison website, you'll get the banks' most recent offers.

*(Husband takes out phone and starts to tap it.)*

MISS JUDITH: You'll see that we're not more expensive than any other bank.

HUSBAND: Are you legally allowed to offer bank deals?

MISS JUDITH: Our co-operative is run according to the rules and regulations of the business and credit bureau.

HUSBAND: And they agreed?

MISS JUDITH: You've got to have a good relationship with them.

*(The Husband laughs out loud and keeps tapping his phone.)*

HUSBAND: So you're right! You're not more expensive! So where's the business in that? Is it a scratch-card game?

MISS JUDITH: There's no lottery, no, we're not a commercial group, and we don't promise you high interest, so no . . .

HUSBAND: But the people who get the loan don't actually get the cash in hand.

MISS JUDITH: That's true, but they get a receipt.

MOTHER: I don't quite understand. Do you?

*(Daughter shakes her head.)*

HUSBAND: In return for your mortgage, you'll get a million-forint loan. If you accept it, you can move in.

WIFE: Jesus Christ. Do we have to do that loan?

HUSBAND: Why would we have to? He's already in there.

MISS JUDITH: This deal only concerns new admissions.

DAUGHTER: Excuse me, but who will own the flat? Will we lose it?

MISS JUDITH: It'll remain yours. The flat can only become the co-op's property if the monthly payments stop. The first reminder is sent out after three missed payments. And it's only after three more months that you get a note on your property documents, but only if you haven't paid up to date by then. This is all in the loan contract.

HUSBAND: And where do you send the warning?

MISS JUDITH: To the registered permanent address.

HUSBAND: But if they're registered here with you . . .

MISS JUDITH: It would still be sent out by post. It'll be sent by recorded delivery and signed by the addressee. Everything is legal.

*(Silence)*

HUSBAND: And let me ask you . . . If the person in question passes away, without next of kin, then you'll own their flat, is that right?

MISS JUDITH: That's right.

HUSBAND: But if there is a next of kin?

MISS JUDITH: They have to continue paying the monthly payments.

HUSBAND: And what happens if they don't know that their relatives died?

MISS JUDITH: We send out the death certificate, by registered and insured mail.

SNEAK: I've said that too.

HUSBAND: But still people can miss payments, right?

MISS JUDITH: We then send an attorney's warning, and yes, it can happen that despite that, there is no payment received.

HUSBAND: What's the percentage? One in ten?

MISS JUDITH: We started six months ago, there's no history yet.

HUSBAND: *(Laughs)* Don't tell me that you haven't calculated it! If they're forgetful or slack, the flat is yours!

SNEAK: So what? The contract is legal!

HUSBAND: How many new oldies do you get a month?

SNEAK: Ten or twelve, depending on how many die. We're quite small.

HUSBAND: A flat a month. If we calculate with cheap flats, let's say ten million forints each, that's already a hundred and twenty million in property.

MISS JUDITH: You can't guess the current market prices, especially not nowadays.

HUSBAND: It's clever, but I wouldn't have the balls—

MISS JUDITH: Mr Sneak will give you information about these conditions. Do we have enough copies?

SNEAK: Yes, we do. I copied some. I'll give it to them at the reception.

MISS JUDITH: Have you taken down their names and ID numbers?

SNEAK: Right away.

MISS JUDITH: You're not allowed to visit unless we've got these. We can't be responsible for unauthorised visitors . . . We accept full responsibility for the welfare and property of our guests. *(They search in their pockets or bags.)*

DAUGHTER: I don't get this. What happens if I pay one million in cash up front?

HUSBAND: You don't have to pay anything up front, if I understand it right. They get your mortgage and then you pay a smallish amount each month as repayment.

DAUGHTER: But what if we don't ask for the loan and want to pay it in one go?

HUSBAND: I don't know, then. What would happen?

MISS JUDITH: We're not in the business of ripping off elderly people. So that's why we don't accept anybody without a loan. If you have one million in cash, spend it on something else. It would cover the nursing care in your own home for a while.

DAUGHTER: You've got to take out a loan. Are you saying that this is the condition to get a place here? Why?

MISS JUDITH: Because the company's owner decided it for humanitarian reasons.

DAUGHTER: Miss Judith, are you also one of the owners?

MISS JUDITH: The ownership information is not public. I'm mainly a managing director.

DAUGHTER: Can you see what they are like?

MOTHER: They're very nice . . .

DAUGHTER: You've always warned me against living in debt, never accept credit, why now then?

MOTHER: This is different. We're not spending beyond our means. We're not overstretching . . .

DAUGHTER: But you're buying the right to live here!

MOTHER: But you don't pay for it, isn't that what they said?

DAUGHTER: Oh my God.

HUSBAND: That's what the state will end up doing. (*Laughs*). First they will bring in property tax—that most won't be able to pay. Secondly, they will add the tax to their mortgages; thirdly they will start evicting the ones who can't keep up with the payments for their own house or they'll be forced to take in some lodger. Anyway, that's what I would do if I were the state, easy peasy.

MISS JUDITH: Most deals are dead easy.

(*Pause.*)

MOTHER: Where shall I put the form?

MISS JUDITH: Here on the table.

MOTHER: When will I get an answer?

MISS JUDITH: Soon.

DAUGHTER: This whole thing stinks! This loan is very suspicious!

MOTHER: Will I be the first on the waiting list if I get the loan and pay cash on top?

MISS JUDITH: No, you won't. We don't make exceptions. It's first come, first served with us.

DAUGHTER: You need to look around first, for God's sake—let's see what it's like. It could be awful. You could pass out from the stench of urine when we walk in.

MISS JUDITH: Please don't rush it, take a look around. We're a bit tight since the hotel is in business, but it's not too bad, go and see for yourselves.

MOTHER: I've seen enough. It'll suit me fine.

DAUGHTER: But you haven't seen anything. Don't do this, because I am getting fed up with all of this. Don't do this; we'll lose our flat!

MOTHER: This is none of your business, so why don't you stick to climbing in and out of the window?

DAUGHTER: I own it too.

MOTHER: I've signed it. Done deal!

MISS JUDITH: *(To daughter)* Now that we have the visitor's details, we're in a position to give out a carer's agreement stating that the next of kin will be looking after their parent. We don't charge for this certificate, but only charge the mailing cost. In the future, certain benefits will depend on this document. I agree with the state's endeavour that the family is what society is founded upon. And if you're going to ask me if I'm married, no, I'm not; I haven't found Mr Right.

*(Pause.)*

SNEAK: The doctor has signed the death certificates this morning.

MISS JUDITH: Take them to the authorities tomorrow.

*(Silence. Sneak gathers the certificates and starts copying numbers into a notebook.)*

*(Pause.)*

MISS JUDITH: Please use capitals to write the guests' names and your relationship to them next to your own names and ID numbers. I won't ask you to verify your relationships with documents this time, but next time, bring them with you.

HUSBAND: Documents to prove I'm visiting my father-in-law? How can we prove that? Isn't her maiden name enough?

MISS JUDITH: Both guests and visitors need to present their birth certificates.

HUSBAND: I don't know where they are . . . it's a pain to get a new one.



MISS JUDITH: You'll need it anyway for the death certificate. We need to protect their safety and peace of mind. In old age your mental resistance is diminished. The mobile phones aren't good for them either. Their blood pressure jumps up. We don't recommend their use.

*(Sneak hands back the identity cards. They put them away. Wife, Husband, and Woman write in the book.)*

WOMAN: You've written to me a little while ago telling me I should come to visit, but I couldn't until now . . . I was thinking no news is good news . . .

MISS JUDITH: My predecessor must have written more than six months ago. It's not our style to scare relatives. We either send them a death certificate or we don't.

WOMAN: Well, I haven't received one of those, I don't remember getting one. Mind you, the postman just tosses in the recorded delivery mail. We'd agreed that he can sign it himself so I don't have to queue at the post office . . . It could have got mixed up in the junk mail, which I get rid of straightaway. I can't stand junk mail, the smell, colour . . . *(Shakes)* Disgusting, they are, especially the one-page ones, the colour is revolting, the feel of it . . .

*(Silence. Sneak walks stage right.)*

WIFE: *(To Husband)* Will you go in, please? If he sees me he'll get upset. If you think he's going to cope, then bring him out. That's okay, isn't it?

MISS JUDITH: The dining room is the visiting area, but since they're busy in there for tonight's event, it's fine for now.

WIFE: Thank you very much.

WOMAN: Very kind of you, Miss Judith.

DAUGHTER: Let's go in finally—Let's see what it's like!

MOTHER: I'm low maintenance; it'll suit me fine.

*(Pause.)*

DAUGHTER: Fine, I'm going without you.

MOTHER: Go.

DAUGHTER: I know you won't believe what I'll say.

MOTHER: Of course I won't.

DAUGHTER: When have I lied to you? Why can't you believe me?! Can you never believe anything?

MISS JUDITH: Mr Sneak.

SNEAK: Are you coming in?

*(Sneak and Husband exit stage right.)*

## Scene 15

MISS JUDITH: *(Turning on the computer)* If you don't mind . . .

WIFE: Of course, go ahead . . .

WOMAN: We don't want to bother you. We could leave, actually.

MISS JUDITH: I'm organising a new group, coming in two weeks' time. During the hunting season we have more competition, we've got to book at least twenty people.

WIFE: What do they hunt?

MISS JUDITH: We've got that already.

WIFE: What, are they wild boar, wild geese, deer, stuff like that? I'm a city girl—don't know what's protected and when . . .

MISS JUDITH: I didn't know either.

*(Pause.)*

WOMAN: Hunting must be exciting, but tiring too.

WIFE: It's a kind of passion, some people fish. I'd lose my wits, waiting through the night, but there are some who put up with it.

WOMAN: They drink while they do it, that's why they do it.

*(Pause.)*

DAUGHTER: Miss Judith, do you really have to get the one million forint loan?

MISS JUDITH: No, of course not, but you don't have to move into the residential care home either.

*(Pause.)*

The loan has nothing to do with "Sweet Home," just like the hotel doesn't either. But without the hotel our guests would starve, just like they do elsewhere. It's thanks to the loan that the business is working. It's non-profit.

*(Pause.)*

MOTHER: But you don't have to pay anything when you move in, right?

MISS JUDITH: You don't have to.

MOTHER: That's what matters, you hear this? That's what matters.

## Scene 16

*(Husband wheels the Old Man in. Mr Sneak is behind them.)*

MISS JUDITH: Mr Sneak, get changed and bring out the others too!

SNEAK: Yes, ma'am. I'm not saying goodbye yet.

*(Leaves.)*

## Scene 17

WIFE: Dad. Do you recognise me, Dad? It's me, Dad. Does he recognise me?

HUSBAND: Of course he does. You haven't changed that much in six months.

WIFE: What's it like inside?

HUSBAND: Not too bad, a bit tight really, but . . .

WIFE: He's looked after all right, is he?

HUSBAND: Yes, he is.

WIFE: Dad, you're alright here, aren't you?

*(Pause.)*

He doesn't understand us. He did last time.

HUSBAND: I think he understands. He didn't object to me pushing him out.

WIFE: Does he recognise us?

*(Pause.)*

OLD MAN: I miss them—that's the horrible thing. I miss them.

WIFE: I miss you too! A lot! All the time!

OLD MAN: The ones who didn't come back. They took them out and they never came back.

*(Pause.)*

HUSBAND: Sometimes these guys mix up reality with dreams. They have visions.

OLD MAN: They were taken out to get some fresh air . . . they never came back . . .

WIFE: He's talking about the war. He was a kid but remembers it well.

OLD MAN: They shot them.

WIFE: I told you—the war . . .

OLD MAN: You can hear it.

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: He's in good shape, isn't he? Looks well.

WOMAN: The food is good because of the hotel.

WIFE: He doesn't look unkempt, does he? His nails have been cut.

OLD MAN: Don't let them do it.

WIFE: What?

OLD MAN: Take me away from here! They'll shoot me!

HUSBAND: I've told you. He's starting again.

WIFE: Oh God! Dad—no one is going to hurt you. You're in good hands!

OLD MAN: They've not brought them back. They won't bring me back either.

WIFE: Miss Judith. What is he talking about?

HUSBAND: It's not unusual for them to say stuff like that.

WOMAN: My father has hallucinations. The stuff he used to say. Because of the side-effects. Or maybe it's because of the withdrawal symptoms. It was awful. I didn't like seeing it, that's why—I kept delaying it too. It's no good. And it makes you feel so helpless. At the end he was completely dependent on me, like on alcohol, he was depending on me, cried when I left—for twenty years he had ignored me, so then I kept a distance between us. He was already here by then, he didn't want me to leave, even though we had agreed about it beforehand—and in fact it was Mary who suggested I come less often—she said that I shouldn't give my life over to him.

MOTHER: That's right, that's what I keep saying too. This isn't real sacrifice, but fake devotion.

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: This blanket is nice and warm. Is it a "Sweet Home" blanket?

MISS JUDITH: Yes, pure wool.

WIFE: It's got a tasteful design.

MISS JUDITH: We try our best.

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: He's freshly shaven.

MISS JUDITH: We shave them before we take them out.

WIFE: That's very good.

*(Pause.)*

WIFE: Where in the garden do you take them out?

MISS JUDITH: Different parts. But when we have the hunt, they get taken to the Woodland of Peace.

WIFE: Don't they catch colds?

MISS JUDITH: No. If need be, they get hats and scarves. They're a hundred percent wool too.

WIFE: Wonderful.

WOMAN: Miss Judith thinks of everything. Of absolutely everything. Everybody knows these things, but still—she's so good that she makes a point of it . . .

MOTHER: I can still walk, but when I won't be able to, and not even able to wheel myself because my arms will be too weak, will you still take me out to get fresh air?

MISS JUDITH: Not a problem. We'll wheel you out.

OLD MAN: Don't let them. They don't bring you back.

*(Pause.)*

HUSBAND: Right, what can I say? This is what he's like now.

WIFE: We should take him home with us, shouldn't we?

HUSBAND: We couldn't cope at home. We've tried, haven't we? We tried and it didn't work out. It crippled us too. We can't offer specialist care. That's why he was brought here, am I right?

## Scene 18

*(From stage left, Mr Sneak enters wearing a hunting jacket and boots. Three beaters in hunting outfits also enter.)*

SNEAK: You see, this is the hussar collar I was telling you about. They used to call it a pig thief, because a whole pig would fit under it . . . Fifteen thousand plus VAT, it's worth it. The boots are my own. I would prefer walking boots, but Miss Judith won't allow it. That's how she is, tries to save here and there . . . Miss Judith, who are we taking out today?

MISS JUDITH: Well, if this gentleman is already here, let him go. And what room shall we choose from the women's ward?

SNEAK: Number eight will do.

MISS JUDITH: How many in there?

SNEAK: Three.

MISS JUDITH: Good. Four people will do for today.

*(The three beaters leave stage right.)*

SNEAK: You see, it's convenient to take out the whole room—much easier to clean up after them. No one gets to be difficult this way. You can finally open the windows and let some fresh air in, without them complaining and squealing.

HUSBAND: Yep, opening the windows or not is their biggest problem.

SNEAK: And the TV.

HUSBAND: That's a general issue though. If you're finally home, you must stare at something . . .

OLD MAN: I don't want to . . .

WIFE: What don't you want, Dad? What doesn't he want?

HUSBAND: I don't know, I don't know.

OLD MAN: I don't want to . . .

SNEAK: *(Laughs)* He doesn't want to go for a walk! It happens. Not everybody enjoys the fresh air.

WIFE: Some fresh air will do you good, Dad. You've got to get out sometimes.

OLD MAN: They won't bring me back either!



WIFE: Dad, please stop. We'll come and visit—everything is fine! I promise we'll come more often, it's just that . . .

WOMAN: Same here . . . And then comes the guilt . . . But it's true, things always crop up.

WIFE: Is your father also like this . . . ?

WOMAN: Oh yes! Ever since I've known him . . .

WIFE: It takes a while to realise how your parents have difficult personalities. And that with time they change, but not to their advantage. It's not getting any easier for them.

OLD MAN: Don't let them . . .

HUSBAND: We won't let them, Dad. You've got to leave them to it. Everything is fine, Dad! We won't let them. He doesn't get it anyway. We should soon—

WIFE: Is it time to leave?

HUSBAND: It's time.

WIFE: But we haven't chatted!

WOMAN: How time flies . . . My train is leaving soon . . . But it was always difficult with my dad . . . Doesn't say much . . . just sits there in silence. Makes me freeze up, that does. Maybe if I'd known him from childhood. But that's not my fault . . .

WIFE: Of course not. Not your fault at all. Not everything is down to us.

WOMAN: Will you give me a ride to the train station?

HUSBAND: Of course, we've already promised.

DAUGHTER: We could take you all the way to Budapest.

WOMAN: No thanks, the station will do.

DAUGHTER: But we've got room in the car!

WOMAN: I like travelling by train. I stare out of the window, daydream, not so easy to leave someone here.

WIFE: Oh God, it isn't easy. My God, it's hard!

HUSBAND: Right, so we should really get going.

*(From stage right, the three beaters wheel in three chairs with an old woman on each. They are wrapped up in blankets.)*

MISS JUDITH: Put a hat on them, the red ones.

SNEAK: Miss Judith, you really think of everything. Well—I'm going to say my goodbyes. It will be a sensitive one, as they say. *(He smiles in a childish way to the Woman.)* I'm glad that your dad . . . Do visit. We'll be looking forward to it. *(Shakes woman's hand. To Husband.)* Lovely chat we had. Rare to meet someone as intelligent as you. *(Shakes hand with Husband. To Wife.)* Goodbye, ma'am. Please don't worry, everything will be according to plan. *(Shakes hands with Wife. To mother.)* I'll see you anyway. I can't wait. *(Shakes hands, gives her a hug. To daughter.)* I know what you must be feeling. I've found it hard to become independent too—but won't be difficult for such a nice lady . . . You'll come and visit, won't you?

OLD MAN: Don't let them . . .

SNEAK: *(Laughs)* Don't be scared, it's not going to hurt. Pleasure to have met you, goodbye. Tallyho!

Tallyho! Tallyho!

*(Sneak and Three Beaters wheel the three wheelchairs.)*

## Scene 19

MISS JUDITH: I'm going to the kitchen.

HUSBAND: We're leaving too.

MOTHER: So you've got my admission form?

MISS JUDITH: Of course. It's over there on the table.

MOTHER: And how long will it take?

MISS JUDITH: Six weeks, two months . . .

MOTHER: It's not that long. I'll be able to hang on in there.

DAUGHTER: I wasn't able to become a homeowner. You did, but remember you did it when it was doable!

MOTHER: Have I ever expected it from you?

DAUGHTER: No, you just made sure that I knew.

MOTHER: Me? When?

DAUGHTER: When you got your flat it was different; it's not like that anymore!

MOTHER: The six weeks would be better than the two months, Miss Judith.

DAUGHTER: Twenty-four-seven, you're trying to prove I'm unable to do anything. You've done that all my life.

MOTHER: Best thing would be tomorrow.

MISS JUDITH: We'll try our best. Three places on the women's ward just got freed up. Please drop off your entry passes at the reception when you leave. I hope you got given one.

HUSBAND: We did, we did, please come with us. We'll take you to the station.

WOMAN: Thanks.

*(Miss Judith exits left, the others also exit left.)*

## Scene 20

*Trees, bushes, bulrushes are being swept by the wind. An approaching dog barks, and a rhythmical shooting sound is heard. From stage left, the OLD MAN and the three OLD WOMEN, looking panic-stricken, speedily push themselves on their wheelchairs. They have red hats on, as they quickly wheel themselves, trying to escape to the right. Dogs are barking. Loud shouts are heard, sounds of rattling. A quick succession of five, six shots are heard. Cries of fleeing birds and the rustling of their wings can be heard.*

*Silence. From the right, three beaters and Mr Sneak come out, pushing four empty wheelchairs.*

## Scene 21

*(The office. The Wife and Husband enter stage left. The latter carries a big package in his hands.)*

WIFE: He could already be asleep.

HUSBAND: We'll put it by his bed then.

WIFE: Let's put it by his bedside table.

HUSBAND: He hasn't got one.

WIFE: How come he hasn't? He did have one!

HUSBAND: There was no more space in his old room. We'll put it by the foot of the bed.

WIFE: He'll get frightened.

HUSBAND: He won't even notice.

WIFE: Should have given it to him.

HUSBAND: Why did you put it in the trunk? I'd have seen it on the back seat.

WIFE: Lucky that I even remembered.

HUSBAND: After twenty kilometres!

WIFE: Still better than at home!

HUSBAND: We could have eaten it. A sack of sweets for a diabetic! What if the corridors are locked?

WIFE: Are they?

*(Husband takes off to the right. Stops at centre stage.)*

HUSBAND: They are.

WIFE: We should call Mr Sneak.

HUSBAND: Leave it, he's probably having his dinner.

WIFE: Okay, let's leave it here on his desk. We'll put his name on it. She's a decent woman; she'll probably give it to him.

*(Husband takes out a pen from his inner pocket, writes on the package. We suddenly hear Gypsy music.)*

HUSBAND: Here we go.

*(Some god-awful singing with unclear lyrics can be heard. Very loud sound of violin. Then quieter.)*

HUSBAND: Wow—they're really going at those strings! What a party!

WIFE: He'll be woken up by this!

HUSBAND: Even the dead will.

*(The violin is playing a folkloric song: "My Father Loved to Sing." It is accompanied by singing. The Husband puts the package on the table. The music becomes softer.)*

WIFE: We'll pop round in two or three weeks.

HUSBAND: Of course we will. We can come more regularly. He'll be pleased to see us.

*(They play very loudly, then quietly.)*

WIFE: So lucky that Dad ended up liking Gypsy music.

HUSBAND: Your dad is in a good place here.

*(He's pushing his Wife towards the door.)*

## Scene 22

*(Mr Sneak in doorman outfit enters stage left.)*

SNEAK: Oh, good evening. Are you still here?

WIFE: We forgot the present . . . came back . . . It's just some chocolates.

SNEAK: Chocolates for Dad, that's not a good idea, ma'am. Feel free to leave them here for me. I'll eat them.

*(Laughs.)*

HUSBAND: *(Laughs.)* That'll be best.

*(Gypsy music stops, applause can be heard.)*

SNEAK: I've come back for the death certificates. I left them here . . . I'll quickly get them signed by the doctor—he's dropped in, he's eating in the kitchen. I'll take them all in tomorrow to avoid having to go twice.

*(He takes out some forms from the drawers, puts them into the folders on the table, and then snaps them under his armpits. He's listening to the sound of the applause from inside.)*

SNEAK: They must be at the Beautiful Legs Competition . . . They love it. Only men can enter, and all they can show are their legs. Their bodies and hands are hidden by a stretched-out sheet—that's how they walk onto the stage. The man whose legs get the most votes wins a trophy of carved wood . . . It's done by the same guy who carves the headstones.

*(Applause. Cheering.)*

Wow—that really must be a good leg. We've got a winner, then. A beef stew will do you a lot of good . . .

WIFE: No, thanks, we don't—

HUSBAND: With dumplings?

SNEAK: Homemade! Come on in, there's plenty.

WIFE: We can't . . .

HUSBAND: Why not? They're asking so nicely. At least we won't have come back for nothing. Let's eat.

SNEAK: Don't make me beg you, ma'am!

WIFE: Alright, but only a bite.

*(They leave. Applause. Cheers. Gypsy music plays.)*

*THE END*