

SUNDAY LUNCH

A Drawing Room Drama by János Háý (2010)

Translated from the Hungarian by Szilvia Naray-Davey

Dramatis Personae:

Girl—Twenty-six years old at the beginning of the play.

Mother—Over fifty.

Father—Close to sixty.

First Man—The Girl's first husband. An operation engineer in his thirties.

Uncle Laci—The mother's brother, well into his fifties.

Second Man—The Girl's second husband, a mathematician in his thirties.

Kid—By the Girl's first marriage, around eight.

Eldest Kid—By the Girl's second marriage, around eight.

Youngest Kid—By the Girl's second marriage, around six.

Kati—The Girl's colleague, in her thirties.

Aniko—The Girl's colleague, in her late twenties.

Matchmaker—A woman in her forties.

In the second act, all of the characters are eight to ten years older.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A converted attic flat in which the Girl and her husband live. It is the evening, the husband arrives home.

First Man: Where's the kid?

Girl: He's already asleep.

First Man: He's always asleep when I get home.

Girl: 'Cause you come home when he's asleep. If you didn't come home when he was asleep, he'd be awake.

First Man: Stuck at work.

Girl: They let you do that there?

First Man: Do what?

Girl: Drink.

First Man: I am there for the overtime. So we can have more. You said there wasn't enough.

Girl: It's too late.

First Man: I have tried everything.

Girl: Don't do it for me.

First Man: Could we . . . ?

Girl: No. Not anymore. You come with too much baggage.

First Man: I can change things.

Girl: Some things you can't.

First Man: I can change anything!

Girl: In twenty years' time, we would still be living here in this attic. With you, it's as good as it gets.

First Man: My father built this with his own hands.

Girl: Shows on his hands too.

First Man: We can do an extension. He has planned it that way. You could extend the other side of the roof, towards the back garden.

Girl: Your parents would still be living under us. So why not pour concrete over them and move them out into the garden, as sculptures.

First Man: They're my parents. And they've done so much for me.

Girl: For you.

First Man: And for you too.

Girl: For me? What?

First Man: Always ready to help with the boy. Didn't even have to ask . . .

Girl: Don't need to ask them to come, have to beg them to leave.

First Man: It's because they love you.

Girl: But I don't love them. They are not my parents. They are just two pushy people who always have advice for you. It's a running commentary on how to do things; as soon as I walk in it's like they are reading them out to me. I don't want to live with them, I don't want to hear your mother's voice, I don't want to eat her Sunday lunch.

First Man: We'll be at your mother's on Sunday.

Girl: That's lucky then.

First Man: I've never said, let's not bother and stay home instead.

Girl: Why would you have said that?

First Man: What I mean is that I made allowances. I managed to go with the flow.

Girl: That's what you are supposed to do. Why wouldn't you have managed?

First Man: Wasn't easy for me either. It's not so straightforward with your parents. I know full well that I wasn't a good enough catch for them because they had someone else in mind, someone who would have been a better match for their daughter.

Girl: And they were proven right.

First Man: But you are not the daughter that they had in mind.

Girl: I had never wanted to be. That daughter was exactly like them—boring. She spoke in her mother's voice and thought that her father was the ideal man. So, as a matter of fact, no, I am definitely not like that.

First Man: Then you can't get the man they wished for.

Girl: In the past, maybe not. But now, yes.

First Man: Why now? What has changed?

Girl: I know I can get him. I used to believe that it could only be you. Now I know that it can be someone else.

First Man: But we have a life together.

Girl: Had.

First Man: I can change whatever you want.

Girl: No chance. You can't erase your mother from here. She will always be here, even if she is not here.

First Man: It's easier for us with them here, plus they give us all they've got.

Girl: I don't want it. I don't want that money; they pay us to be here, and they want to buy us. But I don't want to stay here. I want move to Buda where my parents—

First Man: You don't even like them!

Girl: They are not the reason; I am used to that place.

First Man: But this is Buda too.

Girl: You really don't understand anything, do you? You and I are so different. Even with your big degree, you have become exactly like your parents. You don't know what I want. You only know what your parents want because that's all you have seen. You have no idea how to live for other things or in different ways.

First Man: I haven't had a drink today.

Girl: It doesn't matter.

First Man: It doesn't?

Girl: No.

First Man: Until now, that was your reason.

Girl: No. If you weren't you, I wouldn't mind if you drank. But you are you.

Scene 2

Entry hall. Doorbell rings. Inside: A man looks at his watch, his wife glances toward the wall clock. They open the door. The Girl enters.

Father: What about the boy?

Girl: Oh—didn't I bring him?

Father: Why not?

Girl: I need to talk about something.

Father: What is it?

Girl: I am getting divorced.

Father: *(Astounded)* And you just simply announce it like that?

Girl: How else am I supposed to do it then?

Father: Somehow more gently.

Girl: I am the one divorcing, not you.

Father: And how about your mother? Have you thought of her?

Girl: I have always thought of her. Now I can't.

Mother: *(Approaching)* What's going on?

Father: She says she is getting divorced.

Mother: What do you mean divorced?

Girl: I can't stand to live with him anymore.

Mother: We don't get divorced in our family.

Girl: No. But I will anyway.

Mother: What do you mean you will? Look at me, did I divorce? No, I didn't. I have carried on, because in our family everybody carries on.

Father: And me too, I didn't divorce either. Because then your mother would have been a divorcée. Your mother is not a divorced woman. When half the kids in your class had divorced parents, we were still together.

Mother: Only this has true value. If you untie the knot of marriage, then nothing makes sense.
We become like dogs, happy to lie with anyone.

Father: Dogs don't do it lying down.

Mother: What are you involved in this for? I just mentioned the dog thing, the emphasis was not on the sleeping or the position—and anyway, I don't have time to watch documentaries on dogs' mating habits. I have a house to run, so don't criticize what I am saying. The point is that you can only break things once, because after they're broken, they will stay broken.

Father: Marriage is like football. It's fine when the players are up and running, but rubbish when they're injured on the ground.

Mother: Is football the only thing in your mind?

Father: It's the World Cup soon.

Girl: He drinks.

Mother: He drinks? So what? All men drink; drinking is not a reason to divorce. There would be no marriages left in Hungary.

Father: How much?

Girl: More.

Father: That's a problem.

Mother: Why would it be a problem? You always drank more. Even on our wedding anniversary.
Still no divorce.

Father: That is exactly why.

Mother: What is exactly why?

Father: Because there was still no divorce after so many years.

Mother: Drank because you were happy, right?

Father: I don't know, I don't remember. I really overdid it, but nowadays I forget everything when I drink. I even forget why I drink.

Girl: He is aggressive, too.

Mother: Aggressive? I haven't known him like that. I can't believe that someone who is as polite and well mannered as he is could be aggressive.

Girl: It's all an act. Everyone thinks that he is not like that, but he is—he is just good at pretending.

Mother: I don't think so. It's only actors who have a need to perform in life; they are the ones who get muddled up with their roles, but not Tamàs. He is an engineer.

Girl: You shouldn't look down on him so much because he is an engineer.

Mother: Me? Of course I don't. But I just don't believe that he can pretend to be different.

Father: No, I can't either. I got on well with Tamàs; we understood each other quite well.

Mother: Yes. Especially when you have to get wine.

Father: Yes, but also about women.

Mother: Women? What women?

Father: Not about specific women, but women in general. We really understood each other well on the subject of what women are really like. And look, he is the one proven right, since he is the one being dumped just because he likes his drink.

Girl: Dad, it's me who is your daughter.

Father: Of course you are.

Girl: Then you shouldn't defend him.

Father: I am not defending anyone; I just want to be fair.

Girl: To be honest, I can't go on living with him. I have already made up my mind.

Father: Then don't blame the alcohol if that is your decision.

Girl: The alcohol is part of my decision.

Father: I can't believe that.

Girl: But it's true.

Mother: And where will you live? You can't stay with your ex-mother-in-law.

Girl: No, not there, not for a minute.

Mother: Then where? Where can a divorced woman with a six-year-old kid go?

Girl: Home.

Mother: Home here? That's a no. Your father has high blood pressure—you can't do that to him. And me too, I've got heart problems. And anyway, your father has been sleeping in your bedroom since you moved out.

Girl: I was just about to say no, not home, because that is why I got married—so that I could get out of here.

Mother: You got married because you got pregnant.

Girl: I got pregnant so that I could leave, because I couldn't carry on with you two. I couldn't breathe around you. You were constantly on my case. When am I getting back home? Who am I going out with? What shall I wear? . . .

Mother: Parents have responsibilities.

Girl: I was not a child anymore.

Mother: To a parent, the child is always a child. Even when they grow up.

Father: On top of that, you were only seventeen, legally a minor.

Mother: Why do you always have to be so insensitive? We are talking about our child here, not a legal matter.

Father: Fine, I just meant that even if we set aside the emotional aspects of things, she is our child legally, too.

Mother: Oh, let's leave it. The point is that we wanted you to be happy, for you to go to university, for example. We only wanted what was best for you.

Girl: You? Wanting the best? You drove me into this marriage. Even Tamàs looked a better option than you. So anyway, I am not coming home; you don't need to worry about that.

Mother: Renting then? How will you afford that? Tamàs won't give you much because he doesn't have it himself. He'll be lucky to give you what the court orders.

Girl: What about Grandma's flat?

Mother: Grandma's flat?

Girl: Yes. It's sitting there empty since she died . . .

Mother: We've only just buried her.

Girl: It's been over half a year.

Father: Isn't it convenient that she died now instead of dying next year? Because then you couldn't have mentioned it . . .

Mother: Leave my mother alone. At least now she is dead.

Father: That's why I don't believe in God, because everyone's resurrected. Even your mother.

Mother: How can you hate someone for so long? Especially someone who isn't alive anymore?

Father: But there was a time when she was alive. Her memory still is.

Mother: No, you can't have that flat.

Girl: Why not? It's sitting there empty—no one is using it.

Mother: It's there because it isn't just mine. We both inherited it. And we can't decide what to do with it yet.

Girl: It could be mine, then.

Mother: Don't you understand? Only half is mine . . . of course I'd give it to you right now if I could, but I can't without Uncle Laci's permission.

Girl: I am sure Uncle Laci won't need it. Why would he? He lives by himself. What would he do with it?

Father: Right, and what if he marries a young secretary from work, who will then take it from him?

Mother: Who will take it away?

Father: A woman. These things happen. Women are capable of anything if their eyes are set on a free flat.

Mother: It would still be his.

Father: Well, that is true too, but still—a flat is a valuable asset. It's not every day you inherit a flat from your parents.

Mother: Once.

Father: Twice maybe, if they were divorced. Actually, it's quite likely the kid of divorced parents will be better off than if the parents stay together. I never thought of this until now. And on top of it all, everybody feels sorry for them.

Mother: Who feels sorry for them?

Father: The teacher at school, and the psychologist who sees them because of their problems as a result of the divorce.

Mother: That's why they get seen, because they've got all these problems. They've got them because their parents are divorcing.

Father: The others have got problems too, but they don't dare to take them to the psychologist. Shrinkers are afraid to hear that the kid is full of traumas even though they aren't divorced. No one treats those kids. Only the divorced parents' kids get seen. They need a shrink for the custody hearing anyway. If, for example, your parents had divorced, you wouldn't have had to go through all this with Uncle Laci because you would have inherited two flats to begin with.

Mother: But they didn't divorce, so this is the only one we've got and it has to be shared.

Girl: Then that's the solution. You have to ask Uncle Laci.

Mother: You ask him!

Girl: Me? Ask . . . him? You can't be serious. *(Looking at her Father)*

Father: I am sure your mother . . .

Mother: I always have to do everything around here. If it's anything difficult, I have to do it.

Father: He is your brother. I can't tell him to give away his inheritance.

Mother: You're behaving like this because you haven't inherited anything.

Father: I did inherit, but the value of a flat in the middle of nowhere here in Budapest was only worth a Russian car. That is not my fault.

Mother: A secondhand Russian car.

Girl: I used to love that car.

Father: Me too. The Russians knew what they were doing then. Later they manufactured shittier cars and at higher prices.

Mother: I will give him a ring tomorrow.

Girl: Uncle Laci always liked me.

Mother: Uncle Laci likes everyone. He is that type of person.

Father: It's easy to love without responsibility.

Mother: His work was his responsibility, not family.

Father: Families are different. You can't just say you don't feel like it and go on sick leave.

Mother: He never took a day off—not like others who can't wait to get the flu and their pension.

Girl: I have to go.

Mother: So soon?

Girl: The kid . . .

Mother: That's right. The kid is the most important. Especially now that he'll grow up with divorced parents.

Father: Does he know yet?

Girl: He knows something.

Scene 3

The Girl and the Kid at home.

Kid: Dad?

Girl: At work.

Kid: What's he doing so late?

Girl: What do you think?

Kid: I don't know. Working. He said he has to work a lot. He's at work.

Girl: At work? No. He is not working.

Kid: What's he doing?

Girl: He is drinking.

Kid: At his office? Where he works?

Girl: Or at the pub.

Kid: He is that thirsty?

Girl: His kidneys are always dry.

Kid: How do they get dry?

Girl: It's an expression. Dried out kidneys, like the Sahara.

Kid: Sahara?

Girl: The Sahara is a desert. There is only sand there.

Kid: And kidneys?

Girl: They are a body part.

Kid: Like hands and feet?

Girl: Yes. Like that. We have two kidneys too, but they're in our belly.

Kid: When will he be back?

Girl: Don't know. When you're asleep.

Kid: Does Dad love me?

Girl: He loves you. But not me.

Kid: Not you?

Girl: No, he doesn't.

Kid: He probably doesn't have time. And you? You love him, don't you?

Girl: No, I don't either.

Kid: Why? You don't have time either?

Girl: No, me neither.

Kid: When will you have time for it?

Girl: For what?

Kid: Time to love each other.

Girl: It's possible that we may never again.

Kid: Never, ever?

Girl: Never. These things happen sometimes. You understand that, don't you? It means that now we have to do things separately, just like your mates at school.

Kid: There are three in my class, actually four, because now there is Gabor's family too.

Girl: Gabor's too?

Kid: Yes, but I am the only one who knows.

Girl: There will be more and more. By the time you are in the eighth grade, there will be . . .

Kid: But not you, right?

Girl: Well . . . to be honest.

Kid: Not you, right?

Girl: Well . . . actually . . . There is no other way.

Pause

Kid: Does it mean that you are moving out of Grandma's? Will you not be around anymore?

Girl: I will be around, because I am moving out with you.

Kid: With me?

Girl: Yes.

Kid: That's good. But what about Dad? Will he not be around then?

Girl: He will be around too. On weekends. You can be together at the weekends.

Kid: That's not the same as always.

Girl: But he's never home anyway. Not even on Sundays.

Kid: But he comes into my room at night and in the mornings.

Girl: From now on, it will always be me coming in. I will always be with you.

Kid: Will it be us two?

Girl: Yes.

Kid: And sometimes Dad too?

Girl: (*Caressing him*) Yes, sometimes him too.

Scene 4

Room, the mother is putting the phone down.

Father: So, what did he say?

Mother: That it's all okay.

Father: That he is giving it to her?

Mother: Yes.

Father: Just giving it away like that?

Mother: He is.

Father: Why?

Mother: Because I asked.

Father: Because you said we needed it, and then he just said okay, have it then? I don't need it?

Mother: Basically, yes. I also said something about our childhood.

Father: What?

Mother: That they loved him more.

Father: Did they?

Mother: I felt they did. Love is a feeling, after all.

Father: But it's not so straightforward.

Mother: It is for me. I also said that when we needed help, when mum was already bed-ridden, it was me who went to her. I thought it would never end.

Father: But it did.

Mother: It did, and I was there with her. Even then she wouldn't say that it was good to have me around but asked where Laci was. Even then.

Father: She couldn't ask where you were because you were there.

Mother: I was. Laci never lifted a finger for mum.

Father: He wouldn't for himself either. He has a cleaning lady.

Mother: Fair enough, but our parents were our parents; we had to look after them. He could never make time.

Father: I still wouldn't have given away eighty grand, just like that.

Mother: But he did. Because he felt he had to.

Father: That had to feel like shit.

Mother: Not for him. He's not like that.

Father: Everyone is. Everything has a price. This will too.

Mother: It won't. He is close to our family, since he's without kids. Ours feels like his own to him.

Father: Got divorced before he could have any.

Mother: His marriage didn't work out. They were a mismatch.

Father: He wasn't up for it. He didn't want the commitment.

Mother: He would have with the right person. It just didn't happen.

Father: He could have found someone. His engineering career was more important; make it to manager, work affairs, one-night stands.

Mother: Do you envy him?

Father: No. Actually, I don't know. Yes, a little.

Mother: Why, did the family thing not work out for you, then?

Father: Yes, it did, but I can also picture things differently.

Mother: You couldn't picture things then. You couldn't believe you'd become team leader; you thought only others could get it, not you. And without me you couldn't have done it.

Father: There is no way of knowing what I would have become if things hadn't happened the way they did.

Mother: Nothing probably. You needed the family, and it's me who was there to help you, who could tell you what to do.

Father: I thought that for a long time, but I may have become successful too on my own—maybe more. But different, that's for sure.

Mother: Everyone is the way they are. No one can be someone else. You are who you are.

Father: I have become like this.

Mother: You have become like this because you couldn't have become anything else.

Father: Life events also shape a person, not just their character.

Mother: But events are shaped by you. You needed someone to motivate you; you needed a family so that you could see why it's worth doing.

Father: It was you who wanted it this way. I never had the guts to change things because I was afraid that you'd leave me and I'd lose the kid. But actually nobody would have wanted you. I know that now.

Mother: If only you knew how wrong you are. Have you got any idea how many men were after me?

Father: They only wanted you because you were my wife. They only wanted bits of you; no one wanted you as a whole.

Mother: You just carry on believing that.

Father: Not just believing it, I know it, but it's too late. Things can't be changed now.

Mother: You couldn't have done it anyway.

Doorbell rings

Father: Let's drop it. They're here.

Father opens the door.

Father: By yourself?

Girl: He is with his father.

Father: Not coming to Sunday lunch?

Girl: Can't, because he is with his father.

Mother: I won't stop seeing my grandchild because you are divorcing, will I?

Girl: He needs to be with his dad too. A boy can't grow up without a father. He needs a male role model.

Mother: An alcoholic shouldn't be a role model. Especially not for my grandchild.

Girl: He isn't one. He is just a drinker.

Mother: Will be one in five years. Without a wife they all turn into one. It's me who pulled your father back.

Father: I am the one who said I've had enough. Me, you get it? Me. And, no one can possibly say something like that in someone else's name. I said it when it wasn't fun anymore, when I felt that physically and mentally I—

Mother: You said it too, but only after I did.

Father: I said it, but it's enough for me to know that I did.

Girl: (*Taking her coat off*) What did Uncle Laci say?

Mother: Are you curious?

Girl: Of course I am.

Mother: He didn't say anything special.

Girl: But go on, what did he say?

Mother: That we are his family.

Girl: I know that already. So is he willing to give it away?

Mother: He is.

Girl: He doesn't want anything for it?

Mother: Nothing.

Father: That's what I can't quite believe.

Mother: Not everyone is like you. Some stinge bag! Hanging on to your old clothes . . . rather than let me donate them to charity. I had to sneak them out of the cupboard.

Girl: Really, dad?

Father: No, that's not true. I only wanted my favourite tracksuit bottoms, because I love those.

Mother: But look at the state of them! You can't even take out the garbage in them.

Father: But I loved them. Don't you get it?

Mother: You? You don't love anyone, not even your old tracksuit bottoms, only yourself.

Father: Why are you saying this? Why are you always bad-mouthing me?

Girl: Yes, mum, you really shouldn't always go on about Dad; it's bad for me too. After all, Dad is Dad to me. Actually, I was a daddy's girl for a long time.

Mother: I didn't mean anything really, but the fact remains that your father has a very low opinion of everybody.

Father: Not because I don't like them, but I am just a realist with my friends. I don't want to be biased just because they are my friends.

Mother: But if you liked them, you could understand them better.

Father: I do like them. If they need me, I am always here to help—just a phone call away.

Girl: Okay, let's leave this. I have heard this thousands of times. I don't even know how you can stand it—it's like you've memorised the same bunch of phrases.

Father: Because this is our life. This is what was put on our plate.

Mother: Not that one again.

Father: I have heard "I have heard it a thousand times" a thousand times—

Mother: I am only saying that in thirty years, you have said everything that can be said.

Father: I won't say another word then.

Mother: That doesn't make you interesting either. I don't think there is anything going on up there. Just nothing, plus all the stuff you've already said.

Girl: Could I get some attention, please? Or can you give it only to yourselves?

Mother: We've always given you lots of attention. You were what we lived for.

Father: And I got left out along the way.

Mother: Of what?

Father: Let's drop it.

Girl: So did it go smoothly without any hiccups?

Mother: It did.

Girl: When is it possible to move?

Mother: Tomorrow, if need be. Next week is better though. A few things need clearing.

Girl: Mum, this is . . . good.

Mother: Isn't it?

Father: Really good, right?

Mother: You had nothing to do with it, so don't you get involved.

Father: Because he is your brother.

Girl: I would never have thought it could go as smoothly as this.

Mother: You know how I am when it's about you.

Girl: I'll still give Uncle Laci a call though.

Mother: Absolutely. This needs a big thanks.

Girl: Actually, how big is the flat?

Mother: I looked on the papers. Sixty square metres. The smallest room will do for the kid, the bigger for you. You'll be alright for space.

Girl: For now, yes.

Mother: As long as you wish.

Girl: But not if we are three, we wouldn't.

Mother: But there are the two of you.

Girl: At the moment.

Mother: What do you mean at the moment?

Girl: It's possible there will be more of us. The family may grow—two can become three.

Mother: Did you split up because you are seeing someone?

Girl: No, of course not.

Mother: If you are, that would explain the breakup.

Girl: Don't you understand? There is no one.

Mother: What kind of loser would break up a marriage? It's usually secretaries in their thirties, because their only chance is a married man. But why does a man want a woman with a family? They can lay their hands on someone younger—even in their fifties.

Girl: I am telling you I am not seeing anyone, but I don't want to stay single.

Father: And you don't need to. You mustn't. The boy needs to have a father.

Mother: He has a father.

Father: Yes, but they need one at home.

Girl: That's part of it. And it's bad for me, too, to be alone.

Mother: It's better if you prepare yourself for a single life.

Girl: Why?

Mother: With a kid you don't have much chance.

Girl: You really shouldn't encourage me this much.

Mother: It's better to face reality.

Girl: I am facing it.

Mother: If you had been, you wouldn't have divorced.

Girl: If I stay, nothing changes in my life.

Mother: No change is good because then it can't get any worse.

Girl: But can't get any better, either.

Scene 5

Office, name-day celebration drinking. Female colleagues are a little drunk.

Kati: So you're single now?

Girl: I can't find anyone.

Aniko: Have you looked everywhere?

Girl: What do you mean, everywhere?

Aniko: Under the bed? *(Laughs)*

Girl: Silly cow . . .

Kati: It doesn't matter whether you are single or not.

Girl: What do you mean?

Kati: I am repulsed by him.

Girl: By your husband?

Kati: Just the sight of him . . .

Aniko: Don't look.

Kati: I don't. He climbs on me anyway.

Girl: Don't you like it when he does? You don't feel like it?

Kati: I'd vomit if it wasn't for the sheets.

Aniko: Wow. That's brutal.

Girl: I miss it.

Aniko: But you look great. I can't believe that there is no one out there for you.

Girl: The single ones over thirty always have something wrong with them, you know. They are either ugly, stupid, or they drink.

Kati: Or they're gay . . .

(They laugh as they all look towards someone in the room)

Aniko: Oh, like . . .

Girl: He isn't. Is he?

Kati: Didn't you know?

Girl: No.

Aniko: You can even tell by his walk . . .

Girl: It didn't seem any different to me.

Kati: Well, he is.

Girl: So that's him out.

Aniko: Yes, count him out. That's one less available.

Girl: I don't want to be on my own.

Kati: Then why did you leave your husband?

Girl: Because I ended up hating him. And I realised that he wasn't the one. I did it so I didn't have to breathe the same air as my parents.

Kati: Well, what can I say? I am staying because I have got two kids and I am not as brave as you. But then, twice a week I have to put up with his grunting and moaning. I would have never thought that ten minutes can be so fucking long. And it's disgusting when he touches me; however much I try to rationalise it, my skin crawls. I am doing it for the kids, because they need a family. They need to have parents they can love and feel safe with.

Girl: But this is exactly what I didn't want. I don't believe that there isn't an alternative. It must work out for some people.

Kati: I don't think so. They just don't talk about it.

Girl: Just like my parents. I will make sure I don't bury them in the same grave.

Kati: Two graves are double the price, and you have to water the flowers for both.

Girl: I am still not going to stick them together once they're dead.

Kati: It doesn't matter to the dead.

Aniko: Thanks a lot, guys. I've still got everything ahead of me.

Kati: That's the best time, because everything is still possible.

Aniko: Like what?

Kati: You still can dream about all the good stuff and not just the shitty future.

Scene 6

In Mother and Father's living room

Mother: I told you that you shouldn't leave . . . If you ended it, it's part of the deal, this goes with it, you will be alone . . . Who said that they will be queuing up for you? I did tell you that with a kid, no one will want you . . . What will you do if you have to be alone? . . . Is this my problem now? I can't resolve it for you. I helped with the flat . . . You should be grateful you are not renting, at least, and that newest loser of yours has somewhere to stay . . . You say you don't want the leftovers? Only the real one will do now, will it? That the real one will be next . . . Do you think your father was the real one for me? . . . Well, no. But he was the one around when needed, and then you try to choose the lesser evil . . . Others are lonely too. And the ones who don't feel it yet will feel it later. No one has got anyone; they just live together because they think they have to— . . . I have told you that . . . It's definitely not my fault, that you are alone at thirty; I am not to be blamed for that.

(Mother puts the phone down)

Father: What is she saying?

Mother: Same as always, upset that she hasn't got a husband.

Father: She had one, but didn't want it.

Mother: That's what I said too, that she had one.

Father: What does she want then? At least she has got a kid.

Mother: It's not enough for her.

Father: She'll eventually find someone.

Mother: Apparently her generation are all married.

Father: They'll divorce.

Mother: She doesn't want to break up a marriage.

Father: Not good to anyway. Actually, it wouldn't have been ethical either.

Mother: It's a pity that you have only just realised that.

Father: Realised what?

Mother: What is ethical.

Father: I didn't just realize—I have always known.

Mother: Then somehow you must have forgotten.

Father: When?

Mother: When you were seeing that stupid bimbo from human resources.

Father: Why do you always have to bring that up?

Mother: I am just saying that you could have remembered your ethics then.

Father: I needed someone—you know that. I needed someone because you weren't interested in me.

Mother: I did the laundry and kept the house in order. That is a woman's job at home.

Father: Other things needed doing, but you were always too tired.

Mother: A person can get bored with that. You can't do the same old things in bed over a lifetime—everything always the same. As soon as the kid fell asleep, grabbing me, all frantic to get what you wanted.

Father: I'd been waiting for hours.

Mother: But we couldn't do anything when the kid was up.

Father: Even after that, you were in the kitchen. I was in bed waiting and was thinking you were waiting for me to fall asleep so that you didn't have to.

Mother: With women it doesn't work the same way. You have to create something . . .

Father: What?

Mother: A mood.

Father: The mood was I wanted you. For years I did. Ten years went by and I still did. Then twenty and I still wanted . . .

Mother: You didn't give me any attention. I barely got under the duvet and you were pulling me under you. You had no idea what a woman is like, what she needs, you thought it was the same as for you. Well, it isn't.

Father: Because you didn't love me.

Mother: The basic rule of marriage is that we love each other. There is no need to constantly prove it.

Father: That girl was different. She understood me. She wanted me, not a husband.

Mother: Didn't she want you to marry her then?

Father: Only so she could give me more. More love.

Mother: And you believed it?

Father: It was true. She didn't have the opportunity to love me, just a few hours in secrecy.

Mother: If it had been more, she would be the one sitting here—not me. And she'd be exactly like me, just ten years younger. No one is better than anyone.

Father: I only stayed because I didn't want to harm the kid, I didn't want her not to have a father.

Mother: No. You stayed because you didn't have it in you to start again. This marriage only worked out because of me.

Father: I stayed for the kid so that I could love her and she could love me.

Mother: You don't need to stay because of her now.

Father: She left because of you.

Mother: Who looked for her at night?

Father: Because you said it would be my fault if something happened to her.

Mother: You would have gone anyway.

Father: You didn't allow her to make her own decisions in things that she easily could have made. You did with her what you did with your mum and dad. You were always right.

Mother: Why didn't you say something, if you didn't like the way I did things?

Father: I couldn't say anything because you said that if someone keeps a lover, they better shut up. And I did. Everything is like this because I shut up and let you reorganise everybody's life. But I didn't want what you did.

Mother: You didn't want anything.

Scene 7

Dating agency 's office

Girl: I am a little embarrassed to be here, actually. I am not here as a last resort, I just would like to look at my options.

Matchmaker: Miss, everyone is embarrassed in these situations, but this goes with the territory, and I understand exactly. If I didn't, this wouldn't be my job. But there is no need to worry. Up to now, all our customers have left satisfied.

Girl: It's just that . . . this is not how it's supposed to be. You are supposed to fall in love and then—

Matchmaker: You need a little help. Nowadays, everyone is so busy. People don't get the chance to meet anyone because they don't have the opportunities.

Girl: Yes, but it's hard to accept it emotionally . . . that you can do things this way too.

Matchmaker: Not to worry, Miss, I will find the right man for you. I have been in your shoes myself.

Girl: Really? The same happened to you?

Matchmaker: Worse—I have got two kids. I know it's a bit like losing a coffeemaker and opening a café (*they laugh*). But life goes on and I was able to hold on to the coffeemaker and the flat, actually—because of the kids, really.

Girl: That's lucky.

Matchmaker: I know what it's like to be in this situation. Believe me, you've come to the best place. If you had gone to a shrink, you wouldn't have got anywhere, not even after a year. You would just pay and talk for years, analyse everything and come up with the idea that when you were a baby you were in love with your father's penis . . .

Girl: What?

Matchmaker: They can find out stuff like that . . .

Girl: It's that advanced now?

Matchmaker: A lot of water has gone under the bridge since Freud.

Girl: Well, this is still hard for me, really . . .

Matchmaker: We are action people, so there is no need to fear any talking, or guilt-tripping, or any other phobias. Simply tell us what type you would like.

Girl: You mean, lookswise?

Matchmaker: That too, and personalitywise—the whole person, really. And then I will try to get a close match . . .

Girl: Well, six feet tall . . . Prefer darker hair, and if I can be choosy—

Matchmaker: Of course you can. What age?

Girl: Over thirty really . . .

Matchmaker: With a degree?

Girl: Yes, he would have to have one.

Matchmaker: Any hobbies, activities?

Girl: I don't care as long as it's not something crazy like bodybuilding or gambling.

Matchmaker: Of course not, I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy. Basically, we wouldn't even have anyone weird like that on our list.

Girl: Good. It's just that you meet so many different people, and I am a bit cautious. I wouldn't want to get involved in anything weird, but I know that having a kid makes it harder.

Matchmaker: Not necessarily.

Girl: Really?

Matchmaker: (*Turning pages*) If it works, the kid won't change anything, he will just fit in with the new ones.

Girl: Which new ones?

Matchmaker: Well, the ones that the other partner brings.

Girl: I wouldn't want one who also has—

Matchmaker: Not with kids, then?

Girl: No. It's enough that I have one.

Matchmaker: So this is a deal breaker for you?

Girl: It isn't for others?

Matchmaker: We will find someone without a child then, someone who is okay with you having one. You will be different from each other in that regard.

Girl: In what?

Matchmaker: Regarding the child.

Girl: I wouldn't want to raise someone else's.

Matchmaker: I can understand that. You will have more anyway.

Girl: What will I have more of?

Matchmaker: Children. Don't you want any more?

Girl: I couldn't even think of it while single, but with the right person I probably wouldn't say no.

Matchmaker: Well then, your partner, Miss, oh let's not be formal, as we are talking so intimately. You don't mind, do you, as I am older anyway?

Girl: I thought we were the same age.

Matchmaker: No, I am past forty. But all these successful love stories here have made me look younger . . .

Girl: You didn't have any work done?

Matchmaker: Nothing, just the simplest cream really.

Girl: It's unbelievable that—

Matchmaker: Please, don't—it's me who is going to get embarrassed . . . So (*looking through in her book*), this man here will be your partner. (*Takes out his picture and shows it.*)

Girl: This one?

Matchmaker: You don't like him?

Girl: Yes, I do, a lot. But isn't he married yet? He doesn't have a wife?

Matchmaker: He did have a relationship, but it didn't work out.

Girl: Any kids?

Matchmaker: None. I told you I will not drag you into something that you don't want. I know my clients . . .

Girl: I can barely believe that a man like that is single. He must have some flaws. Does he drink?

Matchmaker: Of course not.

Girl: Take drugs?

Matchmaker: What are you thinking? I told you if they have problems, they don't even make the list.

Girl: But isn't he—So, isn't it because he is . . .

Matchmaker: He isn't gay, if that's what you are thinking.

Girl: Gosh, I was getting worried.

Matchmaker: And he isn't bisexual either.

Girl: So what could be wrong with him then?

Matchmaker: With this client everything is absolutely fine.

Girl: Are you sure? Not even something small? Everybody has got something wrong with them.

Matchmaker: Well . . .

Girl: I knew there must be something.

Matchmaker: Well, to be honest, there is a tiny thing, but it's not really that relevant . . .

Girl: Still, what is it?

Matchmaker: He . . . He is not very good with money, and he doesn't know how to sell himself in the work environment . . . He doesn't know the modern way of presenting himself at interviews . . .

Girl: It's just that? Wow, what a huge weight off my shoulders.

Matchmaker: I can see that. (*Laughs*) So money seems to slip through his fingers. Money just slips through his fingers.

Girl: The past is the past. I will teach him.

Matchmaker: I like a determined person.

Girl: If someone is without goals, they shouldn't expect anything from life.

Matchmaker: You are absolutely right; you can meet each other on Saturday night at our club then.

Girl: What club?

Matchmaker: Well, it's actually like a pub.

Girl: A pub?

Matchmaker: Yes, but you can also have tea, and there is music and the staff are very discrete.

Girl: Can anyone go in, then?

Matchmaker: Anyone, yes, but mainly the ones I send there because I have a close—more like an exclusive—relationship with the owner.

Girl: But isn't there the risk of . . .

Matchmaker: No, of course not; this is a discrete place. And I want to share something with you.

Girl: What?

Matchmaker: This is how the owner found himself a partner.

Girl: Through a dating agency?

Matchmaker: Yes, but back then this club and this office didn't exist.

Girl: Then how?

Matchmaker: At my flat, actually. That's what I used then—well, one of the rooms.

Girl: And you found him the right person?

Matchmaker: For him and for someone else too—

Girl: I am assuming for a lady too.

Matchmaker: You could say that.

Girl: I don't understand.

Matchmaker: Well, for myself too.

Girl: So this means that . . .

Matchmaker: That's right. We have been together ever since. That was my first job and it worked out straightaway. Your future marriage is built on this success.

Girl: It's reassuring to see a positive example.

Matchmaker: And this one is a positive one. You can bet on it.

Girl: I shouldn't bet on anything, don't you think?

Matchmaker: It's just a saying.

Girl: I know, but in my situation, you see, things could very well not work out. I am superstitious.

Matchmaker: You are different. You are strong. Have faith in yourself. On Saturday everything will sort itself out if you want it to.

Girl: I want it to.

Scene 8

Little boy arrives at his grandparents'. A few years have gone by since the first scene. Doorbell rings.

Mother: He is here.

Father: I can hear it. I am on my way.

Kid: Good afternoon, Granddad.

Father: Oh good, we were starting to get worried.

Kid: Good afternoon, Grandma. School just finished, I came right away.

Mother: Come on, quick, your lunch will get cold.

The kid throws his stuff down, enters the room, and sits in the chair that Uncle Laci will later sit on.

Father: Are you sitting comfortably?

Kid: Yes, I am.

Father: That is the best seat.

Kid: Why?

Father: From there you get a good view of the window, the whole table, and even the TV.

Mother: All the seats are good.

Kid: The TV isn't even on.

Father: It's not on because we are eating.

Kid: It doesn't matter then.

Father: What?

Kid: That you can see it from here.

Father: Doesn't matter now.

Mother: How was school?

Kid: We had five lessons.

Mother: Isn't that a lot?

Kid: Six would be a lot.

Father: Do you like your teacher?

Mother: Women again?

Father: What women?

Kid: The teacher.

Mother: The boy knows this stuff already. He is no different, will turn out just like you.

Father: He is old enough to differentiate between a man and a woman.

Mother: I am not talking about that.

Kid: Yes, I like her.

Mother: Who do you like?

Kid: The teacher lady.

Mother: Oh, yes of course. Do you have friends?

Kid: Yes, I do.

Father: How many?

Kid: A lot.

Mother: Are they good students?

Kid: They are.

Mother: It's important to befriend those.

Father: Why only those? He can be friends with anyone he likes.

Mother: Better not with anyone else.

Father: Actually I used to have gypsy friends.

Mother: Let's leave this gypsy thing in front of the boy.

Father: Why?

Mother: I don't want him to talk about gypsies at school, and for the school to think that he heard it from us when we are not prejudiced like that.

Father: I wasn't being derogatory.

Kid: Dad took me to the pool on Sunday.

Father: You can swim? You didn't say.

Kid: I can.

Father: And where did mum take you?

Kid: When?

Mother: Sunday.

Kid: On Sundays I am with dad.

Mother: Oh yes, of course. It escaped my mind.

Father: Do you like the soup?

Kid: It's nice. What kind is it?

Mother: Parsnip cream soup.

Kid: From a packet?

Mother: Isn't it good from a packet?

Kid: It is. The packet one is my favorite. I saw the ad on TV. Looked really good.

Mother: Doesn't this look good, too?

Kid: This looks really good too, but I meant that did, too.

Mother: Well, that's okay. Grandad is bringing the meat in soon.

Kid: I don't want any meat.

Mother: How come you don't want any?

Kid: I am not hungry.

Mother: You are probably not eating properly at home, and your stomach must have shrunk.

Kid: No, it's just I also ate at school.

Mother: At the school too?

Kid: Yes, because I am on school dinners.

Mother: Why am I cooking then?

Father: We eat at home too.

Mother: I wouldn't bother for my sake. A little bread and ham is plenty for me.

Father: I like it if there is some hot food.

Kid: You are cooking so that there will be some left for the days I don't eat here.

Mother: Yes, sure. I didn't think of that.

Father: I didn't think so.

Mother: What?

Father: That you didn't think of me.

Mother: So what about you?

Father: That I also eat at home.

Scene 9

The dating agency's club. A bit bare. Semi darkness. Oldies playing. Chatting couples obviously at different stages of relationships. A man, alone, is waiting at the table. The Girl arrives.

Girl: Hi.

Second Man: Hi. Did you recognise me straightaway?

Girl: The picture helped.

Second Man: I recognised you too.

Girl: Well—and you are the only one by yourself, apart from the waiter.

Man: Do you want a drink?

Girl: Something not too fancy.

Second Man: What do you have in mind?

Girl: The Hawaiian cocktail on this picture (*showing him the drink menu*).

Second Man: Is that not too fancy?

Girl: Well, it's possible that I used the wrong word. I meant something not too strong.

Second Man: No, you didn't use the right word.

Girl: Does it matter that I didn't?

Second Man: No, no, just the precise type. Engineering degree. And I'm into computing. You can't be vague.

Girl: That's good then. Precise people are reliable.

Second Man: Yes, they are.

Girl: And that is exactly the type I need.

Second Man: What type?

Girl: The reliable partner type.

Second Man: Me too.

Girl: Then, we have a lot in common.

Second Man: In what?

Girl: In that we both want reliable partners.

Second Man: That's right, we are the same in that. Shall we dance?

Girl: I don't know, isn't that too soon?

Second Man: I have been looking for a year.

Girl: Actually me too, more like for three years, really. But you see, because of the kid it can't be just anyone.

Second Man: I know, the agency told me.

Girl: But it's not a problem, is it?

Second Man: Of course not, we will become mates. Does he like . . . ?

Girl: What?

Second Man: Does he like boys' stuff?

Girl: He does. Droids and GI Joes.

Second Man: What?

Girl: They're the boy toys nowadays, not soldiers.

Second Man: Pity, because I am really good at playing soldiers. I wanted to become one when I was a kid.

Girl: Aren't you disappointed you didn't become one?

Second Man: Life comes with disappointments. What's important is that you know how to deal with them.

Girl: And do you know how?

Second Man: If I didn't I wouldn't be here.

Girl: What do you mean? I am part of the therapy?

Second Man: No, of course not, it's only like that with people who can't handle these things. And you wouldn't give them the time of day anyway, as they would be psychopaths or addicts.

Girl: But not you?

Second Man: Of course not. Do you want to dance?

Girl: This slow one is good.

They dance.

Scene 10

Sunday lunch at the parents'. Father and Mother are peeking through the window.

Mother: They are coming.

Father: It's about time. *(He gets closer to the window.)*

Mother: He doesn't look bad at all.

Father: Why would he look bad?

Mother: I didn't think that a woman with a kid had any chances.

Father: Why wouldn't she?

Mother: I wouldn't have had any when I was that age.

Father: No, you wouldn't have.

Mother: Why do you have to say that now?

Father: Others would have had chances.

Mother: No, they wouldn't have. They were different times. Women didn't have these opportunities. He is not even shorter than her.

Father: No. Because he is taller.

Mother: And isn't fat.

Father: No, he isn't.

Doorbell rings

Father: *(Opening the door)* Come on in.

Second Man: Good afternoon. Here I am, sir.

Father: Please, formalities are not for me. Keep those for the mother.

Second Man: Thank you—from now on then. I was ready to be formal. Sorry if I messed up.

Father: You will get used to it. Formalities don't matter with us. We are not like that.

Second Man: Good afternoon, ma'am.

Mother: Good afternoon. I am glad to finally meet you. I have heard a lot about you.

Father: The kid?

Girl: With his father, Sundays are his.

Mother: It slipped my mind.

Girl: Could we go in instead of crowding in the hall here?

Father: Of course, come on in, come on in, you must be hungry.

Awkwardness in the hall, bumping into each other, they don't know how to get around each other.

Girl: Listen, we simply can't all fit here.

Father: Yeah, that's right. I'll go first then, and really—apologies for this narrow hall. Please take a seat.

Mother: I am bringing the soup.

Mother brings the soup out.

Girl: What kind of soup is it?

Mother: Cream of parsnip.

Girl: From a packet?

Mother: But I added sour cream.

Girl: Why do we have to eat such artificial stuff on Sundays?

Mother: That's all I've got energy for. I am doing it all alone. You know your father isn't—

Father: I set the table. You didn't have to do that.

Mother: Compared to cooking, it's nothing.

Second Man: I like it.

Mother: Yes, it's not so bad, is it?

Father: What do you do?

Mother: We know he is an engineer.

Father: Oh, yes we do. Where do you live?

Girl: What is all this cross-examining about?

Father: I am just showing interest.

Second Man: It's not a problem at all. Really. I have a bachelor's flat in the outskirts of Pest.
That's where I live.

Mother: Don't you need a bigger place? How old are you?

Second Man: It didn't matter till now, but it will be different from now on.

Father: So you are serious about this?

Second Man: Yes, it's time to take these things seriously.

Girl: Especially now.

Mother: Why especially now?

Girl: Now that I am pregnant.

Second Man: You are pregnant? You didn't say anything.

Girl: I thought it would be a surprise. And I wasn't completely sure.

Second Man: We should have discussed this beforehand . . .

Girl: You are the one who said not to use contraceptives.

Second Man: But this is so sudden.

Mother: Another kid?

Girl: That is how we can become a family.

Father: I am a little surprised myself.

Girl: You will have another grandchild.

Father: Okay, but still—it's a little unexpected.

Mother: Another kid in that small flat?

Girl: We will move by then.

Father: When?

Girl: By the time the kid arrives.

Second Man: A kid and moving, it's all going a little too fast for me.

Girl: (*Stroking him*) It will be good, believe me. We wanted a kid, and now we have one.

Second Man: I thought you needed more time to think about things like that. And that after you decided such things, it would take a little while after that. And I also thought that I would be the one to hear about it first.

Girl: I did want to tell you first, but it just slipped out. But you are pleased, aren't you?

Second Man: I am still in shock, so I can't just be yet—but I will be soon.

Father: This gives meaning to a man's life. Otherwise we wouldn't do anything. If we didn't have to provide for our family, it would just be the pub and our mates. I actually have a theory that it is because of children that there is a European culture.

Second Man: I thought it was because of the cold weather. Because you have to build houses and have heating, as opposed to where blacks live, where they've got bananas hanging off trees and, no doubt, you don't even need to wear underpants, it's so hot.

Mother: Well, family is the most important thing—that's how our society evolved. By the way, research proves that women who have brought up kids live longer than those who lived alone.

Second Man: And the men?

Mother: That, I don't know.

Father: It may be better not to know.

Second Man: We were going to go to Corfu. I have already paid for it.

Girl: We can still go; it's only the third month. Doesn't even show yet. You can easily wear a swimsuit and do anything . . .

Mother: You are going to Corfu?

Girl: We need a shared experience.

Father: What will happen to the kid?

Girl: He is going to the lake with his father.

Mother: Shouldn't you all go together?

Girl: That's not what it's about now. It's about the two of us.

Mother: He could stay with us.

Girl: He can't now.

Mother: Why not?

Girl: He'll be with his father.

Mother: I am getting the meat. You are not vegetarian, are you? Or some Asian type?

Second Man: What do you mean, Asian?

Mother: Like Krishna believers.

Second Man: No, I am not religious.

Father: We're not either.

Mother: Only you aren't.

Father: Well, are you?

Mother: I have always been.

Father: When did you last go to church?

Mother: It has nothing to do with church. Besides, I wouldn't know which one to go to.

Girl: To a Catholic one, where Grandma went too.

Mother: But your grandad didn't go there.

Girl: Of course not. Because he didn't go anywhere.

Father: Only to Party meetings.

Mother: Because he had to for his job. Anyway, he was a specialist in his field, wasn't into politics at all.

Father: I know, I am just saying that he went there and not to church.

Mother: Yes, but not in his childhood.

Father: I think we should leave your father's childhood alone; there is no need to analyse everything.

Girl: I am actually quite interested, since you started it.

Father: Childhood is only of interest to psychologists so they can make the kids hate their parents.

Girl: You don't need a psychologist for that.

A little silence.

Mother: Only half, really.

Girl: What is half?

Mother: He was only half of what he was.

Girl: Who?

Mother: Your grandad, and I only a little, and you not at all.

Father: Will you bring that meat in? I am starving!

Girl: What am I not?

Mother: I am coming.

ACT TWO

Eight to ten years later.

Scene 1

A street.

First Man: Hi. I haven't seen you for a while.

Girl: Me either. Actually, I saw you once.

First Man: Where?

Girl: I don't remember. Just from the bus. Are you all right?

First Man: I am.

Girl: And your daughter?

First Man: She is ten. And yours?

Girl: Ten and eight.

First Man: You've got two now.

Girl: Yes, two. And your wife?

First Man: She isn't anymore.

Girl: How come?

First Man: Just like you. She left and took the kid.

Girl: I am sorry to hear that.

First Man: I only married her because you had found someone new. If you hadn't, I wouldn't have started all over again. I wouldn't have burdened myself with a long-term project.

Girl: So, it's still my fault, is it? You are still pointing at me when things go wrong?

First Man: Not anymore. But when I married her I still did. And the kid came along for that reason too. In a way it's lucky I am only just finding out you have got two.

Girl: How about work?

First Man: I went bankrupt.

Girl: So you are unemployed?

First Man: Yeah.

Girl: Since when?

First Man: It's been six months.

Girl: What do you live on?

First Man: Off the benefits for awhile, and nowadays I am working for a mate of mine.

Girl: Doing what?

First Man: He does flat renovations, and I take care of the plumbing and electrics.

Girl: So, you do have a job then.

First Man: Mostly in the spring. And the kid?

Girl: What about him?

First Man: Do you know how he is?

Girl: We talk on the phone sometimes. Don't you?

First Man: He doesn't call me.

Girl: You can call him too.

First Man: I don't have any credit on my phone.

Girl: He is well. A bit provincial.

First Man: You wanted that.

Girl: You too.

First Man: Not me, no. I just didn't dare say anything in case you'd think that I didn't mean well.

Girl: If he hadn't gone to boarding school, what do you think he would have been like at home?
He was friends with some terrible kids, none had proper parents. Mothers and fathers all over the place.

First Man: Same with our kid.

Girl: We were well organised, though.

First Man: He is still the kid of divorced parents.

Girl: We are all better for it—and that it happened early enough. It would have been much worse to go through years of fighting.

First Man: Maybe, but I didn't want him to be sent away.

Girl: His teacher said he wouldn't pass that year unless I sent him away.

First Man: But he didn't have to go so far away.

Girl: The teachers there were priests. At least they've got some morality left.

First Man: Right, they abuse kids . . .

Girl: These weren't like that. I struggled with him at home. And he didn't have a father.

First Man: What do you mean he didn't have one?

Girl: Only the weekends. All he saw was that you haven't made a success of yourself. A new kid, another divorce, you were too busy with yourself. You were not able to be like a real father to him, someone he could look up to.

First Man: Look, you had something to do with this as well.

Girl: No. That was simply your doing. And you were not a role model for him. Worse, you were a negative role model, and that is why he went to the boarding school. And he is alright at the university in Pécs. It's a lovely town.

First Man: But I never see him.

Girl: He is an adult.

First Man: Does he ever visit?

Girl: Rarely.

First Man: He isn't happy anywhere.

Girl: But he is.

First Man: Where?

Girl: Where he is now. Are you growing a beard?

First Man: No, I just didn't shave.

Girl: Why not?

First Man: I didn't think I'd meet anyone today.

Girl: Sorry, I have to go. I am meeting someone.

First Man: Are things okay with you at home?

Girl: Every woman wants this. Two kids, a husband, and a family home in Buda's leafy suburbs.

First Man: Really?

Girl: Yes, from selling my grandmother's flat and my husband's bachelor pad.

First Man: You told me that you are only willing to live in Buda proper.

Girl: As a matter of fact, it is Buda. Hardly any difference. And it's good for the kids to have a garden, and we are friendly with the neighbours. And you are still outside Pest?

First Man: In a Buda suburb now.

Girl: Of course—I am being stupid. I don't even know why I said that . . .

First Man: Well, as it happens, I do live on the outskirts of town now.

Girl: Why? Is it any good there?

First Man: I didn't have much choice. When my parents died we sold the house in the suburbs.

Girl: That wasn't a bad house, really.

First Man: No, it wasn't. My old man built it. It had a few issues, but basically it was good—expandable, even. But my wife didn't like it.

Girl: No, I didn't like it at all.

First Man: I meant my second wife.

Girl: Oh, I thought I was the only one who didn't like it—didn't realise she didn't either.

First Man: No, she didn't. We bought another one; they live there now.

Girl: Who?

First Man: My ex-wife and my daughter. I believe someone else has moved in.

Girl: I get it. Sorry, I really have to get going.

First Man: If he calls you, tell him to call me.

Girl: Who?

First Man: The kid.

Girl: Ah, of course I will.

Scene 2

A café. The Girl walks in, two other women—Aniko and Kati—are already there.

Kati: We thought you weren't going to show up.

Girl: I ran into my ex-husband.

Kati: Ran into him? Don't you keep in touch?

Girl: There is no need anymore.

Aniko: How come?

Girl: There is no need for the kid's sake. And there wouldn't be any other reason. I haven't seen him for ten years.

Aniko: So what was he like?

Girl: You only have to look at him to know that to divorce him was the best decision ever. He is now divorced from his second wife too. He lives in poverty in a studio flat in the fucking outskirts somewhere, no credit on his phone, and—I almost forgot—he is unemployed.

Aniko: Poor guy.

Girl: Don't feel sorry for him. He doesn't deserve it.

Kati: You did leave him, after all.

Girl: When was that? Fifteen years ago? What, he can't sort himself out in all that time? I hope you are not about to tell me I am responsible for his fucked up life. Look at me. I had a few shit years, but I fixed everything.

Aniko: It doesn't work out for everyone. To some people a blow like a divorce is enough to knock them back—enough so they can't start over again. They get stuck with the idea that nothing will ever work out for them.

Kati: Are you dating another loser again?

Aniko: Not at all! I am just able to understand those who run out of luck. It's not their fault. One bad move . . . Let's say that he married you and then got divorced and that's it . . .

Girl: You can only divorce people like him.

Aniko: You don't know what could have happened if things turned out differently in his life.

Girl: You have only got this one life. There isn't another one, and it wouldn't be possible.

Aniko: You are too harsh.

Girl: With myself too, though. Generally, I only say things about people I would say about myself. He, by the way, had his parents, who helped a lot. There was something to build on. I had no one, you see—did everything with my own hands.

Kati: You did inherit your grandma's flat, didn't you?

Girl: I had to fight for that . . .

Aniko: It's easier to fight than to earn the twenty million that it cost.

Girl: Since then I tripled its value.

Kati: But not with your salary.

Girl: That's in it too. And it's work to be able to deal with money. It's not enough to earn it. Do you know how much I made on it by the time we moved out?

Kati: How much? Actually I know, you already said.

Girl: It's gone up since then, property prices here are skyrocketing. I knew about location.

Kati: Does it matter what it's worth? If it were cheaper you would still be living in it just the same.

Girl: It matters to me. I am happier if I know it's worth more.

Kati: What, so you are sitting in your armchair and feeling that this place has got some value?

Girl: Yes, I do, that this is not some shitsville dump where you don't know if you'll get through the night, or whether your neighbour is going to break through the wall and rob you.

Aniko: Let's move on from this nonsense. Who is interested in property prices anyway?

Girl: I am.

Aniko: But I am not.

Girl: You two started it, I really only wanted to talk about how you all are.

Aniko: Same here. But it's hard to start when we see each other so rarely. It was easier at work when we saw each other every day. How do I start to say that I am feeling really shit actually, because I am thirty-nine years old and completely alone, and that every two years I date worse guys?

Girl: But I thought you were dating the guy of your dreams recently . . .

Aniko: He went back to his wife—said he could not imagine starting the same stuff all over again.

Kati: I knew this would happen.

Girl: How could you?

Kati: Life experience.

Aniko: When did you have life experience like that?

Kati: My husband, too, always comes back. At first I was scared that he had a lover and that she'd pull him away and that he'd leave and have a new family, new kids, and end up ignoring the old ones. But he always comes back. He doesn't dare give up the hot meals. He doesn't know what's in store for him in a new relationship, so he stays.

Girl: Isn't it crap for you when he has a girlfriend?

Kati: I got used to it. It was shit at the beginning. Then I got bored of it. I don't ask him where he is going or when he is coming back, who he gets texts from. He does what he wants. There are, of course, some rules though. If he doesn't break those, I don't give a shit. I don't love him anymore—just got used to us being here together. A family. For the kids.

Girl: Do they still live at home?

Kati: The eldest isn't anymore, and the youngest wants to move out soon.

Girl: It won't be easy when he's gone too.

Kati: I can't quite imagine it yet. Until now, it was all about the kids.

Girl: Is it not about them?

Kati: I don't know, now they'll soon be gone. The question is: What next? I can't believe how quickly it has all gone.

Aniko: No. No. It hasn't gone. It will be different, that's all. I, for example, get along really well with my parents. We go on holidays together. I don't resent them.

Kati: It's because you don't have a husband and kids. If you had, you wouldn't be with your parents.

Aniko: Ouch! Not sure that was necessary.

Kati: Why not? It's the truth. Only single people hang out with their parents.

Girl: But you will have grandkids.

Kati: Those won't be mine. It could be good if one of them divorced and moved in with me, with the kid . . .

Aniko: But then your daughter's life would be all screwed up.

Kati: Not necessarily. She might be better of with me than with her husband.

Girl: That is such bullshit.

Kati: You are lucky that you could start all over again.

Girl: You do feel younger this way. All the women I hang out with are ten years younger than me. I don't feel it at all. It's like we were the same age. It's the kids' ages that determine how old you feel.

Aniko: I don't have any.

Girl: You could still have them.

Aniko: Last minute.

Kati: Try it on your own. Lots of women do it. It's not the way it used to be—people pointing fingers, gossiping behind your back about who the father could be, and calling you a slut.

Aniko: I have thought of that too. I am a member of every single dating website so that I could get pregnant by someone, disappear, and have it by myself, but you can't believe the losers. I can't lower my standards to that degree.

Kati: All you need is sperm.

Aniko: But it still can't be from just anyone. And you have to sleep with them at least once.

Girl: But after it's been too long, don't you just go for anyone, when everything reminds you of it, even a cucumber?

Aniko: Yes, cucumbers have started to do that. The men worth checking out, anyway, they lie about absolutely everything on the Net. Then you meet them and your jaw drops because they look nothing like what they said. They are ten years older, or have three kids and they need someone because they lost their wife to cancer last year. I went to someone's flat once and found a notebook with a list of how many women he'd slept with.

Kati: But not with you?

Aniko: Well, to be honest . . .

Girl: After you realised that you would end up on the list?

Aniko: Well, at least he reached the cucumber standard.

They laugh.

Kati: How are things with you?

Girl: Everything is fine.

Aniko: Don't you ever think that you made the wrong decision, maybe?

Girl: Days go by so quickly. A mother of two doesn't have time to think. Ferrying the kids around. School, swimming, private English lessons, Corfu in the summer, and stuff like that .

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Aniko: Two?

Girl: What do you mean two?

Aniko: Well, two kids?

Girl: Yes. Even two is too many sometimes.

Kati: But it's been a while since you worked.

Girl: Don't you think that it's work to keep that fucking big house tidy?

Kati: But if you had a job on top of it, then it would—

Girl: This is my job.

Aniko: I couldn't bear being kept by a man.

Girl: Especially since you don't have anyone who could keep you. If you had one you would change your mind.

Aniko: No, I wouldn't.

Girl: You don't know that.

Aniko: You couldn't even divorce, even if you wanted to.

Girl: But I don't want to.

Scene 3

At home. It's the evening. The man arrives home.

Second Man: The kids?

Girl: They are already asleep.

Second Man: They are always asleep when I get home.

Girl: Because you come home when they are already asleep. If you came home when they weren't asleep, they would be awake.

Second Man: I work shit hard.

Girl: Others too; they still manage to come home on time.

Second Man: I always hurry, but can't leave earlier. It's company policy. I am the first to leave anyway.

Girl: 'Cause they don't have anyone to go back to. And sure won't, working this way.

Second Man: No, it's because it's an American company. When it's evening here for us, everybody is still working in New York. They need to order stuff for the manufacturing. These software programs become obsolete in five minutes, and it's a rush against time, or someone else comes up with it.

Girl: To tell you the truth, I am not an environmentalist. I can't look at my life from a globalisation point of view. I can't think how world events impact my everyday life. Do you get it? I can't accept that I don't have a husband and the kids don't have a father because of a company's policy.

Second Man: This is the only way. The ones who don't do it like this are completely broke. I am sure that you wouldn't want that. I don't think you could give up the car, the holidays, and the house, which we owe shit loads on.

Girl: We made a joint decision to have these things.

Second Man: I didn't have a choice when the kids came along. We had the house, then you. Well, not in that order, but it ended up all shit.

Girl: Don't blame the family. You are doing it because you like to.

Second Man: No. I hate it.

Girl: It's not true. I can see it on you that you enjoy going to work.

Second Man: I might as well try to do it with a positive attitude if I have to do it anyway.

Girl: You can't talk yourself into it that much. Admit you are happy when you leave home.

Second Man: If you didn't fucking nag me all the time, I would be happy to be at home.

Girl: I am nagging you because work is more important to you than we are.

Second Man: The nagging came first.

Girl: I know exactly what came first, because I remember everything. You don't know anything about what goes on at home because you are never at home. You don't even know what my problem is because you are not at home—so how would you know what my problem is, if my problem is that you are not home?

Second Man: Let's go to bed. I need to sleep. I put in twelve hours a day; I can't deal with these big arguments at night.

Girl: We never discuss anything.

Second Man: I have to go to work tomorrow. If you are bored, get yourself signed up for some classes—drama therapy or yoga—but do not nag me every night. I am under such pressure. These kids who were born into programming, they are nipping at my heels. Do you get it? They grew up binary. They will fucking walk all over me, the fuckers, and then it's kiss good-bye to this lifestyle.

Girl: I don't care about money.

Second Man: If you didn't have it, it's all you'd care about. The reason other things matter more is because we have some. A housewife in India would not have a leg to stand on with this argument.

Girl: But we are not in India. If we were there, we would compare it to other things; but we can only compare things to what we've got over here.

Second Man: I am sure all this crap won't last long anyway. The Arabs or the Chinese will blow it all up. Everything will collapse. There will be no more traveller's checks and Adriatic beach holidays. It will be the Middle Ages, get it? Then you'll be happy if you can scavenge something to eat and not freeze in the winter.

Girl: I don't give a shit about what will happen, because it's not what we have now. I want to live now—the way a family should live. Like my parents who deserve respect for standing by and helping each other.

Second Man: You've been saying that their marriage is worth fuck all, and the only reason they didn't divorce was because of you. They actually should have *because* of you.

Girl: They still have other values in their lives.

Second Man: Like what?

Girl: They hold the family together.

Second Man: With force.

Girl: But we are still together. At least on Sundays. But—you hate them.

Second Man: No. I don't hate them. We do get along.

Girl: Then it's me who you don't love.

Second Man: I do love you. I love you the way I love you. It looked like it was going to work out between us when we first met. And I didn't want it to be the way it was with Gabi when she left one morning and never came back—didn't pick up the phone and I never found out why. She never said she wasn't happy with me, or what I did wrong. She never said, Look Adam, we need to discuss things, and I didn't notice anything apart from it was lovely and good for me. It was bad when she left. I came back from work and there was nothing there. Not even a note saying good-bye. Only empty drawers. I then decided that this wouldn't happen again. I can only love this much. Not more.

Girl: You should love me more, same as you loved Gabi.

Scene 4

Flat doorbell rings. The four of them are standing there: the Girl, the Man and the two Kids. The Father lets them in. We have jumped forward approximately six years.

Father: Only the four of you?

Girl: Four, yes.

Mother: How many did you expect?

Eldest kid: Hello, Grandad!

Youngest kid: Hello!

Father: I was just asking, that's all. Hello everyone.

Mother: You are late.

Eldest kid: Hello, Grandma!

Youngest kid: Hello.

Girl: Getting the kids ready, you know. And it's quite a distance from the suburbs.

Mother: Why on earth did you have to move so far out? If you were here, we could see you more

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Girl: It's better, trust me. It's a house with a garden.

Eldest kid: We have our own swing.

Youngest kid: And our sandpit.

Mother: I have already reheated it twice.

Father: It doesn't matter with soup.

Mother: But the meat dries out if you reheat it twice.

Second Man: Nice food is still nice food, even if it's heated twice.

Mother: It is nice, alright, because I can only cook nice food. It's from the best meat. I know the butcher.

Girl: If you've got the money, you will get quality anyway. You don't have to know them anymore.

Mother: It's still better to know them.

They enter the room; they sit down.

Girl: It's packet again?

Mother: Isn't it nice?

Girl: It is, but it's full of E numbers.

Kid: What are E numbers?

Girl: Poison.

Father: Everything is full of poison. If your body doesn't get used to it, you are finished. Those who can adapt will survive. Those who don't will die out. Basically it's survival of the fittest.

Second Man: There are too many of us anyway. Seven billion people. Simply from a logical point a view, a few billion need to die.

Girl: I wouldn't like it, from a logical point of view, if it were my descendants who would have to die out. So, it's better to be careful and not overwhelm the system with all kinds of crap, especially not the kids'.

Eldest Kid: I like it.

Youngest kid: Me too.

Girl: It's full of flavour enhancers. It's got a stronger flavour than the original.

Mother: Why can't you be pleased that you didn't have to cook and that we are all together?

Girl: I am pleased.

Father: How are things at school, kids?

Youngest Kid: Everything is fine.

Girl: They are studying, what else?

Father: Alright, I just wanted to ask them something.

Girl: They hate to talk about school.

Mother: Do they have friends?

Girl: Yes, they do.

Mother: Nice ones?

Girl: Yes, nice ones.

Father: Have you heard yet?

Girl: No.

Second Man: What has happened?

Girl: To who?

Mother: With him?

Father: Yes, with him. You wouldn't have thought so, right?

Girl: No.

Second Man: This is delicious. It really came out well.

Girl: I told them on the phone that you don't give a shit about what goes on at home.

Second Man: Why did you have to do that? It's our business, no one else's.

Girl: But I did tell them—they are my parents, after all. Who could I talk to if not to them? So don't you try to sweet-talk everyone, because they know what you are like at home.

Mother: His thing is work.

Girl: Don't defend him.

Mother: I am not, but I do know what they have to do.

Girl: It's not compulsory to sit there until nine at night and mess around on the Internet.

Second Man: That's when I finally get some work done, because it's so busy during the day I fall behind . . .

Father: I know all about that too. When I was working, I also had to . . .

Girl: You do it instead of having to come home. I know that's the reason.

Mother: At least it's not women.

Girl: Who knows? . . . I don't investigate. It's good news if I don't. Actually, can I take a look at your phone? I don't even know the code for it . . .

Second Man: A phone is private. There are no secrets in it, but it's still mine. Just like underwear, we don't wear each other's.

Girl: But I am allowed to wash them, right?

Father: No, really—there are boundaries that need to be respected. It's embarrassing.

Mother: You know this all too well. If I hadn't opened that letter . . .

Girl: What letter?

Father: It doesn't matter; it was a long time ago.

Mother: It does matter. You, of course, didn't say a word, and waited in silence for our marriage to fall apart by itself. You didn't want to improve it or for me to change things, but I was able to.

Father: It's true. You were able to change. And this is what it has changed into.

Mother: Meaning?

Father: This is as good as it gets.

Second Man: This meat is really excellent, and the mash is—

Girl: I can't cope by myself.

Father: That house is far too big. Why have so many rooms and a garden on top of it?

Girl: We weren't able to stay in Grandma's flat with the kids. No way. We had outgrown it.

Father: Yes, but there is a compromise.

Girl: But we got it at a good price.

Mother: I have also always wanted a house with a garden, but your father wouldn't hear of doing anything about it. He was scared of everything, even of the little loan we'd need for it.

Father: I'd like to know how I would have paid it back. You worked part-time. It wasn't feasible.

Mother: I worked part-time because I was a housewife too, and I had to iron your shirts.

Girl: Did you only work part-time? I never noticed.

Mother: Part-time, yes. Couldn't have coped with more.

Girl: Why did I always have to go to Grandma's then?

Mother: You liked it there and they liked to see you.

Girl: I preferred home.

Mother: But I needed time to clear up.

Girl: Only part-time?

Second Man: But you don't even work part-time . . .

Girl: No, because a mother of two has more duties, and I was always at Grandma's anyway.

Father: A mother of two?

Mother: Two.

Girl: Where is Uncle Laci?

Father: Abroad.

Girl: Again?

Father: He invested his money in himself, not kids.

Girl: But he hasn't got anyone.

Mother: Only us.

Father: And the occasional tourist guide.

Mother: Don't envy him.

Father: I don't. He doesn't have a kid. Mind you, no wife either.

Scene 5

The house in a leafy suburb. Gate bell rings. The Girl picks up the receiver. We can see both inside and outside events.

Girl: Who on earth would come at a time like this? No, we don't want to buy anything.

Kati: It's me.

Girl: Kati? What are you doing here?

Kati: Will you let me in? Or should I stand here and freeze?

The Girl opens the door. Kati walks up from the street side towards the main entrance.

Girl: You said you wouldn't come out here because it's too far out.

Kati: I've got to talk to someone.

Girl: What's happened?

Kati: Do you want the short or long version?

Girl: Your choice. Short.

Kati: I am getting a divorce.

Girl: What do you mean?

Kati: I am getting a divorce.

Girl: I can't believe it. Now?

Kati: Now.

Girl: But you've been with him all your life.

Kati: Better late than never.

Girl: Why?

Kati: My youngest daughter has moved out. It's just the two of us. Two of us, you know what I mean? It's unbearable.

Girl: What is?

Kati: He comes home, doesn't say a word, has been speaking all day apparently. He drinks and farts and stinks. I recently started to notice that he stinks. I don't want to smell this stench. I don't want to live in this stinky atmosphere.

Girl: What about the girls?

Kati: They don't matter.

Girl: They don't?

Kati: It made sense to stay together when they were little. It was easier too, because there was someone at home who loved me. But not anymore. They don't want me anymore. They show up sometimes, but can't wait to leave. They pack up some old clothes, eat something. That's it. Even on the phone I can tell that they can't stand speaking to me. Why am I so nosy? They don't care that I show interest in what they've been up to and with whom. They say that I wouldn't know them or the places they've been anyway. I don't matter to them anymore. It truly is just the two of us. My parents are not alive anymore. If they were, at least I could go and see them sometimes. But I can't.

Girl: You weren't too keen when they were around.

Kati: I always delayed visiting for when I'd be less busy. When I finally had time, they weren't alive anymore.

Girl: Are you seeing someone?

Kati: Of course not. I didn't go for it when I could have. I didn't want to be doing what everybody else was doing. I thought you could do it differently. Well, you can—but this is how it ends. I prefer to be alone. Alright, I am not saying that if someone lands in my arms I would say no, but I won't be looking. I am happy to be independent. No one will be telling me that I am living off him, and when it's time to do the dishes. I will support myself—won't be much, but I will turn on the washing machine when I please. I won't have to listen to someone else's breathing, to their nightly fogging up the room, and put up with breathing in the air he breathes out.

Girl: It's ecological.

They laugh.

Kati: Silly cow.

Girl: I thought it was alright for you.

Kati: Hell, no. It's not alright for anyone.

Girl: Yes. For some.

Kati: Who?

Girl: For your daughters.

Kati: Only until they find out how it all ends. That you'll end up hating your husband, that you'll lose your kids. Nobody loves you and you are not able to love anyone else.

Girl: When, then?

Kati: I will do the Christmas thing. I don't want to divorce around a family celebration.

Girl: How is your husband going to take it?

Kati: I don't know. If I don't tell him, it's possible that he may not notice for two weeks, when he runs out of clean boxers.

Scene 6

Doorbell ringing. The door opens.

Father: Is it the four of you?

Girl: Us four, yes.

Eldest kid: Hello, Grandad.

Youngest Kid: Hello.

Father: Hang your coats up quickly then.

Girl: Is Uncle Laci already here?

Father: He's been here for half an hour. We've been waiting for you.

Mother arrives.

Eldest kid: Hello, Grandma.

Youngest kid: Hello.

Mother: Hello. Come in quickly, I am sure the table is set.

Father: As in, I set it.

Mother: You know you can't cook and set a table at the same time.

In the room

Second Man: Hello, Uncle Laci.

Uncle Laci: Hello boys.

Kids: Hello, Uncle Laci.

Father: Sit down now, because it will get cold.

Uncle Laci: Well, that's true, cold parsnip soup isn't very nice.

Girl: We are having parsnip soup?

Mother: We always do.

Girl: I know.

They serve and eat.

Second Man: It's nice.

Girl: Don't bother. It won't change anything.

Mother: Let's leave that now. Every Sunday. It's soon Christmas.

Father: Right, and we've got to talk about it. Everything needs to be discussed in a family—like Christmas lunch, for example.

Girl: Yes. We do.

Uncle Laci: It's strange that when I am over here for lunch, the third kid is never here.

Father: What do you mean by over here?

Uncle Laci: I mean that he is not here.

Mother: You have lunch here every Sunday, so there is nothing strange in that . . .

Uncle Laci: So he doesn't come on Sundays?

Second Man: He would get bored. At his age, they prefer Oscar-winning films and nightclubs. He wouldn't enjoy it here, not like us, me appreciating Mother's soup.

Girl: They know what you are like, so it's better if you stop this right now!

Mother: It's nice to be complimented sometimes.

Uncle Laci: He could show up occasionally.

Girl: I would appreciate it if you didn't make it your business what he does. He lives in the country. Doesn't come to Budapest very often, and is quite busy when he does.

Mother: What matters is that he is a good student.

Uncle Laci: But he is still a family member.

Girl: Alright, he'll come next time.

Uncle Laci: At least for Christmas.

Girl: Christmas it is.

Uncle Laci: I am curious about how he turned out.

Girl: He is bigger.

Uncle Laci: I gathered that, but want to know what he is like.

Father: Are you bringing the meat out?

Mother: I am.

Father: By the way, have you heard of the massive sales on at the moment?

Second Man: Products have lost their value now.

Uncle Laci: Because they are from India, made by children. They don't even feed them. If one of them dies of hunger, there is another to take its place. Families sell their kids because they have so many. Eight—even ten.

Girl: I don't believe that a parent could give up their child.

Uncle Laci: From where we're standing, we can't possibly imagine the things that happen in the world. But I have been there. I saw them.

Mother: You've been everywhere. Haven't you?

Father: It's worth nothing if you can't share it with anyone.

Uncle Laci: I can. With you.

Father: It's not the same.

Uncle Laci: What do you mean it's not the same?

Father: That it's different.

Scene 7

The house in suburbia. Ironing room. The radio is on.

Radio: At Christmas, let us think of Jesus not as a Savior, but as a small child. What does the Holy Family teach us, after all, if not to remind us that we too live in a family, that every person is someone's child, that everybody has got a mother and a father? And let us not forget, especially at this time of year, our loved ones, so that at least everyone will receive once a year the warmth that they craved all year long, as the scriptures remind us. For life becomes harder now for those who are lonely. It is hard to be alone. The lonely person who sees all the warmth on TV, for example, will feel the coldness and emptiness of their lives even more. The suicide rate amongst the lonely increases during the holidays. This is what we should aim to prevent with our love. For Christmas is love.

The radio voice fades and the Girl goes to the phone.

Girl: Hi.

Are you well?

It's soon Christmas.

It's going to be at Grandma's.

Could you come?

Why not?

I didn't know that you had a girlfriend.

Oh, yeah. The one that I saw you with when we bumped into each other.

Of course I remember.

So you are going to hers? They invited you?

To the country?

I will really miss you.

At least on Boxing Day.

Yes, I know that it's far, but still if—

Bye.

The end of a lyrical piece of a song. The Girl is tearing up. The door opens. The husband comes in.

Second Man: Hi.

Girl: No one works this late.

Second Man: It was the Christmas do. You can't not show up.

Girl: What is it for?

Second Man: Nothing. Drinking and eating and laughing at the boss's jokes.

Girl: Office Christmas. Christmas is for families.

Second Man: Why are your eyes watery?

Girl: It doesn't matter. It's nothing.

Second Man: It's conjunctivitis, isn't it? I told you not to watch too much TV.

Girl: I don't watch it—it hasn't been working for six months.

Second Man: Not working? We even watched it yesterday.

Girl: That's the one that is in the living room. I said before it needs to be fixed because it is so bloody boring to iron without it.

Second Man: Start the eye drops, or it will get completely infected by Christmas.

Girl: Is your attentiveness linked to Christmas?

Second Man: I am always like this.

Girl: That's right. You always know what's going on with me.

Second Man: Not everything, only stuff I can see. Like now with your eyes.

Scene 8

Leafy suburbs, the Girl's street. A relatively well-dressed Man is just about to close a wheely bin. We are not entirely sure whether he is saying the truth or not, but the Girl believes him.

Girl: Hi, I barely recognised you. What are you doing here, doing the bins?

First Man: Yeah, just getting rid of a banana skin. I didn't want to litter. And you? What are you doing here?

Girl: I live here, in that house over there—and you?

First Man: Doing quite a big job here. A complete renovation. We are doing it all.

Girl: Can you carry mortar in this outfit?

First Man: Oh, I don't do that anymore.

Girl: How come? What do you do then?

First Man: My mate has given me the business.

Girl: What do you mean given?

First Man: Yes, for me to run it.

Girl: Just like that?

First Man: He's got another that keeps him really busy, getting reorders in. So, he said I should run this one.

Girl: For free?

First Man: He is only asking for the bank's borrowing rate, I can keep the rest. He is not bothered, long as he doesn't lose money.

Girl: So what is your role exactly?

First Man: Business manager but I also own a bit of it. So this is where you live, then?

Girl: So this is what you do, then?

First Man: I'm telling you, I am. We are running out of time, and I promised they could be here for Christmas—so we have to work day and night.

Girl: Right, so Christmas is important for you too.

First Man: To me and my clients too. Just the last touches and they can move in.

Girl: Isn't it crap for you to be alone?

Second Man: What do you mean alone?

Girl: At Christmas?

First Man: Oh, at Christmas! I won't be alone now.

Girl: How come?

Second Man: Didn't the kid tell you?

Girl: What?

First Man: That his girlfriend's parents have invited me over for the twenty-fifth.

Girl: What? They invited you?

First Man: Yes. They did.

Girl: But you don't even know them.

First Man: That's the kind of people they are. They found out that I would be by myself, and they suggested it right away. "There is always room for an extra plate on the table" type of thing.

Girl: They've found out and are just adding an extra plate?

First Man: Yes. I was pleased not to be alone. I better go, sorry; I need to buy another switch. I miscalculated—it happens sometimes on big jobs. This is where you all live, then? And what about you? At your parents' again?

Girl: What at my parents'?

First Man: Christmas at theirs?

Girl: Like always, yes. Nice car.

First Man: Not mine.

Girl: I didn't think so.

First Man: Well, kind of mine, you know . . . on credit.

Girl: So, you will be with him?

First Man: With who?

Girl: With the kid?

First Man: Yes. I will. He was pleased too. I am his father, after all.

The Man disappears and the Girl stands there, lost.

Scene 9

Doorbell rings. Door opens.

Father: Four of you?

Girl: Yes.

Father: You said he would be coming too.

Girl: He wasn't able to.

Kids: Hello, Grandad!

Coats off, then toward the room.

Mother: Come in then, come in quickly, the table is ready.

Second Man: We are coming, Mum. Just putting the coats away.

Youngest Kid: When do we get the presents?

Second Man: After dinner.

Eldest Kid: Why not before?

Second Man: Because that's how it is.

Mother: The four of you?

Girl: Yes.

Kids: Hello, Grandma! Hello, Uncle Laci!

Uncle Laci: I thought he'd come.

Second Man: Hello, Uncle Laci.

Uncle Laci: Hello, guys.

Girl: He wasn't able to make it. He is in the country.

Father: Where?

Girl: He is at his girlfriend's house.

Mother: It's that serious? You never said.

Girl: I didn't know either, just found out.

Father: Well, it doesn't matter—it would have been a squeeze anyway. You can't just fit an infinite number of plates here, not even on a round table like this. And actually this table fits the most.

Girl: What wouldn't fit?

Father: The extra plate.

Girl: You mean that it wouldn't have fit here?

Father: It would have been possible, but not easy as there is so little space.

Second Man: We barely managed to fit the seven of us, so eight would really be—

Father: I'll take it down, actually, so it doesn't get knocked down.

Girl: So there wouldn't have been a place for him . . .

Father: I am not saying that it would have been impossible, because I did manage to squeeze it in there. But it was a challenge, and it wouldn't have been comfortable, since you four are here and us two, and Uncle Laci is here because where else would he be at Christmas?

Mother: It's seven of us, counting Uncle Laci.

Girl: Counting Uncle Laci?

Father: Yes, counting Uncle Laci.

Girl: Whose place is Uncle Laci sitting at?

Mother: His own usual one.

Girl: But really, whose place is Uncle Laci's place?

Mother: Uncle Laci's place is Uncle Laci's place.

Girl: But whose place did it used to be?

Father: In our house, we don't have your seat or my seat. Anyone can sit wherever they please. Uncle Laci usually sits there, me here, and mum—

Girl: Uncle Laci is sitting in my son's place.

Uncle Laci: I am only sitting on a chair.

Girl: Uncle Laci sat down where my child should have sat.

Uncle Laci: The kid is never here when I am here. I said that he should be.

Girl: Uncle Laci, did you push out my son?

Uncle Laci: I never pushed out anyone. Never needed to do that. I was talented enough not to have to push anyone to the side, because without me they couldn't get their bigger investments, they couldn't do without my expertise. I didn't need the flat, either. I gave it to you because I had another one.

Mother: Alright, that was a long time ago. There is no need to bring it up.

Uncle Laci: I didn't want to bring it up, but I did give it away.

Girl: Why did you, Uncle Laci? It was worth a lot—nobody else would have given it up, that's for sure . . . Not all that money . . .

Father: I have been asking the same thing, but your mother never told me.

Uncle Laci: I didn't ask for anything. It was free to you.

Girl: What was its real price, Mum? What did Uncle Laci want? Tell me what.

Mother: Just to be there for him as his family, because he is lonely.

Girl: What? Tell me what. My son's place? Did he want that?

Mother: He didn't ask for anything. I am the one who invited him for lunch.

Girl: You gave it to him?

Mother: I didn't give anything, and he never asked for anything.

Uncle Laci: I was the one always saying that you should tell him to come.

Girl: You did because of your guilty conscience. Just like murderers who go back to the crime scene.

Mother: You are speaking utter nonsense. Everybody wanted what's best for you. That was the problem—that all our lives we wanted to do what was best for you.

Girl: Uncle Laci pushed out my son. *(Crying)*

Uncle Laci: I never did anything of the kind and never needed to—

Girl: And did you two help in him?

Father: I don't know anything. Your mother—

Girl: You're involved, too, because you let it happen.

Father: I had no idea.

Girl: You think if you are not doing it personally, that you are not involved. But you are in on it, because you didn't say anything and you just let it happen.

Father: I did try to force a place for the plate and an extra chair. But there is such little space.

Girl: I can't stay here a minute longer. What kind of parents are you?

(She jumps up and runs away.)

Mother: And you—what kind of a kid?

Girl: *(Answers back)* You have more responsibilities as adults.

Mother: You are not a child anymore.

Girl: A child is a child as long as their parents are alive.

Door slamming, silence.

Eldest Kid: Where did Mum go?

Second Man: Out, onto the street.

Youngest Kid: When is she coming back?

Second Man: When she gets cold. It's winter.

Mother: You think it's that simple?

Second Man: Yes, it is.

Mother: Don't you think that she would actually rather freeze? Shouldn't you go out after her?

Second Man: No.

Mother: My husband would have come out after me, wouldn't he?

Father: Well . . .

Second Man: I develop software and when you first look at it, it seems that it's full of peculiarities, but there is a logical system behind it all. Emotional worlds are the same. It's all spectacle. Inside, it's pure logic.

Father: But the computer could freeze.

Second Man: Yes, some malfunctioning can happen; but otherwise, only hackers could screw it up. They're the equivalent to shrinks in psychology. They disturb the system.

Uncle Laci: Well, there was a man in the company, who by the way was perfectly alright, apart from being a little anxious. He went to see a shrink who then proved it to him that in his childhood he wanted to kill his parents. He laughed it off at first, thinking what nonsense, but the shrink insisted to such a degree that he ended up believing that he had killed his parents.

Father: Why? Were they murdered by someone?

Uncle Laci: No. They were simply old, had cancer, and died.

Father: How could he have thought that he did it then?

Uncle Laci: He believed he caused it by transfer because he had wished it. Needless to say that the therapy resulted in job loss, hospital, everything.

Father: It's because of Christmas.

Mother: What?

Father: It's Christmas that has upset her.

Uncle Laci: What do you mean it's because of Christmas?

Father: Christmas makes people crazy.

Uncle Laci: Well, that's true, the whole of December is a crowd of bloody people, consumerism, pushing.

Father: And having to be together from morning till night.

Uncle Laci: It was fun when we were kids.

Second Man: Everything was good when we were kids.

Eldest Kid: Isn't it good now, Dad?

Second Man: Yes, it's good now too.

Eldest Kid: Yes, it is good!

Second Man: It's very good. Just different.

The End