

SINGLE MOTHERS

by

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Translated into English by Barbara Skubic

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ESTER

REBEKA, Ester's mother

AVAN, Ester's grandmother, Rebeka's mother

EVA, Ester's great-grandmother, Rebeka's grandmother

GABOR, Ester's partner

RAFKO, Ester's father, Rebeka's ex-husband

MIHAEL

BRIGITA, Ester's best friend

BARBARA, Eva's best friend

Doctor

Nurse

2023

Slovenia, 2023. Ester is thirty-two years old and lives with her mother, Rebeka, in a pre-war villa that her mother inherited from her grandparents, who got it for free in the process of nationalisation for having fought on the right side of history, whatever that is supposed to mean. Being on the right side of history changes depending on the decade in which we live.

Ester and Rebeka each occupy one floor of the house. Ester lives with her boyfriend, Gabor, since the current housing shortage and skyrocketing rent make this the most affordable option.

PROLOGUE

Ester and her best friend Brigita are in the bathroom of the house, passing a bottle of brandy while Ester is peeing on a pregnancy test. Why is Ester taking a pregnancy test with her friend Brigita by her side and not her boyfriend, Gabor? Because she has an incurable, and also somewhat cynical, attitude towards relationships, which is not her fault because all her female ancestors also had unhealthy relationships with men. Ester does not believe that a single person can fulfil all of another person's needs. She strives to fulfil her sexual needs with her partner, Gabor; her emotional needs with her best friend, Brigita, and her mother, Rebeka; her intellectual needs should be satisfied by her career and her spiritual needs by yoga and meditation. When she still feels empty, she drowns this emptiness with alcohol. As do the majority of the people in a country where tolerance to alcohol is too high, and abstinence is often seen as something negative in social environments.

BRIGITA: Did you know that Dare and his squeeze are with child?

ESTER: No! Seriously?

BRIGITA: Yup!

ESTER: But didn't he say that ... Well, that it was not so serious. Just fun. Because she's a dancer and limber, but that's it.

BRIGITA: Aha, listen to this. It was an accident because she told him she was infertile anyway, and they didn't have to use protection.

Brigita and Ester look at each other for a couple of seconds, then burst out laughing. Ester puts the pregnancy test down on the side of the sink.

ESTER: Fuck, I can't believe the stupidity of some guys.

BRIGITA: Yeah, freaking dumb. I honestly don't get what's rolling around in these women's heads that they have kids with such stupid guys. Because, sweethearts, you're risking your kids being so-bloody-unintelligent, aren't you? I mean, doesn't everybody wish the best for their child? It's already a given that you just cannot influence so many things, you cannot control them, you have no choice. Life happens, things happen. Screw it. This world will probably break your kid's heart ten times before they turn five. However, you do have a choice regarding the amount of stupidity a child might inherit from their father. And I think it's pretty reckless to produce offspring with a guy whose brain can be duped into fatherhood by a trick so unimaginative as "I'm infertile anyway, and we don't need a condom!" This is why we don't progress intellectually as a human species!

ESTER: Geez, a friend of mine was dating this girl, and he wasn't sure if he wanted to get serious or not, yada, yada. In short, he tells me back in February that they got pregnant by accident. Okay, fine, it happens. They're keeping it, why not? Well, then a few months later, I run into this friend and ask when exactly is the baby due, and he tells me January. And I stare at him because I know it was winter when I met him, and he told me he was going to have a baby, and I am calculating by which logic the nine months would be up in January, so when was she supposed to get pregnant? Then he stares at me a little, figures out what I'm thinking, becomes a bit uneasy and says that, yes, he knows what I'm calculating. That she had some kind of a mini-miscarriage, and then they got pregnant again.

BRIGITA: What the fuck is a mini-miscarriage?

ESTER: Exactly! I don't fucking know what a mini-miscarriage is. A carriage? A wheel? It's either a miscarriage, or it isn't. There's nothing in between!

BRIGITA: Then what ... How did that happen to them?

ESTER: I mean, I'd say she was never pregnant. She told him she was, and then they had unprotected sex because, if she's already pregnant, what could possibly happen? An accidental twin?

BRIGITA: Some men would buy it. That you can screw a pregnant woman so thoroughly that her kid becomes a twin.

ESTER: Well, I think she then really got pregnant and viola.

BRIGITA: Voila.

ESTER: Don't care, in short, *voila*, and it came into the world, ecce baby homo, what are we again, baby homo erectus neandertalus.

BRIGITA: I think that would be a homo sapiens.

ESTER: I'm not so sure.

Ester checks the pregnancy test.

ESTER: Fucking hell, I'm pregnant.

Brigita laughs drunkenly. Ester watches her and thinks about how Brigita's drunken laugh sounds like the sound of a squeegee on glass.

BRIGITA: Has Gabor told you he can't have kids anyway, and you don't need to use condoms?

Ester gives Brigita a dirty look because Ester is like this; she can often poke fun at everyone, and nothing is sacred to her, but she takes herself too seriously at times and doesn't take jokes at her own expense too well.

BRIGITA: You know, I've been reading this book explaining the theory that the point of procreation is merely passing on the DNA. So, in fact, we're all just some manipulated machines that serve as packaging or robots for our DNA. And through millennia, this packaging has been developing and has become more and more complex. It has developed a brain and emotions, but actually, it's all just so that the DNA can survive.

ESTER: Haven't you been on page thirty of this book, which has about 300 pages, for about two months now? You don't even know how the author develops this theory further!

BRIGITA: Yes, but isn't it an interesting thought that the entire progress, all the art, all the emotions, everything that people are and everything we have created is simply a manipulation of a little DNA chain that tricks us so it can survive?

ESTER: What does that make the two of us, who at thirty-plus don't feel the need to have kids but instead pointlessly philosophise for hours and verbally develop some theories that benefit no one?

BRIGITA: An anomaly.

Scene 1

Ester and her mother, Rebeka, are in the garden next to the house. Unlike Ester, Rebeka has developed a slightly healthier diversion of anger and the feeling of loneliness into obsessive gardening rather than alcohol.

ESTER: I'm somehow pregnant.

Rebeka looks at Ester carefully before reacting or saying anything. She is afraid to happily congratulate because a mere week ago, she had to listen to her daughter's monologue about not wanting to have children, about the planet being too FUBAR to bring children into it and about her definitely not being able to have children, before she has a career. Because her daughter's look reveals that she herself doesn't know how exactly to handle this pregnancy, Rebeka decides to react in an emotionally non-biased way.

REBEKA: Aha.

ESTER: Don't tell Gabor. I haven't told him yet, and I don't know if I will.

REBEKA: I see. You have my support, whichever way you decide. If you decide to keep it, I'll help you. If not ... It was your great-grandmother who was working in the 1970s to have the right to abortion enshrined in the Constitution.

ESTER: My great-grandmother. The fighter for abortion, who became fanatically religious in the nineties, and then ended up in a fucking prison for having killed her schizophrenic daughter! How does that add up?

REBEKA: If you read things solely through ideology, nothing adds up. Yes, following the principles of institutional religion, she should have been burning in hell. But following the principles of real life, no. Things are more complex. And in reality, it is not quite as exclusionary as some might wish.

Ester is silent. She's thinking. About what? Whenever Ester tries to think about serious life issues, her mind often flees to more practical concerns. So her thoughts involuntarily escaped to thinking about how she has not yet paid this month's bills. Which is not actually so random because it's her menstrual period that reminds her every month that bills need to be paid, and because the period didn't come this month, the bills, too, remained unpaid.

REBEKA: You know, I've been thinking a bit. This house needs to be renovated. The roof needs to be replaced, and it needs hydroisolation. And I've been pondering that perhaps it would be wise to be realistic and sell the house.

ESTER: Yeah?

REBEKA: The house is enormous and in a great location. If we sell it, each one can buy a flat and continue living her life.

ESTER: Aha.

REBEKA: It would feel stupid if we were like those Slovenian families with generations living under the same roof and transferring trauma from generation to generation. The amount of extensions to Slovenian houses says a lot about the collective traumas of the entire nation. Every generation simply builds an add-on to the existing trauma. And then, rather than solving the disgusting, inconsistent architecture that thus appears, the issue is solved by painting the façade apricot, chartreuse or some other absurd colour. Having an apricot house won't stop your husband from cheating. Sometimes, you just need to make a cut. In case this simplifies your decision.

ESTER: I don't know if it's the right time for a baby.

REBEKA: It's never the right time for a baby.

ESTER: That's what everyone says. But I don't believe it.

REBEKA: All your female ancestors were, at a given point in time, an unwanted child. Even you were an unwanted child. For a second. But then a baby is born, and with the baby, hope that all will be beautiful and different. Even if only for a couple of years.

Ester nods absent-mindedly. It is not entirely clear if she even registers rationally what her mother is telling her. Ester, distracted, wanders back into the house. Rebeka digs the soil further, her thoughts wander, and a memory haunts her. A memory in which she hears her grandmother Eva let out a bestial, desperate scream.

We hear the sound of Eva, who, in Rebeka's memory, is screaming like a desperate animal.

Scene 2

Ester and Gabor sit in a fast-food restaurant. Each has a tray in front of them, with burgers and chips. Each is focused on their phone and smiles to themselves every now and then. Gabor is watching funny memes on 9gag. Ester is learning through social media that two of her classmates from primary school who didn't like each other back then have now got married.

Years ago, Ester watched couples sitting together at the same table in a restaurant and silently staring at their phones. She found such couples pitiable. Now, she has become one of those couples. She consoles herself by saying this is what happens after a couple of years of a relationship. You know each other so well you simply don't have so much to say to each other.

Now, she feels she should perhaps bring communication back into her relationship.

ESTER: How was work?

GABOR: We went to this new place for lunch. And Samo, who is a vegetarian, wanted something vegetarian. Which was not on the menu. And it was so obvious that the waiter didn't feel like dealing with him or any other veggie who wanders into their restaurant. In the end, they agreed upon a vegetable risotto. Samo sang praises about how good it was. Well, because Bine knows the waiter, the waiter told Bine that the cook used beef broth to cook the rice.

Gabor laughs loudly at this "anecdote". Ester looks at Gabor with a look that reveals she is questioning whether she does not perhaps love a complete idiot. The verb to love is also being questioned here. Archangel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive through the Holy Spirit. Ester did not conceive through the Holy Spirit but Gabor, a derivative of the name Gabriel. She feels that perhaps she may have conceived through the spirit, nevertheless, because she doesn't know her partner, not even a little. Did he laugh at such stupid events when they met? Making fun of vegetarians in 2023. Bravo. How can this still be a thing? Why do people still have the will to make fun of vegetarians? How can people feel personally insulted by another person's decision to not consume meat? How did she end up in a relationship with someone who finds it hilarious that someone sneaked in beef broth for a vegetarian? Was it as simple as her pheromones smelling that she could produce good offspring with him, and that is why the sex is so unbelievable, while the rest has no place in the biology of reproduction, as Brigita says?

Scene 3

Ester is visiting her father, Rafko. Rafko and Ester's mother, Rebeka, divorced when Ester was three. Rafko is a variant of Rafael. Well-known personalities from mythology, art history and pop culture named Rafael include the archangel, a Renaissance painter and a ninja turtle.

Ester genuinely loves her father, but she doesn't know how to communicate with him. She never knows what to talk to him about. No matter which topic she opens, the conversation soon peters out. Perhaps Ester has some growing up to do before she learns and reconciles with the fact that the relationships are what they are. Wishing to change others so that the relationships can be unilaterally what she wants is a sign that a person is not yet a grown-up.

Ester and Rafko sit at one side of the table, each sipping tea. Every now and then, their eyes meet, and they offer each other an uneasy smile.

RAFKO: And the work is fine?

ESTER: You've already asked that. It's fine.

RAFKO: Ah, okay. Fine, fine.

Silence.

RAFKO: And home? Anything new?

ESTER: Mum is thinking about selling the house.

Rafko is unpleasantly surprised by this information.

RAFKO: Yeah? I mean, everything? Including the plot around it and the garden?

ESTER: Yeah.

RAFKO: Hm.

Rafko ends the conversation about the house with this answer. Ester doesn't find it strange. As explained, most of her conversations with her father end this way.

Scene 4

Ester sits on a chair in the bedroom and watches Gabor lying in bed and scrolling the internet. She is thinking about whether she actually loves this person enough to have children with him. She is pondering whether she even wants to have a child. She's considering who to have children with if she wants to have children. Does an ideal man exist with whom she would not doubt and would have his children without thinking?

ESTER: Gabor.

GABOR: Yes.

ESTER: Have you ever considered if you'd have children in your life and all that?

GABOR: It would feel strange not to have them.

ESTER: Yes?

GABOR: But I wouldn't have them right now. Why?

ESTER: Nothing. Just thinking.

GABOR: We still have time.

ESTER: Yeah, easy for you to say.

GABOR: What do you mean?

ESTER: I mean, you and I can both decide not to have children, and then suddenly we're forty-five, and I'm menopausal, and you get some twenty-year-old and actually have kids.

GABOR: It's not quite as easy for a guy, either.

ESTER: Yeah? Because it looks to me like fucking nature really does prefer the male sex. Women have a mini-window when we can become mothers. If we miss it, we won't be. And men? Just the other day, I read that Robert de Niro became a dad at bloody 80. I mean, hurrah for de Niro and the male sex!

GABOR: I think when a war occurs, it is quite clear which sex is disposable goods.

ESTER: My great-grandmother was a partisan, and she's a woman.

GABOR: But she wasn't on the frontline; she was nice and safe as a paramedic.

ESTER: Should she be running up and down the battlefield with a massive phallic-shaped weapon for you to consider her worthy?

GABOR: I didn't say she not worthy.

ESTER: While we're at it, why does everything have to be phallic-shaped? Why are guns phallic-shaped?

GABOR: Do I actually have to answer this?

ESTER: Yes.

Ester looks at him angrily, even though she doesn't understand why the conversation got her so worked up. It now feels like she deliberately triggered him to say his own thing so that she'd have an excuse to once again be angry and irritated at him. The question she asked does not, as it happens, have a correct or logical answer.

GABOR: It's just that a phallus is a relatively efficient shape. Women can't pin this one on us; it's more about nature. Imagine a gun shaped like a vulva. It would be quite hard to aim.

Ester did not expect this answer. Gabor's response and the image of partisans in her head, running into a battle with vulva-shaped guns, surprises her and involuntarily makes her laugh. Gabor looks at her kindly.

GABOR: Tell me. What is actually bothering you? Do you want to have a child?

ESTER: I don't know.

GABOR: Come here, and I'll knock you up right now. Come!

ESTER: No!

Gabor jokingly grabs Ester and drags her to bed with him.

Scene 5

Ester comes home from work and, surprised, finds her father Rafko digging in the garden together with Rebeka. Rebeka is waving the spade angrily.

ESTER: Mum, what ...

REBEKA: She buried him in the garden. This fucked-up bitch actually buried him in the garden and fucked off to jail. I cannot believe this. I cannot believe how crazy this woman is. Seriously. I ...

ESTER: What? Who?

REBEKA: Your beloved great-grandma left us all a corpse in the garden as a present. Nice, huh? How can we sell the house now when it's a fucking crime scene?

Rafko tries to calm down his ex-wife.

RAFKO: Rebeka, your grandmother is ...

REBEKA: Nuts. I think the secret of whether insanity is inheritable has just been solved. Yes. It is inheritable. My mother was a psychiatric patient because she had sick genes.

Ester stands to the side and looks at her mother and father. She's not entirely convinced whether she's dreaming or going crazy.

ESTER: Who did she allegedly bury here?

REBEKA: Your grandfather.

ESTER: What? I can't. What? I mean. What?

Rebeka gives Rafko a look that tells him it's his turn to explain some things. Rafko decides to tell all he knows.

1991

The time of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and Slovenian independence. The nineteen-year-old Rebeka lives with her grandmother, Eva, and mother, Avan, in the family home. Having decided to find new meaning in religion, Eva attends the holy mass daily and volunteers in her parish. Avan is catatonic. Most of the time, she's unaware of herself and her surroundings. When she's aware of herself, she calls Rebeka her sister rather than her daughter.

Rebeka's husband, Rafko, lives with her. Rafko and Rebeka are expecting their first unplanned but very welcome child, a child who, at birth, will be named Ester.

Scene 1

Late at night. Eva, Rebeka and Rafko are sitting in the living room when the doorbell rings.

EVA: Who could it be at this hour?

Rebeka answers the door. There's an unknown man standing there. The man is in poor condition. One can see from afar that a disease has completely taken over his body. He is emaciated, pale and almost irrecognisable. Rebeka has no idea who the man at the door is. She takes him to the living room.

When Eva sees him, she pales as if she has seen a ghost. An even more accurate description would be that she pales because she is seeing a ghost.

Eva and the man stand and stare at each other. Rebeka and Rafko have no clue what's going on.

REBEKA: Good evening, and you are?

EVA: Rafko, please take Rebeka upstairs.

Rafko takes Rebeka by the hand and leads her from the living room. Rebeka doesn't want to because she has a nosey disposition and doesn't like not knowing things. So she doesn't like it

one bit when Grandmother Eva doesn't explain who the mysterious visitor who has agitated her so much is.

Scene 2

Rebeka and Rafko go to the top floor where they've set up their household. Rebeka can't help but develop theories about who the mysterious stranger who walked into the house is.

REBEKA: Who do you think he is?

RAFKO: I don't know your grandma enough to make conclusions.

REBEKA: Maybe he's actually my grandpa. Do you think he could be?

Rafko tries to redirect Rebeka's attention to putting together a crib for the baby.

REBEKA: Gran always says he disappeared with his whores. Maybe he came back to reconcile.

A loud argument can be heard from the downstairs. Rebeka pricks her ears.

REBEKA: Can you hear that?

Rebeka walks to the door to hear the argument better. Rafko feels eavesdropping is impolite, and he turns on the radio so the music drowns the dispute. The radio plays "Malena" by Idoli.

REBEKA: But I want to know!

Rafko decides on the third variant of attention redirection and pulls Rebeka to bed. Rebeka and Rafko are laughing and kissing in bed. Suddenly, something like a gunshot is heard from downstairs. Rebeka immediately pricks her ears.

REBEKA: Did you hear that?

RAFKO: Are you looking for excuses to avoid sex?

REBEKA: Don't exaggerate.

Rebeka focuses on Rafko again and starts taking off his sweater when, once again, something like a gunshot is heard. Rebeka jumps to the radio and turns it off so she can hear better. All she hears is animalistic screaming and Eva's crying. Rebeka looks at Rafko, terrified. Rafko jumps up and puts his sweater back on.

RAFKO: Wait here.

Scene 3

Rafko carefully peeks into the living room, where he sees bloodied Eva crying and hugging the dead Avan.

The sounds of the conversation between Rebeka and Rafko in 2023.

REBEKA: (voice from 2023) Yes, I remember that, of course, I remember. Grandma snapped and killed Mum.

RAFKO: (voice from 2023) Well, and then your grandma asked me to take you to a hotel so you wouldn't see it and you wouldn't be there when the police arrived.

REBEKA: (2023) Yes.

RAFKO: (2023) But after you fell asleep, I returned as your grandma asked. She gave me a shovel ...

Bloodied Eva from 1991 hands a shovel over to Rafko, and together, they dig a grave in the garden, with a male corpse lying beside them. Eva is still bloody, and after digging, she is also dirty from the mud.

REBEKA: (2023) Rafko, who was this man?

RAFKO: (2023) That's what I asked, too.

Rafko, in 1991, digs and becomes dirty from the mud himself. Confused, he asks Eva.

RAFKO: Eva, who is this man?

EVA: Rebeka's father.

REBEKA: (2023) What?

RAFKO: (to Eva) What?

EVA: This man deserves neither a grave nor to be remembered. By anyone.

Rafko and Eva dig on, and for dramatic effect, it begins to rain heavily. Eva tells Rafko the story of Rebeka's mother, Avan, which Rafko now shares with Rebeka and Ester.

1972

Slovenia, Yugoslavia. Mihael, Eva and their twenty-seven-year-old daughter, Avan, live in a pre-war villa. On the surface, they are a perfect family. Mihael, the father, is a World War II veteran, and Eva, the mother, is relatively active in different committees and quite popular in different social circles. In reality, Mihael has problems with alcohol, and Avan is an anxious, introverted person who spends almost entire days in her room. Avan may be twenty-seven, but at times, she comes across as a naïve child trapped in an adult body and, at times, as an old woman who has survived way too much.

Scene 1

In her room, Avan listens to the song “Kam si namenjen” by the group Bele vrane and leafs through the magazine Naša žena. The magazine cover shows a portrait of the actress Milena Zupančič from the film Cvetje v jeseni.

MIHAEL: Hello, I’m home, so you don’t start nagging again about my whereabouts.

EVA: I don’t nag. I simply asked the other day ...

MIHAEL: Defying me again.

A silence from the next room. A frightened Avan is waiting for what is about to happen. She hears someone rummaging through the cupboards, searching for something, then slamming the cupboard door.

Avan hears Mihael scream angrily.

MIHAEL: Where have you hidden it?

Eva doesn’t answer.

MIHAEL: I know you’ve hidden it! Tell me where!

EVA: I poured it away.

MIHAEL: You what?!

At Mihael's last scream, Avan shudders, scared. Avan then hears a hit and the sound of someone who's lost balance and smashed against the dining table, most likely Eva, whom Mihael most likely hit.

The scared Avan turns the radio way low and walks to the door of her room, which she locks very quietly – because she doesn't have a lock, she uses a wire clothes hanger, which she hooks on the door handle from one side and a hook on the wall on the other.

Meanwhile, the sounds of Mihael beating Eva come from the next room. Eva is begging him to stop. Mihael, like many men who survived the war, suffers from PTSD, which the state medicates by making cheap alcohol easily accessible.

EVA: Mihael, please.

MIHAEL: Shut up.

Scene 2

The next day. Eva, black and blue in the face, hobbles into Avan's room. Avan is lying on the bed, watching an American film on TV. Eva sits next to Avan, and they watch television together for a couple of moments.

EVA: Marlon Brando, huh? A hunk of a man.

AVAN: Yes, a truly a hunk of a man.

EVA: We don't have men like him in this country ... well, perhaps Bata.

Eva and Avan stare at the poster of Bata Živojinović that Avan has on the wall, look at each other and nod in approval.

Eva gets serious. She is visibly uncomfortable having the conversation that follows.

EVA: Avan, it has been quite a few years since you left school and a few months since you quit your job ...

Avan sighs, and her good mood evaporates. She walks over to the television set and turns up the sound. Eva patiently waits for Avan to return to bed and settle there comfortably. Then she walks to the television set and turns it off. Avan, fed up, looks at Eva.

EVA: If you're interested in films, I've seen an advert that Boštjan Hladnik is making a new film and they're looking for extras.

Eva takes a leaflet from her pocket and gives it to Avan, who's turning her face away. Eva is sorry that she has to have this conversation, but she is even more sorry that her daughter has no will to live. Avan has not had the will to live for years, but Eva prefers to lie to herself that everything is fine rather than face the fact that her daughter is obviously not happy. A person is only as happy as their least happy child is happy. This sentence can be interpreted in two ways – either the parents feel the misery of their own child and are subconsciously less happy because the child is less happy, or it is the parents who are, in fact, miserable and the child is simply a projection of their parents' happiness.

EVA: I also read about ... well, we can go and see a doctor. There are pills if people are ... like you.

AVAN: What does that mean? What are people like me like?

EVA: Petulant? Dispirited?

Avan hints to Eva that she really doesn't want to have this debate.

EVA: Can you come to the meeting with me tonight? You went once and found it interesting.

AVAN: Mum, I find your meetings sad. You keep talking about women having to be strong and sovereign, how abortion is a woman's right and so on, yet every single one has a drunkard husband who beats her at home, and you do nothing about it. Why don't you ever talk about that?

Eva is visibly hurt by Avan's words. Avan walks to the TV set and turns it on again, signalling to Eva that she really doesn't want to continue the conversation.

Scene 3

Eva happily enters the kitchen, where Avan already is. Avan is having an even worse day and stares, just stares, in front of her. Eva is dressed to go and happily proclaims.

EVA: Avan. We have actually succeeded. In a year or two, Yugoslavia will write the right to abortion into the Constitution. I am overjoyed.

Avan doesn't partake in the mirth. Eva's triumph cannot be marred.

EVA: We're going to celebrate a little. Are you coming with us?

Avan doesn't even have time to respond because the front door forcefully opens, and the drunk Mihael enters the house. Eva and Avan look at him, scared.

MIHAEL: Woman, I'm home.

Mihael goes into the kitchen and looks around. Terrified, Avan and Eva wait for what's coming.

MIHAEL: And you didn't cook anything.

EVA: There's sarma in the oven.

MIHAEL: And you made sarma. Because you know I don't like sarma.

Mihael grabs the lid and hurls it towards Eva. Avan decides that it would be best if she ran out of the house.

Scene 4

Avan, barefoot and soaking wet, comes back home in the small hours of the morning. Eva looks at her with relief. Avan is clearly absent, absent-minded.

EVA: I was worried where you were. Even Dad was worried. We were looking for you.

Eva goes to Avan and hugs her. Then she looks at her from head to toe.

EVA: Avan, where are your shoes?

Avan looks at her, confused. For a couple of moments, it seems as if she doesn't know who she is talking to, and then she looks at her feet.

AVAN: Ah. I must have forgotten them.

EVA: It's ten degrees outside, and it's raining. You'll catch pneumonia.

AVAN: Hm.

Eva takes a blanket and covers Avan with it, then starts towelling off her wet hair.

EVA: Where have you been?

AVAN: I had to go around because they were stalking me.

EVA: What? Who was following you?

AVAN: Pssst, I got away, Mama.

Eva watches Avan and doesn't know what to think or what to do.

EVA: Avan, are you okay?

Avan smiles and pretends she is fine.

AVAN: Of course.

EVA: Do you know where we are, when we are, who I am and who you are?

AVAN: Of course, you're my mother, and I'm Avan. I'm at home, and it's 1972.

Eva looks at Avan and doesn't know what to do.

EVA: But where have you been?

AVAN: In the park.

Eva is silent and doesn't know what's going on.

EVA: Avan. Are you sure everything is okay?

Avan nods.

AVAN: Yes, yes, no worries.

Scene 5

Avan is lying in bed and staring at the ceiling. Suddenly, she thinks she has heard something. She walks around the room and presses her ear against the wall. She carefully locks the door with her patented clothes-hanger lock.

A few seconds later, she starts tearing the cork from the wall.

Because she doesn't find anything under the first piece of cork, she keeps tearing.

She becomes slightly manic.

Eva, who has just woken up, tries to break into the room.

EVA: Avan! Avan!

Eva manages to break down the door and rushes to Avan. She grabs her and shakes her, and Avan slaps her hard.

EVA: What is the matter with you? What's going on?

AVAN: They are listening to me! They listen to me all the time!

EVA: Who?!

Avan bursts into manic crying.

AVAN: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know what is wrong with me, Mum. I don't know.

Avan coils into a foetal position on the floor, cries and rocks back and forth. Eva looks at her, scared, and doesn't know what to do.

Mihael enters the room as well.

MIHAEL: What's going on?

EVA: I have to take her to the hospital. I don't see what else to do.

MIHAEL: But she's alright. Look.

Mihael walks up to Avan and shakes her by the shoulders.

MIHAEL: Avan? Avan?

Avan pierces him with a poisonous look and bites him. She draws blood. Michael jumps away, scared.

Scene 6

Hospital. Eva is waiting for the doctor. The doctor comes out of the room and walks over to Eva.

DOCTOR: Avan is having quite developed signs of schizophrenia.

EVA: I'm sorry, but I don't know ...

DOCTOR: The nurse will explain everything and give you brochures. It's a form of insanity ...

EVA: Fine.

DOCTOR: She has delusions, she hears things, and she is paranoid. She must have had these issues for a while but was probably hiding them from you successfully.

EVA: Yes?

DOCTOR: And now they're raging out of control, likely because of hormones.

EVA: What hormones?

DOCTOR: Avan is pregnant.

EVA: What?

DOCTOR: Therefore, a careful decision will have to be made about the course of treatment so that it doesn't harm the baby. Schizophrenia is relatively successfully treated with electroshock therapy. But it is risky for pregnant women. Perhaps we should wait until she gives birth and then start treating her?

Scene 7

Eva steps carefully to Avan's bed. She is holding a bag of fruits she brought with her. She puts it on a nightstand.

Avan is lying in bed. She looks blissful and calm.

EVA: Avan.

AVAN: *(blissful)* I'm going to have a baby.

EVA: Yes ...

AVAN: It feels good.

Eva looks at her and doesn't know what to say.

EVA: Avan, who is the baby's father?

AVAN: What?

EVA: Who is the father?

Avan lowers her voice in confidence and hints to Eva to come closer.

AVAN: God.

EVA: What?

AVAN: God.

EVA: God?

AVAN: Psst. Not so loud.

EVA: What?

AVAN: So that the communists don't kill my baby.

EVA: Avan.

AVAN: I will give birth to a saviour. I was chosen.

Eva stares at her in disbelief and fear.

EVA: Avan, I ...

AVAN: I'm just joking, Mum, come on. Of course, God is not the father of my child. What is the matter with you? Are you insane? I'm not. I'm not insane.

EVA: But who is the father?

AVAN: A classmate from high school. You don't know him. It was. Just so. A bit of fun. One evening. I was interested in what it would be like. But obviously, it took.

EVA: Which classmate?

AVAN: Jernej.

EVA: Aha. And what will you do now?

AVAN: What do you mean, what will I do now?

EVA: What will you do with the baby?

AVAN: I'll have it, won't I?

EVA: Are you sure?

Eva's question makes Avan's good mood disappear.

AVAN: Why are you asking me this?

EVA: Just saying. Perhaps, given that you're not even in a relationship with this ... Jernej ... perhaps you'd first figure out what you want from life and then ...

Eva's question upsets Avan, who starts angrily hurling fruit that Eva placed on her nightstand at her mother.

AVAN: What are you saying? Why are you telling me this?

A nurse enters the room to de-escalate the situation.

NURSE: Ma'am, it would be best if you leave.

Scene 8

Avan is strapped to a bed in the psychiatric hospital. Eva is standing by the bed and looking at her, worried. Avan is obviously quite drugged. She appears absent and happy. Eva carefully begins the conversation.

EVA: Avan. I. I was thinking that perhaps I could sit down with this Jernej and ...

AVAN: Who?

EVA: Jernej. Your baby's father.

AVAN: Rebeka's.

EVA: What?

AVAN: I'll call her Rebeka.

EVA: Fine. However. Jernej ...

AVAN: Jernej isn't the father. I made that up.

EVA: Okay. Who is, then?

AVAN: Richard Burton.

EVA: Richard Burton? The actor? Elizabeth Tylor's husband?

AVAN: Yes.

EVA: Aha ... But. He lives in America, you know?

AVAN: They were shooting a film in Yugoslavia, *Sutjeska*, a couple of months ago. Don't you remember?

EVA: That is actually true ... And more probable than divine conception, but still.

Avan has a moment of sobriety or grounding.

AVAN: At times, brains create delusions because truth is too difficult to cope with.

EVA: What?

AVAN: That's what the doctor said.

Avan flies away into delusions again.

AVAN: But don't tell anyone. Because it would be a media scandal, Elizabeth would flip out. Richard said she's not the easiest of women.

Scene 9

Eva is sitting at home and thinking. Mihael enters, walks to the liquor cabinet and pours himself a glass of Rubin brandy.

MIHAEL: What are you thinking about?

EVA: With whom Avan is pregnant. What else?

Mihael smirks.

MIHAEL: Ah, youth. Who could know? Remember when you were young and had an affair with that guy, Josip, or whatever he was. And you didn't want anyone to know. Truth is, everyone in the brigade knew.

EVA: Yes, except. I wasn't holed up in the house all day. Avan has been at home most of the time her entire life, she doesn't go anywhere, she watches that damned television that I'd asked you not to buy, she doesn't have friends, she doesn't have hobbies, I don't understand how she could even meet anyone and ...

MIHAEL: Eva, you're overreacting. How do you know that she's always at home? You're gone most of the time.

EVA: Yes, but ... I don't know. The only man I know Avan has contact with ... is you.

Mihael pours himself a new drink.

Eva looks at Mihael, really without any motif, but Mihael becomes uneasy because of her look.

It suddenly dawns on Eva. She widens her eyes, horrified.

EVA: No.

MIHAEL: What?

EVA: No, no.

MIHAEL: Eva, I don't know what you're talking about.

Eva cannot grasp it all and looks at Mihael, scared. Mihael is uneasy, but he doesn't say anything. Eva collapses.

EVA: You've ruined my life.

MIHAEL: What?

EVA: Yes, way back in '45 when you ...

MIHAEL: Eva, you're no better than I am. What, you think I'm the only one who did bad things back then ...

EVA: And then I even decided we would be a family together. We shouldn't have. I shouldn't have come to you, to this house.

MIHAEL: You made those decisions all on your own.

Eva watches him silently. Mihael gives up on pouring the brandy into the glass and is now drinking from the bottle.

EVA: My daughter. My beloved daughter. How could you ...

Mihael has had enough of the accusations and throws the bottle towards Eva. She ducks, and the bottle breaks on the floor.

MIHAEL: Come on, stop playing stupid. You always want to see me as the bad one, but we both know you're no better than me, are you? We're both bad and corrupt together.

EVA: Apparently, I'm still a little better than you.

Mihael jumps towards Eva and starts strangling her. Eva barely manages to get away and runs out of the room. Mihael searches for a new bottle of drink in the cabinet.

A few moments later, Eva returns to the room with a gun in her hand.

Mihael turns around to tell her something and sees that Eva is pointing a gun at him.

Mihael smirks because he doesn't believe Eva could shoot him.

Mihael is not wrong.

Eva shoots about half a metre next to Mihael.

EVA: Get lost and never come back again.

Mihael smirks.

MIHAEL: Come on.

Eva shoots again, this time half a metre above Mihael's head.

EVA: Get lost!

Mihael leaves the house, and Eva drops to her knees and cries helplessly.

Scene 10

Eva waits in the corridor at the door. A member of the board, Barbara, also Eva's friend from the war, comes through the door and walks over to Eva. Eva looks at her expectingly.

EVA: Well?

BARBARA: No.

EVA: Why not? I wrote an application and described the circumstances. She's sick and ...

BARBARA: Avan is the one who doesn't want to have an abortion.

EVA: What?

BARBARA: We asked her if she wanted an abortion, and she said no. No doctor will perform an abortion on a woman who doesn't want it.

EVA: But she is a schizophreniac.

BARBARA: It doesn't matter. She doesn't want an abortion. She is an adult, and what she says stands.

Scene 11

Eva is holding the newborn Rebeka in her arms. She's talking to the doctor.

DOCTOR: Avan is responding well to the electroshocks. I'd say another ten treatments, and she'll be well.

EVA: Thank you.

DOCTOR: But she is still in a very fragile phase. There are days when Avan is aware that she's given birth, but most days, she isn't ... On some days, she knows what year we're in, but most of the time, she talks about the infiniteness of the universe, where neither space nor time exists.

Eva nods. Avan, strapped to the bed, is wheeled into the room. She must have had one of the treatments. For years to come, there will be psychiatrists who believe that electroshocks are an appropriate treatment for schizophrenia, and not torture and sick pleasure of taking it out on a helpless person who needs help. Even in 2023, this form of treatment will still appear in some countries.

The doctor leaves, and Eva steps to Avan and caresses her gently.

Eva holds Rebeka to Avan, but Avan turns away from her child, annoyed. Eva puts the infant into a pram.

EVA: The doctor says you'll soon be better.

Avan sobs loudly.

AVAN: Mummy, I want to go home. I don't want this anymore.

EVA: Just a little bit more, and you'll be home and healthy and ...

AVAN: But I don't want it anymore.

EVA: I know it's hard, however.

Avan's sobs turn into screams.

AVAN: I don't want it anymore! Take me home!

A nurse dashes into the room and administers a syringe of sedatives to Avan.

NURSE: Ma'am, I think it would be best if you leave.

Eva, with Rebeka in her arms, leaves Avan's room. When Eva is walking down the corridor, she can still hear Avan scream.

We hear the song "Venus in Furs" by the Velvet Underground. The choice of this song is not random. The group's lead singer, Lou Reed, was treated with electroshock therapy in the late 1950s for his psychological problems. Lou Reed does not have anything to do with our story, but it is an interesting fact that also some very creative and successful people in history were traumatised by electroshock.

At the end of the corridor, Eva still hears Avan's screams, but they are slowly calming down because of the sedatives she has been given.

Tears slide down Eva's cheeks.

2023

Scene 6

Rebeka and Ester are staring at Rafko in shock. Rebeka, with horror in her eyes, has realised she is a child of incest. Ester's thoughts immediately jump to the possibility that the foetus currently inside her is degenerated because it's inbred.

REBEKA: I am. My father is. My grandfather?

RAFKO: No. No. No. No. Luckily. If you can call anything lucky in this story. Your real grandpa is. Well. He never recognised Avan. Your gran got pregnant during the war with a guy named Josip.

Rafko continues with the story he learnt from Eva that night.

In 1991, Rafko and Eva have unloaded Mihael's body into the dug grave and are now covering it with soil.

EVA: (1991) It was wartime, and I was a little bit young and a little bit naïve.

1945

1945, liberated territory in Bela Krajina. The news about Hitler's suicide has just spread, and there's mirth in the air because everything points to a near end of the war. Eva works as a nurse in a hospital run by the partisan resistance.

Scene 1

Eva is sitting on an examination table in a small partisan hospital. She's wearing the uniform of a partisan nurse, and Barbara, a fellow nurse, is standing beside her.

BARBARA: Generally, there shouldn't be a problem. I've been through it twice myself.

EVA: Mhm.

BARBARA: But do think again.

EVA: Why are you telling me this? You have twice ...

BARBARA: Yes, because we were in the middle of the war. And the war will soon be over, so it seems. So it'll be easier. The new country will take care of us, the ones who have fought on the right side and helped to win the war.

EVA: But have we been on the right side?

BARBARA: Yes.

EVA: And what will happen to those who haven't been?

BARBARA: I don't know. Who knows? What you need to be interested in is that the country will take care of you and your baby.

EVA: The country may very well take care of me, but Josip will simply go back to take care of his actual wife and three kids.

BARBARA: Has he told you that?

EVA: No, but just because I accidentally got pregnant doesn't mean I'm stupid.

BARBARA: Yes. I don't know. Some survival instinct, or the instinct for survival of the species, is triggered automatically in human nature and children stick faster than in non-war circumstances. Just my observation.

EVA: Scientific medical observation.

BARBARA: No, no. These are more ... anecdotal findings.

Silence.

EVA: How many have come to you now, during the war, to ...

BARBARA: A fair bit.

EVA: What was the most efficient method?

BARBARA: Soapy water.

EVA: Mhm. Let's try this one, then.

Barbara stares motionlessly at Eva.

EVA: What?

BARBARA: One of the women died. Two hours later. It's only right that I tell you.

Eva shrugs.

EVA: I don't have another choice, do I?

BARBARA: I mean. You can keep it. You're Eva. The mother of the humankind, so to speak.

EVA: I've always wondered how humanity continued if Adam and Eve only had two sons, Abel and Cain.

BARBARA: First – no literal reading of the Bible. Second – they had more children, but those are not usually part of the canon, and we don't know anything about them. Their first daughter was supposedly named Avan.

EVA: So we're all simply descendants of incest between siblings.

BARBARA: As I've said – no literal reading of the Bible. These are myths. Are you sure you don't want to keep the baby?

EVA: I don't want to.

BARBARA: Okay. I understand.

Scene 2

A few days later, Eva is lying on the examination table, and Barbara is examining her. Barbara sighs.

BARBARA: Unsuccessful.

EVA: What?

BARBARA: It didn't work. You're still pregnant.

EVA: No way.

Eva sits up.

EVA: Now what?

Barbara shrugs.

EVA: Let's try something else.

BARBARA: I'm scared I'd damage you. I have no idea how your foetus survived this washout, however. I'm scared I'd hurt you if we try this again.

EVA: What other options are there?

Barbara ponders.

BARBARA: I'd wait at least a couple of days. For you to recover.

EVA: Okay.

Barbara goes to the medicine cabinet and takes out some dried herbs.

BARBARA: These are watercress and gentian. Make yourself an infusion. It might help. And lifting heavy things and bathing in hot water could help.

EVA: Thanks.

Scene 3

Eva is boiling a huge pot of water on the stove. Mihael enters the kitchen. At this point, historically linearly speaking, the third archangel enters our story – Mihael. We have already become quite acquainted with Gabriel and Rafael. The author of the story thought it would be ironic to name all three male characters after archangels. Because although the archangels were supposed to be the genderless messengers from God, all three carry unmistakably male names.

Mihael is visibly in love with Eva, but it is equally visible that all the feelings Eva has for him are friendly ones and nothing more.

MIHAEL: Making a stew?

EVA: Something like that.

MIHAEL: Have you talked to the officers about where you'd like to be transferred after the war?

EVA: No, not yet.

MIHAEL: Have you thought about it?

EVA: Not really.

MIHAEL: I'm staying here for training for a year or so, and then to Ljubljana, so I thought ...

EVA: Good for you.

MIHAEL: Yes, but I've been thinking. If you. Wanted to come with me.

Eva is silent and doesn't know what to say.

MIHAEL: I know that. None of your family is left, so. Nobody really is waiting for you, so. I thought that.

Eva gently looks at Mihael and caresses his cheek.

EVA: That is very sweet of you. But I think there's another girl waiting for you somewhere. Perhaps even here, in Bela Krajina. It would be a mistake if I went with you.

Mihael is nevertheless visibly hurt by Eva's words. Eva tries to lift a massive, heavy pot of boiling water from the stove. Because Mihael is angry with Eva, he doesn't even offer to help.

Eva moves the pot from the stove to the floor with difficulty, then drags it across the floor towards a communal bathroom, where there are several bathtubs. Mihael stands still.

MIHAEL: He's going back to his wife.

Eva stops.

MIHAEL: Josip is going back to his family. He won't stay with you. I know you hope he'll stay with you, but he won't. Don't be stupid. I know you're not stupid.

Eva doesn't answer.

MIHAEL: I can tell everybody that it's mine.

Eva stands there, confused.

EVA: Who?

MIHAEL: The baby. I know you're pregnant. We'll tell everybody it's mine, and that's it.

EVA: Ah, Mišo. You have no idea what you're offering. You'll be sorry.

MIHAEL: No, I won't.

EVA: You don't want a child who's not even yours, trust me.

MIHAEL: I do if it's your child.

Eva and Mihael look at each other silently. Eva slowly speaks.

EVA: The child is gone. There's been an accident.

Mihael doesn't know what to say.

MIHAEL: I'm sorry.

EVA: Anyways. Good luck. If you'll excuse me, I have work to do now.

Eva focuses on her boiling water again, and Mihael looks at her in anger.

MIHAEL: You're making a stupid mistake. You'll come asking me for a favour.

EVA: Perhaps.

Mihael leaves. Eva slowly lifts the pot of water and pours the water into the bathtub. Then, she prepares to bathe in the hot water.

2023

Scene 7

Rebeka looks at Rafko and tries to process all the information he has just conveyed.

REBEKA: Why haven't you told me this?

RAFKO: It was already hard on you that your gran went to prison. And you were pregnant. And stressed. And then, when Ester was born, I felt that. I don't know. That it could destroy you.

REBEKA: Thank God for men who decide in our stead what women can take and what not, right?

RAFKO: Rebeka.

REBEKA: No, no, great, thanks. Really. At least I know that you started distancing yourself from me because you helped my grandmother to bury a body. Before, I thought it was actually my own fault that you ... suddenly. Became. Absent. I was certain you were cheating on me.

ESTER (who lacks a piece of the story): But. What actually happened in 1991?

REBEKA: Who cares? May she rot in jail until her death, your great-grandmother. Jesus Christ.

Rebeka looks at Rafko sadly.

REBEKA: You know, when we were expecting Ester, I really thought we had a beautiful life waiting for us. That the three of us would be together. Like that. Happy.

RAFKO: So did I.

REBEKA: And she destroyed it for me.

RAFKO: She tried to protect you. And you did. You did give Ester a beautiful life.

Ester is no longer sure she had a beautiful life. At this moment, she is questioning herself about what this life really was. Was it beautiful? She is really no longer sure if she wants to bring a child into this family. She's having an identity crisis. Who is she? What is her family history? Would she do a child a favour if she terminated her pregnancy? Her parents divorced soon after her birth, and for this reason, Ester has, in fact, quite a lot of mistrust towards the male sex and a cynical attitude toward relationships. The memories from her childhood that she preserved in

her head are getting a different meaning.

1994

Scene 1

Christmas Eve. The house features a beautifully decorated Christmas tree with lights. The three-year-old Ester, eyes wide open, is looking at the beautifully wrapped gifts under the tree and waiting for the moment her mother, Rebeka, announces that she may open them. But Ester knows she has to be good and eat her dinner first.

Rebeka is sitting at the table set for dinner, checking her watch. Finally, Rafko comes through the door. Rafko first hugs Ester then walks up to Rebeka and kisses her. Rebeka immediately smells Rafko's breath, and it ruins her mood. She looks at him reproachfully, and Rafko knows what this reproachful look means.

RAFKO: It's Christmas. We celebrated a little.

REBEKA: Yeah? And three days ago, what was that? And a week ago? Intense preparation for Christmas?

Rebeka and Rafko try to argue as quietly as possible so that Ester won't hear them. Ester is like all small children, who are aware when the conversation is not intended for their ears and make their parents' work easier by pretending that they don't hear the conversation that is not for them, but in reality, they listen very carefully and try to understand.

REBEKA: When did you even get the chance? You took food and a gift to gran. Where and how did you make it?

With the events revealed so far, it is rather clear that Rafko needed some consolation in the shape of alcohol after visiting Eva because the memories of Mihael's burial resurfaced – three years later, he was still hiding them from Rebeka to protect her.

RAFKO: Do you really want to fight on Christmas?

REBEKA: Why not? Isn't it the right time for the truth?

Rafko doesn't have a counterargument.

REBEKA: I can't be bothered to put up with this. And it's been going on for years. Besides, ever since I've given birth, you won't even touch me. I don't need to put up with some comatose guy in my house and for our daughter to witness it. I don't want you here anymore after the New Year.

Rebeka has that incredible ability to look at life completely rationally and completely turn off emotions. In her brain, she conjured an equation that confirms that her life won't be even a smidge worse without Rafko, who has had problems with intimacy ever since that fateful night in 1991.

What about love? In Rebeka's brain, love is something overrated, something that prevents people from having a good life and making healthy decisions. Something devastating. When they read France Prešeren's Wreath of Sonnets and the teacher explained Prešeren's unrequited love to Julia, Rebeka couldn't understand why no one looked at this love from Julia's point of view. A drunk, old dude fell for her, stalked her, bothered her and obsessively wrote poems about her, and now she's supposed to be the villain in this story. "What love, fuck this shit," thought the fifteen-year-old Rebeka, "Why is Prešeren's side of the story part of the nation's history canon and not Julia's? Has anyone ever asked themselves that in addition to his poetry, his legacy is also his unwanted children who, because of their drunk, absent father, have daddy issues and intimacy problems?"

2023

Scene 8

Rebeka, in front of the grave of her mother, Avan, is on her knees, crying. She wishes that the life of her birth mother was different than it was. She wishes her mother had had a happy life.

She is thinking about how life could be different and how she wouldn't be cheated out of a sane mother.

But thinking about what could have been but isn't is pointless.

The rational Rebeka will realise that the following day.

But on this day, her emotions have defeated her reason for the first time in her life.

The very next day, she will come to terms with the rational fact that if only micro-moments in life were different, she wouldn't exist.

At least not in the DNA configuration hiding in her genes. Even worse – her sweet Ester would also not exist.

Rebeka is really quick at rationally arranging things in her head and continuing with life. She can't grasp how Eva and Rafko could have misjudged that she, of all people, could not take this.

Scene 9

Ester is lying in bed and cannot sleep. Gabor, next to her, is sleeping soundly. Ester watches him angrily because she envies his sleep. She doesn't think it's fair that some people can fall asleep on cue. She never could. Even as a child, she had a hard time falling asleep. It always seemed that her insomnia and anxiety weren't hers but something that she had inherited from previous generations. In the last few days, her theory proved to be correct. The thought of what really happened that night in 1991 haunts her.

Ester hears two cats in heat under her window. She gets a minor panic attack because the sounds of a female cat mounted by a male are among the least pleasant sounds a person might hear in everyday life. Male cats allegedly have spikes on their penises, so that's why female cats scream so much while the male is jumping her – because they're in pain. But it's still in their nature to present. Literally present to pain. And these are not even among the most absurd patterns of procreative behavioural practices that Ester has heard about in her life. One scorpion species allegedly deposits its spermatophore somewhere on the beach and then forces the female to sit on it. Some spiders caress females until they fall asleep, then rape them. Love and romance? Only the human species manages to associate this with procreation.

The cats under her window finish mating, and Ester is quite relieved that she doesn't have to listen to it anymore.

Ester decides she will get to the bottom of this thing regarding her ancestry and visit her great-grandmother, Eva, in jail the following day.

Scene 10

Ester sits in the prison park with her great-grandmother, Eva. One can tell they do not have a personal relationship. How could they? Eva asked Ester's mother, Rebeka, that her great-granddaughter should not visit her because Eva decided that she would self-punish with decades in prison where she would be tortured by her own memories, mistakes and traumas. Her brain accepted this punishment and has not relieved Eva with dementia and memory loss, even at almost one hundred years old. No, Eva has to remember everything every day, with a sane mind and a full consciousness.

EVA: Well, then your dad told you what happened to Avan, anyways.

ESTER: He doesn't know everything.

EVA: Indeed, he does not.

ESTER: You accepted Mihael as your husband, and you raised your daughter Avan as if she were his. And then he ...

EVA: Yes.

ESTER: But, what then really happened in 1991?

EVA: In 1991, a new country was born. And with the new country, new hope. A blank page. A fresh start ... But ... A new country doesn't mean a new beginning of history. A new country doesn't bury ghosts that suddenly rise from the dead and demand closure.

Eva tells Ester about the fateful night in 1991.

1991

Scene 1A

Late evening on that fateful night. Eva, Rafko and Rebeka are sitting in the living room when the doorbell rings.

Rebeka goes to open the door. Mihael is at the entrance. Mihael's health is in a poor state. One can see from afar that disease has taken over his body. He's emaciated, pale and almost irrecognisable. Rebeka has no idea who the person at the door is. She leads him to the living room.

When Eva sees him, she pales as if she has seen a ghost. An even more correct description would be that she pales because she is seeing a ghost.

Eva and Mihael stand, staring at each other.

Rebeka and Rafko have no clue what is going on.

REBEKA: Good evening, and you are?

EVA: Rafko, please take Rebeka upstairs.

Rafko takes Rebeka's hand and leads her out of the living room. Rebeka is unwilling to go because she has a curious disposition and doesn't like not knowing things. So she doesn't like it one bit that her grandma Eva doesn't explain who the mystery visitor who upset her so much is. Eva tries to hide her uneasiness at the sight of Mihael.

MIHAEL: Eva, I ... I didn't have a good life. So that you don't think. The last twenty years. Don't think that I had a good life.

EVA: And I had what?

MIHAEL: I thought. After the war. When we became a family, I genuinely believed that we would be happy. That we would have a good life. And then. Ghosts came to the surface. They came in the middle of the night. You remember how I screamed in my sleep.

EVA: You think nothing haunted me? It did, but I put in effort for the three of us so that

...

MIHAEL: You have always been stronger than me. I'm dying, Eva.

Eva is silent. She doesn't know what to say to him. On the one hand, the defeated image of Mihael, once a strong man whose body is being consumed by cancer, evokes pity in her. On the other, this image of a monster who has destroyed her daughter fills her with such rage that she would soon jump up and strangle him.

MIHAEL: The cancer began in the liver. And quickly spread to almost all organs.

EVA: At least it didn't spread to your consciousness, considering you probably don't have one.

MIHAEL: I've always liked your knack for sarcasm. You were different from other girls in the brigade. I didn't want to be in love with you because you rejected me, and I found myself pathetic, but I couldn't help myself.

EVA: You pushed me to murder. I asked you for a job, and you gave me the worst job you could offer.

MIHAEL: I thought that ...

EVA: That we would burn in hell together, yes.

MIHAEL: No, they were ... you know yourself that those were different times. They told you to do something, and you did it. I didn't. I don't know. It seemed so logical at that moment. Eliminate evil so we can have a new beginning. It was a very strange moment in history when we fell into a group psychosis, and none of us questioned the broader picture much. About what was right and ... How, in fact, nobody has the right to obey.

Eva is silent. She doesn't know what to say. She wasn't prepared for this conversation. Eva likes being prepared. This time, she's not.

MIHAEL: Is that ... my daughter?

EVA: You have no right to call her your daughter. She's not yours.

MIHAEL: She's beautiful.

EVA: It is surprising that something so full of light could come from your genes.

MIHAEL: Eva, for the last twenty years, I have been figuring out why I have. Done to you what I have.

EVA: And what have you done?

MIHAEL: You know.

EVA: No, I don't. Do tell.

MIHAEL: Eva.

EVA: Tell me what you have done.

MIHAEL: I can't say it out loud.

EVA: If you're really even a little bit sorry, you'll say it out loud.

MIHAEL: Eva ...

EVA: You killed my daughter! You killed everything that was inside her! For twenty years, she has been a ghost, lost inside her head!

MIHAEL: You're blaming me that she has turned out the way she is? Where did you take her when she was still just a baby? Why did you take her with you to Kočevski Rog? Because, in your opinion, she was just a baby who wouldn't remember anything? Babies soak in everything from birth. All I wanted was to help you. You were the one who made bad decisions! You got pregnant by Josip and got on the wrong side of the entire party! You, you ... All I tried to do was to help you! I took in a child who wasn't even mine because I ...

EVA: Mihael ... Avan is not biologically mine. I lied to you. I'm sorry.

Mihael, confused, looks at Eva. Eva reveals the events from 1945.

1945

Scene 4

Barbara and Eva are in the surgery. Eva is lying on the table with her trousers off. Barbara is standing in front of Eva, holding a wire coat hanger in her hand, disinfecting it with ethanol.

From the outside, the sound of the radio, the announcer saying that the occupier has been defeated and the war is over. Also, the sound of the partisans who shout merrily and sing partisan songs.

Unlike the noise outside, Barbara and Eva are dead serious. Barbara looks at Eva.

BARBARA: Are you really absolutely certain?

Eva nods.

BARBARA: You may not be able to have children after this.

EVA: I don't care.

1991

Scene 2A

Mihael stares at Eva, surprised.

MIHAEL: And you succeeded.

EVA: Yes.

MIHAEL: Avan isn't. Avan isn't Josip's.

EVA: No.

MIHAEL: And Avan isn't yours.

EVA: No.

Eva continues her story.

EVA: Do you remember how I visited you a couple of months later? You had just moved into this house ...

1945

Scene 5

A few months later. Eva is visiting Mihael. They are sitting and sipping tea. Eva looks around Mihael's town house. This is a house that would then stay in their family for generations.

EVA: It's nice.

MIHAEL: Thank you. I've just got it. It's a little empty still. A little lonely. It would be nice if there were some children running around here and playing.

Eva nods and starts biting her lips. Mihael looks at her with concern. It is obvious that he's still in love with her.

MIHAEL: Are you alright?

EVA: Hm, not really. Somehow. I don't have a job. Nobody will hire me.

MIHAEL: What do you mean? You're ours. You fought and won the war with us.

EVA: Yes, Josip's wife somehow managed to turn me into an undesirable. A persona. Well, non grata. An immoral person. Josip confessed everything to her and she forgave him everything and took him back. But she tarnished me in everyone's eyes.

MIHAEL: I see.

EVA: Well, to cut it short. I need a job, Mihael. This is not easy for me, asking you for a favour, seeing how I rejected you in the past and you could feel like I'm using you. But I have truly tried every other option. Currently, nobody wants me. I know many things. I learnt many things during the war. To cook, dress wounds, drive trucks, sew ...

Mihael is visibly happy that Eva needs a favour from him. Eva looks at Mihael and, at that moment, sees him as Archangel Michael himself – the angel protector that will save her from all evil.

MIHAEL: You and I were nevertheless always good friends, Eva. I'd be glad to do you a favour and find something for you. Don't worry.

Scene 6

A line of ten trucks. Eva is driving one of them, and Mihael is sitting on the passenger seat next to her. The truck is driving on a gravel road and shaking terribly. It is getting dark, and they're driving deeper and deeper into the forest.

EVA: Are we still not there?

MIHAEL: No, I'll tell you ... Turn left here.

EVA: There's no road here ...

MIHAEL: Sure, but it's a standard track.

Eva turns left, and they continue driving in silence. From the trailer of the truck, sick coughing is heard.

EVA: I hope a doctor will see them there. So that we don't see tuberculosis start spreading again or some other epidemic.

MIHAEL: Don't worry about that.

The crying of a child is heard from the truck, then the murmuring of the child's mother so that the child would stop crying. When Eva hears the child crying, she shudders.

EVA: You've never told me that there were children here. What will the children do in a working colony?

Mihael is silent and doesn't answer her.

EVA: Mihael? You're moving entire families there? So that they can be together, or ...

Mihael is still silent because he doesn't know what to say. Eva looks at him. She becomes slightly scared.

EVA: Where are we taking these people?

Mihael does not answer her. Eva, crying, asks him again.

EVA: Where are we taking these people?

Mihael is silent.

EVA: Where am I taking these people?

Eva stares in front of her.

Scene 7

Eva is standing to the side and watching Mihael and others getting people off the trucks and lining them up.

Eva throws up.

When Mihael is not watching, a mother pushes a baby into Eva's arms. Eva looks at her, surprised.

MOTHER: Please.

The mother gives Eva a desperate, beseeching look, then steps back into the line. Eva hides the baby under her coat and takes it back into the truck.

Mihael and others shoot the people they have brought there. Eva turns away in horror. The sound of shooting stops.

Eva turns around and sees the baby's dead mother.

Scene 8

Eva and Mihael drive back in silence.

EVA: That wasn't the first time, was it? That you took them.

Mihael is silent.

EVA: But the war is over and ...

MIHAEL: Eva. In every war, things end like this for the defeated side. We're not the first ones. Had they won, we would end up like that. Trust me, they wouldn't spare us.

EVA: And yet.

MIHAEL: The war is over, and we want it to stay over. We don't need another war. We need to make sure that the war is truly ended and that another one isn't coming. Because other countries are sending hordes of our enemies back to us, do you understand? Unless we do this, there will be another war. Is that what you want?

Eva shakes her head.

MIHAEL: We need peace.

Eva nods. Silence. A child's crying is heard. Mihael looks around in confusion.

MIHAEL: What?

Mihael pulls the baby from the crate behind the seat.

MIHAEL: One managed to stash it into the cab. Turn around.

EVA: What?

MIHAEL: Turn around so it can be with its mama.

Eva is frightened.

EVA: It's mine.

MIHAEL: What?

EVA: I had nowhere to put it, so I brought it with me.

Mihael looks at her incredulously.

EVA: You do remember that I was pregnant. And I was telling you that the foetus was gone. Well, I lied. And I've been hiding from everyone that I have a baby. Because I'm ashamed. There, I admit I'm ashamed that I have an illegitimate child and no money and no flat. That's why I needed the job.

Mihael is surprised to hear this. He lovingly looks at the baby.

MIHAEL: You have a beautiful baby, Eva. What's its name?

Eva thinks for a couple of moments.

EVA: Avan.

MIHAEL: Avan?

EVA: Yes, Avan.

MIHAEL: A beautiful name.

Silence. Mihael and Eva are each deep in their own thoughts. Mihael is rocking the baby gently.

MIHAEL: Eva, I know you've rejected me before, and you had your own good reasons for that. But, considering that you now actually have a child. And that this child, nevertheless, deserves the best. I will gladly take you both in, and we will say that Avan is my child, and we will live as a family. A happy family.

Eva is filled with all sorts of emotions, and she sobs loudly.

1991

Scene 3A

Mihael cries, listening to Eva's story from 1945.

MIHAEL: Why have you never told me?

EVA: I was scared.

Reminiscence hurts Mihael and Eva. Eva's anger at Mihael returns.

EVA: It's not fair that your suffering will just end. That you will die and all your demons with you. You haven't suffered enough. Why do you now have a way out and will die, but I have to continue living with all this?

MIHAEL: Eva ... Can I ask you for one last favour?

EVA: No.

MIHAEL: Eva, when I die. I think it will be soon. I want to be buried in an undisclosed place. So that no one remembers me. Because of me, many never got a grave. I don't deserve one, either.

Surprised, Mihael suddenly sees Avan at the door.

MIHAEL: Avan.

Avan holds up a gun and points it at Mihael.

At first, Mihael thinks that just like her mother, Eva, Avan won't shoot him.

Mihael is wrong.

Avan pulls the trigger and shoots Mihael in the head.

A gush of blood caused by the shot spatters Eva's face and clothes.

Bloodied, Eva fearfully looks at Avan.

EVA: Sweetheart ...

Avan points the gun at her head and shoots herself.

Scene 4A

In the bedroom, Rebeka is taking off Rafko's sweater as a part of foreplay when, once again, she hears something that sounds like a gunshot. Rebeka jumps to the radio and turns it off so she can hear better. All she hears is animalistic screaming and Eva's crying. Rebeka looks at Rafko, terrified. Rafko jumps up and puts his sweater back on.

RAFKO: Wait here.

2023

Scene 11

Ester sees Eva in prison.

ESTER: However. You've been locked up unjustly for decades. You didn't kill Avan.

EVA: Not unjustly. I killed her. I didn't protect her. I was there when Mihael killed her mother. Mihael never knew that Avan wasn't my daughter. It seemed. It was too complicated for me to tell him. I felt that this way, I was protecting Avan.

Silence, Ester is uneasy. She has no idea what to say. What exactly does one say at this point? Who would know what to say in her place?

EVA: We all think we're protecting our children when we lie and cover up the truth. But the truth has never killed anyone. The lie, however, has.

Ester tries to comprehend everything she has found out. Because it's too much to digest, she slides into apathy. The human brain has the ability to survive. It simply turns off all emotions once these emotions become too much to process.

EVA: I reserved my plot at the graveyard years ago. Bury Mihael in it. Bury me next to my beloved Avan. When the time comes. I've been praying for years for it to come. But it doesn't come, it doesn't ... I then called Rafko to help me bury Mihael into an unmarked grave in our garden. I then called the police to confess to killing my own daughter.

Ester is silent.

EVA: You know, Ester, in the end, it matters that life goes on. If life goes on, then one day, it might get better. If it doesn't go on, it will never get better.

2023

EPILOGUE

Ester is observing her pregnant belly in the mirror. She caresses it lovingly.

History is an interesting thing that can be explained from different perspectives with different emphases and details depending on the time, space and person dealing with it.

Memory itself is already an interesting thing. What is even the purpose of memory?

The purpose of memory is certainly not to immortalise past events into an objective capsule. The purpose of memory is to survive our present reality. And what is reality? It is what our brain chooses to be the reality at any given moment.

Because there are several such moments, there are also several realities and with different realities, the past is also read in different ways.

Different generations tell different stories differently.

What is the purpose of the constantly new interpretation of reality? What is the purpose of certain details being given more attention at times but left out in a different narrative? What is the purpose of one generation forgetting a certain part of the story and the new generation reviving it?

Survival.

Our brain is a wonderful, ever-working organ that keeps looking for meaning, looking for the positive, looking for life and looking for love.

In this moment of history, in this specific time, in this specific place and in this specific brain, this story was interpreted in the way presented. Certain things are forgotten and left out. In a different interpretation, those very things would be emphasised.

What is the purpose of forgetting?

Survival.

Ester's child will tell this story differently than Ester will. Ester will forget different things than her child will. Ester will try to see the purpose and protect her child, just like her ancestors did.

Are the secrets finally solved and pronounced? Has the new generation finally solved the traumas of the past generations, and is it stepping into the bright future with a lighter step?

Let's not forget that the body of Avan's mother has still not been identified or perhaps not even found.

But what is a happy future? Allegedly, people are not meant to be happy but to survive.

And Ester has decided that life goes on and, with it, the hope that it will be beautiful, even if only for a brief spell.

What about her relationship? She and Gabor diligently go to couples' therapy and try to solve their problems. Like many millennials, Ester is convinced that therapy can solve problems. But if it really is successful, that is for the next generation to tell.

CURTAIN