

THE SOLDIER & THE BIRDS

Hristo Boytchev

The Soldier and The Birds" is an original female version of "The Colonel Bird" by Hristo Boytchev

The n'th war in East Europe. An UN care package falls in a distant psychiatric hospital. The package contains some canned food and K-FOR uniforms. The patients put on the uniforms and embark on a peace-keeping mission. It turns out that they are the only normal people in the mindlessness of the war...

CHARACTERS:

The Doctor
The Colonel
Nina
Titch
Mata Hari
Meral
Teresa

PROLOGUE

Doctor They say that there isn't a normal doctor in the field of psychiatry. Perhaps that's why I chose to work there after leaving the Institute: I often suffered from long-lasting depressions as a result of the absurdities of every-day life, which the philosophers call existentialism. Yes, I've never had much confidence or belief in myself. I've always believed there to be many truths in a conflict but I've never known which one to support myself. This is known as "the Hamlet Complex" by psychiatrists. In the regional Clinic for Psychiatry, where the usual misery and over-crowding reign, I was told that there was a very real need for a young and energetic specialist like myself. Not there in the clinic but at "The Forty Holy Martyrs", a branch of the clinic named after an old monastery in the mountains, where there were about ten interesting but harmless cases. "There's no professional risk there for the doctor," they told me, "and there's no doctor." It was only 43 kilometres away. It was a long journey along rough mountain roads. The mountains became wilder and more splendid whilst the road became rougher and more broken. We didn't meet a soul along the way. At last, at the very end of a huge savage gorge with overhanging rocks, the ruins of the monastery appeared.

Evening. *The sound of a car and the light of headlamps.*
Driver This is the monastery. I'm going back. There's a mist rising and there are wolves around here.
Doctor What wolves?
Driver Real ones! They hide here until the snow falls.
Doctor And when the snow falls?
Driver There's even more of them.
Doctor And how do you get food up here?
Driver We don't.
Doctor I don't understand.
Driver You will.
Doctor Doesn't anyone else live up here apart from the patients?
Driver I told you, didn't I? The wolves.
Doctor Bloody hell!
Driver That's it. Come on...

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A hospital ward: beds and an old television. Nina, back to the audience, is absorbed in a book.

Another patient whose face is almost completely hidden by an anorak hood sits motionless throughout the scene. From time to time Nina, deep in her book, sighs "I am a seagull!"

Doctor Good evening.
They do not even look at her.
Doctor /louder/. Good evening.

No reaction.

Doctor /shouting/. Good evening!
The same result.
A nun enters with a pencil and piece of paper in her hands.

Teresa What are you shouting about?

Doctor I'm the new doctor.

Teresa It's too late to shout now – you should have thought about it before. Oh, there, I've lost the place again. I'd got to 113 500. /She looks at the doctor./ Haven't we met before?

Doctor Where?

Teresa Customs on the Danube Bridge.

Doctor I've never been there.

Teresa You remind me of a colleague.

Doctor A nun?!

Teresa Perhaps, if she has repented.... May the Lord forgive her! /She makes the sign of the cross./ For me I know – there is no forgiveness: I have committed 113 500 sins.

Nina /reading aloud with her back to the others/. “All men and beasts, lions, eagles, and quails, horned stags, geese, spiders, silent fish...”
Teresa taps Nina lightly on the shoulder.

Nina /turning round and seeing the doctor/. I am a seagull!

Teresa The new doctor.

Nina My condolences./she offers her hand./ My name is Nina Zarechnaya.

Teresa /loudly, behind her/. That's a lie!

Nina /continues, unconcerned/. Actress. Three times I've played in “The Seagull” by A. P. Chekhov.

Teresa /behind her/. Another lie.

Nina A. P. Chekhov is my speciality. /She starts Nina Zarechnaya's monologue from “The Seagull”./ “All men and beasts, lions, eagles, and quails, horned stags, geese, spiders, silent fish...”

Teresa Zoo...

Doctor I said “good evening” to you a little while ago.

Nina I didn't see you.

Doctor But I shouted....

Nina I'm totally deaf, ma'am.

Doctor I beg your pardon?

Nina /shouts/. Deaf! I'm deaf! Ab-so-lute-ly deaf! I lost my hearing because of an explosion in a war film.

Doctor But how do you hear me?

Nina I can't. I lip read.

Teresa /behind her/. She lipreads everything.

Doctor And that one? Is she deaf too? /Indicates the immobile figure./

Nina I don't know. She never says anything.

Teresa /loudly/. She's schizophrenic!

Nina I am a seagull.
Teresa crosses herself and continues her calculations.

Teresa 113 500 and that's only a rough estimate! Do not forgive me, Lord – I do not deserve it.

Titch /knocks on the door from outside/. I'm coming in!

Doctor Someone wants to come in.

Nina Titch, for sure! Don't move!

Doctor What?

Nina Sshhhh! Don't move an inch! /Towards the door./ Go on then, come in.

Titch /opens the door and shouts/. Don't move!

Nina Come in.

Titch Nobody is to move!

Nina OK, OK....

Titch OK but you're moving.

Nina There, I've stopped.
Titch enters very cautiously, holding high a torch with a red light, creeps along, back to the wall, following the others with frightened eyes.

Titch Don't move! /lifts up the torch./ One false move and – prison for life.

Nina This is the doctor.

Titch So what if it is? We're all equal in the eyes of the law. /Titch gets under the furthest away of the beds./

Doctor What's going on here?

Nina She suffers from this mania that she's very, very small and she's afraid that someone will step on her.

Titch Only in the evening – not during the day. But when it starts to get dark I become ever so small. I got lost in the grass once.

Nina She carries that torch so that we can see her.

Titch At the moment, for example, I feel that I'm about 100 grams. But we're all the same in the eyes of the law. If anyone steps on me they'll do a life sentence, because there in the court I'm the same as anyone.

Nina Oh, Lord! Such Chekhovian despair!

Teresa /raising her head from her calculations/. The total's growing! 380 740.

Titch Quiet! Mata Hari's coming!

Offstage cautious footsteps are heard.

Nina */whispers/*. Is it her?

Titch It's her.

Nina The money! Quickly!
They all give Nina money from their pockets and she hides it all in the unlit stove. The door slowly opens and there on the threshold stands Mata Hari, uncertain as to whether she should enter. Eventually she enters and goes towards Nina.

Nina Not next to me! I've nothing left. Look. */She turns her pockets out. Mata Hari moves towards Teresa*

Teresa And I've got nothing. See! */She turns her pockets out. Mata Hari goes to the empty bed in the corner of the room.*

Titch */shouts from under the bed/*. No! You'll go to prison!

Mata I've been there already. It's no worse than here.

Doctor */to Mata Hari/*. I'm a doctor. What's your trouble??

Titch Nothing. We're the ones who're troubled.

Nina She's an alcoholic. She steals everything and then drinks it.

Mata That's not true. I steal but I don't drink.

Nina So, where's the monastery wine?

Mata I didn't steal the wine. I found it.

Titch And the petrol for the jeep?

Doctor What jeep?

Titch Scrapped. It was a present from the army. And they gave us half a ton of petrol and she drank it.

Mata I drink gin, not petrol! And you put out that red light, it makes this place really look like a brothel.....

Teresa */offended/*. I have confessed everything to God the Father. And I'm still confessing. 390 000 sins up to now.....

Nina Quiet! The News!
They sit in front of the television but a weeping Meral enters.

Meral I want to die!
She points a spray can at her face.

Meral I want to die!

Titch Well, die then, but watch where you step. */Lifts the torch./* Otherwise it's prison for life.

Meral I'm going to commit suicide!

Nina */anxiously/*. After the News, please! The News is starting now.

Meral I can't take any more!

Nina Fifteen minutes only! This is the short broadcast.

Meral I die!
She sprays her face and collapses on to the floor. They all hold their noses.

Nina Oh, Lord, just when the News is on! She makes our lives stink with that spray.

Mata */lifts the spraycan with a frightened look/*. Nerve gas for self-defence? She'll come round in a couple of hours. She does it every week. */drags Meral to one side by the legs./*

Nina The News!
They all sit down in front of the television. A black and white picture showing the opening sequences of the News appears but there is no sound. They all turn to stare at the screen apart from the schizophrenic who stays motionlessly staring through the window.

Doctor */looks at them in amazement/*. There's no sound!

All Shhhh.....!

Doctor */quietly/*. Why is there no sound?

Mata The sound doesn't work.
The announcer appears and his lips begin to move. At the same instant Nina, staring hard at the announcer, begins to do a voice over.

Nina Good evening , ladies and gentlemen. I am a seagull. Today the fierce fighting continued. The UN once again attempted to get a convoy with aid for the occupied zones through but the convoy was held up by the opposing forces...

SCENE TWO

Doctor */on the telephone/*. Hallo, hallo! Hallo – is that the Chief Consultant? I'm calling from "The Forty Holy Martyrs". There's nothing hereno medicines, no bed linen, no warm clothes, food... what? Gifts from the army...? Yes, yes! There are some tinned tomatoes but they are well past their sell-by date. What? Ah...eat them as soon as possible so they don't go off. I need new medicines. Hallo, medicines! Can't you hear me? I'll get a list over to you.....Hallo? Hallo? Hallo?
Slams down the receiver in despair. There is a knock at the door. Teresa enters.

Teresa I recognised you straight away. You're the colleague from the Danube bridge ?

Doctor I am a doctor.

Teresa And before that? I remember everything. Everything and everyone. I worked fifteen lorries a day at the Customs at the Danube bridge for all of five years.

Doctor So you were a Customs Officer?

Teresa You could call it that. A lonely customs officer at the frontier of love. All the men know me.

Doctor All of them?!

Teresa Five years times 365 days makes 1 825. Multiply that by five lorry-drivers a day – that gives us exactly 28 375. All the men know me. You too.

Doctor But 28 375 aren't all the men there are, after all.

Teresa True, but when each one of them boasts to two others that makes a total of 65 125 men. Then when they boast to two more – it becomes 195 375. And when each of them boast to two more it reaches 586 125. And so on and so on....I'm up to my neck in sin. And you too.

Doctor Are you having any treatment for it?

Teresa Treatment? I'm not in hospital, am I?

Doctor Well, where are you?

Teresa In a monastery,, where else? Don't you think this is a monastery,?

Doctor Of course it's monastery,.

Teresa But the others insist that it is a psychiatric clinic. I told the doctor at the Clinic that I wanted to go to a monastery, and he sent me to a monastery. Now I am atoning for my sins through fast and prayer. I want to be like Mother Theresa. And my advice to you is to do the same Here you are, I've brought you a habit. Put it on and make your confession to God. You'll get his forgiveness more easily because an oral sin is only half a sin. */She crosses herself and leaves./*

Meral enters with the spray pointing at her face.

Meral I die!

Doctor Please, don't! */ She holds her nose./*

Meral I die! */She presses the spraycan several times but*

nothing happens./ This thing is empty....*/She throws the empty can away and takes a new one from her pocket./*

Doctor No! *(She attempts to grab the can but Meral aims it at her.)*

Meral Stand back!

Doctor Please! */Again she tries to direct the can away from her face and grab it. Meral presses the spray and both of them fall to the floor stunned./*

Doctor */coming round/*. Oh, god, what a stench! Why do you poison yourself with shit like this instead of taking some sort of tranquilliser?

Meral All the medicines here have vanished like magic.

Doctor What magic?

Meral Black. They put a spell on me so that I couldn't forget him!

Doctor Who?

Meral My husband */She bursts into tears./*

The doctor continues to search through the medicines.

Doctor And where is he?

Meral He's found somebody younger.

Doctor How old are you?

Meral Sixteen.

Doctor Have you any children?

Meral I have. Three.

Doctor Pardon?

Meral Well, one a year.....

Doctor And where are the children?

Meral With him. My sister is looking after them.

Doctor So is she the younger somebody.

Meral She is, may the good Lord take her! I looked after her from the day she was born. And when she got to thirteen she put a spell on me – and one on him! The one on him made him fall in love and mine brought me nothing but misery! Typical gypsy stuff! */She starts weeping again./* Thirty-two suicide attempts I've made...

Doctor With the spray?

Meral Do you think it's easy? My head aches three whole days afterwards.

Doctor It'll all sort itself out, I'm sure.

Meral Oh, I know who can sort me out but they don't want to.

Doctor Who?

Meral Teresa.

Doctor How?

Meral On the principle of fight fire with fire. If I fall in love again....

Doctor With Teresa?

Meral There's not much choice here...

Doctor You're thinking of falling in love with a woman, is that right?

Meral Teresa isn't a woman!

Doctor What do you mean, not a woman?!

Meral She isn't. Haven't you worked that out yet?

Doctor You mean to say, that Teresa is A man?

Meral Almost...he can perform if he wants to but he doesn't want to.

Doctor But what about the 586 125 men on the Danube Bridge?

Meral Rubbish. There haven't been that many gays crossing that bridge since it was built.

Doctor So that's it.

Meral Yes. So can't you have a word with her, that is - with him, about my problem?

Doctor I can but only if you leave the spray here with me.

Meral But you promise...?

Doctor Yes.
Meral hands over the spray.

Meral I beg of you, doctor! Now I don't even have anything to kill myself with when things get too much. How long will it take?

Doctor Next week.

Meral God bless you! */She exits./*
The doctor tries to secure the broken door with a chair but someone outside tries to push it open.

Mata */offstage/. Help! Help!*
At last Mata Hari manages to open the door and she stumbles in.

Mata They're beating me!

Doctor Only because you're a thief.

Mata I don't do it on purpose. They brought me here because they were supposed to cure me but I'm stealing more than ever. Here, again today... */She throws money on to the desk./*

Doctor What's this?

Mata I found it in the stove.

Doctor Take it back straight away.

Mata There's no point. I'll only steal it again.

Doctor Then keep it yourself and give it to them whenever they need it.

Mata That's what I do. Look. */Takes out a piece of paper./* From Nina – 70 taken, 58 returned. From Titch – 12 taken, 9 returned. I keep strict

records. I've even given more to Teri than I've taken.

Doctor Well, then, look after mine. */Searches in her pockets./*

Mata Don't bother to look. I've got it already.

Doctor: */amazed/. When on earth...*

Mata Last night. I need a really powerful medicine.

Doctor: What sort of medicine?

Mata One to stop me thiefing.

Doctor: There is nothing for that, but might be able to think of something for the alcoholism.

Mata The alcohol isn't a problem, it's the thiefing that worries me. If you only knew how many times I have been beaten... */She rises and goes towards the door./* Shall I tell the next one to come in?

Doctor: No, that's enough for today.
/Mata goes out, the voice of Nina can be heard outside./

Nina: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am a seagull. Today the fierce fighting continued. The UN once again attempted to get a convoy with aid for the occupied zones through but the convoy was held up by the opposing forces...*/Fade./*

Doctor: I had a feeling that the Regional Hospital cut us off completely. They haven't sent us any medicine or food or winter clothing and winter's approaching nearer with each passing day. This morning the mountains awoke silvered with frost or wrapped in iciness which haven't lifted for weeks. Telephone conversations with the Regional Hospital have all been the same. */Lift the receiver./* Hallo, hallo! Is that the regional hospital? Chief Consultant, please! Hallo, hallo? Is that the Chief Consultant? I'm calling from "The Forty Holy Martyrs". There's nothing here... no medicines, no bed linen, no warm clothes, food...what? Yes, yes! There are some tinned tomatoes but they are well past their sell-by date. What? Aha...eat them as soon as possible so that they don't go off. Fine, OK...and when they've been eaten? There are no medicines whatsoever... I need new medicines...what? Medicines! Can't you hear me? I'll get a list over to you... Hallo? Hallo?

SCENE THREE

The schizophrenic is sitting motionless while the doctor is thumbing through her case notes.

Doctor Well, shall we talk?

The schizophrenic does not move.

Doctor What's the date, today?

The same reaction.

Doctor Let's look at the notes.....

The doctor thumbs through the notes, reads something and, wondering, lifts her head.

Doctor /addressing the others/. How many men are there here?

Teresa There aren't any men here.

Doctor And this one?

The doctor pulls back the hood of the schizophrenic's habit. The unshaven face of a man emerges.

Doctor /reads from the notes/ "First and middle name - there is no written down, they have written you down as "Colonel" .. Are you really a colonel or is it a nickname - it isn't unclear? But anyway, that's what we'll call you. How You got to the clinic is also unclear ... Deep schizophrenic depression ...Yes... "After a brain contusion..." is also visible. Judging by the facial injuries, probably shell fragments, so you can be a soldier... Has not spoken for several years. And that's all..." /Loudly to them all./ For the last time - are there any other men here?

Teresa No.

Doctor Tomorrow everyone will have an appointment with me for a gynaecological examination to establish gender.

Teresa You're insulting me.

Doctor It doesn't apply to you....

Teresa This is really terrible! There is a man here, just imagine! I've even walked past him stark naked and all he's done is stare and say nothing.

Meral He never says anything - I've been here for three months....

Nina After the explosion on the film set I couldn't speak either. I was just about able to speak after three days but I couldn't hear anything. But there was a squad of soldiers there working as extras and they had to drill every day. And I watched the sergeant's mouth and compared it with what the soldiers did. That's

how, first, I learnt to hear military commands. The sergeant commanded: "Attention!", "By the left!", "By the right!".....

Mata I worked for the army too. I was in the kitchen....

Nina But they sacked you for stealing stores, didn't they?

Mata Nooo! Not for that. In the army everyone steals.

Nina Then it was because of the drinking?

Mata Nooo! In the army everyone drinks.

Meral Well, what for then?

Mata It was sexual discrimination. I made a great impression on the soldiers...

Teresa You too?

Mata It was a platonic situation. The whole regiment was in love with me...The soldiers wouldn't eat properly and began to lose weight. They lost a lot of weight.... The combined weight of the regiment was reduced by two tons. One day the General arrived and said: "This isn't the barracks, it's a concentration camp." They started to search for the reason for this loss of weight. Tests, doctors, professors.... Nothing! Until, one evening, they found the whole regiment standing under my window whilst I was changing after work. The General came into my room - and me stark naked. His legs gave way under him and he fainted....

Meral And you took his money?

Mata There wasn't any money. Only a gold watch and some medals... I met him six months later and he'd lost a lot of weight. "From jealousy - he said - they've dismissed me - I'm dying for love. At least let me have my medals back for my funeral." And I gave them back to him. Two months later I met him again - but he was dead by then.

Nina And the medals?

Mata He was wearing them, may the Lord have mercy on his soul! That's why I gave them back, wasn't it?

Meral And this one, does he have any medals?

Mata Don't know, I'll check.

Teresa I can't possibly sleep in the same room as a man.

Mata Why should it bother you?

Teresa My spiritual wellbeing.
 Doctor I'll take care of that.
 Nina The News!
They crowd together in front of the television.
 Nina */in chorus with the others/*. Good evening ,
 ladies
 and gentlemen. I am a seagull. Today the
 fierce fighting continued. The UN once again
 attempted to get a convoy with aid for the
 occupied zones through but the convoy was
 held up by the opposing forces....
 Nina */alone/*. A spokesman for the UN declared that
 there would be an attempt to fly in aid with
 the help of the Air Force.
 Meral You say one and the same thing every
 evening....
 Nina I don't think up the News. I tell you what the
 news is- just as it is.
 Mata That's not true. They can't say "I am a
 seagull" in the News.
 Nina I say that because I ammad, but all the
 rest is true.
 Mata True, but always the same. Change the
 commas at least. You've been using one and
 the same text for six months...
 Nina That's not true! For instance now I said that
 tonight they'll send in humanitarian aid by air
 whilst last night I didn't say that.
 Meral Yes, you did.
 Nina I didn't mention aeroplanes.
 Mata You did.
 Nina I didn't.
 Mata You did.
 Nina I didn't.
 Mata It's all the same to me. The question is, the
 text has to change.
 Titch */enters shouting excitedly/*. Snow! It's
 snowing! The mountains are covered in white.
They all rush outside excitedly except for
Teresa and Meral who remain on stage.
 Meral Please, you're the only one who can help me.
 Teresa Blasphemy! */She crosses herself/*
 Meral I'm dying.
 Teresa No!
 Meral Please!
 Teresa I can't. I'm not bent...
 Meral I'm going to kill myself!
 Teresa No!
 Meral Help me. Make the sacrifice!
 Teresa No!

Meral One act of charity and God will forgive you.
 God will forgive you all
 your sins.
Teresa thinks.
 Meral He'll forgive you for everything!
 Teresa */hesitatingly/*. Noo.....
 Meral The sinner is dearer to God than the righteous!
 Teresa Do you think so?
 Meral I'm sure. It's written in the bible.
 Teresa Blindfold me so that I don't see...
 Meral Now! There!..... */She blindfolds him./*
 Teresa And you!
 Meral Right! */She blindfolds herself./*
The other patients enter on tiptoe and await
results with interest. They are all covered with
soft snow like the feathers on angels' wings.
 Teresa */crossing himself/*. Lord, forgive me! It's my
 first time.
 Meral Lord, help me!
The other patients also cross themselves
hopefully. After a while Teresa stands up.
 Teresa It isn't God's will.
 Meral Oh, Lord, why do you punish me so, why?
 Teresa Thank you, Lord, for saving me from sin!
 Meral Why do you punish me, Lord? Isn't it enough
 that I was born a gypsy – and you send me
 such cruel love what depths have I sunk
 to, Lord, to want mercy from a gay! I'm a
 gypsy but I'm a human being too. You'll see,
 Lord, you'll see who we are, us gypsies!
She turns in rage on the others.
 Meral What are you all staring at? Don't you know
 who we are – the gypsies? Don't you know?
 You're the gypsies – I'm Romany. Romany!
 We, the Romanies, founded Rome. You've
 heard of the brothers Romulus and Remus
 who were fed by the she-wolf? Well, that
 Romulus was a pure Romany. And what about
 Romeo and Juliet? Romeo is a Romany too.
 And Roman Polanski? Him too. And Romsky-
 Korsakov – the same. And Roman Polan. And
 Romy Schneider. And we discovered the CD-
 rom. Us Romanies have a state too –
 Romania. And in the spring, at the gypsy
 meeting at Brashow, they'll make me a gypsy
 princess. And the handsomest of the gypsy
 barons will fall in love with me. And I will be
 happy! Happy!
Her anger turns to tears and she leaves,
shaking with uncontrollable sobs.

Nina */shouts ceremonially/*. Chekov is great!
 Chekov
 proved that life is only a dream and nothing
 more!

Teresa */shrieking/*. One million truckers! Two millions
 truckers! Three millions truckers...

*Fade. The fade turns into a stormy night. The
 howling wind fills the stage, lightning is seen
 and the echoes of thunder are heard. The
 sound of the
 storm mingles with the roar of low-flying
 aircraft.*

Doctor Winter arrived and the snow blocked the
 mountain roads. No one took any interest in us
 and so we, six madmen and an addict, were
 buried in the snow high up in the
 mountains. That night the storm was unusual, a
 storm with thunder in November. All night
 long we could hear the sound of aeroplanes
 that had lost their way overhead but the most
 unusual thing of all was what we found in the
 courtyard of the monastery the next morning...

SCENE FOUR

*Early morning in the courtyard of the
 monastery. In the centre there is a large
 container with the UN emblem on it, attached
 to a parachute. Mata Hari is examining the
 container furtively. At this instant the high-
 pitched voice of Nina is heard.*

Nina Stop!
Mata Hari raises her hands.

Nina Where did you steal that from?

Mata Nowhere. It was here.

Nina It wasn't here last night, was it?

Mata It must have fallen during the night.

Nina From the sky?

Mata As it has a parachute... And stamp UN...
The doctor appears.

Doctor What's that?

Nina This one's stolen a container from the UN.

Mata I haven't. I was going to steal it but I didn't.
The Doctor examines the labels.

Doctor This is humanitarian aid for the occupied
 zones.

Nina Didn't I tell you last night – they said they'd
 be dropping supplies.

Mata There aren't any occupied zones here! The
 war is 100 kilometres away.

Nina The storm must have driven them off course.

Doctor That's possible.

Nina They don't know the difference. It's all the
 front to them. They were told to drop the stuff
 over the front and that's what they've done.

Doctor What are we going to do now?

Mata Shall we send it back to the UN?

Nina We didn't have anything to eat last night....
The doctor hesitates.

Doctor Go on! But it says "clothing" on the container.

Mata Clothes – clothes... they're useful too.
*They open the container and first of all pull
 out a silk UN flag then from under that –
 packages of army uniforms.*

Nina Army uniforms?

Mata Never mind – we can sell them at the front.
At this moment Meral runs in and yells

Meral Tinned stuff and chocolate.

Doctor Where?

Meral Behind the monastery.
Titch runs in too.

Titch The forest is full of containers.

Mata Take them all to the store!

Doctor But if they are looking for them?

Mata Who's going to be looking for them? The
 UN?
Fade

Doctor From that moment on I stopped phoning the
 Regional Hospital. I don't know who's right
 or who's wrong in this war, but I am sure that
 if anyone needed help it was us.

SCENE FIVE

*The patients have put on the army uniforms
 but they are unbuttoned and slovenly. Their
 hair is tangled, their shoes unlaced and so
 on. Centre stage there is an open box of
 foodstuffs and the patients, covered in white
 milk powder, are eating it straight from the
 packets with spoons. Mata Hari raises a bottle
 to her lips.*

Titch */under the bed/*. Give me a packet too.

Mata Impossible! You're so small you'd fall into it.

Nina Here's a biscuit.

Titch Only one?

Mata You're small. It's enough.

Titch Just one bar of chocolate?

Mata This is a 200 gram bar of chocolate and you
 are only 100 grams. How can a person
 weighing 100 grams eat 200 grams of
 chocolate?

Meral Go on, give her a bar. Let her have one like us all. */She gives Titch a bar./*

Mata */to Meral/*. If she dies from over-eating, it'll be your fault. We're all equal in the eyes of the law.

Meral Oh, no! */She snatches the chocolate back./*

Titch Give it to me!

Meral Don't get me into trouble, please.

Mata */ferreting through the box/*. There's ham here, too...
They all stick their heads into the box and start to squabble. At this moment the door opens with a loud crash and a loud, commanding voice is heard.

Colonel Attention!
The imposing figure of the Colonel is standing by the door – well-groomed and in full uniform. The patients screech and drop the packets. The Colonel enters with a straight-backed military step. There is a look in his eyes of a pathological power-maniac. The patients continue to stand motionless, staring at him in disbelief.

Colonel */in a military tone/*. At ease. */To Nina/* Zarechnaya?

Nina */jumps up terrified/*. Yes?

Colonel Tea!

Nina Yes, Sir...

Colonel */modestly/*. I'm a colonel. Tea I said.

Nina At your service, Colonel! */She runs to the kitchen./*

Colonel It's a lovely evening, isn't it? */moves slowly towards Mata Hari./*

Mata */steps back nervously/*. I....I.... I was in the army, sir, I was a sergeant.

Colonel Well done, sergeant! It might be a good thing if you didn't drink so much, eh? */He takes the bottle from her hands./*

Meral Yes, sir!
The patients gradually recover from their shock and, influenced by the manner of the Colonel, they start to button up their uniforms. Nina enters with a kettle.

Nina The tea, sir. */She pours a cup of tea for the Colonel./*

Colonel */notices Titch under the bed/*. And you, soldier, what are you doing under that bed?

Titch I'm very small, sir.

Colonel Why do you think that?

Titch Because I'm ill, sir.

Colonel If you are wearing a uniform you can't be so very small, private...?

Titch Private Lomska, sir.

Colonel */looks around the room/*. Sergeant?

Mata Sir?

Colonel What is all this mess?

Mata Well.....

Colonel This room must be kept according to the regulations. Order and discipline is what I'm after. Is that clear?

Mata Yes, sir!
The doctor stands in the doorway. The Colonel rises and introduces himself at the top of his voice.

Colonel Doctor, at your service!
The doctor gulps as she takes in the situation.

Colonel Zarechnaya?

Nina Sir!

Colonel Tea for the doctor!

Nina At once, sir!
The doctor staggers and holds on to the doorpost. Behind her Teresa crosses herself.

Teresa Oh Lord, how wondrous art thy ways! *(She staggers and holds on to the doorpost. Fade).*

SCENE SIX

The general ward. The beds are all in a straight line with the blankets on them folded in military style. The patients, by now more or less properly dressed in uniform, are lining up the edges of the blankets with a string.

Mata Careful! When you look along the string all the edges have to merge into one line. Straighten the blanket on the third bed. That's how the Colonel wants it.

Nina He's mad, don't you understand?

Meral Mad, yes, and he's dangerous. We really shouldn't provoke him.

Titch */under the bed/*. Move to the right and take care where you step. If you step on me now you'll be court-martialled.

Meral The sleeping quarters are better like this. The colonel is sure to approve.

Mata We didn't even realise that he is a man, and he's a colonel.

Titch He hasn't spoken for three years. He keeps quiet, observes and comes to conclusions. And we had no idea of the sort of person we've been living with.

Mata He was at the Staff College. Do you know what that means? And he fought in all the international conflicts.

Meral Did you see the doctor? She said nothing, just drank her tea and went out.

Mata The doctor! What on earth can doctor say when there's a colonel from The Foreign Legion present?

Nina The Foreign Legion?! How do you know?

Mata The Colonel told me. By the way he he lives alone. As yet there's no woman in his life.

Meral Who told you?

Mata He did. He confides in me because I'm a sergeant.

Titch You're lying. The colonel never talks about himself.
At this point The Colonel's voice echoes down the corridor.

Colonel Fall in for evening roll-call!

Mata Fall in! At the double!

Nina Oh, Lord!

Mata Quickly, please! He's here!
Frightened, the three of them line up while Titch curls up under the bed. The Colonel enters.

Mata Sir! Section present and correct!

Colonel Attention! Roll-call! Sergeant?

Mata Sir!

Colonel Zarechnaya!

Nina Sir!

Colonel Romova?

Meral Sir!

Colonel Lomska?

Titch */under the bed/*. Sir!

Colonel */severely/*. Why are you not in line, Lomska?

Titch Someone might step on me, Sir.

Colonel Private Lomska, in line!

Titch I can't. I'm afraid. Look, I'm trembling from head to toe.

Colonel Lomska, in line! The responsibility is mine.

Titch I want to, but I can't. Please! I'm so small, so very small! */in tears./*

Colonel */sharply and loudly/*. Private Lomska, on your feet!
Titch slowly stands up shaking.

Colonel Attention!
Titch freezes in fear.

Colonel Into line, quick march!

Titch lifts her feet with a great effort and with slow steps takes her place in the line.

Colonel Attention! The army has been in existence as long as mankind and the line has been in existence ever since there has been an army. Every army in the world depends on its fighting ranks and when you are in line no one can step on you because each and every one has a place to step on. The great armies have lost because their line has collapsed and small armies have won thanks to the strength of their line. But the line is also within each of us. And when that line within us collapses then a person is no longer a person. The line within us supports us all, all societies, all armies because the spirit of an army is just that line inside each one of the soldiers. Is that clear?

All Yes, sir!

Colonel Attention! Left turn! Right turn!

Fade

Doctor */thumbing carefully through a textbook/*. The patient's condition was clear to me in theory: severe schizophrenia in the paranoid form. Psychiatrists call it "dephrasing". But a few days later the other patients began to change too as though they were infected by The Colonel. Instead of the former scarecrows shuffling about the courtyard there were these clean, smart commandos. They moved more energetically, their speech, clear and to the point. Clearly The Colonel, as a result of his illness, had acquired the confidence and desire to command which resulted in all the others subconsciously and unquestioningly to accept his spiritual strength.

SCENE SEVEN

The doctor's monologue is interrupted by the sound of a bugle. The loud voice of the Colonel is heard in the distance: "One...two...three" and then they all run into the courtyard.

Mata At the double!

Nina */to Meral/*. Now we're really like lunatics.

Colonel No talking, take deep breaths! One...two, one...two...halt! At ease! */The Colonel paces along the line./* Today's orders are as follows: until lunchtime –cleaning the courtyard. After lunch from 1400 hours to 16:00 hours – rest.

From 16:00 to 20:00 hours - time for personal hygiene and evening meal and after 20:00 hours cultural pursuits and rest. Clear?

All Yes, sir!

Colonel Any other suggestions—no. Second: from today we start to take turns at cleaning the rooms and kitchen. Zarechnaya?

Nina Sir!

Colonel Your turn today.

Nina Yes, sir!

Colonel And now, we are faced with a problem, that is to say, a delicate matter. Force of circumstance and the wisdom of God has resulted in there being a person in holy orders living amongst us. You will, of course, understand that the wellbeing of a spiritual soul necessitates a separate room.

Mata But there is no stove there....

Colonel That is true. Will you see to it that there is a stove and wood in Mother Teresa's room.

Mata Yes, sir! /To Titch./ Private Lomska! Stove and wood! At the double!

Colonel I haven't finished yet....

Mata Halt! Attention!

Colonel I have heard that certain items have been disappearing from bedside cupboards. Please would the person responsible for this infringement of the regulations ensure their return.

Mata Sir!

Colonel Any repetition of this infringement will result in the person responsible losing her right to wear military uniform.

Mata How is it possible not to steal in the barracks?

Colonel And finally – an honest and highly-qualified individual is responsible for our welfare. You all realise that I am referring to the doctor. I insist that you follow all of her instructions and take whatever she prescribes – also, whenever you meet her you will salute.

Mata Colonel! The doctor!

Colonel Attention! Eyes right!

The drugged doctor enters. The Colonel takes one step forward and, saluting, reports.

Colonel Ma'am! All present and awaiting their morning check-up.

The doctor stumbles towards the line while the Colonel follows behind her with a military step.

Doctor Morning!

All Ma'am!

Doctor Any complaints?

Nina None at all, Ma'am.

Doctor Hari?

Mata None at all.

Doctor Lomska?

Titch Nothing at all, Ma'am.

Doctor I understand that you no longer sleep under the bed?

Titch I feel safer in the line, Ma'am.

Doctor Very good. So I am not needed. Best foot forward!

Colonel We shall endeavour, Ma'am! Attention! Three cheers for the doctor!

Fade

Doctor /making notes/. Destiny has given me a chance rarely experienced by a specialist – to witness a socio-psychological experiment occurring in front of my very eyes. But after all, every society is a game of set rules which only the mad ignore. And my patients here now live in a game with rules which they can keep. So they're not mad any longer. Quite the opposite, they could even be said to be flourishing. I decided not to interfere, just to let the process develop naturally. I started to write down all my observations. I had the idea that I could develop a similar form of therapy and then patent it.

SCENE EIGHT

Teresa Good morning

Doctor Good morning, do sit down.

Teresa I'm thinking of leaving the monastery.

Doctor Leaving the monastery?

Teresa Yes.

Doctor And where will you go?

Teresa I'll join the army. They always need women in the army. Haven't you heard of Mother Courage?

Doctor Of course I've heard of her.

Teresa I want to be like her. So, there on the field of battle risking my life, I will atone for my sins. I'll tend their wounds, I'll give them spiritual comfort.

Doctor There aren't any wounded at the moment.

Teresa There will be.

Doctor Yes, well, that would be a truly noble gesture but they don't take many nuns in the army these days.

Teresa I've talked to the colonel about it and he said it is possible.
 Doctor Well, if he said...
 Teresa I've got to give in the application form tomorrow.
 Doctor Where to?
 Teresa To the colonel.
 Doctor Oh, of course.....
 Teresa And you've got to give me a medical certificate to show that I am healthy.
 Doctor Why a medical certificate?
 Teresa That's what the colonel says.
 Doctor Of course. Here you are.... */She fills in a form./*
 Teresa Two copies if possible. That's what the colonel wants.
 Doctor Of course, here's another one.
 Teresa There's no signature.
 Doctor Really? Well, here's a signature */She signs./*
 Teresa And a stamp...
 Doctor There's no need for a stamp.
 Teresa The colonel wants it stamped.
 Doctor Right, if that's what he wants... here's a stamp */She stamps the certificates./*
 Teresa */satisfied, picks up the certificates/*. So I'm fit, am I?
 Doctor Of course.
 Teresa Why did the consultant say I was mad then?
 Doctor Anyone can make a mistake.
 Teresa So it was a mistake?
 Doctor It happens to us all.
 Teresa I'm going to send a copy to that consultant to stop him upsetting any more people.

SCENE NINE

Colonel And so, let's take stock of all our resources. Zarechnaya?
 Nina */consulting her list/*. We have food, including tinned stuff and fruit juices for one year.
 Colonel Romova?
 Meral There's enough clothing for about ten years.
 Colonel That's enough for now. Sergeant?
 Mata 24 dollars and 45 euro.
 Colonel It's not much...
 Mata Well, I've stopped stealing. But if I am ordered...
 Colonel Lomska? How are we off for transport?
 Titch There's a jeep in good condition but there are no tyres for it.
 Mata It did have tyres but...

Colonel It must have tyres by the end of the week.
 Mata Yes, sir!
 Titch There's no petrol.
 Colonel In one week it must be found.
 Mata Yes, sir!
 Nina Sir, permission to speak?
 Colonel Yes?
 Nina The News is beginning.
 Mata Take your places for the News!
They sit in a row in front of the television. Nina does the voice over and the other repeat the well-known text with her.
 Nina */and the others/*. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.
 All */the others without Nina/*. I am a seagull.
 Nina Not any more. */She continues alone./* Today the fierce fighting continued. The UN convoy with humanitarian aid was once again stopped and a spokesperson announced that the UN will again deliver humanitarian aid by air using night flights.
 Mata Let's hope that they fly off course again!
 Nina */continues/*. The member countries of the UN have declared that if the conflict continues they will have to adopt decisive actions to ensure the security of Europe.
 Colonel There's only one possible conclusion – we shall have to join the UN forces.
He bangs his fist on the television set and the sound starts to work. The voice of the announcer is heard: "Fierce fighting continued today". The sound of shooting and shells exploding. The sound gets louder and louder.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Teresa in army uniform and Meral.

Teresa No!
 Meral Now you look like a real man.
 Teresa Don't insult me!
 Meral Please!
 Teresa No!
 Meral You serve God, don't you?
 Teresa I serve in the army now.
 Meral Then I ask you as a comrade-in-arms.

Teresa Listen, if you don't leave off I'll tell the Colonel.
 Meral Why?
 Teresa For improper sexual advances.
 Meral But I'm asking you for something completely different.
 Teresa What?
 Meral You, as someone in holy orders, you can ask him whether he is truly free. Because, if he is, he could ...help me. He is the commander, after all, and has a responsibility for his soldiers.
 Teresa He... He already is in love with a nun. And she.... She is inclined to break her vows for him.
 Meral And are they going to get married?
 Teresa These are personal matters and I can't tell you.
 Meral Oh, God! Am I going to have to forget about him as well?

SCENE TWO

A meeting in the courtyard where a booth for secret balloting has been constructed from blankets.

Mata The Doctor!
 Colonel Attention! Eyes left! Do come in, doctor. We can begin now. */Turning to them all./* Comrades! A month has gone by since the UN sent us their gifts, just as God sent manna to the children of Israel in the wilderness. Then we were starving and freezing to death and we accepted that gift from civilised Europe in the practical form of food and clothing without further thought. But today, with the wisdom of hindsight we can calmly say that it was not a simple humanitarian act but something more. It was a sign from God, an invitation to join forces with them. And, because of this, after long deliberation, I propose the following:
First: to declare our military unit a part of the UN.
Second: to declare that the territory which our unit covers to be a separate European territory where European standards of living and international relations are to be upheld.
Third: to establish links with the European administrative institutions and join them as a European enclave.
 There are no other proposals. I suggest that we now have a secret ballot and if there is a

positive result we shall sign the constitutive document. The white ballot papers are "for" and the black ones "against".

He locks a ballot box and carries it into the voting booth.

Colonel Attention!

Mata Attention! Quick march to the voting booth!

They all vote one after another.

Colonel Doctor! Although a civilian you have shared our joys and sorrows throughout this time and because of this it is right that you, too, should vote. In the name of all of us in this unit I kindly request you – please proceed!

After a moment of tense hesitation the doctor rises and goes slowly to the ballot box. Everyone holds their breath as they wait for the result of the ballot. The doctor comes out of the booth. The Colonel ceremoniously brings out the ballot box and tries to open it but is unsuccessful. They all try, one after the other but to no avail.

Colonel The lock is faulty. */looks through the slit in the box./* All the votes are "for". May I have two witnesses to confirm the result? Lomska!

Titch Sir! */looks through the slit./* Correct!

Colonel Romova!

Meral Sir! */looks through the slit./* Correct!

Doctor Perhaps the black papers can't be seen in the darkness?

Colonel Impossible – there are no black papers. All black papers are in my pocket. So now let us officially declare that the first two proposals of our programme are in force.

Mata Attention!

Colonel As a result of our secret ballot we declare our fighting unit to be a detachment of the UN and the territory that we cover as a separate European territory. This is our constitutional document. */He raises high a sheet of paper./*

Mata Hurrah!

A powerful hurrah is heard and Teresa slowly raises the blue silk flag of the UN up the flagpole.

Colonel At this moment we have put into force the first two proposals of our programme. The final proposal remains, the most important and the most difficult one – to establish contact with the European administrative institutions and to integrate with them. I await your suggestions as to how this contact can be established.

Doctor Colonel, sir, permission to speak?
Colonel Please.
Doctor I know that at the moment everyone is thinking of the telephone in my surgery but I do think that using it for such a purpose is unwise. There is every probability that the line is tapped and we will become the victims of insinuation and blackmail even before we have gained the support of the West.
Colonel */after a long pause/*. I think that the doctor is absolutely right. The possibility of using the telephone must be discounted. Other suggestions?
Nina In war films they use homing pigeons.
Titch So let's use migrating birds. Huge flocks are flying south at the moment.
Colonel This is one way of resolving the problem. Yes, by using the thousands of years old experience of the military mind we can send hundreds of messages using the birds. One of them is sure to get through.
Nina And their reply? How will we receive that?
A pause. They all look expectantly at The Colonel.
Doctor Naturally the reply will be sent in the same way.
Colonel We start to send messages tomorrow.
Fade.
Doctor */making notes/*. The birds flew in great flocks over the mountains and at night we caught them in nets while they rested. They were very careful and gentle with the birds so as not to hurt them and they tied hundreds of messages to their legs – messages to New York, to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, UNESCO headquarters and anywhere else they could think of. The birds flew south towards Africa, Titch said, but the Colonel explained that the UN have observers absolutely everywhere and the messages would get through to their destination eventually.

SCENE THREE
Everyone is holding a bird and tying a message to its leg.
Mata It's biting..... my hands are covered in bites!
Nina They're pecking us because they don't understand that our intentions are good. When we let them go then they'll know that they are

and then they won't peck us any more. Birds are wiser than humans.
Than humans?
Yes, because humans have evolved from the birds and no one is superior to their creator.
Humans came from the apes.
Yes, but the apes came from the mammals and the mammals came from the birds. So humans have come from the birds and one day might return to being birds.
Why precisely to being a bird?
Because only the birds and man can fly. The birds with their wings and humans with their souls. And besides, the bird is a noble creation, it is so small and it is capable of such great endeavour – to carry our message for thousands of kilometres and so to save us.
Every creature is capable of endeavour whether it is large or small.
To some extent, yes, to some, no. Because a truly great endeavour compared with the size of a tiny creature becomes proportionately greater.
Everyone ready?
Ready.
Let's release them, then.
Let's do it.
They go to the open window.
Attention! Ready for action! Three...four. Off they go!
Off they go!
The sound of wings is heard and they all stare after the departing birds for a long time.
They've gone.....
Humans might have come from the birds but they're not like them because the birds can always fly off where they will whilst we would have to stay here for ever if it wasn't for the Colonel.
People can take wing if they want to.
The Colonel can fly. I saw him yesterday with my own eyes.
You're crazy.
I know. But I saw him. He was flapping his arms at a flock of birds and then he slowly moved away from the ground, got up to several metres, stayed about half a minute and then he came down again.
You were drunk.

Mata I don't drink any more. I'm telling you the truth.

Nina Well then, if he can fly why hasn't he flown off?

Mata Because he doesn't want to leave us. Perhaps he wants to teach us too.

Titch Sometimes, in the evening I long to be very small again and to cling to a large bird and fly away. To fly for ages and ages, far, far away and to land THERE and to hand over the whole message. And THEY, when they see how tiny I am, will say, "How could such a tiny creature fly such a great distance?" And I will say to THEM, "I succeeded because my friends are there and even though they are large they are just as unhappy as I am..."

Silence.

Titch ... and because there is a man there for whom I'm prepared to do anything.....".

Meral You've never spoken of such a man before?

Titch I haven't. And I'm never going to.

SCENE FOUR

Teresa is stroking a bird which has its head tucked under its wing and she rocks it to sleep singing a lullaby, which children sing to the chickens.

Teresa /sings/. Sleep, sleep, chick,
Your mother is a bird
Your father is a fox...
The Colonel passes by and salutes.

Colonel Good evening!

Teresa Shhhh! Quiet! /She puts the sleeping bird down./ It's asleep...

Colonel Yes, really...

Teresa Birds fall asleep very quickly.

Colonel Really? I hadn't noticed.

Teresa And they shouldn't be woken before they wake up naturally or they stop singing.

Colonel Interesting.

Teresa What is it dreaming of now? Surely it's dreaming that it's already in a hot country. And there'll be someone waiting there for her and she won't be alone...birds live in pairs.

Colonel That's true. Migrating birds are monogamous. We learnt that in Zoology.

Teresa You don't learn those things. They come from the heart... the heart tells us the truest things.

Colonel Yes, especially about the weather. When the weather's bad I get shooting pains, but today the weather is fine.

Teresa Yes, yes.

Colonel Sunny too.

Teresa Yes.

Colonel And it wasn't too bad yesterday.

Teresa That's right, it wasn't.

Colonel We don't know what it'll be like tomorrow.

Teresa How right you are!

Colonel Then again it might continue like this all week.

Teresa Really?

Colonel Yes. Once it turns fine it can go on. Until it turns bad it's always good.

Teresa Oh, Lord, how wondrous art thy works!

Colonel And after that it gets better again.

Teresa I believe you!

Colonel Eh, well, goodbye.

Teresa Goodbye. And I'm sorry.

Colonel What for?

Teresa Well, you know how to have a proper conversation,...

Colonel What proper conversation?

Teresa About the weather It was so moving!

Colonel Oh, please. I simply follow the forecasts.

Teresa I adore the forecasts too but I've never gone into them so deeply. You have opened a window on a new world for me. Thank you so much!

Colonel It was nothing. Permission to leave! /He salutes and exits./
Teresa picks up the sleeping bird, strokes it and starts to weep.

Teresa Oh Lord, please don't let them lose the power and the glory. Men lose their power and glory so very, very easily. /Fade./

Doctor We started to wait for an answer to our message. All day long there was someone on duty in the courtyard whose job it was to observe the sky whilst the others looked out for birds with messages landing on the rocks and trees. Sometimes huge flocks came from the north and flew for hours over the ravine. Then we all came out into the courtyard and stared at the sky hard and long hoping to see a bird leave the flock and land near to us. Our eyes were stinging from staring so long...

SCENE FIVE

They are all scanning the sky and making bird-like sounds to lure the birds. Their uniforms are completely covered in bird droppings which continue to fall on them.

Mata Look, look! There's a new flight on the way. God, the sky is black with birds.....

Meral Down!
They all hide whilst bird droppings 'rain' down on them.

Nina Look at the seventh on the right in the fourth row. Hasn't it got something on its leg?

Meral Can't you see that one? It's flying lower than the rest – something's weighing it down.

Nina Perhaps it's carrying a message? No, no, it's back with the rest of them.

Teresa There's another flight from the north-west. An even bigger one.

Nina True, but those are ravens, aren't they?

Titch Even better! Ravens are the most intelligent of all the birds.

Colonel Ravens are strong and can carry all sorts of messages. Watch carefully to see if any of them break away from the group.

Meral Down!
They all hide whilst bird droppings 'rain' down on them

Nina Look! The two flights have flown into each other!

Titch No, they haven't! It only looks like that from here, but really they are flying at different heights and can never get mixed up. Every flight has its own air corridor.

Mata If one of the birds from the higher company wants to land here now with a message the lower company will be in the way...

Titch No! It won't! They'll open up a corridor for it. Watch carefully for signs of a corridor opening!

Nina Why are we looking northwards when our messages went south? We should be looking south.

Mata True! Very true! We should be looking south. Attention! About turn!
They all turn to the south.

Meral There are no birds coming from the south.

Titch True.

Nina It is very clear. In winter the birds fly south, not north.

Colonel The UN could have got our messages in the south but sent a reply to us from the north. Their lines of communication are unlimited.

Nina So a message could come from the north?

Mata Of course it'll come from the north. What bird is as crazy as us to fly north in the winter? Attention! About turn!

They all turn once more to the north.

Teresa Two more flights are approaching.

Titch */mournfully/*. Oh, Lord, so many birds and not one of them has landed here.

Colonel Calm down! Don't give up! There are billions of birds. If they've sent a thousand message it means that from one million birds only one will have a message. And so far hardly half a million have gone over.....

Titch Can you see that one?.....it's looping. Can you see it?

All Where?

Titch Over there. In the middle of the second flock.

Teresa It's trying to attract attention, can't you see?

Nina True – at least that's what it looks like.

Titch It is. Look, none of the others are doing it.

Nina Look, look! It is leaving the flock.

Titch There, it's coming down.

Mata To the forest! It's flying towards the forest.

Titch I can't see it any more. It must have landed. Let's go and find it.

Nina Where?

Titch In the forest, where else?

Nina How will we find it in the forest? The forest covers hundreds of acres.

Titch It'll call us itself.

Nina We're all mad but you're completely
How will the bird call us?

Puzzled, they all turn to look at The Colonel.

Colonel They'll have trained it.

Nina That would be possible.....

Mata To the forest. Quick march!

All To the forest! To the forest!

Mata Forward.....march!

They run towards the forest leaving the Colonel and Mata Hari on stage.

Mata Sir, permission

Colonel Yes, sergeant?

Mata I... I want to confess something to you...

Colonel Yes, sergeant. I am listening to you.

Mata It is something very personal and very frank.... I simply daren't...*/bursts into tears./*

Colonel Now then, sergeant, pull yourself together. And tell me what you have to tell me. I am human too and I do understand people's problems.

Mata You.....you are the one and only person in my life ...who I haven't stolen from. */Fade./*

Doctor Perhaps the bird was carrying a message but they didn't find it because of the fog that came down. They searched for it until the evening in the fog but obviously the bird was confused and it didn't call them.

SCENE SIX

Nina is staring hard at the Colonel, no doubt so that she can hear him better. Nina

Thank you. You have saved me.

Colonel I beg your pardon?

Nina You have pulled me out of the depths of Chekovian despair.

Colonel Oh! Not I but military discipline has done that.

Nina But you are the one who brought discipline here.

Colonel We create the discipline and the discipline creates us.

Nina Even Chekov wouldn't be able to say it like that! Permission to stand closer?

Colonel Why?

Nina To hear you better. You aren't at all like any of Chekov's heroes.

Colonel Not a hero, only a soldier.

Nina How modest you are. Please turn your face towards the moon.

Colonel Why?

Nina So that I can hear you better. That's right. Now I can see the moon in your eyes. I shall never ever forget this wonderful night...

Colonel And last night wasn't so bad.

Nina Yes, but tonight is unique.

Colonel Naturally. The forecast is made each night specifically for the next day.

Nina There are no forecasts for life, sir.

Colonel They don't always get the weather forecasts right – this morning the forecast was broken, moderate cloud cover. And look: it's clear and cold with sharp falls in temperature in low-lying areas.

Nina I love clear, moonlit nights and thank the Lord for this marvellous mistake in the forecast.

Colonel Why thank the Lord? The mistake was made by the meteorologists. And we are army and

must follow the forecasts bearing in mind the possibility of future military operations. At the moment, for example, in Scandinavia a centre of low atmospheric pressure is forming which heralds a movement of air masses to the north. This means that warm air masses from the Mediterranean will sweep in and that, in its turn,

will result in low cumulus clouds and that will be followed by the flights of birds ceasing because they will not have their basic navigational aid – the stars. Permission to leave! */He moves away./*

Nina Oh Lord! He has reached the stars! He goes beyond Shakespeare and Chekov rolled into one! */Shouts in joy./* I am a seagull! I am a seagull! Oh Lord, it looks like I've gone mad again...*/Fade./*

Doctor The Colonel was right – in the days that followed the flocks became fewer and no news arrived. The Colonel was worried as well, although he gave no signs of it in any way. Marching drill and military exercises continued day in and day out but he himself knew that it wasn't possible to train an army for any length of time without taking it off somewhere. They went on waiting for news and in the meantime there was a mystical incident.

SCENE SEVEN

Meral Light the candles.

The three women and Teresa, one by one, light tens of candles stuck in the snow and their flames look like the starry sky.

Meral This is gypsy magic. My mother taught it to me. It's a spell used for horses and lovers that have run away.

Nina The bird isn't a horse or a lover.

Meral In this case it is the same – something that you want but you haven't got.

Mata Get on with it.

Meral The spell has to be cast by four women,

Teresa Aren't we four?

Meral Yes but there's something very important. The women have to be in love.....

They are all silent.

Meral We must be sure about each of us – otherwise the spell won't work.

Nina You?

Nina Yes.
Meral Do you swear to that?
Nina Yes.
Meral Titch? Do you swear?
Titch Yes.
Meral Teresa? Do you swear?
Teresa Yes.
Meral Mata Hari? Do you swear?
Mata Yes.
Meral And I swear too. Let's go on: The women have to be naked.
Teresa Why?
Meral It's part of the magic. I'm prepared to do it. */She takes off her nightdress./*
Mata Me too. */She takes off her nightdress./*
Nina Me too. */She takes off her nightdress./*
Titch Me too. */She takes off her nightdress./*
Teresa Me no!
Meral But you'll ruin the magic
Teresa */she starts to lift her nightdress then stops/*. No.
Mata It is your duty as you're in the army. That's an order!
Teresa Whose order?
Mata Mine – Sergeant Hari.
Teresa It's 10 degrees below. We'll all be ill tomorrow. And if the Colonel says "Let's go!" will you, Sergeant Hari, be responsible for explaining to the Colonel? Above all we must be fighting fit so we can obey his orders at any time and under any circumstances.
Mata She's right. Get dressed.
Meral You have to be naked to cast the spell!
Mata For a lover, yes, but for a bird you can be dressed.
Meral Right, let's try it. */They all put on their nightdresses./* Now pay attention! Place your hands on your hearts and close your eyes. Are you ready?
All Ready.
Meral Now you must all think about the one you love.
The women stand in silence.
Titch Don't you say anything in this spell?
Meral There's something but I can't remember what.
Nina Let me try.
Meral Fine. We'll start from the beginning. Think about the one you love. Imagine him descending from the sky. He flutters his wings. He is coming...

Nina All men and beasts, lions, eagles, and quails, horned stags, geese, spiders, silent fish that inhabit the waves, starfish from the sea, and creatures invisible to the eye—in one word, life—all, all life, completing the dreary round imposed upon it, has died out at last... No longer are the cries of storks heard in the meadows, or the drone of beetles in the groves of limes. All is cold, cold. All is void, void, void. All is terrible, terrible ...
Whilst she is speaking these lines the sound of an approaching flight of birds is heard and in the half-light, above them, birds are fluttering. Amidst the cries of the birds the shouts of the women are heard.
Meral The spell is working!
Mata Grab one! Grab one!
Titch Grab two!
Nina There are so many I can't see.
Titch The candles have gone out!
Meral The message! The message!
The sound of the birds dies away - they have flown on.
Meral The message! On its leg!
Mata Just let me hold it!
Meral How happy the Colonel will be now!
Mata Just let me hold it!
Meral Where is the bird? Someone's taken the bird!
Mata Here it is. I shall give it to the Colonel.
Meral I caught it and I shall give it to the Colonel.
Titch Give the bird to me! You don't understand about birds! I shall give it to the Colonel.
Meral Let the bird go! Let the bird go!
Mata You let her go!
Nina It's escaped! The bird has flown off!
Light. The Colonel and the doctor appear.
Colonel Attention! */Strictly./* Who caught the bird?
Meral It arrived of its own accord. All I wanted was... But she.....
Mata All I wanted...
Titch And I wanted...
Colonel Attention! Birds are incapable of reasoning, therefore they are defenceless. We're waiting for news and help from them and how do we welcome them? With violence? Just imagine how the rest of Europe would view this And how can we look into their eyes when we go to meet them? How can we look into the eyes of those people who have sent us food when we were starving,

Because those people aren't ordinary folk, they are angels! Is that clear?

Meral The message! It was on the bird's leg. /*She has a tiny ring in her hand.*/ Here!

Doctor An ornithological ring.

Doctor It has the time and place where the ring was put on.

Mata /reads slowly/. P. 01/01.

Doctor There was no magic and no mystery. Hundreds of cases have been described when, on a cloudy, starless night flights of birds have been lured by lights on the ground and flown down towards them. What was supernatural was the fact that they really did intend to go. It became more and more likely with every day that passed. They got out the old jeep and painted it white and the blue UN emblem appeared on the bonnet and doors. Discipline was tightened from day to day.

The women, one by one, try the ring on their fingers and read the code aloud "P. The first. The first." The Colonel enters.

On stage – a map of Europe, covered with huge red arrows and a route marked out.

Colonel France...

they call the normal ones. Of course they would be turned back at the first border or I would have gone with them. Perhaps there in the West someone might have paid me well for my reports. I have even imagined how I lie on the steps of Cologne Cathedral or under the bridges of the Seine – rich, out of it and bothered by no one. On 31st December The Colonel came to me...

Doctor Please, sit down.

Colonel Doctor, before anything else I would like to express my gratitude to you for the position of non-interference which you have taken. I am a military man and am well able to calculate the problems that you could have and still could create for us.

Doctor As you see, I have not done this.

Colonel Of course, you have considerably more choice than any of us. But we must go.

Doctor And what is my other choice?

Colonel I don't know. You know better.....

Doctor And if you don't succeed?

Colonel That question simply does not exist for me.

Doctor There are so many frontiers from here to there and you haven't got a single document? It's pure paranoia.

Colonel To stay here would be worse than paranoia. Every great initiative is paranoia, doctor.

Doctor And every attempt to escape too....

Colonel */slowly and very distinctly/*. Doctor, I want to do this – so I can!

Doctor Perhaps ...God usually helps the mad.

Colonel God helps only those who are mad in this world. Because when he created the world he was mad too. And now he is in love with his mistake.

Doctor At least there is some logic in that....

Colonel We leave at midnight. */ he salutes and exits./*

Doctor */alone/*. To go or not to go? Who shall I follow? Yorick or Fortinbras? In any case up to know I've always followed normal people and, God only knows, that hasn't got me anywhere in particular. Neither geographically speaking or in any other way.....

SCENE TEN

Fade – the sound of a bugle and heavy marching steps. The Colonel's loud commands are heard in the dark.

Colonel Fall in! Attention! Roll-call! Sergeant?

Mata Sir!

Colonel Teresa?

Teresa Sir!

Colonel Zarechnaya?

Nina Sir!

Colonel Lomska?

Titch Sir!

Colonel Romova?

Meral Sir!

Colonel Once again – the route! From here...

All One, two, three, for, France, Strasbou –u-urg.

Colonel Now, if by chance we get separated, each one of us must follow that route. Checkpoint – in front of the cathedral in Strasbourg, every day from 10 to 12. Is that clear?

All Yes, sir!

Colonel Attention! To the right! Quick march!
The scene lights up and we see them all lined up in front of the UN flag.

Nina Oh, Lord! The great exodus of the mad is about to begin!

Teresa */angrily/*. And who is mad? Me? Is this a medical certificate or isn't it? Doesn't it say here that I am well? Doesn't it?

Colonel Calm down, comrades. My dear comrades. You are not mad. You are only different from the others. It is quite simple – you were not created for this world, comrades, because this world was created for everyone to be the same. But our world exists somewhere and we must believe in this because it says in the Bible:
“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
Blessed are they that mourn,
Blessed are they that are persecuted,
Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness.”
We are all of us brought together, comrades, and so let us add one more thing that God has omitted: “Blessed are the mad!” And let's believe in it although nowhere in the Charter of Human Rights is there a single line about the rights of those that are mad. Here you have one and only one right – to be treated so that you become the same as everyone else, that's why the mad are the most defenceless and unfortunate people in the world. We must escape all this. In fact we are already escaping but not as though we have been defeated. We shall escape as those who have won. And we will succeed because we are different. Is that clear?

All Yes, sir!
The doctor approaches.

Doctor Colonel, permission to fall in?

Colonel Permission granted....
They all clap.

Colonel Attention! Comrades, the first sane person has joined our company. Others will follow.

Millions and billions – they will all take their places the line and the line will take its place within them.

And in this way the world will fill with hope and faith and it will move towards that world for which it was created. Hurrah!

All Hurrah!

Colonel Attention! Forward march!

Fade

Doctor The easiest time to cross the border is on the morning of January 1st ...We didn't even see the customs officers – no doubt they were still seeing the New Year in. The border-guards saluted in a manner fitting for a UN Colonel and wished us a pleasant journey. By dawn we were travelling through foreign territory. The further west we went, the more units of blue berets we met and we were welcomed by them. In the end we joined a column of vehicles belonging to the French blue berets and went on north with them. Five days later we arrived in Strasbourg. They wouldn't let us into the building of the European Parliament so we had to submit the application by post. the people there are very precise and one month later we receive a reply. They wrote that there wasn't a law to deal with the question of foreign fighting units who voluntarily joined their forces. For that reason they could not expel them either. So that's how we found ourselves outlaws but in the heart of Europe.

SCENE ELEVEN

They are all sitting on the ground dispiritedly. At this point the strong, confident voice of The Colonel.

Colonel On your feet! Attention! Comrades, we have achieved a great victory. We have passed thousands of kilometres and arrived here. This a real act of valour and will give us the strength to go on. The most important thing in this world is to stand up and go on towards that wonderful world for which you were created. Is that clear?

All Yes, sir!

Colonel Three cheers for victory!

All Hurrah!

Colonel Attention! Fall in! Quick march! One-two, one-two...Section!

Colonel Louder! Louder! Straighten up! By the left! One-two-three! By the left, one-two-three. One-two, one-two, one-two-three....We shall find that wonderful world for which we were created. We shall find it even if it does not exist on this earth. The universe is eternal and no one has been everywhere and proved that the wonderful world does not exist. One-two, one-two, one-two

Suddenly the Colonel throws his cap to the ground, his head flops and he falls silent and motionless. Fade.

Doctor The Colonel got asleep and never spoke again. His illness once again turned back into depression. I no longer remember which day or which year we are but every day from 10.00 to 12.00 we do drill and keep up a good military spirit.

EPILOGUE

The cathedral clock strikes ten. The doctor, in uniform, commands loudly and ceremoniously.

Doctor Fall in! Attention! Quick march!

The group march in ceremonial step. Around them crowds of tourists clap and cameras flash but they continue their march. One of them comes down from the stage and moves through the audience shaking a blue cap with coins in it.