

The Colonel and the Birds

The Doctor
Fetisov
Nina
Titch
Mata Hari
Meral
Teresa

PROLOGUE

The Doctor They say that there are no normal doctors working in the field of Psychiatry. Perhaps that was the reason why, after leaving the Institute, I decided to go in for it; I was often depressed by the absurd questions about life discussed in existential philosophy. In the regional psychiatric clinic where the usual misery and crowding reigned they told me that there was urgent need of a young and energetic specialist such as me. Only it wasn't there but high in the mountains in the "Forty Holy Martyrs" Clinic – named after an old convent converted to a clinic. "There's no risk for a doctor there," they told me, "and there's no doctor." It was only 43 kilometres from here.

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!"

The Doctor Good evening.

They do not even look at her.

The Doctor */louder/*Good evening.

No reaction.

The 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?

The 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?

The Doctor Where?

Teresa Customs on the Danube Bridge.

The Doctor I've never been there.

Teresa You remind me of a colleague – a virgin. Her speciality was oral sex.

The 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/* “The men, the lions, the eagles, the partridges, the antlered deer, the geese, the spiders, the silent fishes of the deep.....”

Teresa crosses herself in sympathy and 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”.

Teresa */behind her/* Another lie.

Nina Chekhov is my speciality. */she starts Nina Zarechnaya's monologue from "The Seagull"/* “The men, the lions, the eagles, the partridges, the antlered deer, the geese, the spiders, the silent fishes of the deep.....”

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

Nina I didn't see you.

Teresa But I shouted....

Nina I'm totally deaf, ma'am.

The 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.

The Doctor But how do you hear me?

Nina I don't.

Teresa */behind her/* She lipreads everything.

Nina */to Teresa, following the Doctor's look/* Don't talk behind my back!

The 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!
The Doctor Someone wants to come in.
Nina Titch, for sure! Don't move!
The Doctor What?
Nina Sshhhh! Don't move an inch! /towards the door/ 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 /she stands still/

Titch enters very cautiously, holding high a torch with a red light, creeps along, back to the wall, following the others with frightened eyes. Teresa stretches out a hand to cross herself.

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/
The 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! /listening/ 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 and sits on it.

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

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

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

Titch We're the ones with a problem – not her.

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

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

Nina So, where's the monastery wine?

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

Titch And the petrol for the jeep?

The 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 Hari 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, shrieking through her tears.

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

Mata Hari */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.

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

All Shhhh.....!

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

Mata Hari 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 in the Balkans 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

SCENE TWO

The Doctor */on the telephone/ Hallo, hallo! Hallo – is that the Chief Consultant? There's nothing here ...no 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.

The Doctor Oh, god!

She opens the medicine cabinet and starts to search feverishly through the medicines.

The Doctor Validol, luminal, diazepam, valerian.....

She throws the medicines aside, clearly not interested in them. There is a knock at the door.

The Doctor */yells/ No!*

Teresa enters. The doctor continues to search through the medicines hoping to find what she wants.

The Doctor I said no. Why have you come in?
Teresa You're not a doctor.
The Doctor What makes you think that?
Teresa Because I recognised you straight away. You're the colleague who specialises in oral sex?
The Doctor I am a doctor.
Teresa And before that? I remember everything. Everything and everyone. I worked fifteen lorries a day at the Customs for all of five years.
The Doctor Were you a customs officer?
Teresa You could call it that. A lonely customs officer at the frontier of love. All the men know me.
The 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. Teresa, the Customs Officer, is known by all the men. You too.
The 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.
The Doctor Are you having any treatment for it?
Teresa Treatment? I'm not in hospital, am I?
The Doctor Well, where are you?
Teresa In a convent, where else? Don't you think this is a convent?
The Doctor Of course it's a convent
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 convent and he sent me to a convent. 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/

The doctor locks the door and again starts to rummage through the medicines to find what she's looking for. At this moment Meral breaks open the door and enters with the spray pointing at her face.

Meral I die!
The 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/
The Doctor No!

She attempts to grab the can but Meral aims it at her.

Meral Stand back!
The 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/ /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.
The Doctor What magic?
Meral Black. They put a spell on me so that I couldn't forget him!
The Doctor Who?
Meral My husband */she bursts into tears/.*

The doctor continues to search through the medicines.

The Doctor And where is he?
Meral He's found somebody younger.
The Doctor How old are you?
Meral Sixteen.
The Doctor Have you any children?
Meral I have. Three.
The Doctor Pardon?
Meral Well, one a year.....
The Doctor And where are the children?
Meral With him. My sister is looking after them.
The 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.....
The Doctor With the spray?
Meral Do you think it's easy? My head aches three whole days afterwards.
The 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.
The Doctor Who?
Meral Teresa.
The Doctor How?
Meral On the principle of fight fire with fire. If I fall in love again....
The Doctor With Teresa?
Meral There's not much choice here...
The Doctor You're thinking of falling in love with a woman, is that right?
Meral Teresa isn't a woman!
The Doctor What do you mean, not a woman?!
Meral She isn't. Haven't you worked that out yet?
The 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.
The 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.
The Doctor So that's it.
Meral Yes. So can't you have a word with her, that is - with him, about my

problem?
The Doctor I can but only if you leave the spray here with me.
Meral But you promise...?
The 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?
The 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 Hari */offstage/* Help! Help!

At last Mata Hari manages to open the door and she stumbles in.

Mata Hari They're beating me!
The Doctor Only because you're a thief.
Mata Hari 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/*
The Doctor What's this?
Mata Hari I found it in the stove.
The Doctor Take it back straight away.
Mata Hari There's no point. I'll only steal it again.
The Doctor Then keep it yourself and give it to them whenever they need it.
Mata Hari That's what I do. Look. */takes out a piece of paper/* From Nina – 700 taken, 580 returned. From Titch – 1200 taken, 900 returned. I keep strict records. I've even given more to Teri than I've taken.
The Doctor Well, then, look after mine. */searches in her pockets/*
Mata Hari Don't bother to look. I've got it already.
The Doctor */amazed/* How on earth...?

All of a sudden the doctor, really frightened, feverishly starts to look for something in her pockets.

Mata Hari This is yours too. */hands over a box of ampoules/* I don't use morphine. */exits/*

The doctor takes a deep breath to help her recover from this shock and then, with shaking hands, opens an ampoule and sticks the needle in her arm. Offstage Nina knocks on the door.

Nina /offstage/ Doctor, doctor!
The Doctor /yells/ Nooo!
Nina The News is starting.

She pulls out the needle and relaxes.

The Doctor Everything I've said about myself is true except for one little thing – the truth is that I'm no doctor. I'm simply an addict. They've had me in for treatment several times – the only difference it's made is that I've exchanged heroin for morphine. It's easier to find morphine in the clinics... and one other thing: whilst they were trying in vain to cure me I managed to read all the textbooks on psychiatric illnesses. That's how I got the idea of pretending to be a doctor so that I could get hold of morphine. And now here I am with my false diploma and the last ten ampoules of morphine. I had hoped to find more here. But there isn't any and I've got to wait for the next delivery. So that's it.

Fade. Offstage the voice of Nina is heard.

Nina Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am a seagull. Today the fierce fighting in the Balkans 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.

SCENE THREE

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

The Doctor Well, shall we talk?

The schizophrenic does not move.

The Doctor What's the date, today?

The same reaction.

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

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

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

Teresa There aren't any men here.

The Doctor And this one?

The doctor pulls back the hood of the schizophrenic's habit.

The unshaven face of a man emerges.

The Doctor */reads from the notes/* “ Dimitri Fetisov, 49 years old. Father – Russian, mother – Bulgarian. Graduated from the Military Academy in Bulgaria and the Staff College in the Soviet Union. A volunteer in Bosnia where, after suffering an injury to his brain, he developed a severe schizophrenic depression and stopped speaking. Has not spoken for several years.”
/loudly to them all/ For the last time – are there any other men here?
Teresa No.
The Doctor Tomorrow everyone will have an appointment with me for a gynaecological examination to establish gender.
Teresa You’re insulting me.
The 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!”.....

The man automatically follows these commands.

Teresa The Lord’s work is truly wonderful!
The Doctor That’s an unconscious reaction. The military instinct is really strong....
Mata Hari I worked for the army too. I was in the kitchen....
Nina But they sacked you for stealing stores, didn’t they?
Mata Hari Nooo! Not for that. In the army everyone steals.
Nina Then it was because of the drinking?
Mata Hari Nooo! In the army everyone drinks.
Meral Well, what for then?
Mata Hari It was sexual discrimination. I made a great impression on the soldiers...
Teresa You too?
Mata Hari 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 Hari 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 Hari 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 Hari Don't know, I'll check.
Teresa I can't possibly sleep in the same room as a man.
Mata Hari Why should it bother you?
Teresa My spiritual wellbeing.
The Doctor I'll take care of that.

She approaches the schizophrenic and loudly commands: "Attention!", "To the right!", "Quick march!" He moves, following the commands automatically. She directs him through commands and he exits as she repeats "One-two, one-two..."

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 in the Balkans 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 British 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 Hari 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 Hari 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 Hari You did.

Nina I didn't.

Mata Hari You did.

Nina I didn't.

Mata Hari It's all the same to me. The question is, the text has to change. It's true that we're mad but we are still human beings.....

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 Romsy-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!

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.

The 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. And the news from the front was always the same but I had no interest in it. I had another world that I could always escape into – a nonexistent but beautiful world where I could live like a human being and the people were all angels. But there were only a few ampoules left and I had to search for somewhere else where I could get hold of the drugs.

SCENE FOUR

Early morning in the courtyard of the convent. 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 Hari Nowhere. It was here.

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

Mata Hari It must have fallen during the night.

Nina From the sky?

Mata Hari As it has a parachute.....

The doctor appears.

The Doctor What's that?
Nina This one's stolen a container from the UN.
Mata Hari I haven't. I was going to steal it but I didn't.

The Doctor examines the labels.

The 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 Hari There aren't any occupied zones here! The war is 200 kilometres away.
Nina The storm must have driven them off course.
The Doctor That's possible.
Nina They don't know the difference. It's all the Balkans to them. They were told to drop the stuff over the Balkans and that's what they've done.
The Doctor What are we going to do now?
Mata Hari Shall we send it back to the UN?
Nina We didn't have anything to eat last night....

The doctor hesitates.

Mata Hari There might be medicines....
The Doctor What medicines?!
Mata Hari Sleeping pills, morphine.....shall I?
The Doctor Go on! But it says "clothing" on the container.
Mata Hari 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. The doctor searches for medical supplies.

Nina Army uniforms?
Mata Hari Never mind – we can sell them at the front.

At this moment Meral runs in and yells

Meral Tinned stuff and chocolate.
The Doctor Where?
Meral Behind the convent.

Titch runs in too.

Titch The forest is full of containers.
Mata Hari Take them all to the store!
The Doctor But if they are looking for them?
Mata Hari Who's going to be looking for them? The British?

Fade

The Doctor Of course there was no morphine but from that moment on I stopped

phoning the Clinic. I don't know who's right or who's wrong in this war, but I'm 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 Hari Impossible! You're so small you'd fall into it.
Nina Here's a biscuit.
Titch Only one?
Mata Hari You're small. It's enough.
Titch Just one bar of chocolate?
Mata Hari 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 Hari */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 Hari */ferreting through the box/* There's icecream 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.

Fetisov Attention!

The imposing figure of Fetisov is standing by the door – well-groomed and in full uniform. The patients screech and drop the packets. Fetisov 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.

Fetisov */in a military tone/* At ease. */to Nina/* Zarechnaya?
Nina */jumps up terrified/* Yes?
Fetisov Tea!
Nina Yes, Sir....!?
Fetisov I'm a colonel.
Nina At your service, Colonel! */she runs to the kitchen/*
Fetisov It's a lovely evening, isn't it? */moves slowly towards Mata Hari/*
Mata Hari */steps back nervously/* I....I.... I was in the army, sir, I was a sergeant.

Fetisov 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 Fetisov, they start to button up their uniforms. Nina enters with a kettle.

Nina The tea, sir. */she pours a cup of tea for Fetisov/*
Fetisov A cup for everyone, please.
Nina Sir.....

They all drink their tea noisily, Russian style, obsequiously imitating Fetisov.

Fetisov */notices Titch under the bed/* And you, soldier, what are you doing under that bed?
Titch I'm very small, sir.
Fetisov Why do you think that?
Titch Because I'm ill, sir.
Fetisov If you are wearing a uniform you can't be so very small, private...?
Titch Private Lomska, sir.
Fetisov */looks around the room/* Sergeant?
Mata Hari Sir?
Fetisov What is all this mess?
Mata Hari Well.....
Fetisov This room must be kept according to the regulations. Order and discipline is what I'm after. Is that clear?
Mata Hari Yes, sir!

The doctor stands in the doorway. Fetisov rises and introduces himself at the top of his voice.

Fetisov Doctor, Colonel Fetisov at your service!

The doctor gulps as she takes in the situation.

Fetisov Zarechnaya?
Nina Sir!
Fetisov 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!

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 Hari 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 Hari 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 Hari He was at the Staff College in Moscow. Do you know what that means? And it looks as though he took part in the Afghanistan War.
- Meral Did you see the doctor? She said nothing, just drank her tea and went out.
- Mata Hari The doctor! What on earth can the doctor say when there's a colonel from the Tamanska Division present?
- Nina The Tamanska Division!?
- Mata Hari Yes. At the time of Gorbachev's take-over he personally commanded the tank strike-force and arrested two of the rebel-leaders and carried them out of the Kremlin wrapped in a Persian carpet.
- Meral Really?
- Mata Hari Yes, together with their mistresses.
- Nina How do you know all this?
- Mata Hari From.... From their mistresses – I saw them on television. And he he lives alone. As yet there's no woman in his life.
- Meral Who told you?
- Mata Hari He did. He confides in me because I'm a sergeant.
- Titch You're lying. The colonel never talks about himself.

At this point Fetisov's voice echoes down the corridor.

- Fetisov Fall in for evening roll-call!
- Mata Hari Fall in! At the double!
- Nina Oh, Lord!
- Mata Hari Quickly, please! He's here!

Frightened, the three of them line up while Titch curls up under the bed. Fetisov enters.

- Mata Hari Sir! Section present and correct!

Fetisov Attention! Roll-call! Sergeant?
Mata Hari Sir!
Fetisov Zarechnaya!
Nina Sir!
Fetisov Romova?
Meral Sir!
Fetisov Lomska?
Titch */under the bed/* Sir!
Fetisov */severely/* Why are you not in line, Lomska?
Titch Someone might step on me, Sir.
Fetisov Private Lomska, in line!
Titch I can't. I'm afraid. Look, I'm trembling from head to toe.
Fetisov Lomska, in line! The responsibility is mine, Colonel Fetisov.
Titch I want to, but I can't. Please! I'm so small, so very small! */in tears/*
Fetisov */sharply and loudly/* Private Lomska, on your feet!

Titch slowly stands up shaking.

Fetisov Attention!

Titch freezes in fear.

Fetisov Into line, quick march!

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

Fetisov 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!

Fetisov Attention! Left turn! Right turn!

Fade

The Doctor */thumbing carefully through a textbook/* Fetisov'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 Fetisov. 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 Fetisov, 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 Fetisov is heard in the distance: "One...two...three" and then they all run into the courtyard.

Mata Hari At the double!
Nina /to Meral/ Now we're really like lunatics.
Fetisov No talking, take deep breaths! One...two, one...two...halt! Attention! At ease! /Fetisov paces along the line/ Today's orders are as follows: until lunchtime –cleaning the courtyard. After lunch from 1400 hours to 1600 hours – rest. From 1600 to 2000 hours - time for personal hygiene and evening meal and after 2000 hours cultural pursuits and rest. Clear?
All Yes, sir!
Fetisov Any other suggestions? No Second: from today we start to take turns at cleaning the rooms and kitchen. Zarechnaya?
Nina Sir!
Fetisov Your turn today.
Nina Yes, sir!
Fetisov 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 Hari But there is no stove there....
Fetisov That is true. Will you see to it that there is a stove and wood in Mother Teresa's room.
Mata Hari Yes, sir! /to Titch/ Private Lomska! Stove and wood! At the double!
Fetisov I haven't finished yet....
Mata Hari Halt! Attention!
Fetisov 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 Hari Sir!
Fetisov Any repetition of this infringement will result in the person responsible losing her right to wear military uniform.
Mata Hari How is it possible not to steal in the barracks?
Fetisov 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 Hari Colonel! The doctor!
Fetisov Attention! Eyes right!

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

Fetisov 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.

The doctor Morning!

All Ma'am!

The doctor Any complaints?

Nina None at all, Ma'am.

The doctor Hari?

Mata Hari None at all.

The doctor Lomska?

Titch Nothing at all, Ma'am.

The doctor I understand that you no longer sleep under the bed?

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

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

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

Fade

The 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. Perhaps I could make some money from it and then get back on to heroin. Oh Lord, the drug! The drug! The drug!!! */she sticks a needle into her arm/*

SCENE EIGHT

Teresa Good morning

The Doctor Good morning, do sit down.

Teresa I'm thinking of leaving the convent.

The Doctor Leaving the convent?

Teresa Yes.

The 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?

The 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.

The Doctor There aren't any wounded at the moment.

Teresa There will be.

The 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.

The Doctor Well, if he said.....

Teresa I've got to give in the application form tomorrow.

The Doctor Where to?

Teresa To the colonel.

The Doctor Oh, of course.....

Teresa And you've got to give me a medical certificate to show that I am healthy.

The Doctor Why a medical certificate?

Teresa That's what the colonel says.

The Doctor Of course. Here you are.... */she fills in a form/*

Teresa Two copies if possible. That's what the colonel wants.

The Doctor Of course, here's another one.

Teresa There's no signature.

The Doctor Really? Well, here's a signature */she signs/*

Teresa And a stamp...

The Doctor There's no need for a stamp.

Teresa The colonel wants it stamped.

The 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?

The Doctor Of course.

Teresa Why did the consultant say I was mad then?

The Doctor Anyone can make a mistake.

Teresa So it was a mistake?

The 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

Fetisov 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.

Fetisov Romova?

Meral There's enough clothing for about ten years.

Fetisov That's enough for now. Sergeant?

Mata Hari 84 Deutschmarks and 24 dollars and 45 million old Serbian dinars.

Fetisov What do we need old dinars for?

Mata Hari I stole them before they changed the currency....

Fetisov Would be better if they were new ones.

Mata Hari Well, I've stopped stealing. But if I am ordered.....

Fetisov Lomska? How are we off for transport?
 Titch There's a jeep in good condition but there are no tyres for it.
 Mata Hari It did have tyres but.....
 Fetisov It must have tyres by the end of the week.
 Mata Hari Yes, sir!
 Titch There's no petrol.
 Fetisov In one week it must be found.
 Mata Hari Yes, sir!
 Nina Sir, permission to speak?
 Fetisov Yes?
 Nina The News is beginning.
 Mata Hari 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 in the Balkans 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 the night flights of the British Air Force.
 Mata Hari Let's hope that they fly off course again!
 Nina */continues/* The UN spokesman announced that if the conflict in the Balkans continues then the UN will adopt decisive measures to ensure the security of Europe.
 Fetisov 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 couldhelp 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 NINE

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

Mata Hari The Doctor!
Fetisov 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 here in the Balkans 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 in the Balkans.
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.

Fetisov Attention!
Mata Hari Attention! Quick march to the voting booth!

They all vote one after another.

Fetisov 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. Fetisov 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.

Fetisov 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!
Fetisov Romova!
Meral Sir! */looks through the slit/* Correct!
The Doctor Perhaps the black papers can’t be seen in the darkness?
Fetisov Impossible – there are no black papers. So now let us officially declare that the first two proposals of our programme are in force.
Mata Hari Attention!
Fetisov 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 in the Balkans. This is our constitutional document. */he raises high a sheet of paper/*
Mata Hari Hurrah!

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

Fetisov 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.

The Doctor Colonel, sir, permission to speak?
Fetisov Please.
The 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.
Fetisov /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.
Fetisov 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 Fetisov.

Fetisov Naturally the reply will be sent in the same way. We start to send messages tomorrow.

Fade

The 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 Greece, some of them even further, as far as South 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 Hari 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.
Mata Hari Than humans?
Titch Yes, because humans have evolved from the birds and no one is superior to their creator.
Mata Hari Humans came from the apes.
Titch 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.

Mata Hari Why precisely to being a bird?
Titch 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.

Nina Every creature is capable of endeavour whether it is large or small.
Titch To some extent, yes, to some, no. Because a truly great endeavour compared with the size of a tiny creature becomes proportionately greater.

Mata Hari Everyone ready?
All Ready.
Mata Hari Let's release them, then.
All Let's do it.

They go to the open window.

Mata Hari Attention! Ready for action! Three...four. Off they go!
All Off they go!

The sound of wings is heard and they all stare after the departing birds for a long time.

Titch They've gone.....
Mata Hari 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.

Titch People can take wing if they want to.
Mata Hari The Colonel can fly. I saw him yesterday with my own eyes.
Nina You're crazy.
Mata Hari 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.

Nina You were drunk.
Mata Hari 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 Hari 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 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...

Fetisov passes by and salutes.

Fetisov Good evening!
Teresa Shhhh! Quiet! /she puts the sleeping bird down/ It's asleep...
Fetisov Yes, really...
Teresa Birds fall asleep very quickly.
Fetisov Really? I hadn't noticed.
Teresa And they shouldn't be woken before they wake up naturally or they stop singing.
Fetisov 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.
Fetisov 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.
Fetisov Yes, especially about the weather. When the weather's bad I get shooting pains, but today the weather is fine.
Teresa Yes, yes.
Fetisov Sunny too.
Teresa Yes.
Fetisov And it wasn't too bad yesterday.
Teresa That's right, it wasn't.
Fetisov We don't know what it'll be like tomorrow.
Teresa How right you are!
Fetisov Then again it might continue like this all week.
Teresa Really?
Fetisov 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!
Fetisov And after that it gets better again.
Teresa I believe you!
Fetisov Eh, well, goodbye.
Teresa Goodbye. And I'm sorry.
Fetisov What for?
Teresa Well, you know how to have a proper conversation, while I.....
Fetisov What proper conversation?
Teresa About the weather It was so moving!
Fetisov 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!
Fetisov 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

The 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 Hari Look, look! There's a new flight on the way. God, the sky is black with birds.....
Nina Look at the seventh on the right in the fourth row. Hasn't it got something on its leg?
Mata Hari 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.
Fetisov Ravens are strong and can carry all sorts of messages. Watch carefully to see if any of them break away from the group.
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 Hari 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 Hari 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.

Fetisov 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 Hari 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.

Fetisov 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 Hari 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 Fetisov.

Fetisov They'll have trained it.

Nina That would be possible.....

Mata Hari To the forest. Quick march!

All To the forest! To the forest!

Mata Hari Forward.....march!

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

Mata Hari Sir, permission

Fetisov Yes, sergeant?

Mata Hari I....I want to confess something to you...
Fetisov Yes, sergeant. I am listening to you.
Mata Hari It is something very personal and very frank.... I simply
daren't...../bursts into tears/
Fetisov 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 Hari You....you are the one and only person in my lifewho I
haven't stolen from.

Fade

The 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.
Fetisov I beg your pardon?
Nina You have pulled me out of the depths of Chekovian despair.
Fetisov Oh! Not I but military discipline has done that.
Nina But you are the one who brought discipline here.
Fetisov 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?
Fetisov Why?
Nina To hear you better. You aren't at all like any of Chekov's heroes.
Fetisov Not a hero, only a soldier.
Nina How modest you are. Please turn your face towards the moon.
Fetisov 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.....
Fetisov And last night wasn't so bad.
Nina Yes, but tonight is unique.
Fetisov Naturally. The forecast is made each night specifically for the next
day.
Nina There are no forecasts for life, sir.
Fetisov 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.
Fetisov 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

The 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 Hari 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 Hari 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 Hari 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 Hari It is your duty as you're in the army. That's an order!
Teresa Whose order?
Mata Hari 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 Hari She's right. Get dressed.
Meral You have to be naked to cast the spell!
Mata Hari 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 "The men, the lions, the eagles, the partridges, the antlered deer, the geese, the spiders, the silent fishes of the deep, starfishes and creatures unseen to the eye – in short all living things, all living things have completed their mournful cycle and flickered out..... for thousands of years the earth has not given birth to a living creature and this poor moon now lights it lamp in vain. The cranes no longer awaken in the meadows and hunt for May beetles in the lime trees. It's cold, cold, cold. It's empty, empty, empty. Dreadful, dreadful, dreadful".

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 Hari 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, probably they have flown on.

Meral The message! On its leg!
Mata Hari Just let me hold it!
Meral How happy the Colonel will be now!
Mata Hari Just let me hold it!
Meral Where is the bird? Someone's taken the bird!
Mata Hari 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 Hari You let her go!
Nina It's escaped! The bird has flown off!

At this moment the roar of a jeep is heard and the headlights light up the squabbling women in a cloud of feathers. Fetisov and the doctor appear.

Fetisov Attention! /strictly/ Who caught the bird?
Meral It arrived of its own accord. All I wanted was... But she.....
Mata Hari All I wanted.....
Titch And I wanted....
Fetisov 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, clothes when we were perished to death and hope when we were down in the depths of despair? Those people who are going to send us messages with a bird and when we get them they'll accept us as brothers. Because those people aren't ordinary folk, they are angels! Is that clear?
All Yes, sir!
Meral The message! It was on the bird's leg. /she has a tiny ring in her hand/ Here!

Fetisov looks at the message carefully.

The Doctor An ornithological ring.
Meral There's something written on it.
The Doctor It has the time and place where the ring was put on.
Fetisov No! It's a code.
Titch /reads/ P. 01/01.

Mata Hari /reads slowly/ P. 01/01.
Fetisov /decoding/P The first, the first. /to them all/ We proceed on the first of January.

Fade

The 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.

SCENE EIGHT

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

Fetisov Attention!

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

Fetisov To repeat the route once more. From here towards Serbia. Serbia – Hungary. Hungary – Slovakia, Slovakia – the Czech Republic, the Czech Republic – Germany, Germany – France, France – Strasbourg. But I want to tell you that when we go into Serbia we might make contact with other UN troops. Now possible obstacles. First, we could be stopped by the traffic police.

Nina That's impossible. The traffic police would never stop a vehicle with the UN emblem.

Fetisov Right. Then.

Mata Hari Then there is the border where they will stop us for passport checks.

Fetisov Have no fear! We have our constitutive document with which we have become members of the UN and no one can stop a fighting unit of the United Nations. Today is the 30th December and we are finally ready. Tomorrow is 31st December. I declare it a day of rest and reflection. We leave on 31st December at 2400 hours. Now repeat the route once more. Go!

All Serbia –Hungary. Hungary – Slovakia, Slovakia – the Czech Republic, the Czech Republic – Germany, Germany – France, France – Strasbourg.

Fetisov Again!

All Serbia –

Hungary. Hungary – Slovakia, Slovakia – the Czech Republic, the Czech Republic – Germany, Germany – France, France – Strasbourg.

Fetisov Break for ten minutes!

Fade

The Doctor They really were going to set off. Of course, every great plan has its weak point. I could have phoned the Regional Hospital and thwarted the whole plan. But that would have ruined the game that ensured that they all lived the lives of normal people. If I had done that they would all have turned back into the human tragedies that they were when I arrived. And when all is said and done who can say which game is the real one? Is it their little game or the great one that we all play, all of us that 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 Fetisov came to see me.....

SCENE NINE

Fetisov enters and salutes.

Fetisov Good morning, doctor.
The Doctor Please, sit down.
Fetisov 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.
The Doctor As you see, I have not done this.
Fetisov Of course, you have considerably more choice than any of us. But we must go.
The Doctor And what is my other choice?
Fetisov I don't know. You know better.....
The Doctor And if you don't succeed?
Fetisov That question simply does not exist for me.
The Doctor There are so many frontiers from here to there and you haven't got a single document? It's pure paranoia.
Fetisov To stay here would be worse than paranoia. Every great initiative is paranoia, doctor.
The Doctor And every attempt to escape too....
Fetisov */slowly and very distinctly/* Doctor, I want to do this – so I can!
The Doctor Perhaps ...God usually helps the mad.
Fetisov 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.
The Doctor At least there is some logic in that....
Fetisov We leave at midnight. */he salutes and exits/*
The Doctor */alone/* 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. Fetisov's loud commands are heard in the dark.

Fetisov Fall in! Attention! Roll-call! Sergeant?
Mata Hari Sir!
Fetisov Teresa?
Teresa Sir!
Fetisov Zarechnaya?
Nina Sir!
Fetisov Lomska?
Titch Sir!
Fetisov Romova?
Meral Sir!
Fetisov Once again – the route!
All From here towards Serbia. Serbia – Hungary. Hungary – Slovakia,
 Slovakia – the Czech Republic, the Czech Republic – Germany,
 Germany – France, France – Strasbourg.
Fetisov 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!
Fetisov Attention! To the right! Quick march!

The scene lights up and we see them all lined up in front of the UN flag.

Nina */weeping/* 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?
Fetisov 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.

The Doctor Colonel, permission to fall in?
Fetisov Permission granted....

They all clap.

Fetisov 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!
Fetisov Attention! Forward march!

Fade

The 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 people there weren't divided into the mad and the sane but into Christians and Moslems. Fate will always find a way to divide people. Thousands of refugees were moving eastwards whilst we continued westward from where those people had fled because the Colonel said that the road to heaven passes through hell. 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. We raised camp in the centre of Strasbourg, in front of the cathedral where any outlaw can find sanctuary.

SCENE ELEVEN

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

Fetisov On your feet!

They slowly get to their feet.

Fetisov Attention!

They obey.

Fetisov 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!

Fetisov Three cheers for victory!

All Hurrah!

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

They march in single file around Fetisov.

Fetisov Section!

This command means that they have to mark time and they continue their march under the heavy beat of soldiers' boots.

Fetisov One-two, one-two.... Let's have a song!

They sing whilst marching.

Fetisov Louder! Louder! Straighten up! By the left! One-two-three! By the left, one-two-three. One-two, one-two, one-two-three....

Fetisov's commands get shriller and shriller over the sound of the song until, in the end, he clutches his heart and collapses to the ground. The others rush towards him and lift him up. Delirious, Fetisov continues to shout.

Fetisov 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

The doctor gives him an injection of morphine and Fetisov quietens down. Fade and the voice of the doctor is heard.

The Doctor The Colonel had no wish to awaken. I gave him my last ampoule of morphine but had no regrets. I didn't need the morphine any longer. I felt good without it. Fetisov had taught me how to feel good without the drug – by standing up and going on.... And we did go on. I no longer remember which day or which year we are but every day from 10 to 12 we do drill and keep up a good military spirit.

EPILOGUE

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

The 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.