

**THE COLONEL BIRD**

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**CHARACTERS:**

The doctor  
Fetisov  
Hacho  
Matei  
Kiro  
Davud  
Peppa

**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. I had the feeling that I'd reached the very heart of the Balkan Mountains.

**ACT ONE****Scene 1**

*Evening. The sound of a car and the light of headlamps.*

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

**Scene 1**

*A hospital ward. Beds, chairs, an old television set. Hacho is there engrossed in a book with his back to the door. On the bed by the window, staring lifelessly through it, the motionless figure of the Russian, unshaven with a huge untidy beard and hair. They are wrapped in blankets and wearing all sorts of odd garments. The doctor enters.*

Doctor: Good evening /they don't even look up/  
 Doctor: /louder/ Good evening! /no reaction/  
 Doctor: /shouting/ Good evening! /the same result/  
 Doctor: /yelling/ Excuse me, but are you deaf? Three times I've said 'Good evening'.

*/Peppa peers in through the other door/*

Peppa: */staring hard at the doctor/* didn't we meet at Customs on the Danube bridge?  
 Hacho: */Sees the doctor/* Are you a new patient?  
 Doctor: I'm the new doctor.  
 Hacho: */politely/* How do you do? I was a student at the Academy of Drama. Would you like to hear one of my monologues?  
 Doctor: I said 'Good evening' a moment ago.  
 Hacho: I'm sorry, I didn't see you.

Doctor: But I shouted.....  
 Hacho: I'm completely deaf, doctor....  
 Doctor: */points to Fetisov who is still in the same pose, not moving in the slightest/*  
 And is he deaf too?  
 Hacho: I don't know, doctor. I've never seen him speak. All I know is that he's  
 called the Russian.  
 Doctor: Where's the Sister?  
 Hacho: Run away.  
 Doctor: How do you heat that place?  
 Hacho: With nothing. We live in one room to keep warm.  
 Doctor: So you're deaf?  
 Hacho: Completely. A shell exploded in my hands when I was doing national  
 service - I lost my hearing then....  
 Doctor: Well, how can you hear me now?  
 Hacho: I can't. I lip read. Excuse me, what time is it?  
 Doctor: Half past seven.  
 Hacho: In half an hour the News will start.

*All this time Peppa has been calculating something from a pile of papers, whispering numbers to herself. Then she falls on her knees.*

Peppa: One hundred and ninety five thousand, three hundred and seventy-five!  
 Lord, forgive me! */continues whispering a prayer/*  
 Matei: */knocking loudly on the door and calling from offstage/* I'm here!  
 Hacho: It must be Matei. Come in, come in.  
 Matei: */opens the door timidly and stands close to it/* I'm coming in.  
 Hacho: Go on then, come in.  
 Matei: Don't move anyone.  
 Hacho: OK, O.K  
 Matei: OK, but you're moving.  
 Hacho: Look, I've stopped */he stands still/*.

*Matei enters very cautiously, standing with his back close to the wall, following the doctor and hacho with frightened eyes. The doctor takes a step and Matei freezes to the spot, terrified, pointing a red pocket torch at them.*

Matei: Don't move! It's getting dangerous! One false move and you'll be in prison  
 for life.  
 Hacho: This is the doctor.  
 Matei: So what if it is? We're all equal in the eyes of the law. */Matei gets under  
 the furthest away of the beds./* You can move now, but no one's to step on  
 me!  
 Doctor: What's going on here?  
 Hacho: He suffers from this mania that he's very, very small and he's afraid that  
 someone will step on him.

Matei: Only the evening. During the day I'm normal, but when it starts to get dark I become ever so small. I carry a red torch because if someone steps on me he'll end up rotting in gaol.

Peppa: */lifting her head from her calculations/* Three hundred and eighty thousand, seven hundred and forty! Lord, forgive me!

*Davud enters, clutching his crotch.*

Davud: I'll cut it off! */takes out a knife/*

Matei: Get to the right! */lights the way with his torch/* Move to the right and keep your eyes down!

Davud : I've made up my mind - I'm going to cut it off!

Matei: Make up your mind but look where you're stepping!

Davud: */sees the Doctor/* Is there a new patient?

Hacho: This is the doctor.

Davud: */flinches/* A doctor, are you?

Doctor: Yes, I'm a doctor.

Davud: */clutching even harder/* Doctor, I'm ever so poorly.

Doctor: Does it hurt?

Davud: Worse than that! I'm going to cut it off!

Hacho: You can cut it off later. The News is starting now.

*The door opens slowly giving a long drawn out creak and Kiro appears on the threshold. He stands at the door reluctant to enter. Eventually he sits beside Hacho.*

Hacho: Don't sit by me. I've nothing left. Look! */he turns out his pockets/*

*Kiro moves to sit next to Davud.*

Davud: And I've got nothing. Look. */and he turns out his pockets/*

*Kiro moves to the empty bed in the corner and sits.*

Matei: */shouts from below/* Owwww! Not on me! You'll go to gaol!

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

Doctor: */to Kiro/* I'm the new doctor. What's your trouble?

Matei: Nothing. We're the ones who're troubled.

Hacho: He's an alcoholic. He steals everything and then drinks it.

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

Davud: So, where's the monastery wine?

Kiro: I didn't steal it. I found it.

Matei: And the petrol for the jeep?

Doctor: What jeep?

Davud: Scrapped. It was a present from the detachment. And the soldiers gave us half a ton of petrol - and he drank it.

Hacho: Quiet! The News!

*Hacho switches on the television, a black and white picture showing the opening sequence of the News appears but there is no sound. They all turn to stare at the screen apart from the Russian who stays motionlessly staring through the window.*

Doctor: */looking at them in amazement/* There's no sound!

All: Sshhhhh.....!

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

Davud: The sound doesn't work.

*The announcer appears and his lips begin to move. At the same instant the Hacho, staring hard at the announcer, begins to do a voice over.*

Hacho: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. 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 2**

*The doctor's surgery*

Doctor: */on the telephone/* 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? Gifts from the army....? 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?

*The Doctor slams down the receiver in despair and starts to search his pockets for something.*

Doctor: Oh, god!

*He opens his bag and and continues to search desperately. There is a knock at the door.*

The doctor: */shrieks/* No!

*Davud enters, clutching his crotch.*

Davud: It's terrible, doctor.....  
 Doctor: What is?  
 Davud: Total impotence!

*The doctor continues to search through his luggage and then goes over to the drugs cabinet.*

Doctor: */reads the labels of the medicines/* Luminal, diazepam, valerian.....

*He throws the medicines aside and continues to search.*

Davud: */repeats/* Total impotence!

Doctor: How long have you been here?

Davud: Half a year.

Doctor: Do you have a wife?

Davud: I don't know.....if she hasn't already run away.... I told you - I've been here for six months. Total impotence!

Doctor: Have you any children?

Davud: Six. And it looks as though that's all I'm going to have...

Doctor: Isn't it enough?

Davud: Well, if there can't be any more...*/bursts into tears/* The shame of it, doctor! The whole neighbourhood is laughing at me. When a gypsy can't do that what is left for him.....?

Doctor: You'll recover, have no fear.

Davud: */sighing/* Ohhhh! I know who can cure me but she won't have anything to do with me.

Doctor: Who's that?

Davud: The customs officer. She's the only one who could cure me.

Doctor: And how could she do that?

Davud: They know everything.

Doctor: Customs officers?

Davud: No. Whores...shall I call her in?

Doctor: Now?

Davud: She's waiting in the corridor. */he opens the door/* Come in! */to the doctor/* Tell her she's got to help me.

*Peppa enters with a white sheet draped around her so that she looks like a nun. The doctor continues to search.*

Peppa: You remember me, don't you?

Doctor: Where from?

Peppa: From the Danube Bridge. The driver of lorry TIR 29-86A. Sofia registration plates. I remember you all. I used to work fifteen lorries a day for five whole years.

Doctor: So you were a Peppa?

Peppa: Well, you could call it that. A lonely Peppa in the Customs Hall of love. All the men know me.

Doctor: All of them?

Peppa: Five years of 365 days makes 1.825. Multiply that by an average of 15 a day - that makes exactly 28.375 men. I've got it all written down. All the men know Peppa,

Doctor: Right, but 28.375 aren't all the men.

Peppa: Yes, but when each of them boasts to two others that makes 65.125. And when they boast to another two...

Davud: 195.375! So many men doing it, only I can't.

Peppa: I'm deep in sin...

Doctor: Are you having any treatment for it?

Peppa: Treatment? I'm not in hospital, am I?

Doctor: Well, where are you?

Peppa: In a monastery, where else? I told the doctor in charge that I wanted to go to a monastery and he sent me here. Now I can atone for my sins. I want to be like Mother Theresa. */She wraps the sheet round her head and exits/*  
*/after her/* Wait, come back. The doctor will tell you something.....

Davud: Not now. I've finished for today.

*Davud follows Peppa. The Doctor tries to close the door after them but someone is trying to get in/*

Kiro: */offstage/* Help! Help!

*At last Kiro manages to open the door and rushes in.*

Kiro: Doctor, they're beating me!

Doctor: Only because you're a Kiro.

Kiro: I don't do it on purpose.

Doctor: Is it true about the monastery wine?

Kiro: I found it in the cellar.....

Doctor: And what did you do with it?

Kiro: I drank it.

Doctor: And the petrol.

Kiro: I drank it too.

Doctor: You drank the petrol!?

Kiro: I sold it first...

Doctor: Where did you sell it?

Kiro: In Serbia.

Doctor: You crossed the border in your pyjamas?

Kiro: I was in a sleeper..... I don't mean to do it. They were supposed to bring me here for treatment but I've started to steal even more. Even today....  
*/throws a pile of money on the desk/.*

Doctor: Whose is that?

Kiro: The other patients'.

Doctor: Give it back immediately.  
 Kiro: There's no point. I'll only steal it again.  
 Doctor: Then keep it yourself and give it to them whenever they need it.  
 Kiro: That's what I do. Look. /takes out a piece of paper/ From hacho - 700 taken, 580 returned. From Matei 1200 taken - 900 returned. I keep strict records. I've even given more to Peppa than I've taken.....  
 Doctor: Well, then, look after mine /he searches his pockets/  
 Kiro: Don't bother to look. I've got it already.  
 Doctor: /amazed/ When on earth.....  
 Kiro: Last night. This is yours too /gives him a box of ampoules/I don't use morphine. /exits/

*The doctor takes a deep breath to help him recover from the shock and then locks the door, opens an ampoule and sticks the needle in his arm. Someone knocks on the door.*

Hacho: /offstage/ Doctor, Doctor!  
 Doctor: /yelling/ No!

*The doctor pulls out the needle and relaxes.*

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 changed 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 here and I've got to wait for the next delivery. So that's it.

*/fade/*

### **Scene 3**

*The Russian is looking through the window while the Doctor, still under the influence of the drug, is reading his patient's notes.*



Doctor: */reads/* 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 he lost his family and developed a severe schizophrenic depression. Has not spoken for two years. No living relatives in Bulgaria.

*He lifts his head and looks at Fetisov.*

Doctor: Shall we talk?

*The Russian does not move.*

Doctor: What's the date today?

*The same reaction.*

Doctor: Yes...And I can never remember the date...what did you use to do?

Peppa: Long-distance lorry driver. A red lorry with a Moscow registration.

Doctor: */shrieking/* Hello! Can you hear me?

Hacho: After the explosion in the barracks I couldn't speak either..... until the time when I had to do drill - then I learned to hear. I stared at the sergeant's mouth and followed what the others did. First I learnt to hear 'Attention!' then 'by the left' and after that 'by the right'. Then "quick march"...

*The Russian automatically follows these commands and exits, marching clumsily.*

Hacho: The Lord's work is truly wonderful!

Doctor: That's an unconscious reaction. The military instinct is really strong...And what happened after the explosion?

Hacho: What about I was telling?

Doctor: About "quick march"?

Hacho: And "quick march", "quick march" I reached the Academy of Dramatic Art.

Doctor: After the explosion?

Hacho: Yes, after the explosion. After one year I began to understand every single word by the movement of the lips. I prepared for the exams, learned the monologues, dialogues, passed all the exams and was accepted. The whole of the interview panel applauded and not one of them realised that I was as deaf as a doorpost. They called me 'the boy with the big eyes' because the whole time I was staring with wide open eyes to see what they were saying. They got me to recite the poem five times.

Doctor: Which poem?

Hacho: 'Two beautiful eyes' - I'll recite it now....  
 Davud: The News is starting!  
 Doctor: And what happened at the Academy?  
 Hacho: I studied there for a month and then got a letter from the army. The regimental commander wrote a letter of thanks to the Academy - "We are most grateful to you for your noble gesture regarding the unfortunate Private Ivanov. Although he is stone-deaf the boy has talent etc. etc.

*The Doctor is almost asleep.*

Davud: The News is starting.  
 Doctor: Haven't we already heard it?  
 Hacho: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. 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....A spokesman for the UN declared that there would be an attempt to fly in aid with the help of the planes of the British Air Force...

Davud: You - you say one and the same thing every single evening.  
 Hacho: I don't think up the News? I tell you what the news is - just as it is.  
 Davud: Change the commas at least. You've been using one and the same text for six months.....

Hacho: 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.

Davud: Yes, you did.

Hacho: I didn't mention aeroplanes.

Kiro: It's all the same to me. The question is, the text has to change....

Hacho: can't change the News. The news isn't a monologue. I know lots of monologues and can recite you a different one every evening. Listen, I'll start. The first monologue - a tragicomic one....

*They all head for the door.*

Hacho: Just one! Come on - only one.

*He rushes outside after them. Only Peppa and Davud remain on stage.*

Davud: Come on, you're the only one who can help me.

Peppa: Get off, I told you.

Davud: Just to lie next to you?

Peppa: No!

Davud: But you know I can't do anything...

Peppa: Even the thought of it is a sin.

Davud: Well, you needn't think of anything, I'll manage on my own.

Peppa: No!

Davud: Please help me, I'm ill, it would be an act of charity.  
 Peppa: No!  
 Davud: One act of charity and God will forgive you. God will forgive you for everything.

*Peppa is quiet.*

Davud: He'll forgive you for everything!  
 Peppa: Do you really think so?  
 Davud: Of course. God loves those who do good, even if they are sinners. The sinner is dearer to him than the righteous. And the Doctor says so.

*The Doctor mutters something in his sleep.*

Davud: Did you hear that?  
 Peppa: Blindfold me so that I don't see the sin.  
 Davud: Right /he blindfolds her/.  
 Peppa: And you.  
 Davud: Fine! /blindfolds himself/

*The other patients enter on tiptoe and await results with interest.*

Peppa: /crossing herself/ Lord, forgive me!  
 Davud: Lord, help me!

*The other patients also cross themselves hopefully. The two of them hide behind the bed..... after a while Davud stands up in tears.*

Davud: Oh, Lord, why do you punish me so, why?  
 Peppa: Thank you Lord, for saving me from sin!  
 Davud: Why do you punish me, Lord? Isn't enough that I was born a gypsy, and now this....I'm a gypsy but I'm a man too, aren't I? You'll see, Lord, you'll see who we are, us gypsies!

*He turns in rage on the other patients.*

Davud: 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? That Romulus was a pure Romany. That's why the city is called Rome - in Italian, Roma. It comes from Romany. And what about Romeo and Juliet? Romeo is a Romany too. And Roman Polanski? Him too. Us Romanies have a state

too - Romania. And in the spring, at the gypsy meeting at Brashow, they're going to make me a gypsy baron. Then you'll see who I am! You'll see!

*His anger turns to tears and he leaves, shaking with uncontrollable sobs. 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. 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 man and where the people were 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. 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 4**

*Early morning in the courtyard of the monastery. Sound of cocks crowing from the village. In the centre of the courtyard - a large cardboard box with the UN emblem on it, attached to a parachute, no doubt this is how it has been delivered. Kiro appears. He looks at the box for a long time from each side, takes a furtive look around and then tries to lift it - but in vain. He rushes to the outhouse and returns with a sack into which he quickly starts to push the parachute. At this instant the high-pitched voice of hacho is heard.*

Hacho: Stop!

*Kiro freezes with raised hands.*

Hacho: Where did you steal that from?

Kiro: Nowhere. It was here.

Hacho: It wasn't here last night, was it?

Kiro: It must have fallen during the night.

Hacho: From the sky?

Kiro: As it has parachute it must have. /he pulls the parachute out of the bag/  
Look, it has the UN emblem.

*The Doctor appears.*

Doctor: What is going on?  
 Hacho: This one's stolen a box from the UN.  
 Kiro: I haven't. I was going to steal it but I didn't.  
 Doctor: This is humanitarian aid for the occupied zone.  
 Hacho: Didn't I tell you last night - they said they'd be dropping supplies.  
 Kiro: The occupied zone is five hundred kilometres away.  
 Hacho: The storm must have driven them off course.  
 Doctor: That's possible.  
 Hacho: 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.  
 Doctor: What are we going to do with it now?  
 Kiro: Shall we send it back to the UN?  
 Hacho: We didn't have anything to eat last night...

*The doctor thinks.*

Kiro: There might be pain-killers, morphine.....shall I?  
 Doctor: Go on!

*They open the box and first of all pull out a silk UN flag then from under that packages of winter camouflage uniforms.*

Hacho: Army uniforms?  
 Kiro: Better and better - they'll buy them at once in Serbia.

*At this moment Davud runs in panting.*

Davud: Doctor, I've found a box of tinned stuff and chocolate.  
 Doctor: Where?  
 Davud: Behind the monastery.

*Matei arrives.*

Matei: Doctor, the whole forest around here is littered with boxes.  
 Kiro: Take them all to the store!  
 Doctor: But if they are looking for them?  
 Kiro: Who's going to look for them? The British?

*Fade. The voice of the doctor is heard in the dark.*

Doctor: Of course there was no morphine but 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 5**

*In the middle of the room there is a container full of goods. The patients are wearing military uniforms and eating greedily. Davud is having fun dressing Fetisov like a doll in a soldier's uniform. Fetisov is now dressed and buttoned up perfectly. At the moment Matei is brushing the shaving foam off his face and the others are laughing at him.*

Matei: There we are now!

Hacho: Put his hat on!

Matei: *(putting the hat on).* There you are! He's ready! *In a loud commanding voice* Stand up!

*Fetisov gets up slowly.*

Davud: *(impressed).* He looks real.

Matei: Lets try some marching now. *(Commanding loudly.)* Attention! *(Fetisov carries out the order mechanically.)* March! One – two! One – two!

Matei: *(under the bed).* Not in my direction!

Matei: About turn!

*Fetisov marches along the wall and the patients fall about laughing.*

Matei: Halt! Well done, colonel!

Hacho: Why do you call him colonel?

Matei: That's what he looks like... if you don't believe me, ask him.

Hacho: *(loudly.)* Colonel Fetisov?

*Fetisov nods his head.*

Matei: Did you see that? Ask him again.

Hacho: Colonel Fetisov?

Fetisov: *(quietly, moving his lips mechanically.)* Yes?

*They all start in amazement. It is the first time they have heard his voice.*

Hacho: He can speak! *(To Fetisov again.)* Colonel Fetisov?

Fetisov: *(nods his head.)* Yes!

*They all fall about laughing. Fetisov takes his head in his hands and begin to sway from side to side.*

Matei: Hang on in there, colonel! Attention! You are colonel Fetisov.

*Fetisov shakes his head again.*

Matei: *(louder.)* You are colonel Fetisov!

Fetisov: *(more laughter.)* Present and correct! *(more laughter.)*

Matei: *(saluting.)* Colonel Fetisov! Division of the 40 Martyrs is present and correct and awaiting your instructions.

*Suddenly Fetisov shouts in a loud abrupt voice.*

Fetisov: Attention!

*They all shake in fright!*

Fetisov: Attention!

*They stand to attention, frightened.*

Fetisov: At ease!

Davud: He really is....

Fetisov: No talking in the ranks! Attention! Private Ivanov?

*Hacho looks around in fright.*

Fetisov: Ivanov?

Hacho: Present and correct!

Fetisov: Tea!

Hacho: Yes, sir!

Fetisov: *(in a loud voice.)* Colonel!

- Hacho: Yes, colonel! (*Pours the tea, Fetisov drinks noisily, pacing up and down in front of the line. He stops in front of Matei.*)
- Fetisov: Why are there so few of you?
- Matei: Well.... (*Shrugs his shoulders.*)
- Fetisov: Where is everyone else?
- Hacho: They're at the regional clinic, there are still....
- Fetisov: Are they wounded?
- Hacho: You could say so....
- Fetisov: I want a complete list of all the wounded and killed. Is that clear?
- Matei: Yes, sir!
- Fetisov: At ease! Attention! Gentlemen, we may be few, but we will be victorious. Five men can make up a battalion, if there is the will. No, gentlemen: even a lone soldier is a soldier. Is that clear?
- Matei: Yes, sir.
- Fetisov: (*seeing Matei under the bed*). Soldier, what are you doing there?
- Matei: I... I'm very small, colonel.
- Fetisov: You can't be small if you're wearing a uniform. Profession?
- Matei: Driver, colonel.
- Fetisov: You'll be behind the wheel again soon, private...
- Matei: Mateev, colonel.
- Davud: (*timidly*). I... I was a corporal, colonel.
- Fetisov: Good lad, corporal ...
- Davud: Corporal Shukri, colonel.
- Fetisov: Well done, corporal Shukri. I remember you well. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have a shave?



Davud: Yes, sir.

Fetisov: Why don't we light up the boiler in the bathroom, corporal?

Davud: Me?

Fetisov: Get the baths ready for 18.00

Davud: Yes, sir.

*The doctor enters, in a semi-drugged haze.*

Fetisov: Who's this civilian?

Davud: That's the doctor, colonel.

Fetisov: Aha... Doctor? (*Shouting.*) Attention! At ease!

*The doctor looks shocked and Fetisov marches up to him.*

Fetisov: (*in a loud voice.*) Doctor, colonel Fetisov at your service. Ivanov!

Hacho: Who me?

Fetisov: Tea for the doctor!

Hacho: Yes, sir. (*Pours a cup of hot water and the doctor drinks it down in one gulp.*)

*Pepa comes in.*

Fetisov: Nurse? (*Fetisov clicks his heels and bow lightly. He offers her his hand.*)  
At your service, Miss. (*Pepa faints.*)

*Fade.*

## **Scene 6**

*The general ward. The beds are all in a straight line with the blankets on them folded in military style. The patients are lining up the edges of the blankets with a piece of string. Davud is on his knees with one eye closed to get a proper sightline.*

Davud: Careful and listen to your Davud. 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.

Hacho: He's mad, don't you understand?

Davud: Mad, yes, and he's dangerous. And strong.

Matei: */under the bed/* Move to the right. To the right and take care where you step with those boots! If you step on me now you'll be court-martialled!

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

Davud: I never heard him speak a word and he's a colonel. That's it - once a commander, always a commander. Tighten that string!

Kiro: He hasn't spoken for three years. He stays silent, watches and comes to conclusions. And we had no idea of the sort of person we've been living with....

Hacho: He was at the Staff College in Moscow. And he fought in the Afghanistan War.

Davud: Have you seen the doctor? He said nothing, just drank his tea and went out.

Kiro: The doctor! What on earth can doctor say when there's a colonel from the Tamanska Division present?

Hacho: The Tamanska?!

Kiro: Yes, sir! During Gorbachov's take over he was in the Tamanska division. He personally commanded the tank strike-force and arrested two of the rebel leaders and carried them out of the Kremlin wrapped in Persian carpets.

Hacho: How do you know?

Kiro: The colonel told me.

Matei: Liar. The colonel never speaks about himself.

Kiro: Shut up or I'll step on you!

*At this moment Fetisov's voice echoes down the corridor.*

Fetisov: Fall in for evening roll-call!

Davud: Fall in! At the double!

*The three of them quickly line up while Matei curls up under the bed. Enter Fetisov.*

Davud: Sir! Section present and correct!

Fetisov: */commanding/* Attention! Roll-call! Davud?

Davud: Sir!

Fetisov: Ivanov?

Hacho: Sir!

Fetisov: Penev?

Kiro: Sir!

Fetisov: Popov?

Matei: */under the bed/* Here, sir!

Fetisov: */severely/* Why are you not in line, Popov?  
 Matei: Someone might step on me, sir.  
 Fetisov: Private Popov, in line!  
 Matei: I can't! I'm afraid, don't you understand? Look, I'm shaking from head to toe.  
 Fetisov: Popov, in line! The responsibility is mine, Colonel Dimitri Fetisov.  
 Matei: I want to, but I can't....please! I'm so small, very small. */in tears/*  
 Fetisov: */sharply and loudly/* Private Popov, on your feet!

*Matei slowly stands up shaking.*

Fetisov: Attention!

*Matei freezes instinctively.*

Fetisov: Into line, quick march!

*Matei lifts his feet with a great effort and with a slow marching step takes his place in the line.*

Fetisov: */calmly/*The army, gentlemen, 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 take your place because then the line would collapse and then so would the army. 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, gentlemen, is not a simple line of people and soldiers, it is inside us. And when the line within us collapses then a man is no longer a man. The line inside us supports us all, all societies, all armies. Because the spirit of an army is just that line inside each one of the soldiers. Clear?

All: Yes, sir!

Fetisov: Attention! Left turn! Right turn!

*Fade*

Doctor: */thumbing through a textbook/*Fetisov's condition was clear to me in theory: severe schizophrenia in the paranoid form. Psychiatrists call it "dephasing". 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-shaven, washed and smart commandos. They move 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 other subconsciously and unquestioningly to accept his spiritual strength.

**Scene 7**

*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 appear in the courtyard running at the double, stripped to the waist.*

- Davud: At the double!  
 Hacho: /to Kiro/ Now we're really like lunatics...  
 Fetisov: No talking, take deep breaths! One...two, one...two...halt! Shirts on! 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 individual pursuits and evening meal, after 2000 hours television 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. Ivanov!  
 Hacho: Sir!  
 Fetisov: Your turn today.  
 Hacho: Yes, sir!  
 Fetisov: And now.....gentlemen, we have a delicate matter to deal with. Force of circumstance has resulted in us having a lady living among us. You will, of course, all understand that she will have to be moved into a separate room.  
 Davud: But there is no stove there...  
 Fetisov: That is true. Davud, will you see to it that there is a stove and wood in Miss Antonova's room.  
 Davud: Yes, sir! /to Matei/ Popov! Stove and wood! At the double!  
 Fetisov: I haven't finished yet.....  
 Davud: 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 return the items.  
 Kiro: Sir!  
 Fetisov: Any repetition of this infringement will result in the person responsible losing his right to wear military uniform. Is that understood?  
 Kiro: But if there is no thieving in the barracks what sort of a barrack will it be?  
 Fetisov: And finally - an honest and highly-qualified person takes care of our welfare. You will realise that I am referring to the doctor. I insist that you follow his instructions and take whatever he prescribes - also, whenever you meet him you will salute.  
 Hacho: Colonel! The doctor!  
 Fetisov: Attention! Eyes right!

*The doctor stumbles in. Fetisov takes one pace forward and, saluting, reports.*

Fetisov: Sir! All present and awaiting their morning check-up.  
 Doctor: Morning, men!  
 All: Morning, sir!  
 Doctor: Any complaints?  
 Hacho: None at all, sir.  
 Doctor: Petrov?  
 Kiro: None at all, sir.  
 Doctor: Popov?  
 Matei: Nothing at all, sir.  
 Doctor: I understand that you no longer sleep under the bed?  
 Matei: I feel fine in the line, sir.  
 Doctor: Excellent! So I am not needed. Courage, men!  
 Fetisov: We shall endeavour, sir! Attention! Three cheers for the doctor. Hurrah!

*Fade*

Doctor: 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!!! */He sticks a needle into his arm/*

### **Scene 8**

Peppa: Good morning.  
 Doctor: Good morning, do sit down.  
 Peppa: I'm thinking of leaving the monastery.  
 Doctor: Leaving the monastery?  
 Peppa: Yes.  
 Doctor: And where will you go?  
 Peppa: 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.  
 Peppa: I want to be like her. So, there on the field of battle risking my life, I will atone for my sins. I'll care for the wounded, I'll give them spiritual comfort.  
 Doctor: There aren't any wounded at the moment.  
 Peppa: There will be.  
 Doctor: Yes, that'd be a truly noble gesture but they don't take many women into

the army these days.  
 Peppa: I've talked to the colonel about it and he said it is possible.  
 Doctor: Well, if he said.....  
 Peppa: I've got to give in the application forms tomorrow.  
 Doctor: Where to?  
 Peppa: To the colonel.  
 Doctor: Oh, of course.....  
 Peppa: And you've got to give me a medical certificate to show that I am healthy.  
 Doctor: Why a medical certificate?  
 Peppa: The colonel says that that's the way it's always done. Will you give me one?  
 Doctor: Of course. Here you are.../he fills in a form/  
 Peppa: Two copies if possible...that's what the colonel wants.  
 Doctor: Of course, here's another one.  
 Peppa: There's no signature.  
 Doctor: Really? Oh yes...well, here's a signature /signs/  
 Peppa: And a stamp....  
 Doctor: There's no need for a stamp.  
 Peppa: Yes, there is - the colonel wants it stamped.  
 Doctor: Right, if that's what he wants....here's a stamp /he stamps the form/  
 Peppa: /satisfied, picks up the certificate/ So I'm fit, am I?  
 Doctor: Of course.  
 Peppa: Why did the consultant say I was mad then?  
 Doctor: Anyone can make a mistake.  
 Peppa: So it was a mistake.  
 Doctor: It happens to us all.  
 Peppa: I'm going to send a copy to that consultant to stop him making mistakes and upsetting people again /exits/

### **Scene 9**

*Evening. The sleeping quarters.*

Fetisov: And so, let's take stock of all our resources. Ivanov?  
 Hacho: /consulting his list/ We have food, including tinned stuff and fruit juices for one year.  
 Fetisov: Davud?  
 Davud: There's enough clothing for about ten years.  
 Fetisov: That's enough for now. Petrov?  
 Kiro: 84 Deutschmarks and 24 dollars and 45 million old Serbian dinars.  
 Fetisov: What do we need old dinars for?  
 Kiro: I stole them before they changed the money...  
 Fetisov: Would be better if they were new ones.  
 Kiro: Well, I've stopped stealing. But if I am ordered.....  
 Fetisov: Popov? How are we off for transport?  
 Matei: There's a jeep in good condition but there are no tyres for it.

Kiro: It did have tyres but....  
 Fetisov: It must have tyres by the end of the week.  
 Kiro: Yes, sir!  
 Matei: There's no petrol.  
 Fetisov: In one week it must be found.  
 Kiro: Yes, sir!  
 Hacho: Sir, permission to speak!  
 Fetisov: Yes?  
 Hacho: The News is beginning.  
 Fetisov: Take your places for the news!

*They sit in a row in front of the television. Hacho switches on and starts doing the voice over.*

Hacho: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Fierce fighting continued today. The U.N once again attempted to get a convoy with aid through but the convoy was held up. A spokesman for the UN declared that there would be an attempt to fly in aid with the help of the planes of the British Air Force...

Fetisov: That's good.....

Kiro: Very good. They might fly off course again...

Hacho: */continues/* The member countries of NATO have declared that if the conflicts in the Balkans continues they will have to adopt decisive actions to ensure the security of Europe. The NATO spokesman announced that almost all of the states from the former Eastern bloc have now applied for membership.....

Fetisov: There's only one possible conclusion - we shall have to join NATO. */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 gunfire and a tirade of Serbian swearing./*

*Fade*

**ACT TWO****Scene 1**

*Peppa, elegantly attired in army uniform, is crossing the courtyard followed by Davud.*

Davud: Please! I only want to try, nothing else.  
 Peppa: No!  
 Davud: Please - as a comrade-in-arms.  
 Peppa: No!  
 Davud: I feel so much better. I only want to test if I'm OK or not.  
 Peppa: Listen, if you don't leave off I'll tell the Colonel.  
 Davud: Why the colonel?  
 Peppa: Why not? You're the one who's married whilst I'm not. You can see for yourself that not right for you to make a pass at me.  
 Davud: Are you serious?  
 Peppa: Yes.  
 Davud: You serve God, don't you? He will forgive you.  
 Peppa: I serve in the army now.  
 Davud: What about all those sins from Danube Bridge?  
 Peppa: Danube Bridge and all the other bridges leading to the past have been burnt, corporal.

*Peppa moves aside with a provocative step. The doctor appears.*

Doctor: How are you, Davud?  
 Davud: Much better, doctor. What does a simple soldier need? To eat, to sleep and, if there's an opportunity, to....but there are no opportunities.

*Hacho rushes in out of breath.*

Hacho: Doctor, the colonel invites you to a General Staff meeting.  
 Doctor: So there's a General Staff already, is there?  
 Hacho: Yes, sir.

*The shrill sound of a siren is heard, Hacho and Davud throw themselves onto the ground.*

Davud: Get down, doctor! We're testing the anti-nuclear attack system.



*Fade.*

## **Scene 2**

*The General Staff meeting is being held in the courtyard, where a booth for secret balloting has been constructed.*

Davud: The doctor is coming!

Fetisov: Attention! Eyes right! */the doctor enters/*

Fetisov: Come in, doctor, we can start now. */turning to them all/* Brothers! A month has gone by since the heavens 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 as from today. Second: to declare that the territory which our unit covers is 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. Are there any other proposals? */they all keep quiet/* None. 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 seals an empty ballot box - marked chocolate - and carries it into the booth.*

Fetisov: Attention! Quick march to the voting booth!

*They all vote one after another.*

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 unseals the box ceremoniously and announces the results in a loud voice.*

Fetisov: All the votes are "for". So now we can officially declare that the first two proposals of our programme are in force.

Davud: 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/*

Davud: Hurrah!

*A powerful "hoorah" is heard and Peppa slowly raises the blue silk flag of the UN up the pole. Then Davud and Kiro bring a barrier on stage.*

Fetisov: From now on this will be our border. Visas will be needed for anyone who leaves.

Hacho: So we'll never leave?

Fetisov: Private Antonova will be appointed as Peppa.

Davud: The UN lorries are on their way.....

Peppa: Never!

Fetisov: Calm down! NATO drivers have different moral standards.....

Davud: So they're impotent?

Fetisov: Quiet! Quiet! Gentlemen, 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.

*There is a long silence. At last the doctor raises his hand.*

Doctor: Colonel, sir, may I speak?

Fetisov: 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.

Fetisov: */after a long pause/* I think the doctor is absolutely right. The possibility of using the telephone must be discounted. Other suggestions?

Hacho: During the war we used homing pigeons.

Fetisov: So we did.

Matei: 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.

Hacho: And their reply? How will we receive that?

Doctor: Naturally the reply will be sent in the same way.

Fetisov: 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 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, hacho said, but the colonel explained that the UN have observers absolutely everywhere and the messages would get through to their destination eventually.

### **Scene 3**

*Everyone is holding a bird and tying a message to its leg.*

Davud: It's biting! My hands are covered in bites.  
 Hacho: They're pecking us because they don't understand that our intentions are good. When we let them go they'll know that they are and then they won't peck us any more.  
 Kiro: Wonder where this fucking rookie'll fly to!  
 Matei: Don't swear at the birds. It's a sin to swear at the birds.

*The doctor appears by the door, listening to the conversation and making notes.*

Kiro: Why?  
 Matei: Because man developed from the birds.  
 Kiro: Man came from apes.  
 Davud: Man might have done but not Davud.  
 Kiro: I don't know about Davud. But man came from the apes.  
 Matei: Right, but the apes came from the mammals and the mammals came from the birds. So man has come from the birds and one day might return to being a bird.  
 Kiro: Why precisely to being a bird?  
 Matei: Because only the birds and man can fly. The birds with their wings, man with his soul. 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.  
 Hacho: Every creature is capable of endeavour whether it is large or small.  
 Matei: To some extent, yes, to some, no. Because a truly great endeavour compared with the size of a tiny creature becomes proportionately greater.  
 Davud: Everyone ready?  
 All: Ready.

Davud: Let's release them, then.

*They go to the open window.*

Davud: 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.*

Kiro: They've gone....

Davud: Man might have come from the birds but he's not like them because a bird can always fly off where it will whilst we would have to stay here for ever if it wasn't for the Colonel.

Hacho: So that means that, if he wants to, man can take wing.

Kiro: The colonel can fly. I saw him yesterday with my own eyes.

Matei: You're crazy.

Kiro: 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, about a metre up for half a minute and then he came down again.

Hacho: You were drunk.

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

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

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

Matei: Sometimes, in the evening when I'm very small I long 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". Then THEY will ask, "Why are they unhappy?" and I will reply, "Because they are mad and there is no one who understands them."

*The doctor quietly moves away. Fade.*

#### **Scene 4**

*In the courtyard. Peppa 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.*

Peppa: /singing/ Sleep, sleep, chick,  
Your mother is a bird  
Your father is a fox.....

*Fetisov passes by and salutes.*

Fetisov: Good evening, miss! Colonel Fetisov at your service.  
 Peppa: */finger to her lips/ Shhhh! Quiet! /she puts the sleeping bird down/ It's asleep...*  
 Fetisov: Yes, really....  
 Peppa: Birds fall asleep very quickly.  
 Fetisov: Really?.... I hadn't noticed.  
 Peppa: And they shouldn't be woken before they wake up naturally or they stop singing.  
 Fetisov: Interesting.  
 Peppa: What is it dreaming of now? That it's already in a hot country probably...and someone will be waiting there for her and she won't be alone... birds can't live alone....  
 Fetisov: Maybe...probably...Yes, yes, come to think of it we learnt at school...  
 Peppa: You don't learn those things....  
 Fetisov: Lovely day, today....  
 Peppa: Yes, yes.....  
 Fetisov: Sunny too....  
 Peppa: Yes.  
 Fetisov: And it wasn't too bad yesterday....  
 Peppa: No, it wasn't.  
 Fetisov: Yes....but we don't know what it'll be like tomorrow.  
 Peppa: That's right, we don't know about tomorrow.  
 Fetisov: And then it might continue like this all week.  
 Peppa: Perhaps, perhaps.  
 Fetisov: Once it turns fine it can go on. Until it turns bad it's always good...  
 Peppa: That's true.  
 Fetisov: And after that it gets better again...eh, well, goodbye.  
 Peppa: Goodbye, and I'm sorry...  
 Fetisov: What for?  
 Peppa: Well, you know how to have a proper conversation while I.....  
 Fetisov: What conversation?  
 Peppa: About the weather...and other things.....  
 Fetisov: Oh, that's nothing...it's so easy that I could teach you.  
 Peppa: Thank you so much.  
 Fetisov: Oh, it's nothing. Permission to leave, miss!

*He salutes and strides away.*

*Peppa picks up the sleeping bird, strokes it and starts to weep.*

Peppa: Oh, Lord, please don't let him get destructed by lose the power and the glory. Power and glory destruct men so very, very easily.

*Fade.*

Doctor: We started to wait for answer to our messages sent by the birds. All day long there was someone on duty in the courtyard whose job it was to observe the sky whilst the other looked out for birds with messages landing on the rocks and trees. Sometimes huge flocks came from the north and one by one they 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 5**

*All of them in the courtyard, scanning the sky and making bird-like sounds to lure the birds. Their clothes and faces are covered in bird droppings. From time to time another one falls. Peppa is under an umbrella.*

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

Davud:Down!

*They all hide whilst bird droppings 'rain' down on them.*

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

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

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

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

Davud: Down!

*They all hide once again whilst bird droppings 'rain' down on them.*

Hacho: True, but those are ravens, aren't they?

Matei: 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.

Hacho: Look! The two flights have flown into each other!

Matei: That's not true. It only looks like this from here, but really they are flying at different heights and can never get mixed up. Every flight has its own air corridor.

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

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

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

Davud True! Very true! We should be looking south. Attention! About turn!

*They all turn to the south and again lift their eyes to the sky.*

Hacho: There are no birds coming from south.

Davud: Really?

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

Fetisov: NATO could have got our message in the south but sent a reply to us from the north. Their lines of communication are unlimited.

Davud: So a message could come from the north?

Kiro: Of course it'll come from the north. What bird is as crazy as us to fly north in the winter?

Davud: Attention! About turn!

*They all turn once more to the north.*

Peppa: Two more flights are approaching.

Hacho: */mournfully/* Oh, Lord, so many birds and not one of them has landed here!

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

Matei: Can you see that one?.... it's looping. Can you see it?

All: Where?

Matei: Over there. In the middle of the second flock.

Davud: Yes, yes! One of them's turning over in the air. Ah-ah-ah!

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

Hacho: True - at least that's what it looks like.

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

Hacho: Look, look! It is leaving the flock.

Matei: There, it's coming down.

Davud: To the forest! It's flying towards the forest.

Hacho: I can't see it now. It must have landed. Let's go and find it.

Kiro: Where?

Hacho: In the forest, where else?

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

Matei: It'll call us itself.

Kiro: We're all mad but you're completely...how will the bird call us?

Fetisov: They'll have trained it.

Kiro: That would be possible....

Davud: To the forest - quick march!

All: To the forest! To the forest!

Davud: Forward...march!

*They set off. 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. In the days that followed the flocks became less 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 the news and in the meantime there was an unpleasant incident.

## **Scene 6**

*Kiro and Davud creep on stage in the dark.*

Davud: */whispering/Petrov?*  
 Kiro: Yes.  
 Davud: Where are you?  
 Kiro: Here.  
 Davud: Forward, crawl!  
 Kiro: On my way.  
 Davud: Down! It's here. I've never ever seen such a huge bird.  
 Kiro: Are you sure?  
 Davud: I'm sure. I saw it as it came through the window.  
 Kiro: What sort of bird?  
 Davud: I don't know, a female I think.... it wasn't very big and strong... but it had everything...

*The flapping of the wings of a large bird can be heard.*

Davud: There, did you hear that?  
 Kiro: I heard it.  
 Davud: I told you, didn't I? Great! She came of her own accord, without us calling her - so she must be bringing something .  
 Kiro: She's looking for contact. Did you close the window so she can't get out?  
 Davud: Everything's shut. You guard the door and I'll go and feel if she's got any messages.  
 Kiro: Get her from behind.  
 Davud: I know.  
 Kiro: Hold tight and search through.  
 Davud: No need to teach a Davud!  
 Kiro: And if there's any money there, take that too!  
 Davud: Enemy ahead. Advance!  
 Kiro: Forward crawl!  
 Davud: Attack!

*The sound of a struggle.*



Davud: */yelling/* Ah, you bitch! Oh, you've made a hole in my skull! Help! I'm wounded!  
 Kiro: Hold on! I'm coming!  
 Davud: Into close battle!  
 Kiro: I'm closing in!

*Blows are heard.*

Davud: That's me!  
 Kiro: Hand-to-hand engagement, sorry!  
 Davud: She's got away! She went for my eyes but I'll find her!  
 Kiro: Is there a message?  
 Davud: I don't know! I don't know but it looks as though I'm cured!  
 Kiro: Liar!  
 Davud: I'm not lying! When I held her and I felt something come over me..... I'll find her and I'll finish her!

*A lamp is lit in the room. At the door Fetisov and the rest are standing.*

Fetisov: */severely/* Who attacked this bird?  
 Davud: It attacked first - all I did was to feel her for messages.  
 Fetisov: Stand! 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!

Peppa: */crawling out from under the bed/* News! News! News has arrived! */she has a small bird in her hand/* It was caught up in the net and freezing cold. I brought it into the warm and found a message written on a metal ring on its leg. Here it is!

*Fetisov takes the bird and looks at the news carefully.*

Hacho: It looks like an ornithological ring....is there anything on it?  
 Fetisov: It's in a code.  
 Hacho: It says: E.01/01.  
 Kiro: */reading slowly/* E. 01/01.  
 Fetisov: */decoding/* E. The first, the first. */to them all/* We leave on the first of January.  
 Hacho: What do you mean? We leave?

Fetisov: Never question orders! Is that clear?

*Fade.*

Doctor: What at first had seemed impossible became more and more likely with every day that passed even though there was less than a week to go to January 1st. 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. They were getting up at four thirty every morning so as to have time to get everything done.

### **Scene 7**

On stage - a map of Europe covered with huge red arrows and a route marked out. Fetisov is standing in front of the map with a pointer.

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.

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

Fetisov: Right. Then.

Kiro: Then there is the border where they will stop us for passport checks.

Fetisov: Gentlemen! Gentlemen, we have a 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 30th December and we are finally ready. Tomorrow is 31st December. I declare it a day of rest and reflection.....  
Departure - 31st December at 2400 hours. Dismiss!

*Fade.*

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 with all its rules that my patients had invented, a 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 have been turned back at the first border or I would have gone with them. Perhaps someone over there 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 - out of it, rich and

bothered by no one. On 31st December Fetisov came to see me....

### **Scene 8**

*The doctor is alone. There is a knock at the door.*

Doctor: Yes. Come in.

*Fetisov enters and salutes.*

Fetisov: Good morning, doctor.

Doctor: Sit down, please.

Fetisov: Thank you. */he sits/* 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.

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

Doctor: Do you really believe that you'll succeed?

Fetisov: What do you mean?

Doctor: You have got to get across five frontiers without a single document.

Fetisov: What do you mean? We have the constitutive document.

Doctor: That document is purely and simply paranoia.

Fetisov: Staying here would be worse than paranoia. Every dream and every great initiative is paranoia, doctor.

Doctor: Great initiatives rarely succeed....

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

Doctor: */hesitating/* Perhaps.....God usually helps the mad.

Fetisov: Doctor, God helps only those that 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: Perhaps... there is some logic....

Fetisov: 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 now I've always followed the normal people and God only knows that hasn't got me anywhere in particular. Neither geographically speaking or in any other way...

### **Scene 9**

*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! Corporal?

Davud: Sir!

Fetisov: Antonova?  
 Peppa: Sir!  
 Fetisov: Ivanov?  
 Hacho: Sir!  
 Fetisov: Popov?  
 Matei: Sir!  
 Fetisov: Penev?  
 Kiro: Sir!  
 Fetisov: Attention! To the right, quick march to the gates. /in the dark the thud of marching boots is heard getting louder and louder/ Halt! To the left! Attention!

*The stage lights up and we see them all lined up in front of the white jeep with the UN flag flying from it.*

Fetisov: Gentlemen, in our role as a fighting unit of the UN it is necessary for us to use foreign languages. Now my mother tongue is Russian.  
 Davud: I can speak Romany.  
 Hacho: I know a monologue in English: 'To be or not to be...'  
 Peppa: You'd be best off keeping your mouth shut.  
 Hacho: I'll keep quiet but if you start on about the Danube Bridge they'll all know that we're mad.  
 Peppa: Mad? Me? Is this a genuine medical certificate or isn't it? Doesn't it say here that I'm well? Doesn't it?  
 Fetisov: Gentlemen, gentlemen! You are not mad, gentlemen. You are only different from the others. It is quite simple - you were not created for this world, gentlemen, 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 which do hunger and thirst  
     after righteousness"  
 We are all of those brought together, brothers, and so let's add one more thing that God has spoken "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, who up to this moment has been listening from the side, approaches Fetisov.*

Doctor: Colonel, permission to fall in!

Fetisov: Permission granted.....!

*They all clap and the doctor stands at the end of the line. Fetisov stands at the other end.*

Fetisov: Attention! Forward march!

### **Scene 10**

Doctor: .....The easiest time to cross the border is on the morning of January 1st...they didn't see Peppas at all - no doubt they were still seeing the New Year in. The border-guards saluted in a manner fitting for a U.N. Colonel and wished them a pleasant journey. By dawn they 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 they continued westward from where those people had fled because the Colonel said that the road to heaven passes through hell. The further west they went, the more units of blue berets they met and they were welcomed by them. In the end they joined a column of vehicles belonging to the French blue berets and went on north with them. Five days later they arrived in Strasbourg. They wouldn't let them into the building of the European Parliament so they had to submit their application by post. The people there are very precise and one month later they received 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 they found themselves outlaws but in the heart of Europe. They raised camp in the centre of Strasbourg, in front of the cathedral where any outlaw can find sanctuary. Praise be to God!

### **Scene 11**

*They are all sitting on the ground dispiritedly with bowed heads. At this point is heard the strong confident voice of Fetisov.*

Fetisov: On your feet! Attention!

*They obey without thinking.*

Fetisov: In line! Attention!

*They obey*

Fetisov: Brothers, we have achieved a great victory. We have passed thousands of kilometres and arrived here. This is a real act of valour and will give us renewed strength to continue ahead. The most important thing in this world is to stand up and go on. The true soldier is a soldier to the end of his days and as long as he lives he will always find the strength to stand up and go on towards that wonderful world for which he was created. Is that clear?

All: Sir!

Fetisov: Three cheers for victory!

All: Hurrah!

Fetisov: In line! Attention! 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!! Tighten up! By the left! Left! One-two-three! Left, left, 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 on the ground. The others rush towards him and lift him up. Delirious, Fetisov continues to shout:*

Fetisov: We shall find that wonderful world. We shall find it even if it does not exist on this earth, because we shall go on searching after death. The universe is everlasting and no one has been everywhere and proved that the wonderful world does not exist. Stand! Attention! Quick march!

*The doctor gives him an injection of morphine and Fetisov relaxes in the arms of the others.*

*Fade.*

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. Fetisov had taught me how to get there without drugs - by standing up and

going on ..... All this happened a long time ago, one, two or three years ago, I no longer remember exactly when. In any case it was sometime around 2000. They didn't know what day it was or which month but it was spring because they caught a migrating bird and Davud used it to send a message to his wife.

*They are all setting free birds.*

Davud: Away they go!  
 All: Awaaaay, they go!  
 Hacho: They're gone!  
 Kiro: They're already out of sight!  
 Matei: I can see her. I can see her. Leaving France! In Germany now!  
 Hacho: Germany - the Czech Republic...  
 Kiro: The Czech Republic - Slovakia.....  
 Peppa: Slovakia - Hungary...  
 Matei: Hungary - Serbia...  
 All: Serbia...../they all cross themselves/ Oh, god! It's landed!

*Fade*

Doctor: And so, as he couldn't write, Davud dictated his letter. Here it is.

Davud: My Dear! I'm writing to you from France, from the Cathedral Square in Strasbourg. It's sunny here and it must be sunny with you too because in springtime it's sunny everywhere. It's a nice place here and the people are nice too. The air is clean but we can't live on air alone. There's no problem with food - we're army here and people give us money every day. I'll send you a card at New Year to make the kids happy. I expect they've grown a lot... sorry, I forgot to ask if they've got a new dad? If one turns up do take him 'cos it's hard to manage without a dad - that's quite clear to me. We haven't given up here. We keep up our spirits and every day at four o'clock we all do drill. Kisses to everyone, I love you all. Your loving husband and father – Davud Shukri.

### **EPILOGUE**

*The cathedral clock strikes four. The doctor standing in the centre of the square commands loudly and ceremoniously.*

Doctor: ...Fall in! Attention! Quick march!

*In twos the soldiers march in ceremonial step. Around them are heard the voices and clapping of sightseers while the squad continues its formal march. One of them comes down from the stage and moves through the*

*audience shaking a blue cap with coins in it.*