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# District Hospital

*(The Colonel's Wife)*  
by  
**Hristo Boichev**

*An unidentified patient who has lost his memory after concussion finds himself in a small provincial hospital. He was found close to a crashed plane. His name is unknown and the doctors have registered his name as "Contusio Cerebris" – his diagnosis. This strange name leads his fellow patients to suspect that he is a NATO pilot. Day after day they invent his biography as an important and rich officer. He doesn't believe it to begin with, but then he begins to like it...*

## **Characters**

Kotuzov

Grandpa

Bratoi

William

Fero

Cinderella

Grandma

General

## **Prologue**

Cinderella enters dressed like a fairy-tale princess in a ball gown and golden slippers.

She looks in the mirror and sees how beautiful she is! Then she begins to transform herself: she covers her face with a surgical lint mask, then puts a green surgical gown over her silk dress, puts a cotton cap over her golden hair and then finally puts on rubber boots. She is now a real assistant nurse. A red light begins to flash at the back of the stage, “Operation in progress”, accompanied by an alarm signal. Cinderella picks up a bucket and brush and exits.

## **Scene One**

*Operating theatre*

Doctor     *(nervously)* Is he breathing?

Sister     He’s breathing... he’ll be all right...

Doctor     Sister, I said sutures!

Sister     I gave you them!

Doctor     Well then... give me another one and I’ve almost finished.

*A loud clap of thunder is heard.*

Doctor     What was that?

Sister     Nothing. That’s just the Allied bombers passing overhead.

*The lights flash and go off.*

Doctor     *(yelling)* Has there been a power cut?

Sister     Just in case they don’t get the wrong country.

Doctor     Jesus Christ!.... Get me a flashlight!

*The flickering light of a flashlight illuminates the stage.*

Doctor     I’m just finishing off now...

Sister     Shall I wake him?

Doctor     Yes.

Sister     *(beginning quietly, but her voice becomes gradually stronger and more powerful)* Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! *(sound of slapping)*  
Breathe! Breathe! Hey! What’s up with him? *(now very loud and powerful)*

Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! Come on! Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! Come on!  
*(slapping continues)*

Doctor Hit him harder! That's right! *(Stronger slapping.)* Breathe! Breathe! Breathe!  
Breathe!

Sister He's breathing.

Doctor Of course he's going to breathe... what else could he do?! What about his  
pulse?

Sister 130

Doctor All right. Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! Breathe! Breathe!  
Breathe...

*The voice and the sound of breathing fade. The light fades.*

### **Scene two**

*Hospital ward. Bratoi is groaning while Cinderella puts him to bed. She begins to mop the floor and the patients lift their legs out of the way. Kotuzov goes up to the recently operated patient.*

Kotuzov Was it a hernia?

Bratoi Appendicitis. Acute with peritonitis. Ohhh!

Kotuzov What's your name?

Bratoi Bratoi

Kotuzov You're lucky!

Bratoi Why?

Kotuzov Because you know your name. The name's the most important thing.

Everything else can be fixed, but if you don't know your name – that's bad!

Bratoi Who doesn't know their own name?

Kotuzov I don't... I've had concussion. I can't remember my name, I can't remember  
anything.

Bratoi Well ask them.

Kotuzov Who? I'm unidentified. I can't remember anyone and no one knows me.  
Absolute tragedy!

Grandpa Kotuzov?

Kotuzov Yes?

Grandpa Just leave him be to get over the anaesthetic.

Kotuzov All right then. I just wanted to tell him that I can't remember anything.

Grandpa And you think I can? I can't remember anything, I can just hear the bell!

Bratoi *(suspiciously)*What bell?

Grandpa I don't know. It's just always ringing in my ears. Ding, ding, ding...

Kotuzov What'd they put you in this ward for?

Bratoi *(frightened)*Why?

Kotuzov They don't put you in here for appendicitis.

Bratoi They said there weren't any beds in the surgical ward.

Kotuzov That's what they say, but...

Bratoi What's special about this ward?

Grandpa It's not the ward's fault. You should have gone to the New Town hospital.

Bratoi They told me there was only one doctor there...

Grandpa Yes, but he discharges everyone. Here they don't. My brother in law got discharged on the third day after the operation.

Kotuzov But they brought him in again on the fourth, didn't they?

Grandpa If you can't remember, what are you arguing for? They brought him back again because they'd forgotten some scissors in his stomach. But he was discharged before that.

Bratoi *(frightened.* How did they forget the scissors?

Grandpa It's no problem with scissors. They show up on the x-ray. It's worse with lint... if they forget lint in your stomach – you die without any reason.

Bratoi Jesus Christ! I hope everything's all right with me...

Kotuzov They told me that if I remembered my name they'd let me go.

Grandpa They'll let you go when they let me go...

Bratoi They're letting me go next week...

Grandpa You'd better knock on wood.

Bratoi I will.

*He sits up in bed to find something wooden.*

Bratoi Give me something wooden.

Grandpa What about your head? Same thing.

Bratoi I think you're right. *(Tapping his head.)*  
*Fero enters. He is wearing glasses as thick as milk bottle bottoms.*

Fero They're sending me home.

Grandpa Is that right?

Fero Yes. They told me I can remember everything and they're letting me go.

Grandpa Is that a fact?

Fero Really. They asked me what the capital of Switzerland was and I told them.

Grandpa Well done!

Bratoi They're letting someone go, is that right?

Grandpa No, they're not. You just lie there. That's just talk.

Fero *(upset)*. Why shouldn't they let me go? Why not? Tell them Kotuzov, tell them how long I've been in here.

Kotuzov Why ask me? You know I can't remember anything – I've got concussion.

Fero I remember everything. The capital of Switzerland is Berne – 41.3 thousand square kilometers, population 6.4 million. Official languages – Italian, French and German. I even remember that the German for diarrhea is diario. So even I was discharged to Switzerland I'd still be all right if I had diarrhea – but they keep me here...

Bratoi I'm only here for a while... they'll be letting me out soon. *(Tapping his head.)*

Grandpa *(to Fero.)* Is the shop open yet? *(Takes out a basket with a rope tied to it.)*

Fero *(looking through the window)*. Yes, it's open.

Grandpa It's Kotuzov's turn today to do the shopping.

Kotuzov Is it my turn today?

Grandpa I think it must be. It was me yesterday.

Kotuzov *(taking out his money grudgingly)*. I don't remember... I've got the strange feeling that I'm the only one who does any shopping in this room. *(Puts the money in the basket and lets it out of the window.)*

Grandpa So you told them everything about Switzerland?

Fero Everything: industry, agriculture, forestry, wild animals...national heroes, William Tell. I told them everything and they asked me how I knew it all if I hadn't been there?

Grandpa And how did you know it all?

Fero I've got a Swiss girlfriend. She calls me everyday on the telephone.  
Kontuzov, tell them she calls me every day.

Kontuzov I told you I don't remember.

Fero Grandfather, you tell them! She calls me doesn't she?

Grandpa I'm sure she does, but I'm a bit deaf. I can only hear the bell.

Kotuzov Beer! *(Pulls up the basket and hands the beer round.)*

Grandpa Cheers! What about the new one? Hey, mate. Bratoi's your name, isn't it?

Bratoi *(half asleep)*Mmmm...

Kotuzov He's still out.

Fero *(drinking beer)*. It's winter at the moment in Switzerland, the Alps are covered in snow...

Grandpa It's winter here as well, isn't it?

Fero You just leave our winter out of it! I've got such a beautiful girlfriend in Switzerland, and they keep me here.

*The sound of planes flying overhead.*

Fero Allied planes!

*Kotuzov and Fero run to the window and look up. The light flickers and goes out.*

Bratoi *(mumbling)*. I'm only here for a while... I'm only here for a while...

### **Scene three**

*Morning. Fero enters*

Fero They're letting us go!

Grandpa What again?

Fero The inspector's come – things are moving now...

Kotuzov What inspector?

Fero I don't know. He's got a suit and tie on, and he's writing everything down.

Kotuzov Is he asking people's names?

Fero I don't know but he's writing something down.

*Cinderella comes into the room in a hurry and starts polishing the floor. A loud voice can be heard from the corridor, "That's right. I want to write everything down. District hospital number 24, word number 6..." A man in a shabby suit, bowler hat and old cardboard briefcase comes in. He is holding a note book in his hand. The patients sit up in bed hopefully.*

William Is this ward number 6?

*Kotuzov suddenly gets out of bed and goes up to him. He stares at him in the face.*

Kotuzov Stop!

William What?

Kotuzov *(staring straight into his face)* Look at me!

William Why?

Kotuzov Just take a good look at me first! *(shows his left and right profile)*

William Well what?

Kotuzov Don't you recognize me from somewhere?

William I'm very sorry but...

Kotuzov Just think!

William I can't remember. Tell me where you know me from and I might remember!

Kotuzov I don't know you at all. But I hoped that you might... I'm unidentified and don't remember anything.

William One moment... *(Notes something down quickly.)*

Kotuzov They told me that I was an agricultural pilot and my crop sprayer crashed into a hill. The plane burnt up and they found me Two miles from it. There's nothing wrong with me, just I can't remember anything...

William Wasn't the plane registered somewhere?

Kotuzov I can't remember anything. Not even my plane or my name...

William What name did they register you under?

Grandpa Kotuzov. He's down as Kotuzov.

Kotuzov No, not Kotuzov, but Contusio. Contusio Cerebris. That's what they wrote down, but I don't believe them. Cerebris isn't a local name.

William *(taking notes)*. Diagnosis, Contusio Cerebris...

Kotuzov Don't write that down, 'cos it isn't right. Cerebris is an German name.

Grandpa It might have been an Allied plane? Why not?

Kotuzov They said it was a crop sprayer.

Grandpa All wrecked planes look alike. And they're hardly likely to tell the truth on account of security. I bet you really are Cerebris.

Kotuzov If I am Cerebris, why can't I speak German?

Grandpa It's on account of the concussion. Don't deny it it'll only get worse.

William *(taking notes)*. It'll only get worse. OK. I've got that down. Next.... You, grandfather? How long have you been here?

Grandpa I don't know

William Didn't they tell you?

Grandpa They might have done. When was it...

William That's what we'll write down then *(repeating and taking notes)* "They might have done". Full stop.

William *(to Fero)*. What about you?

Grandpa He remembers a lot.

William What can he remember?

Fero Everything. And I've got a girlfriend in Switzerland.

William OK. *(To Bratoi.)* Next?

*Bratoi is snoring*

Grandpa He's still under the effect of the anaesthetic.

Bratoi *(sleepily)* I'm only here for a while.

William I see *(Noting.)* He's only here for a while.

*Cinderella has finished washing the floor and is sitting next to the door. Only her eyes can be seen.*

William *(to Cinderella)* And you?

Fero She's dumb. She's the assistant nurse...

William Aha... I see. *(Taking notes.)* Mutos totalis.

Fero What does that mean?

William Completely dumb.

*He closes his note book and looks at them once again before making a decision. They all look at him expectantly.*

William So, everything in good time. I've got my notes and I must get on now...

*He puts his note book down carefully on the cupboard. Then he takes his jacket off and puts it on the chair, then he takes off his shirt, trousers etc., and folds them carefully. The patients looks at him in amazement. When he has nothing on but his underwear, Cinderella gives him a set of hospital pajamas. He puts them on calmly and gets into bed, tucking himself carefully in. He opens his notebook once again.*

William *(lying.)* Now, let my just read what I have written. Ward no.6, bed no.1  
Contusio Cerebris. Secret incident with an Allied plane. No deaths. The pilot has amnesia after cerebral concussion. The incident requires further investigation. Full stop”

Kotuzov I don't believe it.

William You don't – but when you read it here – that's just what it seems like. That's life – when you read about it there's a meaning to it – but when you live it – it's pointless?!

#### **Scene Four**

*The grandmother comes in to visit.*

Grandma Iosif, are you alive?

Grandpa Why do you want to know?

Grandma The pension's late again this month... I've brought you some yogurt.  
*(Rummages in her bag).* Oh, I've gone and forgotten it? And I've forgotten the beer...

Grandpa There's no need. There's plenty of beer here.

Grandma Then I'll reckon I might have one... *(Opens a bottle and takes a drink.)*  
How's the sclerosis?

Grandpa OK thanks.

Grandma You've started remembering things then?

Grandpa What's the point? I don't intend to write my memoirs? There's no point in trying to remember things when I quite all right as I am.

Grandma I've been digging the vines over. I don't know whether you be around to eat the grapes or not... I'm very sick, Iosif!

Grandpa How's the dog?

Grandma It's all right. Getting on a bit, though.

Grandpa Keep it warm. I'll take him hunting in the spring.

Grandma Hunting? He can't see!

Grandpa He can see well enough... but don't think I'm going to buy him glasses.

Grandma I'm very sick, Iosif. I don't think I'm going to make it though this winter.

Grandpa Don't worry, setters are very hardy dogs, they can stand the cold.

Grandma They say Stefan's very sick.

Grandpa Which Stefan? Brother in law?

Grandma That's right. They took him to New Town hospital yesterday.

Grandpa That bastard always lands on his feet.

Grandma Don't talk like that! He's on his last legs.

Grandpa Serves him right! He wasn't a good person. Sister in law – she was OK, but not him!

Grandma Jesus Christ, I hope they kill you! You spent your whole life womanizing and you got your just desserts now!

Grandpa Stupid old woman! Whatever you do during your life... you always end up here... I'm glad I did it while I could.

Grandma I hope they bury you alive! You can remember everything, you're just lying to the doctors.

Grandpa Don't shut like that, that one over there, he writes everything down.

Grandma (*whispering*). You should be ashamed of yourself! You've got five grandchildren...

Grandpa (*also whispering*). Five? I thought we had four?

Grandma No, there's five. Nadya had a little boy.

Grandpa When?

Grandma The other day when...

Grandpa What did they call him?

Grandma Ivo. They said they'd come and see us in the fall.

Grandpa In the fall?

Grandma Yes.

Grandpa The vines, we'll have to dig over the vines.

Grandma I dug them over already – I almost forgot to tell you.

Grandpa All right then, you'd better go now!

Grandma I'm going. *(Takes another bottle, but the grandfather takes it back.)*

Grandpa Don't touch! That's doctor's prescription. Tell my sister in law not to worry too much if my brother in law dies.

Grandma What do you mean, die?

Grandpa It's easily done.

Grandma They said he was going to get better.

Grandpa He'll get better when I get better... off you go now!

Grandma All right then.

### **Scene Five**

*Morning. Grandfather wakes up with a scream.*

Grandpa I dreamt I saw my wife. She said the dog was very ill and was in New Town hospital. I says, "who'd let a dog in the hospital?" She says, "It's who you know...". She said her sister wants glasses and said she'd take me out hunting rabbits in the winter. So I says, "You can't catch rabbits, you're not a dog!" And then I says, "You should be ashamed of yourself! You've got five dogs. What do you mean five, I thought there were four of them? She says, "There's five of them and they're digging the vines over and drinking beer".

*The man writes the names of the patients on the files and files them in on the shelf.*

William Ward number 6, bed number one – Contusio Cerebris.

Kotuzov I'm not Cerebris, I told you. That's what they say. I'm unidentified.

William That's just what I call you for the records. For the records you're Contusio Cerebris.

Kotuzov No, I'm not.

Grandpa *(nudging Kotuzov)*. Don't deny it, I told you. You'll only make things worse.

Kotuzov All right, then. I'm Cerebris.

William All right then. File number one – Cerebris. File number two – Arteriosclerosis. File number three – Bratoi, Peritonitis. File number four – Fero – Hypermnesia. File number five...

Grandpa Can I ask you something?

William Me?

Grandpa Yes, you.

William Ask away.

Grandpa Why are you... you know...?

William Why do I take notes about life?

Grandpa Yes.

William Because a life without notes has no meaning.

Grandpa And a life with notes does?

William Yes. Take Robinson Crusoe for example. All alone on a desert island for 27 years. That must have been awful! And now the whole world reads his diaries, because what he wrote gave meaning to the most meaningless life. And what's more, the world began with notes.

Grandpa That's not true. The bible says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and he said, Let there be Light!"

William And the Word was God – but someone wrote it down. Otherwise who would have known what he said. That's my question – who took notes? (*To Kotuzov.*) Who?

Kotuzov I don't remember, you know ...

William Just think about it!

Kotuzov I am.

William In the beginning the Lord God was alone amongst nothing. So God himself must have taken notes. Is that right?

Kotuzov I can't say anything. I don't remember, you know ...

William And then, "And God made Man in his own image and likeness." i.e. since God took notes, then Man in his likeness has to take notes. But that's his major sin - Man doesn't take notes. That's why we're unhappy. Because life is created to be noted down, and not lived. (*To Kotuzov.*) For example, if you'd taken notes, you would know who you are. Isn't that right?

Kotuzov That's right.

William Of course, that's right. All the great people in the world have said, "Take notes and make records!" Othello said, "Note, note everything!" Act three, scene three. King Lear, Hamlet, "To note or not to note..." Richard IV, "Note again and again." Richard III, Richard II, Richard Ist and so on and so one...

Fero So what's your name?

William William.

Bratoi William who?

William William. Wi-liam.

Grandpa William what?

William It's very difficult and you wouldn't remember.

*The thundering sound of a squadron of planes flying overhead wakes Bratoi.*

Bratoi *(waking up)*. What the hell's going on?

Grandpa Allied planes.

Fero *(from the window)*There must be at least one hundred...

William *(writing)*Six thirty five: about one hundred allied planes flew overhead bearing west...

Kotuzov That makes at least 300 hundred in all.

William *(adding)*Total number of planes flying overhead up to the present moment is 300 according to the pilot, Cerebris. Is that right?

Grandpa I don't know, I don't understand military things.

### **Scene six**

*Fero is talking and William is taking notes. Cinderella is washing the floor.*

Fero National holidays in Switzerland – Saturday, Sunday and 1<sup>st</sup> August – Swiss Independence Day. Police telephone is 117, Ambulance – 144. International dialing code for Switzerland is 0041, Berne – 31, Basel – 61, Geneva – 22, Zurich – 1.

William Do you write all those things down?

Fero No, I can remember them.

William You do now, but what if you get concussion like Kotuzov?

*Fero thinks about it.*

William Life is full of vicissitudes. Kotuzov used to remember everything.

Kotuzov That depends how intelligent I was.

Grandpa There's no such thing as stupid pilots.

Kotuzov I'm not a pilot! They found me two miles away from the plane.

Grandpa You must have ejected, but you can't remember.

William That's right. So write that down, while you can still remember it. Because it'll amount to nothing if you don't write it down. Here's a file for you. (*Gives Fero a file.*)

Kotuzov It's all quite plain to me. They're keeping me here until I remember something. Now if there was someone to tell me my autobiography then I could write it down...

Grandpa Just ask any pilot. All their biographies are the same. Military college, then military service, then what comes next – military stuff.

William (*repeating clearly and noting down*). Military college, service, career...

Bratoi My operation scar is healing slowly. When it's healed completely, I can go home. (*Taps his head a number of times and counts in a whisper.*)

Grandpa I hope you bring us all luck!

Bratoi The problem is getting luck in the first place. I haven't had any luck in my life, but I'm getting better here. My operation's healing now. (*Taps his head a number of times in the same way.*)

Grandpa You're supposed to do it three times.

Bratoi I do it twelve times to make sure, 'cos there's eleven letters in "knock on wood" and once more for luck.

William (*noting*). Neurosis ritualis ... neurotic rituals.

Bratoi There's nothing neurotic about it... I just have the feeling that I'll get better that way.

Kotuzov There's nothing wrong with my body, it's just my memory that's weak. So, granddad, you reckon I'm in the armed forces?

Grandpa You must be a colonel at least, take it from me. At your age all pilots are colonels at least. If we were in the New Town hospital, they would have had you up and on your feet by now. There's no messing about there. They work on the principle of natural selection. Survival of the fittest.

Kotuzov I'd at least like to know my name... but... I don't know if they'd put me in a common grave or in the grave of the unknown soldier...

Grandpa And how long am I going to hear that bell toll? Right up until the end they said... Dong, dong, dong...

Bratoi I was in the New Town hospital in the summer. I had bronchial pneumonia. Me and my brother-in-law borrowed some money from the bank and we bought two German combine harvesters. One for him and one for me. Brilliant machines! Harvest like mad and they keep you cool as well. Two minutes in the cabin and you get shivers up your spine – freeze your bloody cockles...

*William and Fero take notes.*

Fero Slow down a bit!

Bratoi That's right. 40 degrees outside and I've got my overcoat on in the cabin. But my brother-in-law – the bloody opposite. You could fry eggs inside his. He's got his swimming trunks on and dripping with sweat, "I spent two years working in the Sahara desert, nothing like this!" My bloody windows started icing over. Bloody freezing it was! I had to put my hat and gloves on, scraped the ice off the window and carried on with the harvesting. And then I lost consciousness, started freezing to death! They woke me up in the hospital. They brought my brother in law in two days later with heat stroke. I didn't know it but they'd got air conditioning in the cabins – mine was set to minus twenty and his was set to plus 40.

William Can you say those figures again?

Bratoi Minus 20 and plus 40.

Kotuzov I bet they've got air conditioning in planes as well.

Bratoi I bet they have.

Kotuzov I'll have to know what to wear in the future...

Grandpa They retire you now. I reckon they'll give you at least 5000 dollars a month pension, and then what'll you wear?

*They all tremble in surprise, even Cinderella.*

Kotuzov How much??

Grandpa Five thousand dollars a month. Perhaps even more. You'll spend all day in your country house.

Kotuzov What country house?

Grandpa Yours. All colonels have country houses.

Kotuzov I can't remember anything of that. Isn't there anyone who might recognize me, for goodness sake!

Grandpa Why don't you go round the German airbases. There's bound to be someone who will recognize you there.

Kotuzov As soon as I get out of this place. Good God, a thousand dollars!

William I've got 5000 dollars written down here.

Kotuzov Five was it? Give me a file too. (*Writing down.*) Five thous-and! Jesus! I've had a good life, all right, but who can prove it?

### **Scene Seven**

*Morning. Visiting hours. William enters with his files.*

William Get up, visiting hours!

*He sits on the bed next to Kotuzov and opens the file. Cinderella comes in and they lift their legs for her to clean.*

William Bed number one. What do we have here? (Reads.) "Contusio Cerebris. Profession – pilot. Personal assets - country house. Income – 5000 dollars monthly pension. Full stop. How are you? Can you remember anything?"

Kotuzov Things are becoming a little clearer.

William What's today's date?

Kotuzov Today.... I can't quite remember.

William So you can't remember dates.

Kotuzov I can't seem to keep count of them this month.

William Never mind. You will next month. The main thing is that there is a substantial improvement.

Bratoi What improvement – he's completely better.

William We'll get round to you in a minute. (*Opens the next file.*) Bratoi, male, status – active, apparent and real age – 40 etc... professional – agricultural worker?

Bratoi Exactly.

William Bronchial pneumonia after a serious industrial accident.

Bratoi Double bronchial pneumonia...

William All right... *(Correcting.)*... Double .... Operated on for appendicitis accompanied by Peritonitis diffusa acuta. Is that right?

Bratoi Yes, but I'm getting better. Look, the wound's healed. *(Lifts the blanket and shows it).*

William Is that it?

Bratoi Yes.

William That's not appendicitis.

Bratoi What?

William Your appendix is on the right, but your wound's on the left.

Bratoi There must be some mistake!

William No mistake. Raise your right hand. Look, you see that? And your wound's on the left.

Bratoi And they told me it was appendicitis.

Grandpa It could be. There are people with appendixes on the left. This friend of mine had everything on the wrong side: his heart on the right, his appendix on the left...

Bratoi So it could still be appendicitis?

William Yes, if your appendix is on the left...

Bratoi I've got a left appendix. If the wound's on the left, that means I must have a left appendix.

William *(Noting)* Bratoi Stefanov – physiological anomalies: left appendicitis. Any other anomalies?

Bratoi I don't know. I don't know anything and I don't care. I only want to get out of this place. *(Taps his head several times counting in a whisper.)*

*Fero enters. Stands in the doorway and looks at Bratoi, anxiously.*

Bratoi *(to Fero)* What's up? Are they discharging us?

Fero They said you had to get ready.

Bratoi To be discharged?

Fero For an operation.

Bratoi What operation?

Fero Appendicitis.

Bratoi Jesus!

Grandpa You might have two appendices. This friend of mine he had two of...  
Bratoi Jesus Christ! What a fucking life! *(Starts thumping his head)*. I've lost  
count... *(Starts hitting his head again, counting.)* That's twelve now. And  
now for the first letter "K" - another eleven times.... *(Thumps and counts)*.  
Grandpa Have a beer and calm down. Give him a beer! Kotuzov, it's your turn.  
Kotuzov *(Showing his middle finger.)* Up yours! I got them yesterday.  
Grandpa So you can remember that!  
Kotuzov Have I hell! Look I wrote it down, "I got the beers yesterday!"

*Fade*

### **Scene eight**

*William alone. Cinderella enters. She goes up to him and makes a number of signs in deaf-mute sign language.*

William Pardon? *(Cinderella repeats)*

William I understand. So you're not deaf and dumb?

*Cinderella nods affirmatively.*

William All right then. I'll have to correct that. *(Opens his notes.)* So we erase mutos totalis. What should I write in its place?

*Cinderella explains in sign language.*

William All right. That's what I'll write down. You've made a oath of silence. Is that right?

*Cinderella nods*

William And how long will this oath last?

*Cinderella explains.*

William Yes. I've got that. *(Takes notes.)* Tell me some more. That's interesting.

*Cinderella hesitates*

William It'll be better for you if you do, believe me.

*Cinderella explains and William takes notes quickly, repeating "All right", "I understand", "Yes", "That's clear" and so on. Cinderella finishes.*

William So what did I write down then? *(Reading.)* M.I., 32 years actual age, apparent age 18. Up to the age of 17 read only fairy tales. At the age of 17 entered late puberty, but favorite story is still Cinderella. Suffered a number of personal

disappointments, combined with other failures. Carries out dirty and heavy work. Anything else?

*Cinderella gives him a folded sheet of paper.*

William *(reading)*. One morning I woke up and realized that I was Cinderella. I felt calm and self-assured – the future was ahead of me. I was happy to suffer, since I knew the end of the story. The more I suffer, the happier I am.

*Cinderella starts “telling” her story again.*

William You took an oath not to speak until the end of the story. That’s clear. *(Notes it down.)* So, the oath transphases into acquired mute syndrome, i.e. voluntary mutism. *(William closes his note book and looks up at Cinderella.)*

William So you believe this fairy tale’s about you then?

*Cinderella “says” something.*

William You not only believe in it, but you are certain?

*Cinderella nods. Then she takes the hood off her head and shakes her long golden blond hair. She takes off her nurse’s uniform and stands in front of William in the full glow of her beauty as a princess. Then she takes off her shoes and leaves barefoot. Her shoes remain behind on the stage. Fade.*

### **Scene nine**

*Fero is reading a book to Fero.*

Fero Listen to this.

Kontuzov Did you write it?

Fero No, listen! “Six years ago I had to make a forced landing in the Sahara desert. Something had gone wrong with the plane’s engine.... I had enough water for only eight days. And so the first night I fell asleep on the sand, thousands of miles away from the nearest center of population. I was cut off from the world more than any shipwrecked sailor on a raft in the ocean. Imagine my surprise in the morning when I was awoken by a strange little voice.... And I saw a strange little boy staring curiously at me...”

Kontuzov What is that book?

Fero The Little Prince.

Kontuzov Is that the truth?

Fero Yes. The writer was a pilot.

Kontuzov So, a colleague of mine. What was his name?

Fero Antoine. Antoine de St. Exupery.

Kontuzov I don't remember him. Anton, you said?

Fero Antoine.

Kontuzov I like the way it begins. It might have been written about me.... (*Looks at the book.*)

Fero (*Listening*). It's ringing again.

Kontuzov What?

Fero The telephone in the corridor? It must be my fiancée from Switzerland.  
(*Exits.*)

Kontuzov Granddad?

Grandpa What?

Kontuzov Am I married, what do you reckon?

Grandpa You must be, no two ways about it.

Kontuzov Who'm I married to? If I'm German, then she must be German.

Grandpa She must be.

Kontuzov Do you think she's pretty?

Grandpa Of course she is. You've been to college haven't you...?

Kontuzov What me?

Grandpa Yes, you. You might even have a post-graduate degree!

Kontuzov Jesus! But if anyone asks me how I got it, I've got no idea!

Grandpa That's one of those things people forget. Especially after concussion.

Bratoi (*enviously*). You were lucky with that concussion: you got a wife and a post-graduate degree...

Kontuzov I had them before that?

Bratoi You might have, you might not have. But when you're in luck, you're in luck. You're getting on in life now.... What can I say? Worked hard all my life and nothing to show for it? Unless that is I get some concussion...

Grandpa You will, you will. Sooner or later you will.

Kontuzov There's only one thing I'm not clear about – how did I get my university degree and my post-graduate degree? (*Thinking.*) How? I bet it was hard work and I bet I had to read a lot! Imagine that!

Fero        Have you started to remember?  
Kontuzov    I can't remember, but I can imagine. Just ask me how difficult it is to get a post-graduate degree?  
Bratoi     That's right. Some people have got two university degrees and I've got two appendices. There's no salvation.  
William     There is!  
Bratoi     Where?  
William     In writing. All you've got to do is write and you'll be saved.

### **Scene ten**

*Bratoi on the operating table.*

Bratoi     Doctor, what anaesthetic are you going to use?  
Doctor        Local.  
Bratoi     Won't it hurt?  
Doctor        It won't. We're not going to cut deep this time, we're just going to clean it out. *(To the sister.)* Sister, penicillin ampoules.  
Sister        There you are.  
Doctor        Procain ampoules for the anaesthetic!  
Sister        There you are *(Opens the ampoules.)*  
Doctor        I'm going to give you the anaesthetic and that it'll be it... *(Gives him an injection.)* There you are. Just one more. ... Is it going numb, now?  
Bratoi     I went numb ages ago. Get on with the cutting and lets get it over and done with.  
Doctor        I want to wait for the anaesthetic to start working first... *(Taps him with a surgical instrument.)* Can you feel anything?  
Bratoi     I can.  
Doctor        What about that? *(Taps again.)*  
Bratoi     Still can.  
Doctor        But a bit less?  
Bratoi     Perhaps...  
Doctor        The anesthetic's working. Sister – tweezers!  
Sister        Tweezers. *(Gives them to him.)*

Doctor Scalpel  
Sister Scalpel (*Gives it to the doctor.*)  
Doctor Down to work then!  
*The doctor makes an incision and the terrifying yells of Bratoi resound through the operating theatre. Everyone jumps.*  
Doctor (*frightened*). What's up?  
Bratoi It hurts!  
Doctor Of course, it hurts a little. Act like a man! (*Doctor makes another incision and Bratoi screams terrifyingly.*)  
Doctor Come on, that's enough of that! It can't hurt that much, you're not the first person I've operated on!  
Bratoi It really hurts! Sister! Oh, Jesus!  
Doctor (*enraged*). Shut up! Or do you want me to hit you? How do you expect me to get the job done like that?  
Bratoi It hurts!!!  
Doctor You'll have to suffer it like a man! Grit your teeth! (*The doctor tries to make another incision but Bratoi yells.*)  
Doctor Come off it now! (*To the staff.*) Come here and hold him down! Like that!  
*They hold down and the doctor cuts enthusiastically while Bratoi screams.*  
Sister (*elling.*) Stop! Stop!  
Doctor What?  
Sister I made a mistake, doctor! I got the anaesthetic mixed up with the penicillin. They look just the same, for Christ's sake!  
*Bratoi yells out in anger, pulls his arms out and grabs the scalpel.*  
Bratoi (*screaming*). Get back! Fuck you all! (*Waving the scalpel.*) It always happens to me, for Christ's sake! Always me! That's something you ought to write down! You ought to write that down!  
Fero (*screaming from under the table.*) I've got it all down!

### **Scene Eleven**

*Bratoi is lying tied up in a straightjacket with very long sleeves tied at the back.*

Bratoi I've got to start writing things down, grandad. Kontuzov got his life sorted out by writing things down. He started with nothing. And now he's got a villa, pension, wife... Whole bloody fortune.

*Kontuzov just looks at him unconcerned and continues to look at himself in the mirror, all the time writing something down.*

Grandpa I spent all my life saving, and what was the point? None whatsoever. I got sent to hospital and my brother-in-law stole everything. No damned conscience whatsoever – no bloody morals. I worked so hard, every bloody night collecting... Every bloody night!

Bratoi What did you do in the daytime?

Grandpa I couldn't do it in the daytime. They've got guards on duty during the day and during the night for that matter, but they fall asleep after two o'clock... I spend three nights watching the guard on the garage just to get my hands on a diesel engine. *(To the others who are taking notes.)* Haven't you written enough?! All you've got to do is cough round here and it gets written down!

Bratoi And then what?

Grandpa He fell asleep. So I got in through the building site and found the engine. But I went and knocked down this barrel of lime and he woke up. And he went after me. I ran down the darkest streets and he followed me. All the bloody way. I went into the forest and he was still after me. I crossed the border and then another one. Then I went through a desert and then I saw the Tigris and Euphrates – rivers... Then I saw the library of Babylon between them. I like reading, so I went in and said, "Got anything for me?" "We've got the Thief of Baghdad" they said, "I'd like to read that" So I waited for them to bring it to me, and they brought me this lorry full of bricks. The book was so old that they hadn't invented paper then and wrote on the bricks. Made me think how long people've been stealing for. When I saw so many bricks, I had a thought. I said, "Can I take it home to read?" "Yes, if you pay for the petrol." "Thanks" - I said. "I don't". So I read it brick by brick, got up a real sweat from reading. And I was just reading the last page, when I heard steps behind me. I turned round and it was him. He'd been hiding in between the bricks

and found me. I looked at the soles of my shoes and they were covered in lime from the barrel I had knocked down and he'd been following me. So I waded into the Euphrates, washed my feet off and followed the current until I got home.

William Very romantic.

Grandpa Of course. If it wasn't romantic. I wouldn't steal. How do you think I could carry a seventy kilogramme engine? And then my brother in law stole it without a drop of romanticism and now he's dying of a hernia. Because he didn't wade through the Tigris or the Euphrates. He hasn't even heard of them.

Kontuzov What did you need that engine for?

Grandpa Do you think my brother in law needed it? What'd he want it for? It didn't even work. That's enough you've written now! It's like a bloody writers' club. All you do is write all damned day...

William No-one can steal what's been written down. Writing is all that we leave behind for others...

Grandpa Stolen goods – that's what we leave for the others... You come to this world and you leave it naked. And if you steal something, then it's just like borrowing – God forgives. Except for my brother in law – he's not got a drop of conscience or romance.

Bratoi I got involved in arms dealing.

Grandpa Pardon?

Bratoi I'm selling a second-hand Tomahawk rocket.

William I don't get that?!

Bratoi Tomahawk rocket. Three hundred thousand dollars.

Grandpa How did you steal it?

Bratoi It landed in my cornfield. Brand new, but no one wants to buy it. I went to the market and cried "Tomahawk rocket, Tomahawk rocket..." but the people just looked at me and passed away. Difficult business.

Grandpa Kontuzov'll buy it – he is rich.

Bratoi I sold it in parts for scrap.

Grandpa *(to William)* Don't write that down, you'll get him into prison.

Bratoi All that was left, was two buckets of gun powder, and the hens ate that.

Grandpa Hens don't eat gunpowder.

Bratoi Mine did. You can't imagine what eggs they lay. Very nutritious stuff, that gunpowder. You get a slice of bread and sprinkle gunpowder on it and you can keep going for 24 hours.

Grandpa Come off it!

Bratoi No, you sprinkle it on a slice of bread and you can keep going for 24 hours.

Fantastic stuff – gunpowder! But finished.

Grandpa Don't worry. Another one will lend in your cornfield.

Fero It's the telephone again. It must be from Switzerland. That girl phones me everyday. *(Exits.)*

Kontuzov What does my wife do for a living?

Grandpa She's probably a secretary?

Bratoi Or a nurse?

Grandpa She might be an actress...

Kontuzov On television?

Grandpa I wouldn't wonder.

Kontuzov *(amazed)*. Well fuck me!

*Kontuzov gets up, puts the television on and stares at the screen. Cinderella washes the floor and sits down next to him in front of the television. She looks at Kontuzov's face secretly, but he's staring at the television screen. The others are already asleep snoring.*

Kontuzov *(yells out.)* I recognized her! That's her!

*They all jump up out of their sleep.*

Kontuzov *(pointing to the television)*. That's her!!

Bratoi *(frightened)*. Who?

Kontuzov My wife!

William That's not her, that's French television.

Kontuzov *(disappointed)*. Bugger! I fancied that one...

Grandpa Never mind. You'll find another one. Good night then.

*Fade*

## Part two

### Scene One

*Darkness. They're all singing "Happy Birthday to You!". Light. They're all around*

*Kontuzov's bed. He wakes up.*

All *(in chorus)*. Happy Birthday!

Kontuzov Whose birthday is it?

Fero Yours.

Kontuzov Who told you?

Bratoi That's what we decided.

Grandpa Everybody has a birthday some time?

Kontuzov So I was born today, is that right?

Fero We could postpone it till tomorrow, if you like?

William We can't, I've already noted it down with today's date.

Kontuzov Hold on a sec, I want to write it down too. It's a very important date for me as well. *(Takes note.)*

Fero And now – your present! *(They sing again, and Cinderella brings him a present all wrapped up.)*

Kontuzov What is it?

Fero Open it and see.

Kontuzov *(tears the wrapping.)* What is it?

Fero Your uniform. Brand new. From the second hand market.

*Kontuzov is so touched, he bursts into tears.*

Kontuzov I can't remember that last time I put a uniform on.... *(Puts the cap on, and he will wear it to the end of the play.)*

Fero We hired a camera to film the party.

Kontuzov *(flattered)*. And a camera as well! What brought all this on?!

Bratoi So you don't forget us, Colonel! One day, when you go back to that other world, you'll remember that you had poor, but loyal friends.

Kontuzov *(sobbing)*. I'll never forget you! Never! You got me out of oblivion and brought me back to life. *(Cinderella brushes away her own tears.)*

*They line up to have their photographs taken next to Kontuzov.*

Grandpa Say something for posterity!

Kontuzov (wiping his eyes). What do you want me to say?

William Something we can write down for history.

Kontuzov All right then, I'll say something.

*He gathers his thoughts and begins:*

Kontuzov Some time ago, I had to make a forced landing in the desert...

Fero (*whispering*). Why in the desert?

All Shhhh!

Kontuzov Something had gone wrong with the engine of my plane and it caught fire. And so the first night I fell asleep on the sand. I was cut off from the world, more than any shipwrecked sailor on a raft in the middle of the ocean. Just imagine my surprise when in the morning I was woken by a strange little voice. And I saw a strange little boy staring down at me. He asked me, "Who are you?" "I don't know", I said, "I can't remember anything. I'm unidentified..."

*Fade*

## **Scene two**

*Morning. Everyone except William. Fero is examining Williams files lined up on the shelf.*

Fero Grandfather?

Grandpa Yes?

Fero I have my doubts about him.

Grandpa About who?

Fero William.

Grandpa It's taken you a while to catch on, hasn't it?

Fero What, you got your doubts as well?

Grandpa No doubts, I'm absolutely sure.

Fero Sure about what?

Grandpa You tell me first.

Fero I think that his second name is Shakespeare.

Grandpa And I think it's more likely to be Pushkin.

Fero Pushkin? Why Pushkin?































