Matjaž Zupančič

THE HURRICANE

Translated by Tina Mahkota

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Characters

Ingeborg

Karmen

Ališa

Herbert

Leon

Koloman

The Gardener

I don't know why people expect art to make sense.

They accept the fact that life doesn't make sense.

David Lynch

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LEON: Where are we?

KOLOMAN: At the top of the hill.

LEON: The observatory is here?

KOLOMAN: Nowhere else. Just as it says in the brochure.

KARMEN: So, we'll be seated?

KOLOMAN: That's what the chairs are for.

LEON: Aren't they a bit uncomfortable?

KOLOMAN: They're traditional chairs.

LEON: What does that mean?

KOLOMAN: Chairs… with tradition.

KARMEN: In the midst of unspoilt nature!

HERBERT: Good move, manager.

KOLOMAN: We're doing our best.

HERBERT: But still… have you considered sun loungers?

KOLOMAN: That sort of stuff's always breaking down.

HERBERT: Of course. I only mentioned it because we're outdoors…

LEON: Hang on, Koloman… is that all?

KOLOMAN: No, that's not all. The best is yet to come.

HERBERT: A tornado observation post. A brilliant invention!

LEON: You're exaggerating. Anyone can put chairs out in the garden.

HERBERT: You have to appreciate the advantages of where you live. Seize the opportunity to be able to…

INGEBORG: Watch tornadoes?

HERBERT: Even though they won't reach you.

Pause.

ALIŠA: Will we see a funnel cloud?

KOLOMAN: You're in luck. There'll be plenty of them on the weather map.

LEON: Give up painting, Koloman. I hope you're not selling waterspouts.

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KARMEN: What's your problem with paintings? I admire them. Apart from opera, which is my greatest obsession.

ALIŠA: I'd like to see a funnel cloud up close.

INGEBORG: You wouldn't want that.

ALIŠA: Why not?

INGEBORG: Where there is one, there's no one left.

HERBERT: A geographically limited phenomenon, madam. Fascinating from a distance, but fortunately limited.

INGEBORG: Cumulonimbus clouds are deadly.

HERBERT: It's a new phenomenon, a new thermal cloud…

ALIŠA: Tall, narrow, powerful…

HERBERT: But it doesn't reach this far.

INGEBORG: It's not far away, though.

HERBERT: So enjoy the view. *(To Karmen)* Why are you clapping, madam?

KARMEN: I'm very excited. Can we film it on our phones?

KOLOMAN: You can, but I'd advise against it.

KARMEN: Why?

KOLOMAN: Firstly, you can get the photos in the gift shop. There are lines and sticks, cones and funnels…

KARMEN: And secondly?

KOLOMAN: Sometimes the wind picks up.

KARMEN: What do you mean… the wind picks up?

KOLOMAN: If it blows your phone away, don't blame me.

Pause.

INGEBORG: That's something new, isn't it?

HERBERT: Not really. A bit of adrenaline goes with it.

INGEBORG: Why?

HERBERT: It amplifies the effects. And with that, the sensations.

KARMEN: I see what you're on about. Is that why there's no roof here? So we're more in touch with our sensations?

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KOLOMAN: It would get in the way. Besides, you don't need a roof at all. If it happens to drizzle, you've got an umbrella. You received it along with the brochure which also served as an invitation. Thank you for responding to it. It's big enough, so you can fan yourselves with it if it gets hot. You're welcome to keep it, too. But please do return the umbrella to the gift shop once the tour is over.

HERBERT: Of course. A really good idea. This observation point. Congratulations, Mr Koloman.

KOLOMAN: All the credit goes to our district. I'm just the manager.

LEON: And what do you manage?

KOLOMAN: What do you mean?

LEON: The districts haven't existed for sixty years.

KOLOMAN: That means they're older than your country, state councillor, sir.

LEON: I'm not here on official business.

KOLOMAN: But you could put in a good word for our cause? When you're back in government service?

HERBERT: He's right. Think globally, act locally!

LEON: I'm on holiday.

HERBERT: So am I. My name is Herbert.

LEON: What are we talking about, Herbert?

HERBERT: About the fact that the state can support a good idea, even if it's a local one.

LEON: I've come to get some fresh air.

HERBERT: The two aren't mutually exclusive.

LEON: You're lobbying early. I've heard you're brilliant at this sort of thing.

HERBERT: I work behind the scenes. Unobtrusively.

KOLOMAN: Right, distinguished guests… I can already sense a change in the weather over there. I'll go and sort out the chairs. They're still a bit scattered from yesterday.

LEON: Haven't you brought too many up here?

KOLOMAN: Our district is developing, state councillor. Mention that at the celebration.

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LEON: *(surprised)* How do you know I've got a celebration this evening?

KOLOMAN: I don't know. Only guessing. Here we go, it won't be long now.

Pause.

ALIŠA: I wonder if there's ever been a tornado… that's gone deeper?

KARMEN: Deeper?

ALIŠA: Closer to here. Where we are now.

INGEBORG: Why do you want to know?

ALIŠA: Tornadoes love low-lying areas…

KARMEN: Love low-lying areas… how beautifully put!

ALIŠA: Thank you.

KARMEN: Why do they love them, though?

INGEBORG: Because they need moist, warm air, which is usually found in the lowlands. So that it can mix with the dry, cold air coming down from high up.

ALIŠA: That's what my relationship was like, but it fell apart…

HERBERT: *(To Ingeborg)* Are you a meteorologist?

INGEBORG: No. Weather phenomena are my hobby.

ALIŠA: Herbert …

HERBERT: Go ahead.

ALIŠA: Do you have a hobby too?

HERBERT: I do. Tasting cold starters.

ALIŠA: Really? Is that a thing?

HERBERT: If you have a taste for it.

ALIŠA: In this heat… I'm thinking of ice in the microwave…

HERBERT: It's practical for me.

ALIŠA: Why?

HERBERT: I attend a lot of banquets and events in my job… Tomorrow, for example, I've got the opening of a new shopping centre on my schedule.

ALIŠA: Will there be a reception as well?

HERBERT: For selected guests.

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ALIŠA: Are you looking forward to it?

HERBERT: I'm pinning my hopes on the king prawns with mango. The cottage cheese spread with chilli and asparagus is also high on my list, although I prefer the tomato carpaccio. Provided the sheep's cheese is premium quality...

KOLOMAN: Right then… Please take a seat.

KARMEN: Are the chairs numbered?

KOLOMAN: You're not at the theatre, madam.

KARMEN: That's exactly what I thought! What a lovely spot for an open-air event! How I'd love to experience an opera here, with no roof over my head, surrounded by nature!

KOLOMAN: On Sundays we have a local district picnic here. If you're interested in our music.

KARMEN: Thank you, but I'm fine for now…

KOLOMAN: It's more of a cosy affair. We close the place to tourists.

HERBERT: That's why this chair's covered in mayonnaise…

KOLOMAN: *(nervously)* It's bird poo, Herbert. What's the problem?

HERBERT: There isn't one.

KOLOMAN: You're out in nature!

HERBERT: I only mentioned it...

KOLOMAN: Sometimes someone poos on my head too!

HERBERT: It doesn't bother me at all. I swear. I'll clean it up myself…

KARMEN: So, can we sit down now? Which way should we face?

KOLOMAN: The way the chairs are arranged. Isn't that obvious?

KARMEN: I see. You're the one who knows where the main event will be!

KOLOMAN: Talking of which, madam…

KARMEN: Karmen.

KOLOMAN: Karmen. No offence, but I haven't seen your receipt yet.

KARMEN: What receipt?

KOLOMAN: You know. The one for the contribution you paid into our district's account. You received it along with the invitation.

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KARMEN: Oh, of course. Everything's sorted, Mr Koloman. Here, just a moment…

LEON: *(to Herbert)* Won't he ever stop going on about the district?

HERBERT: You'd better leave him be.

KARMEN: I don't know… I must have misplaced it somewhere…

KOLOMAN: Come on, just show me the invitation.

KARMEN: I just need to find it…

KOLOMAN: What are you holding in your hand?

KARMEN: Oh, right. Of course. Here you are…

KOLOMAN: What's that?

KARMEN: Is there something wrong?

KOLOMAN: Tan… hauzer…?

KARMEN: Hang on… I don't know… oh, right! I've got everything mixed up…

KOLOMAN: Who's that?

LEON: Tannhäuser. It's an opera. Madam's taken the wrong invitation with her.

KARMEN: Oh dear. I'm so sorry. I'm going to see the performance tonight… I've been so scatterbrained of late… Anyway, thanks for the umbrella…

KOLOMAN: What shall we do now?

LEON: *(to Koloman)* Let her watch it, since she's already here. We'll sort out the bill later.

KOLOMAN: I don't know. The government just makes promises.

LEON: If there's anything to watch at all, by the way.

KOLOMAN: What do you mean?

LEON: It's not certain, is it? The whole thing? Will you give us our money back, if we end up simply staring into space?

KOLOMAN: Let's get one thing straight, honourable councillor. If, for example, you pay for a bear hunt…

LEON: I have no such intention…

KOLOMAN: If you did, I mean. It's your problem, if you can't shoot it.

LEON: First it has to come into view!

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KOLOMAN: So keep your eyes peeled! *(To Karmen)* You'll be… out in the fresh air for a bit.

KARMEN: Oh, thank you. I'd love to. A lovely meadow.

HERBERT: Neatly mown. By hand?

KOLOMAN: Traditional mowing. All by hand.

HERBERT: Nicely trimmed.

KOLOMAN: We've got a barber.

HERBERT: A barber? That's a good one! Do you mean a gardener?

KOLOMAN: Let's sit down.

The group sits down and fans themselves with invitations and brochures.

INGEBORG: It's hot.

KARMEN: Not a breath of air.

ALIŠA: Very muggy.

HERBERT: I'd fancy a cold aperitif.

KARMEN: A glass of champagne.

HERBERT: I like it best in the morning.

KARMEN: I'm so angry with myself.

HERBERT: Why?

KAREMEN: I mix up the invitation, forget the receipt…

HERBERT: These things happen.

KARMEN: They keep happening to me.

HERBERT: That's not the worst of it. It's more annoying when you fall victim to the confusion at the administrative office. For example, an acquaintance of mine received an invitation to an event, even though he'd been dead for five years. Things like that need sorting out, state councillor, sir.

LEON: I don't understand.

HERBERT: I'm talking about the national infrastructure.

LEON: With whom?

HERBERT: That's a good one! With you.

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LEON: What's that got to do with me? If an invitation doesn't suit you, just ignore it. Or choose another one.

ALIŠA: As long as you're alive, you can choose. That's what he's trying to tell you, Herbert.

HERBERT: I know what he's trying to say.

INGEBORG: There are too many invitations.

HERBERT: Why? You have complete freedom…

INGEBORG: What freedom? A dictatorship of choice!

Pause.

HERBERT: Karmen, I've been admiring your dress all this time.

KARMEN: Do you like it?

HERBERT: Unusual... for these circumstances.

KARMEN: I like your tie. Armani?

HERBERT: Hugo Boss.

KARMEN: I always dress according to the invitation. Do you?

HERBERT: Habitually. Sometimes according to the weather, too.

KARMEN: What about today?

HERBERT: Today I'm somewhere in between.

KARMEN: For a particular reason?

HERBERT: I didn't know what to expect. *(Silence.)* But can I ask you one thing? I'm really curious.

KARMEN: Of course.

HERBERT: How did you manage to get here in high heels?

KARMEN: Slowly, with a bit of effort… and it works.

ALIŠA: You have to make an effort.

HERBERT: Pardon? Why?

ALIŠA: You never know when it's watching you.

HERBERT: Who?

ALIŠA: The eye of the tornado.

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Pause.

INGEBORG: The sun's beating down.

LEON: Nothing's happening. Will there be anything to see soon?

KOLOMAN: A bit of patience, all right? Look at the horizon. Can't you see the colour's changing? It'll be soon.

ALIŠA: That reminds me of a little game… when we were children, travelling by car on holiday… we used to play who'd be the first to spot the sea…

Pause.

INGEBORG: *(To Leon)* Can I ask you something?

LEON: Me?

INGEBORG: Yes, you.

LEON: Go ahead.

INGEBORG: What's that on your neck?

LEON: What's what?

INGEBORG: A black spot.

LEON: You can see it?

INGEBORG: Yes.

LEON: If you can see it, why are you asking me?

INGEBORG: You're sitting next to me.

LEON: It's not contagious. If that's what you're worried about.

INGEBORG: You're out in the sun.

LEON: So are you.

INGEBORG: I know. That might worry both of us.

Pause.

LEON: A birthmark.

INGEBORG: Pardon?

LEON: On my neck. A birthmark.

INGEBORG: Have you had it long?

LEON: Since birth.

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INGEBORG: A person’s birth leaves its mark.

LEON: It depends where you’re born.

INGEBORG: Is that a political question?

LEON: No. It’s a coincidence.

INGEBORG: But it could become one.

LEON: What?

INGEBORG: A political question.

LEON: Why?

INGEBORG: It’s not fair that your life depends on that.

LEON: On what?

INGEBORG: On where you’re born.

LEON: I agree, but I’m out on a trip.

Pause.

INGEBORG: I’m glad.

LEON: About what?

INGEBORG: That it’s not a melanoma.

LEON: What?

INGEBORG: Especially if it’s not malignant…

LEON: Stop it now!

INGEBORG: I’m talking about the sun. About the heat.

LEON: I enjoy sitting in the sun!

INGEBORG: It could kill you.

LEON: You too!

INGEBORG: If it can kill both of us, then it’s a political question.

LEON: You can move seats. The chairs aren’t numbered.

INGEBORG: Can you see any shade anywhere?

LEON: You’ve got your way. I’ll move seats.

Leon stands up. He stands there for a moment. He sits back down.

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INGEBORG: What's the matter? Aren't you going to move?

LEON: No.

INGEBORG: Are they all taken?

LEON: No.

INGEBORG: Not a single patch of shade anywhere?

LEON: It's now become clear to me what you want.

INGEBORG: What?

LEON: You want to get political. But you're wasting your time. I'm not here on official business.

Pause.

HERBERT: There are more and more insects.

KARMEN: The birds are flying lower and lower.

LEON: That's the reason, if it isn't clear to you.

KARMEN: Although not all of them have the same colour plumage…

INGEBORG: What's flying past right now isn't a bird.

HERBERT: Do you mean…?

LEON: Ingeborg is right. It's an unmanned aircraft.

HERBERT: A drone? Look, there's another one.

ALIŠA: That one's flying in the opposite direction.

LEON: That's because they're shooting at each other.

INGEBORG: Is this a political question, state councillor, sir?

LEON: We've already covered that.

HERBERT: As long as they're just flying over us, it's bearable. But it's not nice being where they drop down.

INGEBORG: Corpses everywhere.

HERBERT: A massacre.

KARMEN: A horror film. I've got some photos on my phone.

HERBERT: I wouldn't want to be there.

ALIŠA: Nobody's forcing any of you to go anywhere.

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LEON: If the heat doesn't let up soon, we'll have to move.

INGEBORG: Where to?

LEON: I don't know about you lot, but I'll be heading for the shade if I have to. *(Silence.)* Why are you all staring at me? Does anyone have a problem with that? Me going into the shade if I feel like it?

ALIŠA: Look… look!

KARMEN: What?

INGEBORG: Something's happening…

ALIŠA: I can see it… I can see it!

KARMEN: Me too!

ALIŠA: I saw it first!

INGEBORG: It really is… what a cone!

KARMEN: So beautiful!

LEON: At last. It's quite a sight.

KARMEN: It's so slender…

HERBERT: But it's getting thicker, don't you think?

KOLOMAN: What did I tell you?

KARMEN: May I climb onto the chair?

HERBERT: Be careful in those heels…

INGEBORG: It was just a line before, now you can almost see the funnel…

ALIŠA: A tornado. A tornado!

KARMEN: What marvellous colour! Ochre grey…

ALIŠA: I'm being drawn towards it…

KOLOMAN: You'd better stay here!

A long pause.

INGEBORG: Watch out.

HERBERT: What?

INGEBORG: Can't you see? A funnel cloud! It's getting closer and closer…

HERBERT: But it can't possibly reach us, can it?

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INGEBORG: I don’t know… how should I know?!

KARMEN: I can feel a slight breeze…

ALIŠA: It feels so good…

HERBERT: Those are proper tornado wisps… instead of carpaccio…

INGEBORG: A whole serving’s coming up!

LEON: You’re not in a restaurant, can’t you stop it?!

ALIŠA: I feel like going out to meet it…

KARMEN: You’re such a brave woman!

ALIŠA: No, I just loved the wrong man…

KOLOMAN: Don’t exaggerate. Just because you’re standing in front of a lion’s cage doesn’t mean you can stick your arm in!

LEON: The wind is getting stronger…

HERBERT: Shall we open our umbrellas, Koloman? Is there a storm coming?

KOLOMAN: No need. Just a few drops, if at all…

LEON: It’s getting closer and closer. *(To Koloman)* I hope you know what you’re doing!

KOLOMAN: Don’t panic. At least you can see the cone clearly!

KARMEN: It’s so virtuoso…

INGEBORG: It’s too close…

KOLOMAN: It’ll just give us a little lick…

ALIŠA: Like strawberry ice cream, Herbert…

A loud noise. A few unexpected, long and heavy gusts of wind.

When it’s over, everyone straightens their clothes and fixes their hair. Karmen is sitting on the floor next to a chair.

KARMEN: Now that was… intense!

KOLOMAN: A real breath of fresh air, wasn’t it?

HERBERT: A breath of fresh air? It nearly blew me away!

LEON: This isn’t in the brochure, Koloman!

KOLOMAN: Of course it is, check the small print!

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INGEBORG: So close… so fast …

ALIŠA: It only brushed past us from a distance…

HERBERT: Just as well it missed us.

INGEBORG: I'm afraid not by much.

ALIŠA: You're always afraid of something!

INGEBORG: I'm working on not being. Is that all right?

ALIŠA: Straighten your tie, Herbert…

Pause.

LEON: Is that all for today, manager? Shall we head down now?

KOLOMAN: Definitely not. You absolutely mustn't miss the next one!

HERBERT: This one was enough for me, to be honest…

INGEBORG: Too much adrenaline?

HERBERT: I had a very good look at it. Didn't you?

LEON: How do you know there'll be another one?

KOLOMAN: There are usually two. And the second one's always better than the first.

INGEBORG: What if there are three today?

KOLOMAN: The price stays the same.

KARMEN: I've dropped my phone somewhere…

KOLOMAN: We'll find it. Let's set up the chairs again.

HERBERT: *(to Leon)* He's enjoying this more than we are…

LEON: He wants to prove himself. But he's already messed everything up for me.

HERBERT: What a weirdo.

INGEBORG: Are you all right, Karmen?

KARMEN: Just about. I just need to get myself together…

INGEBORG: Let me help you.

KARMEN: Thank you.

KOLOMAN: There… You can sit down again.

INGEBORG: I'd like to stand for a bit longer. Now that the wind has died down. May I?

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KOLOMAN: As you wish. *(He sits down.)* Once I sit down, I don't like getting up. But you do as you please.

Pause.

LEON: *(To Ingeborg)* That sounds almost like a threat.

INGEBORG: He's playing with fire, and he doesn't even realise it.

LEON: With fire? With us! *(Silence.)*

Do you know?

INGEBORG: What?

LEON: Why you came here.

INGEBORG: Do I have to know everything?

LEON: Not everything, but this you could.

INGEBORG: I need a break. Tomorrow I've got… something stressful coming up.

ALIŠA: What is it?

INGEBORG: A wedding.

LEON: Something stressful?

INGEBORG: It doesn't matter.

ALIŠA: How can it not matter? Tell me! I feel like we've got a lot in common! Are you getting married?

INGEBORG: Not me.

ALIŠA: Who then?

INGEBORG: My best friend. She used to be.

ALIŠA: But she isn't anymore?

INGEBORG: Something came between us.

ALIŠA: What?

INGEBORG: My husband. Now her groom. *(Silence.)*

ALIŠA: I see. Invitations can be awkward.

INGEBORG: They can.

ALIŠA: If I were in your shoes… I might not go.

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INGEBORG: Why not? I've got the present ready. It's waiting in the car. In the back seat.

KARMEN: Look… over there…

HERBERT: Something's starting up again.

ALIŠA: Far away.

INGEBORG: It's not over yet, don't worry.

KARMEN: What shall we do?

HERBERT: Let's sit down again.

Everyone sits down and fans themselves. Pause.

HERBERT: It's getting hot again.

KARMEN: I'll wait for one more cone. I really can't manage any more.

HERBERT: Where are you in such a hurry to go?

KARMEN: I'm going to the opera tonight… you know. Tannhäuser…

HERBERT: Are you interested in anything contemporary as well?

KARMEN: I don't understand the question.

HERBERT: Apart from the opera, I mean.

INGEBORG: The opening of a shopping centre?

HERBERT: I'm just having a little chat with Karmen. May I?

KARMEN: Contemporary, contemporary… I live here and now. What does that mean? That I'm a contemporary woman. Why should I concern myself with what's contemporary? If I want something to attract me, to occupy my innermost thoughts… does it have to become an acquaintance from the next street? Isn't it a bit too simplistic to reduce everything to the little stories written by contemporary life? To view everything through emotions that are, in this day and age, becoming increasingly pauperised, like something out of a soap opera?

INGEBORG: *(To Herbert)* What do you make of that?

HERBERT: Nothing. I took a sleeping pill today. If I sleep well, I'm a bit groggy in the morning. It takes me a while to get going.

Pause.

KARMEN: I have to get up.

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INGEBORG: Are you in any pain?

KARMEN: No, not really. I feel awkward.

INGEBORG: Why?

KARMEN: It's never happened to me before that the wind has blown me off my chair. In front of an audience, I mean. I usually sit in the auditorium… When a person just lies there in front of you like that… it's not a nice feeling. As if I'm on display. On display like… like a corpse.

INGEBORG: At a post-mortem?

KARMEN: I'd like to leave now. *(Silence.)*

INGEBORG: Mr Koloman, the lady would like to leave.

KOLOMAN: Why?

INGEBORG: She feels award.

KOLOMAN: I'm not going to drive everyone down there individually.

ALIŠA: *(To Koloman)* May I ask you something?

KOLOMAN: Ask whatever you like.

ALIŠA: When you have a picnic here… is there an accordion too?

KOLOMAN: Of course. And a suckling pig turning on the spit as well. It's just a different sort of gathering. A different tune. You tourists don't understand that.

ALIŠA: What is it that I don't understand?

KOLOMAN: You just come up here up and wait for something to happen to you. I don't expect you to know how to turn a suckling pig. But someone could at least put their sweaty rucksack onto the table. If they'd brought one with them.

HERBERT: Where's there a table here?

KOLOMAN: Am I supposed to lay a white tablecloth for you as well, or what? A lace one?

HERBERT: No, don't worry about that. It'd get blown away. That much is clear to me.

ALIŠA: What's clear to you?

HERBERT: That the tablecloth would get blown away…

ALIŠA: *(nervously)* How do you know that?

HERBERT: What?

ALIŠA: That the tablecloth would get blown away!

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HERBERT: Of course it would. In this wind!

ALIŠA: There's a solution!

HERBERT: What solution?

ALIŠA: Pegs!

HERBERT: What sort of pegs?

ALIŠA: *(very nervously)* Clips… clasps… or whatever they're called… to secure the tablecloth to the table! So it doesn't get blown away!

HERBERT: Come on, you were almost blown away yourself. What pegs!

ALIŠA: You don't need them!

HERBERT: Why not?

ALIŠA: You've got them in your head!

HERBERT: I don't understand why you're being offensive.

ALIŠA: Because that's how I feel!

HERBERT: Neurotic?

ALIŠA: Can I tell you something?

HERBERT: Can I stop you?

ALIŠA: No, you can't! When I first saw you, I got the feeling that I was passionately drawn to you. That one day I might even… perhaps… kill myself for you. But then you say something, and I feel the exact opposite.

HERBERT: Like what?

ALIŠA: That I could sit next to you for an eternity, and still not warm up to even room temperature!

HERBERT: What am I supposed to say? I suppose I come across as refreshing in this heat!

ALIŠA: You're ridiculous!

HERBERT: I'm glad you find me funny. I usually speak less if I don't have to.

Pause.

INGEBORG: *(To Ališa)* You're like a tornado.

ALIŠA: What do you mean by that?

INGEBORG: A woman of… extremes.

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ALIŠA: I find it hard to cope with what's in between.

INGEBORG: And what is that… in between?

ALIŠA: Sadness.

KOLOMAN: Watch out! Watch out! You'll miss everything!

LEON: What's…?

KOLOMAN: Over here on the left!

KARMEN: Oh dear!

INGEBORG: A cone! A massive one!

LEON: Where on earth did that come from all of a sudden?

KOLOMAN: If you'd talked less, you'd have spotted it sooner!

HERBERT: That's what you're here for. To warn us!

KOLOMAN: You wouldn't see an elephant, if it stepped on you!

ALIŠA: The mother of all tornadoes… It's magnificent… majestic, slender, long… what power… I need this… to blow away all the fucking pegs… all the clasps in our heads…

LEON: *(To Ingeborg)* Isn't it too close again?

INGEBORG: This one's going to be much worse than before…

KOLOMAN: Watch out, it's passing us now, maybe the wind will pick up again…

LEON: Maybe? Go and play your Russian roulette with someone else…

KOLOMAN: Hold on to your chairs…

A violent wind, lasting for a while.

When it's over, the same routine: everyone fixes their hair and clothes. Karmen is lying on the floor.

LEON: Good heavens. Good heavens!

HERBERT: That was… that went…

INGEBORG: Right to the bone!

ALIŠA: Fucking hell… terrible! It really was.

KOLOMAN: Now you can see what traditional chairs are like. They never get blown away!

HERBERT: Of course not, if we're hammering them into the ground!

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LEON: *(To Koloman)* You'd better build a shelter!

KOLOMAN: We work miracles with the money we get from the state. Sort it out, and you'll be more comfy!

LEON: Comfy?! I'm barely alive!

INGEBORG: Madam, are you all right?

KARMEN: My phone's stopped working…

KOLOMAN: I told you to hold tight to the chair!

KARMEN: How am I supposed to hold to something that's lighter than me?

KOLOMAN: Lose some weight!

KARMEN: That was very inappropriate. That remark.

HERBERT: Is it just me, or has it got cold?

LEON: It's certainly cold!

KOLOMAN: So what? It'll be hot again soon. It's always sweltering one minute and freezing the next in these parts. We're not in the tropics!

KARMEN: Look… it's raining…

KOLOMAN: Open your umbrellas, that's why you've brought them!

Everyone opens their umbrella. They stand still and silent.

ALIŠA: I love the rain.

INGEBORG: Me too.

KARMEN: It's drizzly.

ALIŠA: It's sprinkling…

LEON: Stop it, we're not in a mortuary.

ALIŠA: That was a close call…

KARMEN: Yes. We got almost blown away.

ALIŠA: Like blades of grass in the wind…

KARMEN: Do you like Walt Whitman? I adore him…

Pause.

KARMEN: Are you crying, by any chance?

ALIŠA: No. I've got ice in my eyes. From before.

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INGEBORG: An icy gust.

KARMEN: I can see tears.

INGEBORG: Ice gets wet in the heat.

KARMEN: It's melting.

INGEBORG: It's disappearing.

ALIŠA: Everything's disappearing… I'm sorry. I admit, a memory… of a classmate who's passed away. I don't know why right now… It's probably this rain's fault.

INGEBORG: Was he dear to you?

ALIŠA: Very much so. *(Silence.)* Never mind.

INGEBORG: Tell me.

ALIŠA: Tonight's my school-leaving anniversary reunion. I don't know which one it is now… That's when I remember. That's when everything that's gone comes flooding back… to make it easier to live with what's here now… All the memories become alive… Always at the same venue, which is perfect for dance parties, anniversaries, memorial services… And the wedding photos come up first, then the babies, the children, how they're growing up, holiday snaps… Then, at some anniversary, someone doesn't turn up, and then they come back again, but divorced, leading a life that's either a shambles or happy once more, and then someone suddenly dies and we talk about them all evening… How he once explained, whilst drunk, that he was a spiritualist… unlike us, who are a mixture of shit and lust… and we loved him all the same, even though he insulted us all evening… If we take a quick look at ourselves, we're all idiots … but some of us are even bigger fools. And perhaps we'll have a drink today in his memory too; there'll be booze again, and laughter, melancholy, and perhaps a new album of old phots to go with it… Before we part ways, let me not forget… my name is Ališa. *(Silence.)*

INGEBORG: Are you unhappy?

ALIŠA: No. Sentimental.

Pause.

HERBERT: There we go. It's stopped raining.

KOLOMAN: You can put your umbrellas away.

KARMEN: The mist has cleared.

HERBERT: It's hot again.

KOLOMAN: What did I tell you?

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LEON: Right, Koloman. That was something… worth seeing. Shall we go down now? *(Silence.)*

ALIŠA: I'd like to wait a bit longer.

LEON: Why?

ALIŠA: Maybe there'll be another one.

LEON: Come on. Haven't you had enough?

ALIŠA: I'd like one more.

INGEBORG: The last one?

HERBERT: Like the last cigarette? I can still remember how delicious it was. When I gave up smoking years ago…

ALIŠA: See? State councillor, sir?

LEON: I don't know… If there's one more, it will definitely be my last. But you, do as you please.

ALIŠA: Karmen?

KARMEN: As you wish. I'm finding it hard to walk back in these shoes on my own.

LEON: *(To Ingeborg)* You're curious, aren't you?

INGEBORG: What?

LEON: Whether there'll be one more.

INGEBORG: How do you know it'll be the last one? *(Silence.)*

LEON: Koloman?

KOLOMAN: I'm listening.

LEON: Will there be another one?

KOLOMAN: I can't promise anything.

LEON: I see. Just make sure to put that in the brochure then.

KOLOMAN: Three cones for the price of two seems a bit much to me. But you don't look a gift horse in the mouth. Let's not be petty. You can sit for a couple more minutes if there's anything else. Then we'll be off.

INGEBORG: How generous.

KOLOMAN: There's a guest book in the gift shop. I prefer to have it in writing.

They close their umbrellas and sit back down. A long pause.

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KARMEN: Are we going to stop at the gift shop on the way back?

KOLOMAN: Of course.

KARMEN: I'd like to buy some photos. My phone's busted.

KOLOMAN: We always do that.

KARMEN: Thank you.

KOLOMAN: You're welcome. Karmen …

KARMEN: Yes?

KOLOMAN: I'm sorry about earlier. That… remark.

KARMEN: I've already forgotten about it.

KOLOMAN: I've got a few kilos on me too…

KARMEN: Of course. You sit down a lot.

KOLOMAN: I've got a lot on my mind… I'm a hot-headed sort of person.

KARMEN: I understand you perfectly.

KOLOMAN: What I mean is… forget about the participation fee. And all the other costs.

KARMEN: How kind of you.

A bird's carcass falls to the ground.

LEON: What…?

ALIŠA: Is that?

HERBERT: It looks like a bird.

KARMEN: I can see that. It's just…

KOLOMAN: A dead bird.

INGEBORG: What are you on about?

KARMEN: *(To Ingeborg)* Don't upset him. Please!

ALIŠA: Where did it fly from?

KOLOMAN: This can't fly any more.

INGEBORG: A bird cadaver…

KOLOMAN: Something knocked it down.

KARMEN: A cone, perhaps?

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INGEBORG: Birds take cover from the wind. It must have been something else.

LEON: A drone?

INGEBORG: Probably. That's what killed it.

LEON: *(To Koloman)* It's come back to your home district.

KOLOMAN: From your ignorant country!

KARMEN: There you go again…

INGEBORG: One war does not a summer make...

LEON: Ingeborg! People are dying over there, and you're just making light of it?

INGEBORG: *(agitated)* That's what you're doing! Don't try to make me feel guilty! I admit: I'm a cynic, but I've got nothing else left! I'm dying too, and all over again every single day! I'm struggling with all my might so the wind doesn't blow me away, though it will one day, there's no doubt about that! Probably even today! If you feel like dust and powerless, the wind has an easy job! Even though I wish no harm to anyone, and I show solidarity at every opportunity, and activism is no stranger to me either; I help as much as I can, whilst trying to support myself and my child; my husband has left me; what am I to do when idiots are killing one another? It's just this innocent bird that got caught in the middle, I do care about it right now! *(Silence.)*

KOLOMAN: Let me tell you something. Quite honestly, although I don't usually speak to strangers this way. It might not be obvious, but even for my liking, too many things are piling up. This bird's carcass, for instance. Do you think I don't care? That it doesn't bother me when two people are shooting at each other over my head? As if I weren't there? As if I didn't exist?

LEON: As if you were in your own garden, if you pardon the expression, fuck all.

KARMEN: State councillor, sir? You?

LEON: It happens. *(Silence.)*

KOLOMAN: Wouldn't it be better if someone took that thing away?

LEON: You're the manager.

KOLOMAN: But I'm not your gofer!

HERBERT: Then get one.

KOLOMAN: I've already got one!

HERBERT: Where is he, then? I can't see him.

KOLOMAN: He'll tidy up after you've gone!

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HERBERT: That thing can't simply be lying here on the ground.

INGEBORG: Unless it's paid the participation fee…

KOLOMAN: I've heard you. Who are you taking the mickey out of?

INGEBORG: Just myself. If you know what I mean.

KOLOMAN: *(To Herbert)* You throw it away.

HERBERT: Why me?

KOLOMAN: It's right under your nose.

HERBERT: I can't smell anything at the moment.

KOLOMAN: You will soon enough. Take it round the back.

HERBERT: Where round the back?

KOLOMAN: Out of sight.

HERBERT: It'll still stink.

KOLOMAN: If you can't see something, it stinks less. Throw it over there.

HERBERT: Over... where?

KOLOMAN: Over the edge.

HERBERT: Where's an edge? I can't see it.

KOLOMAN: That's what it's called! Can't you have a look around before asking silly questions? We're on a plateau. The plateau's on top of a hill. A gentle one, but still a hill. Did you look around at all before you plonked yourself down in that chair?

HERBERT: I have no intention to walk around in this weather. A tornado observation post! I can't believe it!

KOLOMAN: Come on. Haven't you got the guts?

LEON: Don't talk to a man this way!

KOLOMAN: Which way?

LEON: In an offensive way!

KOLOMAN: If he's got the guts, he won't be offended.

LEON: *(To Herbert)* I know a good solicitor. Don't you worry.

KOLOMAN: Are you threatening me?

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HERBERT: I don’t know what came over me to fall for this brochure. I should have gone to the opening, instead of sitting here on this grass which doesn’t hold water by any standard!

LEON: Leave him alone. There’s no point.

KOLOMAN: What do you mean, ‘leave him alone’? Who should be left alone? Let the young master go and do his tastings at your celebration! Here, we’ve got to grab a spade and shovel out the manure if we have to!

HERBERT: *(To Leon)* He’s on edge because he has to work overtime.

KOLOMAN: That’s lame. We could pack up and leave at any moment. But whilst we’re here, we’re not going to waste time with any of this. Openings, celebrations, operas, weddings… Give it a rest and get that bird’s carcass out of the way! *(To Ališa)* Your school-leaving anniversary, for goodness’ sake! Noone gives a shit that you passed your A-levels. *(To Leon)* Lawyers, eh? You know the judges as well, eh? On this bench, you can only judge yourself! And that’s even harder! You’re like headless chickens in a minefield! Do you want to get your arses burnt? *(Silence.)*

KARMEN: My God.

INGEBORG: He’s totally lost it.

HERBERT: Let’s leave him until it’s over.

KARMEN: When will it... be over?

KOLOMAN: Well, what’s going to happen? Is anyone going to take the bird away?

LEON: You take it yourself.

INGEBORG: Wait. I’ll do it.

HERBERT: Do you need a handkerchief?

INGEBORG: I feel sorry for the animal…

Ingeborg picks up the bird’s carcass and takes it off stage. Silence.

KOLOMAN: Did you discard it? What are you looking at?

INGEBORG: I can’t believe…

HERBERT: What?

INGEBORG: Come and have a look.

Everyone except Koloman goes over to Ingeborg.

LEON: What on earth!

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HERBERT: Rubbish!

KARMEN: Nothing but rubbish! Piles of rubbish!

LEON: But where from?!

INGEBORG: Everything's covered in it!

LEON: What a mess!

HERBERT: Terrible..

KARMEN: A rubbish tip… And I'm not wearing the right shoes!

ALIŠA: The prettier the cone, the more damage it does…

LEON: Koloman!

KOLOMAN: What is it?

LEON: Come and have a look!

KOLOMAN: *(Stands up.)* I know what it is. A landfill site.

LEON: What sort of… rubbish tip?

KOLOMAN: A tip.

LEON: I know what a tip is! I'm asking what's happened!

KOLOMAN: The rubbish's been blown up here.

LEON: How is that possible?!

KOLOMAN: You're asking me?

LEON: Yes, I am! With all my political authority! Why did this happen?

KOLOMAN: Because it's falling apart! The landfill site should have been cleaned up ages ago! The weather's getting worse, and the government's doing nothing! Why are you staring at me? You bring truckloads of your filth out of the city and dump it here, and then you have the nerve to complain when you're on a day trip!

LEON: I've had enough of this crudeness. The cheek of this man. *(To Koloman)* I'm talking about you! Where are you going?

KOLOMAN: Back to my chair. Do you mind?

Pause.

INGEBORG: What a sea of rubbish.

ALIŠA: An ocean.

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INGEBORG: In which whales are dying…

LEON: Those are piles of old plastic.

ALIŠA: I can see fish…

LEON: You have to see what's true.

KARMEN: Why? I, for one, can hear music when I close my eyes. Trumpets, cellos…

LEON: A whale is not a fish!

INGEBORG: A ketos? A sea monster. A big fish…

LEON: The bigger it is, the more it stinks in ancient Greek!

INGEBORG: Why are you being so nasty?

LEON: Can't you smell it? It's disgusting!

KARMEN: Stop it! Please! Can't you, just for a moment – for a tiny moment – show a bit of zest for life? Do you see more than what's true?

ALIŠA: That's easy to say…

LEON: Look up at the sky.

INGEBORG: A drone.

LEON: They're shooting at each other again.

HERBERT: They start as soon as the weather changes.

INGEBORG: Perhaps the weather changes because they're shooting?

LEON: *(nervously)* Those two things aren't connected! It's a coincidence! Don't you understand?

INGEBORG: What if it isn't?

LEON: These are childish questions!

INGEBORG: Why?

LEON: Because not everything is connected! It's a coincidence! A chance occurrence!

INGEBORG: Why are you getting so worked up, state councillor, sir?

LEON: You're always trying to politicise things, yet you don't understand what a coincidence is!

INGEBORG: And what is it?

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LEON: The very fact that you were born at all! Not where you were born… but the fact that you exist at all! That's pure coincidence!

INGEBORG: Calm down.

LEON: One of those tiny white ones hit the jackpot!

INGEBORG: Stop it! What's got into you?

LEON: It's a complete lottery that you, of all people, came into the world!

INGEBORG: I was born by a caesarean!

LEON: Well, there you go! They even had to give you a helping hand!

INGEBORG: You're banging your head against a brick wall!

LEON: I always find the door!

INGEBORG: Yes, a locked door!

Suddenly *and unexpectedly, a fierce and prolonged gust of wind. Everyone clings to their chairs, but they're still being whirled round and round.*

When it passes, it's back to the usual routine: everyone is fixing their hair and clothes.

LEON: That's it, I've had enough of this!

HERBERT: Where did it come from… all of a sudden?!

LEON: Without warning… out of the blue!

KARMEN: I've banged my head…

ALIŠA: Yeah, with mine!

HERBERT: This isn't normal anymore!

INGEBORG: Wait.

LEON: What is it?

INGEBORG: Wait… Where's the cone? *(Silence.)*

LEON: Has anyone seen it at all? Koloman!

HERBERT: Has anyone seen the cone?

INGEBORG: Don't you get it? Nobody's seen it because we're stuck inside the cone!

LEON: What are you on about?

INGEBORG: We're floating in a spin dryer!

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LEON: Stop exaggerating… Koloman!

KOLOMAN: I'm here.

LEON: What's going on? *(Silence.)* What are you doing?

KOLOMAN: Thinking.

LEON: That must be quite a strain!

KOLOMAN: I've got nothing to do with you lot. Absolutely nothing. Except that I have to put up with you today.

LEON: This observatory… it's a sham! A dead end!

KOLOMAN: Swim back from it, if you please!

HERBERT: Are you saying we'll be flooded?

ALIŠA: If we have to swim, we'll be deep and far away…

INGEBORG: Don't you get it? It's a trap.

LEON: What sort of a trap?

INGEBORG: We're trapped. Locked in a spin dryer!

HERBERT: How can we be trapped if we're outside?

ALIŠA: The eye of the tornado has such a stern gaze…

HERBERT: Stop it!

ALIŠA: You're wearing too many clothes, Herbert. If we're going for a swim…

LEON: *(To Koloman)* Get us out of here!

KOLOMAN: Sit down for a moment.

HERBERT: Why?

KOLOMAN: So I can see where we're standing...

HERBERT: I can't sit down!

ALIŠA: Why?

HERBERT: Because the chair's completely wet!

KOLOMAN: Just yours!

HERBERT: So what can I do? Protest?

ALIŠA: Give it a go. Maybe there's a revolution somewhere…

HERBERT: Everything's somewhere, just not here!

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KOLOMAN: Take a handkerchief and wipe the chair. What do you want from me?

ALIŠA: Next time we'll be blown away… like dandelion seeds… unexpectedly… without warning…

LEON: Can you meditate in silence?

ALIŠA: I dreamt of such an event yesterday. The same garden, the same chairs. Even the group, exactly like ours…

LEON: And then?

ALIŠA: Nothing. That's it.

LEON: I'm asking how it ended!

ALIŠA: It didn't end. It's still going on…

LEON: Not for me. As far as I'm concerned, it's over. I'm off.

INGEBORG: Where to?

LEON: Down. Away. Wherever I want. To the celebration!

KARMEN: Wait, we'll go together…

HERBERT: Don't you think… it's too risky?

KOLOMAN: Leave him be, let him go. I couldn't care less about him anyway. Let him blow off to the tip.

LEON: All right, Koloman. I won't pass judgement on that remark of yours. Not today, when I've just come out for some fresh air. Perhaps you're right about the tip. I'll enquire about the redevelopment. It's not right for rubbish to be flying about, now that bad weather has become almost the norm. And in general… do you know what the Dalai Lama said? What's the recipe for mental health? Not to pass judgement on anything, just once a day. I'm off now, even if I'm to wade knee-deep through this filth. As for your observation post, my report will be short and to the point. In a word: a hell of a mess!

KOLOMAN: Please return your umbrellas to the gift shop.

LEON: Of course. I don't intend to keep the brochure either.

He leaves.

KARMEN: Where are you going, state councillor, sir? Stay here…

HERBERT: What's in it for him staying here?

KARMEN: He can still hold on to a chair… Which is better…

HERBERT: Better than what?

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KARMEN: Than holding on to nothing on the way down…

HERBERT: *(Kicks the chair.)* I'm not sitting on that thing again! *(To Koloman)* Next time, sort out something more comfortable!

KOLOMAN: You'd better not do that.

HERBERT: Something more suitable!

KOLOMAN: In this district, we used to sit on them even before you lot knew what a chair was! Stop doing that.

HERBERT: I'll do whatever I want. I've paid my participation fee!

KOLOMAN: You have. But it's still not your chair.

HERBERT: It is, for now!

KOLOMAN: That doesn't give you the right to smash it!

HERBERT: Oh, come on. Isn't there no other problem you could be dealing with?

KOLOMAN: Well, I do need to say something now. I'm not a violent person. I really am not, even though I probably give that impression. Well, maybe sometimes… occasionally. But with good reason. If something gets on my nerves, I can go too far. How far? It doesn't matter. But if I've ever smashed someone's face, it was for a reason. So remember, you're only in that chair temporarily!

HERBERT: Until when?!

KOLOMAN: I don't have a stopwatch!

HERBERT: You dragged us here!

KOLOMAN: Stop smashing things!

HERBERT: A tornado observation point! A gift shop! A lovely view! From a safe distance! What distance? We're up to our necks in shit, and you're selling us bidets!

Leon returns.

LEON: *(To Koloman, agitatedly)* Hey, you!

KOLOMAN: What's up? Back already?

LEON: What on earth are you doing?

KARMEN: Has something happened?

LEON: Are you out of your mind?

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KOLOMAN: More than I look like.

HERBERT: What's wrong?

LEON: This is unacceptable!

HERBERT: Tell us what this is all about.

LEON: Do you even know what's here? Right next to us?

KARMEN: A gift shop?

LEON: A cemetery! *(Silence.)*

HERBERT: Seriously?

KOLOMAN: So what? People do die in this neighbourhood from time to time. Does that surprise you?

LEON: You're running a mass tourism operation right next to a cemetery!

KOLOMAN: If you're the crowd, then I'm the gravestone!

LEON: Even if I disregard the fact that it's a listed site…

ALIŠA: What good is a listed site if the memory is suffocating in rubbish…

LEON: This entire thing is in bad taste!

KOLOMAN: There must be others in this country who have to get by, apart from you lot who've got your snouts in the trough!

LEON: Show me the urban development plan, if you've got one!

KOLOMAN: Aren't you fed up with that rubbish paper lying about already?

LEON: You won't get away like so! I swear!

ALIŠA: State councillor, sir...

LEON: What...?

ALIŠA: Sit down for a moment.

LEON: Why?

ALIŠA: You've got that gleam… in your eyes.

LEON: What gleam?

ALIŠA: I recognise it. You don't look well.

LEON: What's it to you what I look like!

ALIŠA: Sit down. Calm down.

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LEON: *(To Koloman)* You won't get away with this. I'll use every legal means at my disposal…

Strong gusts of wind. Stage fans are now near the actual scene. Once it passes, the familiar routine follows, only this time it lasts longer.

After a while, they spot the Gardener standing at one side, along with some tools and a rubbish bin.

HERBERT: *(To Ingeborg)* Damn your spin dryer!

INGEBORG: Mine? I'd be happy to give it to you!

LEON: Has it come off its bearings?

INGEBORG: Not quite, not whilst I can still see you...

HERBERT: Karmen, what with you're lying there like so?

KOLOMAN: Okey. Get up on your feet. It's over now. That was the third one, if I've counted correctly. They means the last time.

INGEBORG: The last time? This is only the beginning!

HERBERT: Ingeborg! You really know how to drive a person to despair!

KOLOMAN: We're off to the gift shop now. Are you all here?

LEON: All of us? There are more of us than before!

Pause.

INGEBORG: Who's that?

HERBERT: It doesn't just carry rubbish through the air, but binmen too!

KARMEN: He's a gardener, don't you see?

LEON: You always see more than there really is.

KARMEN: You can't tell a gardener from a binman…

HERBERT: Where did he come from?

KARMEN: Is he… alive at all?

LEON: Do you believe in ghosts, Karmen?

KARMEN: Not really, but you mentioned earlier…

KOLOMAN: He's more alive than you are! Tools and all!

INGEBORG: Do you know him?

KOLOMAN: I sorted him out with a job.

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LEON: What sort of job?

KOLOMAN: A gofer.

LEON: A what..?

HERBERT: A gofer. I've heard the term before. That's what they call binmen in this back of beyond. I'm sorry, Karmen.

KOLOMAN: Better he's doing something than just loitering.

LEON: Loitering?! You're not supposed to work outside in this weather. Don't you know the regulations?

KOLOMAN: Here, we work whatever the weather! Who's going to clean up after you, then?

ALIŠA: I recognise him. What's your name?

KOLOMAN: I suggest you don't badger him.

LEON: Why not? Does he bite? *(To the Gardener)* Hey, you. Do you have anything to say to us?

KOLOMAN: He won't tell you anything.

LEON: I'm talking to him!

KOLOMAN: It's a waste of time. He won't answer.

LEON: Why not?

KOLOMAN: Because he's mute.

INGEBORG: What do you mean? Deaf?

KOLOMAN: He doesn't speak.

LEON: Not a single word?

KOLOMAN: Nothing.

Pause. The Gardener lights a cigarette.

KARMEN: Has he been like that… since birth?

KOLOMAN: What?

KARMEN: Shh.

KOLOMAN: How should I know where he was born? He came here from somewhere.

ALIŠA: From a tornado country…

INGEBORG: They don't rip people's tongues out there.

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KARMEN: Poor thing.

HERBERT: Came? Flew in!

KOLOMAN: You're not at the cinema, Herbert. The lad isn't Batman. Life in these parts isn't a cartoon. Here we're standing firmly on the ground; otherwise, we'd have been swept away long ago. Did we come up with this weather? Which is slowly getting on my nerves too? No, we didn't. But since we're stuck with it, we might just as well make the most of it. You lot tidy up your things so the lad can sort the place out for the next round. Then he'll move on, he's still got plenty to sort out.

INGEBORG: What do you mean… move on?

HERBERT: *(To Ingeborg)* We could follow him. Like following a piglet finding his way through the marshes…

INGEBORG: What sort of things are going through your head? I can't believe it!

HERBERT: I'm trying to figure out how we're going to get out of here! Will you let me?

INGEBORG: Don't you understand what I've been telling you all along? That we're in the middle of…

HERBERT: The manager said we should get out of here pronto…

INGEBORG: Him too! He's got no clue!

HERBERT: Then tell me, how did that… his employee end up here?

KARMEN: What if he just works without being employed? I don't know where my high-heeled shoe is…

HERBERT: It's right here…

LEON: Of course they're exploiting the man; that's obvious to everyone!

KOLOMAN: Who's exploiting whom? That lad's as loyal as a dog!

LEON: Do you pay him like a dog, then?

KOLOMAN: He gets food. And tobacco. If he needs more, he'll say so.

INGEBORG: How come, if he's mute?

LEON: Koloman, if you employ a person, you need some out paperwork!

KOLOMAN: He picks paper up off the ground!

LEON: You call that a job?

KOLOMAN: If there's no one else to do it, it's still a job! Would you do it? Sort out the tip, and there'll be less paper lying about after every shitstorm!

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The Gardener smokes a cigarette. He pays no attention to anyone. Everyone is watching him from a distance.

KOLOMAN: Well, what are you waiting for? What are you staring at, as if you were at an exhibition? Have you collected your things? Let's go. The lad can't tidy up whilst you're hanging about here.

No one moves.

HERBERT: He can go and poison himself somewhere else.

ALIŠA: I've smoked all my life… and I still love the smell of it.

KARMEN: He's a strange one.

LEON: *(To the Gardener)* Hey, you! Look at me.

ALIŠA: He won't.

INGEBORG: He won't communicate with us.

HERBERT: The village oddball.

ALIŠA: They're everywhere.

LEON: Unfortunately.

HERBERT: Anti-social creatures.

Pause.

ALIŠA: I've seen him somewhere before…

HERBERT: Do you know him?

ALIŠA: I don't know. Maybe.

LEON: That lad needs professional help!

ALIŠA: Why?

HERBERT: You can see, he's not quite right in the head!

ALIŠA: Because he's quiet?

KOLOMAN: He's got ears like a bat if he wants to.

LEON: Do you have any kind of institution for cases like this? Stop treating him as if he were an animal!

KOLOMAN: We look after our own animals here, while we're on the subject. Even if they have to be slaughtered afterwards. It's because of you politicians, they're dropping dead on our barns!

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LEON: You've got it all mixed up! Absolutely everything!

KOLOMAN: You can't tell a pitchfork from a spade!

LEON: I'll get him a solicitor to protect him!

KOLOMAN: From whom?

LEON: From you!

KOLOMAN: You know what, state councillor, sir, fuck off. You're going to send lawyers after me? I hope this is the last time I see you in these districts.

LEON: That's not something you need to worry about at all!

Pause.

KARMEN: How dark it's got again…

ALIŠA: How long have we been here?

INGEBORG: I don't know. My watch has stopped…

A brief gust of wind. The Gardener looks up at the sky, stubs out his cigarette and gets on with his gardening chores. As he works, he picks up rubbish from around the chairs and throws it into the bin. He pays no attention to anyone.

LEON: *(To the Gardener)* Listen to me. Just listen, that's all. Here's my business card, in case you need legal help. *(Silence.)* Don't you want the card? Fine, I won't force it on you. I'll put it here. On that chair. In case you change your mind. Should you ever need me. I'm not an arrogant man, even though I hear those accusations. I'm happy to help. *(Silence.)* I must admit, though, that I haven't been in the best of form lately. Funny, don't you think? The fact that I'm not in the best of form. Judging by this spot on my neck. I'm not telling you this because you're a gofer. That's what they call you, no offence… I'm telling you this because you know how to listen. Because you're quiet. In my line of work, you rarely come across someone like that. In fact, I haven't met anyone like that yet. Everyone just hisses. All the time. Non-stop. Nothing but sycophants. Right… so here I am. And if I'm being realistic, which is essential if you're in politics, my decision was probably rash. Naively, I fell for the brochure, paid the participation fee and turned up. If you have to be sensible and responsible all the time at work, your free time tends to take you in a different direction. But you can believe me one thing: I just wanted to get some fresh air. To relax a bit. To rest. To be honest, though, I've learnt my lesson. You can't escape. From what, you might ask. A storm? Politics? Illness? From oneself, if I'm being honest. That's all. *(Silence.)* Right. There's just one more thing I'd like to say to you. What you're doing is ridiculous. Picking up rubbish in this chaotic weather … it's like pissing into the sea. Unless you're doing it for your own

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peace of mind. I accept that argument. *(Silence.)* Or perhaps just to relieve yourself… Whatever the case. I've got a celebration to attend this evening. So I'd be grateful if you could show us the way to the gift shop. From there on, there'll be no more trouble.

A very brief, though intense, gust of wind. Everyone clings to their chairs. The Gardener pauses for a moment. When the wind dies down, he carries on with his work.

KARMEN: I'm such a scatterbrain! Wearing high heels to climb this hill! *(To the Gardener)* Thank you for tidying up after us. You look after this garden so well. So I'd like to give you something too. As a thank-you. Do you see this invitation? I took it with me by mistake. I'd like to give it to you. Tannhäuser… tonight … I'd like you to treat yourself to this experience. I adore it. Sitting in a comfortable seat, even though it's sold out … I often think about how similar we are. Opera and I. We're both in good old shape, but young at heart. Nothing is so old that it won't one day become young again … Just as it's not certain that any young thing will ever grow old. Including you. I live on that hope. *(Silence.)* Will you accept this gift? Would you go in my place? And when it begins, you'll sit there in silence until the end… Oh, what have I said! I know you can't speak! How silly of me. I'd never make fun of you. I'm sorry. Who's pulled out your tongue? People can be so cruel… Anyway, I suppose… this invitation is no longer of any value. It seems I'll struggle to make it through to this evening. I'm not that naive. *(Silence.)* But even though this invitation is pointless… I'm taking great care not to let the wind blow it away. Why am I doing this, you might ask. Why am I making the effort if it's worthless? Because, at this moment, it's the only thing I can hold close to me. And it gives me a bit of hope. Do you know what sort? That in this unsuitable setting and beyond all reasonable circumstances… my opera will be performed today all the same. Because then everything you see, all this tormenting business around us… will, at least for a short while, be nothing but a backdrop. To something that is, in truth, magnificent.

A brief gust of wind.

HERBERT: *(To the Gardener)* May I suggest something to you as well? I've been watching you the whole time. And I must admit I've changed my mind. You're very good at what you do. I can see you've mastered your trade as a gardener and a binman. You're skilled at both. That's why I have an offer. A park is planned next to the new shopping centre, and it will need a caretaker. I guarantee the pay will be better than what you get here. If you get any at all. I'm a lobbyist. I know some important people, and I know how to talk to them. I know how to put someone forward. In a subtle, decent, irresistible way. Why would I do this for you? Are you interested? Because I like you. Because we

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have something in common: unobtrusiveness. I can see you're a master at it. You don't push your way in on anyone, yet you still get the job done. I could learn a thing or two from you. I know what I'm talking about. If I take a slightly broader view of myself, I'm an expert in tasting. Food isn't the only thing I taste in small quantities: I taste people too. My menu comes at a high price, and as of today, you're *à la carte.* A person can be clumsy, strange, forgetful, but they must never become pushy. What could be more off-putting than a chatterbox who breathes down your neck all evening just to sort out some measly deal? To secure some insignificant favour? If you start communicating too quickly and at the top of your voice, you'll spoil the impression. You'll ruin everything. So just carry on with your work in peace and quiet. You've made an impression on me. As for the offer, I don't need thanks. Because in the end, I'll get more out of you than you will out of me. No offence, to be honest. It'll be another good deal once the recession's over. Once the weather settles down and the acid rain stops falling.

Ališa stands up and approaches the Gardener.

The Gardener lights a cigarette and sits down on Ališa's chair.

ALIŠA: Do sit down. Have a rest. Have a quiet smoke. I'm glad I can offer you my chair. You and I, we're not afraid of tornadoes. You don't run away from the storm. You live with it. I can smell your nomadic blood. I can smell your freedom. Your untamed spirit. Your sweat. Your tobacco. Your stench. Your loneliness. I couldn't stand it before. *(Silence.)* But now I'm sure we know each other. Today's the anniversary of my A-levels. Sometimes a classmate changes so much that I barely recognise them. Especially if they've missed a few anniversaries… I don't just mean they get older; I mean, literally: they change. You know how it goes. At first you meet every month, then every year, then less and less often… But there are always hugs, laughter and kisses… As if nothing had happened. As if we were all still the same. But everything has changed. And when you've finished eating dessert, you have to keep going back to those times we shared, otherwise you can't talk about anything at all. The only thing you cling to, like a drowning man, is memory. Of those times when we were together. As a class. As a group. From here on, it's a black hole. The conversation fizzles out and there's silence. Until you find yourself back at the school-leavers' ball. And the night that followed. And if you remind me of that night today, please don't hold it against me. I'll keep it to myself. Say hello to your wife and children. I'm sorry.

A clap of thunder. The Gardener stands up, stubs out his cigarette and starts putting his tools away.

INGEBORG: Just put your tools away. You won't be needing them anymore. I can call you by your first name, can't I? It doesn't matter now. When the spin dryer

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falls apart, we'll all be on first-name terms anyway. But can't you see how dark it's getting? You'd better get back to your gardener's shed as soon as possible, if you've got one. And whilst there's still time. Why are you staring at me? You're staring right through me, as if I were a ghost. As if I didn't exist. I understand that look. I know what you're trying to say. Stop whingeing, roll up your sleeves and stop rambling. That's what you're saying. We're cut from the same cloth. But you're provoking me for nothing. I know I've got no desire to work. Not a bit of it right now. But I'm not a ghost. Do you know why? Because I'm afraid. As long as a person is afraid, they're alive. And I'm very afraid. Not for myself. For the child. What's its fault, being born into a hurricane? What awaits it? If, by any chance, you find a carcass in the rubbish… It's a bird, by the way. It's not right that they're killed. It's not right that they suffer. That they're shot down from the sky before they've even spread their wings. Where's the justice in that? What have they done wrong that they can no longer fly freely about? That's why I'm afraid. Unlike that young lady. No hard feelings, Ališa. *(To Ališa)* But we still have so much in common. You know what I suggest? You skip the anniversary, I skip the wedding, and we go for a drink together. As far as I'm concerned, the whole thing was a daft idea anyway. Buying a present and watching the father of my child get married. You don't go for a walk in this weather. It's my latent masochism again. Nothing else.

A thunder. Then violent, strong and prolonged gusts of wind, which last right through to the end of the next scene.

The fans are now on stage. The Gardener picks up his tools and leaves in a hurry. Noise. Shouting.

INGEBORG: Watch out! Watch out!!

HERBERT: Everything's crashing down!

INGEBORG: The spin dryer's blown up!

LEON: Open your umbrellas!

KARMEN: In this storm?!

KOLOMAN: Hold on to something!

INGEBORG: It won't stop… it's getting worse…

ALIŠA: Where's the Gardener?

LEON: He ran off, just in the nick of time!

KOLOMAN: He won't get far!

KARMEN: Wait for us…

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HERBERT: He’s already too far away!

KARMEN: What are you saying?

HERBERT: He can’t hear you…

KARMEN: I’m here! I’m here!

HERBERT: You’re waving in vain; he can’t see you either!

INGEBORG: He comes without a word, he goes without a word…

KARMEN: Someone give me a hand…

INGEBORG: I can’t reach you; the wind’s too strong…

KOLOMAN: Hold on to your chairs!

KARMEN: He’s been blown away…

ALIŠA: No more pegs, no more clasps, no more clips…

HERBERT: Koloman, where should we take shelter?

KOLOMAN: Everyone fend for themselves!

INGEBORG: Let’s stay together! In solidarity…

KOLOMAN: Not together…

INGEBORG: We won’t survive on our own!

KOLOMAN: If we’re all on the same plank, we’ll all drown!

INGEBORG: What’s all that flying down here…?

HERBERT: Rubbish…

KARMEN: Rain…

LEON: Invitations… photos… brooches…

ALIŠA: Knives, razors, axes…

HERBERT: The gift shop’s been blown sky-high…

KOLOMAN: No way! Fuck off everything!

ALIŠA: The investment’s gone down the drain…

KARMEN: Look! The piano’s flying through the air…

ALIŠA: Without a pianist…

LEON: When will this stop?

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INGEBORG: It won't…

ALIŠA: The water's rising…

HERBERT: Something has to be done! It'll suck us down the drain!

INGEBORG: Nothing to be done now, just try to survive!

HERBERT: There's always something to do to stop it getting worse…

LEON: Where's this mud coming from?

KOLOMAN: What mud?

LEON: You're standing ankle-deep in it, can't you see!

KOLOMAN: Who gives a shit, it's our mud!

LEON: It's not mine!

KOLOMAN: Mud from our district!

HERBERT: What an explosion!

ALIŠA: Something's been blown up…

KOLOMAN: The terminal!

HERBERT: What terminal?

KOLOMAN: The pipes, for fuck's sake!

INGEBORG: Can't you smell it? Gas is leaking!

LEON: First the tip, now the gas pipeline…

HERBERT: That's the sewer…

ALIŠA: I can see everything in colours…

HERBERT: Gas has no colour!

ALIŠA: I can see red… white… blue…

HERBERT: What gas? Why gas now?

KOLOMAN: To make you ramble! Ever since you arrived, everything's gone wrong!

ALIŠA: I'm high on this smell…

LEON: The hemp's on fire! Everything's on fire!

KOLOMAN: No one's getting me high!

LEON: Fire!

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KOLOMAN: We've got to put it out…

LEON: How, in this gale-force wind?

The noise is getting louder.

INGEBORG: Contamination…

KARL: Mud…

ALIŠA: Drones…

KARL: Another explosion…

HERBERT: I can see something…

KARMEN: Tell me what's happening, I've gone blind…

HERBERT: The waiter, he's making his way over here… knee-deep in mud… all wet and dirty, carrying a silver tray… and on the tray, tomato carpaccio …

KARMEN: And with it, Tannhäuser, the overture… can you hear it…

INGEBORG: Where are you? I can't see you…

KARMEN: I'm here and I'm shouting!

INGEBORG: Shout at the top of your voice, that helps!

ALIŠA: My memories are screaming as they're swept away by tornadoes…

KARMEN: Let's hold on to each other, let's embrace… Koloman!

KOLOMAN: I don't want to embrace you!

KARMEN: Why not?

KOLOMAN: Because you're like a virus! You infect everything!

KARMEN: With what?

KOLOMAN: Even I can see now more than it's true…

LEON: Speak up, whilst you can still say anything!

KOLOMAN: My exhausted wife in the courtyard…

INGEBORG: If she's yours, she must be exhausted…

KOLOMAN: … with an armful of dirty laundry… she's shouting after me and laughing at me…

LEON: I can hear her cackling at you…

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KOLOMAN: … enjoy your picnic, darling, have a drink and a laugh, pick up a girl if you must, and come home before you get soaked…

KARMEN: How she loves you, instead of giving you a kick up the backside…

LEON: What an explosion!

HERBERT: That was a hypersonic missile!

KARMEN: How do you know?

HERBERT: Because I didn't see it!

INGEBORG: Your shopping centre's been blown to smithereens!

HERBERT: What? I can't hear you!

ALIŠA: My hair's falling out!

LEON: Mine too!

ALIŠA: You didn't have much to begin with!

HERBERT: That's not rain! It's something acidic; didn't I tell you?

INGEBORG: Everything's melting… everything's falling apart!

HERBERT: Just mud… we're going to sink!

INGEBORG: I can see it flying … a bird in the middle of the storm… with its wings wide open …

KOLOMAN: You're rambling!

INGEBORG: So what? Is it only you who can do that?

KOLOMAN: If something's dead, it can't fly!

INGEBORG: It's your pragmatism that will kill me, not the cataclysm!

KOLOMAN: Mud's oozing out of your ears!

INGEBORG: And out of your mouth!

HERBERT: I'm up to my neck in it… I can't move …

KARMEN: The orchestra is fleeing; instruments are raining down…

ALIŠA: I can't see a thing…

KARMEN: Where are you?

LEON: Where are we?

Darkness.

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Light. Silence. A blue sky. Everyone is sitting in their chairs. A long silence.

HERBERT: The carpaccio was delicious.

KARMEN: I'm glad to hear it.

HERBERT: I definitely can't say the same for the prawns with mango, though. They were somehow… how shall I put it… bland.

INGEBORG: Too much money for too little flavour?

HERBERT: It's not just about the money. Avocado butter with a dressing, for example, is something I'll always recommend. Although there are countries where avocados are cheaper than potatoes.

LEON: If there's too much of something, it's worthless.

HERBERT: I did meet a woman at the opening, though. I think she found me attractive. But I don't know if I capitalised on that feeling.

INGEBORG: You don't know?

HERBERT: We didn't sit next to each other for long enough. I remember her perfume though. How was the wedding?

INGEBORG: Joyful. A lively crowd. The groom got drunk. Too soon. Considering what still lies ahead for him in life. (*To Karmen*) Did you enjoy the opera, madam?

KARMEN: Very much so. I liked the storm best of all. I love it when I can physically feel what's happening on stage. I really felt it. Just like the music. A well-deserved and long round of applause.

ALIŠA: What was the celebration like, state councillor, sir?

LEON: Very festive. A bit of criticism of the country, but ending on a… how shall I put it… optimistic note.

ALIŠA: I'm glad to hear it.

LEON: And you? How was the anniversary? Did you stay till the end?

ALIŠA: Almost till the end. When I was left on my own, I left. It started to rain.

LEON: Did you have an umbrella?

ALIŠA: No. I took a taxi.

LEON: When's the next one?

ALIŠA: The anniversary?

LEON: Yes.

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ALIŠA: I don’t know. In a few years’ time.

LEON: Will you be going?

ALIŠA: Probably.

KOLOMAN: You could come for a picnic in the meantime.

ALIŠA: Will there be an accordion again?

KOLOMAN: A button accordion player.

A long pause.

INGEBORG: It’s so peaceful.

KARMEN: Not a cloud in sight.

LEON: The horizon’s crystal clear.

ALIŠA: It smells lovely.

KOLOMAN: Shall we go?

HERBERT: We could sit here a bit longer.

KARMEN: We could.

LEON: We should make the most of it.

KOLOMAN: Are you thinking about the weather?

LEON: That’s exactly what I mean.

KARMEN: What’ll the weather be like today?

KOLOMAN: Mostly clear. With a few cumulus clouds. According to all the forecasts.

HERBERT: Will there be any cones?

KOLOMAN: It’s not out of the question. But I can’t promise anything.

ALIŠA: Lovely weather.

LEON: Perfect for a trip into the countryside.

INGEBORG: Dead calm.

THE END

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