

Valentin Krasnogorov

THE FALL OF DON JUAN

A play in two acts

Translated from Russian by Yana Skrynnik, Dimitri Vorontzov

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OTHER PLAYS OF THE AUTHOR

Contacts:

Valentin Krasnogorov:

Tel. (7)-812-699-3701; (7)-951-689-3-689
(cell.)
(972) 53-527-4146, (972) 53-527-4142
e-mail: valentin.krasnogorov@gmail.com
<http://krasnogorov.com/english/>

Contacts with the translators:

Tel. (1)-917-402-1319
e-mail: YanaSkrynnik@gmail.com
DimitriVorontzov@gmail.com

Synopsis

This play combines elements of drama and comedy.

Bride and groom, who are also successful business partners, are forced by circumstances to offer a total stranger (an aging, oddly behaving man) the role of a witness in their wedding ceremony. To kill time, the young couple asks their witness to tell them about women he loved. The result turns out to be quite unexpected. This accidental meeting dramatically changes the fates of all three characters.

The play is performed in several countries with great success.

3 characters: 2 males, 1 female.

Characters:

MICHAEL, 30 years old

NATALIE, 34 years old

WAITER (WITNESS), about 60 years old

The ages of the characters are approximate and may be changed depending on the cast and specifics of the production.

Act I

A few tables out on the street near a small dilapidated cafe in suburbs. In the background, a forest, a lake, a few houses. It's quiet and empty.

Michael and Natalie enter. They're about thirty, both elegant, handsome and impeccably dressed. Michael looks a bit younger than Natalie. He projects the air of certain arrogance of a successful, self-confident, bossy man.

NATALIE. *(Looking at her watch.)* We're almost two hours early.

MICHAEL. Told you we should've left later.

NATALIE. I hate being late.

MICHAEL. So, now what?

NATALIE. Let's just walk a little. The air smells so nice.

MICHAEL. I don't feel like walking around.

NATALIE. Do you want to sit here then?

MICHAEL. Where? In this crappy cafe?

NATALIE. We told Bob to meet us at the door. That one right across the street, do you see it?

MICHAEL. Whatever, I'd prefer something a little more VIP.

NATALIE. I don't want to leave. At least this place is nice and quiet.

MICHAEL. Fine then. Let's stay here.

They sit. Pause. Michael's phone rings. He answers it.

Talk to me... Tell the printing shop to send invoices, but double-check them. No, I'll write the checks. *(Pockets his cellphone.)*

NATALIE. Can you turn it off, Mike?

MICHAEL. Why? We've got nothing else to do.

NATALIE. We can just talk. I mean, that's why I wanted to come early anyway. We haven't talked since forever. We're always too busy.

MICHAEL. Just a sec. *(Takes out his phone, dials a number. Speaks into the phone.)* Well, are you done yet? *(Listens.)* Hurry up. *(Hangs up.)*

NATALIE. Oh, c'mon, turn it off already.

MICHAEL. I can't. What if Bob calls me? *(Pause.)* What sort of idea was it to pick this ugly town?

NATALIE. This lovely town, you mean. Look around, it's so nice and peaceful...

MICHAEL. Splendid. But a day like this calls for a different kind of environment.

NATALIE. I like it here.

MICHAEL. I know.

Pause.

NATALIE. Maybe we should order coffee.

MICHAEL. Sure. *(Calls a waiter.)* Hey! Anybody around?

Pause. No response. Michael drums on the table.

Waiter!

A waiter appears. He's an aging, disheveled, unshaven man wearing an untidy coat and muddy boots.

WAITER. Can I help you?

Michael looks him up and down with disgust.

MICHAEL. Yes, you can. Bring us coffee.

The Waiter stares at NATALIE.

What are you looking at? I told you - two coffees. Quick.

The Waiter walks away.

The hell was he looking at you for.

NATALIE. No idea. I guess he liked me.

MICHAEL. You've been here before?

NATALIE. No.

Phone rings

MICHAEL. *(Picks up.)* Hello. No. It's not ready for print yet. Show it to the designer first... Listen, you know where Bob is? OK. *(Hangs up.)*

NATALIE. You were right, it was a bad idea to come here. I thought we could be alone together in a nice and quiet place, just the two of us.

MICHAEL. It is just the two of us.

NATALIE. Three of us, with your phone.

MICHAEL. Natalie, please. It's only a couple of short phone calls.

Pause.

So, where's that waiter?

NATALIE. Don't ask me. (*Pause.*) This is no fun.

MICHAEL. You chose this town. I told you it would be a lot more fun in the city.

NATALIE. That's not what I mean.

MICHAEL. Don't be sad. (*Hugs her.*) Hey! Say that you love me.

NATALIE. (*Kisses him.*) You are too handsome. So handsome that it attracts and scares me.

MICHAEL. Scares you?

NATALIE. Scares me, because I notice how girls look at you sometimes. They'll steal you from me.

MICHAEL. From someone as beautiful as you?

Enter Waiter. A tiny tray in his hands. On the tray, sugar, cookies, cream and one cup of steaming coffee. The Waiter places it in front of Natalie.

WAITER. Here you go.

NATALIE. Thank you. (*Sips coffee.*) Mmm, it's good.

WAITER. Made just for you.

NATALIE. (*Strange look.*) Ummm, okay, well thanks.

MICHAEL. Where's mine?

WAITER. Oh, did you want some coffee too?

MICHAEL. Yeah?

WAITER. Oh, my mistake, sir. What would you like? Turkish, Irish, Colombian or instant?

MICHAEL. Just coffee.

WAITER. Black or light?

MICHAEL. Black.

WAITER. Sugar?

MICHAEL. Sugar.

WAITER. Double or regular?

MICHAEL. I said regular. Whatever, just bring some damn coffee.

WAITER. I see. I'm afraid I can't do that. The cafe is closed.

MICHAEL. What? What do you mean closed? You just brought her coffee!

WAITER. That was for the lady.

MICHAEL. Huh? And what about me?

WAITER. I'm afraid there's nothing for you, sir.

MICHAEL. What the hell are you talking about?

WAITER. The cafe is closed, sir.

MICHAEL. Then why the hell did you ask all those damn questions about what kind of coffee I wanted?

WAITER. I was just being polite. I wanted to know what kind of coffee you drink.

MICHAEL. So, the cafe is open for her, but not me. Is that it?

WAITER. That's right.

MICHAEL. What are you, a waiter or a freaking clown?

WAITER. I'm a freaking clown. (*Steps aside, starts dusting other tables.*)

NATALIE. *(To Michael.)* Don't.

MICHAEL. What do you mean don't. That guy is a mental case.

NATALIE. Just don't, it's not worth it. Here, drink mine.

MICHAEL. No thanks. *(To the Waiter.)* Hey you, here's ten bucks for being a complete weirdo. Keep the change.

WAITER. That's okay sir, I got it. *(Returns money.)* In case I didn't mention it before, the cafe is closed.

MICHAEL. *(To Natalie.)* That freak is asking for it.

NATALIE. *(To the Waiter.)* Excuse me sir? I know you said the cafe is closed, but can you make an exception and please bring us another cup of coffee?

WAITER. For you, miss?

NATALIE. Yes, for me please.

The Waiter leaves.

MICHAEL. Must be the full moon tonight... What kind of freaking cafe is this anyway? It looks like it really is closed.

NATALIE. Why are we talking about the cafe and the waiter? Can we forget that and just talk about you and me?

Phone rings. Natalie reacts.

MICHAEL. *(To Natalie.)* It's Bob. *(Into the phone.)* Hello? Yes. *(Listens for some time.)* Holy... Are you ok?.. Oh, I see... That sucks, man... Well, take care of yourself then. *(Hangs up.)* Bob's not coming.

NATALIE. What happened?

MICHAEL. He had an accident.

NATALIE. *(Worried)* Is it serious?

MICHAEL. No, he's fine. He rear-ended someone and now has to fill out a bunch of paperwork at the police station. Anyway, he said hi.

NATALIE. So, he's not coming.

MICHAEL. No.

NATALIE. What are we gonna do?

MICHAEL. I've no clue. May be we should go back.

NATALIE. And cancel everything?

MICHAEL. Not cancel, just postpone. I knew it was a bad idea to come here. We should've done it in the city, the proper way... in a restaurant with guests, music and champagne... But you wanted peace and quiet.

Pause.

Say something.

NATALIE. Something.

MICHAEL. Great.

Enter the Waiter. A cup of coffee in his hand, but no tray. He places the cup in front of Michael.

Is the cafe really closed?

WAITER. Yes.

MICHAEL. Then what are you still doing here?

WAITER. Oh, nothing, just twiddling my thumbs, that's all.

MICHAEL. Good for you, now go away.

The Waiter walks away.

NATALIE. So what do we do now?

MICHAEL. We drink coffee.

NATALIE. Don't be mad.

MICHAEL. I'm not mad. *(Pause.)* All right, why don't we just ask one of the locals here to stand in for Bob?

NATALIE. Just anyone?

MICHAEL. You have a friend who lives here, don't you?

NATALIE. No, she lives in the city now. I don't know anyone else here.

MICHAEL. Any other suggestions?

Pause. Michael taps on the cup to call the Waiter, who appears instantly.

Why is it so quiet here? Where's everyone? Did they run away?

WAITER. It's always quiet here during the off-season. Plus, it's the middle of the week, so some people work and others are in the city.

NATALIE. We need a little help, and it would only take half an hour. Could you tell us where we can find someone?

WAITER. Try asking in any of the nearby bars.

MICHAEL. Thanks.

WAITER. No problem.

The Waiter just stands there.

MICHAEL. You can go.

WAITER. Go where?

MICHAEL. I'd tell you where, but not in front of the lady.

WAITER. Can you write it down on a piece of paper please? I'll go make some coffee for myself.

Exit Waiter.

MICHAEL. He's getting on my nerves.

NATALIE. I know. We both seem to be nervous today.

MICHAEL. Weird.

NATALIE. Yeah.

Pause.

MICHAEL. (*Joking.*) May be we should hire that waiter guy.

NATALIE. That's not very funny, but he may be our only choice.

MICHAEL. True, and after all, we really need him just to sign a piece of paper.

NATALIE. I kind of imagined it differently.

MICHAEL. I know, but we can't just walk around and knock on random doors. We'll have to get someone or postpone the wedding.

Pause.

NATALIE. Ok. Let's talk to him.

Pause. Enter the Waiter with a cup of coffee and sits down at another table, not too close to Natalie and Michael.

MICHAEL. Hey you, what's your face, come over here.

The Waiter approaches Michael and Natalie.

WAITER. What would you like, sir?

MICHAEL. Sit down. Want a drink?

WAITER. Coffee, you mean? No, thanks. But if you're offering something stronger, then why not? I could use a little alcohol to cheer me up.

MICHAEL. I've got brandy in the car. I'll go get it.

WAITER. Good call.

Exit Michael. Pause.

What does he want from me?

NATALIE. What makes you think he wants anything from you?

WAITER. Why else would he invite me to his table and offer me brandy?

NATALIE. You're right, we'd like to ask you for a favor.

WAITER. A favor?

NATALIE. We'll explain.

Enter Michael with a bottle.

MICHAEL. No brandy. Just whisky.

WAITER. Even better. I'll go get the glasses.

MICHAEL. Good call.

(Exit the Waiter.)

Did you tell him?

NATALIE. No.

MICHAEL. Ok. I'll talk to him.

Enter Waiter with three glasses.

WAITER. Found some glassware.

MICHAEL. Impressive. *(Pours whisky.)* Well, down the hatch!

WAITER. What's the cause?

MICHAEL. Don't worry about it.

WAITER. *(Lifts his glass.)* Whatever you say, sir... Well, down the hatch.

They drink.

MICHAEL. So, here's the deal... We need a witness.

WAITER. A witness to what?

MICHAEL. You see, we're getting married, legally.

WAITER. So, before now your marriage has been illegal?

MICHAEL. *(All patience.)* Before now it hasn't been registered.

WAITER. *(Ignores Michael, to Natalie.)* You're getting married to this kid? Well, congratulations. I presume, it's for love.

NATALIE. Why else would people get married?

WAITER. It depends. For love, sex, money, entertainment or for some other silly reason and last but not least, just for getting married. Some people even get married out of fatigue.

NATALIE. Out of fatigue?

WAITER. Well, let's say, a man and a woman are intimate. A year goes by, then another one... The affair just drags on and on. The uncertainty, the instability begin to tire them out. So she decides it's time either to break up or get married.

MICHAEL. Look mister, or sir, or whatever the hell you want me to call you.

WAITER. Just call me simply "My lord".

MICHAEL. Sorry, can't bring myself to call you that. Now, next to someone as decrepit as you I may come off as a young boy, but just so you know, I'm a grown man. Quite fit to beat the crap out of anyone who doesn't mind his own business.

WAITER. *(Doesn't acknowledge him immediately.)* What if I used to be a boxer? And not just any boxer but a heavyweight?

The men face each other, ready to attack. Suddenly the Waiter turns around and leaves.

NATALIE. Where did he go?

MICHAEL. He suddenly remembered he had urgent business.

Michael's phone rings.

NATALIE. Turn it off, for God's sake!

Michael turns off the phone. Pause.

If you want him to be our witness, be polite.

MICHAEL. That guy drives me mad.

NATALIE. Just be patient.

MICHAEL. These suburban winos talk too much. Their drivel gets to you at some point.

NATALIE. Just ignore him.

Enter Waiter carrying a bouquet of violets. He casually moves Michael aside and hands the bouquet to Natalie.

WAITER. This is for you.

NATALIE. Violets? Thank you.

MICHAEL. Why would you bring her flowers, dude?

WAITER. A bride should have a bouquet. We're low on fleur d'orange in this town, so I had to go with the violets.

MICHAEL. Ok then. Sit down. Let's get back to where we left off. So, this lady and I are getting married, legally. In like an hour, in the local town hall. Are you paying attention?

WAITER. I am paying attention, except, what does it have to do with me?

NATALIE. We need a witness for the ceremony. The witness we've invited couldn't come. He had an accident. We need you to stand in for him.

MICHAEL. We'll pay you of course.

The Waiter is suddenly sad. Pause.

Well, what do you say?

WAITER. Let's have another one.

MICHAEL. Kind of lame without a chaser.

WAITER. I'll bring some.

MICHAEL. You've got some?

WAITER. I've got everything.

Exit Waiter.

NATALIE. I don't get it. Was it a yes or a no?

MICHAEL. Of course, a yes. He'd say yes to anything for a bottle.

NATALIE. What if he says no?

MICHAEL. We'll just give him more.

NATALIE. Interesting character.

MICHAEL. He stinks of fish.

NATALIE. At least it's not booze.

MICHAEL. Thank God for that... even though it's about to change.

NATALIE. Still. He's kind of funny.

MICHAEL. Than maybe he should entertain us for the next hour. That'll help us kill time before the ceremony.

Enter Waiter carrying plates with some food.

WAITER. Not a wedding banquet, but at least we won't be hungry.

NATALIE. Wow! Just like Versailles.

MICHAEL. Now let's drink. *(Pours whisky.)*

WAITER. To the newlyweds!

They drink.

You may now kiss the bride.

NATALIE. You didn't give us an answer. Will you be our witness?

WAITER. First I should know whom I'm uniting in holy matrimony.

MICHAEL. First, you don't need to know anything, pal. Second, you're not the minister. All you have to do is stand there and be quiet. Then you sign the paper, get your money and that's it. Got it?

WAITER. Then find somebody else.

MICHAEL. If you want more money, just say so. I won't bargain.

WAITER. Well, I will.

MICHAEL. What the hell do you want to know? My fiancee wanted a modest ceremony, and our close friend as a witness. The close friend didn't show up. That's it.

WAITER. *(to Natalie.)* You'd like me to be your close friend for this hour?

MICHAEL. Don't get it into your head you are irreplaceable, pal. If you really have to know, this whole thing can be done without any witness. A little something to the clerk - and no problem. But my fiancee wanted a witness, and I'm used to fulfilling her fantasies. That's just the kind of guy I am.

NATALIE. I'm not asking to fulfill my fantasies, but it'd be nice to have someone give me what I really need.

MICHAEL. Which is the same thing.

WAITER. The difference is that our fantasies are what we really need, and other people's needs are just fantasies.

MICHAEL. Oh, shut up.

WAITER. I'm leaving.

NATALIE. Please stay. I'm asking you to take the role of my friend.

WAITER. I accept.

MICHAEL. Well, thank god. Let's have a drink. (*Pours and is about to drink.*)

NATALIE. Mike, don't get carried away. We have a ceremony.

MICHAEL. You're right. (*Puts his glass down. To the Waiter.*) But you drink. Stick around for a while. Let's sit and chat, we are bored. My fiancée finds you kind of funny. Don't you, darling?

NATALIE. I think you've had enough alcohol for today, darling.

WAITER. I don't get it. You'll be married in an hour, and you're bored?

MICHAEL. Not like "bored" bored... But check this out: we've been living together for two years. We're not talking about crazy, swipe her off her feet, make her swoon, happily ever after kind of wedding, the first night of marital bliss and a thrilling reversal of fortune here. It's just a formality, getting a certificate, confirming the current status, OK?

WAITER. Still it's a wedding... Do you get bored easily?

MICHAEL. Like any other guy.

WAITER. This means you can be a bore to others. That's dangerous. When women get bored, they fall out of love.

(*To Natalie.*) Do you love him?

NATALIE. (*After a pause.*) Yes. I'm getting married to him.

MICHAEL. (*To the Waiter.*) Look, do me a favor, quit telling me how to live my life. If you think your gray hair gives you any right to preach to total strangers, then you're wrong. We don't appreciate advice from an old fart living off social security pension.

WAITER. So, you're bored, and you want me to entertain you...

MICHAEL. Precisely.

WAITER. And you're willing to pay for that.

MICHAEL. That's right.

WAITER. Well, I'm ready. Where do we start?

NATALIE. Tell us something about yourself.

WAITER. What for? Here I am, in front of you. You can see me and hear me. What else do you want?

MICHAEL. The looks, the words... those are nothin'. I want the core, not the outside. What's your name?

WAITER. The question trifling seems from one,

Who it appears the Word doth rate so low;

Who, undeluded by mere outward show,

To Being's depth would penetrate alone.

MICHAEL. What the hell was that?

WAITER. Faust. I remember it from school.

MICHAEL. Your memory is good, for your age.

WAITER. No complaints so far.

NATALIE. And yet.... Perhaps, you could tell us your name?

WAITER. What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet.

MICHAEL. (*To Natalie, ironically*) There you go, someone for you to talk with. You're into that sort of stuff.

NATALIE. (*To the Waiter*) Are you really a waiter?

WAITER. Not really.

NATALIE. What are you then?

WAITER. I'm a freaking clown, just like your future husband said, and I'm here to please you, as we agreed.

MICHAEL. If I offended you, I apologize.

WAITER. I'm not offended. Any job is a good job.

NATALIE. What about this cafe?

WAITER. Like I told you, it's closed. It's been closed for the last couple of years.

NATALIE. Where did you get coffee and food then?

WAITER. Magic.

NATALIE. What should we call you?

WAITER. Why not just call me "a witness"? I'll be gone in less than an hour anyway, so why bother to know my name?

From this moment on we, too, will call him "the Witness".

NATALIE. How do you know so many poems?

WITNESS. Not many, you heard only two. I learned them by heart when I was a kid, so I could seduce girls.

MICHAEL. Any luck with that?

WITNESS. Oh yes. They just swooned.

MICHAEL. Maybe you could tell us about some of your past adventures... if it's humanly possible for someone to remember that far back. Now that's what I'd call entertainment. Go ahead, I'll keep the booze coming.

WITNESS. Great, let's get smashed. Wait, I'll be right back.

Exit the Witness.

NATALIE. Don't mock him.

MICHAEL. He'll survive. And besides, I'm not sure he gets it anyway.

NATALIE. He's not as stupid as you think.

MICHAEL. I don't think he's stupid. I think he's weird. There's a difference. Watch this, he's going to tell his entire life story in the next hour.

NATALIE. But listen....

MICHAEL. (*Cutting her off.*) Oh come on. Let me have some fun, will ya?

Enter the Witness carrying some napkins.

MICHAEL. How about some whiskey?

WITNESS. Sure.

They drink.

MICHAEL. So, you were just about to tell us what a great thief of hearts you used to be.

WITNESS. (*Chewing.*) Used to be? You better watch out or I'll steal your fiancée's heart.

Michael laughs out loud. The Witness pours himself another drink.

NATALIE. You're going to have a hell of a hangover.

WITNESS. All good things come with a trade-off.

MICHAEL. To hell with the hangover!

NATALIE. *(To Michael in low voice.)* Don't provoke him.

MICHAEL. Don't worry. Just let me have a good time. *(To the Witness.)* So, the girls just swooned, huh?

WITNESS. You bet they did!

MICHAEL. How many did you have?

WITNESS. Enough.

MICHAEL. Hard to remember them all, huh?

WITNESS. Not really.

MICHAEL. Well, go ahead and tell us then. Let's go through your little black book.

WITNESS. The whole book? There's not enough time.

MICHAEL. Bummer. Well, tell us about the best ones then, but in detail.

Pause.

Well, what's keeping you?

WITNESS. Umm... where to begin?

MICHAEL. Start from the beginning. Who set you off on your glorious path of becoming Don Juan? Who was the first one?

WITNESS. Hmmmm..... The first one...

NATALIE. Must've been awhile ago. You probably can't remember.

WITNESS. Sure I can.

NATALIE. How did you meet her?

WITNESS. She lived next door. I was nineteen, and clueless. Just a nerd who knew everything about Miles Davis and J.D. Salinger but nothing about girls.

NATALIE. Then I guess I was a nerd too.

WITNESS. She was sixteen, and God, she was hot. All the guys were crazy about her and tried to ask her out. Cars stopped when she walked along the street.

MICHAEL. So what did you do?

WITNESS. I... I didn't do anything. I was a nerd, remember? But the best part of being a nerd was that I was actually able to help her with her homework. So one day after doing some math we chatted in her room, and then all of a sudden she just got up, walked out and then called out for me from somewhere else in the house. Well, I followed her voice down the hall and into her parents' bedroom, and there I saw her in bed, stark naked. I freaked out and asked her what she was doing.

NATALIE. And what did she say?

WITNESS. She said that she loved me.

NATALIE. And you?

From this moment on Natalie will listen to the Witness with increasingly focused attention.

WITNESS. She was young and pretty, and her hair smelled like apples, and her eyes shined with love and anticipation. And I, I was a skinny and awkward kid, and I didn't even dare to look at her.

MICHAEL. So, what happened?

WITNESS. It was a bit of a mess, really. I don't think either of us felt much, except may be pain and embarrassment. And yet it was the most intimate and romantic moment I ever shared with a woman.

Pause.

MICHAEL. Was she a virgin?

WITNESS. I wish I could go back in time...

MICHAEL. Right, but was she a virgin?

WITNESS. Huh? Oh, yes... You want the details. Yes, she was a virgin.

MICHAEL. Why did she choose you?

WITNESS. Because she loved me.

NATALIE. Why?

WITNESS. No idea.

NATALIE. Were you courting her?

WITNESS. No.

NATALIE. Then why did she fall in love with you?

WITNESS. May be because I loved her too.

NATALIE. Did you tell her that?

WITNESS. No. But somehow she knew that anyway.

The Witness takes another sip. Pause.

MICHAEL. That's quite a story, Don Juan. You don't mind if I call you that, do you?

WITNESS. Call me whatever you like.

MICHAEL. Now tell us about the next one.

WITNESS. Is this really so fascinating?

MICHAEL. Of course! Tell us about your most memorable night with a woman.

WITNESS. They were all memorable.

MICHAEL. Pick one.

NATALIE. Should I take a walk?

MICHAEL. No, stick around. This is going to be interesting.

NATALIE. I'm not interested.

WITNESS. Please don't leave. I promise my stories won't offend you, even though they'll probably make him laugh.

MICHAEL. So, the most memorable of all your memorable nights. How old were you?

WITNESS. I was twenty two and she was nineteen. We escaped from a boring party our friends were having on a ranch, and found a small cottage to hide in. We picked some wildflowers along the way, and when we got there I threw them on the bed. She laughed and said she always wanted to do it in a haystack.

MICHAEL. So, what was it like?

WITNESS. Words can't give it justice. So much closeness, tenderness. It happened in early June, lilacs were blooming and we made love all night long. I was happier than I could ever imagine.

NATALIE. You are a romantic... unless you're telling us someone else's story you read in some book.

WITNESS. Maybe I did. What's the difference as long as you're not bored?

MICHAEL. A flower bed, that's cute. Oh by the way, was she a virgin, too?

WITNESS. No.

NATALIE. I can't figure out if you're a poet or a sex maniac.

WITNESS. A maniacal poet. Or a poetic maniac.

MICHAEL. Sex crazed poetic maniac.

WITNESS. The best kind of craze I can think of. You're the one who insisted I go through my little black book.

MICHAEL. I had no idea old folks can come up with such torrid sexual fantasies.

WITNESS. You have no idea about a lot of stuff, kid. For example, how to behave yourself. I'm not sure if your IQ is too low or your ego is too big, or maybe you're just too much of an adolescent...

MICHAEL. Shut the fuck up...

WITNESS. No, you shut up, kid. Why did you have to come all the way down her to get married instead of just doing it in the city? Did you elope? Don't your parents know? Aren't you over eighteen yet? Maybe I should inform the authorities.

MICHAEL. Are you making fun of me?

WITNESS. Nah, I'm just teasing ya. You keep reminding me in front of the lady of how old I am, so I'm paying you back by reminding you of how young you are.

NATALIE. Are you saying I look older than him?

WITNESS. Not at all, it's just that he looks younger than you.

MICHAEL. Let's go find someone else.

NATALIE. Stop it, both of you!

WITNESS. Stop what? I'm trying to be tactful. I could call him a snotty little punk, but I didn't!

NATALIE. Enough already!

WITNESS. But he keeps calling me dude and pal, when he should be calling me sir.

NATALIE. Please forgive him. He really wasn't very polite to you. He's just nervous today, and so am I. Believe me, with someone else and in a different situation he can be very tactful.

WITNESS. If he's rude to waiters he can be rude to anyone. Even to you. You'll see. Pretty soon he'll be telling you to shut the fuck up.

NATALIE. No he won't.

WITNESS. Don't bet on it.

Pause.

NATALIE. Let's stop bickering and talk about something else.

MICHAEL. Let's get back to his little black book. You agree?

WITNESS. Yeah sure. Why not?

MICHAEL. Let's move on then. Next chapter. What's it called?

WITNESS. A night in a hotel.

MICHAEL. Sounds promising. I hope it has some kinky details.

NATALIE. Michael...

MICHAEL. Don't hold anything back. We're all adults.

WITNESS. I'm a seducer, not a pornographer. If you want porn, go get some magazines.

MICHAEL. Just get on with it.

WITNESS. It happened in the city I've never been before or since. I met her at the train station and we went straight to a hotel.

MICHAEL. I don't get it. That wasn't the first time you slept with her?

WITNESS. Yes. I've made that lady before. You can't imagine how much we longed for each other... *(To Natalie.)* Do I shock you?

NATALIE. No.

WITNESS. We got into the room. I was locking the door, I said to her: "I'll rip your clothes right off". She said: "Too late. I've ripped 'em right off already". True. When I turned to her she was naked. We threw ourselves at each other. Later she said: "I was a slut tonight..." I said: "A man likes a slut." She said: "I know that." And we just cracked up. *(Pause.)* It was such a long time ago...

MICHAEL. How old were you then?

WITNESS. Thirty something.

NATALIE. And she?

WITNESS. A little less. Best age for love. She was like gentle fire. I loved her that night like never before, or after.

NATALIE. Did you love all the women you slept with?

WITNESS. Every single one.

NATALIE. I don't see how it's possible.

WITNESS. And I don't see it any other way.

NATALIE. Where did you get so much love?

WITNESS. That depends on one's capacity for love. Plato believed humans were created androgynous. It was only later that gods split us into genders. Ever since the halves have not been feeling complete and longed for each other. Perfect harmony can be achieved only in finding your second half.

Michael and Natalie exchange perplexed looks. Witness picks up knife and fork and starts to eat.

MICHAEL. Who the hell are you? I can't place you. What are you?

WITNESS. What am I? A killer.

NATALIE. A killer?

WITNESS. *(With a knife in his hand.)* Yes. A professional killer. I have lots of blood on my hands.

MICHAEL. Bullshit.

WITNESS. I mean it. I send people to the Almighty on the regular basis.

NATALIE. And they didn't put you to jail?

WITNESS. They tried. Three times. But as you can see, I'm still free.

MICHAEL. Are you a psycho or just faking it?

WITNESS. I'm telling you the truth. *(Showing his hands.)* These hands are used to a blade.

Michael and Natalie exchange glances and edge away from Witness and his knife.

Still want me as a witness?

Pause.

MICHAEL. No I don't.

WITNESS. You can relax young man. As any self-respecting maniac I only kill women. You probably thinking that I take them by force first. If say I don't, you wouldn't believe me anyway.

MICHAEL. I'd believe you. At your age you couldn't take anybody by force.

WITNESS. With your inimitable tactfulness you hint again at my age and related impotence. You think you got me pinned down with that "old guy" label, but you're so young and naive, you don't realize how transparent you are to anyone who'd want to know.

NATALIE. What could you possibly know about him?

WITNESS. True. About him I don't know much. But then I know a lot about you.

NATALIE. What can you know about me?

WITNESS. All there is to know.

NATALIE. Stop trying to impress me. You should quit drinking. You've said enough already. First you're a psycho, now you're a psychic on top of it.

WITNESS. A psychic - yes. *(Takes the coffee cup and stares into it.)* Your name is Natalie.

NATALIE. You are a perfect fortune teller.

WITNESS. Your last name... It doesn't matter, you will change it in an hour anyway... Single. So far.

NATALIE. Astonishing.

WITNESS. You are a sociologist specializing in advertisement. You are in business with your boyfriend, probably a partner. Your age... - I won't say it. A woman over eighteen has no age.

MICHAEL. You just don't know it.

WITNESS. But my coffee cup tells me your birthday - May 12... You're a Taurus, and so you are stubborn.

NATALIE. Have you been stalking me? Why? How? Who are you? Who gave you the right?

WITNESS. A woman is an open book to me. One look and I know everything.

MICHAEL. Bullshit. He probably just knows one of our employees. Anyway, you can just google it.

Pause.

NATALIE. What else do you know?

WITNESS. I told you I know everything.

NATALIE. You're bluffing. Give an example.

WITNESS. I can't say it out loud. Not ethical.

NATALIE. Don't say it then. *(Pause.)* Ok. Say it.

Witness whispers something in her ear. Natalie reacts.

What does it mean? It's impossible!

WITNESS. I told you I know everything about you.

NATALIE. How?

WITNESS. Don Juan's secret.

NATALIE. You are weird. I don't like you.

WITNESS. And I, on the contrary, liked you from the moment I saw you.

NATALIE. Go away. I don't want to see you.

MICHAEL. What did he say?

NATALIE. Please leave.

MICHAEL. *(Grabbing Witness.)* You insulted my woman, I'll beat you to the pulp.

NATALIE. Don't touch him.

MICHAEL. Oh, I will touch him. Should've done it long time ago.

NATALIE. He didn't insult me. Leave him alone.

MICHAEL. Ugly old creep. You're lucky. Thank her.

Michael reluctantly releases Witness. Pause.

NATALIE. Forgive me.

WITNESS. My fault. I talk too much.

NATALIE. How do you know so much about me?

WITNESS. Let's make a deal. I promise I'll tell you, but a little later. And you promise you don't ask me now. Let me keep my mystery a little longer. Ok?

NATALIE. I don't know.

WITNESS. Come on. There's nothing to it, really. You'll probably guess it anyway. So, friends?

NATALIE. Friends. *(Reaches out to shake his hand.)*

WITNESS. *(Kissing her hand.)* Smile and I will believe you.

Natalie smiles reluctantly then brightens up. Pause.

Well, the show is over. Your ceremony starts soon.

MICHAEL. *(Checks his watch.)* Not soon enough.

WITNESS. No matter. Enough entertainment. *(Pause.)* I was out fishing. I probably look disgusting.

MICHAEL. You do.

WITNESS. I apologize for that. *(Pause.)* You're right, I'm getting old I guess. Do you want to know a clear sign of that? I begin to dislike the world where I live. Everything seems to have been better before. Isn't it a sign of creeping old age?

MICHAEL. What do you have against this world?

WITNESS. I don't know. It's more hurry, less thinking. More TV, less reading. More sex, less love. More money, less soul. Actually, less money too, but more thoughts about it.

MICHAEL. May be.

WITNESS. Ok. I'm going to take a shower and put myself together. *(Exits.)*

MICHAEL. What did he say to make you freak out?

NATALIE. It doesn't matter.

MICHAEL. Something offensive?

NATALIE. No.

MICHAEL. Then why did you jump like this?

NATALIE. I was shocked.

MICHAEL. Why?

NATALIE. Stop interrogating me.

MICHAEL. Come on, it's me!

NATALIE. It's you. That's the point.

MICHAEL. So, you have a common secret with that guy that I'm not supposed to know.

NATALIE. I guess so. He knows more intimate details about me than you do.

MICHAEL. How's that possible?

NATALIE. I don't know.

MICHAEL. What do you mean you don't know? You've met him before?

NATALIE. I doubt it. I can't remember. You know I have bad memory for faces.

MICHAEL. What do you mean you can't remember? What intimate details? Have you slept with so many that their faces are all just a blur?

NATALIE. You've been a jerk to him and now you're being a jerk to me.

MICHAEL. Shut the fuck up.

Pause.

I'm sorry.

NATALIE. He was right. (*Hurries away.*)

MICHAEL. Wait! (*Rushes after her.*)

End of Act I.

Act II

The same set as in the Act I. Michael and Natalie enter continuing a conversation.

MICHAEL. You're Ok?

NATALIE. Yeah.

MICHAEL. I don't know what's got into me today. I freak out, snap at people, provoke this weird old guy for no reason... (*Hugs her.*) You're sure you're Ok?

NATALIE. Yes. It's stupid to fight on our wedding day.

MICHAEL. You don't seem too happy today.

NATALIE. Neither do you.

MICHAEL. Perhaps we should talk about it?

NATALIE. Or, perhaps, we shouldn't. These discussions usually don't end well.

MICHAEL. Then better have the discussion before the wedding than after. What's eating you?

NATALIE. We're getting married, but you are moody, edgy, too businesslike. Honestly, I'm... sort of... taken aback.

MICHAEL. I'm nervous, because you're not happy.

NATALIE. (*Laughs without much merriment.*) So, each of us is nervous, because the other one is nervous.

MICHAEL. I think there are some other reasons for your bad mood.

NATALIE. Tell me frankly, are you happy that we are getting married?

MICHAEL. Are you?

NATALIE. Of course. At last the historic event is taking place.

MICHAEL. You were the one to procrastinate.

NATALIE. I was?

MICHAEL. Not me. I've been trying to get you for two years.

NATALIE. Actually, you got me almost right away.

MICHAEL. But not as a wife. You had some sort of inner resistance to me all this time. I think you're still resisting.

NATALIE. Do you need me as a wife?

MICHAEL. You have doubts?

Pause.

You don't like something about me. Tell me what. It bothers me.

NATALIE. Stop making things up. I like everything. You'll make the ideal husband, I wouldn't find any better: strong, handsome, successful, young... Too young, unfortunately, for me.

MICHAEL. There you go again... You are only four years older.

NATALIE. For a woman age difference like that is a catastrophe. It's like I'm twice as old as you.

MICHAEL. Don't be silly. You look younger than I do.

NATALIE. Now yes. But in five years I'll fade, and you'll be at your peak. What's then?

MICHAEL. Then we'll discuss the problem. (*Kisses her.*) Tell me, what's really bothering you?

Natalie is silent.

Does it have anything to do with sex?

NATALIE. No, sex is fine... Even though, if you want the truth, when I'm in bed with you I can't help thinking that we are having sex, not making love.

MICHAEL. Where do you see the difference?

NATALIE. You're so concerned with having me satisfied that I feel pressured to be satisfied. It's as if we both have obligations to fulfill and deadlines to meet, and the whole thing feels like some sort of business deal.

MICHAEL. What do you want then?

NATALIE. Can't we just love each other when we do it?

MICHAEL. You're still a romantic at heart? At your age?

NATALIE. Thanks for reminding. A woman at any age is a romantic at heart.

MICHAEL. Don't be mad. We're not eighteen. Do you feel I'm not being gentle enough with you?

NATALIE. It's not about how you treat me. You do take care of me, but only because that's how it's done. Not because you feel that way. Do you understand?

MICHAEL. Not really. Does this bother you a lot?

NATALIE. No. I can live with that. I'm far from perfect myself. And maybe I'm not particularly warm either.

Pause.

MICHAEL. I didn't realize we had problems.

NATALIE. You did not?

MICHAEL. Maybe I did, but I never paid attention.

NATALIE. I told you we shouldn't have discussed that.

MICHAEL. Why not? That was important. Something to think about.

NATALIE. At least we won't have anything unsaid.

MICHAEL. But still, we stick with the plan, right? We get married? You didn't change your mind?

NATALIE. No.

MICHAEL. Ok.

Enter Witness. He's well dressed and shaven. He carries a tray with coffee cups. Michael and Natalie don't notice him right away.

WITNESS. Why don't we have more coffee?

NATALIE. (*Surprised.*) My god! Is that you?

WITNESS. It's me, no doubt. Or may be not. Hard to tell.

MICHAEL. You look great.

WITNESS. Trying to fit the image of a first class waiter.

MICHAEL. You look more like a bridegroom.

WITNESS. You are a handsome couple, and I'm your best man. Must look accordingly.

NATALIE. I think I know your face. Didn't we meet before?

WITNESS. How could you forget? Of course we've met. Half an hour ago I was right here with you at this table. Only I had stubble.

NATALIE. No, I mean before that.

WITNESS. Then I would have remembered you. You are gorgeous, and I do not forget gorgeous women.

NATALIE. Don Juan attacks again?

WITNESS. Just to keep in shape.

MICHAEL. Let him. Gotta kill time anyway.

NATALIE. Kill time?

MICHAEL. Sorry, that didn't sound right.

NATALIE. Well, let's kill time.

WITNESS. Don't kill time. It's like killing yourselves. We must enjoy every moment of life. I'm telling you this as a killer.

MICHAEL. What do you enjoy the most, apart from being a killer? Women, of course?

WITNESS. Women too.

NATALIE. How many did you have?

WITNESS. Countless.

NATALIE. Really? This must be tiresome - flying from one to another.

WITNESS. You're right. It can be exhausting sometimes. (*Drinks.*)

NATALIE. Then why?

WITNESS. The world is filled with wonderful women: shy, daring, modest, passionate, innocent, experienced, open, guarded... Who wouldn't want to know them all?

NATALIE. Why?

WITNESS. Ask a man of my age, how many times he made love to his wife. Or don't even ask. It's easy to calculate. Say, twice a week, fifty weeks a year... This makes it a hundred times a year, and in thirty years... (*Pours and drinks.*)

MICHAEL. Three thousand.

WITNESS. Bravo. Now ask how many of these acts he remembers. One or two, no more than that. The rest of it blurs into a monotone, mundane routine, mentioned in medical books as reproductive activity.

MICHAEL. So, you've read medical books too?

WITNESS. One or two. Don't you find what I've described depressing? On the other hand, you have Don Juan. For us, great seducers, meeting every new woman is an adventure, a battle, a victory, a celebration. It has the charm of novelty. Three thousand adventures. Three thousand victories. Three thousand nights of love.

NATALIE. And it was always love, wasn't it?

WITNESS. Always.

NATALIE. That's not possible.

WITNESS. What's not possible? To love three thousand women, or to love a woman three thousand times?

NATALIE. (*Laughs bitterly.*) Either. But go on.

WITNESS. What's the point? Honest, do you like my stories?

NATALIE. Honest, not really. Each of them is, so to speak, the end, the result of your courting... And the result is pretty much the same every time.

MICHAEL. The bed.

NATALIE. Yes. Tell us how you seduce, how you win, how you court - that's what's interesting. The rest is physiology.

WITNESS. Physiology? If that's how you feel, I pity you. To me it's the ultimate manifestation of happiness. Intimacy - what a beautiful word.

MICHAEL. Who wins, that's a question. They say, a man runs after a woman until she catches him.

NATALIE. Good thing you're not running after me. Or I would've taken your observation personally.

MICHAEL. (*To Witness, ignoring Natalie's comment.*) Getting a woman is not the issue, the issue is how to say goodbye to her. How did you do that?

NATALIE. You want to learn that, huh?

WITNESS. I never said goodbye to anyone.

NATALIE. How so?

WITNESS. Hocus-pocus.

NATALIE. Well, tell us.

WITNESS. We magicians don't share secrets.

NATALIE. Then tell us how you seduced all those women.

WITNESS. We seducers do not analyze such things. We just come and take what already belongs to us. It requires no effort. It's easy and joyful.

NATALIE. But there must be some secret. The secret of Don Juan.

WITNESS. There is. Ok, I'll tell you this one. To conquer a woman you need to love her. That's all.

NATALIE. You love women that much?

WITNESS. I do. A woman is the most beautiful creature in the world.

Pause.

MICHAEL. You must've been lucky to meet some exceptional women.

NATALIE. And you were not?

MICHAEL. I was not. Till I've met you.

NATALIE. Tell us, my dear Don Juan, these adventures, didn't they affect your relationship with your wife?

Pause.

WITNESS. Not at all. Thousands of women, young and old, undressed in front of me. But it didn't bother my wife in the slightest.

NATALIE. Still, I'm sure she has a lot to say about it.

WITNESS. (*After a brief silence.*) She's not with me anymore.

MICHAEL. So, she left you, huh?

WITNESS. My wife was worth a thousand women. But she died. And I couldn't save her.

NATALIE. Why did it have to be you to save her?

WITNESS. Who else?

Pause.

NATALIE. Forgive me. Please accept our condolences.

WITNESS. Don't. It's been three years. Let's not talk about sad things. Today is your happy day, let's be happy!

MICHAEL. I don't know what to say.

WITNESS. Don't say anything. Let's continue flipping through my little black book.

Pause.

MICHAEL. By the way, so far you've been telling us about your affairs with younger women. But have you seduced anyone who was of age, so to speak?

WITNESS. Yes I have.

MICHAEL. How old was the oldest of your conquests? *(To Natalie.)* Do you mind his stories?

NATALIE. I mind your questions.

WITNESS. I can stop anytime.

NATALIE. No, why, go on.

MICHAEL. How old was she?

WITNESS. Fifty three. But I wasn't young either.

MICHAEL. So, what was it like? Not too scary?

WITNESS. Believe it or not, it was wonderful. There was a touch of grey in her hair, wrinkles on her face, but her body was young and fresh, her breasts heavy and hard, and she was endlessly gentle... There's something maternal in a woman of that age, she gives you peace, consolation, comfort, tenderness... And you feel like a man and a child, a lover, a protector... Anyway, these are just my fantasies. Never mind.

NATALIE. I'm listening to you and asking myself: do I envy your women or pity them?

WITNESS. *(Pause.)* So, what's your answer?

NATALIE. *(Pause.)* Envy.

MICHAEL. Envy what?

NATALIE. I'll tell you some other time. *(To Witness.)* Do you ever get bored?

WITNESS. Never.

NATALIE. And your women, were they ever bored with you?

WITNESS. Better ask them.

NATALIE. But they're not here.

WITNESS. *(Pause.)* Yes, they're not here.

NATALIE. Whom should I ask then?

WITNESS. Then ask yourself again. Are you bored with me?

NATALIE. No.

MICHAEL. What does it have to do with being bored or not? In your opinion the man's purpose is to be an entertainer? Nothing more worthy, more important?

NATALIE. I don't have an opinion.

MICHAEL. A man is not a dancing monkey. He should earn money, take care of his woman, support the family.

WITNESS. You should run for congress.

MICHAEL. May be I will.

NATALIE. I agree. Still, a woman shouldn't be bored with her man.

MICHAEL. What about a man? What if he's bored with a woman? Whose fault is that? His? Hers? *(To Witness.)* What do you say?

WITNESS. Nothing. I don't know men that well. I know women better.

NATALIE. Stop bragging.

WITNESS. I'm not bragging. I know female body better than anyone. I know its sufferings and afflictions. And I know a woman's soul. I've heard confessions of thousands of women. I witnessed so many tears, heard so many stories, and moans, and sighs, and cries...

NATALIE. Wait!.. I know where I saw you... You are a doctor.

WITNESS. I told you you'd guess it.

MICHAEL. *(To Natalie.)* How do you know?

NATALIE. I've had an appointment with him.

MICHAEL. *(To Witness.)* You, a doctor?

WITNESS. What did you think I was?

MICHAEL. I didn't think anything. What do I care? A doctor, so what? What's the big deal?

NATALIE. Why did you introduce yourself as a killer?

WITNESS. Every surgeon feels as a killer sometimes.

MICHAEL. What about all your stories? All make-belief?

WITNESS. All truth.

NATALIE. I'm sure they're not.

WITNESS. Why? You think a doctor can't be a Don Juan?

NATALIE. He can, I guess.

WITNESS. If I were making it up, my stories would've been more elaborate, more spectacular.

MICHAEL. True. Frankly, when I asked you to flip through your little black book, I've expected something kinkier.

WITNESS. Such as?

MICHAEL. Well, for example, how you made love on a hood of a car, or on a table. Go wild, make it big.

WITNESS. On a hood - no, on a table - yes.

MICHAEL. A-ha, so it did happen. Well, tell us. Saved the best for desert.

WITNESS. Sure, but this will be the last one. I think we're all fed up with this game by now. *(Pause.)*

NATALIE. Well, why are you quiet? Making up something romantic again? Tell us the truth this time.

WITNESS. I always tell the truth. May be not the whole truth, but nothing but the truth. It was in the middle of the night, and the smell of chrysanthemums...

NATALIE. Why chrysanthemums?

WITNESS. Because it happened in the fall. The table was covered with flowers.

MICHAEL. A flower bed again? You repeat yourself, my dear Don Juan. I get it, I get it: it would be too hard on a table without flowers.

WITNESS. Glad you get it so quickly.

MICHAEL. Get back to business.

WITNESS. To business? You may find it boring. I simply held her hand and talked to her the whole night.

MICHAEL. That's it?

WITNESS. That's it. I was remembering all my life day by day. All I had achieved, or lost, what I regretted and hoped for, what I would have changed if I could have started it all over again. I confessed my love to her, I said thousands of tender words, I implored her to stay with me, I swore that I wanted to be with her forever.

MICHAEL. And she?

WITNESS. She was quiet. Listening. It was a long, memorable night. Suddenly it was morning, but I felt I didn't have time to say what I wanted to say. I couldn't bring myself to part with her.

MICHAEL. And that of course, was yet another best night of your life.

WITNESS. No, it wasn't. And now excuse me, please, I have to leave you for a few minutes. *(Starts picking up the dishes, but leaves and exits.)*

NATALIE. Why are you treating him like that? Picking on him? What did he do to you?

MICHAEL. I don't know. I disliked him from the first moment. We are different.

NATALIE. You can say that again.

MICHAEL. I'm a man of action, a business man, and he's a bullshitter.

NATALIE. That's not the difference. He has deep inner life and you're all on the outside.

MICHAEL. "Inner", "outside"... These are just words. You don't know what you want from me. What do you expect from me after all? Am I handsome? You say yes. Well off? Yes. Caring? Yes. Love you? Yes. What else do you need?

NATALIE. You're simply refusing to understand what I'm trying to tell you.

MICHAEL. Have you ever tried to understand me? Direct me? Help me to live that inner life? Is it my fault no one read "Faust" to me when I was a kid, and didn't take me to listen to Tchaikovsky? I live in the world of sharks. Any moment they can break me and swallow me. I have to be made of steel to survive. No one cares about me or my inner life. I've built myself, and it's hard for me to change. If you love me, accept me the way I am.

NATALIE. That's what I do.

MICHAEL. And if you don't like me the way I am, then help me to change.

NATALIE. Calm down.

MICHAEL. Why did you have to have an appointment with him? Why didn't you go to your own doctor?

NATALIE. *(Reluctantly.)* I had problems...

MICHAEL. *(Taken aback.)* What sort of problems?

NATALIE. A few months ago I started having slight pains. My doctor said it was nothing, but to make sure, he sent me to an expert.

MICHAEL. *(Motions to where Witness has gone.)* To him?

NATALIE. Yes.

MICHAEL. *(Astonished and contemptuous.)* He, an expert?

NATALIE. That's who he is, professor or something.

MICHAEL. That's odd. What happened next?

NATALIE. He examined me, checked my sonogram and realized that I must have a surgery right away. It was a simple surgery, but it saved me.

MICHAEL. How come I didn't know about it?

NATALIE. You were away on a business trip, opening the new branch. And by the time you

got back I was all right.

MICHAEL. How could you not recognize the doctor?

NATALIE. During the surgery I could not see him. And afterwards, I think he checked on me once, and then it was the doctors on the floor who took care of me.

MICHAEL. But during the appointment?

NATALIE. He was wearing a robe, a cap... And he was the one who examined me, not the other way around.

MICHAEL. Brilliant.

NATALIE. That's how it is.

Pause. Michael hugs her.

MICHAEL. Our plans hadn't change, I hope.

NATALIE. *(Pause.)* Mine didn't. Yours?

MICHAEL. No. Definitely not.

NATALIE. Ok.

MICHAEL. This is all his fault, this goddamn waiter, or professor... Whatever he is.

NATALIE. What does he have to do with it?

MICHAEL. He worked you up with his talk. It was odd, the way you listened to him.

NATALIE. Nothing odd. I just listened.

MICHAEL. You don't think all that storytelling was truth?

NATALIE. What I think is... *(Pause.)* Oh my god!

MICHAEL. What? What happened?

NATALIE. Oh my god, I'm such an idiot! Now I see! God, I'm so ashamed! So ashamed!

MICHAEL. What is it? What do you see now?

NATALIE. He didn't have any little black book!

MICHAEL. That's what I've been telling you all along. He made it up. I knew it from the start.

NATALIE. You knew nothing! He's been telling us about the same woman, the one he loved all these years. He was talking about his wife! How could I be so callous, so stupid, teasing him, making fun of him, asking him about naughty details!

MICHAEL. He was more than willing to tell...

NATALIE. He just needed to talk to someone. He had a drink, it loosened him up... He was tired of keeping it all in. He was sad. Remember, how he said: "I'm in a minor key today". Or maybe he had other reasons.

MICHAEL. But this last bit with the table...

NATALIE. That's her funeral, didn't you guess? He was saying farewell to her. And you and I were laughing! All his stories were so truthful, so sincere, and so pure, but we... We just...

MICHAEL. Ok, get over it... Relax... There's nothing we can do now.

Pause.

NATALIE. *(Takes a look at the watch.)* It's almost time. Do you want to go to the office, see what's going on?

MICHAEL. Yes, sure.

Exit Michael. Enter Witness.

NATALIE. Could you come over here, please?

Witness walks up to her.

Tell me, the women in your stories, are they all the same woman?

WITNESS. You've guessed...

NATALIE. Your wife?

WITNESS. Yes.

NATALIE. Please forgive us for being so tactless. I'm very embarrassed for myself and him.

WITNESS. Not a big deal. You didn't know...

NATALIE. Why did you come up with this?

WITNESS. I couldn't admit to you that all my life I loved only one woman and that she happened to be my wife.

NATALIE. Why not?

WITNESS. Not interesting, not trendy, no one would have believed it.

NATALIE. I'd have believed it.

WITNESS. And of course, I wouldn't have been able to tell to the total strangers intimate things about my wife. It's easier to talk about some women from a little black book.

NATALIE. Why didn't you tell us who you were? Didn't remind me when you saw me today? Why pretend to be a waiter?

WITNESS. Because I wouldn't be very convincing as a waitress.

Natalie laughs.

Seriously, I didn't pretend to be anything. You asked for a coffee, and I brought it.

NATALIE. By the way, what sort of a cafe is this? It looks dilapidated.

WITNESS. I bought this place and turned it into a summer house after my wife died. Just wanted to hide here as if in a shell. Hide from people, from guilt, to be alone with my grief.

NATALIE. Guilt? Why?

WITNESS. I am a doctor. I was supposed to be the first to realize she had cancer. I was too busy operating on others, and didn't notice her illness before it was too late.

NATALIE. And if you had noticed, would it be possible to save her?

WITNESS. I don't know. Not sure. *(Pause.)* So, whenever I'm sad I hide here.

NATALIE. This is a false escape. She wouldn't have approved.

WITNESS. I know... I see life differently these days. I actually started appreciating life again only very recently. But why does life have to be so sad?

NATALIE. I had the appointment with you quite a while ago. How could you remember my name and even date of birth? You see dozens of women ever day.

WITNESS. But none as charming as you.

NATALIE. I appreciate the compliment. But it's Ok now to drop the mask of Don Juan. The show is over.

WITNESS. Unfortunately. I bid farewell to the mask and to you.

NATALIE. Apart from my looks there must be a less poetic explanation of your excellent

memory.

WITNESS. Soon afterwards I saw you again here, in this town. I recognized you then.

(*Pause.*) When I got back to the office I checked your name in the computer.

So, the explanation is quite simple. (*Pause.*) Why do you visit this town? Do you keep a summer house here?

NATALIE. My girlfriend does. I love being here. I grew up in this town, my parents lived, got married and died here. It's dear to me.

WITNESS. That's why you chose this place for your ceremony?

NATALIE. Yes. Wasn't a very good idea, as you see.

WITNESS. Marriage is often not a good idea.

NATALIE. You do not like my fiancée?

WITNESS. I like his fiancée much better.

NATALIE. Another compliment and I'd have to believe you are indeed a seducer.

WITNESS. I'd never been a seducer, but when I met you, I decided to become one.

NATALIE. And that was the next compliment.

WITNESS. In your presents the compliments come naturally.

NATALIE. You are inexhaustible.

WITNESS. You inspire me.

Pause.

Forgive me my earlier histrionics.

NATALIE. What made you want to do that?

WITNESS. Can't you guess?

Pause. Natalie and Witness look at each other. Enter Michael.

MICHAEL. They're all set. We can go soon.

NATALIE. Already? Wait... I need a few minutes on my own.

WITNESS. You're welcome to go inside. The door isn't locked. Show you the way?

NATALIE. Thanks. I'll find it.

Exit Natalie. Pause.

MICHAEL. I have no idea how to act around you anymore.

WITNESS. Why? What's the problem?

MICHAEL. Well... For example, I promised to pay you.

WITNESS. So, what's stopping you?

MICHAEL. You're not the kind of person I thought you were. You happen to be a doctor. I would be embarrassed.

WITNESS. You can go ahead and pay me. Doctors love to be paid.

MICHAEL. But you weren't being a doctor with us.

WITNESS. Doesn't matter. Clowns get paid too, and waiters get their tips.

MICHAEL. You mean it? (*Pulls out his wallet.*) How much?

WITNESS. I was joking. You brought drinks, I brought the chaser. We're even.

MICHAEL. (*Hides the wallet.*) I've underestimated you. You are a threat. I can't figure out in what way, but you are. I sensed it immediately.

WITNESS. No need to worry about that. We'll part ways in half an hour.

MICHAEL. To mutual delight.

WITNESS. And I doubt we'll see each other again.

MICHAEL. Never, I hope. I regret I've asked you to be our witness.

WITNESS. And I'm grateful to you for that.

Enter Natalie.

NATALIE. I'm ready

WITNESS. You are unbelievably beautiful! That's what I call a bride.

Pause.

MICHAEL. Well, let's go?

NATALIE. Let's go.

Michael heads towards the exit, Natalie follows him half-heartedly. Witness doesn't move.

MICHAEL. (*To Witness.*) Are you coming?

WITNESS. Only if it's absolutely necessary.

NATALIE. You promised.

WITNESS. Then I'll keep the promise.

All three of them are headed off stage. Natalie stops suddenly.

NATALIE. Where's my bouquet?

MICHAEL. What bouquet? (*Sees the violets.*) Ah, this one... Just a sec. (*Pulls Witness to the side.*) Where's the nearest florist?

WITNESS. At the train station.

MICHAEL. How far away is it?

WITNESS. Five minutes walk. That way.

MICHAEL. (*To Natalie.*) Wait for me. I'll be back soon. (*Exits.*)

WITNESS. I thought you've forgotten about my violets.

NATALIE. No. I haven't.

Pause.

We have only a few minutes left. Can I talk to you frankly?

WITNESS. By all means.

NATALIE. Promise to say the truth and not be surprised by what I say?

WITNESS. I promise.

NATALIE. Do you like me?

WITNESS. You know I do. Very much.

NATALIE. And I do like you.

WITNESS. I'm glad you're no longer repelled by me.

NATALIE. No, that's not what I mean. You are... I... I'd want to be with you all the time.

WITNESS. I don't understand.

NATALIE. What's to understand? I want to be with you. Didn't I say it clearly? I want to be with you.

WITNESS. Why?

NATALIE. (*Trying to sound playfull.*) To add another name to your little black book.

WITNESS. That book doesn't exist.

NATALIE. But I do.

WITNESS. Are you kidding?

NATALIE. Not anymore. I want to be yours. What else should I say?

WITNESS. You want to be with me after your wedding?

NATALIE. Yes. After our wedding, yours and mine.

WITNESS. First your fiancée was making fun of me. Now it's you.

NATALIE. (*Still trying to hide embarrassment behind the playful tone.*) I'm proposing to you. I'd rather you were the one to do that, but it would be a long wait.

WITNESS. (*Suddenly agitated.*) Don't laugh at me.

NATALIE. (*Earnestly.*) I'm not laughing. I... I love you.

WITNESS. Since when?

NATALIE. Since forever.

WITNESS. We only know each other for a little over an hour. Is that since forever?

NATALIE. Almost. I was asleep before I met you, but now I woke up. I've realized I was looking for you all my life.

WITNESS. Why all of a sudden? What have I done to conquer someone like you?

NATALIE. Great seducers don't do anything special. They just come and take what already belongs to them. Rings the bell?

WITNESS. Yeah, that's my line. No need to quote it.

NATALIE. Did you notice how in all your stories you kept saying words "gentle", "tenderness"? I will be gentle with you. I know how to be gentle. I want to be tender. Whenever you need me to be tender and gentle, I will be.

WITNESS. You know something? You are a seductress. Hard to resist.

NATALIE. That's good. Don't even try. If you love me half as much as you loved your wife, even that would be enough for me. I want to have that happiness. Even if I remain for you only her shadow.

WITNESS. A woman like you can not stay in a shadow.

NATALIE. I'm not going to compete with her. I know it's impossible. I will simply love you.

WITNESS. You don't know me at all. I am a moody introvert.

NATALIE. I'm no picnic myself.

WITNESS. I work a lot. They call me to come to the hospital every other night. Sometimes I just spend nights there. You'll be bored.

NATALIE. Bored? With you?

WITNESS. Without me.

NATALIE. Anything else I should be warned about?

WITNESS. I can be possessive. You'll find it hard to deal with.

NATALIE. I'll do my best.

WITNESS. This sounds very romantic, but... I'm sixty years old.

NATALIE. And I'm thirty four. It's not that big of a difference.

WITNESS. This didn't come out clear enough. To help you understand, I'll rephrase what I said: in ten years I'll be seventy.

NATALIE. And I'll be forty four. Awful! I hope you wouldn't dump an old lady.

Pause.

WITNESS. You almost got me there.

NATALIE. You are still refusing to understand. I do want to spend my life with you.

WITNESS. I know I'm a little drunk. But not enough to accept this insanity.

NATALIE. Well, I'm fed up with being sane.

WITNESS. Sometimes a little sanity wouldn't hurt.

NATALIE. If we start reflecting, calculating, double-checking, we may ruin everything.

Pause.

WITNESS. Natalie, I like you a lot. But this is impossible. Forgive me.

Exit Witness. Natalie is alone. Pause.

Enter Michael carrying a posh bouquet of white lilies. Pause.

MICHAEL. For you.

NATALIE. Thank you.

MICHAEL. Ok. Let's go?

NATALIE. Where to?

MICHAEL. What do you mean "where to"? To get married.

NATALIE. Wait. (*Puts the bouquet down on the table.*) I have to tell you something.

Pause.

MICHAEL. Well?

NATALIE. I don't think you should marry me.

MICHAEL. Am I allowed to know why?

NATALIE. Because... Because I don't love you.

MICHAEL. Since when?

NATALIE. I don't know. Since long ago, I guess. May be I never loved you.

MICHAEL. Why are you telling me this only now?

NATALIE. I guess, because I've just realized this.

MICHAEL. This is unbelievable. We've been together for two years. And it's been good, I think. We're in business together...

NATALIE. No, Mike. I've realized that a woman shouldn't marry a man just because she could live with. She must marry a man whom she couldn't live without. Or no one at all.

MICHAEL. How could you change your mind just like that?

Pause.

Ok. If you changed your mind, let's postpone the ceremony. In the mean time we can just live together as before.

NATALIE. No, Michael. We break up. Now. Right away.

MICHAEL. But why?

NATALIE. I settled for some kind of compromise all my life, I agreed to everything, I always said "yes", but today I say "no". This will be better for both of us.

MICHAEL. For you, may be. But not for me. I'll go mad without you.

NATALIE. Believe me, I'm not the kind of woman you need.

MICHAEL. But why? Why?

NATALIE. This exactly is our problem, your not understanding why. You are caring, you love me in your own way, but we are different.

MICHAEL. Is this final?

NATALIE. Final. You know, I've been thinking the whole day why am I being so nervous? Why all the tension? It's only now I realize, I felt I was about to make a mistake.

MICHAEL. You're making a mistake now.

NATALIE. *(Hugs him.)* I'm sorry.

Enter Witness.

WITNESS. Excuse me... Am I interrupting?

NATALIE. Not at all.

MICHAEL. Thank you for being ready to help, but the wedding is cancelled. We changed our minds. *(Takes his coat and the car keys.)* Natalie, come.

WITNESS. *(To Natalie. Pleasantly surprised)* You refused to marry him?

MICHAEL. *(Irritated.)* That's not your business who refused. I said there'll be no wedding, that's all. *(Tries to lead Natalie away.)*

WITNESS. No, there will be a wedding.

Michael stops and stares at Witness, perplexed. Witness takes a step towards Natalie and kneels down on one knee in front of her.

Natalie, I give you my hand and my heart. Will you marry me?

MICHAEL. He's playing fool again.

NATALIE. Yes, I will.

Witness rises. He and Natalie stand facing each other.

MICHAEL. What kind of game is this?

NATALIE. (*Holding Witness's hand.*) This is not a game.

MICHAEL. You want to marry - him?

NATALIE. Yes.

MICHAEL. (*To Witness.*) And you confirm that?

WITNESS. I insist on that.

MICHAEL. How did you make the deal so quick?

WITNESS. I don't owe you any explanations.

MICHAEL. (*Takes a few threatening steps towards Witness, who remains calm.*) I wanted to teach you a lesson the moment I saw you. It's not too late still.

NATALIE. Michael, some problems can not be solved with your fists.

MICHAEL. We'll see.

WITNESS. (*Taking a deliberate step towards Michael.*) Easy, my friend. What's the matter?

MICHAEL. (*Slightly less aggressive.*) You stole my bride.

NATALIE. Nobody stole me. I've made my choice.

WITNESS. Cool down. Take it like a man.

MICHAEL. Easy for you to say...

WITNESS. No. Not easy. I love this woman, and yet I agreed to be a witness for her wedding with you. I gave you my time, I smiled, I was making a fool of myself, and every minute I was saying good bye to her in my mind. Now it's your turn to be a witness. So pull yourself together.

MICHAEL. Your witness? Me? You're crazy! Should I witness not only your happiness, but also your wedding?

NATALIE. No. That would've been too cruel. (*Pause.*) Unless you decide to. Then I'd be glad.

Pause.

MICHAEL. (*Crashed.*) Natalie, wake up! What's the rush?

NATALIE. I'm afraid he may change his mind.

MICHAEL. Well... Perhaps I should indeed act like a man. Do you really want me to be your witness?

NATALIE. Yes.

MICHAEL. Well, if you insist...

NATALIE. Thank you.

Picks up the violets and takes Witness by the hand.

Come. Come quick. I've been waiting for so long.

THE END