

STALINKA
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CHARACTERS: (All Bulgarian)

FATHER: Left his daughter and wife for America back in the 1960's. Leaving is something he does well.

DAUGHTER: The middle generation of Eastern Europe, also the lost generation: Saw there was something else, but never quite knew how to get it. An actor.

DIRECTOR: More than anything else, knows how to survive. Shrewd. Pretty good at staging plays, as well.

MOTHER: Lived as a Communist most of her life, and too old to change when the changes came. Shouts and controls others to keep real feelings at bay.

WRITER: Man whose brilliance has been an obstacle. His loves have eluded him, and so the bottle has not.

CYRIL: An actors heart: naive and idealistic. Treats, AThe changes,@ as though they were a new rock and roll band.

PETAR: A good party member, but too idealistic to have ever gotten any real power. Needs the party because fundamentally, he is uncertain and weak.

STALINKA: The AAuntie@ that isn=t related to anybody, but tells everyone what to do. She has been dying for the past ten years, but still manages to eat everything in sight.

MAN/VENDOR/REPAIRMAN/NEWSPAPERMAN/COMMUNIST: Man of many talents.

ACT ONE

(The play takes place in a kitchen in modern day Sofia, Bulgaria. The set consists of this kitchen, with two doors, stage right and left, each leading to a side stage. The space these stages represent is redefined throughout the play)

(Play begins with FATHER staring at closed door with three locks across it; MOTHER is at table staring off in another direction. STALINKA -barely alive -is at the table, moving from one chair to the next, slowly, painstakingly eating whatever food is left at each of the places. DAUGHTER is standing, watching all of it, like she is in a room with crazy people who are going to bite her, and yet it is familiar. She is smoking a cigarette.)

(Throughout the kitchen, there is an odd juxtaposition of traditional Bulgarian, and kitschy American: plastic Statue of Liberty, etc. There are scattered about an array of clocks, each telling a different time. There is a calendar that says the day, November 15th. It is the type of calendar where you tear off each day in succession to reveal the next.)

(Generally, the play moves about as if a dream, paralleling the unhinged life of a people whose world has changed one hundred and eighty degrees almost overnight. In terms of time, and space, the play never seems to get a hold of itself, as the characters struggle to do the same)

DAUGHTER:

Mother...

(Pause, no response)

Mother, I am sorry.

(Pause, no response)

Papa...

(Again, no response, then more desperately:)

Papa, tell me!

MOTHER:

(Suddenly)

If everyone would simply sit around the table -then! (Beat) Then...

(Pause)

FATHER:

(To DAUGHTER)

He has been in there a long time.

DAUGHTER:

He is a very important man, with important things to do.

FATHER:

Yes. And I am expected for jury duty in New York. What could be more important than that?

MOTHER:

Any excuse.

(STALINKA begins coughing, hacking up sputum)

FATHER:

(Matter of fact, routine)

Shall I call the doctor?

(No response)

FATHER:

(Again, routine)

She may be dying this time.

MOTHER:

She is trying to sing and will begin soon.

DAUGHTER:

Please, Teddy -hurry.

(MOTHER suddenly turns to DAUGHTER noticing her for the first time.)

MOTHER:

Who is this "Teddy?"

DAUGHTER:

He is a very famous director.

(Pause, MOTHER considers, then:)

MOTHER:

Have I told you today how important it is to remain a virgin?

DAUGHTER:

(No reaction; deadpan, routine)

Mother, I've been married for ten years.

MOTHER:

(Doesn't acknowledge)

Yes, well, remember this, my daughter. It is good advice from your mother. And remember, never start smoking.

(DAUGHTER exhales her cigarette)

DAUGHTER:

(Rote: to herself)

'Why do we do theater?' Let us take the actor, (raises hand), more or less stuck within a narrative written by the writer -or his "advisors" - staged by the director, wearing clothing imposed by yet another, and moving about on the set created by the designer, all in front of a fickle and uncertain audience. And yet, from these rather confining circumstances, the actor creates life, (Beat) and through commitment to that which appears absolutely confining in every way, the actor creates freedom: (Beat) through commitment to that which appears absolutely absurd.

MOTHER:

(Suddenly)

Oh my God! Is the door locked?

FATHER:

Three times.

MOTHER:

Are you sure? I thought I felt a breeze.

FATHER:

It was probably the old woman passing wind.

(MOTHER sniffs the air)

MOTHER:

Oh yes. Thank goodness.

FATHER:

(Suddenly screaming into the locked doors.)

You know, here in Bulgaria, a man can be on a jury and show up again ten years later. But in America, I am telling you there will be hell to pay!

MOTHER:

Once you could walk down the streets and the streets were clean.

DAUGHTER:

(Reflecting out loud)

It was to have been different. I dreamt my life in 1989, and I imagined myself complete, renewed, symmetrical, consistent -correct. (Beat) And I waited for it to be so, but instead, I found myself unattached, moving freely into a past that has no meaning and a future that doesn't exist: the changes.

(At this moment, DIRECTOR comes out of bathroom -through a door -crosses room with pile of scripts)

DIRECTOR:

I will say this as simply and clearly as I can: I want some cheese.

DAUGHTER:

Teddy, the scripts!

DIRECTOR:

(Handing her the scripts)

Yes, well, you were out of toilet paper and so your "Romeo and Juliet" is now without a sword fight.

DAUGHTER:

Beckett, Mamet, Bedrosian...Anything...Anything!

(STALINKA has been holding up a note, which MOTHER has taken from her and reads)

MOTHER:

(Matter-of-fact)

Listen, now: The old woman says that there is water on the floor and it is rising.

(Automatically, MOTHER, DAUGHTER, and FATHER roll up their pants and continue their business, while DIRECTOR becomes irate at the sight of the STALINKA)

DIRECTOR:

The old woman!

DAUGHTER:

She is not staying.

DIRECTOR:

She has never left!

DAUGHTER:

She is dying.

DIRECTOR:

Then why isn't she dead?

DAUGHTER:

Teddy, in Denmark there is a melancholy prince!

DIRECTOR:

In Denmark there are cheeses: Havarti, Roquefort, Gouda.

(Concurrently STALINKA has made her way to the FATHER and has given him a note, which he has read.)

FATHER:

(To STALINKA, crumbling up note)

No. I refuse.

DAUGHTER:

(Intensely)

Teddy, listen to me. I don't know what is happening anymore. It has been too much, all of this, and now, it is though we -all of us -are absent from our lives, and, and - absurd. People talking, and nobody is listening because nobody knows where anything is going! Our shadows are undefined. Myself, Teddy, I am a shadow unstuck in time: Without form, I am only making the room darker!

MOTHER:

(To FATHER)

What does the old woman say?

DAUGHTER:

Teddy, you must!

DIRECTOR:

(Pushing her aside)

Yes, well, I have an important meeting now -and a buffet is promised.

MOTHER:

(To FATHER)

You refuse to listen to her!

FATHER:

She speaks nonsense!

MOTHER:

And yet she never says anything untrue!

FATHER:

(Holding up the paper)

Oh yeah? Look here, the old bat says today is the Holiday of Saint George!

MOTHER:

She never says this.

FATHER:

Look! It says, "We must prepare: Today is May 1st"

MOTHER:

You see! She says it is “First of May Day!” The Festival of the worker!

FATHER:

It was “First of May Day” under the Communists: May 1st was “Saint George Day” before, and it is Saint George Day now -celebrating the great Saint of the mighty and invisible Bulgarian military!

MOTHER:

You Capitalist pig! Why don’t you go back to America and celebrate, “Stock Market Day!”

FATHER:

We celebrate Labor Day in America!

MOTHER:

The day to celebrate whores, the only people in America who work!

DAUGHTER:

(Urgent, grabbing DIRECTOR)

Listen, Teddy, in time your meeting will be over. You will look at the scripts and you will return with an idea for us.

(DIRECTOR hesitates before heading out the door)

DIRECTOR:

Yes, yes. (Then dramatically) But I want the old woman taken out and beaten!

(DIRECTOR exits as FATHER and MOTHER continue their argument)

FATHER:

I am celebrating Saint George Day!

MOTHER:

I am celebrating First of May Day!

DAUGHTER:

(Suddenly turning on them)

Idiots! Look at the calendar! It is November fifteenth!

(As DAUGHTER points to the calendar on the wall, STALINKA has made her way to it, and sort of falls on it, ripping off the current day, NOVEMBER 15th and suddenly revealing the day as MAY 1st)

MOTHER:

Look! We must prepare!

DAUGHTER:

(Resigned)

Here it is, beginning all over again...

Skip to later in the first act. We are in the past during the Communist era. DAUGHTER has married a stalwart Communist, PETAR, and it is their wedding night. Through the course of the play, it has been revealed that the DAUGHTER's father has defected to the United States. The DAUGHTER has not seen or heard from him since he left when she was a little girl. This has caused her and her mother a great deal of problems, keeping her from getting the roles she wants as an actor, and making it in her best interest to marry someone in the Communist party.

(Shift to DAUGHTER and PETAR in their underwear.
DAUGHTER is sitting somewhat disconnected on the side of the bed. PETAR is awkwardly lying down under the covers)

PETAR:

You know, I was thinking...I was thinking that now, as husband and wife, we should be...honest.

DAUGHTER:

Honest?

PETAR:

There should be no lies between us. None.

(Pause)

(FATHER enters beside the bed, not noticed by PETAR. He remains a parody of American bad taste, dressed in a gaudy, ridiculous outfit, sunglasses, mixed metaphors)

PETAR:

Is there anything that you would like to tell me?

DAUGHTER:

I guess you would know if I was lying or not.

PETAR:

(As though saying, "Yes")

Of course not.

DAUGHTER:
DAUGHTER:

(Turning, then, as if delivering line)

Only that I love you, and I must have you now!
And if you are the kind of man who knows these things, it should be small business for you to land me the role, Juliet.

PETAR:

(Suddenly taken, shocked)

Oh my! Oh my!

Yes, that is true. It will be small business to get you that role.
(PETAR acts, and continues to act, as though DAUGHTER is making love to him. But DAUGHTER sits on the edge of the bed and lights a cigarette, detached from the action she is apparently undertaking in the bed)

Well? Is there something you want to tell me?

PETAR:

(Making love)

Oh, yes, my love. You feel so good my love...Come to me, my love -come to Comrade Petar!

DAUGHTER:

(Detached, looking at him)

“Comrade Petar?” I wonder if he will rise through ranks until I am making love with Comrade Stalin.

PETAR:

“Yes...come closer -hold me there -yes! Comrade Petar is happy! Comrade Petar is happy!

DAUGHTER:

(Addressing FATHER)

Do you realize, if you didn't leave me in such a state, I could be down with my husband, now, making love to him and having a good time?

PETAR:

(Frightened)

Ah! Is that...is it what I think it is?

DAUGHTER:

Well, maybe not so good of a time. But then, “Comrade Petar” might not be my husband. Do you ever think about these things? I wonder, do I ever cross your mind?

PETAR:

It’s yours or it’s mine? Are you there? Where are you....Oh! I’m sorry! Are you all right?

DAUGHTER:

(Suddenly yelling)

Who are you old man, and why do you leave us? (Beat) Well? Papa, tell me!

(FATHER has been mute, suddenly, slowly speaks, struggling)

FATHER:

I have to...put...a...thousand dollars in the stock market. Then, I am going to hire a prostitute and take her to the horse races.

(DAUGHTER turns away, despondent)

DAUGHTER:

Yes. And it is always the same thing.

PETAR:

(Ecstatic)

Oh yes, you know...I think that...Yes, I think that is correct. Oh yes! Comrade Petar is coming to the rescue; Comrade Petar is coming to the rescue!

DAUGHTER:

(Sarcastic)

Well, then, if you will excuse me, I think I am almost finished. It was nice talking with you, just as it always is.

(DAUGHTER joins PETAR rolling about and just as the sex is completed, FATHER lingers for a moment and says a line that DAUGHTER does not hear)

FATHER:

Even when I was a young man, my father said to me, “Son, no matter how hard things are now; take heart. In all my years of living here, I have learned that things will always get worse.”

Events of the play continue out of control, back and forth through time, absurd. It is only after the characters face a single traumatic truth common to all of them that they can finally speak to each other in truth. As a little girl, the daughter was molested by a party leader. The FATHER witnessed this and could do nothing. The next day he stowed away on a boat. In this scene, he is finally able to say what his life was really like in America.

FATHER:

(To DAUGHTER)

America would be a place to live like a man: an ocean, a new world, and real feelings -America. (Beat, then change of mood) In the basement of the church -Cyril and Methodius -on the upper west side of New York, there is a bulletin board on which any scrap of information about Bulgaria is posted. There, written in pencil, would be small notes that began with the words, "I have heard." Alongside of these, on index cards, information: "Cheapest calls to Bulgaria," "Where to find cheap Bulgarian cheeses," "Cheapest postage to Bulgaria"; never "The best"; always, "the cheapest"; and never about any other country but our home. (Beat) Outside, the Puerto Ricans and Blacks, the Americans struggle, fight, kill each other, look angrily upon us. And so, we try never to speak, never to show who we are -out of fear. In a land of tall buildings, we try to walk among the shadows. Afraid of the light, we are never going to be great men, in this place.

(FATHER has taken a candle that had been hidden, and takes the Statue of Liberty lighter that had also been hidden, lights the candle and stares into it as he speaks)

On the festival of Saint George, on Easter, whenever we have a reason - or sometimes, for no reason at all -we light candles, and we pray; pray that one day we would return to our home. And I remember I would look into the flame and imagine how things could be: How people would one day say, "What an amazing thing: you crossed an ocean all by yourself; you came to a new world, and you lived. You made money. You gave things back to your family. You may not have been a very great man, but you, you were honest; you could have made choices to do things that were not right, but you didn't do these things." Because, you know, if you commit a crime in America, you cannot be chosen to serve on a jury.

(FATHER blows out the candle, then continues)

Play continues.

"Stalinka" is available for independent production or as part of a World Communities residency. For information, or to view the entire script, please contact me at tdetitta@earthlink.net